Resolving the South Caucasus Conflicts Through International Intervention: The ESDP as a Viable Option

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To My Most Beloved Mother, Tamar Kereselidze

ABSTRACT

Frozen ethnic conflicts have become a persistent feature of modern international relations. They have gained particular relevance since the collapse of Communism in 1991, a period which was characterized by the breakout of fierce and bloody ethnic wars in the successor states of the Soviet Union. This problem of unresolved national conflicts is especially important for the South Caucasus region, all three states (Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia) of which have been embroiled in violent armed hostilities between different ethnicities since the beginning of the 1990s. In the meantime, the South Caucasus conflicts intensified the issue of peaceful conflict resolution through outside intervention on the world agenda, which resulted in the engagement of the OSCE and the UN mediators on the ground. However, given that none of the conflicting parties have reached a viable political compromise with each other, the conflicts are still at the frozen stage, causing serious political instabilities in the region. This thesis asks: what is the best strategy to peacefully solve the entrenched ethnic conflicts in the South Caucasus and which international actor possesses the appropriate capabilities to carry it out?

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INTRODUCTION

Frozen ethnic conflicts have become a persistent feature of modern international relations. They have gained particular relevance since the collapse of Communism in 1991, a period which was characterized by the breakout of fierce and bloody ethnic wars in the successor states of the Soviet Union. This problem of unresolved national conflicts is especially important for the South Caucasus region, all three states (Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia) of which have been embroiled in violent armed hostilities between different ethnicities since the beginning of the 1990s. In the meantime, the issue of peaceful conflict resolution in the Caucasus through outside intervention was brought up to the world agenda, which resulted in the engagement of the OSCE and the UN mediators on the ground. However, given that none of the conflicting parties have reached a viable political compromise with each other, the conflicts are still at the frozen stage, causing serious political instabilities in the region.

Considering all these developments, the main research question of this study is: What is the best strategy to solve peacefully the entrenched ethnic conflicts in the South Caucasus? After analyzing the four most widely acknowledged methods, I suggest that the coordination of soft and hard power elements on the ground through the engagement of the global "civilian power" – the European Union (EU) is a viable option, which will be justified in the next chapters.

The inter-state conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the status of Mountainous Karabakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), an autonomous region of Azerbaijan predominantly inhabited by ethnic Armenians, was the first case when the interests of the two

former Soviet republics openly contradicted each other.[1] This was soon followed by a domestic inter-ethnic rivalry in neighboring Georgia, resulting in two devastating civil wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, respectively.

In order to prevent an escalating ethnic warfare in the South Caucasus occurring in the early 1990s, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, later OSCE)[2] and the United Nations (UN) got involved in the process of mediation between the warring sides, the former in Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia and the latter in Abkhazia. However, these organizations have failed to make real progress in the political settlement of the problem, which is mainly due to the weak peace-keeping mandates of their missions as well as the backlashes of the conflict resolution strategies applied by them.

In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, the OSCE Minsk Group of mediators was established in 1992 to promote peaceful solutions to the problem.[3] Later, in 1993, the UN Security Council also passed several resolutions (no 822, 853, 874, 884) calling for the withdrawal of the military forces from the region in order to cease fire and to "refrain from any hostile acts and from any interference or intervention"[4] into conflict by all parties directly or indirectly involved in the matter. Nevertheless, aside from the fragile ceasefire agreement of 1994, which was actively mediated by Russia and the OSCE, the efforts of the mediators to substantially solve the problem have been unsuccessful.

For instance, the OSCE Minsk Group proposals of 1996-1997, based on Azerbaijan's territorial integrity suggested the withdrawal of the Armenian military troops from Nagorno-Karabakh as well as the subsequent return of refugees and IDPs, which would greatly facilitate the solution of the future status of the disputed territory. This option was rejected by

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[1] Charles King, "The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia's Unrecognized States", *World Politics 53,* July 2001, 529
[2] The CSCE, which was established in 1975 by the signatories to the "Helsinki Final Act", changed its name to the OSCE on December 5-6 at the CSCE Budapest Summit
[3] UNSC, 3313th meeting, *Resolution 884(1993),* clause no 5
[4] UNSC, 3313th meeting, *Resolution 884(1993),* clause no 6

the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities due to their unwillingness to integrate with Azerbaijan. In response to this, an alternative solution was proposed in 1998, which envisaged the creation of a "common state" between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh. However, like the previous one, this proposal was also refused, but this time by the government of Azerbaijan, which considered it as an infringement of Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Another failed bargaining deal that was actively discussed within the framework of the OSCE in 1999 entailed a land exchange. On the one hand, Armenia would gain Nagorno-Karabakh and the Lachin corridor connecting it to Armenia, while on the other hand, Azerbaijan would acquire the Nakchivan corridor, Armenia's only land border with Iran.[5]

Similar efforts have been made by both the OSCE and the UN to peacefully solve the two ethnic conflicts in Georgia, in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, respectively. For example, the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) was set up by the UN Security Council resolution (no 858) to monitor the observance of the cease-fire agreement of 1993 in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict.[6] Furthermore, during 1994-1997, the UN was directly involved in the political negotiations between the Georgian and Abkhaz leaders over the issue of extended autonomy for Abkhazia within Georgia's jurisdiction. Later, in 2002, the UN Secretary-General's envoy to Georgia even prepared a document on "Basic Principles for the Distribution of Competences between Tbilisi and Sukhumi" in order to facilitate a fruitful dialogue on this matter.[7] However, it has not produced any concrete results until now due the refusal from the Abkhaz authorities to remain under Georgian sovereignty. The same holds true for the OSCE peace-keeping efforts in the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict, where the

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[5] International Development Cooperation (SIDA), "The South Caucasus: A Regional Overview and Conflict Assessment", *Cornell Caspian Consulting ,* September 2002
[6] UNSC, 3268th meeting, *Resolution 858(1993),* clause no 2
[7] See more information on the UNOMIG activities in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict on:
http://www.unomig.org/glance/facts_figures/

OSCE Joint Control Commission (JCC), which has been involved in the conflict resolution since 1992, has failed to reach any viable solutions to the future status of South Ossetia.[8]

Therefore, as a result of incompatible political interests pursued by Azerbaijan and Georgia on the one hand (territorial integrity and sovereignty) and by their breakaway regions on the other (self-determination and secession), the OSCE and the UN efforts for conflict resolution have been in vain. Hence, the issue of the replacement of these organizations with a new political actor, complemented by credible civilian as well as military capabilities, has been actively debated among the parties concerned.

Here, another important dimension of the aforementioned frozen conflicts emerges, which relates to the Russian factor. It should be noted that despite the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian political elites still consider the post-Soviet space as an outpost of Moscow and therefore they are quite reluctant to lose control over it. Moreover, in the case of the South Caucasus, in order to keep this region in the orbit of its political influence, Russia has been manipulating the breakaway regions in Georgia and Azerbaijan, for example, by deploying military troops as well as by threatening to recognize their independence.[9] So, Russian involvement is a problem, which makes international mediation difficult, but also precludes simple military engagement in the region.

Therefore, the replacement of the OSCE and the UN with purely military alliances such as, for instance, the American-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) would be perceived by Moscow as a direct threat to Russian security "because of Russia's Cold War time visions."[10] Here, it is noteworthy to mention a 2006 statement issued by the Russian Foreign Ministry in the wake of Georgia's inclusion in the Intensified Dialogue (ID) with

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[8] Information on the OSCE mission to Georgia is available at: http://www.osce.org/georgia/13199.html
[9] Mark Leonard and Charles Grant, "Georgia and the EU: Can Europe's Neighborhood Policy Deliver?" *Center for European Reform,* Policy Brief, September 2005, 3
http://www.cer.org.uk/pdf/policybrief_georgia_sept05.pdf
[10] Mariam Dekanozishvili, "The EU in the South Caucasus: By What Means, to What Ends*?" Georgian Foundation for Strategic International Studies* (GFSIS), Occasional Paper no 2, January 2004, 8
http://www.eurojournal.org/files/93.pdf

NATO, which has once again reaffirmed Russia's negative attitude to NATO's military engagement in its near abroad.

> "Our negative stance towards this issue is well known … In fact, NATO's eastward expansion towards the South Caucasus could seriously threaten Russia's political, military as well as economic interests and would further deteriorate the fragile situation in the region.[11]

Taking these factors into account, one should seek an alternative solution to the Caucasian frozen conflicts. In this respect, it is useful to explore the geopolitical implications of the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) for conflict resolution in the South Caucasus. Here, one can argue that through its enhanced civilian-military framework, the ESDP can achieve better results for peace-keeping and peace-building than the OSCE and the UN have done so far. Indeed, the incorporation of credible and unbiased "hard power" elements on the ground together with developed civilian crisis management tools for conflict prevention would be a necessary precondition for the subsequent political resolution of the future status of all disputed territories. Besides, the EU's security engagement in the South Caucasus conflicts would likely be less challenging for the Russian government than that of NATO's.[12]

In order to explore the puzzle described above and conduct comprehensive research on it, I use the methodology of text analysis, which entails the comparison and contrast of conflicting theoretical explanations made by prominent scholars on the best possible strategies for ethnic conflict resolution. This will be complemented by the critical evaluation of qualitative data sets such as books, articles, official documents, web sites, reports, and statements in order to classify and analyze the empirical events in the conflicting regions, as

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[11] See a statement of the Russian Foreign Ministry on NATO's decision to start the Intensified Dialogue (ID) with Georgia, *No. 1624* , September 22, 2006, available at: http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/sps/F65544CF295B3E15C32571F10039ED61
[12] Mariam Dekanozishvili, *The EU in the South Caucasus*, 8

well as the historical background of the ESDP and its geopolitical implications for the regional security.

This thesis contains the three chapters. First includes the on-going debate and the review of the existing literature about the general theoretical framework and specific approaches for effectively resolving ethnic conflicts through international intervention. Second - an empirical analysis of the South Caucasus conflicts including their current state and international resonance. Third - the strategic framework applied by the EU towards these conflicts and the major contribution to the study on the implications of the ESDP for viable conflict resolution in the South Caucasus. To show the credibility of the ESDP, I compare the ethnic conflicts in the Western Balkans, where the ESDP got effectively involved with the Caucasian ones, where it is still reluctant to do so. Here, I will focus on the possible geopolitical obstacles for the ESDP engagement in the South Caucasus. Finally, after summarizing the major arguments, I will put forward some conclusive remarks underpinning my central hypothesis that the involvement of the ESDP would greatly facilitate the peaceful political settlement of the South Caucasus conflicts.

CHAPTER 1: Theoretical Debate on the Best Possible Ways for Conflict Resolution through International Intervention

The problem of effective ethnic conflict resolution has gained particular salience since the end of the Second World War and the subsequent process of the decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s. Furthermore, due to the drastic proliferation of bloody national clashes right after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the issue of their prevention has become a high priority worldwide.

In this regard, David Carment and Albrecht Schnabel argue that successful conflict prevention strategy as such should be implemented through long-term and consistent operational or structural mechanisms in order to ensure a stable international security environment. This, in turn, necessitates the involvement of high-profile outside actors.[13] Therefore, the role of multilateral intervention in effective conflict settlement, carried out by the world's greatest powers having credible operational capabilities, has gained enormous importance in modern international relations. Consequently, there has been an intensive debate among academic scholars and politicians on the best possible ways and methods international actors should apply to effectively solve frozen ethnic conflicts.

