

# Importance of NATO's Engagement in Critical Energy Infrastructure Protection in the South Caucasus

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Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, independent Azerbaijan and Georgia launched their new national energy policies. This enabled them to bring Western investment and technologies into their energy sectors, which led to the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, Baku-Supsa and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines. These pipelines empowered Azerbaijan and Georgia as politically and economically independent actors in regard to the transportation and supply of Caspian's energy resources to the West. With Turkey's involvement, the cooperation acquired a larger scope and led to the implementation of the Southern Gas Corridor. However, the regional and national level security threats in the Southern Caucasus including Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani territories, the post-2008 Russia-Georgia War situation and its implications, ongoing skirmishes in/around Nagorno-Karabakh, and bomb attacks on pipelines in Turkey brought the security of critical energy infrastructure onto the agenda of regional states, Europe, and even NATO. The national and political security environment in Azerbaijan and Georgia, as well as in Turkey, has therefore become important for European energy security. This requires NATO's involvement in the protection of energy infrastructures in the South Caucasus region. This article examines, therefore, the possible modes of cooperation between NATO, Azerbaijan and Georgia on the protection of energy infrastructures in the light of the security threats in the South Caucasus. The paper elaborates and concludes with recommendations for deepening the cooperation between NATO, Azerbaijan, and Georgia on energy infrastructure protection.



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*From Supply Security to Physical Security*

*The situation changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the post-USSR independence breathed new life into Azerbaijan's energy policy.*

The first oil pipeline in the South Caucasus running from the coast of Caspian Sea to Georgia's Black Sea coast was the 883-km-long Baku-Batumi oil pipeline, built in 1897-1907.<sup>1</sup> Since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Azerbaijan has played a significant role in world oil production, especially during World War II, when Azerbaijani oil was among the main driving forces behind Soviet military power. However, prior to independence, Azerbaijan did not have sovereign control over its energy resources. The situation changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the post-USSR independence breathed new life into Azerbaijan's energy policy. By pursuing an independent foreign policy, Azerbaijan managed to attract Western energy companies to invest in the country's vast oil and gas fields, leading to the successful realization of the Baku-Supsa, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) pipelines. The country is currently in the process of realization of the Southern Gas Corridor's new branches (TANAP, TAP). At the same time, in the light of the Russia-pioneered 'Turkish Stream' project, Azerbaijan is not neglecting the alternative gas transport routes to Europe, one of which is the AGRI (Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania Interconnector) project.

Once the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) is fully operational, most European countries would be able to gradually reduce their gas dependence on Russia. At this juncture, Azerbaijan and Georgia have become indispensable for Europe's energy security. As a main owner and operator of the oil and gas fields, pipelines and terminals, it is necessary for Azerbaijan, as well as for Georgia and Turkey as transit states, to ensure the security of the energy infrastructures on their territories. Any type of attack on or security threat to the energy fields, terminals, pipelines, storages and other transportation facilities will undermine the oil and gas flow from Azerbaijan through Georgia and Turkey to Europe and global markets. This would damage not only the European supply security, but also the commercial interests of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. The vulnerability of energy infrastructures and fields to potential attacks will make those countries less attractive to Western investors.

<sup>1</sup> Aslanbayli, B. (2014) 'NATO's Possible Role in the Protection of Critical Energy Infrastructure in Azerbaijan', *Caucasus International Journal*, 4(3-4), p.134.

Although the protection of infrastructures falls within the national security competences of the hosting and owning countries, the latest security threats show that the protection of critical energy infrastructures requires shared responsibility, collective endeavors and pooling of resources, working in collaboration with international organizations, as well as the private sector. These pipelines transport the energy resources of one country to many others, and tackling these threats collectively would certainly be much more effective. A secure supply to Europe through this region, including Critical Energy Infrastructure Protection (CEIP) requires a secure geography, peaceful environment and physical security measures. Critical Energy Infrastructure Protection “intends to reduce the vulnerability of energy infrastructure (facilities and pipelines) against external threats, notably against the disruption of a supply chain by physical attacks (terrorism or other violent act).”<sup>2</sup> The CEIP gained momentum following the PKK’s attack on the BTC pipeline in Turkey and the Russia-Georgia war in 2008, when Azerbaijan’s oil shipments via BTC and Baku-Supsa oil pipelines were halted for several days.

