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Magistrant: Cavad Əhmədov

Elmi rəhbər: Dr. Vasif Hüseynov

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Master Student: Javad Ahmadov

Supervisor: Phd. Dr. Vasif Huseynov

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INTRODUCTION

The urgency of the problem

Throughout the history, the South Caucasus region has perpetually held a place of strategic importance for major global powers. In the 21st century, it continues to serve as a locus for a political power play between the West and the East. Despite the European Union's role as a peacebuilding entity over the disputes between Georgia and Russia within the framework of the Geneva International Discussions since 2008, the European Union is also eager to take a leading position in mediating the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. This involvement has notably increased in the aftermath of the 2020 war. Consequently, as of the 2020 Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, Russia established military presence in all three South Caucasian countries for the first time, while simultaneously, the European Union has intensified its engagement in mediation efforts involving all three South Caucasian nations. To that end, so far, available literature mainly Eske Van Gils' article on "Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy Strategies and the European Union: Successful Resistance and Pursued Influence" (Van Gils, "Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy Strategies and the European Union: Successful resistance and pursued influence", 2018), Argyro Kartsonaki & Stefan Wolff's writing on "The EU's Responses to Conflicts in its Wider Neighbourhood: Human or European Security?" (Wolff A. K., The EU's Responses to Conflicts in its Wider Neighbourhood: Human or European Security?, 2015), in the same order, Richard G. Whitman and Stefan Wolff's another writing named "The European Union as a Global Conflict Manager" (Wolff R. G., 2012), Michele Egan, Neill Nugent, William E. Paterson's published edition named "The European Union as International Mediator Brokering Stability and Peace in the Neighbourhood" (PATERSON, 2020) and many more did not include the effectiveness, reasons, and methods of its intervention, and with that being said, the increasing role of the European Union as the conflict manager in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and its mediation efforts after the recent large-scale clashes. With this objective in mind, the primary aim of this paper is to conduct an analysis aimed at identifying and addressing the existing gaps within the literature. Despite the European Union's heightened engagement in global peace mediation, particularly within specific regions, there exists a dearth of literature that comprehensively examines the factors influencing the EU's efficacy as a mediator in the aftermath of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict.

In particular, the reasons behind its intervention, assessed from a theoretical standpoint, as well as the methodologies utilized for this purpose, remain notably underexplored. Thusm

there is a distinct necessity for an in-depth analysis of the EU's expanding role as a conflict manager in the context of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and an evaluation of the effectiveness of its mediation efforts following recent extensive hostilities. Various conflict resolution approaches have been proposed for further examination, with a focus on mediation—a process involving the introduction of an impartial third party to facilitate communication and negotiation between conflicting parties, each with its distinct approach and the degree of external involvement. This paper is dedicated to scrutinizing the European Union's mediation endeavors aimed at achieving a peaceful resolution to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and evaluating the efficacy of these efforts thus far.

The degree of study of the problem

South Caucasus has always been in the strategic interest of the major powers all over history. With no exception, in the 21st century, South Caucasus has been a soft power competition platform for the West and East. Even though the EU has been one of the peacebuilding actors over the conflict between Georgia and Russia under Geneva International Discussions since 2008, on top of that, the EU aims at taking a lead in mediation efforts over the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia and is increasingly involved in the aftermath of the 2020 war. Thus, while Russia as of the 2020 Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, for the first time ever has a military presence in all three South Caucasian countries, parallely EU is engaged more in mediation efforts with all three South Caucasian countries. To that end, so far, available literature mainly Eske Van Gils' article on "Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy Strategies and the European Union: Successful Resistance and Pursued Influence" (Van Gils, "Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy Strategies and the European Union: Successful resistance and pursued influence", 2018), Argyro Kartsonaki & Stefan Wolff's writing on "The EU's Responses to Conflicts in its Wider Neighbourhood: Human or European Security?" (Kartsonaki, 2015), in the same order, Richard G. Whitman and Stefan Wolff's another writing named "The European Union as a Global Conflict Manager" (Wolff R. G., 2012), Michele Egan, Neill Nugent, William E. Paterson's published edition named "The European Union as International Mediator Brokering Stability and Peace in the Neighbourhood" (PATERSON, 2020) together with "Mind the normative gap? The EU in the South Caucasus" by EJ Stewart (Stewart, 2011), and "EU and the Eastern Neighbourhood: reluctant involvement in conflict

resolution” by N Popescu, (Popescu, (2009)) many more did not include the effectiveness, reasons, and methods of its intervention, and with that being said, the increasing role of the European Union as the Conflict Manager in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and its mediation efforts after the recent large-scale clashes.

On that account, centering on the external policy strategies embraced by Azerbaijan and their direct implications for the European Union per se, article prepared by Eske Van Gils adressed on the "Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy Strategies and the European Union: Successful Resistance and Pursued Influence" (2018), studies thriving resistance of Azerbaijan to the influence of the European Union and its chase of alternative partnerships, specifically with Turkey and Russia which shares the border with Azerbaijan. Hence, the bottlenecks undergone by the European Union in its relations with Azerbaijan and the increasing demand for a nuanced approach to boost the cooperation, have been put forth for further condieration within the aforementioned article, however, the writing lacks to touch upon the recent developments in the geopolitical order of the South Caucasus and in the same order, new emerging needs and interests of Azerbaijan and Armenia in the EU and vice versa for the mediation efforts in the aftermath of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict.

Further on that, the paper prepared by Richard G. Whitman and Stefan Wolff on the "The European Union as a Global Conflict Manager" which analyzes the EU's effectiveness and efforts as a conflict manager of the various conflicts and its conflict management plans, methods, organizations, and capacities of the EU are examined in depth. In the same order, the paper touches upon the difficulties and challaneged encountered and the lessons learned while mediating conflicts in various regions for the European Union however, by the same tokens, it lacks the empirical analyzes over the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict mediation efforts of the European Union.

The edited book "The European Union as International Mediator Brokering Stability and Peace in the Neighbourhood" (2020), by Michele Egan, Neill Nugent, and William E. Paterson, suggests various standpoints on the function of the Euroeapan Union as an international mediator in conflict resolution. Thus, focuse of the book concentrates on the EU's participation in conflict resolution procedures as it examines the EU's efforts to mediate stability and peace in its area. On that account and to understand the mediation role and efficiency of the EU in a brightther angle, a number of case studies, techniques, and theoretical frameworks have been put forth in the article. Thereupon, this article is more recently published article and cover a

number of important and necessary details in the mediation efforts, however, eventough the book partially goes over the Georgia-Russian war, it barely entails to Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict mediation, therefore the book lacks the empirical analyses over the Karabakh case.

To that end, this paper is aimed at analyzing and filling the gaps in the literature. While the European Union has increased its involvement in the mediation efforts in peacebuilding around the world and particularly in the region, there is a lack of literature examining the factors affecting the effectiveness of the EU as a mediator in the aftermath of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, reasons of its intervention in a theoretical perspective, and utilized methods to that purpose. Specifically, there is a need to analyze the increasing role of the EU as a conflict manager in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and the effectiveness of its efforts in mediation following recent large-scale clashes. Different conflict resolution methods each with its own approach and level of involvement by outside parties have been put forth for further consideration, in particular, mediation that involves bringing in a neutral third party to facilitate communication and negotiation between the parties in conflict. The paper is addressed to mediation efforts of the European Union for the peaceful resolution of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and its effectiveness so far.

The purpose of this study

This paper seeks to ascertain the strategic interests held by all involved parties and explore the potential consequences related to the amplified involvement of the European Union as a mediator in the post- Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict scenario. It aims to delve into the effectiveness, rationale, and methodologies employed in the EU's mediation interventions. On this account, the research will focus on evaluating the effectiveness of the European Union-sponsored trilateral and quadrilateral meetings among leaders, assessing the significance of the recent civilian EU monitoring mission, and examining the intentions behind fostering trust at both high-level diplomatic tiers and grassroots levels.

These components will be subjected to in-depth analysis and consideration in this study.

Research Question:

According to the findings of the analysis, the research question is described below:

How EU involves in the mediation process in the aftermath of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict together with its effectiveness and methods of its intervention?

The object of the research

This comprehensive study encompasses an examination of the historical backdrop, ongoing integration processes, statistical insights into the European Union's soft power influence within the region, the dynamics surrounding the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, the regional orientation toward security, the effects of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, and the potential impact it might have. Additionally, it scrutinizes the escalation of mediation endeavors, assessing their effectiveness and rationale in the context of the region's geopolitical complexities and historical developments.

The subject of this research

The intended research aims to elucidate the significance of ongoing projects facilitated by the European Union involving the conflicting parties. It seeks to evaluate the extent of integration between the EU and each individual conflicting party in this particular case. Furthermore, the study will analyze the influential role of Russia within this context, emphasizing the regional dynamics within the South Caucasus. Additionally, it will explore the interests of other stakeholders acting as conflict managers in the region. The research will also consider the European External Border policy and its implications, among other pertinent factors.

Scientific novelty

Upon completion of this research, the effectiveness, reasons, and purposes of the European Union in the conflict mediation over the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict will be put forth

for further consideration. In addition to this, the categorization set forth by Bergmann and Niemann (Niemann B. a., 2020) to analyze the effectiveness of the mediation efforts, peacebuilding efforts and possible short-term and long-term benefits of it has been examined for all involved parties. That being, analysis of the EU mediation efforts in Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict peacebuilding efforts, recent EU-backed meetings of the leaders, the role of the civilian EU monitoring mission in the region, confidence building in between societies and trust to EU mediation, possible setbacks, the reasons for setbacks, the evaluation of the EU efforts over the case study on Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict has been presented in the paper.

Theoretical foundation of the study

The debate about the EU's international security identity and whether it is in any sense fundamentally different from that of other, more traditional, international powers (especially the USA) can be organized around four central positions: pacifist and interventionist Normative Power, Realist Power and Liberal Power. These power identities differ in terms of the justification of foreign policy goals and the (prioritization of) foreign policy instruments used towards these goals. (Crum, Military operations and the EU's identity as an international security actor, (2019)). To capture the presumably distinct international identity of the EU, Ian Manners (Manners I. , 2006) has coined the term Normative Power Europe (NPE), which refers to the European Union's "ability to shape conceptions of what is normal". This term, coined by Ian Manners (Manners I. , 2002), encapsulates the EU's strategy of exerting influence not through military or economic might, but rather through setting standards and promoting values such as human rights, democracy, and environmental sustainability. The EU's unique method of extending its influence lies in its ability to shape global norms and practices, thereby leading by example rather than coercion (Whitman R. (., 2013). Traditional geopolitical power, which mostly depends on direct, material methods of influence like military presence or economic leverage, stands in sharp contrast to this strategy. However, recent global developments and challenges, ranging from security threats to economic competitions, have sparked debates about whether the EU is, or should be, transitioning towards a more assertive geopolitical role ((Biscop, 2019); (Tocci, 2020)). This evolving discourse underlines a critical juncture in the EU's strategic positioning: whether to continue championing its role as a beacon of normative power or to pivot towards a more pronounced geopolitical posture, leveraging economic, diplomatic, and potentially military capabilities to assert its interests and influence on the international stage ((Forsberg, 2014)).

On the other hand, through the lenses of "Principled pragmatism" in the EU's Global Strategy of 2016 it represents a balance between upholding EU values and practical geopolitical considerations. (The EU Global Strategy and diplomacy, n.d.). This strategy promotes principles like democracy and human rights and recognizes the EU's position as a soft power, all the while maintaining realism in foreign policy decisions. The plan highlights the diplomatic role of the EU and promotes a smart-power strategy that blends aspects of soft and hard power. Europe's

status as a primarily "civilian power" has evolved, and the strategy acknowledges its capacity for hard power.

By integrating findings and suggestions from both mediation research and EU foreign policy studies, Julian Bergmann has identified six factors that affect the effectiveness of EU mediation (see Julian Bergmann 2020, pp. 11-13). These factors can be attributed to either the mediator or the conflicting parties: leverage, mediation strategy, coherence, mediator coordination, the willingness of the conflicting parties to compromise, and internal cohesiveness of the conflicting parties which has been discussed in detail in the presented paper.

Moreover, in order to examine the mediation efforts of the EU in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, two theories of international relations, namely neorealism and liberalism have been applied.

Applying the Neorealism (Structural Realism) theory

A few guiding concepts serve as the foundation for the realism theory of international affairs. The fundamental tenet is that nation states are the primary actors in international politics and that their interests, particularly those related to security and survival, are what motivate these actors. The second premise is that states should use their own power to protect their interests because there is no central authority overseeing the international system. Apart from this, neorealism theory holds that power is the primary medium of exchange in international relations and that states either aim for dominance or, if they are unable to do so, a balance of power.

On the other hand, neorealism is an outgrowth of traditional balance-of-power (or "realist") theories of international relations and was first articulated by Kenneth Waltz in 1975 and 1979. The international system is viewed as completely and always anarchic. While norms, laws and institutions, ideologies, and other factors are acknowledged as influencing the behavior of individual governments, neorealists typically insist that they do not alter the central role that war plays in international politics. Nor do alterations in the characteristics of governmental units—from ancient empires to the European Union, and everything in between—affect the underlying logic. (Donnelly J. , 2000)The principles of neorealism offer a powerful prism through which it is possible to examine the EU's intentions and actions in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. Given the EU's status as a regional and international force, it makes sense that its involvement in this

crisis is not entirely altruistic. Instead, it is motivated by the intrinsic need to protect its interests, ensure regional stability, and maintain a balance of power in its surroundings.

