

No peace no war: the Western role in the Caucasian conflicts

Mgr. Zinaida Bechna, Ph.D.

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The South Caucasus

- The South Caucasus forms the hub of an evolving **geostrategic and geo-economic system** that stretches from NATO Europe to Central Asia and Afghanistan. It provides unique **transit corridors** for Caspian energy supplies and Central Asian commodities to the Euro-Atlantic community, as well as direct access for allied forces to bases and operational theaters in the Greater Middle East and Central Asia.
- Projecting Western power and values along with security into Central Asia and the Greater Middle East.
- Security assistance, state-consolidation efforts, and promotion of energy projects.
- New-type security threats associated with international terrorism, mass-destruction-weapons proliferation, arms and drugs trafficking.

The South Caucasus

- Mikhail Gorbachev, acting as Secretary-general of the USSR, in a speech at the Assembly of the Council of Europe, in Strasbourg, on July 1989, articulated the idea of a common European home.
- This integration process has been ongoing since 1991, first in the OSCE, then in the CoE and for the Baltic States in the EU and NATO.
- Overall, the **four institutions** have sponsored a common understanding of security, rooted in the shared values and principles of democracy, human rights and rule of law, in the principles of comprehensive and indivisible security, as well as on conflict prevention and diplomacy, which are cornerstones of the security community enjoyed in this geographical area.

1. OSCE

- The OSCE was formally created in 1994: the Budapest Summit - international organisation of regional scope, from 'Lisbon to Vladivostok'.
- Dialogue and cooperation in the post-Cold War context, especially within the so-called third basket (human dimension), dealing with democracy and human rights that has become more visible.
- Since 1991: establishment of field offices in the three South Caucasus states.
- In Georgia, the OSCE has played a particularly important role: the deployment of a Mission, mandated to conduct negotiations, maintain contacts, support the ceasefire and assist in the development of a political base for lasting peace in the conflict of South Ossetia.
- The mission was an important international presence in Georgia, aimed at balancing the predominance of Russia in the peacekeeping formats negotiated with the United Nations in the 1990s (in the case of Abkhazia, the CIS peacekeeping mission was also accompanied by a UN Observer Mission in Georgia, UNOMIG).
- In 2008 Russia boycotted the renovation of the OSCE Mission to Georgia, which closed on 31 December 2008, severely limiting the international presence around Georgia's conflicts.
- The OSCE office in Baku was closed in 2014.
- OSCE provides an important layer of legitimacy and full and equal participation of the South Caucasus states in a forum along with their European, Russian and North American partners.

2. Council of Europe

- Georgia became a member in 1999. As then Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania symbolically stated in his address to the Parliamentary Assembly, 'I am Georgian and therefore I am European.'
- Membership is seen as a necessary first step towards EU accession, and for the countries in the Caucasus was also a confirmation of the recognition by other European nations of their European identity.
- Armenia and Azerbaijan were the last members to join in 2003.
- The European Commission for Democracy through Law : transformations in the political systems, technical advice and information before preparing reports and strategic documents. The CoE also provides the EU with the standards and benchmarks against which progress is monitored and conditionality is set.
- Clear positive synergies between the EU and the CoE, as the ENP allows for the articulation of their approaches to reforms in the South Caucasus.
- The Parliamentary Assembly (PACE): election observation and it is often used by its member states as a site for denunciation of large human rights violations.

3. NATO and the South Caucasus

- For the South Caucasus countries, NATO membership is a divisive issue among them and within their societies. All cooperate with NATO under the Partnership for Peace (PfP), since the early 1990s.
- While Georgia's main foreign policy goal is to become a member state of NATO, Armenia and Azerbaijan has a pragmatic approach, focusing on increased cooperation, technical assistance, and exchange of experiences, access to new knowledge.
- NATO's regional presence has become much more contentious over the course time. As Russia came to react more negatively to NATO regional presence in the South Caucasus, local elites became more cautious in their cooperation with the Alliance. Moreover, the hesitations of Western leaders in materialising the Euro-Atlantic community's commitment to the region were visible in the refusal to give Georgia a membership perspective to NATO and the ENP's lack of commitment to membership into the EU.

3. NATO and Georgia

- For Georgia: sense of security vis a vis Russian military aggression and occupation. Georgians believe that it also increases chances for conflict resolution, strengthening countries defense resilience, including its capacity to fight cyber-attacks, terrorism, espionage and so on.
- NATO as a way of return to Europe, deepening security and defense sector reforms.
- For NATO: ensuring peace and stability and build resilience against the Russian influence which promotes instability, governance failure and violent conflicts.