Here, I will first provide a general theoretical framework of this study and then compare and contrast some of the most wide spread and debated approaches towards the ending of ethnic disputes. At the end of the chapter, after discussing the drawbacks of each approach, I will elaborate more on my own vision with regard to this issue, which proposes the combination and consistent coordination of soft and hard power mechanisms in the conflict zone.

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[13] David Carment and Albrecht Schnabel, "Conflict Prevention: Theory and Evidence" in *Path to Peace or Grand Illusion?* ed. David Carment and Albrecht Schnabel (Tokyo: The United Nations University Press, 2003), 11.

1.1. Neo-Realism vs. Social Constructivism

Importantly, all the strategies discussed below for ending intrastate ethnic wars fall within the broader theoretical framework of two prominent international relations (IR) theories, such as neo-realism and social constructivism. In this regard, there is an obvious rift between the rational choice model ("logic of expected consequences") pursued within a neo-realist paradigm and constructivism's value based approach ("logic of appropriateness").

According to Kenneth Waltz, one of the founding fathers of the neo-realist school of thought, anarchy, predominantly characterized by insecurity, where there is no overarching authority to ensure peace and stability in the world, causes political units to greatly rely on "self-help" in order to survive and build up their own power capabilities. In this respect, the key to survival is the acquisition of military power, which could be accomplished through the formation of military alliances with the units sharing the same interests. In this respect, things gets more complicated due to the emergence of the "security dilemma, wherein measures that enhance one state's security typically diminish that of others," thus provoking countermeasures from an opposing alliance.[14]

Furthermore, neo-realists argue that the struggle for security and survival in the condition of an anarchical international system is the main cause of conflicts during the interaction of the self-interested unitary political units. Therefore, "the distribution of power capabilities across units" is crucial in order to maintain the peace and balance of power in the system. Here, the interests and actions of the most powerful states matter the most. Moreover, through the usage of military, economic as well as political instruments at their disposal, these states can drastically change the nature of the international system. Importantly, in contrast to the constructivist paradigm, the neo-realists also claim that due to the competitive

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[14] Kenneth Waltz, "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* Vol. 18, No. 4, (1988), 619-625

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international environment characterized by distrust and the consequent struggle for power and survival, the establishment of stable social norms and institutions is less likely to occur.[15]

A contrasting theoretical stance from that of the neo-realist school is held by constructivists. According to Alexander Wendt, one of the most distinguished representatives of the social constructivist school, this theory, which is embodied in social and cultural norms, values, ideas, claims "that the fundamental structures of international politics are social rather than material and they shape actors identities and interests rather than just behavior - a claim that opposes rationalism." Here, Wendt also argues that even the core concept of neo-realism - the "security dilemma" - can be perceived as an intersubjective social structure, entailing distrustful considerations of conflicting parties, who "make worst-case assumptions about each others' intentions." [16]

Furthermore, social constructivism explains how "agency and interaction produce and reproduce structures of shared knowledge over time," where "material resources only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded."[17] In other words, the main guiding principle of social constructivism is to pinpoint the ways in which various social actors endlessly interact with each other in the construction of their intersubjective social world, which is a rather dynamic process. Therefore, the reality is created by social units which act according to their perceptions and shared knowledge of it. Key components of shared knowledge - social norms - become "more influential the more they are shared among the units of a social system and the more precisely they distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior."[18] Accordingly, constructivists argue that even the national interests and strategic preferences of states are

[15] Ben Rosamond, "Intergovernmental Europe?" *Theories of European Integration*, (2000), 132-133.
[16] Alexander Wendt, "Constructing International Politics", *International Security,* Vol. 20, No. 1, (1995), 71-73.
[17] Ibid, 73-76.
[18] Karl Cordell and Stefan Wolff, "A Foreign Policy Analysis of the "German Question":
Ostpolitik Revisited ", *Foreign Policy Analysis 3 (3),* (2007), 257.

based on the aforementioned social norms, which make them legitimate and value-based. Besides, while taking into account domestic and international norms as driving forces of international relations, social constructivism is more concerned with explaining and predicting the foreign policy content of a given actor rather than the policy making process itself.

By and large, from the neo-realist perspective, the concept of power, embodied in the struggle of units for the development of credible military capabilities, is the key variable for dealing with the "security dilemma," which is inherent to the anarchic international system. Conversely, social constructivism is in favor of "soft power" variables, such as values, norms, culture, and ideas, which greatly determine the behavior of social units during their interaction.

After analyzing the core ontological assumptions of neo-realism and social constructivism, it is worth elaborating more on the specific approaches and strategies for conflict prevention conducted by international actors, which basically stem from these two IR theories. Here, one can argue that with regard to conflict preemption, the elements of neo-realist approaches should prevail over the constructivist ones however the social constructivist paradigm is equally essential as the neo-realist one in conflict prevention and reconciliation between the belligerents as well as in the subsequent reconstruction of common identity.

A. Mediation

One of the broadly acknowledged and applied methods for ending violent ethnic wars through outside intervention is an "ad hoc" third party mediation, which has a legally non-binding decision-making power, based on the voluntary consent/request of conflicting parties. In fact, the main purpose of mediation, which should be impartial and peaceful, is to help

parties amicably resolve the conflict and reach a mutually acceptable agreement without using military force, thus suggesting a constructive way for conflict management.[19] In this respect, Jacob Bercovitch and Allison Houston, who substantially developed the concept of mediation, favor the "contingency approach," which focuses on the reciprocal social relationship between the mediators and disputing sides, which is aimed at changing their respective perceptions and behavior in order to facilitate the subsequent resolution of the conflict. Based on this approach the aforementioned scholars argue that a successful mediation should definitely take into account such context variables as parties' political context and cultural differences, their relative power, previous relations between them, the nature of the dispute, as well as the characteristics of the mediator itself. Besides, in order to achieve an effective resolution of a dispute through international mediation, it is also crucial to consider parties' commitment to the mediation process, its surrounding environment as well as the applied strategies and tools of mediation. Accordingly, the acknowledgement of all these factors will "make a considerable and positive difference to the management of a conflict and the subsequent interaction between the parties."[20]

It should be noted that mediation strategies are mostly implemented within the auspices of the UN today, which serves as the major guarantor of international peace and security by using peaceful means. According to Article 33 of the UN charter,

> The parties to any dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, shall, first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice.[21]

However, as indicated in the introduction, mediation conducted by the UN and the regional framework of the OSCE in the South Caucasus conflicts has turned out to be

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[19] Jacob Bercovitch and Allison Houston, "The Study of International Mediation: Theoretical Issues and Empirical Evidence", in *Resolving International Conflicts*, ed. Jacob Bercovitch (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996), 12-13.
[20] Ibid, 15-19
[21] UN Charter *(1945),* Chapter VI, clause no 1 of Article 33

unsuccessful, which, aside from the weak peace-keeping mandates of both organizations, could be also explained by the characteristic backlashes of the concept of mediation itself. Considering that outside mediation is purely based on the goodwill and the commitment of the disputing parties, it is not entitled to impose a legally-binding arrangement upon them. Therefore, the mediator lacks an influential leverage in the conflict settlement. This is especially evident in intrastate ethnic conflicts between state and non-state actors, like the ones in the South Caucasus, where due to the incompatible political objectives of the respective actors, one side refuses to recognize the legitimacy of the other one, resulting in a stalemate during the negotiations.[22]

B. Partition

Another widely debated method for conflict resolution applied by outside interveners is partition entailing the demographic/ethnic separation of warring sides into "defensible enclaves." This considerably contradicts the social constructivist paradigm of mediation. In this regard, Chaim Kaufmann argues that the likelihood of ethnic clashes instigated by the "security dilemma" is greater in heterogeneous states than in homogeneous ones. Accordingly, the separation of the intermixed populations into defensible homogeneous regions by creating their respective national homelands can end the war between them.[23] Importantly, Kaufmann also claims that partition of state sovereignty and borders carried out without ethnic separation could spark a new conflict. This is due to the fact that the newly created boundaries of sovereign successor states may well serve as their defensible fronts, which could cause clashes between the majority ethnic groups and the minority ones. In order to avoid this state of affairs, there should be a substantial separation between ethnic groups,

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[22] Lois Kriesberg, "Varieties of Mediating Activities and Mediators in International Relations", in *Resolving International Conflicts*, ed. Jacob Bercovitch (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996), 222
[23] Chaim Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars", in *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict,* ed. Michael Brown, et. al. (1997-2001), 456

who should be provided with complete autonomy and enough capability for regional self-defense, which in turn will foster democratic processes in partitioned communities. Indeed, if these conditions are met, inter-ethnic wars could be solved even without the partition of state sovereignty as such.[24] Here, Kaufmann clearly differentiates the ethnic partition and state secession, the latter demanded by the secessionist leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which is totally unacceptable for the governments of Azerbaijan and Georgia, respectively.

However, there are great many counterarguments against the viability of the demographic separation of conflicting ethnic groups as a solution for ending violent conflicts between them. Nicholas Sambanis, who conducted a comprehensive quantitative analysis on the drawbacks of the partition theory, proved that ethnic partition is related to "tremendous physical and emotional suffering," thus violating the fundamental human rights of the partitioned people. As a result, it is more likely to produce new grounds for ethnic tensions rather than prevent civil wars.[25] Another opposing stance to the partition approach is proposed by Arend Lijphart, who claims that demographic partition has serious disadvantages. Firstly, given that ethnic groups are geographically intermingled, it is extremely hard to clearly separate them. Secondly, large-scale population transfers caused by the partition are very costly, and thirdly, there is a big problem regarding the equitable distribution of land and natural resources among the rival ethnic groups.[26]

C. Power-Sharing

As an alternative to the aforementioned drawbacks, characteristic to the neo-realist concept of ethnic partition, Lijpart applies a more constructivist power-sharing approach to

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[24] Ibid, 469-470

[25] Nicholas Sambanis, "Ethnic Partition as a Solution to Ethnic War: An Empirical Critique of the Theoretical Literature", *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 2208,* (1999), 6-20

[26] Arendt Lijphart, "The Power-Sharing Approach", *in Conflict* and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies, ed. Joseph Monteville (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1990), 493-494

conflict management, which should entail a constitutionally embedded high degree of autonomy and fair representation for all significant ethnic groups within the government of a given state. Importantly, this should also be complemented by the principles of proportional representation and the minority veto. Furthermore, power-sharing should embody the joint exercise of governmental powers (especially executive power). Here, Lijpart differentiates between the presidential systems of government and the parliamentary ones in terms of preferable and more effective power-sharing as a tool for conflict prevention.

