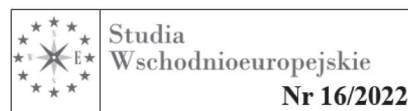


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*Panu Profesorowi Józefowi Tymanowskiemu  
w dowód wdzięczności za ukształtowanie jako naukowca  
i wieloletnią współpracę badawczo-organizacyjną  
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## **Changing power dynamics and new geopolitical reality in the South Caucasus**

The subject of this article is the geopolitics of the South Caucasus. Key in this regard is the recent 2020 event in the region - the Second Karabakh War and its effects. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, launched on February 24, 2022, although it does not directly affect the South Caucasus, is also very important for the present and future geopolitical situation in this region, due to the importance of the event and its impact on the global international order. The above facts show that the study of the subject matter will be most effective if it is carried out from the discussed perspective. Such an approach will allow for a new look at the geopolitics of the South Caucasus, which will make the discussed research an important contribution not only to Polish, but also European and world science.

The article poses the following research question: how the Second Karabakh War and the war between Russia and Ukraine affect the geopolitical position of the states of the South Caucasus and the entire region, as well as the main entities influencing the indicated area.

In answer to the above question, it will be helpful to verify the following research hypothesis: The Second Karabakh War and its effects, above all, radically strengthened Azerbaijan's position as a key state in the South Caucasus, mainly thanks to this entity regaining control over most of the previously illegally occupied (by Armenians) part

Azerbaijan. This fact, which strengthens the territorial integrity of the state and another effect of the War - the arrangements guaranteeing the connection, through the corridor through the Zangezur, of the main part of territory this state with the Nakhichevan exclave, increase the existing development opportunities for Azerbaijan and open up new ones. The effect of the Second Karabakh War is also strengthening the position of the entire South Caucasus as one of the key areas from the point of view of global geopolitics, as almost entirely eliminates the existing factor that prevented the optimal use of the strategic location of the region, which is the illegal Armenian occupation of Karabakh and its adjacent areas. Agreements concluded as a result of the 44-day war also provide prospects for achieving further arrangements that will completely and permanently eliminate this unfavorable element.

Taking into account the volume limitations of the article and substantive issues, a time limitation has been used - the period is examined: from the beginning of the Second Karabakh War to the moment of writing this study - the sixth month of Russia's war with Ukraine. This is due to the fact that the indicated period is crucial for the optimal understanding of the subject matter. The research undertaken (territorial limitation) is limited to the territory of the South Caucasus and the main entities influencing the indicated region. The above areas are the most important for the analysis of the geopolitical situation of the South Caucasus. The use of the objective limiter is due to the fact that mainly the influence of two events on the geopolitical position of the South Caucasus is examined - Second Karabakh War and Russia-Ukraine war. Apart from volumetric issues, such an approach is conditioned by the fact that these events are the most important taking into account the current geopolitical position of the states of the analyzed region and the South Caucasus as a whole. They are also crucial in the case of predictive research.

#### **The influence of the Second Karabakh War on the geopolitics of the South Caucasus**

In the last year and a half since the signing of the November 10 declaration between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia it is already a well-established fact that the so-called 44-day war changed the geopolitical picture of the region once and for all, and pushed different actors to adapt their regional policies to the new realities on the ground. According to the trilateral statement, Russia gained the right to deploy its peacekeeping forces to Azerbaijan's Karabakh region for a five-year period with the possibility of extension to another five years unless either Baku or Yerevan notifies about its intention to terminate this clause 6 months before the

