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The *Journal of Political Science: Bulletin of Yerevan University (JOPS)* is the leading journal of contemporary political research, which is focused on the political science analysis of institutions, processes, political systems and regimes in the countries of the South Caucasus and Black Sea regions. Articles published in the Journal of Political Science are theoretically innovative and methodologically diverse and includes a variety of intellectual approaches.

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In this Issue

At the current stage of confrontation, interintegration mechanisms are a relevant topic of research, driven by the continuing academic need for a comprehensive political science study of the specifics of relations between the EU and the EaP countries, taking into account the cases of Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Long-standing political, economic, cultural, and human ties have always underpinned our understanding of the need to ensure European security and stability as a guarantee of the well-being of the EaP countries.

This understanding is especially important in conflict situations, when the political elite of the EaP countries has consciously and firmly chosen to actively integrate into the European and global community, as repeatedly stated by the political leadership of these countries. Recently, cooperation between the EaP countries, both with European organizations and with individual European countries, has reached a qualitatively new level and is supported by concrete steps in domestic and foreign policy. This is evidenced by the regular holding of important multilateral and bilateral meetings and negotiations in recent years, including at the highest level, within the EU, OSCE, Council of Europe, and other continental forums. The documents and decisions adopted during these meetings have made it possible to begin building a fundamentally new system of collective security both in Europe and in the EaP countries.

Furthermore, cooperation between the EaP countries, the United States, and NATO and EU member states, along with a shared commitment to protecting the world from war, military invasion, and threats, significantly contributed to the improvement of not only bilateral relations but also relations between the EaP countries and the West. Moreover, the very fact of holding negotiations on such key issues as ending war and nuclear deterrence once again demonstrated to the world that the EU and the United States truly strive to become equal strategic partners, recognizing their responsibility for the fate of the world and its security. Therefore, the heads of state, politicians, diplomats, and military personnel who were members of the negotiating delegations sought to ensure maximum and guaranteed security for their countries without infringing on the interests and priorities of their allies and partners, taking into account their opinions, wishes, and proposals. During these negotiations, a new model for the negotiation process itself began to emerge, one that could serve as an example and basis for shaping relations between the EaP countries and other states, primarily European ones. This model is not burdened by narrow-mindedness, mutual mistrust, and outdated approaches, but is aimed exclusively at solving specific problems within established deadlines.

In 'Challenges of the European Union's engagement in strategic conflict resolution in the Eastern Partnership region: The cases of Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine', Liana Grigoryan analyzes the EU's tools for systematizing existing approaches to interregionalism in the EaP countries. She also devotes considerable attention to conceptualizing the phenomenon and identifying its distinct types for the purpose of strategic conflict resolution. She understands this function in terms of finding effective solutions to overcome the internal problems of EaP countries by building cooperation with other regions, concluding joint agreements on mutual assistance, humanitarian

cooperation, and addressing food and environmental issues. Furthermore, in the context of a changing geopolitical landscape and the turbulence of global politics, she highlights the function of consolidating the EU political system, which involves pooling resources and efforts to respond to the war in Ukraine and the emerging unpredictable threats in Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova. This means that, in times of uncertainty, through the use of interregional ties, regions unite to develop unified strategies for a more rapid and successful response to global crises. For the strategic settlement of conflicts in the EaP region and the characteristics of interregional relations, the author identified: 1) the involvement of not only states and regional organizations, but also civil society; 2) an asymmetric nature, namely, the frequent involvement of states with different levels of development; 3) limitations within the framework of low politics, which means a pronounced interest of regional organizations in cooperation on economic and social issues, rather than solving strategic security problems; 4) the desire of international organizations to set global political goals when concluding agreements; however, in reality, these goals are often not achieved.

In his article 'Regional dimension of geopolitical processes of defense capacity and diplomatic support of the statehoods of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1919: A new look at history', Gegham Petrosyan analyzes the nature of international relations shaped by the superpower confrontation. Following the end of World War I, the global community entered a period of large-scale and dynamic change, marked by conflicting trends in international security. However, this process cannot be considered fully completed, and it is premature to say that a new system of international relations has emerged. Security uncertainty, which persists despite the end of the confrontation, manifests itself in the resolution of intrastate conflicts in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. With the end of World War I, the number of conflicts around the world increased significantly, their nature, the composition of the participants, the causes of the conflicts, and the methods of struggle in the South Caucasus changed. These changes necessitated a reconsideration of security strategy and conflict, the development of new concepts and instruments, and the reform of existing state institutions in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan in 1919. While previously the majority of conflicts were interstate in nature, intrastate conflicts were added to these. Regional conflicts in 1919 were also driven by geopolitical factors, which only complicates their resolution processes. This study examines the defense capability and diplomatic support for the statehood of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan in 1919. This year, the situation in these countries remains extremely dire, and military action is escalating. Here the geopolitical interests of many states intersect, which gives particular relevance to the chosen topic. The regional conflict arose from intractable contradictions (historical, territorial, economic, political, interethnic, etc.) between neighboring states of the South Caucasus, as well as various socio-political groups within these countries. Failure to address regional issues led to an escalation of the situation in the region and the escalation of the regional conflict into a local war. During the defense of the statehood of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, accumulated contradictions between the states were resolved, and a new structure of diplomatic relations was established, corresponding to the prevailing balance of political,

economic, and military forces at a given moment. Accordingly, military force was viewed as a crucial component and factor in state power and the maintenance of power by the ruling elites of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan in 1919. The decisive role of armed clashes and, consequently, military force in regional politics was largely explained by the fact that war was a continuation of politics through violent means.

In 'Water insecurity in the South Caucasus: a hydro-strategic assessment of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict', Filippo Verre analyzes the impact of water on the South Caucasus, providing a regional hydrostrategic assessment based on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. According to the author, the water factor has already created new forms of international interaction: technology markets have emerged that allow for the increase or redistribution of water reserves; the concept of trading virtual water, or water-intensive products, has emerged, as it became clear that accounting for the water input into the production of a given commodity is an effective tool for both economic development and enhancing international security. Water instability in the South Caucasus has forced senior leadership and the general public to focus on issues such as water security, effective water resource management, the development of alternative freshwater sources, and the production and trade of water-intensive products. These issues, which have been a focus for many developed countries for the past quarter century, have been extremely poorly integrated into the development of national strategy, foreign policy, and national security in Nagorno-Karabakh. At the same time, freshwater shortages have been growing globally over recent decades. As a result, the efficient use of water resources, initially an economic and environmental issue, has become one of the most important strategic tools for strengthening the power of any state on the international stage. More efficient use of water has begun to enhance the international competitiveness of countries, while geographical features have allowed a number of states to directly restrict neighboring countries' access to water resources or use this opportunity as a lever of political pressure. The water factor in Nagorno-Karabakh has thus come to directly influence the balance of power and the nature of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In response to these emerging challenges, politicians, scholars, and journalists have identified a potential new primary cause for war not only in Nagorno-Karabakh but in the 21st century as well: the struggle for fresh water. The most fundamental question in international relations theory, the question of war and peace, seemingly comprehensively studied, has been posed in a sharp and new way.

In the article 'The difficult European path to settling Russian-Georgian relations in post-election Georgia in 2024: a rollback on European integration or the unacceptability of confrontation', Marut Vardazaryan and Erem Vardazaryan discuss the difficult European path to resolving Russian-Georgian relations in post-election Georgia in 2024, taking into account the lack of representation in Georgian public politics of the group of voters who doubt the country's integration into the EU. Since 2024, the post-election Georgian political elite has been unconvinced of the country's ability to achieve Euro-Atlantic integration along the lines of Central and Eastern European and Baltic countries. The South Caucasus, located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, has for centuries been at the intersection of civilizations, world religions, and states. This region, with access to the Caspian and Black Seas, occupies

a key geopolitical position. Currently, amidst the transformation of international relations, the South Caucasus region, thanks to its geostrategic location and the significant energy reserves of the Caspian Basin, has become a focal point for the foreign policy priorities of regional and extra-regional actors. In the context of implementing the South Caucasus vector of their foreign policy, Russia and Türkiye are paying particular attention to Georgia, which remains a key player in the region amid the unresolved conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. An examination of Russia and Türkiye's foreign policy toward Georgia, which occupies a unique position in the South Caucasus, allows us to identify the goals and interests of their foreign policies in this region. The relevance of the topic chosen for this article is also determined by the fact that the implementation of Russian and Turkish policies in the South Caucasus affects their national security interests, as well as the South Caucasus vector of their foreign policy. A thorough analysis of bilateral relations suggests that Russia's foreign policy toward Georgia spans several stages: the 1990s and the first decades of the 21st century. This study attempts to present an approach that divides the current stage of Russia's foreign policy toward Georgia into four periods: 2002-2007, 2008-2011, 2012-2023, and from 2024 onward. An analysis of these stages and periods indicates that Russia is actively expanding relations with Georgia, continuing to seek new avenues for strengthening its leverage in the country and securing tools for advancing its interests. In examining the evolution of Russia's foreign policy toward Georgia, particular attention is paid to the fourth period of the current stage, which remains quite complex, despite the level of strategic approach between the two countries. A number of problems in bilateral relations have become increasingly apparent recently.

In the article 'The cost of commitment: Understanding the Iran's Intervention in the Israel-Hamas War (2023-2024)', Aso M. Ali reconsiders Iran's intervention in the war between Israel and Hamas from 2023 to 2024, taking into account that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict remains one of the most acute in the Middle East and beyond, despite being overshadowed by more bloody events such as the wars in Syria, Libya, and Yemen, as well as the threat posed by extremist organizations. This conflict is characterized by its asymmetry, as it involves disparate actors and also involves regional and international players in the international relations system. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a legacy of the bipolar era and has become firmly embedded in the modern system of international relations. Iran's intervention in the war between Israel and Hamas periodically comes under the scrutiny of the international community due to escalating tensions on the ground or the steps taken by global actors in an attempt to resolve the situation. The conflict also remains relevant at the regional level, as it is the main stumbling block to establishing good-neighborly relations between Israel and Arab countries. The process of resolving this complex ethnic conflict is of particular interest to the academic community, as a settlement model that satisfies all parties and takes into account all of its specific features has yet to be developed. Moreover, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has features of ethnopolitical, ethnoconfessional, and ethnoterritorial conflicts. For the Middle East, the conflict has become one of the most protracted and complex issues, often hindering its peaceful and dynamic development. Furthermore, the war between Israel and Hamas and the Palestinian issue often fuel

negative perceptions of the Western world in Arab society and serve as an ideological basis for recruiting young people into terrorist ranks. Stability in the Middle East directly affects the interests of Iran, which has strong ties with the Palestinians. Iran seeks to coordinate its efforts with global and regional actors to promote a just peace and is also taking steps to overcome the inter-Palestinian rift. This paper demonstrates that the obstacles to achieving a just and lasting peace within the constantly changing regional landscape are internal and external processes: the rigid positions of all parties, Israel's lack of interest in a settlement, the inter-Palestinian conflict, the impulsive steps of mediators, as well as the absence of a viable settlement model that takes into account not only the territorial issue, but also the value component, which has become insurmountable in the course of numerous negotiations.

In his article 'Iran's political factors towards Afghan refugees: trends of ethnonational consolidation and changing priorities of regionalism', Armen Israyelyan analyzes the geopolitical significance of Afghanistan for Iran in contemporary international politics, discussing a number of factors related to the armed conflict in Afghanistan. Iran's political factors in relation to Afghan refugees, such as Afghan instability, can be seen as a source of risk for all countries in the region, including China, Pakistan, Iran and the countries of Central Asia. If extremists gain strength and state institutions weaken, Afghanistan will become a potential springboard for terrorist organizations. Furthermore, various Iranian forces are involved in the confrontation with the Afghan armed opposition, so the outcome of the conflict and the Afghan refugees determines the strength of their position in the long term. The failure of Washington's Afghan policy could lead to a loss of credibility for the United States among its allies. The transit factor is also significant, as is Afghanistan's potential role as a transit zone in a number of transport routes linking post-Soviet Central Asia and the countries along the Indian Ocean. These projects could include energy and fuel supplies, as well as consumer goods. Finally, it is necessary to consider Afghanistan's potential role in the Pakistan-India conflict, where the country could act as an ally of one of the parties. This combination of factors makes Afghanistan a region whose situation is of great importance for international political processes. Given this, the author's recourse to the experiences of Afghanistan and Iran is entirely justified, as the historical stages of Afghan and Iranian societies provide striking examples of the achievements of these countries' peoples in terms of national and state development. The study devotes particular attention to the nature of the trends in the subsequent development of these states. Along with the general historical relevance of studying the experiences of Afghanistan and Iran, it is worth emphasizing the general significance of certain aspects of their experiences for the post-Soviet countries, as these countries are neighbors for many of them. Therefore, an analysis of Iran's political factors in relation to Afghan refugees, as well as social and political processes in Afghanistan and Iran, is becoming an important state and public imperative.

In the article 'The Impact of Armed Conflicts on Climate Change: Perceptions of Environmental Security and the Search for Ways to Overcome These Risks', Nubia Nieto analyzes the impact of armed conflict on environmental security, as the planet's environmental problems have come to the forefront among other global issues. Climate change is one of the most pressing issues facing the Earth's ecosystem, and the global

community has recognized the problem of anthropogenic impact on climate change. The article notes that climate change is a result of armed conflicts and increased greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere. Therefore, the topic of the article is relevant, firstly, due to the need to further improve existing legal regulation mechanisms for preserving the Earth's climate, both at the international and domestic levels. Secondly, the relevance of this topic is determined by the need to ensure the progressive implementation of international norms aimed at resolving climate change within national legal systems. Environmental security and climate change are a global problem of our time, the resolution of which requires the joint efforts of all states. However, certain difficulties in the process of its international legal regulation exist, predetermined by the complexity of the problem and its asymmetric nature. Firstly, since climate is a common good, all countries benefit from efforts to preserve the Earth's climate, regardless of the scale of measures taken, which, in turn, influences the motivation of states. Secondly, differences in countries' socioeconomic and geographic conditions, their contributions to the climate change problem, and their adaptive capacities have created difficulties in achieving consensus among states on resolving this problem. Thirdly, the financial component of emission reduction measures, as well as the long-term nature of the results, have predetermined difficulties in finding solutions that satisfy the interests of all states. The Paris Agreement, for the first time, outlined the parties' commitments to adapt to the impacts of climate change. The establishment of the Adaptation Committee and the Least Developed Countries Expert Group was a significant step in assisting countries in developing domestic adaptation measures. The Paris Agreement is notable for its clear financial mechanisms for climate change adaptation. However, these provisions are characterized by their rather loose commitments. For example, one such provision merely requests the Green Climate Fund to expedite support for developing countries to facilitate their development and implementation of national adaptation plans. Furthermore, a significant shortcoming in the implementation of this international legal instrument is the fact that some countries, among the largest greenhouse gas emitters, are not party to it or have withdrawn their participation.

In the article 'Gender Dimensions of Verbal Aggression in Modern Media and Political Discourse: Cult of Violence or Playing with Aggressive Content?', Anna Knyazyan, Hasmik Shapaghatyan, and Viktorya Melkonyan discuss the gender dimensions of election debates, considering that they are an important part of the political campaign leading up to parliamentary or presidential elections. These debates involve the leaders of political parties represented in parliament or with a chance of winning the election. Debates are a form of public communication that can significantly influence voter decisions. The structure, content, results, and methods of election debates are of great interest in both the theoretical and practical aspects of the cult of violence and the game with aggressive content. The heightened interest of researchers in this phenomenon stems from the fact that communication is moving from the interpersonal to the social level. Communication strategies implemented by political actors to achieve specific goals become instruments for influencing public consciousness. Politicians' communication strategies are directly subject to political analysis. Linguists study political communication from a technical perspective,

focusing on the techniques used to influence the lexical, semantic, and pragmatic levels, paying particular attention to the implementation of speech tactics aimed at managing and manipulating public opinion. The authors believe that political discourse is a sphere where communication occurs in the context of political struggle, which involves various forms of counterargumentation and even verbal aggression toward a political or ideological opponent, harsh direct or hidden negative expressions toward the opponent, and anything that hinders the realization and achievement of political goals. Political discourse is viewed as a set of speech productions that arise within the context of political activity. This approach by the authors involves analyzing linguistic material taking into account the political, cultural, and temporal conditions of its actualization, as well as the social and individual characteristics of the participants in the interaction. Gender studies in the United States are at a peak in popularity, and gender linguistics is undergoing a qualitative transition from interdisciplinary research to the realm of discursive practices. This study bridges media, political, and gender discourses and examines gender asymmetry in the media's portrayal of female politicians in the United States.

This volume of the Journal presents a review of books on Resilience and the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood Countries, focusing on the crisis and transformation of the EU's political system. This book analyzes the problems of regional, interregional, and transregional cooperation within the EU, which are acquiring a special resonance and attracting the attention of an increasing number of researchers. In the context of military confrontation, the main challenge for the EU may be developing a more flexible policy of rapprochement with the EaP countries, as the EU confirms the use of soft and normative power toward member countries of regional associations. It is assumed that the development of a loyal and compromising approach may be a key factor in strengthening interregional relations in various regional areas.

__Editorial Board__

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CHALLENGES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S ENGAGEMENT IN STRATEGIC CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP REGION: THE CASES OF ARMENIA, GEORGIA AND UKRAINE

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Abstract

This article analyses the EU's engagement in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in its Eastern Neighbourhood, which is undergoing political transformation. The article highlights that, initially focusing on diplomatic efforts and development assistance, the EU has gradually deepened its engagement in response to the increasing complexity of regional conflicts. In the Eastern Partnership countries, the EU has deployed a range of instruments, from political dialogue and economic sanctions to financial assistance and civilian missions, aimed at stabilising the region and promoting long-term peace. The effectiveness of such EU strategies varies in a number of ways, reflecting the diverse political landscapes and challenges faced by each EaP country. This article analyses three separate case studies to examine the EU's conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies. Each of these studies provides a nuanced understanding of EU conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies in different geopolitical and conflict contexts. In this regard, Georgia's significant involvement in European integration processes is highlighted, which underscores Georgia's strategic importance for the EU in promoting democratic governance and regional stability. The article also examines the role of the EU in Georgia's political and security sector reforms and conflict prevention. The article also examines the geopolitical dimensions of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the context of Armenia's European integration processes and Armenia's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union. The article analyzes the role of the EU in Ukraine, in particular, after the annexation of Crimea and Russia's invasion in 2022, which shows a significant shift towards a more proactive and interventionist stance. A comparative analysis of the Ukrainian case provides an opportunity to gain insight into the EU's strategies to stabilize the Eastern Partnership region, support state-building, and overcome the broader geopolitical consequences of the conflict.

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Introduction

The EU's approach to the South Caucasus has long been characterized by a largely passive political stance, often limited to issuing declarations and communications. This region did not initially command significant attention from the EU, even after the republics gained independence in 1991. The enforcement of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) marked a shift toward more active engagement, but even then, the South Caucasus remained a lower priority compared to other regions (Jafarova 2011).

The EU began discussions on enhancing its involvement in the South Caucasus around 1999, and by 2001, various assistance programs were initiated, focusing on fostering democracy, civil society, and economic development. Despite these efforts, the EU's relationship with the South Caucasus countries was primarily defined by unilateral aid, including financial support, humanitarian assistance, food security initiatives, rehabilitation projects, and technical assistance (Jafarova 2011, 64-65; Aleksanyan 2020, 32-39).

When comparing the EU's engagement with Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine, it becomes evident that Ukraine was the first country where the EU began a more proactive and comprehensive approach. This is particularly clear when comparing the partnership and cooperation agreements signed with Armenia and Georgia to those with Ukraine. The agreements with Ukraine and Moldova were more comprehensive, including the objective of establishing a free-trade area with the EU, a goal notably absent from the agreements with the South Caucasus countries (Luciani 2025; Poz˙arlik 2025). In the initial stage, the EU refrained from involving itself in the conflict resolution mechanisms for the secessionist movements in Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, highlighting the limited scope of its engagement in the region during the 1990s and early 2000s.

The first major signal for the EU in the South Caucasus came with the Rose Revolution in Georgia. This event marked a turning point, prompting the EU to take a more active role in the region, particularly in the areas of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. The EU's direct involvement in conflict resolution in the South Caucasus began in 2003 with the appointment of a Special Representative. This role was established to aid in conflict prevention and resolution, foster dialogue with key regional actors, and support the development of a comprehensive EU policy toward the region (Sasse 2008; Vasilyan 2020).

A significant milestone followed in 2004 when Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia were formally included in the European Neighborhood Policy. With the region's growing strategic importance, particularly in terms of energy resources and transportation routes, the EU began to reassess and expand its engagement in the South Caucasus. The EU's decision to deepen its involvement was also influenced by the anticipated closer proximity of the South Caucasus to EU borders following the enlargement to include Romania, Bulgaria, and potentially other countries in the Balkans.

Similarly, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 was a crucial signal of the country's desire for democratic reforms and closer alignment with European values.

This pivotal event led the EU to increase its support and engagement with Ukraine. Additionally, Ukraine's strategic location made it a key player in the EU's interests, particularly in terms of energy transit routes and regional stability (Wolczuk, Puglisi and Wolowski 2008, 87).

Following the incorporation of Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine into the European Neighborhood Policy 2004, Action Plans (AP) were adopted in November 2006 to align these countries with European standards (European Union 2006). These Action Plans represented a pivotal moment in the EU's engagement with its eastern neighbors, outlining a framework for political and economic reforms. However, despite these ambitious goals, the ENP faced challenges in effectively addressing conflict resolution. The ENP Strategy Paper and the accompanying Action Plans did recognize the importance of conflict resolution, but their approach was criticized for being too abstract and lacking concrete measures. The strategy was more focused on general facilitation rather than offering specific, actionable steps to enhance the EU's role in resolving conflicts.

The analysis presents that for the EU, achieving security in these countries depended on the implementation of reforms in critical areas such as justice and security sector reform. The goal was to strengthen democratic institutions and create a more favorable environment for conflict settlement. Consequently, the EU prioritized supporting these reform processes as a foundational step in its broader strategy for enhancing regional security and stability. The EU's approach to conflict resolution in the South Caucasus through the European Neighborhood Policy Action Plans was inconsistent and lacked a clear, cohesive strategy. While the Action Plan with Azerbaijan emphasized sovereignty and territorial integrity, the one with Armenia highlighted the right to self-determination, reflecting a contradictory stance. This inconsistency suggests that, despite identifying conflict resolution as a priority, the EU was hesitant to directly engage in resolving conflicts in the region at that time (Delcour 2010, 548-549).

The Eastern Partnership as a key renewal of EU engagement with justified expectations

When the EaP was launched in 2009, it was seen as a significant upgrade to the EU's engagement with Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine. However, this enhanced offer came with certain expectations: partner countries were anticipated to align closely with EU rules and standards. While the EaP aimed to facilitate legal approximation with EU regulations, it fell short in several key areas. The emphasis on legal alignment did not effectively bolster the EU's conflict resolution mechanisms or adequately address the need for political reform. Furthermore, the broad application of EU standards often clashed with the socio-economic realities of the post-Soviet region. This disconnect hindered the potential for meaningful transformation and left the partner countries grappling with the challenge of reconciling EU norms with their own complex domestic situations (Kardaś 2025).

Analysis shows that from 2000 to 2009, the EU's engagement in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine was predominantly indirect, employing soft power techniques to influence post-Soviet states. The EU focused on promoting reforms in governance, economic

development, and legal systems through methods such as development aid, technical assistance, and diplomatic outreach (Liu 2025; Heinemann-Grüder 2025). This strategy aimed to align these countries with European standards and foster stability without direct intervention in conflicts. The approach sought to gradually induce transformation by supporting institutional modernization and encouraging democratic practices, leveraging indirect influence and strategic partnerships rather than direct conflict resolution (Burmester 2024).

The conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are deeply rooted in the complex history of the Caucasus region, where ethnic, political, and territorial disputes have persisted for centuries. Both regions were part of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic during the Soviet era, but tensions over national identity and autonomy simmered beneath the surface. In Abkhazia, the relationship between the Abkhaz people and the Georgian government became increasingly strained during the Soviet Union's later years. Abkhazia was initially a separate Soviet Socialist Republic but was later merged into the Georgian SSR as an autonomous republic. Despite its autonomous status, Abkhaz identity and culture were often overshadowed by Georgian influence. This marginalization led to rising nationalist sentiments among the Abkhaz, who feared losing their cultural and political identity. The situation in South Ossetia was somewhat similar. South Ossetia, inhabited mainly by the Ossetian people who are ethnically distinct from Georgians, was also granted autonomy within the Georgian SSR. The Ossetians, like the Abkhaz, harbored concerns about the preservation of their identity and autonomy. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s exacerbated these tensions, as nationalist movements gained momentum across the former Soviet states. As Georgia moved towards independence in the early 1990s, the central government's efforts to assert control over its territories were met with resistance in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Bartuzi et al. 2008, 1-7). Tensions in Abkhazia escalated into a full-scale war in 1992-1993, during which Abkhazian forces were able to expel Georgian forces from their territory. The conflict resulted in significant loss of life, the displacement of ethnic Georgians from Abkhazia, and the region's de facto independence, although it remains internationally recognized as part of Georgia. In South Ossetia, a similar conflict erupted around the same time. South Ossetian forces, also with Russian backing, clashed with Georgian troops. The conflict led to the establishment of a fragile ceasefire in 1992, leaving South Ossetia with de facto independence but without international recognition. Tensions remained high, with occasional flare-ups of violence, particularly in 2004 and 2008 (Chankvetadze and Murusidze 2021).

The EU's involvement in Georgia's separatist conflicts began in the 1990s, initially concentrating on providing humanitarian aid. Between 1992 and 2006, the EU invested considerable resources in these regions, allocating €25 million to Abkhazia and €8 million to South Ossetia, with over €100 million dedicated to humanitarian efforts, including assistance for internally displaced persons (IDPs). After the 2008 war, the EU maintained its support, channeling €61 million through the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and an additional €6 million for IDP projects following the end of the OSCE mission in Georgia (Popescu 2007, 28-30).

The situation changed significantly after the 2008 Russian-Georgian war. The EU's involvement in Georgia shifted from a predominantly indirect role to a more direct engagement in conflict resolution and peacekeeping. Under the French Presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy, the EU played a key role in brokering a six-point ceasefire agreement on August 12. Following this, the EU established a Special Representative for Georgia and launched the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) on October 1, 2008. The EUMM, staffed by over 200 monitors, was tasked with overseeing the ceasefire implementation and monitoring the withdrawal of Russian and Georgian forces. While the mission was mandated to cover all of Georgia, it faced limitations as it could only access areas under Georgian control due to restrictions imposed by Russia. Despite these constraints, the EUMM became an essential presence, stepping in after the cessation of OSCE and UN monitoring missions. One of the criticisms of the EU's response to this war was that Georgia exposed deep divisions within the EU regarding Russia and highlighted the need for a more proactive and coherent policy towards Eastern Europe (Akçakoca et al. 2009).

The EU's initial responses were fragmented, reflecting varying national perspectives on Russia's intentions and the EU's role. Despite successfully brokering a ceasefire through French mediation, the EU's neutral stance during the conflict limited its ability to effectively support Georgia or counter Russian actions. If the EU had responded more decisively and effectively to the conflict in Georgia, it might have influenced the dynamics in other neighboring regions experiencing frozen conflicts. A stronger EU stance could have demonstrated a clearer commitment to regional stability and conflict resolution, which might have impacted the behavior of other actors (Uchida 2022; Trunk 2025).

As was mentioned the key development in the EU-Georgia relationship was the signing of the Association Agreement (AA) in 2014, featuring the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA) (EUR-Lex 2014; EDIT 2014). This agreement, which provides Georgia with access to the EU's single market, aims to enhance trade by eliminating barriers and aligning Georgian trade practices with EU standards. While the DCFTA is expected to drive economic growth, boost exports, attract foreign investment, and strengthen Georgia's regulatory framework, its primary focus is on economic benefits rather than security. The AA promotes European standards in governance and human rights, but it does not directly ensure security or address regional conflicts.

In addition to its economic focus, the EU has supported Georgia through initiatives aimed at enhancing mobility, education, and research collaboration. The country participated in programs like Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020, which support educational reforms and research cooperation aligned with European standards. Financially, the EU has provided significant support to Georgia through the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), the primary source for budget support and complementary measures. Additional targeted funding has come from thematic budget lines such as the Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities (CSO-LA), the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), and the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP). Georgia has also benefited from two Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA) operations aimed at macroeconomic stability, with further aid during the

COVID-19 pandemic through the EU's Team Europe approach, which allocated EUR 150 million in emergency MFA for Georgia (European Commission 2022b, 5-7).

The situational relationship between the EU and Georgia remains complex and dynamic. Inter political turmoil in Georgia has significantly impacted its relationship with the EU, leading to the freezing of its candidacy status. The controversial Foreign Agents Law and other internal political challenges have strained the country's EU aspirations, culminating in a suspension of its membership process and associated aid (Civil Georgia 2024).

The conflict between Ukraine and Russia has deep historical roots that intensified after Ukraine's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Ukraine remained divided between pro-Russian and pro-Western factions. This divide became pronounced in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea following the Euromaidan protests, which ousted pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych and led to the establishment of a pro-Western government in Kyiv. The annexation was followed by conflict in Eastern Ukraine, where Russian-backed separatists declared independence in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, resulting in a protracted war that continued until 2022. Tensions had been brewing since 2004, during the Orange Revolution, when protests over alleged electoral fraud led to the election of pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko. His presidency aimed to strengthen ties with the EU and NATO but faced resistance from Russia and internal divisions (Wilson Center 2005).

The political landscape in Ukraine experienced a profound shift in 2010 when Viktor Yanukovych, who had been elected President, chose to align Ukraine more closely with Russia rather than pursue an AA with the EU. This decision was met with widespread disapproval and criticism from many Ukrainians who saw the AA as a path towards greater integration with Europe and reform. In late 2013, the rejection of the EU AA led to mass protests in Ukraine, known as the Euromaidan movement. The movement, which began in Kyiv's Independence Square, quickly grew into a broad-based popular uprising against Yanukovych's government. Protesters demanded closer ties with the EU and greater political and economic reforms. The Euromaidan protests were characterized by their scale and intensity, drawing hundreds of thousands of people to the streets. The movement culminated in February 2014 with the ousting of Yanukovych and the establishment of a new interim government. The success of the Euromaidan Revolution marked a pivotal moment for Ukraine, signaling a decisive shift away from Russia's sphere of influence and towards a pro-European orientation. This transition set the stage for Ukraine's European integration efforts and significantly altered the country's geopolitical trajectory. The revolution also led to significant repercussions, including Russia's annexation of Crimea and the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine, further complicating the region's relations and security dynamics (Krapfl and Kühn Von Burgsdorff 2023).

In June 2014, the newly elected President Petro Poroshenko signed an EU-Ukraine AA, which came into effect in September 2017 (European Union 2014). This shift was met with immediate aggression, as Russia's occupation and annexation of Crimea in March 2014 set the stage for ongoing conflict. The EU's role in conflict resolution remained limited, with France and Germany assuming a more prominent role in mediating through the 'Normandy format', which included Ukraine and Russia. When

the Ukraine-Russia conflict began in the spring of 2014, the EU was hesitant to become directly involved and even avoided labeling the situation as a war. Instead, the EU focused on supporting Ukraine's internal reforms, while imposing sanctions on Russia for its illegal annexation of Crimea. However, the EU did not engage in conflict resolution, leaving this role to the Normandy format, where France and Germany acted as mediators alongside Ukraine and Russia. Although the EU acknowledged the risks of its energy dependence on Russia, as evidenced by the European Commission's 2014 report, actions to mitigate this dependence were minimal, with Germany proceeding with the Nord Stream 2 pipeline (Malyarenko and Wolff 2018; Åtland 2020). The EU's reluctance to confront multipolar competition until 2022 partly explains its failure to curb Russia's aggressive actions. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine might have been avoided if the EU had responded more decisively in 2014.

It's important to mention that the Normandy format was not an EU-driven initiative, and the involvement of France and Germany did not represent the EU as a whole. This format, including Russia, Ukraine, and the OSCE, led to the Minsk Agreements aimed at establishing a ceasefire in eastern Ukraine, with provisions for local elections and a special status law for the conflict areas The Minsk agreements, established in 2014 and 2015, aimed to cease hostilities in eastern Ukraine by implementing a ceasefire and outlining steps for political resolution, including local elections and special status for conflict areas (Wittke 2019). However, the agreements lacked effective enforcement, allowing Russia to continue exerting control and ultimately failing to achieve lasting peace (European Parliament 2020). The agreements, ultimately, were not implemented as intended, becoming a temporary measure that reduced conflict intensity but failed to resolve the underlying issues. This situation led to a prolonged standoff, effectively freezing the conflict until 2022.

Despite differing views among EU member states on the geopolitical competition with Russia, there was a strong consensus on the need to support Ukraine's political and economic reforms since 2004. Between 2014 and 2022, while the EU refrained from direct involvement in the conflict, it significantly bolstered Ukraine's resilience through a variety of measures. The AA catalyzed reforms across multiple sectors, including decentralization and anti-corruption efforts, with the EU providing vital political, financial, and organizational support. However, the EU did not grant Ukraine a membership prospect during this period. The DCFTA within the AA helped align the Ukrainian economy with the EU's single market by integrating EU rules and regulations into various sectors (Raik, Blockmans, Osypchuk and Suslov 2024). Additionally, the EU-Ukraine cooperation extended to reforms in local governance, public administration, and justice (Samokhvalov and Strelkov 2021; Králiková 2022).

Supporting security sector reform with a focus on deepening integration

In 2014, the EU took significant steps to assist Ukraine by deploying the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) tools, leading to the establishment of the EU Advisory Mission (EUAM) in Kyiv, with regional offices in Lviv, Kharkiv, and Odesa. The primary aim of EUAM Ukraine was to support the reform of Ukraine's security sector, focusing on the police, judiciary, and border guard services. Between 2014 and 2021, the EU also committed substantial financial resources to address the impact of

the ongoing war in Donbas. This support included funding for reconstruction efforts and assistance to internally displaced persons, reflecting the EU's broader commitment to stabilizing Ukraine amidst the conflict (EEAS 2020).

The EU's response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine has been one of the most decisive and comprehensive in its history, marked by swift and multifaceted actions. The EU imposed extensive sanctions on Russia, targeting key sectors like finance, energy, and defense, and placed travel bans and asset freezes on Russian officials and entities linked to the government.

In addition to sanctions, the EU has provided significant financial and military support to Ukraine. As of August 2024, the EU had disbursed €12.2 billion under the Ukraine Facility, with a total of over $121 billion allocated for financial, military, humanitarian, and refugee assistance since the war began. European leaders committed an additional $54 billion in February 2024 to support Ukraine's recovery and EU accession efforts, bringing total EU support to over $162 billion. Of this, $13.1 billion has already been disbursed, with further funds allocated to attract investment and support recovery. The EU has also provided over $42 billion in military aid, including ammunition, air-defense systems, tanks, and fighter jets. This aid includes $6.6 billion from the European Peace Facility and bilateral contributions from member states. In March 2024, a dedicated Ukraine Assistance Fund worth $5.4 billion was established to further these efforts. The EU has also allocated $2.2 billion for joint procurement of artillery ammunition and $535 million to boost the EU defense industry. Additionally, the EU has become the largest military training provider for Ukrainian forces, with plans to train 60,000 personnel by the end of 2024 under the $390 million Military Assistance Mission. Humanitarian efforts include $27 million for de-mining liberated territories (EEAS 2024).

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 significantly impacted the EUAM, leading to an expanded mandate that included facilitating refugee flows and humanitarian aid, as well as supporting the investigation and prosecution of war crimes. As the conflict intensified, the EU launched the EU Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM Ukraine) in November 2022 to train 15,000 Ukrainian armed forces personnel, with the goal later increasing to 30,000 (Brzozowski 2023).

The situation changed dramatically after February 2022, with the European Peace Facility (EPF) becoming a crucial tool for financing the delivery of military equipment to Ukraine by EU member states. The EPF, originally designed as a common off-budget fund for the CSDP, was rapidly adapted to meet the needs of the Ukrainian military, alongside bilateral aid from individual member states (European Peace Facility 2024). In conclusion, it is evident that following the 2022 war in Ukraine, the EU significantly shifted its policy by providing military assistance, underscoring its role as a key player in conflict resolution.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict began to escalate in the late 1980s, as the Soviet Union entered a period of political and economic turmoil. The policies of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) initiated by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev inadvertently allowed suppressed nationalist sentiments to resurface across the Soviet Union, including in Nagorno-Karabakh. The modern phase of the conflict began in February 1988, when the Nagorno-Karabakh regional legislature passed a resolution

requesting the transfer of the oblast from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR. As the Soviet Union weakened, the conflict escalated into full-scale war between 1991 and 1994. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, and Nagorno-Karabakh declared its independence as the Republic of Artsakh, though it was not internationally recognized (Avakian 2015).

Bishkek Protocol, brokered by Russia in 1994, established a ceasefire that granted Nagorno-Karabakh de facto independence with a self-declared government in Stepanakert. Despite this status, the region remained heavily dependent on Armenia for economic, political, and military support (OSCE Minsk Group 1994). This ceasefire remained in effect until September 2020.

The relative calm was shattered in April 2016, when intense fighting broke out along the Line of Contact. The four-day conflict often referred to as the April War or the Four-Day War, resulted in hundreds of casualties on both sides and some territorial changes, with Azerbaijani forces reclaiming several strategic positions. The April War underscored the fragility of the ceasefire and highlighted the risk of a renewed large-scale conflict (Broers 2016). During the Four-Day War in Nagorno-Karabakh in April 2016, the EU played a relatively restrained role, reflecting its broader cautious approach to conflicts in the South Caucasus region. The EU's response to the escalation was primarily diplomatic, urging both sides to adhere to the ceasefire and engage in renewed negotiations under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group. The EU expressed concern over the outbreak of violence and called for an immediate cessation of hostilities, emphasizing the need for a peaceful resolution to the conflict (OSCE 2016). However, the EU's involvement was largely limited to issuing statements and supporting the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group, which is co-chaired by France, Russia, and the United States. The EU did not take a leading role in mediating the conflict or in proposing new initiatives to resolve the long-standing dispute, reflecting its cautious approach and its reliance on the established international framework for conflict resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh. The 2016 conflict underscored the EU's limitations in addressing the complex and deeply entrenched conflicts in its Eastern neighborhood, particularly in regions where its influence is constrained by other major powers, such as Russia.

The EU's restrained role during the Nagorno-Karabakh Four-Day War in 2016 can be understood within the broader context of Armenia's geopolitical choices, particularly its decision not to sign the AA with the EU in 2013 and instead join the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) under Russia's influence. This pivotal decision had far-reaching implications for Armenia's foreign policy and its relations with the EU, effectively limiting the EU's leverage and influence in the country, particularly in the security sector (Ter-Matevosyan et al. 2017; Aleksanyan 2020). Armenia's alignment with the EAEU, a bloc dominated by Russia, placed the country firmly within Russia's sphere of influence. This geopolitical alignment had significant consequences for the scope of EU-Armenia relations, especially in the security sector, where Russia's dominance was—and remains—pronounced. As a result, the EU found its ability to engage with Armenia on security matters severely constrained, as Russia held the primary influence over Armenia's defense and security policies.

In contrast, the EU's actions in Georgia, where it played a more proactive role, highlight the difference that political orientation can make. Georgia's political majority firmly aligned the country's future with the EU, allowing the EU to engage more deeply and assertively in conflict resolution efforts. This was evident in the EU's involvement during the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and its subsequent diplomatic initiatives. The Georgian government's commitment to European integration provided the EU with a platform to exert greater influence in the region, particularly in the security domain.

The most dramatic escalation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict occurred in September 2020, when Azerbaijan launched a full-scale offensive, employing advanced military technology, including drones and missile systems. The conflict, marked by heavy casualties and widespread destruction, saw Azerbaijan, with significant backing from Türkiye, secure substantial military gains. The war continued until November 10, 2020, when a statement was signed between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia, which established a ceasefire. It included provisions for the deployment of Russian peacekeepers to oversee the implementation of the ceasefire and the return of refugees (Office of the Prime Minister of the RA 2020).

Following this ceasefire, the EU increased its engagement in the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, working more proactively to facilitate dialogue and support long-term stability in the region. In a significant move that highlighted the EU's ambitions and marked a robust response to regional instability, the EU launched a two-month observer mission to the Armenia-Azerbaijan border in the fall of 2022. This mission, developed almost on an ad hoc basis, was modeled after the EUMM mission in Georgia, which had been in place since the 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict (EU Mission in Armenia 2024). This mission was unprecedented as it was the first of its kind conducted on the territory of a member state of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). It was criticized by Russia, which argued that the EU presence could exacerbate regional tensions, and by Azerbaijan, which argued that it had forced Armenia to adopt a more hardline stance. The short-term mission was followed by a two-year deployment, starting in February 2023, with the possibility of extension. Around 100 observers from various EU member states were sent to help stabilize Armenia's border areas, build confidence and strengthen security in conflict-affected regions, and support efforts to peacefully normalize relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan (Sahakian 2023). Despite Azerbaijan's reservations, this move has contributed to reducing tensions and increasing the political cost of potential Azerbaijani aggression against Armenia.

The EU's involvement also included the initiation of the Brussels format talks in late 2021 and early 2022, which quickly positioned the EU as a key mediator in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. This marked a shift from the OSCE Minsk Group, which had previously led peace efforts but saw its influence wane due to Russia's preoccupation with the Ukraine conflict. Under the guidance of European Council President Charles Michel, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev engaged in multiple meetings in Brussels, with additional discussions in Prague and Chişinău (Górecki 2024). These talks, also attended by leaders such as French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf

Scholz, underscored the EU's growing role in facilitating peace. One of the key recent developments was the meeting on April 5, 2024, in Brussels, where President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, EU High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, USAID Administrator Samantha Power, and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan gathered to reaffirm their support for Armenia's sovereignty, democracy, territorial integrity, and socio-economic resilience. The EU will launch a EUR 270 million Resilience and Growth Plan for Armenia for 2024-2027. This plan aims to bolster Armenia's socio-economic resilience, support trade diversification, and address the long-term needs of displaced individuals. It will enhance sectoral cooperation, promote regulatory alignment with the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), and support key areas like trade, infrastructure, energy, and aviation safety. The plan builds on the Economic and Investment Plan launched in 2021, which mobilized over EUR 550 million for strategic investments in connectivity, digital and energy infrastructure, and business development. The EU has mobilized EUR 38.4 million in humanitarian aid and budget support since 2020, focusing on housing, training, employment, and psycho-social support (Office of the Prime Minister of the RA 2024). The consideration of transferring non-lethal military equipment to Armenia under the European Peace Facility (EPF) highlights the evolving security dynamics in the region. Armenia's increasing alignment with Western interests and the heightened tensions with Russia are reflective of these shifts. Despite criticism from Russia and Azerbaijan, the EU's efforts, including the EUMA, have played a role in reducing tensions and deterring further aggression, signaling the EU's commitment to promoting stability and peace in the South Caucasus (Buniatian 2024b).

