

Azerbaijan as a factor in the formation of relations between Türkiye and Armenia

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Türkiye and Armenia are geographical neighbours but have not formed fully-fledged diplomatic relations since Armenian independence (1991). Although Türkiye recognized the independence of Armenia in 1991, their relations did not develop further than unofficial contacts. One reason is the discrepancies between them based on a common history. However, another, important reason why Türkiye and Armenia did not establish relations is the aggressive war imposed by Armenia on Azerbaijan, the outcome of which left the latter's territories under occupation. Thus far, three attempts have been made to reconcile the two countries' relationship. In all three of Türkiye's attempts to establish relations, while the foreign policy of Türkiye and the geopolitical situation in the South Caucasus region have changed, the factor of Azerbaijan has remained central. This article provides an analysis of the central role of Azerbaijan in the evolution of the relations between Türkiye and Armenia.

Keywords: Türkiye, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Karabakh region, normalization.



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Introduction

A new geopolitical and geo-economic reality emerged in the South Caucasus region in November 2020, in the aftermath of the 44-Day War, when Azerbaijan managed to radically change the long-term status quo and liberate its formerly occupied (by Armenia) territories. These events also unfolded new opportunities for shaping the attitudes of the countries in the region and neighbourhood.

For about three decades, because of the occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan, Armenia's ties with this country and Türkiye were completely blocked, its borders with them were sealed, and it was deprived of opportunities to join the regional projects and resume diplomatic relations with Türkiye.

Attempts to form relations never yielded a logical end result. Türkiye advocated the formation of relations in the early years of Armenia's independence; then after 2008, when its foreign policy strategy underwent a radical change; and after the 44-Day War in 2020. The third initiative caused more optimism that the two countries will be able to find a common language to form sustainable relations. So far, the minimum conditions have been created to move the normalization process forward.

The main approach of this article will be from Türkiye's point of view. Thus, Türkiye will be the main variable in analysing its relations with Armenia. Armenia's readiness for taking reciprocal steps toward Türkiye's initiatives will also be examined in parallel. While explaining Türkiye's initiatives towards rapprochement with Armenia, the reaction of Azerbaijan and the perception of Azerbaijan's foreign policy by Türkiye will be the central focus of this paper, as the main hypothetical line of research is the position of Azerbaijan with respect to the two countries' relations.

Türkiye's attempt to shape relations after Armenia's independence

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Türkiye was the first country to recognize Armenia's independence (December 16, 1991).¹ However, their first contacts were established even before this event, when an official Turkish delegation met Armenia's then-President, Levon Ter-

¹ MFA.gov.tr, *Relations between Turkey and Armenia*, available at: <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-Turkey-and-armenia.en.mfa> (accessed: March 6, 2022)

Petrosyan, in Yerevan on 21 October 1991. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Türkiye recognized the former's independence on December 24, 1991.² In contrast, Türkiye considers the date of the recognition of Armenia's independence as the day when Türkiye's former Prime Minister, Süleyman Demirel, sent a letter to Armenia's president Levon Ter-Petrosyan. In this letter, Demirel stated:

Our government while recognizing the Republic of Armenia has acted with the understanding that it will abide by the principle of respect for its territorial integrity and the immutability of borders. I believe that relations will be established and developed on the basis of respect for these fundamental principles.^{3 4}

Recognition by Türkiye is also significant in the sense that, before Armenia became a Soviet Republic in 1920, there were hostilities between the two countries that ended in the complete defeat of Armenia and the signing of the Treaty of Gyumri (also known as the Treaty of Alexandropol) on 3 December 1920. However, the treaty never entered into force. Later, relations between Türkiye and Armenia were determined by the Treaty of Moscow (16 March 1921) and the Treaty of Kars (13 October 1921), signed between Russia and Türkiye, and within the framework of which all their borders and boundaries (including that between Azerbaijan and Georgia, as a signatory to the Treaty of Kars) were defined.⁵ These two international documents provide the basis for determining the current borders of Türkiye with the countries of the South Caucasus.