3. NATO and the South Caucasus: History of Mutual relations

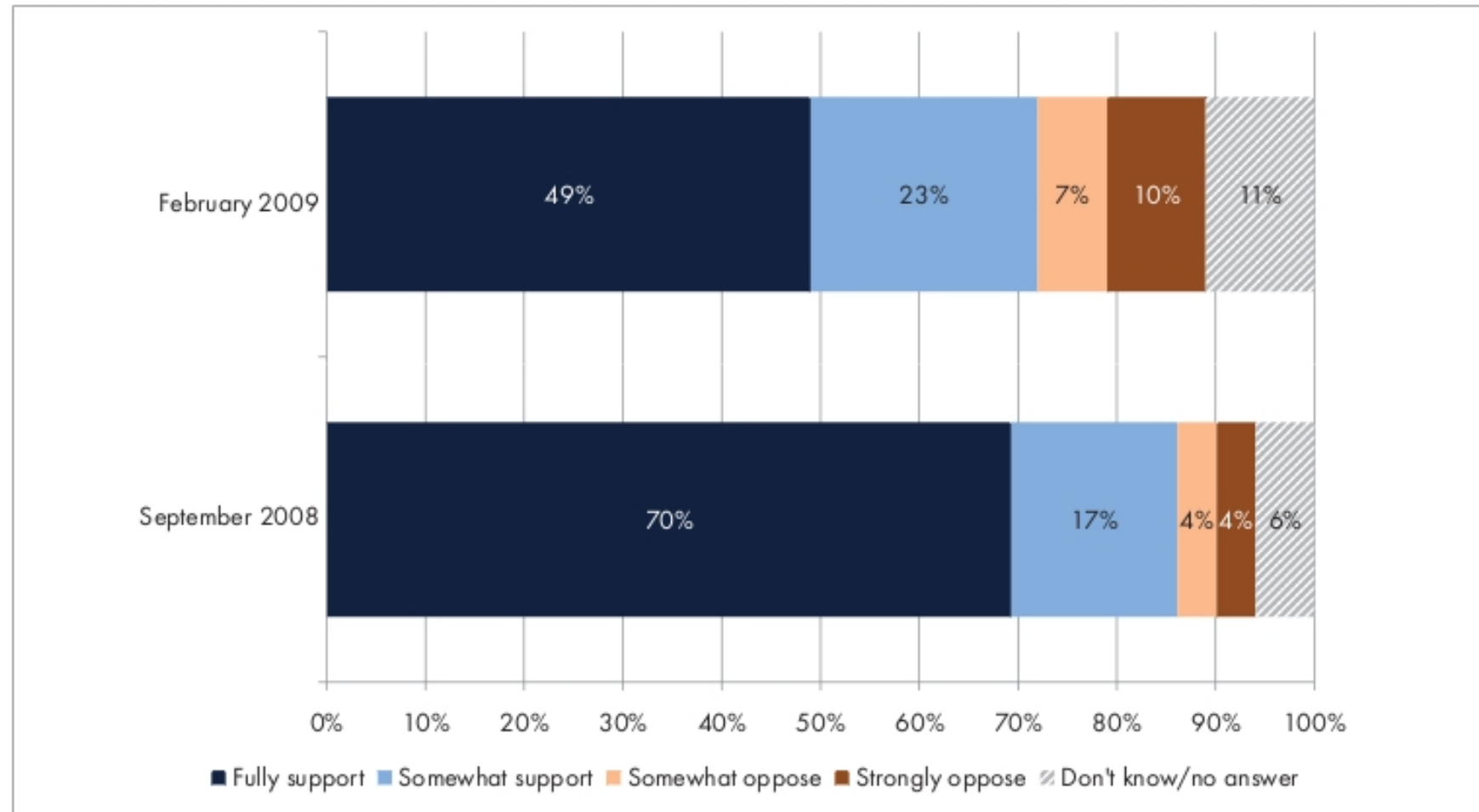
- "Open Door" policy vs. "Russian factor"
- NATO's approach towards Georgia since the 2008 Russia-Georgia War has been following two key principles: deepening relations with Georgia, while preventing it from joining the Alliance so as to not provoke Russia.
- Since 2004, Georgia has actively participated in NATO-led operations and is among its top troop contributors, regularly receiving praise for troop interoperability and combat readiness.
- In 2015, NATO and Georgia signed the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package (SNGP), which initiated comprehensive assistance programs in 13 areas of defense and security-related sectors (including the NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Center-JTEC).
- In 2016, Georgia also received recognition as a NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partner country, providing, "all of the privileges that alliance members receive except for the collective security umbrella".
- Finally, NATO members also started to supply Georgia with defensive weapons and technologies – an issue which was politically taboo for some period after the 2008 war with Russia.

