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‘Strasbourg’ in the South Caucasus

The EU’s Opportunities, Obstacles, and Incentives

Rick Fawn

Implausible might be the hyperbole of “once in a generation.” Occasionally, overstatement is legitimate and necessary. Just as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline revolutionized development and income in the South Caucasus a generation ago, so too (and more) are the prospects of reconstruction in the region due to Azerbaijan’s victory in the Second Karabakh War. The possibilities for win-win progress and growth are truly unprecedented.

Hyperbolic hope faces challenges, and they need reconciliation with the unprecedented opportunities now recasting the South Caucasus—with potential betterment of the peoples and countries of the region, and even for the wider world.

This essay first considers the momentous changes already underway as well as the significances they portend. It then assesses obstacles, and thereafter suggests ‘Strasbourg’ as a multi-faceted label for contributions both to overcome them and help to realize fully the ambitions for this region. To be precise: ‘Strasbourg’ here means the physical, technological, and financial involvement of the EU in regional infrastructural development, including linkages of the South Caucasus more widely, and also as a metaphor for deep-seated, historically truthful reconciliation. (In the Summer 2021 edition of *Baku Dialogues*, elements of both meanings were put forward by F. Murat Özkaleli in an article titled “Winning the Peace” and are built upon here.) This thinking takes even greater significance as Euro-Atlantic planning will concentrate on redefining relations in this region due to conflict over Ukraine.

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Opportunities from Facts on Ground

A critical, even immutable, new factor is Azerbaijan’s already-begun reconstruction of Karabakh. Short of renewed calamitous war that no one should welcome, this development is here to stay—and it is rapidly expanding.

Both the restoration and protection of communications and infrastructure were part of the 10 November 2020 tripartite agreement signed together by the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia. Calls for the same—made in slightly more concrete terms—were reiterated in a second statement on 11 January 2021 and grew in specificity in the text of a third statement signed in Sochi on 26 November 2021. Various agreed statements put out by EU Council President Charles Michel in the wake of meetings with the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan have also contributed to making connectivity an integral part of the region’s new reality. All told, the principles are present, as is the wider recognition that long-term security, success and prosperity comes from cooperation and, ideally, integration. Things are happening on the ground.

As real as was Azerbaijani military success in 2020, so too is reconstruction, and indeed redevelopment, already undertaken in and planned for its liberated territories. And it is not just that, but the speed, intensity, and quality of this redevelopment. Where dereliction and destruction stood in areas of Karabakh, transformative renewal is already evident.

Commenced in January 2021, in less than ten months Fuzuli airport became fully operational,

built to international standards, and with a capacity of handling hundreds of passengers per hour. Plans exist already for more airports, including in Lachin and Zengilan. Apart from being icons of renovation, these three important transportation hubs will finally furnish this highly-mountainous region with unprecedented accessibility.

The totality of what is proceeding in Karabakh could be a greater transformative impact than the BTC a generation before, and these benefits should be shared widely. That endeavor recalibrated to the South Caucasus's favor the historical imperial Russian and Soviet system of extracting raw materials from their vast southern holdings before shipping them north to reap exclusive value-added in their heartlands. A cursory glance at any energy infrastructure map shows the lost opportunity for the Armenian side, with the BTC having to skirt some territories and divert itself unnecessarily to across others, while making Georgia a wealthier country through transit fees and its status as an indispensable regional partner.

Post-2020 developments are also enhanced by the prospects for the expansion of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway (BTK). Although its international agreement was signed in 2005, it faced multiple delays, becoming operational only in 2017 (as opposed to the planned 2010). The outcome of the Second Karabakh War increased the likelihood that BTK could live up to its full potential. Moreover, these new economic and structural impetuses have further gained in importance consequent to the conflict over Ukraine. BTK and related connectivity projects may become momentous even on global terms—after all, the South Caucasus provides the shortest (and safest) rail connection between Europe and China (christened the Middle Corridor to differentiate it from the northern route through Russia and a southern one through Iran).

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These historic developments are partnered with post-2020 works that include an emerging road and highway network. Long a challenge even to Soviet planners who, in theory, could assign unlimited resources to major projects, the Caucasus mountains remained a profound geographic challenge. The major existing route, which was constructed in Czarist times and telling named the Georgian Military Highway, was nevertheless impassable with snow for months annually. Now, high quality roads systems are linking previously detached parts of this mountainous terrain, which has allowed them to integrate into regional and even international systems.