In conclusion, the EU's engagement with the South Caucasus has evolved significantly over the years, reflecting shifts in geopolitical priorities and strategic interests. Initially characterized by a passive stance and limited involvement, the EU's approach began to change in the early 2000s, marked by increased support and a more active role in regional affairs. However, the effectiveness of these frameworks in conflict resolution and peacebuilding has been mixed. The EU's initial reluctance to directly address conflicts in the South Caucasus, such as those in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh, limited its impact in these areas.

Financial overview of EU support for conflict resolution and peacebuilding

Understanding the EU's approach to conflict resolution and peacekeeping requires a detailed analysis of its financial interventions and strategic priorities. The EU employs both security and non-security mechanisms to address conflicts, with funding allocated to various areas. Examining these funding allocations is crucial for grasping how the EU balances its efforts between immediate security needs and long-term developmental goals. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the EU's conflict resolution and peacekeeping strategies in Armenia, Ukraine, and Georgia, it's crucial to explore the financial support provided through various EU initiatives. For this purpose, within the thesis, I apply Official Development Assistance (ODA) data to operationalize EU Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding Strategies through the EU's financial support

under the Conflict, Peace, and Security category, which is divided into five main subcategories (OECD 2019).

Figure 1. Total EU Disbursements to EaP Countries in the Conflict, Peace, and Security Sector (2009-2024) (in EUR)
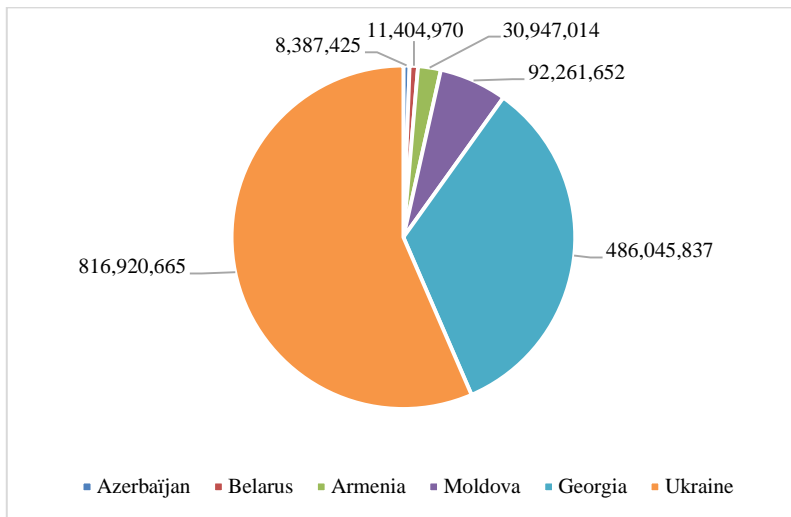
Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data (European Commission 2024d)

The total disbursements allocated by the European Union to various countries under the Conflict, Peace, and Security sector. According to the data, Ukraine received the highest EU assistance, totaling €816.9 million. This is because of the EU's prioritization of Ukraine's security and stability, especially in light of the ongoing conflict and the country's strategic significance in Eastern Europe. Georgia, with €486 million, follows as the second-largest recipient. This is because Georgia plays a crucial role in the South Caucasus, where the EU aims to foster stability and security through reforms and international peacekeeping support.

Moldova faces challenges related to unresolved territorial disputes and regional tensions, particularly with the Transnistrian region. The EU's financial support aims to address these conflicts and promote stability, reflecting a strong commitment to enhancing security and managing conflict in a region with significant internal and external challenges. Armenia received €30.9 million, which is lower compared to Georgia and Ukraine. This is because the EU's involvement in Armenia is more focused on specific areas, such as targeted security reforms and civilian peace-building, reflecting Armenia's unique regional challenges. Also research revealed that EU began its proactive assistance in Armenia after the 2020 war, addressing immediate needs and long-term stability requirements. Belarus and Azerbaijan, with €11.4 million and €8.4 million respectively, received the least amount of assistance. This is due to their more limited cooperation with the EU, as well as concerns over their lower levels of democracy and governance, which have affected the extent of EU support and engagement.

Figure 2. Total EU Disbursements to EaP Countries in the Government and Civil Society Sector (2009-2024) (in EUR)
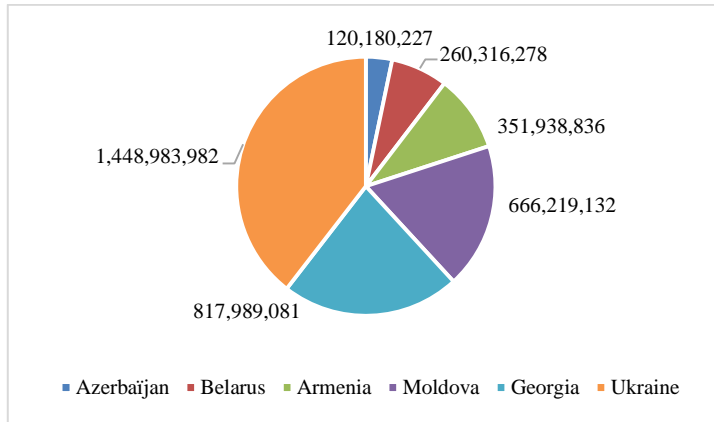
Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data (European Commission 2024d)

As discussed in the first chapter, the EU employs both security and non-security mechanisms for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. To substantiate this, it is important to examine the EU's funding in the 'Government and Civil Society' category, which complements its security initiatives. This funding covers a broad range of areas, including public sector policy and administrative management, public finance management, and decentralization with support for subnational governments. It also includes funding for anti-corruption organizations, domestic revenue mobilization, and public procurement. Additionally, it supports legal and judicial development, macroeconomic policy, and enhances democratic participation and civil society. The funding addresses elections, legislatures and political parties, media and the free flow of information, human rights, and women's rights organizations. It also works to end violence against women and girls and facilitates orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility (OECD 2019). This comprehensive approach underscores the EU's commitment to strengthening governance and societal development, complementing its security mechanisms to effectively address and resolve conflicts. Figure 2 shows a significant increase in financial assistance as a non-security instrument compared to the support provided for security-related sectors (see Figure 1). Ukraine received the highest disbursement, totaling €1.45 billion, followed by Georgia with €818 million. This is substantially higher than the security assistance, indicating that the EU places a strong emphasis on strengthening state governance, the rule of law, and internal affairs in these countries. Moldova, with €666.2 million, Armenia with €351.8 million, Belarus with €260.3 million, and Azerbaijan with €120.2 million, also received considerable amounts, reinforcing this pattern (see Figure 2).

The analysis of the funding distribution across the two sectors, Conflict, Peace, and Security, and Government and Civil Society, reveals a clear prioritization of governance and civil society by the EU. The total disbursement for the Conflict, Peace, and Security sector in these six countries amounts to €1.446 billion, whereas the allocation for the Government and Civil Society sector is significantly higher, reaching

€3.669 billion. This substantial disparity underscores the EU's strategic emphasis on strengthening governance structures and supporting civil society as fundamental components in addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting long-term stability in the region.

In both the Conflict, Peace, and Security sector and the Government and Civil Society sector, the distribution of financial assistance follows a consistent pattern. Ukraine consistently receives the highest level of support, followed by Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, Belarus, and Azerbaijan. This ordering reflects the EU's recognition of the varying levels of governance and civil society development in each country, as well as the strategic importance of addressing these issues in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The EU's focus on governance and civil society as integral elements of its conflict resolution strategy indicates a fundamental shift in its approach. By prioritizing the enhancement of governance structures and the support of civil society, the EU aims to tackle the underlying causes of instability, particularly through the strengthening of state institutions. This approach demonstrates the EU's conviction that sustainable peace and long-term stability are dependent on the effective functioning of state institutions and the empowerment of civil society. Additionally, as our research reveals, the EU has been cautious in its direct involvement in conflicts, preferring to support structural and institutional improvements as a means to promote stability and peace.

Figure 3. Sectoral Disbursements for Armenia (2009-2024) (in EUR)
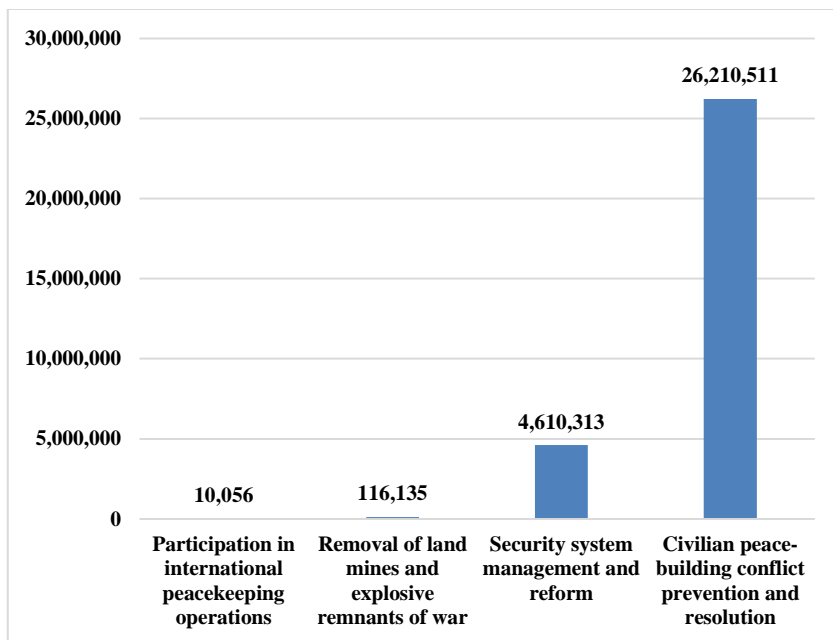
Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data (European Commission 2024d)

Examining the sectoral disbursements in Armenia, Ukraine, and Georgia will be effective for understanding the EU's priorities and strategies in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. According to the dataset, from 2009 to 2024, the EU has allocated the most funds to civilian peace-building, conflict prevention, and resolution in Armenia, with a substantial amount of 26.2 million euros. This is followed by 4.6 million euros dedicated to security system management and reform. In contrast, participation in international peacekeeping operations and the removal of land mines and explosive remnants of war received considerably lower funding, at 10,056 euros and 116,135 euros, respectively (see Figure 3). This distribution reflects the EU's emphasis on supporting civilian-led peace efforts in Armenia. While other areas are also important, the EU's focus on civilian peace-building in Armenia aligns with its broader goal of facilitating deep-rooted, systemic changes that address the causes of conflict and promote enduring stability. The data on Reintegration and Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) were missing.

Figure 4. Trendline of Sectoral Disbursements in Armenia (2009-2023) (in EUR)
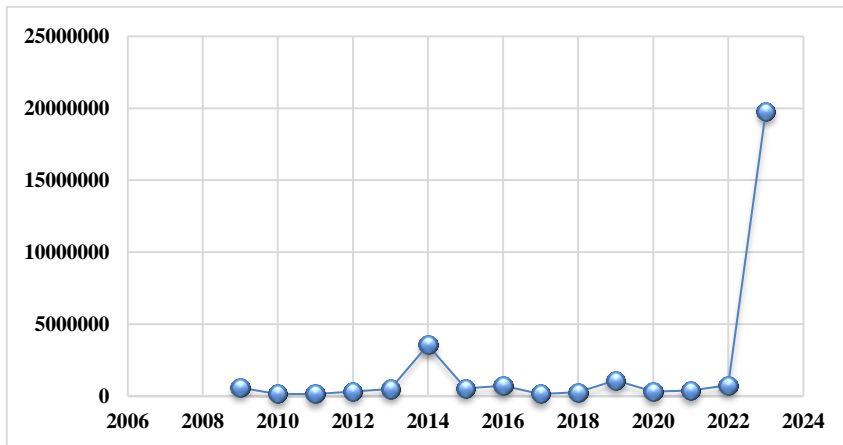
Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data. (European Commission 2024d)

The chart illustrates the fluctuation in EU disbursements to Armenia across different years from 2009 to 2023. The most noticeable peak occurred in 2023, where disbursements sharply increased to nearly 19.77 million euros. Prior to this, the disbursement levels remained relatively stable, with minor fluctuations, indicating consistent but lower levels of funding. Another noticeable peak is in 2014, though it is considerably smaller compared to 2023. The fluctuation in EU disbursements to Armenia in 2014 can be linked to several key developments. Following Armenia's decision in 2013 not to sign the AA with the EU and instead join the EAEU under Russian influence, the dynamics of EU-Armenia relations changed significantly (Stepanian 2013). In response, the EU likely increased its funding in 2014 to maintain engagement with Armenia, supporting democratic reforms, civil society, and conflict prevention efforts despite the geopolitical shift. Additionally, although the CEPA was officially signed in 2017, preparatory activities and negotiations were ongoing in the

years prior. The sharp increase in EU disbursements in 2023 is related to the aftermath of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The war had severe consequences for Armenia, leading to a humanitarian crisis, significant territorial losses, and ongoing security concerns. As was mentioned above the substantial funding increase in 2023 likely reflects the EU's response to Armenia's heightened need for humanitarian aid, conflict prevention, and peace-building efforts. This surge in funding may also indicate the EU's broader strategic interest in the South Caucasus region, where it sought to reinforce its role as a mediator and peacebuilder amid the continuing tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan (Landgraf and Seferian 2024). Also, it's important to note that The EU Monitoring Capacity in Armenia began operations on October 20, 2022, after the EU decided to deploy monitoring experts along Armenia's side of the international border with Azerbaijan. This deployment likely played a role in the substantial increase in EU disbursements in 2023 aimed at bolstering Armenia's security and stability in a challenging regional context (EEAS 2022).

Figure 5. Sectoral Disbursements for Azerbaijan (2009-2024) (in EUR)
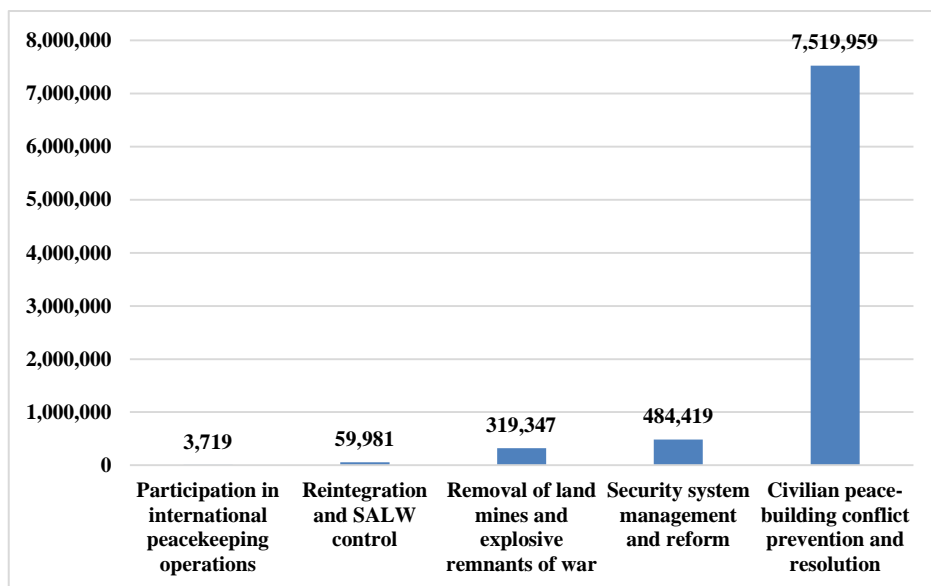
Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data (European Commission 2024d)

Figure 5 shows that in Azerbaijan, the largest disbursement was for civilian peace-building, conflict prevention, and resolution, amounting to approximately €7.5 million, while security system management and reform received about €484,419. Comparatively, in Armenia, the EU allocated a much higher sum of €26.2 million for civilian peace-building efforts and €4.6 million for security system management and reform. Overall, Armenia received a much higher total disbursement from the EU compared to Azerbaijan.

Figure 6. Trendline of Sectoral Disbursements in Azerbaijan (2009-2023) (in EUR)
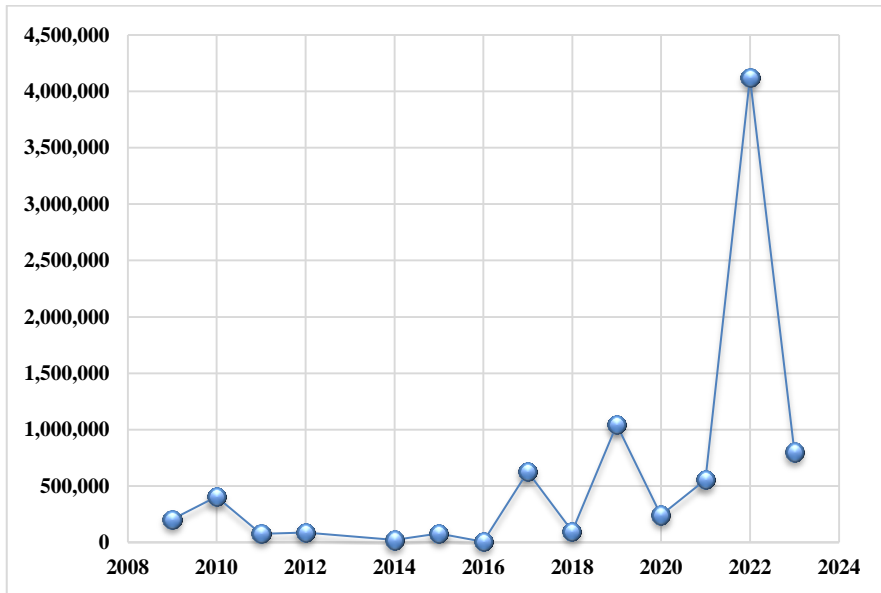
Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data. (European Commission 2024d)

The Figure 6 shows a notable rise in disbursements starting from 2017, which is closely related to the 2016 conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. This increase reflects the EU's intensified efforts to support peacebuilding and conflict resolution in Azerbaijan. The trend continues into 2019 with a significant surge in funding, likely tied to the initiatives aimed at stabilizing the region after the war and preventing further escalations. Additionally, the significant increase in disbursements in 2022, reaching 4,122,028, is related to post-war efforts. As was mentioned in previous chapters following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the EU heightened financial commitments to support recovery and reconstruction efforts. This substantial peak in disbursements reflects investments in rebuilding infrastructure, providing humanitarian aid, and supporting economic and social recovery in the aftermath of the conflict.

Figure 7. Sectoral Disbursements for Georgia (2007-2024) (in EUR)
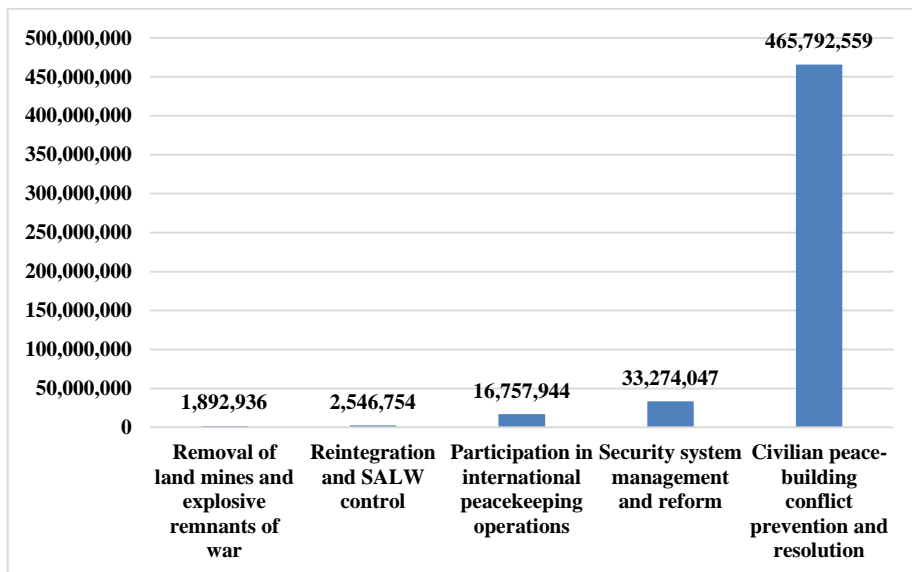
Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data (European Commission 2024d)

To examine the EU's funding for Georgia, I analyzed data from 2007 to 2024, as research revealed a significant increase in allocations starting in 2008. This substantial rise reflects the EU's heightened engagement in response to the 2008 Russia-Georgian War and its ongoing impact on Georgia's stability. The data for Georgia indicates that from 2007 to 2024, the European Union has prioritized funding civilian peace-building, conflict prevention, and resolution, with a significant allocation of approximately 465.8 million euros. This substantial investment highlights the EU's focus on promoting long-term peace and stability in Georgia, likely in response to the country's ongoing conflicts and post-war recovery efforts, particularly after the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. The EU has also allocated around 33.3 million euros to security system management and reform, which underscores its commitment to enhancing Georgia's security infrastructure and governance. Participation in international peacekeeping operations received notable funding of approximately 16.7 million euros, reflecting Georgia's role in contributing to global peace efforts. In comparison, funds allocated for the Removal of Land Mines and explosive remnants of war and for reintegration and Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) control are lower, at approximately 1.9 million euros and 2.54 million euros respectively. These areas received less attention, possibly due to the EU's greater emphasis on broader security reforms and conflict prevention strategies rather than specific post-conflict clean-up operations. Overall, the EU's funding strategy in Georgia highlights a comprehensive approach to supporting peace, security, and governance in the region. In contrast to Armenia, Georgia received a much larger total allocation, particularly in the area of civilian peace-building, conflict prevention, and resolution, which amounted to approximately 433.7 million euros (see Figure 3). This reflects the EU's extensive involvement in Georgia's peace

efforts, especially after the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, which left lasting impacts on the country's stability.

Figure 8. Trendline of Sectoral Disbursements in Georgia (2007-2023)

Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data (European Commission 2024d)

The disbursement data for Georgia shows several peaks and fluctuations over the years, reflecting both external and internal political dynamics. The early years, particularly 2008 and 2009, show substantial disbursements, which align with the EU's immediate response to the 2008 Georgia-Russia conflict and the subsequent efforts to stabilize the region amidst tense relations with Russia. These high levels of financial support also underscore the EU's commitment to strengthening Georgia's governance structures and addressing internal political challenges that emerged from the conflict. During this period, the EU's involvement was crucial not only in managing the external threat posed by strained relations with Russia but also in navigating internal political changes within Georgia, such as shifts in government and efforts to consolidate democratic governance. The disbursement amount remained relatively high through 2010 and 2013, but there was a noticeable decline in 2014 and 2016, reflecting evolving geopolitical strategies and internal adjustments within Georgia's political landscape. From 2010 to 2015, the disbursements from the EU to Georgia reflect a period of intense engagement, particularly following the 2008 Georgia-Russia conflict. The signing of the AA and the DCFTA in 2014 was a pivotal moment, as it significantly deepened Georgia's integration with the EU. These agreements not only enhanced economic ties but also underscored the EU's commitment to supporting Georgia's security system. The increase in disbursements from 2016 to 2018 can be linked to the full entry into force of the AA on July 1, 2016. This agreement was a landmark development in EU-Georgia relations and had several significant implications.

In 2019, the sharp decline in disbursements can be linked to a year of significant change and political crisis in Georgia, which set the stage for the 2020 parliamentary elections. This period was characterized by widespread public dissatisfaction and political unrest as various factions within Georgia grappled with the direction of the country's future.

In 2020, the situation improved, and disbursements increased, reflecting the EU's response to regional security dynamics, including the impact of the Nagorno-Karabakh war. However, in 2021, disbursements decreased again, which can be attributed to the aftermath of the conflict. Substantial financial resources were allocated to Armenia and Azerbaijan to address immediate humanitarian and reconstruction needs, affecting the level of support for Georgia (see Figure 4 and Figure 6). As a result, while Georgia did receive assistance, the overall disbursements were lower compared to previous years due to the prioritization of urgent needs in the conflict-affected regions. In 2022 and 2023, the disbursements decline slightly but remain substantial, indicating continued EU support in the face of ongoing regional tensions and internal challenges in Georgia.

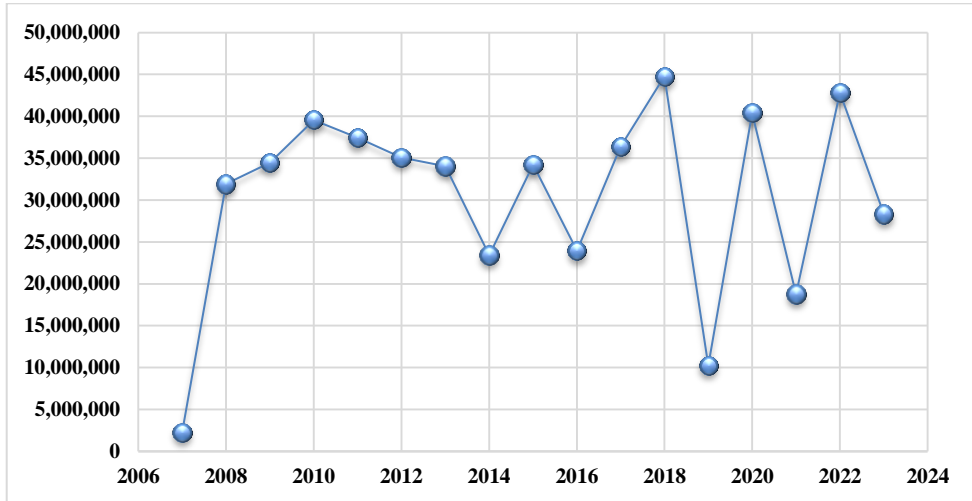**Figure 9. Sectoral Disbursements for Ukraine (2009-2024) (in EUR)**
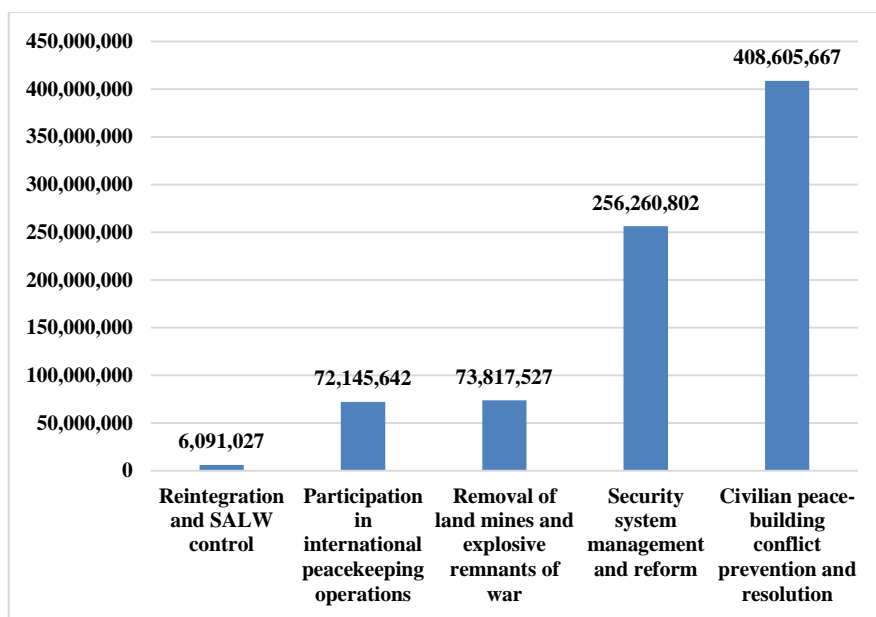
Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data (European Commission 2024d)

The EU's financial disbursements to Ukraine across Security sectors highlight the strategic importance of stabilizing and rebuilding the country amidst ongoing conflict. The largest allocation, 408.4 million euros, was directed towards civilian peace-building, conflict prevention, and resolution, reflecting the EU's commitment to fostering long-term peace and addressing the root causes of conflict in Ukraine. Significant funding of 256.3 million euros was also allocated to security system management and reform, underscoring the need to modernize Ukraine's defense and

security institutions in response to the challenges posed by internal unrest and external threats. The EU's focus on removing land mines and explosive remnants of war, with 73.8 million euros, further illustrates the urgency of clearing large areas of Ukraine contaminated by ongoing military activities. Participation in international peacekeeping operations received 72.1 million euros, highlighting the EU's support for Ukraine's active role in global security, even as it faces significant internal challenges.

Figure 10. Trendline of Sectoral Disbursements in Ukraine (2009-2023) (in EUR)
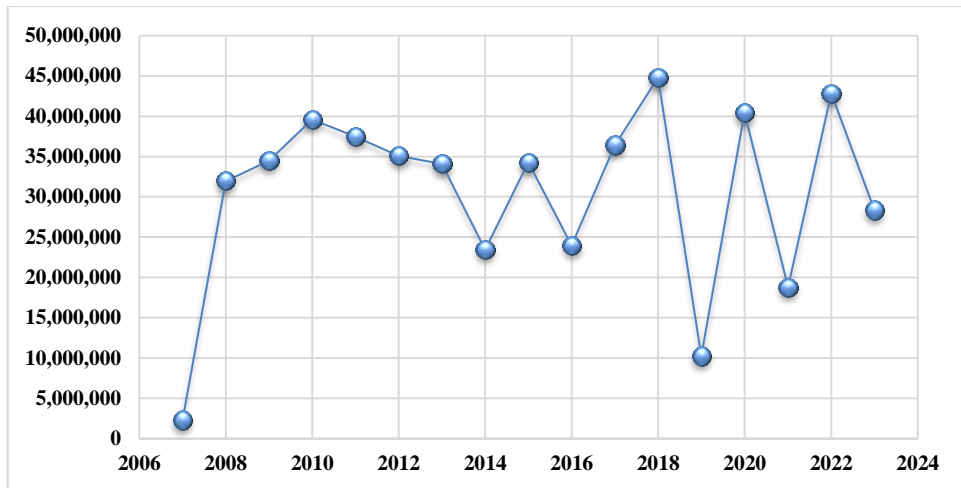
Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data (European Commission 2024d)

The disbursement figures from 2009 to 2023 for conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts in Ukraine reveal a trend that corresponds with the country's geopolitical situation and the escalation of conflict. The data shows a significant increase in funding beginning in 2014, which can be linked to both the onset of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea by Russia, as well as the signing of the AA between the EU and Ukraine on June 27, 2014. The years 2015 through 2019 saw substantial disbursements, reflecting intensified international efforts to stabilize the situation and support Ukraine's security and governance reforms. The peak disbursement in 2017, with €114,747,402, corresponds to the implementation of major reforms and increased international aid to address the ongoing conflict and its humanitarian consequences. Additionally, the AA between the EU and Ukraine fully came into force on September 1, 2017, after which the EU significantly increased its support to Ukraine, further enhancing funding and resources for conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts.

This high level of funding continued through 2019, with another peak at €111,211,547, before starting to decline in 2020. The significant decline in 2022 and 2023 suggests a possible conclusion of specific projects, reallocation of funds, or a shift in international priorities, possibly influenced by the evolving situation on the ground or changes in the geopolitical landscape. The steep decline in disbursements for 2023, might be explained by the EU's reallocation of funds towards immediate

humanitarian aid and crisis management. Additionally, the decline could reflect a strategic decision to encourage Ukrainian self-reliance in certain areas, with the EU stepping back from direct financial involvement as local institutions and governance structures are strengthened (see Figure 10). It is important to emphasize that this does not mean the EU decreased its overall assistance; rather, it signifies a change in the EU's approach, allocating substantial resources to other critical areas. The EU and its Member States have provided €39 billion in military aid to Ukraine, including €6.1 billion through the European Peace Facility for military equipment delivery. In March 2024, the Council established a specific Ukraine Assistance Fund of €5 billion, raising the total European Peace Facility support to €11.1 billion. Additionally, the EU Military Assistance Mission for Ukraine, with a budget of €362 million, is addressing the training requirements of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and has already trained 52,000 Ukrainian soldiers (European Commission 2024e).

Furthermore, the data provided under the conflict, peace, and security do not reflect allocations during active military actions. Instead, this data illustrates the EU's assistance focused on preventive measures, including civilian oversight, transparency in the security system, capacity building, monitoring, and dialogue aimed at preventing conflicts and promoting peace.

Figure 11. Trendline of disbursements by EU in government and civil society sector in Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine (2007-2023)
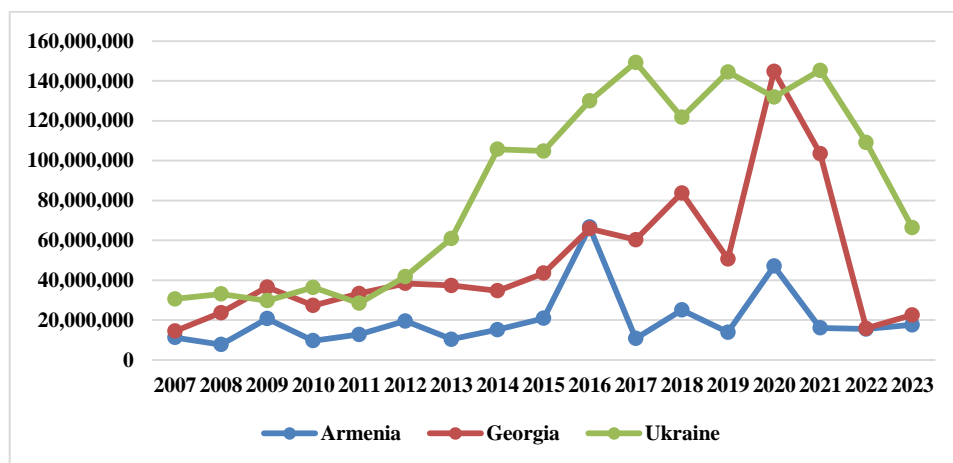
Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data (European Commission 2024d)

After analyzing in detail, the EU disbursements in the conflict, peace, and security for each country, it is essential to provide an overall assessment of the funding trends in the Government and Civil Society sectors in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine. The analysis of these disbursements reveals a clear correlation between EU funding patterns and the geopolitical dynamics of the region.

From 2011 to 2016, a significant increase in investments was observed across all three countries, coinciding with the signing of AAs. During this period, the EU substantially increased funding in areas such as democracy, human rights, and

governance, aiming to strengthen democratic institutions and improve governance structures. This strategy was viewed as a crucial means to promote long-term stability and development in the region.

However, after 2020, the trend shifted, with noticeable declines in investment. In Georgia, this decline can be attributed to internal political developments, particularly the passage of the controversial Foreign Agents law in 2023, which strained relations with the EU and led to a suspension of financial support. In Ukraine, the decrease in funding resulted primarily from the EU's reallocation of resources towards military assistance in response to the ongoing conflict with Russia, prioritizing defense and reconstruction efforts. In Armenia, the decline in investment is linked to the aftermath of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, which prompted a reassessment of EU priorities and a more targeted approach to conflict management and stabilization (Aleksanyan 2025).

Conclusion and discussion

The shifts in EU funding patterns reflect the evolving geopolitical landscape and the EU's recalibration of its strategies in response to changing security concerns. Initially, the EU prioritized non-security mechanisms to achieve peace, focusing on governance, human rights, and democracy. However, as the region faced escalating security challenges—particularly the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and Ukraine—the EU adjusted its approach, placing greater emphasis on military sector funding, with Ukraine serving as a prominent example of this shift.

In conclusion, it is evident that in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine, the majority of the EU's financial allocations have been directed towards Civilian Peace-Building, Conflict Prevention, and Resolution. This emphasis on civilian-led activities, such as capacity building, monitoring, and dialogue initiatives, reflects the EU's commitment to long-term strategies for preventing conflicts and fostering sustainable peace. By investing in these areas, the EU aims to enhance the capacity of local communities and institutions to manage and resolve conflicts internally, thereby promoting stability and resilience in the region.

The substantial increase in financial support during periods of heightened conflict—such as the escalation in Ukraine starting in 2014, the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, and the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War—demonstrates the EU's strategic approach to addressing regional instability. The focus on civilian peace-building and governance reforms highlights the EU's commitment to addressing the underlying causes of conflict and promoting stability through a combination of security and non-security mechanisms.

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Ethical standards
The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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REGIONAL DIMENSION OF GEOPOLITICAL PROCESSES OF DEFENSE CAPACITY AND DIPLOMATIC SUPPORT OF THE STATEHOODS OF GEORGIA, ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN IN 1919: A NEW LOOK AT HISTORY

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Abstract

The article provides a comparative analysis of the geopolitical situation in Transcaucasia during the period of 1919, when Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan declared their independence and began nation-building and state-building.

The author focuses on the regional dimension of the geopolitical processes of 1919, arguing for the existential significance of issues of defense capability and diplomatic support for their new statehoods of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Based on the analysis of archival and diplomatic documents, as well as periodical press materials, the article determines the positions of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in the formation of independent states. In this context, the article argues the main causes of ethno-territorial contradictions and the role of the Entente states. Based on historical facts, the author comes to the conclusion that, having given priority to issues of delimitation and demarcation in the formation of their own statehood, the Transcaucasian countries relied more on the arbitration of the Entente countries, without seeking to resolve the issue themselves.

Introduction

The official relations between the Republic of Armenia and the South of Russia had just been restored, when in the autumn the military-political situation of the republic became even more difficult, which is explained by the strengthening of the aggressive aspirations of the neighbors towards the Republic of Armenia and their practical steps in that direction. With this unfriendly and even hostile relationship between Azerbaijan and Georgia, by the fall of 1919, it intensified and turned into a threat. As for Türkiye, major changes were made here, which were encouraging at first, but after a short time

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became a great danger for the Republic of Armenia (Mkhoyan 2017; Yemelianova 2023).

The Paris Peace Assembly put forward the problem of dissolving the Ottoman Empire, which was a real opportunity to solve the Armenian Question. However, the Milli movement led by Mustafa Kemal prevented the destruction of Türkiye and at the same time the realization of the political goals of the states of the Entente to solve the Armenian Question. Kemalist Türkiye entered the historical arena, striving to complete the process of the destruction of Armenians. After the departure of British soldiers from Transcaucasia in August 1919, favorable conditions were created for Kemalist Türkiye and Azerbaijan to finally destroy Armenia and bring the borders closer to Azerbaijan.

From July 10 to August 6, 1919, at the conference convened in Erzurum, Turkish nationalists officially announced their uncompromising anti-Armenian policy. In the first point of the Manifesto adopted at the conference, it is recorded that Western Armenia is an inseparable part of the Ottoman Empire. "The vilayet of Trabizon, the sanjak of Janik, as well as the vilayets of Urzrum, Svaz, Diyarbakır, Van, Bitlis, and the administrative regions included in these vilayets form a unified whole and cannot be separated from the Ottoman Empire under any pretext" (Kemal 1929, 381). Later, on October 17, Kemal telegraphed Mahmed Pasha. "We will not cede a single inch of land to Armenia" (Kemal 1932, 120; Simonyan 1986). Azerbaijan and Georgia, encouraged by the active support of Kemal Türkiye, sought to resolve territorial disputes with the Republic of Armenia by military means.

On September 25, 1919, A. Khatisyan informed in a telegram addressed to Av. Aharonyan and Poghos Nubar Pasha, the chairmen of the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian national delegations in Paris, that under the pressure of Azerbaijan, an agreement was signed between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan in Shushi on August 22, by which Nagorno-Karabakh temporarily, until the question is resolved at the Paris Peace Assembly, recognizes the sovereignty of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan also extended its power over the provinces of Shushi, Jhanshir and Karyagin, and Zangezur appeared in the ring on both sides. Now Azerbaijan is feverishly 'preparing for war', the telegram says, 'to capture Zangezur'. The leaders of Türkiye and Azerbaijan continue to create conspiracies against Armenia[1]. Azerbaijan seeks to capture Zangezdur and extend its control from Aghdam to Qamarlu, then join the Muslims of Arax and connect with Türkiye through them. In order to implement their military plans, secret military alliances were signed at the direct behest of Türkiye, which were directed against both the Volunteer Army of the South of Russia and the Republic of Armenia.

Spontaneity, lack of political experience of the elites and weakness of political forces

In 1919 at the conference of Svaz (Sebastia) (September 5 to 11), all the decisions taken by the Kemalites in Erzurum, their policy towards the non-Turkish peoples of Türkiye (Ataturk 1966, 49), which was directed against Armenia in all its severity,

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[1] National Archives of Armenia, fund 200, inv. 1, list 355, part 1, sheet 206.

were officially reaffirmed. In a special resolution adopted at the Svaz conference, the Kemalites declared that they would wage a decisive battle against any movement that would set itself the task of creating an independent Armenia (Sadiq 1981; Akin 2017; Simonyan 1991, 366). Representatives of Soviet Russia, Azerbaijan and Georgia participating in the forum were also supporters of that policy (Haratch 1919).

It is important to note that the Milli movement led by Mustafa Kemal would not have succeeded if it had not received the support of a major power. And that power was Soviet Russia, which at that time was waging a life-and-death battle against international imperialism. M. Kemal was able to diplomatically use that circumstance and present the movement he led as a revolutionary struggle against "imperialism", which even has a tendency to establish totalitarian formation. The leaders of Soviet Russia and M. Kemal formed an alliance with, and the latter received great assistance (Hairenik 1926, 70; Hairenik 1940, 143). Garo Sassouni informs that after the signing of the armistice of Mudros on October 30, 1918, "the leaders of the Ittihat party immediately visited Germany and Russia and entered into political relations with them" (Hairenik 1926, 70; Hairenik 1940, 143). And in 1919, relations between Soviet Russia and Kemalist Türkiye had entered a friendly course with secret or open pacts. Garo Sassouni also writes: "Bolshevik Russia's aspirations were obvious, which apparently coincided with Turkish interests, and the very existence of Armenia and the Armenian people became of little value for Russia" (Hairenik 1928, 109). "For dubious advantages," writes Zarevand, "Soviet Russia sacrificed the centuries-old right of the indigenous people of Turkish Armenia to the land of their fathers" (Zarevand 1971, 167-169). In fact, the alliance between Soviet Russia and Kemalist Türkiye first of all violated the interests of Armenia and the Armenian people.

