

QUID PRO QUO IN TURKEY'S SOUTH CAUCASUS POLICIES

Turkey is one of the most dynamically developing states of Eurasia. No longer a passive respondent, it is firmly defining its priorities in this huge area while it revises the main directions of its foreign policy. Under the AKP, which came to power in 2002, Turkey has conducted a pragmatic foreign policy aimed exclusively at defending and satisfying the strategic interests of the Turkish state. This article focuses upon aspects of Turkey's foreign policy as they relate to the current developments in the South Caucasus, particularly through the prism of Turkey's relations with the EU and Russia.

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T *he New Image of Turkey*

Any analysis of the directions of Turkish foreign policy requires consideration of at least four factors. First, Turkey increasingly perceives itself as the second actor after Russia in terms of its role, involvement, and significance in Eurasia. Second, domestic political circumstances frequently shape and define the directions of Turkey's foreign policy – or at least introduce serious corrections at the point of implementation. Third, during almost the entire duration of its existence, Turkey has embarked upon significant political and social reforms only as a consequence of strong external pressure. Fourth, according to Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu, Turkey now demonstrates a readiness to “normalize its history.”¹

In the foreign policy arena, the AKP upholds the following main goals as formulated by the architect of the new foreign policy of Turkey, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu:

- To reach a new balance between the security of the state and the freedom of individual;
- To solve all problems with neighbors;
- To implement proactive diplomacy aimed in particular to prevent crises;
- To establish a consistent relationship with all states;
- To increase activity in international organizations;
- To create a new image of Turkey as an emerging, self-confident world power.

Unlike domestic policy, where almost each problem causes hot debate, the majority of the population approves of the main directions of foreign policy. But due to tense internal political developments, the Turkish government is unable to ignore public opinion as it concerns some more sensitive foreign political issues.

Along with the persistence of “misunderstanding” in regards to relations with the United States and the European Union, as well as current internal political shifts, Turkey has started to defend its strategic interests more rigidly. Against the background of the low-intensity talks on EU membership, Turkey has begun to build up strategic relations with Russia; revise the relationship with Iran and Syria; engage in more frequent conflicts with Israel; engage actively in the wider Black Sea region; and expand cooperation with most of the former Soviet republics of the South Caucasus and Central Asia. In addition, after a ten-year break, Turkey

¹ Lecture of Davutoğlu “The Philosophical and Strategic Challenges to the Emerging World Order: Rethinking the Transatlantic Alternative” at John F. Kennedy Forum, 28 September 2010, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

revisited the attempt to implement the so-called “Turkic belt” with the expectation of benefiting from serious political and economic dividends in the Eurasian space despite the loss of its almost half-century role as a NATO outpost.

Undoubtedly, the persisting problems of Turkey’s foreign policy are full membership in the European Union, developments in Iraq, the Kurdish problem and the Cyprus issue, the struggle against terrorism (above all the Kurdish Workers’ Party –PKK– activity), as well as the fight against other non-conventional threats.

Therefore, the South-Caucasian and Central Asian directions for Turkish foreign policy are still peripheral or of secondary importance. They become priorities only when Turkey’s problems with the United States and the European Union emerge or escalate. However, there is an apparent trend of developing not only bilateral relations with the states of the South Caucasus and Central Asia, but also an attempt to conduct a regional policy with the prospect of obtaining a predominant role in these two regions.

However, Turkey is not a dominating foreign actor in the South Caucasus area. Its strategic interests and claims to a role of regional power to some extent contradict or overlap Russian strategic interests. The alternation of Russian and Turkish interests in the South Caucasus creates an additional potential for conflict and leads to a deepening of divisional lines primarily between the regional states: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

At the same time, the strategic interests of Turkey to some degree coincide with the goals and interests of the European Union. This organization is ready to provide Turkey *carte blanche* in pursuing an active policy and building up bilateral relations with Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, as well as in creating a favorable economic climate in the region. As a whole, a consistency is evident in respect to the strategic interests and approaches by Turkey and the EU toward the South Caucasus region.

This article will focus upon political and military aspects of Turkish policy in the South Caucasus and evaluate them through the prism of Turkey’s relations with the European Union and Russia.

Turkey and the South Caucasus: Through the Prism of the Relations with the EU

As a result of the parliamentary elections of 3 November 2002 and presidential elections of August 2007 in Turkey, and subsequent consolidation of power by the moderate Islamists, there have been some “corrections” in the Turkey-EU relationship. On the one hand, the objective obstacles that both sides had for mov-

ing the talks to the final phase became all the more evident.² On the other hand, political, economic and social prerequisites were created for Turkey to review its perspectives to the East,³ – in particular, the South Caucasus.

