

# Connectivity in the new world order - Reason or consequence?

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Laszlo Vasa\* and Peter Barkanyi\*\*

This article discusses how various forms of connectivity – such as trade, digital networks, cultural ties, and diplomacy – are linked to international cooperation in the South Caucasus region. It examines how these connections interact with the efforts of multilateral organizations active in the region. The article also highlights some of the main problems faced by these organizations. For example, the OSCE is often seen as weak when it comes to conflict resolution, and there are doubts about how fairly the UN, OSCE, and EU apply international law in this context. At the same time, the article points out some successes achieved by international organizations. They have supported economic development, encouraged more diverse economies, and helped to build better infrastructure in the South Caucasus. The UN and others have also supported economic growth, new industries, and infrastructure development in the countries of this region. The article also highlights that cooperation among regional organizations is often weak or not well coordinated. As a result, countries in the region are beginning to focus more on regional cooperation, especially when larger international actors appear to have less influence than before. One of the key results of this study is that the countries of the South Caucasus are increasingly seeking to rely on their own regional initiatives whenever external actors appear less effective. Ultimately, the article suggests that building strong and fair linkages – while understanding the needs of the countries of the South Caucasus – can help create lasting peace, stability, and shared progress in the region.

**Keywords:** South Caucasus, Connectivity, Multilateralism, Diplomacy, Regional Cooperation, Peacebuilding, Digital Transformation, Energy Infrastructure



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\* **László Vasa** is a chief advisor, senior research fellow of the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs and full professor, Széchenyi István University, Doctoral School of Regional - Sciences and Business Administration, Győr, Hungary, and [vasa.laszlo@ga.sze.hu](mailto:vasa.laszlo@ga.sze.hu); <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3805-0244>

\*\* **Peter Barkanyi** is a PhD Candidate, John von Neumann University Doctoral School of Management and Business Administration, Hungary, Kecskemét, [peter.barkanyi@uni-flexys.hu](mailto:peter.barkanyi@uni-flexys.hu); <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6330-7793>

### *Introduction*

In today's world, countries are more interconnected than ever before, linked through trade, technology, travel, cultural exchange, and cooperation through international organizations. This web of relationships – often described as ‘connectivity’<sup>1,2</sup> – has become a defining feature of global development. Strong connectivity fosters economic growth, supports problem-solving across borders, and creates opportunities for more stable and peaceful relations. Yet such connectivity also brings some challenges: excessive competition, weak communication, and unresolved disputes can turn connectivity into a source of tension rather than cooperation. Nowhere is this dual nature more evident than in the South Caucasus. Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia all seek stronger economies and deeper international partnerships, but they are grappling with long-standing divisions. In this context, connectivity is more than a policy goal – it is a strategic necessity. It has the potential to unlock new avenues of cooperation, accelerate progress, and contribute to lasting peace if managed wisely.

In the South Caucasus, the question remains whether connectivity and multilateralism can genuinely promote peace and stability, or whether they sometimes reproduce existing rivalries instead.<sup>3</sup> This study addresses this issue by examining how different forms of connectivity – economic, digital, cultural, and diplomatic – interact with the work of international organizations and the policies of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. The main research question guiding the article is whether connectivity in the South Caucasus functions primarily as a cause or as a consequence of peace and stability.

This article, therefore, will explore the role of connectivity and multilateralism in the South Caucasus, focusing on economic development, digital transformation, cultural exchange, and diplomacy, while also considering the contributions of international organizations. Ultimately, it will reflect on some practical steps the region can take

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1 European External Action Service (EEAS), “About the European Union Mission in Armenia (EUMA)”, Available at: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/euma/about-european-union-mission-armenia\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/euma/about-european-union-mission-armenia_en) (Accessed: October 3, 2025).

2 International Telecommunication Union (ITU), “Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2024”, Available at: <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/facts/default.aspx> (Accessed: October 3, 2025).

3 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), “Peace and Development in the South Caucasus”, Available at: <https://www.undp.org/georgia/projects/peace-development> (Accessed: October 3, 2025).

to build stronger ties and gradually move toward greater stability and integration in the future.

