



THE EU AND THE CAUCASUS IN 2030 – ENVISIONING THE FUTURE

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INTRODUCTION

Envisioning the future sounds a lot less complicated than it actually is. The participants of an intercultural seminar on EU-Caucasus relations held at the Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences 12-17 March 2018, quickly discovered the complexities of negotiating future scenarios for their region and its relationship with the EU. Four mixed groups consisting of Abkhazian, Armenian, Georgian, and German students took the challenge and created four different worlds, imagining various futures with a focus on the South Caucasus region.

In this publication, we have collected these four worlds and their constructions of alternative developments. If we are thinking about the not-so-distant future – 2030 is merely a bit more than a decade away – we do not claim that these four outcomes are the only possibilities available. In fact, there is at least in theory an endless variety of such scenarios. However, certain factors and trends can hardly be changed or reversed drastically. Within this framework, our participants created their four worlds before knowing on which of the scenarios they would be working on. Later, after having also agreed

in the plenary on the drivers, the participants were randomly distributed, ensuring all countries were represented in each group. The participants agreed on the four following worlds:

- Same world
- Better world
- Worse world
- Weirder world

In the next step, more than thirty potential drivers for the analysis had been collected in a joint brainstorming session. The participants then narrowed them down to agree on a final set of four drivers that each group then analysed in their potential impact on their respective worlds:

- Societal and Democratic Development
- International Relations
- Regional Stability
- Economic Situation

Our future is still unwritten, but the scenarios in this publication give us a glimpse of how the Caucasus region might look like in 2030. While we will most likely not experience any of these scenarios come true in exactly the way that the participants predicted, certain

elements of them definitely have a high probability to become reality. Whether it is going to be the same, better, worse or weirder scenario that comes closest to the real future, we do not judge here. Yet they all have made us, and hopefully will make the readers of this brochure think through the different paths that the future may take, and explore the possibilities of influencing the course of events.

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for their support. Furthermore, we would like to thank the Delegation of the European Union to Armenia and the Diplomatic Academy at the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their valuable information and time to discuss our scenarios with us. Last but not least we want to thank our participants. Without their dedication and hard work, we would not have been able to write this introduction and put together the brochures. We congratulate the groups on their successful scenario-building and look forward to meet again in twelve years for a reality check!

The editors

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Scenario 1: Same World

CAUCASIAN SISYPHUS

«The gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight» – Albert Camus

The Caucasus region's development between 2018 and 2030 can be read as an exercise in Sisyphean work. The four big stones, International Relations, Regional Stability, Societal and Democratic Development, as well as Economic Conditions are not marked by what could be seen as distinctly positive nor a distinctively negative development. Rather, small steps and minor changes characterise the status quo in 2030.

Between 2018 and 2030, global politics was not marked by big changes. Geopolitics are still characterised by ongoing tensions between the “West” and Russia. A multipolar world, with the USA and the European Union being occupied with their own internal issues, has helped the Russian Federation to gain more influence in the Eastern hemisphere. The Kremlin continues to expand its influence in the strategically

important Caucasus region. Stuck between Russia and the EU, the Caucasus region has not amalgamated. The countries continue to pursue different foreign policies and external relations. Georgia is still oriented westwards. Armenia strengthened its relations with Russia, especially through the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Abkhazia and South Ossetia are still struggling to achieve recognition by the international community.

After the withdrawal of the UK and the accession of the Balkan countries, Europe has not come closer to a federal state. An approach of “principled pragmatism” as a feature of EU foreign policy excludes enlargement in the near future as well as ambitions to engage in foreign conflicts. Russia managed to establish the EAEU as a counter project to the EU. Besides internal issues, Brussels has no military

potential to help Caucasus to solve the frozen conflicts.

The Caucasus in 2030 still finds itself in between. While there

were internal developments, the divisions that already existed in 2018 have proven robust. Many stones remain to be rolled in the Caucasus region.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Several big players continue to shape the international arena. The optimism about the promises of multilateral arrangements and the possibility of global cooperation decreased with ongoing geopolitical struggles between the “West” and Russia. While the EU tries to push for a further solidarization of international society, it is not powerful enough to challenge an increasing emphasis on sovereignty, nationalism and spheres of influence.

Starting with the Austrian elections in 2017 and other wins of Eurosceptical parties in the following years in Hungary 2018, and Poland 2019, the idea of “United States of Europe” is virtually dead. Occupied with its own internal issues, Europe is unable to find a coherent and powerful position in terms of foreign relations. In line with the Global Strategy from 2016, Europe adopts an approach of “principled pragmatism”, in which it acknowledges its lack of hard power. After the UK withdrew from the EU in 2019, the Brussels lacks the financial as well as the military capabilities to count as a big player in international affairs.

While the EU aims at diversifying its energy sources, Russia remains one of the most important suppliers of gas to Europe. In 2025, the Western Balkan countries joined the EU, extending its boundaries eastwards. At the same time, Brussels reemphasised that there are no plans for further enlargement regarding the Caucasus region.

Russia at the same time claims a say in regional dynamics. Staying in office until 2024, President Putin aggressively defended a “spheres of influence” policy, directed towards Russian domination of its neighbourhood-not least to circumvent discussions about the internal economic situation. While the EU and the US criticise this approach internationally, they are not able to prevent it, apart from sanctioning the Russian regime economically. Also, the EU’s dependence on Russian gas hinders a harsher reaction. The EAEU is mainly used by Russia to increase its political powers as well as the economic dependence of its member countries. The rouble has been established as common currency in 2025. The Eurasian Economic Union can now be seen as a counter-project to the

European Union, in economic but also in normative terms. In 2024, after Putin's two consecutive terms, a new candidate of the United Russia party claims victory. There are some protests in the forerun to the election due to the bad economic performance caused by the Western sanctions, but the civil society is not strong enough to seriously confront the power of the regime. As protests continue between 2024 and 2030, minor democratic reforms are introduced in order to coopt civil society.

The geopolitical climate divides the countries of the Caucasus region. Because of the stark division between East and West, which is expressed by the growing importance of the EAEU, the states are pushed to choose sides. 2018 was a crucial year for Armenia: the now parliamentary system allowed former President Serj Sargsyan to become prime minister (after he had reached a maximum number of two terms as president) and thus keep his power position and pursue his political ideas for the next six years. As such, he continued to orient the country eastwards to maintain close cooperation with the Kremlin. The ties were fostered through the adoption of the rouble as official currency in 2025. The Comprehensive & Enhanced Partnership Agreement between the European Union & Armenia (CEPA) allowed Brussels to gain some influence in terms of

supporting civil society initiatives and communication fora with the Armenian government. Over the years however, the evolving economic ties between Armenia and Russia through the EAEU made the impact of CEPA seem marginal. While superficial political cooperation between the EU and Armenia persists, the lack of political will on both sides leads to a stagnation of their relationship.

