

Turkey`s South Caucasus Policy after the 44-Day War

Javid Valiyev*

This paper covers the South Caucasus policy of Turkey after the 44-Day War between Azerbaijan and Armenia in 2020. The aim of the research is to investigate the role of Turkey, which supported Azerbaijan politically and morally in the war, in the South Caucasus. This article concludes that, after this war, a new geopolitical situation has emerged in the South Caucasus region. In this new geopolitics, Turkish soldiers have been deployed, alongside those from Russia, in the Joint Monitoring Centre to observe the ceasefire in the Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and Turkey became a kind of guarantor of the liberated Azerbaijani territories through the Shusha Declaration signed between Turkey and Azerbaijan. Additionally, according to the trilateral statement of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia that was signed on 11 January, it was decided to establish a new corridor that is planned to pass through Armenia to connect Turkey with Azerbaijan. Moreover, Turkey–Azerbaijan strategic relations have entered a new phase in terms of economic, military, and defence industry technologies. In short, after the 44-Day War, Turkey gained an advantageous position in the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Keywords: Turkey, South Caucasus, 44-Day War, Shusha Declaration, Zengezur Corridor.



* **Javid Valiyev**, Head of Department, Center of Analysis of International Relations, Baku, Azerbaijan

Introduction

In the 44-Day War, which was fought between the two states of the South Caucasus, Azerbaijan and Armenia, Turkey supported Azerbaijan both diplomatically and politically. As a result of the war, Azerbaijan liberated its previously occupied territories from Armenian occupation. Turkey's support for the end of the occupation has led to its increased influence in the region.

After the 44-Day War, Turkish soldiers were deployed in the Joint Monitoring Centre together with those of Russia to observe the ceasefire in the Karabakh region. Thus, a new geopolitical balance was created in this region that was moved a step further with the Shusha Declaration signed on 15 June between Ankara and Baku.

By supporting regional cooperation in the aftermath of the 44-Day War, Turkey demonstrated that it prefers cooperation rather than military and geopolitical confrontation in this region. The six-country (3+3) platform proposed by Turkey and Azerbaijan for regional cooperation after the war raised certain doubts in Georgia. In order to eliminate these doubts, there was intense diplomatic traffic between Turkey and Georgia. However, as Georgia did not change its stance towards this platform, Turkey proposed another tripartite platform comprising Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia.

The Turkish–Armenian borders were closed owing to the occupation of Azerbaijani lands in the early 1990s and have not yet been opened, despite the end of the occupation. The main reason is that Armenia has not given up its artificial historical and territorial claims against Turkey. Turkey is waiting for Armenia to back down from these demands.

Since the South Caucasus is an arena of geopolitical confrontation among regional and global powers, it directly affects Turkey's relations and position with the countries involved in these struggles. After this war, Turkey wanted to remind the West of its strategic value by increasing its effectiveness in the region. However, during and after the war, Turkey was oppressed in the South Caucasus not only by its historical rival Russia, but also by its Euro-Atlantic allies, which complicated their role in the South Caucasus.

The fact that Turkey functioned as an independent actor this time increased its influence in the region and caused reactions from Western

states such as the USA, France, Canada, the Netherlands, and Belgium, as well as leading to a ban on sales of defence-industry products to Turkey. However, none of these actions could change the end result. Turkey still tried not to generate a geopolitical confrontation, especially with regional powers such as Iran and Russia.

The aim of this article is to analyse how the 44-Day War, which solved the 30-year-old Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict, shaped Turkey’s South Caucasus policy and explain how Turkey–Azerbaijan, Turkey–Georgia, and Turkey–Armenia relations were affected in the post-war situation.

Turkey and the new geopolitical reality after the Second Karabakh War

The 44-Day War, which resulted in the liberation of Azerbaijan’s territories from Armenian occupation and a decisive victory of Azerbaijan over Armenia, created a new geopolitical reality in the region. Turkey played a direct role in the emergence of this situation. As Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev stated, “If Turkey is not next to Azerbaijan someone else may have tried to fish in troubled waters here.”¹ After the war, Ankara started to take more confident steps as it sided with both justice and the victorious side during the war.