Regarding complicated issues defining the relations between the EU and Turkey, there is, first, the contradiction that arises from lack of harmony between EU's self-image as a pan-European structure that discourages nationalism, and Turkish ideas of a strong state and a single Turkish nation rooted in the Kemalist ideology. Second, under the EU pressure, Turkey is expected to carry out reforms in the domestic political, economic, and military spheres, thereby softening the internal legislation, especially in respect to issues related to ethnic minorities and other democratic freedoms. Third, the Muslim identity of Turkey is considered as a threat to pan-European values.⁴

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As a whole, there is no single opinion or approach in respect to Turkey's EU membership; both supporters and opponents hold complex pro and contra arguments. However, the EU recognizes that Turkey is one of the key actors for bolstering its relationship with the Middle Eastern states, in particular, Iran and Syria. Furthermore, the EU acknowledges Turkey's strategic role in the wider Black Sea region and recognizes how Turkey provides the most important transit way for oil and gas supplies from the Caspian region; and is the acceptable partner and/or competitor for Russia. In the meantime, the EU is trying to secure itself from "the Turkish threat" by reorienting Turkey and creating a framework for regional

cooperation whereby Turkey would play the leading role.⁵

² EU-Turkey Associative Council, 10 May 2010, Brussels, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/114363.pdf

³ "Im Finale halte ich zu Deutschland" [In the end I stick by Germany], *Die Zeit*, 25 March 2010, No. 13, p. 4.

⁴ If Turkey joins the EU, by various estimates the number of Muslims as a whole in the EU will grow from 5 – 7 percent to 20 percent.

⁵ The projects of the European Union, "The Wider Black Sea region" and "Mediterranean partnership," should be considered as such frameworks.

One of the areas where Turkish interests acceptable to the European Union can be applied is the South Caucasus. The South Caucasus has historically been a front yard for the Ottoman Empire, and since 1923, for the Republic of Turkey and an area of Turkish influence. Owing to both objective and subjective reasons, the region fell out of the sphere of strategic interests of this regional power for quite a long time. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, and hence the loss of Turkey's function as the guardian of NATO borders, Turkey unsurprisingly intensified its activity in the South Caucasus against the background of the slow-moving negotiations towards EU membership and increasing ambitions for a regional power status. The European Union often considers Turkey's ability to conduct an independent policy in its front yard in the context of its capacity to contain Russia's desire to reinstate influence along the perimeter of the former Soviet Union.

There are three points that provide the basis of analyzing Turkey's approach to the South Caucasus:

- Turkey has not yet achieved sufficient economic and political might to realize its regional ambitions, although there are some visible trends to increase its involvement in both economic and political life of the region.
- Before the collapse of the Soviet Union and the entire socialist bloc, Turkey avoided engagement in regional political processes.⁶ This was one of the main postulates of Turkish foreign policy since Atatürk's times and it has been broken. Since the early 1990s Turkey has become a direct or indirect participant in the ethno-political conflicts in the Balkans (Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina), the South Caucasus (Nagorno-Karabakh), and the Northern Caucasus (Chechnya). Turkey has now begun to conduct an active foreign policy, formally designated as "zero problems with neighbors". However, it clearly aims to support the Muslim and Turkic peoples in these regions, even at the cost of opposing pan-European policy. In addition, even in the framework of NATO, Turkey acts in terms of its own strategic goals.⁷
- The diversification of Turkey's foreign policy priorities and an increased emphasis on its Islamic and Turkic characters has to some extent led to the politicization of Turkish society itself, and even to the revitalization of nationalist and ultra-nationalist moods.⁸

⁶ Probably, the only exclusion was the intervention of Turkish troops in Northern Cyprus in 1974 to protect the Turkish population of the island.

⁷ On 1 March 2003, the Turkish Parliament voted against the attempts of the government to permit the U.S. military to employ the territory of the country for attacks on Iraq.

⁸ Mustafa Aydın, "Twenty Years Before, Twenty Years After: Turkish Foreign Policy at the Threshold of the 21st Century," in Mustafa Aydın and Tareq Ismael (eds.), *Turkish Foreign Policy in the 21st Century: A Changing Role in World Politics*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), pp.16-17.

It is necessary to note that the trajectory in relationship between Turkey and the European Union is of special interest to the South Caucasian states themselves; all three republics welcome the opening of Turkey-EU negotiations for a number of reasons. First, with Turkey's membership in the EU, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan would acquire an immediate border with the European Union. Second, Turkey could also lobby for the interests of its South Caucasus partners –Georgia and Azerbaijan– in the EU. Third, Turkey itself has already become a substantial economic partner for the South Caucasian states and its EU membership could indirectly increase the exchange of cargo flows between the South Caucasian states and the EU. Finally, in the case of membership to the EU, the flow of Turkish migrants to Europe will most probably grow. A corresponding increase of the labor force in Turkey to Azerbaijani and Georgian citizens and, to a lesser extent, Armenian citizens would likely occur.