expiration of the current term<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, Article 9 of the declaration envisages the deployment of border guards of Russia's Federal Security Service to oversee the unobstructed movement of persons, vehicles, and cargo through the Zangezur Corridor connecting Azerbaijan's newly-liberated western regions with its Nakhchivan exclave via Armenia's Meghri region<sup>2</sup>. On its part, Turkey increased its foothold in the South Caucasus as it sent its servicemen to Azerbaijan's Aghdam region to join Russia in the creation of a joint monitoring center. Ankara also benefited from Azerbaijan's successful use of TB2 Bayraktar drones on the battlefield against Armenia's Russia-supplied weaponry that boosted Turkey's image as an established drone power in the new era of great power competition. Weakest of the regional major powers, Iran emerged as one of the main losers of the war as Azerbaijan gained control over its southern borders and deepened military-economic cooperation with Turkey, Pakistan, and Israel to the detriment of vital Iranian interests in the region. Armenia's defeat in the war meant Tehran would have to spend more energy on bolstering its position in the South Caucasus and secure its northern flank from further external encroachments. When it comes to the Western countries, the 44-day war showed the lack of will and to some extent, capabilities on the part of the U.S. and the EU to cajole warring sides into agreeing on sustainable peace in the region. During the war, they mostly laid low, watching Russia to dominate the peacemaking process. In the post-war period, the EU appeared to be more active in the mediation process and went as far as offering alternative peace agenda that challenged Russia's monopolistic position in the post-war negotiations. Although Washington kept a low profile till recently, it has started to increase its diplomatic efforts to actively contribute to the reconciliation process.

### **The impact of Russia's war with Ukraine on the geopolitical situation of the South Caucasus**

Amid this geopolitical hustling in the wider Caspian region, there has been a slow-motion drama unfolding in Europe unprecedented since the end of the Second World War. On February 24, Russia attacked Ukraine<sup>3</sup> and occupied swathes of territory in the eastern and

<sup>1</sup> W. Górecki K. Strachota, *Kaukaz rozregulowany. Region w rocznicę zakończenia drugiej wojny karabskiej*, KOMENTARZE OSW, za: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/komentarze-osw/2021-11-26/kaukaz-rozregulowany-region-w-rocznice-zakonczenia-drugiej> (03.08.2022).

<sup>2</sup> *Szczegóły porozumienia Armenia – Rosja – Azerbejdżan*, za: <https://studium.uw.edu.pl/szczegoly-porozumienia-armenia-rosja-azerbejdzan/> (03.08.2022).

<sup>3</sup> M. Kowalczyk, *Pierwszy dzień wojny w Ukrainie. Co powinniśmy wiedzieć? [NAJWAŻNIEJSZE INFORMACJE]*, za: <https://www.newsweek.pl/swiat/ukraina-rosja-wojna-co-sie-stalo-24-lutego/8ehyvne> (05.08.2022).

southern parts of the country<sup>4</sup>. In response, major Western economies imposed a comprehensive package of sanctions on Russia, including the EU<sup>5</sup> preparing to stop the import of Russian oil and gas in a short time. Consequently, the growing zero-sum dynamics between the West and Russia in the so-called shared neighborhood put the countries in the region at an unrewarding crossroads, pushing them to make choices that could have serious repercussions for their position in the newly-emerging regional (dis)order.

Azerbaijan seems to be the most prepared for the potential collapse of the regional security system thanks to its military-economic capabilities and diversified alliance portfolio. In the aftermath of the Second Karabakh War, Baku considers the new system amenable to its interests and calls for the Armenian side to put the conflict behind for once and for all. What is striking is that Azerbaijani diplomacy has proactively been shaping the agenda of post-war negotiations with Armenia and the other participating countries. Accordingly, the status for the remaining territories in Karabakh has been mostly absent from the current discussions and all the interested parties are invested in the idea of signing a comprehensive peace agreement. With this, Baku aims to push Yerevan to recognize its territorial integrity which would cement the existing status quo, making it remarkably difficult for Armenia to challenge it in the near future. To Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Azerbaijan reacted in a balanced way. On the one hand, it sent humanitarian aid<sup>6</sup> and provided much-needed energy supplies for Ukraine<sup>7</sup>. Azerbaijani leadership on different occasions reiterated its support for Ukraine's territorial integrity. On the other hand, Baku did not join sanctions against Russia and avoided openly criticizing Russian aggression. In geopolitical terms, Russia's blunder in Ukraine creates certain opportunities for Azerbaijan to pursue more independent foreign policy, especially on issues that are in its vital interests<sup>8</sup>. Karabakh issue and ongoing negotiations with Armenia are some of these policy areas. For Russia,

<sup>4</sup> *Mapa wojny. Brutalna agresja Rosji na Ukrainę. Gdzie toczą się walki?*, za: <https://i.pl/mapa-wojny-brutalna-agresja-rosji-na-ukraine-gdzie-tocza-sie-walki/ar/c1-16083205> <https://polskatimes.pl/mapa-wojny-brutalna-agresja-rosji-na-ukraine-gdzie-tocza-sie-walki/ar/c1-16083205> (06.08.2022).