The post-2020 regional order is not all about infrastructure, however. Plans for integrated and technologically advanced communities ("smart" cities and villages) are being executed, with some of the latter launched in Agali, Zangilan region, earlier this year. Plans to rebuild the devastated city of Aghdam from-the-ground-up are being finalized, and, once completed, will serve as a model green city for the entire region.

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These ideas are innovative and capitalizing on further opportunity—rare is it that countries can rebuild from scratch, and then to install highest-end technology all the way up and through integrated developmental plans. While privatization reshaped so much of the post-Soviet space, the tragedy and in this case irony of the protracted conflict over Karabakh also stunted private ownership. Redevelopment there can occur without the impediments and delays that otherwise occur when trying to produce even modest-sized construction.

Karabakh also has a distinguished agrarian heritage. Farming and shepherding may well gain added importance (at least at the regional level) as a consequence of disruptions to world food supplies caused by the Western-led sanctions and export restrictions regime against Russia in reaction to its invasion of Ukraine. Regardless, some populations will want to farm—or, more accurately, return to farming—and agriculture enhancements are included in the post-war reconfiguration of Karabakh. This is a sector that cannot be neglected, with nearly half of Azerbaijan's population

located in countryside, and it is also a sector with significant growth.

All of this has another layer of immutable importance: these realized and planned advances will amount to hefty facts on the ground. Mere facts on the ground do not necessarily cause the reorientation of popular perceptions or of government policy; they can even harden existing policies. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan's reconstruction efforts represent both Karabakh's new reality and its new opportunity.

New reality because not only is reconstruction underway, but also because it will lay the basis for other development and economic patterns, including that for key outsiders. China has been active in the South Caucasus regardless, and Beijing wants to make full use of new infrastructure. New opportunity because, engaged fully and in the right circumstances, the totality of redevelopment can provide economic regeneration. Ignoring this, and forswearing the prospects that it will furnish, risks counterproductivity. Signaling—and tangible reassurance—is needed.

What, then, are the issues, and how might all of this be done?

Signals and Incentives

The following discussion is not to make light of personal and collective pains, humiliation, and fears. At a minimum, dismissing traumas in others irrespective of one's own, risks the immediate derailment of wider and longer-lasting benefits. Self-interest—let alone other worthy motivations, foremost amongst them being individual wellbeing—also appeals to these considerations. At the same time, recognition of the above triad that inevitably arises from the horrendous, protracted conflict over Karabakh is necessary to help build a stable, prosperous, and shared future.

The depth of despair at the outcome of the Second Karabakh War among citizens of Armenia is clear enough—be it manifested in public protests, attacks on government buildings, or the attempt to physically bloc Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's vehicle from reaching the Yerevan airport to depart for Moscow to sign the second tripartite agreement. Prominent writings, also in English intended for international audiences, suggest Pashinyan is unrepresentative for running a "de facto single-party" regime and also of being mentally unwell. Pashinyan treads an incredibly difficult political terrain, of which all interlocutors need to be understanding.

More complex is the matter because of divergent constituencies and communities, even if these also sharing major common interests. Armenia—the country, the polity, and state structures—and Armenians are not monolithic. Often those most physically removed (though not necessarily emotionally) are the most committed to forceful rather than peaceable, negotiated outcomes. Paul Hockenos's *Homeland Calling* (2003) illustrates—primarily through the prism of the Balkans—how much nationalism came to be driven by those born or living outside (even for decades) the cauldron of conflict. After the Second Karabakh War, diaspora publications like *The Armenian Weekly*—which is headquartered in a Boston suburb, i.e., nearly 8,800 kilometers away from Yerevan—called not just for the reinvigoration of the Armenian military, but also that re-armament is the *only* option for Armenia. Bellicose rhetoric from any party invites more of the same—generating vicious cycles that are unlikely to help anyone. It should also go without saying that nationalism, by itself, does not generate any economic welfare.

True, in the past, Armenian leaders from Karabakh have had a disproportionate influence on the politics of Armenia. But the dynamics now are fundamentally different, and the country's public policy questions should focus primarily on economic revitalization.