We have already mentioned that the situation around the Republic of Armenia was getting worse, because its immediate neighbors, Georgia and Azerbaijan, signed a secret anti-Russian military alliance on June 16, 1919, which was also directed against the Republic of Armenia. In order to get out of that difficult situation, the government of the Republic of Armenia hastened to find ways of rapprochement with Georgia in order to thwart the actions arising from its military alliance with Azerbaijan. At the Svaz conference, they understood the purpose of the diplomatic move of the government of the Republic of Armenia and quickly resorted to drastic measures to disrupt the possible Armenian-Georgian rapprochement. It was certainly no coincidence that after the end of the conference, the Kemalites immediately started negotiations with the Georgian authorities, and at the end of September 1919, the second secret Georgian-Azerbaijani military anti-Russian alliance was signed. It was more offensive and more militant in its content compared to the previous one. The alliance stemmed from the strategic interests of both Kemalist Türkiye and the latter's "friendly" Soviet Russia. This created an opportunity to attack both the Volunteer Army of the South of Russia and its friendly Republic of Armenia. On December 12, 1919, the newspaper "Haratch", published in Yerevan, confirms the following information from the newspaper "Kubanskaya Zemlya" published in Kuban (from "Turkish Armenia and Transcaucasia" guide): "Bolsheviks seek to complicate the situation of the Volunteer Army, support the separatist tendencies of Georgia and Azerbaijan. The Young Turks, who joined the organizations of the national councils,

support Azerbaijan and Georgia in every possible way in order to gain allies against Armenia, whose existence they have not come to terms with".

The struggle for defense capability and diplomatic support in the confrontation

The Bolsheviks are actively assistd by the Turks in order to make the situation of the Allies more difficult in Turkish Armenia. All this is confirmed by the following facts.

Geliladze, the representative of Georgia in Constantinople, is very close to Churuk-Suli-Mohammed Pasha and is negotiating with the Young Turks to take action against the Republic of Armenia, the volunteer army and allies. Negotiations between representatives of Georgia and Azerbaijan, Young Turks and Bolsheviks took place in Baku and Batum. The Turks received a lot of money from the Bolsheviks" (Haratch 1919).

That the second secret Georgian-Azerbaijani military alliance was mainly directed against the Volunteer Army and the Republic of Armenia is evidenced by its content.

1. To prevent the Russians from entering Transcaucasia.

2. Azerbaijan and Georgia together with the Bolsheviks should fight against the Allies to remove them from Transcaucasia.

3. Consider Armenians as enemies.

4. In case Azerbaijan declares war on the Republic of Armenia, Georgia is obliged to block all communication routes of the Republic of Armenia.

5. The Georgians undertake to withdraw two military units (divisions) against General A. Denikin in the direction of Petrovsk.

6. In order to act against General A. Denikin, Azerbaijan is obliged to remove an area along the northeastern borders of the Republic of Armenia.

7. The center of Turkish operations should be Transcaucasia, Trabzon, Dize and Batum.

8. The Turks are obliged to send 15,000 soldiers to help Azerbaijan and Georgia, as well as to the Republic of Armenia in order to raise an uprising of the Muslim population there (Haratch 1919).

That military alliance was immediately put into action. At the end of September, the Georgian government, faithful to its alliance commitment, sent 400 Bolshevik generals to Baku by train to fight against Denikin during his attack[2]. And in October-November 1919, in order to strengthen the defense of Azerbaijan, Baku sent eight machine guns, 3 wagon shells, bullets of different calibers, rifles, ammunition for one battalion and 48 officers to serve in the Azerbaijani military units[3].

On September 20, 1919, when Azerbaijan launched its first attack on Zangezur from Jebrail province (Harutyunyan 1996,186-199), at the end of the same month, the Georgian government imposed an economic blockade on the Republic of Armenia. On October 30, "Veratsnund" weekly published in Paris reported that the goods delivered to the Republic of Armenia "will remain in Batumi until the states put the necessary pressure on the Georgian government. The siege of Armenia by Georgia, by which the

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[2] National Archives of Armenia, fund 276, inv. 1, file 197, sheet 1.
[3] National Archives of Armenia, fund 200, inv. 1, file 33, sheet 33, fund 204, inv. 1, file 133, sheets 30, 33, 38, fund 276, inv. 1, file 183, sheet 122.

necessary military equipment and other various goods will enter Armenia, confirms the opinion expressed in many places that there is some agreement between Georgia and Turkish nationalists" (Veratsnund 1919, 342).

The idea of creating a Turkish-Azerbaijani military alliance, which would also be directed against the Republic of Armenia, was outlined at the Svaz conference. On October 29, 1919, Turkish Chief of Staff Javad Pasha and Azerbaijan's representative Kerimov signed a secret Turkish-Azerbaijani military pact in Constantinople, according to the first clause of which both sides undertook to preserve each other's territorial integrity. If one side is attacked, the other commits to providing military assistance. According to the 9th clause of the alliance, Türkiye undertakes to prepare instructors, officers, and soldiers for the Azerbaijani army and at the same time to train and enrich the military knowledge of the Azerbaijani officers.

The Turkish-Georgian-Azerbaijani military-political cooperation

According to clause 10, Türkiye undertakes to provide the Azerbaijani army with cannons, rifles, equipment and other munitions. According to clause 11, the government of Azerbaijan undertakes not to sign any agreements with other states without consent of Türkiye[4].

The Turkish-Georgian-Azerbaijani military-political cooperation generated new problems for the Volunteer Army, the solution of which required new approaches in the changing political situation. General A. Denikin was immediately informed about Transcaucasian transitions, political movements and secret military alliances. At the end of October 1919, the Russian intelligence of the Transcaucasia stated in a report to the head of the General Command of the Volunteer Army that the relations between Georgians and Muslims were strengthened by the second secret military pact signed with Azerbaijan (September 1919), which was directed against the South of Russia[5]. General A. Denikin was also informed about the existence of the secret Turkish-Azerbaijani military alliance (October 29, 1919). In such a complicated military-political situation, General A. Denikin could not carry out military operations against Azerbaijan and Georgia, when even the English troops obstructing the Volunteer Army had left Transcaucasia. General A. Denikin would not take that step mainly because he concentrated all his forces in the military operations against Bolshevism in the auspices of Moscow.

In 1919 (September 6-14) during a meeting with A. Khatisyan in Tiflis, General N. Baratov announced that the Volunteer Army does not plan any military operations against Azerbaijan and Georgia until the capture of Moscow. The volunteers had said that at the moment their forces were needed to defeat the Bolsheviks[6]. In order to capture Azerbaijan and Georgia, it was necessary to direct five military units against each of them, but General Denikin could not withdraw so much power from the fronts, because decisive military operations for Moscow continued[7]. There was also another

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[4] National Archives of Armenia, fund 276, inv. 1, file 184, sheet 67-68.
[5] State Archive of the RF, fund 446, inv. 2, file 34, sheets 96-97.
[6] National Archives of Armenia, fund 200, inv. 1, file 293, sheet 21.
[7] Ibid, sheet 16.

important circumstance. In case of using military force against the independence of Georgia and Azerbaijan, the Volunteer Army of the South of Russia would be deprived of the help of the Entente states. However, it is an undeniable fact that General Denikin could not give up Baku, which is rich in oil products, because the latter had an important strategic and economic importance for the South of Russia. By subjugating Baku, he would first secure his rear from possible Bolshevik attacks and gain influence over the entire Caspian Sea, while improving his economic and financial situation. Therefore, General A. Denikin sought to solve the problem not by military force, but by diplomatic means, keeping Azerbaijan and Georgia constantly under the threat of military attack.

In September 1919, General A. Denikin sent a note to the Azerbaijani government, demanding to supply the South of Russia not only with the necessary amount of oil and oil products, but also to create an opportunity to thoroughly repair the warships of the Volunteer Army in the only workshop of the Caspian fleet[8]. There were conflicting approaches to the issue in the government of Azerbaijan. According to Military Minister N. Mehmandarov, it was necessary to accept General A. Denikin's note, but the Azerbaijani government was deliberately delaying the response[9].

In October, another note from the General Command of the Volunteer Army followed, already in a rather stern tone. Atamanov (Atamanyan), military attaché of the diplomatic mission of the Republic of Armenia in Baku, reported that General A. Denikin demanded from the Azerbaijani government to stop the closure of Russian cultural centers, schools, violation of the rights of Russian citizens and persecution[10]. Then Colonel K. Palitsin[11], the representative of the main command of the Volunteer Army of the South of Russia, was recalled from Baku. It already meant a break in relations between the Volunteer Army of the South of Russia and Azerbaijan. The news spread widely in Azerbaijan and Georgia that the Volunteer Army was preparing and would soon begin military operations to capture Baku[12].

Azerbaijan was preparing to resist General A. Denikin and simultaneously start military operations against the Republic of Armenia. Russian intelligence reported to General Denikin that on November 1, Azerbaijani troops under the command of General Ali Agha Shikhlinsky launched a general attack on Zangezur in three directions (Shushi, Jebrayil and Nakhijevan) and on November 5 captured the villages of Khoznavar and Bayandur[13] (Harutyunyan 1996, 186-201; Simonyan 2004; Simonyan 2005). By attacking Zangezur, Azerbaijan had a goal to capture Sharur-Nakhijevan and become a border with Türkiye. By doing so, he would have a wide opportunity to import the necessary amount of arms, ammunition and even military force from Türkiye continuously, freely and unhindered (Hille 2010a; Hille 2010b; Simonian 2005). In the Russian intelligence summary "General Theory about Azerbaijan" of November 4, 1919, it is said: "There is no doubt that if Azerbaijan

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[8] National Archives of Armenia, fund 276, inv. 1, file 101, sheet 92, file 183, sheet 36.
[9] National Archives of Armenia, fund 276, inv. 1, file 183, sheet 122.
[10] National Archives of Armenia, fund 278, inv. 1, file 10, sheet 15.
[11] Ibid, sheet 18.
[12] National Archives of Armenia, fund 276, inv. 1, file 183, sheet 122.
[13] National Archives of Armenia, fund 276, inv. 1, file 227.

succeeds in carrying out the Zangezur operation, then Azerbaijan will have a great opportunity to carry out large-scale military operations against the neighboring republic (the Republic of Armenia) and the Volunteer Army of the South of Russia."[14] In order to prevent the threat to the Republic of Armenia and Russia from the south, General A. Denikin signed the following order in Taganrog on November 9: "In connection with the hostile attitude of the Azerbaijani authorities towards the Russian army and the aggressive attack of the Azerbaijani troops on the territories of Armenia, I order all Russian officers serving in their troops to leave the military ranks"[15] (Haratch 1919).

By the way, on the initiative of the government of the Republic of Armenia, on November 20, 1919, an Armenian-Azerbaijani forum was to be held in Baku to settle the disputed issues peacefully. A. Khatisyan informs the General Command of the Volunteer Army about this and suggests forcing the Azerbaijani government to immediately stop military operations in Zangezur, otherwise it may lead to a fire in the entire South Caucasus region[16]. A. Khatisyan sent telegrams with the same content to Deputy High Commissioner[17] of Great Britain, France, Italy, and Armenia Colonel J. Ray[18].

As can be seen from the order signed by General Denikin a harsh attitude was shown towards the government of Azerbaijan also on the occasion of the military invasion of Zangezur. The general also telegraphed the representative of the "Special Political Consultation" of the Russian Embassy Council in Paris S. Sazonov instructing "...to ask the Supreme Council to take measures so that the order in the Caucasus is no longer disturbed and the possibility of surprise attacks is eliminated"[19].

Political orientation of the Transcaucasian government and their right to an independent foreign policy

Taking advantage of the difficult situation of the Republic of Armenia, Azerbaijan tried to realize its strategic goal of connecting with Türkiye through Zangezur. However, this attempt failed. In short fierce battles, the Armenian military forces gave a worthy counterattack to the enemy and pushed him back to the exit positions. On November 18, 1919, in a letter addressed to the diplomatic representative of the Republic of Armenia in Washington, A. Khatisyan informs that "...after fierce battles, near Khoznavar and Bayandur, not far from Goris, they massacred the Tatars and pushed them back to Karabakh, the Turks left behind 14 machine guns, 150 prisoners, a huge amount of food, ammunition, tents, etc."[20].

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[14] National Archives of Armenia, fund 276, inv. 1, file 183, sheet 53.

[15] National Archives of Armenia, fund 200, inv. 1, file 131, sheet 127, file 164, sheets 58, 71, 256, fund 276, inv. 1, file 183, sheet 123.

[16] National Archives of Armenia, fund 200, inv. 1, file 164, sheets 67, 95-96.

[17] On December 3, 1919, Colonel W. Haskell returned from Paris to Tiflis. He had participated in the Paris Peace Assembly to report on Transcaucasia and particularly the situation in the RA.

[18] National Archives of Armenia, fund 276, inv. 1, file 179, sheet 268.

[19] National Archives of Armenia, fund 276, inv. 1, file 196, sheet 120

[20] Museum of Literature and Art, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) Archives, N 4063, Boston.

The significance of Zangezur heroic battle is great. With that experience, Azerbaijan was also checking the degree of combat capability of the Armenian forces, assuming that it would not face serious resistance. However, it was badly mistaken.

In a letter addressed to Colonel Arsen Shahmazyan on December 10, 1919, A. Khatisyan writes: "The last heroic battle of Zangezur, the military spirit and indomitable character of the people of that country proved once more, and your tireless efforts and organizational talent were also revealed. Greeting you warmly on behalf of the government and congratulating our people on their brilliant victory, I am sure that they will protect their independence and freedom from now on, as they have until now."[21]

On the recommendation of Colonel J. Ray, General A. Denikin, High Commissioner of Allies in Transcaucasia M. Wardrop, the presidents of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Armenia and Azerbaijan left for Tiflis on November 19, 1919. On November 20-22, the negotiations of the two prime ministers on the issue of Zangezur took place with the participation of Colonel Ray and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia Ye. Gegechkori [22]. The result was that the four participants signed a five-point agreement[23] on November 23. According to clause 1 of the ZST agreement, military operations had to be stopped. On the same day, November 23, A. Khatisyan sent a telegram from Tiflis to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Military Minister General K. Araratyan about stopping military operations[24].

By clause 2 they agreed to open the roads through Zangezur to peaceful passers-by, by clause 3 all disputed questions, including border issues, were to be settled by peaceful agreement and, if this process is failed, to be left to the discretion of a neutral party as conciliator, and the said party must be the High Commissioner. According to the 4th clause of the agreement, an Armenian-Azerbaijani forum was to be held in Baku on December 4, which was to be continued on the 10th of the same month in Tiflis with the participation of the three Transcaucasian republics. An agreement was reached to resolve the disputed territorial issues through peaceful negotiations[25] (Kirakosyan 1972, 599). It is true that the enemy did not succeed in annexing Zangezur to Azerbaijan, but it did not give up the aggressive ambitions.

On December 6, 1919, the "Azerbaijan" newspaper published in Baku published General A. Denikin's order of November 9, which created great tension in the political circles of Azerbaijan and Georgia. "Azerbaijan" and Georgian "Struggle" newspapers, with special editorials, called that step of General Denikin a provocation against the independence of the Transcaucasian republics. On December 9, 1919, A. Khatisyan reported in a letter to L. Yevangulyan that A. Denikin's order made a great impression in Yerevan, and everyone has the feeling that Armenia is beginning to be recognized[26].

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[21] National Archives of Armenia, fund 200, inv. 1, file 50, sheet 372.

[22] State Archive of the RF, fund 446, inv. 2, file 67, sheet 287; National Archives of Armenia, fund 276, inv. 1, file 131, sheets 98-100, 88-91.

[23] National Archives of Armenia, fund 200, inv. 1, fie 50, sheet 318; fund 276, inv. 1, file 227, sheets 6-7.

[24] National Archives of Armenia, fund 199, inv. 1, file 110, sheet 26.

[25] National Archives of Armenia, fund 200, inv. 1, file 50, sheet 318; fund 276, inv. 1, file 227, sheet 67.

[26] National Archives of Armenia, fund 199, inv 1, file 211, sheet 6.

On December 13, "Haratch" newspaper, published in Yerevan, correctly analyzed the content of "On General Denikin's order" in a special editorial (on December 19, the same was published in "Worker" newspaper, published in Tiflis): "No matter how we refer to the political and social nature of the Volunteer Army, it is impossible not to accept that it, as an organized force pursuing certain political goals, cannot take into consideration the condition of the rear, what kind of relations are now in its neighboring countries. From this point of view, Denikin, rightly, should pay attention to the steps taken by the Turks in the Caucasus and, in particular, in Azerbaijan and Dagestan" (Haratch 1919; Worker 1919). Then, talking about the connection between Turkish nationalists and Bolsheviks, the newspaper presents the actions of the Turkish pashas against the Republic of Armenia and the Volunteer Army, which, naturally, could not follow all this indifferently and had to take practical steps.

In the end, the journalist expresses his belief that "if Denikin's intervention in the affairs of Azerbaijan is vulnerable, the intervention of Nur Pasha is even more reprehensible. And since the Turkish nationalists will consider the Transcaucasia as a theater for their conspiracies, because the agents of Enver and Mustafa Kemal will find patronage here, it will be completely unnecessary to be angry against the behavior of the volunteers. The one who patronizes Nur Pasha, Kemal Bey and Khalil Bey, the one who every minute calls pashas in Constantinople and Svaz to interfere in the affairs of Transcaucasia, should be subject to such surprises. The Transcaucasia will be free, yes, the Transcaucasian republics must be free from any interference, but not only from the interference of the north, but also of the south" (Haratch 1919; Worker 1919).

General Denikin's order of November 9 somehow prevented the threat to the South of Russia and the Republic of Armenia. The publication of the order certainly had certain consequences, the myth of the alleged secret military alliance between the Volunteer Army and the Republic of Armenia was circulated with renewed force, as well as the belief that the Volunteer Army and the Republic of Armenia were preparing to attack Azerbaijan. In fact, in the hands of General Denikin, that fake news became a restraining factor to dispel the belligerent sentiments of Azerbaijan and its allies. Azerbaijan did not dare to start military operations against the Volunteer Army.

The news of the so-called "secret Armenian-Russian military alliance" was deliberately spread by individual Bolshevik figures. In those days S. Kirov announced that the government of the Republic of Armenia has big plans to expand its territories and widely benefits from the sympathy and protection of the Entente and the Volunteer Army of the South of Russia, that General A. Denikin has a secret military alliance with the Republic of Armenia (Kirov 1936, 143). By doing so, the Bolsheviks tried to attack the Republic of Armenia, an apparent ally of the forces fighting against them, in the event that the Government of the Republic of Armenia maintained neutrality, not intervening in the struggle of either Soviet Russia or General Denikin.

The restraining power of the order of November 9, 1919 was also expressed against the opponents of the Republic of Armenia. In Azerbaijan's behavior, Prime Minister N. Usubbekov stated that Azerbaijan is the least interested in resolving border issues with the Republic of Armenia by force of arms, as there is a great threat from the north[27]. In

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[27] National Archives of Armenia, fund 223, inv. 1, file 113, sheet 78.

those days, A. Khatisyan reported that after General A. Denikin's order became known, the severity of the Tatar attacks eased[28].

The members of the Georgian delegation from Paris, worried by General A. Denikin's order, immediately instructed their government to be in good relations with the Republic of Armenia. They also demanded to send a representative to negotiate with general in Yekaterinodar[29]. In a telegram sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, L. Yevangulyan informed that during the Armenian-Georgian consultation held on December 9, he proposed Gegechkori to restore the neighborly relations of the three republics of Transcaucasia. He also warned that our deputies should be alert, because it is not excluded that they will once again propose to create a united front against General A. Denikin. At the end of the telegram, he again warned that the assembly being convened in Baku might fail[30].

Worried about the situation of those days, the Azerbaijani government offered to make concessions to the Republic of Armenia if it started negotiations immediately. The government of the Republic of Armenia considered negotiations possible – "to talk and find out what concessions the Turks are making"[31].

Thus, during that difficult period General A. Denikin supported the Republic of Armenia. This is evidenced by the aforementioned order, which was issued in connection with the forceful attack of the Azerbaijani forces on the territories of the Republic of Armenia, forcing them to stop the aggression. General A. Denikin's order significantly eased the unfriendly attitude of the neighbors towards the Republic of Armenia. The move of the General Command of the Volunteer Army to support the Republic of Armenia was not accidental. Georgia and Azerbaijan took a hostile position towards the Russian army; its prop in Transcaucasia was the Republic of Armenia, which needed to be supported. However, it was negatively received by the Entente states, as their goal was to push Russia out of Transcaucasia, a policy that has not lost its relevance to this day.

In another letter addressed to L. Yevangulyan on December 9, Khatisyan reported: "It seems to me that this order is semi-recognition of Armenia by the Russian Volunteer Army. I mean, England and America do not welcome our relations with Russia, and I think Wardrop will not like the order. That is why the question of a confederation between the three republics is now being raised again. It is aimed at Russia with a sharp edge"[32]. Campaign against the spread of Russian influence, the problem of the unification of the republics of the Transcaucasia, which had to be solved by the creation of a confederation, was again raised. A new political situation was emerging, which demanded reasonable steps from the leadership of the Republic of Armenia. Having a good understanding of the new situation, Khatisyan writes: "It is necessary to carefully avoid between the Entente, Denikin and the Caucasian Confederation. Therefore, I need to know every detail about the mood in Tiflis."[33] A.

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[28] National Archives of Armenia, fund 199, inv. 1, file 211, sheet 7.
[29] National Archives of Armenia, fund 57, inv. 5, file 205, sheet 6.
[30] National Archives of Armenia, fund 276, inv. 1, file 196, sheet 46, inv. 179, sheet 279.
[31] National Archives of Armenia, fund 57, inv. 5, file 205, sheet 5.
[32] National Archives of Armenia, fund 199, inv. 1, file 211, sheet 9.
[33] Ibid.

Khatisyan instructed the delegation of the Republic of Armenia (T. Bekzadyan[34], V. Papazyan, M. Harutyunyan and H. Arghtyunyan) participating in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conference to be held in Baku: "If Azerbaijan raises the issue of confederation at the conference, our representatives will talk about this issue, but they will not come to a conclusion"[35]. During the meeting between M. Harutyunyan, H. Arghtyunyan and Prime Minister N. Usubbekov on December 9 in Baku, the latter's first question was: "Did you bring an answer about the confederation or not?"[36]. The issues put forward by the delegation of the Republic of Armenia - temporary establishment of the demarcation line, reception and accommodation of migrants and signing of trade and railway contracts, etc. - were not accepted in Baku. The delegation of the Republic of Armenia telegraphed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Yerevan informing them that the Azerbaijanis do not want to talk about anything for now. "...They advance only and only the question of the confederation"[37].

On the same day, December 9, the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Armenia discussed the proposal of the governments of Azerbaijan and Georgia to form the Transcaucasian Confederation. The meeting of the Council recorded that "Denikin's attitude towards Armenians is generally good. Our neighbors notice and know that. Denikin's order, by which he forbids Russian officers to serve in the army of Azerbaijan, made a particularly big impression on Azerbaijan. The government believes that it is possible to enter into a relationship with Azerbaijan and conclude various pacts, apart from the military one, for example, customs, border, railway, etc."[38] (Documents of the History of the Armenian Church 1999, 203).

The approach of the Republic of Armenia regarding the confederation was definite and absolutely correct. Having discovered the real intention of the neighbors to create a military alliance against General A. Denikin, the Republic of Armenia agreed to establish multilateral alliance relations with them, except for the military alliance.

By the way, during the conversation with A. Khatisyan, Colonel W. Haskell also advised to avoid signing a military alliance in case of accepting the confederation's proposal, it will be harmful for the Republic of Armenia, because 240 thousand bushels of bread and seeds are imported from the South of Russia. Back in Tiflis, Colonel Haskell suggested to the members of the delegation of the Republic of Armenia to temporarily determine the borders, sign commercial and other types of agreements, however "in no case should you join them against Denikin"[39]. The point was that the Entente states were against the destruction of General Denikin's forces fighting against Bolshevism and demanded not to prevent him from confronting with Bolshevism. That is why colonel W. Haskell and M. Wardrop, being in favor of creating a union of Transcaucasian republics, believed that they should not conclude a military alliance, but mainly focus on economic, railway, post-telegraph and transit agreements[40].

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[34] On February 2, 1920, the Council of Ministers of the RA appointed Martiros Harutyunyan instead of Tigran Bekzadyan, the diplomatic representative of the Republic of Armenia in Azerbaijan.
[35] National Archives of Armenia, fund 200, inv. 1, file 158, sheet 116.
[36] National Archives of Armenia, fund 200, inv. 1, file 365, sheet 24.
[37] National Archives of Armenia, fund 57, inv. 5, file 205, sheet 3.
[38] National Archives of Armenia, fund 57, inv. 5, file 205, sheet 3.
[39] National Archives of Armenia, fund 200, inv. 1, file 365, sheet 24.
[40] National Archives of Armenia, fund 200, inv. 1, file 440, sheet 5.

The Council of Ministers of the Republic of Armenia, taking into account all that, decided that "...now it is impossible to conclude an agreement on confederation with Georgia and Azerbaijan, because our borders are not definitively known. To conclude a confederation under the conditions that are proposed means also to conclude a military alliance against Russia, by which we will have allowed Turkish troops to pass through our country to fight against Denikin, and so on"[41]. The government of the Republic of Armenia considered it possible to accept the idea of a confederation if the territorial issues with Azerbaijan and Georgia were justly resolved, and, secondly, if such a clause was included in the treaty that the alliance was not directed against Russia[42].

There was also another important circumstance. The government of the Republic of Armenia could not enter the confederation without solving the issue of Western Armenia. "Droshak" journal writes on that occasion: "For our neighbors, the Caucasus ended in best case with the 1914 border, and in general, they (Azerbaijan, Georgia) spoke about the borders, created by Turks. Armenians could not come to terms with that fact, in their political consciousness; Armenia was not only on one side of Masis, but also the other side. What kind of confederation in such psychological and factual conditions?" (Droshak 1931,198).

According to Georgians and Azerbaijanis, the Transcaucasian Confederation is an alliance that should only be directed against Russia, relying on Türkiye, that is, "...with Türkiye against Russia" (Droshak 1931, 200).

The offer of a confederation by Azerbaijan and Georgia was not news, which they remembered only when there was a threat from the North. A similar offer was made by Georgia and Azerbaijan back in April-May 1919, when a threat was created by General A. Denikin. On May 31, 1919, during a meeting with the chairman of the Azerbaijani delegation A. Topchibashev in Paris, A. Aharonyan and H. Ohanjanyan stated that they were not against and are not against now "...the union of the Caucasian peoples, but first each of them should have their own state. For us, the problem is complicated by Turkish Armenia, which we have to join us, but since that issue has not been officially decided yet, we are unable to make new political combinations without Turkish Armenians. As for Caucasian Armenia, it will never undertake to present itself separately again" (Aharonyan , 23-24).

"Droshak" journal rightfully reminded the neighbors of the Republic of Armenia that if the union of the three Transcaucasian republics is a dire necessity, then why in 1918 at the end of May, they destroyed "...the Union of the Caucasus, the Transcaucasian Seim was destroyed, as is known, as a result of the internal conflicts of the Caucasian peoples and, for the most part, Turkish pressure.

The Georgians, led by Jordania, secretly agreed with Germany in advance and left the pan-Caucasian positions. Seduced by the Turks, the Azerbaijanis brought the troops of Vehib and Nuri pashas to the Caucasus. It was under the direct patronage of the Turks that the division of the Caucasus took place. Vehib Pasha drew the border line that the Azerbaijanis demanded, mercifully leaving Yerevan to the Armenians. Later, until the defeat and departure of the Turks, the leaders of Azerbaijan did not make any

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[41] National Archives of Armenia, fund 57, inv. 5, file 2005, sheet 3.
[42] National Archives of Armenia, fund 200, inv. 1, file 440, sheet 6; inv. 2, file 56, sheet 16; fund 276, inv. 1, file 116, sheet 129.

changes in their mentality and practical policy. Azerbaijani officials wanted to create a national federation under such conditions" (Droshak 1931, 196-197). It is natural that the government of the Republic of Armenia did not go to such a deal because it did not trust the sincerity of the authors of the proposal of the Transcaucasian Confederation.

On January 4, 1920, the Council of ministers of the Republic of Armenia again referred to the question of the confederation. The Council heard the report of the delegation of the Republic of Armenia in Baku. MP M. Harutyunyan reported that Azerbaijan failed the work of the conference (the Armenian-Azerbaijani conference that started on December 14 was interrupted on the 21st of the same month). "... All those were some kind of games to achieve other goals"[43]. The government of the Republic of Armenia knew that on November 27, 1919, an agreement was reached between the Bolsheviks and the Turks in Baku, according to which Turkish troops should pass through Armenia "...to capture Denikin's rear" (Haratch 1920).

In January 1920, the political situation changed. The Volunteer Army of South of Russia was defeated in a bloody civil war against the Bolsheviks. On December 26, 1919, the Soviet army occupied Rostov, and at the end of March 1920, Dagestan and the entire North Caucasus. On January 21, 1920, A. Aharonyan reported in a letter-report addressed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia from Paris. "...The advance of the Bolsheviks and the hopeless defeat of Denikin cause general anxiety in the political circles. They are working to block the Bolsheviks in the Caucasus Mountains. The representatives of Azerbaijan and Georgia - Topchibashev and Chkheidze, Tsereteli and Avalov - three days ago made a solemn promise to fight against the Bolsheviks with their armies, and to supply them with weapons and ammunition. One thing that is certain for me is that the Armenians should not fight against the Bolsheviks, but only protect their borders from the Turks"[44].

Conclusion and discussion

It is true that the idea of the Transcaucasian Confederation lost its importance as a result of the defeat of General A. Denikin, but the diplomacy of Azerbaijan and Georgia tried to lead the Republic of Armenia into the confederation again, this time proposing to create a united military front against Soviet Russia, which the Government of the Republic of Armenia opposed in principle.

On February 13, 1920, British High Commissioner M. Wardrop arrived in Yerevan from Baku, whose goal was to influence the government of the Republic of Armenia to create a union with Georgia and Azerbaijan and stop the Bolshevik invasion by all possible means. M. Wardrop asked to attend a meeting of the Council of Ministers to present his concerns. At the meeting of the council convened on February 14, he clearly presented England's position: "I and the British government are Russian haters. Our interests are opposite to Russia's everywhere in the East. Anyone who loves Russia is a suspect for us. Whoever follows a policy against Russia is our true friend, always worthy of our help. You should interpret all our steps from this point of view. ... All Transcaucasian republics now have one big and dangerous enemy, and that enemy

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[43] National Archives of Armenia, fund 200, inv. 1, file 365, sheet 25.
[44] National Archives of Armenia, fund 200, inv. 1, file 290, sheet 63.

is Russia. It is against this enemy that you must direct all your forces by creating a common front together with your neighbors. You must arm yourself and unite against the North. For this, it is necessary that you sign a political and military alliance with Georgia and Azerbaijan by forming a confederation" (Hairenik 1950, 29). Members of the government, opposing M. Wardrop, answered that he was forgetting that the main danger of the Republic of Armenia is Türkiye rather than the North. "...Free us from that deadly danger, and then we will agree with you. Then it will be very easy for us to find a common language with our neighbors who, like you, did not want to recognize the danger of the South now. In addition, we have important border disputes with our neighbors, the satisfactory solution of which can only pave the way for the confederation we all desire" (Hairenik 1950, 29). The Chief Commissioner replied to the justified explanations of the government. "...Your border disputes with your neighbors are of secondary importance. The main thing is your unity against the common enemy, the North" (Hairenik 1950, 30).

In April 1920, the discussion of the issue of confederation on the agenda of the assembly of the three Transcaucasian republics convened in Tiflis remained unfinished due to the Sovietization of Azerbaijan.

Thus, in the autumn of 1919, the difficult military-political situation of Armenia presented difficult problems to the leadership of the republic, the solution of which required an extremely careful and circumspect policy. It was necessary to reveal the true goals of the neighbors' political games, to thwart their aggressive actions. In that case, the Republic of Armenia was supported by the Volunteer Army of the South of Russia. General A. Denikin's order of November 9 confused the plans of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Türkiye regarding the Republic of Armenia, weakened the tension created around it. The attempts of the neighbors to create a military-political alliance against the Volunteer Army of the South of Russia and to involve the Republic of Armenia in it were in vain.

The idea of confederation failed, despite the great efforts of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Entente, they failed to push the Republic of Armenia to anti-Russian positions, and the leadership was at its height at that moment.

Conflict of interests
The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical standards
The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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WATER INSECURITY IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS: A HYDRO-STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT OF THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

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Abstract

The intersection of water security and geopolitical tensions in the South Caucasus is nowhere more evident than in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This article provides a comparative analysis of the hydrostrategic aspects of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, emphasizing the duality of water resources as a source of conflict and a potential unifying force. Control over river basins such as the Kura-Araks River and the Sarsang Reservoir, vital for both countries, has become a top priority for Armenia and Azerbaijan. In this regard, the Kura-Araks River basin, which supplies vital water resources to both countries, has often been the source of confrontation and struggle for control, determining not only military strategies but also economic and political stability. Similarly, the Sarsang Reservoir, located in the conflict zone, symbolizes a hydropolitical struggle, where access to water determines the survival of local communities and regional security as a whole. Using a hydrostrategic approach, this article examines the multifaceted impact of water scarcity, control over infrastructure, and climate vulnerability on the escalation of hostilities. The potential of water diplomacy and the possibility that shared water resources will ultimately foster cooperation rather than conflict between these two regional powers is also considered.

Introduction

The South Caucasus is considered one of the most vulnerable regions in the world, facing a serious threat of water shortages. This threat to the region's water security has weighed on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which most nations have set for 2030, as water plays a substantial role in people's livelihoods, involving strategic sectors such as energy, agriculture and industrial production. A drop in water levels in dams and hydroelectric power plants means a decrease in electricity

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production and is a significant threat to every sector. This shows how critical water management has become and how intense the threat of water scarcity is for communities, companies and nations. In this regard, it is essential to take into account the words of Ismail Serageldin, former World Bank vice president. According to his view: "In the 20th century, people fought for oil; in the 21st century, they will fight for water" (Lopes and Gama 2025). In light of the current difficult historical-climatic situation, following a general increase in temperatures and an exponential growth in the urban population, water resources management will play an increasingly decisive role in the near future. Specifically, the peaceful management of cross-border watercourses, as in the case of the numerous rivers between Armenia and Azerbaijan, will represent a very significant political and diplomatic challenge to avoid the triggering of water wars.

Tensions over control of the water supply between Yerevan and Baku began a few years after the fall of the Soviet Union. The first real conflict between the two regional powers emerged in 1988 and, amidst periods of warm conflicts and cold tensions, it continues to this day due to a situation of perennial tension involving the two Caucasian republics that arose following the collapse of the Soviet empire. The main reason for the water conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan is Baku's lack of water sovereignty. Azerbaijan is a country with a high level of water insecurity, as more than 70% of the country's water basins originate outside its borders. This makes the Caspian nation subject to the water policies of upstream countries, including Georgia, Türkiye and Armenia. Moreover, the lack of national water policies aimed at limiting wastage makes Baku extremely vulnerable in terms of water supply, not only for private consumption but also for agricultural production, industry and hydropower generation.

In addition to examining the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from a water security perspective, this article aims to highlight how Azerbaijan's water insecurity has been a fundamental cause for Baku's policy of aggression against Armenia in recent years. The conflict over control of the enclave is often associated with issues of ethnic nationalism in which both nations involved seek to prevail over each other for purely ethnic and cultural chauvinist reasons. While undoubtedly an essential aspect of the issue, the ethnic element is only one interpretative solution to fully comprehend a conflict that has been active for over thirty-five years. Specifically, this article will propose Azerbaijani's water insecurity from a geopolitical and strategic standpoint as a possible interpretative element to comprehend the dynamics associated with the Nagorno-Karabakh numerous political and military crises.

Theoretical framework and methodology

As mentioned, for the purpose of this paper, the concept of Hydro Strategy (HS) will be essential in assessing the water conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Such confrontation between the two nations centres around the control and management of transboundary water resources, particularly in the contested Nagorno-Karabakh region, which will be the centre of the research. Water, considered as a strategic resource for hydropower and agriculture and, also, as a weapon of influence, plays a dual role in this conflict, influencing both military actions and diplomatic relations. The adoption of HS as a theoretical framework will allow for a deeper understanding of the use of

water resources to assert control over territory and influence negotiations. Specifically, in the Armenia-Azerbaijan confrontation, water resources such as the Kura and Aras rivers and critical infrastructure such as the Sarsang Reservoir have been central to the long-standing struggle. For Azerbaijan, control of water in Nagorno-Karabakh is crucial to irrigating agricultural lands and ensuring water security for downstream regions. At the same time, Armenia has used control of relevant water systems to support its energy and agricultural needs, using water as leverage in negotiations.

The theoretical framework centred around Hydro Strategy allows for bridging the epistemological connection between environmental security and political conflict. In order to comprehensively analyse the case of Armenia-Azerbaijan water tensions, some authors (Wolf 2024; Zeitoun 2008; Homer-Dixon 2024) who have produced several works with a hydro-strategic approach will be mentioned in this paper. Concretely, according to the HS theoretical model, water scarcity, exacerbated by climate change and environmental insecurity, intensifies the diplomatic tension between neighbouring countries. Such tension, as in the case under analysis, became a warm political and military confrontation with both Armenia and Azerbaijan facing dwindling water supplies for multiple reasons. Azerbaijan's water insecurity, combined with a long-aged issue of water scarcity, has fuelled competition for control over water infrastructure, such as dams and reservoirs, with water shortages having direct implications for agriculture and energy security. As argued by several scholars, South Caucasian water infrastructures have been weaponized in the conflict, with both sides accusing each other of environmental sabotage and eco-terrorism.

At the same time, just as it can be used as an instrument of political tension and conflict, water can also play a unifying role between nations sharing transboundary waterways. In this regard, despite its role in the conflict, water also holds the potential as a catalyst for cooperation in Caucasian politics. The theoretical framework of hydro-strategy with an environmentally diplomatic approach suggests that shared water resources could incentivize cooperative management and peacebuilding efforts. Concretely, both Armenia and Azerbaijan depend on the Kura-Aras River basin for drinking water, agriculture, and energy production. Establishing joint water management mechanisms could provide a foundation for dialogue, reducing tensions and promoting regional stability. This integrated and peaceful approach to the management of shared water resources could prevent the occurrence of further water conflicts such as the one over Nagorno Karabakh.

In terms of research methodology, this article relies primarily on qualitative methods to explore the water tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan. These techniques allow for a more comprehensive approach to conflict analysis, especially when used to examine secondary data and official documents issued by regional and international institutions. Such materials are essential for the purposes of this research, offering outlooks on past and present politics that are necessary for elaborating adequate conclusions from a hydro-strategic standpoint. Specifically, secondary data from academic articles, government documents, and, notably, international organization reports such as those from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the United Nations (UN), the World Bank (WB), and the European Union (EU), offer authoritative insights into the water dispute in the Nagorno-Karabakh

region. These reports allow to gather critical data and insight on water security issues concerning the countries involved in the dispute. In addition, by confronting official documents with academic papers, the geopolitical magnitude of water conflicts in the region will be fully examined, particularly concerning the shared river basins like the Kura-Aras basin. While the documents allow to trace the evolution of water tensions, showing how the strategic control of water resources like the Sarsang Reservoir has shifted between the two nations over time, the examination of academic papers on the subject provides a detailed historical analysis.

Hydro-strategic tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan: A historical overview

After the destruction of the Soviet Union, the partition of water resources emerged as a stringent problem in the Eurasian geography (Swain 2004; Stucki et al. 2012). During the Soviet period, the agreements and management systems under the Union ensured its harmonious functioning, in line with a period of domination that facilitated the peaceful resolution of any water-related conflicts. The lack of sovereignty of the various national groups in the Caucasian region prevented water issues from becoming a strategic problem for the various ethnic groups that made up the Caucasian Soviet republics (Hanks 2010). However, in the post-Soviet era, the share of these resources has emerged as an unsolvable problem, like many other problems, as most of the resources satisfying water demand in the region turned into transboundary rivers.

During Moscow's rule, Nagorno-Karabakh had an autonomous status under the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialistic Republic (ASSR), with a mixed population combined of both Armenians predominated in the hills and Azerbaijanis concentrated in the plains (Freizer 2014). In 1921, the Kavburo (the Bolshevik Caucasian Committee), under the leadership of Stalin, decided that the mountainous part of Karabakh would be part of Azerbaijan, and as a result, in 1923, the Nagorno (the Mountainous) Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAO) was created. Given the significant concentration of the Armenian population in the area, this decision was never entirely accepted and resulted in violent protests in 1945, 1965, and 1977 (Freizer 2014). With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Soviet part of the Kura-Araks River basin became transboundary, divided between three countries - Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia - that comprise the modern-day South Caucasus. As previously mentioned, the river basin is the lifeline of all these three post-Soviet states as it sustains the socio-economic and sustainable development of the national economies (Abdolvand et. al. 2014; Stucki et al. 2012). Since the beginning of the independence years, several problems emerged due to the overuse of water resources, which led to pollution and a lack of adequate cooperation stemming from the existing political conflict between, mostly, Armenia and Azerbaijan (Abdolvand et. al. 2014). Concretely, in 1988, NKAO declared its decision to secede from Azerbaijan and union with Armenia, which was vehemently opposed by the former that saw Nagorno-Karabakh as part of its territory and national identity. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the conflict was transformed into an international confrontation. As a result of the 1991-1994 war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, thousands of people were killed on both sides, and more than half a million were displaced (Sadoff and Grey 2002; Stucki et al. 2012).

After the truce - signed in 1994, following the substantial victory of Armenia - relations between the two neighbouring nations grew tense for a long time but did not result in a real war. For about 20 years, from the mid-90s until 2016, the diplomatic agreements established in 1994 held up with mutual suspicion on the part of Baku and Yerevan (Abdolvand and Mez 2014). In order to try to ensure peace between the contenders, some international organizations were also involved. Specifically, the OSCE established the Minsk Group, which called for mediation of the conflict and assisting in preserving peace (Stucki et al. 2012). In this regard, in the mid-2000s, the Minsk Group proposed a package of principles for a future peace deal, which was officially presented at the 2007 OSCE Madrid Summit and became known as the 'Madrid principles' thereafter. The proposed Madrid Principles included, *inter alia*, the return of the occupied Azerbaijani territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, an interim status of Nagorno-Karabakh and self-governance, and a corridor linking the enclave to Armenia (De Stefano et al. 2017; Hajihoseini 2023). Despite initial positive progress in the talks between the two sides that culminated in the signing of the Moscow Declaration in 2008 reaffirming the intention of both parties to find a peaceful settlement to conflict, the efforts failed, and the talks froze, leaving an environment of tension and distrust between the two nations (Abdolvand and Mez 2014).