For Turkey, the 44-Day War was a successful experience in terms of achieving a conclusion through combining its rising military power with diplomatic steps in recent years. Most strikingly, the successful performance of the Turkish defence industry’s products in the Second Karabakh War led to a breakthrough in this field. Winning this war was important for Turkey in terms of consolidating its leadership in the Turkic world.

For Turkey, the 44-Day War was a successful experience in terms of achieving a conclusion through combining its rising military power with diplomatic steps in recent years.

This war was also closely related to Turkey’s political economy, which seeks the development of trade and transportation routes with the countries of the region and especially with the South Caucasus and Central Asian countries. Therefore, after the war, Turkey started a diplomatic initiative to sign a free trade agreement with the countries of the region and sought more support for the Middle Corridor, endorsed by Turkey and Azerbaijan.

¹ President.az, *Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by Turkish Haber Turk TV channel*, October 13, 2021, Available at: <https://en.president.az/articles/42869> (Accessed: July 15, 2021).

After the 44-Day War, a new cooperation environment emerged between Turkey and Russia. The ceasefire monitoring centre between the parties in proximity to the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan was one result of this cooperation, and Russia shared its power capabilities in the region with Turkey. Russia, which has continued to see itself as the protector of the South Caucasus in the post-war period, tried to limit Turkish military influence in the Karabakh region including in this monitoring centre. Despite Azerbaijan's demands, Moscow was able to keep Ankara out of the post-conflict negotiation process, causing anger in Turkey. It is possible to say that, similar to other regions, there is competition inside the cooperation here as well, and the future of cooperation in the region contains uncertainties.

After the 44-Day War, Iran was one of the parties disturbed by the increase of Turkey's influence in the region. Iran regarded Turkey's strengthening influence as a threat to its own security. However, Turkey and Azerbaijan did not oppose bilateral relations with Iran as a part of the new geopolitical formation in the region in the post-war period. Iran was also included in the proposals regarding the post-war regional cooperation mechanisms.

If we assume that the 44-Day War was a geopolitical power struggle, then the Turkey-Azerbaijan duo won the military and diplomatic war against the Armenia-France-Russia trio.

If we assume that the 44-Day War was a geopolitical power struggle, then the Turkey-Azerbaijan duo won the military and diplomatic war against the Armenia-France-Russia trio. The Turkey-Azerbaijan partnership achieved, in the (former) conflict zone in and around in Karabakh region, what the West could not achieve in Georgia and Ukraine. Moreover, the Turkey-Azerbaijan duo achieved in 44 days what the

Western co-chairs of the Minsk Group could not accomplish for the last 30 years for the former Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. While Azerbaijan underlined Turkey's moral and political support in the victory, Armenia tried to form an anti-Turkey coalition and front in the international arena, where rival states saw this war as an opportunity to pressurize Turkey. Although Arab countries supported Azerbaijan within the framework of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, they did not make supporting statements in the 44-Day War due to their rivalry with Turkey in recent years. In a way, the geopolitical struggle in the Middle East was reflected obliquely in the Caucasus.

After the 44-Day War, no Western member of the Minsk Group is actively engaged in the region, except NATO member Turkey, but the West was not satisfied with this. In particular, the rivalry between Turkey and France in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East was also reflected in the South Caucasus region. France, Canada, Greece, and some other European countries saw this war as an opportunity to put pressure on Turkey in the international arena. One result of the geopolitical struggle was that France, Greece, and Canada accused Turkey of “bringing foreign fighters to the region” while allowing their own Armenian citizens to fight in Karabakh.

Despite France being a co-chair of the Minsk Group, it did not take part in the signing of the 10 November Tripartite Statement between the parties on the solution of the problem, mediated by Russia and with the certainty that Turkey would participate further in these affairs. The Armenian side has always sought to undermine the 10 November statement; like France, they were disturbed by Turkey’s involvement. Therefore, they united on common ground against Turkey. The statements made not only by France, but also by Canada, Belgium, Luxembourg, and even the USA have hindered the healthy progress of the post-war reconciliation process and the expansion of cooperation opportunities following 10 November.

