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AMBIGUITY-IN-USE**

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Abstract

Driven by the aim of observing the particular instance of ‘territorial ambiguity’ confronted under the label ‘South Caucasus’, the present research concentrates on the analysis of the outward discourse, weaved around the region by three major powers – the EU, Russia and the US. Turning into a discursive battleground of various semantic dominations, the region gets conceptualised according to various functionalities it receives in specific contexts or metanarratives. These are classified under three major discursive nodal points, identified throughout the data analysis, reflecting the region’s role as a ‘neighbour/partner’, a ‘conflict zone’ and a ‘transit corridor’. Drawing separate pictures of each discourse and bringing them together in the end, the present research demonstrates the external inconsistency within the conceptual takes on the region, which further complicate its internal ambiguity.

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To my Grandmother...

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We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time...¹

T.S. Eliot

Introduction

‘A Broken Region’ – is how Peter Semneby, the EU envoy for the South Caucasus, referred to the region in his annual address to the European Parliament’s Foreign Relations Committee.² The two words, contradictory as they might seem, come together to characterise the ambiguity underlying the label ‘South Caucasus’ today. The EU is not the only actor recognizing this ‘brokenness’. The internal ‘complexity’ of the region had been realised long before the EU’s involvement with the region, by actors like Russia and the US, whose presence in the South Caucasus has resulted in a more intricate narrative, woven in a more complex conceptual patchwork. Yet, despite this uniform understanding of its ‘brokenness’ the label still holds, reflecting the region’s ambiguous territoriality, which can be characterised as a ‘a split in unity’. This conceptualisation, ambiguous as it is, nevertheless still determines, and in a sense constrains, the policies and strategies of external actors towards the region, which also results in an extreme inconsistency in their take on the region.

The aim of the present research is to observe this instance of territorial ambiguity, confronted under the banner ‘South Caucasus’ – a symbolic knot tying together various contesting ideologies and harbouring multi-dimensional discourses that get intertwined, further complicating the symbolic meaning of the region. Being

¹ T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (San Diego: Harvest Book, 1968)

² Peter Semneby, annual address to the European Parliament’s Foreign Relations Committee, October 2, 2007, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1078854.html> (Accessed May5, 2009)

often portrayed as a connecting bridge between East and West³, the region frequently gets trapped within the undesirability of its international orientation, marked by different ‘directionalities’ stemming from the separate ‘milieus’⁴ comprising it. Finding itself within the web of numerous power projections, the region gets defined and redefined according to various functionalities it receives, and depending on the different relationships of alterity it finds itself in with regard to each great power. As a result, the label, that stays firm in one context, becomes meaningless or altogether disappears in another, reflecting its internal split. Thus, the internal split and the external boundedness of the region at times get divided within separate discourses, or at times come together within a single discourse.

For the purpose of observing these various instances, when South Caucasus gets constructed as either a bounded region (see fig. 1), a splintered region (see fig. 2), or a region reflecting a split in a boundedness (see fig. 3), I have come up with a framework of exploration in the form of three variations of a power triangle. The triangles, depicting the EU, Russia and the US on each pole⁵, represent the three major external actors in the region, thus introducing the ‘outside’ discourse on the region. The three variations of the graphical portrayal of the South Caucasus inside the triangle reveal the various discursive definitions and the conceptual lenses each pole prioritises in making sense of the region.

³ Edmund Herzig, *The New Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1999) 87.

⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988) 313.

⁵ Michael Emerson, “The EU-Russia-US Triangle,” CEPS Policy Brief, no. 52 (June 2004).

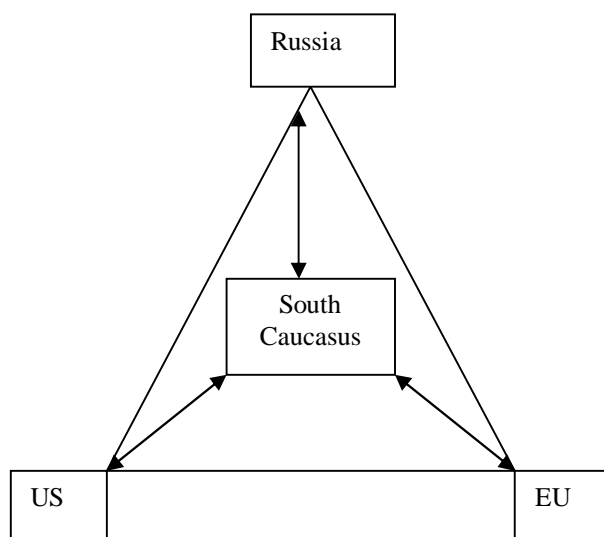


Figure 1: South Caucasus as a 'bounded region'

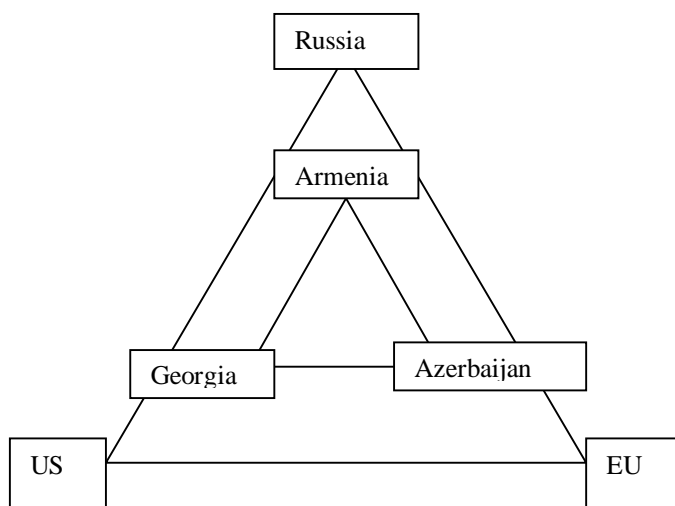


Figure 2: South Caucasus as a 'Split/broken region'

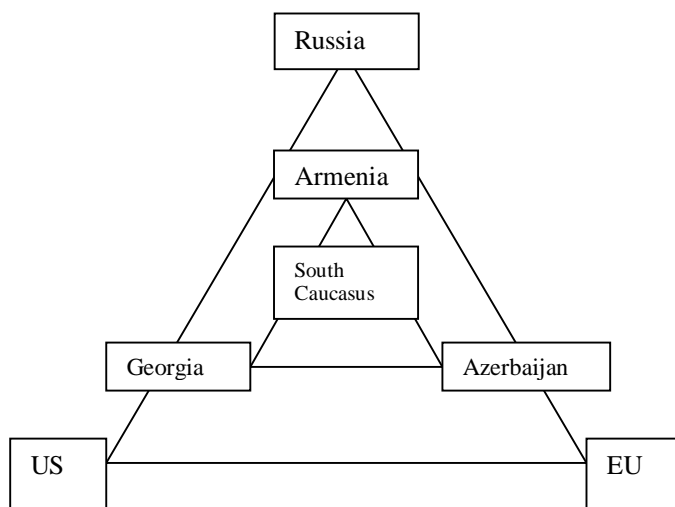


Figure 3: South Caucasus, reflecting a 'Split in boundedness'

Within the struggle of various conceptualisations emanating from the poles of the triangles, each attempting to assign a particular meaning to the territory under the symbolic banner of ‘South Caucasus’, the region simultaneously takes up the functional roles of a ‘neighbour/partner’, ‘a conflict zone’ or a ‘transit corridor’. Each of these roles becomes prioritized at a particular instance, within a specific institutional discourse. Thus the meaning of the regional label, which is constructed through discourse, is subjected to strict institutionalisation, where power does not emanate from some central point, but is polar, it is ‘everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere’⁶. Within this multi-dimensionality of power projection, various meanings get various discursive credibility, and any attempt to single out a particular hegemonic discourse with the aim of totalising its meaning over a specific milieu becomes an act of a mere selective imposition. The present research, therefore, is not driven by an objective to single out a general discourse that would characterise the region, distinguishing between ‘accepted discourses and excluded discourses’ or between ‘dominant and dominated’⁷ ones, but rather draws a picture of the multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play at various strategies.

Such multi-dimensional analysis will contribute to the better understanding of the region and its ambiguity. Unlike the majority of the existing literature that situates the region within a taken for granted perspective of its brokenness and internal inconsistency, concentrating on its internal discourse, I take a reverse perspective and concentrate on the outer discourse. I build my own framework of understanding, where the meaning of the region evolves gradually, through giving voice to different

⁶ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 1:93.

⁷ *Ibid.* 1:100.

discourses, each separately constructing a different picture of the region. Bringing these pictures together, I reconstruct the ambiguity that is often taken for granted. But within the process of reconstruction I reveal the internal chemistry of this ambiguity, which is often left unnoticed by external actors. Building their policies from an established perspective on the region, based on the recognition of its internal inconsistency, they become unaware or consciously neglect their immediate participation in enhancing this very ambiguity.

I start my research with a brief review of literature, which also serves as data for my research, being an inextricable part of the discourse surrounding the region. I then proceed with the elaboration of the theoretical grounding of my research and the methodology used, which is followed by the actual empirical analysis. This is where I delineate the three separate discourses emanating from each pole of the triangle – US, Russia and EU – around the three major discursive nodal points, which I single out during the process of data analysis. In the concluding section I reconstruct the broader picture, summarising the findings and draw major implications.

Chapter 1

Situating the Research

1.1 Literature Review

The role of literature in the present research is crucial for the mere reason that it not only serves as an impetus for a more in depth analysis with the purpose of fulfilling certain gaps in the existing research, but also serves as the actual data, which builds on the broader discourse surrounding the region. Since the literature, as such, introduces a specific point of view on the region, based on a particular perceptual framework, it has served as an important starting point for my research. Going through the works written on the South Caucasus, I singled out major dominating themes and the discursive categories, which later appear in my empirical analysis in the form of discursive nodal points.⁸ Emanating from a single perceptual take on the region, most of the works are centered around a specific functional definition, be it reflected in the notion of a ‘conflict zone’, the region’s importance in the broader energy security discourse, or the more recent focus on its role in Europe’s ‘new neighbourhood’. Important as they might be for the conceptualisation of the specific meanings the region gets for the outside, they lack the multi-dimensionality that I seek for comprehending the broader discourse underlying the label.

Two specific works are worth reviewing in this context. A significant step towards a more dimensional account of how the region gets defined through different conceptual lenses was made by Damien Helly⁹. Although he mostly concentrated on

⁸ Thomas Diez, “Europe as a Discursive Battleground: Discourse Analysis and European Integration Studies,” *Cooperation and Conflict*, no.1 (March 2001):15.