The aim of the article is to identify the main forms and drivers of connectivity in the region and to assess the conditions under which they can contribute to more stable and cooperative regional relations. The article argues that connectivity can only foster peace when it is shaped by locally owned and balanced institutional frameworks. Its structure reflects these objectives: after this introduction, the article examines economic connectivity, digital transformation, cultural and educational exchange, and diplomatic cooperation before concluding with lessons for future regional integration.

### ***Economic Connectivity in the South Caucasus***

Economic connectivity refers to the trade, transport, and financial links that bind countries together. In the South Caucasus, these connections are particularly significant, yet their full potential remains underutilized.<sup>4</sup> Situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, the region holds a natural advantage as a transit hub that can facilitate integration and generate new opportunities for growth. Over recent decades, several large-scale infrastructure projects have already demonstrated this potential. The Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway, for instance, has connected Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye, enabling goods to move more efficiently between Asia and Europe.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the Southern Gas Corridor has positioned the region as an essential energy bridge, transporting Caspian gas from Azerbaijan through Georgia and Türkiye to European markets.<sup>6, 7</sup> These projects illustrate that the South Caucasus is far from being isolated; rather, it is increasingly embedded in global trade and energy networks. However, challenges remain. The benefits of connectivity are not evenly distributed among the countries, and gaps in cooperation, infrastructure, and trust

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4 *Ibid.*

5 Azerbaijan Railways (ADY), Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway officially reopened after year-long closure, 2024, Available at: <https://corp.ady.az/en/2/news/news/baku-tbilisi-kars-railway-is-officially-open-again-after-year-long-closure-1> (Accessed: October 3, 2025)

6 Pirani, S., “Expansion of the Southern Gas Corridor pipelines and prospects for additional Azeri gas supplies to Europe”, *Oxford Institute for Energy Studies*, 2024, Available at: <https://www.oxfordenergy.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Expansion-of-the-Southern-Gas-Corridor-NG180.pdf> (Accessed: October 3, 2025)

7 Trans Adriatic Pipeline AG (TAP), *TAP delivers 50 billion cubic metres of natural gas to Europe*, 2025, Available at: <https://www.tap-ag.com/news/news-stories/tap-delivers-50-billion-cubic-metres-of-natural-gas-to-europe> (Accessed: October 3, 2025)

continue to limit progress. Unlocking the region's full potential will require sustained efforts to deepen collaboration, balance national interests, and ensure that connectivity serves as a driver of shared development.

In Central Asia, countries such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have invested heavily in developing new roads and railways, while also establishing special trade zones to facilitate commerce. Beyond physical infrastructure, regional cooperation has been strengthened through membership in organizations such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)<sup>8</sup> and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). These platforms not only help harmonize trade regulations and improve transport coordination but also attract foreign investment to support long-term development.<sup>9</sup> Together, such initiatives illustrate how Central Asian states are seeking to position themselves as important connectors between markets, while also diversifying their economic partnerships.

This brief comparison with Central Asia helps to highlight that, unlike their eastern neighbours, the South Caucasus countries have not yet developed similarly coordinated regional frameworks. While the potential for economic cooperation exists, political divisions and differing external alignments have so far limited the depth of integration. The following section examines how these differences shape the region's economic and infrastructural connectivity.

The situation in the South Caucasus differs significantly from that of Central Asia, as Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan each pursue distinct political and economic paths. Georgia has aligned itself closely with the European Union (EU), yet this has not prevented its participation in large regional initiatives such as the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway and the Southern Gas Corridor, which connect all three states. Armenia, while a member of the EAEU, has also shown openness to new initiatives, including a trilateral agreement with Azerbaijan and the United States on transport cooperation – sometimes referred to as the ‘Zangezur’, or ‘Trump’ corridor. Azerbaijan, meanwhile, leverages its resources to maintain a greater degree of strategic autonomy. These divergent approaches made it difficult to design a single, unified plan for the region. Nevertheless, the fundamental needs remain the same: better infrastructure, expanded trade, and greater economic opportunity. This opens space for pragmatic cooperation in less politically sensitive areas – such as agriculture, energy, small business development, and

8 Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), About the EAEU, Available at: <https://eaeunion.org/?lang=en> (Accessed: October 3, 2025)

9 Vasa, L., “Regionalism in Central Asia”, *Tér-Gazdaság-Ember*, 2020, 8(3), pp. 27–46.

transportation – where shared interests can overcome divisions.