The Armenian side has always sought to undermine the 10 November statement; like France, they were disturbed by Turkey’s involvement. Therefore, they united on common ground against Turkey.

Relations with Azerbaijan in the pre-war period

In order to understand Azerbaijan–Turkey relations after the Second Karabakh War, it is necessary to look at the pre-war period. Unable to get any results from the unsuccessful diplomatic negotiations that had continued within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group for about 30 years, Azerbaijan started to organize its military training with careful consideration of the results of the victorious operations of the Turkish army in Syria and Libya and the successful performance of the Turkish defence industry’s products. One of the important issues for Azerbaijan was how much support Turkey would provide in the event of a war. In the early 1990s, Ankara’s backing was limited to diplomatic support alone, and this time Azerbaijan needed more to ensure its territorial integrity. In fact, several important developments took place between

the two countries in the political and economic fields before the war.

For the first time, Azerbaijan changed its neutrality among third countries in foreign policy and gave open support to Turkey in return for the latter's cooperation in developments in the region. At the High-Level Strategic Cooperation meeting held between the two countries in February 2020 in Baku, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev supported Turkey's policies on Syria, Iraq, Libya, and the Eastern Mediterranean by stating that the Azerbaijani state and people stand by the Turkish state and people in every issue at the regional and global levels.² At the same meeting, Turkey's President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, said, "Karabakh is Azerbaijan!"³ and, by using that slogan, he supported the active diplomacy that Ilham Aliyev had initiated against the occupation policy of Armenia.

From a military point of view, a test of support between the parties took place during Armenia's border attack on the Tovuz district of Azerbaijan in July 2020. The deaths of members of Azerbaijan's military forces, including one prominent Azerbaijani general, as a result of this attack led to increasing demands from Azerbaijani society to liberate the territories from occupation by military means.

Just after the Tovuz clashes, two deputy defence ministers of Azerbaijan went to Turkey and, during this visit, Turkish Defence Industry President Ismail Demir shared the message on his Twitter account that "Our defence industry products are at Azerbaijan's disposal,"⁴ thereby giving clear support to Azerbaijan on this issue. After this visit, Azerbaijan launched joint military exercises (27 July–11 August 2020) with Turkey, in parallel with Russian–Armenian exercises. At the end of the first phase of these exercises, Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar visited Azerbaijan and met with President Aliyev. Aliyev declared that "the Azerbaijani army would adopt the model of the Turkish army, and that Turkey would have a priority position in arms imports."^{5,6} This

2 President.az, *Azerbaijan, and Turkish President made press statements*, Press conference, February 26, 2021, Available at: <https://en.president.az/articles/35964>, (Accessed: July 5, 2021).

3 President.az, *Azerbaijan, and Turkish President made press statements*, Press conference, February 26, 2021, Available at: <https://en.president.az/articles/35964>, (Accessed: July 5, 2021).

4 Anadolu Agency, *Turkey-Azerbaijan discuss defense industry cooperation*, July 17, 2021, Available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkey-azerbaijan-discuss-defense-industry-cooperation/1913897> (Accessed: June 10, 2021).

5 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by TRT Haber TV Channel*, October 5, 2020, Available at: <https://en.president.az/articles/41763> (Accessed: July 15, 2021).

6 President.az, *Ilham Aliyev received delegation led by Turkish Minister of National Defense*, August 13, 2020, Available at: <https://en.president.az/articles/40473> (Accessed: July 15, 2021).

gave a blank check to Azerbaijan for the further development of military relations. In fact, this statement sent a politically discomfoting message to Armenia's military ally with the expectation of more political support from Turkey.