⁹ Damien Helly, ‘EU Policies in the South Caucasus’, June 2001, <http://www.ceri-sciencespo.com/archive/june01/helly.pdf> (Accessed 21 April, 2009).

the EU and its comprehension of the region, he still provides an important representation of various approaches or mental maps,¹⁰ which can be appropriated to the other two poles of the triangle as well. These are mainly the Caspian Caucasus approach, which introduces a more global take on the region, thus reflecting the perception dominant within US discourse, and the ‘Zakavkazie’ approach, which together with the ‘Post-Soviet Caucasus’ approach, reflects Russia’s take on the region and the gradually fading attempt to regionalise it through the framework of the CIS. Interestingly enough, contrasting the EU’s perception with that of the US, Helly traces a lack of any overarching conceptual lens that Europe takes in defining the region. The US, adopting a more coherent approach, directs its policies towards a symbolic appropriation of the region with a ‘New Silk Road’, which reflects the discourse of a ‘transit corridor’ or the ‘Great Chessboard’ that implies its geopolitical contestation with Russia. Nevertheless, as my research will demonstrate, I challenge Helly’s argument through an introduction of a more up-to date¹¹ conceptualisation, within which the EU proves to be much more consistent in its policies towards the region than the US, which keeps oscillating within its three-dimensional take.

Further work worth drawing attention to as a useful reference for this particular research is an article by Simão and Freire,¹² published in the *Caucasian Review of International Studies*. Concentrating on the EU’s process of engagement in the South Caucasus in the context of ENP, the authors look at how the ‘divergent perceptions of the region, both inwards and outwards-driven, impact on regional policy choices’. The suggestion the article makes is one of overcoming the

¹⁰ The seven ‘mental maps’ are: ‘European Caucasus’, ‘Balkan Caucasus’, ‘Caspian Caucasus’, ‘Zakavkazie’, ‘Post-Soviet Caucasus’, ‘Middle-Eastern Caucasus’ and ‘Third World Caucasus’ approaches

¹¹ The article was written in 2001 and therefore could not reflect the ENP discourse, which in my research has found a central role in conceptualising EU’s take on the region.

¹² Licínia Simão and Maria Raquel Freire, “The EU’s Neighbourhood and the South Caucasus: Unfolding New Patterns of Cooperation,” *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, no.4 (Autumn 2008) 225-239.

‘artificially constructed ‘South Caucasus’ regional label’¹³, to place it within a wider framework of regional bounds, such as the Black Sea Security complex. Drawing on the point raised by Simão and Freire regarding the ‘imposed’ constructedness of the label and recognizing the importance of their insight, the present research, nevertheless, does not attempt to evade and escape the label as such. It rather engages within the task of the latter’s decoding and making sense of this very ‘artificiality’, since the very notion of overcoming the label does not ensure a full redemption from any contextual framing. Moreover, reconceptualising the region within the wider framework of the Black Sea complex, may lead to a far greater undecidability and ambiguity around its semantic territorialisation.

Taking certain significant insights from the above mentioned works, I use them as a ground or a setting where I build my own research, expanding and further developing the ideas from both. The works in a way serve as stimuli for a more profound thinking about the issues raised and the challenges of making sense of the label within the meticulous discourses where it becomes constructed.

1.2 Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The ontological assumptions the present research draws from are rooted in the constructivist paradigm, which regards the world as a social construction and emphasises the intersubjective character of social reality. Within such ontological perspective, language becomes more than just a mere reflection or a ‘mirror’ of the world, but rather intrinsic and ‘constitutive’ of social reality.¹⁴ The recognition of the

¹³ Licinia Simão and Maria Raquel Freire, “The EU’s Neighbourhood and the South Caucasus: Unfolding New Patterns of Cooperation,” *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, no.4 (Autumn 2008) 225.

¹⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1967).

constructive role of language, identified as the ‘linguistic turn’ and introduced by Wittgenstein, has brought about new research concerns in social sciences, replacing the widely dominating questions on ‘how things work’ by new ones, primarily concentrating on ‘what things mean’.¹⁵ Thus the notion of sense-making and interpreting what certain relationships or phenomena signify became of central concern within the constructivist paradigm. The present research, driven by a similar concern of unpacking the meaning of a particular concept or label, puts a major emphasis on language or utterance as mechanisms for producing specific discourses, through which constructing meaning and sense-making becomes possible. Truth in this case becomes not just a property of the world out there, generated by some abstract logical form, but a ‘product of language’¹⁶ it is expressed in, therefore always ‘relative to a particular semantic system.’¹⁷

To understand the meaning of certain concepts, which are not some neutral descriptions of how things are, but are created and constructed within a particular social reality, we need to understand their ‘grammar’, their function within a larger semantic field.¹⁸ Thus the meaning of a concept is determined by its use, rather than provided by its direct reference. The contingency of certain concepts arises from the recognition of the multiplicity of uses or functionalities they receive in various semantic contexts. The act of admitting this relativity does not necessarily lead us towards the abyss of arbitrariness and an ultimate denial of truth. The accumulation and the assembly of various systems, within which the particular concept becomes meaningful, helps us to avoid falling into the trap of generalisations and conceptual

¹⁵ Peter Winch, *The Idea of Social Science* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

¹⁶ Jonathan Potter, *Representing Reality – Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Construction* (London: Sage Publications, 1997) 81.

¹⁷ Friedrich Kratochwil, ‘Constructivism: What it is (not) and how it matters’ in *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective*, eds. Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 82.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 88

partiality that arises from a blind submission to the search for general concepts. Hence, taking into account the fluidity and the contradictory dynamics, lying within specific concepts, the present research aims at searching for the discourses, reflected in narratives and texts that hold together these contradictory flows, making them 'real' or 'true'.

Thus the methodology I have adopted for conducting the research is discourse analysis, which is often claimed to be more than just a method that entails practices of data collection and analysis, but a methodological approach to discourse, based on a set of metatheoretical and theoretical assumptions and a body of research claims.¹⁹ These assumptions, offering a perspective on the nature of language, concentrate on its constructive effects, thus grounding discourse analysis in an explicitly 'constructionist epistemology that sees language as constitutive and constructive, rather than reflective and representative.'²⁰ This specific research approach has also been identified as 'discourse theory'²¹ which draws its main methodological concerns from the Foucauldian notion of problematization through which the 'being offers itself to be thought.'²² Thus discourse theory becomes a version of a 'problem-driven' rather than 'method-' or 'theory-driven' research, the key objective of which becomes the elucidation of carefully problematized objects of study by seeking their description, understanding and interpretation.²³ Driven by the aim of exploring the discursive meaning of 'South Caucasus' and rendering visible the plurality of

¹⁹ Nelson Philips and Cynthia Hardy, 'Discourse Analysis: Investigating Processes of Social Construction (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002) 50:5.

²⁰ Linda Wood and Rolf Kroger, *Doing Discourse Analysis: Methods for studying action in talk and text* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000).

²¹ David Howarth, 'Applying Discourse Theory: the Method of Articulation', in *Discourse theory in European politics : identity, policy and governance*, ed. David Howarth and Jacob Torfing (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 317.

²² Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Pantheon, 1985) 11.

²³ David Howarth 'Applying Discourse Theory: the Method of Articulation', in David Howarth and Jacob Torfing (Ed.) *Discourse theory in European politics : identity, policy and governance* (London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 318.

interpretations it receives, I examine how language constructs, reflects and reveals its internal logic. I thus adopt the major assumption of discourse theory, according to which ‘discourse is constitutive of social world, and the world cannot be known separately from discourse.’ This, nevertheless, does not mean that ‘there is nothing outside discourse’ in a sense that language constitutes the material world. As David Campbell puts it: “The world exists independently of language, but we can never know that (beyond the fact of assertion), because the existence of the world is literally inconceivable outside of language and our traditions of interpretation.”²⁴

Having specified the epistemological significance of discourse theory, I now turn to the actual set of methods it offers for studying discourse. I treat discourses not just as simple groupings of utterances, but ones that have meaning, force and effect within a particular social context. Discourses cannot be treated in isolation; they are always situational and are ‘connected to other discourses that were produced earlier, as well as those which are produced synchronically and subsequently’²⁵ Therefore, I establish certain time-frameworks within which I observe a specific discourse, at the same time, however, drawing on the previous discourses to trace their evolution and the major transformations that have brought about the current discourse. For example, regarding the ENP discourse, through which I analyse the new conceptual take of the EU towards the South Caucasus, I draw parallels between the documents produced within the framework of ENP with an earlier document, produced in 1995, reflecting the strategies of the Union towards the region. Apart from a diachronic comparison, I also draw synchronic parallels among various discourses, evolving around the same

²⁴ David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1992) 6.

²⁵ Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis”, in *Discourse as Social Interaction*, ed. T.A. Van Dijk (London: Sage Publications, 1997) 1:277.

discursive nodal points, with the purpose of tracing their points of convergence and divergence.

Thus, in a sense, I treat discourse as a ‘dialogical struggle’ among the different poles of the triangle, each producing a number of utterances, contrasting or adding up to the general discursive framework. The research unfolds around the practice of giving voice to multiple meanings and interpreting these meanings to come up with a wider and encompassing framework of understanding. Meaning becomes impossible to be fixed or controlled, due to the basically ‘volatile nature of language’.²⁶ Therefore a discursive formation can never be a self-contained, closed whole. There are always open parts, where a certain battle over meaning takes place. A discourse can never dominate or fix all meaning completely, obtaining what Laclau and Mouffe call a ‘suture’.²⁷ Thus, it is wrong to speak of a single meaning of South Caucasus, but one can speak about different kinds of situations, or metanarratives that at points contest each other, but also converge and overlap at other points. Identifying both the points of convergence and divergence I trace certain discursive nodal points (DNPs), identified by Diez²⁸. These are concepts often articulated in the discourses formed around the general label of South Caucasus. Throughout the discursive process of articulation of these metanarratives, I simultaneously observe the internal contingency and malleability of certain concepts that form them. This helps me in the long run to account for the broader ambiguity of the initial concept I indent to unpack.

Singling out three major discursive nodal points, through a thorough examination of the major concepts that emerge in various data sources, namely

²⁶ Henrik Larsen, *Foreign Policy and Discourse Analysis: France, Britain and Europe* (Routledge, 1997) 19.

²⁷ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy – Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985) 111.

²⁸ Thomas Diez, “Europe as a Discursive Battleground: Discourse Analysis and European Integration Studies,” *Cooperation and Conflict*, no.1 (March 2001):15.

documents, speeches, articles, official statements, related to South Caucasus, I structure my research around the clash of a limited set of metanarratives. These include:

1. *South Caucasus perceived as a ‘neighbour’*
2. *South Caucasus as a ‘conflict zone’*
3. *South Caucasus as a ‘transit corridor’*

The three concepts reflect different discursive positions and thus conceptualise the region according to different functionalities it receives in specific contexts. Moreover, the meaning some of them receive in a particular metanarrative does not necessarily correspond to the meaning of the same concept in a different metanarrative. The metanarratives are deeply interwoven in the discursive nodal points and only make sense ‘within a larger universe of discourses knit together by articulations of actors’.²⁹ Thus, for example, the meaning of a ‘neighbour’ in the context of Russia-South Caucasus relations receives a different conceptualisation from the one that can be traced in the EU-South Caucasus discourse. The semantic contingency of this concept, which is quite often articulated within both discourses, will be observed later in the detailed analysis of the individual discourses. Simultaneously, these discursive categories do not necessarily satisfy the semantic relations or conceptualisations, which originate from the three major players. This can be seen in the case of the ‘transit corridor’ where Russia becomes ‘discursively excluded’. What concerns the third discourse, where the region gets conceptualised as a large ‘conflict zone’, it leaves none of the parties excluded and in a way becomes the overarching theme that characterises the broader meaning of the region. The latter appears to be an umbrella for bringing the three states, quite diverse among each

²⁹ Thomas Diez, ‘Europe as a Discursive Battleground: Discourse Analysis and European Integration Studies,’ *Cooperation and Conflict*, no. 1 (March 2001):18.

other, both identity-wise and in terms of the functionalities they receive within various discourses, into a single regional framework under the label of ‘South Caucasus’.