In contrast to Armenia, Georgia continued its orientation westwards. Georgia's trade with the EU increased due to the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA). As civil society and all relevant parties are in favour of fostering cooperation with the EU and establishing closer ties, Tbilisi made its choice for integration towards the West. While Georgians hope to achieve membership at some point in the future, the EU does not offer such a perspective. Nevertheless, relations between these two actors are constantly improving. On the other hand, relations with Russia stay complicated, which is also due to the question of Georgian membership in NATO. Georgia continues its efforts to become a full member. Since 2018, there were comprehensive disputes about this membership, within NATO itself, as well as between NATO and Russia, which fears another attempt of the West to gain influence in its neighbourhood. According to structure and working rules,

decisions within NATO have to be made by consensus. The decision made by the allied leaders at the Bucharest summit 2008 that Georgia will become a NATO member was reconfirmed in 2018, 2020, 2023, 2025, 2027 and 2030.

The Abkhazian question remains disputed. Russia, Nauru, Venezuela and Nicaragua are recognising Abkhazia in 2018. In 2025, parallel to introducing the rouble as currency, all members of the EAEU recognised Abkhazia as an independent state. This led to a further division of the

Caucasus between East and West. Still, Abkhazia in 2030 is seen by the EU and the majority of UN member countries as a territorial part of Georgia. Russia continues its financial support to Abkhazia. Also, granting Abkhazia membership to the EAEU in 2027 is another signal that it is highly unlikely that the territorial dispute about the region will be solved in the near future. Trade through the EAEU helped Abkhazia to raise their exports, especially in the agricultural sector.

REGIONAL STABILITY

In 2030, the Caucasus region stays unstable. The reasons are the conflicts that prevail in Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh as well as in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As mentioned above, the opposed movements of

Georgia and Armenia to the West as well as to the East, Russian power and European inability and unwillingness to act as a regional force made conflict transformation impossible in the years from 2018 to 2030.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH/ARTSAKH

After continuing smaller skirmishes at the disputed border in 2019 and 2021, a more serious conflict broke out in 2023. Armenian as well as Azerbaijani soldiers died, and diplomatic tensions also evolved between Armenia and Turkey, which was blamed for supporting Azerbaijan in that matter. After relations had improved between Armenia and Turkey up until that point, talks stopped after the conflict. Although there were discussions

after the conflict outbreak in 2023 to substitute France by the EU in the Minsk group, the EU lacks capacity and capability to act in that matter. As the EU is still a more economic and political union than a military one, it cannot provide security guarantees in Nagorno-Karabakh. In the years after 2023 and leading up until 2030, the conflict remains frozen. There are no direct talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

ABKHAZIA/SOUTH-OSSETIA

Since both, Abkhazia and South Ossetia lack international recognition (although the members of the EAEU recognised Abkhazia), the entities remain “de-facto” regimes also in 2030. Boundaries also remain contested between Russia and Georgia. Russia tries to come closer to Georgia. On the other hand, Georgia does not have an interest in escalating the conflict, since Russia’s military power is overwhelming. The accession to the EAEU in 2027 stabilised Abkhazia internally, as exports grew. At the same time,

the decision was very much disputed by Georgia, as it sees Abkhazia as part of its territory. Following from that, there were also diplomatic tensions between Georgia and Armenia as the latter recognised Abkhazia as an independent state. But as the countries remain co-dependent economically, those benefits overweighed the dispute. In 2030, just like Nagorno-Karabakh, the conflicts remain frozen. Although more countries now recognise the independence, full international recognition is still highly unlikely.

SOCIETAL AND DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

The Caucasus region experienced an overall slight progress concerning societal and democratic development that differed among Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan and the entity of Abkhazia. In 2018, there was a shift from semi-presidential to parliamentary democracy in Armenia that resulted in more limited presidential power that mainly granted the office a ceremonial role. This was the first time when the president was elected by the National Assembly instead of by popular vote. The prime minister Serj Sargsyan, who was the former president, is in power after being reelected in 2025, which means no drastic change in the country’s political state. The Freedom

House index that comprises the National Democratic Governance, Electoral Process, and Independent Media slightly increased from 5.39 in 2017 to 5.0 in 2030 after continuous ups and downs within these 13 years. During the latest elections, there were serious shortcomings in the electoral process with the consequence of people protesting. An improvement could be reached with regards to independence of the media.

As for Georgia, the elections in 2020 restated the parliamentary system with the same prime minister, Giorgi Kvirikashvili. Throughout the last ten years, the two parliamentary elections brought some changes in the

personnel of the parliament with the Georgian Dream staying the governing party in the country. The orientation of Georgia towards the EU and its policy brought up improvements in the democratic development. In 2025, there was the Path for Progress reform agenda, pushing for governance and societal reforms. A case in point is the law that reduces the legal voting age from 18 to 16, enabling more young people to express their political beliefs. Due to this reform agenda Georgia reached the Freedom House index of 4.0 in 2030. There is a strong and active civil society in Georgia, regularly having campaigns, for example the huge campaign in 2028 for the legalization of the same-sex marriage.

A legacy of the Soviet Union system, corruption is still a problem in the post-Soviet countries of the Caucasus. In this struggle, Georgia appeared to develop a strategy in dealing with the problem. It successfully overcame corruption by adopting and implementing a strong anti-corruption policy, which is illustrated by its rank of 42 out of 180 countries in the corruption perception index (CPI) for 2030. Concerning Armenia, due to a lack of change in the inner political system, the corruption remained an immense problem within the Armenian society, which had also had an impact on the economic situation of the

country. In 2028, high officials of the Ministry of Education in Armenia were involved in a widespread corruption scandal. An anti-corruption law was adopted with the aim of calming down the critical voices within civil society. However, the law turned out to be a paper tiger without being implemented effectively in practice. In 2030, Armenia is on rank 95 out of 180 in the CPI.

Abkhazia also encounters corruption problems. Although Russia financially supports Abkhazia, the later does not fully benefit from it as the money goes into the pocket of the government officials.

Economic situation

The economic situation in the Caucasus region mirrors geopolitical relations and is characterized by a lack of autonomy and a high dependence on the EU on the one hand, and Russia on the other.

As a member of the EAEU and introducing the rouble in 2025, Armenia has established closer ties with Russia. Tourism is emerging as a source of income and it is the declared aim of Armenia to catch up with Georgia in terms of tourist numbers. While ties with the EU persist and trade is generally increasing, the country has made its choice for the East through introducing the new “Eurasian” currency in 2025. Trade with Russia and through the emerging single

market of the Eurasian region starts to replace the EU as the most important economic partner.

Georgia intensified its trade relations with the EU through the further implementation of the DCFTA and the Association Agreement. Funds of the EU and the US are still important, but generally, the economic situation is improving. The GDP is rising, also because of an increasing number of tourists. Also, agriculture starts to play a bigger role and is developed further. More and more agricultural goods are exported to the EU, which is the most important partner in terms of trade.

