

TURKEY'S GEOSTRATEGIC INTERESTS IN THE CAUCASUS

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The disintegration of the U.S.S.R. brought about radical changes in Turkey's foreign policy environment. First of all, there is no longer a direct threat from its northern and northwestern neighbors. Whereby, instead of one neighbor, the Soviet Union, it has gained six new ones: Rus-

sia, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. On the whole though, because of the rather complicated relations with its other regional neighbors, Greece, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, Turkey still faces demanding foreign policy challenges, which are having more of an impact on where Ankara places the emphasis in its foreign policy than on its new orientation choices.

As NATO's southeast wing, Turkey has become an independent regional nation with growing influence in the Near and Middle East, as well as among the Turkic-speaking peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia. What is more, the regional military balance in the Black Sea and the Central Caucasus has shifted in its favor.¹ And its geographical location has predetermined its role as a mediator between Europe and the Near and Middle East. In so doing, its ethnic and linguistic kinship with the Turkic nations of the Caucasus and Central Asia has helped Turkey to gain faster access to the local markets. At the same time, it is becoming a gateway for the export of Caspian oil to Europe. But as things stand today, Ankara has to take Moscow's interests into account in this area, which requires it to act cautiously and avoid confrontation with it.

Nevertheless, involvement in the affairs of these two regions is vitally important for the Turkish economy, since they have vast supplies of natural minerals and serve as a new investment market.

There are several factors in Ankara's Caucasian policy which are also related to the country's socioeconomic upswing. The economic boom, which began in the mid-1980s and earned itself the name of a "Turkish miracle," has encompassed not only the large industrial centers of the country, but also its periphery. In order to meet the needs of the growing economy, Turkey needs a large amount of energy resources, mainly oil and gas, which it does not have. At that time, the deterioration in the situation in the Near East, particularly in the Persian Gulf zone, aggravated by the difficult relations between secular Turkey, which was oriented toward the West, and the Islamic regimes of the countries of this region and the Middle East, forced it to look for alternative sources of energy. They are available in several of the independent Central Asian (Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) and Caucasian (Azerbaijan) states, which are ethnically and cul-

turally close to Turkey. In contrast to Tehran, which was striving primarily for political expansion in the Central Caucasian vector, Ankara was focusing on economic relations, primarily with Azerbaijan, which was prompted not only by its ethnic kinship, but also by its geographic proximity. Of course, geopolitical goals aimed at increasing Turkey's influence in both the Caucasus and Central Asia were important too. Here, Turkey's interests fully coincided with the geostrategic interests of the West, which was trying to squelch the dominating positions of both Russia and Iran in this region.

Ankara wasted no time in establishing political, economic, and cultural contacts with the new political forces which have been forming in the newly independent post-Soviet Turkic-speaking republics. In so doing, it stressed over and over that its interest in the Caucasus was motivated by its desire to restore the relations destroyed during the years of Soviet power with the Turkic-speaking peoples residing there. And there are rather large Caucasian diasporas in Turkey itself. According to some data, they amount to approximately 7 million people, including about 500,000 Abkhazians and almost 400,000 Daghestanis.² The Shamil, Northern Caucasus, and other societies function in the country, to which parliamentary deputies, businessmen, officers from the Turkish army, and journalists belong. Ankara is trying to use these social groups to expand its influence in the region.

In 2000, the Turkish government officially stated that would focus its attention not only on Central, but also on the "Greater Caucasus." At the same time, Ankara made new statements about the possibility of creating a commonwealth of Turkic states under its auspices. And as we have already noted, it has been activating its policy in this region as early as the beginning of the 1990s, by taking advantage of the temporary hiatus in Russia's presence in the Central Caucasus. Since this region is a vast market still unassimilated by Turkish capital, as well as a convenient springboard for penetrating Central Asia, Ankara wanted to assist in creating an economic management system in the Central Caucasus with close ties to its economy. The main obstacles were the unregulated state of Turkish-Armenian relations and the danger of renewing the hostilities interrupted in May 1994 in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone.