While Azerbaijan's armed forces had been trained by the Turkish army since 1992, after 2010 Turkey was also selling defence industry products to Azerbaijan. Furthermore, the members of the Azerbaijani army, who were trained in Turkey, proved their capabilities in the Four-Day War with Armenia in 2016. Azerbaijan actively benefited from Turkey's military tactics and strategies in the Second Karabakh War. As the Defence Minister of Azerbaijan, Zakir Hasanov, stated, the war was an exam for the military forces, and Turkey's Military Forces had prepared Azerbaijan army for that exam.⁷ In addition to this, further unity was achieved between the parties in the field of media relations before the war. In August, Assistant to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Hikmet Hajiyev visited Turkey and it was decided to establish a joint media platform with his counterpart there. This platform worked effectively during the war. The experience of Turkish journalists and television broadcasters, who gained experience as war correspondents in Iraq, Syria, and Libya for many years, was important in conveying the events to the outside world during the Second Karabakh War.

Azerbaijan actively benefited from Turkey's military tactics and strategies in the Second Karabakh War. As the Defence Minister of Azerbaijan, Zakir Hasanov, stated, the war was an exam for the military forces, and Turkey's Military Forces had prepared Azerbaijan army for that exam.

Relations with Azerbaijan after the war

The liberation of Azerbaijan's occupied territories and Turkey's support to Azerbaijan strengthened the mutual political trust between the two countries. Since there is political and social solidarity in support of Azerbaijan on this issue, it was easier for the government to rally support for Azerbaijan. There were important developments in the military, defence, and economic fields between the two countries after the war. In the first four months of 2021, four joint exercises were held between the armies of the two countries. The purpose of these exercises

⁷ Zakir Hasanov was interviewed by Real Tv, June 26, 2021, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agcSfKtqnhI> (Accessed: June 26, 2021).

is not only coordination and joint action, but also the transformation of the Azerbaijani army according to the Turkish army model. Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar, who participated via videoconference in monitoring one of the exercises held in April, stated that the roadmap for the modernization of the Azerbaijani army is ready.⁸ Some military experts from Azerbaijan, on the other hand, suggest that the transition to the Turkish model is not enough to counter the threats in the region; they believe it is important to establish of a joint army under a single command.

During the 44-Day War, in addition to Turkey's political support, the successful results of the weapons imported from Turkey led to increased cooperation in the defence industry.

During the 44-Day War, in addition to Turkey's political support, the successful results of the weapons imported from Turkey led to increased cooperation in the defence industry. On 6 April 2021, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan approved the cooperation agreement in the of the defence industry field signed between the parties in 2017. Before the war, Turkey was in the third place in terms of Azerbaijan's arms imports after Russia and Israel.

Since the war, Turkey's military exports to its ally Azerbaijan have risen six-fold.⁹ In this sense, Azerbaijan became the second largest customer, after the USA, for Turkey's arms exports.

A delegation headed by the Turkish Defence Industry Minister, Ismail Demir, that included Turkey's STM, Roketsan, Havelsan, and Aselsan companies visited Azerbaijan on 30 April 2021. Ismail Demir, in his interview with the press, noted that "it is time to take the cooperation in the defence industry and technology to a new dimension, to combine the capabilities of the defence industry, that is, to make joint production."¹⁰ In this sense, the purpose of the visit was not only to sell weapons to Azerbaijan, but also to develop the infrastructure of Azerbaijan's defence industry. During the visits and meetings, the establishment of a joint factory, technology transfer, and distribution were, at Azerbaijan's request, discussed in detail.

8 Anadolu Agency, *Turkish, Azerbaijani Defense Chiefs Meet Virtually*, April 8, 2021, Available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkish-azerbaijani-defense-chiefs-meet-virtually/2201682>, (Accessed: June 15, 2021).

9 Reuters, *Turkish arms sales to Azerbaijan surged before Nagorno-Karabakh fighting*, October 14, 2020, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/armenia-azerbaijan-turkey-arms-int-idUSKBN26Z230> (Accessed: June 15, 2021).

10 Erbay, N.O. "Turkey to roll out defense products as foreign interest gains pace", *Daily Sabah*, June 26, 2021, Available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/defense/turkey-to-roll-out-defense-products-as-foreign-interest-gains-pace> (Accessed: June 24, 2021).