International organizations also play an important role in supporting economic development in the South Caucasus. The United Nations (UN) implements programmes aimed at reducing poverty and strengthening local economies, while institutions such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank have provided significant financing for infrastructure, modern agriculture, and energy projects. These projects and initiatives not only create jobs and improve living standards but also help integrate the region into wider networks of trade and cooperation. By enhancing connectivity and building capacity, international organizations contribute to making the South Caucasus more resilient, more open, and better positioned to benefit from global opportunities.

Yet significant challenges remain. The countries of the South Caucasus do not always move in the same direction, as each pursues its own strategies and partnerships. This divergence makes it difficult to formulate a common regional approach.

In summary, economic connectivity offers significant opportunities for the South Caucasus, yet its development has been uneven across the region. For many years, Azerbaijan and Georgia advanced joint projects with Türkiye and global partners, building railways and pipelines that opened new corridors for trade and energy. Armenia, however, remained largely excluded due to the occupation of Azerbaijani territories, which limited its participation in regional initiatives. As a result, connectivity has not progressed equally: while some parts of the region have moved forward rapidly, others have been left behind. Overcoming this imbalance will require greater cooperation among the three states as well as stronger engagement with international partners. Only through more inclusive collaboration can economic growth reach wider segments of society and contribute to fairer, more sustainable development across the South Caucasus.

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### ***Digital Connectivity in the South Caucasus***

Digital technology – ranging from the internet and mobile communication to a wide array of online services– has become an integral part of everyday life.<sup>10</sup> In the South Caucasus, Armenia,

<sup>10</sup> International Telecommunication Union, *op.cit.*

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Azerbaijan, and Georgia are each striving to strengthen their digital ecosystems. Their efforts focus on expanding high-speed internet access, developing more efficient e-government platforms, and fostering innovative technology companies.<sup>11</sup> By investing in digital infrastructure and skills, the three countries aim not only to modernize their economies but also to enhance regional competitiveness and integration into global markets.

(1) Georgia is in a favourable position, having developed advanced e-government platforms that allow citizens to access public services online with greater ease. The country also provides strong support for startup firms, making Tbilisi an active hub for young entrepreneurs and tech talent.<sup>12</sup>

(2) Armenia, meanwhile, has cultivated a vibrant IT sector. A large section of its youth are engaged in programming and software development, and several international companies have established offices in this country.<sup>13</sup>

(3) Azerbaijan is also making strides, channelling revenues from its resource economy into digital transformation. Investments in smart city initiatives, new data centres, and digital platforms are positioning Baku as a regional hub for innovation and technology. Although each country follows its own path, all three recognize that digital transformation is essential for creating jobs and securing future growth. Whether through e-government platforms, a thriving IT sector, or smart city initiatives, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia share the understanding that digital connectivity is not only a driver of innovation but also a foundation for long-term competitiveness and regional development.

Increasingly, governments in the region are also integrating cybersecurity strategies, e-government expansion, and the first applications of artificial intelligence into their national digital agendas. These priorities

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11 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), “UN E-Government Survey 2024: Digital Government in the Decade of Action for Sustainable Development”, Available at: <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/Reports/UN-E-Government-Survey-2024> (Accessed: October 3, 2025)

12 World Bank, “Armenia’s Digital Technology Adoption by Firms 2025”, Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/armenia/publication/armenia-s-digital-technology-adoption-by-firms> (Accessed: October 3, 2025)

13 *Ibid.*

reflect a growing awareness that secure and well-governed digital systems are essential not only for economic modernization but also for state resilience and public trust.

The international community also plays an active role in advancing digital connectivity in the South Caucasus. The EU's EU4Digital programme supports Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in improving internet infrastructure and expanding online services. Financial institutions such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank have similarly provided funding for projects that bring internet access to schools, create training opportunities for youth, and assist small businesses across the region.