¹ See: Z. Batiashvili, "Huntington's Theory and Relations between Turkey and the Caucasus," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 2 (20), 2003.

² See: K.S. Gajiev, *Geopolitika Kavkaza*, Moscow, 2001, p. 348.

Being keenly aware of the trend in the developed countries toward integration, at the same time (the beginning of the 1990s) Turkey came forward with the idea of broad regional cooperation in the regions where it hoped to assume a leading role. The Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSECO) created in Istanbul on 26 May, 1992 and financed by Turkey is also in keeping with this goal. All three states of the Central Caucasus are members of it. The BSECO focuses its activity on regional integration, which includes forming border economic zones and building a "Eurasian corridor" (TRACECA), or the new Great Silk Road, for transporting energy resources from Asia to Europe without passing through Russia and Iran. It stands to reason that this corridor was supported by the U.S. and the European Union.

The following factors show that Turkey is becoming a regional "power center:" first, its growing role after the war on Iraq and in the Persian Gulf; second, the change in the geopolitical situation throughout Eurasia; third, the formation of a "Turkic world," stretching from the Balkans to Xinjiang, where approximately 160 million Turks live who speak in dialects of the Turkic languages (in the CIS countries alone there are 20 different dialects), which, according to UNESCO, occupy fifth place in the world in terms of prevalence, and others. On the whole though, the neo-Ottoman evaluation of Turkey as a "world power center" defines its geostrategic role.³

As mentioned above, the Central Caucasus offers vast unassimilated markets and convenient transit to Central Asia for Turkish business, so Ankara is promoting the idea of broad regional economic cooperation, particularly within the framework of the BSECO. The Central Caucasian states are primarily attracted to this organization by the opportunities its format provides for developing economic cooperation. For example, the 16th session of the BSECO Parliamentary Assembly (PA) on 27-28 November, 2000 in Erevan reviewed questions of political, humanitarian, and economic cooperation in the 21st century, and the 17th session on 19-21 June, 2001 in Baku discussed the problems of strengthening legislation, increasing stability, building a law-based state, and fighting organized crime.⁴

³ See: *Rossia i Zakavkazie: realii nezavisimosti i novoe partnerstvo*, Moscow, 2000, p. 64.

⁴ See: *Rossia i Zakavkazie v sovremenno m mire*, Moscow, 2002, p. 99.

Another vector of Turkish policy in the Caucasus is security. And here Ankara is not only acting as a NATO participant and representative, responsible for carrying out its policy in the region, but also as an independent player. And its strategy with respect to the Caucasian countries is based, first, on recognition of their territorial integrity, therefore Turkey supports Azerbaijan in its opposition against Armenia and is against a split in Georgia; second, on cooperation with the U.N., OSCE, and NATO aimed at maintaining stability in the Central Caucasus; third, on support of the political and economic independence of these states; and fourth, on counteracting Russia's influence and dominance in the region.

The relations between Ankara and Moscow during that period can be described as tough rivalry in the Central Caucasus. For several reasons, primarily due to Russia's traditional geopolitical position in the Caucasus, Turkey has been unable to gain leadership in the region. It has had to concentrate on its domestic political and economic problems, as well as on its foreign policy priorities in Europe, particularly in the Balkans and in the Middle East. The wave of Islamic revival in the country, the Kurdish issue, the tense relations with the EU, and the domestic economic crisis have prevented Turkey from exerting active influence on the situation in the Central Caucasian states. In turn, Russia has been concerned with its own economic and political difficulties, which were complicated by its changing foreign policy priorities, largely conditioned by Moscow's relations with the U.S. and NATO.