Abkhazia's economic situation is marked by its dependence on Russia, as well as the lack of international recognition. The ongoing sanctions on Russia also affect Abkhazia as financial support decreases. However,

Abkhazia is becoming a popular destination among Russian tourists which improves its economic situation. Agriculture is also developing as well as trade with Russia in this field. As Abkhazia became a member of the EAEU in 2027, it was also able to diversify its trade relations to other members, for example Armenia.

Brain drain remains a general problem in the region. Many young well-educated people leave the region in order to find jobs abroad. While Georgians tend to leave for the EU, Armenians and Abkhazians are more likely to go to Russia.

Overall, there is a slight progress in terms of the economic development in the Caucasus region. However, inner-regional conflicts and tensions hinder a broader and more integrated economic development.

SUMMARY

The Caucasus in 2030 cannot readily be characterised as a coherent region. Rather, different countries are moving into different directions. Russia, through military superiority as well as through the EAEU, has consolidated itself as a regional hegemon. Although Georgia continues its Western orientation, Armenia and Abkhazia are more and more dependent on Russia, not least economically. The introduction of the rouble

fostered Russian influence. The EU on the other hand is withdrawing from the region. Acknowledging the limits for its action that come with military incapacity and internal problems, the EU and Georgia have the closest relations. Armenia has turned towards Russia. Conflicts in the region remain frozen and unresolved. Initial hopes for a resolution of those conflicts through the EU as an external actor vanished as

the latter lacks the capability as well as an original and immediate interest in conflict resolution. The conflicts tend to further disperse the countries and also slow down democratic development, since security concerns dominate the political agenda and rank highest on the list of priorities.

The fields of international relations and regional stability partwise also determine the country's economic situations. For instance, Georgia has economical support, funding, grants and subsidies from the EU, US etc. Due to Armenia's and Abkhazia's Eastern choice, they have financial support from the Kremlin, besides that Russia struggles with economic declines because of ongoing sanctions by the West.

Apart from the international relations, territorial amalgamation and economic conditions, there is one more key subject: democratic development. Relying on domestic policy, each Caucasian state has its approach about civil society. From 2018 there were big achievements in this field. Comparing with each other, nowadays, with the assistance of the Western side, Georgia has better conditions in point of corruption, civil society evolution, fair elections, etc. However, in 2030 the civil society is not (yet) strong enough to challenge the political system.

One key determinant for the future development is the relation between the EU and the EAEU.

There remains the possibility, that through economic cooperation, the creation of a free trade zone and the abolishment of tariffs, both "blocks" can consolidate their relation. Spill over effects to political cooperation could then improve also the conflict situations in the Caucasus region. And in the end, maybe we indeed have to "imagine Sisyphus happy." (Camus). The pathway to this future, however, remains a rocky road.

“

A world without conflict is impossible. As ongoing globalization is bringing regions as well as different regional organizations closer to each other, border conflicts as well as conflicting mind-sets in territorial zones „far away“ are becoming central issues to every single actor.

SALIMA DZHIKIRBA, MARY NAZARYAN, MARIE-THÉRÈSE
SCHREIBER, BADRI BELKANIA, NORA GALSTYAN, JANNA ARTICUS

Scenario 2: Better World

IT'S THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION, STUPID!

A world without conflict is impossible. As ongoing globalization is bringing regions as well as different regional organizations closer to each other, border conflicts as well as conflicting mind-sets in territorial zones „far away“ are becoming central issues to every single actor. One possible way of dealing with globalization is isolation which is not going to solve any problems at all. Therefore, there is a need for further institutionalization, trying to live together peacefully on the shared habitat – planet earth. Overlapping spheres of economic and political influence and a new won self-confidence of formerly marginalized actors are the keys to success.

After a successful settlement of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, Ukraine becomes a role model and mediator between diverging interests of the same kind in other regions. By the time of 2030, the „Kyiv Platform of Conflict Transformation“ (KPCT – also „capacity“) will

be established. Within this framework, Russia, the EU, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh can discuss their positions with mutual recognition of all interests. This has only been possible due to a regime change in Russia as well as a readjustment of the inner framework and foreign policy of the EU.

In Europe, the young generation was united during the struggle against the rise of right-wing populist movements. When in Germany the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) eventually took over the government and everybody realized that there's a far-right party leading the country again, the founding narrative of the European Union was re-ignited and the Union got even stronger.

The rise of renewable energy technology in all countries allows for differentiated and honest approaches towards conflict transformation, far away from just trying to keep the corridors of the

distribution of energy resources like oil and gas accessible. Mere geopolitics therefore loses its impact on international relations.

The internet is a crucial instrument of the distribution of information. By 2030 people are most likely to inform

themselves through the internet after taking courses on how to deal with the new media, which makes propaganda less successful. Democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law are regarded as important factors of civilization.

SOCIETAL AND DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

In 2020 more educational programs are launched in the Caucasus region. This program includes the exchanges (e.g. Erasmus+) with EU, Russia and Caucasian countries. The workshops and trainings are held in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh to teach young people how to handle economic problems, how to improve agriculture and tourism, and how to implement principles of international law as well as democracy in these countries. There is an advanced training of teachers, doctors, journalists etc. in order to enhance their educational level, the quality of healthcare and to spread non-personal information within the countries.

By 2025 we can see that civil society in Caucasian countries has gained a stronger position because people are more educated, they know their rights and can express their opinion in an objective way. Young journalists can deliver non-biased

news, information is transparent and free from propaganda. The civil society and journalists can influence governmental decisions that they do not agree with through negotiations, peaceful demonstrations and mutual cooperation. As a result, human rights and democracy are protected in Caucasus. Women are more represented in executive and legislative branches, because they also know their rights and are able to access legal systems.

In 2022, an agreement was reached to open the Caucasian University which is aimed at teaching Caucasian languages, history and political science that will consolidate Caucasian peoples. After long discussions, it is decided to base it in Kyiv, but the university will also have branches in different Caucasian countries. Classes are generally taught in English. In addition, there will be workshops for teachers and students can apply for scholarships. The university is funded by the EU, national governments and various NGOs.