One of the fundamental tenets of neorealism is the principle of balance of power, which holds that states are essentially driven to prevent any one state from attaining a significant share of power (Korab-Karpowicz, 2017). Applying this theory to the EU's involvement in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict reveals motives and ambitions that go beyond merely advancing regional peace. The outcome of the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia which are nations located not far away from the EU borders may drastically change the region's power dynamics. Further escalation of the conflict might strengthen the dominance of nations like Russia and Turkey, which, in turn, will endanger the influence and interests of the EU. The EU can attempt to stop any one state from concentrating too much power and causing a destabilizing shift in the regional power dynamics through its mediation efforts. The EU's diplomatic communications and activities serve as examples of this. As an illustration, the EU has frequently underlined the necessity of a fair and impartial solution to the crisis and has offered itself as an unbiased mediator. This implies a deliberate effort to prevent either Armenia or Azerbaijan, or their respective regional supporters, from emerging as the conflict's dominating force. In addition, the EU's financial support for peacekeeping and reconstruction initiatives might be viewed as a tool for influence and power balance. The EU can ensure that it has a stake in the future stability and balance of the area by contributing resources for post-conflict rebuilding. This viewpoint makes it possible to interpret the EU's involvement in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict as a strategic decision to reduce potential risks to its own security. The EU faces a number of security dangers if the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict continues or worsens. First of all, a full-scale conflict with the involvement of all regional powers may likely result in a refugee crisis and displaced individuals seeking asylum in the EU. Given the EU's prior experiences with significant refugee movements, this could result in socioeconomic pressures and political tensions within the region. Besides, the conflict may serve as a breeding ground for international crimes including people trafficking and the smuggling of weapons which will also have implications for EU security. Additionally, the continuation of the conflict runs the risk of fueling terrorism and extremism, which would pose new dangers to European security. Finally, a substantial escalation of the conflict would attract NATO allies like Turkey, complicate the security environment for the EU, and possibly strain its relations with NATO.

The EU's remarks and actions surrounding the crisis are evidence of these security concerns. For instance, the EU has repeatedly appealed for the observance of international law and ceasefires and made it clear that it wants to stop an escalation. Additionally, it has started development projects and offered humanitarian aid in the area, which can be considered as strategic actions to address some of the underlying reasons for instability.

Suffice it to note that the South Caucasus region where the conflict takes place is of great geopolitical relevance to the EU since it serves as a vital intersection and is a crucial supply route for energy. The EU can increase its political clout and strengthen its influence in this crucial strategic region by acting as a mediator in the crisis. Additionally, the EU's involvement can be considered as a counterbalance to the influence of other major powers in the area. As a member of the Minsk Group, Russia has long played a vital role in the dispute. Turkey has also played a direct role as a result of its backing for Azerbaijan. The EU's active participation offers a different European viewpoint and influence and potentially reduces the dominance of other states. The EU's policies and activities provide specific examples of how it is pursuing its geopolitical objectives. The EU aligns itself with these goals through its mediation efforts and diplomatic involvement in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and solidifies its position as a major player in the regional dynamics.

Apart from this, it is important to take into account the economic interests of the EU. Due to its considerable energy reserves and significance as a key transit state, Azerbaijan is of great economic interest to the EU. Due to its significant oil and gas reserves, Azerbaijan is a key participant in the EU's energy security plan. With its abundant hydrocarbon resources and advantageous position, Azerbaijan provides a feasible alternative to the EU's reliance on the Russian energy supply. The Southern Gas Corridor is a prime example of the EU's energy interests in Azerbaijan because it carries gas from the Shah Deniz field in the Caspian Sea to Europe. High volumes of Azerbaijani gas are intended to be sent to the EU through this ambitious project which will greatly assist in the diversification of the EU's energy sources. Suffice it to note that in July 2022, the EU and Azerbaijan signed a memorandum about the energetic partnership (O'Byrne, 2022). Moreover, the EU is the major trade partner of Azerbaijan. Currently, hydrocarbons account for the majority of the trade, but there are also continuous initiatives to broaden and diversify commercial relations. Besides, the EU can be identified as one of the largest foreign investors in Azerbaijan and energy, infrastructure, agriculture, and services are just a few of the sectors of the Azerbaijani economy that have received direct

investments from EU member states. Azerbaijan's economic potential, its geopolitical position as a transit nation, and the possibility for market diversification are the factors that contribute to the EU's interest in investing in this country. However, the ongoing Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict affects the investment climate in Azerbaijan, even if there are many opportunities. Therefore, the EU's investment policies are intimately linked to its overarching objectives of fostering regional stability, prosperity, and peace.

Despite not having as many natural resources as Azerbaijan, Armenia nonetheless offers the European Union significant economic opportunities. Armenia and the EU have strong trade relationships and base metals, precious stones, minerals, textiles, and agricultural products are important trade items. The Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the EU and Armenia intends to expand bilateral economic ties. Thanks to giving Armenian firms additional options, the agreement aims to raise the quality of goods and services and strengthen Armenia's trade relations with the EU. Moreover, The EU is very interested in making investments in a variety of Armenian industries. Although the country's booming tech industry is gaining attention, the investment portfolio has historically been diversified across industries including mining, energy, and telecommunications. The IT sector in Armenia has been expanding by double digits, and this expansion, along with a skilled labor population, has made it a desirable location for EU investment.

Thus, conflict-related instability can generate changes in local markets, which can disrupt trade patterns and threaten the region's overall economic stability. Any disturbance in stability might directly affect the trade interests of the EU, which maintains significant trade links with both nations. The volatility may make it riskier to conduct business in the area, which would discourage new investments and trade partnerships. However, if the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict is resolved, there may be significant economic potential for the EU. Economic growth in both countries would certainly be encouraged by regional peace, which would also likely improve the investment climate and economic stability. Additionally, it might increase the security of energy imports from Azerbaijan and create new opportunities for regional integration. In this regard, it is possible to state that the mediation efforts of the EU are also dictated by economic interests.

The emphasis on structural issues like security and economic interests, as well as the balancing of power relations, particularly with regard to other regional actors like Russia and Turkey, attempting to maintain a balance of power in its area, addressing security issues pertaining to the refugee crisis and regional instability, and pursuing geopolitical and economic objectives seem

to more closely line with the tenets of neorealism. Neorealism would interpret the EU's actions as a reaction to the structural forces operating inside the international system, including the necessity of preserving regional stability and the balance of power in anarchic times.

Applying the liberalism theory

Realism is contrasted by the liberal theory of international affairs which places a strong emphasis on the opportunity for global collaboration, the advancement of democracy and human rights, and the role of international organizations in reducing conflict and fostering peace. Certain facets of the EU's engagement in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict can be understood when liberal theory is used. However, it will become clear that the liberal theory may not adequately explain the role of the EU on its own.

According to the liberal theory, the involvement of the EU in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan can be evaluated as an endeavor to advocate peace, human rights, and democratic principles in the region. These values serve as the foundation of the EU as an institution, and it promotes them both domestically and internationally. The participation of the Union in the mediation process might be viewed as a tool to promote dialogue, encourage negotiation, and finally reach a peaceful resolution.

From this perspective, it is possible to interpret the EU's mediation efforts in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict as an attempt to encourage diplomatic solutions, dialogue, and better cooperation between the opposing Armenian and Azerbaijani parties. The EU has actively promoted negotiation and peaceful resolution and demonstrated its dedication to global collaboration. For instance, it has participated in diplomacy, offered debate forums, and supported the efforts of the Minsk Group to mediate disputes. These efforts support the liberal viewpoint and demonstrate the EU's dedication to cooperative problem-solving and its faith in diplomacy as a strategy for resolving international disputes. Although the idea of international collaboration sheds some light on the EU's participation, it does not fully capture the scope and depth of its involvement. The liberal viewpoint frequently ignores the underlying power dynamics and strategic objectives that also influence how the EU acts. Without acknowledging these realism elements, as described in the earlier analysis, the involvement of the EU in the conflict cannot be understood in its entirety.

Apart from this, the principle of international collaboration which presupposes a common willingness to collaborate and a certain level of equality among the states is also hardly applicable as the course of the development of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict has demonstrated. To be

more precise, international collaboration has frequently proven to be more difficult and complex than the liberal theory might predict in this conflict due to the parties' entrenched historical enmities and divergent national interests. Besides, a fundamental element of liberal thought is the promotion of democracy and human rights. The EU might be considered as applying these values to its role in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict given its strong commitment to these principles. In fact, the EU has frequently reaffirmed in its comments regarding the conflict its adherence to these principles. It has voiced concern over breaches of human rights and demanded adherence to international law. Additionally, it has supported democratic norms in its interactions with both Armenia and Azerbaijan and promoted peaceful resolution and adherence to democratic principles in the process.

However, it is necessary to emphasize that this liberal viewpoint has serious practical limitations with regard to the conflict between two parties. It is difficult to advance democracy and human rights in a region marked by enduring conflict, historical differences, and ingrained ethnic tensions. The Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict has been historically, culturally, and politically complex for a very long time, therefore simply promoting these ideals will not resolve the problem or fully explain the EU's position in the situation. Additionally, the EU's involvement in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict goes beyond only advocating for human rights and democracy. Its involvement is also motivated by strategic considerations, economic interests, security worries, and a desire to preserve the region's power balance which are aspects that the liberal theory frequently downplays or ignores. In essence, liberal theory's guiding principles are in line with the EU's commitment to democracy and human rights, but they do not entirely explain the EU's engagement in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. In addition to being committed to liberal ideas, the EU is also motivated by neorealism considerations about power and security.

In fact, the EU has intervened in the crisis using its institutional position. It has promoted nonviolent conflict resolution, backed diplomatic initiatives, provided humanitarian aid, and made an effort to involve other international organizations in mediating the parties. The EU's involvement in a number of fora and support of the Minsk Group's conflict resolution initiatives are examples of the liberal emphasis on intergovernmental institutional cooperation. This viewpoint, however, is too simplistic for the explanation of why the EU is involved in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. Although the EU as an institution plays a certain role, it is crucial to keep in mind that it also serves to represent the interests of its member nations. As a result, its

actions are impacted by the member nations' geopolitical interests, security concerns, and power dynamics in addition to institutional requirements.

Apart from this, the history of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict has shown that the EU has failed to resolve it. The OSCE created the Minsk Group, which is co-chaired by France, Russia, and the United States, expressly to mediate the war and offer peace agreements. The Minsk Group, however, has likewise been unable to come to a definitive resolution despite countless meetings, discussions, and recommendations. Similarly, while being a significant player in world affairs, the EU has failed to find a solution to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict as well. \ The EU has mainly been reduced to a role as a donor of humanitarian assistance and has not been successful in mediation attempts. The appointment of a Special Representative for the South Caucasus was one of its political and diplomatic initiatives, but it has made little headway in trying to end the conflict.

Why the neorealism theory is more persuasive

After the comprehensive analysis, it appears that the neorealism theory offers a more compelling explanation for the EU's involvement in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. First and foremost, the EU has major and irrefutable strategic interests in the region, particularly with regard to energy security and geopolitical balance. The neorealism perspective is supported by the EU's activities, such as its diplomatic endeavors and mediation attempts, which are in line with these objectives. Second, despite the EU's unquestionable dedication to human rights, democracy, and peace, it hasn't been particularly successful in advancing these principles in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. In this regard, the complexity of the EU's position may not be adequately captured by liberal ideology. Thirdly, the neorealism theory paints a more accurate picture of the competitive, conflictual, and power-wielding international relations environment thanks to its focus on power dynamics and strategic interests. As a result, given the evidence and analysis, the neorealism theory presents a more persuasive explanation of the EU's role in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict.

The Structure of the work

An introduction together with theoretical foundation, two chapters, a conclusion, and a list of used literature.

Chapter 1. The EU as a Conflict Manager

1.1. Why EU employs mediation efforts

During the period between the two World Wars, the Nobel Committee in Norway granted a number of awards to individuals and entities who were aiming at paving the way for peace and understanding between two dissident parties namely Germany and France. To that end, following the devastating events of World War II, it became more than clear that a new Europe idea was necessary. The lengthy history of conflict between Germany and France, which had seen them engage in three wars over a span of seventy years, made it substantial to find new ways to forge mutual trust, collaboration and cooperation. Nevertheless, today, the idea of these two nations at war with one another is inconceivable and unimaginable. This serves as a powerful example of how persistent efforts and the cultivation of truth can transform historical enemies into close allies.

With all being considered, the Norwegian Nobel Committee aimed to draw attention to what it deems the European Union's most crucial achievement: the successful efforts towards peace, reconciliation, democracy, and human rights. Thanks in part to the stabilizing influence of the EU, much of Europe has transitioned from being a region rife with conflict to one characterized by peaceful coexistence that has been a sample for the rest of the world ever since.

To that end, managing conflicts at the international level has emerged as an important raising priority on the global front. On this account, numerous nonviolent approaches available have been utilized over the course of history for managing conflicts and preventing the possible further escalation of the skirmishes.

Thus these include avoidance, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and adjudication. To elaborate on that basis, one of the primary objectives of mediation is to help dissident parties in reaching a mutually acceptable solution that well aligns with the interest of the disputants and it is being conducted with the help of a neutral third party. Rather than imposing a resolution, the mediator facilitates discussions between the parties to uncover the underlying interests driving their positions. Hereby, mediation irrefutably is an effective way for the parties to express their feelings and thoroughly explore their complaints. Conversely, arbitration involves a neutral third party acting as a judge to resolve the dispute. During the arbitration process, each party presents their case and relevant evidence, and the arbitrator issues a binding decision. The parties can negotiate several aspects of the arbitration process, such as whether attorneys will be present and

what standard of evidence will apply. Negotiation refers to the process where two opposing parties in conflict reach a mutually acceptable settlement by engaging in discussions without involving a third party. Hence, negotiations are reached through conversations between the parties or their representatives, and the goal is to arrive at an agreement that both sides can accept. Adjudication can be considered the most well-known type of dispute resolution, where the defendant confronts the plaintiff before a judge who weighs the evidence and deliver a verdict. The outcome of mediation is not legally binding, which sets it apart from other external intervention methods like arbitration and adjudication. Unlike these methods, in mediation, third parties do not have any authority over whether the disputants comply with the outcome. (Groom, 1986) In fact, it is widely believed that most disputants would not agree to mediation if it obligated them to follow a predetermined outcome (Touval, 1985). The mediation typology consists of three distinct categories of behavior that vary in the level of third-party involvement. Their categorization is particularly valuable as it forms part of a comprehensive mediation framework. The three categories they identify are communication, formulation, and manipulation (Touval, 1985). By examining the different patterns of behavior that lead to different outcomes, this typology enables us to analyze and understand the actual actions of mediators in a conflict and their effectiveness. This analysis can be conducted through various techniques such as interviews, observations, or surveys.