It is often those living face-to-face, or closer to their counterparts, that ultimately want and need realistic, workable, and practical measures. True, in the past, Armenian leaders from Karabakh have had a disproportionate influence on the politics of Armenia. But the dynamics now are fundamentally different, and the country's public policy questions should focus primarily on economic revitalization—an against-the-odds effort that the Pashinyan government is pursuing. Armenians and Azerbaijanis living in the two countries are the core interlocutors, and expressions of need and concern—including the matter of security guarantees—should be addressed in terms of mutual interests and with genuine recognition of and responses to asymmetric relations and needs.

Thus, it is to the ethnic-Armenian communities on the ground to which appeals to the future can and should be made. Beyond existing calls for non-violence and the avoidance of any provocations, repeated reference to the futility of war is essential—foremost on the individual human level. Of course, some may still commit to the "greater good" of sacrifice for the collective, but many now likely understand that this has only brought them harm for decades.

It seems sensible first to address the socio-economic and security wellbeing of those most geographically affected. The real alternatives for generating economic prosperity should be extolled—and questions pressed to those who lack alternatives.

It is worth asking, what are the realistic sources of support? One is China, to which Armenian sources give much attention and which is underlined by the Memorandum on the Promotion of Cooperation in Building the Silk Road Economic Belt signed by Armenia and China in 2015. China has promised IT developments for Armenia. Nevertheless, even Armenians noted the limitations before the 2020 war. For example, Armenian analyst Mher Sahakyan offers the cautionary note that Armenia "could not find its place in China's mega initiative, which has resulted in the Sino-Armenian relationship being in a state of stagnation." China's two BRI projects in Armenia are valued, in international terms, at a paltry $10 million. In the wake of the Second Karabakh War, China is redoubling efforts to be involved in and benefit from postwar infrastructural redevelopment. Far from putting hopes on China, Armenia might want to reconsider how it can best maximize work with Chinese interests.

It is therefore unlikely that China can be Armenia's deliverer, irrespective of the already colossally-imbalanced trade in the former's favor. For China even remotely to be able to fulfil such a role would also require the end of blockades by two of Armenia's neighbors (i.e., Azerbaijan and Türkiye), and likely also the end of sanctions on both Russia and Iran. A regional plan therefore is needed for this option to work.

A second source remains Russia, which has been economically important to Armenia as both the country's largest trading partner and a provider of employment for remittances. True also that in the April 2022 meeting between Vladimir Putin and Pashinyan, Russia pledged to increase bilateral trade. Russian-Armenian trade remains far larger than Sino-Armenian, but in the long-term is not a substitute for the EU market. Notwithstanding that Armenia balked at signing an association agreement with the EU in September 2013, it has worked stealthily since then to navigate the pressures of being uniquely linked to the wider region's two regional trade formations. That includes the 2017 signature of the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, which entered fully into force in 2021 but with provisions that may remain declaratory rather than generating significant income.

Azerbaijan now holds a decisive hand. It is to that hand to show tangible, unambiguous magnanimity—and to know that this is a sign of strength, and also an act that could generate greater prosperity and security for the entire region.

These limited prospects could be reversed, and a win-win scenario ensured by involvement in post-war redevelopment. Unfortunately, some of the limited efforts to recommence connectivity after 2020 have caused discord, especially when attempted forcibly. All the more is the case, therefore, that socio-economic developments need to be conducted transparently and with as much agreement as possible—with the help of third parties, if needed. These initiatives must not engender fear and instead make the benefits more palpable to all.

Easier for those at a distance to propose such things; but that may be exactly what is needed. In the past, I have shown to assembled Azerbaijani some of the depictions Armenians themselves have generated—and credit to the Azerbaijani organizers for that. Azerbaijan now holds a decisive hand. It is to that hand to show tangible, unambiguous magnanimity—and to know that this is a sign of strength, and also an act that could generate greater prosperity and security for the entire region.

Indeed, it is critical for all parties to desist from anything that could be conceived as undue expressions of strength. This sounds impossible, and in practice, almost

is. The importance, however, is greater now than before 2020: the physical proximity of people to armed forces, and armed forces to each other, has increased. If Armenians, and Azerbaijanis, can come to be or feel safe, the role for armed outsiders can diminish. That in turn eliminates possibilities for local misunderstandings, mishaps, and misperceptions, all of which too easily can escalate.

