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Divergent Pragmatism in Baku, Tbilisi, and Brussels

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One consequence of the end of the U.S.-led (and EU-supported) "rules-based liberal international order" is the increasing adoption of pragmatism in the foreign policy practice of major powers, emerging keystone states, and lesser actors alike. The conflict over Ukraine—a manifestation of the end of the aforementioned order—has accelerated the redefinition of strategic priorities, forcing states to recalibrate their external engagements around a concept of national interest that favors strategic autonomy, diversification, and a greater emphasis on sovereignty rather than ideology, normative preferences, or bloc loyalty.

For small and medium-sized states situated in geopolitically sensitive regions like the South Caucasus, pragmatism has become a necessary foreign policy strategy to balance between competing powers and interests while strengthening strategic autonomy under conditions of uncertainty. Exposure to overlapping spheres of influence of global and regional powers—Russia, the West, Türkiye, and increasingly China—has compelled the South Caucasus states to incorporate pragmatism into their approaches to foreign policy. The dramatic capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro by U.S. forces in January 2026 demonstrates how rapidly global power dynamics can shift and underscores the necessity for small states to adopt flexible, interest-based strategies to preserve sovereignty and navigate evolving great power competition. The Maduro event is also a reminder that the relatively fair, "rules-based liberal international order," underpinned by the United States as a broadly stabilizing hegemon, was historically unique, and that power in today's multipolar world is increasingly exercised through spheres of influence, great power diplomacy, and the ability to project force—as it has been for thousands of years.

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The absence of a clear and accepted definition of the notion of pragmatism in foreign policy leaves room for diverse interpretations. Some authors refer to pragmatism as a skill rather than a quality—a tool to enable policy practitioners to cope better with worldwide complexity and uncertainty. Other theorists see the primacy of practice as the core of pragmatic approach. Putting these and other perspectives together get us to understand pragmatism as a flexible set of instruments aimed at pursuing specific objectives and advancing a broad notion of national interest detached from ideological constraints.

Two Different Logics

Pragmatism and non-alignment have long been the dominant foreign policy posture of Azerbaijan, while Georgia has armed its foreign engagement policies with this tool relatively recently, after 2022. For Azerbaijan, pragmatism has long represented a practical tool in advancing its two fundamental state objectives. First, the restoration of Azerbaijan's sovereignty and the end of the territorial conflict over Karabakh with Armenia. Second, consolidating strategic autonomy and strengthening national independence. In the period leading up to the Second Karabakh War, Baku pursued a multi-vector strategy—building functional relations with Türkiye, Israel, Russia, the EU, and the United States—while avoiding overdependence on any single center of power. Energy diplomacy, including projects such as the Southern Gas Corridor and TANAP, supported Azerbaijan's positioning as a strategic energy partner for the EU, while parallel tracks deepened security cooperation with Türkiye and maintained working channels with other regional actors. Former Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov succinctly captured the logic and methods of achieving these objectives, stating: "We are trying to be friends with everybody, at the same time as acting in accordance with our national interests."

Over time, Azerbaijan's pragmatism has evolved into a multi-vector policy that is balancing between great power and regional actors. This approach enables Baku to leverage its geography, energy, and connectivity as instruments of bargaining, influence, and negotiation. Thus, Azerbaijan has turned pragmatism into a form of diplomatic capital that underpins its external engagements and enhances its international standing.

Georgia's "pragmatism" is more recent and takes a more defensive form. It is presented domestically as a risk-management approach: avoiding escalation in a high-pressure security environment while preserving room for maneuver on its way to achieve its constitutionally enshrined Euro-Atlantic track. In EU-facing terms, however, this pragmatic posture has increasingly collided with accession expectations and conditionality. The EU has stated that Georgia's accession process came to a de facto halt in 2024, and messaging from official Brussels has linked this to the Georgian authorities' course of action and reform backsliding.

So, although today both Azerbaijan and Georgia describe their diplomacy as *sovereign, interest-based, transactional, and pragmatic*, the evidence shows that these are two different logics, motivation for and nature of pragmatism.

