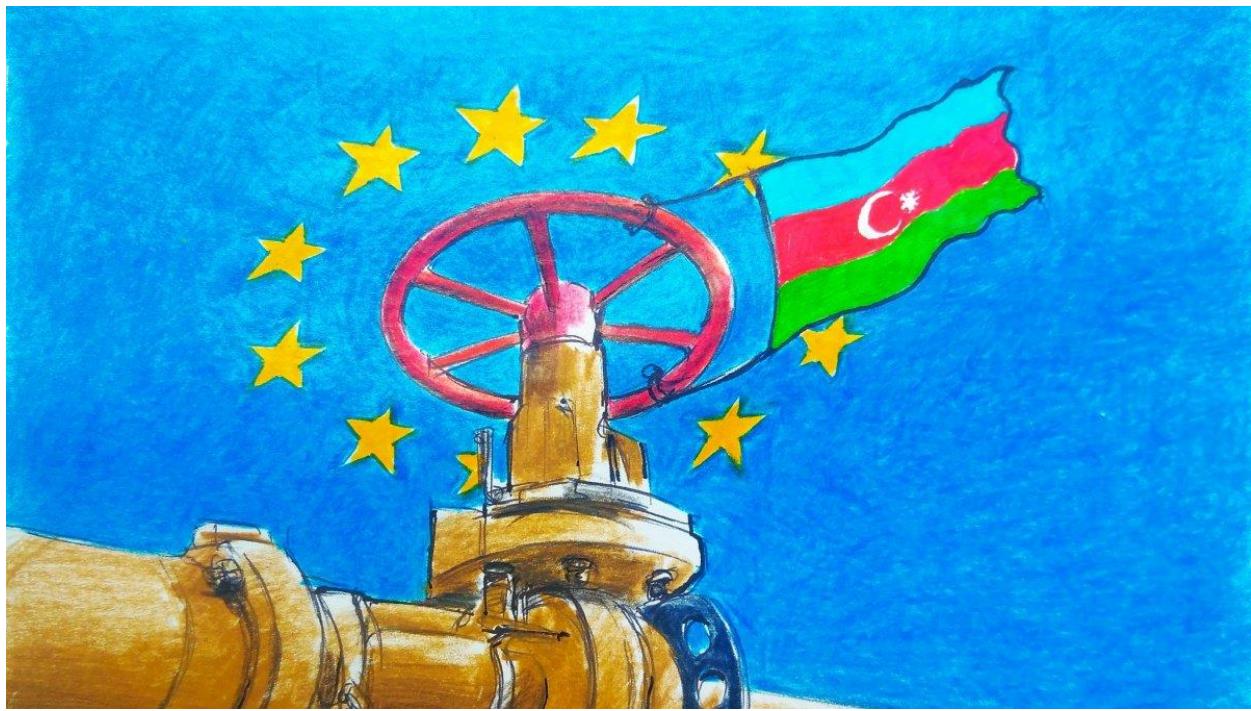


EU reconsiders relations with Azerbaijan

By Cavid Veliyev

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["Azerbaijan's strategic importance to Europe lies in its role as a key energy supplier."](#) (Illustration by Erhan Yalvaç)

The EU is rethinking ties with Azerbaijan as strategic and energy needs grow despite ongoing political tensions

April and May were turning points in the European Union's relationship with the South Caucasus and Azerbaijan, which had been strained for some time. In April, Azerbaijan hosted three high-level visits from the European Union. On April 1, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier visited Baku, marking a significant diplomatic engagement. This was followed by the visit of EU Commissioner for Energy and Housing Dan Jorgensen, who took part in the 11th ministerial meeting of the Southern Gas Corridor Advisory Council and the third ministerial meeting of the Green Energy Advisory Council on April 4.

Most notably, on April 25, Kaja Kallas, the EU high representative for foreign affairs and security policy and vice president of the European Commission, held separate meetings with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov. Kallas described Azerbaijan as an important partner for the EU in the South Caucasus. Her visit is widely seen as a turning point

in the bilateral relationship, which had been strained for some time. At the press conference, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Ceyhun Bayramov announced that the country has started to renegotiate the Azerbaijan-EU strategic partnership agreement, which was previously agreed on 90%-95% but has been suspended for an extended period.

Meanwhile, on May 16, at the European Political Community summit held in Albania, it was decided that the 2028 summit would be hosted by Azerbaijan. These developments mean that Azerbaijan-EU relations, which had experienced fluctuations, especially after the liberation of Azerbaijani lands from Armenian occupation, have now entered a new, positive phase.

EU's past bias

The EU's South Caucasus policy has been particularly pro-Armenian after the Karabakh victory. Several EU members – most notably France, Greece, Belgium and the Netherlands – have leveraged their influence within European institutions to impede the development of Azerbaijan-EU relations. Thus, while trying to put pressure on Azerbaijan, the EU's policy in the South Caucasus has been confined to Armenia. For this reason, President Aliyev has accused the EU of dividing the South Caucasus into lines.