Considering that in the presidential systems, one person - a president - wields supreme executive power, it is less likely to exercise collegial decision-making in the executive branch of the government. On the other hand, in the parliamentary systems based on proportional representation of the different ethnic groups, the implementation of effective power sharing in the decision-making process could become a distinct possibility for the prevention of ethnic conflicts.[27]

In this regard, the concept of autonomy is considered as a credible way for balancing conflicting claims of states and secessionist groups. Moreover, if fully implemented, it could become the strongest weapon to counter the numerous separatist movements and ethnic clashes within the country. Here, Timothy Sisk identifies two approaches towards autonomy: "group building-block approach" (also called "consociational democracy") and the "integrative approach." The former is associated with an expanded territorial, political, as well as cultural autonomy to different ethnic groups based on "confederal arrangements." This includes an equal representation of different ethnic linguistic and religious groups in the decision-making at all levels of the state governance, which should be enshrined in a "highly proportional electoral system." On the other hand, "an integrative approach" is focused on the establishment of "mixed or non-ethnic federal structure, with boundaries drawn on other

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[27] Ibid, 506-507

criteria such as natural features or economic development zones" within a centralized and unitary government. Importantly, ethnic diversity in political institutions is guaranteed by a semi-majoritarian or semi-proportional electoral system.[28]

Despite the credibility of both power-sharing approaches, some problems still arise with the effectiveness and viability of this concept. Firstly, the power-sharing method can only be applied after the war is over, meaning that it is primarily concerned with post-war conflict management, rather then conflict prevention and resolution as such. Secondly, its success greatly depends on the level of ethnic hatred between the conflicting parties. If the enmity based on ethnicity is high, it is extremely hard to "create the structures for living together" as the best alternative to armed antagonism. [29] Thirdly, due to the difficulties to meet diverse ethnic interests and expectations, the exercise of minority veto, entailing the broadest possible consensus in the decision-making, could often become a source of "political blackmail," which seriously hinders the process of reconciliation.[30]

Taking all these factors into account, it appears that power-sharing arrangements should be preceded by a full-scale outside military engagement, followed by the credible efforts of international civilian and humanitarian actors for reconstructing the identity of the war-torn societies. In this respect, the forced integration of conflicting sides, complemented by the necessary reforms for their reconciliation and the ensuing building of civil society, could well serve as the most reasonable and viable strategy for effective conflict resolution.

D. Forced Integration and Subsequent Civic Encouragement

As noted above, the last approach discussed in this study, could be the best possible alternative to all the previously analyzed methods for the settlement of frozen ethnic

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[28] Timothy D. Sisk, "Power-sharing after Civil Wars: Matching Problems to Solutions", in *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Violence and Peace Processes,* ed. John Darby and Roger Mac Ginty (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 143-147
[29] Ibid, 140-148
[30] Ibid

conflicts. This strategy encompasses the core theoretical paradigms of both neo-realism and social constructivism, which should be put into practice through international military intervention entailing the forced integration of warring ethnicities and the ensuing reconstruction of common identity (civic encouragement).

The main reason behind the outside military engagement into the intrastate ethnic conflicts is related to the atrocities during the civil wars, which result in gross violations of human rights and a massive outflow of refugees, which pose a serious threat to international peace and security. In fact, through their criminal organizations, refugee armed groups often carry out illegal activities abroad, such as the trafficking of people, weapons and drugs. Besides, refugee movements inflict considerable damage to the domestic institutions of the host government by requiring high social and economic services. Moreover, they can have negative effects on the existing political system and national identity of the host populations by influencing the decision-making at all levels of the government. This in turn greatly hinders their integration into the host country, leading to the distortion of the domestic balance of powers there. [31] Considering all these threats, which internationalize the civil wars, an outside military intervention can be legitimized multilaterally (through the UN Security Council) in order to eliminate the aforementioned security as well as humanitarian concerns. In this regard, Alan Dowty and Gil Loescher suggest that the best possible way to prevent the large-scale outflow of refugees is their repatriation (forced resettlement) to the country of origin. This task greatly rests on the obligation of the international community to guarantee the fundamental human rights and security of the repatriated refugees through the elimination of the "root causes" of their displacement, thus providing favorable conditions for the economic rehabilitation and reconciliation between the conflicting ethnicities. In order to effectively cope with this difficult task of civic reconstruction, the international community

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[31] Alan Dowty and Gil Loescher, "Refugee Flows as Grounds for International Action", *International Security,* Vol. 21, No. 1, (1996), 43-49

should first and foremost use its adequate military, political as well as economic capabilities.[32]

Indeed, the process of post-war reconciliation and subsequent democratic transformation is very demanding, wherein the self-identity of a given ethnic community, embodied in the concept of citizenship and belonging, is constructed by the subjective perceptions and emotions of each individual towards structural changes and reforms in the country. Here, the protection of universal human rights norms and standards within the framework of the newly established institutions serves as a key variable in "entrenching the value system of a new society," which considerably fosters the construction of a common identity.[33] In this respect, first and foremost, it is necessary to implement the full-scale military and police reforms in the war-torn regions, right after the ceasefire has been reached. These reforms envisage the establishment of counterbalance of political and institutional forces to prevent one dominant group from forcefully influencing the domestic politics. Here, Charles Call and William Stanley suggest two models of "military merger" and "demilitarization and police reform," respectively. The former, entails the merging of previously antagonized military forces into the united governmental armed forces in order to diminish the "security dilemma" among the conflicting sides. The latter approach favors the incremental demilitarization or reduction of armed forces, thus stressing the importance of an integrated civilian police force, which is essential for further reconciliation and socialization processes.

It should be noted that the superiority of civilian police institutions over the military ones is conditioned by several factors. Firstly, the "prevalence of military weaponry" in the post conflict settlement could be easily utilized for criminal purposes by certain armed

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[32] Ibid, 51-58
[33] Brandon Hamber, "Transformation and Reconciliation", in *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Violence and Peace Processes,* ed. John Darby and Roger Mac Ginty (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 228-229

groups. Secondly, the reduction of military forces in the post-war federal structures creates more propitious prospects for the long-term stability and democratization. Thirdly, the concept of civilian police is crucial for building the public trust and confidence in the capacity of the new government to ensure lasting peace and security. This is due to the fact that the police is more accessible to the ordinary citizens than military forces. Besides, a successfully reformed civilian police is characterized by a moderate and proportional use of force during the fair protection of both individual and group rights, which is of paramount importance in building general public support. [34]

However, there has been a persistent problem regarding the international monitoring of the aforementioned civilian police reforms in post-conflict societies. This is related to the lack of appropriate institutional capacities at the disposal of the UN and regional organizations, such as, for instance, the OSCE. Besides, the situation is further complicated by the short-term deployments of international missions (six months for the UN missions) as well as the different linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the conflicting communities from the ones of the outside interveners. [35]

1.2. Conclusions

Based on the analysis of various theoretical approaches described above, it appears that all the aforementioned strategies are relevant; however, they are only applicable to specific circumstances and conditions, which rarely occur together in a convenient manner. Therefore, it is rather hard to label any approach as the best solution to ethnic wars.

Nevertheless, despite some characteristic intricacies, I propose that a legally authorized military intervention, carried out on the ground by the relevant international

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[34] Charles T. Call and William Stanley, "Military and Police Reform after Civil Wars", in *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Violence and Peace Processes,* ed. John Darby and Roger Mac Ginty (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 212-216
[35] Ibid, 218-222

organization with credible military and civilian capabilities could well serve as a model for the pre-emption and subsequent prevention of violent ethnic wars. In this context, I also suggest that after accomplishing the total cessation of armed hostilities between the belligerents, international interveners should ensure the secure return and resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees. At this stage, military deployments can be gradually supplemented by the viable civilian and humanitarian missions, aimed at building the long-lasting peace, reconciliation as well as the reconstruction of the common identity. This should be accomplished through an active civic encouragement and the subsequent development of equitable power-sharing arrangements, the application of which towards the South Caucasian conflicts will be justified in the third chapter.

CHAPTER 2: Empirical Overview of the South Caucasus Conflicts

After providing the theoretical background of this study, it is worth analyzing the relevance and the actual application of each approach towards the conflict settlement in the South Caucasus. In order to show how the reasons behind the conflicts relate to the difficulties in resolving them, I would like to elaborate more on the empirical analysis of the Caucasian conflicts themselves, their progression and current state as well as the strategies being used by the international community on the ground. Here, while focusing on the weaknesses of international mediators, I will then justify why the EU, through the ESDP, is better equipped to deal with these problems.

It should be noted that of the whole post-soviet space, the South Caucasus is one of the most interesting regions in terms of conflict studies. In fact, since 1988, even before the demise of the Soviet Union, this region has been the arena of armed hostilities between the different ethnic groups residing in all three countries of the South Caucasus (Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia).

One could argue that the eruption of these conflicts in the late 1980s was greatly conditioned by the weakening of communism, which in turn further undermined a common socialist ideology between the different societies in the South Caucasus. Aside from the nationalist movements arising in the aforementioned three former soviet republics against the USSR in the late 1980s, secessionist sentiments started developing within the autonomous regions of those republics themselves. These sentiments, based on grounds of ethnicity, language, religion and culture, were further encouraged and manipulated by the political

elites in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, which in turn served as a catalyst for the onset of bloody civil wars in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, respectively. [36]

2.1. The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

A. Historical Background

The on-going conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the historically disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh has resulted in more than 20,000 deaths, together with 1.5 million refugees and IDPs. An intricate dimension of the dispute is due to the fact that the conflicting interests of three parties, independent states of Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as Azerbaijan's breakaway republic of Nagorno-Karabakh are involved in the matter. This internationalizes the conflict, making the solution of the problem even more complicated. [37] In this respect, it is worth tracing the history back in order to uncover the roots of the conflict itself and then discuss the possible ways of its settlement applied by the international community.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is based on historical claims of both Azeris and Armenians over the Karabakh territory. These claims sparked vigorously during the Russian revolution of 1905, when the first large-scale bloody battles broke out between the Azeri and Armenian communities residing in Nagorno-Karabakh. The situation got even more complicated after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, which resulted in the end of the Tsarist regime in Russia, when the South Caucasus region was split into the three independent republics of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, respectively. [38] Despite the fervent protests and the armed resistance of the Karabakh Armenians, who were even then the predominant

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[36] Alexei Zverev, "Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus 1988-1994", *in Contested Borders in the Caucasus,* ed. Bruno Coppieters (Brussels: VUB University Press, 1996), 13-16
[37] Svante E. Cornell, "Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethno-political Conflict in the Caucasus" (The UK: Curzon Press, 2001), 61-62

[38] Georgia declared its independence from the collapsed Russian Empire on May 26, 1918. This was followed by the declarations of independence in Azerbaijan and Armenia, two days later, on May 28.

ethnic group in the region, Nagorno-Karabakh was proclaimed as an integral part of Azerbaijan in 1918. This decision was greatly conditioned by the pro-Azeri stances of big powers such as the Ottoman Empire (which collapsed in 1918) and later the British Empire, which had replaced the Ottomans in the South Caucasus after their defeat in the First World War.[39]

The incorporation of Nagorno-Karabakh into Azerbaijan, albeit with substantial autonomy, was recognized by the Soviet Union (established on December 28, 1922), which took control over all three South Caucasian republics.[40] As a result, on July 7, 1923, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) was established within the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic (Azerbaijani SSR). This was followed by the formation of the Nakhchivan autonomous republic in 1924, also within the Azerbaijani SSR, which has been another disputed territory between the Azeris and Armenians.