The aim of the current research, nevertheless, is not the search of a dominant or overarching discourse with an attempt to draw a single objective picture of reality, but rather to take an observational stance, elucidating and exposing the alternative semantic positions and their peculiar effect on the conceptualisation of the region within the diversity of the possible discursive frameworks. My analysis in a way freezes the social world in question when confronted with the final task of explanation. My concern becomes not the search for general necessary conditions that constitute the meaning of my object of analysis in general, but for the constellation of conditions that make its meaning ‘contingently possible’ at a particular point in time, since ‘admitting the plurality of possible interpretations allows us to free ourselves from the mistaken identification of explanation with one of its forms’.³⁰

Multidimensional as it attempts to be, the analysis is still prone to partiality, since the meticulous semantic web within which the region finds itself is too vast to be incorporated within the confines of the present research. This wide range of metanarratives has been narrowed down to a limited set of three major discursive nodal points, which being dominant within the meanings, consciously appropriated to the region, nevertheless, do not fully account for the much richer and broader scope of possible meanings.

³⁰ Friedrich Kratochwil, ‘Constructivism: What it is (not) and how it matters’ in *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective*, eds. Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 97.

Chapter 2

EU and South Caucasus: Changing the Label, Changing the Discourse

Every new neighbour creates both ‘opportunities and challenges’³¹ for the Union. These two words, often emphasised in the ENP discourse, in a way become important measuring factors in the EU’s decision to acquire ‘new neighbours’. The notion of a ‘neighbour’ in this case extends beyond the mere geographical confines, becoming something that can be chosen through a careful consideration and weighing of the ‘opportunities’ and ‘challenges’ it bears for the Union. The implication of both notions is well reflected in Benita Ferrero-Waldner’s recent speech, where she referred to the South Caucasus as a ‘remarkable and complex region that has enormous economic promise.’³² Thus the challenge lying in its ‘complexity’ and the opportunities stemming from its ‘enormous economic promise’ form together the core conceptualisation or the meaning the region receives in the eyes of the EU. These two notions get combined under a new meaning the region has acquired for the Union through its incorporation into the European Neighbourhood Policy – the meaning of a neighbour.

The meaning, nevertheless, is relatively new, and so is the idea of neighbourhood, both geographically and discursively. It became an immediate consequence of the recent ‘big bang’ of enlargement of the Union in 2004, followed by the launching of the European Neighbourhood Policy and thus a construction of a

³¹ European Neighbourhood Policy : Strategy Paper – Communication from the Commission (Brussels, 12.5.2004).

³² Benita Ferrero-Waldner, ‘Political Reform and Sustainable Development in the South Caucasus: the EU’s approach’ (Speech/06/477) delivered at the “Caspian Outlook 2008” Bled Strategic Forum, (Slovenia, 28 August, 2006) .

new discourse around the Union's periphery. Still, the inclusion of the South Caucasus within this new discourse was not immediate. It was indeed highly contested due to the challenges it bore for the Union itself. But the need for a 'stronger and more active interest'³³ in the region kept growing as the Union started to realise the 'particular strategic importance' it bore for Europe.³⁴ Thus the 'ring of friends' became complete with the 2004 adoption of the three South Caucasian states, opening a new page in the EU-South Caucasus relations that also brought about a change in the mutual perceptions, predominantly in the perception of the EU towards the region. The 'feared and poorly understood specter at the edge of Europe's thinking'³⁵ suddenly became 'important' and the need to 'develop good neighbourly relations'³⁶ was to be accompanied with the EU's active involvement in understanding the region.

An important shift can already be traced in the official discourse reflecting the very label of the region. It previously appeared in the EU documents as 'Transcaucasus' – the corresponding equivalent of 'Zakavkazie', still dominant in the Russian discourse. This, in a way, reflects the EU's new take on the region, previously perceived as a 'Russian space'³⁷ and now moving beyond this conceptualisation, to become an 'area of overlapping concern'³⁸. Thus the region or Transcaucasia, still referred to as such in the 1995 communication from the

³³ 'A Secure Europe in a Better World' - European Security Strategy (Brussels, 12 December 2003).

³⁴ Benita Ferrero-Waldner, 'Political Reform and Sustainable Development in the South Caucasus: the EU's approach' (Speech/06/477) delivered at the "Caspian Outlook 2008" Bled Strategic Forum, (Slovenia, 28 August, 2006).

³⁵ Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 248

³⁶ European Neighbourhood Policy : Strategy Paper – Communication from the Commission (Brussels, 12.5.2004).

³⁷ Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 99.

³⁸ Michael Emerson, "The Wider Europe as the European Union's Friendly Monroe Doctrine," CEPS Policy Brief, no. 27 (October 2002).

Commission, marked by ‘internal conflict’ and ‘external isolation’³⁹ gradually overcame the latter, offering new opportunities for the EU to engage and promote its main interests in the region, stated as ‘geopolitical, economical and moral’⁴⁰

Having identified the region’s incorporation into the ENP as an important point in the formulation of the EU’s new discursive perception of the region, I limit my analysis to the 2004-2009 time-framework. Thus the major focus of this particular subchapter will be the elaboration of the meaning of a ‘neighbour’ the South Caucasus receives within the ENP discourse and how it incorporates the other two discursive nodal points, identified in the methodological chapter.

2.1 South Caucasus as an EU ‘Neighbour’

The notion of a ‘neighbour’, forming the basis of the ENP, has been a subject of a wide scope of analysis in the academic literature. Its semantic meaning has been questioned by various scholars and gained various interpretations, which account for the very ambiguity of the concept – the building block of the ENP - thus simultaneously accounting for the ambiguity of the whole policy as such. Looking at the official discourse, however, the most common representation of the ‘neighbour’ is one of a ‘friend’, introduced by Romano Prodi. Nevertheless, the concept of a ‘friend’ remains as ambiguous as that of a ‘neighbour’ and rather reflects a desire for a future transformation from a mere band of neighbouring states to a ‘ring of friends’, than an objective portrayal of the current meaning the ‘neighbour’ receives for the Union.

³⁹ Towards a European Union Strategy for Relations with the Transcaucasian Republics – Communication from the Commission (Brussels, 31.05.1995).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

‘I want to see a “ring of friends” surrounding the Union...’⁴¹

Turning to academic interpretations of the term, I outline Karen Smith’s conceptualisation, where the ‘neighbour’ receives the connotative meaning of an ‘outsider’⁴², which semantically comes closer to a ‘threatening other’, rather than a friendly insider. The concept of a ‘potential threat’ underlying the character of the new neighbours is also mentioned in Zaiotti’s piece, where he identifies the ENP as being caught in a ‘gated community syndrome’⁴³. Thus the stated objective of avoiding ‘new dividing lines across the continent’⁴⁴ becomes violated through the symbolic practice of building new fences and enforcing the old ones. In contrast, Ifversen and Kølvråa⁴⁵, drawing on Bauman’s conceptualisation of the ‘neighbour’s’ ambivalent position in between friends and enemies⁴⁶, semantically locate the European Neighbourhood within the category of a ‘stranger’. If friends and enemies introduce two opposite concepts, necessarily presupposing either inclusion or exclusion, then the notion of a ‘stranger’, one that is not particularly well-known or understood, does not necessarily have to be categorised within the binary opposition of a friend or enemy.

In my particular analysis, where I concentrate on a specific group within the ring of the EU’s neighbourhood, namely the three South Caucasian states, I find the

⁴¹ Romano Prodi, “A Wider Europe – A Proximity Policy as the Key to Stability”, speech delivered at the Sixth ECSA- World Conference (Brussels, 5-6 December 2002).

⁴² Karen Smith, “The Outsiders: the European Neighbourhood Policy,” *International Affairs*, no. 4 (July 2005):757-773.

⁴³ Ruben Zaiotti, ‘Of friends and Fences: Europe’s Neighbourhood Policy and the ‘Gated Community Syndrome’, *European Integration*, no. 2 (May 2007):143-162.

⁴⁴ Wider Europe— Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament (Brussels, 11.3.2003) 4.

⁴⁵ Jan Ifversen and Christoffer Kølvråa, “European Neighbourhood Policy as Identity Politics”, paper presented at the EUSA Tenth Biennial International Conference (Montreal, Canada, May 17-19, 2007)

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⁴⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) 53-61.

conceptualisation of a ‘stranger’ as best reflecting the specific position the region finds itself in with regard to the EU. It is the very lack of knowledge about the region that makes it hard for the EU to strictly categorise it under a certain perceptual framework. Thus the idea of a ‘stranger’ comes comfortably at ease in describing the peculiar relation the Union establishes with the newly acquired ‘neighbour’; for the ‘stranger’ and the ‘neighbour’ are not mutually exclusive categories and can perfectly coexist, while the process of cognition and sense-making takes a faster pace under the condition of a growing ‘rapprochement’ and ‘proximity’, bringing the ‘South Caucasus closer to the EU.’⁴⁷

An important step towards understanding the region could potentially be through the notion of ‘differentiation’, emphasised in the ENP ‘Action plans’, and presupposing an individual approach towards each ‘neighbour’. Nevertheless, from a careful analysis of the individual Action plans, it becomes evident that the EU’s take still remains largely regional, and the ‘individually tailored’ action plans resemble nothing but a single document, designed for the region at large and then appropriated for each state with some structural changes in the succession of the priorities listed. The order of such dissemination seems somewhat illogical at times, when the same issue, bearing the same wording, appears of high priority for one state and far below in the same list for the other. An example of this is the issue of conflict resolution, stated as priority number one in Azerbaijan’s Action plan, which only appears under point seven in the Action plan designed for Armenia.⁴⁸

Yet, designed in 2004, the three action plans were in a way an opening page in the EU’s engagement with the region, and served as a testing ground for developing a better informed understanding of the region and the countries comprising it. It was in

⁴⁷ Peter Semneby, Mission Statement - <http://ue.eu.int/showPage.aspx?id=1037&lang=EN> (Accessed May 5, 2009).