Until these fundamental changes happened at the beginning of the 20th century, for many centuries Armenians did not have their own statehood and lived mainly on the territory of the Ottoman Empire. The growth of national self-consciousness, which began to spread in Europe, did not bypass this ethnic group, which began to put forward the idea of “political self-determination”. During World War I, these challenges led

2 MFA.am, *Bilateral relations with Turkey*, available at: <https://www.mfa.am/en/bilateral-relations/tr#:~:text=The%20Republic%20of%20Turkey%20officially,1995%2C%20reopened%20its%20air%20border>, (accessed: March 6, 2022)

3 Göksedef, E., “*Turkey-Armenia relations: What happened in the last 30 years?*” (translation from Turkish), *BBC Türkçe*, December 27, 2021, available at : <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-59802160>, (accessed: March 6, 2022)

4 The text of the letter is translated from Turkish and may not match the original.

5 Ulchenko, N. Y., “A glimpse of history: How the Treaty of Kars was signed (March through October, 1921)”, *Review of Armenian Studies*, No. 32, 2015, pp. 199–208

Several terrorist organizations were created, among which ASALA (the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia) is the most infamous. As a result of their assassination attempts on Turkish representatives abroad, 31 Turkish diplomats were killed.

to a sharp escalation between the Ottoman government and Armenian military formations, which Armenians portray as the [so-called] “genocide of Armenians”. These events, combined with Armenia’s territorial claims against Türkiye, have been instrumentalized by Armenian diaspora. The wave of growing nationalism among Armenians across the world had dramatic effects. (The first generation of Armenian emigrants worried that their children would be assimilated within the societies where they lived. In this regard, the older Armenian generation believed that uniting around “a common grief of the past” could become an impulse for preserving national identity.) Several terrorist organizations were created, among which ASALA (the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia) is the most infamous. As a result of their assassination attempts on Turkish representatives abroad, 31 Turkish diplomats were killed.⁶

Moreover, the Armenian SSR had a football team named “Ararat” (the biblical name of Mount Ağrı, located in Türkiye) and the mountain itself was flaunted on the coat of arms of the Soviet Republic of Armenia;⁷ this mountain remained on the new coat of arms of Armenia after independence.⁸

In general, given the specificity of the federal system of the Soviet Union, in which Moscow was the decision-making centre and the Soviet Union member republics had no separate central governments, it was impossible to form direct relations between those republics and other countries. Thus, there were no relations between Türkiye and Armenia until the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the declaration of independence by Armenia. Even the existence of the railway connection between Kars (Türkiye) and Leninakan (Armenia) played no larger role, as it was of national importance only in linking Türkiye to the Armenian SSR. However, at the end of the 1980s, shortly before the collapse of

6 AA.com.tr, *31 Turkish diplomats and their relatives became victims of Armenian terrorist organizations* (translation from Turkish), November 22, 2019, available at : <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/31-turk-diplomat-ve-yakinlari-ermeni-teror-orgutlerinin-kurbani-oldu/1622156> (accessed: Mar 6, 2022)

7 Geraldika.ru, *Gerb Armyanskoy Sovetskoy Sotsialisticheskoy Respubliki*, available at: <https://geraldika.ru/s/2205> (accessed: March 6, 2022)

8 President.am, *State symbols of the Republic of Armenia*, available at: <https://www.president.am/en/state-symbols/> (accessed: March 6, 2022)

its people. “*I want to state clearly and unambiguously, considering our national interests and interests of the people, Georgia does not plan to participate in the financial and economic sanctions, as this would only damage our country and populace more,*” he said on 25 February, the day after Russia launched a war against Ukraine.⁴ In protest, Ukraine recalled its ambassador from Georgia. Such a policy stance of the government of Georgia outraged the country’s opposition and most of society, which have strongly condemned Russia’s war against Ukraine.⁵ Nevertheless, the government of Georgia has demonstrated an entirely pro-Ukraine position on international platforms and submitted its application for EU Membership, thereby reaffirming the country’s pro-Western aspirations.

For **Armenia**, it has been much more difficult to maintain neutrality due to the military and economic alliances with Russia under Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), respectively. Moreover, Armenia’s territorial claim to Azerbaijan’s Karabakh region made Yerevan dependent on Russia’s peacekeeping mission deployed there after the 44-Day War in 2020. On 25 February 2022, Armenia alone voted with the Russian delegation against a decision at the Council of Europe to suspend Russia from the organization due to the latter’s armed attack against Ukraine.⁶ In the face of criticism from the Western-aligned civil society and threats of sanctions, Armenia had to make some corrections in its policies that were reflected, among others, in the country’s ‘abstentions’ in the voting at the United Nations General Assembly on the resolutions condemning Russia’s actions vis-à-vis Ukraine in early March 2022.⁷

According to Armenian political experts, the Russia–Ukraine war might entail serious threats to Armenia, with possible Russian plans to strengthen its control over the countries on its periphery or to

4 Civil.ge, *Georgia Won’t Join Russia Sanctions, PM Says*, February 25, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/archives/475153> (accessed: April 14, 2022)