Figure 1. A map indicating the river's tributes and hydro plants in the disputed area

Source: Nareg Kuyumjian/Eurasiane 2021

The conflict between the two nations became active again in 2016 with the so-called 4-day war. The fragile truce established in 1994 and reinforced by the Madrid agreements could not withstand the rising tension that had been occurring in the region

since 2007 (Rzayev 2015). Concretely, during the April 2016 clashes, Azerbaijan launched a military campaign aimed at gaining control over territories that could provide vital resources, including those linked to water management, in the disputed area (Turgul et al. 2016; Libiseller 2023). It is essential to consider that it was not an actual conflict but a series of skirmishes and military reprisals between the armed forces of Baku and Yerevan that lasted less than a week. Although the skirmishes were primarily focused on military strongholds and border security, Azerbaijan sought to regain strategic terrain that included areas around the Tartar River, a tributary of the Kura River that is vital for irrigation in Azerbaijani territories, as already pointed out (Libiseller 2023). On the other hand, Armenia wanted to maintain water control in the area, as Yerevan considered the Sarsang Reservoir a key water resource for its internal development and supply. In addition, by keeping the water control, Armenia could exert relevant pressure on Azerbaijan by threatening water supplies. In this regard, it is not a coincidence that Azerbaijani officials frequently pointed to Armenia's control of water infrastructure as a form of "water war" in which water scarcity was used as a tool of coercion (Libiseller 2023; Lawrence et al. 2024). As mentioned, the 2016 skirmishes did not result in significant territorial changes nor in a full-scale regional war. Nevertheless, the limited military confrontations highlighted the ongoing tension over hydro-strategic resources between Baku and Yerevan (Shikhali and Safarova, 2016). Essentially, water infrastructure remained a critical part of the broader conflict, influencing military tactics and long-term political strategies.

In 2020, four years after the 2016 skirmishes, Armenia and Azerbaijan once again clashed militarily in what has been renamed the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. From a hydro-strategy standpoint, one of Azerbaijan's primary motivations in the 2020 war was to regain control of key territories that housed critical water infrastructure. As mentioned, the lack of reliable access to water, especially from the Sarsang Reservoir, had been a long-standing grievance (Poghosyan 2022; Lawrence et al. 2024). In this regard, Azerbaijan sought not only to reclaim symbolic land but also to secure these critical water resources for its domestic agricultural and drinking water needs. On the other hand, for Armenia, retaining control over water resources in the region had been a significant part of its defence strategy (Libiseller 2023). By holding onto the Sarsang Reservoir and other water bodies, Armenia could ensure a degree of economic sustainability for Nagorno-Karabakh and exercise leverage over Azerbaijan, similarly to the 4-day-war in 2016. The war, which lasted between the 27th of September until the 10th of November 10, 2020, involved intense fighting and advanced military technology between the two opponents (Lawrence et al. 2024). Thanks to its use of advanced military technology, such as, specifically, the Bayraktar TB2 drones and the Israeli Harop loitering munitions, Azerbaijan was able to secure a solid military victory (Libiseller 2023; Poghosyan 2022). The conflict ended with significant territorial gains for Azerbaijan, as Baku regained control of water infrastructures, particularly the Sarsang Reservoir and major rivers. Similarly, the loss of these strategic water assets was a significant blow to Armenia's ability to influence downstream water flows and weakened its economic and military position (Poghosyan 2022; Lawrence et al. 2024).

The military hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan reached new heights in September 2023 when a robust defeat occurred for Yerevan's authorities on the war

front after a rapid incursion by Baku's troops. In less than two days, between 19th - 20th September 2023, Azerbaijan conducted a quick attack on the self-appointed Republic of Artsakh. This attack erupted following months of rising tensions, which had included the blocking of the Lachin corridor - the only road connecting Armenia with Nagorno-Karabakh - causing deficits of food, medicine and other essentials for the people of Armenian origins in the region (Libiseller 2023; Lawrence et al. 2024). It is relevant to note that, during the assault, Baku asserted it was not an aggression against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh but an anti-terror operation to neutralize Armenian armed formations in the region. The conflict only lasted for around a day, during which Azerbaijan went on to defeat the poorly equipped Armenian forces (Libiseller 2023). The latter in Nagorno-Karabakh, outnumbered and given no assistance from Armenia's national army, agreed to a ceasefire brokered by Russian peacekeepers on 20th of September. The rapid stabilization of the situation has finally put to rest a historical controversy that had existed over thirty-five years, involving many generations and affecting hundreds of thousands of Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Following Yerevan's defeat, the dismantlement of the Armenian forces in Nagorno-Karabakh was achieved, and the self-state regime in the enclave was obliged to surrender by the 1st of January, 2024. Consequently, nearly the entire Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, around 100,000 people, fled to Armenia, fearing revenge and ethnic cleansing by the Azerbaijani soldiers who remained in the enclave (Libiseller 2023; Lawrence et al. 2024).

The relevance of water management for the Armenia's energy production

The control of water resources is not only a relevant aspect in the geopolitical confrontation between nations sharing one or more waterways but, above all, it ensures economic development, industrial productivity, energy supply and growth in agricultural production. Therefore, reducing the Nagorno-Qarabak water issue to a mere dispute to gain major political control over the opponent is a misleading and incomplete reading. As suggested by two prominent authors who have produced relevant works centred on the concept of Hydro Strategy - Aaron T. Wolf (2024) and Mark Zeitoun (2008) -, water plays a crucial role in creating the preconditions for the internal economic development of a state. The greater the amount of water available to a community, the greater the opportunities for economic growth and integrated development. This situation, in line with the power politics and force dynamics that characterises relations between rival nations, means that national authorities promote control over cross-border water resources, often at the expense of peaceful political and diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries.

Regarding the Armenian scenario, water management is a central issue in many aspects, especially in terms of energy production. The nation receives approximately 592 mm of precipitation per year, or in other words, 18 billion m^3 of annual rainfall (FAO 2016), of which 11 billion m^3 is lost to evaporation (FAO 2016). Its total renewable water resources amount to around 7.7 billion m^3/year (FAO 2016), although 1.4 billion m^3 is the overlap between the renewable surface water (3.9 billion m^3) and the renewable groundwater (4.3 billion m^3), meaning that its annual inner renewable water resources actually amount to approximately 6.8 billion m^3 (FAO, 2016), which is

equivalent to the annual flow of the Kura and Araks River Basins. As shown in Table 1, there are 14 significant sub-basins created through these two main river basins. Essentially, almost 3/4 of Armenia's territory lies within transboundary river basins (Bichsel 2009).

Table 1. River basins in Armenia (FAO 2016)

River Basin	*Area (sq. km)*	*Precipitation (million m³ per year)*	*Evaporation (million m³ per year)*	*Flow (million m³ per year)*	*Reservoirs (2004 in operation*
Debet (within Armenia)	3895	2726	1457	1203	1
Aghstay (within Armenia)	2480	1569	979	445	5
Kura's small tributaries (within Armenia)	810	510	354	199	4
Akhuryan (within Armenia)	2784	1653	972	392	8
Kasakh	1480	979	486	329	6
Metsamor	2240	N/A	N/A	711	25
Hrazdan	2565	1572	876	733	7
Lake Sevan Basin	4750	N/A	N/A	265	4
Azat	952	607	306	232	2
Vedi	998	573	340	110	1
Arpa (within Armenia)	2306	1643	768	764	11
Vorotan (within Armenia)	2476	1828	811	725	7
Voghji (within Armenia)	1341	1097	448	502	2
Meghri	664	470	241	166	-

According to the Falkenmark parameters, which the United Nations accept for the assessment of the clean water situation in certain countries or regions, if the annual water supply is higher than 1,700 m³ per capita, then the country could be categorized as water-abundant (Falkenmark et al. 1989). On the other hand, any nation with shares below the 1,700 m³ per capita threshold is deemed water-scarce, and there are several levels of water scarcity depending on the population and the amount of the water drops per capita (Falkenmark et al. 1989). Hydro availability in Armenia for its population of 2.9 million is sufficient to categorize the country as, theoretically, "water-rich". This so-called hydro-wealth, however, is a relative conception, as other significant factors make the water supply index a very volatile and unpredictable variable (Fox et al. 2007; Grey et al. 2003). Factors that contribute to the volatility of these indicators

include transboundary water conflicts, natural disasters, and the water policies of upstream nations.

In the post-Soviet era, in the absence of any mutual agreements, several water-based conflicts have broken out that have profoundly affected Armenia's water security, and the disharmony between Armenia and Azerbaijan is directly related to the transboundary status of the Araks and Kura Rivers (De Stefano et al. 2017; Freizer 2014). Transboundary water conflicts represent a severe dilemma for Armenia, which is faced with two regional solid players such as Türkiye - a real waterpower in the region - and Azerbaijan. Until the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, Yerevan had maintained significant control over the enclave, being able to count on important water resources on a territory internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan (Hanks 2010). After the outcome of the conflict, Armenia lost control over the enclave, significantly decreasing its diversification of water supply. Specifically, the Sarsang Reservoir, located within the boundaries of Karabakh, used to provide drinking and irrigation water for many Armenian communities. The reservoir has a capacity of 560 million m^3 and has been under Armenian control for nearly thirty years (1994-2023). Following the defeat in the 2020 and 2023 rapid conflict, Yerevan lost a valid supply source (De Stefano et al. 2017; Freizer 2014).

In addition, beyond the insecurity related to the transboundary nature of its resources, natural disasters play a relevant role in decreasing Armenian water insecurity. In this regard, in 2000, Armenia suffered a severe drought that was devastating to the subsistence farmers inhabiting the mountainous areas who depend on rain-fed irrigation (FAO 2016; World Bank 2017). In that case, the initial losses amounted to $110 million, while the subsequent losses of agriculture products were estimated at $43 million, in a country where agriculture accounts for almost 30% of the GDP and half of the employment (World Bank 2017; Grey et al. 2003; FAO 2016). As a result of low rainfall and high temperatures caused by climate change, precipitation in some areas fell by around 70%. Most of the crops were lost, leading also to a seed shortage the following year. For instance, in 2006, another drought hit, though not as intense, and the resulting crop drop forced Armenia to import cereal to meet its requirements. In recent years, extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, hot, dry winds and hailstorms have become more common, lasting longer and bringing greater devastation. According to a World Bank report (2018), the total damage from 1994 to 2014 is estimated to have reached around $1.5 billion, including severe agricultural damage and industrial losses. Floods caused by climate change and seasonal flows cripple all activities around rivers, particularly in the Araks River Basin, where people have lost their lives, clean water is scarce, and it has not been possible to cultivate sufficient food products (Hettiarachchi et al. 2017; FAO 2016).

As anticipated, water management for Armenia represents an essential driver for internal economic development, especially regarding energy production. In this regard, it is relevant to consider that natural gas, which is Armenia's primary energy source, accounts for almost 60% of the total, while nuclear power provides 22% and hydropower around 10% (IAEA 2019). Regarding electricity in Armenia, nearly 40% is provided by thermal power plants, 30% by hydroelectric power plants and approximately 30% by nuclear power plants (IAEA 2019). Regarding other energy

sources, specifically thermal power, Yerevan can count on an annual capacity of 2.43 gigawatt electrical (GWe) and on the production of around 3.4 billion kWh of electricity (IAEA 2019). Given this scenario, Yerevan faces severe challenges in terms of energy security. First of all, its dependence on foreign resources draws primary attention. More specifically, since it lacks any proven oil or natural gas reserves, three-quarters of the total energy demand in the country is met through imports of oil and natural gas (World Bank 2017; IAEA 2019). Furthermore, it has very limited coal deposits and has no production. Even though nuclear power plants provide a high percentage of the total electricity, the fuel is imported from Russia. Essentially, Armenia has a significant strategic problem, as it must count on other nations for most of its energy imports. In this regard, Armenian authorities are keen to close old-generation nuclear power plants rather than extend their lifespan (Lawrence et al. 2024), seeking more reliable and affordable electricity, and being unwilling to pay millions of dollars only for an extension (Zakhirova 2013; Porkka et al. 2012).

One of the solutions to reduce Armenia's dependence on foreign energy supplies could be to develop hydroelectric power generation through progressive infrastructure upgrades. In this regard, Yerevan's hydropower sector has a total capacity of 1.33 GW (IAEA 2019; World Bank 2018). The Hrazdan and Vorotan rivers are hosts to 10 power plants that generate most of the country's hydroelectric energy. The Sevan-Hrazdan cascade includes seven power plants with a total capacity of 560 MW that are designed to generate 2.3 billion kWh electricity - being the Sevan (34 MW), Hrazdan (81 MW), Argel (224 MW), Arzni (70 MW), Kanaker (102 MW), Yerevan-1 (44 MW) and Yerevan-3 (5 MW) hydropower plants (HPPs). The Vorotan cascade, on the other hand, incorporates three power plants, featuring the Spandaryan (76 MW), Shamb (171 MW) and Tatev (157 MW) hydro-power plants, with a total capacity of 404 MW. In addition to these, there are 187 smaller hydropower plants with a full capacity of 370 MW.

Table 2. Armenian's largest hydroelectric power plants (IAEA 2019)

Name of the plant	*Installed capacity*	*Years of construction*	*General description*
Sevan-Hrazdan	~ 560 MW	1936 - 1962	Integrated system - six total plants
Vorotan	~ 404 MW	1970 - 1989	Armenia's second-largest hydropower system
Tatev	157 MW	1970	Integrated system
Dzora	26 MW	1932	Armenia's oldest water facility
Aragats	25 MW	1948	Armenia's second oldest water facility

It is essential to consider that Armenia has been supplying more than one-third of its total electricity demands through HPPs, and almost three-quarters of the total renewable energy are produced by hydropower (FAO 2016; World Bank 2017). The country's current hydroelectric generation capacity is around 1,325 MW. While the potential water energy resources of Armenia amount to 21.8 billion kWh, the total

electricity generation in 2018 was 2 billion kWh, indicating that the potential is far beyond the current generation. In this regard, production may be enhanced to close the gap between the potential and actual generation. In this respect, hydropower stands as the only domestic resource that could reduce the influence of foreign states in supplying energy sources (World Bank 2018; IAEA 2019). However, it is essential to take into account that the water resources that hydropower in Armenia relies on are mostly fed by transboundary rivers, making them prone to the external effects of nature or other upstream nations' water policies (Zakhirova 2013; Porkka et al. 2012).

Azerbaijan's water insecurity

As mentioned, the severe water insecurity affecting Azerbaijan is one of the primary drivers of Baku's recent (2020 and 2023) military activism in Nagorno-Karabakh. In this regard, although Azerbaijan is the most extensive and most populous country in the South Caucasus, it accounts for only a minimum part - 10% - of the region's total water resources. As previously pointed out, the rivers Kura and Aras are the country's primary water sources, accounting for 80% of overall water use (Oki et al. 2006). Both the rivers are transboundary, meaning that Azerbaijan has no complete control of them and is forced to deal with the water policies of the upstream countries. Specifically, the Kura River originates in northeastern Türkiye and flows through Georgia and Azerbaijan before emptying into the Caspian Sea (Mirumachi 2015). Similarly, the Aras River also originates in northeastern Türkiye. It flows through several countries, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Iran, before merging with the Kura River near Azerbaijan's coast, eventually draining into the Caspian Sea (Mirumachi 2015).

In addition to the lack of water on its territory and external control of water flows, Azerbaijan struggles with severe anthropogenic drivers that fuel its water scarcity. One of the main reasons for its water scarcity stems from unsustainable agricultural irrigation practices. Under-maintained canals built during the Soviet era, lack of investment in modern technology and infrastructure, and the bureaucratic nature of local governments all serve as obstacles to improving the irrigation system. According to Hajihoseini (et al. 2024) and Hettiarachchi (et al. 2019), almost 75% of agriculture and irrigation throughout the country had either challenging or poor water supply. As surface temperatures continue to increase (due to global warming), the situation is only expected to worsen in the future. Considering that the primary water sources of the Kura and Aras rivers originate from rainfall, melting snow, and glaciers in the mountains, an increase in the intensity of precipitation resulting in more intense floods and a decrease in snow are expected to cause water scarcity in rivers and aquifers (Hanks 2010). In this regard, throughout the last decade, the country's rainfall has decreased by 30% (FAO 2022). Projections forecast that by the year 2100, water resources will decline by 25% compared to the year 2000. The presence of hydrological infrastructure such as dams and reservoirs on Azerbaijan's rivers cause disruptions in their natural flows, further escalating seawater intrusion and resulting in habitat homogenization. To prevent further harm to their crop fields, many villagers are forced to buy water every two to three days at their own expense, while many people lack access to water due to financial constraints (FAO 2022).

Table 3. Azerbaijan's main water courses (FAO 2022)

Name of the river	Total length	Path length in Azerbaijan	Volume flow
Kura River	1 515 km	900 km - 60% of total length	575 m³/s
Aras River	1 072 km	390 km - 36% of total length	285 m³/s
Qabirri River	320 km	100 km - 31% of total length	50 m³/s
Samur River	216 km	38 km - 18% of total length	70-90 m³/s
Tartar River	184 km	100% of total length	22 m³/s
Ganjachay	98 km	100% of total length	10 m³/s

Moreover, the poor quality of Azerbaijani water resources should be taken into account. In this respect, the primary sources of pollution of rivers and groundwaters in Azerbaijan include the discharge of waste originating in manufacturing, the runoff from the massive use of fertilizers and pesticides in the agriculture sector and the leakage of oil and other chemical substances (Smith 1995) All these factors, among others such the pollutant agents discharged in Azerbaijanis waters from upstream nations, pose severe challenges to the country's water quality. In addition, the pollution of water bodies in the Caspian nation, especially the Kura River, by individuals is one of the unpleasant realities of the current day. Concretely, the most widespread form of pollution by people is the littering of riverbanks with plastic (Sadoff et al. 2005).

Transboundary water management, which, as pointed out, represents a major problem for Armenia, is also a key strategic issue for Azerbaijan. Notoriously and obviously, water recognizes neither political borders nor administrative boundaries. While local pollution is a problem that internally disrupts the quality of water resources, the external challenges stemming from transborder rivers affect not only Azerbaijani citizens but also the lives of people in neighbouring countries (Mirumachi 2015; Libiseller 2023). There are two main aspects regarding these challenges: one deals with the quality and quantity of water; the other is related to the need for internal and shared management of water resources. In this context, 65% of the Kura-Aras basin is located in the South Caucasus, while the rest is split between Iran and Türkiye. Azerbaijan is downstream of both rivers' sources, making it inevitable that all the repercussions of upstream water extraction and contamination pass into Azerbaijan (Libiseller 2023). The main obstacle to the shared management of transborder water resources revolves around the need for an inclusive regional arrangement due to existing political tensions between the states that share the Kura-Aras basin. The conflict between Yerevan and Baku for the control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which, as stated, is home to a major reservoir - Sarsang - represent a relevant case in this regard (De Stefano et al. 2017; Freizer 2014).

Azerbaijan places great significance on Nagorno-Karabakh hydro resources as a potential source of hydropower, which can reduce the country's domestic consumption of natural gas and free up more of that resource for export through the recently commissioned Southern Gas Corridor (Lawrence et al. 2024). It is relevant to consider that gas now accounts for 82% of Azerbaijan's electricity mix, but exporting more would improve revenues and support the country in meeting its domestic emissions

targets. As previously pointed out, Azerbaijan's dependence on transboundary hydro politics has constantly worsened water relations with Armenia before, during, and after the Second Karabakh War. Following the positive outcome of the latter for Baku, Azerbaijan gained control of the Khudafarin and Qiz Qalasi dams, two relevant water facilities (Turgul et al. 2024; Libiseller 2023). This allowed for the construction of new power plants, together with Iran - on which Baku and Tehran had already agreed in 2016. The dams gave Azerbaijan some control over the flow of the lower part of the Aras. However, it should be taken into account that the capture of Khudafarin and Qiz Qalasi does not provide Azerbaijan access to new water resources as the flow of the Aras towards the Khudafarin reservoir leans on the water inflow from upstream zones in Türkiye, Armenia and Iran (Turgul et al. 2024; Libiseller 2023).

Discussion

The theoretical framework centred around the concept of hydro strategy allows us to understand how water policies can become a source of tension between states due to its strategic importance as a critical resource for survival, economic growth, energy production and political stability. As claimed by Zeitoun (2008) and Homer-Dixon (2024), in the regions where water is scarce or unevenly distributed, states strive to secure access to as many water sources as possible, leading to competition, and sometimes conflict, over shared transboundary rivers, lakes, and aquifers, as was the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. The concept of hydro-hegemony, as developed by scholars like Zeitoun, explores how more powerful states can dominate the distribution of shared water resources. In this respect, hydro-strategic policies are often shaped by geopolitical calculations, where control over water is seen as a means to assert dominance over neighbouring states. This can create asymmetrical power dynamics, with upstream states unilaterally dictating water flows and downstream states left in a vulnerable position. Such a situation applies not only in the Nagorno-Karabakh case but in several other scenarios. For example, Egypt's historical dominance over the Nile has been challenged by Ethiopia's construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), highlighting how control over water can shift power balances between nations. In some cases, water policies can act as tools of coercion, with states manipulating water flows to exert political pressure. Particularly, this phenomenon is evident in the conflicts between India and Pakistan over the Indus River, where water-sharing agreements are tightly linked to broader geopolitical tensions. Similarly, in the Middle East, control over the Jordan River has been a source of conflict between Israel, Jordan, and Palestine, where water scarcity amplifies territorial disputes (Zeitoun 2008; Homer-Dixon 2024).

It is essential to consider that, according to HS, tensions over water resources are often exacerbated by the lack of effective supranational agreements. The latter, particularly when absent or teleologically weak, leave countries to pursue unilateral water policies that, as mentioned, maximize their own resource exploitation at the expense of shared management and cooperation. This imbalance, predictably, creates a fertile ground for disputes. Water resources, especially those that cross international borders, require coordinated management to prevent over-exploitation and ensure fair distribution. Without supranational frameworks, tensions and conflicts will likely erupt

with severe sociopolitical consequences for many communities and hundreds of thousands of people dwelling near water dispute areas (Zeitoun 2008; Homer-Dixon 2024).

One of the core problems underlying the water tensions in the South Caucasus region is the inadequacy of the current transboundary water resource management system, which is both too complex and-or uncoordinated. For example, Georgia, a country upstream from both Armenia and Azerbaijan, has separate hydro strategic agreements with Yerevan and Baku signed in different years that pursue different objectives. In 1998, Azerbaijan and Georgia signed the Environmental Protection Agreement (EPA) to address environmental issues in the South Caucasus region, particularly concerning shared natural resources like water and air (Freizer 2014). The agreement was mainly aimed at fostering environmental cooperation, joint monitoring, strategic ecological data sharing and transboundary water management, especially regarding the Kura River (Sadoff et al. 2005; Bichsel 2009). Although this was an important agreement between two key nations in the Caucasus region, it was a separate operation and not tied to a regional collaborative approach. In this regard, in 1999, Georgia signed a separate agreement with Armenia that pursued similar objectives but with different strategic goals (Bichsel 2009). Besides generic intentions of environmental cooperation, one of the critical aspects of this agreement focused on transboundary water management, especially concerning rivers like the Debed and Khrami that flow between the two nations (Sadoff et al. 2005; Bichsel 2009). Tbilisi and Yerevan agreed to cooperate to prevent pollution, improve water quality, and ensure sustainable usage of water resources for both national economies (Hanks 2010). In addition, a key element of the agreement was the promotion of joint environmental monitoring and data-sharing efforts, similarly to the Georgia-Azerbaijan agreement signed a year prior. Essentially, both nations committed to regularly exchanging information on environmental conditions, particularly air and water quality, to manage pollution and other environmental risks in a more efficient and joint way (Sadoff et al. 2005; Oki et al. 2006).

Figure 2. Map of the Kura (Mtkvari) - Aras River system in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran and Türkiye

Source: US Geological Survey: https://www.usgs.gov/

In order to solve the critical water tensions in the South Caucasus region and maintain a sustainable regulatory framework, effective coordination must be assured between government agencies and other stakeholders. The main objective is to eliminate power politics mechanisms that prevent states from cooperating on water issues, as in the case of the various conflicts in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. Indeed, other aspects have contributed to fueling tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan, including identity-based nationalism and ethnic claims (Sadoff et al. 2005; Oki et al. 2006). However, the supremacy of regional water control represents one of the main drivers that have pushed the two nations into repeated military actions and harsh confrontations for over 35 years. A solution that could bring benefit to the region is the adoption of the so-called Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), which, according to the UN, is a "process that promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources in order to maximize the resultant economic and social welfare equitably without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems." (Abdolvand et. al. 2014, 907). In the Armenia-Azerbaijan case, one of the main factors of this model is the involvement of water users and interest groups in the management and formation of a peaceful and joint water policy aimed at adopting shared solutions. Identifying joint solutions to common problems could, over time, foster an environment of institutional trust between the two countries and stimulate dialogue, peace, and prosperity (Fox et al. 2007; Freizer 2014).

Conclusion and discussion

The issue of water availability and shared water resource use is particularly acute today in the countries of the South Caucasus. The high hydrological dependence between the countries of the region is characterized not only by the large number of participants but also by the uneven distribution of water resources. The South Caucasus is considered one of the regions with the highest levels of water availability globally. However, inefficient water use, the lack of modern technologies, the need to constantly increase food and industrial production to feed a rapidly growing population, and the deterioration of irrigation structures and water conservation systems have already led to acute water shortages, both in rural areas and desert zones, as well as in industrial centers and foothills.

The breakdown of economic and interdepartmental ties between the former Soviet republics of the South Caucasus region led to a widespread decline in production and a decline in water resources. The well-established operation of reservoirs and energy supply systems began to falter. The South Caucasus states faced the challenge of resolving issues related to the shared use of the region's hydropower resources, which had previously been centrally managed. Changes in the political and economic situation in the region led sovereign states to seek to use water resources primarily for their own national interests.

Water resources in the South Caucasus have always had and continue to have a significant impact on the economic activities of the region's states, as all major rivers cross the territories of two or more countries. Any change in water use by one country, which shares aquatic ecosystems, or any impact on the condition of water bodies through the construction of water management structures, inevitably impacts the interests of others. Moreover, incoordination can lead to conflict, as the consequences are often adverse for downstream countries, both in terms of economic development and social and environmental outcomes.

Certain norms of international law, including regional agreements, have now been established regarding water use and the management of transboundary water resources. However, these agreements are characterized by the specific characteristics of their respective basins, and therefore, attempts to universalize them face significant difficulties. Meanwhile, the need to develop common approaches to the distribution of water resources in transboundary rivers is continually growing.

While the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is often viewed primarily as a purely ethnic dispute between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, a deeper analysis presented in this article reveals that control over water resources played a decisive role in the Second Karabakh War of 2020 and fueling tensions between the two countries. The region's geography, dominated by crucial transboundary rivers, reservoirs, and irrigation systems, made water a strategic asset in the conflict. Both Yerevan and Baku depend heavily on these water resources for agricultural productivity, drinking water, and energy, especially in an increasingly water-scarce environment influenced by climate change.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the water security matter achieved more significant prominence, as what was once Soviet resources became transboundary. Just like the other regional countries, Armenia and Azerbaijan were left with no laws or regulations related to the sharing of hydro resources, which thus became an obstacle

standing in the way of regional cooperation and the assurance of a broader and regional water security framework. Looking at Armenia's and Azerbaijan's water resources and the annual flow rates, it is important to understand that two factors must be taken into account: the shared status of all of its water resources and the threat of natural disasters or environmental impacts. The absence of a proper, functioning regional cooperation agreement related to water politics clearly makes Armenian and Azerbaijani water security vulnerable, given the potential for conflicts over the share of water or clashes that have consequences on water security. This issue is exacerbated by the suitability of the geography for natural disasters, which makes the situation even more complex.

In order to limit the risk of escalation, it would be desirable to set up a form of institutional dialogue focused on the joint management of transboundary water resources. This solution could include the creation of a supra-national commission composed of experts, politicians and analysts from both countries to oversee the agreements between the two nations to foster fair and sustainable water resource management. For Armenia and Azerbaijan, beyond their survival, food, humanitarian, developmental and agricultural needs, the energy sector is also heavily dependent on water security since both aim to increase their share of hydropower electricity. Armenia, as mentioned, to reduce foreign dependency on the supply sources and Azerbaijan to increase gas exports by reducing internal usage. In the event of any decrease or uncertainty in their access to water, both countries, following a dynamic related to the concept of hydro-strategy, could find themselves in a chaotic situation, with the potential to turn into catastrophes of different extents that could be extremely expensive for Baku and Yerevan. Such a situation could trigger a perilous spiral of water tensions, capable of seriously impacting regional stability. Essentially, Azerbaijan and Armenia's water security is extremely vulnerable to threats, and the insecurity in this area makes the topic of energy security even more important.

Conflict of interests
The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical standards
The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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THE DIFFICULT EUROPEAN PATH TO SETTLING RUSSIAN-GEORGIAN RELATIONS IN POST-ELECTION GEORGIA IN 2024: A ROLLBACK ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION OR THE UNACCEPTABILITY OF CONFRONTATION

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Abstract

The article analyzes the trends in the settlement of Russian-Georgian relations after the parliamentary elections in Georgia on October 26, 2024. Attention is paid to how the ruling Georgian Dream party won, as well as to why Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili and the opposition parties refused to recognize the results of the parliamentary elections, calling for civil unrest and protests. The article examines the trends in the settlement of Russian-Georgian relations after 2024 as the beginning of the formation of a new track, which is significantly influenced by historical memory and the Russian war against Ukraine since 2022. In this sense, the Georgian ruling elite actively uses and periodically weaves all this into the modern political agenda, trying to get its domestic and foreign policy dividends. The article notes that the Georgian elite, since the transition of the ruling Georgian Dream party, has begun to create a reality in which a new fundamental historical narrative was formed by returning to the supposedly forgotten past. In this context, the basic actions in implementing this policy are Georgia's transition to a pro-Georgian development course and a demonstrative rejection of its previous orientation toward the EU and European integration.

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Introduction

The article covers the dynamics of Russian-Georgian relations after the victory of the Georgian Dream party in the elections, held in Georgia in October 2024. In the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian military confrontation, the restoration of political relations became important for Tbilisi and Moscow. The positive signals coming from Georgia were perceived with understanding in Moscow, as they believed that even if attempts to normalize relations with Georgia do not achieve significant success, bilateral relations discussed at the level of the two governments will certainly improve.

In Russian-Georgian relations, both sides have their own 'red lines'. For Moscow, this is the exclusion of Georgia, which shares a common border with its country, from joining NATO, and for Tbilisi, the restoration of its territorial integrity. The Kremlin understands that no Georgian government can establish full relations with Moscow and open the Abkhazian road. In the complex international conditions that have developed at the same time and the realities that have developed in the region after the loss of Artsakh, if Georgia guarantees that it will not be included in NATO, how important are Abkhazia and South Ossetia for Moscow?

The article also touches on the disruption of the balance of power in the South Caucasus that had developed in previous decades and the new challenges that became part of the agenda after the fall of the Republic of Artsakh.

Russian-Georgian regional balance

Two interrelated principles are important for Russia. First, Georgia's European or Western choice should not become an anti-Russian one. That is, the principle of geopolitical pluralism should also apply to Russia. Meanwhile, from the late 1980s until 2024, Georgian foreign policy was conceptually built on the West-Russia opposition. Second, the European or Western choice should not entail a choice in favor of expanding NATO military infrastructure right up to Russia's borders. Identifying the Western choice with an anti-Russian one pushed Georgia's previous ruling elite to base its foreign policy strategy on a scenario in which Russia's foreign policy influence would at a minimum not grow and at a maximum weaken. This scenario is clearly not coming to fruition. Relying on Russia's weakening makes the success of Georgia's strategy critically dependent on factors beyond Georgia's control. Finally, this rate prevents Georgia from taking advantage of the benefits that Russia's growing economy provides to its neighbors and that business groups from Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Kazakhstan enjoy.

The question of the scope and quality of the Russian military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, discussed in principle in the context of the long-term normalization of the situation in the region, can hardly be raised under the current circumstances. The resumption of social and economic ties between the parties could involve the creation of a common space for the movement of people, goods, capital, and services between Georgia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, with the direct participation of Russia, which should become a structural part of this space. The initiative to restore railway service between Georgia and Abkhazia met with objections or doubts in both Tbilisi and Sukhumi and was removed from the agenda. Nevertheless, despite the obstacles facing

the practical implementation of this plan, the restoration of railway service could give new impetus to positive processes throughout the Transcaucasus, which is of interest to several states in the region. We believe that this topic requires discussion, if not at the political, then at the expert level.

The Russian-Ukrainian war created a completely new situation not only in global terms but also in terms of the regional balance formed in the South Caucasus. The unprecedented military operations in Europe after World War II posed new challenges to the South Caucasian republics. The Kremlin, foreseeing the sanctions, restrictions on various communications and logistical problems it would face before the Russian-Ukrainian war, tried to mitigate them by deepening relations with Azerbaijan and Türkiye, as a result of which the Armenian Artsakh was depopulated. On the other hand, the role of Georgia became important again for Russia, since the only land route bypassing Russia and stretching to Europe remained the South Caucasus.

Since 1991, the Georgian authorities had adopted the Western vector of development, since in Tbilisi they believed that reducing the Russian threat in that region and ensuring Georgia's sovereignty could be realistic only by joining the EU and NATO structures.

After the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, Georgia's pro-Western sentiments among the population became even stronger (Hopmann 2025; Selivanova 2025; Jones 2025). Diplomatic and political relations with Russia were severed. According to opinion polls conducted in Georgia, 85% of the population was in favor of the EU, and 78% of it was in favor of joining NATO. Opinion polls conducted in March of 2023 also indicate that public sentiments in Georgia have not changed significantly. This time, 89% of the population was in favor of EU membership, and 80% of it was in favor of joining NATO. According to the Georgian population, the main threat to them remains Russia (IRI 2023; Civil Georgia 2023a). However, since 2020, the Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia (GD), taking into consideration these public sentiments in the country and the complex political processes taking place globally in the world, has tried to conduct a cautious and balanced foreign policy.

Despite the fact that one of the first resolutions of the 10th session of the Georgian Parliament in 2020 was the "Decision on Georgia's Foreign Policy until 2024," according to which Tbilisi should have officially applied for membership in the EU and NATO by 2024, and the main strategic partner was declared to be the United States, with which the "United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership" (U.S. Department of State 2009) had been signed back in 2009, opposition parties nevertheless believed that this resolution was declarative in nature and intended more to serve as a 'balm for the soul of the West,' since what was being discussed in this resolution was already enshrined in Article 78 of the country's Constitution.

As for relations with the Russian Federation, it was included in two points. The first concerns the de-occupation policy and the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity, and the second concerns the establishment of a fundamentally new and constructive relationship with Moscow in order to reduce new existential and hybrid threats to Tbilisi and to establish pragmatic relations (Civil Georgia 2020a).

After the Second Karabakh War, Georgia lost its leadership in the region, and as a result of the Ukrainian war, new economic prospects opened up for Georgia. In

January-June of 2023, as a result of economic cooperation with the Russian Federation, Georgia received $2 billion in income, which was 1.6 times higher than the level of the same period in 2022 (Transparency International Georgia 2023a).

A political scandal erupted in Georgia when it became known that Russian businessman D. Khidasheli was an advisor to the Minister of Defense of Georgia in February of 2020-2024 (Hosaka 2025). Thus, in the current situation, the restoration of political and economic relations has become important for both Russia and Georgia.

The views of those advocating a pragmatic policy towards Russia have been reflected in Georgia's political life, considering that the U.S. offered Georgian society an alternative path, thus placing Georgia at the center of geopolitical games. However, the U.S. offered the Georgian political elite conditions that it had already received from Russia (visa-free travel, free trade privileges, and military assistance). However, the possibility of visa-free travel is no longer attractive to most of the Georgian population, since the country's skilled workforce has long been in the United States. As for the free trade status with the U.S., Russia is a traditional market for Georgian products, and for a number of reasons, Georgia cannot be competitive in the American market. In this context, one can question what kind of war with Russia is being discussed when trade volumes and the number of tourists arriving from Russia are growing, and Georgia not only lacks the resources to confront Russia, but any such step could have serious consequences.

The ruling Georgian Dream party was well aware that reintroducing the bills on foreign agents and on banning LGBT propaganda to parliament would lead to a deterioration of relations with the West (House of Commons 2024; Human Rights Watch 2025). This indicates that, ahead of the parliamentary elections on October 26, 2024, the Georgian authorities prioritized weakening the opposition's position by establishing good neighborly relations with Moscow and ensuring the country's dynamic development. In this way, the ruling Georgian Dream party also secured the support of conservative segments of society and the church.

Georgia's integration with the EU and the Western vector of development

Following these steps, Georgia's integration into the EU was effectively frozen for a time, and the Georgian authorities were criticized by the U.S., while European institutions also considered these laws anti-democratic and demanded their revision (European Parliament 2024; Venice Commission 2024).

Thus, despite the fact that the European and Western development vector has received the approval of a significant part of the population, moreover, it has been enshrined in the constitution, nevertheless, in the current geopolitical situation, Tbilisi, using its Eurosceptic and conservative line, decided to preserve the country's sovereignty through the diversification of foreign policy. Freezing relations with the EU and NATO is beneficial to Russia, Türkiye, Azerbaijan and Iran. However, in our opinion, such a strategy of Georgia is more in the interests of Moscow than anything else. For the Kremlin, Georgia has always been considered a zone of geopolitical influence. In Russian-Georgian relations, both sides have their own 'red lines'. For Moscow, this is the exclusion of Georgia, which has a common land border with it, from joining NATO, and for Tbilisi, the restoration of its territorial integrity.

Thus, Georgia is no longer considered by the West as a center of democracy in the South Caucasus. In addition, such a change in the Georgian vector will reduce the West's position in Armenia, which will no longer have the opportunity to move west through Georgia. The relations that have developed between the two countries since 2008 have not satisfied anyone. Georgia has become convinced that neither NATO nor the EU is going to accept them. And in the current difficult geopolitical conditions, Moscow has begun to attach more importance to Georgia's loyalty than to the issue of the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. For Moscow, the "Georgian Dream" is preferable to M. Sahakashvili, who will not be able to engage in political activity in the near future, and the party he leads is about to be outlawed. As a result of the policy of the current Georgian authorities, closer relations with the EU or NATO are also not a matter of the foreseeable future. The Kremlin understands that no Georgian authority can deepen its relations with Russia and open the Abkhazian road without restoring its territorial integrity. If this issue is of secondary importance for Moscow, then it is a matter of principle for Tbilisi. After all, Russia can survive without that road. However, here another question arises for the Kremlin. In the current complex international and regional conditions, how important is the role of South Ossetia and Abkhazia for Moscow? Moscow solved a similar problem in the South Caucasus together with Ankara. True, initially not considering that it would completely lose Nagorno-Karabakh, the complex situation forced the Kremlin to make concessions. In recent years, Abkhazia and South Ossetia were options for Moscow to put pressure on Georgia. More than a dozen Russian military bases and the construction of the Ochamchire naval base were considered important in the event of Georgia's accession to NATO. However, if it is possible to reach an agreement with Georgia and obtain guarantees that Georgia will not claim to be included in the North Atlantic Alliance, then in that case for Moscow, as happened with Azerbaijan in the case of Artsakh, Moscow believed that in the current situation, it was more economically beneficial to fully return Georgia to its geopolitical orbit and fully control it, instead of two unrecognized republics that had become a "burden" for it.

In fact, with smart and balanced steps, Tbilisi managed to put Moscow in front of a difficult dilemma "ahead of time". Moscow now understands that strategically, having previously recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, they are currently in a difficult situation. Back in 2015, Vladimir Putin stated that the territorial integrity of Georgia is primarily a matter for the Georgian, South Ossetian, and Abkhazian peoples, and that Russia would accept any decision they make (German 2016). This is a rather vague formulation, and if the Kremlin withdraws its decision, an uncomfortable situation will be created for its allies, who, at the instigation of Moscow, had recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Syria, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Nauru).

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, speaking at the UN on September 28, 2024, on the issue of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, noted that they are neighbors of Georgia and that the current Georgian leadership honestly assesses the events that have taken place and is inclined towards historical reconciliation (MFA of the RF 2024a). He then added that if all sides show willingness, Russia will be ready to assist in this process (MFA of the RF 2024a).

In his speech in Georgia, Bidzina Ivanishvili responded by stating that the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity is possible only through peaceful means, based on mutual reconciliation and forgiveness (Tsurtsumia 2024). He emphasized that foreign agents and the National Movement do not want this. He also stated that after winning the elections, the ruling Georgian Dream party is ready to choose a model of constitutional arrangement that will allow for the restoration of the territorial integrity of a united Georgia (Tsurtsumia 2024).

In essence, this was a message to Russia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. With this, the Georgian leadership hinted that, in addition to the threat of a new war, it understood the impossibility of resolving this issue without an agreement with Russia, which put the Russian leadership in a difficult situation. In the prevailing difficult international circumstances, Russia needed Georgian transport and communication infrastructure and at least its neutrality. However, the Kremlin did not quite understand how to convince the Abkhazians and South Ossetians in these republics (Miklasová 2024; Gabrichidze 2021), which are recognized by Russia and where dozens of Russian military bases are located, of the need to unite with Georgia within the framework of a federation or confederation. According to Article 4 of the Constitution of Abkhazia, the territory of the Republic of Abkhazia is indivisible, inviolable and inalienable, and its independence and territorial integrity cannot be abolished.

South Ossetia, which is in a more difficult economic and political situation, deliberately included a mechanism in its Constitution for possible incorporation into the Russian Federation. However, the Russian political leadership has so far ignored these proposals. According to paragraph 3 of Article 3 of the Constitution of South Ossetia, the territory of the republic is not subject to alienation, but paragraph 4 of the same article states that the territory, status and borders cannot be changed without the consent of the people. Nevertheless, Russia reacted positively to the proposals of the Georgian leadership, as the Kremlin believed that even if attempts to normalize relations with Georgia were unsuccessful or only partially successful, bilateral relations would nevertheless reach a new level, since the issues were being discussed at the government level (Miklasová 2024; Gabrichidze 2021).

In his annual report presented to Parliament in June 2024, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze noted that Georgia has two main problems: the final eradication of poverty and the unification of the country. He thus also confirmed Bidzina Ivanishvili's statement that by 2030, Abkhazia and South Ossetia will already be reunited with Georgia (Solovyov 2024).

The Georgian side understands very well that now a favorable internal and external situation has been created for it. Joe Biden was defeated in the US elections; the position of the German Chancellor was also shaken. These figures decided to pursue and thoroughly study the mistakes made in the elections in Georgia. Ukraine received new missiles, for which Moscow also becomes accessible. However, the West, for some reason, will also have to recognize the Georgian elections and not completely break off ties with Tbilisi.

First of all, this is the use of the Georgian section of the East-West transit route. Second, with this step, the West is also trying to counter the further expansion of Russian influence in the region. Thus, both Moscow and the West are trying to pursue

a pragmatic policy in the region. This circumstance, in turn, will also give Tbilisi the opportunity to pursue a multi-vector policy and improve relations with the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China and Türkiye, and, possibly, with Iran.

The abolition of Russian visas for Georgian citizens, the warming of Russian-Georgian relations caused concern in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali. Although on October 4, 2024, at the meeting of the foreign ministers of the Russian Federation, South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Moscow, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov stated that the 2008 recognition of the Republic of Abkhazia and the Republic of South Ossetia is not subject to abolition, however, these assurances did not completely dispel the doubts of the Abkhazians and South Ossetians (MFA of the RF 2024b). This is not the first time that the idea of creating a confederation with Georgia has been raised by Moscow.