<sup>5</sup> *Kalendarium – sankcje UE wobec Rosji w sprawie Ukrainy*, za: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/policies/sanctions/restrictive-measures-against-russia-over-ukraine/history-restrictive-measures-against-russia-over-ukraine/> (06.08.2022).

<sup>6</sup> *Ukraina: Otrzymujemy pomoc medyczną i humanitarną z Azerbejdżanu*, za: <https://www.wnp.pl/rynki-zagraniczne/ukraina-otrzymujemy-pomoc-medyczna-i-humanitarna-z-azerbejdzanu,546683.html> (09.08.2022).

<sup>7</sup> *Pomoc dla Ukrainy. Azerbejdżan gotowy dać paliwo na zasiewy*, za: <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/pomoc-dla-ukrainy-azerbejdzan-gotowy-dac-paliwo-na-zasiewy-6752206049676192a.html> (09.08.2022).

<sup>8</sup> *Azerbejdżan wobec rosyjskiej inwazji na Ukrainę - Kierunek Kaukaz*, za: <https://kierunekkaukaz.pl/2022/06/19/azerbejdzan-wobec-rosyjskiej-inwazji-na-ukraine/> (09.08.2022).

these have long been policy tools to maintain managed instability in the region, and now Ukraine diverting its attention elsewhere might strengthen Baku's hand in future negotiations. Moreover, Azerbaijan continues to deepen its strategic partnership with alternative power poles such as Turkey<sup>9</sup> and the EU<sup>10</sup> to better ward off potential Russian pressures. After the sanctions on Russia, Azerbaijan's growing role in the EU's energy security and connectivity strategy strengthened its ties with Western partners and bolstered its image as a reliable partner in the international fora. Successful use of this momentum not only widens Azerbaijan's margin of error *vis-a-vis* Russia but will also afford it a stronger position in negotiations with Armenia.

Contrarily, Armenia's structural position after the 44-day war has been the weakest among the countries in the region, with its military-economic dependence on Russia growing year by year. Thanks to recovering jurisdiction over the formerly occupied territories Azerbaijani military reached to Armenian borders, gaining a significant strategic advantage over the bordering regions. Now, Azerbaijan's armed forces are in the vicinity of the Armenian separatist entity in Karabakh which gives the former different leverage mechanisms to limit the maneuvering space of the latter till Azerbaijan peacefully integrates the remaining parts of Karabakh under its jurisdiction. The 44-day war also degraded Yerevan's military strength and dealt a huge blow to its already fragile economy<sup>11</sup>. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and eventual break of ties between Russia and the West put further pressure on Armenian foreign policy as it had to go a long way to avoid sanctions while pleasing its main ally and military patron. Facing a remarkably restrictive geopolitical environment, the Pashinyan government, on the one hand, accepts Azerbaijani and Turkish proposals to normalize relations and eventually sign a comprehensive peace agreement. The Armenian prime minister went even further to concede that Armenia should lower the bar regarding the status of Karabakh, hinting that he is prepared to recognize the territory as part of Azerbaijan<sup>12</sup>. On the other hand, the Armenian leadership moves discursively closer to the narratives put forward by Russia, opposition groups known for pro-Russia platforms, and the separatist

<sup>9</sup> P. Şahbazov: *Hazırda enerji trilemmasının hər üç aspekti - təhlükəsizlik, əlçatanlıq və davamlılıq arasında balans pozulub*, za: [https://azertag.az/xeber/Perviz\\_Sahbazov\\_Hazirda\\_enerji\\_trilemmasinin\\_her\\_uch\\_aspekti\\_tehluksesizlik\\_elchatanliq\\_ve\\_davamliliq\\_arasinda\\_balans\\_pozulub-2050700](https://azertag.az/xeber/Perviz_Sahbazov_Hazirda_enerji_trilemmasinin_her_uch_aspekti_tehluksesizlik_elchatanliq_ve_davamliliq_arasinda_balans_pozulub-2050700) (09.08.2022).

<sup>10</sup> *Rada Wspólpracy UE–Azerbejdżan*, za: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/meetings/international-ministerial-meetings/2022/07/19/> (10.08.2022).