As pragmatism has become a survival tool for small and middle states in a shifting global order, major actors such as the European Union have also moved toward more interest-driven external engagement. The EU's Global Strategy introduced "principled pragmatism" as a guiding approach—combining a self-assessment of strategic interests with the Union's self-defined normative commitments. Its Strategic Compass (adopted in March 2022) explicitly reflects the EU's move towards interest-driven external engagement marking recognition of the need to move away from a purely value-driven identity toward a more pragmatic and interest-based 'actorness' in an increasingly multipolar world. This recognition has developed into the EU's "principled pragmatism"—an external relations approach that blends realism, grounded in a self-assessment of strategic interests, with idealism, rooted in self-defined normative commitments.

Yet, the European Union has exposed a differing reaction when it becomes the object of pragmatic foreign policy from its partners, Azerbaijan and Georgia. While both non-EU states frame their diplomacy as sovereign, interest-based, transactional and pragmatic, the EU's responses to these approaches diverge significantly reflecting differences not only in the motivations and nature of their pragmatism but also in the extent to which each aligns with EU expectations and interests. While the EU finds pragmatism a common ground for cooperation with Azerbaijan, particularly in energy diversification, connectivity, and raw materials, it criticizes and penalizes (referring to the suspension of Georgia's EU accession process, which had not really gotten off the ground) for prioritizing sovereign pragmatism over its EU integration trajectory.

It is against this background that we explore and analyze the divergent nature pragmatism practiced by Azerbaijan and Georgia, as well as diverging EU approach towards each of these states. We first analyze the characteristics of Azerbaijani and Georgian pragmatism. We then examine and compare the EU's divergent reaction to both, drawing parallels with broader context of EU's own shift towards principled pragmatism in foreign policy practices.

Divergent Pragmatism: Azerbaijan

The foundational drivers of Azerbaijan's post-Soviet foreign policy were shaped by the First Karabakh War and the subsequent occupation of internationally recognized Azerbaijani territories by Armenia, Azerbaijan's perception of Russia's support for Armenia during the conflict over Karabakh, and persistently tense relations with Iran. In this context, national security, strengthening the armed forces, preventing further territorial loss, and securing reliable external partnerships became the core foreign policy priority.

To reduce vulnerability in an uncertain regional environment, Baku pursued a hedging strategy: managing relations with difficult neighboring powers (above all Russia and Iran), while deepening cooperation with key partners such as Türkiye, Pakistan, the European Union, China, and the Central Asian states. Over time, this approach was increasingly described as a "multi-vector" foreign policy, standing for an effort to maintain working relationships with multiple poles of power and to strengthen sovereignty and preserve strategic autonomy in foreign policy amid shifting geopolitical conditions. This logic has also been reflected in Azerbaijan's official foreign-policy discourse for quite some time. Speaking in Davos at the World Economic Forum in 2018, for example, President Ilham Aliyev framed Azerbaijan's approach to a "tense neighborhood" in explicitly pragmatic terms, arguing that the "best way" is to build "very pragmatic and very sincere relations with the neighbors based on your national interests" and an understanding of the interests of others, adding that Azerbaijan "managed to establish such a partnership."

Pragmatism emphasizes practical outcomes over ideological alignment. In this sense, the idea of pragmatic statecraft runs through much of Azerbaijan's foreign policy practice over the past three decades. While this pragmatic posture emerged first and foremost as a response to immediate regional insecurity and aim at conflict resolution, as Azerbaijan sought to maximize strategic autonomy and avoid dependence on any single actor it gradually expanded beyond the 'neighborhood' level and evolved into a wider practice. This logic was earlier formulated in Damjan Krnjević Mišković's analysis, where he frames Azerbaijan's foreign policy posture as one that actively avoids dependence "on any single line of access to the outside world," seeking instead to manage relations among external power centers so Azerbaijan remains a strategic subject rather than an object of rivalry.

Azerbaijan's approach to the EU aligns with this pragmatic, multi-foreign policy strategy: engagement with the EU is pursued where and when it advances clearly defined interests (e.g., economic connectivity, energy exports) without any need to take steps toward even seeking official candidate status, much less aspiring toward formal integration. From Azerbaijan's perspective, the EU is one of several crucial partners: cooperation is built around areas where tangible outcomes are achievable—export routes, investment, and diplomatic leverage. This framing treats the EU not as a superior normative center, but rather as a functional counterpart within Azerbaijan's broader multi-vector strategy.