These strategies refer to the mediator's behavior at the lower end of the intervention spectrum. In the case of communication, the mediator's role is mainly passive, providing information to the parties and encouraging cooperation but not exerting much control over the formal process or content of mediation. To that end, the tactics linked to this strategy include but are not limited to contacting the parties, gaining their trust, arranging for their further positive sustainable interactions, determining common sharable issues and interests of the dissident parties, clarifying the situation in a most unbiased way showing the two sides of the same coin, avoiding taking sides, building a rapport with the parties, providing missing information to capture the full picture, developing a framework for understanding and platform as such to interact more, promoting meaningful communication, offering positive feedback, and allowing the parties to discuss their interests. When mediators utilize communication-facilitation strategies, they act as intermediaries, transmitting messages from one party to another and providing impartial information to disputants (Young, 1967).

Communication-facilitation strategies are strongly supported by Burton, who claims that all disputes are products of misunderstanding, and that clear communication among disputants, through mediators, is the key to conflict resolution (Burton, 1969).

Whereas formulation methods grant chance to the mediator to have more assertive control over the formal aspects of the mediation process, including the setting, structure, and flow of the proceedings. The mediator can influence the venues and frequency of the meetings of the parties, the organization of the agenda, and the transaction of the information between the belligerent parties. They can also manage factors like media exposure and the power dynamics between the parties which play extremely important roles in shaping the perception of the people regarding the people on the other side of the wall. More to that, the mediator can facilitate communication and keep the process on track. Examples of tactics associated with procedural strategies include selecting the location of meetings, controlling the timing and level of formality, creating a comfortable physical environment, suggesting protocols and procedures, identifying common interests, reducing tension, structuring the agenda, encouraging parties to stay involved, preserving the parties' reputations, and keeping the focus on issues at hand. Procedural strategies are intended to create a favorable context for resolving the conflict.

On the other hand, when it comes to manipulation strategy that is considered the most powerful form of intervention where the mediator can directly influence the content and substance of the bargaining process. Directive strategies aim to change the motivation and behavior of the parties in dispute by providing incentives or issuing ultimatums. Tactics associated with this strategy include changing the parties' expectations, making substantive suggestions and proposals, making the parties aware of the costs of non-agreement, suggesting possible concessions parties can make use of, and offering to verify compliance with the agreement. Directive strategies represent the highest level of mediator involvement, and they are designed to pave the way for a resolution to the conflict. Touval (Touval, 1985) typology of mediator behavior provides a clear and systematic way to understand and analyze mediator behavior in conflict resolution. By identifying the different categories of behavior and the tactics associated with each, researchers can empirically test how mediators act in specific situations and how their behavior may affect conflict resolution outcomes. This framework also enables researchers to identify the factors that may influence mediator behavior, such as the mediator's background, the nature of the conflict, and the parties' attitudes and behaviors.

In a later study, it is suggested that communication strategies were most likely to be employed but less likely to lead to a successful outcome ((Bercovitch, 1992) (Touval, 1985).

1.2. What methods EU use for mediation?

The main guidebook and document for mediation is the Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities, where the EU ascribed a bigger role in international relations and aimed at addressing the gaps in its meditation efforts. Since 2009 onwards, the EU's main rationale and overall aim is a more coordinated and focused approach that will enhance the EU's ability to play a more active international role in this field.

The European Security Strategy (ESS) highlights the significant importance of "preventive engagement" policy of the European Union and the utilization of all possible readily available conflict prevention measures at the EU's disposal, including but not limited to political, diplomatic, military, civilian, trade, and development tools. The report by the Secretary-General/High Representative on the implementation of the European Security Strategy recognizes the necessity of enhancing the European Union's dialogue and mediation capabilities. (EUROPEAN SECURITY STRATEGY - A SECURE EUROPE IN A BETTER WORLD, 2009).

The EU is heavily involved in various mediation, facilitation, and dialogue processes across the entire spectrum. Although mediation has become an essential part of the EU's external action, its usage has been seen as rather spontaneous. However, with the help of this Concept, the EU aims to create a more systematic approach to mediation and enhance its support capacity, enabling it to contribute more effectively to preventing and resolving conflicts. The European Union's ultimate aim is to establish and encourage the usage of mediation as the primary tool for addressing emerging or ongoing crisis situations where applicable. Additionally, mediation has the potential to be incorporated into other EU conflict prevention and crisis management activities as appropriate.

On that account, the mediation efforts and their utilized methods have been hypothesized and described through numerous international relations theories which created great debates in the social sciences study major in this particular field. Namely, to start with, as per the perspective of neorealism which is a political theory that emphasizes the importance of power and self-interest in international relations, conflicts arise because of the different interests of the actors

and the perpetual need for maximization of their power and influence and competition for resources among states in international relations. To that end, in the context of conflict, realists might argue that mediation could only be effective when it well aligns with the self-interests of the parties involved and hereby, describing the only two ways to have a peaceful resolution of the conflicts which are through a balance of power between the dissident parties or the dominance of one state over others encompassing the conflicting nations as well. During the course of the history, the real case examples of the proposed hypothesis is irrefutable and for some, ongoing developments in the contemporary world is not a precursor for the liberal world order. In the context of conflict mediation, realists might argue that mediation is most effective when it helps to establish a balance of power or to promote the interests of the most powerful actor. Realists agree with most standard definitions that peace entails the 'absence of war and other forms of overt violence' (Anderson, 2004)).

On the order side, Liberalists believe the significance of the cooperation and institutions in international relations. With that being said, according to liberalism, conflicts may arise due to the lack of cooperation and the absence of effective institutions in international relations. In the context of conflict mediation, liberals might argue that mediation is most effective when it promotes cooperation and strengthens existing institutions. One of the key proponents of mediation in international conflicts was Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher and one of the founding figures of liberal thought. In his writing "Perpetual Peace," Kant argued that a federation of free states, which would include mechanisms for resolving disputes through mediation and negotiation, would be the best way to ensure lasting peace between nations. (Kant, 1991) More recently, scholars such as John Burton and William Zartman have emphasized the importance of mediation in resolving long lasting conflicts. They argue that mediation can be effective in situations where there is a high level of mistrust between the parties, as the mediator can help build trust and create a framework for negotiation as described above in detail. Thus, in the theoretical perspective analysis of the EU as a mediator, it can be hypothesized that as a liberal actor in the world politics, EU approaches to the conflict mediation efforts through lenses of liberalism, hence prioritizes the cooperation and strengthening the existing institutions and through communication strategy aims to enhancing the trust of the parties to the peace talks.

Yet in 2003, the EU was eager to acknowledge in its European Security Strategies (ESS) that roots of its security were to be found outside of its parameters. (Frappi, The EU Eastern partnership: common framework or wider opportunity?: EU-Azerbaijani perspectives on

cooperation, 2012). It is crucial for Europe to ensure that these South Caucasian states become stable, predictable, and synergetic to the EU since the instability in the region can have a damaging impact on the EU. Walter (2004) defines geo strategies as the discourses concerned with organizing territory and space at the border and figuring out the relationship with the “other” beyond. Different geo strategies can be best described as the mental geographies and perceptions of particular landscapes and territories. The geostrategy of the march entails viewing the border as an inter-zone between powers or as a buffer zone, which separates secure landscape from the dangerous other. The EU aims at prioritizing its external border management because of its freedom of movement regulation within the Schengen Area. The EU does recognize that expanding transparency of borders among EU member states and its immediate neighbourhood brings about not only the movement of “good things” but also “bad things” such as smuggling, organized crime, illegal migration, organ trafficking. It is more than clear that the EU faces some challenges with the Turkish-Greece border through its Balkan neighbourhood. With that in mind, the EU can comprehend that having required security in the distant borders will keep the EU safer, to that end, cultivating good relations and reform on border management not only brings peace and security to the South Caucasus but also to the EU in one way or another.

The debate about the EU’s international security identity and whether it is in any sense fundamentally different from that of other, more traditional, international powers (especially the USA) can be organized around four central positions: pacifist and interventionist Normative Power, Realist Power and Liberal Power. These power identities differ in terms of the justification of foreign policy goals and the (prioritisation of) foreign policy instruments used towards these goals. (Crum, Military operations and the EU’s identity as an international security actor, *European Security*, (2019)) To capture the presumably distinct international identity of the EU, Ian Manners (Manners I. , 2002) has coined the term Normative Power Europe (NPE), which refers to the European Union’s “ability to shape conceptions of what is normal”. (Manners I. , *Normative power Europe: a contradiction in terms?*, 2002) On that account, a normative power does not necessarily rely on material capabilities such as military or economic power, but instead largely relies on the power of ideas. Central to NPE is the assertion that a pure instrumental use of norms is not possible (Whitman R. , 2013).

Only through the application of military measures can the EU establish itself as a more prominent Realist Power and pursue strategic security goals that were previously unattainable. As Hyde-Price (2013, 18) puts it, if the EU is to become “an effective and coherent vehicle for collective

endeavours to safeguard and enhance common European security interests, they [Member States] must shed their lingering illusions about the virtue and efficacy of an EU security strategy primarily based on soft power and moral suasion and develop political will and military capacity to back up diplomacy with coercive instruments when necessary”. (Hyde-Price, 2008) From this perspective, value-based concerns are at most of second order importance (Hyde-Price, 2008). The EU's explanation are believed to limit some policy choices and increase the likelihood of others. Conversely, the EU's mission choices restrict the types of explanation that can be convincingly utilized. Although the EU's humanitarian motives may be indisputable in certain situations, in other cases, the EU's security interests may be apparent. Obviously, the stated objectives of military operations may well contain both utility-based and value-based considerations (Aggestam, 2008), (Raik, 2012).

For long, the lack of military means of the European Union singled out the European Union more of as a “civilian” or “normative power”. Nevertheless, since 2003 numerous military operations of the European Union have been launched. To that end, conceptions of the EU’s international identity can be employed along two underlying dimensions: justification (the purpose of military operations) and policy-embeddedness (the coordination between military means and other foreign policy instruments) (Bergmann J. a., 2013). As per EU’s increasing role in the world order, it has been suggested that the European Union has been evolving towards a “Liberal Power” identity, as is reflected in a shift from value-based to utility-based justifications, while military operations have at the same time become more embedded in the EU’s overall foreign policies. (Bergmann J. a., 2013)

The literature on EU foreign and security policy offers different conceptualizations of “drivers”, variously seeing them as actors (e.g., individual member states with a specific agenda), the underlying motivations that these actors are said to have (e.g., desires for security) or as structures that “compel” the EU to undertake certain actions (e.g., the international trade system). These are not mutually exclusive conceptions of drivers; rather, they operate, interact and compete at different levels. (Smith M. , (2003)) This paves the way for the clear segregation to be suggested between a norms-driven policy encompassing the human security approach and a utility-driven policy that politically seeks greater European security in a manner of greater security for the European Union and its citizens together with legal member states. This is not to argue that such a European security focus does not have its own normative underpinnings or to suggest that the definition of norms at EU level is not, in part, a reflection of member states’ interests, (Smith M.

, (2003)) but to engage with an established debate (Lavenex S. , EU External Governance in 'Wider Europe, 2004) on whether the EU is a normative power, (Manners I. , Normative power Europe reconsidered: beyond the crossroads, 2006a) i.e., an actor who has the ability to project the norms of peace, liberty, rule of law, democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and make them part of an internationally accepted conception of normal. (Manners I. , 2002) Therefore, the pursuit of European security is completely coherent with the approach of human security, and it is widely believed that the EU pursues the human security approach, albeit mostly for instrumental reasons, especially in areas where it has significant security concerns of its own as a Union.

Mary Kaldor, and two of her colleagues had a publication arguing that “[h]uman security could be considered a ‘bridging concept’ between the immediate need for stabilization and the need, simultaneously and over the long term, to address ... structural conditions”. (Kaldor) As a guide for policy, a human security approach to the EU’s foreign and security policy would thus entail five principles: respect for human rights, the establishment of legitimate political authority in countries the EU engages with through its foreign and security policy, multilateralism as a counterweight to possible neo-colonial tendencies, a bottom-up approach that takes note of local needs and interests, and finally a regional focus that looks beyond just the country in question (Ibid). The following year, the “Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy” noted confidently that “[w]e have worked to build human security, by reducing poverty and inequality, promoting good governance and human rights, assisting development, and addressing the root causes of conflict and insecurity”. (Union .. C., 2008) (Wolff A. K., The EU's Responses to Conflicts in its Wider Neighbourhood: Human or European Security?, 2015)

Therefore, European security can be defined as the maximization of security for the EU per se, its citizens, and member states. Regarding the EU's foreign and security policy, this can be interpreted as the quest for internal security objectives of the EU using foreign policy mechanisms, which has been explored in a substantial body of literature referred to as the “externalization of internal security objectives”. (Lavenex & Lutterbeck, 2005)

Based on the definition of international mediation by Bercovitch et al. (Bercovitch, 1992), which implies that the term ‘EU mediation’ includes mediation efforts that are carried out by one or more of the following actors within the EU’s foreign policy system (Davis, (2014)) p. 97) (Bergmann J. p.-4., 2020).

- The High Representative/Vice-President of the Commission

- The Presidency of the Council of the EU
- EU Special Representative(s) for a world region or policy field
- Heads of EU delegations or CSDP missions in third countries
- Senior EEAS officials
- MEPs.

As per Touval and Zartman, EU's definition of mediation, outlined in the 2009 Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities, differs from the definition used in Julian Bergmann's book in two ways. First, the EU's definition emphasizes that mediation is an instrument of conflict transformation that should be applied—if possible—to address the root causes of conflict. While conflict transformation may be the ultimate goal of mediation in the long term, this book concentrates on conflict settlement as the immediate to mid-term objective of mediation. Second, according to the EU's definition mediation implies the active involvement of the intervening third party by making substantial proposals and suggestions on how to solve the conflict. Although such an interventionist strategy is one possible form of mediation behavior, less interventionist strategies such as facilitation and formulation also represent typical mediation approaches and are thus not excluded from the definition of EU mediation applied in this book (see (Touval, 1985), pp.10-14, (Bergmann J. p.-4., 2020))

By integrating findings and suggestions from both mediation research and EU foreign policy studies, Julian Bergmann has identified six factors that affect the effectiveness of EU mediation (Bergmann J. p.-4., 2020). These factors can be attributed to either the mediator or the conflicting parties: leverage, mediation strategy, coherence, mediator coordination, willingness of the conflicting parties to compromise, and internal cohesiveness of the conflicting parties.