There was an increase in mutual visits and the signing of new agreements to develop Azerbaijan–Turkey economic and commercial relations before and after the war. The main purpose here is to boost trade between the parties, create a common market, and reduce customs duties. In short, it involves the rapid adoption of free-market economy laws in bilateral economic and commercial relations. This creates favourable conditions for Azerbaijan, which wants to ramp up exports of its non-oil products. The bilateral preferential trade agreement was signed at the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council meeting held in Baku in February 2020 and entered into force on 1 March 2021.

A protocol adopted at the meeting of the intergovernmental commission in March intended to expand the preferential trade list. The Turkish side wants to increase the number of goods included in the preferential trade agreement to 150. Moreover, the former Ambassador of Turkey to Azerbaijan voiced a proposal to conduct trade in national currencies between the parties.

Turkey also suggests that transit fees in the Caspian Sea be increased and ro-ro taxes reduced to acceptable levels to double the number of Turkish trucks passing through Azerbaijan. As of 1 April, travel between the two countries is conducted using a national identity card. This will also have a positive impact on business and tourism trade cooperation.

Although Turkey is not involved in the diplomatic negotiation process between the parties after the 44-Day War, its involvement in the military and economic processes means that Turkey holds a strong position in the process. Turkish companies were given an active role in the restoration of the liberated territories of Azerbaijan. In 2020, 134 Turkish military personnel arrived Azerbaijan to clear the liberated areas of landmines and in February 2021 Turkey provided Azerbaijan with 20 MEMATT demining machines to clear landmines on Azerbaijan’s liberated territories. In the same month, 23 Azerbaijani soldiers received mine-clearance training in Turkey.

Although Turkey is not involved in the diplomatic negotiation process between the parties after the 44-Day War, its involvement in the military and economic processes means that Turkey holds a strong position in the process.

The Turkish highway company is subcontracting the construction of the Ahmedbeyli–Horadiz–Mincivan–Agband highway, which will play a

very important role in the socio-economic development of the liberated territories. This road has strategic importance in terms of connecting the other regions of Azerbaijan and its Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. Turkish companies were also involved in the construction of the airport in the liberated Fuzuli district. Turkish and local construction companies are also involved in the development of the Ahmedbeyli–Fuzuli–Shusha highway project, which is being prepared for the future development of Shusha and the Karabakh region in general. Through a decree of President Ilham Aliyev, three mineral deposits in the liberated lands were assigned to three Turkish companies for 30 years of study, research, exploration, development, and operation. The active role of Turkish companies here increases Ankara’s sensitivity to ensure the security and stability of this region in the future. President Erdoğan demonstrated this sensitivity by visiting the liberated city of Shusha as well.

According to Article 9 of the statement signed on 10 November, after the 44-Day War, transportation and communication lines must be opened between the parties. In order to realize a new project dubbed as the Zangezur Corridor by President Ilham Aliyev, another tripartite agreement between Azerbaijan, Armenia, and the Russian Federation was signed in Moscow on 11 January and a relevant commission started work in this direction. With the Shusha Declaration, Azerbaijan and Turkey have once again officially confirmed their intentions regarding the establishment of the Zangezur Corridor.

This corridor is important for Turkey in three respects. As in all areas, diversification in the field of transportation is important for security in this area, just as energy-exporting states have alternative pipelines. Second, this corridor will reveal opportunities for cooperation between Turkey and Armenia. Third, after the completion of this line, it will be the shortest route for Turkish companies investing in the liberated Azerbaijani territory.

After the war, education diplomacy between the parties has accelerated with the signing of a cooperation protocol between Turkish Maarif Foundation and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Turkish Maarif Foundation was established to open schools, educational institutions, and dormitories at all educational level. In a meeting with the Minister of Education of Turkey, Ziya

Selçuk, in Azerbaijan, both sides stated that they wanted to benefit from Turkey's experience in opening and structuring vocational higher schools in the regions liberated from occupation. Many other mutual cooperation agreements were also signed between the universities of the two countries.