From the EU's side, Azerbaijan's strategic value increased sharply after the onset of the present stage in the conflict over Ukraine in February 2022, when the EU imposed a sanctions regime on Russia and sought to reduce reliance on Russian sources of energy. This is reflected in the Azerbaijan-EU Memorandum of Understanding on a Strategic Partnership in the Field of Energy (July 2022), which sets out an ambition to expand the Southern Gas Corridor's capacity to deliver at least 20 bcm annually to

the EU by 2027. At the same time, the document lays out a path to strengthen bilateral cooperation in renewable energy. This has ended up including the Trans-Caspian Black Sea Green Energy Corridor initiative, which is intended to move renewable power from the Central Asia and South Caucasus to the shores of the European continent.

Connectivity constitutes another pragmatic track. With the northern overland route via Russia becoming significantly more constrained after 2022 due to the imposition of EU sanctions, the Trans-Caspian or Middle Corridor has gained prominence as a practical alternative for east-west trade, linking Asian supply chains to European markets via the Caspian, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye.

Another example of pragmatism also appears in Azerbaijan's readiness to work with the EU in specific formats in the peace process with Armenia. The EU provided support in a few stages of the talks, but also ended up supporting Azerbaijan's preference to conduct negotiations along multiple parallel tracks rather than exclusive alignment.

Overall, this cooperation trajectory points to a mutual pragmatic recalibration: EU-Azerbaijan relations deepen primarily in a selective, sectoral, and interest-driven engagement through practical means such as routes, volumes, and interconnectors rather than along a pathway of formal integration. As the EU's own pragmatic external engagement has become more interest driven, which as a result places less emphasis on normative conditionality, Brussels is increasingly becomes an object of Baku's pragmatic foreign policy strategy, with an emphasis on tangible gains and mutually beneficial cooperation.

Azerbaijan's multi-vector policy reflects an attempt to pursue tangible security and sovereignty goals through flexible partnerships across East-West lines. At the same time, official discourse repeatedly frames this flexibility as conditional: cooperation is pursued where it serves national interests, but core security priorities are presented as non-negotiable.

Divergent Pragmatism: Georgia

Following the implosion of the Soviet Union, Georgia emerged as one of the states entangled in a significant and direct conflict with its former metropole. The outcome of this friction has been three decades of protracted confrontation, a total absence of diplomatic relations, and, most crucially, the occupation of two of Georgia's historical regions.

Against the backdrop of these complex relations, Georgia gradually formulated an unambiguous foreign policy stance. To neutralize the threats emanating from Russia, the country decided to pivot toward NATO, the primary post-World War II adversary of both Russia and its predecessor, the Soviet Union. While the partnership with NATO dates back to the 1990s, Georgia made its first formal bid for membership in 2002.

This was formally welcomed by NATO at the 2008 Bucharest Summit. In parallel, the country initiated cooperation with the European Union, leading to the signing of an Association Agreement and the launch of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) in 2014. A few years later, ensuring the "full integration of Georgia into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization" was enshrine in the country's constitution. Subsequently, in March 2022, amid Russia's further invasion of Ukraine, Georgia officially applied for EU membership, with the EU granting official candidate status in December 2023.

In short, since the late 1990s and particularly the early 2000s, Georgia has established integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions as its core foreign policy priority. Thus, Georgia stands as the only state in the South Caucasus to have pursued a foreign policy characterized by such a one-sided and unequivocal orientation. Whether this decision was strategically sound in the long run remains perhaps the fundamental question that demands a rigorous assessment.

As early as 2008, Georgia was compelled into a direct military confrontation with Russia. In the aftermath, Russia unilaterally recognized the independence of two Georgian regions—Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region (a.k.a. "South Ossetia")—while, in reality, effecting their occupation. Furthermore, since the August 2008 Five-Day War, Georgia and Russia have maintained no diplomatic relations, and no formal peace treaty has been concluded between them to this day. The ceasefire document signed on 12 August 2008 remains strictly limited in scope.