Policy coherence is a widely discussed topic in EU foreign policy and has been defined in various ways. Essentially, coherence refers to the extent to which different actors and policies are coordinated in a shared policy-making environment. In the context of EU mediation, coherence refers to the level of coordination among the actors involved in conducting EU mediation, both within and across different fields of EU foreign policy. Therefore, the concept of coherence in EU mediation involves two primary aspects.

The degree of coordination between individual member states' policies towards a conflict and the EU mediation effort (vertical coherence);

The degree of coordination between the different EU institutions involved in organizing and conducting the EU mediation effort, both within the CFSP and across other EU external policies

(e.g. development policy, European Neighborhood Policy, etc.) (horizontal/institutional coherence). (Bergmann J. p.-4., 2020)

With that regard, the first aspect of coherence in EU mediation entails the endorsement of EU mediation efforts by both EU institutions and member states, in terms of their statements, positions, and actions. More to that, it also means that no actions are taken that hinder the EU's ability to mediate between the conflicting parties. Additionally, it requires a unified stance by the EU towards the conflict and the parties involved. Furthermore, relevant information is shared among actors, and there is a general agreement on the EU's approach and strategy as a mediator. A prominent assumption on the EU's role as an international actor is that the EU has to 'speak with a single voice' in order to be effective in international politics (Niemann A. &., 2014a). The standard of coherence is frequently used to evaluate EU foreign policy due to the complex and multi-layered institutional structure of the EU. It is plausible to hypothesize that there is a positive relationship between coherence and EU mediation effectiveness. The argument is that a highly coherent EU approach leaves no room for ambiguity regarding the EU's preferences on the outcome of the mediation, and it signals the EU's determination to assist the disputants in settling their conflict. Consequently, this increases the EU's credibility because the concerns of the conflict parties about the EU's ability to deliver on its promises are significantly reduced. In other words, if the EU demonstrates a high degree of coherence, the conflict parties are reassured that it is sincere in its intentions and preferences and is not being deceived by the opposing side. Conversely, a low degree of coherence is hypothesized to have a negative effect on EU mediation effectiveness because it undermines the EU's credibility and increases the conflict parties' doubts about its ability to fulfill promises made during the mediation process.

European Union policy coherence can be better comprehended as a continuation with so called high, medium, and low values as the main reference points. On that account, a high degree of coherence occurs when there is a high level of coordination between pursued policies of the individual member states of the European Union towards a conflict and the EU's per se mediation efforts namely, vertical coherence and among the EU institutions itself involved in processing and conducting the mediation, as well as their respective policies, hereby so-called horizontal coherence. A medium degree of coherence suggests that some coordination has been established, but there are still certain aspects of the mediation efforts on which coordination is limited or situations where EU member states or institutions have taken actions that undermine EU mediation, therefore EU foreign policy toward a conflict could not be considered as a universal

one to the best extent. Whereas a low degree of coherence entails the very limited or no coordination between individual member states' policies towards a conflict and the European Union's mediation efforts as a union, as well as among the EU institutions involved in promoting and leading the mediation efforts.

To analyze the EU's coherence as a mediator in the case studies, Julian Bergmann addresses the following questions: (Bergmann J. p.-4., 2020).

Has there been a collectively shared EU position towards the conflict and the disputing parties?

Have EU member states supported the EU mediator/mediation team during the negotiations?

Have EU member states taken any relevant actions outside the negotiation context that had a favorable or negative effect on negotiation dynamics and the conflict parties' ability to find a settlement to their conflict?

Have the different EU institutions involved in the mediation efforts (EEAS, EUSRs, European Commission, etc.) adopted a collectively agreed approach towards the organization of the mediation efforts and the EU's mediation behavior?

Have the different EU institutions involved in the mediation efforts shared relevant resources and information with each other?

The above definition of coherence pertains to the level of coordination within the European Union when engaging in peace negotiations as a mediator. However, since many EU mediation efforts involve multiple third-party mediators due to the international nature of the conflicts and other involved parties, it is also essential to consider the level of coordination between the EU and these other mediators as an additional conditioning factor in any empirical analysis that will be developed.

On the other hand, multi-party mediation can also have a positive impact on mediator leverage by combining resources and institutional capacities. This can potentially increase mediation effectiveness. However, empirical research on the relationship between the number of mediators and mediation outcomes indicates that there is no linear correlation between the size of the mediation team and its effectiveness. Therefore, the idea that more mediators always lead to better outcomes is not supported by the evidence. It is important to recognize that the number of mediators involved does not necessarily determine the effectiveness of a mediation effort. In lieu, it is suggested that the quality of mediator coordination be examined. Therefore, it has been suggested that more closely the EU coordinates with other mediators within a multi-party mediation team, the more effective it will be in achieving conflict settlement and goals. Similar

to EU policy coherence, mediator coordination can be best understood as a continuum with high, medium, and low values as the main reference points. When mediators have a high degree of coordination, they communicate frequently and interact closely with each other, sharing resources, knowledge, and expertise. If they have a medium degree of coordination, there is some communication and interaction, but they may still act unilaterally or withhold information and resources. If they have a low degree of coordination, there is very limited or no communication or interaction between them. To examine the effectiveness of the cooperation, Julian Bergmann, (see (Bergmann J. p.-4., 2020)) suggests following questions to be taken into consideration.

Has there been a common position of all mediators towards the conflict and its management?

Have individual mediators taken any relevant actions outside the mediation context that had a favorable or negative effect on the collective mediation efforts?

Has there existed an agreement among the mediators on the basic rules and procedures to organize and conduct the mediation?

Have the co-mediators shared relevant information with each other and pool their resources to increase their leverage vis-à-vis the conflict parties?

The extent to which conflict parties are willing to compromise is a crucial factor that affects the effectiveness of mediation efforts. While it is commonly assumed that parties entering into a mediation process are motivated to see it succeed, this view is challenged in the literature on peace and conflict studies. Conflict parties may have various motives for initiating and participating in mediation efforts in the first place, ranging from true interest in settling the conflict, to increasing the group's international and national legitimacy, or even using a pause in the fighting to rebuild their own military strength (Richmond, 2007a). It can be argued that a genuine desire to settle the conflict through negotiations is necessary for any peace agreement to be reached. If mediation is simply used as a tactic to delay violence before resuming hostilities, the chances of a successful negotiated agreement, let alone its implementation, are low. Rationalist thinking suggests that conflict parties will prioritize negotiating a settlement if they expect greater benefits from doing so compared to other options, including continued violence. Putting it differently, thus the anticipated gains of mediation in nature should be greater than those of non-mediation and the maintaining of the status quo per se (Sisk, 2009). Soft rational choice approach suggests that conflict parties' expected gains are not solely based on their cost-benefit calculations, but also influenced by their perceptions of their counterparts, the mediator, and the mediation process itself. The negotiators' objectives and their willingness to cooperate or

reject the process are calculated through the filter of these perceptions. This means that the conflict parties' motivation to find a compromise solution and make concessions depends on their expectation of the benefits they would gain from a negotiated settlement. The EU's effectiveness as a mediator increases with the conflict parties' willingness to compromise based on their expected gains from a negotiated settlement. The willingness to compromise varies on an issue-by-issue basis and is a matter of degree.

To make this complex variable operational, Julian Bergmann categorized the conflict parties' willingness to compromise into three following levels: low, medium, and high degrees. Since each potential benefits of each party from a negotiated settlement may substantially differ, it is essential to study their motivations individually before drawing conclusions about the overall degree of their willingness to compromise. To analyze the gains that each conflict party expects from a mediated settlement empirically, the following questions can be used as guidelines: (Bergmann J. p.-4., 2020)

What political and economic benefits and costs of a negotiated settlement at the domestic and international level do conflict parties expect?

What are their perceptions of the mediation process and how do they influence their expectations about the potential benefits of a settlement?

On what issues and in what ways are conflict parties willing to make concessions? What are their 'red lines' concerning possible compromise solutions?

By assessing each conflict party's motivations, preferences, and red lines, it is possible to determine the potential zone of agreement (ZOA) between the parties and the degree of their willingness to compromise within that range. The empirical analysis investigates the conflict parties' cost-benefit calculations and perceptions, and compares them with their willingness to compromise in the negotiations. This approach enables conclusions to be drawn about how this factor has influenced the EU's mediation effectiveness in each case.

Mediation scholars agree that the conflict parties' internal cohesiveness may significantly influence mediation outcomes (Kleiboer, *The multiple realities of international mediation*, (1998)). Cohesiveness has been understood in two slightly different ways. First, it has been conceptualized as the stability of parties' internal power structure, focusing on whether there are clearly identifiable leaders who have the authority to negotiate with the opposing side and are able to secure the implementation of agreements, if necessary, against internal resistance (Assefa H. p., (1987)), Second, cohesiveness has also been understood as the nature and number of the

conflict parties' domestic constituencies, assuming that the more constituencies, the less cohesive a conflict party, and therefore the more difficult the interaction between disputants (Kleiboer, Understanding success and failure of international mediation, 1996).

According to Stedman (Stedman, 1997), spoilers are "leaders and parties who believe that peace emerging from negotiations threatens their power, worldview, and interests, and use violence to undermine attempts to achieve it". In addition to using violence, spoilers may opt for manipulating the public opinion for formulating domestic opposition against the mediation process and/or the negotiation behavior of the conflict party toward more of an aggressive policy. Therefore, this can pave the way to outbreaks of violence and puts negotiators under immense pressure. Spoilers can also jeopardize the mediation process by causing a deterioration in the relationship between the conflict parties with each other and/or their relationship with the mediator. Conversely, if a conflict party is internally united, they will have greater flexibility and room for negotiation, leading to a wider potential zone of agreement (ZOA) and lower chances of spoilers. This, in turn, increases the likelihood of reaching a compromise solution. As Sisk notes, "[W]ell-integrated parties with a clear line of decision-making responsibility and deference to a single leadership can 'deliver' at the table." (Sisk, 2009)

It is widely believed that European Union's efficiency as a mediator is positively interlinked with the level of internal cohesion of the conflict parties. Internal cohesion is categorized into three hierarchical degrees be it namely, low, medium, and high. Thereupon, a conflict party is considered to have high internal cohesion if there is broad internal support for its negotiation positions and no noticeable spoiler behavior by factions within the government, opposition, civil society. Whereas medium internal cohesion is present if there is considerable domestic support for the government's negotiation behavior but also some regional resistance against its participation in the process all in all. On that account, low internal cohesion is characterized by marginal support for the government's approach to the mediation and a broad domestic opposition expressed through large-scale protests and violent clashes that aim to undermine the efforts to settle the conflict accordingly in a peaceful coexistence.

With that being referred, the degree of the conflict parties' internal cohesiveness has been put forth to an assessment, hence, the analysis is structured around the following questions: (Bergmann J. p.-4., 2020).

Are there different factions within the conflict party that have diverging positions and preferences concerning the desired outcomes of the mediation process?

Are there factions within the conflict party that openly oppose their party's involvement in the mediation process?

Has the mediation process been accompanied by outbreaks of violence and clashes that can be related to factions that oppose the mediation process?

To what extent have the conflict parties' leaderships been able to accommodate potential spoilers and prevent attempts to derail the mediation process?

The inclusion of certain conditioning factors, such as the timing of the intervention, conflict intensity, or the nature of the conflict issue, has been questioned for both practical and substantive reasons. The concept of 'ripeness' proposed by William Ira Zartman suggests that mediation should occur when both sides perceive the costs of continuing the conflict to be greater than the expected benefits and a unilateral victory is impossible. (Hellman, 2012) Conflict intensity and the nature of the issue also influence the parties' cost-benefit calculations together with the role of mediator bias and impartiality in mediation effectiveness which has also been debated. Two-dimensional conceptualization of mediation effectiveness, separating goal attainment from conflict settlement had also been a great debate in mediation conceptualization.

The EU has adopted its mediation strategy in recent years, concentrating more on building confidence and facilitating agreements on low-key issues that could spill over to the settlement of more politicized issues. The EU has gained considerable experience as a mediator in various conflicts and systematically developed its mediation capacities, but there is still room for improvement. The EU's own problem-solving expertise is a great source of leverage that could be more strongly exploited by EU mediators. Technical expertise is often needed in negotiations on complex issues, which can provide a potential stepping stone for further compromises on more politically salient issues. The EU has a great amount of technical expertise at its disposal that relates to a variety of issues relevant to the settlement of territorial and political conflicts.

The categorization set forth by Bergmann and Niemann adequately sets out the various possibilities of conflict settlement:

(0) No agreement: the mediation does not yield any outcome whatsoever.

(1) Ceasefire: given the absence of any military activity relating to – or occurring during – EU mediation.

(2) Process agreement: a procedural agreement whose significance lies in the commitment of the conflicting parties to hold further rounds of negotiations.

(3) Settlement of minor conflict issues: an agreement that solves some lesser issues, regarded as trivial by the conflicting parties.

(4) Settlement of major conflict issues: an agreement that solves some key issues, regarded as vital by the conflicting parties.

(5) Full settlement: an agreement that addresses and solves all contentious issues between the conflicting parties. (Bergmann J. p.-4., 2020)

The structures and initiatives of the European Union in the field of mediation reflect the EU's growing recognition of the importance of mediation as a foreign policy tool and its commitment to enhancing its mediation capabilities. The Mediation Support Team (MST), for example, provides strategic advice and support to EU mediators in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of mediation activities. The European Parliamentary Mediation Support Service, on the other hand, aims to facilitate parliamentary diplomacy and dialogue by providing expertise, training, and logistical support to members of the European Parliament engaged in mediation activities. The European Institute of Peace (EIP) serves as a hub for research, training, and operational activities in the field of mediation and peacebuilding and works closely with the EU and other international actors in promoting sustainable peace and stability in conflict-affected regions. These structures and initiatives are crucial for ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of the EU's mediation efforts, and for enhancing its role as a global mediator.