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### *Past, Current and Potential Threats*

The region’s protracted territorial conflicts constitute one of the main threats to energy infrastructure. There are ongoing conflicts in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, and the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions of Georgia. Specifically, on July 10-11 2015, the de facto ‘borders of South Ossetia’,<sup>3</sup> a breakaway territory of Georgia, were expanded by the separatist forces into the Tsitelubani and Orchosani villages, with new fences, barbed wire and signage. The new ‘border posts’ were relocated 450 meters from the Tbilisi-Gori central highway. The ‘borderization’ also left the 1.6 km section of the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline within the newly annexed area, out of Georgia’s control. According to David Gamtsemlidze,<sup>4</sup> Tskhinvali could demand official negotia-

2 Stepper, P. and Szálkai, K. (2014) ‘NATO’s Energy Security Agenda and its Possible Applications in the South Caucasus’, *Caucasus International Journal*, 4(3-4), p.33.

3 LeVine, S. (2015) ‘Putin has started a new clash with the West, this time over the flow of oil through Georgia’, *Quartz*, 28 July, Available at: <http://qz.com/464703/putin-has-started-a-new-clash-with-the-west-this-time-over-the-flow-of-oil-through-georgia/> (Accessed: 13 August 2015).

4 Гамтсемлидзе, Д. (2015) ‘Почему Грузия разочаровывается в прозападном курсе’, *Carnegie Moscow Centre*, 23 July, Available at: <http://carnegie.ru/2015/07/23/ru-60818/idtt> (Accessed: 8 August 2015).

tions with the operator of the pipeline, BP, on transit fee payment for this small section. Surely, BP would not agree to this, as it would indicate the company's recognition of the breakaway territory as a legal entity. Therefore, BP has suggested abandoning that part of pipeline and replacing it with a new 1600 meter section inside of Georgia. In fact, similar acts to expand the 'borders of South Ossetia' took place in 2010 by absorbing the two square kilometers of Akhgori region, as well as two further incidents in 2013.<sup>5</sup>

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The illegal enlargement of breakaway territories creates a 'buffer zone' between Georgian-controlled areas and de-facto 'borders' of breakaway territories. Thus, separatist forces can easily take control of the East-West central highway, close to where both BTC and Baku-Supsa pass.<sup>6</sup> This can have appalling effects on the transportation routes and pipeline infrastructure. Actually, prior to the end of Russia-Georgia war in 2008, Russian military jets dropped bombs nearby the BTC and Baku-Supsa pipeline,<sup>7</sup> though the pipeline itself was not hit. However, Azerbaijan was still forced to temporarily suspend its oil delivery via these pipelines, as well as its maritime oil exports from Georgia's Black Sea ports of Poti, Batumi and Kulevi.<sup>8</sup> The Russia-Georgia war also affected Georgia's main electricity source, as the turbines and generators of Enguri Hydropower Plant are inside Abkhazia controlled areas, while the dam and reservoir remain in Georgia-controlled territories. During the August War, Georgia's transportation infrastructure (bridges, electricity cables, railways and air transport facilities),<sup>9</sup> military bases (in Vaziani, Marneuli, Bolnisi) and military infrastructures (in Zugdidi, Poti, Senaki),

2015).

5 Witthoef, A. (2015) 'The Heavy-Handed Russian Move Nobody's Talking About', *The Diplomat*, 6 August, Available at: <http://thediplomat.com/2015/08/the-heavy-handed-russian-move-nobodys-talking-about/> (Accessed: 8 August 2015).