It is widely believed that the Soviet government's decision to incorporate Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhchivan into Azerbaijan was conditioned by two major factors. Firstly, at that time, the Soviet leaders - Lenin and Stalin - openly expressed their strategic preferences towards the newly established Turkish republic (close ethnic kin to Azeris), headed by Kemal Ataturk, who was against the granting of Nagorno-Karabakh to the Armenian SSR. Secondly, the separation of the Karabakh Armenians from their ethnic kin and the geographical partition of Nakhchivan from the Azerbaijani mainland well served Stalin's policy of "divide and rule," which aimed at manipulating both Armenia and Azerbaijan in case of their future claims for independence from the USSR. Indeed, all these developments caused great

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[39] Ibid, 68-73

[40] After "the Bolshevik Red Army" invaded first, Baku on April 28, 1920, later Yerevan on December 4, 1920 and lastly, Tbilisi on February 25, 1921, the Soviet rule was established in all three republics of the South Caucasus. They were integrated into the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (SFSR), which dissolved in 1936.

resentment among ethnic Armenians, who had been attempting to regain the jurisdiction over the lost territories since then.[41]

Consequently, while gradually swelling during the whole period of the Soviet era, the Armenian nationalist movement had reached its climax in the late 1980s, when the new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev embarked upon his political and economic reforms within the USSR, which were based on "Perestroika" and "Glasnost." Importantly, this period of the weakening communist regime was generally characterized by a growing boldness of the nationalist and secessionist demands in the constituent republics of the USSR. As a result, since 1987 onwards, huge demonstrations started occurring in Armenia demanding for the integration of Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhchivan into Armenia, which eventually resulted in the holding of unofficial referendums on this issue. A turning point for the onset of large-scale armed hostilities between the Armenians and Azeris came in February 1988 with the Azeri-led "Sumgait pogrom" of ethnic Armenians. This was caused by the Armenian-led ethnic cleansing of Azeris, a month before, which resulted in their massive forced displacement from Armenian territory.[42]

On the other hand, despite these developments, the Soviet leadership kept holding a pro-Azeri stance, which was conditioned by the threat to the unity of the Soviet Union posed by the rising Armenian nationalism and its possible spill over into the other Soviet republics. As a result, on July 18, 1988, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR once again reaffirmed the status of NKAO and Nakhchivan within the Azerbaijani SSR, which even more exacerbated an already tense situation in the region.

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[41] Ibid, 73-77

[42] Sumgait is a city near Baku, where the thousands of Azeri refugees were located after they were forcefully driven away from Armenia in January 1988. In response to this, on February 27, 1988, Azeris launched a bloody pogrom against ethnic Armenians residing in Sumgait, which according to the official figures resulted in the death of 26 Armenians and 6 Azeris.

In the following year, on December 1, 1989, the Armenian Supreme Soviet jointly with the Karabakh local council declared the unification of Armenia and NKAO.[43] Moreover, greatly bolstered by the successful declarations of independence, which were proclaimed in the Soviet republics during 1991, the Karabakh Armenians declared the full independence of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan on September 2, 1991. In response to this, the Azerbaijani parliament abolished the autonomy of NKAO on November 26, 1991.[44] This gave rise to the breakout of a disastrous bloody war between the two rival ethnic groups, which only ended on May 16, 1994, when a Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement was signed by the defense ministers of Azerbaijan, Armenia and the head of the Karabakh Armenian armed forces.

Nevertheless, there are on-going low intensity armed clashes between the Karabakh insurgent forces, open-heartedly assisted by their ethnic kin (Armenian military troops),[45] and Azeri armed forces, who have failed to reach any fruitful solution to the conflict until now. Here, it should also be noted that notwithstanding Nagorno-Karabakh's declaration of independence, no international actor has recognized it as a sovereign state, not even Armenia itself.

B. International Engagement

The first international actor to be involved in the mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was the newly established Russian Federation (June 1991), which after the dissolution of the USSR became the dominant power in the region. In fact, since the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on December 21, 1991, Russia

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[43]Importantly, since then, the Karabakh authorities have been well supplied with Armenian military equipment and weapons.
[44] Interestingly enough, Georgia was the first South Caucasian country to declare independence from the USSR on April 9, 1991. Azerbaijan declared its independence on August 30, 1991, while Armenia did the same on September 23, 1991.
[45] The Armenian Foreign Affairs Minister Vardan Oskanyan ,"Small State Diplomacy", *Public Lecture at CEU,* October 30, 2007

has been trying to keep the successor states of the USSR in the sphere of its political influence. In this regard, it is noteworthy that unlike Armenia, which started developing a long-term strategic partnership with the newly formed Russian Federation, Azerbaijan and Georgia were quite reluctant to become members of the Russian-led framework. However, due to the escalating ethnic warfare in both countries, they were forced to accede to the CIS and subsequently accept Russia's role as the major peace-keeper in the region.[46]

Meanwhile, the atrocities between the Armenians and Azeris raised concerns among the Western powers as well. As a result, the CSCE/OSCE Minsk Group, consisting of an eleven-member committee, was set up in 1992, which ever since has been entrusted to mediate peace between the warring sides.

After contributing to the conclusion of the aforementioned 1994 ceasefire agreement between the belligerents, in December 1996, the OSCE made its first serious effort to peacefully solve the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh at the Lisbon OSCE summit, where the document prepared by the "Minsk Group" was adopted. Importantly, the document once again reaffirmed the legal status of Karabakh within Azerbaijan, albeit with the highest degree of autonomy. However, the Armenian side from Yerevan vetoed this proposal, thus openly expressing its unwillingness to cede Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan.

In the following year (September, 1997), the OSCE troika (France, Russia and the US)[47] proposed a new plan for the solution of the Karabakh problem, which entailed the withdrawal of Armenian military troops from Nagorno-Karabakh, the subsequent return of

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[46] Armenia joined the CIS in March 1992, while Azerbaijan and Georgia became the members of this organization later, (September 1993 and November 1993, respectively). Importantly, before the CIS, both Armenia and Azerbaijan were admitted to the CSCE/OSCE, on January 30, 1992. Georgia joined the CSCE/OSCE on March 24, 1992, http://www.osce.org/about/13131.html

[47] A co-chairmanship system for the "Minsk Group", which includes the heads of the OSCE member states or governments to mediate the negotiations between the belligerents in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, was established on December 6, 1994, at the OSCE Budapest Summit. Interestingly, since 1997, France, the US and Russia (Troika), have become the permanent co-chairs of the "Minsk Group." http://www.osce.org/item/21979.html

refugees and IDPs, as well as the deployment of peacekeepers. This proposal was denied by the Armenian leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh.[48]

In November 1998, the OSCE troika suggested another peace proposal to the conflicting sides, called the common state approach, which implied the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan into one common state on an equal basis. Nevertheless, like the previous ones, this proposal was also rejected, this time by the Azerbaijani side, which regarded it as an infringement of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity.[49]

In 1999, another deal was endorsed to solve the Karabakh problem through the OSCE mediation. Interestingly, this option entailed the exchange of territories between Azerbaijan and Armenia. On the one hand, Azerbaijan would regain the Nakchivan corridor (Armenia's only land border with Iran) and other areas outside Nagorno-Karabakh which have been occupied by Armenian military troops to date, while on the other hand, Armenia, would spread its jurisdiction over Nagorno-Karabakh and the strategically important Lachin corridor, connecting Karabakh to Armenia. This deal was unacceptable to the Azerbaijani government, due to the threat of Armenia's direct military intervention in Nagorno-Karabakh through the usage of the Lachin corridor.[50]

Considering the failure of all the aforementioned proposals, in July 2004, at a press conference in Yerevan, the representatives of the OSCE "Minsk Group" announced that they would not suggest any new peace plan arguing that "no agreement is possible, which means maintaining the fragile status quo." In fact, the OSCE "Minsk Group" placed the whole responsibility for the deadlock in the mediation process upon the parties of the conflict.[51] Ever since, the political negotiations between the disputing sides have been stalled, causing high tensions in the region.

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[48] Interestingly, Nagorno-Karabakh was first recognized as a party to the conflict in the report of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (Doc. 7182), on October 17, 1994
[49] Ibid, 114-119
[50] Ibid, 121-123
[51] International Crisis Group, "Nagorno-Karabakh: A Plan For Peace", *Europe Report no 167*, October 11, 2005

While analyzing the reasons behind the failure of the OSCE to peacefully solve the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, four major factors come into play. Firstly, at the time of engagement (1992), the CSCE/OSCE did not have any previous experience in peaceful conflict management. Therefore, its mandate to perform mediation was rather restricted, entailing only the monitoring of peace maintenance on the ground and making recommendations for the peaceful settlement of the dispute. Secondly, due to the high distrust and enmity between the belligerents, resulting in incompatible political interests (territorial integrity vs. secession) none of them has been eager to comply with the guidelines of the OSCE and through it contribute to a viable resolution of the problem. Thirdly, Russia's striving for dominance in the region also substantially hinders the mediation process conducted by the Mink Group. In fact, being a full member of the OSCE, the Russian Federation has been actively involved in the work of the "Minsk Group," thus trying to considerably influence the mediation process in its favor to maintain the geopolitical leverage in the region.[52] Finally, and most importantly, the failure of the OSCE Minsk Group to peacefully solve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is due to its declaratory and recommendatory nature, thus only serving as a political forum for discussions between the belligerents. Indeed, the regional framework of the OSCE does not have any "judicial or quasi-judicial institutions" for imposing its legally binding resolutions upon the member states or for effectively dealing with human rights violations during the conflicts.[53]

Moreover, given the emergence of the ESDP within the EU in 1998, the great European powers, focused on the steady development of this new security dimension of the Union, have become rather reluctant to provide the OSCE framework with the necessary civilian or military resources for conflict prevention and the subsequent resolution.

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[52] Ibid, 110-125
[53] David Chandler, "The OSCE and the Internationalization of national minority rights" *in Ethnicity and Democratization in the New Europe,* ed. Karl Cordell (London/N.Y: Routledge, 1999), 63

Consequently, the OSCE has been considerably deprived of its leverage in the management of regional security.

Taking into account all these factors, the OSCE mediation in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan has not reached any fruitful results and the conflict still remains at a frozen stage until this day.

2.2. Internal Conflicts in Georgia

Apart from Armenia and Azerbaijan, the third country in the South Caucasus – Georgia – has been also embroiled in the ethnic conflicts since 1988, however, unlike its neighbors, there are two unresolved intra-state conflicts in Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia).

While sharing some fundamental similarities with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Georgian-Abkhazian and the Georgian-South Ossetian conflicts have their own distinct peculiarities. Firstly, unlike the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh between the independent states of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the two ethnic conflicts in Georgia can be still perceived as intra-state disputes between the central government and the minority groups, albeit with an active (often negative) involvement of Russia in them. Secondly, Georgia is ethnically more heterogeneous than its two other South Caucasian neighbors, which in turn intensified the security dilemma among different ethnic groups. Thirdly, and very importantly, from the Georgian perspective, there has been an overt political interference of Russia in both the South Ossetian and the Abkhazian conflicts, where the Russian government has been openly supporting the political demands of the secessionist leaders.[54]

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[54] Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers,* 142-143

2.3. *The Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict*

A. Historical Background

The bloody ethnic war between the Georgians and the Abkhaz during 1992-1993 has led to more than 10,000 deaths as well as 200,000 refugees and IDPs. One could argue that this conflict is mainly a result of Russia's "divide and rule" strategy, entailing the promotion of various ethnic identities, which had been widely applied against the former colonies of the Russian Empire since the beginning of the twentieth century.