At the same time, despite the fact that both these countries have incompatible interests in the Caucasus, post-Soviet Turkish-Russian relations regarding this region have been developing within the framework of a model which prevented them from engaging in Cold War rhetoric. Of course, Ankara and Moscow openly clashed on such issues as Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, the Caspian pipelines, flanking restrictions in the Caucasus, the continued Russian military presence in Georgia and on the Armenian-Turkish border, and the Chechen problem. But nevertheless, both countries have been manifesting immense caution in order to prevent these contradictions from infecting the entire spectrum of bilateral relations. After all, for historical and geographic reasons, maintaining constructive relations with Russia is one of

Turkey's main security interests. What is more, the confrontational trends in their bilateral relations are being greatly alleviated by economic partnership and their understanding of the need for peaceful coexistence at the political level.

At the end of 1990s and during the first years of the current century, Russia's perception of Turkish policy in the Central Caucasus underwent a major overhaul. Moscow began to see Ankara more as a propitious partner than a dangerous threat. This was largely promoted by two factors, and the main one being gas. Turkey, along with Europe, is Russia's main sales market for blue fuel. Moscow has made its largest energy transactions with Ankara. In so doing, completion of the Blue Stream pipeline (which stretches along the bottom of the Black Sea) raised Turkey's dependence on Russian gas from 66% to 80%.⁵ What is more, Russia is beginning to view Turkey more as a transit country for its energy resources, rather than simply an export market.

The second factor, which is promoted by positive changes in bilateral relations, is Moscow's reassessment of Ankara's strategic potential, due to which by 2001 it was already used to perceiving the latter not as a geopolitical threat, but as a potential competitor, dealing with its own difficult domestic political and economic problems. After radically reassessing the hierarchy of threats facing the country, the Russian Federation Security Council no longer considers Ankara's penetration into the Caucasus a high-ranking danger, and the acute political and economic crisis in Turkey in February-March 2001 seemed to confirm this conclusion.

A certain amount of progress in bilateral relations was made in the rivalry between the two countries over the export routes of Caspian oil. For example, in mid-2001, Moscow withdrew its objections to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan route, and even called on Russian companies to participate in its laying and operation. But it still took energetic steps toward completing construction of the Tengiz-Novorossiisk main pipeline.

On the whole though, Russia prefers to view the problem of oil transportation in the geo-economic rather than the geopolitical context, placing the question of profitability higher than the idea of a balance of power in the region, that is, giving pref-

erence to economic competition, rather than to fighting for spheres of influence. Although Moscow still feels rather nervous about Washington and Ankara's plans in the Caucasian-Caspian region, the desire to avoid confrontation over this territory still prevails in Russian foreign policy.

After 9/11, the Caucasus as a whole began to play an important role in the war on international terrorism, and the U.S. and Turkey greatly toned down their critical evaluation of the Kremlin's actions in Chechnia. What is more, Russia did not put up too much resistance to America's plans to build military bases in Georgia intended for fighting international terrorism. There can be no doubt that this is having a positive effect on Turkish-Russian relations.

As for the ethnic conflicts in the Central Caucasus, Ankara and Moscow are currently in favor of a direct dialog between the opposing sides. Although there are certain disagreements over the solution to the situation, both states are showing a clear interest in implementing the Stability Pact for the Caucasus, while, of course, keeping their sights on their geopolitical goals in this region. At the same time, Turkey is concerned about the Russian military bases in Armenia and Georgia, seeing them as quite a serious threat. It would like the so-called CIS peacekeeping forces (essentially Russian) in the Central Caucasian conflict zones to be replaced with international contingents under the auspices of the U.N. or OSCE. Russia, on the other hand, is not happy about the cooperation between Turkey's military and special services and the corresponding departments of Azerbaijan and Georgia, in particular about the fact that in January 2002, Ankara, Baku and Tbilisi entered a trilateral agreement on regional security, which aroused Moscow's poorly disguised irritation.