6 Aze.az (2015), *Stratfor*: азербайджанские нефтепроводы находятся под контролем России, Available at: <http://aze.az/id/122049> (Accessed: 1 August 2015).

7 LeVine, S. (2008) 'Targeting the Pipeline', *Steve LeVine*, August 14, Available at: <http://stevelevine.info/2008/08/targeting-the-pipeline-2/> (Accessed: 1 August 2015).

8 Daly, C.K.J. (2008) 'Turkey and The Problems with the BTC', *The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor*, August 13, Available at: [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5btt\\_news%5d=33887&no\\_cache=1#.Vcx-u\\_ntmkq](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5btt_news%5d=33887&no_cache=1#.Vcx-u_ntmkq) (Accessed: 28 July 2015).

9 Tsereteli, M. (2009) 'The Impact of the Russia-Georgia War on the South Caucasus Transportation Corridor', *The Jamestown Foundation*, Available at: [http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/Full\\_Mamuka\\_RussiaGeorgia.pdf](http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/Full_Mamuka_RussiaGeorgia.pdf) (Accessed: 28 July 2015).

Shavshvebi Radar Station, Black Sea port of Poti, Dedoplistskaro airfield, etc. were destroyed by the military airstrikes.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, the PKK had already launched a terrorist attack on BTC pipeline on 5 August 2008, two days before the Russia-Georgia war, suspending oil delivery. Following Turkey's massive air strikes over PKK camps in Northern Iraq recently, the PKK began targeting energy infrastructures on Turkey's territories once again, with bomb attacks on the Baku-Tbilisi Erzurum and Iran-Turkey gas pipelines, and the Kirkuk-Ceyhan oil pipeline. Bombing has been the PKK's traditional method since the 1990s. This ended the 2013 ceasefire agreement between Ankara and the Kurdistan Workers' Party, which had suspended the PKK's terrorist activity - ongoing since 1984.<sup>11</sup>

There are threats beyond those mentioned above. One of the NATO partner countries - Armenia - occupies 20% of the Azerbaijan's internationally recognized territories (Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent districts). The situation along the contact line around Nagorno-Karabakh remains tense. The possible escalation of war in the region certainly undermines the security of energy infrastructure. For instance, during October 1-13 2012, Armenia held military exercises simulating possible attacks and strikes on Azerbaijan's oil and gas infrastructures in case of war.<sup>12</sup>

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### *Where Does NATO Stand in Terms of Energy Security?*

Uninterrupted energy supply is vital for NATO to ensure continuity and operational mobility of its military missions outside of Alliance borders. Growing importance of energy supply security and strong dependence of NATO's European Member States on third party suppliers, as well as the security threats in the neighborhood require the Alliance to set up a concrete policy framework for energy security in the region, including and security of energy infrastructures. NATO's collective approach to energy security,

10 Cornell, S. et al. (2008) 'Russia's War in Georgia: Causes and Implications for Georgia and the World', *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Silk Road Studies Program*, August, Washington, Available at: [http://www.silkroadstudies.org/resources/pdf/SilkRoadPapers/2008\\_08\\_PP\\_CornellPopjanevski-Nillson\\_Russia-Georgia.pdf](http://www.silkroadstudies.org/resources/pdf/SilkRoadPapers/2008_08_PP_CornellPopjanevski-Nillson_Russia-Georgia.pdf) (Accessed: 28 July 2015).

11 Lenta.ru, (2015) 'На газопроводе в Турции произошел взрыв', Available at: <http://lenta.ru/news/2015/08/04/pipeline/> (Accessed: 1 August 2015).