The idea was approved and in 2023 the university construction began. Now we are able to see the results by opening this university in Kyiv. It will encourage

not only Caucasian students to study their languages and history but also European and Russian students and thus foster the intercultural communication.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

EU-Russia relations

In the beginning of 2020, many Russian students and young scholars left the country to study in countries of the European Union in the framework of educational exchange programs. When they came back, demanding change by active participation and nonviolent demonstrations, a wave of democratization and civil society participation emerged, which gradually resulted in closer relations between Brussels and Moscow. In 2024, Sergey Lavrov became the president of the Russian Federation. After the elections, thousands of people rallied in the streets of Moscow demanding democratic reforms and closer connections to the European Union. After two months of ongoing demonstrations, Lavrov had to respond to the protestors. He then started to negotiate with Brussels about the sanctions and travel restrictions, which continued to have an enormous effect on the people in Russia. The EU then used soft power in Crimea as an instrument in the discussion about sanctions and visa free regimes. In 2026,

this led to the possibility of a transparent referendum in Crimea which resulted in Crimea re-joining Ukraine, which in turn enhanced the possibility for reaching a closer trade cooperation with the EU by putting the economy above existing conflict lines. After the management of the Ukraine crisis, both sides decided to deal with the conflict transformation in the Caucasus region with the Ukrainian conflict transformation process being a role model for the Caucasus region. This led to the creation of a new, more institutionalized platform in 2030: The Kyiv Platform for Conflict Transformation (KPCT) with the members of Armenia, Azerbaijan, EU, Georgia and the Russian Federation as well as including the de facto states of Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh and South-Ossetia as participants in the conflict transformation negotiations as a significant feature of the new Platform.

EU-Armenia relations

After having signed the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in November 2017, the Armenian parliament ratified the agreement

in May 2018. The agreement started operating as expected, however, the elections in Russia in 2024 paved the way for Armenia to deepen its cooperation with the EU. After the creation of the KPCT, the question about bringing Nagorno-Karabakh into the negotiations has been resolved, as it is a de-facto member-state of the platform itself. The new Armenian president Armen Sargsyan, with his rich diplomatic experience in different EU member states, had significant contributions on launching the negotiations. The EU and Armenia signed the Agreement on Enforced Political Cooperation (AEPC) in 2026. After four years of negotiations, the EU then put a visa free regime for Armenian citizens in place in 2030. After having signed AEPC, experts from Armenia and the European Union created a task force to work on the effectiveness of political reforms and anticorruption measures.

EU-Azerbaijan relations

In 2021, the EU and Azerbaijan signed the New Comprehensive Partnership Agreement (NCPA). After deepened trade relations,

EU-member countries now receive gas from Azerbaijan, which in turn facilitates the political dialogue between Baku and Brussels. Civil society and human rights actors become slowly involved in the political process exercising their right of freedom of speech.

EU-Georgia relations

In 2026, Georgian citizens can easily gain work visa. This enables them to get closer to the European Union as Georgian citizens and citizens of EU-member countries work, live and study together. In 2025, Georgia gets the Membership Action Plan (MAP) which in turn ties Georgia and EU even stronger together. After the Eastern Partnership (EaP), Georgia and the EU launched an Agreement on Comprehensive Relations (ACR) in 2020, including financial and political cooperation in the fields of civil society, education and regional political challenges. A recent survey just underlined the importance of close EU-Georgia relations as 73% percent of Georgian citizens sympathize with the idea of joining the European Union.

REGIONAL STABILITY

Stability in the region was enhanced after Russia's weakened position due to the development concerning the Ukraine crisis and EU relations, as it has also lost its overall control in the

Caucasus region. This opened up the possibility for the countries of the region to enter enhanced relations between each other and to choose their political directions without fearing of Russia's

possible aggressive (preventing) actions. The EU started to deepen its cooperation with each regional country taking into considerations the uniqueness of every country. Therefore, as the EU has paid attention to the specific features of cooperating with each country of the Caucasus region, it became possible to have more effective results in each specific issue. Thus, in case of relations with Azerbaijan the economic sphere of cooperation was highlighted as the EU is the biggest export and import market for Azerbaijan. In case of Armenia, political cooperation was increased.

The development of renewable energy sources in Armenia will boost its economy, which in turn, will create a situation, where Armenia and Azerbaijan are in equal positions. This will bring balance and stability in the region.

ECONOMIC SITUATION

Economic Theory by 2030

By the time of 2030, every country in the region is going to have balanced economic ties with both the European Union and the Eurasian Union. The latter has become an economic project without any ideological aspects, after Lavrov decided to get rid of the influence of personalities like Alexander Dugin and other thinkers of ideological „Eurasism“. On the other hand, the EU decided to have a very differentiated

Within the Caucasus region, Georgia now acts as a role model that Armenians and Azerbaijanis can live in peace together in one society. This can be transferred to the societies within Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Trade relations in Caucasus have opened up the possibility for further communication on the economic level as the economy is more emphasized than politics in order to cut corners between conflict-stricken regions. The idea is that countries that are interdependent are more likely to avoid war and conflict and make long-lasting peace more probable.

As the role of EU in the region is increased and Caucasus faces less tension between Brussels and Moscow, regional stability is achieved.

approach towards its economic and political partners. Trade agreements do not any longer intend to spread a capitalistic economical system that is just focusing on market access for transnational corporations and other big players. Furthermore, Brussels has learned from the past, that in order to be a sustainable and trusted actor of change in any region, it has to take into account the problems that occur when it comes to the so-called dilemma of simultaneity.

The simultaneity dilemma refers to the difficulties that emerge when countries try to transform themselves politically and economically. When economic reforms will be established first and countries don't lay a focus on democratic development, there might be a short-term to middle-term improvement in the economy that is not approved by a mature and democratically sensitive electorate which will lead to further problems in the future. When it is the other way around and countries focus on their democratic development without taking into consideration economical needs and a sustainable economic development, the inhabitants might become disappointed about democracy. As the EU is now aware of this dilemma, it has a more balanced approach regarding the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), especially the Eastern Partnership (EaP). It tries to support small- and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), led by democratically aware citizens – at home and abroad.

Energy Resources

In October 2019, a German-Russian group of hackers wanted to show the vulnerability of nuclear power plants around the world in the age of cyber-crime. Therefore, they hacked some of the biggest nuclear power plants in Germany, France and Russia. Although having

had the intention to create a real catastrophe, they did not manage to cause a meltdown in the reactors. Nonetheless, the impact of this incident has been so strong, that countries around the world started a serious investment in renewable energies. The EU set up a bill, that defines the investment in renewable energies as a guideline of the cooperation within the EU as well as in the ENP. 5% of every state's budget have to be invested in the development of sustainable sources of energy. As there are a lot of hydroelectric power stations in Georgia, this new approach towards resources especially benefits Georgia's economy.

At the same time, Armenia and the EU reached an agreement on renewable energy development. With help of the EU, Armenia is able to install photovoltaic plants by 2023 and become an actor in the field of energy supply. Formerly, Azerbaijan was able to rely on its position as an indispensable actor in the field of gas and oil supply, not involving too much in the politics of international relations and trying to be neutral. Now it has to put more effort in diplomacy and good neighborhood ties towards all counties in the region, as well as the EU. This will help to settle the conflict on Nagorno-Karabakh in the future. For not alienating Azerbaijan as a partner in the region, the EU and Azerbaijan set up the Nabucco pipeline

project again in 2024. Though the focus in energy supply lies on renewable energies, it will take some years to fully establish this big project of renewables, and in the meanwhile the EU gains more independence from Russian gas and oil by setting up the Nabucco pipeline together with Azerbaijan.