The ongoing conflict over Ukraine demonstrates that the issue of NATO expansion represents a "red line" in Russia-West relations. This is particularly relevant to the membership prospects of Ukraine and Georgia. Indeed, the April 2008 Bucharest Summit Declaration—the relevant sentence reads thusly: "We agreed today that [Ukraine and Georgia] will become members of NATO"—preceded the Five-Day War by four months. Consequently, this war can be unequivocally regarded as Russia's first military-grade response to the explicit formalization of NATO's expansion strategy toward Georgia. Such a reaction, coupled with the current conflict over Ukraine, clearly demonstrates that Georgia's aspiration for North Atlantic integration is a pursuit fraught with existential risk. Furthermore, even the theoretical possibility of Georgia being reinvolved in a direct military conflict with a major power must be viewed as a significant threat to the South Caucasus as a whole and its broader economic potential.

The mention of NATO is a vital component within the broader context of the question of EU integration. It must be noted that, over the past two decades, Georgia's political and intellectual elites have treated these two processes as an inseparable whole. This is evidenced by the constitutional formulation cited above. EU membership is perceived by these elites as the only viable path toward political and economic development, while NATO integration is viewed as the sole prospect for guaranteeing the security

necessary for that development. Consequently, in the Georgian context, these processes have remained indistinguishable—until now. However, the conflict over Ukraine has introduced certain corrections into both public perception and, to some extent, the government's rhetoric.

Naturally, a government that does not command a constitutional majority in Parliament is unable to repeal the aforementioned constitutional provision—an action that would, in any case, likely carry significant political repercussions. In late November 2024, following the outcome of the parliamentary election, the Prime Minister of Georgia announced that the country did not intend to apply for the opening of EU accession negotiations until 2028. As noted above, this announcement was preceded by statements from EU representatives, including the EU ambassador accredited to Georgia, regarding a deadlock in the country's integration process. Essentially, the EU itself had signaled that it did not intend to engage in accession talks with the current government.

However, this was insufficient to prevent the domestic opposition and foreign-funded non-governmental organizations from holding the government solely responsible for the disruption of the EU integration process. The Prime Minister's statement triggered mass protests. Although the actions of the protesters repeatedly exceeded legal boundaries over several days, the response from the West was limited to condemning the government's use of force and accusing the authorities of employing such measures against what its spokespersons insisted on defining as "peaceful demonstrators."

Most recently, in early December 2025, the BBC broadcast an investigative documentary accusing the Georgian government of using toxic substances, suggesting a pattern of chemical deployment—specifically Camite, a chemical agent dating back to World War I—against the "peaceful demonstrators." However, no concrete evidence was presented to support these claims, beyond certain manipulations. It should be noted that the Georgian government intends to pursue legal action against the BBC.

The likely objective of such an information campaign was to reignite the waning momentum of the protests. Nevertheless, although the demonstrations persist, they are no longer capable of exerting a significant political impact on the country's ongoing processes; at their peak, the number of protesters did not regularly exceed a few hundred. It can be argued that the government's delayed, yet strategically sound decisions have yielded results. The funding from abroad of non-governmental organizations operating within the country has been restricted and complicated. Furthermore, legal proceedings are underway against leaders of certain opposition parties, several of whom remain in custody. Legally speaking, this has deprived the protest movement of its leadership. There is even a well-founded suspicion that some leaders preferred arrest over the responsibility for a failed revolution, deliberately opting to violate the law. Additionally, legislative restrictions were placed on holding protests and blocking roads, with specific violations being reclassified as criminal offenses. This stripped the

protesters of their ability to produce urban gridlock—a primary tool for a small-scale protest to capture public attention.

Based on the aforementioned factors, several key issues must be highlighted. The treatment of Euro-Atlantic integration as an exclusive, non-alternative path has confronted Georgia with a series of challenges in both its foreign and domestic policy. Here, seven can be mentioned.

First, persistent confrontation with a key neighbor. To date, Georgia maintains a confrontational stance—extending to a total absence of diplomatic relations—with the state with which it shares its longest land border. This neighbor remains one of Georgia's primary economic partners (Russia, alongside Türkiye, holds a leading position in Georgia's import-export balance). Most critically, Russia possesses not merely a theoretical but a practical capacity to pose an existential threat to the Georgian state. It also occupies two parts of Georgian sovereign territory—a situation not only unlikely to be resolved through Euro-Atlantic integration, but one where preventing such integration may actually be the precondition for the resolution itself.