5 Civil.ge, *‘Traitor Garibashvili’ Faces Resignation Calls*, February 28, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/archives/476001> (accessed: April 14, 2022)

6 Council of Europe (2022), “1426ter meeting, February 25, 2022, 2.3 Situation in Ukraine – Measures to be taken, including under Article 8 of the Statute of the Council of Europe”, available at: https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=0900001680a5a360 (accessed: June 4, 2022)

7 Armradio.am, *U.N. General Assembly resolution demands end to Ukraine war*, March 2, 2022, available at: <https://en.armradio.am/2022/03/02/u-n-general-assembly-resolution-demands-end-to-ukraine-war/> (accessed: June 3, 2022)

the Soviet Union, Türkiye began electricity supply to Armenia with a view to normalizing relations.⁹

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Türkiye was eager to develop relations with all the newly independent states, including Armenia. Yet, the formation of relations with Armenia was different: historical events and the perception of Türkiye by the Armenian diaspora influenced this process. Türkiye believed that Armenians, who had lived for three generations during the country's 70 years of existence within the Soviet Union, would have managed to forget the reasons for animosity with their western neighbour. However, this expectation was proved incorrect at the very first stage of the formation of statehood in Armenia. In short, a statement reflecting Armenians' historical claims against Türkiye was included in their declaration of independence, adopted on 23 August 1991.¹⁰

In addition, the declaration also contained definitions such as “Western Armenia” reflecting Armenia's territorial claim to the south-eastern part of Türkiye. Despite these controversial provisions, Türkiye did not express dissatisfaction and recognized the independence of Armenia without preconditions. This circumstance was, nevertheless, the reason Türkiye limited itself to recognition only, without establishing diplomatic relations with Armenia.¹¹

Meanwhile, Türkiye kept its borders with Armenia open as a sign of goodwill towards its eastern neighbour and for the sake of developing its relations with the EU, as official Ankara applied for EU membership in 1987. Türkiye allowed Western humanitarian aid to reach Armenia (due to its difficult economic condition) from the EU via the Kars–Gyumri railway (the name “Leninakan” was changed).¹² Türkiye also

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9 Göksedef, E., *op.cit.*

10 Gov.am, “*Armenian Declaration of Independence*”, available at: <http://www.gov.am/en/independence/> (accessed: March 5, 2022)

11 Ibrahimov, R., “Turkish foreign policy towards Armenia in 2008–2009: Impact on Azerbaijani–Turkish relations”, *Bilge Strateji*, Vol. 7, No. 12, 2015, pp. 47–59, available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339881863_Turkish-Foreign-Policy-Towards-Armenia-2008-2009-Impact-On-Azerbaijani-Turkish-Relations_1, (accessed: March 5, 2022)

12 Dündar, C., “Türkes reminded Atatürk's signature”, (translation from Turkish), *Milliyet*, April 25, 2005, available at: <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/can-dundar/>

The Türkiye–Armenia border was officially closed on 3 April 1993 following Armenia’s occupation of Azerbaijan’s Kalbajar district.

actively contributed to the membership of Armenia in international organizations and invited the country to join the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) as a founding member.¹³

For a small country with scant natural resources, without access to the open sea, and at war with Azerbaijan, ties with Türkiye were of strategic importance for Armenia in this period. In the early years of Armenia’s independence, there was an increase in the mutual visits of tourists, businessmen, and journalists. The then-president of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, who is known as a pragmatic person, considered Türkiye a significant economic partner and a gateway to Europe and the Middle East countries. In addition, Ter-Petrosyan tried not to touch upon historical issues in relations with Türkiye and called for the formation of relations without preconditions.¹⁴ In general, he hoped to build non-hostile relations with Türkiye, which would be the most pragmatic assessment of reality. This “soft perception [of] the eternal enemy” Türkiye was misunderstood by several high-ranking politicians and intellectuals, who negatively perceived this kind of strategy. Disagreements on this issue led to the resignation of the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, a representative of the diaspora, and a citizen of the United States, Raffi Hovannisian. He also had different views on the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict, insisting that Armenia should recognize the separatist regime established in Azerbaijan’s then-occupied (by Armenia) territories, as a result of which he had to resign.¹⁵

The Türkiye–Armenia border was officially closed on 3 April 1993 following Armenia’s occupation of Azerbaijan’s Kalbajar district. Later, on 30 April 1993, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 822 which demanded “the immediate withdrawal of all [Armenian] occupying forces from the Kalbajar district and other recently occupied areas of Azerbaijan”.¹⁶

turkes-aturkun-imzasini-hatirlatti-113327 (accessed: March 6, 2022)