With all being considered, above findings have been utilized to portray EU's effectiveness as a mediator in the aftermath of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. Despite encountering a number of difficulties, the European Union has been able to contribute to peace efforts in the region through various diplomatic initiatives. To that end, one of the key findings that support the EU's effectiveness as a mediator in the aftermath of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict is its commitment to promoting dialogue and negotiation between the conflicting parties. Additionally, the EU has been working to facilitate talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan, inciting both dissident parties to engage in constructive dialogue and reach a peaceful resolution to the conflict and on that account has organized numerous trilateral meetings of the heads of the governments. Another important factor that gives necessary impetus to the EU's effectiveness as a mediator is its ability to leverage its economic and political influence to foster cooperation and compromise between the conflicting parties. The EU has provided financial and technical assistance to support reconstruction and development efforts in the region, which has helped to promote stability and cooperation between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Overall, while the EU faces numerous challenges

as a mediator in the aftermath of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, its commitment to promoting dialogue and negotiation, as well as its ability to leverage its political and economic influence, has contributed to its effectiveness as a mediator in the region. Through the lens of above said pillars and analysis, EU's effectiveness as a mediator in the aftermath of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict has been suggested in the below empirical findings relevant to the case.

Chapter 2. Empirical analysis of the peace talks between Azerbaijan and Armenia with the facilitation of the European Union

2.1. History of the conflict over Karabakh.

According to MFA Azerbaijan, during the Soviet rule over the South Caucasus region in 1920, Armenia continued its territorial claims against Azerbaijan, and it is visible from the evidence that during the 70-year period of Soviet rule, Armenia was able to enlarge its territory by displacing Azerbaijanis and using all available non humanistic means. To that end, the policy was conducted in a systematic and methodical manner.

In July 1923, the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) was established, with being Khankandi as its administrative centre. However, despite the establishment of the NKAO, more than 300,000 Azerbaijanis living in Armenia were not granted cultural autonomy by either the central government of the USSR or the government of Armenia SSR. Hence, in 1987, Armenia publicly asserted its claims to the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan which was preceded by following direct attacks set on by Armenia on Azerbaijanis again in both the Karabakh region and in Armenia itself. To that end, these attacks resulted in civilian casualties and forced many Azerbaijanis to become IDPs and refugees. Soon after making their territorial claims, over 250,000 Azerbaijanis were expelled from Armenia and consequently, by the end of 1991 and the beginning of 1992, the conflict had escalated to a military phase.

On May 12, 1994, a cease-fire was implemented to put an end to the ongoing military clashes. It should be emphasized that the armed aggression against Azerbaijan has continued despite the cease-fire. Nearly 26 years have passed since 1994, during which Armenia has maintained its unlawful occupation of one-fifth of Azerbaijani territory and prevented the return of more than 1 million Azerbaijani IDPs. The major offensives by the armed forces of Armenia against Azerbaijan occurred in April 2016, July 2020, and September 2020.

On 27 September 2020, a counter-offensive was launched in response to Armenia's yet another large-scale military attack on Azerbaijani Army positions and civilian settlements. The counter-offensive later became known as Operation Iron Fist that led to the Patriotic War. (Azerbaijan P. , n.d.) That day, the armed forces of Azerbaijan along the frontline and the adjacent populated areas in the country were subjected to intensive fire, with the use of large-caliber weapons, artillery, and mortars, resulting in deaths and injuries among civilians and the military. Extensive damage was inflicted upon the civilian property and infrastructure in the area. The combat actions that followed lasted for 44 days.

In order to repel military aggression by Armenia and ensure the security of civilians and densely populated residential areas deep inside the internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan, the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan undertook counter-offensive measures within the right of self-defense. Azerbaijan acted on its sovereign soil and took adequate and proportionate measures necessary to repulse the imminent threat to its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the security of its civilian population. As a result of the counter-offensive operation, the Fuzuli, Gubadly, Jabrayil, and Zangilan districts, the city of Shusha, and more than 300 cities, towns, and villages of Azerbaijan were liberated and Armenia was enforced to ceasefire.

Following a ceasefire deal brokered by Moscow, on 10 November 2020, nearly 2,000 Russian peacekeepers have been deployed to Karabakh. The announcement of the statement on the ceasefire paved the way for new geopolitical reality to the region.

Thus the statement of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and the President of the Russian Federation, signed on 10 November 2020, concluded the almost three-decades-old armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The realization of this aforementioned agreement guaranteed the termination of all military activities in the region and the liberation of the Kalbajar, Lachin, and Agdam districts of Azerbaijan.

2.2. Trilateral ceasefire agreement to end military conflict and further mediation efforts of the EU to change the power dynamics in the peace talks

Within the trilateral statement of the leaders of Republic of Azerbaijan, Russian Federation and Republic of Armenia of November 10, 2020, the parties unilaterally agreed on nine main clauses which is set to forge the future of the Karabakh. Hence, as per clause 1. of the agreement the complete ceasefire and a cessation of all hostilities in the zone of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict was agreed to be ensured and this clause was launched on 10 November 2020 at 00:00 hours Moscow time and to be adhered from that time onward. With that being considered, dissident parties were obligated to stop at their current positions. Referring to the second clause of the agreement, Aghdam district of Azerbaijan shall be returned back to the Republic of Azerbaijan by 20 November 2020 without any further bloodshot. In the same order, as per provision 3. the peacekeeping forces of the Russian Federation was supposed to be deployed in the amount of 1,960 military personnel with various scale arms, 90 armored personnel carriers, and 380 units of the automobile and special equipment. along the contact line in Karabakh and along the Lachin corridor. More on that, in accordance with the provision 4. the peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation were to be deployed in parallel with the withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces and in nature, the period of stay of the peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation in Karabakh is set to be for five years and is subject of automatic extension for another further five-year period if none of the Parties announces its formal intention for the termination the application of this provision six months in advance of the expiration of the period of the initial five year term of the peacekeepers. When it comes to clause 5. it was agreed that for the aim of increasing the effectiveness of control over the application of the agreements by the all involved parties to the conflict, a peacekeeping center shall be deployed to oversee the control over the ceasefire. Furthermore, as per preambular 6. of the aforementioned agreement, the Republic of Armenia shall return back the Kalbajar district to the Republic of Azerbaijan by mid-November 2020 and in the same order, Lachin district shall be returned back to Azerbaijan by first day of December 2020. Hence, the Lachin corridor with its 5 km width, shall ensure a connection of Karabakh with Armenia and shall not affect the city of Shusha, and should remain under the control of the peacekeeping forces of the Russian Federation. On that account, as per the agreement, a construction plan of a new route along the Lachin corridor should be determined in the next following three years, thus providing communication between Karabakh and Armenia,

with the subsequent redeployment of the Russian peacekeeping contingent to protect this route. Within this article, the Republic of Azerbaijan shall guarantee the safety of citizens, vehicles and goods traveling along the Lachin corridor in both directions. For next remaining clauses of the article, as per 7. Provision, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees was to return to the territory of Karabakh and adjacent districts under the oversee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In the same order, the exchange of prisoners of war (POW) and other detainees and dead bodies was to be carried out as per provision number 8. To conclude, all economic and transport links in the region was to be restored most importantly, the Republic of Armenia is obligated to guarantee the safety of transport links between the western regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic to facilitate the organization of an unimpeded movement of citizens, vehicles and goods in both directions. For that purpose, the control over transport shall be overseen by the bodies of the Border Guard Service of the Federal Security Service (FSB) of Russia. All in all, by agreement of the involved parties, the new transport communications linking the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic with the western regions of Azerbaijan shall be constructed.

As of this agreement, a new phase of the conflict resolution has been envisaged and to that purpose, all the interested parties are trying to involve to the peacebuilding and mediation efforts with their own meditation agenda.

With the end of the armed conflict in accordance with the Trilateral Statement, Azerbaijan entered into a new stage of post-conflict rehabilitation, reconstruction and reintegration. In the post-conflict period, sustaining peace, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities and return of IDPs is the absolute priority for Azerbaijan. (AZE M. , n.d.) The withdrawal of forces from conflict-affected territories will allow hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people (IDPs) to benefit from their right to return to their homes in a safe and dignified manner. More to that, this creates irreplaceable opportunities for economic revitalization by reintegrating the liberated territories, which have abundant natural resources and have been kept devastated for almost 30 years to be back into the economic cycle of the government.

It is noteworthy to mention that Azerbaijan is eagerly determined to reintegrate its citizens of Armenian origin who live in conflict-affected territories into its political, social, and economic environment. Hence, it is decided that these citizens should be granted the same rights and freedoms as all other Azerbaijani citizens, regardless of their ethnic, religious, or any other

background like any other nationality representatives living in Azerbaijan. On that account, the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan grants a strong supporting legal basis for this initiative.

Hence, European Union has put its efforts to involve to mediation and peacebuilding activities in the regions to bring the dissident parties to conflict management and peaceful coexistence. Therefore, as of the end of the 44 days of the war, Russia with its peacekeeping forces in Karabakh plays a strategic role and possible leverage over other peacebuilding entities however, considering the Ukraine-Russian war, Russia is heavily involved in the ongoing conflict hence, is practically unable to prioritize the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict mediation efforts in its agenda therefore, with the opportunity arisen, European Union wants to seize this chance and play a bolder role in the mediation of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. To resolve the conflict before the 2020 war, the European Union (EU) has taken part in a number of diplomatic and policy measures, mostly through declarations, resolutions, and its European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). It's crucial to remember, though, that rather than directly resolving the conflict, the EU's involvement in this one—especially before to the 2020 war—was mostly concentrated on lobbying, humanitarian assistance, and support for international law with particular support to OSCE to resolve the conflict. For a long period of time, Russia was the principal mediator between Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, since 2021, this role has been contested by the European Union. Moreover, due to the war in Ukraine, the OSCE Minsk Group—which since the 1990s has held the mandate to assist in negotiating a peaceful settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan but was widely regarded as a failure—has effectively ceased to function. (Guliyev, 2023) As a logical end of it, with its practical terms, European Union has organized already numerous high-level meetings with the participation of the leaders of both countries which had been largely considered as positive by the participating nations. Thus, the level of commitment of the European Union to the mediation of the conflict is in increasing tendency however, its effectiveness and reasons are under question and require more thorough analysis. Among contributions of several books that provide deep insights into the conflict's history, causes, and potential paths towards resolution, "Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War" written by Thomas de Waal is a well-regarded in European audience. ("Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War" , 2003)

More to that to delve into the international politics surrounding the conflict "The International Politics of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict" (Cornell) underscores the geopolitical importance of the Caucasus region and the conflict's potential to generate insecurity, involving the interests of major regional and global powers. More to that, to revisit the conflict post-2020 war, highlighting the role of Russia and examining the conflict's evolution "The Karabakh Conflict Between Armenia and Azerbaijan" (M. Hakan Yavuz, 2023) provided the insights to the case of Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict.

The settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict presents new prospects for the relations of the EU with the aforementioned countries. To that end, formulating an acceptable approach to both Baku and Yerevan has been a big challenge for the EU in their engagement with the region since Yerevan requested the EU to prioritize the principle of self-determination for the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, while Baku requested Brussels to approach with a similar stance on territorial integrity as it does for other territorial disputes in the area.

However, in order to effectively leverage the opportunities created by the post-war situation, the EU needs to treat the regional countries equally and consider their concerns in its policies regarding the region. For example, Brussels was widely criticized in Azerbaijan in 2021 after the announcement of an aid package for the EaP countries. (Huseynov, p. 12) Disregarding Azerbaijan's need to demine and rehabilitate the totally destroyed Karabakh region, the EU allocated substantially less aid to Azerbaijan (less than €200 million) than to Georgia (€3.9 billion) or Armenia (€2.6 billion). Nevertheless, the EU forged further cooperation and with a more balanced policy had been able to organize several main meetings of the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan with the mediation and facilitation efforts of the EU.

14 December 2021, Charles Michel, the President of the European Council, organized a trilateral meeting with the participation of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, to negotiate on the current ongoing situation in the South Caucasus regions and to discuss how the European Union can advance its relations with these two nations.

President Michel one more time reaffirmed to the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan that the European Union is dedicated to and interested in collaborating closely with both countries in resolving conflicts, forging the cooperation, and establishing a trustworthy environment towards achieving long-lasting and sustainable peace in the region. The three leaders share a collective goal of developing a secure, stable, and prosperous South Caucasus that will be advantageous for

all the people residing in that area. Ultimately, they hope to achieve this through a comprehensive peace agreement.

Thus, during the meeting, Prime Minister Pashinyan and President Aliyev reconfirmed that key commitments undertaken in the framework of the two trilateral statements of 9 November 2020 and 11 January 2021 would be honoured and that understandings reached in Sochi on 26 November 2021 should be built upon.

President Michael promoted the utilizing the humanitarian gestures since humanitarian gestures by both dissident parties also promotes confidence building and supports on creating an environment conducive to progress towards peace and reconciliation. Thus, the European Union will also resume its efforts to support confidence building measures between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Further on that, the leaders also discussed over the strategic existing and prospective trade and economic partnerships between the EU and both relevant parties. In the same order, the European Union's intention to commence an economic advisory platform to advance the confidence building, contribute to peaceful coexistence and build up economic cooperation in the region.

President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan agreed that in the context of the planned launch of negotiations on the delimitation and demarcation of the state border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, further tangible steps will need to be taken to reduce tensions on the ground to ensure a conducive atmosphere for the talks. President Michel called on both Yerevan and Baku to actively engage in good faith and to work towards de-escalation. He stressed that ensuring the appropriate distancing of forces is an essential element of incident prevention. The EU will make available an expert mission/consultative group to support the border delimitation and demarcation issues by providing technical assistance to both countries. (Michel)

President Michel highlighted the significance of reinstating communication infrastructure between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as the broader region of South Caucasus, with utmost respect for the independence of all countries. To that end, the decision was made to move forward with repairing railway lines, with proper measures in place for border and customs supervision, based on the concept of mutual exchange. The European Union is prepared to assist with the expansion of connectivity links as part of its Economic and Investment Plan, and the proposed economic advisory platform can also provide support for this endeavour.

For some scholars including (Huseynov, p. 12), the meeting presented a new format for post-war peace negotiations between the sides. This was a remarkable development against the backdrop of the declining role of the OSCE Minsk Group and Russia's emergence as the sole power broker in the post-war peace process. For Azerbaijan, the EU was seen as a more desirable mediator than the Minsk Group, which had proved rather ineffective and often controversial owing to the embedded pro-Armenian bias in the policies of France, one of the co-chairs along with the USA and Russia.

