

*How can the South  
Caucasus achieve regional  
integration and security?  
An Armenian Perspective*

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**Abstract**

*This essay investigates the possibility of and conditions for lasting stability and peace in the South Caucasus. Following an initial definition of the existing destabilizing factors, the essay offers possible routes to overcoming the political discord and lack of harmony in the region. To the author, if the regional states want to achieve peace and stability, they must focus on strengthening human rights and democracy in their respective countries, develop mutually beneficial economic policy, create a regional organization involving all South Caucasian states, and settle the region's ethnic and territorial conflicts.*

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Today, the world has undergone a new integration system, and this process implies the creation of a globalized world. In tandem with global integrative formations, new subsystems are also being formed. The need for new subsystems that will bring cohesion and harmony in delimited territories is nowhere more evident than in the South Caucasus; and nowhere is the formation of such systems harder than in the South Caucasus. This is because the region is at the crossroads of interests, not only of the three South Caucasian republics but also Russia, Turkey, Iran and the U.S.

In a subsystem, the occurrence of an event or a development in one country definitely has positive or negative effects in other countries. For instance, an economic crisis in Russia today unavoidably has repercussive effects on the South Caucasus. Similarly, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has had serious impacts not only on Azerbaijan and Armenia but also on Turkey, Georgia, Russia and even Iran.

### *Search for stability*

Systems can be either stable or unstable. Caucasian subsystem has no balance of power or consensus on common interests; stabilizing mechanisms do not exist. There are several reasons for this, all of which are in some way related to the absence of an overarching regional organization, where common issues can be

examined, common solutions can be found, and common interests can be built. The destabilizing factors are numerous. In my opinion, they can be divided into four categories.

The first category consists of internal political factors. Unfortunately, state structures have not yet evolved sufficiently to contribute to a state's domestic stability. Armenia may remove these destabilizing factors through, for instance, taking a leading role in the building of human rights and democratic institutions. This why our state must first 'put its own house in order'. In this regard, the human rights environment in Armenia must be improved. A mature democratic society must be created so that it can credibly advocate the spread of human rights and democracy in the region. Only then we will be able to resolve our economic, ethnic and political problems. Protecting human rights can become the top priority in the national strategy for pacifying political opposition and conflicts.

The next stabilization category is political. Our region lacks a congruence of interests. Political interests are different and it seems that each state has its own direction. Additionally, the continued use of the East-West division leads to serious polarization, which is not conducive to stability. So, it will be wiser to conduct a policy of "positive equilibrium" by providing equal opportunities to

all states wishing to engage with the region, and by creating a network of security arrangements that are mutually complementary.

The third is the economic category. The uneven distribution of natural resources in the South Caucasus is a further destabilizing factor. Regionally, the issue of pipeline routes and division of the Caspian energy resources is a bone of contention among numerous states. Even more dangerous is the competition surrounding the passage of pipelines through the various countries. Therefore, it is important for our region to create a unified and equal economic system. In particular, each country must be active in all regional economic initiatives and oil matters.

Finally, the fourth category of destabilizing factors is regional conflicts and the failure to develop good neighborly relations.

#### *Armenia and regional stability*

Armenia's foreign policy is contingent on objective factors of both a regional and global nature. Among the imperatives that shape the country's foreign policy, the leading ones are Armenia's historic past and traditions, along with its geographical location. Armenia also prioritizes relations with its immediate neighbors, because regional conflicts are the toughest security concerns for the whole region. Indeed, the establishment of normal relations with neighbors is one of the major tasks

for Armenia, for both political and economic reasons. Of course, it is necessary to mention that there are many psychological barriers in communication among the nations of the South Caucasus, which derive from long-running controversies. Unfortunately, due to a number of reasons, at present Armenia has established relations with only two of its neighbors, Iran and Georgia, which will continue to develop. The implementation of the objective of the normalization of relations with all neighboring countries depends on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Although a cease-fire has held since 1994, the conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has not been resolved. Now the consequent blockade along both the Azerbaijani and Turkish borders is a great impediment to Armenia's economic development. Land routes through Azerbaijan and Turkey are closed; routes through Georgia and Iran are inadequate or unreliable. Armenia has developed a varied and flexible economy, due to the transportation limitations and to the economic blockade imposed by two of its neighbors, Turkey and Azerbaijan. So, relations with neighbors, particularly with Turkey, must be based on bilateral rather than unilateral principles. Today, our new policy requires that the actions and reactions be commensurate with Turkey's actions and attitudes. The intention of the Republic of Armenia is not to confront Turkey, but to engage with it. In my view

the Armenia-Turkey rapprochement and the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are important for the social and economic growth of the South Caucasus, in the reinforcement of mutual confidence and goals, in promoting neighborly relations in our region, in assuring stability and security, and for integration with European organizations.

*Pathway to a stable peace in the South Caucasus*

Negotiations and dialogue are the only paths towards the establishment of a stable peace and mutual trust in the region and towards the resolution of regional problems. Without resolution in this manner, we will not be able to reach lasting peace or stability in the South Caucasus or achieve regional integration and security. With good will and reciprocal steps forward we can yield results. It is vital to realize that the future of our region is in our hands, and each South Caucasus country cannot develop separately without taking into consideration the issues and interests of all regional states. Of course, it is not easy and only through hard work and perseverance can success be guaranteed. If we want to live in a stable region, we must agree to a compromise.

Distrust prevents the adjustment of the political dialogue, economic cooperation and good neighborly relations, which are needed by all states to ensure their own welfare. Creating a favorable atmosphere for coopera-

tion, harmony, confidence and mutual understanding is possible only once the disputes and conflicts in the South Caucasus have been addressed peacefully and definitively. As H. G. Wells said, "If we don't end war, war will end us". Thus, it is high time to brush aside perceptions of the South Caucasus as the crossroads of never-ending conflicts.

There is no other place on the map where such a small transfer of land would have such a global impact. This clearly demonstrates the unique situation in which the South Caucasian states find themselves in. Thus, they must correctly define their foreign policy concerns and find the right solutions. They must strive to contribute to stability and peace in this region.

To sum up, our future is in our hands and this future depends on what we do today. If we want to achieve stability in the South Caucasus, we must focus on strengthening human rights and democracy in the region, develop a unified and equal economic policy, create a regional organization involving all the South Caucasian states, and achieve the peaceful settlement of the region's ethnic conflicts.