Second, regional vulnerability and diminished transit potential. The existence of the threats mentioned above, coupled with a lack of practical measures to neutralize them, characterizes Georgia as the most vulnerable state in the region. Consequently, this increases circumstances that undermine the country's transit potential, thereby damaging the strategic interests of the entire region.

Third, exclusion from regional engagement formats. The persistent confrontational stance toward Russia excludes Georgia from significant regional cooperation frameworks. A recent example is the 3+3 format, in which Georgia has never participated. While the long-term viability of this specific format remains uncertain, it is evident that regional cooperative structures will inevitably emerge to define the balance of power and the trajectory of regional development—particularly in the post-conflict era following the end of hostilities in the Ukrainian theater.

Fourth, geopolitical and economic realities of EU accession. Integration into the European Union is fundamentally problematic without the prior accession of Türkiye, which would establish the necessary contiguous land border between Georgia and the EU—a bridge that does not currently exist. The prospects of Türkiye's EU membership are complex enough to warrant a separate extensive analysis. Furthermore, even setting aside the lack of a common land border, EU membership could impose significant strains on Georgia's regional standing. It would necessitate a complete revision of trade, economic, and humanitarian-visa relations with all its current regional partners and neighbors. Whether the benefits of EU membership could adequately compensate for the resulting economic and strategic losses remains, at this stage, highly questionable.

Fifth, erosion of independent policymaking. The Euro-Atlantic integration agenda has transformed Georgia into a state where the domestic policymaking process was virtually nullified. Political life became—and to a large extent, particularly in the economic sphere, remains—subordinate to the directives of foreign actors.

Sixth, NGOs as unaccountable power centers. A sector of non-governmental organizations, funded by external, primarily EU- and U.S.-based entities, emerged as an independent center of power. This sector exerted, and partially maintains, significant influence over both domestic and foreign policy, while remaining entirely unaccountable to the country's citizenry.

Seventh, manipulation of public sentiment. The portrayal of the current foreign policy as having no alternative has served as a potent tool for manipulating public sentiment and organizing artificial protest movements. This has become one of the primary drivers of internal political and social instability.

Ultimately, the lack of alternatives in Euro-Atlantic integration has reduced Georgia to a state of limited sovereignty, both in its foreign policy and the management of its internal affairs. This has resulted in the country following a trajectory that runs parallel to, and perhaps even contrary to, the development and interests of the South Caucasus. Internally, this process has led to the near-complete disintegration of sovereign institutional building.

Consequently, the developments since the onset of the conflict over Ukraine, followed by the shifting behavior of external actors—most notably the trajectory of U.S. foreign policy under a second Trump Administration—demonstrate that the post-Soviet, unipolar, "rules-based liberal international order" has come to an end. Along with it, "end of history" era—built upon normative illusions whereby liberal democracy was believed to be the sole relevant framework and a single center of power dictated the legitimacy of global processes—has also come to an end.

International politics is witnessing the return of an era of cold pragmatism and realism. It is increasingly evident that the major nuclear powers do not intend to engage in direct conflict with one another. History shows that new global orders are typically the result of major wars—sometimes "hot," as in World War II, and sometimes in the form of a Cold War, which led to the implosion of the Soviet Union and the temporary emergence of a unipolar order. Given that a direct armed confrontation between the great powers is nearly impossible, we should expect a protracted struggle to define the new order, reminiscent of the Cold War, where the use of proxy forces may become an increasingly widespread practice. For small states like Georgia, this environment presents numerous ongoing challenges for national survival.

Accordingly, this necessitates that Georgia pursues a pragmatic, multi-vector foreign and domestic policy rooted firmly in its sovereign interests. The issue of

Euro-Atlantic integration must be subordinated to the objectives of this pragmatism. It is clear that the EU remains, and will continue to be for the foreseeable future, a highly affluent global consumer market with a vital need for both industrial and consumer energy and other imports. As a South Caucasian state situated on a crucial artery connecting the Caspian region to the Black Sea, Georgia must naturally strive for a sound partnership with the EU and its member states, many of which are also part of NATO. However, this must be accompanied by a realistic reassessment of the advantages of advancing along the double path of Euro-Atlantic integration and a necessary correction of foreign policy.