13 MFA.gov.tr, *Relations between Turkey and Armenia*, *ibid*.

14 Demir, A.F., “Turkey-Armenia Relations in the Post-USSR Era”, (translation from Turkish), *Uluslararası İlişkiler / International Relations*, Vol. 2, No 5 (Spring 2005), p. 113

15 Shogren, E., *Armenia’s Foreign Minister Quits Post: Caucasus: Fresno-born Raffi Hovannisian was Asked to Resign After Clashes over Foreign Policy with Newly Independent Country’s President*, Los Angeles Times, November 17, 1992, available at: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-10-17-mn-226-story.html> (accessed: March 5, 2022)

16 Ibrahimov, R. (2014), *op.cit.*, p. 49

Regardless that Türkiye had closed its borders, Ter-Petrosyan continued to look for ways to improve relations with the country. On 21 April 1993, Ter-Petrosyan arrived in Ankara to take part in the mourning ceremony for the former Turkish president, Turgut Özal.¹⁷ During his visit to Ankara, Ter-Petrosyan also met with the then-President of Azerbaijan Abulfaz Elchibey to discuss the conflict.¹⁸ Ter-Petrosyan was perhaps seeking contacts to change the current situation, but he failed. The delegation headed by Ter-Petrosyan, accompanied by then-Foreign Minister of Armenia Vahan Papazyan and presidential adviser Gerard Libaridian, was received by Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel. As Libaridian recalls, Demirel took out a map, pointed to it, and said:

“This is Armenia, we have no problems with this, this is our neighbour; this is Karabakh, and this is not Armenian land, but Armenians live there, and you have your own concerns about this, this can also be understood; further, this is Lachin, this is also not your land, and the Armenians do not live here, you occupied it and stated that it was for security, this can also be understood somewhere. Well, how to justify Kalbajar? When you occupied Kalbajar, the Turks said that you were beating our brothers, right?”¹⁹

Nevertheless, for the sake of improving Armenia’s relations with Türkiye, Ter-Petrosyan banned the activities of the Dashnaksutyun party, known for its sharp anti-Türkish rhetoric, in October 1994.²⁰ Despite the steps taken by Ter-Petrosyan in this direction, Türkiye’s general foreign policy towards Armenia did not undergo major changes for quite a long time due to the issue of occupation of Azerbaijan’s territories. The borders between the two states remained closed, although mutual flights between Yerevan (Armenia) and Istanbul and Antalya (Türkiye) have operated since 1995.²¹

17 APNews, *World Statesmen Attend Ozal Funeral*, April 21, 1993, available at: <https://apnews.com/article/02b7e05ce58a42962b3a8db835524887> (accessed: March 6, 2022)

18 Ulman, S., *Thousands turn out for funeral of Turkish President Ozal*, UPI, April 21, 2022, available at: <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1993/04/21/Thousands-turn-out-for-funeral-of-Turkish-President-Ozal/1331735364800/> (accessed: March 6, 2022)

19 ANI, *Demirel ve Ermenistan: Ermeniler ve Türkler*, January 14, 2022, available at: <http://www.aniarc.am/2022/01/14/demirel-and-armenia-in-turkish/> (accessed: March 07, 2022)

20 Demir, A.F., *op.cit.*, p. 114

21 Shahnazaryan, D., “Nervous Neighbors: Five Years After the Armenia-Turkey Protocols”, *Journal of Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Fall 2014), p. 46.

Breakthrough in the foreign policy of Türkiye towards Armenia after 2008

After Ahmet Davutoğlu was appointed Foreign Minister of Türkiye in 2009, Turkish foreign policy sought to abandon the traditional status-quo policy in the international arena and pursue a more active engagement on the basis of Türkiye's historical, geographical, and cultural capabilities, as enshrined in Davutoğlu's book *Strategic Depth: Türkiye's International Position*.^{22 23} The foreign policy strategy of "zero problems with neighbours" pursued by Türkiye under Davutoğlu envisaged intensifying efforts to resolve, not to freeze, the existing disagreements with the countries of the region on a mutually beneficial basis.²⁴

Türkiye's zeal to open its borders with Armenia without waiting for the liberation of Azerbaijan's occupied territories was negatively perceived by official Baku.

