

Norms and Interests in the Caspian Region: Bridging the Division between ENP and EUCAS

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Abstract

The present work is dedicated to the analysis of the nature and impact of EU's engagement in the Caspian region. This territory is divided between two approaches performed by the EU, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the EU Central Asia Strategy for a New Partnership (EUCAS). The former has been characterized by a 'transition paradigm' inspired by the enlargement toolkit, while the EUCAS adopted a 'pragmatic modernization paradigm' aimed at establishing a strong EU presence in Central Asia and supporting these countries in their modernization path. The study does not aim to give an assessment of the whole region but to analyse to what extent the EU's actions demonstrated normative characteristics when dealing with oil-rich and authoritarian Caspian littoral states. The core assumption is that, due to the lack of leverage and influence, the EU's actions have not been purely normative, neither under the ENP nor under the EUCAS. The ENP declarations have not been followed by a coherent normative engagement, due to the contrast between norms and economic interests experienced by the EU. In the EUCAS the approach is not normative either, but the 'pragmatic modernization paradigm' led to more interesting results due to the different methods deployed, based on neutral forms of cooperation that can lead to enhanced bilateral ties and the pursuit of both pragmatic interests and normative objectives. Two case studies have been chosen from the two sides of the Caspian Sea: Azerbaijan, which recently did not sign the Association Agreement under the ENP; and Kazakhstan, a successful example of cooperation within the EUCAS. A comparison between the two paradigms is of the utmost importance, and the result could offer food for thought in light of the ENP review launched in 2015.