12 Kuchera, J. (2012) 'Armenian Military Simulates Attack on Azerbaijan's Oil', *Eurasia.net (The Bug Pit)*, 17 October, Available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66061> (Accessed: 13 August 2015).

security of transportation facilities, and transit routes were highlighted in NATO's Riga and Bucharest Summit Declarations,<sup>13</sup> as well as its Strategic Concepts (1999/2010), which serves as NATO's *acquis communautaire*.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Article 19 of the 2010 Strategic Concepts document<sup>15</sup> states that, '[NATO] will develop the capacity to contribute to energy security, including protection of critical energy infrastructure and transit areas and lines, cooperation with partners, and consultations among Allies on the basis of strategic assessments and contingency planning.' Meanwhile, Article 15 notes that 'increasing energy needs will shape the future security environment in areas of concern to NATO and [will] significantly affect NATO planning and operations'.

Those *acquis* apply to NATO Member States, but not to partners. While Turkey is a full member of NATO and Georgia is rapidly advancing its relations and cooperation with the Alliance, the current NATO-Azerbaijan relations<sup>16</sup> are primarily based on the Partnership for Peace program and Individual Partnership Action Plans, including Azerbaijan's troop and transit-route contribution to NATO's ISAF mission in Afghanistan. Although Azerbaijan and Georgia are both major contributors to NATO's military missions, their foreign policy trajectories significantly differ in regard to both NATO and Russia. Azerbaijan's skilful use of energy resources accord it a certain political immunity, enabling Baku to maintain a balance between its relations with NATO and Russia without NATO-membership aspirations, but also having a strong ally like Turkey in NATO. Among the South Caucasus states, Georgia is the most eager to gain NATO membership. However, Tbilisi's hostile relations with Russia due to the frozen conflict in its breakaway territories have blocked Georgia's chance for a Membership Action Plan. Georgia's main motivation for gaining NATO membership is the protection afforded by Article 5 of the

13 NATO's '2006 Riga Summit Declaration' and '2008 Bucharest Summit Declaration', official website of NATO, Available at: <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2006/p06-150e.htm>; [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_8443.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm); (Accessed: 10 August 2015).

14 This term is usually used for the combination of the EU's treaties, legislation, legal acts, and court decisions, which together constitute the body of EU legislation. Whereas, the term is applied here to describe the NATO legislation.

15 'Strategic Concept for the Defense and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization', Adopted by Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Lisbon, November 2010, official website of NATO, Available at: [http://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_publications/20120214\\_strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf](http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_publications/20120214_strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf) (Accessed: 2 August 2015).

16 Ibrahim, K. (2014) 'The Azerbaijan-NATO partnership at 20', *Caucasus International Journal*, 4(3-4), p.86.

NATO Charter,<sup>17</sup> which promises a security guarantee by other NATO members to an Allied state in the event of being militarily attacked.

This security guarantee only covers the Allied states, and not their partners. Bakhtiyar Aslanbayli writes that a new ‘Article 4.5’ format is required for protection of critical energy infrastructure.<sup>18</sup> This could be realized through Individual Partnership Action Plans between Azerbaijan and NATO, by merging Article 4 and 5. The ‘Article 4.5’ format could also involve Georgia. Article 4 of NATO Charter<sup>19</sup> requires a consultation in the event that the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any Allied state[s] is threatened, in order to collectively discuss the situation facing the concerned states, and formulate the strategy for a certain level of Alliance engagement. Even in 2006, during the Riga Summit, US Senator Richard Lugar said that, “Energy security should be a commitment under the Article 5, mutual defense clause of the North Atlantic Treaty. This does not mean NATO’s military response, but the Alliance’s commitment to prepare itself for and respond to attempts to use the energy weapon against its fellow members.”<sup>20</sup> However, Senator Lugar’s proposal is also NATO-centric, excluding partner countries. By contrast, under the ‘Article 4.5’ format NATO could commit to providing security guarantees to Azerbaijan and Georgia in the event of security threats against their energy infrastructures, which both directly and indirectly concern its member states as well. For instance, NATO’s Liaison Officer to South Caucasus, William Lahue stated that “NATO could get involved in protecting a potential Trans-Caspian gas pipeline, [however] only by pulling partners looking for protection of critical energy infrastructure; and facilitating trainings, education for the national organizations working in this sphere for protection of infrastructure.”<sup>21</sup> However, this does not constitute a real security guarantee, but rather complementary engagement by NATO.