⁴⁸ EU-Armenia and EU-Azerbaijan ENP Action Plans

2007, three years down the road of cooperation with the ‘stranger’, that the EU gradually started to realise the artificiality of the region’s common label. It was in his 2007 address to the European Parliament’s Foreign Relations Committee, that the EU envoy, Peter Semneby, referred to South Caucasus as a ‘broken region’⁴⁹. This new definition reflected the EU’s realisation that despite sharing a common history, the three Caucasian states lacked any common identity and were still in the grip of ‘*old-fashioned, ethnically exclusive nationalism*’.⁵⁰

Given the rivalries between and inside the countries, this identity has to be larger than the region itself. An additional layer of identity, a European identity, is what comes to mind here. For such an identity, or for such a layer of identity to work as a catalyst for bringing this **broken region** together again, the countries and the communities in the region need, however, to understand that this identity is based on much more than just interests, but it is fundamentally based on **common values**.⁵¹

This realisation led the European Parliament to issue a resolution on a more effective EU policy for the South Caucasus, which put a stronger emphasis on the notion of ‘differentiation’ and the need not to ‘ignore the three states’ *particular characteristics*.’⁵² Despite the EU’s desire to understand the region better through acknowledging its internal particularities, the document still reflected the Union’s largely regional take and the need to ‘develop a regional policy for the South Caucasus’, where the practice of ‘sharing European values’ would be central.⁵³ Thus the practice of uncovering the ‘stranger’ with the implementation of differentiated bilateral policies was part of a larger project of ‘bringing the broken region together

⁴⁹ Peter Semneby. Annual address to the European Parliament’s Foreign relations Committee, October 2, 2007, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1078854.html> (Accessed May 5, 2009), (The special emphasis in bold in the passage and in all the subsequent block quotations is added by the author).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² European Parliament’s Resolution on a More Effective EU Policy for the South Caucasus: from Promises to Actions (17 January, 2008), point 2.

⁵³ European Parliament’s Resolution on a More Effective EU Policy for the South Caucasus: from Promises to Actions (17 January, 2008)

again'. The cornerstone of this mission would be '*shared projects, rather than shared history*',⁵⁴ and the ENP in this regard would serve as an 'excellent framework for regional cooperation with the view of creating a genuine space of security, democracy and stability',⁵⁵.

2.2 South Caucasus - Europe's own past?

The second discursive nodal point, identified in the first chapter, reflects the negative portrayal of the region as being 'locked in a vicious spiral of tit for tat conflict',⁵⁶. Herein I outline a new form of conceptualising the EU's perception of the South Caucasus, which was partly outlined in the preceding subchapter. Within this new conceptualisation, the 'newly acquired neighbour', or the 'stranger' that still needed to be discovered, turns into a stark 'other' – reminding Europe of its own past⁵⁷ – something that took the EU so long to overcome. Having refashioned itself as a set of new values, Europe has made enormous effort to 'forget and to shove into the dark corners of the past of those values that most often defined Europeanness: nationalism, chauvinism, and a penchant for the authoritarian state.'⁵⁸ What the EU sees in the South Caucasus today, is the very 'old-fashioned' nationalism that formed the core of its tragic past – the 'other' against which it constructs itself. As part of the project of overcoming this past, Europe has now undertaken a policy of a 'continental

⁵⁴ Kalypso Nicolaidis and Robert Howse, "'This is my EUtopia...': Narrative as Power", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2002, 40(4), 773.

⁵⁵ European Parliament's Resolution on a More Effective EU Policy for the South Caucasus: from Promises to Actions (17 January, 2008), point 12.

⁵⁶ Benita Ferrero-Waldner, 'Political Reform and Sustainable Development in the South Caucasus: the EU's approach' (Speech/06/477) delivered at the "Caspian Outlook 2008" Bled Strategic Forum, (Slovenia, 28 August, 2006).

⁵⁷ Ole Waever, "Insecurity, Security and Asecurity in the West European Non-war Community", in *Security Communities*, eds. Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁵⁸ Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 250.

shift', engaging with lands further east, those wishing to be part of it, with an attempt to remould them in the model of its own collective rethinking of the past.

Drawing on the different forms of 'othering' identified by Diez⁵⁹, I trace two forms present within the EU – South Caucasus discourse: representation of the other as 'different' and representation of the other as a 'threat'. The former is seen in the region's symbolic resemblance to the EU's own past and therefore is different in not having yet fully embraced the values that constitute the EU's present. The latter is a direct consequence of the former, since the very characteristics underlying this difference represent a potential threat to the EU's own security within the situation of the currently growing rapprochement. Now faced with the South Caucasus in the framework of the ENP, Europe uncovered a region confronting 'a struggle within its own ghosts' bearing more than a 'passing resemblance to the one the rest of Europe has been waging' so long⁶⁰ In Benita Ferrero-Waldner's August 2008 speech on Political Reform and Sustainable Development in the South Caucasus, one can trace a strong degree of disappointment and alarm on the part of the EU towards the new neighbour. The semantic context of the speech is overflowing with negative words and expressions, placing the region within the discourse of a large '*conflict zone*', such as '*worrying trends*', '*negative strands*', '*alarming*', '*little or no progress*', '*deep concern*', '*bad policy-making*', '*desperate need*', '*serious danger*', '*devastating consequences*', '*failure to pull back from the brink*'. All these are followed by an explanatory phrase: '*because the most important impediment to the region's development are the frozen conflicts*'.⁶¹ Despite this focus, the objectives of resolving

⁵⁹ Thomas Diez, "Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering 'Normative Power Europe'," *Millennium- Journal of International Studies*, no. 3 (June, 2005): 628.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 248

⁶¹ Benita Ferrero-Waldner, 'Political Reform and Sustainable Development in the South Caucasus: the EU's approach' (Speech/06/477) delivered at the "Caspian Outlook 2008" Bled Strategic Forum, (Slovenia, August 28, 2006).

these conflicts do not receive much of an emphasis in the ENP's actual policy framework towards the region. It rather leaves it as a matter of the countries' own responsibility, creating a suitable atmosphere through the promotion of regional cooperation.

The European Neighbourhood Policy is not in itself a conflict prevention or settlement mechanism, but through promoting democracy and regional cooperation, boosting national reform programmes and improving the socio-economic prospects of the region, it can contribute to a more positive climate for conflict settlement.⁶²

The ENP in a way also serves as a stage for the EU for self-identification and self-assertion as a modern and normative actor. This is often revealed in its discursive portrayal of the other actors engaged in the same dialogue, including not only the South Caucasian states, around which the dialogue evolves, but the other major actors as well, forming the two other poles of the triangle – US and Russia. In its call to the new neighbours to '*overcome nationalist and other resistance and fears of change and modernisation*'⁶³, the EU simultaneously acknowledges the complex position the region has found itself in, having become an '*arena for competition between strategic interests of several big geopolitical players*'⁶⁴. Thus the EU in a way attempts to take on the role of a mediator, promoting a '*dialogue and coordination between the EU, Russia and the United States*',⁶⁵ thus backing off 'outdated geopolitical games, and supporting instead cooperative regional initiatives'.⁶⁶

⁶² Benita Ferrero-Waldner, 'Political Reform and Sustainable Development in the South Caucasus: the EU's approach' (Speech/06/477) delivered at the "Caspian Outlook 2008" Bled Strategic Forum, (Slovenia, 28 August, 2006).

⁶³ Romano Prodi, "A Wider Europe – A Proximity Policy as the Key to Stability", speech delivered at the Sixth ECSA- World Conference (Brussels, December 5-6, 2002).

⁶⁴ European Parliament's Resolution on a More Effective EU Policy for the South Caucasus: from Promises to Actions (17 January, 2008), point J.

⁶⁵ Ibid, point 2

⁶⁶ Michael Emerson 'The Wider Europe as the European Union's Friendly Monroe Doctrine' CEPS Policy Brief No. 27, October 2002.

This incentive to keep away from geopolitical contestation and promote a ‘constructive engagement’ with all countries in the ‘shared neighbourhood’, nevertheless, does not prevent the EU from engaging in a discursive battle over the territory. Notably, it directs most of its attacks towards Russia, which becomes its immediate rival in the context of ‘overlapping neighbourhood’. Such discursive attacks are not a recent phenomenon and could be traced in earlier documents, issued by the Commission, when the region was not yet incorporated into the ENP framework. The negative semantics reflecting Russia’s influence in the region comes out in expressions like ‘Russia’s *drive to dominate* the region’⁶⁷ or a more recent one with regard to the Russia-Georgia war in August 2008 – ‘foreign country [direct implication to Russia] aiming at creating *exclusive spheres of influence*’, ‘*relieve* the country [Georgia] from the consequences of the *Russian embargo*’, ‘*urge* Russia *not to oppose* any engagement by the EU in conflict management...’⁶⁸. Thus Russia gets discursively portrayed as an ambitious monopoly, still attempting to keep the region within its grip, which is gradually slipping towards the West. At the same time, within this discursive battle over the common neighbourhood, the EU plays the role of a ‘liberator’, attempting to ‘relieve’ the region from Russia’s influence, often defined as its ‘backyard’. Nevertheless, the ENP discourse itself does not attempt to escape the term, which is well reflected in Prodi’s speech, where he clearly equates ‘*our neighbourhood*’ in a literal sense of the word to ‘*our backyard*’.⁶⁹ It thus becomes hard to make sense of the nature the ‘shared neighbourhood’ acquires for both actors. In a way, it becomes transformed into a ‘shared backyard’.

⁶⁷ Towards a European Union Strategy for Relations with the Transcaucasian Republics – Communication from the Commission (Brussels, 31.05.1995).

⁶⁸ European Parliament’s Resolution on a More Effective EU Policy for the South Caucasus: from Promises to Actions (17 January, 2008), points 10, 30.

⁶⁹ Romano Prodi, “A Wider Europe – A Proximity Policy as the Key to Stability.” Speech delivered at the Sixth ECSA- World Conference (Brussels, December 5-6, 2002).

2.3 From Challenges to opportunities

To sum up, the first two major discursive portrayals the region receives in the eyes of the EU are that of a ‘neighbour’ or a ‘stranger’- yet to be discovered, and a more familiar representation of a ‘conflict zone’. I locate the latter within the discursive category of a ‘challenge’, whereas the former, due to its ambiguity and undesirability, gets an equally contingent position within the dual category of both ‘opportunity and challenge’. Meanwhile, the third discursive nodal point – that of a ‘transit corridor’ – fits within the category of an ‘opportunity’. The region’s discursive construction as an opportunity, thanks to its ‘economic promise’, lying in its rich energy resources and attractive geographical location, is not a recent conceptualisation. It, however, acquired a greater degree of emphasis with regard to the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi- Ceyhan pipeline. Largely a US initiative, it will be better elaborated in the US-South Caucasus discourse. However, it is important in this context to map out the EU discourse and what renders it different from the US discourse around the same discursive nodal point.