Türkiye had actually begun the process of developing relations with Armenia as early as 2008. Türkiye had disregarded the factor of perceiving Armenia through the prism of the latter's occupation of Azerbaijan's territories. At that time, Türkiye believed that the comprehensive development of relations with Armenia would also have a positive impact on the latter's relations with Azerbaijan and the subsequent liberation of its occupied territories. In the initial stage, Türkiye planned to open its borders with Armenia and establish diplomatic relations with the country. Türkiye's zeal to open its borders with Armenia without waiting for the liberation of Azerbaijan's occupied territories was negatively perceived by official Baku. Thus, after 2008, there were attempts to form a policy toward Armenia without consideration of Azerbaijan's perceptions in this regard.²⁵

At that time, Türkiye's plans to open the border with Armenia without preconditions were based on the belief that, with the opening of the border, bilateral trade relations would boost the small economy of Armenia and Turkish investment therein. It was expected that, with

22 Davutoğlu, A., *Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position*, (translation from Turkish), (İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2014)

23 Çamlıbel, C., *The Neo-Ottoman Attribution is Malicious*, (translation from Turkish), August 29, 2011, available at: <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/neo-osmanli-yakistirmasi-kotu-niyetli-18601714> (accessed: March 7, 2022)

24 MFA.gov.tr, "Policy of Zero Problems with our Neighbors", Official site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Turkey, available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/policy-of-zero-problems-with-our-neighbors.en.mfa> (accessed: March 7, 2022)

25 Ibrahimov, R. (2014), *op.cit.*, p. 52

closer economic relations, a subsequent political dialogue would be formed and, later, the parties would create an atmosphere in which each side should respect the other's memory of historical events.²⁶ This was an attempt to develop relations with Armenia without reference to Azerbaijan's expectations.

As a beginning of contact, the former President of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan, invited his Turkish counterpart Abdullah Gül to watch a football match (dubbed "football diplomacy") between the two national teams in Yerevan on 6 September 2008. Gül's acceptance of this invitation meant the first (and only) visit of a Turkish President to Armenia since the latter's independence.²⁷ Later, on 14 October 2009, at the invitation of the President of Türkiye, Sargsyan's trip to the city of Bursa for the return match with a very representative delegation demonstrated that they have arrived in Türkiye not only to watch the match. During this visit, the parties had agreed that the next round of the negotiations would be concerned with defining specific steps to open the borders.²⁸

Azerbaijan's reaction to Türkiye's policy towards Armenia at that time was negative because the process of rapprochement between the two countries began without coordination with Baku and awareness of the possible consequences for Azerbaijan on the issue of de-occupation of its territories. Since a number of great powers had their own interests in the South Caucasus region in terms of maintaining the status quo in the [now former] conflict, Azerbaijan had limited opportunities to put pressure on Armenia to resolve the conflict peacefully. One lever was the introduction of economic sanctions and the isolation of Armenia from regional projects. Moreover, keeping the Turkish–Armenian border closed was an integral part of this strategy. If the border was opened, this instrument of pressure would lose its effectiveness and Armenia, encouraged by the indulgence of Türkiye, would continue

26 Davutoğlu, A., "Turkey-Armenian Relations in the Process of De-Ottomanization or 'Dehistoricization': is a 'Just Memory' Possible?", *Journal of Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 1, Spring 2014, p. 29

27 Ibrahimov, R., "Turkish-Armenian rapprochement: Defining the process and its impact on relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey", *Caspian Report*, HASEN, Winter 2014, p. 89

28 President.am, *Working visit of President Serzh Sargsyan to Bursa /Republic of Turkey*, September 14, 2009, available at: <https://www.president.am/en/foreign-visits/item/2009/10/14/news-74/> (accessed: March 12, 2022)

its occupation policy. Notably, albeit Türkiye was ready to reopen its border, Armenia did not plan to withdraw from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan.²⁹

Azerbaijan closely followed this process and did not remain a passive observer. Thus, Azerbaijan reacted to Gül's visit to Yerevan and continued to protest all subsequent steps by Türkiye. The opening of borders between Türkiye and Armenia was endorsed by the West, in particular the United States. In April 2009, during the official visit of former U.S. President Barack Obama to Türkiye, it was expected that Türkiye and Armenia would sign an agreement on opening the border and mutual establishment of diplomatic corps in both states within a month.³⁰ The harsh and negative reaction of Azerbaijan, as well as Turkish society, alerted Türkiye, as Ankara did not want to spoil relations with a country with common ethnic roots. Therefore, Türkiye sought to obtain the endorsement of Azerbaijan for its policy of rapprochement with Armenia. As a sign of its dissatisfaction with the endorsement of relations between Türkiye and Armenia by the U.S. without coordination with official Baku in advance, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev refused to attend the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) forum held in Istanbul on 6–7 April 2009, despite repeated invitations from then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.³¹

President Aliyev's refusal to participate in the forum in Istanbul had its effect. Türkiye realized that rapprochement with Armenia could cost it the deterioration of relations with Azerbaijan.