The South Caucasus as a Front Yard for Turkey and Russia

In the Eurasian security system Turkey is quite capable of satisfying its ambitions as a regional power. However, in the Eurasian format Turkey has a powerful rival and an ally in Russia. Understanding that the confrontational approach will not assist in the realization of their strategic interests, Russia and Turkey gradually began in the early 2000s to overcome their longstanding disputes.⁹ Both Turkey's and Russia's complicated relationships with the European Union and the United States and the historically established bilateral relationship has led to the development of their bilateral ties to the level of strategic partnership. Both countries consider cooperation in purely strategic terms – a mode of acting that actually contributes to deepening lines of division between the states in the region. Both regional powers are dividing the South Caucasus into spheres of influence in concordance with the developments of their bilateral relations with each of the regional states.

This development was influenced by the Russian-Georgian War of August 2008, which reformatted the entire security system of the South Caucasus¹⁰ and shook the military-political balance in the region. The end result of this process was a new drive toward militarization. In addition, in spite of the world economic crisis, the military expenditure of all three regional states –Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia– is growing, along with a large concentration of military equipment and arms in the South Caucasus. The foreign military presence, mainly Russian and Turkish, is also growing.

⁹ See, in particular, "Cooperation Action Plan for in Eurasia: from bilateral cooperation to multidimensional partnership" or "The Eurasian Action Plan," signed on November 16, 2001, in New York

¹⁰ Gayane Novikova. *The Five-Day War of August 2008 and Shifts in Security in the South Caucasus*. *Panorama of Global Security Environment 2009*. Ed. by M.Majer, R.Ondrejcsak, V.Tarasovic, T.Valasek, Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs, Bratislava, 2009, pp.343-359.

Increasing Russian and Turkish Military Presence in the South Caucasus

Russia legalized its military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and prolonged it in Azerbaijan, continuing the operation of the Gabala Radio Location Station (RLS) until January 2012 at the earliest, as agreed upon in the bilateral agreement of 2002. It has also prolonged its military presence in the Armenian territory. However, in accordance with the signed Protocol on the introduction of amendments into the Treaty on the Russian Military Base in Armenia (August 2010), not only the term of its presence was prolonged, but also the sphere of its geographic and strategic responsibility enlarged. In particular, the new version of Article 3 of the Protocol states that, in addition to the function of defending the interests of the Russian Federation, security of the Republic of Armenia across the entire perimeter of its borders will be provided in cooperation with Armenian armed forces.¹¹ The Russian-Armenian Protocol has eventually ended speculation on how Russia would behave in case of the resumption of military actions in the confrontation area. Russia will not participate in any military action in the region for several objective reasons:

First, the Nagorno Karabakh conflict is considered as an intrastate conflict,¹² thus, the membership of both Russia and Armenia in the Collective Security Treaty Organization will have no bearing in this particular case;

Second, as high-ranking Russian political leaders have frequently stressed, both Armenia and Azerbaijan are strategic partners of Russia; Third, after the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia prefers to avoid further aggravation in its relations with the Western powers. Indirectly, Russia's policy of non-interference in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict was confirmed by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev during his official visit in Azerbaijan in September, 2010.¹³

Considering that the real threat to Armenia can only come from Azerbaijan and be directed towards the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, the updated version of the agreement on the Russian Military Base provides Armenia with some space to

¹¹ Earlier the functioning of the base was confined within the external borders of the former USSR; this limitation has been removed from the new edition of the Agreement.

¹² According to international law, the Nagorno Karabakh conflict is a conflict between Azerbaijan and the Armenian population of the Nagorno Karabakh.

¹³ "It is certainly very important for Russia to maintain stability here in the Caucasus. Russia is a Caucasian and Caspian nation. This is the main concept for building relations with our closest neighbor and friend, Azerbaijan. Thus, we are interested in maintaining peace and order in the region. The decision made during my visit to Armenia should be viewed in that light – that of extending the agreement to maintain a Russian military base in Armenia. There aren't any hidden or other considerations. The base is intended to ensure peace and order, to preserve stability, and to lessen all the complications we have today." See: A joint press-conference on the results of the Russian-Azerbaijani negotiations. 3 September 2010, Baku. <http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/transcripts/883>

maneuver. Theoretically the joint Armenian-Russian protection of the Armenian border provides the possibility for a greater concentration of Armenia's armed forces on the border with Azerbaijan in order to confront potential aggression from the Azerbaijani side.

