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THE ENERGY- FOCUSED RELATIONS BETWEEN AZERBAIJAN AND THE EU AFTER THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

Relations between Azerbaijan and the European Union began to develop in a wide range after Azerbaijan gained its independence in 1991. Due to Azerbaijan's strategic location and energy resources in the Caucasus region, it has become a significant partner for the European Union. In the relations between Azerbaijan and the European Union, the energy field has a strategic importance. As a country with

abundant energy resources, Azerbaijan has a significant position as a partner for the European Union in terms of energy supply security and diversification. The Azerbaijan-EU relationship encompasses economic and political dimensions in addition to energy issue. There are numerous agreements between the parties. For example, the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), which transports gas

extracted from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz natural gas field to Greece, Albania, and Italy through Türkiye, is a joint project between Azerbaijan and the EU. The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline Project (TANAP) and the merger of the South Caucasus Pipeline and TAP have completed the strategic project called the Southern Gas Corridor. Through these projects, the European Union is diversifying its energy sources by importing natural gas from Azerbaijan.

Russia, as one of the world's largest producers of natural gas and oil, is a critical supplier for the EU's energy security. The European Union imports a significant part of its energy consumption from Russia, while Russia supports its economy with the income from energy exports. However, this situation makes the European Union dependent on Russia for energy and limits the organization's political activities. Russia exports natural gas to Europe largely through Ukraine. The long-standing conflicts between Ukraine and Russia and the current war make this energy trade process highly tense. While the European Union strives to ensure the security and sustainability of the gas infrastructure passing through Ukraine, Russia seeks to direct its energy policy in accordance with its political and commercial objectives. Energy can be interpreted as a cause or consequence of political tensions between Russia and the European Union. In particular, recent political crises or different political goals negatively affect energy cooperation and cause disagreements between the parties. The European Union has imposed several sanctions against Russia because of its occupation of Ukrainian territory. The European Union has imposed several sanctions against Russia because of its occupation of Ukrainian territory. The goal

is to weaken the Russian economy and stop the aggression against Ukraine. However, this situation has resulted in crises in both EU countries and Russia. The energy crisis stemming from the Russia-Ukraine war has led to rapid increases in energy prices across the European Union and beyond. To deal with Russia's manipulation of the energy market, the European Commission proposed measures across the EU in September 2022. These measures aim to reduce energy consumption in specific circumstances. This approach seeks to alleviate pressure in the energy market and ensure more efficient use of energy resources during times of crisis. EU countries have taken steps such as reopening coal-fired power plants and postponing the closure of nuclear power plants, driven by the belief that short-term solutions are needed to meet energy demand. However, such policies raise environmental concerns due to increased dependence on fossil fuels. The diverse applications of energy resources lead to both competition and collaboration on the international stage to focus on energy. States striving to gain the upper hand in energy competition carry out various efforts to develop the energy resources in their own territories. On the other hand, countries that do not have sufficient energy resources develop projects to ensure secure energy trade with energy-owning states.

Following the onset of the Russia-Ukraine War, European Union countries began seeking new gas suppliers and significantly limited their relations with Russia. However, Western sanctions simultaneously affected inflation, increased cost of living, and raised energy prices in Europe. Many countries in Europe faced inflation levels not seen in years. Price increases and rising inflation

overshadowed the EU's "unity" on sanctions. For instance, Hungary announced that it would not participate in sanctions against Russia, stating that it would also affect Europe. The EU's sanctions include a ban on the import of Russian seaborne crude oil and petroleum products. Some EU countries like the Netherlands, Austria, and Germany announced plans to return to coal-fired power plants to cope with the energy crisis. France, which expressed a desire to restart coal-fired power plants, also called for allowing the return of oil-producing countries such as Iran and Venezuela to the market. Furthermore, as part of efforts to reduce dependence on Russian energy, the European Union and Azerbaijan announced a new agreement to double the import of Azerbaijani gas.

European Union countries, grappling with the energy crisis, are focused on energy conservation and replenishing gas stocks. Despite aiming to reduce dependence on Russian natural gas, EU countries currently need to continue purchasing natural gas from Russia to fill their gas storage facilities and maintain energy supply. In this context, various steps are being taken to enhance energy security by reducing reliance on Russian natural gas and diversifying alternative supply sources. In line with these strategies, the EU aims to diversify its energy supply by increasing its natural gas purchases from countries such as Azerbaijan, Algeria, and Norway. These measures seek to enhance the EU's energy supply security and create a more resilient structure to withstand energy crises.

On July 18, 2022, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, after visiting Baku and holding talks on increasing energy supplies to the European Union, signed an agreement with

Azerbaijan to double natural gas imports by 2027. This agreement aims to import at least 20 billion cubic meters of Azerbaijani natural gas annually within 15 years. This agreement is part of the European Union's efforts to find alternative suppliers for energy, following the Russia-Ukraine war. The agreement between Baku and the European Union seeks to increase gas flow to the bloc through the Southern Gas Corridor pipeline. Also, during the meeting in Baku, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen emphasized Azerbaijan's enormous potential in the field of renewable energy, particularly offshore wind, and green hydrogen. Noting that they have laid the foundations of cooperation with Azerbaijani President Ilhan Aliyev on this issue, the President of the European Commission emphasized that Azerbaijan will become a very reliable and leading renewable energy partner for the European Union.