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17 ‘The North Atlantic Treaty’, *official website of NATO*, 4 December 2008, Available at: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm) (Accessed: 2 August 2015).

18 Aslanbayli, *NATO’s Possible Role*, p.142.

19 ‘The North Atlantic Treaty’, *official website of NATO*.

20 Stepper and Szálkai, *NATO’s Energy Security Agenda*, p.30.

21 Azvision.az, (2015) ‘Azerbaijan becoming important component of global energy security – NATO’, Available at: [http://en.azvision.az/Azerbaijan\\_becoming\\_important\\_component\\_-14103-xeber.html](http://en.azvision.az/Azerbaijan_becoming_important_component_-14103-xeber.html) (Accessed: 2 August 2015).

*What is the Best Way to Boost Cooperation and Advance Relations between NATO, Georgia, and Azerbaijan?*

The key question is about the nature of NATO's engagement in critical energy infrastructure protection. Should there be a traditional military deterrence and retaliation-based approach,<sup>22</sup> by preparing a detailed military engagement plan against military and terrorist threats, and by virtue of deployment of troops and patrols at the proximity of interconnections and compressor stations in order to minimize attacks and neutralize risks? On the other hand, a demonstrable NATO military/paramilitary presence in both Georgia and Azerbaijan would undoubtedly trigger counter-responses by third countries, and ultimately be counter-productive in terms of national security of both Georgia and Azerbaijan. Fruitful cooperation requires an appropriate level of political stability within supplier and transit countries, otherwise there is a risk that energy supplies will be disrupted. Even individual Alliance members would refrain from taking a military approach to CEIP.

Azerbaijan, backed by its military resources and capabilities, has the capacity to protect its energy infrastructures. Thus, Azerbaijan's SOCAR, together with the Special State Protection Service of Azerbaijan, are responsible for the stationary protection of energy infrastructures in Azerbaijan through regular patrolling, physical and technological monitoring of pipelines, terminals and compressor stations. Georgia provides the same security measures for pipeline protection through its state pipeline protection system, with the assistance of the Strategic Pipeline Protection Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Special Task Force Police of Ministry of Internal Affairs (for Baku-Supsa pipeline) and the BP-developed protection system.<sup>23</sup> In Turkey, CEIP is considered to be the responsibility of the Gendarmerie (paramilitary police)<sup>24</sup>. Theoretically, at first glance none of the mentioned countries needs external intervention in terms of CEIP; given that this is solely a national responsibility, it would duplicate the tasks of existing institutions. However, the latest 'borderization'

<sup>22</sup> Stepper and Szálkai, *NATO's Energy Security Agenda*, p.36

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.37-38.

<sup>24</sup> Eissler, E. (2013) 'Turkey's Energy Infrastructure Security Challenge: Protecting Pipelines and Bolstering International Security Cooperation', Expert Opinion, *Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies*, p.5, Available at: [http://gfsis.org/media/download/library/articles/opinion/EISSLER\\_TURKEY\\_13\\_ENG.pdf](http://gfsis.org/media/download/library/articles/opinion/EISSLER_TURKEY_13_ENG.pdf) (Accessed: 2 August 2015).



problems in Georgia and the bomb attacks on oil/gas pipelines in Turkey demonstrate that the current security measures are not sufficient. Effective CEIP requires NATO's added value in terms of preventive, limited and complementary engagement, in order to ensure the uninterrupted flow of energy in the region, rather than putting boots on the ground. Support should be provided without direct military intervention or over-militarization of energy security.