On February 4th, 2022, with the participation of Charles Michel, the President of the European Council, Emmanuel Macron, the President of the French Republic, Ilham Aliyev, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and Nikol Pashinyan, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia another set of meeting has been held and the complete dedication of President Michel and President Macron towards supporting initiatives to decrease tension and establish confidence in the region was reiterated during the meeting. In the same order, during the virtual meeting, participants reviewed the progress made since the meetings held during the Eastern Partnership Summit, specifically the release of prisoners, the current collaborative efforts in finding missing individuals, and the upcoming restoration of railway tracks. More to that, to create a secure, prosperous, and stable South Caucasus, the European Union and France expressed their intention to continue collaborating with other organizations, including the OSCE.

Thus, in his analysis (Huseynov, p. 13) puts forth that, according to various media sources and statements and speeches of the leaders, the issues raised during the summit were focused on the post-conflict period and in the same order, seemingly, no topics related to the pre-war period, such as the revival of the Minsk Group and addressing the status issue, were raised by either the European or Caucasian leaders. On that account, in the statement by Presidents Michel and Macron, the main areas of discussion were also mainly focused on de-escalating the tensions, building confidence, granting UNESCO access to territories of the Armenia and Azerbaijan, and reinstating regional transportation connections. Moreover, it is believed that a significant change in EU policies toward Azerbaijan and indirectly to the mediation efforts was noticed regarding the newly set investment strategy of the European Union in the South Caucasus. On that account, during his visit to Baku, Commissioner Varhelyi declared that a financial plan of €2 billion would be assigned to Azerbaijan as part of the economic investment scheme. Hence, that the parties

were contemplating undertaking particular projects, including those focused on Azerbaijan's rebuilding process of the Karabakh region.

Further on this, on 30 March 2022, the European Union organized a trilateral meeting in Capital of Europe. In Brussels that hosted senior officials from Armenia and Azerbaijan leadership to collaborate on exploring possible resolutions to various issues between their respective nations. Thus, the discussions largely focused on preparations for an upcoming meeting in Brussels to be held on April 6, 2022, among the President Charles Michel of the European Council, President Ilham Aliyev of Republic of Azerbaijan, and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of Republic of Armenia.

During the meeting, the Republic of Azerbaijan was represented by, Hikmet Hajiyev, assistant to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, whereas, Republic of Armenia delegation was being headed by Secretary of the Security Council, Armen Grigoryan and by the same tokens, EU was being represented under the leadership of the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus Toivo Klaar.

Thus, during the meeting, the attendees engaged in comprehensive and substantive talks, which also involved particularly a separate one-on-one meeting of Mr. Hajiyev and Mr. Grigoryan. On that account, they evaluated the political and security situation and examined all the issues between Armenia and Azerbaijan as a continuation of the agreements made during the meeting between the leaders of both nations and President Michel in Brussels on December 14, 2021.

The attendees concurred to schedule another consequent meeting in the following weeks to resume the ongoing discussions, in particular, topics that have been raised during the leaders' meeting on December 14, 2021. In addition to this, dissident parties, namely, Armenia and Azerbaijan will tackle matters concerning the potential for a peace agreement between the aforementioned parties.

On the following meeting on 06 April 2022, the leaders evaluated and scrutinized the progress made and developments achieved since their previous meeting in Brussels in December 2021 and their video conference with President Macron in February 2022. To that end, they examined the fulfillment of previous commitments and discussed the reported recent tensions while emphasizing the importance of adhering to the provisions of the 9/10 November 2020 trilateral statement that halted the war between the communities. By the same tokens, the leaders also welcomed the meeting between senior representatives from Armenia and Azerbaijan on March

30, 2022, hosted by the EU in Brussels and concurred on the need to resume this kind of involvement to make sure the sufficient follow-up to the agreements achieved at the highest level. During the meeting, President Michel acknowledged the expressed intentions of President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan to promptly proceed with the progress towards a peace accord between their respective nations. Hence consecutive to this matter, they also agreed to task their respective Foreign Ministers to collaborate on drafting a prospective peace agreement that would cover all pertinent matters of concern.

It was also confirmed that the process of defining the boundaries and securing the bilateral border between Republic of Armenia and Republic of Azerbaijan is of utmost important, and with that aim, both dissident parties have agreed to establish a Joint Border Commission by the end of April, as also outlined in the Sochi Statement of November 26, 2021. Thus, the Joint Border Commission will be accountable for two main tasks including but not limited to delineating the border between the two countries and ensuring a stable security environment along the border and its surrounding areas.

In the same order, it was also noted and highly appreciated by the communities that the meeting was the first ever meeting out of series of meetings for the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan to pay a visit to Brussels for the sole and only aim of negotiating about their disputes. Moreover, shortly after of the summit, the sides made the first major move in that direction and on April 11, the foreign ministers of respective countries, for the first time ever in recent years of the relationship, talked on the telephone, without any third-party mediation, as a follow-up to the agreements reached at the level of the leaders of both states.

Therefrom, President Aliyev of Azerbaijan and Prime Minister Pashinyan of Armenia and President Michel of the European Council had meet again on numerically their third meeting in this format. The main discussion topics were focused on the current situation in South Caucasus together with strengthening the European Union's ties with both countries, as well as the wider region to achieve the set agreed objectives.

The conversation was genuine and fruitful and to that end, the participants relished an opportunity to examine all the issues comprehensively and to the details, in particular, dialogue on humanitarian topics, such as demining, and initiatives to release captives and resolve the fate of individuals who are unaccounted for during the military clashes. On that account, the

representatives agreed on mainly border issues where the Border Commissions set to be hold their inaugural meeting on the inter-state border in the upcoming days of the meeting and in the same order, aforementioned meeting will cover all issues associated with border demarcation and the most effective approach to maintaining a stable situation. More to that, the leaders reached a consensus on the significance of progressing on the unblocking of transportation links. With that being said, agreement on the guidelines regulating transit between western Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan, and between different regions of Armenia via Azerbaijan, as well as global transport via communication infrastructure in both countries have been agreed on during the meeting. In particular, the principles of border management, security, land fees, and customs concerning international transportation had been focused and the Deputy Prime Ministers have been tasked to take charge of this undertaking in the forthcoming days. Furthermore, the leaders concurred to make headway in the discussions concerning the forthcoming peace treaty that will oversee inter-state relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Teams headed by the Foreign Ministers of the respective countries will proceed further this initiative in the upcoming weeks of the aforementioned meetings. More on that, President Michel of the European Council highlighted to both leaders of the countries on the significance of addressing the security and rights of the ethnic Armenian inhabitants in Karabakh.

Over and above that the European Union will take a lead on proceeding with both parties to continue the activities of the Economic Advisory Group, whose objective will be to progress the economic growth for the advantage of both nations and their inhabitants. During the meeting, Mr. President Michel also emphasized the significance of getting the people ready for sustainable peace in the long-term perspectives and committed that the European Union is willing to increase its assistance in this regard. To conclude, EU concurred to maintain close communication and will meet again in the same format by July or August.

As agreed during the previous meeting in May, a follow up meeting in August has been organized with the participation of President Aliyev of Azerbaijan and Prime Minister Pashinyan of Armenia and with the direct facilitation of the President Charles Michel in the same format. On that account, the leaders mainly discussed the recent ongoing events in the South Caucasus and the connection between the European Union and both aforementioned nations. On top of that, Charles Michel, President of the European Council had welcomed the recent positive steps that

have been taken to proceed the agreement further as of last meeting held among the aforementioned representatives.

On the meeting held on 31 August, the participants have agreed to enhance the efforts to make progress on the peace treaty that regulates the inter-state relations between the dissident parties namely, Armenia and Azerbaijan and on that account the Foreign Ministers of the respective countries have been yielded the responsibility to meet within the next month to work on draft texts of the peace treaty.

As previously, a thorough and comprehensive conversation had been discussed on humanitarian concerns, such as demining, detainees, and the fate of missing persons and it was highlighted that the European Union will remain involved in these matters.

Whereas in regard to the advancements made on the matters concerning the border's demarcation and ensuring stability in the area, it was agreed that the Border Commissions' upcoming meeting is set to be organized in Brussels in November of the same year. More to that, the European Union highlighted the significance of the public messaging in regard to the confidence building between the communities, since every public statement is closely scrutinized by the other side thus, the European Union is prepared to increase its support towards achieving long-term sustainable peace, and will continue to push for the economic development of both countries and their populations. And to follow up on that, the next meeting was set to be organized again in this format by the end of November.

Whereas, during the Prague summit within the framework of the first European Political Community, the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, and the President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, held discussions separately and all together with the Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, and the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, on the sidelines.

As an outcome of the meeting, in October, a civilian mission from the European Union is agreed to be stationed along the border of Azerbaijan and Armenia and to that end, Armenia has agreed

to facilitate this mission while Azerbaijan has agreed to cooperate with it as far as it is concerned. During the meeting it was agreed that the mission was set to last for a maximum of two months. More to that, as a result of the meeting, both conflicting parties namely, Armenia and Azerbaijan have affirmed their dedication to the principles outlined in the United Nations Charter and the Alma Ata Declaration of 1991, in which they recognize each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. To that end, in the same order, it was agreed that these principles will serve as the basis for the activities of the border delimitation commissions to be deployed to the region. Thus, the next follow up meeting of these commissions was set to be taken place in European Capital, Brussels by the end of October. The main purpose of the aforementioned mission is set to foster trust-building measures between the communities and provide input to the border commissions through its reports.

According to Farid Guliyev, (Guliyev, EU Mediation is Taking a Leading Role in Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Negotiations, 2023) the significance of the meeting can be characterized into three main ways. Thus, as a start, the principle of territorial integrity highlighted by Azerbaijan is envisaged, whereas the statement does not necessarily mention any points related to the right of people to self-determination which Armenia largely referred Armenians living in Karabakh. In the same order, the meeting once more reconfirmed an enhanced role for the European Union as an increasingly proactive mediator in the peacebuilding efforts in the region. By the same tokens, it is undeniable that the Brussels-led negotiation process seemingly made leaps forward, amid the Russia-mediation track remained largely unclear and more to that, Russia still capable of sabotaging a possible EU-mediated peace deal between the dissident parties irrespective of its overloaded agenda with the Ukrainian-Russian war.

Nevertheless, the President of Azerbaijan touched upon Armenian leadership's official statements, which are dangerous and lead to escalation. The head of state pointed out that a serviceman of the State Border Service was wounded during another provocation by Armenia on March 20, 2023, near the Armenia-Azerbaijan border where the European Union's mission is deployed, and two more servicemen were martyred on March 5 during a provocation by illegal Armenian military units in Azerbaijan's Karabakh region. (Azerbaijan P.)

That already questions the effectiveness of the European Union in its mediation efforts in the South Caucasus. In the analysis of the how EU tries to influence the region, it is clear that EU aims to utilize its mediation efforts since, rather than imposing a resolution, the EU facilitates discussions between the parties to bring to light the underlying interests driving the dissident

parties' positions. Over and above that, it is widely believed that mediation seemingly is most applicable in direct conflict de-escalation and settlement. However, mediation is a voluntary process (Bercovitch, 1992); (Moore, 1996) and the right to accept or reject an offer of mediation or a mediation outcome rests entirely with the disputants (Ross, 1993).

Thus, the outcome of mediation is not legally binding, which sets it apart from other external intervention methods like arbitration and adjudication. Unlike these methods, in mediation, third parties do not have any authority over whether the disputants comply with the outcome. (Groom, 1986). On that account, it is clear that the EU largely uses cohesion measures by alluring the parties with large investments with the practical examples of around 2 billion USD package of investment addressed to the aforementioned countries. In fact, in the same order, it is widely believed that most disputants would not agree to mediation if it obligated them to follow a predetermined outcome. (Touval, 1985). To that end, mediation typology has been categorized for three distinct categories of behavior that differentiates in the level of third-party involvement. The three categories that have been identified were followingly communication, formulation, and manipulation (Touval, 1985).

Thus with the observation method utilized in the analysis, it is hypothesized that EU is largely involved in the communication strategy, where the mediator's role is mainly passive, providing information to the parties and encouraging cooperation but not exerting much control over the formal process or content of mediation. To that end, the tactics linked to this strategy and what EU used so far includes but is not limited to contacting the parties, gaining their trust, arranging for their further positive sustainable interactions, determining common sharable issues and interests of the dissident parties, clarifying the situation in a most unbiased way showing the two sides of the same coin, avoiding taking sides, building a rapport with the parties, providing missing information to capture the full picture, developing a framework for understanding and platform as such to interact more, promoting meaningful communication, offering positive feedback, and allowing the parties to discuss their interests. When mediators utilize communication-facilitation strategies, they act as intermediaries, transmitting messages from one party to another and providing impartial information to disputants (Young, 1967). On that account, particularly, the successful establishment of a direct communication link between the Ministers of Defense of both countries, facilitated by President Michel, can be considered as a cornerstone achievement on that end.

To analyze the EU effectiveness in detailed, by referring to the six factors identified by Julian Bergmann (Bergmann J. p.-4., 2020). which can be attributed to either the mediator or the conflicting parties are as follows: leverage, mediation strategy, coherence, mediator coordination, willingness of the conflicting parties to compromise, and internal cohesiveness of the conflicting parties.

Further on that, mainly, coherence refers to the extent to which different actors and policies are coordinated in a shared policy-making environment. Whereas, in the context of EU mediation, coherence refers to the level of coordination among the actors involved in conducting EU mediation, both within and across different fields of EU foreign policy. Therefore, the concept of coherence in EU mediation involves two primary aspects.

The degree of coordination between individual member states' policies towards a conflict and the EU mediation effort (vertical coherence);

The degree of coordination between the different EU institutions involved in organizing and conducting the EU mediation effort, both within the CFSP and across other EU external policies (e.g. development policy, European Neighborhood Policy, etc.) (horizontal/institutional coherence). (Bergmann J. p.-4., 2020)

To put it differently, with the EU's visible strong unity, it gives trust in the conflicting parties that the European Union has genuine intentions and preferences and is not being misled by either side. On the other hand, if the EU lacks coherence, it could harm its ability to mediate effectively, as it would undermine its credibility and lead to increased doubts from the conflicting parties about whether the EU can fulfill its promises during the mediation process. A prominent assumption on the EU's role as an international actor is that the EU has to 'speak with a single voice' in order to be effective in international politics (Niemann A. &., (2014a)).