Major problems between NATO and Georgia

- Georgian territorial disputes and Russia's geopolitical posture.
- The territorial conflicts are the powerful tool for Kremlin.
- "As Georgia is not a member of any security organization and its NATO prospects remain uncertain, Moscow has attempted to lure Georgia back into its orbit by hinting at some face-saving solutions which could be implemented regarding Abkhazia and South Ossetia under the auspices of the Moscow-promoted Eurasian Union" (Kakachia 2013).
- Georgia also needs a political compass or road map from its Western partners on how to move forward with strategic patience, and without damaging its Euro-Atlantic identity.

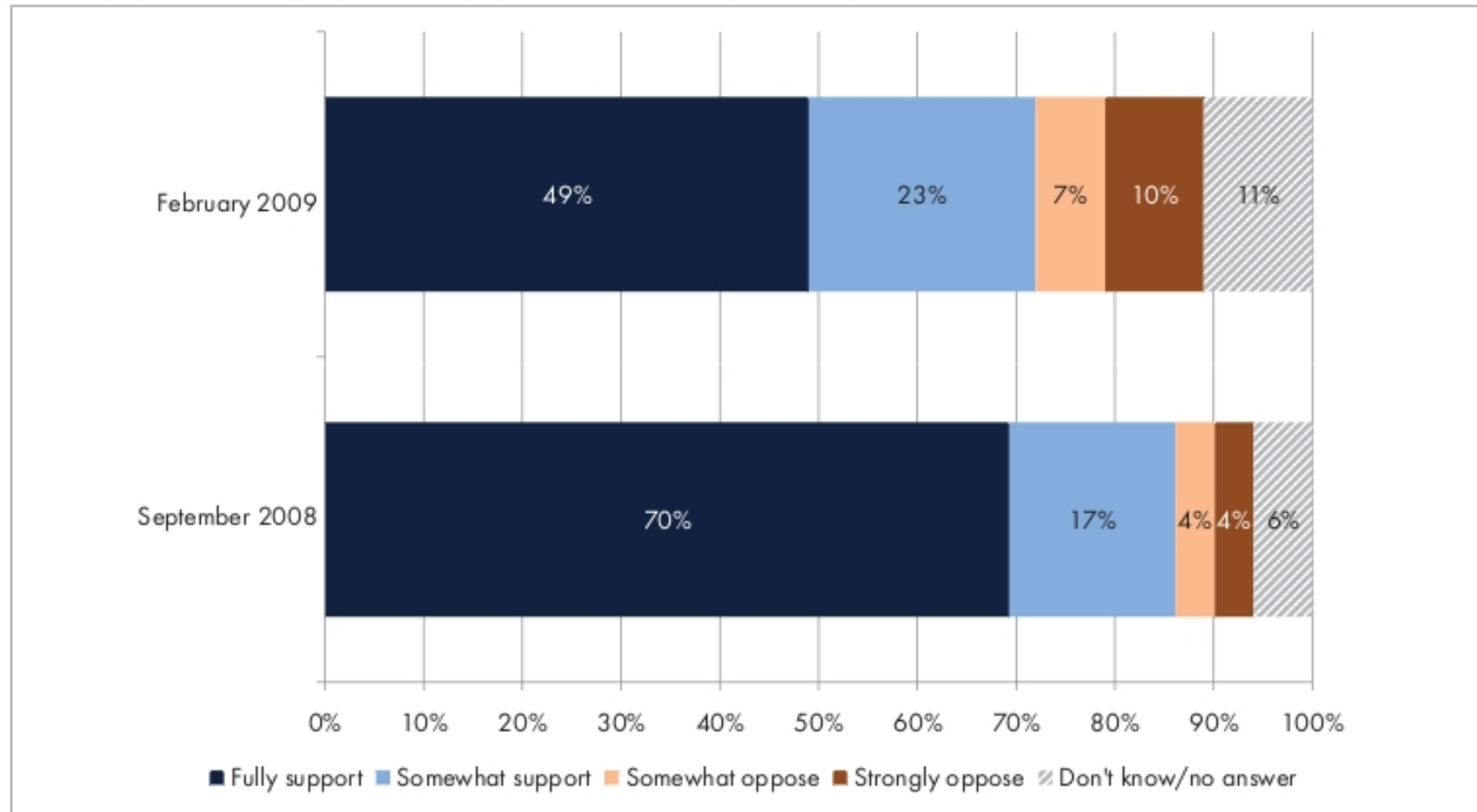
Georgian Popular Opinion on NATO Membership and the Relationship with the West