For the elaboration of this particular discourse I have taken a larger time-framework (1995- 2009) in order to depict the shift in the importance the EU attaches to the region’s functional role as a transit corridor. The elucidation of the shift is important for the purpose of tracing the evolution in the EU’s self-projection as a ‘normative power’ and its urge to justify its ‘interest’ in the region through a differentiation from other powers engaged in the same discourse. Looking at the document reflecting the EU’s strategy towards South Caucasus (Transcaucasus) issued in 1995, it becomes clear that the EU openly presents itself as a geostrategic actor. It spells out precisely its interests in the region and finds its presence important

‘in order to promote its interests in energy sector’⁷⁰. In contrast, in more recent documents, the same objective gets more carefully elaborated. Still acknowledging the importance of the region in terms of the ‘opportunities’ it provides, the Union attempts to shift the issue towards a more peripheral area of concern, through an emphasis on its normative concerns foremost:

Whereas the **significance of the region** for the positive involvement of the EU is **not only** linked to its geographical position as a **transit area** for energy supplies from Central Asia to Europe but is also based on mutual interest, shared by all concerned, in the development of the region with a view to enhancing **democracy, prosperity** and the **rule of law** and thus creating a viable framework for regional and inter-regional development and cooperation in the South Caucasus area.⁷¹

A clear attempt to differentiate itself from the other powers interested in the region’s economic potential can be seen in the following statement:

“Highlights ... the **growing interest of other economic powers**, such as Russia, the United States and China, in this area; considers it of the utmost importance, therefore, that cooperation with the South Caucasus be given the highest priority, **not least** in matters relating to energy.”⁷²

Staying true to its objective of promoting regional cooperation, the EU does not remain blind to the exclusion within the region when the latter is viewed through the discursive lens of a ‘transit corridor’. The exclusion is traced in the way the majority of the Trans-Caspian energy corridor projects, as well as Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline (also referred to as the South Caucasus pipeline), Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway projects ‘bypass’ Armenia, though the general discourse of a ‘transit corridor’ is generally attached to the region at large.

⁷⁰ Towards a European Union Strategy for Relations with the Transcaucasian Republics – Communication from the Commission (Brussels, 31.05.1995).

⁷¹ European Parliament’s Resolution on a More Effective EU Policy for the South Caucasus: from Promises to Actions (January 17, 2008), point I.

⁷² Ibid. point 3

This issue gets addressed by the EU in its ‘urge’ and ‘strong request’ to ‘include’ the excluded state within the regional projects.⁷³ Thus the EU, remaining true to its largely regional take, attempts to eliminate the inner lines of exclusion within the region.

⁷³ European Parliament’s Resolution on a More Effective EU Policy for the South Caucasus: from Promises to Actions (January 17, 2008), points 39, 47

Chapter 3

Russia and South Caucasus: A Splintered Perception

The narrative linking Russia – the second major pole of the triangle – to the South Caucasus is much more expansive and henceforth much more complex, compared to the EU – a relatively modern actor in the discursive battle over the region's meaning. The very notion of neighbourhood, identified in the ENP context, takes a different conceptualisation, having undergone a much longer historical evolution. Being once a 'stranger' at the periphery of the expanding Russian empire, still to be explored and understood, it has now turned into an 'old neighbour', better known through a tightly interwoven shared narrative. The very practice of linking the three Caucasian states together under one regional label, holding up till now, is largely an outcome and a product of the early Russian imperial system, so as the term 'Caucasian'⁷⁴ (kavkazets) – an imagined collective identity, used to describe people, having family ties to the Caucasus, often having dark hair and olive skin. While the EU is in the process of developing its understanding of the region through the very regional model initially imposed by Russia, the latter has taken a reverse path. Having long realised the 'brokenness' of the region, it is more prone to recognise its constituent parts. The regional label 'Transcaucasus', used to denote the area lying beneath the Caucasus range, an area of its 'former realm', gradually loses its initial meaning for Russia, getting trapped within an ambiguous net of splintered perceptions.

⁷⁴ Note the confusion that can arise when compared to the English term 'Caucasian', denoting a racial category developed by an 18th century German anatomist to identify the allegedly primordial form of humankind, with light skin and round eyes

Referring to the three discursive nodal points identified above, I will outline the respective conceptualisations through the analysis of the Russia – South Caucasus discourse, simultaneously drawing parallels with the EU approach, where possible.

3.1 Neighbourhood Approach: Between ‘Friendship’ and ‘Enmity’

The idea of ‘neighbourhood’, elaborated in the EU’s discourse, now receives a different conceptualisation, when articulated within the metanarrative evolving around Russia-South Caucasus relations. The mild identification of the ‘neighbour’ with a ‘stranger’, as mentioned with regard to the EU’s perception of the region, gets more radically categorised. A mostly differentiated approach results in a split within the region between the binary categories of ‘friendship’ and ‘enmity’.

Conducting the research within the confines of a strictly official discourse, I draw upon major speeches and the official meeting transcripts that can be found on the official website of the Kremlin. We can trace here the lack of a single perceptual take towards the region regarding the concept of ‘neighbourhood’. Most of the related data demonstrates the individual approach of Russia towards the three states. Analyzing the reports on the bilateral meetings among the countries’ presidents and various interviews, I concentrate on the semantics of the word ‘neighbour’. This is revealed though an examination of the broader context, characterised by words of similar semantics, often used interchangeably. Observing the semantics of Russian-Armenian relations, the concept of the ‘neighbour’ clearly falls into the category of a ‘friend’ or a ‘partner’. The following recurring phrases bring it into sharp relief:

*‘regular, constructive and **friendly** exchange’⁷⁵, ‘high level of cooperation and **friendship** that characterises the relations between Armenia and Russia’⁷⁶, ‘talks held in a spirit of **friendship** and understanding.’⁷⁷*

It is worth quoting a particularly evocative passage:

We are not just **friends**, **neighbours** and **partners**. Our relations have a very special chemistry that has evolved during a very difficult **history**, on both Armenian and the Russian side. In the light of this **history**, our current relations are superimposed on a solid legal foundation and on the way we feel about each other.⁷⁸

Almost identical semantics can be traced with regard to Azerbaijan, disclosed in phrases like ‘relations of *friendship* and trust’⁷⁹, ‘discussions... in a genuinely *friendly* spirit’,⁸⁰, ‘excellent state of our relations and our auspicious plans for the future’,⁸¹ ‘*friendly* and *good-neighbourly* relations between Russia and Azerbaijan.’⁸² The notion of ‘friendship’ not only emerges from within the context of bilateral presidential talks, but is deeply rooted in the bilateral diplomatic agreements, such as ‘Declaration of *Friendship* and Strategic Partnership’ signed with Azerbaijan and the ‘*Friendship* and Cooperation Agreement’ with Armenia.

As regards the third ‘South Caucasian neighbour’ – Georgia, the reverse category of ‘enmity’ becomes obvious through an open statement of dislike and a negative semantic context, prevailing in the speeches of the Russian president. The dislike as such is directed towards the regime and the Georgian leader, Michael Saakashvili, rather than the nation as a whole: ‘*As for Saakashvili and his regime, it is*

⁷⁵ Dmitry Medvedev (from the meeting with president of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan), Zavidovo, Tver Region, April 23, 2009.

⁷⁶ Dmitry Medvedev, ‘Press statements and answers to journalists’ questions following Russian-Armenian talks’, Yerevan, Armenia, October 21, 2008.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Dmitry Medvedev, ‘Joint news conference following Russian-Azerbaijani talks’, Barvikha, Moscow Region, April 17, 2009.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Dmitry Medvedev, ‘Press Statements after Russian-Azerbaijani Talks’, Baku., July 3, 2008.

⁸² Ibid.

*true that **we do not like him...** Our actions aimed against Saakashvili's aggression were undertaken precisely to calm the **aggressor...***⁸³. The Georgian people, meanwhile, are portrayed as but victims of this regime within the Russian discourse, where the history of the '*fraternal relations*'⁸⁴ between the two people '*existing for centuries*' is constantly emphasised.

Our people have a rich **spiritual and moral heritage**. We have much to love and be proud of, much to stand up for and defend, and much to aspire towards. This is why we will **stand firm in the Caucasus**.⁸⁵

This revival of common history and once shared culture had long served as a tool to promote regionalism, which is an attempt to glue the 'broken region'. What the 2008 events demonstrated, however, is that the Russian take, based on celebration of shared history, which is directly opposed to the EU's approach of emphasising shared projects, has not worked in Georgia's case.

We tried to help **glue Georgia back together**. But this latest aggression and this genocide unleashed by the Saakashvili regime have **put an end to these plans**.⁸⁶
 ...
 ...we really did try to help the Georgian leadership **hold their crumbling state together**.⁸⁷

At the same time, the good-neighbourliness with the other two South Caucasian states seems to be still largely holding on the very celebration of common history, 'spiritual unity'⁸⁸ and cultural development. This also became an important component of the CIS charter – a Russian attempt to regionalise the former Soviet

⁸³ Dmitry Medvedev, Interview with Al-Jazeera Television, Sochi, August 26, 2008.

⁸⁴ Dmitry Medvedev, Transcript of Meeting with Representatives of Public Organisations, The Grand Kremlin Palace, Moscow, September 19, 2008.

⁸⁵ Dmitry Medvedev, Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, Grand Kremlin Palace, Moscow, November 5, 2008.

⁸⁶ Dmitry Medvedev, Interview with Al-Jazeera Television, Sochi, August 26, 2008.

⁸⁷ Dmitry Medvedev, Transcript of Meeting with Representatives of Public Organisations, The Grand Kremlin Palace, Moscow, September 19, 2008.

⁸⁸ Charter of the Commonwealth of Independent States, January 22, 1993.

space through promotion of *‘strengthening of the relations of friendship, good neighbourliness, inter-ethnic accord, trust, mutual understanding and mutually advantageous cooperation among the member states’*.⁸⁹ This attempt at regionalisation, through an emphasis of ‘past’ cultural ties, is now turning into a more individual approach towards bilateral ‘rapprochement’ and can be equally traced within Russia’s discourse both with Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Interaction in this field (referring to humanitarian cooperation) that reflects the **closeness of the spiritual traditions** of our people is, in our view, a **priority**, and we intend to develop it actively... Russian-Armenian relations have **roots** that go **deep into the centuries**.⁹⁰
 ... the content of our **cultural cooperation** occupies an important place in our relations, and we will continue to make efforts to ensure that it takes on new forms and features new projects.⁹¹

Russia and the EU in a sense share a similar objective. This similarity can be traced in the very logics of CIS and ENP, which are both based on an incentive of ensuring a ‘friendly periphery’. Meanwhile, the South Caucasus, having found itself in an overlapping area of both discourses, is becoming more splintered, unable to choose a single directionality. Common as they might seem in the objectives pursued – promotion of good-neighbourliness through shared values - the CIS and the ENP utilise different tools. If the former attempts to bring back the history, through a revival of once shared values, the latter seeks to promote a new type of identity, based on European values, through a contrary process of overcoming the past. In an attempt to ‘save’ the region from complete ‘de-Russification’, predominant in recent years, Russia puts a strong emphasis on the importance of cultural cooperation. Yet

⁸⁹ Charter of the Commonwealth of Independent States, January 22, 1993.

