

Geopolitical shifts and domestic reconfigurations in the South Caucasus

Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS Berlin)

Anton-Wilhelm-Amo-Str. 60, 10117 Berlin

26–27 November 2025

November 26

15:15 – 16:00 **Coffee welcome and registration**

16:00 – 16:15 **Opening remarks** by Diana Forker (Friedrich Schiller University Jena) and Tsypylma Darieva (ZOiS Berlin)

16:15 – 17:45 **Panel 1: Re-centering the South Caucasus-EU relations in light of geopolitical shifts**

Amid the turbulence of global power shifts, actors in the South Caucasus are re-evaluating their relationship with the European Union – not as passive recipients of external agendas, but as agents with their own priorities, constraints, insecurities, and visions for the future. This panel foregrounds perspectives from the region, exploring how local intellectuals, researchers, and public figures interpret Europe's evolving role, navigate competing geopolitical pressures, and seek to reshape the terms of engagement. The discussion moves beyond normative prescriptions to examine how Europe is imagined, contested, and strategically engaged from within the South Caucasus.

Moderator: **Nadja Douglas** (ZOiS Berlin)

Speakers:

Gevorg Avetikyan (Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO, Berlin) *Armenia's European Turn amid Regional Backsliding: Managing Dependence, Expectations, and Democratic Risk*

Zaal Andronikashvili (Leibniz Zentrum für Kultur- und Literaturforschung, Berlin) *Georgia's Authoritarian Turn: A Test Case for Europe*

Nazrin Gadimova-Akbulut (Independent researcher) *Reassessing Azerbaijani–EU Relations: Between Pragmatic Engagement and Geopolitical Realignment*

18:00-19:30 Public Roundtable: The EU and Germany in the South Caucasus: Arising insecurities and new visions?

The Round table explores how recent geopolitical ruptures and the evolving regional power and security order have reshaped the EU and Germany's positioning in the South Caucasus. Amid the scramble for influence by external powers in the South Caucasus, panelists will discuss Europe's capacity to act as a stabilizing force, mediator, and balancing power responding to the growing illiberalism and geopolitical tensions in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. With perspectives from politics, diplomacy, and policy analysis, the session will assess the plausibility of the renewed call for a unified EU strategy towards the region and Germany's contribution in terms of a more structured engagement.

Moderator: **Tiffany G. Williams** (Friedrich Schiller University Jena)

Speakers:

Franziska Smolnik (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik Berlin), **Könül de Moor** (International Crisis Group), **Robin Wagener** (Alliance 90/The Greens/Member of the German Bundestag)

19:30 –20:30 Reception

November 27

9:30 –11:00 Panel 2: Geopolitics on the ground: infrastructure, alliances, and public response in the South Caucasus

This panel explores how shifting geopolitical dynamics have influenced strategic alliances pursued by governments of the South Caucasus with a focus on infrastructure projects. As states in the region navigate changing global power balances – such as Georgia's reorientation away from the EU toward illiberal actors like Russia and China, Armenia's increasing efforts to diversify its foreign policy and move closer to the EU, while Azerbaijan is asserting itself as a regional power – infrastructure has become both a tool and a symbol of what it means to redefine geopolitical roles. While these governments have actively pursued their agendas through high-stakes infrastructure initiatives, public perceptions and societal concerns have often been sidelined, leading to political and social tensions.

Moderator: **Irena Gonashvili-Münch** (Friedrich Schiller University Jena)

Speakers:

Markus Sattler (Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde - IfL Leipzig) *Whose hydropower? Mapping the relational geographies of hydropower development in Georgia*

Narek Sukiasyan (University of Zurich/American University of Armenia) *Armenia from obstacle to opportunity in connectivity: But at what cost?*

Yéléna Mac-Glandières (Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne) *Your hub in Eurasia!": Spectacular logistics and the pursuit of modernity in Azerbaijan*

11:00 – 11:30 **Coffee break**

11:30 – 13:00 **Panel 3: Politics of diversity and civil society: Strategies, contestations, and alternatives**

Against the backdrop of ongoing political and social transformations in the South Caucasus – including increasing autocratization, a shrinking space for civil society, and shifting geopolitical alignments – this panel examines lived and contested diversity in political society. We focus on the dynamics of social orientations, particularly those related to religious diversity, youth, and civil non-state actors. Our discussion explores how these groups navigate, challenge, or intersect with broader state- and nation-building processes. What forms of governance of diversity and political engagement can be observed across the region? What moments or themes of contestation emerge around these issues? And what alternative visions or practices are evolving?

Moderator: **Hakob Matevosyan** (ZOiS)

Speakers:

Najmin Kamilsoy (Charles University, Prague) *Civic Associations in the South Caucasus Under Multiple Crises*

Tsypylma Darieva (ZOiS, Berlin) *Making and Unmaking Religious Diversity in Georgia and Azerbaijan*

Veronika Pfeilschifter (Friedrich Schiller University Jena/ZOiS Berlin) *Desiring EU-reopeanness? Political attitudes and political behavior among young Georgians and Armenians*

13:00 – 13:15 **Wrap-Up**

13:15 – 14:00 **Lunch**