The coherence of European Union policy toward the mediation efforts can be characterized using three degrees be that namely, high, medium, and low. To that end, a high degree of coherence is considered when there is a considerable level of coordination between the policies of individual member states towards a conflict and the EU's mediation efforts. This includes both vertical coherence between member states and the EU's mediation efforts, and horizontal coherence among the EU institutions involved in the mediation process. A medium degree of coherence indicates that some coordination has been achieved, but there are still areas where coordination is limited, or where member states or institutions have taken actions that undermine EU mediation efforts. As a result, EU foreign policy towards a conflict may not necessarily be

considered universal and a single voice. A low degree of coherence occurs when there is little or no coordination between individual member states' policies towards a conflict and the EU's mediation efforts as a union and there is also a significant lack of coherence among the EU institutions involved in leading and promoting mediation efforts.

On that account, EU's horizontal/institutional coherence and vertical coherence toward the mediation efforts in Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict can be characterized as medium, since while individual EU member states opt to pursue their own interests and perspectives on the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, the EU's, as a collective entity per se, main objective is to maintain a united and coordinated approach as a single voice in its efforts to facilitate a peaceful resolution of the conflict however, seemingly it differs from the reality. The EU's involvement is primarily through its institutions and mechanisms, such as the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Nevertheless, under the leadership of European Council President Charles Michel, the European Union invited the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan to resume peace talks following the anti-terror operations in Karabakh region. Moreover, European leaders, including President Charles Michel, French President Emmanuel Macron, and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, declared their unwavering support for Armenia's territorial integrity, signaling a clear stance on the conflict. ("EU seeks new talks on Nagorno-Karabakh, boosts aid to Armenia." , 2023). On the other hand, the European Commission, led by President Ursula von der Leyen, announced an increase in emergency aid to Armenia. This aid, totaling over 10 million euros, was intended to alleviate the plight of those who fled from Karabakh to Armenia. (EU seeks to revive Armenia-Azerbaijan peace talks, aid Yerevan, 2023). Whereas, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning Azerbaijan's anti-terror operation against illegal Armenian armed groups in Karabakh. The resolution highlighted Azerbaijan's violation of international law and human rights, the infringement of the ceasefire agreement, and the humanitarian crisis following the blockade of the Lachin corridor. The Parliament also stressed the situation as ethnic cleansing and urged the EU institutions and member states to offer immediate support. (European Parliament resolution of 5 October 2023 on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh after Azerbaijan's attack and the continuing threats against Armenia (2023/2879(RSP)), 2023).

Within member states, considering the France's biased approach to the dissident parties which diminishes the confidence among the mediated partners toward the EU's general effectiveness in conflict resolution. In particular examples, the National Assembly, lower house of the French Parliament, has unanimously adopted a biased resolution demanding "to stop Azerbaijan's aggression against Armenia". (Mehman, France carries on with "Armenian interest" approach, biased resolutions fail to influence Azerbaijan's policy, 2022). The draft resolution, proposed by Member of Parliaments from French President Emmanuel Macron's Renaissance party, received 256 votes in favor and zero against which displays France's biased approach to the mediation thanks to vast influence capacity of Armenian lobby in France. Similarly, the French Senate had also previously passed a resolution advocating for sanctions against Azerbaijan. Moreover, Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also reacted to the FM's of France groundless accusations during a joint press conference of the FMs of Armenia and France on April 28 which one more time displays the France's stance in choosing sides in between of the conflicting parties. In the same order, Azerbaijan has signed strategic partnership agreements with nine members of the EU and developed strong ties with many of them. (VASIF HUSEYNOV, 2023) On this account, it also showcases to what extent collective approach EU member states would have in relation to the mediation efforts over Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict.

Thus, with the help of the Bergmann analytical questions it can be hypothesized that it is potently indicated that EU already put its stance with the collectively shared EU position towards the conflict, however, EU member states per se taken no relevant actions independently taken outside the negotiation context that had a favorable effect on negotiation dynamics. However, EU has already utilized and involves various institutions involved in the mediation efforts (EEAS, EUSRs, European Commission, etc.) and it can be considered that they have a collectively agreed approach towards the applications of the mediation efforts and the EU's mediation behavior.

In the same order, it is also crucial to consider the level of coordination between the EU and these other mediators namely, Russia. Mediator coordination not only approximates what EU foreign policy scholars have termed 'external coherence' (Gebhard), but it is also a variable that has been discussed by mediation researchers (Böhmelt). Crocker et al. argue that the higher the number of mediators, the higher the coordination costs as well as the potential of diverging interests and agendas and resulting misunderstandings.

On the other hand, multi-party mediation can also have a positive impact on mediator leverage by combining the resources and institutional capacities. This can potentially increase mediation

effectiveness. To that end, by the same tokens, like EU policy coherence, mediator coordination can be described as a continuum with high, medium, and low degrees be that as the main reference points. Thus, it is irrefutable that when mediators have a high degree of coordination, they communicate frequently and interact closely with each other, sharing resources, knowledge, and expertise to that end. However, if they have a medium degree of coordination, which can be described as there is some communication and interaction, but they may still opt to acting unilaterally or withhold information and resources and consequently in the case of the low degree of coordination, there should be a very limited or no communication or interaction between them. To examine the effectiveness of the cooperation, as per Julian Bergmann suggestions, (see (Bergmann J. p.-4., 2020)), it is clear that there has not been a common position of all mediators engaged towards the conflict and its management and in the same order, no individual action has been noticed from individual that had a favorable or negative effect on the collective mediation efforts up until now. More to that, once more there has not been agreement existed between the EU and Russia on the basic rules and procedures to organize and conduct the mediation and for now, co-mediators have not been seen sharing the relevant information with each other and pool their resources to increase their leverage vis-à-vis the conflict parties. To that end, it is hypothesized that the level of coherence between the mediators can be considered as low. However, progressively, in One on One interview of the TRT World reporter with the EU Special Envoy for South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia, Toivo Klaar, in response to the question on the intention of the Mr. Klaar on seeing a more coordination within the mediators or should that be kept as a separate diplomatic channels that they may provide more benefit as a whole, Mr. Klaar expressed that coordination is always useful, most importantly this initiatives should not be working at Cross purposes. More to that, during the interview Mr. Klaar informed that it can be sometimes considered as good due to variety of the interlocutors because, quoted “if I talk to you and you are trying to sort out my conflict with my neighbor and then I get maybe a bit annoyed at you because I don't feel that you are really, then I can turn to somebody else but it's all in the same direction so, I find it can also be useful so in in general I believe we are working in the right direction”.

More to that, Julian Bergmann categorized the conflict parties' willingness to compromise into three following levels followingly, low, medium, and high degrees. Considering that each potential benefits of each party from a negotiated settlement may completely vary, thus, it is undeniably crucial to study the motivations of the dissident parties individually before drawing

conclusions about the overall degree of their willingness to compromise on the resolution of the conflict. On that account, to analyze the gains that is calculated by the dissident parties the political and economic benefits and costs of a negotiated settlement at the domestic and international level that the conflicting parties anticipate together with their perceptions of the mediation process and how do they influence their expectations about the potential benefits of a settlement plays strategically important role for peacebuilding. More to that, knowing the issues and ways dissident parties may will to make concessions and knowing their 'red lines' concerning possible compromise solutions can be another analyzing factor for that purpose.

To that end, it was observed from the rising tensions between the conflicting parties during the sour relations, the Armenian side resumed its mines and military equipment delivery to Karabakh Armenians irrespective of the explicitly indicated clause on the Trilateral agreement signed on 10.11.2022, hence paved the for the understanding for Azerbaijani side that Armenia is not interested in peace and is getting ready for another set of conflict. More to that, mine explosions caused the deaths of four police officers and two civilians which dragged Azerbaijani side to come to conclusion to launch the anti terror operations to defuse the remnants of the separatist regime.

Thus, the Azerbaijani military decisively defeated Armenian forces in a rapid 24-hour operation. This compelled the separatist authorities to consent to disarmament and engage in discussions about the "reintegration" of Karabakh into Azerbaijan after three decades of separatist governance. Large numbers of Armenians have left the Karabakh region following the complete takeover of the region by the Azerbaijani military. To that end, each conflict party's motivations, preferences, and red lines, have already been crossed and it is not possible to identify the potential zone of agreement (ZOA) between the parties and the degree of their willingness to compromise within that range.

Mediation scholars agree that the conflict parties' internal cohesiveness may significantly influence mediation outcomes (Kleiboer, *The multiple realities of international mediation*, (1998)). Cohesiveness can be conceptualized as the stability of parties' internal power structure, focusing on whether there are clearly identifiable leaders who have the authority to negotiate with the opposing side and are able to secure the implementation of agreements, if necessary, against internal resistance (see (Assefa H. , 1987)).

According to Stedman (Stedman, 1997), spoilers are “leaders and parties who believe that peace emerging from negotiations threatens their power, worldview, and interests, and use violence to undermine attempts to achieve it”. Thus, it can be clearly hypothesized that Azerbaijani under the leadership of its president is being considered as a single voice considering the great support and trust of the population toward him whereas when it comes to Armenia, Prime Minister of Armenia should take into consideration the great opposition toward him in Yerevan and on going riots against his rhetoric’s quite frequently. Hence, such spoilers to internal cohesiveness can also jeopardize the mediation process by causing a deterioration of the relationship between the dissident parties with each other and/or their relationship with the mediator. Conversely, if a conflict party is internally united, they will have greater flexibility and room for negotiation, leading to a wider potential zone of agreement (ZOA) and lower chances of spoilers. This, in turn, increases the likelihood of reaching a compromise solution. As Sisk (2009, p. 50) notes, “[W]ell-integrated parties with a clear line of decision-making responsibility and deference to a single leadership can ‘deliver’ at the table.” (Sisk, 2009). Thereupon, a conflict party is considered to have high internal cohesion if there is broad internal support for its negotiation positions and no noticeable spoiler behavior by factions within the government, opposition, or civil society. Whereas medium internal cohesion is present if there is considerable domestic support for the government's negotiation behavior but also some regional resistance against its participation in the process all in all. On that account, low internal cohesion is characterized by marginal support for the government's approach to the mediation and a broad domestic opposition expressed through large-scale protests and violent clashes that aim to undermine the efforts to settle the conflict accordingly in a peaceful coexistence. To that end, it can be considered that Azerbaijan might be as a highly cohesive however, Armenia being low to Mid level of internal cohesion. Hence, with the analysis of the questionnaire based approach, can be considered that there are various factions within the conflict party that have diverging stiff positions and preferences concerning the desired outcomes of the mediation process and in the same order, Armenian side to a large extent have not been able to accommodate potential spoilers and prevent attempts to derail the mediation process.

The categorization set forth by Bergmann and Niemann adequately sets out the various possibilities of conflict settlement:

(0) No agreement: the mediation does not yield any outcome whatsoever.

- (1) Ceasefire: given the absence of any military activity relating to – or occurring during – EU mediation.
- (2) Process agreement: a procedural agreement whose significance lies in the commitment of the conflicting parties to hold further rounds of negotiations.
- (3) Settlement of minor conflict issues: an agreement that solves some lesser issues, regarded as trivial by the conflicting parties.
- (4) Settlement of major conflict issues: an agreement that solves some key issues, regarded as vital by the conflicting parties.
- (5) Full settlement: an agreement that addresses and solves all contentious issues between the conflicting parties. (Sisk, 2009)

To conclude, the categorization suggested by Bergmann and Niemann provides an analytical framework to have an understanding that, the mediation efforts of the European Union in Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict lays within the (2) Process agreement, where a procedural agreement whose importance to a large extent bases on the commitment of the conflicting parties to hold further rounds of negotiations did not yet yield any tangible result and is in its embryo phase which with current up and downs in the relationships is impossible to draw a future predicted dynamic. Thus to elaborate on that, considering the increasing number of meetings between the conflicting parties with the facilitation of the EU leadership, and naming one of few examples of the reached agreement between the dissident parties, e.g. EU civilian mission in Armenia (EU Mission in Armenia / EUMA) under its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), it would be incorrect assertion to classify that mediation does not necessarily lead to any outcome whatsoever. With that being analyzed, in the same order, since the ceasefire has been brokered by Russia and is being protected by Russian peacekeepers in the ground and several past military confrontations, it would not be largely fitting to the Ceasefire categorization proposed by Bergmann and Niemann. In the same path, the mediation efforts could not be generalized on the settlement of the minor issues classification, as up until, now no tangible result is achieved in line with the peace agenda, and yet not communities are being prepared for the peaceful coexistence. Therefrom, as vital issues are being largely neglected so far in particular demining, and initiatives to release captives and resolve the fate of individuals who are unaccounted for during the military clashes, the settlement of the major conflicting issues cannot be considered the real case. Logical end of it also impedes the parties to have a common agreement to full settlement therefore, still lacks necessary grounding and further steps on that

account is pending. Thus, considering the taken first steps by conflicting parties, and increasing positive developments with the facilitation of the EU, and in particular the meetings held by the high management of the parties gives us an understanding that the facilitation of the peace talks can be categorized under the Process agreement, since significance lies in the commitment of the conflicting parties to hold further rounds of negotiations.

In the same order, considering the level of the organized meetings mainly address the head of the government level participation, which displays a serious commitment to resolving the problem which potentially accelerate the decision-making process and provide a stronger mandate for the negotiators. More to that, head of the governments in mediation efforts is more likely to imply a symbolic weight and paves the way for the recognition of the significance of the conflict which may increase the legitimacy and credibility of the mediation process per se.

On that account, direct involvement of the heads of the governments, mediation might avoid bureaucracy and expedite the decision-making process considering that the leaders enjoy the power to make significant decisions in a quicker way, by sidestepping the bureaucratic procedures that can slow progress in a possibly lower-level negotiations where otherwise messages are routed through multiple bureaucracies.

It is immensely crucial to underline that eventhough having the leaders level involvement in mediation helps reduce possible bureaucracy and facilitate the process, it does not provide any guaranteed imminent or automatic success. The complexity of the conflict and its underlying concerns must be addressed, as must the sides' desire to participate in productive and constructive dialogue.