⁹⁰ Vladimir Putin, ‘Statement to the press and answers to questions at a joint news conference with Armenian president Robert Kocharian’, the Kremlin, Moscow, January 17, 2003.

⁹¹ Dmitry Medvedev, ‘Press Statements after Russian-Azerbaijani Talks’, Baku, July 3, 2008.

alongside the failure of the CIS, Russia's regional take on the South Caucasus is failing as well, giving way to strict bilateralism.

The very term 'Transcaucasus' so often implemented by Russia with regard to the region, has become almost non-existent within the Russian discourse since the August 2008 events. Any previous initiatives aimed at 'gluing' the region through a promotion of 'peace, good-neighbourliness, and prosperity for all countries'⁹² – the underlying principles of the 'Caucasian Four'⁹³ or the Caucasus group of CIS countries have disappeared as well. What has still remained though, and is holding tight and 'frozen' as the very nature of its defining characteristics, is the broader term 'Caucasus', and this is where I turn to the second discursive nodal point – the one of a 'conflict zone'. Previously elaborated in connection to the EU's perceptual take towards the South Caucasus, it is now extended into a broader category within the Russian discourse.

3.2 A 'Complicated' Region

When it comes to the notion of conflict, Russia's conceptualisation of the region moves beyond the narrow label of 'Transcaucasus' or 'South Caucasus', towards a much larger and encompassing label of 'Caucasus'. The adjective that often comes to describe the situation and which is firmly rooted in the Russian discourse – now to be elaborated in the framework of the discursive nodal point of a 'conflict zone' – is 'complicated'.

⁹² Vladimir Putin, 'Introductory remarks at the meeting with the Secretaries of the Security Councils of the States of the "Caucasian Four"', Sochi, March 30, 2002.

⁹³ The «Caucasian Four» format, comprising of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia, was instantiated by Russia in 1996.

‘On the whole, the situation in the North and South Caucasus is **fairly complicated...** there are **numerous problems** in the region.’⁹⁴

The word ‘complicated’, ambiguous as it is, reflects the equally ambiguous take of Russia on the issue. It is an outcome of both the absence of any coherent perception of its ‘neighbourhood’ and the strictly differentiated take, described in the previous section. If, as already mentioned, for the EU the ‘stranger’ still dwelling in the notion of a ‘neighbour’ turns into a stark ‘other’ within the context of a ‘conflict zone’, then for Russia the process of othering takes a more complex form within the same context. Unlike in the EU’s conceptualisation of the ‘other’, where the latter is portrayed as being both different and therefore threatening, the representation of ‘difference’ in the Russian discourse is rather replaced by the contrary practice of seeking similarity in the revival of common values and heritage. Although the othering based on the notion of a perceived ‘threat’ can be similarly traced in the Russian discourse, once again, as seen in the conceptualisation of the notion of ‘neighbourhood’, the overall approach takes a quite differentiated character. The degree of the potential threat here varies with regard to each state.

The othering against Georgia takes the form of ‘securitisation’.⁹⁵ Georgia, being in Russia’s immediate proximity, becomes discursively constructed as an existential threat. The term ‘securitisation’ represents the ‘discursive process through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat.’⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Vladimir Putin, Answer to a question about Russian-Georgian relations, Moscow, October 12, 2001

⁹⁵ Barry, Buzan et al. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder London: Lynne Rienner, 1998)

⁹⁶ Barry Buzan, and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers. The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 491.

What happens on our borders cannot be a matter of indifference to us... we are not going to do anything other than **strengthening** our own border along its length.⁹⁷

... we are of course **worried** about the aggravation of the situation in the Georgia- Abkhazia **conflict zone**...It is especially important to prevent the resumption of **hostilities** in the **immediate proximity**. Naturally this applies to Russia, because the region is in the immediate proximity of our borders.⁹⁸

In contrast, the othering with regard to Armenia and Azerbaijan becomes much milder. Within it Russia rather takes up the role of a '*mediator*', unwilling to 'become an unwelcome partner for one or other side in the long term'⁹⁹. Therefore the vocabulary Russia utilises in describing the situation does not go beyond the vague adjectives like 'complex' or 'difficult', which results in quite identical statements to both parties concerned:

This is a **complex** process, and we will assist moving it forward however possible... Russia will continue to assist for **mutually acceptable solutions** in this matter.¹⁰⁰

... Russia will continue to contribute to finding a **mutually-acceptable solution** to this **difficult** problem.¹⁰¹

When referring to the broader regional framework, however, Russia's conceptualisation becomes quite similar to that of the EU, and the notion of 'cooperation', serving the building block of the ENP, becomes the only possible solution to the situation: *'The settlement of local conflicts is a relevant task for the region... One can break the vicious circle of confrontation'¹⁰² here only by strengthening confidence and cooperation... for the security of each of our countries*

⁹⁷ Vladimir Putin, Answer to a question about Russian-Georgian relations, Moscow, October 12, 2001

⁹⁸ Vladimir Putin, 'Introductory Remarks at a Meeting with the Secretaries of the Security Council of the States of the "Caucasian Four"', Sochi, March 30, 2002

⁹⁹ Vladimir Putin, 'Press-Conference with Russian and Foreign Media', The Kremlin, Moscow, December 23, 2004

¹⁰⁰ Dmitry Medvedev, 'Press Statements after Russian-Azerbaijani Talks', Baku,, July 3, 2008

¹⁰¹ Dmitry Medvedev, 'Press statements and answers to journalists' questions following Russian-Armenian talks', Yerevan, Armenia, October 21, 2008.

¹⁰² Parallel with Benita Ferrero-Waldner's identification of the region with a 'vicious spiral of tit for tat conflict'

*and for regional security as a whole; it is our duty to look for joint approaches’.*¹⁰³

Thus the interest in promoting stability in the region in a way becomes a potential point of convergence between the two discourses, which also embraces the US discourse, as will be demonstrated in chapter 4.

The third discursive nodal point, which conceptualises the region as a ‘transit corridor’, becomes irrelevant within the Russian discourse. Alongside Armenia, Russia becomes the country that gets ‘bypassed’¹⁰⁴ with the construction of BTC pipeline, symbolising the very idea of a ‘transit corridor’. The latter, as I argue, becomes a dominant discursive nodal point within the US – South Caucasus discourse, to which I turn in the following chapter.

¹⁰³ Vladimir Putin, ‘Introductory Remarks at a Meeting with the Secretaries of the Security Council of the States of the “Caucasian Four”,’ Sochi, March 30, 2002.

¹⁰⁴ Frederick Starr and Svante E Cornell, *The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: Oil Window to the West* (Washington DC: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2005).

Chapter 4

US and South Caucasus: A Three-dimensional Perception

Having mapped out the two perceptual takes emanating from the two poles of the triangle – EU and Russia – the former being predominantly regional, attempting for more differentiation, whereas the latter – predominantly individual, with a slight tilt towards regionalism, I now turn to the third major pole – the US, whose take, as I argue, becomes the most ambiguous, incorporating both individual or differentiated and regional approach, adding a broader lens of globalism. Interestingly enough, the US often gets portrayed as having the most ‘clear analytical grid’ on the region, perceiving the latter through a macro-lens of the ‘New Silk Road’ or the ‘Great Chessboard’ approach, as argued by Helly¹⁰⁵. Comparing the US strategy towards the region, which clearly falls within the category of a much broader or global take, with that of the EU, Helly traces the latter’s lack of any clear policy towards the region. The present chapter, nevertheless, challenges Helly’s argument, introducing the internal inconsistency within the US approach, stemming from its diverse three-dimensional take, in contrast to which the EU’s take becomes much clearer and better formulated within a predominant regionalism. Surprisingly, this very notion of an ‘unambiguous’ take on the part of the US, is voiced within the actual official discourse, which nevertheless gets quite a different contextualisation from the one found in the academic discourse, and clearly pointed out by Helly. The notion of ‘unambiguousness’ within the official discourse is used to reflect the US’s individual take towards the region and the nations comprising it.

¹⁰⁵ Damien Helly, ‘EU Policies in the South Caucasus’, June 2001, <http://www.ceri-sciencespo.com/archive/june01/helly.pdf> (Accessed April 21, 2009) 2.

The policy of the United States in this region is **unambiguous**: We want to help **the nations of this region** travel along the same path toward freedom, democracy and market-based economies that so many of their neighbours to the West have travelled...¹⁰⁶

Thus, instead of arguing for a single perceptual take, I paint a broader picture, which reflects the three-layered conceptualisation of the region by the US, drawing on the discursive nodal points I have identified.

4.1 From 'Neighbourhood' to 'Partnership'

As argued in the chapter on methodology, the US becomes excluded from the discursive nodal point of a neighbour. However, the notion of a 'neighbourhood' within the US discourse gets replaced by a similar concept of 'partnership', which is the building block of NATO discourse, just as 'neighbourhood' is within the ENP discourse. As mentioned, my take on the elaboration of the concept of 'neighbourhood' goes beyond the mere geographical confines, rather taking a more symbolic meaning. Within this meaning the notions of 'neighbourhood' and 'partnership' often become interchangeable. One might argue against the very choice of NATO as a major framework of reference for the elaboration of the US discourse. Yet, within my particular analysis NATO becomes an important actor, if not the major actor, through which the US perception of the region becomes reflected.

The notion of partnership applied towards the region within the US discourse becomes an interesting mix of both the Russian take of strict differentiation and the EU's largely regional take. Moreover, added to this two-fold policy of partnership,

¹⁰⁶ Daniel Fried, 'State's Fried Remarks on Situation in South Caucasus Region,' June 19, 2008, <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2008/June/20080619105352xjsnommis0.4269831.html> (Accessed May 15, 2009).

there is a broader framework of globalism, which accounts for the three-dimensionality outlined above. Mapping out the elements of Partnership, the NATO Secretary General, Lord Robertson, clearly expresses this layered approach, which starts from an Individual Partnership Action Plan, gradually shifting towards a ‘stronger focus on regional or functional cooperation’, and culminates in a need for a broader ‘coalition of like-minded nations’ to strive against the global threat of terrorism.¹⁰⁷ All three find an expression in my analysis as I progress with the elaboration of the three discursive nodal points of a ‘neighbour’, or rather a ‘partner’ in this context, ‘conflict zone’ and a ‘transit corridor’. In this specific subchapter I concentrate on the former, drawing the major principle underlying NATO/US – South Caucasus relationship within the discourse of ‘partnership’.

The meaning of South Caucasus as a ‘partner’ for the US is reflected neither in the idea of a ‘stranger’, as mentioned within the EU discourse, nor in the radical ‘friend/enemy’ categorisation I traced within the Russian take. Despite the rather differentiated approach towards the three South Caucasian states, the ‘partner’ still remains a quite neutral category, though capable of ‘maturing’ and ‘deepening’, and thus transforming into a ‘friend’. This process of gradual maturing and transformation into friendship can be traced within US-Georgia discourse:

Relations between Georgia and NATO have intensified steadily. We now engage in substantive and frank political dialogue on a regular basis...Our relationship has **matured** and I am convinced it will continue to **deepen**.¹⁰⁸

Thus, unlike the ENP Action Plan, which is similarly based on the notion of ‘differentiation’, but nevertheless, as argued earlier, largely fails to reflect this

¹⁰⁷ Lord Robertson, speech at Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia, 14 May, 2003, <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2003/s030514a.htm> (Accessed May 15, 2009).