As there has been a regime change in Russia and an honest recognition of the importance of renewable energies and the possible ending of fossil fuel resources, the Kremlin is putting effort in the development of renewables as well, cooperating with the EU. Therefore, in 2026, a special cooperation agreement between the EU and Russia was concluded, setting up scientific and political dialogue.

Trade Agreements

The implementation of the Association Agreement with Georgia was successful. Nonetheless, EU and Tbilisi set up an additional clause, referring to the approach of strengthening especially SMEs and involve Georgia in the 5%-investment-strategy on renewables. Full EU-membership is neither at stake, nor wanted by any of the parties.

Armenia left the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) by the beginning of 2025 and developed equal economic ties towards the EAEU and the EU by signing trade agreements that are not related to further

political or ideological integration into one of these spheres.

By 2018 Turkey has been the fourth important trade partner of Armenia, but it has been very difficult to import Turkish products due to the closed border. After a regime change in Turkey in 2022, Ankara managed to apologize for the genocide. Diplomatic relations are now in the process of being established with the long-term vision of opening the Armenian-Turkish border again.

Other Factors

Digitalization of work around the globe became intensified. Therefore, there has been a significant positive development of rural areas in South Caucasus. People don't need to move to the big cities in order to get work. Trainings on how to find a job are held online in every region.

After Brexit in 2022, the EU and the UK agreed on future trade relations. After years of ongoing disputes and negotiations, finally this process of agreeing on trade relations between the EU and a former EU-member state revealed its positive aspects as a model of deeper cooperation between the EU and countries of the Caucasus region.

SUMMARY

Significant importance has been given on economic cooperation. The key towards peace through the economy is strong economic ties, often referred to as economic interdependence. However, at the same time these economic ties should not be so strong, that a country's survival is completely dependent on others. A strong dependence in this field leads towards an aggressive geopolitical approach in international relations, which is not helpful to overcome tensions. That is why autonomy

and cooperation are only bringing peace and stability through their complementarity. The creation of the KPCT is a major step in establishing negotiations between the conflicting parties. Due to the education exchanges of students with EU civil societies in Russia and in Caucasus countries became well-educated and active in their countries, which led to major positive changes. Thus, a stronger civil society can have significant effects on the formulation of its country's main policy directions.

HANNAH ESSING, ARTEM HAKOBYAN, SILVA AVETISIAN, NATIA KETILADZE, ALEKSANDRA SHALIBASHVILI

Scenario 3: Weird World

THE CAUCASUS IN 2030: THE UNEXPECTED UNION

Is a single event enough to change the course of geopolitical, economic and societal development completely? What if this single event is not only unexpected, but one could even say, weird? This group imagined several unexpected events and with the following likely consequences.

The year is 2030. The Caucasus region has never been so united. The Caucasian Union was formed in 2028, which affected the

economic, political as well as societal developments to an enormous extent. It all started when a new president was elected in Russia in 2018, and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) was dissolved in 2020. Over the years 2020- 2028 the EU stabilised, which lead to the decision to stop enlargement completely and not to accept new members. Below the course of events are explained in four different areas and how they led to the situation in 2030.

TWO VISIONS OF REGIONAL STABILITY

HANNAH ESSING, ARTEM HAKOBYAN

Over the year the change of government in the countries of the region changed the relationship between them and contributed to creating the Caucasian Union. The following events took place between the years 2018 and 2030.

2018: Elections in Armenia, the parliament appoints a new Prime Minister, who has new ideas to change the direction of the country.

2020: A coup d'état in Azerbaijan

brings changes in society and foreign policy, a new president is elected one year later. His agenda is to change the regime and build new relationships with neighbouring countries.

2022: The heads of state of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan meet at a summit and negotiate about making borders easier to cross and possible ways to solve the frozen conflicts.

2024: Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia become independent, sovereign states.

2025: The borders are open, it is possible to cross (with passports).

2028: Georgia gets tired of hoping for EU membership, in the same year the Caucasian Union is formed, a starting point for the bond between the three countries is formed.

2029: Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia join the Caucasian Union (CU).

2030: A free trade agreement is achieved among the countries, negotiations about abolishing border control between the members of the CU are ongoing; development of common conventions and institutions, for example the Regional Caucasus Court of Human Rights is created at the border triangle between Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan; Iran expressed the desire to join the CU.



6 republics, 1 union

the Caucasian Union (CU) founded in 2028

Member states by 2030: Abkhazia, Georgia, South Ossetia, Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Russia: The situation in Russia has changed after the elections held in 2018. A female candidate with a very different agenda won the elections, which lead to global changes in not only in Russia, but also in the whole region. Russia changed its political course towards the EU, the US and got closer to the rest of the world in upcoming years. In the year 2020, the Russian president dissolved the EAEU.

The EU: Brexit led to unexpected consequences. Brussels decided that once a country has left the EU, it would not be able to apply for membership again (as the UK did in 2021). After the messy negotiations with the UK, other countries did not want to leave the EU anymore, especially

not after the UK faced negative consequences in the economic sector. To guarantee the stability of the existing system, Brussels generally stopped accepting new members. This also applied to Turkey as well as Georgia. However, trade and political agreements with the EU exist.

UN and NATO: The regime change in Russia led to the dissolution of NATO, which in 2025 was reformed and became a humanitarian organisation, the North Atlantic Humanitarian Organisation (NAHO). The UN had various reforms in 2025. Permanent membership in the Security Council including veto rights were abolished, all countries got the same equal rights.

SOCIETAL AND DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

Taking measures to get even closer to the EU, Georgia is focusing on human rights, investing funds in campaigns to foster tolerance and communication within the population. NGOs work on implementing positive changes with regards to minorities. In 2028, civil unions between same sex couples are possible.

The 2018 elections foster change in Armenian politics, when the parliament appoints a new prime minister. He starts working closely with Georgia to implement an anti-corruption process in Armenia. The close relations also help

implementing structures for human rights in Armenia. In 2030 Armenia is discussing to legally allow civil unions of same sex couples, after it has been successfully implemented in Georgia.

The coup d'état in Azerbaijan in 2020 brought positive changes within the society.

The countries try to change their parliaments and politics by diversifying the political landscape. Young people are more involved in decision making, and so are women and minorities.

ECONOMIC SITUATION

Over the course of the aforementioned events, there has been a drastic change in the economic growth of the region. Due to free trade agreements within the Caucasian Union, as well as between the CU members and Turkey, a lot of goods are produced and actively being exchanged between the countries.

Another factor that impacted the economic situation is the political stabilisation of the region. It makes all countries safer and as a

result more attractive in the eyes of international visitors. There are a significant number of jobs created in the area of tourism.