The growing use of digital tools also brings new vulnerabilities. Online risks, cyberattacks, and hacking have become serious challenges for digital economies,<sup>14</sup> threatening both businesses and critical infrastructure. In the South Caucasus, these risks are heightened by inter-state political tensions, which increase the likelihood of cyber threats being used as instruments of pressure or conflict. This makes the need for stronger cybersecurity measures particularly urgent. Building resilient digital systems is, therefore, not only a technical issue but also a matter of national and regional security.

### ***Cultural and Educational Connectivity in the South Caucasus***

Culture and education play a vital role in fostering understanding between people, a point of particular importance in the South Caucasus, where diverse languages, religions, cultures, and traditions coexist alongside a difficult history marked by conflicts. Cultural exchange and educational cooperation can gradually reduce tensions and challenge entrenched stereotypes, thereby opening new pathways for dialogue.

Shared traditions – such as music, cuisine, art, or history – provide opportunities for mutual learning and respect. Initiatives such as joint cultural projects, student exchange, and tourism not only strengthen cross-cultural ties but also allow local communities to showcase their identities.<sup>15</sup>

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14 International Telecommunication Union (ITU), “Global Cybersecurity Index 2024”, Available at: <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Cybersecurity/Pages/global-cybersecurity-index.aspx> (Accessed: October 3, 2025)

15 Shubladze, R., “Youth Study South Caucasus 2023 – Comparative Analysis: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia”, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2024, Available at: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/georgien/21144.pdf> (Accessed: October 3, 2025)

Education is equally central to both social and economic progress. It equips young people with the knowledge and skills needed for modern economies while also teaching them how to collaborate across cultural boundaries.

Among these initiatives, international scholarship programmes such as the Stipendium Hungaricum provide valuable opportunities for students from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia to complete full degree programmes abroad.<sup>16</sup> Living and studying in a new environment helps them build professional networks and personal friendships that often continue long after their return home. These experiences broaden horizons and promote empathy, creating small but lasting bridges of understanding.

In the South Caucasus, a variety of initiatives support this goal, ranging from scholarship programmes and international exchanges to partnerships between universities. The EU's Erasmus+ programme, for example, enables students from the region to study in Europe, build new professional networks, and gain broader perspectives.

Smaller-scale initiatives, such as school and university partnerships within the region, also play an important role by connecting students and teachers across borders. These direct human contacts can often do more to build trust than official diplomacy.<sup>17</sup> They give young people a sense of belonging to a wider regional community and create social ties that endure beyond political cycles.

Cultural and educational cooperation contributes to peacebuilding. It highlights common human values that transcend political disputes and provides space for dialogue even during times of heightened tension. Cultural and educational exchanges often progress more slowly than economic or digital projects, yet their effects reach deeper into everyday life. Their impact may not be immediately visible, but they help shape perceptions, encourage tolerance, and prepare the social ground for reconciliation. In the long run, these connections build trust and mutual understanding, laying the groundwork for reconciliation and more stable regional relations.

Still, cultural and educational initiatives cannot achieve this alone. For trust to take root, they require the support of diplomacy and institutional cooperation.

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16 Bárkányi, P., "The ten years of the Stipendium Hungaricum programme in the perspective of Hungarian–Central Asian relations", *Új Munkaügyi Szemle*, 2023, Vol. IV, No. 3, pp. 2–17.

17 Shubladze, R., *op.cit.*

### ***Diplomatic and Institutional Connectivity in the South Caucasus***

Diplomatic and institutional connectivity refers to the ways in which states engage in dialogue, negotiate agreements, and attempt to resolve disputes. It is not limited to heads of state, but also involves officials, experts, and sometimes even local actors. International organizations play a central role in this process by providing platforms for dialogue, offering mediation when parties cannot agree, and supplying coordination or technical assistance. They also contribute to creating norms and frameworks that can promote stability and cooperation over the long term. In the South Caucasus, where complex politics persist, such external support remains particularly important. International actors can sometimes open doors that the regional players alone cannot. Some international organizations are more active in the South Caucasus than others. The EU is the most visible, with initiatives that support peacebuilding and assist governments in implementing reforms.<sup>18</sup> The UN also maintains a presence through development and humanitarian programmes, though its role is somewhat more limited than that of the EU.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe are also recognized actors, yet today their influence in the region is smaller and less clearly defined. The track record of these institutions is mixed. The OSCE once played a leading role through its Minsk Group, tasked with mediating the [former] conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Yet the group ultimately failed to produce a settlement, as demonstrated by the renewed war of 2020 and 2023.<sup>19</sup> Many observers had long argued that the Minsk Group lacked both the political backing of major powers and the institutional strength to be effective, leaving its peace efforts largely symbolic.