Support for NATO Membership in Georgia 2008–2009

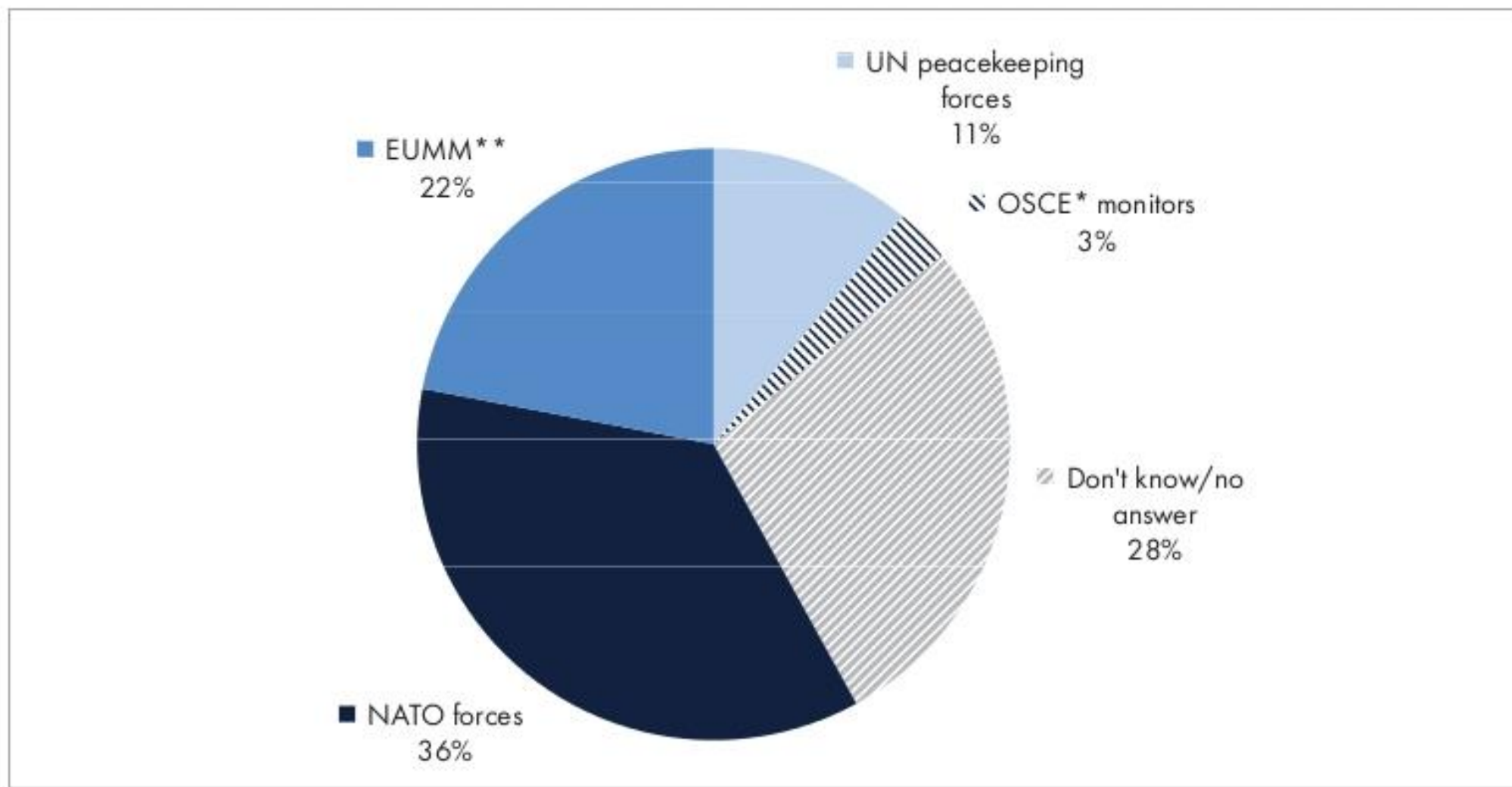


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