2.3. EU Civilian Missions in other country case examples

Shotly after the Russian-Georgian conflict in 2008, the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) was immediately deployed to the region and since then, the EUMM has played a key role in preventing further hostilities and facilitating the return of those affected to a normal, fear-free life for the people living in and around the conflict affected regions. As a trusted entity, EUMM has been effective in building trust among the parties involved, resulting in the restoration of safety and normalcy to local populations near former conflict zones. By deaily engaging about 8,000 calls through its direct hotline, the EUMM has on several occasions ensured efficient exchange of information and eased tensions between the parties. More to that, the EUMM has supported Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) meetings that allow participants from both sides of the administrative border to discuss security issues and other issues that affect the livelihoods of local residents. IPRM meetings is considered to be effective in addressing the situation on the ground and promoting stability in Georgia. The EUMM has been carrying out this important and sensitive task since 2008 and continues to closely monitor the situation along the administrative border between Abkhazia and the South Ossetia. Over the past decade, EUMM has conducted over 65,000 field patrols. (Action, 2018)

Further to the abovementioend example, for aiming to cooperate with Moldova and Ukraine to align their border control, customs, and trade norms and procedures with those of the EU Member States, the EU Moldova and Ukraine Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) was established in 2005 and its mandate is focused on fostering global cooperation and enhancing cross-border cooperation between Border Patrol, Customs, and other law enforcement agencies. Following Russia's aggressive military campaign against Ukraine, EUBAM changed its strategy to help Moldova cope with the growing number of refugees arriving in the country. More to that, as per new agreement, EUBAM is expected to receive an additional €15 million in aid to deal with the

refugee crisis and associated funds will help recruit, equip and train newly recruited border guards in Moldova and combat cross-border crime, and facilitate legitimate trade and movement of people. (Commission, The EU steps up support to border management on the Moldova-Ukraine border, 2022)

The EU Mission in Armenia is tasked with observing and reporting on the situation on the ground; contributing to human security in conflict-affected areas and based on the above, contributing to build confidence between populations of both Armenia and Azerbaijan and, where possible, their authorities. The Mission has a two-year mandate and will involve up to 100 staff, including EU experts and monitors. (ARMENIA, 23) The difference from the abovementioned case examples is that the EUMA is a Civilian Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) mandate and does not require executive or military functions. Its duties include monitoring and reporting on the security situation along the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The mission aims to improve human security and to help improve relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. EUMA plays an important role in the EU's efforts to promote peace in the region, as a tool to support the mediation efforts led by President Charles Michel, High Representative Josep Borrell and EU Special Envoy Toivo Krall.

In December 2022, the Armenian government formally requested the establishment of a fully civilian EU mission on the ground, leading to the establishment of EUMA.

The mission is expected to have a full team of 103 international staff on site and be composed of professional, unarmed observers from EU Member States. The entire chain of command consists of civilians and the mission is overseen by civilian authorities based in Brussels. Each EU Member State should be able to send experts from their ministries and authorities to this mission.

Armenia understandably warmly welcomed the decision of the European Union especially given Russia's diminishing influence in the South Caucasus. Since Yerevan has struggled to get the necessary support from Moscow in its relations with Azerbaijan, it has seen the European Union's increased activity in security matters as an important aspect of its new strategy to maintain the balance of power. By creating a connection between Armenia's security and the EU's collective security and defense policy, it is expected that the Armenia-EU relations will strengthen, and

thus the geopolitical influence of Armenia, which has been in the shadow of the EU-Azerbaijani strategic energy partnership for a long time, will improve.

In contrast, Azerbaijan has expressed strong resentment with the choice of the EU to deploy monitors near its borders. Even, The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan has openly expressed his dissatisfaction during his interview to public TV channels. President is quoted, “The sending of this mission is, of course, very unwelcome. This will not boost security; rather it will undermine the format of negotiations with us” (President, 2023).

Conclusion

Through the eyes of neorealism and liberalism theories, the EU's engagement in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict is examined, and the results show a complex interplay of motivations, interests, and goals. While liberalism illuminates the EU's dedication to peace, human rights, and international cooperation, realism offers insights into the EU's geopolitical considerations, power dynamics, and security concerns.

When the neorealism theory is used, it becomes clear that the EU's engagement in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict is motivated by its inborn need to safeguard its interests, promote regional stability, and maintain a balance of power in its surroundings. A key component of realism is the notion of balance of power, which emphasizes the EU's efforts to prevent any one state from obtaining a major portion of power. The EU seeks to avoid the domination of countries like Russia and Turkey, which would endanger its influence and interests in the area, by serving as a mediator. The EU secures its stake in the future stability and balance of the region through diplomatic interactions, financial support for peacekeeping and rehabilitation programs, and involvement in post-conflict rebuilding.

In 2003, the European Union formally recognized in its European Security Strategies (ESS) that its security interests were significantly influenced by factors originating beyond its own borders. Consequently, it is imperative for the EU to actively cultivate stability, predictability, and harmonious relations with the South Caucasian states. This strategic approach is vital for preempting the adverse consequences of regional instability. Hence, fostering positive diplomatic ties and instituting effective border management in the South Caucasus can potentially yield

dividends in the form of enhanced peace and security, benefiting not only the region itself but also fortifying the security interests of the European Union.

Furthermore, neorealism theory highlights how state behavior in international relations is shaped by national security concerns. It is possible to see the EU's involvement in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict as a strategic choice to reduce potential threats to its own security. If the conflict worsens, the EU confronts a number of security risks, including migration problems, global crimes, terrorism, and strained ties with NATO partners. The EU has expressed its commitment to tackling these security issues and preserving a secure environment in the region, and has demonstrated this commitment via its words, deeds, and support for stability-oriented measures. Along with the neorealism viewpoint, the liberal theory sheds light on the EU's dedication to world peace, human rights, and democratic values. The EU seeks to encourage communication, bargaining, and peaceful resolutions to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict as an organization based on these principles. It aggressively promotes diplomacy, platforms for discussion, and the initiatives of global organizations like the Minsk Group. The EU adheres to the ideals of liberalism in its commitment to collaborative problem-solving and its belief in diplomacy as a means of resolving international conflicts. On the other hand, neorealism is an outgrowth of traditional balance-of-power (or “realist”) theories of international relations and was first articulated by Kenneth Waltz in 1975 and 1979. The international system is viewed as completely and always anarchic. While norms, laws and institutions, ideologies, and other factors are acknowledged as influencing the behavior of individual governments, neorealists typically insist that they do not alter the central role that war plays in international politics. Nor do alterations in the characteristics of governmental units—from ancient empires to the European Union, and everything in between—affect the underlying logic. (Donnelly J. , 2000)The principles of neorealism offer a powerful prism through which it is possible to examine the EU's intentions and actions in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. The encapsulates the EU's strategy of exerting influence not through military or economic might, but rather through setting standards and promoting values such as human rights, democracy, and environmental sustainability. The EU's unique method of extending its influence lies in its ability to shape global norms and practices, thereby leading by example rather than coercion (Whitman R. (., 2013). However, recent global developments and challenges, ranging from security threats to economic competitions, have sparked debates about whether the EU is, or should be, transitioning towards a more assertive geopolitical role ((Biscop, 2019); (Tocci, 2020)). On the other hand, through

the lenses of "Principled pragmatism" in the EU's Global Strategy of 2016 it represents a balance between upholding EU values and practical geopolitical considerations. (The EU Global Strategy and diplomacy, n.d.). This strategy promotes principles like democracy and human rights and recognizes the EU's position as a soft power, all the while maintaining realism in foreign policy decisions. The plan highlights the diplomatic role of the EU and promotes a smart-power strategy that blends aspects of soft and hard power. Europe's status as a primarily "civilian power" has evolved, and the strategy acknowledges its capacity for hard power.

However, it's critical to recognize the liberal theory's limitations in explaining the EU's involvement in this conflict. Promoting democracy and human rights is difficult because of the deep-seated historical animosities, conflicting national interests, and complicated dynamics of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. While the EU supports these principles in its contacts with Armenia and Azerbaijan, finding a solution to these problems needs more than just applying liberal principles. Power dynamics, strategic goals, and security considerations are all aspects of neorealism that have a big impact on how the EU acts. It also helps to understand the EU's involvement in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict when considering the liberal emphasis on global cooperation and the function of international organizations in managing crises. Due to its institutional position, the EU is able to actively support peaceful conflict resolution, take part in mediation, and involve other international organizations. But it's crucial to understand that the geopolitical interests, security concerns, and power dynamics of the EU's member states also have an impact on the organization's decisions.

To examine on mediataion effort, considering that, mediation is a purely voluntary process that occurs when disputants is interested in assistance from third parties, and they do reserve the right to accept or reject an offer of mediation or its outcome entirely, it is widely believed that otherwise most disputants would not agree to mediation if they were obligated to follow a predetermined outcome. Hence, Touval and Zartman's mediation typology provided a useful categorization of three types of behavior that differ in the level of third-party involvement in particular communication, formulation, and manipulation which provided a grounding categorization to identify EU involvement in mediation efforts in the region and had been conceptualized to be communication behavior for the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict peace

building efforts. More to that, EU Mediation activities and its effectiveness has been put forth during the study of the thesis.

To examine on Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, thus, the European Union has made efforts to participate in mediation and peacebuilding activities in conflict regions to promote conflict settlement and peaceful coexistence among the conflicting parties. Hence, following the 44-day war, Russia and its peacekeeping forces in Karabakh have a strategic role and potential leverage over other peacebuilding entities in the ground. However, due to its heavy involvement in the ongoing Ukraine-Russian war, Russia may not be able in the position to prioritize mediation efforts in Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. To that end, this presents an opportunity for the European Union to take a more active role in mediating the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. For that purpose, the European Union has already organized several high-level meetings with the leaders of both countries, which have been viewed positively by the participating nations. The European Union's commitment to mediating the conflict is increasing tendency, however, its effectiveness and reasons for involvement require further analysis.

Hence, in practical terms, the EU has actively strengthened its cooperations and applied a more equitable approach to the case, leading to the organization of numerous major meetings between the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan, with the particular mediation and facilitation efforts of the European Union. More to that, the successful creation of a direct communication channel between the two countries' defense ministers, facilitated by President Michel, appears EU to rely heavily on incentivizing the parties with substantial investments, as demonstrated by the approximately \$2 billion investment package earmarked for the two countries thus uses cohesion measures to drag the interest of the conflicting parties.

Using the observation method in the analysis, it has been hypothesised that the EU's involvement in the mediation process is mainly focused on communication strategy. The mediator takes on a role by providing information to the parties and encouraging cooperation, but does not exert significant control over the formal process or content of mediation.

The EU's coherence in both horizontal/institutional and vertical aspects towards the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict mediation can be described as moderate. This is due to the fact that the EU is not entirely unified in its stance, as seen in France's biased approach towards the conflicting parties, which undermines the confidence of the parties towards the EU's effectiveness in resolving the conflict. In particular examples, the National Assembly, lower house of the French

Parliament, has unanimously adopted a biased resolution demanding "to stop Azerbaijan's aggression against Armenia". (Mehman, France carries on with "Armenian interest" approach, biased resolutions fail to influence Azerbaijan's policy, 2022) The draft resolution, proposed by Member of Parliaments from French President Emmanuel Macron's Renaissance party, received 256 votes in favor and zero against which displays France's biased approach to the mediation thanks to vast influence capacity of Armenian lobby in France. In the same order, Azerbaijan has signed strategic partnership agreements with nine members of the EU and developed strong ties with many of them. (VASIF HUSEYNOV, 2923) On this account, it also showcases to what extent collective approach EU member states would have in relation to the mediation efforts over Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict.

Furthermore, it is important to note that there is currently no agreement between the EU and Russia regarding the basic rules and procedures for organizing and conducting the mediation process all together. As a result, there is no evidence of the co-mediators sharing relevant information or pooling their resources to increase their leverage over the conflicting parties. Therefore, it is suggested that the level of coherence between the mediators can be characterized as low.

To that end, it was observed from the rising tensions between the conflicting parties during the sour relations, the Armenian side resumed its mines and military equipment delivery to Karabakh Armenians irrespective of the explicitly indicated clause on the Trilateral agreement signed on 10.11.2022, hence paved the way for the understanding for Azerbaijani side that Armenia is not interested in peace and is getting ready for another set of conflict. More to that, mine explosions caused the deaths of four police officers and two civilians which dragged Azerbaijani side to come to conclusion to launch the anti terror operations to defuse the remnants of the separatist regime.

Thus, the Azerbaijani military decisively defeated Armenian forces in a rapid 24-hour operation. This compelled the separatist authorities to consent to disarmament and engage in discussions about the "reintegration" of Karabakh into Azerbaijan after three decades of separatist governance. Large numbers of Armenians have left the Karabakh region following the complete takeover of the region by the Azerbaijani military. To that end, each conflict party's motivations, preferences, and red lines, have already been crossed and it is not possible to identify the potential zone of agreement (ZOA) between the parties and the degree of their willingness to compromise

within that range. It can be hypothesized that the Azerbaijani president has the support and trust of the population, making him a single voice whereas in contrast, the Armenian Prime Minister must consider the repercussions of his actions on the Armenians in Karabakh and faces great opposition in Yerevan, leading to frequent riots. Such internal spoilers can jeopardize the mediation process by damaging the relationship between the parties and/or their relationship with the mediator which affects the peace efforts in the region. After evaluation of the effectiveness of the European Union's mediation efforts in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict with quantitative data on economic and aid data, together with qualitative data with the analysis of interviews with EU officials and respective governments, and comparative analysis via comparisons with other mediators and historical comparison, it is concluded that the thesis suggests the categorization proposed by Bergmann and Niemann provides an analytical framework to understand the EU's mediation efforts in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, which can be classified under the Process agreement. This procedural agreement, based on the commitment of the conflicting parties to hold further rounds of negotiations, has not yet yielded any tangible results and is still in its early stages. However, it would be incorrect to say that mediation efforts have not led to any outcome at all, as exemplified by the EU civilian mission in Armenia. It is not appropriate to classify the mediation efforts under the Ceasefire category, as the ceasefire was brokered by Russia and is being enforced by Russian peacekeepers on the ground. Likewise, the minor issues classification does not apply since significant issues such as demining, captive release, and the fate of missing persons have not yet been resolved. The lack of progress on these issues impedes a full settlement and suggests that the mediation efforts are still in their early stages. Despite these challenges, positive developments have been made through high-level meetings between the parties, which indicates a commitment to hold further negotiations and thus, can be classified under the Process agreement.

The role of the EU as a mediator for the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict can be explained better by the neorealism theory than by the liberalism theory of international relations.

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