It should be noted that Turkey has to take into account not only Russia's interests in the region, but also its rival Iran's. The rise in Ankara's and Tehran's role in the Central Caucasus is accompanied by their struggle for leadership and spheres of influence in the region, primarily for possession of its natural resources and the most important communication, fuel and energy, and strategic centers. But these two countries recognize the limits of their possibilities and are trying to coordinate their actions, the first with the U.S. and NATO, and the second with Russia. On the whole, Ankara's and Tehran's policy in this area largely depends on the

⁵ See: O. Kojaman, *Postsovetskoe Zakavkazie v rossijsko-turetskikh otnosheniiakh: ot konfrontatsii k sotrudnichestvu* [<http://www.avsam.org/rusca>].

results of their cooperation with Moscow, which despite the current weakening of its position in the Central Caucasus, is still a sufficiently influential military and political force there. What is more,

since there is no longer a standoff between the Western and Eastern blocs, American-Russian geopolitical rivalry for influence in this region is taking on major significance for the Caucasus.

Aspects of Cooperation with Georgia

One of the important areas of Ankara's Central Caucasian policy is its relations with Tbilisi. This is primarily related to Georgia's geographic location, which joins Turkey with Azerbaijan. What is more, transportation routes linking Russia with Armenia, Moscow's main ally in the region, pass through Georgia. In this way, Georgia is becoming a main opposition zone between the two geopolitical configurations of the U.S.-Turkey-Azerbaijan and Russia-Armenia-Iran. In principle, it is this opposition that is giving rise to the rather difficult political situation Georgia currently finds itself in. In so doing, it is obvious today that Georgia's inclination toward Turkey is stronger than it is toward other regional nations. But the Moscow factor is forcing official Tbilisi to act with extreme caution and take into account the interests of its northern neighbor.

Although during the first years of its independence, Georgia had a rather watchful attitude toward Turkey, relations between them soon entered a phase of mutually advantageous cooperation. At the present, three main areas can be identified in this sphere: transportation-communication projects (TRACECA); the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) pipelines; and contacts in the military sphere (in the NATO format and on a bilateral basis).

Under the TRACECA project, Ankara and Tbilisi entered an agreement (1993) on creating the shortest rail route, Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku, which, if it is successfully carried out, will significantly expand Georgia's international transportation routes and will give Turkey additional opportunities to carry out its economic projects in the region. Economic trade and other contacts between Turkey and Adjara, which is primarily populated by Muslims, are developing in leaps and bounds.

Turkish-Georgian relations are becoming particularly close due to the fact that Georgia is currently viewed as an important transit country for Caspian hydrocarbons. Tbilisi is party to all the agreements entered by Ankara, Baku, and the oil companies. An important event in the strengthening of Turkish-Georgian relations was the opening of the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline on 9 April, 1998, which ultimately determined the pro-Western and pro-Turkish slant in Georgia's foreign policy. Along with the agreements signed on oil and gas projects at the OSCE Istanbul summit, important decisions were also made about withdrawing Russian bases from Georgian territory, which gave Ankara an additional stimulus for expanding military cooperation with Tbilisi with a prospective increase in its military and political presence in the region.⁶

It should be noted that the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum projects are important to Georgia for several reasons, the purely economic interests of a state which does not have its own supplies of energy resources being among them. What is more, along with convenient access to Azerbaijani oil and gas, Georgia will obtain large amounts of transit fees since the pipelines will pass through its territory. Nevertheless, western capital is interested in the safety of the pipelines, which also means in the security of the countries through which they pass. For Tbilisi, though, guarantees in this sphere are currently playing a priority role in the country's sustainable development.

Since the first days of its independence, Georgia has been intent on removing Russian military bases from its territory, which Moscow responded to by increasing its pressure on Tbilisi. An example is 1993, when Abkhazian armed formations supported by Russia attacked Georgian government troops. At the same time, in the west of Georgia, an uprising of Z. Gamsakhurdia's supporters began, as a result of

⁶ See: *Rossia i Zakavkazie v sovremennoe mire*, p. 103.

which Eduard Shevardnadze was forced to make concessions to Russia, with the help of which the advance of Z. Gamsakhurdia's contingents on Tbilisi was halted. At that time, Eduard Shevardnadze agreed to Georgia's membership in the CIS and to sign a treaty defining the status of the Russian troops in the country. But this did not mean any changes in Georgia's strategic policy, that is, cooperation with Turkey and NATO.