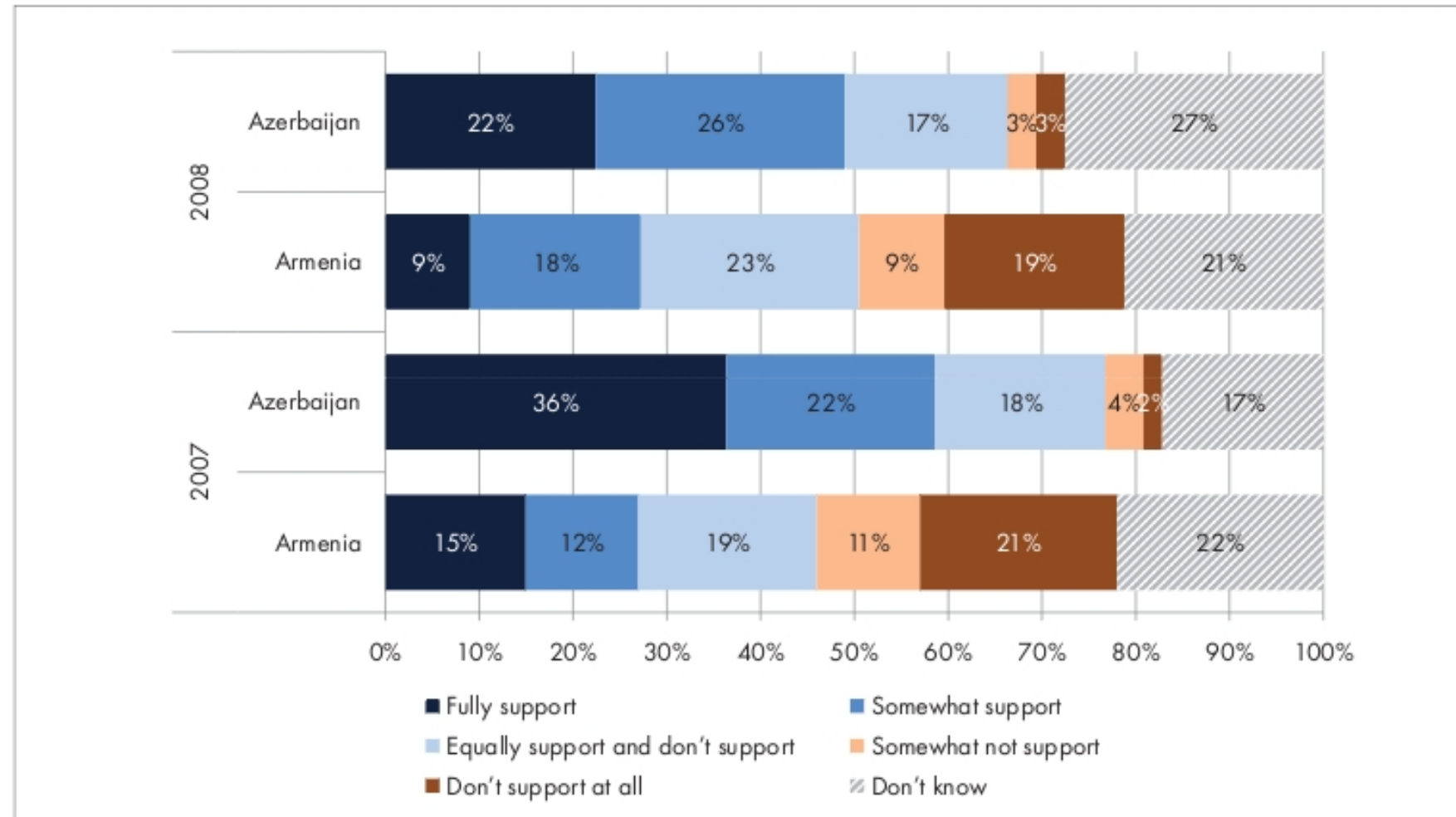


Who Can Best Provide Security for Georgia in Conflict Areas?