In particular, Kaja Kallas' predecessor, Joseph Borell, attracted attention with his radical statements and attitudes against Azerbaijan. Borell decided to support Armenia within the framework of the European Peace Facility at the meeting of European Union foreign ministers held on Nov. 14, 2023. The EU's unilateral support of 10 million euros to Armenia was blocked by Hungary, an observer member in the OTS, which has close relations with Azerbaijan.

At a time when European Union leaders and institutions were strongly supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity during the Russia-Ukraine war, their advocacy for illegal armed groups in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan rightfully provoked harsh reactions in Azerbaijan.

On the other hand, on Jan. 25, 2024, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) decided not to ratify the credentials of the Azerbaijani delegation. This decision came after Azerbaijan's anti-terrorist operation in September 2023 and the subsequent arrests of separatist figures. In response, the Azerbaijani delegation announced the suspension of its participation in PACE meetings and all forms of cooperation indefinitely. The aggressive stance of certain European countries and EU institutions toward Azerbaijan triggered a very strong reaction from Baku. President Ilham Aliyev declared, "If the PACE does not restore the rights of the Azerbaijani delegation, Baku will review its membership in the Council of Europe and the ECHR." Amid these tensions, the French Foreign Minister went so far as to accuse Azerbaijan of intervening in French colonies.

However, the biased policy toward Azerbaijan within the European Union has not been supported by all member states. Azerbaijan maintains strategic partnerships with 10 European countries, several of which have actively pushed back against the EU's one-sided approach and called for a more balanced policy. For instance, the Italian Deputy Foreign Minister openly criticized France's stance on the South Caucasus, urging it to refrain from interfering in the region's peace-building

efforts. Additionally, [**Hungary, one of Azerbaijan's closest partners in Europe**](#), blocked the EU's proposed unilateral aid package of 10 million euros (\$11.37 million) to Armenia.

Reconsidering allies in Caucasus

On the other hand, ongoing geopolitical developments in the Eurasian region have compelled the European Union to reassess its relations with Azerbaijan. The transport corridors developed by [**Azerbaijan in recent years have become crucial**](#) for strengthening the EU's connectivity with Central Asia and China. During her visit to Baku, Kaja Kallas specifically highlighted this issue in her meetings with Azerbaijani officials. The Trans-Caspian Corridor, an integral part of the EU's connectivity strategy and supported with a 12 billion euro investment, must pass through Azerbaijan to reach European markets.

Above all, Azerbaijan's strategic importance to Europe lies in its role as a key energy supplier. Since 2020, Azerbaijan has been exporting natural gas to European countries via the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC). Following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, Azerbaijan expanded its gas exports through interconnectors to 10 European countries: Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Slovakia and North Macedonia. Following the signing of the "Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Energy Partnership between Azerbaijan and the EU" in Baku in July 2022, which outlines the goal of doubling Azerbaijan's natural gas exports by 2028, projects have been launched to expand the capacity of the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP).

In the aftermath of the Ukraine war, the EU significantly reduced its dependence on Russian natural gas, bringing it down to 14%. In contrast, Azerbaijan now supplies approximately 5% of the EU's gas needs, a share that is expected to grow as infrastructure expands and strategic cooperation deepens.

Azerbaijan and its state-owned company have increased natural gas exports through the Southern Gas Corridor to 25 billion cubic meters (bcm), of which 13 bcm is exported to EU member states. This figure is up 57% since 2021. The Southern Gas Advisory Council, which met in Baku on April 4, discussed ongoing developments in the gas production and transmission infrastructure, as well as requirements and conditions for financing and investments in view of further increasing supplies in the coming years.

Azerbaijan also plays a critical role as both a source and transit country for Europe in the field of green energy. In this context, Azerbaijan has signed key agreements with Georgia and Türkiye, as well as a multilateral agreement with Georgia, Romania and Hungary, to facilitate electricity exports. During the 3rd Green Energy Advisory Council meeting, participants discussed several major initiatives spearheaded by Azerbaijan, including the Caspian–Black Sea–Europe Green Energy Corridor Project. This project is designed to transport the region's abundant green energy, particularly from Azerbaijan and Central Asia, to European markets. These initiatives aim to strengthen regional energy connectivity and support the broader transition toward sustainable energy across Eurasia.

On the other hand, the agreement reached on the draft peace treaty between Azerbaijan and Armenia has been viewed by the European Union as a positive development, contributing to easing tensions in EU-Azerbaijan relations. Notably, Azerbaijan's demands, such as the termination of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Minsk Group and the removal of the reference to Karabakh as Armenian territory in the preamble of Armenia's Declaration of Independence, are no longer being challenged by the EU. At a press conference, Kaja Kallas stated that the EU welcomes the agreement on the peace treaty text and fully supports the efforts of both sides to achieve a sustainable and lasting peace in the South Caucasus.

As a result, the recent positive developments may mark the beginning of a new chapter in Azerbaijan-EU relations. The ongoing geopolitical turmoil in the Eurasian region is likely to further push the EU toward a pragmatic reassessment of its approach to Azerbaijan. Current developments clearly demonstrate that the EU will need Azerbaijan as a strategic partner in the long term.