Championing an inclusive future for Karabakh, now again under Azerbaijani control, would constitute a tremendous opportunity to reinforce the government's successful portrayal of the country's ethnic and religious tolerance and co-existence. So many a Western diplomat has praised, as it has been put, a "'Muslim' country that treats its minorities well." Ensuring the safety of ethnic-Armenians wanting to return or remain in Karabakh would be a remarkable addition; implementing a policy of inclusive involvement in and gain for economic renaissance would be mutually beneficial, and, indeed, could be seen eventually as a confidence building measure in its own right.

'Strasbourg' can provide at least four critical elements in the South Caucasus: one, positive force multiplication; two, technical know-how and planning best practices; three, funding; and four, soft security.

If needed, credible intermediaries should be recruited and encouraged to aid the process of, first, communicating benefits, and, second, of seeing them achieved. 'Strasbourg' holds incredible promise.

'Strasbourg' in the South Caucasus

As noted above, in addition to its important historical significance, 'Strasbourg' stands here also as a shorthand for the EU and its many institutions. 'Strasbourg' can provide at least four critical elements in the South Caucasus: one, positive force multiplication; two, technical know-how and planning best practices; three, funding; and four, soft security.

Positive force multiplier refers to how the EU represents many policies and views of the West—i.e., the U.S. and most of the other industrial democracies—and the stability and support that goes

along with it. American policy towards the South Caucasus is often overlapping with and reinforcing or even de facto subcontracting to EU. As EU Neighbourhood and Enlargement Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi explained in March 2021: "The U.S. and the EU act along similar lines; we share a similar vision. Security and stability are the foundations of prosperity. We cooperate already to strengthen the region's resilience, particularly on governance and rule of law in Armenia and Georgia, and on economic diversification and civil society in Azerbaijan."

In addition to its "Western" role, the EU can provide an additional platform for working though ever-increasing Chinese interests in the South Caucasus, which both Armenia and Azerbaijan welcome, though separately. Usefully, the EU also calls for working with China in this region. As an EU Commission document explained in September 2018: "The European Union and China share an interest in making sure that our respective initiatives work well together, despite the differences in approach and implementation. Connectivity is not possible if systems and networks are not interoperable."

A greater EU presence in the South Caucasus would provide diplomatic ballast to Tbilisi as well as good returns for the other two South Caucasus states.

EU involvement acts also as a force multiplier for Georgian concerns, and then for the vital roles that Georgia can continue to play for many parties in the South Caucasus. Tbilisi, with 20 percent of Georgian territory out of its control, understandably is doubtful of the 3+3 format—it's Tbilisi's policy not to enter into new regional arrangements that involve Russia and no Western states. Georgia seeks closer ties with the EU, having submitted an "application" (however symbolic) for EU membership after the Russian attack on Ukraine. In late June 2022, the EU Council fell short of granting official candidate status for Georgia, but it did recognize its "European perspective," declared that its "future" lies in the European Union, and stated that it will be "ready to grant the status of candidate country to Georgia once the priorities specified in the [EU] Commission's opinion on Georgia's membership application have been addressed." A greater EU presence in the South

Caucasus would provide diplomatic ballast to Tbilisi as well as good returns for the other two South Caucasus states.

Technical capacity and funding is critical for the post-2020 regional progress to have a real chance at success. While the calls in the various Russia-mediated and EU-facilitated post-war statements involving Armenia and Azerbaijan to unblock transport lines and communications are essential starting points—not least after three decades of impasses—they have not yet materialized. This is understandable, for these matters are complex and sensitive. More work is needed, but the light at the end of the tunnel is now visible, with Azerbaijani initiatives to date already being recognized.

Most tragic and also most relevant to present plans is how some efforts at re-opening or building new connectivity have sparked fear and even violence.

In this essential domain, the EU is fundamentally—and, arguably, irreplaceably—important. It offers concrete value-added in having had long-term interest and expertise in transportation and infrastructural development. In the South Caucasus it has had scant chance to bring planning into play: before the Second Karabakh War, EU provisions could only be inchoate and for parts even incoherent due to the protracted conflict that came to an end in 2020. EU plans under its Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) for Armenia before 2020, other than one modest connection to Georgia, proposed no more than cul-du-sacs transport routes that remain within that country.