The UN, meanwhile, has contributed through humanitarian aid and development assistance, but it has never been a decisive player in mediation.<sup>20</sup> Perceptions of bias – where some actors are criticized

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18 European External Action Service (EEAS), About the European Union Mission in Armenia (EUMA), Available at: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/euma/about-european-union-mission-armenia\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/euma/about-european-union-mission-armenia_en) (Accessed: October 3, 2025)

19 Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM), “OSCE Dissolves the Minsk Group”, 2023, Available at: <https://pism.pl/publications/osce-dissolves-the-minsk-group> (Accessed: October 3, 2025)

20 ReliefWeb, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Regional Overview: Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia – October 2024, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/regional-overview-europe-caucasus-central-asia-october-2024> (Accessed: October 3, 2025)

more harshly than others – have further eroded trust in multilateral institutions. This reflects a broader challenge: efforts to remain neutral often make organizations cautious and slow-moving, while perceived double standards undermine legitimacy.

These dynamics illustrate the limits of traditional multilateralism in the South Caucasus. Western-designed frameworks do not always fit the local realities of the South Caucasus, where history, entrenched disputes, and different political logics shape outcomes. As a result, external involvement is sometimes viewed less as cooperation and more as external pressure.<sup>21</sup> Some experts argue for a more flexible, context-specific approach that adapts international support to regional needs rather than imposing universal models.<sup>22</sup>

Recent years, however, have seen new developments. Following the war in 2020, the EU became more engaged in the South Caucasus, launching fresh initiatives to facilitate dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan and deploying a small civilian monitoring mission along the Armenian border to build confidence (although it became rather counter-productive because of its extension, neglecting the discontent of Azerbaijan). Georgia also has strong links with the EU and NATO. These links pushed reforms. They also supported Georgia's democratic agenda, although the pace of progress has recently become uneven, and debates over Western alignment have slowed down. Even though the EU has expanded its assistance and engagement with Armenia in recent months, and Armenia has demonstrated a more pro-European tendency in its foreign policy, this country remains in Russia's economic orbit with its membership of the EAEU. Azerbaijan often questioned the EU's fairness because of its recent inclination towards supporting Armenia financially (mainly in the post-conflict period, when Azerbaijan needed more support for the recovery of its conflict-affected territories) and some European officials' bias in the context of the former conflict with Armenia. However, the change of the cabinet of the commissioners of the EU in late 2024 brought a new atmosphere to cooperation between the EU and Azerbaijan, with recent intensification of bilateral interactions, mainly in areas such as energy, trade, and connectivity.

Meanwhile, regional cooperation remained weak among the three South Caucasian states. In the past, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia often

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21 Vasa, L., "The Geopolitical and Geo-Economic Significance of Central Asia in the 21st Century", *European Mirror*, 2020, 25(1), 67–80.

22 Bárkányi, P., & Vasa, L., "Revitalisation of Regional Cooperation in Central Asia", *Economic and Regional Studies*, 2023, 16(3), 304–316.

avoided direct trilateral talks. There is no regional body uniting these three countries. They were tending to make more deals with regional or outside powers than with each other. However, in 2024, the three countries held a trilateral meeting in Tbilisi (Georgia) at the deputy foreign minister level – a small but symbolic attempt to resume regional dialogue without external mediation.

Nevertheless, there are modest signs of progress. Georgia has served as a venue for dialogue in the past, and in recent years, Armenia and Azerbaijan have engaged in direct discussions, even without strong external mediation. While these are small steps, they suggest a shift toward more regionally driven diplomacy. In the past, the EU and Russia tried to mediate these talks; however, each failed due to several factors associated with the expectations of the negotiating parties. For diplomacy to succeed, South Caucasus states will need to take greater ownership of the dialogue, develop their own formats for engagement, and build confidence incrementally. International partners can and should support these efforts, but durable progress will depend, above all, on initiatives that originate within the region itself.