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Based on this assessment, the following recommendations for NATO's contribution to the critical energy infrastructures protection can be made:<sup>25</sup>

1. Deployment of purely defensive military hardware (small-scale radars, anti-aircraft, missile defense systems) in the proximity of the pipelines to prevent possible attacks by surface-to-surface missiles. In addition, movement sensors, satellites, acoustic detectors, and fiber-optic cables over the pipelines should be installed. Turkey can easily make use of NATO assets, as it did with NATO Patriot batteries deployed to Gaziantep. However, Georgia and Azerbaijan are not NATO members and therefore, hosting Patriot-style military hardware is currently not an option. The establishment of a common-integrated missile defense system between Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan in consultation/cooperation with NATO might be a better option, enabling both Georgia and Azerbaijan to advance their air-defense arsenal up to NATO standards benefitting Turkey's experience. Moreover, Azerbaijani and Georgian air protection of pipelines could be organized jointly with the involvement of Turkey, rather than on an exclusively national basis. They can also conduct air policing on a rotational basis by pooling their resources;

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2. Cyber security is a key dimension of energy security, i.e. security of critical energy infrastructures against cyber attacks (e.g. viruses or hacking). Hackers can paralyze the software systems

<sup>25</sup> Through formulation of above-mentioned recommendations, author, along with his personal views and experiences, also benefited from following pieces for subject-matter terminologies: Stavridis, James (2015) 'It's All About the Base', *Foreign Policy*, 29 July 2015; Stepper and Szálkai, *NATO's Energy Security Agenda*; Czulda, R. and Loś, R. (eds.) (2013), *NATO - Towards the Challenges of a Contemporary World*. Mariusz Ruszel, 'NATO's Role in Ensuring Energy Security in Europe', *International Relations Research Institute, Warsaw*; Rohac, D. and Dubéci, M. 'The Defenseless "New Europe"', *The American Interests*, 13 August 2015.

of hydropower stations, nuclear power plants, smart grid systems, compressors stations, terminals, refineries, and pipelines. NATO can support cyber operations in response to those types of attacks by providing advice and defensive measures;

3. NATO can offer support to Azerbaijan and Georgia on intelligence-information gathering/sharing and surveillance through its advanced unmanned air vehicles or remotely piloted aircrafts (US-Hawks or JSTARS aircrafts and NATO airborne early-warning aircraft/AWACS) basing them in Turkey's Incirlik Airfield. Through intelligence-information sharing, NATO, Georgia and Azerbaijan will be able to access high quality analyses, prognoses and risk assessments on pipeline security, the vulnerability of transit routes and the probability of terrorist threats. This will enable them to enhance the security of their local infrastructure system against possible crisis and attacks;

4. NATO can provide training and consultation assistance for military staff of Georgia and Azerbaijan by training their

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Elite Units and increasing their capacity to conduct special operations to liquidate the terrorists, and to prevent possible attacks on critical energy infrastructures (oil and gas pipelines, LNG tankers and terminals). This could be realized either through country-specific trainings or through/within the formation of the multinational brigade of Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia, including common conventional defense forces capable of deterring local conflicts, similar to the 'LitPolUkr'<sup>26</sup> brigade, which is to be created by Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine;

5. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation/political consultation with NATO Special Operations Headquarters, NATO's Terrorist Threat Intelligence Unit, NATO Energy Security Centre of Excellence, Energy Security Section of NATO's Emerging Security Challenges Division, including regular meetings in the '28+n' format at various levels, on energy security, sharing concerns and best practices, developing en-

<sup>26</sup> NATO, (2015) *Multinational brigade forms up*, Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOhNPXwU\\_s&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOhNPXwU_s&feature=youtu.be) (Accessed: 12 August 2015).

ergy security standards and concept of energy security, conducting technical and scientific experiments, consequence management, proposals/recommendations on solutions of the security problems and the protection of critical energy infrastructure, anti-terrorism policy and contingency planning;

6. To provide military assistance to Georgia, mostly with defensive weapons, at least in order to recover Georgia's tremendous military hardware losses incurred during the August War in 2008, and to strengthen its defense capability. Although the UN arms embargo on Azerbaijan<sup>27</sup> is no longer active, the OSCE arms embargo<sup>28</sup> and restrictions under Section 907<sup>29</sup> of the Freedom Support Act remain in place, which makes it difficult for official Baku to receive defensive weapons, financial and security assistance from NATO member states on CEIP.