According to Cornell, in the case of the Georgian-Abkhaz relationship, this strategy was easier implemented through language, first by the Russian Empire and later by the Soviet Union. Indeed, despite both being integral parts of the ancient Georgian kingdom, the Abkhaz and the Georgians (historically comprising a considerable ethnic majority in Abkhazia) belong to different ethnic and linguistic groups. Therefore, in order to further separate these two communities, first the Russian Empire and later on the USSR, proclaimed the Russian language as the "language of inter-ethnic communication" between the Abkhaz and the Georgians, which in turn greatly contributed to the subsequent instigation of "anti-Georgian sentiments" among the Abkhaz.[55]

Interestingly enough, during the three years of the Georgian independence from the Russian Empire (May 26, 1918 - February 25, 1921), Abkhazia remained an integral part of the democratic Georgian republic. However, on March 31, 1921, soon after the Bolshevik Red Army invasion in Tbilisi, Abkhazia was proclaimed as an independent Soviet Socialist Republic, separately from Georgia. This state of affairs changed again in December 1921, when the Abkhazian SSR joined the Georgian SSR under the Union Treaty. In 1931, the Abkhazian SSR was included into the Georgian SSR as an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia (the Abkhazian ASSR), which according to the Abkhaz political and

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[55] Ibid, 146-147

cultural elites, was a result of Stalin's policy of the Georgianization of Abkhazia, resulting in the massive migration of Georgians into the autonomous republic.

As a consequence, anti-Georgian attitudes started developing among the Abkhaz, who repeatedly (in 1956, 1967 and most notably in 1978) appealed to the Soviet leadership for secession from Georgia and a subsequent integration into the Russian Federation. In response to these demands, the Soviet government extended the administrative and cultural autonomy of the Abkhaz in the early 1980s.[56] Nevertheless, this could not calm the tensions between the two ethnic groups, which by that time were already running high.

On the other hand, the rising tide of the Georgian nationalism directed against the Soviet rule in the late 1980s further deteriorated an already tense relationship between the central Georgian government and the secessionist leaders of the Abkhazian ASSR, the latter complaining about Georgia's assertive nationalist policies in the region, especially in the fields of education and culture. As a result, on August 25, 1990, Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet, without any participation of the Georgian delegates, declared the sovereignty of Abkhazia from Georgia, thus granting it the status of an independent Soviet Socialist Republic. In response to this, in a few days, the Georgian Supreme Soviet annulled the aforementioned declaration. Furthermore, in the following year, on April 9, 1991, the newly elected Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia proclaimed Georgia's independence from the USSR, while declaring Abkhazia as an integral part of Georgia.[57]

Notwithstanding this fact, on July 23, 1992, the Abkhazian parliament re-declared its independence from Georgia, followed by a statement of the Abkhazian secessionist leader Vladislav Ardzinba to wage a war against the Georgian government with the help of outside supporters, "should this prove necessary."[58] All these developments gave rise to the break out of a full-scale ethnic warfare between the two conflicting sides, starting from August 14,

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[56] Zverev, *Contested Borders in the Caucasus,* 39
[57] Ibid, 42-43
[58] Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers,* 170-174

1992 and lasting until May 1994, when a Russian bartered ceasefire and separation of forces agreement (Moscow Agreement) entered into force, which envisaged the deployment of the CIS peace-keeping mission on the ground.[59]

Ever since, being characterized by an on-going sporadic guerilla fighting between the Georgian and the Abkhaz paramilitary groups (mainly in the upper Kodori gorge, which is under the jurisdiction of the Georgian government), the conflict has been stalled without any significant progress towards its resolution. It should also be noted that like Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia has not been recognized by any international actor as an independent sovereign state, thus regarding this breakaway region as an integral part of Georgia.

B. International Engagement

As noted above, Russia's involvement is critical in all the three South Caucasian conflicts, especially in the one in Abkhazia, where the Russian government has long-term strategic interests related to the Black Sea Port of Sukhumi (the capital of Abkhazia), the former Soviet military base of Gudauta as well as to the considerable Russian minority in the region.[60] Therefore, the Russian political elites have been very keen on integrating strategically important Abkhazia into the Russian Federation, which explains why Russia was militarily involved in the conflict, thus actively providing the Abkhaz with military personnel and weapons. It is also noteworthy that already in 1993, the then Russian President Boris Yeltsin urged the international community to recognize Russia's role as the major peace keeper in Abkhazia and generally, in the whole post-Soviet space.

On the other hand, this rhetoric forced the Georgian government to join the Russian-led CIS in October 1993 and agree on the Russian military presence in its breakaway regions

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[59] King, *The Benefits of Ethnic War*, 533
[60] Catherine Dale, "Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Dynamics of the Conflicts", in *Conflicts in the Caucasus*, ed. Pavel Baev and Ole Berthelsen (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1996), 16

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of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[61] Regarding the CIS, it should be noted that recently, on April 29, 2008, the Russian Ministry of Defense has issued an official statement to increase the number of CIS peace-keepers in Abkhazia, which further deteriorated an already tense Georgian-Russian relationship as well as the situation in the conflict zone itself.[62] Considering these factors, it appears that Russia is interested in both gaining strategically important region of Abkhazia and in destabilizing Georgia to keep its political control over the Georgian government.

Apart from the Russian-led CIS peace-keepers, the UN also got involved in the mediation of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict through participation in the ceasefire negotiations, which subsequently led to the conclusion of the interim ceasefire agreement between the belligerents, on July 28, 1993.[63] Later, on August 24 1993, under the Security Council resolution (no 858), the UN launched its observer mission (UNOMIG) in Georgia, consisting of 88 military observers, which has been increased to 133 to date. The military observers started operating along with the civilian support staff in order to ensure the maintenance of the ceasefire agreement.[64] However, on September 16, 1993, the war re-emerged again, which officially ended in May 1994, with the signing of the Russian-brokered Moscow agreement, mentioned above.

With regard to the UNOMIG activities in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict resolution, it is worth noting that during 1995-1997, the mission considerably contributed to the return of many Georgian IDPs to the Gali region of Abkhazia (which has an administrative border with Georgia). Besides, in 1997, the UNOMIG Coordinating Council was set up as a consultation mechanism to encourage political dialogue and cooperation between the conflicting parties.

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[61] Catherine Dale, *Abkhazia and South Ossetia,*17-18
[62] See the statement of the Russian Ministry of Defense at:
http://www.mil.ru/info/1069/details/index.shtml?id=41981
[63] In May 1993, the UN Secretary General appointed a Special Envoy for Georgia, who was mediating the negotiations over the ceasefire agreement. http://www.unomig.org/background/background/?id=214
[64] For more detailed information about the composition of the UNOMIG see:
http://www.unomig.org/background/background/?id=214

Since its establishment the Coordinating Council has been working on security issues, return of refugees and IDPs, as well as social and economic issues.[65] Furthermore, in 2002, the UN Secretary-General's envoy Dieter Boden worked out a document on the "Basic Principles for the Distribution of Competences between Tbilisi and Sukhumi," which was strongly supported by the UN Security Council.[66] In this regard, in order to strengthen the capacity of the UNOMIG and facilitate "the safe and dignified return of IDPs and refugees," on July 30, 2003, the UN Security Council adopted another resolution, calling for the incorporation of a civilian police component of 20 officers to the UNOMIG.[67]

Nevertheless, none of the aforementioned efforts have brought substantial progress in the viable political settlement of the conflict. There are several reasons behind this, which are mostly similar to the ones in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh. First and foremost, under its rather limited mandate for observation and monitoring only, which is in accordance with Chapter VI of the UN Charter, the UNOMIG is an observer mission with "lightly armed or unarmed troops," requiring the consent of conflicting parties. Therefore, this is considerably different from the concept of the peace enforcement mission enshrined in Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which entails urgent military "action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security."[68] This limited mandate was especially the case during the return of the Georgian IDPs to the Gali region (1995-1997), when the UNOMIG failed to ensure their safe and secure resettlement, which resulted in the death of several dozen returnees.[69]

Aside from that, there is a lack of close and consistent cooperation between the UNOMIG and the Russian-led CIS peace-keepers, the latter claiming the role of the major

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[65] The UNOMIG, *Facts and Figures*
http://www.unomig.org/glance/facts_figures/
[66] UNSC, 4464th meeting, *Resolution 1393(2002),* clause no 3
[67] UNSC, 4800th meeting, *Resolution 1494(2003),* clause no 17
[68] UN Charter *(1945),* Chapter VII, Article 42
[69] Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers,* 186-187

peace guarantor in the region. Importantly, while investigating the facts about Russia's military assistance to the Abkhaz fighters during the Georgian-Abkhazian war, the UNOMIG has been denied access to certain areas in Abkhazia by the CIS peace-keepers ("a Russian-only force"), which in turn has greatly aggravated the cooperation between the two peace-keeping missions.[70] In fact, instead of facilitating the constructive settlement to the conflict, the Russian peace-keepers have further alienated Abkhazia from Georgia and added more legitimacy to Russia's de facto control over it.[71] Moreover, they have been repeatedly accused of bribery, smuggling, looting and other illegal activities.[72]

Finally, there is a problem with the incompatible political interests of the Georgian government and the Abkhaz separatist government. While first suggesting a "federative or confederative solution to the problem" in 1992, which according to Cornell would "safeguard Georgia's territorial integrity,"[73] after the refusal from the Georgian side, the Abkhaz secessionist leaders have gradually increased their demands to full independence from Georgia. On the other hand, the Georgian government excludes every possibility that this will happen, which does not move the negotiations forward.

2.4. The Georgian-South Ossetian Conflict

A. Historical Background

The Georgian-South Ossetian conflict leading to the death of approximately 700 people and a tide of around 100,000 refugees and IDPs, can be regarded as the "mildest" of the three conflicts in the South Caucasus.[74] It is noteworthy that, unlike the Abkhaz, the Ossetians are relatively new settlers in Georgia and therefore they did not have any separate

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[70] Ibid.
[71] Mark Leonard and Charles Grant, *Georgia and the EU,* 5
http://www.cer.org.uk/pdf/policybrief_georgia_sept05.pdf
[72] Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers,* 186-187
[73] Ibid, 170
[74] Ibid, 167

ethno-political or ethno-territorial administrative formation until April 22, 1922, when the USSR formed the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast (AO) within the Georgian SSR.[75] This was soon followed by the establishment of the North Ossetian (AO), on July 7, 1924.[76]

Here, one could argue that like in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia, the aforementioned Soviet decision was greatly driven by the Russian concept of "divide and rule," analyzed above. Indeed, considering that the Ossetians in Georgia are ethnic kin to the Ossetians in Russia, their partition into the North-Ossetia (Alania) and the South-Ossetia between the Russian Federation and Georgia, respectively, well served the Soviet strategy of ethnic polarization, which was aimed at weakening the constituent republics of the USSR.[77]

However, there had not been any ethnic clashes between the Georgians and the South Ossetians almost during the whole Soviet era. This state of affairs changed drastically only in the late 1980s, which was due to the rising wave of the Georgian nationalism striving for independence from the Soviet regime.

In fact, since 1988, anti-Georgian sentiments started developing among Ossetians (comprising the ethnic majority in South Ossetia), who were complaining about Georgia's assertive nationalist policies in the region. In this respect, the law enacted by the Georgian Supreme Soviet in November 1988, which substantially extended the role of the Georgian language throughout the whole territory of Georgia, served as a catalyst for the development of the South Ossetian nationalist movement demanding the unification with their ethnic brethren in North Ossetia.[78] In response to this, Georgia vetoed "all-Union laws," thus exercising its right to secede from the USSR.