Back in August 2008, Abkhazian President S. Bagapsh was offered the opportunity to create an Abkhaz-South Ossetian confederation before the recognition of independence, which would be open to other Georgian entities (Hille 2010; Potier 2001a, 2020b). The Abkhazians and Ossetians did not agree to this proposal, guessing the purpose of the Kremlin's 'trick' and offered to recognize their independence separately (Beacháin 2025). Even more suspicious was the fact that Dmitry Kozak, the deputy head of Russia's presidential administration, who is the author of the failed project for the integration of Moldova and the Transnistrian region, was sent to the Abkhazian direction. Another of his failed attempts was the Minsk agreements on Ukraine.

Over the past decades, friendly relations were established between Stepanakert, Sukhumi, Tskhinvali and Tiraspol. These unrecognized republics linked their future primarily with the influence of Russia in the region. And here they are witnessing that Moscow is losing its influence in the South Caucasus, that Armenia is left alone in the face of Azerbaijani-Turkish aggression, that NATO member Türkiye is extracting concessions from the Kremlin in the region and, in the end, the Republic of Artsakh is ceasing its activities. Consequently, political elites in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are concerned about whether the fall of Artsakh marks the beginning of the end for unrecognized states in the post-Soviet space.

Unfortunately, the Kremlin's wavering policy has not once created the basis for this. For example, in 1991 and 1992, Moscow found itself in the status of an observer in two tense situations, without the South Ossetian side, and the Kremlin has repeatedly discussed blocking the road from Georgia to the Russian Federation through South Ossetia. After the fall of Artsakh, the Abkhazians and Ossetians no longer have the confidence that the presence of Russian military bases guarantees their security (Blakkisrud, Kemoklidze, Gelashvili and Kolstø 2020). Over the past two decades, Russia has had the opportunity to ensure economic prosperity for these two small republics and, conversely, demonstrate to everyone what it means to be friends with Russia. However, South Ossetia and Abkhazia are plagued by numerous economic difficulties and ineffective governance.

Initially, Abkhaz society and a number of political groups were dissatisfied with the extraordinary session of Parliament held on December 27, 2023, according to whose decision the territories of the Pitsunda settlement and the Myussera nature reserve were leased to Russia (Civil Georgia 2023b; OC Media 2022). About 30 points of this

agreement did not correspond to the Abkhazian Constitution. Moscow should have foreseen that by proposing a "Russian-Abkhazian investment agreement" to Sukhumi in November 2024, it could not but cause discontent among the Abkhazians (OC Media 2024). It contains quite high corruption risks and expresses the interests of several oligarchs, who would be exempt from all taxes for 25 years, would have priority access to all communications in Abkhazia, could import construction equipment and labor without restrictions, and non-Abkhazian banks would also regulate financial flows. After the sale of only thirty thousand apartments built by them, more than one hundred thousand Russians could move to Abkhazia. After discussing this law in the Abkhazian Parliament, about twenty amendments were proposed, none of which were accepted by the Russian side (Euronews 2024). In the end, it was rejected by the Abkhazians.

The main thing for the Kremlin, in order not to be completely discredited, is to preserve the 'independence' of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region in the form of a 'confederation', as well as to guarantee the presence of part of its troops there for some time. At the same time, before 'returning' Abkhazia to Georgia, Moscow wants to take possession of the 'most fertile' areas, and the Russian army is the guarantor of this. From this point of view, the discontent of the Abkhazians and the resignation of the president were very favorable. It is clear that these demonstrations could have been dispersed in a very short time with the help of the Russian army. Moscow reduced funding and threatened to sell gas at international prices. In addition to the steps taken to gradually push them into the arms of Georgia, they are trying to convince Russian society that the 'ungrateful' Abkhazians should be abandoned. In Russian pro-government patriotic circles, the role of several separatist leaders and illegal armed groups during the Georgian-Abkhazian war of 1992-1993 is sometimes recalled, and some of them were awarded Abkhazia's highest awards and titles at the time (Kikalishvili 2023). As was the case with the Artsakh issue, now Moscow is interested in Georgia, opening the way for Russia and becoming one of the important logistical routes, not giving the West the opportunity to control or create obstacles for Moscow. The Kremlin is also concerned about the fact that Tbilisi has not yet expressed its opinion on the revision of Article 78 of its constitution, which enshrines its strategy for joining NATO.

It should be noted that no country can join the North Atlantic Alliance if there are territorial issues. Therefore, by returning South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Moscow will demand guarantees from Georgia not to take anti-Russian steps. It should be borne in mind that Georgia's neutral status is also beneficial to Türkiye, Iran and Azerbaijan. And from this perspective, they will clarify the example of Azerbaijan before Georgia, which restored its territorial integrity and became Russia's key strategic partner in the region.

In fact, today we are witnessing that the previous balance of power created in the South Caucasus has been violated, and not only has a new regional security system not been formed, but new challenges have also emerged, which appeared on the agenda after the fall of the Republic of Artsakh.

Conclusion and discussion

Over the past decades, various schemes of the South Caucasus security system have been tried to be formed. Among them, we would like to single out 3+3+1 (three South Caucasian republics, Russia, Türkiye, Iran and the EU) and 3+3+2+2+1 (RA, AR, Georgia, NKR, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, RF, Iran, Türkiye, EU, USA, PRC). However, none of these initiatives was crowned with success.

At one time, the borders of the South Caucasian states were mainly determined by Russian-Turkish agreements and treaties. After the collapse of the USSR, it was advantageous for the RF, Türkiye and IRI to have 3 South Caucasian republics, which were actually a buffer for the regional countries that had been at war with each other for centuries. At the same time, the regional countries were united in the issue of inhibiting the influence of the West in the region. Moreover, for three decades, Russian (Eurasian) influence dominated in the South Caucasus. After the Second Karabakh War, the pan-Turkic factor became active in the region. The West, which had local influence in Georgia, to some extent, ceded its positions to RF. The interests of RF and Iran in the region coincide, limiting the influence of Türkiye, which enjoys the support of the Anglo-Saxon powers. From this perspective, they also expect the support of the PRC, whose influence in the region may also become obvious.

Artsakh ceased to exist by force at a time when the international community was talking about exclusively peaceful methods of resolving ethnic conflicts. Such a solution to the ethnic problem in the post-Soviet space creates a dangerous precedent for all unrecognized entities when the latter approach wins out between the principles of self-determination and territorial integrity. Unfortunately, we are currently witnessing the fact that each of the South Caucasian countries is trying to develop its own security concept at the expense of the security of its neighbors. If we take into consideration that the South Caucasus is a rather complex region from a geopolitical, religious and ethno-political point of view, then it will be understandable what consequences the intervention of regional and global power poles in this part of the world can lead to. However, in our opinion, such a forceful solution to any problem cannot be final, and we will still see its reactions. Another important conclusion is that such a solution to the Artsakh problem, as well as the aggravation of the situation in Abkhazia, first of all, indicates the weakening of Russia's positions in the South Caucasus. By using the Karabakh scenario to "solve" the issues of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Moscow is trying to neutralize the West and maintain its hegemonic position among regional countries.

Such a solution to the issue will definitely cause discontent among the Ossetians, Adyghe and Abkhazians living in the North Caucasus. It will seriously affect the image of the Russian Federation, and it is not yet clear what consequences this tactical maneuver will have in terms of strategy.

Georgia, for its part, is trying not to appear on the dividing lines in the conditions of the formation of a new world order. However, the Georgian authorities understand very well that, taking into consideration the pro-Western sentiments in Georgian society, it must act very carefully and cannot appear in any structure controlled by Moscow in the near future.

In the current Russian-Georgian relations, Moscow is more interested in guarantees from Tbilisi that after reunification with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia will not move towards NATO. And for this reason, the Russian Federation is trying to maintain its military and economic presence in these territories.

The complex geopolitical processes taking place in the South Caucasus pose new challenges for Yerevan. The Republic of Armenia must conduct a sufficiently balanced policy; otherwise, it will again come under attack and pay the next price for Russian-Turkish rapprochement. Although stable contacts between the Armenians of Armenia and Abkhazia have not been established, the change in the status of the Republic of Abkhazia for the Armenians living in that country could lead to quite serious consequences, and Yerevan should develop its position and tactics in the event of different development scenarios.

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JOPS

THE COST OF COMMITMENT: UNDERSTANDING THE IRAN'S INTERVENTION IN THE ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR (2023-2024)

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Abstract

Using the concept of commitment trap, this article makes the argument that Iran's indirect war support to the Palestinian Hamas militant group in Gaza during the Israel-Hamas war in 2023-2024 should be explained primarily based on the Islamic Republic's public commitment to Palestinian armed struggle against Israel. This article explains that the need to avoid the costs of abandoning its commitment to support Palestinian armed struggle compelled Iran to provide military support to Palestinian militant forces in Gaza through using its Lebanese proxy group of Hezbollah group to attack Israel from Lebanon despite the Hezbollah's lack of preparedness to engage in a war with Israel. Thus, the defeat of Hezbollah in the resultant war with Israel weakened the Iran's own military defense in Syria against Syrian armed opposition. As a result of this power shift, the HTS-led armed opposition succeeded in overthrowing the Iran-backed Assad government in a short war which also ended the Iran's military-political influence in the country.

Introduction

When Israel launched a full-scale retaliatory military offense into the Gaza Strip against the Palestinian Hamas militant group following the Hamas's complex attack on civilian and military targets in Israel, Iran found itself in the face of the possibility of becoming party to a conflict it was not really prepared to join. For decades, the Islamic Republic had been asserting its opposition to any negotiated settlement to the Palestinian-Israel conflict and advocated, instead, armed struggle to destroy the Jewish state. In this manner, the Islamic Republic bound itself with unconditional, maximalist commitment to an enduring conflict, challenging the dominant approach advocated by other states for ending the conflict politically through two-state arrangement.

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Per its commitment to Palestinian armed struggle, Iran has been trying to enable Palestinian militant groups in Palestinian territory, through training, funding, and arming, to wage and sustain armed struggle against Israel, without directly involving it. As a result of this undertaking, a close relationship began to develop between the Islamic Republic and Palestinian Islamist groups, primarily Hamas, which shared the Iran's maximalist objective of wiping out Israel off the map of the region. For Iran, supporting Palestinian armed struggle to defeat the Jewish state and recover the territory to the Muslim Palestinian became a matter of fulfilling of an Islamic religious duty, whereas the Palestinian resistance found in the Islamic Republic as largely the only major provider of political-military support in the fight against the much superior army.

In view of this public commitment, when Israel started its full-scale offense on the Hamas-held Gaza with the declared aim of destroying Palestinian militants, the Islamic Republic found itself compelled to intervene in the conflict indirectly through employing its loyal forces of the Lebanese militant organization of Hezbollah by opening a frontline against Israel from Lebanon. In the course of the ensued escalatory war between Iran-linked Hezbollah and Israel, the Lebanese militant group suffered massive military blows, losing its top leadership and much of its capabilities.

The Iran's risky decision to involve its Lebanese proxy group in the war resulted in a strategic disaster its regional interest as the Hezbollah's military defeat in Lebanon produced wider regional military reverberation. Hezbollah had effectively been working as Iran's major ground force in the civil war-torn Syria since 2011. In Syria, it was providing protection for the Syrian Assad government against the Syrian insurgency and, thereby, securing the Iran's military-political foothold which had been established and growing in the shadow of the much enfeebled Assad government. Now, the defeat in the war with Israel left Hezbollah no longer able to provide the same level of reinforcing fighting capabilities on behalf of Iran in Syria. The consequence was the change of the balance of force in favor of Syrian insurgent groups led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). In view of this opportunity, in early December 2024, a day after the cessation of the Israel-Hezbollah war, Syrian rebel groups successfully resumed attacks on the Syrian army and its ally forces. Largely abandoned by its military allies on the ground, the government forces quickly collapsed. Few days later, the HTS-led insurgent movement toppled the Assad government and, with it, removed the Iranian presence from the country.

In view of the introduction above, I argue that the concept of commitment trap can be applied to explain the Iran's decision to join Israel-Hamas War through its Lebanese proxy group in support of the Palestinian group. As will be discussed below, commitment trap grows out of the pressure, generated by domestic as well as external considerations, on the committed party to act on its prior pledge even though the fulfilling of the commitment no longer serves, or even endangers, the state power interests under the circumstance. To put it in other words, when a commitment becomes a trap, it means its fulfillment involves the level of sacrifice or risk not envisaged when the commitment was first made. Nevertheless, it still feels compelled to act on it.

The rest of this article proceeds as follow. The following section develops the arguments by drawing on the relevant literature. The second section will discuss the declaratory and ideological root of the Iran's commitment to the armed struggle by the Palestinians against Israel will be discussed. Third section addresses the Iran's intervention through its proxy forces of Hezbollah in the Hamas-Israel war following the start of the Israel retaliatory offense into the Gaza Strip in October 2023 and the consequences of the intervention to the Iran's regional power position. The last section examines two possible alternative explanations to the commitment trap explanation. In the conclusion, few final remarks are presented.

Research Statement

In this article, I use the concept of commitment trap[1] to explain the Iran's decision to intervene through its proxy forces of Hezbollah in the Hamas-Israel war following the start of the Israel retaliatory offense into the Palestinian Gaza Strip in October 2023. Before proceeding further into the analysis, some definitions are in order. To begin with, for the purpose of this article, commitment is defined broadly as a public pledge of providing protection or support for an external party in the context of conflict; that is, commitment by a party (commitment giver) to helping a party to a dispute (the recipient of the commitment) against the other party to the dispute (the target of the commitment). Accordingly, commitment is an act of self-binding to certain political-strategic position. Perhaps the Thomas Schelling's rather analogical illustration captures the essence of commitment when he compares it to "getting yourself where you cannot retreat" (Schelling 1966, 49). Hence, commitment trap.

Commitment trap suggests that whereas initiating commitment is typically a voluntary act, fulfilling commitment assumes an obligatory quality. Commitment as a trap refers to a situation in which a state (the commitment provider) feels compelled to act on its prior commitment even though fulfilling the commitment may no longer serve its interests (security or power) any longer or it may even poses risk to those interests. Commitment trap implies that the situation under which the commitment has to be acted on has evolved unfavorably from the situation under which the commitment was initiated. The commitment giver may be now in a weaker or vulnerable military position than before and the target of the commitment is now in a more stronger military position than before; or even the recipient of the commitment is now no longer of a high political or military value for the commitment giver compared to the risk involved in defending it or protecting it. Accordingly, by following through with its commitment, usually after the failure of deterrence, the committed party runs the risk of becoming a party to a costly conflict or fighting a war under unfavorable balance of force; yet, backing doing from the commitment (undoing the commitment following the failure of deterrence) also incurs cost.

In the literature, two disparate types of costs are discussed: political audience cost and international reputation cost. Therefore, the desire to avoid the political audience cost as well as to maintain international reputation serves as compelling causes for

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[1] The concept of commitment trap was first articulated by Douglas Macdonald in his study of the US foreign policy toward its allies in the Third World (Macdonald 1992).

fulfilling public commitments. Political audience cost refers to incurring political punishments to the state rulers by domestic individuals and groups for reneging on foreign policy commitments, especially in the face of crisis escalation. In a seminal work, James Fearon developed this concept to explain why leaders in democratic countries find it hard to back down from their commitments (promise or threat). "Backing down after making a show of force is often most immediately costly for a leader because it gives domestic political opponents an opportunity to deplore the international loss of credibility, face, or honor," Fearon concludes (Fearon 1994, 581). On this account, the fear of losing office (voters support) gives leaders in democracies incentive to comply with their prior commitments. The domestic audience cost has also been applied to non-democratic systems. The argument here is that even in autocratic states backing down from international commitments may put the leader in the danger of overthrowing from power by domestic political interest groups, especially if the groups on whose support the leader depends have means and motives to take collective action (Weeks 2008). Thus, whether in democracies or autocracies, reneging on international commitments endangers the legitimacy of the leadership at home since it will be seen as weak by political domestic audience, and, therefore, it loses its domestic support to stay in power.

Although these and other works on political audience cost thesis locate the audience (whether voters or political interest groups) within state boundaries, the political audience of a national regime or leader can extend beyond the state boundaries. To put it in other words, it could sometimes be the case that the individuals or groups whose opinions and sentiments are important for sustaining the legitimacy and strength of a state regime may be transnational. In that sense, the space of political interest of the state regime transcends the boundaries of its geographic space into neighboring states, using certain cultural or ideological means of connection. This is typically the case when the state in question seeks to build transnational networks of political influence and allegiance beyond its own national boundaries; those supra-state networks tend to become political audience of the state regime. In such cases, not just its national population but also those transnational groups also become political audience of the state regime. Under this circumstance, the leadership of the regime tends to feel obliged to factor the satisfying of the expectations of those transnational supporters beside the national population into complying with its international commitments. Although transnational political audience may not figure the same weight in the decision-making as the national political audience, for a regime with transnational political ambitions, the transnational audience can still be an important consideration, not only for strengthening its external influence but also for maintaining its domestic legitimacy.

The case in point is the Middle East, Iran's regional neighborhood. There is a consensus in the literature on Middle East politics that the region is uniquely characterized by the existence of shared ancestral and cultural ties that spread across state boundaries and challenge the state authority for identity and legitimacy (Ayubi 1995; Halliday 2005; Buzan and Waever 2003; Noble et al. 2008; Hinnebusch 2014). According to these scholars, out of these transborder cultural bonds and communal ties, there exists a transnational space for political influence and audienceship in the Middle

East region. The two main manifestations of these regional linkages have been pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism. These two linkages have traditionally provided opportunities for states with pan-Arabist or pan-Islamist ambitions to advance their influence regionally. During 1950s-1960s Egypt under Gamal abdul-Nasser used pan-Arab nationalism effectively to project its influence throughout the Arab world. Iran itself launched its own transnational bid since the rise of Shia clergy under Imam Khomeini to power following the 1979 Revolution. Using pan-Islamic claim, namely Shiism, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been a major penetrator of state boundaries, seeking to access the domestic populations of states in the region through using its religious and sectarian appeals. In the process, it has cultivated networks of political loyal groups among the Muslim populations generally and particularly Shia communities of those countries. As will be discussed below, its commitment policy to support struggle against Israel and Western powers in the region has been the Iran's key rallying call the Muslim Middle East with considerable success.

International reputation serves as another reason for upholding foreign policy commitments. It has basically become an axiom in international relations that states, small and big, care about their reputation: reputation for resolve (Mercer 1996). What relates commitment to reputation is that by making public commitments, the state creates expectations in other states that it will take certain action in accordance of its pledge. More precisely, when a state makes commitment to support or defend a party in conflict, it is expected internationally to act when the party comes under threat. In this manner, acting on its commitment becomes the measure of the state's ability to save its international reputation for resolve. Since perception (true or not) is a critical consideration in foreign policy making (Jervis 1976), the failure to maintain resolve now tends to undermine the credibility and deterrence posture of the state in the future. Because of this enduring nature of political perceptions, any impression of irresoluteness can prove to be particularly dangerous for a state already in rivalry relationships with other states. Therefore, such a state finds more reason to stand firm on its commitments now in order to impress its adversaries in the future.

To summarize, in view of the above theoretical literature, this article makes the argument that the case of Iran's military intervention through its proxy group of the Lebanese Hezbollah in the Hamas-Israel war in 2023-2024 in support of the Palestinian militant group should be explained in term of the Islamic Republic's long-standing commitment to support Palestinian armed struggle against Israel. It further argues that although it had been deeply preoccupied in the Syrian civil war, the Islamic Republic still followed through with its Palestinian commitment. The explanation for this Iran's war intervention, this article argues, can be found in its concern to avoid political audience cost and international reputation weakening. It is hard to determine which one of these two considerations was more influential; therefore, this article suffices with making the general theoretical statement that played a magnitude of influence on the Iran's decision-making to intervene.

Iran's Commitment to Palestinian Armed Struggle

Since commitment making primarily takes the form of verbal statements, it may be necessary to provide a short survey of the official discourse of the Iranian leadership in

order to determine the origin and nature of the Iran's commitment to Palestinian armed conflict with Israel. The origin of the Iran's commitment dates back to the early days of the rise of the Iranian Shia clergy to power in Tehran under Imam Ayatollah Khomeini on the back of the popular revolution of 1979, which ended the monarchical rule of Muhamad Reza Shah and turned the country into theocracy on the basis of the Shia Islamic theological system of vilāyat-i faqī (the rule of Islamic jurisprudence). Designating itself as the true Islamic state, Iran declared its principled commitment to the cause of armed struggle of the Muslim Palestinians to recover the Islam's second holiest land from the Jewish state of Israel. In this sense, supporting Palestinian armed struggle against Israel basically assumed an article of faith in the political lexicon of the Islamic Republic.

Proclaimed by Imam Khomeini, the Iran's commitment to the Palestinian conflict assumed an uncompromising stance. It made the eradication of the Jewish state as "a cancerous cell in the body of the Muslim world" as its ultimate goal in order to end the question of Palestine conflict. From this stand point, it rejected any compromised solution to the conflict. For example, when Arab countries proposed Land-For-Peace Initiative with Israel in 1980s, which would have seen Israel withdrawn from occupied Arab lands to the pre-1967 war borders in return for Arab recognition,[2] the Islamic Republic categorically denounced it. Khomeini declared, "If the advantage of this (peace initiative) is the article that calls for Israeli withdrawal from certain lands it occupied during this or that war, then it is dangerous because it means that Israel will only return some of the lands it has usurped while still keep the rest of it… This ugly project should be resisted and defeated…" (Wazārat al-Irshād al-Islāmya 1981, 154-156). Instead, Khomeini called on all Muslims to "make the liberation of the Holy Quds and Palestine from the US-backed Zionist desecrating occupation their priority" (Wazārat al-Irshād al-Islāmya 1981, 62).

This Khomeini's commitment to Palestinian armed struggle against Israel was inherited by his successor, Ali Khamenei. Following his predecessor, the new supreme leader asserted, "There is no other way before the Palestinian people except armed struggle which should be carried out both inside of the occupied land and abroad" (Dār al-Welāyah 1996). Therefore, it was only natural that the Islamic Republic continued to oppose the two-state solution. "Our call is for the liberation of all Palestine, not just a part of Palestine. Any project that aims to divide the land of Palestine is unacceptable. The two-state solution… is nothing but the submission to the will of the Zionists… Any practical project should be based on one principle: all Palestine land is for all the Palestinian people. Palestine is Palestine from the river to the sea," Imam Khamenei reasserted (Dār al-Welāyah 2011).

Yet, despite this maximalist commitment to Palestinian armed struggle, Iran never expressed its willingness to engage in or support for full-scale wars with Israel. Given the clear-cut state of imbalance of force in favor of the enemy, the Islamic Republic has not been advocating waging full-scale war as a mode of conducting the struggle against the Jewish state. The history of the Egypt-Syria-Jordan conflict between 1950s-1970s

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[2] The Land-for-Peace Initiative was first proposed by Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Fahd bin Abdul-Aziz during a summit of the Arab League in 1981. A year later, it was adopted by the League and, thereby, became the official position of the Arab states on the Palestine question.

with Israel had proved the futility, or even fatal drawbacks, of conventional war with Israel.

Instead, the Islamic Republic preferred a prolonged struggle through waging small scale periodic attacks with limited targets. This armed mission was to be carried out by Palestinians groups themselves, albeit with enabling support from Iran itself. The Iranian leadership thought, or hoped, that the cumulative impact of such protracted struggle would bring down Israel or force it to surrender. In defending this approach, the Iranian supreme leader stated, "Since its outset, this cancerous tumor (Israel) grew in stages until it reached its current size. In the same way, its treatment similarly needs to be in stages. To the present day, various rounds of successive uprisings and resistant activities have been able to achieve important tactical objectives in the process of achieving the (end) goal of liberating the whole land of Palestine" (Dār al-Welāyah 2019). According to this vision, time is on the side of the armed struggle and, therefore, the priority now is to sustain the struggle, not necessarily pressing onto accomplish its ultimate goal through all-out wars, as some Arab states did during 1950s and 1960s. For example, on one occasion the Iranian leader responded to the critics of the approach of armed struggle by saying, "True, the Resistance has not been able to reach its ultimate goal which is the liberation of all Palestine; nevertheless, it has been able to keep the Palestinian question alive… The main achievement of the Resistance is that it has forced a war of attrition on the enemy"(Dār al-Welāyah 2019). Beyond rhetoric, Iran also began covertly or openly providing Palestinian armed groups with military assistance such as training, funding and arming through various channels.

In this manner, for decades the Islamic Republic publicized and promoted its commitment to supporting Palestinian armed struggle. Under this banner, it constantly pressed to extend its regional power reach, even justifying its interventions one way or another in the name of fulfilling that commitment. In fact, Imam Khamenei justified his country's much controversial military intervention in the Syrian civil war in 2011 on the same ground when he declared, "The Islamic Republic of Iran will defend Syria due to its support for the Resistance Front" (The Office of the Supreme Leader 2022). By supporting anti-Israeli armed struggle, the Islamic Republic secured for itself a leading popularity position among the Muslim masses in the region. Accordingly to a public poll conducted in Arab countries in 2008, following the month-long Hezbollah-Israel war of summer 2006 which concluded in the prisoner exchanges in August 2008, most of the participants supported the Iran's nuclear program and opposed Western pressure and sanctions on it (Shibley Telhami 2008). Equally telling, according to the same polls, the leader of the Iran-linked Hezbollah Hassan Nasrallah, the Iran-allied Syrian Bashar al-Assad, and the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinijad came out as the most popular leaders in the Arab World, respectively. This Iran's regional popularity came as direct political returns of its public commitment to Palestinian armed struggle, a popular case in the Muslim Middle East.

But also, this commitment also came at an international price for the Islamic Republic. First and foremost, the Islamic Republic made itself a disputant in the Palestine-Israel conflict, locking itself in an enduring strategic rivalry with Israel. Seeing it as an existential threat to its being, the Jewish state has been investing a great political and military deal in order to contain the Iran's military capabilities and power

reach. Moreover, the Iran's commitment to support Palestinian armed struggle and its accompanying regional interventionist behavior in the region has been antagonized Western powers, particularly the U.S., making the Islamic Republic a target of crippling economic sanctions and other punitive measures. As a result, an enduring power struggle, or what Inis L. Claude (1989) would call "competitive manipulation of power relationships," developed between Iran on one side and Israel and the U.S.-led Western world on the other.

The Hamas-Israel War as a Test for the Iran's Commitment

Before discussing Iran's act to fulfill its commitment to support Palestinian armed struggle following the breakout of the Hamas-Israel war in October 2023, it might be necessary to give an account of the Iran's military involvement in Syria over the past previous decade or so. The Iranian intervention in Syrian occurred following the breakout of civil war there after the escalation of the country's Sunni mass uprising into armed insurgency against the Shia minority-based government of al-Assad summer 2011. Gradually, with the deployment of its loyal forces of the Lebanese Hezbollah, Iran was able to save the Assad government by pushing back rebel groups to the north of the country of Idlib province. Then, under the shadow of the war-exhausted Assad government, it carved out its own zone of military control with extensive economic and cultural influence under the protection of Hezbollah militant forces. In this manner, in the trajectory of the Syrian civil war, Hezbollah militants became the Iran's major boots on the ground, fighting under the command of officers from its Revolutionary Guards for securing the Islamic Republic's expanding interests there: protecting the much weakened Assad government and maintaining the Iran's newfound influence in the country to grow and consolidate. On this account, when the Hamas-Israel war broke out in October 2023, Iran and its loyal force of Hezbollah were effectively in extensive military entanglement in the Syrian conflict.

Militarily, therefore, Iran or its Lebanese proxy group of Hezbollah was not quite free now, at least not like 2006-2008, to start another conflict against Israel. True, the Syrian conflict had been dormant since 2020; yet, Syrian insurgency led by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and backed Türkiye had survived. Nevertheless, in spite of its military occupation in Syria, Iran decided to act on its commitment to Palestinian armed struggle by supporting the Hamas-led defense in Gaza against the Israeli retaliatory war. Toward that end, as the Israeli government vowed to turn the Hamas-run Gaza "into rubble" (Israeli Government 2023), the Iranian leadership tried to deter Israel through verbal threats and warnings. For example, the supreme leader warned, "if the Zionist entity continues its crimes, nobody will be able to stop the Muslims and the Resistance forces" from attacking Israel (Tasnim News Agency 2023). This verbal threat became the Iran's main declaratory theme toward the Hamas-Israel war in Gaza. During his regional tour, Iranian foreign minister aired the same veiled threat, warning about "the opening of new frontline" if Israel continued its offense into Gaza (Athr Press 2023).

Soon, in an apparent attempt to reinforce the Iran's verbal threats with action, the Lebanese Hezbollah started conducting sporadic shooting of rockets into Israeli territory from its home base in southern Lebanon. The objective of the Hezbollah's

military involvement was meant to be limited. "We had to involve (in the war) with providing a limited support and see what will happen," the head the organization later disclosed (al-Mayadeen 2025). The Hezbollah's intervention aimed to relief some military pressure on the besieged Hamas fighters inside the Gaza Strip by forcing Israel into splitting its army along two separate frontlines which would have the militant organization reinforced its "resistance legitimacy" without provoking an all-out war with the Jewish state. The Iran-linked Lebanese group was not ready for a total war. "The consequence of the total war was predictable. It required prior preparation, and this was not there," the head of the organization later recognized (al-Mayadeen 2025).

As it is usually the case, however, once a war starts, it is hard to prevent it from escalating, and the provoked party often does escalate it with seeing advantage. Thus, capitalizing on its national rally for war and the Hezbollah's unprovoked rocket firing as well as the newfound support from Western powers, Israel decided to take control of the trajectory of the skirmishes with its Lebanese archenemy by going for a full-scale war. As a result, in the course of several months, from southern Lebanon to southern and eastern Syria, Hezbollah's bases, centers, commanders, communications, and operational routes became open targets of Israeli bombing. Ultimately, the Hezbollah suffered a debilitating military destruction. According to some sources, by the time the ceasefire was announced in late November 2024 its casualties stood at four thousands, larger than its losses in the summer 2006 war by more than tenfold (Bassam, Perry and Gebeily 2024). Still more consequential, the group lost two secretary generals within the space of a week including its charismatic General Secretary Hassan Nasrullāh, in addition to many of its top military figures. The human and material losses, combined with the security breaching of its communication system which came to be known as Pager Explosions, caused deep operational disarray and political demoralization to the Iran-linked militant group.

The military consequences of the Hezbollah's defeat quickly transpired in the neighboring Syria. As discussed previously, in view of the vital combat role in protecting the Iran's military interests in Syria, including reinforcing the defense of the Syrian army, the outcome of the Israel-Hezbollah war constituted an auspicious moment for Syrian rebel groups. Due to the covert nature of its military moves, it is hard to tell how much combat-ready forces Hezbollah still had in Syria by the time its ceasefire with Israel took effect in late November. Still, it stands to reason to estimate that by that time it had pulled most of its fighting forces back into Lebanon, either to deploy them to the frontlines in southern Lebanese border against the invading Israeli army or to protect them from Israeli relentless air raids in the more open terrains of Syria.

Clearly, the HTS had a good measure of the remaining strength of their Lebanese enemy even before the dust of the war settled. Not wanting to give the Iran-linked group time to regain strength, the HTS led groups to re-launch attacks on the Syrian army on the same day the Israel-Hezbollah war ceasefire took effect – in an obvious exploitation of the auspiciousness of the new favorable balance of force. Thus, the four-year-frozen conflict suddenly rekindled. Evidently, the Iran government still believed that its ally government in Damascus was salvageable when it made what was tantamount to a last ditch effort to save the Assad government by dispatching

'supervising forces' from Lebanon to help halting the advance of rebel groups (Bassam, al-Khalidi and Hefezi 2024). However, the move proved too late too little. Within the span of few days, Damascus fell to the control of the HTS and the ruling family of al-Assad fled the country. With the fall of its ally government, Iran and its linked forces found no recourse but to pull their remaining forces out Syria.

In this manner, by acting on its commitment to the Palestinian conflict, the Islamic Republic paid at a heavy price in terms of power interests. The defeat caused irreversible setbacks to the Iran's regional power. The fall of the Syrian state into the hands of Sunni Islamist groups represented a strategic earthquake to the Shia Iran. For decades, Syria had been helping Iran's regional strategy in at least two ways: First, Syria had remained the Iran's only ally state in the Arab world, supporting politically Iran's positions on various regional and international issues.. Additionally, Syria had been serving as the main operational conduit for Iran to reach its proxy militant organization of Hezbollah in Lebanon. Without Syrian cooperation, the Iran's political influence in Lebanon could not have been possibly with such degree of success. Lastly, since 2011 when the Assad government lost its control over much of its territory, Iran had found in the Syrian territory a vital space to expand its regional influence. With the takeover of the Sunni HTS group, Syria for the first time in over four decades is no longer an ally state or a power foothold of Iran.

Commitment Trap and Alternative Explanations

This section attempts to discuss alternative explanations to commitment trap-based explanation of the Iran's intervention in the Hamas-Israel war in support of the Palestinian armed group in Gaza. There are two possible alternative explanations. First, Iran itself ordered the attack on Israel; the other one is that the Palestinian Hamas was also a proxy force of Iran similar to the Lebanese Hezbollah and, therefore, its act of deploying Hezbollah to help Hamas was simply motivated by immediate power interests, not fulfilling a prior public commitment. These two explanations deserve some attention as alternatives to the commitment trap explanation.

To begin with, following the Hamas's attack on Israeli military and civilian targets that triggered the Israel full-scale offense into the Gaza Strip, fingers were pointed to the Iranian leadership as the instigator of the attack, especially by Israeli officials. However, that charge was neither backed up by the Iran's position following the attacks nor its traditional modus operandi for the conflict. As mentioned previously, Iran advocated long-term struggle by using periodic attacks of limited targets was a method to sustain the armed struggle against Israel, rather than waging large-scale operations or extensive targeting. The first sign of Iran's discontent with the Hamas's broad, complex attacks on Israel, which targeted not only military but also civilian positions, became evident during a visit by a Hamas delegate to Tehran following the start of the Israeli offense. According to media reports, Iranian officials declined the request by the Hamas's visiting officials for help, informing them, "we will not enter the war on your behalf," protesting that the Palestinian group did not consult the Iranian leadership on the plan of the operation or provide it advance notice (Hafezi, Bassam and Mohammed 2023). The early public speculations about the lack of communication or coordination by the Palestinian Hamas with Iranian officials on its

October 7th attack were later confirmed by statements from both Iranian and Hezbollah sources. For instance, in a revelation about his country's initial reaction to the news of the attack, the head of the Quds Force, the Iran's paramilitary unit in charge of covert military operations in the region, declared that with the breaking of the news of the event, "I began to consider a way to discuss the matter with Said Hassan Nasrallah (then the secretary general of Hezbollah) as to what we should or shouldn't do (in response to the unfolding conflict)," indicating that neither his country nor its Lebanese proxy force possessed advance knowledge about the Hamas's decision of attacking Israel (Tasnim News Agency 2025). This Iran's account of the event further confirmed that of the Hezbollah's leadership, mentioned above, which acknowledged that the Iran-linked group in Lebanon was basically at loss concerning "what the best course of action was to be taken" by way of providing fighting assistance for Palestinian militants in Gaza since it had no sufficient preparations for such an undertaking (al-Mayadeen 2025).

The Hamas's decline to consult Iranian or Hezbollah leadership on its attack could not have been by accident. The Hamas leadership might have calculated that the Islamic Republic would never approve of such large-scale attacks on both Israeli civilian and military positions. The Iran's unstated worry has been that any unlimited attack would destined to provoke Israel to respond with a full-scale war against the Palestinian armed resistance which endanger the very existence of Palestinian armed groups given the state of massive imbalance of force in favor of the Jewish state. The danger is that such a large military attack on Israel would ultimately force Iran to intervene directly or indirectly to save the movement from annihilation. Above all, the Hamas leadership seemed to have felt confident that Iran, given its prior commitment, would have no choice but to provide military support directly or indirectly should Israel waged a full-scale war, something that Iran had long tried to avoid.

The other alternative explanation is that the Palestinian Hamas was, like the Lebanese Hezbollah, was or is an arm of the Iranian regional power; therefore, the Iranian intervention through Hezbollah in the Hamas-Israel war on the side of Hamas was driven by immediate power interests, not long-standing political commitment per se. However, a short comparison between the Shia Hezbollah and the Sunni Hamas refutes this explanation. To make this comparison, a brief exploration of the history of the Iran-Hezbollah and the Iran-Hamas relations is warranted. To begin with, the origin of Hezbollah (the Party of God) dates back to early 1980s when Iran through dispatching teams of Islamic revolutionary operatives into then the civil war-engulfed Lebanon. The mission was aimed to recruit and organize a fighting force from the local Shia community with the primary purpose of fighting the invading Israeli army as well as to give the Lebanese Shia an Islamic voice, albeit along the line of the Iranian Shia theological ideology. Out of this operation, the militant Islamic organization of Hezbollah was born. Outliving the initial goal of its formation, Hezbollah, with Iran's constant military and financial aids as well as political leverage, developed virtually into an army without state within Lebanon, surviving attempts at disarmed by the Syrian military authority in Lebanon thank to Iran's pressure (Ali 2023,103, 110,122). Formed and sustained by Iran, the Lebanese militant organization grew to become the

Iran's principal regional proxy force, conducting various Iranian interests-mandated security and military activities in the region and beyond.

In Syria, the Hezbollah's role in the Iran's regional strategy reached its peak, as suggested previously. There, the militant organization reinforced the Iran's strategy on the country's conflict from the very beginning, both politically and militarily. Publically, its leadership charged the Syrian rebellion of being a foreign plot, vowing to stand with the Assad government to defeat it. Considering Assad's Syria "the backbone of the Resistance," then the head of the Lebanese Hezbollah vowed that his armed group was not to stand by but to fight on the side of pro-Assad forces against the Syrian armed rebellion until achieving victory (Alalam News Network 2013). Taking this political stance, the group poured thousands of its fighters into the Syrian conflagration to reinforce the fighting position of the Assad government army against the Sunni rebellion. In the process, the Lebanese militant group effectively became the Iran's ground force there, defending the Iran's newly founded military and political foothold to the end. In short, the Iran-Hezbollah relationship grew into something well resembling a proxy-patron relationship.

This is quite contrary to the nature of the Iran-Hamas relationship. The Palestinian Hamas was not found by Iran and has not been an Iran's regional military arm; therefore, it never constituted a military power asset for Iran as the Lebanese organization has been. Rather, the alliance between the two, asymmetrical as it has been, was primarily, if not exclusively, centered on their mutual commitment to fight Israel (Alalam News Network 2016). Also, broadly speaking, both Hamas and Iran belong to the same universe of political Islam. However, Hamas, a Sunni Islamist movement with link to the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood Movement, does not subscribe to the Shia theological ideology as Hezbollah does, to say the least. The ideological-theological differences between Hamas and Iran came to the open drastically in the Syrian civil war. In that particularly critical instance, Hamas did not hesitate much to throw its political support behind its sectarian brethren of Syrian rebels, to dismay the Iranian leadership. "I bless the heroic Syrian people who are struggling for freedom, democracy, and reform," declared the head of the Hamas government in Gaza (Al Arabiya Network 2012). Moreover, when Iran asked the group to back its position on Syria, its reply was "Iran's position has become unfriendly; it has to revise its pro-Syrian regime stance if it wants to avoid antagonizing the Arab public (al-Jazeera 2012). By rejecting Iran's position on the Syrian conflict, Hamas contributed to the weakening of the public credibility of the Islamic Republic in the eyes of the Arab Middle East during the most intense era of Sunni-Shia sectarian polarization in the modern time, fostering the view prevalent in the Sunni world that Iran was a sectarian force aiming to subject the Sunnis to its dominion.

Conclusion and discussion

Using the concept of commitment trap, this article made the argument that the Iran's indirect war support to the Palestinian Hamas forces in Gaza during the Israel-Hamas war in 2023-2024 should be explained primarily in terms of the Islamic Republic's long-standing commitment to support Palestinian armed struggle against Israel. Drawing on relevant theoretical literature and empirical data analysis, this article

argued that the need to avoid political audience cost and international reputational damage compelled the Islamic Republic to act upon its Palestine commitment by using its Lebanese proxy forces of Hezbollah to attack Israel from Lebanon during the Israel-Hamas war following the Hamas's October 2023 attack on Israel. However, the Iran's proxy group was not prepared for an all-out war, not least because it was preoccupied in the Syrian conflict. Thus, the Iran's ultimate decision to order Hezbollah to intervene in the Israel-Hamas war ended with a debilitating defeat to the Lebanese militant group, weakened the defense of its own Hezbollah-protected military position in Syria in favor of the Syrian armed opposition, and enabled the HTS-led Syrian opposition to overthrow the Iran-backed Assad government in a short war and end of the Iran's own power base in the country.

In advancing this argument, this article tried to refute other possible alternative explanations that Iran itself ordered Palestinian armed groups to wage the attack, or that Iran's was support to the Palestinian Hamas was driven by power interests since the group was/is another arm of the Iran's regional power similar to the Lebanese Hezbollah – the Iran's principal ideological-military arm in the region. Thus, the conclusion drawn is that neither did Iran order the Hamas's October 2023 attack nor was its decision to provide war support through its Lebanese proxy organization of Hezbollah to the Palestinian Hamas in the subsequent Israel-Hamas war motivated by power interests. Rather, the Iran's war intervention can best be understood as produced by the Islamic Republic being trapped in its own long-standing commitment to Palestinian armed struggle. The commitment became a trap because Iran found itself between two opposing forces: its long-standing commitment to support Palestinian armed struggle on the one hand, and its own or its Lebanese proxy group's lack of willingness or preparation to engage in war with Israel in fulfilling of the commitment on the other hand. Ultimately, the Islamic Republic decided to go ahead with its commitment, even if indirectly through sending its Lebanese proxy group to war with Israel, in order to avoid political audience cost and international reputation damage – the possible prices of abandoning foreign policy commitments.

Finally, it has to be recognized that the final account of this recent event may not be possible before the currently classified information (minutes of official and unofficial correspondences and meetings) become accessible to the public. However, the currently available, largely indirect and secondary, data lend clear support for the main argument of the article.