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For Azerbaijan, the war for Karabakh has still not reached a conclusion. Its aftermath is considered exclusively in the context of territorial losses and revenge. Accordingly, the Military Doctrine of Azerbaijan, adopted in June 2010, envisages the possibility of taking back by force the territories that came under Armenian control in the aftermath of the Karabakh war. Article 6 of this doctrine stresses that it is "necessary to raise the military units up to the required level in order to strengthen the strategic pressure on the occupant and, if necessary, to use force to settle the conflict with the Republic of Armenia in the soonest possible terms and with minimal losses for the Azerbaijan Republic."¹⁴

However, the Doctrine contradicts Article 11 of the Constitution, which stipulates that "no part of territory of the Azerbaijan Republic may be estranged" and that "the Azerbaijan Republic will not give any part of its territory to anybody."¹⁵ This implies that the establishment of the military bases by foreign countries is forbidden on the territory of Azerbaijan. However, in accordance with the newly adopted Military Doctrine, "in case of radical changes of the military-political situation, Azerbaijan reserves the right for a temporary deployment of foreign military bases on its territory, or a foreign military engagement in some other form, if the national interests require it."¹⁶

¹⁴ The description of the main provisions of the Azerbaijani military doctrine see in article "Tekst voennoy doktrini Azerbajjana" on http://aze.az/news_tekst_voennoy_doktriny_37501.html (in Russian). Some details are provided also in "Option of hosting foreign military bases 'important' for Azerbaijan." *News.Az* interviews Zahid Oruj of the Azerbaijani parliament's defense and security committee and deputy head of the Motherland (Ana Vatan) Party, 08 June 2010 at <http://news.az/articles/17039>; "Azerbaijan Adopts Military Doctrine At Long Last", *RFE/RL*, 9 June 2010; "Defence Ministry highlights innovations in Military Doctrine", 09 June 2010 at <http://news.az/articles/17177>

¹⁵ "The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan", *Official website of the President of Azerbaijan*. http://archive.president.az/browse.php?sec_id=52

¹⁶ http://aze.az/news_tekst_voennoy_doktriny_37501.html

The adoption of the Military Doctrine was followed by several steps aimed at strengthening the Azerbaijani-Turkish strategic partnership by demonstrating a firm Turkish-Azerbaijani alliance or, in their term, “brotherhood”, *vis-à-vis* Armenia. On 16 August 2010, a Treaty on Strategic Partnership was signed – the details of which are still unknown. However, in an interview on Azerbaijani private ANS TV, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu stressed that the parties “will realize cooperation in military areas. There will also be defense activities in other areas related to joint military cooperation. But let me note that this agreement is not directed against any country. We signed it and then Russia and Armenia signed [their agreement]. The entire world knows that Turkey considers the defense of Azerbaijan as Turkey’s defense.” Davutoğlu also added that the agreement “is a sign of our everlasting friendship with Azerbaijan.”¹⁷

Against this background rumors about the possible creation of a Turkish military base on the Azerbaijani territory –in the Nakhijevan Autonomous Republic, in particular– have been discussed quite intensively. Several reasons stand behind these discussions:

First, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and especially after the Karabakh war, Nakhijevan was considered by Turkey and Iran as a probable zone for their economic –and then political– activity. It is obvious that Turkey’s activity in this region is more preferable for Azerbaijan than Iran’s; moreover, an appearance of the Turkish military base will prevent further Iranian activity in Nakhijevan.

Second, the new round of Turkish activity aimed at Nakhijevan has closely coincided not only with the freezing of the ratification of the Armenian-Turkish Protocols, but also with the present impossibility of any shifts toward normalization of bilateral Armenian-Turkish relations. Comprehended by the Azerbaijani state as a diplomatic victory, the deadlock in Armenian-Turkish relations stimulated a strengthening of militarist and revanchist sentiments in Azerbaijan.

Third, the issue of ratification of the Treaty of Kars (1921), which is the continuation of the Moscow Treaty of 1921 by Armenia, has special significance for Turkey and Azerbaijan. Both treaties defined, among other issues, the status of Nakhijevan as an “autonomous territory under the protection of Azerbaijan, on condition that Azerbaijan will not give up [this] protectorate to any third state” (Article 3 of the Treaty of Moscow and Article 5 of the Treaty of Kars).