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[75] King, *The Benefits of Ethnic War*, 534
[76] Importantly, on December 5, 1936, North Ossetia received the status of an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) within the Russian Federation, which has not changed since the break up of the USSR, available at: http://www.kafkas.org.tr/english/bgkafkas/bukaf_gosetya.html
[77] Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers,* 151
[78] Ibid, 165

While protesting against Georgia's nationalist policy, the South Ossetian leaders appealed to the central Soviet government for granting them the status of an autonomous republic. Moreover, emboldened by the 1990 Soviet decision to strengthen the position of the autonomous regions in the Soviet republics, in September 1990, the South Ossetian Supreme Soviet declared independence from Georgia, thus proclaiming South Ossetia as an "Independent Soviet Democratic Republic." In response to this, on December 11, 1990, the Georgian Supreme Soviet revoked the status of the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast (AO), which in turn instigated the onset of open armed hostilities between the Georgians and the South Ossetians.

Importantly, the Russians and the North Ossetians were actively siding with the South Ossetians during the war, regarding them as Russian citizens, "thereby implicitly recognizing South Ossetia's accession to Russia." In this regard, in order to prevent the break out of a full-scale violence between the aforementioned ethnic groups, on June 22, 1992, "the Sochi Agreement" was signed by then Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze and Russian President Boris Yeltsin. According to this agreement, the ceasefire entered into force six days later (held ever since) and soon after, a peacekeeping force comprised of Russians, Georgians as well as the Ossetians was established on the ground.[79]

Notwithstanding this fact, the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict has also been at a frozen stage, without any durable solution to the problem until now. It should also be noted that like in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia, South-Ossetia's independence has not been recognized by any state.

B. International Engagement

Aside from the Russian peacekeepers, operating within the framework of the CIS, the CSCE/OSCE mission to Georgia got also engaged in the mediation of the Georgian-South

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[79] Ibid, 166-170

Ossetian conflict in the late 1992. Regarding the Russian peacekeepers, it should be noted that their activities in South Ossetia have been reminiscent of the ones in Abkhazia, discussed above. Therefore, their military presence on the ground could not be considered as useful in terms of a constructive conflict settlement.[80]

Conversely, the OSCE mission to Georgia, which has a similar mandate to the one pursued by the OSCE "Minsk Group" in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, has brought some minor but still important improvements in the first stages of mediation.[81] Here, the question concerning the return of refugees and IDPs had gained particular salience. In this respect, the initial negotiations on this issue, mediated by the OSCE mission since 1992, could be regarded as more or less successful, resulting in inter-ethnic reconciliation and the subsequent return of many Georgian IDPs to the South Ossetia in the mid 1990s.

However, soon after, the situation deteriorated again. This was greatly due to the 1997 resolution adopted by the South Ossetian parliament, whereby only those Georgian refugees and IDPs were allowed to return to the South Ossetia, who did not take part in the 1992 war between the two ethnic groups and recognized the legitimacy of the South Ossetian constitution. Apart from that, the South Ossetians were claiming an equal status with Abkhazia within a "restructured Georgian federation," thus demanding that Georgia's form of a unitary republic should change into an "asymmetric federation." This proposal, which had been actively discussed within the framework of the OSCE Joint Control Commission (JCC), was immediately rejected by the Georgian government.[82]

A crucial turning point for the escalation of tensions in the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict arrived after the Georgian "Rose Revolution" of November 2003, when the newly elected Georgian government, headed by Mikheil Saakashvili embarked upon a remarkably

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[80] Mark Leonard and Charles Grant, *Georgia and the EU,* 5
http://www.cer.org.uk/pdf/policybrief_georgia_sept05.pdf
[81] See the mandate of the OSCE mission to Georgia at: http://www.osce.org/georgia/13203.html
[82] Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers,* 193-194

assertive policy to regain the territorial integrity of Georgia. Considering that the overall situation with regard to the political settlement of the South Ossetian conflict was more promising than the one in Abkhazia, the Saakashvili government redoubled its efforts to take control over the region. However, this strategy met strong resistance from the South Ossetian separatist leadership, which was strongly backed up Russia. As a result, these developments served as a catalyst for the renewal of armed hostilities between the Georgians and the South Ossetians in July 2004.[83]

On the other hand, during all the years since 1992, international mediation carried out by the OSCE mission jointly with the CIS peacekeepers has failed to positively influence the overall picture with respect to the South Ossetian conflict resolution, which has been considerably aggravated in the last few years. Here, all the aforementioned unfavorable factors prevalent in the cases of Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia, such as the weak mandate of international peace-keeping missions, Russia's political, economic and military support for the secessionist entities as well as the incompatible political interests of the conflicting parties come into play. All together, these factors substantially hinder the peaceful settlement of the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict.

2.5. Conclusions

Based on the empirical analysis of all three conflicts in the South Caucasus, it appears that international mediation applied in this region as a strategy for effective conflict resolution has been rather unsuccessful. This is due to the fact that both the OSCE and the UN peace-keeping missions considerably lack the credible civilian and most importantly military capabilities which are essential for the implementation of their respective mandates and for the maintenance of lasting peace and security in the region.

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[83] Svante E. Cornell at al, "A Strategic Conflict Analysis of the South Caucasus: With a Focus on Georgia", *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program,* prepared for the Swedish Development Cooperation Agency (2005), 21-22

Here, I will briefly discuss the appropriateness of alternative conflict resolution strategies analyzed in the previous chapter for the South Caucasus conflicts.

Regarding the substantial demographic partition of the conflicting ethnic groups as another solution to the problem, it should be noted that this option has not yet been proposed by any international intervener, acknowledging the highly intermixed patterns of ethnic settlement in the whole South Caucasus, especially in Georgia.

Another approach towards the resolution of frozen ethnic conflicts is related to the effective power-sharing arrangements between the central governments and the secessionist leaders of the breakaway regions. Interestingly enough, this option has been widely discussed with respect to all three conflicts in the South Caucasus. Nevertheless, given the highly antagonized environment in the whole region, especially in Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia, the negotiations over this issue have practically broken down.

Taking into account all these obstacles, one could argue that the incorporation of credible "hard power" elements on the ground is necessary to create the constructive environment for the political settlement of the South Caucasian conflicts. This in turn should be complemented by the highly developed civilian capabilities for the subsequent reconciliation and reintegration of conflicting ethnic groups, thus facilitating the establishment of a modern civil society in the region. In this respect, neither the UN nor the OSCE peacekeeping missions have the capacity to perform the above mentioned task. Consequently, the issue of their replacement has been gaining more and more salience among the parties concerned.

Meanwhile, the EU as a newly emerging global "civilian power," effectively combining the institutionalized civilian and military components for crisis management within the ESDP, has started developing its long-term strategic relationship with all the three countries of the South Caucasus. Importantly, this relationship also covers the aspects of

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conflict resolution. It appears that through the ESDP engagement in the South Caucasian conflicts, the EU could considerably fill the existing gap in the peace-keeping missions of the UN and the OSCE. Indeed, as the following chapters will argue the deployment of the ESDP military/civilian missions on the ground would greatly facilitate the peaceful resolution of the frozen ethnic conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

CHAPTER 3: Enhancing EU's Political and Security Involvement in the Resolution of the South Caucasus Conflicts

Given its favorable geopolitical location, lying as a convenient transport corridor for trade and communications between Europe and Asia, the South Caucasus has emerged as a region of growing strategic salience to the European Union (EU). Moreover, acknowledging the issue of energy diversification, one of the crucial priorities of the EU, the close partnership with Azerbaijan, which possesses rich hydrocarbon resources (oil and gas), as well as with Georgia, which servs as an important energy transit country, could become of considerable relevance to the EU member states. As it stands, the main energy supplier of the EU is Russia, which imposes rather high export tariffs on gas and oil. Hence, the EU seeks alternative energy sources and transit routes, bypassing Russia in order to import the energy supplies at a reduced price. In this regard, one of the best possible alternatives is the transit route through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, which connects the Caspian Sea (Azerbaijan) and the Black Sea ports (Georgia and Turkey) with Europe.[84]

However, the persistent ethnic conflicts in the South Caucasus posing a real threat to the peace and security of the EU considerably hinder the realization of the aforementioned strategic deliberations. Indeed, the EU member states are greatly challenged by the risks related to organized crime and international terrorism together with the illegal trafficking of people, weapons and drugs, which emanate from war-torn societies of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, respectively.

In order to prevent this state of affairs, the EU is greatly concerned about the stability and the democratic development of the South Caucasus. In fact, being perceived as a global "civilian/normative power," the EU is trying to spread the core European values of

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[84] Leila Alieva, "EU and South Caucasus", *Bertelsmann Group for Policy Research,* Discussion Paper (December 2006), 1-2

democratic governance, human rights, rule of law as well as a free market economy in the region through the framework of its newly launched European Neighborhood Policy (ENP).[85] Nevertheless, despite considerable economic, legal as well as humanitarian assistance delivered to the South Caucasus countries through the ENP, very little has been done to solve the entrenched ethnic conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

In this regard, while focusing on their drawbacks and the reasons behind them, I will first analyze the strategic methods and tools currently applied by the EU towards the resolution of the South Caucasus conflicts. Next, I will dwell upon the question of the ESDP's geopolitical implications for the Caucasian frozen conflicts, suggesting that the EU's increased political and security involvement in the disputed matter could greatly facilitate a viable solution of it.

3.1. The EU as a Normative and Financial Actor

Since the mid 1990s, the EU has been steadily developing its relations with the strategically important South Caucasus region. The first legal basis of this relationship was the signing of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) with Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia in 1996, which entered into force in 1999. Importantly, aside from the political, economic and cultural relations with the aforementioned countries, these agreements also envisaged cooperation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, albeit in the framework of the UN and the OSCE only.[86] The lack of the EU's own contribution to the conflict resolution in the South Caucasus could be well explained by the fact that at that time the Union did not yet have a credible and autonomous crisis management tools, which was brightly illustrated in the EU's failure to deal with the violent Balkan wars at its doorstep.

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[85] Roberto Aliboni, "The Geopolitical Implications of the European Neighborhood Policy", *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 10/1, (2005), 1-2
[86] See the Political and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) with Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia available at: http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/ceeca/pca/index.htm

However, by gradually developing its second pillar (the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)) in the following years, the EU has become more engaged in the political and security cooperation with the South Caucasus countries, thus expressing its willingness to foster the prevention and peaceful resolution of protracted ethnic conflicts in the region. This was clearly outlined in the European Security Strategy of 2003, which says that "We should now take a stronger and more active interest in the problems of the Southern Caucasus."[87] Accordingly, in July 2003, the EU established the office of the first EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the South Caucasus, whose mandate envisions the development of the EU's comprehensive policy towards the region as well as assistance in conflict prevention and resolution.

Moreover, greatly inspired by the substantial progress in the democratic reforms in Georgia that were carried out right after the "Rose Revolution" of November 2003, the EU decided to expand its role in the whole South Caucasus. As a result, on June 14, 2004, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia were included in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), which marked a new stage in their strategic partnership with the European Union. In November 2006, the EU concluded Action Plans (AP) with all three countries, which encompass closer political, economic and cultural cooperation as well as the EU's more enhanced engagement in the mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts.[88]

Notwithstanding these facts, the EU has not yet been actively involved in the formal process of political negotiations between the conflicting parties. This could be explained by the concept of the ENP itself, based on the conditionality and socialization principles,

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[87] European Security Strategy, *A Secure Europe in a Better World,* Brussels, (2003), 8
[88] The European Commission's Delegation to Georgia, *The EU & Georgia: Bilateral Relations*
http://www.delgeo.ec.europa.eu/en/eu_and_georgia/bilateral_relations.html

through which the EU is pursuing the constructivist policy of soft diplomacy towards the South Caucasus countries with limited crisis management capabilities.