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IRAN'S POLITICAL FACTORS TOWARDS AFGHAN REFUGEES: TRENDS OF ETHNONATIONAL CONSOLIDATION AND CHANGING PRIORITIES OF REGIONALISM

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Abstract

The relevance of this article's research topic lies in the complex multi-polar factors of Iran's policy toward Afghan refugees. Its significance is predetermined by the scale and nature of Afghan refugees and labor migrants in Iran due to the explosive conflict and political instability. The article notes that, despite a number of ethnonational issues, Iranian authorities still demonstrate confidence that Afghans educated in Iran are already capable of forming a stratum that can play a significant role in the reconstruction of modern Afghanistan. At the same time, it is important to consider the impact of globalization and regionalization on the development of Iranian and Afghan multi-ethnic societies. In this context, we observe how, even despite certain successes of globalization in terms of social and economic progress, these countries are facing fierce resistance to societal modernization; they are retreating, returning to their traditional positions. This resistance appears to be deeply rooted in the very nature of their cultures. This is precisely why, in the current context of the transformation of the global community and the emergence of a new system of international relations, the complex nature of ethnonational processes and the specific nature of relations between Iran and Afghanistan, which are drawn into this process, are of primary concern. The current stage of global development is characterized by the emergence of new values, new orientations, and the formation of a unified social and spiritual global space linking diverse cultures and peoples. At the same time, opposing trends in the search for self-identification in a globalizing world and the desire of peoples to preserve their uniqueness and distinctiveness, expressed in culture, language, religion, and the revival of national traditions, are becoming significant.

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Introduction

Afghanistan's importance in contemporary international politics is determined by a complex set of factors related to the armed conflict within its territory. Afghanistan's social, economic, and political instability can be considered a source of risk for all countries in the region, including China, Pakistan, Iran, and the countries of Central Asia, as if extremists gain strength and state institutions weaken, Iran becomes a potential springboard for terrorist organizations to establish bases. Also of great importance is the transit factor, with Iran potentially serving as a transit zone for a number of transport routes linking post-Soviet Central Asia and the countries along the Indian Ocean. This combination of factors makes Iran a region whose situation is of great importance for international political processes (Siavoshi 2025).

Iran's policy towards Afghan refugees has evolved over the past four decades, shaped by both internal and external factors. Following the Islamic Revolution, Iran welcomed Afghan refugees with the expectation that they would return home once the situation in Afghanistan stabilised. This perhaps explains why Iran has primarily designed its refugee policy with a short-term perspective. However, due to social, economic, and security concerns, as well as the ongoing influx of refugees, Iran continues to pursue a short-term approach to its refugee policy.

This article examines the factors influencing Iran's refugee policy toward the more than 3.4 million officially registered Afghan refugees (ODP-UNHCR 2025), as Iranian and Afghan societies are acutely sensitive to refugee issues, water use from the Helmand River, and border security. In the context of geopolitical developments, these issues could negatively impact current and future Iranian-Afghan relations. Over the past decade, the refugee issue has become a considerable aspect of Iran's domestic agenda, adversely affecting public opinion towards Afghans. This topic has gained particular attention in light of Iran's broader policy in the Middle East, which involves the establishment of the Fatemiyoun group, composed entirely of Afghan refugee fighters, on Iran's initiative.

Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran's policy towards Afghans has been characterised in scholarly literature as an 'open door' policy, rooted in the historical, linguistic, cultural and religious affinities between Iranians and Afghans. The Afghan authorities' treatment of Shia Hazaras and other Persian-speaking ethnic groups has considerably influenced this policy. Due to the cultural and historical ties between Iranians and Afghans, Iran did not impose upon Afghans the typical restrictions on refugees. Initially, the prevailing sentiment in Iran was that Afghans are brothers of Iranians, and they need to be helped. As the flow of refugees continued and new factors emerged, the Iranian political landscape began to shift.

In modern Iranian society, attitudes toward Afghan refugees tend to be negative, manifesting primarily at the upper and middle social levels. In parliament, representatives from constituencies with the highest percentage of Afghan refugees cite them as the cause of social and economic problems in the regions (EUAA 2022).

The problem of Afghan refugees and migrant workers is further exacerbated by the lack of a public policy for their integration into Iranian society (Siavoshi 2022; Siavoshi 2025). Neither the migrants or refugees themselves nor the Iranian authorities show interest in this process, relying largely on stereotypes about linguistic, religious,

and cultural similarities. As a result, specialists at adaptation centers serve as facilitators in solving pressing problems. However, experience in previous years has shown that adaptation is necessary even in interactions between two neighboring Muslim countries. Adaptation courses, by helping to identify extremist elements, could help resolve a number of issues. Furthermore, the courses would familiarize representatives of rural areas, who make up a significant portion of Afghan refugees and migrants, with behavioral patterns in the urban environment, thereby reducing the degree of negative attitudes among the Iranian population. Finally, adaptation courses should help dispel the persistent myth in Afghanistan about Iran's colossal international aid to support refugees.

The ideology of the Iranian Revolution (1978-1979) encouraged the acceptance and support of refugees (Glazebrook and Abbasi-Shavazi 2007, 191). Iran is also guided by this ideology in its support for the 'oppressed peoples' of the Middle East. Until the first Taliban rule in 1996, Iran had generally managed the flow of Afghan refugees effectively. However, under Taliban rule, conditions became dire for the Shia population in Afghanistan. In 1997, the Taliban blockaded Hazarajat, making it exceedingly difficult for Hazaras to escape the country, leading many to enter Iran primarily via Pakistani territory. This new wave of refugees strained Iran's borders.

The main triggers for Afghan migration to Iran include: a) the unstable political situation in Afghanistan, b) the oppression of the Shia and Persian-speaking populations by Afghan authorities and c) the cultural similarities between Iranians and Afghans.

A comparative study of the historical experience of Afghanists shows that when internal tensions in Afghanistan intensify, the flow of refugees to Iran increases. After the Islamic Revolution, Afghan migration to Iran occurred in three stages: 1) 1979 - the Islamic Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; 2) The Afghan Civil War from 1989 to 1993; 3) 1996 and 2021 - the capture of Kabul by the Taliban and the establishment of control over Afghanistan.

Estimates of the number of Afghan refugees in Iran vary. In the early 1980s, the number of Afghan refugees in Iran ranged from 1 to 1.5 million. Between 1989 and 1992, this number doubled to 3 million (Ahmed and Akbar 2023, 37).

The arrival of Afghan refugees in Iran began after the Islamic Revolution. Migration indicators suggest that this migration was forced rather than voluntary. An analysis of migration flows from Afghanistan to Iran between 1986 and 2011 indicates that the largest influx occurred in 1991, when 3 million people arrived (Hugo, Abbasi-Shavazib and Sadeghi 2012, 265; Moinipour 2017).

By 1991, Iran had already faced significant socio-economic challenges following the Islamic Revolution, the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf War. In this context, the perceived 'takeover' of the Iranian labour market by Afghan refugees only heightened tensions within Iranian society (Shargh 2023a, 2023b, 2024a, 2024b).

Consequently, Iran revised its refugee policy in the 1990s, emphasising three main focuses, namely, repatriation of refugees, invite international support and Integration of Afghan refugees within Iranian society (Rajaee 2000, 56).

Afghans residing in Iran can be categorised into four groups: 1) Refugee card holders (Amayesh), 2) Afghan passport holders with Iranian visas (500,000), 3)

undocumented Afghan refugees (1.5–2 million) and 4) Afghans registered in censuses (850,000). It is important to note that the exact number of irregular (undocumented) Afghan migrants in Iran remains a topic of ongoing debate (Jussi, Davood and Salavati 2020, 11).

According to 2016 data, there were nearly 1 million registered refugees and 3 million illegal, unregistered refugees living in Iran (Sahbnam 2017, 824). According to these figures, the largest flow of refugees to Iran occurred during the Taliban rule. In addition to security concerns, the decision of Afghans to migrate to Iran was influenced by the Taliban government's policies towards the Iranian-speaking population and the Shia Hazara community.

Since 1989, Iran has endeavoured to facilitate the return of Afghans to their country through several initiatives (EUAA 2022, 100). The Bureau for Foreigners and Immigrants (BAFIA) has been established. As a result of cooperation between the governments of Iran and Afghanistan and the UNHCR, repatriation agreements have been signed. According to the Iranian interior minister, by 2023, there will be 5 million Afghan refugees residing in Iran (UNHCR 2025a, 2025b, 2025c). However, the Iranian ambassador to Afghanistan, Hassan Kazemi Gomi, provided a different estimate, stating that the number of refugees before the second Taliban regime was 4 million. Combining these two sets of data suggests that the number of Afghan refugees had increased by 1 million after 2021 (ODP-UNHCR 2025; UNHCR 2025a).

A notable aspect concerning the Afghan refugee population in Iran is the issue of second-generation Afghans, which offers valuable insights into the nuances of Iran's migration policy. According to the 2006 census, half of the Afghan refugees living in Iran were born in the country and are considered second generation (Naseh et al. 2018). In fact, most Afghan refugees who have resided in Iran for decades are yet to be granted Iranian citizenship. The process of obtaining citizenship under Iranian law is notably complex. However, in the first half of 2024, a bill has been submitted to the Iranian parliament to amend the law on obtaining citizenship. There are various assessments and viewpoints on this issue within Iran.

Iranian officials assert that cultural and scientific figures will find it easier to obtain citizenship (Iranintl 2024). Further, a process to grant Iranian citizenship to families of the deceased members of Fatemiyoun is also believed to be underway (Schwartz 2022). However, Iran does not grant citizenship even to individuals whose mother is an Iranian citizen and whose father is an Afghan. Interestingly, upon returning to Afghanistan, these individuals often adopt an objectively anti-Iranian stance.

Ethno-cultural factors: **Is the Persian language under threat in Afghanistan?**

To assess the influence of ethno-religious and linguistic factors on Iran's migration policy, I posed the following research questions: Under what circumstances have Hazara Shiites and other Farsiyazi ethnic groups decided to migrate to Iran, and what factors has Iran deemed most important in shaping its migration policy?

Among the factors influencing Iran's policy towards Afghan refugees, perhaps the most influential are the historical, cultural and religious similarities between Iranians and Afghans. Both Iranians and Afghans, having coexisted within the same civilisation throughout history, share close linguistic, cultural and religious commonalities. These

shared traits facilitate the integration of Afghan refugees into Iranian society. While there is consensus regarding the historical and cultural ties between the two nations, Iranian and Afghan historians have diverged on numerous issues.

A prevalent belief among Iranian intellectuals is that Afghanistan was established as a result of the Paris Agreement during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar. In the late nineteenth century, the two states were separated by administrative and political boundaries. Following the Pashtunisation of Afghanistan, a 'separation' of identities became evident. In this context, it is important to note that Afghanistan is important for Iran not only politically, but also from a cultural and historical point of view, as there are many similarities between Iranians and Afghans, which are evident in Afghanistan's policy towards the Persian language and the situation of Afghan refugees living in Iran (Lamm and Winter 2024; Lischer 2016). Currently, the linguistic and cultural divide between Iran and Afghanistan is so pronounced that Dari speakers in Afghanistan can be accused of holding pro-Iranian views if they use words characteristic of Persian. Conversely, most Iranians remain unaware of the distinctive features of Dari. More than half of Afghanistan's population speaks Persian, with Afghanistan's Persian language – Farsi Dari – serving as one of the country's official languages and acting as a lingua franca for the Afghan populace (Hakimi 2025; International Crisis Group 2022).

Language has played a crucial role in the formation and maintenance of Afghan and Iranian identities. Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that, according to Iranian sources, Afghan intellectuals who wrote in Persian, despite never having visited Iran, were perceived by the Afghan populace as Iranians prior to the Pashto policy aimed at diminishing the role of the Persian language. Thus, when Pashto was declared Afghanistan's official language, the identity of Afghans underwent a transformation (Arman-e Melli 2021, 51).

In the early twentieth century, nationalist ideologies in Iranian and Afghan state politics also influenced the perspectives and ideas of the Afghan and Iranian elites regarding history and identity. In the ideology of Pashtun nationalists, elements of Iranism began to be dissociated from Afghan history. By the 1930s, these ideas and principles became foundational to Afghanistan's state ideology (History of Afghanistan 2004, 45).

As part of this ideology, the Academy of Sciences of Afghanistan and the Society for the History of Afghanistan were established, and Pashto gained prominence during Mahmud Tarzi's reign. Pashto became the official second language of Afghanistan, and Farsi became Dari. Iran contends that Pashtuns employ Dari instead of Farsi to fragment the Persian-speaking populations residing in the border regions of Iran and Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's Constitution refers to the country's population as Afghans. However, this designation is generally unacceptable to other ethnic groups in Afghanistan, with the exception of the Pashtuns. This overshadows the identity of other ethnic groups. They are identified with the Pashtuns.

Following the emergence of nationalist ideology among the Pashtuns of Afghanistan in the 1950s, the Pashtuns have wielded greater influence and authority within the governance system of the country than the other ethnic groups.

Despite the process of Pashtunisation, experts assert that the nation-building (mellat-sazi) process in Afghanistan remains incomplete. While the constitutional movement in Iran during the early 20th century led to the unification of Iranians as a nation, the national identity of Afghans is yet to fully form (Castien Maestro 2024; Lamm and Winter 2024).

Nation-building in Afghanistan has a number of peculiarities and difficulties, as it attempts to be based on the identity, culture and civilization of the roots of the Afghan nation, and has represented a special form both in its nature and identity, and in its implementation (Castien Maestro 2024; Wafa 2024).

A unique feature of Afghan society is that each ethnic group strives to gain an influential role in the government system. The primary rivalry is between Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns (Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras). It is important to note that the differences between these two main players hinder the formation of unity in Afghan society (Ahmadzada 2024; Castien Maestro 2024.). In this context, Iranian and Afghan historians and researchers hold contradictory views of history. Afghan scholars, in particular, reject Iranian claims that Afghanistan lies within Iran's cultural sphere and that most Afghans identify themselves as part of the civilisation of 'Greater Iran'.

Afghanistan not only distances itself from Iran but also accuses Iran of appropriating Afghan historical and cultural figures. Additionally, Afghanistan claims Molana, Masawi, Hafez and Saadi as integral figures of Afghan literature.

In recent decades, Iran has struggled to leverage the ideology of Iranism to foster genuine cooperation between Iran, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The underlying issue is not solely the Pashtunisation of Afghanistan, as Iranian experts assert, but also the differing approaches and priorities of Iran and Tajikistan (Israyelyan 2019, 272-274).

Iran's official stance has consistently been that all religious and ethnic groups in Afghanistan should participate in the formation of the government. The Bonn Conference in 2001 recognised the Hazaras as the third ethnic group in Afghanistan. According to the Afghan constitution, the second vice president has always been a Hazara. From 2004 to 2009, Mohammad Mohaghegh served as Afghanistan's Vice President, representing the Hazara community (Sahar 2025).

During the presidencies of Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani, the Afghan authorities generally practised participatory governance. In periods of relative calm, when there were no triggers for refugee flows, Iran initiated programmes to encourage the repatriation of Afghan refugees (Hugo, Abbasi-Shavazib and Sadeghi 2012, 276).

During Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency, Tehran sought to capitalise on the media's portrayal to enhance the situation in Afghanistan and increase the influence of the Persian language. The Islamic Republic of Iran proposed the establishment of a television channel for Persian-speaking countries called 'Nowruz', which however was never realised due to a number of factors, including the political ideologies of the countries involved. Naicountries have failed to establish such cooperation on the basis of cultural commonalities. This cooperation could have manifested itself in collaborations with Afghanistan and Tajikistan, and could have had a positive impact on relations between states.

After the second Taliban government assumed power, another wave of refugees arrived in Iran, prompting the Iranian press to once again highlight the discriminatory policies of the Taliban government against Shia Hazaras and Persian-speaking groups.

The issue of limitations on the Persian language in Afghanistan was even raised during a visit to Iran by Mohammad Motaghi, the foreign minister of the Taliban's interim government (Gholami 2018; BBC 2023).

In my assessment, the primary reason for Afghan migration to Iran is the continuing instability in Afghanistan and the resulting security risks.. However, two interrelated factors may have also influenced Afghans' decisions to migrate: the Taliban's policies towards Hazara Shia and Persian-speaking groups and Iran's cultural and educational policies towards Afghan refugees.

Despite the socio-economic and legal challenges associated with the presence of refugees in Iran, the Iranian government places considerable emphasis on addressing the language issues faced by Afghan refugees. According to a decree from the Supreme Leader of Iran (2015), all Afghan migrant children residing in Iran have the right to receive an education, regardless of their parents' status. Refugees living illegally in Iran are also entitled to education, as per an order from the country's spiritual leader.

Over the past four decades, Iran has invested substantial resources in the education of Afghan migrants. While the number of Afghan students enrolled in Iranian schools was 300,000 in 2014, this figure had doubled by 2023 (Barzegar 2014, 121). Currently, approximately 620,000 Afghan students are receiving education in Iran, with 35,000 students benefiting from free education (UNHCR 2025a; 2025b, 2025c).

On the surface, the Islamic Republic of Iran's educational initiatives for Afghan refugees represent a considerable contribution to integrating Afghans into Iranian society and harnessing their potential for Iran's long-term prospects. If we consider Iran's long-term policy towards Afghan refugees, it would be reasonable to argue that Iran accounts for cultural factors in implementing its long-term strategy. However, the reality contradicts claims that Iran is employing Persian as a form of soft power against Afghans (Ahmed and Akbar 2023; Akbarzadeh, Ahmed and Ibrahimi 2021). In my opinion, it appears that Afghan students educated in Iran, who were expected to remain in the country after their studies, either return to Afghanistan or emigrate to other countries due to the lack of citizenship.

Influence of the religious factor

Pashtuns have played an important role in Afghanistan from both a religious (Sunni) and ethnic (demographic) perspective. The Hazaras of Afghanistan, whose origins and religious affiliations are subjects of various theories, are predominantly Shia Muslims (Bartold 2003, 71). The Hazaras have historically maintained close ties with Iran, which has exerted considerable ideological influence over them. Even prior to the Islamic Revolution, the Hazaras had a notable presence in Iran.

In the face of security threats, ethno-religious factors have served as the primary motivation for Afghans to migrate to Iran. Hazara clerics who received their religious education in Iran regarded the leader of the revolution, Imam Khomeini, as their supreme leader (Canfield 2004, 252). Following the Islamic Revolution, Imam Khomeini's positive stance towards Afghans contributed to the influx of thousands of

Afghans who moved to Iran as refugees. Iran's open door policy towards Afghan refugees was driven by the objective of exporting the Islamic Revolution (Siavoshi 2025, 1591-1594).

Iran has a history of utilising Afghan Shiites to further its geopolitical interests, particularly during the 1980s when Shiite groups supported by the Islamic Republic of Iran formed resistance factions to combat the Soviet Union. Grounded in Islamic solidarity, Iran felt compelled to shelter Afghans fleeing the communist regime (Siavoshi 2025; Zandi-Navgran et al. 2024).

The migration of Afghans to Iran primarily occurred as part of religious migration in the early years of the Islamic Revolution. Iran's migration policy is influenced by both external and internal factors. External factors are mainly related to policies of the Afghan authorities towards the Iranian-speaking population and the Shia Hazaras, the internal situation in Afghanistan and the conditions along the Iran-Afghanistan border.

During both periods of Taliban rule, the Hazaras were targeted precisely because they were Shia, whom the Sunni Taliban regarded as pro-Iranian forces. It was during this time that the Taliban imposed the most brutal repression on the Shia Hazaras (Saikal 2012, 82). Since the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan, the primary flow of Shia Hazara migration has been to Iran (Glazebrook 2007, 190).

In my view, after the Islamic Revolution, the religious factor in the refugee issue has remained a priority for Iran. Unlike the linguistic factor, Iran adopts a long-term perspective regarding the religious factor. Similar to its approach towards Tajikistan, Iran prioritises the religious factor (Israyelyan 2019, 272-274).

In 2014, for the first time since the Islamic Revolution, Iran developed a long-term plan for Afghan refugees. Iran reconsidered its decision to forcibly expel Afghan refugees, recognising the necessity of intensifying the activities of proxy groups in the Middle East. Similar Iranian-backed groups are also active in Pakistan (Zaynebiyoun), Azerbaijan (Hoseynyoun), Yemen (Ansarullah), Iraq (Hashd al-Shaabi) and Lebanon (Hezbollah). For this purpose, another Iranian-backed group, 'Fatemiyoun', was formed in May 2013 by Afghan commander Ali Reza Tavassoli, primarily comprising Afghan refugees and migrant workers who had settled in Iran. Most of these individuals belonged to the Shia Hazara ethnic group (Jamal 2019, 5).

The majority of the millions of Afghan refugees living in Iran are ethnic Tajiks and Hazaras. Among the registered Afghan refugees in Iran, 40 per cent are Shia Hazaras (Monsutti 2007, 169). Iran's differentiated approach to the Afghan refugee issue has caused some confusion within Afghan society. In interviews with Iranian officials, Afghan journalists frequently highlight instances of human rights violations against Afghan refugees in Iran. The establishment of Fatemiyoun in particular has intensified discussions on this matter.

Iran has not officially denied its connections with the Fatemiyoun formation. Instead, Iran has claimed that the group formed spontaneously and that its members voluntarily travelled to Syria to protect Shi'ite shrines. Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (2013-2021) commented on the issue, stating: The fighters of the Fatemiyoun, which was made up of Afghans living in Iran, made their own decisions and fought in Syria for their religious ideas (Shadi 2020).

While Tehran officially asserts that these Afghan fighters travelled to Syria voluntarily, reports indicate that some refugees, facing the risk of deportation, opted to go to Syria rather than return to Afghanistan. In this manner, they sought to safeguard their families from the threat of deportation (Human Rights Watch 2016).

Iran ceased recruiting new fighters for Fatemiyoun after the defeat of ISIS in Syria in 2017. There are conflicting reports regarding the number of fighters in the group, with estimates ranging from 10,000 to 20,000 Fatemiyoun fighters in Syria (Ahmed and Akbar 2023). After the Lebanese, the Afghan Shia Hazaras constituted the second largest foreign ethnic group killed in Syria, with 897 Afghans reported to have died there between 2012 and 2018.

Iran has paid special attention to the families of Afghans who fought in and were martyred through Fatemiyoun. Evidence supporting this assessment includes Iran's decision to grant citizenship to members of these families.

Mohammad Ali Shahidi, head of Iran's Martyrs and Veterans Affairs Foundation, stated in an interview in 2017 that Iran's Supreme Leader had ordered the resolution of citizenship issues for the 'Holy Shrine Defenders' to be resolved. On the other hand, claims from some Fatemiyoun members suggest that Iran did not grant citizenship but provided residence permits for a period of five years (Sheikh 2016; Schwarz 2022, 102). It is noteworthy that, in light of existing security and demographic challenges, Iran made an exception for family members of Fatemiyoun that had not previously been extended to other Afghan refugees. This case is unprecedented, given that the process of obtaining citizenship in Iran is notoriously complicated. Millions of Afghan refugees have lived in Iran for decades without gaining citizenship.

Second-generation Afghans are already integrated into Iranian society, receiving substantial educational, social and medical support from the government, yet they have not been afforded the opportunity to acquire Iranian citizenship. Even Afghan cultural figures and intellectuals encounter difficulties in obtaining citizenship (Lischer 2016).

In summary, Iran has been providing funding to Afghan refugees for decades to meet their social, educational and health needs. However, after receiving education, many leave the country due to the lack of Iranian citizenship. Some Iranian experts believe that Iran is losing a huge amount of capital that could have been leveraged to further Iranian interests. By 2020, Iran had deported 860,000 illegal migrants from the country. According to the International Organisation for Migration, Iran deports between 20,000 and 30,000 migrants every week (IOM 2025a, 2025b).

The Iranian Foreign Ministry is yet to officially respond to this concern. It is highly likely that this reflects the bifurcation of power characteristic of Iran's Islamic system. This is probably one of those cases where diplomacy has adopted one approach to a sensitive issue, while 'Maidan' (the influence of the Revolutionary Guard) has pursued a different one.

Iran's differentiated approach to Fatemiyoun appears inconsistent with its social policy towards refugees. This action contradicts the argument that Iran is employing linguistic and cultural soft power to influence Afghanistan. An analysis of Iran's educational and religious policies towards migrants can be summarised as follows: Iranian policy over the past decade has demonstrated that, with the exception of a

limited number of Hazara Shiites, Tehran lacks a clear medium- and long-term policy towards refugee groups.

This contradiction is evident in the fact that Iran is undertaking educational initiatives that logically should be reserved for the second generation. In short, Iranian-educated Afghan students become second-generation refugees and are integrated into Iranian society but without the opportunity to obtain Iranian citizenship.

In conclusion, the above arguments suggest that, unlike cultural, ethnic and linguistic factors, the religious factor has long been a priority in Iran's policy towards Afghan refugees, at least over the past two decades.

Iranian society's attitude towards Afghan refugees

Examining Iran's migration policies over the last two decades reveals a shift in Iranian society's attitude towards Afghan migrants. This change can be explained by both internal and external factors, and the following circumstances themselves represent the main issues influencing the mood in Iranian society: social, economic and demographic problems, as well as security threats.

Internal factors consist of several components. Initially, the civilisational links between Iranians and Afghans were considerable. While a sizeable portion of Iranian society accepted Afghan migrants as fellow Iranians after the Islamic Revolution, perceptions began to shift in the 2000s. It is likely that the Iranian public's views have been influenced by the inconsistent policies of successive Iranian governments towards migrants and the impact of these issues.

The prevailing sentiment among Iranian society has been that refugees should settle in Iran temporarily. Thus, the underlying assumption was that they would return to their homeland after a certain period. However, the increasing number of refugees, coupled with the government's social and health costs and its ambiguous migration policy, has begun to create challenges for citizens, particularly under international sanctions on Iran. As much as Iranian society initially accepted and perceived Afghans as fellow Iranians, social and security issues have had a negative impact on Iranians' approach.

The demographic issue is another factor contributing to Iranian society's frustration with refugees. Concerns such as Afghans occupy the south of Tehran, 75% of mothers giving birth in Tehran are Afghans, 80% of schools in Iran operate double shifts due to Afghan migrants, Refugees receive government subsidies and Refugees take foreign currency out of the country stoke fears within the Iranian society (UNHCR 2025a).

There is a widespread fear that Afghans, who tend to cluster in specific areas, may eventually outnumber the Iranians. To manage such risks, Iran has refrained from resettling refugees in major cities or provinces bordering Afghanistan since 2008. As of 2023, the following provinces of Iran are subject to a general ban on the presence of Afghan refugees: East Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, Ardabil, Zanjan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Ilam, Lorestan, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, Gilan, Mazandaran, Sistan and Baluchestan, Hormozgan and Hamadan. Only select areas within the provinces of Isfahan, Bushehr, Razavi Khorasan, South Khorasan, Khuzestan, Semnan, Fars, Qazvin, Markazi and Yazd are made available for settlement.

Water issues concerning the Helmand River also influence the Iranian government's migration policy and shape public opinion. When the Afghan side fails to supply Iran with sufficient water for objective and subjective reasons, the problem becomes particularly acute. The problem is especially pressing in Sistan and Baluchistan, one of Iran's most water-stressed provinces. In such instances, the populace may demand that the authorities respond to the water concerns by deporting Afghan refugees.

The head of Iran's National Organisation for Migration, Ali Asghar Balukian, on May 4, 2024 stated that Iran no longer possesses the capacity to accommodate Afghan migrants. He urged the Taliban government to ensure the necessary security and living conditions for Afghan migrants to facilitate their return to Afghanistan.

According to Ahmad Ali Goudarzi, commander of the Iranian Border Police, Afghans living illegally in Iran are expected to leave the country by the end of the year (Iranian date).

This indicates that the refugee issue is indeed a concern for both Iranian society and the government of Iran's newly elected president, Massoud Pezeshkian. It is also possible that Iran is attempting to exert pressure on the Taliban government by deporting refugees.

In a related development, a spokesperson for the Afghan interim government's Ministry of Migrants and Repatriates has urged the Iranian government to exercise patience until Afghanistan can create adequate conditions for the return of Afghan refugees. According to the IOM, a total of 714,572 Afghan migrants were registered as returning from Iran between January 1 and June 29, 2025 (IOM 2025a, 2025b).

The security aspect

Are Afghan refugees an opportunity or a threat to Iran's national security? This question is pertinent across all aspects of this study. Following the Islamic Revolution, the issue was perhaps viewed more as a prospective one, but after the NATO operation in Afghanistan in 2001, the security component of Iran's Afghanistan policy became paramount. The ongoing uncontrolled influx of refugees into Iran has become a security concern. Moreover, Iran has since begun to frame its relations with neighbouring countries in terms of security rather than economics, leading to the development of a security-concerned regional policy.

The influence of the security factor on Iran's migration policy is intertwined with both internal and external realities. Events in Afghanistan, the foreign policy priorities of Afghanistan, the activities of ISIL, the Afghan authorities' approach to border security, disputes over the Helmand River's water and attitudes towards Shia and Persian speakers in Afghanistan are all contributing circumstances influencing Afghans seeking asylum in Iran.

Internal realities consist of two components. One aspect of the security issues arises from the principles of Iran's regional policy, while the other stems from the situation on the ground.

I have examined Iran's migration policy in two distinct periods to address the questions posed in this section of the study. The first phase spans from the Islamic Revolution until 1996. During this period, Iran generally managed the security threats

associated with refugees, and the security factor had less influence on Iran's migration policy. Following the first Taliban takeover, the issue of Afghan refugees became securitised.

In 2001, the security component of Iran's refugee policy gained prominence after the 11 September attacks (Mahmud and Hossain 2025) which prompted several countries to launch military operations against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan (Monsutti 2007, 170; Hunter 2003).

The security factor has considerably influenced Iran's migration policy since the second Taliban rule. Until that point, Iran had generally been able to manage the security challenges posed by migration flows. I believe that Iran had employed the threat of deportation primarily as a leverage in its relations with Afghan authorities (Akbarzadeh 2021, 8).

In collaboration with Afghanistan and international organisations, Iran has sought to ensure the voluntary return of Afghan refugees to their homeland. However, simultaneously, to hinder the expansion of security cooperation between Afghanistan and the U.S., Iran has been securitising the refugee issue (Ahmed and Akbar 2023; Akbarzadeh, Ahmed and Ibrahimi 2021). In 2005, during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's first term in office, Iran forcibly expelled over 350,000 refugees from the country. Iran even threatened illegal immigrants with prison (FIDH 2025).

In subsequent years, in 2003 an agreement was reached between the governments of Iran and Afghanistan, resulting in several hundred thousand individuals voluntarily returning to Afghanistan (Naseh et al. 2018). At that time, the number of Afghans residing in Iran was approximately 1.5 million (Emery 2001, 16-17).

The flow of Afghan refugees to Iran increased considerably, particularly during the second period of Taliban rule. Naturally, a new influx of refugees was anticipated following the tense situation in Iran (Barzegar 2014, 123). As soon as the Taliban regained power in Afghanistan, the Tehran government, despite criticism from certain social and political circles, engaged in dialogue with the Taliban to manage refugee flows. Cooperation with the Taliban has become a priority in Iran's policy toward Afghanistan. Despite criticism from various social and political groups, as well as its tough stance toward the Taliban, Tehran officially maintains dialogue with the movement.

The main reasons for Iran's acceptance of the Taliban as a reality and the basis of its policy towards Afghanistan are the security of the 1,000-kilometer border between Iran and Afghanistan, drug trafficking, the presence of 5 million Afghan refugees in Iran, the presence of ISIS in northwest Afghanistan, and the rights of Shia Hazaras and Iranian-speaking ethnic groups in Afghanistan. If the Taliban are officially recognised, will they adhere to agreements? After assuming power in Afghanistan, the Taliban attempted to rebrand themselves, seeking legitimacy by creating the impression that the Taliban of 2021 is different from that of 1996.

Iran's perspective is that without a minimal relationship with the Taliban, isolation may drive the group to adopt more extreme measures. Despite dialogue between the interim Taliban government and Iran, disagreements have arisen over the past two years regarding the utilisation of water from the Helmand River and border security, occasionally resulting in border clashes.

Iran's official stance on the Taliban is as follows: Iran acknowledges the Taliban as a reality. However, following official recognition, all religious and ethnic groups in Afghanistan should be represented in the formation of the main government, particularly the Shia Hazaras and Tajiks.

In Iran's view, the flow of refugees can be managed if Kabul is willing to engage in constructive discussions. Iranian experts have suggested that the Taliban may be interested in encouraging opposition groups to emigrate, thereby exercising lax control at the borders to facilitate this end (Ali Akbar Raefipour's YouTube Channel 2023).

Until 2021, during the second Taliban rule, Iran was generally able to manage refugee issues in cooperation with the governments of Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani. Security concerns became more pronounced as ISIS became increasingly active in Western Afghanistan, particularly in regions bordering Iran. Concurrently, the Taliban intensified pressure on the Shia Hazaras. Iran contends that both the Taliban and ISIS pose a serious threat to Afghanistan's Shia population (Middle East Institute 2021).

The conflict between the Taliban and ISIS has further complicated the internal situation in Afghanistan, which in turn has led to a new wave of refugees seeking asylum in Iran. According to official Iranian figures, 5,000 Afghans entered Iran daily in 2022 (Eghtesadsaramad 2022).

The Iranian authorities have offered to assist the Taliban in establishing proper border control and risk management. The Iranian government has also invited Afghanistan to sign a comprehensive agreement on border security cooperation. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif visited Afghanistan for this purpose. According to Iranian sources, the Afghan authorities have not adequately addressed border control issues. This may explain why Iran has decided to construct a wall along its border with Afghanistan, allocating $3 billion for the project.

Over the past four decades, the attitudes of both Iranian authorities and society towards Afghan refugees have shifted due to security concerns. In the periods after the Islamic Revolution, Afghans were seen as muhajirs; by the 1990s, economic issues had redefined them into migrants (Safri 2011, 587).

Due to security and socio-economic concerns, Iran has shown little interest in hosting Afghan refugees over the past decade. The security threat was exacerbated when several terrorist attacks involving refugees occurred within Iran.

In 2021, outside the Imam Reza mausoleum in Mashhad, three clerics were killed in a terrorist attack. According to official Iranian sources, the perpetrator held refugee status in Iran and was an illegal immigrant. This incident has raised considerable concerns within Iranian society. In 2022, another terrorist attack occurred at the Shah Chirag mosque in Shiraz (Nournews 2023). There was another terrorist attack in Kerman, the hometown of Suleimani, in January 2024, for which ISIS Khorasan claimed responsibility (Hafezi, Elwelly and Tanios 2024). In the aftermath of these attacks, there has been a growing perception in Iranian society that the actions of a few individuals among the 5 million Afghans residing in Iran are being unjustly blamed on Afghan refugees as a whole (Lieven 2021). In order to avoid public unrest, Iranian officials were careful not to associate the attacks with any specific nationality (Entekhab 2023).

An analysis of Iranian press publications indicates that efforts are being made to shape public sentiment in order to facilitate the deportation of refugees without considerable upheaval. Both Iranian and Afghan media have contributed to tensions amid the prevailing discontent in Iranian society. Kabul has accused Tehran of mistreating refugees, while Tehran has countered by accusing the Afghan government of disregarding Iranian aid and portraying isolated incidents involving refugees as indicative of Iranian policy. There is a prevailing sentiment among Iranian officials and intellectuals that a single instance of mistreatment could overshadow the extensive efforts made by the Iranian government towards Afghan refugees.

While Iran views anti-Afghanism as a programme linked to security threats, Afghan refugees are sometimes ridiculed in Iranian TV series. This affects the behaviour of both the public and Iranian officials who interact with migrants (Iran 2023).

With the second Taliban rule, security issues related to refugees have intensified. Although Iranian authorities were generally able to cooperate with the Afghan government and make mutually acceptable decisions, the situation became more complicated after 2021.

The uncontrolled influx of migrants poses security threats such as food security, employment and shifting ethnic dynamics. On the one hand, Iranian society expresses legitimate grievances regarding refugees and calls for decisive government action; on the other hand, the Taliban accuse Iran of treating refugees harshly, humiliating them and abandoning those who cross the border.

Three years into the Taliban's second rule, Iran's security risk management has become increasingly complex, and its capabilities more constrained. In 2024, the press reported extensively that thousands of Afghans trained by the Taliban were in Iran. Therefore, in 2024, Iran allocated $3 billion for a wall project along the border with Afghanistan, while the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) was involved in the border demarcation and installation of barbed wire (Smith 2024; Cafiero and Aman 2025).

According to official figures, Iran spends $10 billion annually on the 6 million Afghan refugees it hosts (Iranpress 2024). Iran's new government has announced that all Afghans residing illegally in Iran will be required to leave.

The above indicators suggest that influence of the security concerns has considerably increased in recent years. Iran is no longer considering cooperation with the Taliban in managing the flow of refugees. It is likely that Iran has assessed the security risks as high and is therefore resorting to more stringent measures.

Conclusion and discussion

Against the backdrop of such changes, there arises a need to analyze the development of the social roles and destinies of nations, national entities, nationalism, trends in ethnosocial and national development in contemporary Iran and Afghanistan, and the nature of self-identification and worldview of the peoples inhabiting them. The problem is exacerbated by the divergence of opinions among political figures and ideologists in Eastern countries regarding the foundation of a modern state strategy that would enable developing nations to adequately respond to the challenges of the times. This has a specific rationale, as the appearance of any social and political system in the

world, along with other parameters, is determined by the ideas and ideological and political processes that underlie it, the attitudes of the people of a given national entity, and their conceptions of a dignified public life. Given this, the author's consideration of the experiences of Afghanistan and Iran in relation to refugees and migrant workers is entirely justified, as the historical stages of Afghan and Iranian societies provide vivid examples of the achievements of their peoples in terms of national and state development. The study devotes particular attention to the nature of the development trends in these countries, taking into account the significant challenges of managing refugee and migrant worker flows. Along with the general historical relevance of studying the experiences of Afghanistan and Iran, it is worth emphasizing the general significance of certain aspects of their experiences for countries in the post-Soviet space, as these countries are neighboring countries for many of them. Therefore, the analysis of social and political processes in Afghanistan and Iran is becoming an important state and public imperative.

Linguistic, cultural and religious factors possess considerable potential for integrating Afghan refugees into Iranian society and enhancing Iranian influence over the Persian-speaking populations of Afghanistan. However, due to its inconsistent and short-term policies regarding Afghan refugees, Iran has failed to maximise this opportunity, prioritising religious and security considerations instead. As a result of both Iranian and Afghan policies, alongside objective and subjective factors, an atmosphere of mutual distrust has developed between Iranians and the Iranophone people of Afghanistan.

Since the Islamic Revolution, the Afghan refugee issue has evolved into a serious security and demographic challenge for Iran. Both Iran and Afghanistan have been unable to resolve the refugee issue through inter-state mechanisms. Consequently, the Iranian government has opted to address it through deportation.

Iran has been prioritising religious factors over ethno-linguistic and cultural considerations in its policies towards Afghan refugees, with an eye primarily on short-to medium-term results. However, it is my view that, in the long term, the attitudes of the Iranian-speaking population of Afghanistan towards Iran may shift.

The deportation of Afghan refugees, including the substantial second-generation refugee population, could exacerbate the existing mutual mistrust between Iran and Afghanistan. I do not discount the possibility that this situation may provide an opportunity for a third party to influence the political relations between the two nations. As a result, anti-Afghanism may increase within Iranian society, while anti-Iranism may rise within Afghan society.

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THE IMPACT OF ARMED CONFLICTS ON CLIMATE CHANGE: PERCEPTIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY AND THE SEARCH FOR WAYS TO OVERCOME THESE RISKS

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Abstract

This article analyzes the impact of armed conflicts on climate change, as well as the perception of environmental security and the search for ways to overcome these risks. Currently, issues related to environmental security and climate change are becoming a particularly significant item on the global political agenda. Modern societies have already witnessed such global phenomena and processes as large-scale natural disasters such as floods, droughts, fires, temperature fluctuations, and hurricanes; the depletion of vital natural resources essential to society; and changes in such vital indicators as the ozone layer, atmospheric gas composition, radiation pollution, and other dramatic changes in the biosphere. In this regard, this article analyzes the impact of war and military conflict on climate change over the past decade. It addresses the following questions: Do wars and conflicts accelerate the impacts of climate change? Why don't governments mention wars and conflicts as important causes of global warming? To answer these questions, the article describes the increasing number of climate change events that are correlated with war and climate change. To this end, it reveals the lack of interest of national governments in raising awareness of the impact of wars and conflicts on climate change, and finally, some concluding comments are offered.

Introduction

Around the world, there are dozens of conflicts some of which are very well reported by the Media, others less advertised, but with powerful repercussions. According to Genova Academy, Middle East and North Africa is the first most affected region by conflicts and wars, registering more than 45 armed conflicts in the territories of Cyprus, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Türkiye, Yemen and

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Western Sahara. Africa is the second region most affected, it is recorded more than 35 armed conflicts taking place in Bukina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Soudan (Geneva Academy 2024).

Asia takes the third place in frequency of conflicts, registering 21 armed conflicts happening in Afghanistan, India, Myanmar, Pakistan and the Philippines. Europe occupies the fourth place with seven conflicts, occurring mainly in Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia and Aserbaijan. Latin America is classified on fourth place with six conflicts happening in Mexico, Colombia and others countries in the region (Geneva Academy 2024).

The list of war and conflicts tends to increase, for example in Middle East, due to the conflict between Israel and Palestine, the war is expanding to other countries in the region such as Iran, Lebanon and Syria(ACLED 2024).

The war and armed conflicts have not only human and economic costs, but also environmental costs. It is estimated that armed conflicts are responsible for 5.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions (Weir 2024), but governments tend to avoid mentioning the consequences of wars on climate change.

Armed conflicts are worsening the climate change effects: droughts, floods, landslides, hunger, water shortages, avalanches and tsunamis become more common and less predictable. Military conflicts provoke not only the consumption of large amounts of natural resources: land and sea used for military training, as well as hydrocarbons: gas, coal, oil; minerals such as lithium, copper, iron and so on, but they also cause damages to the biodiversity, landscape, marine and human habitants, without forgetting, the release of massive emissions carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and other green house gases into the atmosphere.

Taking into account the aforementioned, the present article aims to analyse the effects of war and military conflicts on climate change in the last decade. The hypothesis asserts on the assumption that climate change effects are accelerated by armed conflicts. This article is guided by the followings questions: Do war and conflicts worsen the effects of climate change? Why are not governments interested to create awareness about the impacts of war and armed conflicts on climate change? The text is based on qualitative and quantitative data, such as press releases, specialised reports and statistics on conflicts and environmental degradation worldwide. The text is divided into three parts. The first one describes the increase of events related to climate change. The second one analyses the correlation between war and climate change; the third one exposes the disinterest of governments to mention armed conflicts as the main drivers of climate change, and finally some conclusive comments are offered.

Currently, issues related to environmental security and climate change are becoming a particularly significant item on the global political agenda. We have already witnessed global phenomena and processes such as large-scale natural disasters such as floods, droughts, fires, temperature fluctuations, and hurricanes, as well as the depletion of vital natural resources essential to society, as well as changes in such vital indicators as the ozone layer, atmospheric gas composition, radiation pollution, and other dramatic changes in the biosphere. In this regard, climate change issues are

becoming a matter of paramount political importance for all people on Earth, regardless of national borders, and for the political leadership of the vast majority of countries.