Furthermore, it is essential for Georgia to transition its relationship with Russia away from a confrontational footing. Pragmatically, this shift should transform Georgia into a far more attractive and secure partner with enhanced transit potential, both within the regional context of the South Caucasus and for European interests, rightly understood.

The EU's Divergent Approach

The term "principled pragmatism" entered the European Union's foreign policy lexicon in 2016, when Brussels adopted its Global Strategy. Its inclusion signaled the need for the EU to adapt to a rapidly changing international environment and to inject a dose of political realism into its external action, while still upholding its core principles. However, principled pragmatism does not mean that the European Union has abandoned the normative values enshrined in the Treaty on European Union (2007).

Developments since 2016 have instead shown that the EU has come to balance value-based and interest-driven considerations on a case-by-case basis. For example, in its cooperation with Türkiye on migration management or with North African states on border control, the EU has often opted for a pragmatic, stability-focused approach despite concerns about human rights and governance, whereas in its response to Russia's further invasion of Ukraine in 2022 it chose a more explicitly values-driven stance, when despite significant material costs it opted to provide support package consisting of a blend of grants, loans, guarantees, and budget support to Ukraine totaling nearly **€200 billion.**

The incorporation of principled pragmatism into EU foreign policy thus indicates that Brussels has, to a considerable extent, aligned itself with the kinds of pragmatic practices applied by the major states in its neighborhood.

As previously noted, the EU-Azerbaijan relations provide examples of engagements and partnerships based on geoeconomic pragmatism and economic gains. This was initially formulated around the TACIS technical assistance program, which sought to

support post-Soviet states in their transition to market economies and more effective governance. EU-Azerbaijan cooperation has broadened and became more political from the mid-2000s onwards: in 2009, the EU introduced its Eastern Partnership program, which included the three states of the South Caucasus. This program was rooted in principles of conditionality: closer ties and access to the common market, funding, and sectoral cooperation in return for political and structural reforms more aligned with EU normative standards. Over time, however, the six Eastern Partnership countries followed increasingly divergent paths. For some countries, including Georgia, the EU was more persistent in applying conditionality and moving toward Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade ties. Georgia became the poster child of norms-based EU engagement, which became anchored not only in trade and sectoral cooperation, but also in governance reforms and regulatory approximation.

In the case of Azerbaijan, by contrast, the country's strategic position and role as an energy supplier repeatedly tested the EU's willingness to enforce its own conditionality, and Baku signaled a clear preference for a looser, interest-based cooperation format in the sectors of direct national interest (such as energy, trade, infrastructure and technology). As a result, the Eastern Partnership gradually lost relevance as the main framework for EU-Azerbaijan relations, which in turn has paved the way for a more openly pragmatic, sectoral form of cooperation.

Against this background, energy emerged as the only sphere in which EU-Azerbaijan cooperation advanced consistently and produced tangible strategic outcomes. The Southern Gas Corridor positioned Azerbaijan as a key potential contributor to the EU's long-term diversification away from Russian gas. Geopolitical developments coupled with Azerbaijan's unchanging political course enabled the country to develop its role with the EU as a "reliable" supplier and strategic partner in energy and connectivity with soften political conditionality tone from the EU side. The result is a relationship in which pragmatic cooperation in energy and transport has repeatedly trumped conditionality, illustrating how Azerbaijan has been able to treat the EU as an object of its own pragmatic foreign policy—maximizing economic and geoeconomic gains while limiting the impact of the EU's normative agenda.

On the other hand, EU-Georgia relations have evolved within a fundamentally different framework from EU-Azerbaijan relations, as discussed above. They were heightened further following Russia's renewed invasion of Ukraine in 2022, with Georgia's EU trajectory entering a new political stage, as enlargement regained strategic relevance in the EU's external policy. However, in 2024, EU representatives publicly signaled a deadlock in Georgia's integration process, indicating that accession-related progress would not advance under existing political circumstances.

As a result, EU-Georgia relations increasingly shifted from a momentum-based integration pathway toward a more conditional and politically constrained format,

where functional cooperation continues, but strategic advancement remains limited. This contrasts with the EU's more openly pragmatic engagement with Azerbaijan and illustrates the EU's uneven reaction when becoming the subject of pragmatic foreign policy approaches from different South Caucasus partners.

Whether the EU's approach to Georgia best serves its interests is no longer a case that can be made convincingly.