Considering the negative reaction within the country and from Azerbaijan, then Prime Minister of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan tried to ease the tension. In his speech on April 10, 2009, he stated:

“Unless Azerbaijan and Armenia sign any agreement on the solution to the “Nagorno-Karabakh” conflict, we will not sign any final agreement with Armenia on ties. We are doing preliminary work, but this definitely

29 Ibrahimov, R., (2014), *op.cit.*, p. 52

30 Richter, P., “Turkey, Armenia are likely to ease conflict, President Obama is to visit Turkey in a few days, and the expected deal would allow him to point to progress toward reconciliation”, April 4, 2009, available at: <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/apr/04/world/fg-Turkey-armenia4> (accessed: March 12, 2022)

31 Eurodialogue.org, *The Alliance of Civilizations Forum: A Major Test for Turkish Diplomacy*, available at: <http://eurodialogue.org/us/1513> (accessed: March 12, 2022)

depends on the resolution of the “Nagorno-Karabakh” problem.”³²

Nevertheless, six months after this statement, on 10 October 2009, Türkiye signed two protocols with Armenia in Zurich: (1) “Protocol on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Türkiye and the Republic of Armenia” and (2) “Protocol on the development of relations between the Republic of Türkiye and the Republic of Armenia”.³³ It should be noted that these agreements were signed because of the inertia of previous steps, and already had no importance.

Thus, the documents were not ratified either in Türkiye’s or Armenia’s parliament. In fact, the Armenian side acted as the initiator in freezing the process.³⁴ The two documents had to be approved by the Constitutional Court of Armenia, which suggested preconditions and imposed restrictive provisions impairing the letter and spirit of the protocols, which led to the suspension of the ratification process of by Armenia on 23 April 2010. In February 2015, Sargsyan withdrew the protocols from the Parliament of Armenia and, on 1 March 2018, declared these protocols invalid.³⁵

Türkiye–Armenia relations in the aftermath of the 44-Day War

On 27 September 2020, to the surprise of many, including those who had done their best to maintain the status quo since the 1994 truce, Azerbaijan launched a counteroffensive operation (a.k.a. the 44-Day War) that resulted in the liberation of its territories formerly occupied by Armenia.³⁶

Immediately after the end of hostilities, Azerbaijan made a constructive proposal for the development of relations with Armenia, as enshrined in the framework of the Trilateral Statement (10 November 2020), through the opening of transport communications, as well as the signing of a

32 Ibrahimov, R., (2015), *op.cit.*, p.53

33 BBC.co.uk, *Armenia and Turkey normalize ties*, October 10, 2009, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8299712.stm> (accessed: March 12, 2022)

34 BBC.co.uk, *op.cit.*

35 MFA.gov.tr, *Relations between Turkey and Armenia*, *op.cit.*

36 Ibrahimov, R. and Muradov, M., “Historical and legal aspects of the Karabakh Conflict An Azerbaijani perspective on a shared post-conflict future, in F. Ismailzade and D.K. Mišković (eds), *Liberated Karabakh* (Baku: ADAU, 2021), p.51

The post-conflict situation also presents one more stage for enabling Türkiye and Armenia to resume their relations. In fact, Türkiye's new proposal on the opening of the borders and the establishment of diplomatic relations was positively received by the Armenian authorities.

peace agreement. The parties have already started negotiations in bilateral and multilateral formats. In addition, a “3+3” platform was proposed by Türkiye (involving the three countries of the South Caucasus region: Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia; and three countries bordering those countries: Türkiye, Russia, and Iran) to strengthen peace in the region by forming a cooperation platform. With the exception of Georgia (due to Russia’s occupation of Georgia’s Abkhazia and South Ossetia separatist regions), all these countries supported this initiative. The first meeting of the platform at the level of deputy foreign ministers of the five countries (in absence of Georgia) was held on 10 December 2021 in Moscow to discuss the issue of unblocking economic and transport lines in the South Caucasus. The parties agreed to meet at least twice a year.³⁷ Thus, the “3+3” platform can be another noteworthy opportunity for the development of relations between Türkiye and Armenia.