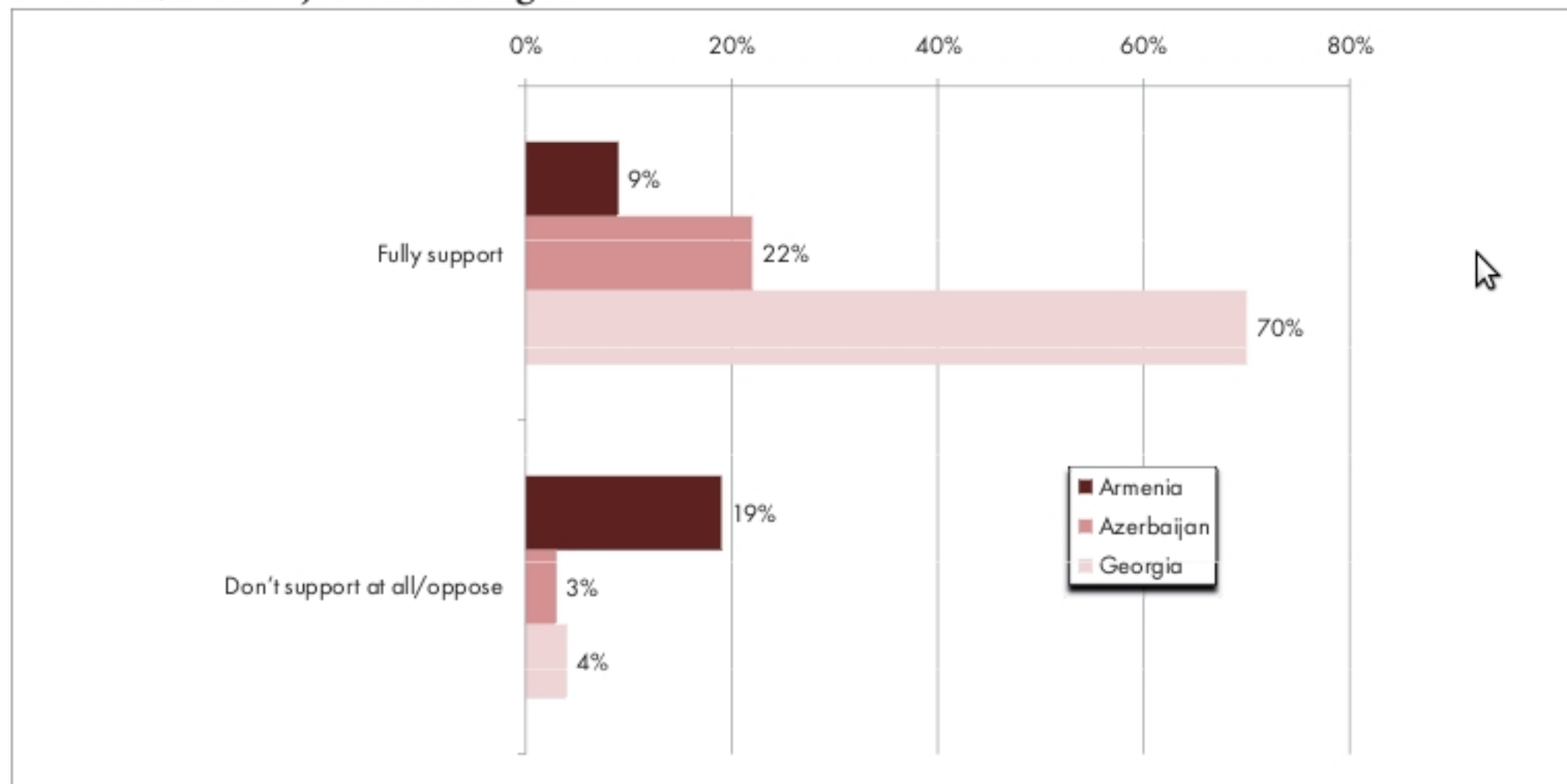


Extent of Popular Support for NATO Membership in the South Caucasus

Support for NATO Membership in Armenia and Azerbaijan 2007–2008



Percentage of Respondents Who Fully Support And Who Fully Oppose NATO Membership in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia





4. EU's role in the South Caucasus

- In 90, the South Caucasus was a “distant neighbour for the EU.
- Mutual cooperation at this time was based on regional funding programs within the Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS), the EU Food Security Program and the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO), European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), as well as Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) and Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe (INOGATE). Despite all of these programs, EU considers the South Caucasus the “region of the frozen conflicts.”
- 2003 – year when EU thinking towards the region began to change:
 - - appointment of Special Representative to the region
 - - inception of the Wider Europe Initiative
 - - prospect and process of EU enlargement towards the Central and Eastern Europe.
- EU – more powerful security actor – direct role in the regional conflict.

EU's role in the South Caucasus

- EU – “silent disciplining” power
 - To provide security – employing the “stabilization/cooperation/partnership” formula.
 - EU-as-a-framework – export models of governance, law and policies to its periphery
- or
- EU-as-an-actor – exert its influence through negotiation and creating incentives for the peaceful resolutions of conflict.

EU's role in the South Caucasus

- 1989 Trade and Cooperation Agreement with the former Soviet Union.
- EU's policy – aid and assistance for post-war reconstruction (aid for physical survival of the population, humanitarian and food aid – 84% of total grants in 1996).
- 1999 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement – technical areas of cooperation, funded through TACIS national projects and TRACECA and INOGATE.
- TACIS – transition towards a market economy and the building of democratic institutions.

EU's role in the South Caucasus

- 2004/2007 enlargements – domino-effect on EU policies towards the South Caucasus.
- By 2003 – civilian and military crisis management operations – Rapid Reaction Force, Civilian and Military Headline Goals 2008 and 2010.
- South Caucasus – test-case where the EU could prove its credentials in civilian and military crisis management.
- Long-term stability projection through intensified financial assistance and the *European Neighbourhood Policy (Action Place)*, *the Black Sea Synergy and Eastern Partnership* (March 2009).
- The ENP, BSS and EaP:
- More enhanced relationship and contribute to the transformation to EU models of governance.
- Platforms of bilateral dialogue between the conflict parties and the south region.

4. The EU's role in the South Caucasus

- The first Eastern Partnership (EaP) summit in Prague on 7 May 2009
- leaders from the EU Member States, EU institutions and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine to launch this **new framework of reinforced bilateral and multilateral cooperation**.
- deepening of political and economic relations,
- more energy security,
- increased mobility and
- pro-democratic and market oriented reforms in partner countries.