¹⁷ “Turkey: Azerbaijani-Turkish Deal not Against Any Country”, *Today’s Zaman*, 28 August 2010. <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-220295-102-turkey-azerbaijani-turkish-deal-not-against-any-country.html>

It should be noted that the possible establishment of a Turkish military base in Nakhijevan serves the following aims for the Azerbaijani and Turkish leadership:

- preventing a revision of the borders between Armenia and Turkey (although the Armenian side has not raised this issue);
- preventing a revision of Nakhijevan's status (according to the Treaty of Moscow, Russia is also a guarantor of Nakhijevan's status);
- preventing growing activity of Iran in Nakhijevan.

The possible establishment of a Turkish military base in Nakhijevan most probably will be considered by Russia with "understanding." Undoubtedly, Russia and Turkey will not engage in a military confrontation in the region. However, the enlargement of their military presence is evidence of the qualitatively new balance of forces. It introduces adjustments for the Armenian-Turkish relationship and the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Division Lines in Turkish Policy in the South Caucasus

The Strategic Triangle: Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia

Turkey's relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia are relatively clear and interrelated: Turkey considers these two states as its younger partners. A number of energy and communication projects tie Georgia and Azerbaijan to Turkey, thereby increasing their interdependence. Building up its relations with these two South Caucasian states, Turkey reaches its own strategic goal of transforming into a Caspian energy resources hub and enlarging energy transit to some European states.¹⁸ The same communications provide Turkey with direct access to the Central Asian states and, owing to the increased share of Turkish capital in the non-energy sector in Georgia and Azerbaijan, Turkey has acquired an additional market for its products and services. Turkey is one of the main suppliers of arms to Georgia and Azerbaijan and possesses military facilities in both states. In this Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia strategic triangle, Turkey's two regional partners consider their alliance with Turkey as a link providing to them a binding to NATO.

In addition, the Turkic and Muslim identities dominate public opinion within the context of Turkish-Azerbaijani relations. These two aspects are utilized by the Azerbaijani leadership in a manner that aims to maximize Turkey's engagement in internal political processes specifically focusing on the goal of transporting the model of the Turkish state system onto Azerbaijan. The role of Sunni Islam is in-

¹⁸ Terry D. Adams, "Caspian Oil and Gas Development and the Black Sea Region: an Overview", in *Europe's Black Sea Dimension*, (Brussels: CEPS, 2002), pp. 47-52, 60-68.

creasing (especially in the capital city and in the northern regions), the Azerbaijani army is being built on the NATO/Turkish model, and Turkish military instructors train Azerbaijani officers. However, Azerbaijan needs Turkey's support with respect to a major issue: the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Contradictions emerging from the bilateral relations can be resolved. Azerbaijan does not dare to ignore Turkish interests in any issue. And Turkey is unable to neglect developments in Azerbaijan and its adjacent neighbours, i.e. Azerbaijani-Armenian relations. Public opinion is predominantly oriented toward supporting Azerbaijan on all issues related to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. At first sight, this agreement gives Azerbaijan the idea that it can exert pressure on Turkey. But it is necessary to stress that Turkey builds up relations with its neighbours exclusively on the basis of its own strategic interests and goals.

In regards to Turkish-Georgian relations, it could be mentioned that Turkey uses Georgian territory to transit Azerbaijani and Kazakh energy resources and to create a "Turkic belt" that would serve as a transit corridor for Turkish goods to Azerbaijan and Central Asia. In addition, the strengthening of the Turkish position in Georgia balances the increased Russian influence in Armenia.

In the meantime, the antagonistic relationship between Georgia and Russia, although providing Georgia with additional manoeuvring space in regard to its relations with the West at the same time constrains Georgia to redirect its communication priorities toward Turkey. One objective consequence is clear: Georgia is becoming increasingly dependent both economically and politically upon Turkey and Azerbaijan. This development is apparent in the fact that the Georgian leadership, welcoming Turkey's statements on the territorial integrity of Georgia, prefers not to acknowledge or examine the issue of Turkey's expanding investments in Abkhazia. Georgia also tries to avoid discussing with Turkey the issue of repatriation of the Meskhetian Turks to Georgia.

Armenian-Turkish and Turkish-Armenian Relations: Gains and Losses

For Turkey the most problematic relations in the South Caucasus are with Armenia. Until the late 1980s, this relationship existed more as a consequence of the Armenian Diaspora's emphasis upon the problem of international recognition of the Armenian Genocide and less as a bilateral relationship between Turkey and the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. The appearance of the independent Republic of Armenia has not yet led to the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations.

Furthermore, Armenia's engagement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict led to the unilateral closure of the border with Armenia by Turkey in 1993. All further contacts

between the two states were directly or indirectly related to conditions surrounding the settlement of the conflict, and thus influenced by the relations of Turkey with a third country, Azerbaijan. In this context, the normalization of bilateral relations is one of the most challenging topics concerning the South Caucasus. On the regional level, the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations is not in the interest either of Georgia or Azerbaijan. Although this issue is not prioritised by any of the external actors – in particular, the United States, Russia and EU – speculation abounds.