Other plans were underway before 2020, with impetus for more now. In its first High-Level Transport Dialogue with Azerbaijan, in February 2019, the EU sought to take forward infrastructural plans on the basis of focused attention on technical cooperation. In that Dialogue, the EU rightly recognized Azerbaijan's regional roles and initiatives, including the newly-opened Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, the Baku International Sea Trade Port, and the joint Common Aviation Area Agreement. Here too, the EU referred to TEN-T. These necessarily tentative but auspicious plans now have unprecedented opportunity.

The ongoing destruction of Ukraine is now an added consideration for regional reconstruction, although one that needs not necessarily hinder the expansion of the EU's footprint in the South Caucasus. The EU conceived of TEN-T in the context of its Eastern Partnership—that is, with more countries than just those three in the South Caucasus. The looming need for Ukrainian reconstruction and re-integration will be astronomical, and the EU's TEN-T program is due for revision in 2023. The time is incredibly auspicious for everyone.

Other issues, of course, abound. Most tragic and also most relevant to present plans is how some efforts at re-opening or building new connectivity have sparked fear and even violence. Mutual benefit needs to be reiterated by all interlocuters. After all, it was Russia that brokered the trilateral agreements that included the first references to the resumption of transportation. And the EU appropriately affirmed on 22 May 2022 that Armenia and Azerbaijan had "no extraterritorial claims with regard to future transport infrastructure."

Of course, Karabakh's status, though consistently recognized internationally as part of Azerbaijan's international boundaries, lacks the formal and binding agreement of Armenia. Here, a reiteration of the postmodern European project is vital: enemies can not only reconcile but flourish together. And here too the EU appears—and now fully as 'Strasbourg'. A city with a distinctively-one-spired cathedral, its significance radiates from sitting by the German border in the Alsace region of France—a part of Europe over which Europe's two major continental powers fought three times in as many generations. By contrast, today one traverses that evaporated border with happy oblivion regarding those conflicts, and instead having pause for the European institutions established in their stead. This must not be merely rhetoric. Positive actions on the ground will relay those essential messages even more convincingly. Credible external powers need also to join that refrain, and to back it materially.

The South Caucasus could be a significant winner from the circumstances arising in the wake of the Second Karabakh War. This would mean a move, albeit quite gradually, to something of a postmodern conception of both state and nation. That should not mean the loss of territory, history, or sense of place, especially for those who have been displaced, but their recasting—and in many respects, for greater benefit.

The EU also has tremendous opportunity, having looked for over a decade for ways to transform what it labelled its Eastern Partnership. This program has stumbled—not least because it almost arbitrarily packed together six very different countries. The infrastructural talks the EU began in the High-Level format in 2019 with Azerbaijan was also done with reference to the Eastern Partnership. An EU dimension may well be a significant way to reassure and incentivize Armenian participation.

Until the earlier this year, the U.S. and French governments expressed support for the OSCE's Minsk Group Co-chair format to continue. The EU has associated itself with various statements by the Co-chairs, such as that calling for restraint after a lethal flair-up in November 2021. But Azerbaijan's historical patience and frustration at the Group's failure is understandable. And like after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, which coincided with Moscow redoubling efforts on Karabakh, the Kremlin might also attempt the same now—despite and because of Ukraine. Still, the Western Co-chairs and Russia have made it clear that the format is inoperable for the moment. Together with Azerbaijan's understandable unwillingness to engage through it, clearly no one should count on its relevance.

All said, it may be wise and beneficial to recognize that the Armenian side needs some reassurance—the 3+3 format may be unlikely to do so because of the absence of any Western party. If an integrated and prosperous South Caucasus is genuinely wanted in future, some greater role in this vital interim period for the EU as a soft security provider could pay off well later.

Third, EU involvement is a means to address costs. Should Azerbaijan have to pay for all of the reconstruction? That is both a moral and practical issue. Moral because Azerbaijan had felt aggrieved at international indifference to the occupation, neglect, and destruction of its territory. Moral also because although a successful hydrocarbon extractor and exporter, Azerbaijan's GDP is incomparable to those, for example, of the Gulf states. Practical, because of all of Azerbaijan's economic growth, its relative wealth is small.

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World Bank statistics even put its 2020 per capita GDP at slightly below Armenia's ($4,266 and $4,221, respectively. These comparative figures also show the potential for wider benefits from energy innovations). And for greater contrast, the World Bank calculates UAE's per capita GDP ($36,284) to be eight times that of Azerbaijan and that of Qatar at almost twelve times ($50,124). *Eurasianet* reports reconstruction cost estimates of $15 billion. By contrast, the first postwar Azerbaijani state budget allocated just over $1 billion to reconstruction, although this figure has increased dramatically since then.