### ***Regional Cooperation and Future Possibilities***

Regional cooperation refers to the ability of neighbouring states to work together by establishing common rules, addressing shared challenges, and pursuing joint goals in areas such as trade, transport, education, and culture. In the South Caucasus, stronger cooperation contributes significantly to stability, economic growth, and social development. Yet political tensions and a persistent lack of trust continue to limit progress, leaving regional cooperation weak and underdeveloped. For more than three decades, unresolved territorial questions have shaped the political landscape of the region, influencing how the three states see their security and limiting the trust needed for deeper cooperation.

As a result, trust among the three South Caucasus states remained low, making regional cooperation difficult to achieve. Instead of working closely with one another, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia often looked outward for major partnerships with, for example, the EU, the U.S., NATO, Russia, or China. While these external connections provided opportunities, they also introduced new layers of competition and rivalry, further complicating prospects for genuine regional cooperation.

As a result, the three South Caucasus states often turn to external powers for support. While this kind of engagement can provide important resources and security guarantees, it also carries risks. When one country grows closer to a major power, the others may feel marginalized or threatened. Rather than fostering stability, such dynamics can increase rivalry and create new challenges, complicating efforts to achieve lasting peace in the region.

Armenia has traditionally relied on Russia for its security, though in recent years it has shown growing frustration with Moscow and a willingness to explore Western partnerships. Azerbaijan maintains close ties with Türkiye and continues to build up its defence capacity, while Georgia aspires to integrate with the EU and NATO, though progress there has been uneven. China has also expanded its economic presence in the region through the Belt and Road Initiative, which, while focused on infrastructure, carries long-term strategic implications.

Yet beneath rivalries over the region, the three states share many of the same fundamental needs: reliable transport infrastructure, secure energy networks, and greater employment opportunities for their populations. These common priorities could serve as a foundation for cooperation if approached in a spirit of mutual benefit rather than competition.

Shared needs can create strong incentives for cooperation. The Middle Corridor offers a clear example: stretching across the South Caucasus, it connects Central Asia with European markets and holds significant potential for trade and transit. Yet this project can succeed only if all countries in the region participate. No single state can develop or sustain such a corridor on its own – regional cooperation is the only path forward.

International organizations can play a supportive role by providing funding, expertise, and platforms for dialogue. This assistance is valuable, but it cannot substitute for the political will of the countries themselves. Lasting cooperation must ultimately come from within the region, grounded in shared interests rather than external intervention.

The countries of the South Caucasus should increase direct dialogue and develop their own regional platforms. This effort may not be limited to governments – experts, civil society, and young people also need to be included. One practical step could be the creation of a regional forum.<sup>23</sup>

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23 LINKS Europe, *Action Plan for the South Caucasus 2025: Pathways to Dialogue and Cooperation*, 2025, Available at: <https://links-europe.eu/action-plan-2025> (Accessed: October 3, 2025)

At first, it could focus on easier areas of cooperation, such as tourism, culture, or disaster relief. Later, if trust grows, it could address more sensitive issues, such as security or cross-border management – areas that already have bilateral mechanisms but could benefit from a regional framework.

Security remains one of the most difficult issues in the South Caucasus. Each country follows its own path to ensure its security. Armenia, once closely tied to Russia and the CSTO, is now trying to make a move more toward the West. This shift began gradually after 2020 but became more visible in 2024, when Armenia froze its participation in the CSTO and sought deeper relations with the U.S. and the EU. Azerbaijan maintains strong links with Türkiye and invests heavily in its hard power due to its existing threat perception. Georgia has long sought integration with NATO and the EU, but today that path appears slower. Because of these different approaches, building a common regional security system is currently less likely.

Therefore, all three South Caucasian states are diversifying their foreign policies to avoid dependence on a single partner. Georgia looks more to the West but keeps some other ties. Armenia is now moving away from Russia but needs new partners. Azerbaijan works closely with Türkiye, and at the same time, maintains energy deals with Europe.<sup>24</sup> These directions reflect not a lack of will to cooperate regionally, but rather the different security perceptions, economic structures, and foreign policy orientations that evolved from each state's unique historical trajectory. There are, however, also small steps toward direct cooperation.