It should also be noted that relations between Ankara and Tbilisi are expanding in the military sphere. For example, on 15 April, 1998, the Headquarters of the Turkish Armed Forces signed a Memorandum on Mutual Understanding with the Georgian Defense Ministry, which envisaged Turkish assistance in forming a corresponding material and technical base for Georgia and in training soldiers for its armed forces. What is more, joint Turkish-Georgian military-naval exercises have been held repeatedly in the Georgian sector of the Black Sea, during which operations were elaborated for ensuring the safety of future oil pipelines from the Caspian along the southern route.⁷ An important step in intensifying military cooperation was the treaty On Modernization and Use of the Air Force Base in Marneuli, signed on 17 October, 2000. It stipulated that Ankara would modernize this base and allot 1,125 million dollars for this purpose. And Tbilisi was to assume responsibility for servicing Turkish airplanes free of charge and on a priority basis for five years. Speaking about this in parliament, Georgian Deputy Defense Minister G. Bechuashvili noted that this document did not call for turning the airport into a Turkish base and was not directed against any third party.

Activation of cooperation between Georgia, on the one hand, and Turkey and NATO, on the other, as well as the ongoing attempts to eliminate Russian military bases in the country, forced Moscow to find new way of putting pressure on Tbilisi. They included enforcing a visa system (5 December, 2000) and accusing the Georgian leadership of sheltering Chechen militants.

An agreement on security in the Caucasus (the Caucasian Pact) signed by Turkey and Georgia noted that not only Russia has the right to a presence in the region. This led to an extensive cooling off in relations between Moscow and Tbilisi.⁸ What is more, Russia accused Turkey of sending guerillas and arms through Georgia to Chechnia, as well as of financing the training of terrorists in Karachaevo-Cherkessia and of supposedly sending money through Azerbaijan.⁹ Moscow is particularly irritated by the military contacts between Ankara and Tbilisi, including the above-mentioned help from Turkey in modernizing the air force base in Marneuli. What is more, in October 2002, a Turkish military delegation arrived in Tbilisi to participate in the ceremony of the official opening of the Joint Military Academy, founded with assistance from Ankara and partially staffed by its professors.

Relations with Armenia

Here it should be noted that since Armenia acquired its independence, its relations with Turkey have been strained. Diplomatic ties between them have still not been established, and economic and cultural relations are essentially non-existent. Erevan continues to demand that Ankara recognize the so-called "Armenian genocide" in the Ottoman Empire in 1915, and is also making territorial claims against it. What is more, when he came to power in 1988, Armenian President Robert Kocharian promised that the question of "Armenian genocide" would be brought to the international level and become one of the state's foreign policy priorities.¹⁰ (The practice of recent years shows that these were not empty words.) Ankara, in turn, is accusing Erevan of supporting the Kurdish militants. Between 1 May and 30 October, 1995, Turkey created a "security zone" in Kars, motivating this by the fact that Armenia was helping the Kurds, who were ousted from northern Iraq to Iran. What is more, Ankara blocked the air corridor linking the country to Erevan.

⁷ Ibid., p. 356.

⁸ See: *Izvestia*, 18 February, 2000.

⁹ See: *Izvestia*, 12 September, 2000; *TDN*, 23 September, 2000.

¹⁰ See: *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 14 September, 1999.

Another bone of contention in bilateral relations is the intensive and growing Armenian-Russian cooperation in the military sphere, which was manifested in particular in deliveries of Russian MiG-29 airplanes and S-300 surface-to-air missile complexes; the increase in the number of Russian military bases; the organization of joint exercises close to the Armenian-Turkish border, and so on. Turkey sees these actions as a threat to its interests in the region. Conflict relations with Ankara and Baku are pushing Erevan toward establishing closer cooperation with Russia, which is interested in "tethering" Armenia to itself.