Georgia maintains its strategic importance for Turkey

The First Karabakh War between Azerbaijan and Armenia had various consequences for Georgia over the last 30 years. On the one hand, Georgia was disturbed by the war of its two neighbouring countries and the tension on its borders. This situation even created the danger of creating tension between the Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities living within the borders of Georgia. On the other hand, owing to Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani lands, all regional projects bypassed Armenia and passed through Georgia instead. The actualization of regional projects through Georgia led to the creation of the Azerbaijan–Turkey–Georgia triangle. However, after the Second Karabakh War, there were suspicions that the situation would change for Georgia and political groups in Georgia that were against the Azerbaijan–Turkey–Georgia trilateral cooperation tried to exaggerate the new situation. These issues can be grouped under three headings.

However, after the Second Karabakh War, there were suspicions that the situation would change for Georgia and political groups in Georgia that were against the Azerbaijan–Turkey–Georgia trilateral cooperation tried to exaggerate the new situation.

First, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan attended the military ceremony held in Baku after the 44-Day War and, at the press conference, both presidents proposed a new six-party platform for regional cooperation. In fact, this platform resembled the Caucasus Platform proposed by Erdoğan after the 2008 Russia–Georgia war, but with the addition of neighbouring Iran. The aim was to empower regional states to solve regional problems and develop regional cooperation. Since this platform would be established only among the countries of the region and Western states were not involved, Iran and Russia viewed it positively. However, Georgia did not support this platform owing to the presence of Russia. Turkey and Azerbaijan started to develop new proposals as it was not possible at first to convince Georgia to solve this problem.

The latest concrete proposal in this regard was expressed by President Erdoğan during the visit of Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili to Turkey on 1 June 2021, where he presented a new “3+3” formula, i.e., Turkey–Azerbaijan–Georgia and Azerbaijan–Georgia–Armenia. However, since Armenia is still not ready to take part in this format, it seems that the trilateral cooperation between Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia will continue in the region for a long time.

Second, according to Article 9 of the 10 November statement signed between the parties, a new communication and transportation network should be established in the region. This will not be limited to connecting Armenia–Azerbaijan–Russia, but Turkey and Iran will also join this project. This route, which President Aliyev named the Zangezur Corridor, between Azerbaijan and Armenia constitutes a natural alternative to rail lines that pass through Georgia. Therefore, it was interpreted that Georgia would lose its strategic importance for Turkey, Azerbaijan, and the West. However, it should be mentioned that the purposes of the lines that will pass through Armenia and Georgia are different: the new line that will pass through Armenia will be a shorter route for Turkey’s ties to South Caucasus and Central Asian countries and will actually make Armenia a part of regional cooperation. Georgia will continue to provide the safest line for Turkey and Azerbaijan. It was essential that Erdoğan emphasized the importance of projects with Georgia in his meeting with Garibashvili. This shows that, despite the Zangezur Corridor, the projects passing through Georgia are still important for Turkey.

Third, the Russia–Turkey limited cooperation during and after the war also brought up the question of whether Turkey would give up its strong support to Georgia’s territorial integrity and NATO membership. However, during the Georgian foreign minister’s visit to Turkey, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mevlut Çavuşoğlu, renewed Ankara’s support for Georgia’s potential NATO membership and, in a meeting with Prime Minister Garibashvili, President Erdoğan renewed his support for Georgia’s territorial integrity and sovereignty in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Therefore, after the Second Karabakh War, Turkey’s policy on Georgia has continued on the same path; that is, Georgia still remains strategically important for both Turkey and Azerbaijan.

Will the borders with Armenia be opened?

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey–Armenia relations have been unstable. As early as 1990, Armenia targeted the international recognition of the 1915 events as “genocide” in its “Declaration of Independence” and referred to the eastern part of Turkey as being “Western Armenia”. Since Armenia did not accept Turkey’s protocol proposal on the recognition of borders in 1991, diplomatic relations were not established between the two countries. When Armenia expanded its occupation of Azerbaijani lands in the early 1990s, Turkey closed its borders with Armenia in support of Azerbaijan. Therefore, there have been no direct diplomatic, political, economic, or commercial relations between Turkey and Armenia for the last 30 years. Diplomatic dialogue continues through Georgia and only within the framework of the Black Sea Cooperation Organization.