¹⁰⁸ Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, speech at Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia, 4 October, 2007, <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2007/s071004a.html> (Accessed May 15, 2009).

principle, and rather constrains the three actors within a single framework of development, the NATO Individual Partnership Action Plan better reflects the idea of ‘differentiation’, whence it responds to the ‘desire of partners who want to engage in a more intensive and demanding relationship.’¹⁰⁹ It is based on this framework of operation that the US develops a particular approach towards the region, which is built on a promotion of those who perform well, not sparing praise and encouragement for a better cooperation. Thus Georgia becomes somewhat portrayed as the ‘good pupil’, that understands the logic of cooperation:

Georgia **understands** the logic of what I call cooperation... it is a **reliable** partner for the Alliance... Georgia has set out on a **bold** reform course, and demonstrated a **strong determination** to contribute to security and stability.¹¹⁰

What differentiates the US approach from that of the EU, is that despite the equal emphasis on commitment, the former is more comfortable with offering stronger conditionality, which potentially leads to a split within the region – a split the EU strictly avoids. Thus, if the ‘neighbour’ for the EU becomes a more solid category, applied to the region as a whole, then the ‘partner’ for the US is more adept at changing and shifting to the category of a ‘friend’, as in the case of Georgia. This can be traced in the recent ‘United-States- Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership’:

*“...the importance of our relationship as **friends** and **strategic partners**... Our **friendship** derives from mutual understanding and appreciation for our shared belief...”*¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Lord Robertson, speech at Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia, May 14, 2003.

¹¹⁰ Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, speech at Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia, October 4, 2007.

¹¹¹ “United-States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership”, 9 January, 2009, <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2009/January/20090109145313eafas0.2139093.html> (Accessed May15, 2009).

The Partner, apart from its potential of transforming into a ‘friend’, depending on the degree of its commitment, further becomes categorised with regard to the importance or value it represents for NATO. In this respect Azerbaijan, thanks to its rich energy resources, receives the role of the ‘valued’ or ‘important’ partner:

... Azerbaijan, a **valued partner** of NATO... a **very important** player in the region, but also beyond, as a nation which is **crucial** in the very **important** area of energy, and energy security is a **highly valued** and **respected** partner of NATO. We are building on that cooperation.¹¹²

Thus the initially neutral portrayal the ‘partner’ receives within the general framework of Partnership for Peace becomes more nuanced and specific through the adoption of the Individual Partnership Action Plans. Nevertheless, the difference in the pace each country has chosen in ‘moving closer to the Alliance’¹¹³ leads to a certain split within the region, which becomes a crucial problem in the second discursive nodal point of a ‘conflict zone’, to which I turn in the following subchapter.

4.2 A Two-fold Perception of Threat: Caucasus as a ‘Challenge’ and a ‘Partner to Combat Larger Challenge’

When it comes to the elaboration of threat, the US perception of the region takes an interestingly two-fold stance, and the broader label ‘Caucasus’ comes to replace the more specific label ‘South Caucasus’ as seen in the Russian discourse as well. On the one hand, the region and its internal insecurity becomes the ‘threat’ in itself. On the other, the region becomes an ‘important partner’ for fighting broader challenges, most importantly – terrorism. Notably, in this regard, the US engagement with the region has become particularly extensive since “9/11”, when the US took on

¹¹² Jaap de Hoop Scheffer (Joint Press Briefing by the president of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev and NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer) (April 29, 2009).

http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_53520.htm (Accessed May 15, 2009).

¹¹³ Lord Robertson, speech at Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia (May 14, 2003).

a mission of fighting the global threat of terrorism through a creation of a ‘broad network of international cooperation’, and the Caucasus region was seen as ‘a crucial part of that network.’¹¹⁴ Within this global conceptual take on the region, it becomes unified again under one label, fighting against the bigger threats side by side with the rest of the Euro-Atlantic community:

Today, the Caucasus region is seen for what it is: an area of **crucial importance** to our **common security**. In facing the **threats** of terrorism, proliferation, and regional instability the countries of the Caucasus are **front line states**. They are also important **partners** in finding common solutions to these **deadly challenges**.¹¹⁵

Yet, shifting from the broader framework to a more narrow, regional lens, the US projects the same picture as the two other poles of the triangle. The South Caucasus remains here a ‘big conflict zone’ – a region, which is a ‘challenge’ in itself, and therefore a threat to the security of the Euro-Atlantic region. Some quotes aptly illustrate this conclusion:

Finding solutions to the conflicts here in this country (Georgia) and the wider Caucasus region is **vital for the security of the entire Euro-Atlantic region**.¹¹⁶

The world may have changed after “9/11”, but the Caucasus remains a region of crucial importance for **the stability of Eurasia**.¹¹⁷

This crisis (Russia-Georgia war) has a real impact on peace and stability in this region and therefore is **crucial to the Alliance**.¹¹⁸

Hence, the focus now shifts to the region itself, which seizes being but a small link within a wider network, aimed at combating bigger challenges. It rather becomes

¹¹⁴ Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, speech at Yerevan State University, November 5, 2004, <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2004/s041105c.htm> (Accessed May 15, 2009).

¹¹⁵ Lord Robertson, speech at the French University, Yerevan, Armenia, May 15, 2003, <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2003/s030515a.htm> (Accessed May 15, 2009).

¹¹⁶ Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, speech at Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia, October 4, 2007.

¹¹⁷ Lord Robertson, speech at Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia, May 14, 2003.

¹¹⁸ Condoleezza Rice, ‘Remarks by the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice following the meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the Level of Foreign Ministers’, August 20, 2008, <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2008/s080819a.html> (Accessed May 15, 2009).

the center of a potential threat that goes far beyond the region. But this center, as both Russia and the EU have realised, is internally ‘split’ and ‘broken’, and the only path to eliminating the threats coming from its very ‘brokenness’ is seen in the promotion of regional cooperation. This is where I trace the perceptual convergence among the three poles of the triangle. Despite the divergence in EU’s, Russia’s and US’s takes towards the region within the framework of the discursive nodal point of ‘neighbourhood’ or ‘partnership’, they all converge in their emphasis on regionalism and cooperation. Thus the broader regional label, which was gradually losing its meaning within the contexts, where the differentiated approach towards the region prevailed, becomes important again.

I understand the **difficulties** involved in **promoting cooperation** in this region... NATO Allies see **regional cooperation in the Caucasus** as an important step in building the confidence necessary for the countries concerned to address their common security issues.¹¹⁹

What remains problematic, though, is that the picture inside the region, diverse as it is, becomes even more mixed, due to the very inconsistency within various conceptual takes coming from the outside. This inconsistency is felt not only with regard to the different poles, but within each pole. Unlike the EU, which remains more or less consistent in its approach towards the region, the US and Russia often oscillate between differentiation and regionalism, in a sense enhancing the different directionalities within the region.

Despite sharing some common challenges, each of these three countries has taken its **own path** in addressing these challenges, and the picture on the ground in each country is **mixed**.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Lord Robertson, speech at the French University, Yerevan, Armenia, May 15, 2003.

¹²⁰ Daniel Fried, ‘State’s Fried Remarks on Situation in South Caucasus Region’, June 19, 2008, <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2008/June/20080619105352xjsnommis0.4269831.html> (Accessed May 15, 2009).

I know that this region faces **great internal challenges**. And I know it will take a great effort from us all, over a very long period, to defeat the threats...¹²¹

The US remedies for defeating these threats in many points converge with those of the EU, where the urge to overcome the past becomes central. Here it becomes even somewhat hard to draw a clear line between the two discourses, both the US and the EU taking on the role of normative powers, promoting similar values and norms.

They must **throw off** the failed communist institutions of the **past** and build new ones to replace them... the legacy of Soviet communist institutions and poor governance is a **burden**: as are the **historical issues of ethnic strife** that were exacerbated by the Soviet experience. On top of this, these countries are building **new identities** as modern, sovereign nation-states.¹²²

Comparing the ENP Action Plan for Georgia with the recently adopted ‘United-States- Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership’, the normative basis of the two documents strikes as almost identical, based on the same values of ‘democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, good governance, etc’. Thus the *European identity*, constructed through sharing European values, that would ‘*work as a catalyst*’¹²³ for bringing the region together, as Semneby argued, is not only European, but rather Western. Interestingly, this role of the ‘catalyser’ within the US discourse is assigned to Georgia, which, having taken the fastest pace in embracing the ‘*necessary standards*’¹²⁴, is encouraged to promote them throughout the region.

An increasingly democratic Georgia can unleash the full creative potential of its industrious citizens, and thereby **catalyze** prosperity throughout the region and beyond.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Lord Robertson, speech at the French University, Yerevan, Armenia, May 15, 2003.

¹²² Daniel Fried, ‘State’s Fried Remarks on Situation in South Caucasus Region’, June 19, 2008.

¹²³ Peter Semneby, annual address to the European Parliament’s Foreign Relations Committee, October 2, 2007, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1078854.html> (Accessed May 15, 2009).

¹²⁴ “United-States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership”, January 9, 2009.

¹²⁵ “United-States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership”, January 9, 2009.

4.3 Going Global: South Caucasus – a Link between East and West

As already mentioned regarding the EU's discourse towards the region, the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline marked an important point in the development of the region's meaning as a 'transit corridor'. The contribution and support of the US to the BTC project, which gets defined as a 'centrepiece of the East-West Energy Corridor',¹²⁶ is significant. I therefore take the discourse evolving around the project as the major focus for elaborating the US perception with regard to the third discursive nodal point.

Looking at the discourse around the BTC pipeline, one can trace the drastic shift within the general perception towards the region, which suddenly becomes a promising area, an area of 'crucial importance' and 'economic potential'. The shared project also transforms everyone into 'friends' and 'allies':

The BTC oil pipeline and the South Caucasus gas Pipeline... are **crucially important projects** in our shared effort with **our friends and allies** in Europe and the Caspian region to help European and global markets diversify their supplies of oil and gas.¹²⁷

If the EU discourse evolving around the opportunities the region provides through its functionality as a 'transit corridor' displays a certain 'modesty' and an attempt to shift the focus from the mere notions of 'interest' and 'benefit', then the latter cannot be seen in the US discourse, which quite openly celebrates the benefits of the corridor, extending far beyond the region.

¹²⁶ Richard Boucher, 'United States Welcomes Opening of Caspian Basin Pipeline', US Department of State, Office of the Spokesman, May 25, 2005, <http://www.america.gov/st/washfile-english/2005/May/200505251558241CJsamohT0.8835413.html#ixzz0FOSgV5rV&A> (Accessed May 15, 2009).