The Eastern partnership

- The Eastern Partnership was proposed by the European Commission in December 2008.
- - **Association Agreements** (for those partners that have made sufficient progress towards democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and principles of market economy, sustainable development and good governance);
- - better **economic integration with the EU** (with the objective of establishing deep and comprehensive Free Trade Areas), as well as free trade among the partners themselves, with a longer term goal to develop a Neighbourhood Economic Community;
- - **increased mobility through visa facilitation and readmission agreements** (with gradual steps towards full visa liberalisation)
- - strengthened **energy security** cooperation, including through support to investment in infrastructure, better regulation, energy efficiency and more efficient early warning systems to prevent disruption of supply;
- - improved **administrative capacity** of partner countries through jointly decided Comprehensive Institution-Building Programmes, financed by the EU;
- - specific **programmes addressing economic and social development** in the partner countries, aimed at reducing disparities of wealth between regions which can undermine stability; - additional financial support of € 350 million for the period till 2013, plus the redeployment of €250 million bringing the total for the implementation of the policy to €600 million.

EU's role in the South Caucasus

- After 2008: EU established a monitoring mission to Georgia and launched an international fact-finding mission to investigate the origins and the course of the conflict.
- After the Russian-Georgian armed conflict, EU acquired a role of a security actor by enhancing the Russian-Georgian six point peace agreement, supporting territorial integrity of Georgia and established the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM), which remains the only international mission in Georgia.
- The EU is also engaged in the “Geneva discussions.”
- Together with UN and OSCE, the EU is also hosting the peace talks between Russia and Georgia in Geneva.

EU and Armenia

- The main foreign policy goal of Armenia: complementarity.
- Three main premises:
 - 1. reciprocity of interest with the external actors,
 - 2. the indivisibility of the national interests,
 - 3. non-forceful choice between partners.
- It is not a policy of balance: Armenia can pursue closer relations with one or other actors as long as its national interests are fulfilled.
- A strategic U-turn towards the EU in 2013 over AA.

Vilnius summit 28-29 November 2013

- A signed Association Agreement offers Georgia the possibility of closer economic integration provided Tbilisi adjusts its legal, judicial, and economic systems to fit certain EU norms.



Vilnius summit 28-29 November 2013

- Azerbaijan continues to negotiate for its own Association Agreement with the bloc.
- The European Union and Azerbaijan signed an agreement to facilitate the procedures for issuing short-stay visas.
- “This will allow citizens from Azerbaijan to travel more easily to the Schengen area, as well as for EU citizens to travel to Azerbaijan,” said Cecilia Malmström, the European commissioner for Home Affairs.
- “This is a very tangible result of the Eastern Partnership and will further promote interaction between citizens of the EU and Azerbaijan.”



4. EU and Armenia

- Moving from assistance provider and humanitarian actor to a political one in the South Caucasus has been a long process for the EU. Whereas EU assistance is far from negligible and carried important political weight in a country largely dependent on external revenues it failed to translate into political leverage over the Armenian government.
- On the one hand, the assistance carried limited conditionality, due to the reduced perspectives for integration. This led to a focus on socio- economic recovery, grounded on the respect for democratic principles, the rule of law and human rights, and aimed at establishing a business climate conducive to increased investments.
- However, the scope of political reforms achieved with the PCA implementation was insufficient to create and strengthen formal institutions in Armenia, as opposed to lingering informal ones, surviving from the pre- vious regime.
- The outcome has been an ‘imitation of democracy’, aimed at maintaining external assistance, crucial for the survival of the regime (and, to a certain extent, of the state), but unable to assure more freedoms and equity within society. This has affected both Armenia’s ability to strengthen its sovereignty and independence *vis-à-vis* its regional context, but also the image of the EU as a close ally in promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

4. EU and Armenia

- the EU has also remained rather absent from the main hard security challenges of the region: the armed conflicts. In Armenia the EU has been perceived as favouring a pragmatic, interest-based approach to the region, focused on energy and transport routes.
- Armenia has focused on the development of regional cooperation as a central goal of the ENP. Both from a pragmatic point of view and an identity one, officials in Yerevan hoped the EU's insistence on promoting regional cooperation among the three South Caucasus states would improve Armenia's situation.
- European integration has been the only common interest among the three South Caucasus states and this could prove an important tool in creating a new regional identity, closely linked to the European values-system. However, this is a long-term process, which accounts poorly for regional dynamics and competition as well as for short-term calculations, such as the ones developing between the EU and Russia.

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- What will happen to South Ossetia and Abkhazia, since they are totally dependent on Russia for their political, military, and economic survival?
- How can Tbilisi overcome the disadvantage of being a small country with a small military with 20 percent of its de jure territory garrisoned by its giant neighbor to the north, Russia?