Today, Armenia and Azerbaijan are no longer engaged in open warfare, following the large-scale hostilities of 2020 and the renewed clashes in 2023. With the signing in Washington, DC, of the August 8 Trilateral Statement between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the U.S., the situation in the region has become more stable, yet the borders remain unsettled, and many key issues are still unresolved.<sup>25</sup> So, the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia is no longer on the agenda, as Azerbaijan has restored sovereignty over its formerly occupied territories. However, some unresolved problems remain in the South Caucasus. While the war ended long ago, political tensions and humanitarian challenges continue to affect relations.

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Fraser, C., "Peace Prospects in the South Caucasus", *Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)*, 2024, Available at: <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/peace-prospects-south-caucasus> (Accessed: October 3, 2025)

*So, the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia is no longer on the agenda, as Azerbaijan has restored sovereignty over its formerly occupied territories.*

Georgia, however, still faces unresolved challenges to its territorial integrity. The regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Tskhinvali) broke away in the early 1990s and remain outside Georgia's control, sustained by political, economic, and military support from Russia. This situation undermines Georgia's sovereignty, weakens its security, and prevents the country from being fully united.

Such unresolved cases have kept the region fragile and unstable. However, in the absence of conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, today the three neighbours (including Georgia) could agree on some regional norms and address intraregional practical challenges relating to trade, transport, mobility, etc.

### ***Conclusion***

The South Caucasus is a region with a long history and many different cultures. Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are all trying to build stronger economies and better societies, and they want a peaceful environment. However, mistrust between the countries has inhibited this enthusiasm.<sup>26</sup>

This article has examined how different kinds of connectivity – economic, digital, cultural, and diplomatic – can help the region move forward, and what limits their impact. The analysis shows that, while progress exists in some areas, such as infrastructure and digital development, other forms of cooperation remain fragile. Political divisions, unresolved issues, and uneven foreign alignments continue to hold back broader regional integration.

International organizations can also play a role by supporting peace and development. For example, the EU, the UN, and the OSCE have provided platforms for talks and technical help in rebuilding infrastructure. However, their influence is often limited because of local mistrust and the perception that external actors are not fully impartial.

There are still many difficulties. Some international organizations are not seen to be as strong or as fair as people expected. Regional cooperation also remains weak due to political factors. There is still no regional framework for the South Caucasus where Armenia,

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<sup>26</sup> Vasa, L., "The Geopolitical and Geo-Economic Significance of Central Asia..", *op.cit.*

Azerbaijan, and Georgia can work as equals. Cooperation often takes place through larger powers – Russia, Türkiye, or the EU – which also generates some rivalry. Nevertheless, recent developments, such as the 2024 trilateral meeting at the deputy ministerial level in Tbilisi and direct talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan, suggest that small steps toward regional dialogue are possible.

Countries often feel more comfortable working with outside powers rather than with their neighbours. To move forward, the South Caucasus nations need fair support. Economy, borders, culture – all can be shared goals and can be achieved with the additional support of outside partners.

Peace is possible, but it takes time and persistence. True stability can also be built with small and consistent steps toward cooperation.<sup>27</sup> The countries must keep dialogue open, institutions need to cooperate, and people must continue to build trust through direct contact. Step by step, the region can become safer, more stable, and more open.

For policymakers, the most effective steps may be modest ones – rebuilding cross-border transportation lines, expanding student exchanges, or coordinating regional disaster response. These small, practical projects cost little in political terms but can build habits of trust. Ultimately, one lesson stands out: connections alone do not create peace, but they can make it easier for peace to take root. In the South Caucasus, stability must come first before deeper cooperation can grow — yet, over time, connectivity may become not just a reflection of peace but one of its main drivers.<sup>28</sup>

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27 Bárkányi, P., & Vasa, L., *op.cit.*

28 Vasa, L., “The Geopolitical and Geo-Economic Significance of Central Asia.”, *op.cit.*