In fact, the main goal of the ENP is to ensure durable peace and stability in the neighboring countries of the EU through the promotion of the rule of law together with the subsequent political and economic reforms. This is based on mutual commitment to shared civilian/normative values inherent to the EU, such as human rights, democracy and liberal economy. According to the ENP strategy paper adopted by the European Commission, "effective implementation of such commitments is an essential element in the EU's relations with partners."[89] Therefore, the countries in the democratic transition, like the ones in the South Caucasus, which tend to conform more to the aforementioned values get the prospects of a "privileged relationship" and closer cooperation with the Union.

However, the rhetoric of the ENP with regard to an active political and military engagement in the conflicting regions has been rather softened. According to the European Commission, the EU engagement in such areas should have a preventive character and be introduced gradually in line with the progress made by the parties concerned. Besides, it should not entail the imposition of democratic principles upon the parties but rather be based on their voluntary commitment.[90]

Another important strategy pursued by the EU within the ENP is the principle of socialization, when the creation of reputational pressures (shaming, persuasion) changes the behavior of the EU's neighbors, resulting in a fostered socialization between them. This is done through the establishment of social representations (diplomats, academics, cultural representatives), who closely interact with domestic political units and civil society, by using

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[89] The European Neighborhood Policy Strategy Paper, (May 2004), 13, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/documents_en.htm#1
[90] Judith Kelley, "New Wine in Old Wineskins: Promoting Political Reforms Through the New European Neighborhood Policy", *Journal of Common Market Studies 44/1,* 2006, 30-36

the "value language" in order to promote the normative principles of liberal democracy.[91] In this regard, the Commissioner for External Relations, Benita Ferrero-Waldner argues that "one key feature of the ENP is its human dimension: education, health and people–to-people contacts; greater mobility and exchanges of pupils, students and scientists."[92]

Here, while analyzing the general guidelines of the ENP with regard to conflict prevention and the subsequent resolution in the neighboring regions, one can easily identify the core assumptions of the social constructivist paradigm, which have been widely applied in the case of the South Caucasus frozen ethnic conflicts. Indeed, rather than using its political and security leverage on the ground, the EU prefers to constrain its activities to economic rehabilitation as well as humanitarian assistance programs and through them facilitate the process of reconciliation and confidence building between the conflicting ethnic groups. For instance, since 1997, the community has funded assistance programs in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which are aimed at creating favorable conditions for the return of refugees, and IDPs have amounted to more than €35m.[93]

Nevertheless, much less contribution has been made to other crucial aspects of peaceful conflict resolution "such as demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR)," which obviously need the deployment of credible political and military instruments on the ground. In this respect, the EU rehabilitation and development programs carried out in close cooperation with the UN and the OSCE only serve as supporting soft power tools, which struggle to make any substantial progress in the settlement of the conflicts themselves.[94]

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[91] Ibid, 39-40

[92] Benita Ferrero-Waldner, SPEECH/07/829, *Structured Dialogue – Committee of the Regions,* Brussels, (December 18, 2007), at:
http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/07/829&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en

[93] Tracey C. German, "Visible Invisible: EU Engagement in Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus", *European Security 16/3*, (September 1, 2007), 365

[94] International Crisis Group, "Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus: The EU's role", *Europe Report no 173*, March 20, 2006, 16-22

Considering that the EU possesses much more developed political, military as well as financial tools than the ones available at the disposal of the OSCE and the UN missions, it should be more actively engaged in the peace-keeping activities on the ground. This in turn, would well serve the subsequent political resolution of the frozen ethnic conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

3.2. How Would the ESDP Engagement Reach Fruitful Results?

In this respect, the EU should use the wide range of civilian and military crisis management tools within the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), which "has become the necessary framework for the formulation and implementation of effective European security policy." As Jolyon Howorth nicely points out, the ESDP dimension of the Union can be perceived as a "common acceptance of integrated European interventionism" when the use of limited military force is permissible as a means to secure the idealistic and normative values inherent to the EU.[95] Moreover, the use of military force is regarded as a legitimate tool in order to stabilize the security situation in the conflict regions before providing long-term development assistance to them.[96] According to the European Security Strategy (ESS), the EU "should be ready to act before a crisis occurs, conflict prevention and threat prevention cannot start too early."[97] Here, it appears that the main focus of the ESDP is on the management of ethnic conflicts, maintenance of peace and stability as well as post-war

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[95]Sonia Lucarelli and Roberto Menotti, "The Use of Force as Coercive Intervention", *in Values and Principles in European Union Foreign Policy* ,ed. by Sonia Lucarelli and Ian Manners (London: Routledge, 2007), 157
[96]Xymena Kurowska, "The Role of ESDP Operations" *in European Security and Defense Policy: An Implementation Perspective,* ed. Michael Merlingen and Rasa Ostrauskaite (London: Routledge, 2008), 30
[97] European Security Strategy, *A Secure Europe in a Better World,* Brussels, (December 12, 2003), 7

democracy building, which could have significant implications on the ethnic conflict resolution in the South Caucasus.[98]

In order to explore how the ESDP engagement in the stalled Caucasian conflicts can improve the tense political situation in the region, it is relevant to provide a brief historical background of the ESDP itself together with its institutional build-up as well as an empirical analysis of the ESDP's geopolitical implications for the settlement of the South Caucasus conflicts.

It is noteworthy that since the launching of the ESDP by the Cologne European Council in June 1999, the EU has been gradually emerging as a global security and military actor in modern international relations. This can be regarded as a response to the global challenges and security threats of the early twenty-first century, which have shown that the development of autonomous military capabilities is necessary for Europe to uphold its normative values of democracy worldwide.

As a result, the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty introduced the office of a High Representative for the CFSP pillar, together with the Policy Planning and Early Warning units as supporting structures. Aside from that, the Petersberg Tasks entailing humanitarian assistance, rescue tasks, peacekeeping/peacemaking and crisis management were also incorporated within the CFSP, which in turn have considerably contributed to the steady development of EU's security and military dimension.[99]

The cornerstone for the emergence of the ESDP, which is regarded as a "fourth pillar" dealing with military aspects of the EU's foreign policy[100] was the St. Malo Joint Declaration

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[98] Michael Merlingen and Rasa Ostrauskaite, "The European Union in International Security Affairs', *in European Security and Defense Policy: An Implementation Perspective,* ed. Michael Merlingen and Rasa Ostrauskaite (London: Routledge, 2008), 2

[99] Maria Raquel Freire, "The European Security and Defense Policy: History, Structures and Capabilities" *in European Security and Defense Policy: An Implementation Perspective,* ed. Michael Merlingen and Rasa Ostrauskaite (London: Routledge, 2008), 11

[100] Michael Smith, "*The EU as an International Actor", in European Union: Power and Policy-making*, ed. Jeremy Richardson, London: Routledge, 2007, 295

signed by British Prime Minister Tony Blair and French President Jacques Chirac in 1998. This document states that

> The European Union needs to be in a position to play its full role on the international stage…To this end the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises.[101]

In this regard, the Helsinki European Council of December 1999 proposed the Headline Goals, which envisaged the creation of a functioning European Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) by 2003. This force would be comprised of the 60,000 (deployable within 60 days) military troops with air and naval assets sustainable for at least one year as an instrument to realize the Petersberg Tasks.[102] Here, it is also noteworthy that the implementation and operation of the ESDP military and civilian missions fall within the competence of the Council of the EU and thus are based on the unanimity of the member states. This was determined by the Nice European Council of December 2000, which envisioned the creation of the permanent structures within the Council to deal with the ESDP matters. In fact, important politico-military bodies of the Council such as the Political and Security Committee, the European Union Military Staff (EUMS) as well as the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crises Management (CIVCOM) were set up on a permanent basis in order to facilitate the effective functioning of the ESDP both in military and civilian realms. Importantly, the main priorities and decisions of the ESDP are voiced by the Secretary-General of the Council (embodying the functions of a High Representative for the CFSP), who is perceived as the EU's face and voice on the international scene.[103]

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[101] Franco-British Summit Joint Declaration on European Defense, St. Malo, (4 December, 1998) http://www.atlanticcommunity.org/Saint-Malo%20Declaration%20Text.html
[102] The creation of the Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) was envisaged by the Helsinki Headline Goal set by the Helsinki European Council Declaration of December 1999. It was further refined by the Helsinki Headline Goal 2010, which was endorsed by the European Council on 17 and 18 June 2004.
[103] Maria Raquel Freire, *The European Security and Defense Policy,* 12-16

Moreover, in order to further enhance the ESDP's operational capabilities and their efficiency, the Brussels European Council of 2004 adopted a new 2010 Helsinki Headline Goal that established the European Defense Agency (EDA) together with a civil-military cell of planning and running military operations within the EU Military Staff. The principal novelty of the new Headline Goal was the creation of the European battle groups of around 1,500 troops at short notice, which should be militarily self-sustaining, with the necessary planning and operational capabilities for the fulfillment of the Petersberg Tasks.[104]

After impressively developing its civilian and military capabilities, the EU member states made a decision to operationalize the ESDP. As a consequence, on January 1, 2003, the first civilian crisis management operation (the European Union Police Mission (EUPM) was launched in Bosnia, which was soon followed by the military mission (CONCORDIA) in Macedonia deployed on March 31, 2003.[105] Since then, there has been a steady proliferation of the ESDP crisis management operations worldwide, which has resulted in 18 civilian and military deployments in regions such as the Balkans, Africa, the Middle East Asia and interestingly enough even in the South Caucasus, namely in Georgia.[106]

Indeed, on July 16, 2004, the EU launched its first ever rule of law mission (EUJUST THEMIS) under the auspices of the Council of the EU (within the CIVCOM), which marked the first ever ESDP engagement in the South Caucasus. However, a quite small-scale rule of law mission to Georgia, which was basically carried out by technical experts, did not have any direct implications for the resolution of the frozen ethnic conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, respectively. In fact, the one-year mandate of EUJUST THEMIS envisaged the assistance to the Georgian government in reforming and coordinating the whole criminal justice sector of the country. In order to eliminate the widespread corruption and fraud among

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[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid, 19
[106] For more information on the ESDP operations see:
http://consilium.europa.eu/showPage.asp?id=268&lang=en&mode=g

the judicial authorities of Georgia, a newly reformed judicial sector should be based on the principle of local ownership. Nevertheless, with its limited scope and rather scarce instruments EUJUST THEMIS had a rather moderate success and was unable to have a wider political impact in the region, especially in terms of peace-building and state reconstruction in the region.[107]

From the shortcomings of the aforementioned rule of law mission to Georgia it appears that in order to facilitate the rapid democratic transition of the South Caucasus countries, the EU member states should pay more attention to the areas of conflict prevention and resolution, which are crucial for building an effective civil society in the region. For this purpose, the ESDP should be comprehensively engaged on the ground through the application of both civilian and military crisis management tools.