Between Geopolitics and Transformation

- Today the EaP faces a **double challenge**:
- 1) The transformation it was meant to bring about has largely failed to materialize, whereas a conflict with Russia for which it was not designed has come to the fore. As a consequence, the EaP region has become more instead of less divided.
- 2) The EU's agenda has been increasingly overshadowed and contradicted by a largely geopolitical concern: competition with Russia.
- It did not contain instruments for supporting its partners against Russian reprisals.
- The EU's strength tends to lie more in its transformational powers than in a capacity to act strategically.
- the EU usually has difficulties setting and following coherent objectives, to say nothing of responding flexibly to the interactive nature of strategy.
- In times of crisis, this condemns the EU to a **reactive** rather than **pro-active role**.

Between Geopolitics and Transformation

- Russia, following a **“realist” understanding of international relations**, views the conflict as a **zero-sum game for power and influence** and expects its interests to be respected.
- For the EU, the EaP is more **about promoting development** than about geopolitical interests. Consequently, the EU rejected the EaP as a reason for conflict. Russia, for its part, likely misread EU communication on the EaP as assurances that EU interference in the post-Soviet neighborhood would be limited.
- On a fundamental level, the **EU’s strategic culture is built on rejecting the hierarchical relationships of traditional power politics and spheres of influence**. Instead, it aims for **cooperation** that seeks common gains in terms of liberal values. This culture is what led EU politicians to deny the legitimacy of Russian interference or even its objections to the EaP.
- A major weakness of the EaP is thus that it was ill-equipped from the start for what turned out to be unavoidable competition and eventual conflict with its largest neighbor to the east.

Between Geopolitics and Transformation

- Russia, however, can provide not only considerable short-term benefits – such as reduced energy prices and loans – to those same countries but also short-term disincentives. These include imposing trade sanctions, limiting access to migrant workers, negative propaganda by influential Russian media, sponsoring domestic opposition, and, not least, raising tensions in separatist regions, supporting armed insurgents, and sponsoring outside intervention.
- **Russia dismisses EU values as a mere pretext for advancing geopolitical ambitions, while the EU dismisses Russia's objections as illegitimate.**
- The form of the current conflict, like its causes, has been asymmetrical. **Exploiting EU weaknesses, Russia responded to EU soft power with instruments of hard power.** At the same time it developed and employed its own soft power in the form of effective propaganda while the EU was distracted by crises over the euro, refugees, and, finally, the Brexit referendum.
- Overall, Russia's policies look more reactive than strategic.

Between Geopolitics and Transformation

- **Russia, moreover, has been no more successful than the EU in achieving its objectives.** Only in the case of Armenia did it manage to turn the country away from European integration and toward Eurasian integration.
- The most important impact of Russia's opposition to the EaP is less direct: that the "Russian factor" has strengthened the leverage of vested interests within EaP countries, helping these deadlock the reform process, particularly in Ukraine and Moldova.
- Geopolitical competition with Russia has pushed the EU into supporting pro-EU governments regardless of their real reform records.

IOs in the South Caucasus

- Potential of IOs:
- Now war: not allowing the conflicts to re-escalate;
- Democratization: transformation of political regimes to become more democratic than they are;
- Increase chances for their economic development;
- Emphases on soft security measures: the role of civil society.
- The EU must go beyond merely supporting reforms in the EaP and effectively take coresponsibility for them. This involves upgrading the principle of conditionality and getting involved more directly in implementation. By stressing the importance of human resources in state institutions and proposes concrete measures for appointing and retaining qualified personnel and, particularly, independent leaders for key law enforcement and regulatory bodies.

Conclusion

- The security deficit and fragile peace arraignment in the South Caucasus underlines the need for **internationalization of conflict resolution efforts**.
- The interaction between the EU-led security community, the regional powers in its Eastern neighbourhood, the USA, and the pan-European institutions is a complex affair. There are clear dynamics reinforcing the spread of the European security community, namely through the promotion of a common understanding of peace and stability, rooted in liberal democratic norms, human rights, and the rule of law, and on the centrality of cooperative security, diplomacy, predictability and mutual responsiveness.
- The OSCE has become a site of contestation and for exerting unilateral power, either through the vetoing of the organisation's work or through its gradual marginalisation.
- NATO expansion has failed to deliver on its role as the main security provider.
- EU member states, the lack of clarity as to the nature of its engagement with the region. The EU will need to provide clear answers to these anxieties, whereas the countries in the South Caucasus acknowledge the EU's approach as systemic shift in their approaches to peace and security.
- The EU has a new momentum and can contribute to revival of multilateral security engagements in this region: creation of multidimensional and coherent approach may keep the conflicts from escalating to "hot" wars.