<sup>11</sup> *İkinci Qarabağ müharibəsinin Ermənistan üçün iqtisadi nəticələri*, za: <https://aircenter.az/az/single/ikinci-qarabag-muharibesinin-ermenistan-ucun-iqtisadi-neticeleri-687> (11.08.2022).

<sup>12</sup> W. Görecki, *Radykalny zwrot w karabaskiej polityce Erywania*, za: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2022-04-15/radykalny-zwrot-w-karabaskiej-polityce-erywania> (11.08.2022).

entity in the remaining parts of Karabakh that damages the reconciliation process. Although this policy line gains some time for Armenia to better prepare itself for the newly-emerging order, ignoring the changing power balance in the region could have serious consequences for Armenian security in the short term.

After the Second Karabakh War, Georgia understandably views Russia's deployment of troops to yet another South Caucasus republic as a strategic challenge to its regional policy. At the same time, Tbilisi closely follows the Armenia-Azerbaijan and Armenia-Turkey normalization process which, if successful, could totally change the geopolitical picture of the region. Although regional peace and partnership are in Georgia's best interests, it can also weaken its central role as a transit hub in the South Caucasus. For example, in the aftermath of the 44-day war, there were arguments that the realization of the Zangezur Corridor could decrease the importance of transport projects passing through Georgia. Due to the absence of diplomatic relations with Russia, Tbilisi also did not join the 3+3 platform offered by Azerbaijan and Turkey in early 2021<sup>13</sup>. After Russia's launch of war against Ukraine in late February, Georgia suffers from internal polarization and cooling of relations with its Western partners. Tbilisi applied for EU membership on March 3<sup>14</sup> but the EU's reluctance to give candidate status to Georgia means Georgia will have to maneuver between Russia and the West with a host of domestic and external pressures that might hamper its ability to mobilize resources to reach its goals in an increasingly destabilized neighborhood.

The new geopolitical realities in the South Caucasus after the Second Karabakh War have been further underscored by the more active involvement of third powers in Russia's flanks in regional affairs. Most notably, the EU, for the time being, replaced the currently-defunct OSCE Minsk Group as one of the major mediating bodies between Armenia and Azerbaijan. European Council President Charles Michel has been especially active in bringing the state leaders together in Brussels to discuss plans to reach tangible results in mutually beneficial policy areas such as the reopening of the transportation routes, delimitation of borders, and eventual peace agreement. At the same time, the EU's South Caucasus policy entered uncharted territory in March 2022 when Brussels and Georgia started discussions on Georgia's possible candidate status. Although the EU delayed the process due to the Georgian government's recalcitrant behavior, what is certain is that the EU membership narrative will

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<sup>13</sup> D. Aslan, *Georgia will not attend 3+3 Caucasus platform in Turkey: Envoy*, «Daily Sabah», za: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/georgia-will-not-attend-33-caucasus-platform-in-turkey-envoy> (12.08.2022).

<sup>14</sup> *Gruzja*, za: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/policies/enlargement/georgia/> (14.08.2022).

be an essential part of the discourse in the EU-Georgia relations in the near future. In both attempts, the U.S. supports the EU policy towards the South Caucasus. Turkey is another power aspiring to bolster its military-economic presence in the region. Growing cooperation with Georgia and especially with Azerbaijan will increase its foothold to the detriment of the Russian position in the neighborhood. After the Western sanctions hampered Russia's transit role in the East-West connectivity, Turkey in cooperation with Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Kazakhstan stepped up efforts to strengthen the Middle Corridor as a viable route for the intercontinental trade. Ankara also deepened military-economic contacts with the Turkic republics in Central Asia, adding a new layer to the great power competition in the region. Taken together, these geopolitical developments created a new reality in the South Caucasus but one should also keep in mind that many will depend on the result of the ongoing war in Ukraine. Whether Russia will win or lose or be forced to a stalemate will have serious implications for the alignment behavior of the South Caucasus states.