The dynamics of political processes in the South Caucasus between 2008 and 2010 have led to an increase in international attention both on relations between Armenia and Turkey and on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Unprecedented activity was concentrated in these directions. Immediately after

the end of the Russian-Georgian five-day war in August 2008, Prime Minister Erdoğan of Turkey initiated a “Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform.” Armenia reacted to this proposal with the so-called “football diplomacy.” However, developments since 22 April 2009, when information about the forthcoming breakthrough appeared in the press, indicate that serious political pressure to reach a compromise had been exerted on both Armenia and Turkey. In light of strong tensions aggravating a series of problems, including the situation in Georgia, oil and gas projects, the Middle East conflict and the Iranian problem, the European Union, Russia and United

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States as the main external actors in the South Caucasian area needed to demonstrate a unified approach to achieve some sort of success. Most probably, the illusion existed regarding the possibility to achieve progress in the normalization of the Armenian-Turkish relations, not least owing to the fact that confidential talks had been held since 2007 with varying degrees of intensity. For Armenia the mitigation of relations with Turkey could solve problems, above all, those related to economy. For Turkey, normalization of relations with Armenia was secondary in its long list of foreign political and domestic priorities. However, under intense external pressure and in spite of strong domestic resistance, the Turkish government was forced to take some steps in the normalization of relations with Armenia to demonstrate “good will”.

As already mentioned, the European Union is quite satisfied with Turkey's eastward shift, particularly as regards the South Caucasus. At the same time, EU-Turkish relations, as projected over the South Caucasus concern Armenian-Turkish normalization.

Turkey's possible membership to the European Union is a matter of speculation among the Armenian political elite as well, which by and large welcomes Turkey's EU membership. On the eve of negotiations in 2005, public intellectuals, politicians and state officials in Armenia assumed that the discussion of Turkey's membership might assist the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border.¹⁹ This did not happen, but the issue of the closed border (which contradicts EU principles and statutes) became an indirect tool for the EU to pressure Turkey. Some EU member states see the Armenian factor and the tension between Armenia and Turkey as one of the major hidden obstacles to Turkey's membership. This is most vividly displayed in Turkish-French relations, and recently some nuances became evident in German-Turkish relations. Not surprisingly, on the eve of the opening of EU membership negotiations in 2005, the Turkish leadership took a strong position on the inadmissibility of additional points into the negotiation agenda.

For the EU, continued tension in the Armenian-Turkish relationship will remain a veiled means to place pressure on Turkey. At the same time it will be used by Turkish political leadership to demonstrate its firmness and decisiveness in defending national interests. The history of the signing of the Protocol On the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Armenia and Protocol On the Development of Relations constitutes evidence of Turkey's resolve. However, it is worth noting that in the case of a normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations, one of the unvoiced obstacles to Turkey's membership in the EU (the closed borders with Armenia) would be removed.

As for the United States, it is apparent (especially in the light of current developments in the Arab world) that the present Administration's priority is to preserve and develop further relations with Turkey as a key partner in the Middle East and the South Caucasus. The normalization of the Armenian-Turkish relationship implies removal of pressure by the Armenian Diaspora for the United States to recognize the Armenian Genocide. In 2009, against the background of the positive shifts in U.S.-Turkey relations and leaked information on the forthcoming Armenian-Turkish "road-map," President Barack Obama used the term *Mets Yeghern*²⁰ in his statement in honor of Armenian Remembrance Day commemorating the

¹⁹ The problem of closed borders between Turkey and Armenia is not mentioned in the EU-Turkey framework document.

²⁰ "Eghern" is the Armenian synonym of the Genocide. "Mets" means "great."

events of 1915. This term was aimed at softening tension in the camps of both supporters and opponents of the appropriate resolution by Congress.

In addition, the Administration is convinced that a new cooperative relationship between Armenia and Turkey will contribute to regional development. Here can be found the origin of the unprecedented pressure exerted upon both countries in 2009 – pressure that ultimately led to the signing of the Armenian-Turkish Protocols of October 2009. These Protocols constitute the first bilateral documents in the entire history of both the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Armenia. It is important to note that further developments in Armenian-Turkish relations have demonstrated the limitations of the pressure placed by the United States on Turkey in respect to issues related to the defense of Turkey's strategic interests.