The post-conflict situation also presents one more stage for enabling Türkiye and Armenia to resume their relations. In fact, Türkiye’s new proposal on the opening of the borders and the establishment of diplomatic relations was positively received by the Armenian authorities. Actually, after the 44-Day War, Armenia had imposed an embargo on the import of Turkish goods, which were secretly imported through third countries. For instance, in 2020, Türkiye’s exports to Armenia amounted to about \$200 million and comprised clothing, citrus fruits, and household appliances.³⁸ In 2021, indirect trade between the two countries was, according to Turkish data, just \$3.8 million.³⁹ But at the beginning of 2022, the embargo was lifted.⁴⁰

37 TASS.ru, *Vstrechi v formate «3+3» budut proxodit ne reje dvux raz v god*, December 10, 2021, available at: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/13173419> (accessed: March 13, 2022)

38 Arka, *Tovarooborot mezhdru Armeniyey, Azerbaydzhanom i Turtsiyey ne obsuzhdayetsya na peregovorakh - deputat pravyashchey fraktsii*, February 11, 2021, available at: https://arka.am/ru/news/economy/tovarooborot_mezhdru_armeniyey_azerbaydzhanom_i_turtsiyey_ne_obsuzhdaetsya_na_peregovorakh_deputat_prav/ (accessed: March 14, 2022)

39 Aljazeera, *Turkey, Armenia talk normalizing ties after decades of animosity*, January 14, 2022, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/14/Turkey-armenia-talk-normalising-ties-after-decades-of-animosity> (accessed: March 13, 2022)

40 Newsarmenia, *Armeniya otmenila embargo na import turetskikh tovarov*, December 30, 2021, available at: <https://newsarmenia.am/news/economy/armeniya-ne-prodlila-embargo-na-import-turetskikh-tovarov/> (accessed: March 14, 2022)

Recently, the two states appointed representatives (Serdar Kılıç from Türkiye and Ruben Rubinyan from Armenia) to start bilateral negotiations on the normalization of relations. The first round of negotiations took place on 14 January 2022 in Moscow⁴¹ and the second on 24 February 2022 in Vienna. Even though the parties did not come to any concrete decisions, they “agreed to continue negotiations without preconditions with a view to the full normalization (of relations)”. On 12 March 2022, within the framework of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum (ADF, 11-13 March, Türkiye), the Foreign Ministers of the two countries, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and Ararat Mirzoyan, held a meeting where they “reiterated their will to conduct the process aiming at full normalization and good neighborly relations without pre-conditions”.⁴² Meanwhile, passenger flights between Türkiye and Armenia resumed from 2 February 2022.⁴³

The beginning of negotiations between Türkiye and Armenia was positively perceived by Azerbaijan. After each round of talks, Azerbaijani officials on different levels (such as the President and Minister of Foreign Affairs) declared their support for the normalization of relations between the two countries.

The beginning of negotiations between Türkiye and Armenia was positively perceived by Azerbaijan. After each round of talks, Azerbaijani officials on different levels (such as the President⁴⁴ and Minister of Foreign Affairs⁴⁵) declared their support for the

41 France24, *Turkey and Armenia welcome ‘constructive’ efforts to mend relations*, January 14, 2022, available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20220114-Turkey-armenia-to-hold-talks-in-moscow-on-normalising-ties> (accessed: March 13, 2022)

42 MFA.gov.tr, *Press Release Regarding the Bilateral Meeting of H.E. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Turkey, and H.E. Ararat Mirzoyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Armenia at the Margin of Antalya Diplomacy Forum*, March 12, 2022, available at: https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-83_-sayin-bakanimizin-antalya-diplomasi-forumu-marjinda-12-mart-2022-tarihinde-ermenistan-disisleri-bakani-ararat-mirzoyan-la-yaptigi-ikili-gorusme-hk.en.mfa (accessed: March 14, 2022)

43 MFA.gov.tr, *Press Release Regarding the Meeting of the Special Representatives for the Normalization Process Between Turkey and Armenia*, available at: <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no-63-turkiye-ve-ermenistan-normallesme-sureci-ozel-temsilcileri-hk.en.mfa> (accessed: March 13, 2022)

44 London.mfa.gov.az, *Normalizing relations with Azerbaijan will create new opportunities for Armenia: President Ilham Aliyev*, April 29, 2022, available at: <https://london.mfa.gov.az/en/news/3119/normalizing-relations-with-azerbaijan-will-create-new-opportunities-for-armenia-president-ilham-aliyev> (accessed: May 22, 2022)

45 Report.az, *Azerbaijan supports the establishment of Turkish-Armenian relations*, (translation from Azerbaijani), December 27 2021, available at: <https://report.az/xarici-siyaset/azerbaycan-turkiye-ermenistan-munasibetlerinin-qurulmasini-destekleyir/> (accessed: March 14, 2022)

normalization of relations between the two countries.