An additional reason for the growth in Georgia's economy is the legalisation of marijuana. Following years of efforts, the Libertarian Party of Georgia finally managed to persuade the ruling party to legalise it in 2023. It led to a giant flow of tourists and made a significant impact on the GDP.

CONCLUSION

These changes in the political, economic and societal development were not only due to unexpected changes, but could only be made possible because communication between the countries and also their leaders increased. In this scenario, international relations as well as regional stability profited from a productive dialogue between parties. This shows that political, economic and social changes are

possible due to communication and constructive dialogue. Although some of the events we imagined for a possible future seem to be highly unlikely. What can be seen is that when countries, governments and people understand that a common future is only possible when there is cooperation and a willingness to compromise, it can foster positive changes in a region.

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Scenario 4: Worst Case Scenario

CCCP: CAUCASUS CASE OF CHAOS AND REGRESSION: HOPE IS GUN?

SHORT SUMMARY / NARRATIVE

Looking back to the history of more than a decade of the South Caucasus region, it is sure that the developments were drastically and led to a devastation of the region. Economic and political instabilities within the region were the results of both changes of the geopolitical positions of the main actors and intra-Caucasus crisis. Given the severe situation concerning human rights protection in the region and internal instabilities, the European Union opts not to engage further in the South Caucasus. Other actors, especially Russia and the Eurasian Union enlarged their sphere of influence. The decrease of the gas/oil prices

had a huge negative impact on the Russian and Azerbaijani economic stability. Armenia and Georgia are reluctant to continue the democratization processes due to the rise of populist and nationalist movements. The escalation of the conflicts in the region (Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia) resulted in two devastating wars which caused many casualties from every side. Now the main issues, which endanger the further development of the South Caucasus are: uncompetitive economies, military involvement in conflicts, nationalist governments and international isolation.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

In the year 2030 the region of South Caucasus finds itself in a state of severe isolation from most Western partners and the EU. The aftermath of the huge “Viségrad-Crises” of the European Union in 2022 and the following Hungrexit (2023), Polexit (2024), Czexit and

Slovexit (2025) caused a huge shift of European Foreign Policy towards isolation of the core European members. The growing populist discourse in most of the European member states escalated to a shared perception of all three South Caucasus countries as the homeland

of thieves, prostitutes and terrorists. All remaining hopes of the still remaining little Western-orientated civil society were destroyed through the Internal Focus Enactment (IFE) in 2025 where the remaining European member states declared a suspension of all political and economic ties towards all South Caucasian countries (AA, DCFTA, CEPA) and the dissolution of the Eastern Partnership Programme.

Armenia's membership in the Eurasian Union turned into a disastrous dependency and exploitation through the Eurasian Union Acts 2020, 2024 and 2029. Russia dictates the Armenian economy while Armenia itself is being extremely dependent on Russian energy and military supply. The revitalisation of war in Nagorno-Karabakh since the "Nagorno-Crisis" 2025 is a serious harm to the state budget and hence causing serious cuts in welfare state expansions.

Azerbaijan, for long time remaining still a main supplier of gas and oil in the region, got hit disastrously by the fall of the oil and gas prices

in 2020s and the IFE in 2025. The aggressive way of committing war crimes in Nagorno-Karabakh made all trade countries withdraw from any cooperation with Azerbaijan except Georgia. Azerbaijan's long tradition of "choosing not to choose" therefore is not existent anymore and it gets more and more dependent on Russia. In January 2030 Azerbaijan's president announced that his country will enter in membership-talks with the Eurasian Union (though the chances for acceptance are close to zero since Armenia is member of the Union).

Georgia allegedly is most affected by the isolation from Western institutions. Finding itself in open war with Russia it is currently calling for NATO or the UN for help. The UN support is of course dead-locked through the veto-power Russia and NATO still hesitates to take any action due to the chaotic situation in the region. It tries hard to call for Turkey and the US for any kind of military support.

DEMOCRATIC AND SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, all former member states started the process of state building also announcing their commitment to democratic values. The countries in the region had different pace and different perception of the democratization process: while Georgia was seeing the future in the European Union, Armenia built strong relationship

with Russia also having some agreements with the EU, and Azerbaijan "chose to not choose".

In 2018 crucial elections took place in Russia and in every South Caucasian country. The election results turned out to be more or less expected. But further decline of democratic values was visible after the presidential elections in

Azerbaijan, when the incumbent president and president-elect Ilham Aliyev issued an order prohibiting the “alternative media” to report about the elections.

Despite huge hopes in Georgia concerning the relationship with the EU things went in opposite direction: the EU started to receive many migrants from Georgia and the European Commission decided to terminate the visa-free regime with Georgia. This decision served as a signal for Georgia that their European future is postponed for a long time. Due to the missing perspectives to become a member or at least a candidate of the EU, the Georgian government lost the motivation for reforms and growing Euroscepticism effected huge parts of the civil society.

The EU’s decision to concentrate mostly on its core members in order to preserve the future of the Union limited its ambitions to be a normative power. In 2025 the IFE also designed the new budget allocation and as a result all the funds that the EU had for supporting civil societies in the former Eastern Partnership countries were cut. On the other hand, the pro-Russian non-governmental organizations became more actively involved in reshaping the traditionally Russia-oriented civil society in Armenia. Seeing the crisis within the European Union, other countries lost the will to assimilate with European values. Transparency International reported that after 2020 the situation concerning the corruption in the

countries started to deteriorate. The ranking of Corruption Perception Index of the South Caucasian countries declined drastically over the years: Armenia fell from position 101 to 145, Georgia from 88 to 120, Azerbaijan from 133 to 151. The overall democratic governance level decreased and all the branches were concentrated in the hands of the ruling parties in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

The most vivid example for the human rights violations in Armenia happened in May of 2021, where a LGBTQ community’s demonstration was violently interrupted by nationalists and the police did not intervene to stop the clashes, neither did officials make any announcements on that matter.