When Armenia expanded its occupation of Azerbaijani lands in the early 1990s, Turkey closed its borders with Armenia in support of Azerbaijan. Therefore, there have been no direct diplomatic, political, economic, or commercial relations between Turkey and Armenia for the last 30 years.

Since the Turkish–Armenian borders were closed after the occupation of Kalbajar, everyone started to think that there would be a rapprochement regarding the borders after Kalbajar was liberated. After the liberation of Azerbaijan’s territories, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Ara Ayyvazyan, said that the balance in the region had changed after the Second Karabakh War and there was no reason for the Turkey–Armenia borders to remain closed. However, Turkey expects the Armenian side to adapt its stance on the 1915 events in accordance with Ankara’s thesis and to give up its territorial claims against Turkey. Therefore, Turkey waited for the Armenian administration to reach the desired point and did not rush to open the borders.

Simultaneously, no step has been taken by the West, which, during the occupation period, defended the thesis that as a result of opening the Turkey–Armenia borders, Armenia would turn away from Russia, the occupation would end, and Armenia would turn towards the West. The Washington administration, which actively worked for the Turkey–Armenia normalization process in 2009 (Biden was Obama’s deputy at that time), remained very passive after the 44-Day War regarding the Turkish–Armenian border issue. Therefore, the West

On the other hand, politicians and society in Armenia have different approaches to cooperation with Turkey and Azerbaijan. Some see cooperation as a concession or a loss, while others favour it.

did not take any active role in the development of Turkey–Armenia relations, despite the Azerbaijan territories being liberated.

On the other hand, politicians and society in Armenia have different approaches to cooperation with Turkey and Azerbaijan. Some see cooperation as a concession or a loss, while others favour it. Of course, as a result of the unilateral promotion of the “hostility of Azerbaijan and Turkey” towards the Armenian community for the last 30 years, it is very difficult to defend cooperation with Turkey and Azerbaijan in Armenia today. In fact, those who defend this issue are kept under pressure by marginal groups and isolated from the society.

Conclusion

During and after the war, Turkey’s South Caucasus policy was developed independently of its Western allies, in solidarity with Azerbaijan, and in consideration of Russia’s role in the region as well as of the idea of extending the success that it achieved in the war to Central Asian countries. It is possible to list Turkey’s South Caucasus policy under that title only after the war. In terms of political, military, security, and economic aspects, Turkey’s South Caucasus policy can be summarized as follows.

Politically, the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan and Georgia will be supported by Ankara. Turkey also firmly maintains its stance regarding the establishment of diplomatic relations and opening the borders with Armenia in return for the latter’s renunciation of its historical and territorial claims. Turkey has also tightened its diplomatic relations with Russia.

During and after the war, Turkey’s aim was to increase its strategic value to the West by boosting its influence in the region; however, the rivalry with some of its Western allies has prevented the desired cooperation in the region. Some states that are not happy with the increase of the Russian and Turkish roles after the conflict period have tried to prevent the Turkey–Armenia normalization process by supporting Armenian radical groups.

In economic terms, Turkey could take the economic and commercial relations with Azerbaijan to a higher level by signing a free trade

agreement. Turkish companies are playing a leading role in the reconstruction of the liberated territories of Azerbaijan.

In the field of transportation, Turkey aims to consolidate the position of the “Middle Corridor” as an East–West transportation route and, in this context, to reduce transportation tariffs through Azerbaijan. Turkey is supporting the realization of the Zangezur Corridor and Azerbaijan’s intentions in this direction as well.

Cooperation with Azerbaijan in the military field rapidly increased. The realization of the modernization of the Azerbaijani army, the coordination of the two armies, and the production of joint defence industry technologies through establishing a factory in Azerbaijan gained priority in this framework.

After the war, Turkey’s interaction with the Central Asian countries has also increased through visits and the signing of important agreements in the fields of the defence industry and trade. In short, in the post-war period, one can clearly observe Turkey’s strengthening influence in both the South Caucasus and Central Asia regions.