To demonstrate the viability of a combined civilian/military engagement as a strategy for the resolution of inter-ethnic conflicts, I would like to provide the two examples of the ESDP civilian and military crisis management operations in the Western Balkans, namely in Macedonia and Bosnia, the crisis situations of which have some similar characteristics to the ones in the South Caucasus. Firstly, like in the case of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, Bosnia also got embroiled in a bloody inter-ethnic warfare in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet system, which has had a devastating effect on the process of its smooth democratic transition. Secondly, the efforts of the international interveners to reach a durable political solution to the protracted crisis were mostly unsuccessful, which was due to the limited scope and resources at their disposal. Thirdly, like in the South Caucasus countries, the legacies of the communist system such as corruption, fraud, bribery and nepotism have been also prevalent in the public governance of both Bosnia and Macedonia, especially in their judicial sector.

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[107] Xymena Kurowska, "More than a Balkan Crisis Manager: The EUJUST THEMIS in Georgia" *in European Security and Defense Policy: An Implementation Perspective,* ed. Michael Merlingen and Rasa Ostrauskaite (London: Routledge, 2008), 97-108

Taking all these negative consequences into account, the EU decided to deploy the ESDP civilian and military missions in Macedonia and Bosnia, the European Union Police Mission (EUPOL PROXIMA) and the EU Military Operation (EUFOR ALTHEA), respectively.

While focusing on the democratization and reformation of the state-level policing system, the EUPOL PROXIMA in Macedonia had the following tasks: preventing organized crime and corruption, demilitarizing the police in order to transform it into the civilian service for citizens, as well as promoting an equitable representation of conflicting ethnic groups of Macedonians and Albanians in the police. Importantly, EUPOL PROXIMA launched on December 15, 2003, was preceded by the aforementioned military operation (CONCORDIA) in Macedonia, which had ensured the security presence of the EU in the region. This in turn provided "an armed protection element" on the ground, thus facilitating the stable implementation of PROXIMA's civilian mandate.

By and large, through its well-equipped investigation and monitoring mechanisms the EUPOL PROXIMA has managed to reach its main strategic priorities for peace-building in the region, related to the decentralization of police decision-making and management as well as the fight against organized crime. [108]

The same holds true for the on-going ESDP military operation (EUFOR ALTHEA) in Bosnia, with the largest credible military force (7,000 soldiers) the EU has ever deployed under the ESDP auspices. This operation has been successfully performing its major peace-keeping objectives on the ground since its launching on December 2, 2004. In fact, the EU's considerable military presence in Bosnia aimed at deterring illegal armed groupings in the region, has received a rather positive acclaim from the local population, who is convinced that EUFOR ALTHEA would greatly prevent the renewal of inter-ethnic fighting in the

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[108]Tobias Flessenkemper, "EUPOL PROXIMA in Macedonia, 2003-2005" *in European Security and Defense Policy: An Implementation Perspective,* ed. Michael Merlingen and Rasa Ostrauskaite (London: Routledge, 2008), 80-84

country. In this regard, EUFOR's mandate envisages patrolling and collecting the weapons and ammunition from the conflicting ethnic groups as well as the gathering of information and intelligence, which are carried out by the specialized units. In order to fulfill these strategic objectives, the EUFOR ALTHEA is authorized to use its military force.[109]

Importantly, like in the case of Macedonia, ALTHEA has been also operating in close cooperation with the previously deployed EU Police Mission (EUPM) in Bosnia. The EUPM in Bosnia has a similar mandate to the one launched in Macedonia, thus mainly focusing on police modernization and the fight against the organized crime and corruption. In fact, through their credible civilian and military instruments, which are operating under the Common Operational Guidelines, ensuring the coherent and consistent activities of the two missions, the ALTHEA and the EUPM have managed to reduce the threat and impact of organized crime in the region.[110]

Overall, through the application of a wide range of military and civilian capabilities at their disposal, the EU military operation (EUFOR ALTHEA), together with the civilian police mission EUPM have greatly contributed to the maintenance of peace and stability in war-torn Bosnia, which is a necessary precondition for the subsequent process of modernization and democratization there.

Considering the aforementioned successful coordination of the ESDP's civilian and military instruments in the Western Balkans, it appears that the EU should deploy the similar kinds of missions in the South Caucasus as well in order to solve the frozen ethnic conflicts and build up a long-lasting peace and stability in the region. Here, aside from the strategic objectives such as the police reformation and the fight against the illegal armed groupings and criminals, another crucial aspect of conflict resolution comes into play, which is the return and resettlement of hundreds of thousands of refugees and IDPs. The most important

[109]Thomas Bertin, "The EU Military Operation in Bosnia" *in European Security and Defense Policy: An Implementation Perspective,* ed. Michael Merlingen and Rasa Ostrauskaite (London: Routledge, 2008), 64-68
[110] Ibid, 70-71

task in this regard is to guarantee a perspective of life in security and dignity for them. This can only be accomplished through the presence of the ESDP's credible military force on the ground, which should assist its civilian crisis management advisers in the fields of DDR, border management, security sector reform, humanitarian aid and rehabilitation as well as media and human rights protection.[111] All these activities in turn could greatly foster inter-ethnic reconciliation and the subsequent reconstruction of a common identity.

However, unlike in the Balkan case, the lack of a coherent common strategy and specific goals of the EU towards the South Caucasus countries could present a considerable obstacle for the realization of the aforementioned strategic priorities. This is especially evident in the relationship of certain EU member states towards Russia, perceived as a major player in the region. In fact, "The Big Three" (France, Germany and the UK), who have been the driving forces for the development and operation of the ESDP, are rather reluctant to deploy large-scale civilian and military missions in the South Caucasus conflict zones in fear of antagonizing the Russian government. Apparently, those "Big Three" attach more importance to the strategic partnership with Russia rather than the one with the South Caucasus countries. Therefore, from their perspective, the ESDP's military presence in the conflicts in Russia's backyard could considerably undermine this partnership.[112]

On the other hand, the new members of the EU, such as Poland and the Baltic states, are supporting the EU's increased political and security involvement in the South Caucasus, regardless of the powerful Russian factor on the scene. This stance of the above mentioned Eastern European countries could be well explained by the prevalent resentment towards the Soviet Russia's imperialistic policies, which resulted in the occupation of Poland and the Baltic states in 1939. Consequently, these countries are striving for the EU's enhanced political actorness in its "New Eastern Dimension" in order to balance Russia's often

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[111] International Crisis Group, *Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus: The EU's role*, 26
[112] Dov Lynch, "Russia's Strategic Partnership with Europe", *The Washington Quarterly 27(2)*, 2004, 99-118

assertive foreign policy in that area. Here, it should be emphasized that the ESDP rule of law mission (EUJUST THEMIS) to Georgia was first proposed by such countries as Estonia and Lithuania.[113]

3.3. Conclusions

Overall, one could argue that a credible contribution to the long-lasting peace and stability in the South Caucasus through the full-fledged engagement of the ESDP in conflict resolution could well serve the global strategic preferences of the EU itself. Firstly, as noted above, the issue of energy diversification from costly Russian-controlled oil and gas supplies and transit routes has become one of the top priorities on the European agenda. In this regard, the South Caucasus region possesses a key strategic value due to its rich hydrocarbon resources as well as its favorable geopolitical location between the Caspian and the Black Seas. Secondly, it is vital for the stability of the EU member states to prevent the "soft security threats," such as the organized crime, smuggling and illegal trafficking, which are common in the neighboring conflict zones of the South Caucasus. Thirdly, the EU as a global civilian/normative power is greatly interested in spreading and upholding its inherent democratic values in the near abroad, which in the case of the South Caucasus conflicts necessitates the incorporation of sustainable hard power elements on the ground.

Taking all these factors into account, it appears that the EU should play a more visible role in crisis management and conflict prevention actions in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia by deploying an ESDP combined civilian-military operation on the ground.

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[113] See Xymena Kurowska, *More than a Balkan Crisis Manager: The EUJUST THEMIS in Georgia,* 99-100

CONCLUSION

The entrenched ethnic conflicts in the South Caucasus have caused great concerns among the Western powers over the regional peace and stability in Europe and its neighborhood. As a result, since the early 1990s there has been an intensive debate on the best possible methods for the durable political settlement of those conflicts through outside intervention.

One of the widely acknowledged strategies, already discussed in the theoretical chapter, - international mediation - conducted by the UN and the OSCE has failed to reach any fruitful solution to the status of disputed territories in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This failure of the aforementioned international organizations is mainly conditioned by the backlashes of the non-binding mediation itself as well as their weak peace-keeping mandates and the lack of credible civilian and military instruments. Aside from that, Russia's strive for regional hegemony on the one hand and the conflicting political visions of the disputed parties on the other also serve as hindering factors for the efficiency of the UN and the OSCE mediation efforts. In this regard, the theoretical and empirical analysis provided by the first and second chapters of this study shows that a viable solution to the South Caucasus conflicts requires credible and unbiased international military presence on the ground, which should also entail the application of effective civilian crisis management tools.

In terms of this strategy, first and foremost, it is vital to ensure the safe repatriation and resettlement of a large number of refugees and IDPs, who were forced to flee their homes in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, respectively due to the break out of violent ethnic wars in those regions in the early 1990s. For this purpose, there should be a considerable deployment of military personnel in order to carry out the peace-keeping

measures, such as the DDR, border monitoring and management as well as the fight against organized crime and illegal armed groupings.

After safeguarding both security and freedom of the returnees, the subsequent focus of the international community should be on the civic encouragement activities that foster reconciliation and reconstruction of common identity among the conflicting ethnic communities. This should be done through a sustainable police reform and restructuring aimed at police demilitarization and creation of an integrated civilian police force, which would be more accessible to citizens and therefore crucial for building their confidence in the new democratic platform of the government. Wide public trust in the government policies would in turn greatly facilitate the subsequent establishment of effective power-sharing arrangements between the central authority and autonomous regions by extending the political and cultural rights of breakaway ethnic groups in the state decision-making.

Concerning the appropriate capabilities of international actors for successfully implementing the aforementioned peace-keeping and peace-building tasks, it appears that the engagement of the EU's newly emerged security dimension - the ESDP - would be a viable option for a peaceful political settlement of the South Caucasus conflicts. In fact, through its rather developed civil-military cell of planning and running crisis management operations the ESDP has shown that it is capable of dealing with the difficult peace-keeping and peace-building mandates in the various conflict zones around the world. Yet, this has not been done with respect to any of the frozen ethnic conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

As noted above, one possible obstacle for the ESDP's full-fledged involvement in the South Caucasus conflicts is related to the Russian factor, which plays a dominant role in the geopolitics of the whole post-Soviet space. As a consequence, the EU has failed to work out a coherent and consistent foreign and security policy towards Georgia, Armenia and

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Azerbaijan. Indeed, the powerful EU member states, the stance of which is central for the launching of the ESDP's civilian and military operations worldwide, have been quite reluctant to override Russia's political influence in its backyard, thus preferring to maintain the status quo ante in the region.

On the other hand, there are considerable rational reasons in favor of the EU's enhanced engagement in the resolution of the South Caucasus conflicts. In fact, the strategic importance of the region, the prevention of "soft security threats" as well as the promotion and upholding of the European normative values are all of significant relevance to the EU's own policy preferences and the stability of its external borders.

Finally, I suggest that the EU's more visible contribution to broader regional peace and stability, including an active political involvement in the peaceful settlement of frozen ethnic conflicts in the South Caucasus would greatly speed up the process of democratic transition in this region, but also would well serve the image of the Union, as an emerging global power in the international system.

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