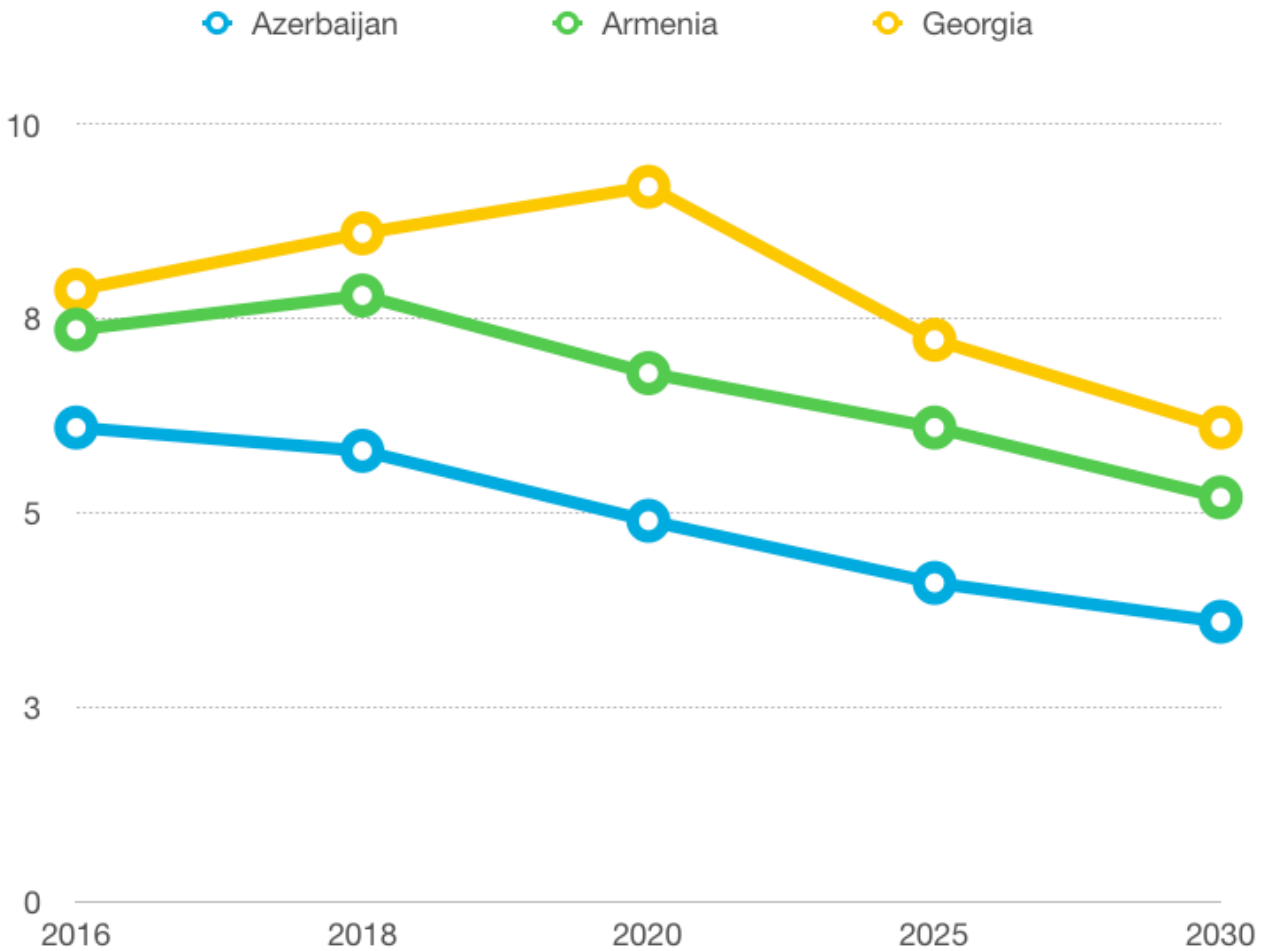
The high dissatisfaction in the society concerning the devaluation of money, rising tax hike and wage reduction resulted in strikes in Armenia and Georgia.

The tensions on the border of Nagorno-Karabakh with Azerbaijan started to rise in 2024, which served as an incentive for the populists and nationalists to become actively engaged in the decision-making process. Taking into account the concerns for the security, the Armenian parliament started to practice “legal nihilism”: adopting the laws for security reasons and neglecting fundamental human rights. Suddenly the separation of powers became a mere declarative principle.

Apart from the geopolitical situation, the Caucasian countries

also had problems regarding sustainable development. Due to the fact that all the efforts of the governments were concentrated on securitization the overall development of the states was

quite unsustainable: all the facilities were concentrated in big cities while regions were left on their own. This “policy” led to total degradation of the regional parts of the respective countries.



Human Freedom Index of the South Caucasus Countries 2016-2030 (1 worst - 10 best)

Source: Authors

REGIONAL STABILITY

The conflict driven region of South Caucasus went from a relatively stable situation back in 2018 with no declared wars to a situation of two openly declared wars in 2025 and 2028. The last 12 years can be described as an escalation of conflicts due to various reasons and events.

In a climate of a strong nationalist government in Georgia and Russia finding itself in the need of a victory in foreign affairs, the incident of Tskhinvali in February 26, 2028 led again to an outbreak of war between South Ossetia and Georgia. Three students from Georgia went to visit their families in Tskhinvali.

When crossing the border, the border security detained the group. After two days of incarceration it became clear that two of the students were dead and the third one had been tortured and is in a life endangering health condition. The nationalist government in Tbilisi took that as a window of opportunity to invade South Ossetia. Russia answered with sending troops and military support to South Ossetia. Since there were no binding ties to any of the international organizations, only Turkey and the US could be considered as supporting actors. Until now only the US supplied Georgia with weapons and humanitarian aid.

In early 2020s, in order to fill the gap in the state budget created by the decreasing prices of gas, Russia decides to focus on its arms exports. To increase its exports in this sector, Russia used modern political

technology means such as cyber-attacks and fake news to persuade Armenians and Azerbaijanis about the threat coming from the opposite side. In the atmosphere of nationalist governments both in Baku and Yerevan, this strategy easily turned out to be successful. Russia renewed its extensive trade of weapons with both sides of the conflict.

In 2025 a new crisis broke out which resulted in a two weeks' war with more than 200 soldiers killed. The international actors (the OSCE Minsk group and the UN peacekeeping forces) were allowed to mediate the conflict only under the supervision of Russia. Due to the ongoing economic interest of Russia still the peace is never maintained in the Armenia-Nagorno-Karabakh-Azerbaijan relationships and escalations happen from time to time.

ECONOMIC SITUATION

After years of stagnation caused by the global financial crisis in 2008, the world economy started to strengthen its position gradually due to various social-economic recovery plans and strategies adopted by the governments of the countries. The positive tendency would have continued, if not the sudden armed conflicts had risen in the Caucasus region. Nagorno-Karabakh clashes in 2025 and later on Georgia-South Ossetia war ended the recovery process and made countries shift their financing approaches and spend more money on defence