The Russian position regarding normalization and further improvement of Armenian-Turkish relations should be evaluated in light of the following points. First, the normalization of relations between these two countries will scarcely have any impact on the development of energy and communication opportunities for Russia. Second, if relations are normalized, Turkey will become the only actor in the wider South Caucasus region lacking tensions with its neighbors. Viewed against the background of the tension-filled relations between Russia and Georgia, Turkey's strategic possibilities will only increase. However, Russia will preserve its position as one of the most important –if not the key– external actor in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This fact will allow it to directly control Armenia and Azerbaijan, and to indirectly impede Turkey's activity in the peace process of the conflict, thereby hampering its advance in the South Caucasus region. Third, Russia is sure that Turkey remains weak as a competitor in Central Asia. Within the context of the developing strategic partnership with Turkey and the “reset” of Russian-U.S. relations,²¹ Russia cannot directly interfere in Armenian-Turkish relationship. Nonetheless, the dynamic of their development is fully in line with Russian interests.

For Armenia and Turkey, normalization of relations requires a deep revision of their own domestic and foreign policies as well as national perceptions of history. There are a number of questions that must be answered, considering domestic developments in the Armenian and Turkish societies. How justified have been the expectations from the two sides after the signing of the Protocols? How comparable are these expectations? Are these societies, both of which have been cultivating the “image of the enemy” for almost one hundred years, prepared to become equal partners owing alone to the will of the leadership elites? How will changes reflect on the relations of Armenia with the Nagorno-Karabakh Repub-

²¹ The term 'reset' was used by U.S. high-ranking officials, including President Barack Obama and Secretary of the State Hillary Rodham Clinton to identify a characteristic defining new developments in U.S.-Russia relations.

lic and the Diaspora? And how it will influence domestic political developments? How will these processes impact relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan? How will they influence relations with the radical groups within Turkey? There are no straight answers to these questions. Overall, Armenia plays the role of an “irritant” for Turkey and is considered by Turkey a natural obstacle to the advancements of its interests in the South Caucasus.

Let us discuss other components of Armenian-Turkish relations apart from the issue of recognition of the Armenian Genocide. For Armenia, settlement of relations with Turkey will provide some positive and negative shifts in the economic sphere:

- Open borders with Turkey will provide extended communication possibilities given the completely or partly blocked Russian-Georgian border and the balancing on the edge of a potentially escalating situation around Iran;
- Transportation expenses for goods to and from Armenia will be reduced;
- Investments from the EU states in the Armenian economy could increase;
- A replacement of local products in light industry by cheaper Turkish products is possible (this issue possesses numerous variations and has been speculated upon by both supporters and opponents of open borders);
- Inflow of labor migrants – Turkish citizens from the less-developed regions of Turkey can enlarge the cheap labor force market in Armenia and provoke the growth of hidden unemployment;
- The flow of Armenian labor migrants to Turkey, as well as the number of Armenian tourists visiting Turkey will grow;
- Trafficking would increase.

In Armenia, the discussion on normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations and the very fact of a signing of the Protocols stimulated a number of negative developments, such as:

- A greater isolation of the authorities, split of the ruling coalition, and to some extent, consolidation of the political opposition and an increased politicization of the society;
- Increasing disagreements between the Diaspora and the Armenian authorities, and increasing tension within the Diaspora itself.

For Turkey, which possessed incomparably greater communication and economic possibilities, the economic aspect of normalization of relations with Armenia

seems less important. The opening of the border with Armenia is lobbied for only by the governors of the poorly-developed eastern provinces, who wish to attract more investment in this region.

The discussion of the same issue in Turkey and the signing of the Protocols was extremely painful. To some extent these discussions have amplified the negative perception of Armenians and Armenia as a whole. Generally speaking, in their orientation towards Armenia, Turkish state and society are completely united. However, within Turkish public opinion Armenia is perceived as a state that blames Turkey for committing genocide against Armenians and as a nation occupying a part of the brotherly and friendly Azerbaijan. Moreover, certain factions within the Turkish population complain that the Armenian government and society as well as some segments of the Armenian Diaspora ignore steps taken by Turkey aimed at democratization – in particular in the field of minority rights.²²

Thus, in Turkey and Armenia asymmetry in the perception and interest in the normalization of relations is obvious. However, the main conundrum revolves around the fact that bilateral relations between Armenia and Turkey are directly and indirectly conditioned by the relations of each to Azerbaijan and the settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. This circumstance currently complicates, and perhaps makes impossible, achievement of progress in any Armenian-Turkish rapprochement despite the advances apparent in the internal and foreign political processes both in Turkey and in Armenia after the signing of the Protocols in October 2009. It is necessary to point out that one year after, the Protocols remain unratified by either Parliament. Moreover, they were recalled by Armenia on 22 April 2010, for “Turkey is not ready to continue the process that was started and to move forward without preconditions in line with the letter of the Protocols.”²³

