International *JENA-CAUC*[1] Closing Conference

South Caucasus after "Zeitenwende": Multipolarity, Connectivity, Resilience

Call for Papers for Conference

26-27 April 2027
Friedrich Schiller University Jena, Jena, Germany

Description

The South Caucasus is undergoing a profound geopolitical transformation with major implications for the countries of the region as well as for the policies of the European Union (EU) and Germany. As the regional order becomes increasingly multipolar, Western influence is more contested, while Russia, Turkey, China, Iran, and other powers are expanding or recalibrating their roles. At the same time, the region's importance for Europe is growing as a hub of transport, energy, and digital connectivity linking Europe with Central Asia and South-West Asia.

These shifts are closely intertwined with domestic politics. External alignments shape regime strategies, political contestation, state–society relations, and patterns of economic dependence, while domestic actors selectively use geopolitical pressures to reinforce legitimacy and authority. Discourses of sovereignty, strategic autonomy, and non-interference are being increasingly instrumentalized, alongside changing political economies of investment, infrastructure, elite accumulation, and connectivity.

The conference will examine the South Caucasus as a microcosm of the evolving multipolar order, focusing on how international changes interact with domestic political transformations and reshape ideas as well as practices of sovereignty, resilience, decoloniality, neoliberal governmentality, and regional cooperation. It will also explore how Germany and the EU might adapt their strategies to the region's changing geopolitical, economic, and societal realities.

Monday, 26. April 2027

Opening Remarks
Diana Forker (Friedrich Schiller University Jena)

[1] Funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF, Förderrichtlinie Regionalstudien, https://www.geistes-und-sozialwissenschaften-bmbf.de/de/Regionalstudien-Area-Studies-1715.html). More information on the project https://www.kaukasiologie.uni-jena.de/jena-cauc/about

Keynote Speech
Eduard Abrahamyan (King's College London)

Panel 1: Security, multipolarity and conflicts: responses from (extra)regional actors

Being part of the post-Soviet space, a shared neighborhood between Russia and the West, over the past decade the South Caucasus has increasingly witnessed the consequences of in-betweenness and great power rivalry. Itself a conflict-ridden region, the security environment and related narratives in the South Caucasus are strongly affected by escalating conflicts and wars in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, incremental normalization of use of force in international politics all over the world and polarity shifts in the region and beyond. This poses a question how Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan navigate these changes, but also what challenges and opportunities these developments have created for EU's (including Germany's) South Caucasian policy, and how they have handled them so far. Related questions are whether EU's regional actorness and relations with the three small states are undergoing any significant change (and, if yes, how) and what the implications for the German *Ostpolitik* are.

Panel 2: Sovereignty, (anti-)coloniality and neoliberalism

The governments of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan have increasingly embraced discourses centred on national sovereignty, state resilience, and geopolitical autonomy. These narratives have served divergent domestic and foreign policy trajectories. In Azerbaijan, official rhetoric has strategically appropriated the language of anti-colonialism. In Georgia, the ruling Georgian Dream party has foregrounded sovereignty as a central political trope, presenting itself as the guarantor of peace and stability against alleged external attempts to draw the country into regional conflicts. In Armenia, particularly since the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh and 2023 wars, the government has increasingly emphasized sovereignty,and the need to diversify its external partnerships and reduce dependence on Russia. Across the South Caucasus, sovereignty and nationalism have thus become not only foreign policy principles but also powerful instruments of domestic political legitimation.

What has remained consistent across these divergent political trajectories is a continued commitment to neoliberal economic governance. Despite increasingly sovereignty-centred rhetoric, the governments of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan have largely maintained policies favouring market liberalization, foreign investment, and export-led growth. The coexistence of assertive sovereignty discourses with enduring neoliberal economic policies suggests that recent ideological shifts have not fundamentally altered the region's political economy, but rather reframed it through the language of national security and statehood. How can this be explained? Also, how do external actors, like the EU and Germany, react to these changes? What kind of political agendas are being formulated?

Tuesday, 27 April 2027

Panel 3: Connectivity and Corridors

The South Caucasus has become a critical hub of transport, energy, and digital connectivity between Europe, Central Asia, and Southwest Asia, while competing corridor projects (e.g. The Middle Corridor/TITR, TRIPP) have become closely intertwined with shifting geopolitical alignments. This panel focuses on the strategic significance of these connectivity infrastructures, and what their growing importance might mean for EU and German policy towards the region. The panel explores various approaches to connectivity, from transactional to explicitly geopolitical, and how they interact with evolving commitments to democratic governance, human rights, and other value-based principles. The panel further considers whether connectivity can serve as a tool of resilience and strategic autonomy, or whether infrastructure and corridor politics risk reinforcing existing dependencies and asymmetries.

Round Table: Germany and the EU in a Multipolar South Caucasus
(Participants will be selected by the organisational committee and announced later)

The changing geopolitical environment in the South Caucasus presents Germany and the EU with a more complex and competitive regional landscape. As Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia pursue increasingly differentiated foreign policy strategies, and as Russia, Turkey, China, Iran, and other actors expand their influence, European policy can no longer rely on assumptions associated with the post-Cold War order. This round table will discuss how Germany and the EU can adapt to this new reality. What lessons can be drawn from past engagement? Which instruments remain effective, where are the limits of European influence, and how can strategic interests in security, connectivity, and economic cooperation be balanced with commitments to democracy, human rights, and international law?

To apply to participate, please send your abstract of 300-400 words to jenacauc@uni-jena.de with “JENA-CAUC Conference 2027” in the email subject line. Please also indicate your panel preference, and include a short author biography. Funding for travel is available for a limited number of participants.

Deadline for abstracts: **6 November 2026**

Notification of acceptance: **20 November 2026**