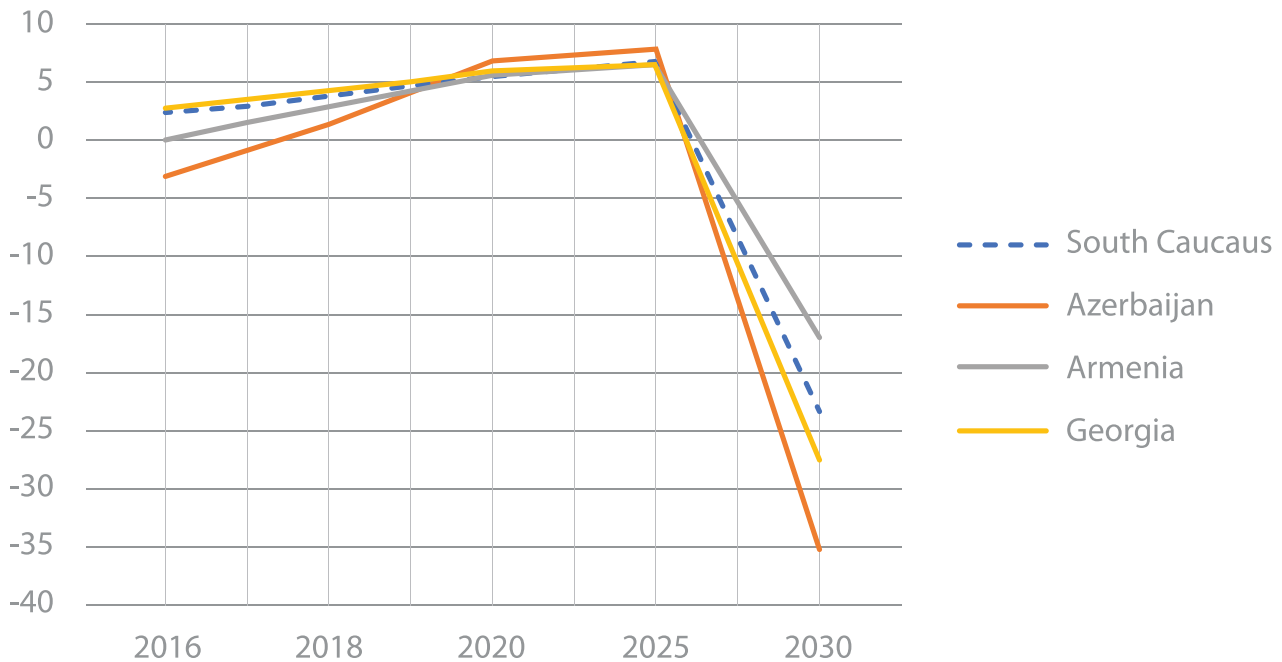
and rearmament rather than social welfare and economic development. In Azerbaijan, military expenditure reached an all-time high of 2.9 billion USD of the government's overall budget or 43,7% of the country's average GDP in 2025.

Continuous aggression and persecution in the region caused the suspension of all political ties with South Caucasus by Europe and from then until now the region is being considered as a "dangerous place to live". Due to the isolation of the countries the last decade was punctuated by series of negative

shocks and financial-economic crises. The total GDP growth rate of the South Caucasus countries fell because of the above mentioned

negative events and the future predictions of the tendency do not promise any positive change.

GDP Growth Rate



Source: Authors

The uncertain political situation and negative economic changes that occurred in the South Caucasus region did not guarantee the realization of the right to an adequate standard of living and equality. Therefore, the wealth gap became bigger. High level of unemployment had a huge impact on the rates of migration, which increased drastically throughout years. In 2018, the population in Armenia was about 2.9 million. Now, a bit more than a decade later in 2030 it has decreased to only nearly 1 million. This negative tendency had a huge economic, social-cultural and demographic impact on the

countries causing higher consumer prices and costs of services, such as health and social care. The high rate of “brain drain” had a negative effect on labour causing countries to lack highly skilled people. Through the loss of young workers, all the economic activities become less productive in the countries.

There is a strong correlation between the rate of economic growth and the Foreign Direct Investments (FDI). Political risk and economic instabilities caused limitations of foreign capital flows in the South Caucasus region. Because of the falling oil prices, the rate of the oil FDI in Azerbaijan started to

decrease drastically. The suspension of economic ties with European countries led Armenia become totally dependent on Russian FDIs and economic decisions.

After the violation of international law and human rights, due to war crimes in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the above-mentioned border incidents, the EU imposed a total embargo on South Caucasus in 2025. The IFE had a dramatic impact on Caucasus economics. Banning import and export, freezing assets and bank accounts lead to a collapse of economic trade relations between the Caucasus and the EU. Especially Georgia has been suffering from those sanctions as the main industrial sectors as the wine export rates decreased from 2020-2030 by 60%. The rapidly growing industry of tourism in Georgia which generated a total economic impact of \$60.8 billion in 2016, suffered also a loss due to war situations and visa restrictions in the Caucasus. Another side effect of the embargo was the already named drastic decrease in crude oil prices which has been constantly fallen from \$65.85 per barrel in 2018 to \$17.31 in 2030 in Azerbaijan. The price development of oil and gas in the Caucasus region has been influenced furthermore by the rising export of Iranian resources and global energy market developments. At least since the 1970s, the linkage between the price of oil and inflation is evident. In the Caucasus case, the inflation has been increased due to rising oil prices as crude oil is a major input in economy and therefore

the costs of the end products rose. As a result, the inflation rates had been quintupled. At the same time the rapid devaluation of paper money and the volatile currency exchange rate led to a high dissatisfaction in the society. Additionally, the rising tax hike, the state regulated price hike as well as the ongoing wage reduction drove people to the streets protesting against the economic situation. The undertaken economic restrictions provoked direct countermeasures to first stabilize the situation in the region and second to sanction the EU, the US and Russia (in the case of Georgia). Concrete measures were incredibly high tax hikes against multinational enterprises like Synopsys in Armenia or Rome Petrol and Coca Cola in Georgia. Sales taxes increased from average 25% in 2018 progressively up to 75% in 2027.

In the light of the latest changes, the South Caucasus now has to finally deal with the various problems in the region. The Caucasian countries should address the issues and crisis otherwise they can lead to the total destruction of the region. Even if there is little or no support coming from the other countries, the separate countries need to take the initiative until it is too late.

DISCLAIMER

Responsibility for the information and views set out in this publication lies entirely with the authors of the respective scenarios. The groups were randomly distributed and consisted of Abkhazian, Armenian, German, and Georgian participants.

Scenario 1: Same World «Caucasian Sisyphus»: Astanda Avidzba, Svenja Brunkhorst, Nicolas Gäckle, Hasmik Kirakosyan and Tekle Ortoidze

Scenario 2: Better World «It's the Institutionalization, stupid!»: Salima Dzhikirba, Mary Nazaryan, Marie-Thérèse Schreiber, Badri Belkania, Nora Galstyan, Janna Articus

Scenario 3: Weird World «The Caucasus in 2030: The Unexpected Union»: Hannah Essing, Artem Hakobyan, Silva Avetisian, Natia Ketiladze, Aleksandra Shalibashvili

Scenario 4: Worst Case Scenario «CCCP: Caucasus Case of Chaos and Regression: Hope is Gun?»: Tatev Derzyan, Anna Ghorukhchyan, David Bender, Irakli Gabidzashvili, Lorenz Schwochow

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