Obviously, Azerbaijan's position towards the process of rapprochement between Türkiye and Armenia has changed since 2008, notably after the 44-Day War. This happened due to several reasons: first, for example, Azerbaijan has achieved its goal in restoring the country's territorial integrity; and second, Azerbaijan is eager to strengthen peace in the South Caucasus region through regional cooperation. In this case, the opening of Türkiye's borders with Armenia will also contribute to this goal.

Türkiye is conducting the current process of rapprochement with Armenia in active consultation with Azerbaijan. Türkiye checks its steps against the processes between Azerbaijan and Armenia. In this context, Armenia has to carry out two processes of improving relations with two neighbours at the same time and not postpone the peace process with Azerbaijan. The visit of Türkiye's Foreign Minister Mevlut Çavuşoğlu to Baku on 5 March 2022, a week before the start of the ADF, was highly significant and symbolic. During his meeting with the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, Türkiye's special representative in charge of the normalization of relations with Armenia, Serdar Kılıç, was also presented.⁴⁶ This indicates that, for Armenia, the improvement of relations with Türkiye and Azerbaijan can only happen in conjunction with both states. In fact, Çavuşoğlu once again voiced this position during his visit to Baku, saying that there is full coordination between Türkiye and Azerbaijan regarding the process of normalizing bilateral relations with Armenia, and that "the main goal of Türkiye in the region is good-neighbourly relations in accordance with international law".⁴⁷

In fact, Armenia coordinates its steps with Russia too, since they suggested the first meeting to be held in Moscow. The second one was in Vienna. Only after Türkiye insisted that meetings should be directly held in respective countries, not in third ones, two ministers had meeting at the ADF.

46 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev received Foreign Minister of Turkey*, March 5, 2022, available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55580> (accessed: March 14, 2022)

47 Daily Sabah, *Azerbaijan fully supports normalization of Turkey – Armenia ties: FM*, March 6, 2022, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/azerbaijan-fully-supports-normalization-of-turkey-armenia-ties-FM> (accessed: March 14, 2022)

Conclusion

Since the independence of Armenia, there have been three initiatives between Türkiye and Armenia to establish relations. Albeit Türkiye and Armenia have their own agenda for discussion, Azerbaijan played a key role in shaping relations between these two countries. As this study shows, the development of relations between Türkiye and Armenia has never depended only on their bilateral perceptions of each other. In all attempts by Türkiye to start the process of rapprochement with Armenia, Azerbaijan's interests became an inevitable factor.

In all three initiatives, the Azerbaijan factor was present in different ways. Türkiye's first initiative to improve relations was undertaken in 1991. Türkiye's actions can be characterized as an integral part of the overall formation of relations with the newly independent states after the collapse of the Soviet Union. At that time, the relations, after mutual attempts at developing them, became frozen. Although Armenia continued looking for ways of rapprochement, Türkiye considered them premature. Armenia supposed that, if the normalization of relations started, it could be perceived as Türkiye ignoring Armenia's occupation policy towards Azerbaijan. Given the historical, cultural, and strategic ties with Azerbaijan, official Ankara did not take this step but expressed solidarity with Azerbaijan by closing its borders with Armenia. Since then, Türkiye has shaped its position as follows: the development of ties with Armenia was directly related to the de-occupation of Azerbaijan's territories. Albeit this position remained steadfast until 2008, Türkiye began to form a different policy towards Armenia thereafter.

The second attempt of Türkiye to resume its relations with its eastern neighbour was in 2008. An important feature of this initiative was that, for the first time since 1991, Türkiye promoted a strategy for developing relations with Armenia, independent of Azerbaijan–Armenia relations. Türkiye planned to open the borders and establish diplomatic relations with Armenia despite the ongoing occupation of Azerbaijani lands. At that time, the Turkish foreign policy course was designed on the assumption that the formation of relations with Armenia would also have a positive impact on the resolution of the [now former] Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict and Azerbaijan would therefore not interfere. However, Azerbaijan reacted negatively to this, which led to dissatisfaction in relations, and the continuation of this process

would bear a cost for Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations. Eventually, this disagreement led to the strengthening of relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye, which reached the level of a strategic alliance.

The third initiative started with the new geopolitical reality after the 44-Day War. The peculiarities of the current format are that Azerbaijan fully supports the normalization of relations between Türkiye and Armenia, as Baku’s previous objections regarding Armenia’s occupation of Azerbaijan’s territory are not a factor any more after the liberation of these territories. Albeit Türkiye receives the full support of Azerbaijan, official Ankara coordinates its actions with official Baku. This indicates the strategic level of the relations between these countries and their political determination to consider each other’s national interests.