Acceleration of climate change effects

In recent years around the world, there have been many natural disasters attributed to climate change[1], just in 2024, in Valencia, Spain, strong storms and floods have killed at least 214 people and dozens were still unaccounted for, damaged roads and rail infrastructure, disrupted businesses, and habitats engulfed in mud (Morel 2024). In France, torrential rain caused floods in central and southeast of the country, one of the worst floods in 40 years. The damages were estimated to be between 350 and 420 million euros (Euronews 2024). In the USA, Hurricane Milton hit the Gulf Coast of Florida just weeks after Hurricane Helen did the same. The damages caused by Hurricane Milton were calculated up to $100 US billion (Cohn and Noor 2024). In Taiwan, heavy rains and high winds hit the island killing at least one person, injuring dozens and causing many damages to local infrastructure, the Typhoon Kong-rey reached 200 kilometers per hour (Cheung and Magramo 2024)

Others floods were registered in 2024 in Morocco, Algeria, Mali and Sudan, where floods turned the traditionally arid Sahara into lakes. The West and Central African countries experienced a state of humanitarian emergency with over 4.4 million people affected by floods across 15 African countries. In Nigeria, more than one million people were affected, 269 died, and more than 640,000 were displaced from their homes (Intersos 2024). In Chad, 1.5 million people were affected by these floods, including more than 12,000 in the east of the country, "which since April 2023 has witnessed the exodus of more than 600,000 Sudanese refugees fleeing the war"(Intersos 2024), while in Mali, floods affected more than 14, 400 people, damaging 2,745 water points and destroying 5, 780 latrines (Intersos 2024). In Pakistan and India, heavy rains and landslides caused the death of hundreds of people, while in China more than 300 rivers exceeded warning levels (Asia Financial 2025).

In Mexico, severe droughts were registered during 2024 causing the death of hundreds of people and animals such as cattle, monkeys, parrots, horses. Even fishes were found dead floating on lakes (Andreoni 2024). One year later, 2025, torrential rains in many Mexican states caused at least 76 dead, dozens of people missing and more than 100 communities affected, without mentioning the damages to the oil infrastructure that trigger a 5 mile oil spill in the state of Veracruz (The Associated Press, 2025).

The costs of climate change are incalculable not only for the human and animal suffering, but also in terms of damage to infrastructure in countries. Just in the United

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[1] Climate change science seeks to understand the physical, chemical, biological and geological processes, and the interactions among these processes, that produce climate. The scales of interest range from local to global and from weeks or months to millions of years. Changes in climate, both temporally and spatially, are detected by examining observational evidence from instruments and indicators such as tree rings, fossils, glaciers and sea ice, plant pollen, and sea level. One of the goals of the scientists is to predict future climates based on natural phenomena and to project future climates based on assumptions of future human activities (UNITAR 2015, 4).

States, in November 2024, there were 24 climate disaster events with losses exceeding $1 billion each. These events included 17 severe storm events, 4 tropical cyclone events, 1 wildfire event, and 2 winter storm events. Overall, these events resulted in the deaths of 418 people and had significant economic effects on the areas impacted. From 1980 to 2023, annual climate disasters events were an average of 8.5 events, while the annual average during the last 5 years (2019-2023) was 20.4 events (NOAA 2024).

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reports: "the U.S. has sustained 400 weather and climate disasters since 1980 where overall damage cost exceeds \$2.785 trillion" (NOAA 2024).The list of natural disasters is getting bigger each day as they are more frequent and intense events than in the previous decade. There are many causes behind these natural disasters such as manufacturing, mining and other industrial productions or processes; cutting down forests for pastures; increasing of farms or construction projects; emissions from volcanoes, variations in Earth's orbit, domestic rubbish, plastic and industrial waste, all increase greenhouses gases, water waste, over exploitation of natural resources, burning fossil fuels such as coal, oil, gas and so on (Greenpeace 2024), but one of the main causes that it is accelerating the climate change effects is without doubt the pollution caused by armed conflicts.

Wars and climate change

Environmental degradation[2] is one of the biggest challenges worldwide. Armed conflicts are one of the most important sources that affect the environment, and harm to human life. Certainly, the environmental impact depends on different elements such the intensity of conflicts, length of wars and size of weapons used, but there are general features that most of the armed conflicts share, where soil, air and sea pollution is generated. Some of the most outstanding features that contribute to environmental degradation during conflicts are operations and supply chain: energy consumption, production of debris and waste, launching missiles and weapons, destruction of natural resources, rebuilding infrastructure after war and human losses.

Operations and supply chain: energy consumption

Before, during and after armed conflicts, the pollution generated by emissions of Carbon Dioxide (CO_2) is triggered by the supply chain and operations in transportation of vehicles, equipments, weapons and members of the army. The military sector is one of the most energy-intensive industries worldwide. According to a retired US army general and former CIA director, David Petraeus, who once said in 2011, "energy is the lifeblood of our war fighting capabilities" (Ogoyi 2022). Certainly, war efforts and the military operations require significant energy, derived from fossil fuels (Ogoyi 2022).

Maintaining military activities means consumption of energy for military vehicles, aircraft, tanks, ships, vessels, buildings and infrastructure. The CO_2 emissions from

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[2] The environmental degradation term comprises destruction of wildlife and non-compliance with environmental obligations, social and environmental justice. As well as, pollution on air emissions, soil degradation, solid waste, untreated water, burning and waste of hydrocarbons, over exploitation of ground water, deforestation, over exploitation of sea lives and all natural resources (UNITAR 2015).

military purposes are larger than emissions generated by many of the world's countries combined. It is estimated that military operations are responsible for 5.5% of all greenhouse gas emissions globally (Weir 2020). In this vein, the military sector is a huge energy user that contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions.

The consumption of energy and production of greenhouse gas emissions are generated not only during the armed conflict, but also during non-war operations[3], such as military exercises, war games or maintenance of military installations (Crawford 2019, 2).

Since 2001, the US Department of Defense (DOD) "has consistently consumed between 77 and 80 percent of all US government energy consumption" (Crawford 2019, 4). The US military sector uses a great amount of fossil fuel, mainly extracted from the Persian Gulf (Crawford 2019, 3), not to mention all the electricity consumed by this sector. To put it in perspective, in 2007, DOD spent $3.5 billion to support heat and electricity for US operation facilities that accounted for 560,000 sites with over 275,000 buildings at 800 bases located on about 27 million acres of land in the US and across the globe, just in 2007 (Vine 2019; Conger 2018).

Production of debris and waste

Throughout the history of industrial society, environmental problems have posed a threat to the entire global community. Pollutant emissions into the atmosphere, climate change and, consequently, natural disasters, and the discharge of industrial and domestic wastewater into water bodies have increasingly negatively impacted the environment and human health. The significant deterioration in the quality of life of the population, as well as the consequences of anthropogenic impact on the natural environment, have seriously raised the need to intensify efforts to develop effective environmental policies in many countries.

During and after armed conflicts, the production of debris is enormous. Houses, schools, hospitals and building destruction, as well as roads, vehicles and all types' infrastructures damaged or completely reduced to rubble. Not to mention, high quantities of dust, plastic rubbish and industrial waste generated by fighters and local people.

Following a report from the United Nations, the consequences of wars to climate change are considerable, particularly for all the waste produced: "Oil fires and spills, bomb – damage and looted industrial facilities, abandoned military material and munitions, rubble and demolition waste – all are associated with contemporary conflicts, and all can threaten ecosystems and human health" (UNEP 2017, 1).

The same report indicates that since 1999, the toxic remnants of armed conflicts continue damaging the environment: "depleted uranium weapons in the Balkans; abandoned military material in Afghanistan; hazardous industrial sites in Iraq; waste, rubble and munitions in Gaza and Lebanon, and abandoned industries in Sierra Leone" (UN 2017, 3).Besides, it is necessary to mention all waste produced by corrosives

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[3] Operational energy use is defined as the energy "required for training, moving, and sustaining military forces and weapons platforms". The US Department Of Defense (DOD) accounts for 70 percent of energy consumption from the whole country's energy consumption (Crawford 2019, 8).

substances, paints, fuels, and especially heavy metals that are launched to rivers, oceans, forests or farms that also contribute largely to environmental degradation (Gambuzza et al. 2023).

Launching Missiles and Weapons

During war and armed conflicts, the amount of explosions caused by missiles, ammunitions, tanks, drones are countless. The release of greenhouse gases such as sulfur dioxide, perfluorocarbons, halocarbons, methane, nitrogen oxide and other extremely dangerous gases and substances such as mercury, ammonia are damaging the environment (Hausfather 2022, 55), which contribute to the global warming effect on oceans, increasing temperatures, habitat destruction, soil erosion, droughts, fire, flooding and destruction of flora and fauna.

The heat added to the planet due to weaponry is contributing, without any doubt, to the climate change. According to Lijing Cheng, researcher at the International Center for Climate and Environmental Sciences at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, since the explosion of "the Hiroshima atom-bomb" the energy released from this event was about 63,000,000,000,000 Joules" (Kottasova 2020). This explosion gives an idea about the amount of heat that was produced in a single event.

Another example of global warming caused by war is offered through the US invasion of Afghanistan. From 2001 to 2018 US military greenhouses gas emissions reached 1,267 million metric tons in Afghanistan (Crawford 2019, 2).

According to the report presented by the Non Government Organisation, Oil Change International, the Iraq war alone generated 141 million tons of CO_2 in four years, equivalent to 25 million extra carson the US roads in one single year (Oil Change International 2008).

During the most recent armed conflict between Israel and Palestine registered on 7 October 2023, the greenhouse gases were "over than 281,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide (CO_2 equivalent)", burned by Israel."The climate cost of the first 60 days of Israel's military operations was equivalent to burning at least 150,000 tons of coal" (Niranjan et al. 2023).While, "Hamas rockets fired into Israel during the same period generated about 713 tons of CO_2, which is equivalent to approximately 300 tons of coal (Niranjan et al. 2023).

Worse still, it is estimated that emissions from the Israel-Palestine conflict during the first two months reached an annual carbon footprint of more than 20 times CO_2 emissions of the world's most climate-vulnerable nations (Lakhani 2024). This can give an idea about the amount of damage caused to the environment for the following months and years that this conflict lasts.

The amount of heat added to the global warming is growing exponentially one reason is the armed conflicts. Following to Cheng "the amount of heat that we have put in the world's oceans in the past 25 years are equals to 3.6 billion Hiroshima atom-bomb explosions" (Kottasova 2020).

The global oceans are heating at the same rate as if five Hiroshima atomic bombs were dropped into the water every second (Kottasova 2020). Not to mention, all the heating caused by wars' weapons put into the air and soil. It is not a coincidence that

global temperature is increasing each year, just a case in point, between 2024-2028 it is predicted to be between 1.1°C and 1.9°C (WMO 2024).

Destruction of natural resources

During armed conflicts natural resources are damaged. Chemical contamination of rivers, oceans and marine environments, as well as deforestation and destruction of animal life are frequent. For example, the environmental devastation in Ukraine due to the war with Russia – on February 24, 2022- has caused irreversible damages. One of the most disturbing events was the destruction of the "*Nova Kakhovka dam*" on 6[th]June 2023 (Yerushalmy2023), causing massive flooding, financial losses, energy problems and destruction of the ecosystem. Furthermore, the destruction of other critical reservoir supplies such as fossil fuel infrastructures.

"In the war in Ukraine, 36 Russian attacks on fossil fuel infrastructure were recorded in the first five weeks alone–February and March 2022-, leading to prolonged fires that released soot particulates, methane and CO_2 into the atmosphere, while oil infrastructure has been ablaze on the Russian side too." (Clauben 2022).

During the conflict Russia-Ukraine, another important environmental destruction was the *Kurakhove*dam in Donetsk Oblast, Ukraine, on 11th November 2024, which caused floods and infrastructure damages (The Kyiv Independent 2024).

According to Daniel Hryhorczuk, professor in the School of Public Health at the University of Illinois Chicago, estimates that the Russia-Ukraine war –from 2022 to 2024- has caused $56.4 billion just in environmental damages (UIC 2024). Others collateral environmental degradations during conflicts are the increase fires, deforestation and destruction of animal life due to bombings, military operations, fight confrontations, and lack of firefighters to control wildfires(UIC 2024).It is important to quote former United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, who once said: "the environment has long been a "silent casualty" of war (UN 2014) This message also makes an echo to "the contamination of land, the destruction of forests, the plunder of natural resources and the collapse of management systems" (UN 2014) The environmental consequences of war are often widespread and devastating for local people and their habitat.

The destruction of natural resources is also translated into damages to oceans, for example, between 1987-2019, ocean warming was 450% greater than during 1955-1986 (Kottasova 2020).Oceans serve as a good indicator of the real impact of climate change. Covering almost three quarters of Earth's surface, they absorb the vast majority of the world's heat. Since 1970, more than 90% of global excess heat went to the oceans, while less than 4% was absorbed by the atmosphere and the soil (Kottasova 2020).

Rebuilding infrastructure after war

After armed conflicts, there is the need to rebuild cities, roads, hospitals, schools and the whole country infrastructure, which requires CO_2 emissions. For example, it is estimated that reconstruction in Syria would lead 22 million tons of CO_2 emission (Clauben 2022). In the case of the Ukraine-Russia war, according to the Conflict

Environment Observatory (CEOBS), this war will need the largest carbon footprint by far in reconstruction of destroyed infrastructure. This could be even worse in terms of CO_2 emission per capital in the war in Palestine, given the amount of bombing intensity in this conflict"(CEOBS 2024).

The environmental disaster in Palestine is one of the most catastrophic examples of destruction of farmland, buildings, roads, energy and water infrastructure. It is calculated that between 36% and 45% of Gaza's buildings have been destroyed during 2023 causing one of the major global warming drivers in current times (Niranjan et al. 2023).

The relevance of this study is explained by the fact that in recent years three dangerous processes have emerged in the international sphere, negatively affecting the state of problems in the field of international environmental security:

- firstly, the aggravation of international tensions in many parts of the world;
- secondly, the increasing severity of global environmental problems and the growing lag in the process of preparing and implementing adopted decisions in the field of international environmental security;
- thirdly, the effectiveness of the main negotiating mechanisms of the UN, its bodies and associated organizations has decreased as a result of deliberate attempts by a number of Western countries to weaken the international legal and institutional system of the world order.

Human losses and catastrophe

During the armed conflicts, there are not only financial losses or destroyed infrastructure, but also human and environmental casualties. People killed, injured and disabled with mental health issues, not to mention the amount of people, who are forced to leave their countries, increasing displacements and migration levels, which is translated into the boosting of greenhouse gas emissions.

When large amount of people move by coach, boat, car or airplane, they use different modes of transport to abandon their countries, which produce carbon emissions in their journey along with all waste that is generated in this process.

The pollution associated with conflicts can also have consequences for countries neighboring them in terms of production of rubbish, industrial waste, destruction of crops, extinction of animals and plants, and even chemical contamination of rivers, marine life, deforestation and other environmental issues. The consequences of armed conflicts have also a resonance in refugee-hosting nations not only due to the lack of infrastructure to accommodate new arrivals, but also due to the environmental pressure (UN2017, 3).

The history shows how many natural ecosystems have been destroyed in wars, most of them irreversibly. Even, arm forces have already accepted that climate change is real problem, but they haven't assumed any serious commitment to reduce their amount of CO_2 emissions, and they haven't either included the topic of the environment as part of their national security agenda, which goes in contradiction with the role of the military forces, since the main objective of the arm forces "is to protect its country from any potential harm; this should also include climate change and protect nature (…) since they can harm human lives"(Ogoyi 2022).

The role governments in reporting costs of war

The military sector has avoided taking responsibility on environmental issues worldwide. The United States as the major military power has not reported the environmental cost of wars, worse still; the United States continues spending large amounts of money in military operations and is currently engaged with dozens of conflicts and wars around the world: "the US has been continuously at war since late 2001, with the US military and State Department currently engaged in more than 80 countries in counter terror operations" (Crawford 2019).

The United States along with China, Russia, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and Ukraine are countries characterized to spend huge amounts of their GDP on the military sector, therefore they are the most important polluter worldwide. For example, the US Department of Defense (DOD) is the world's largest institutional user of fossil fuels and the biggest polluter of greenhouse gases. From 1975 to 2018, DOD's emissions reached more than 3, 685 million metric tons of CO_2, just in 2017 the Pentagon's total carbon emissions were larger than the emissions of the entire industrialised countries. The CO_2 emissions of the USA military sector were also greater than all emission from the US production of iron and steel (Crawford 2019).

In 2017, the US Air Force used USD $4.9 billion worth of fuel. In the same year, the US military was responsible for 59 million tons of CO_2 equivalent to the overall emissions of some industrialised countries such as Switzerland or Sweden(Ogoyi 2022).

In this context, it is not a surprise that the weapons industry and military sector are not present in the Paris Climate Agreement[4], which means that they are not obliged to report to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change their actions (Ogoyi 2022).

The oil corporations such as BP, Shell, Saudi-Aramco, Rosneft or Lukoil are not either interested in reducing emissions, when their profits are rocketing due to the high demand by the military sector. Another important organization in armed conflicts worldwide is NATO that designed a methodology for counting emissions, but it does not apply to its members. NATO also excludes emissions from their operations, missions, training and all kinds of military exercises (Weir 2024).

Besides, the military sector is excluded of 1997 Kyoto protocol and it considers voluntary reporting data to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change emissions under the 2015 Paris agreement (UN 2015; Weir 2024). In this context, many countries of the West report what they want to report just for giving a nice façade on climate change engagements, others countries prefer to omit any information, because there is no legal obligation to report the real CO_2 emissions related to armed conflicts.

It appears that despite the current attention paid to climate change, the political significance of this purely humanitarian issue remains underestimated. This is largely due to the fact that the subject matter of global, regional, and national climate security and environmental diplomacy is still in the process of formation. Moreover, given the

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[4] International treaty agreement on climate change adopted by 196 Parties at the United Nation Climate Change Conference in Paris, France, on 12 December 2015, and it was implemented on 4 November 2016 (UN 2015).

increasingly tense international situation at the beginning of the second decade, all security issues, including, naturally, environmental security, are particularly pressing and more difficult to resolve, while diplomatic tools are subject to dynamic change.

Conclusion and discussion

The environmental crisis, its consequences, and the methods for combating them will occupy a key place on the political agenda and diplomatic practice of the future, although the impact of this process should not be overestimated. It can be said that environmental arguments are beginning to be actively used in politics, but for now, as a rule, this is primarily driven by state interests or the interests of individual non-state actors in international relations. Over the past decades, the international community has taken numerous measures aimed at addressing climate change. One need only look at the history and chronology of the signing of numerous multilateral documents. It should be noted that despite the significant economic component of climate change, the entire history of addressing this issue convincingly demonstrates that climate change is, first and foremost, a matter of global politics, largely dependent on the positions of the world's leading countries. Therefore, decisions made at the global level are largely predetermined by decisions made at the national level. Traditionally, the main line of confrontation at the global level runs between developed and under developed countries, whose economic interests often diverge.

Climate change is a dangerous threat to global security. One of the most polluting sectors is represented by the military industry and military forces around the world. Historically, countries with large and powerful military forces are also countries with larger CO_2 emission that pollute the most. In this sense, at the top of the military polluters are United States with 2,127,500 military personnel, Russia with 3,570,000, China with 3,170,000 and India with 5,137,550 (Global Firepower 2024).

Worse still, due the current geopolitical scenario (2024), where armed conflicts have increase, NATO states as well as Russia, China, Iran, Israel, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and many other countries worldwide are increasing their military investments, which means more CO_2 released to the atmosphere and more deterioration to the climate change.

In 2021, total global military expenditure increased by 0.7% per cent, reaching $2 trillion. The five largest spenders in 2021 were the United States, China, India, the United Kingdom and Russia, together accounting for 62 per cent of expenditure, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI 2022).

Since 2021, global military expenditure has showed a trend to increase, rather than decrease due to the visible effects of climate change worldwide (SIPRI 2022).Weapons, missiles, tanks and all sort of military equipment are on the rise with the wars in Ukraine, Russia, Israel, Palestine, Iran, Lebanon and other countries in the Middle East, without forgetting the conflicts in other part of Latin America and Asia.

The green energies have been considered as a source of energy for military purposes, but its development hasn't been translated into a reduction of fossil fuel and CO_2 emissions. Military global powers have not reduced their overall greenhouse gas emissions, just the opposite they are increasing their emissions without any concern for the global environment. For decades military environmental "exceptionalism" and poor

interpretations of climate security have contributed to deteriorate the environment (Weir 2024) for the benefit of political elites and large weapon manufacturing companies, military aircraft corporations, and all sorts of armament manufacturers who make huge profits during wars and armed conflicts. For this sector, war means profits and extension of business, which is the only priority in their agenda.

The destruction of the environment and climate change effects are presents all over the world. Certainly, the consequences for rich countries are less severe than poor ones with poor infrastructure to tackle climate change. There is a lack of awareness about the consequences of armed conflicts on the environment and the levels of emissions released to the planet, as well as its influence to climate change disasters. Many anti-war protests worldwide, they express their concerns in terms of human rights, but they don't include in their agenda the "ecocide" –destruction or extermination of the environment- that it is caused before, during and after the armed conflicts.

The media worldwide do not help either to inform about the impacts of war on the environment, since "the media is the engine of persuasion that allows our Earth-destroying system to persist. It has repeatedly mislead us about the choices we face (…) -Media world- on behalf of its wealthy proprietors, it has sought to justify a political economy that allows a few extremely rich people to grab and destroy the natural wealth on which all depend" (Morbiot 2022, 369).

The destruction of the environment and global warming is a real threat to everybody; however, political, military and financial elites are insensitive as for environment, animal and people lives, their only motivation is making profits, subjugate countries, placing puppet governments who ease their own interest, and loot natural resources, minerals, oil and gas to trade with those resources, paying cheap prices and sale them at high rate, with large profits margins. This is the game that is repeated over and over again in all wars, until the planet and human life will be extinct if civil society does not oblige to government to reduce armed conflicts.

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The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical standards
The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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Gender Dimensions of Verbal Aggression in Modern Media and Political Discourse: Cult of Violence or Playing with Aggressive Content?

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Abstract

The article examines gender stereotypes and speech aggression in political discourse, reflecting generalized judgments about the qualities and properties inherent in men and women, and the differences between them in the modern information society. This study is devoted to gender differences in the manifestation of aggression in political television debates, thereby revealing gender differences in aggressive behavior, stereotypes and features of linguistic manifestations, as well as communicative strategies present in the speeches and television debates of female and male politicians.

This article analyzes the problems of gender stereotypes in the modern information society, the academic significance of which is associated with the need to study the factors of political culture and discourse. In this sense, the analysis of the nature of political power, its resources and methods of its legitimacy have not been sufficiently studied in terms of the role of political, social and cultural discourse in maintaining gender stereotypes and the gender agenda of the modern information society. In social terms, the relevance of the problem is associated with the need to study those resources of political power that do not involve open violence, but, nevertheless, act as an effective means of social control and a tool actively used, in particular, in political struggle.

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The implementation of a political analysis of the role of gender stereotypes in the modern information society involved studying their properties, content and functions, identifying the conditions and reasons that allow them to act as a factor in political relations and social inequality.

Introduction

The issues of verbal aggression in modern media and political discourse are of great importance for modern society. The article examines the gender dimensions of verbal aggression in modern media and political discourse. The relationship between the manifestations of aggressiveness of the personality of male and female politicians is revealed. The formation of gender stereotypes is an important element of political culture, which performs a hereditary and protective function. At the same time, the formation of stereotypes of masculinity and femininity also generates a certain conservatism in the activities of politicians and voters, including in the process of their debates and political thinking. This is a feature of public opinion, which highlights two important reasons that influence the formation of gender stereotypes.

The speech of female politicians is quite emotional, striving to establish themselves in the political world and wanting to be taken seriously, female politicians demonstrate their knowledge, striving to equalize their status in political life with the positions of male politicians. The speech behavior of male politicians is characterized by monotony, as they use many verbs and imperative constructions. It is obvious that gender relations influence political culture, language and customs, as well as political decision-making by state institutions and CSOs, forming social and cultural stereotypes.

Despite the obvious differences in the manifestation of verbal aggressive behavior in male and female politicians, there are several common features that unite both genders in modern media and political discourse:

- in the political process, men's verbal aggression often manifests itself in the form of physical clashes, while women tend to a more verbal form of aggression.
- Both genders can experience verbal reactive aggression, which occurs in response to a threat or provocation, which is accompanied by instrumental aggression aimed at achieving certain political goals.
- Gender stereotypes and societal expectations about what male and female politicians should be can influence the expression of verbal aggressiveness. This can lead to the suppression of aggression in female politicians or, conversely, to the encouragement of aggressive behavior in male politicians.
- As mentioned above, men tend to switch from verbal to physical aggression, while women more often maintain and express verbal and relational aggression (damaging relationships and social connections).

- In male politicians, verbal aggression may be associated with the desire to dominate, establish their status and compete, while in female politicians, verbal aggression may arise from the protection of their reputation or close relationships.
- In female politicians, verbal aggression is often manifested in emotionally charged situations associated with negative emotions, while in male politicians, verbal aggression may be more cooled and calculated.

Political research on the gender aspects of aggression provides a more complete understanding of the diversity of this phenomenon. Similarities and differences in the expression of aggression in men and women indicate a complex interaction of biological, social and cultural factors. Understanding these dimensions helps to create a more comprehensive picture of gender verbal aggression and facilitates the development of more effective approaches to managing and reducing verbal aggression in contemporary society.

As factors that influence the manifestation of gender verbal aggression: biological factors, social upbringing, cultural norms, etc. Hormonal differences between the sexes can influence aggressive behavior in the media and political discourse. Upbringing and education in the family, school and society form stereotypes and expectations regarding verbal aggression, which may differ for men and women. In this context, different cultures may present different norms for the expression of verbal aggression depending on gender.

At the present stage of development of society, gender issues occupy one of the leading positions in terms of relevance. Despite obvious progress, gender discrimination still covers many areas of society. Females are subject to a special set of behavioral norms and expectations, significantly different from the requirements for the males. For this purpose, special terms and words are used to describe men and women differently. All this is reflected in special forms of manifestation of public consciousness – stereotypes. The study of the phenomenon of gender stereotypes in the modern political debates is relevant and significant. Gender stereotypes play a major role in influencing various spheres of life, including the political sphere. Gender equality and overcoming gender inequalities require a deep understanding of the phenomenon of gender stereotypes and its role in shaping public opinion in the context of political discourse. The study is based on the assumption that television media play a significant role in the formation and maintenance of gender stereotypes in political discourse. The purpose of the study is to analyze gender stereotypes and their reflection in political discourse. The results of the study will expand knowledge about gender stereotypes in the political discourse of television media and their influence on public opinion. The practical significance of the work lies in the fact that its results can be used to develop recommendations for adjusting and eliminating the negative impact of gender stereotypes on political discourse.

Gender is an integral part of the social and cultural interaction of people and affects various aspects of the political life of each, groups and society. In this context, the manifestation of social, cultural and linguistic features of gender stereotypes in political discourse is of particular interest, since gender ideas about masculinity and femininity have a certain impact on both human behavior and language. Political

language offers a ready-made set of stereotypes for designating politicians of different sexes, characterizing a certain gender, forming a specific vision of a person of how this political world is structured and what it should be. Using political language every day, we do not just speak, we learn, repeat and reinforce our political ideas about what politicians of different sexes and the civil society around us should be like. The use of linguistic means can also be presented through certain stereotypes, and this is becoming increasingly important in the process of political communication itself, since they have become standards of behavior for women and men politicians, thanks to which the type of moral relations between them, characteristic of a given political and civil culture, is formed (Knyazyan and Hakobyan 2018, 43). Analyzing stereotypes, it is necessary to take into account both negative and positive consequences of stereotyping (Knyazyan and Marabyan 2023). For example, a political text as a product of a certain civil culture accumulates values, the experience of generations, knowledge that is significant for a certain society, including information about femininity and masculinity, which attract people's attention and also cause constant disputes and disagreements.

Among researchers of political stereotypes and gender stereotypes in politics (Van der Pas and Aaldering 2020; McDermott 2020), which we can conditionally characterize as the 'deficit' approach, which assumes that in political life, male politicians have certain characteristics that female politicians lack. In this context, it turns out that men dominate women in all spheres, therefore some spheres, such as politics, are reserved for men only (Van der Pas and Aaldering 2020). Among the characteristic features given to women are modesty, compassion, politeness, cooperation. They lack oratory and public speaking skills. Next is the cultural difference theory, which represents gender differences between different cultures (Shitrit, Elad-Strenger and Hirsch-Hoefler 2017).Women's and men's roles are not only seen as given by nature, but more often they are imposed by society. Social power theory, which sees language as a means of creating social structure and power, is also stereotypical (Bennett, Connor, Bryant, and Metzger 2024). Men's role in communication has always been to provide power. The characteristic features of a man are the following: strength, less worried about his appearance and almost not afraid of old age, unemotional, objective, logical, rational, strives for power and leadership, independent, free, active (Akhtar, Jenichen and Intezar 2024). Characteristic features of a woman are: weakness, worries about her appearance and is afraid of old age, virtuous, emotional, gentle, frivolous, inconsistent, helpful.

In civil society, there are a large number of stereotypes that are formed on the asymmetry of the feminine and masculine. In any society, there is a division into men and women, on the basis of which certain roles of political behavior are prescribed to one or another gender group. In addition, in many cultures, there are emotionally charged ideals, images of traditional masculinity and femininity, according to which society judges the value of an individual as a representative of a particular sex. In this sense, gender stereotypes are a particular manifestation of social stereotypes and, accordingly, are also prototypical, collective, and have national and political cultural specificity. Gender stereotypes that arise over biological-sexual reality reflect a set of

biological characteristics, social roles, mental and behavioral characteristics inherent in representatives of a given sex within a certain culture.

Gender stereotypes are directly related to the political roles of men and women, since many gender differences are predetermined by the distinctive features of political roles that support or suppress certain options of political behavior in men and women. Differences in political behavior are a consequence of the fact that gender roles influence the experience, skills, and perceptions of men and women.

The distribution of genders among different political roles leads to certain social norms, according to which women and men behave in a certain way. The manifestation of gender-stereotypical behavior by men and women depends on the specifics of the situation and the behavior that is considered correct in this situation, i.e. political and social roles are usually regulated. Such regulation is stereotyped, and then functions in the collective consciousness according to the right/wrong scheme. The list of desirable/correct, i.e. positively assessed by society, in a sense ideal male qualities looks like this: assertiveness, ambition, competitive spirit, independence, self-sufficiency, leadership ability, firmness of convictions, integrity, willpower.

Gender Stereotypes of Male and Female Politicians

Social perceptions of male and female politicians concern their behavior in society. They differ in their psychological and social qualities: a man is usually associated with an active and socially creative human being, while a woman is perceived as a bearer of passive power. Women politicians have certain behavioral norms and expectations, which differ significantly from the requirements for male politicians. There is a misconception that women have no place in politics, and only men can be engaged in political activities. However, today women politicians have achieved obvious and significant success in political activity.

Stereotypes about men in politics match expectations of political leaders, while stereotypes about women contradict those expectations. There is a stereotype that female politicians are honest and likeable, and these seem to be very valuable traits for political leaders. However, in many cases such stereotypes lead voters to perceive politicians according to gender stereotypes, so they do not support female politicians who lack important masculine qualities. A number of stereotypes are imposed by society, according to which men are better suited to the role of politician, but there are fields such as education and health care, which are usually perceived as women's fields, and therefore in these fields people trust female politicians more. They are considered to be better able to solve social problems related to childcare, education, health, environment, poverty, violence etc. Male politicians are more focused on foreign policy, military affairs, trade and agriculture. There is even a widespread opinion that women do not have a place in politics, because the image of a female politician formed throughout the history of human society was influenced by the belief that the concept of 'politician' refers to a man. The stereotype of 'housewife' prevailed in the society, which was conditioned by the fulfillment of the duties. Men are characterized as aggressive, direct, assertive, strict, loud, while women are considered calm, gentle, talkative. In political communication, men are more often the direct initiators of aggression, while women are more sensitive and empathetic. Female

politicians often talk about women's issues, while men talk about men's issues. If male politicians focus on economic issues, crime, foreign policy, defense, women are more likely to discuss social issues.

Gender aggression in political television debates

In political debates, female and male candidates use many communication tactics to succeed (Knyazyan and Marabyan 2021). Studies of televised political debates have shown that men are more likely than women to break the order and pre-established topic constraints, and when these rules are broken by women, the TV presenters intervene much more quickly than do men. Women are more conscientious about following the rules of television debates than men. For women, the strategy of following the rules and acting as a good citizen during debates is more useful. During the debate, men get more opportunities to speak and address topics of interest to them. Gender stereotypes continue to shape the roles and positions that women and men occupy in society. Women are seen as the weaker sex and men dominate in many areas. Men and women have different political preferences, so voters judge politicians based on the candidate's gender. It should be noted, however, that currently the situation has somewhat changed. Since the second half of the 20th century, this stereotype has been receding, and women are actively involved in a variety of fields.

Television debates are considered as communicative phenomena, in which the male and female politicians' intentions, objectives, and opportunities to understand each other appear (Knyazyan and Marabyan 2023). During televised debates, each participant chooses or develops tactical and strategic components of their speech to maximize their strengths and achieve their goals in the debate. At the same time, expectations that the audience may have of each participant are taken into account. The speech that will be acceptable or considered successful for a woman politician may be considered unacceptable or unsuccessful for a man, and vice versa. In this process, not only the gender specificity of speech and language thinking plays a significant role, but also the factor of the audience's predisposition to it, which, we assume, affects the decision of voters.

The main stages of televised debates can be conventionally defined as passive and active. The passive stages of TV debates include the presentation of the participants by the host and the self-introduction of each of them. Active stages include the participants' answers to the audience's questions (at this stage, the participants practically do not communicate with each other, but communicate directly with the audience and the person who asks the question) and the debate itself, during which the discussion takes place between the participants. In this phase, all participants use verbal and non-verbal communication, talking or interrupting each other at the same time. In the context of studies of gender stereotypes, it is noted that women are as aggressive in verbal conflict as men. Women are characterized by: dispersion, clear or practical thinking, fusion of ideas and emotionality and instability of character, jealousy and cheerfulness, weak control of emotions and weak will, mild excitement, expressive movement in speech and communication, facial expressions, voice (talkativeness and tendency to repeat thoughts), exposure to the environment, incompetence in political activity. Thus, according to these characteristics, the role of a

woman is not to create, but to be a reliable support in society. Accordingly, men have the opposite characteristics: strong will, brief and exhaustive speech, analytical thinking, the ability to concentrate. In addition, men are characterized by originality of character and external personality, which is usually absent in women.

Conflict situations are mainly created between representatives of the same sex. It is noteworthy here that women seek to settle conflict situations by compromise and mutual agreement, unlike men, who in conflict situations can use pressure to achieve their goals. In a situation in which a woman becomes the object of verbal aggression, the opponent often uses insults, which mostly emphasize gender affiliation. When a woman becomes a participant in a conflict situation, the probability of using mutual insults increases. A man in a conflict situation may use slang, sometimes non-ethereal vocabulary, as well as words and expressions that do not correspond to the gender identity of the interlocutor, with the aim of insulting the latter.

The November 2016 U.S. presidential election (see Table 1) marked the end of a long electoral campaign that saw the political preferences of broad sections of citizens, elites, and the most influential lobby groups take shape. The unprecedentedly intense struggle for the post of head of state, which often went beyond basic ethical norms, provoked an extreme degree of polarization of society, splitting it into two ideologically irreconcilable camps.

Table 1. 2016 Presidential and Vice-Presidential General Election Results

Presidential Candidate	Vice-Presidential Candidate	Political Party	Electoral College		Popular Vote	
			Vote	%	Votes	%
Hillary Clinton	Tim Kaine	Democrat	227	42.2%	65,844,954	48.04%
Donald Trump	Mike Pence	Republican	304	56.5%	62,979,879	45.95%
Gary Johnson	William Weld	Libertarian	0	0	4,488,919	3.28%
Jill Stein	Ajamu Baraka	Green Party	0	0	1,457,044	1.06%
Other candidates	*n/a*	*n/a*	*7*	*1.3%*	*1,179,566*	*0.86%*

Source: OSCE/ODIHR 2017

Against the backdrop of unprecedentedly growing geopolitical tensions and turbulence, the confrontation between Russia and the West, with the United States still acting as the flagship, is exponentially intensifying. The election of D. Trump as U.S. President in 2016 (see Table 1), which came as a surprise to many, marked a correction in the military-political dimension of both the external and internal strategic approaches of the United States in 2016-2020. A characteristic feature of the U.S. political system is that it is during the presidential race that strategic agreements on mutual support are reached between candidates and influence groups seeking to ensure that their interests are met by the state over the next four years. Such agreements involve a market exchange of votes and material resources for potential political and managerial decisions that the candidate undertakes to make in the event of victory. Along with the largest American companies and corporations, CSOs and non-profit organizations representing the social interests of their members provide tangible moral and material support to candidates. Throughout the presidential election campaign,

American society was distinguished by a diversity of opinions on key aspects of political and social life. There were no patterns of social behavior in the country that obliged adherents of certain political views of the official candidates from the Republican and Democratic parties to take pre-determined positions on a wider range of social issues. This phenomenon largely supported the relative political and social stability of American society despite the different views between billionaire businessman Donald Trump and former Secretary of State and Senator Hillary Clinton.

Mosaic nature of television debates and aggressive verbal behavior

Public language, civil society and politics are in close interaction with each other and generate the complexity and multidimensionality of political discourse, which determines the interdisciplinary nature of its study at the junction of such sciences as psycholinguistics, cognitive linguistics, political linguistics, sociology, pragmatics, rhetoric, and speech influence theory. Such a comprehensive approach allows us to integrate scientific results and achievements and at the same time enrich our knowledge of this phenomenon. The dynamics of social development entail changes in the field of political communication and imposes ever new demands on language. Thanks to the rapid development of the media, information and communication transformations, including in the field of Internet technologies, a new field is being created for the formation of relations between the state and society, between politicians and citizens. In the context of such shifts, not only the linguistic analysis of public speech comes to the fore, but also the analysis of extralinguistic and paralinguistic means, for example, in speeches on television and radio, as well as the analysis of the transmission of political information through the prism of media discourse (Carmines, Schmidt and Fowler 2022). The current state of the linguistic paradigm is characterized by an anthropocentric approach, the essence of which lies in addressing the role of man in the process of generating and perceiving speech. The scientific community, taking into account the factor of the addressee, seeks to comprehend the nature of the phenomenon under consideration from a theoretical standpoint and, last but not least, from a practical one. For this reason, the creation and study of the most effective means of optimizing the verbal impact on the listener plays a special role, which is a significant contribution to the development of the culture of speech and business communication. The need to master the art of public speaking is great due to the ongoing processes of democratization, the growth of social and political activity. Public speech is a phenomenon that we often encounter in everyday practice, be it an academic speech, a speech on television or at parliamentary sessions. It is public speech that can have a great influence both on the level of development of a society of a separate state and on the international level. Therefore, this study is based on the idea of language as an instrument of social regulation of relations between communicants. The relevance of this work is determined by the trends that have emerged in political linguistics in connection with the study of pragmatics, with an interest in the study of psychological and social features of the generation and perception of speech in the course of communicative activity, with the mechanisms of speech influence, as well as the desire to clarify the nature of the connections between various cognitive processes and the conditions for the success and effectiveness of speech acts in certain situations

(Carmines, Schmidt and Fowler 2022). In addition, the study of public speeches of American statesmen lies in the need for a correct understanding of the political processes taking place within democratic countries.

To characterize the political structure of aggressive verbal behavior in the U.S., gender differentiation of electoral support, and answer the key question of contemporary U.S. electoral geography about the dynamics and degree of political polarization of American society, it is necessary to characterize the mosaic nature of television debates and, as a reflection of it, the country's electoral space.

Several parts from the television debates that contain aggressive verbal behavior are analyzed in the following examples.

TRUMP: She doesn't have the look. She doesn't have the stamina. I said she doesn't have the stamina, and I don't believe she does have the stamina. To be president of this country, you need tremendous stamina.

HOLT: The quote was, "I just don't think she has a presidential look."

TRUMP: Wait a minute, Lester. You asked me a question. Did you ask me a question? You have to be able to negotiate our trade deals. You have to be able to negotiate. That's right. With Japan, with Saudi Arabia. I mean, can you imagine, we're defending Saudi Arabia and with all of the money they have, we're defending them, and they're not paying, all you have to do is speak to them. Wait, you have so many different things, you have to be able to do, and I don't believe that Hillary has the stamina.

HOLT: Let's let her respond.

CLINTON: Well, as soon as he travels to 112 countries and negotiates a peace deal, a cease-fire, a release of dissidents, an opening of new opportunities in nations around the world or even spends 11 hours testifying in front of a congressional committee, he can talk to me about stamina.

TRUMP: The world. (CHEERS AND APPLAUSE) (POLITICO 2016; PBS NewsHour 2020).

Trump's statement *"She doesn't have the look"* and the repetition of *"She doesn't have the stamina"* carry negative connotations and directly attack Clinton's capabilities to run the country. Furthermore, he used the intensifier *"tremendous"* to highlight the huge power that he holds. Clinton's response was delivered in a composed and assertive tone, which contrasts with Trump's more confrontational style. Clinton responds to Trump's aggression with irony using specific examples and accomplishments that add credibility to her response and reinforce her argument. However, Trump's interruptions of the moderator and repetition of phrases like *"Let me tell you"* and *"Wait a minute"* serve as linguistic markers expressing dominance and control.

CLINTON: Third, we don't know all his business dealings, but we have been told through investigative reporting that he owes about $650 million to Wall Street and foreign banks. Or maybe he doesn't want the American people, all of you watching tonight, to know that he's paid nothing in federal taxes, because the only years that anybody's ever seen were a couple of years when he had to turn them over to state authorities when he was trying to get a casino license, and they showed he didn't pay any federal income tax.

TRUMP: That makes me smart (POLITICO 2016; PBS NewsHour 2020).

Clinton's statements *"we have been told…"*, *"maybe he doesn't want the American people... to know"* contain a sense of accusation and attack Trump's financial transparency and integrity.*"That makes me smart"* is an ironic response and downplays the seriousness of Clinton's accusations.

TRUMP: You look at the inner cities, I just left Detroit, I just left Philadelphia. You've seen me, I've been all over the place. You decided to stay home and that's OK.

I will tell you, I've been all over, and I've met some of the greatest people I'll ever meet within these communities. And they are very, very upset with what their politicians have told them. And what their politicians have done.

CLINTON: I think Donald just criticized me for preparing for this debate. And yes, I did. And you know what else I prepared for? I prepared to be president. And I think that's a good thing. (APPLAUSE) (POLITICO 2016; PBS NewsHour 2020).