The relationship between Azerbaijan and the European Union, starting with energy cooperation, holds the potential for a broad spectrum of development. Increasing cooperation in trade, economy, education, and cultural fields can contribute to further strengthening and deepening relations between Azerbaijan and the European Union and mutually promote the interests of both sides. Azerbaijan's agricultural and mineral products hold significant trade potential for European markets. Strengthening economic ties through free trade agreements and collaboration projects can further boost commercial relations between the parties. Azerbaijan's strategic location plays a vital transit role between Central Asia and Asia to Europe. Azerbaijan's ports and railway lines provide connectivity between Eurasian trade and transport hubs. For instance, the Baku-

Tbilisi-Kars Railway Line provides a crucial route for cargo transportation between Asia and Europe. This line enables Azerbaijan to link with Türkiye in the west and Central Asia and China in the east, facilitating fast and efficient trade. Infrastructure investments and modernization projects in Azerbaijan-EU relations will lead to increased regional cooperation. Education and cultural exchange programs can contribute to enhancing mutual understanding and establishing closer relations between Azerbaijan and the European Union. In the long term, educational and cultural exchange programs contribute to the establishment of lasting and constructive relations between the two societies, while building a future based on peaceful cooperation and mutual benefit.

Despite possessing rich energy resources in the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan needs a reliable and efficient transit route to deliver its natural gas and oil to European markets. Türkiye holds a strategic transit position and serves as a critical gateway for transporting natural gas and oil extracted from Azerbaijan to Europe. Türkiye's function as an energy corridor is important for both Azerbaijan and the European Union in terms of energy supply security and diversification. Türkiye can also play a crucial role in energy diplomacy. By balancing regional interests and promoting collaboration between the both parties, it can contribute to the effective management of energy policies within broader political and economic contexts. Türkiye is indispensable for the successful execution of energy cooperation and trade between Azerbaijan and the European Union.

The projects within the Southern Gas Corridor provide benefits not only for

Azerbaijan and the EU but also for Türkiye. These projects hold significant importance for Türkiye's energy supply security as well. Türkiye is a crossroads for Europe and Asia, and its geographical position essentially turns it into an energy distribution center. Natural gas produced in Asia is transferred to Europe through Türkiye. Meanwhile, Türkiye earns significant economic income due to its role as a natural gas transporter. Furthermore, the pipeline routes passing through numerous cities and districts contribute to employment and economic vitality. It is also known that most of the pipes used are domestically produced. The relevant projects bring both economic benefits and strengthen Türkiye's diplomatic position. Türkiye is also an important part of the decision-makers' negotiations on energy transfer between the two continents. Indeed, Türkiye's historical role as a mediator between Asia and Europe is embodied and diversified through major projects such as the Southern Gas Corridor.

Many crises and conflicts in the international system are rooted in imbalances in the distribution and sharing of resources. This situation has also affected the balances in the energy market and has once again emerged with events such as the Russia-Ukraine War. This crisis in the energy sector emphasized the strategic importance of energy resources. Different countries have been affected to varying degrees by this crisis. In a world politics characterized by interests, gains, and ambitions, achieving permanent peace seems challenging. The effects of the energy crisis are likely to continue shaping the agendas of countries for a considerable period. Renewable energy sources play a significant role in the EU's long-term plans. However, the effectiveness of initiatives like the Green Deal in providing solutions

focused on renewable energy sources to overcome the current energy crisis is subject to debate. The energy crisis influences the dynamics of international relations, causing countries to reconsider their energy policies. Ultimately, the energy issue is a crucial factor deeply impacting global politics and the economy.

Today, when resource scarcity is becoming a major issue in the world, states are looking for ways to continue to sustain the basic needs of their citizens. These approaches include a shift towards renewable energy sources, reconsideration of harmful fossil resources like coal, nuclear energy production, development of necessary technologies for resource extraction, and the creation of transfer pipelines for importing resources from resource-rich countries to resource-poor ones. In addition to these, states react in various ways with the awareness that environmental security and the satisfaction of basic needs are at stake. These responses can be combative or cooperative. Particularly, resource-poor countries often exhibit collaborative tendencies, and this trend can also be observed among EU member states. The necessity for collaborative approaches among these states to fulfill their energy needs has become evident, especially considering the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The diplomacy skills of European states suggest that they will successfully overcome this process as well. Evaluating Azerbaijan-EU energy relations through the objective of the EU's own needs and its developed diplomacy would offer a realistic perspective.

The energy cooperation between Azerbaijan and the European Union can be said to have a positive impact on economic relations as well. Energy trade contributes

to the economies of both sides, and EU countries support the development of the energy sector in Azerbaijan by investing in energy projects. Energy also influences the political and strategic dimensions of Azerbaijan-EU relations. Energy trade and collaboration can encourage closer political ties between the parties within the framework of the EU's relations with Asian countries, and relatively enhance mutual trust.



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