¹²⁷ Matthew Bryza, quoted in 'Caspian Region Crucial for Europe's Energy Needs, US Says,' June 30, 2006, <http://www.america.gov/st/washfile-english/2006/June/20060630173344MVyelwarC0.4769251.html#ixzz0FONSdBAk&A> (Accessed May 17, 2009).

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline is a central component of a new **East-West energy corridor** that will provide far-reaching **benefits...** Our common security, our commercial **interests**, and our **interests** in peace and prosperity will be strengthened with each length of pipe laid along this line. This event...a new, more **promising** chapter in a new, more **promising** history between our nations.¹²⁸

The 'partnership' within this context takes a different perspective. It is no longer as much centered around the idea of 'commitment' and 'good performance', but is rather based on the 'natural' value of the partner. Thus Azerbaijan, as the one 'blessed with abundant natural resources'¹²⁹ becomes the 'essential partner' for the US:

The United States has **deep** and **long-term interests** in the Caspian region... Azerbaijan's key role in global energy security, our important cooperation on regional security, and the country's **strategic position** as the **natural gateway** between Europe and Central Asia make it an **essential partner** for the United States... it is time to extend and spread the **opportunity** and **prosperity** that this country has been **blessed with**. You will have a **strong** and **reliable partner** in the United States government... in helping you on this journey in economic and energy cooperation.¹³⁰

Encouraging such **partnership** is fundamental to **America's** energy policy...¹³¹

The regional label as such takes a very symbolic function since the region itself is no longer what it meant within the 'conflict zone' discourse. The previously individual or regional perspective now transforms into a broader, global lens, through which the region gets a symbolic meaning of a connecting link between East and West, and the BTC pipeline – a crucial constructing element of this new meaning.

¹²⁸ George Bush, Presidential statement, The White House, Washington DC, <http://www.america.gov/st/washfile-english/2002/September/20020918170627jthomas@pd.state.gov0.751034.html#ixzz0FOTdsYBu&A> (Accessed May 17, 2009).

¹²⁹ Daniel S. Sullivan, Assistant Secretary for Economic, Energy and Business Affairs, Remarks at American Center, University of Language, Baku, Azerbaijan, August 16, 2007, <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2007/August/20070823153808eafas0.6603052.html#ixzz0FOUFbNDM&A> (Accessed May 17, 2009).

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ George Bush, Presidential statement, The White House, Washington DC, <http://www.america.gov/st/washfile-english/2002/September/20020918170627jthomas@pd.state.gov0.751034.html#ixzz0FOTdsYBu&A> (Accessed May 17, 2009).

*“The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline is a major success for the US goal of enhancing and diversifying **global** energy supplies.”¹³²*

¹³² Richard Boucher, ‘United States Welcomes Opening of Caspian Basin Pipeline’, US Department of State, Office of the Spokesman, May 25, 2005.

Conclusion

Having mapped out the three perceptual takes on the region around the three major discursive nodal points identified throughout the process of data analysis, I now turn to the summary of the major findings. The purpose of the following section is to weave together the various metanarratives stemming from each pole of the triangle within a broader picture. During the process of the elaboration of the separate discourses, each portraying the region through a specific conceptual lens, I have attempted to draw certain parallels among the three, pointing out their major points of convergence and divergence. Such comparison is important for the current research, since it demonstrates the nuances within the perception of each pole with regard to the same discursive nodal point, thus accounting for the general ambiguity of the object of my analysis. The notions of a ‘neighbour’ or a ‘conflict zone’, self-explanatory as they might seem, get a much more complex meaning when observed through a multi-dimensional take on the region. In order to better portray this complexity, I introduce a table that summarizes the major findings, revealing the points of convergence and divergence within the perceptual takes of the three poles. (See table 1)

Table 1: Summary of the different perceptual takes around the three major discursive nodal points

South Caucasus: perceptual takes	EU	Russia	US
Neighbourhood/partnership	Neighbour - Stranger that needs to be understood	Neighbour – categorised between friends and enemies	Partner – neutral category that has a potential to mature and transform into a friend
Impact on the label	No split	Radical split	Mild split
differentiation	Low (traced in the ENP Action Plans)	High (demonstrated through strictly bilateral cooperation)	High (traced in the Individual Partnership Action Plans)
regionalisation	High (exercised through ENP)	Low (exercised through CIS)	Low (exercised through NATO)
Driving mechanism	European values (urge to overcome the past)	Historical/cultural ties (attempts to revive the past)	Western values (urge to overcome the past)
Conflict zone	Challenge	Complicated region	Challenge
Impact on the label	Same label – South Caucasus	Broader label – Caucasus	Broader label - Caucasus
Perception of threat	Regional perception of threat: South Caucasus (the other) as different (reflecting the EU's own past) and therefore presenting a threat	Differentiated perception of threat depending on its proximity (from stark othering to milder othering)	Twofold perception of threat: 1.regional scale –Caucasus as a threat 2.global scale –Caucasus as a partner to combat the threat
Proposed Solution	Regional cooperation	Regional cooperation	Regional cooperation
Transit/energy corridor	opportunity	N/A	benefit
	Regional take – attempt to come to terms with the inner exclusion within the label		Global take – disregard of inner exclusions: the label takes a strictly symbolic use

Looking at the discursive nodal point of neighbourhood or partnership and the portrayal it receives from each pole, we get three different pictures, where the concept of ‘neighbour’ or ‘partner’ takes different meanings. This at times results in a split within the external label ‘South Caucasus’ due to the differentiated approach towards its constituent parts. Despite the difference in conceptualisations, one can trace certain

points of convergence within the discourses. What unites the US and Russian approach towards the region is their differentiated approach with regard to each neighbour or partner and relatively low degree of regionalisation in their strategies. Meanwhile, the neighbour for the EU becomes a more unitary category, which accounts for the high degree of regionalisation in its policies towards the South Caucasus. Despite converging in their emphasis on differentiation, the US and Russia diverge on the actual tools guiding their strategies towards the region, where the former advocates for a necessity to overcome the past, whereas the latter celebrates the common past. This is where the US converges with the EU, which likewise emphasises the importance of overcoming the past through a promotion of identical norms and values as those promoted by the US. Although the EU coins them as ‘European’, as well as the identity that is shaped through the promotion of such norms, they can equally fit within the broader label ‘Western’, thus grouping the normative influence of the EU and the US within a single framework. Thus the first discursive nodal point reveals both patterns of divergence and convergence within the perceptions of the three poles, where, nevertheless, no dominant convergence can be traced that would unite the three.

Turning to the second discursive nodal point – that of a ‘conflict zone’ – we get a more or less consistent picture, where the points of convergence prevail. All three, recognising the complexity of the region that stems from its internal ‘brokenness’ and the challenges it represents, agree on the importance of a regional approach and celebrate regional cooperation. However, despite this uniform agreement for a regional conceptual take, the three poles diverge in their perception of the threat coming from the region. If in the Russian discourse threat is perceived through a strictly individual lens, resulting from the initially differentiated approach

towards the region, then the EU remains true to its regional take, and consequently perceives the threat through a regional lens. In contrast, the US takes a more global lens, developing an interestingly two-fold approach towards the region, where the latter becomes either the ‘threat’ itself, or a ‘crucial partner’ in fighting the broader threat. Yet even in the context of ‘the region as a threat’, the othering does not take an extreme shape, not being perceived as a direct challenge to the US, but rather a challenge to the broader Euro-Atlantic community.

The third discourse evolves around the region’s functionality as a ‘transit corridor’ and involves only two of the poles of the triangle – EU and US. Since the very notion of a ‘transit corridor’ is often referred to the region’s role as a connecting link between East and West, this meaning becomes irrelevant in Russian discourse. Therefore I concentrate on the comparison of the EU’s take with that of the US. The major difference I trace is in the way the two poles articulate their ‘interest’ towards the region. Unlike the EU, which, acknowledging the opportunities the region presents, chooses a milder form of stating its interests, and concentrates mostly on their normative side, the US does not avoid openly stating its economic interests and the ‘benefits’ the region bears. Thus the EU, remaining true to its regional take, and the use of the corresponding regional label - ‘South Caucasus’, attempts to come to terms with inner exclusions, bringing the broken region together. The US, through a largely global take, becomes less preoccupied with external labels – and the broader label ‘Caucasus’ becomes but a symbolic name for the corridor, not fully reflecting its regional meaning.

The major implication that can be drawn from such comparison is that the EU remains the most consistent in its perceptions towards the region. Having adopted a

largely regional take, it forms its perceptions with regard to the three discursive nodal points identified above through the same regional lens. Thus the label ‘South Caucasus’ remains unchanged within all three discourses, and the first of the three triangles introduced above is the one that better reflects the EU’s perception of the region (see fig. 1). The Russian approach towards the region becomes less consistent, and the label South Caucasus gradually disappears from the Russian discourse. Taking an opposite take to that of the EU, Russia regards the region through strictly individual lenses, therefore the perceptions it forms with regard to each state comprising the region cannot be totalised for the whole label at large. Although it does attempt to promote regional cooperation, its policies towards the region remain strictly bilateral, and the tool for bringing the region together through a revival of shared cultural ties does not prove to be effective. Therefore, Russian perception oscillates between the second and third triangles (see. fig. 1, 2). Meanwhile, the US perception towards the region appears the most ambiguous, embracing both individual and regional approaches under a more global framework. The label in this case does not disappear, but rather takes a more symbolic use, often extended to the broader term ‘Caucasus’. Thus the US approach can be demonstrated through all three triangles (see fig. 1, 2, 3).

The inconsistencies within these three cases demonstrate the ambiguity of the external discourse towards the region, which contributes to a better understanding of its internal ambiguity. Thus the major implication that I draw from the analysis is that *the internal ‘brokenness’ of the region is enhanced through the external inconsistencies in the perceptive takes of each pole.* Each pole, building its strategies towards the region, prioritises a specific take, depending on the functional meaning the region receives within a particular context. This, nevertheless, further

complicates the initial ‘complexity’ of the region, adding yet another layer of contingency to its meaning that deepens its internal exclusions. From the three observed cases, the EU- the more or less consistent actor in shaping its perceptions on the region- demonstrates the best path towards avoiding any further exclusions and narrowing the gap within the various directionalities stemming from inside the region. In contrast, the US and Russia, despite sharing with the EU the necessity of the promotion of regional cooperation, simultaneously take quite controversial lenses that lead the region towards the abyss of far more radical directionalities.

The present research demonstrated a three-dimensional perspective on the region with the purpose of exploring its ambiguity, constructed through the segmented discursive definitions it receives. The picture can be further extended through a more encompassing research, concentrating on the wider web of power projections and relations the region finds itself in. This could be done through an incorporation of a wider scope of metanarratives, going beyond the limited set of the three discursive nodal points chosen for the present research, and including new actors, like Turkey and Iran – unarguably important players in the ‘dialogical struggle’ over the region’s meaning.

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