Trump contrasts his actions with Clinton's purported decision to *"stay home,"* and makes an explicit value judgment on that decision by stating *"and that's OK"*. Trump implies that she is neglecting or avoiding certain issues, thereby he attempts to undermine her credibility or commitment. Rather than accepting Trump's implied criticism, Clinton cleverly reframed his remarks to her advantage. since Trump did not stay home as she did - he did not prepare for the debate, thus his actions of having *"been all over the place"* was not an advantage. In this case it illustrates how Clinton skillfully used language to shift the focus onto her strengths and highlight potential weaknesses in Trump's candidacy.

CLINTON: First, we have to build an economy that works for everyone, not just those at the top. That means we need new jobs, good jobs, with rising incomes (POLITICO 2016; PBS NewsHour 2020).

While talking about economy, Clinton employs the pronoun "we" to align herself with the audience. Moreover, the phrase *"economy that works for everyone, not just those at the top."* presents Trump in a privileged way. In this way she fosters a sense of solidarity with her audience. In addition, it implies that her opponent's economic strategies primarily benefit wealthy people and Trump lacks empathy for others as he is from the "top". The modal verb "have to" underscores the obligation to fight against the economic elite.

CLINTON: The other day, I saw Donald saying that there were some Iranian sailors on a ship in the waters off Iran, and they were taunting American sailors who were on a nearby ship. He said, you know, if they taunted our sailors, I'd blow them out of the water and start another war. That's [Interruption]

TRUMP: That would not start a war.

CLINTON: That's bad judgment. That is not the right temperament to be commander in chief, to be taunted and the worst part [Interruption] (POLITICO 2016; PBS NewsHour 2020).

Clinton cites Trump's assertion that he would *blow Iranian sailors out of the water and start another.* This statement is full of aggressive rhetoric which Trump neither tries to hide nor reject. In his response *"That would not start a war"* Trump uses conditional *"would "* to indicate starting a war may not be the inevitable outcome in this case. However, this does not indicate opposition to the idea of military action

against Iran. With the help of the adjective *"bad"* and adjective phrase *"not the right"* Clinton questions Trump's judgment and suitability for the presidency, particularly in sensitive diplomatic matters. Besides, Clinton's critical tone and declarative sentences show the audience that Trump is impulsive and not suitable for the post of the president.

CLINTON: …He even said if there were nuclear war in East Asia, that's fine, you know.

TRUMP: Wrong.

CLINTON: Have a good time, folks.

TRUMP: That's lies.

CLINTON: And in fact, his cavalier attitude about nuclear weapons is so deeply troubling. That is the number one threat we face in the world, and it becomes particularly threatening if terrorists ever get their hands on any nuclear material. So, a man who can be provoked by a tweet should not have his fingers anywhere near the nuclear codes. As far as I think anyone with any sense about this should be concerned.

TRUMP: That line is getting a little bit old, I have to say.

CLINTON: It's a good one, though. It describes the problem well.

TRUMP: It's not an accurate one at all. It's not an accurate one. So, I just want to give a lot of things and just respond (POLITICO 2016; PBS NewsHour 2020).

Clinton uses the phrase "that's fine, you know" ironically to emphasize the absurdity of Trump's rhetoric regarding the nuclear war. This time Trump contradicts directly with the word "wrong" and qualifies Clinton's accusations as "lies". In return Clinton employed the colloquial phrase *"Have a good time, folks"* showing the public that she is certain about her assertions and is not going to argue with Trump. She uses the metaphorical phrase *"cavalier attitude"* and the intensifier *"deeply"* in the expression *"deeply troubling"* to highlight her concerns regarding Trump's recklessness. She claims that Trump is easily provoked and uses another metaphorical expression *"should not have his fingers anywhere near the nuclear codes"* to state that he should not have the authority and responsibility associated with the presidency, due to his temperament. *"That line is getting a little bit old"* is used metaphorically as well and conveys Trump's dismissive attitude towards Clinton's argument and its relevance. With the response, *"It's a good one, though. It describes the problem well"* Clinton acknowledges Trump's assertion; however, she also affirms the validity of her argument. *"It's not an accurate one at all. It's not an accurate one":* the repetition here emphasizes Trump's disagreement with Clinton's claims and contributes to the aggressive tone of this debate.

TRUMP: And I'll tell you what. I didn't think I'd say this, but I'm going to say it, and I hate to say it. But if I win, I am going to instruct my attorney general to get a special prosecutor to look into your situation, because there has never been so many lies, so much deception. There has never been anything like it. People have been — their lives have been destroyed for doing one-fifth of what you've done. And it's a disgrace. And honestly, you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

RADDATZ: Secretary Clinton, I want to follow up on that.

CLINTON: … because everything he just said is absolutely false, but I'm not surprised.

TRUMP: Oh, really?

CLINTON: In the first debate… (LAUGHTER)

Last time at the first debate, we had millions of people fact checking, so I expect we'll have millions more fact checking, because, you know, it is — it's just awfully good that someone with the temperament of Donald Trump is not in charge of the law in our country.

TRUMP: Because you'd be in jail (POLITICO 2016; PBS NewsHour 2020).

With the phrases *"I'll tell you what"* and *"I hate to say it"* Trump grabs the attention of the audience afterwards he introduces his intentions. The sentence "*I am going to instruct my attorney general to get a special prosecutor to look into your situation"* adds a sense of command and authority to his speech. The repetition of the phrase "there has never been" reinforces Trump's beliefs. Furthermore, he employs hyperbolic language, e.g. *"so much deception"* and *"so many lies"*, to exaggerate reality. In her declarative sentence, *"Everything he just said is absolutely false,"* Clinton uses the adverb *"absolutely"* to emphasize that Trump's accusations are pointless. Trump's response "Oh really" was an irony, even the audience laughed. Meanwhile, the sentence *"It's just awfully good that someone with the temperament of Donald Trump is not in charge"* adds a mocking tone to Clinton's answer. With statements such as *"it's a disgrace"* and *"you ought to be ashamed of yourself"*, Trump makes the audience morally judge and condemn his opponent.

TRUMP: …I think the one that you should really be apologizing for and the thing that you should be apologizing for are the 33,000 emails that you deleted. …

CLINTON: Look, it's just not true. And so please, go to…

TRUMP: Oh, you didn't delete them?

COOPER: Allow her to respond, please.

CLINTON: It was personal emails, not official.

TRUMP: Oh, 33,000? Yeah.

COOPER: Please allow her to respond. She didn't talk while you talked.

CLINTON: Yes, that's true, I didn't.

TRUMP: Because you have nothing to say.

CLINTON: I didn't in the first debate, and I'm going to try not to in this debate, because I'd like to get to the questions that the people have brought here tonight to talk to us about.

TRUMP: Get off this question.

CLINTON: OK, Donald. I know you're into big diversion tonight, anything to avoid talking about your campaign and the way it's exploding, and the way Republicans are leaving you. But let's at least focus… (POLITICO 2016; PBS NewsHour 2020).

In this part of the debate Trump is far more aggressive than Clinton. Even the moderator is not able to limit his interruptions. At the outset, he blames Clinton for deleting emails and uses imperative language *"you should be apologizing"*. We can consider his questions *"Oh, you didn't delete them?"* and *"Oh, 33,000? Yeah"* sarcastic and rhetorical at the same time, since he does not expect an answer from his opponent. However, Clinton keeps stability. *"Look, it's just not true."* is a straightforward denial of Trump's accusations. She also uses the gap-filling word "Look" to capture public attention. In her statement *"Yes, that's true, I didn't"* Clinton

shows the opponent that she is not going to discuss this topic. In response to this, Trump uses the following phrases *"Because you have nothing to say."* and *"Get off this question." to* directly attack Clinton's credibility and ability to answer effectively. Eventually, Clinton attacks him back. She addresses Trump directly and challenges his behavior and motives during the debate.

RADDATZ: *And why did it morph into that? No, did you — no, answer the question. Do you still believe… [Interruption]*

TRUMP: *Why don't you interrupt her? You interrupt me all the time.*

RADDATZ: *I do.*

TRUMP: *Why don't you interrupt her?*

RADDATZ: *Would you please explain whether or not the Muslim ban still stands?*

TRUMP: *It's called extreme vetting* (POLITICO 2016; PBS NewsHour 2020).

In this example Trump criticizes the moderator using the rhetorical question *"Why don't you interrupt her?"* two times and accusatory language. He attempts to avoid the original question and portray himself as a victim of unfair treatment. After the moderator repeats the question, Trump avoids using the controversial term "Muslim ban" and instead he employs the euphemism *"extreme vetting"* to make his political visions less problematic.

COOPER: *You said that half of Donald Trump's supporters are, quote, "deplorables, racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic." You later said you regretted saying half. You didn't express regret for using the term "deplorables." To Mr. Carter's question, how can you unite a country if you've written off tens of millions of Americans?*

CLINTON: *Well…my argument is not with his supporters. It's with him and with the hateful and divisive campaign that he has run, and the inciting of violence at his rallies, and the very brutal kinds of comments about not just women, but all Americans, all kinds of Americans.*

TRUMP: *We have a divided nation, because people like her — and believe me, she has tremendous hate in her heart. And when she said deplorables, she meant it. And when she said irredeemable, they're irredeemable, you didn't mention that, but when she said they're irredeemable, to me that might have been even worse* (POLITICO 2016; PBS NewsHour 2020).

According to the moderator Clinton regretted describing Trump's supporters with negative adjectives such as *"deplorables, racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic."*. In response to this, Clinton uses parallel structure in the phrase *"It's with him and with the hateful and divisive campaign that he has run,"* to underscore his criticism towards Trump and his campaign, not his supporters. Conversely, Trump uses hyperbole with *"tremendous hate,"* to exaggerate Clinton's attitude. He also employs parallelism in the phrase *"And when she said deplorables, she meant it"*. After she repeats the same structure in *"when she said irredeemable, they're irredeemable."*

CLINTON: *Well, here we go again. I've been in favor of getting rid of carried interest for years, starting when I was a senator from New York. But that's not the point here.*

TRUMP: *Why didn't you do it? Why didn't you do it?*

COOPER: *Allow her to respond.*

CLINTON: Because I was a senator with a Republican president.
TRUMP: Oh, really?
CLINTON: I will be the president and we will get it done. That's exactly right.
TRUMP: You could have done it, if you were an effective — if you were an effective senator, you could have done it. If you were an effective senator, you could have done it. But you were not an effective senator (POLITICO 2016; PBS NewsHour 2020).

"Here we go again" is an instance of an irony used in daily conversations. The repetition of *"Why didn't you do it?"* is a direct accusation and emphasizes that Clinton failed to fulfill her responsibilities. Trump is from the Republican party. Thus, with the answer *"Because I was a senator with a Republican president."* Clinton blames Trump and his party for not letting her do her job. Trump's response to this *"Oh, really?"* was an irony as well. Trump is assured that Clinton is not competent enough and repeats the phrase *"You could have done it, if you were an effective"* to make his point more impressive.

TRUMP: It's just words, folks. It's just words. Those words, I've been hearing them for many years. I heard them when they were running for the Senate in New York, where Hillary was going to bring back jobs to upstate New York and she failed. She's done a terrible job for the African-Americans. She wants their vote, and she does nothing, and then she comes back four years later. We saw that firsthand when she was a United States senator. She campaigned where the primary part of her campaign [Interruption]

RADDATZ: Mr. Trump, Mr. Trump — I want to get to audience questions and online questions.

TRUMP: So, she's allowed to do that, but I'm not allowed to respond?

RADDATZ: You're going to have — you're going to get to respond right now.

TRUMP: Sounds fair (POLITICO 2016; PBS NewsHour 2020).

Trump uses colloquial phrase "folks" to address the audience and repeats the phrase *"It's just words"* to dismiss Clinton's points. The repetition of "*She's done a terrible job*" and *"she does nothing,"* highlights that Clinton breaks her promises after elections. He attacks the moderator with *"So, she's allowed to do that, but I'm not allowed to respond?"* as he feels imbalance and unfairness between him and Clinton. The phrase *"Sounds fair"* was sarcastic to emphasize the injustice during the debate.

CLINTON: He gets to decide what he wants to talk about. Instead of answering people's questions, talking about our agenda, laying out the plans that we have that we think can make a better life and a better country, that's his choice. When I hear something like that, I am reminded of what my friend, Michelle Obama, advised us all: When they go low, you go high.

TRUMP: Michelle Obama. I've gotten to see the commercials that they did on you. And I've gotten to see some of the most vicious commercials I've ever seen of Michelle Obama talking about you, Hillary.

So, you talk about a friend? Go back and take a look at those commercials, a race where you lost fair and square, unlike the Bernie Sanders race, where you won, but not fair and square, in my opinion (POLITICO 2016; PBS NewsHour 2020).

Clinton criticizes her opponent for his behavior. *"He gets to decide what he wants to talk about."* highlights that Trump focuses on personal attacks instead of answering

the questions directly. The phrase *"When they go low, you go high."* is used metaphorically and symbolizes different moral or behavioral standards. Trump describes Michelle Obama's commercials as vicious. The use of the adjective *"vicious"* suggests that the campaigns deliberately harmed or degraded Clinton's reputation. Thus, the phrase "you talk about a friend?" and *"Go back and take a look"* are sarcastic. Besides, he refers to the race between Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton and claims that her victory was not legitimate by describing it as *"not fair and square".*

CLINTON: *And we should demand that Donald release all his tax returns so that people can see what are the entanglements and the financial relationships that he has with the Russians and other foreign powers.*

TRUMP: *Well, I think I should respond, because — so ridiculous. Look, now she's blaming — she got caught in a total lie. Her papers went out to all her friends at the banks, Goldman Sachs and everybody else, and she said things — WikiLeaks that just came out. And she lied. Now she's blaming the lie on the late, great Abraham Lincoln. That's one that I haven't... (LAUGHTER)*

OK, Honest Abe, Honest Abe never lied. That's the good thing. That's the big difference between Abraham Lincoln and you. That's a big, big difference. We're talking about some differences (POLITICO 2016; PBS NewsHour 2020).

Trump employs the adjective "*ridiculous" to describe* Clinton's demand for his tax returns release. After using the gap-filling word *"Look"* to grab public attention, Trump keeps blaming his opponent for a *"total lie"*. *"Now she's blaming the lie on the late, great Abraham Lincoln."* is an irony, since Lincoln is considered as a benchmark of honesty. *"Honest Abe"* is a well-known nickname for Abraham Lincoln highlighting his reputation. The statements *"That's the big difference between Abraham Lincoln and you."* and *"That's a big, big difference"* make a contrast and emphasize Trump's beliefs.

CLINTON: *...We have 17, 17 intelligence agencies, civilian and military who have all concluded that these espionage attacks, these cyber-attacks, come from the highest levels of the Kremlin. And they are designed to influence our election. I find that deeply disturbing.*

WALLACE: *Secretary Clinton [Interruption]*
CLINTON: *And I think it is time*
TRUMP: *She has no idea whether it is Russia, China or anybody else.*
CLINTON: *I am not quoting myself.*
TRUMP: *You have no idea.*
CLINTON: *I am quoting 17, 17 -- do you doubt?*
TRUMP: *Our country has no idea.*
CLINTON: *Our military and civilian [Interruption]*
TRUMP: *Yeah, I doubt it, I doubt it* (POLITICO 2016; PBS NewsHour 2020).

Clinton accuses Russia of cyber-attacks and Trump of defending them. The word "disturbing" in the sentence *"I find that deeply disturbing."* is used to express her concern. On the contrary, Trump employs phrases like *"she has no idea whether it is Russia, China or anybody else."*, *"you have no idea"* and *"Our country has no idea."* to challenge Clinton's credibility. Clinton cites 17, 17 intelligence agencies to prove her

trustworthiness. Then, Trump responds to her with the repetition *"Yeah, I doubt it, I doubt it."* to reinforce his point.

CLINTON: He would rather believe Vladimir Putin than the military and civilian intelligence professionals who are sworn to protect us. I find that just absolutely [Interruption]

TRUMP: She doesn't like Putin because Putin has outsmarted her at every step of the way.

WALLACE: Mr. Trump [Interruption]

TRUMP: Excuse me. Putin has outsmarted her in Syria, he's outsmarted her every step of the way (POLITICO 2016; PBS NewsHour 2020).

In the above-mentioned example both sides firmly use declarative sentences to assert their point aggressively. Clinton uses "would rather" to highlight that Trump preferences Putin over their country. Trump used the interjection *"excuse me"* to interrupt the conversation and show dominance. Subsequently, he repeats his point *"Putin has outsmarted her at every step of the way"* to underline Clinton's incompetence.

In exploring the gender features of aggressive verbal behavior, it becomes evident that communication styles are influenced by societal expectations, cultural norms, and individual characteristics. While traditional gender roles often dictate distinct modes of expression for men and women. Women may employ subtle forms of verbal aggression, such as sarcasm and irony, to assert themselves. Conversely, men may exhibit more forms of aggression, including direct attacks and interruptions, as a means of asserting dominance. Political discourse serves as a revealing case study, showing how gender dynamics play out in high-stakes communication environments.

Lately, the term 'hate speech' often includes expressions and forms of expression of opinion that are somewhat offensive or disliked by people. Examples of such speech include cursing, insulting, defamation, etc. Swearing is perceived as an aggressive act. Women who engage in such behavior may be perceived as violating cultural stereotypes and expectations of femininity. How do people perceive swearing, especially when it is uttered by politicians? Some studies have shown that swearers are perceived as untrustworthy, incompetent and unfriendly (Roberts and Utych 2022). Other researchers argue that swearing can have a positive effect because it significantly contributes to the persuasiveness of speech (Weidhase 2024). Swearing serves as a social signal. Those who adopt this strategy may hope that their target audience responds positively to profanity. Therefore, competing politicians may be perceived more positively. In addition, profanity has a rhetorical effect that implies the skill of delivering speech emotionally. Swearing is seen as a means of self-expression and can be effective in certain speech expressions (Hargrave and Blumenau 2022). Profanity at the beginning or end of a persuasive speech increases the persuasiveness of that speech (Hargrave 2023).

In social life, the use of profanity in the ordinary relations of people is rejected, and if it is milder, it is not encouraged, acceptable or desirable. Taking into account the fact that social prohibitions that have the power of tradition ensure people's morals, the traditional way of life, they also play a significant role in staying close to the original state. Usually, women are more faithful to traditions than men, This circumstance is

clearly seen not only in the attitude of men and women towards profanity, but also especially in the differentiated attitude that society shows towards women when they use profanity or obscene language. In this case, unlike a man, a similar act of a woman is evaluated much more negatively and intolerable. Usually, women who use rude language are characterized as having a lower social position and can be perceived as violating cultural traditions. Men's speech is characterized by a propensity for vulgarity and profanity, and especially men use offensive vocabulary, referring, for example, to different parts of the body (Leonora, Gamuzza, Scieri and Caruso 2025). Other research has shown that while men's use of profanity in speech may sometimes still be tolerated, or seem to be tolerated, women's use of profanity is frowned upon and perceived as a breach of necessary decency (Reneses, Riberas-Gutiérrez and Bueno-Guerra 2025). However, women's vocabulary is also sometimes marked by vulgar style, and they can also use this vocabulary when communicating with representatives of the opposite sex (Greaves 2025). However, while women tend to use profanity and vulgar language when they are very angry, men swear both when they are angry and when they are calm. Political television debates are distinguished by a remarkable feature. men talk longer than women, although the stereotype that women always talk more than men is still common in modern society. The most characteristic of women's self-presentation strategies is the tactic of solidarity, which is accompanied by gestural movements and conversational communication, for example, a smile. Most men dominate communication, have a greater opportunity to express themselves using various language means. Their verbal communication is characterized by verbal and grammatical repetitions, verbs and word repetitions prevail in speech. The speech of female politicians is quite emotional, they often use complex grammatical and lexical structures. In terms of gender stereotypes, it is also noteworthy that men talk more factually than women and try to control the topic of conversation. Men are more likely to ignore or not respond to the comments of other interlocutors. For women, a conversation is an opportunity to make a connection, and for men, every interaction can lead to deciding a winner or a loser. Men do not ask for help because it weakens their status. They don't talk about their problems and they never ask for advice. However, women talk about their problems, ask for help and have conversations. Men want to establish themselves, while women want to establish and maintain harmonious relationships. People who have status or experience in a certain context talk more. In influential and elite professions, men have greater legitimacy, while women are seen as outsiders, so they try to prove that they too belong to that group.

Thus, the 2016 U.S. election campaign is in many ways a reflection of those political styles that were provocative in nature, those fundamental social divisions that have existed in the U.S. for a long time. Evidence of this is the fact that old concepts of electoral behavior are becoming relevant again, for example, social divisions along the lines of city and village, middle class and poor, center and periphery have been renewed and transformed.

The consequence of this is the electoral and political polarization between the Democratic and Republican parties, leading to social tension. Based on all of the above, we conclude that Donald Trump's victory is contradictory (as is his image), on the one hand, he enjoys the unconditional support of his electorate, on the other hand,

the fulfillment of his election promises and program may encounter serious rejection by other electoral groups.

Since 2016, there have been changes in the electoral space and public sentiment, some American citizens are in dire need of radical changes. The response to the current demand and changes was the emergence of unique political styles that were previously considered marginal, they have become mainstream. For example, Hillary Clinton's image began to be perceived by part of the democratic electorate not as offensive and populist, but as a sincere and honest position of a politician. Donald Trump's right-wing radical image is also perceived by his electorate as honest and sincere, but the downside is the acute rejection of his image by other electoral groups (Crosbie 2025). Attention was also paid to the features of modern communication channels between candidates and the electorate.

Criticism in public dialogue with official candidates for the U.S. President is a concept of argumentative nature, uniting the genres of accusation, reproach, reproach and other types of speech behavior containing a negative assessment of the current government. Criticism is one of the forms of communicative provocation, conditioned by the task of a mediator of the media, as a mediator of public opinion, to find out the necessary information. Criticism is explicated in the initiating remarks of the journalist mainly by means of vocabulary with negative evaluative semantics (Hopkins and Sigler 2025).

The reactive replica of the official candidates for the U.S. President has the features of textual organization. In the structure of the reactive replicas, schematicity and repetition of communicative tactics are traced, which served as the basis for the construction of their compositional schemes. The methods and means of responding to critical statements in the discourse of official candidates for the U.S. President vary depending on the components of the communicative situation and the addressee of criticism, the topics of criticism and the intensity of criticism. The general strategies for responding to criticism in American political discourse are information-interpretation and argumentative strategies. However, the methods for implementing these strategies differ: if the speech of official U.S. presidential candidates is characterized by polemical tactics, then in rhetoric, tactics of forming the emotional mood of the addressee prevail (Jardina and Ollerenshaw 2025).

Differences in the methods of responding to critical statements in the speech of presidents are due to the speech image of the politician and the role they choose based on the audience forecast. The determining factor in the choice here is the peculiarities of the mentality of voters, which form their linguistic picture of the world. Similarities in the use of linguistic means in the speech of both official U.S. presidential candidates are due to similar conditions of the communicative situation, but differences are found in the style of their statements. If Trump is characterized by the use of stylistically marked vocabulary (including colloquialisms, vernacular, jargon, etc.) as an expressive means of persuasion and rapprochement with the mass addressee, then the stylistic background of Clinton's responses is more neutral and is formed by means of phraseological units (proverbs, catchphrases), rhetorical figures (periphrasis, parallelism) and tropes.

The use of a structural and semantic approach to the analysis of the texts of the responses of official U.S. presidential candidates in response to criticism and the definition of semantic dominants in their speech allows us to discover the main lines of their speech behavior, clarify the methods of influencing the mass addressee, conduct a kind of cross-section of the state and development of modern society and trace the differences in the mentality of peoples.

Conclusion and discussion

The article studies the gender aspects of verbal aggression of the electoral structure and differentiation of electoral preferences based on the experience of television debates of official U.S. presidential candidates in 2016, characterizes the dynamics and factors of image formation of candidates, including in the context of modern processes of increasing political polarization. The implementation of the set research tasks allows us to draw the following conclusion:

- Political linguistics has been one of the most relevant and promising areas of political research in recent years. The central core of political linguistics is the study of political discourse, which is a set of all speech acts used in political discussions, as well as the rules of public policy, sanctified by tradition and tested by experience. The study of political discourse on various linguistic materials is a vast field for linguistic research. The focus of political scientists is on the cognitive foundations and linguistic features of political discourse, its genre differentiation, the study of political communication as a discursive and textual phenomenon, and the study of the idiostyles of political figures. All these problems are studied from synchronic and diachronic perspectives, both comparatively and descriptively.

- In recent decades, researchers have increasingly focused on issues of gender variation in political discourse. Taking into account the gender factor implies an analysis of the use of gender stereotypes and gender metaphors in political discourse, a study of gender-marked lexical and grammatical parameters, the characteristics of communicative behavior and the nature of the argumentation of politicians, including taking into account existing ethnocultural differences.

- In political life, stereotypes are certain ideas of political party leaders and civil activists about groups, people and events that may contain a reasoned truth of their own, but at the same time may be incorrect and overly generalized. On the one hand, they simplify the political picture of the world and help to quickly assimilate incoming information, on the other hand, they can distort political reality and lead to erroneous generalizations.

- Gender stereotypes shape public expectations, behavior patterns, communication styles and the image of modern American politicians. Verbal aggression is implemented through certain communication strategies and tactics chosen by a politician based on the election program of each of them, studying the perception of the image of these politicians by the electorate. In recent years, especially in American political discourse, women have demonstrated sufficient self-confidence, determination and the ability to control and promote the topics under discussion. When a politician cannot present a weighty counterargument

to his opponents in a constructive dialogue, he often resorts to various forms of aggressive speech: populism, humor, accusations, criticism, lies, etc.

- As a result, it was found that the gender aspects of verbal aggression are features of the image as a form of communication of official candidates in the 2016 U.S. election campaign: 1) The formation of various populist images and political individuality becomes an important part of verbal communication; 2) The interaction of new political styles and the electorate leads to the polarization of electoral groups, resulting in a polarized perception of the candidates' images; 3) The images of the U.S. presidential candidates were perceived fragmentarily, partly because they were populist, partly because the images were broadcast through television and social networks, where their holistic perception is impossible.

- Gender stereotypes and verbal communication play a significant role in the political and electoral life of the U.S. and are reflected in the key institutions of the state, the political model and historical traditions of the country. Their significance is manifested, among other things, through the established practice of federalism, territorial representation, the electoral college as an instrument of territorial democracy, and the localization of political struggle. The very important, specific significance of the gender dimension of the territorial factor in the political life of the United States distinguishes this state from other world democracies.

- In general, communication channels have changed under the influence of populist political styles of candidates. Thus, television and debates in particular have completely transformed into a political show, where the main goal is not to convey one's position on a particular issue to the electorate, but to popularize one's political style, with the help of sharp statements, a provocative style to generate more content for discussion than one's opponent. Social networks and media have also become an important tool for forming a political image and style. Social networks have become an excellent platform for politicians to publish their populist positions on key issues. The use of these tools in the context of developing their populist political style by candidates has led to the polarization of the electoral space in the U.S., the genesis of the 'two Americas' - Republican and Democratic.

- The response of official U.S. presidential candidates to criticism in a public dialogue with a media representative is a multi-faceted object of research that requires an understanding of the principles of building and functioning of a public dialogue, the interrelationship between elements of a communicative situation, the communicative-pragmatic foundations of presidential discourse, the role of the media in the life of society, the professional tasks and ethical code of a journalist, the axiological nature of criticism, the corpus of evaluative linguistic means, etc.

- The image of the head of state in a modern democratic society determines the paradigm of his speech activity and brings dialogical genres to the rank of the most significant channels of interaction between the people and the authorities. Media representatives, on the one hand, are conductors of public opinion, on the

other hand, they contribute to the projection of the president's intentions onto a mass addressee. Demonstration of openness and transparency of the authorities' actions to society presupposes the introduction of the axiological operator good/bad, in other words, it makes it possible to express an approving or critical opinion about the actions of the authorities.

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Resilience and the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood Countries: Crisis, Transformations and Policies, edited by Gilles Rouet, and Gabriela Carmen Pascariu. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2025. XXXIII, 617 pp. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-73379-6.

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Abstract

This book explores one of the central issues in contemporary international relations and, simultaneously, the confrontation between Russia and the West: the eastward expansion of the EU. Globally, the eastward expansion of the EU holds the potential for the EU to emerge as a new pole of global politics, capable of significantly influencing the balance of power in the modern world. Regionally, the latest wave of EU enlargement, which has included post-socialist European states, could be decisive in establishing a new type of interstate relations on the continent and in determining the extent to which Eastern European and Baltic countries adapt to EU standards and norms. In other words, it could have a direct impact on reform processes in post-Soviet and post-communist countries. For Eastern European countries, analyzing this process is important not only for determining prospects for further development within the EU political system or for the Eastern Partnership countries. This book analyzes the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe following the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's ongoing, aggressive, full-scale war against Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022. In this context, the authors of various chapters in this book examine the economic, social, institutional, and political instability in the countries of the eastern part of the EU.

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In this book's 20 chapters, the authors comparatively analyze the various dimensions of resilience in European integration and the EU's Eastern Neighborhood, thereby examining the underlying causes of crisis and transformation of political systems (Rouet 2025).

The EU is the most advanced regional integration association, interacting with both individual states in various regions of the world and other regional structures. The EU's external relations have expanded significantly in the post-bipolar period. The EU seeks to consolidate its role in the international arena: in global trade, development assistance, and the promotion of regional integration, democracy, and security. The EU has consistently demonstrated an interest in implementing interregional policies, which is enshrined in its foreign policy doctrine and is further evidenced by a comprehensive system of interregional relations. However, various cases demonstrate that the EU is not always successful in implementing its interregional strategy, and each existing and emerging approach has its own unique characteristics (Crombois 2025; Pascariu 2025). Beyond the EU, other regional associations are also striving to build interregional ties, thereby forming an extensive network of regional partners, of which the EU is the most active. The relevance of the chosen topic is determined by both the above-mentioned practical considerations and theoretical problems: despite the existence of a number of studies devoted to the phenomenon of interregionalism, the key factors that determine the success or failure of the implementation of interregional relations in modern world politics have not yet been identified.

Issues of regional, interregional, and, more broadly, transregional cooperation are acquiring particular prominence and attracting the attention of an increasing number of researchers. Most studies of the phenomenon of interregionalism in global politics, as institutionalized relations between two regional integration associations to varying degrees, are conducted primarily by authors from European universities, drawing primarily on the experience of the EU. Consequently, a Eurocentric perspective on this issue currently prevails in the theory of new regionalism (Pintilescu and Viorica 2025).

Thus, a significant literature has accumulated on the new paradigm and normative approaches to EU foreign and security policy, as well as individual cases of EU interregional policy. However, studies assessing the characteristics and causes of the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of individual interregional areas of EU activity and situating this experience within the context of the transregionalization trend remain insufficient. Currently, the practice of interregionalism is used not only by the most developed integration association, the EU, but also by other integration blocs. However, to successfully integrate them into interregional relations, it is necessary to identify their specific features and the challenges of their formation. It is particularly important to consider Russia's war against Ukraine, the migration crisis, the vulnerability of Eastern Partnership countries to geopolitical risks, as well as the

dimensions of multiculturalism in the context of new geopolitical securitization and steps to enhance resilience in the EU's Eastern Neighborhood countries (Schäffer 2025; Ţigănaşu, Corodescu-Roşca and Cărbune 2025).

The research objects in various chapters of this book are based on a common understanding of the resilience of interregionalism in EU foreign policy. The authors of this study, using various dimensions, explain the characteristics and risks of EU interregional policy in various regional areas. In their chapters, the authors identify the specific features of EU interregional policy in various regional areas (van Gils 2025).

By identifying the specific features of resilience and the factors hindering the development of EU interregional relations, the authors address the following objectives to achieve this goal:

- To summarize theoretical approaches to understanding the resilience of the EU political system and interregionalism as a phenomenon of modern international relations;
- To identify the main areas of EU interregional policy, their evolution and key characteristics in challenging times, and the path to EU integration for the Eastern Partnership and Western Balkans countries;
- To identify the most and least institutionalized areas of EU interregional policy and characterize their specific features;
- To identify key features and challenges hindering the implementation of EU interregional policy;
- To identify the participation of Romania and the Slovak Republic in the implementation of the EU's geostrategic interests in Ukraine (Muntele and Bănică 2025; Terem and Gura 2025), thereby assessing the risks of a Russian invasion of Ukraine and strengthening the EU's position in its new Eastern neighborhood;
- To identify shortcomings in EU-Azerbaijan relations from 2009 to 2023, taking into account the threats of Europeanization and hybrid challenges;
- To consider the EU's key steps toward the Eastern Neighborhood in the context of the growing instability of the global order, i.e., the challenges of resilience and transformation in the Eastern Neighborhood during and after the war in Ukraine.

The authors' most significant findings include the identified levels of approximation of legal and regulatory acts as a tool for ensuring the resilience and stabilization of the legal systems of EaP countries on the path to full EU membership, as well as the transformation of the European Neighborhood to "Greater European Council". The authors also identify the main functions of interregionalism as a foreign policy instrument, the causes, characteristics, and challenges of interregional practices

in the modern world, using the EU as an example, and a refined typology of interregional relations (Wojakowski 2025).

The theoretical significance of this book lies in its analysis of the factors that facilitate and, conversely, hinder the development of interregional ties. Through an analysis of the EU case, the authors aim to contribute to the development of the concept of interregionalism and the theory of new regionalism, which underpin their research. The practical significance of the research chapters in this book can be linked to the focus on developing interregional ties in the post-Soviet space. Understanding the characteristics, drivers, and obstacles of the EU's interregional policy and assessing its experience may prove valuable for the foreign policy of the EaP countries. Furthermore, individual sections of this book can be used in educational processes on foreign policy and European integration strategies in the EaP countries and also serve as the basis for a broad academic discussion (Nitoiu 2025).

In this comparative analysis of the resilience of European integration as a complex phenomenon, the concepts of new regionalism, transregionalism, interregionalism, institutionalism, and the neoliberal approach are used as theoretical foundations. Theoretically, the very possibility of the emergence of interregional ties is explained by the open nature of the new regionalism policy. The EU's transregionalism strategy helps explain the influence of interregional ties on European and global politics, as well as their determinacy in current trends in international relations. In this sense, the resilience of European integration and the EU political system can be viewed as one type of transregional ties. The theory of European resilience is important for the book in terms of studying the institutionalization of new EU strategies in global politics. Institutionalism is also applicable in identifying the most and least institutionalized areas of EU interregional policy. The use of a neoliberal approach in this work allows us to consider the modern system of international relations as a complex set of subsystems linked by complex interdependence, institutionalization, and the trends of globalization and integration (Maha and Socoliuc (Guriță) 2025).

Despite a number of obstacles, developing interregional ties remains a significant area of EU foreign policy. In a context of global uncertainty, diversifying trade ties has become crucial for the EU, as well as seeking not only new trading partners but also political allies. Furthermore, geopolitical tensions, the energy crisis, and unstable political situations in certain regions of the world are pushing for the acceleration of negotiations on a number of agreements.

The growing number of regional ties, as well as the desire of existing regional blocs to establish new ones and develop existing ties with individual regions, suggests promising prospects for studying the phenomenon of interregionalism in the coming years. Furthermore, studying the phenomenon of interregionalism within a developed integration association such as the EU, as well as the challenges it faces in building its

interregional ties, could also serve as a basis for studying the interregional ties of EaP countries (Pintilescu and Viorica 2025). In this regard, it can be assumed that if the existing problems of interregional cooperation between the EU and other integration associations are overcome, and more interregional agreements are concluded, the EU will face a number of challenges, as establishing interregional ties requires EU leadership to re-engage and consider the foreign policies of EU member states.

Identifying the factors hindering the development of interregional ties allows us to make a forecast regarding the prospects for the further evolution of interregionalism in EU foreign policy. Undoubtedly, in the face of competition with global centers of influence and geopolitical instability, the EU must actively seek new allies. This could stimulate the signing of more interregional agreements, which in turn are necessary to strengthen the EU's geopolitical influence and maintain its competitiveness on the global stage. Concluding agreements with an entire interregional association, rather than with an individual state, will also allow the EU to reach a larger number of allies and thereby strengthen relations with individual countries. Currently, the EU prefers to initially conclude bilateral agreements with individual countries of integration associations in order to lay the foundation for future interregional agreements (Wojakowski 2025). However, the question of whether this approach is effective remains open. In light of geopolitical tensions and the emergence of transnational initiatives from China and the United States, the EU should be more flexible and consider not only the cultural and political characteristics of integration associations but also their integration models, which may differ from those of Europe. Accordingly, the main challenge for the EU may be the development of a more flexible cohesion policy, as it currently acts primarily unilaterally, which confirms the use of normative power and the imposition of rigid norms on member countries of regional associations. It is assumed that the development of a flexible and compromising approach may be a key factor in strengthening interregional relations in various regional areas.

The unstable political situation in certain regions also significantly impacts the development of constructive dialogue between the EU and individual regions and, consequently, the functioning of regional associations (Poz᾽arlik 2025). Based on an analysis of the EU's interregional policy areas, we found that one of the reasons for the slowdown in interaction is the unstable political situation in the EaP countries, as well as unresolved conflicts within these countries. There are numerous unresolved political contradictions in virtually every region of the world, which, to varying degrees, impact interaction with the EU. Another example of weak interregionalism due to political contradictions is the EU-Russia relationship, caused by the Ukrainian factor (Holovko-Havrysheva 2025). Russia's large-scale war against Ukraine, which has been waged since 2022 (Dîrdală 2025), is one of several reasons, as Russia itself is impeding the development of any interregional ties between the EU and the EaP countries.

The COVID-19 pandemic has recently emerged as a serious global challenge since the beginning of 2019. Caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome, it was declared a non-traditional security threat in many countries in Europe and Asia. With the rapid spread of the virus, individual EU countries, such as Italy and Spain, suffered significantly and found themselves practically facing the disease. One reason for this is the EU's delay in providing adequate assistance and adapting morally and infrastructurally. European values and norms, such as trust and solidarity, which underpin the very philosophy of European integration, found themselves in the face of new challenges (Kruglashov 2025).

The pandemic led not only to a health, economic, and social crisis but also to a significant slowdown in regionalization processes. To control the spread of the virus, countries were forced to resort to national securitization. National security measures included self-isolation, border closures, and travel bans, which to some extent helped slow the spread of the pandemic. However, all these national restrictions seriously damaged regional cooperation. The COVID-19 crisis has fueled populist forces promoting protectionism and immigration control, leading more and more countries to resort to protectionist and import substitution policies, which has significantly limited international supplies (Rouet and Côme 2025).

Another global challenge is the migration crisis, specifically the influx of illegal migrants and refugees into EU countries. This crisis began in 2014-2015 and has not only continued to this day but is also becoming increasingly pressing. The rise in illegal migration to the EU is considered a serious problem, as it is linked to rising crime rates. The influx of refugees into EU countries is primarily due to the destabilization of the situation in North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, namely the Iraqi Civil War, the Syrian Civil War, the wars in Afghanistan, the war in Libya, the military operation against the terrorist organization ISIS, the crisis in Serbia and Kosovo, religious clashes in Nigeria, and the conflicts in Yemen and Pakistan. Another factor is the population boom in African and Middle Eastern countries and the inability of states in these regions to ensure socioeconomic stability for their citizens. The primary factors contributing to the acute crisis in the EU include the lack of a unified policy and concept for the reception and distribution of refugees across EU countries, as well as the lack of adequate funding and coordinated rapid response actions (Pascariu and Clipca 2025).

A new influx of refugees into European countries was observed in 2022 with the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine. In this situation, it is noted that EU countries responded in a more coordinated manner, utilizing existing legislation and incorporating large-scale funding from European funds. However, the influx of refugees from Ukraine did not cause a particularly acute crisis in the EU, as EU member states managed it relatively successfully. Furthermore, an increase in

migration flows is possible due to a lack of resources and infrastructure for receiving migrants. The issue of solidarity among member states regarding refugee reception policies remains relevant. The development of a unified, coordinated migration policy has become a priority in recent years. In the summer of 2023, EU member states held a series of negotiations on reforming the Asylum and Migration Policy Regulation and the Asylum Procedures Regulation. Today, the EU's response to the refugee influx is particularly urgent not only in the context of the Ukrainian issue but also in connection with the new influx of irregular migrants from the Middle East, triggered by the recent escalation of the conflict between the radical Palestinian movement Hamas and Israel in October 2023. European leaders have already held a series of emergency meetings and a summit to address the risk of new migration waves. Countries bearing the brunt of the burden of receiving refugees from the Middle East have already requested humanitarian aid (Socoliuc (Guriță) and Maha 2025). If the conflict situation in the Middle East intensifies, a new migrant crisis in Europe is possible, which could become much more dangerous due to the unresolved accumulated problems of migration and asylum governance. The need to resolve global crises, in turn, significantly slows down the process of building successful interregional policies, which is reflected in the protracted negotiations on certain agreements, as well as the inability to ensure stability in the fulfillment of certain obligations (Pascariu and Clipca 2025; Gerasymchuk 2025).

The EU actively applies its inherent policy of conditionality, as it is a large economic bloc and, by offering regional organizations or states access to its market, advances its political interests. This may be a factor hindering the implementation of EU interregionalism, particularly in relatively developed integration associations. The implementation of a policy of conditionality can have a positive impact on those who have accepted European values and rules, manifesting itself in political recognition, granting candidate status for EU accession, promising preferential relations, market access, signing favorable agreements, and providing aid. However, it can also manifest itself in a more inactive manner, namely, by imposing embargoes, suspending or limiting economic agreements and aid programs, denying visas to senior officials, terminating EU accession negotiations, and freezing contacts (Onofrei, Oprea and Cigu 2025).

At present, the EU strives to maintain a competitive strategic position and a certain geopolitical influence, since for many integration associations, the EU is a profitable trading partner, investor and political ally. One of the factors influencing the establishment of successful interregional relations is the EU's rivalry with other influential centers. The main competitors are the United States and China, which extend their influence to virtually every region of the world and thereby hinder the EU's development of interregional ties. This is also a manifestation of the competitive

transregionalism that shapes the geopolitical competition between transregional projects. In this context, among the main factors slowing down the establishment of interregional relations of the EU, the authors highlight: 1) competition with global powers and centers of influence, 2) the policy of conditionality, 3) the imposition of strict legislation and norms, 4) political conflicts and instability of regional partners, 5) global challenges, 6) the bureaucratic mechanism of the EU, 7) changes in the foreign policy priorities of integration associations.

As is well known, the EU promotes its values by enshrining them in normative documents. However, some regions may not adopt them for various reasons, including because these norms may conflict with the values and cultural characteristics of the countries. Therefore, the successful dissemination of norms depends largely on the presence of a common, favorable historical experience, and as political reality demonstrates, the presence of a common historical experience is not always determined by geographical proximity.

Conflict of Interests
The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards
The authors affirm this research did not involve human subjects.

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