Another cost is that of demining—here financial figures, great though they are, are insufficient to grasp the scope of the challenge. This dangerous process is already underway in Azerbaijan, and its necessity and urgency is underscored by the fact that those planted munitions have inflicted at least 200 more casualties since the end of the Second Karabakh War. International support and solidarity in this painstaking procedure is a statement to general human wellbeing.

In addition to moral, EU involvement is practical, with the potentiality to facilitate more investment in the new transit corridors that are themselves potentially win-win. Although Azerbaijan's hydrocarbon resources are important sources of energy diversification, they cannot total replace Russian energy supplies to the EU. Nevertheless, it remains an alternative and, more importantly, greater expansion of routes and capacity could do what should have bene done decades ago—namely, ensure greater linkages with Central Asian hydrocarbon flows via Azerbaijan. EU support now and hereafter might be very helpful.

This takes us back to the moral aspect. In describing itself as a key partner of both Armenia and Azerbaijan, the EU will want to show equanimity. The parties can have some confidence in the EU and the individual efforts and offices of EU Council President Charles Michel, which have been received well by both Baku and Yerevan. And the words of the EU's Special Representative for the South Caucasus, Toivo Klaar, are apposite: "The EU is genuinely interested in supporting the emergence of a South Caucasus that is that is peaceful, that is prosperous. We are a genuinely benevolent actor, that was our message. I think that is also recognized in Baku and Yerevan."

A final EU role is soft security provider and inter-cultural assister. We need, again, to be realistic that reconciliation is a long-term process—much uncertainty remains. The above discussion already points to multiple benefits from the EU and its positive reception by groups within all parties. The EU is well-versed in creating dialogue internally and externally, and it also presents itself as world-class exemplar in building cross-border and cross-cultural educational programs.

The post-2020 environment is an opportunity for the EU to show its capacity for transformative development. Finding a safe and acceptable way to internationalize the new connectivity and economic developments of the South Caucasus holds potential for everyone's benefit.

Incentivizing Past the Obstacles

We started by caveating the introduction of lofty-sounding Strasbourgian ideals by acknowledging obstacles like open tensions on ground and the fact that various normalization documents are yet to be negotiated, much less signed—even and as all UN member states (save one) continue to recognize Azerbaijan's international borders.

The obstacles, however, do not alter the facts of transformation in Karabakh. And that includes also their likely long-term implications—and benefits. Third parties would do well to convey the message of benefits, including that the future of the South Caucasus need no longer be about insecurity but about prosperity. Disaffected parties—even individuals—can and do challenge peace processes, sometimes instrumentally and other times on the basis of genuine concerns. Issues of insecurity need to be addressed to ensure prospects of long-term peace and prosperity.

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It is thus all the more essential to make prospects for the region as whole as attractive and as transparent as possible, and to dent the prospects of the spoilers. While some may wish to negotiate bilaterally, it is also understandable that others may wish the presence or participation of farther-afield parties. Utilitarian, gains-for-all benefits may come from multilateralism.

Those who continue to call for violence should be invited to offer plans for prosperity (and any silence allowed to speak for itself). This is and should be true for all. The value and volume from transit rights could be overtaken by the benefits from other economic plans. As important and promising as that is, lasting peace also comes from transcending transactional and technical processes. The EU, especially, could be encouraged to assist in both facilitating and promoting mutual understanding; the EU also has vast experience, from transnational education to integrated regional tourism: the long-term ideal is a twenty-first century version of what 'Strasbourg' was for the second half of the twentieth century. In fact, what we may want is 'Strasbourg' twice—first, as that European symbol of prosperous reconciliation; and second, as a soft but essential security provider equipped with means, funds, know-how, and ultimately reassurance to get the job done right.

Premature, even naive might be the idea of a "Strasbourg in the South Caucasus." But little happens without ideas, ideals, and will. The starting point is dispassionate cost-benefit analyses and a willing to see mutual gains. The physical groundwork is underway to make that possible. In the absence of direct bilateral dialogue, let alone agreements, multiple interlocuters are needed to expand dialogue, profile opportunity, and to reassure. Without first signaling and then encouraging participation in the benefits that will accrue from this transformative process, yet another generation may miss out from what is happening right now. BD