7. NATO should engage with relevant private sector stakeholders and other government entities (Ministry of Emergency Situations, Ministry of National Security<sup>30</sup>, State Border Service, Ministry of Communication and Technologies) in Azerbaijan and Georgia that are tasked with protecting infrastructures against natural disasters, political instabilities, conflicts and man-made attacks, by providing private expertise, technical tools, communication services, technology transfer, or training and education facilities for damage assessments, disaster-management and rapid restoration of energy supplies.

8. In order to raise consultations and practical cooperation between Azerbaijan and NATO to a new level and diversify the format of collaboration, NATO should increase its assistance for Azerbaijan's defense reforms.

27 'Non-mandatory UN arms embargo on Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)', *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, 2012, Available at: [http://www.sipri.org/databases/embargoes/un\\_arms\\_embargoes/nagorno-karabakh-azerbaijan-non-mandatory/non-mandatory-un-arms-embargo-on-nagorno-karabakh-azerbaijan](http://www.sipri.org/databases/embargoes/un_arms_embargoes/nagorno-karabakh-azerbaijan-non-mandatory/non-mandatory-un-arms-embargo-on-nagorno-karabakh-azerbaijan) (Accessed: 2 August 2015).

28 'OSCE arms embargo on Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)', *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, 2012, Available at: [http://www.sipri.org/databases/embargoes/eu\\_arms\\_embargoes/azerbaijan](http://www.sipri.org/databases/embargoes/eu_arms_embargoes/azerbaijan) (Accessed: 2 August 2015).

29 'Extension of Waiver of Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act with Respect to Assistance to the Government of Azerbaijan', *U.S. Department of State*, 2008, Available at: <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/prsr/2003/27664.htm> (Accessed: 2 August 2015).

30 However, on December 14, 2015, Ministry of National Security of Azerbaijan has been transformed into between the two separate government entities (Foreign Intelligence Service and State Security Service) by the order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan

### *Conclusion*

With NATO's attention currently being focused primarily on ISIS and Ukraine, the most NATO-focused country in the South Caucasus, Georgia, is struggling with its Euro-Atlantic aspirations vis-à-vis its ongoing territorial conflicts. The systematic division through 'borderization' of Georgia, Azerbaijan's main transit and strategic ally in the South Caucasus, might leave Azerbaijan in a difficult situation as well. Given the conflict with Armenia and reluctance of Baku to become dependent on other transit countries, Georgia is currently the most preferable transit state for the transportation of Azerbaijani oil and gas to Europe. Therefore, the destabilization of the situation in Georgian territories might have negative implications for Azerbaijan's oil and gas delivery to Turkey and Europe. Consequently, NATO's role in the protection of critical energy infrastructures and a clear strategy by the Alliance is strongly needed.

The Russia-Georgia war has demonstrated the limitations of NATO's security umbrella and the lack of a clear strategy towards the South Caucasus. Thus far, the reaction of the West to the region's territorial conflicts has been based on careful and somewhat ambiguous declarations. These declarations are counter-productive in the sense that they encourage aggressor parties to go further, and the status quo in the region remains unchanged. Meanwhile, Russia is not pleased to see Georgia's NATO-membership aspirations, nor the opening of NATO's joint training center in Georgia, and so on. Georgia's potential NATO membership is considered as a threat by Russia, as it implies the Alliance's military presence in Georgia with a larger military fleet in the Black Sea, plus missile defense and radar systems in the South Caucasus in the proximity of Caspian Sea and Russia's staunch ally, Armenia.