Eventually, the enforced normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations has become irrational from the political, economic, social, and moral points of view, despite the fact that both nations should have been highly interested in establishing a settlement. The main reason for the failure should be noted as the obvious asymmetry at the level of an interest in normalization. The impact of this factor on the dynamics of economic development must also be taken into account, as well as its perception given domestic developments in each society. In addition, the strategic

²² In particular, in the context of demonstrating a readiness to move toward democratic transformations and to display ‘good will’, Turkish authorities allowed an Armenian liturgy in the *Surb Khach* (Sacred Cross) Church in the province of Van on 19 September 2010. As far as, despite the promises of the Turkish government, the cross was not put on the church, the official Echmiadzin (spiritual center of Armenia) did not take part in the ceremony. The event occurred in the Armenian society as a Turkish PR action; protest demonstrations took place in Yerevan.

²³ “Televised Address of the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan on the Process of Normalization of Relations between Armenia and Turkey”, *The official website of the President of Armenia*, 22 April 2010, <http://www.president.am/events/news/eng/?day=22&month=04&year=2010&id=983>

relations with Azerbaijan have been and are decisive for Turkey; they shape and determine the Turkish position in regard to the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Thus, for all these reasons, the chances for any progress appear limited even in the medium term perspective of five to eight years.

Conclusion

The level of political mobilization in Turkey and in the direction of its foreign policy is mostly determined by its EU membership process, bilateral relations with the United States and Russia, the Cyprus problem, the Kurdish issue, and other relevant developments in the regions adjacent to its borders. As a whole, an increasing interest of Turkey toward the South Caucasus appears reasonable; however, even though the South Caucasus geographically and strategically constitutes its front yard, Turkey's current activity in the region is rather constrained.

Turkey would prefer to pursue a policy aimed at stabilization of this region. However, all the proposals of the Turkish leadership to create stability through security pacts and platforms can be implemented only through normalization of bilateral relations between three regional states and only if Turkey's relations with each develop in a consistent manner. There are different types of tensions and contradictions in bilateral relations of Turkey with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. Under certain circumstances, political, economic and military-political problems may contribute to a further de-linkage across these countries. As a consequence, all possibilities and variants for regional cooperation forms, acceptable to Turkey, are more and more pushed into the indefinite future.

Turkey has already received economic dividends from the transit of Caspian energy resources and from its control over communications in Georgia and Azerbaijan. To some extent, Turkey was also able to use the gridlock in relations with Armenia to its advantage: it has allowed Turkey to demonstrate its readiness to settle the problem and it has rendered Armenia's position in the international arena even more complicated, mainly because of the dynamics of bilateral relations among the regional states.

Turkey's policy toward the South Caucasus demarcates a series of expectations in the mid-term perspective:

- Growth of Turkish investment in the Azerbaijani, Georgian and Abkhazian economies;
- An increasing Turkish military presence in Azerbaijani and Georgian territories;
- A stronger coordination of efforts by Turkey and Azerbaijan (with

indirect Georgian support) to exclude Armenia from all possible regional projects;

- Sharpening of Turkey's position related to the recognition of the Armenian Genocide and the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border, as well as continuing Turkish support of the Azerbaijani position on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, having signed the Armenian-Turkish Protocols, Turkey is obligated to act in a cautious and circumscribed manner;
- An acceleration of the formation of a platform that facilitates the political integration of the Turkic states.

It is also important that the actual division of the South Caucasus space into Russian and Turkish areas of *Realpolitik* influence quite satisfies both Russia and Turkey. These nations will construct their bilateral set of relations regardless of relations with Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. In addition, both Turkey and Russia remain uninterested in –and opposed to– the appearance of any third powerful external actor in the South Caucasus.

Both Russia and Turkey retain quite a large field of opportunity for strategic maneuvering within the negotiation and settlement of any disagreements that emerge in the South Caucasus. In particular, Russian President Medvedev, on the occasion of his visit to Turkey in May 2010, announced, “Russia and Turkey share an interest in consolidating stability in the Caucasus region, including settling the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The Russian Federation will continue to work on advancing this process, using its influence at every possibility. Of course, we will consult on these issues with our Turkish partners, too.”²⁴

In sum, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Eastern and Western bloc policy, Turkey has gradually become accustomed to the role of a regional power. Nevertheless, the South Caucasus has not yet become a priority in Turkish foreign policy. For this reason a reflexive and cautious posture in respect to relations with the states of this area will to a significant degree continue.

²⁴ Joint Press-Conference of Medvedev with the Turkish President Gül, *The Official Website of the President of Russia*, 12 May 2010, http://eng.kremlin.ru/speeches/2010/05/12/1337_type82914type82915_226022.shtml