

## BOOK REVIEW

# Géopolitique du Caucase : Au carrefour énergétique de l'Europe de l'Ouest

---

By Samuel Lussac\*

Published by: Editions Technip, 2010.

Reviewed by Hashim Gafarov

Samuel Lussac's work on the geopolitics of energy in the Caucasus region is one of the latest and valuable additions to scarce list of academic work on this issue. The South Caucasus region and its three republics – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – that gained independence in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union were neglected for a long time despite its abundant energy resources and strategic location on the way from Europe to Asia. In fact, it is the only way connecting two continents by bypassing both Russia and Iran. The importance of the region was first understood not by traditional state policy makers but by private oil and gas companies. The states were forced to bandwagon as they slowly understood the importance of the new region emerging from the rubbles of the ex-Soviet Union.

Samuel Lussac takes us through the complicated history and geopolitics of the region and explains the involvement of Western and later on other states (such as China and India) in the development and exportation of the energy resources from the Caspian Sea towards world markets. This history got complicated because of multiple ongoing ethnic conflicts that remain unresolved even today. Once the vast oil and gas deposits were confirmed, the routes of exportation became another important strategic game involving many world and regional powers. Lussac explains how in this process Russia, Iran and Armenia were isolated and how Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey were able to form a strong alliance in developing

---

\* PhD Candidate at the School of Political Studies, University of Ottawa, Hashim Gafarov currently works at the University of Ottawa as Teaching Assistant. His research interests are ethnic conflicts, war and peace as well as security studies, nationalism, and post-Soviet politics.

and exporting the Caspian oil and gas towards European markets. With the Western financial support two most important oil and gas pipelines of the whole region were built – Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) gas pipeline. Recently, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey agreed on and financed the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) rail road.

Lussac tried to show that the Caspian energy sources are vital for Europe in its quest for diversification of its energy supplies and most importantly in decreasing its dependence on Russia for those supplies. Europe neglected this region for a long time and to do so further on will be only in its own detriment. That is why Europe should support the construction of Nabucco gas pipeline that is supposed to bring Azeri and Central Asian gas to Europe.

However, Lussac's work is not without shortcomings. As French, he is very Euro-centered. The whole book is about Europe and its energy security. Although, a lot is being said about the history and politics of the Caucasus region itself, I did not see him discuss how this big power politics affect rather small states of the region and its ordinary people. Even, when other big states' (such as Russia, China, etc.) involvement is discussed, it is done so in relation to Europe and how this involvement will affect European energy security. On the other hand, the United States is largely ignored.

Furthermore, the author, for example, exaggerates the political role of BP (the biggest oil company working in Azerbaijan) in Azerbaijani internal politics, presenting its president as a true king-maker. He, probably unintentionally, solidifies the rumors that BP was behind the coup d'état that replaced A. Elchibey with H. Aliyev as the president of the Republic of Azerbaijan as the former was undermining BP's role in the energy development in the Caspian Sea.

On more technical side, the book does not have any references to the used sources which affect its academic standing. At the end of the book it is indicated that the majority of the sources were taken from the interviews done in seven countries, which is impressive, but nothing is said when they were done, under which circumstances and who were the interviewees.

Overall, these above-mentioned shortcomings do not affect the overall importance of the book, especially if we take the lack of general academic interest on the Caucasus region into consideration. This is an important addition to strategic studies and a valuable work for policy-makers.