### **Conclusion**

The indicated facts confirm the statement contained in the hypothesis presented in the introduction that: The Second Karabakh War and its effects, first of all, radically strengthened the position of Azerbaijan as a key state in the South Caucasus, mainly thanks to this entity regaining actual control over most of the part of Azerbaijan previously illegally occupied by Armenians. This fact, which strengthens the territorial integrity of the country, and another effect of the War - the arrangements guaranteeing the connection, through the Transangu Corridor, of the main part of this country with the Nakhichevan exclave, increase Azerbaijan's existing development opportunities and open up new ones. The effect of the Second Karabakh War is also strengthening the position of the entire South Caucasus as one of the key areas from the point of view of global geopolitics, as it almost entirely eliminates the current destabilizing factor and prevents optimal use of the strategic location of the region, which is the illegal Armenian occupation of Karabakh and its adjacent areas. Agreements concluded as a result of the 44-day war also provide prospects for achieving further arrangements that will completely and permanently eliminate this unfavorable element.

The above facts imply the statement that the research hypothesis put forward in the article has been positively verified.

Summing up, it should be pointed out that the greatest beneficiary of the effects of the Second Karabakh War is Azerbaijan, which was possible thanks to the military and political

victory of this state, fighting to regain control over the illegally occupied by Armenians Karabakh and its adjacent territories, which are an integral part of Azerbaijan. However, the result of the 44-day war is not only the strengthening of the indicated state as a key entity in the region. The provisions concluded as a result of the Second Karabakh War and the resulting prospect of further arrangements provide an opportunity (thanks to the permanent return to the effective control of Azerbaijan of the illegally occupied parts of that country by Armenians) for stabilization and normalization of the situation in the entire region, which will ultimately be beneficial for the South Caucasus and other countries this region. Thanks to the indicated situation and other benefits, such as the restoration of previously frozen communication connections, Azerbaijan and the entire region will gain in importance. The advantages discussed may be magnified by the current situation related to the war between Russia and Ukraine. In all scenarios of the development of the situation - apart from Russia's victory, its impact on the South Caucasus will be to a greater or lesser degree permanently weakened. This situation will allow even greater opportunities to use the advantages of the strategic location of the region in accordance with its interests. In such a case, the role of Azerbaijan will increase even more - the strongest state in the South Caucasus, which will therefore be able to shape the directions of development of this region. The aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine has also caused a severance of relations between the West and this state (RF) on many levels. The South Caucasus, and Azerbaijan in particular, has a chance to replace Russia as a link between the West and the East, which may be very important, especially when it comes to supplying European Union states with oil and natural gas, the deposits of which Azerbaijan has - thanks to the location and independent from Russia transmission infrastructure, It can act as a transit state in the case of the transport of energy resources from Central Asian states to the EU, which is intensively looking for alternative to Russian, sources of crude oil and natural gas. The discussed situation generally causes the EU to deviate from the «Russia first» principle in relations with the South Caucasus and greater interest in the states of the region, especially in Azerbaijan, which is mainly the result of the unfavorable energy situation of the Union. Strengthening the role of Azerbaijan is also supported by a stronger position in the region of Turkey - its strategic partner. The greater involvement of the USA in the South Caucasus is also not without significance.

In conclusion, the two key events for the South Caucasus - the Second Karabakh War and the war between Russia and Ukraine, although in different ways, strengthen the geopolitical position of Azerbaijan not only as the leader of the region but also as a strong and equal partner for the main entities affecting the South Caucasus.



**Streszczenie:**

Artykuł porusza problematykę geopolityki Kaukazu Południowego. Postawione przez autora pytanie badawcze odnosi się do wpływu Drugiej Wojny Karabaskiej i wojny Rosji z Ukrainą na pozycję międzynarodową regionu oraz położonych w jego obrębie państw. Tekst składa się z wprowadzenia, fragmentu dotyczącego oddziaływania wojny 44-dniowej na znaczenie Armenii, Azerbejdżanu i Gruzji oraz Kaukazu Południowego jako całości w relacjach międzynarodowych. Część trzecia dotyczy wskazanych kwestii w odniesieniu do ataku FR na Ukrainę 24 lutego 2022 r. i wydarzeń będących jego następstwem. W podsumowaniu zawarte jest odniesienie do postawionej na wstępie hipotezy badawczej oraz konkluzje. Wskazane ujęcie badanej problematyki pozwoliło na uzyskanie odpowiedzi na określone na początku artykułu pytanie badawcze.

**Słowa kluczowe:**

geopolityka, Kaukaz Południowy, Armenia, Azerbejdżan, Gruzja

**Key words:**

geopolitics, South Caucasus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia

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