As we have already noted, diplomatic relations have still not been established between Turkey and Armenia. Bilateral negotiations on opening a Turkish consulate in Erevan have not yielded the desired results due to the burgeoning of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. What is more, after Armenian armed formations seized the Kelbajar region of Azerbaijan, Turkey even closed its border with Armenia.

After Baku and Erevan signed a truce (May 1994), Turkish business circles tried to establish economic relations with Armenia, but each time official Ankara broke off these efforts. Its stance on this question remained staunch, regardless of the changes in leadership in the states in question. An example is the protocol signed in 1999 by representatives of the parties who were members of the Turkish coalition government. The part of the protocol devoted to Armenia notes that the normalization of bilateral relations is contingent on Erevan's renunciation of its hostile policy toward Turkey and liberation of the territory seized from Azerbaijan.

In 2000, the tension between them was hiked again during the discussion of "the Armenian genocide" in the Ottoman Empire in the legislative bodies of several western countries. This was preceded by intensified action by the Armenian lobby in 1999, when this problem was considered by U.S. Congress. And although Congress did not recognize the "Armenian genocide," the Armenian lobby in other countries continued to fight for this cause.

It would not be right to entirely blame the Armenian lobby for the hysteria raised around this issue. To some extent certain circles both in Russia and the West were interested in inflating it, which some researchers explain by Turkey's latest attempts to join the EU. The possibility of a change in the "balance of power" in the European Union after Turkey, which has immense human and economic potential, joins it is causing some members of this international organization to withhold a positive resolution of this question. The problem of the "Armenian genocide," on the other hand, is being used as another lever of pressure on Ankara and to delay its integration into the EU.

At approximately the same time as the "Armenian genocide" campaign unfolded in the West, the next stage in negotiations on the Karabakh problem began. The western countries, particularly the U.S., which all took a noticeably active position, mainly proceeded from their own interests, as motivated by their need to ensure security in the Caucasus. For it could become a corridor for transporting the oil and gas resources of the Caspian to the world markets. In order to implement the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline project and begin developing the Caspian's main oil fields, maximum efforts must be exerted to ensure the safety of these plans. Under these conditions, the OSCE Minsk Group (MG) hiked up the pressure on both parties to the conflict in order to bring them closer together on this issue. But although the MG representatives made statements about the need for a compromise on both sides, in reality they were putting the main pressure on Azerbaijan, which was particularly obvious from the three drafts the MG cochairmen presented to the conflicting parties. This was not in keeping with Azerbaijan's interests and cast aspersions on its sovereignty over Karabakh, which naturally aroused Baku's justified displeasure and prompted it to reject the document and take an even tougher stand on the issue. Turkey's position in this context was unequivocal, immediate liberation of all the Azerbaijani territory occupied by Armenian armed forces, followed by removal of the blockade and establishment of bilateral relations in the political and economic spheres. Erevan, on the other hand, which would like to normalize relations with Ankara, is still insisting that this process not hinge on the Karabakh problem.

On the whole, Ankara's position on this question was most clearly formulated in an interview V. Vural, international policy advisor to the Turkish prime minister, had with Reuters on 28 June, 1994: "There is no alternative to peace. Both countries, that is, Azerbaijan and Armenia, are exhausted, and the

parameters of a solution are in the offering: Karabakh remains Azerbaijani territory, but with cultural autonomy and relations with Armenia, and with a special status which must still be agreed upon.”¹¹

Proximity of Strategic Goals with Azerbaijan

Baku holds a priority position in Ankara's Caucasian policy. Along with their ethnic kinship, this is also promoted by the fact that, as noted above, Turkey is very interested in Azerbaijan's geographically advantageous location and its oil and gas resources.

Azerbaijan, in turn, has many reasons to strengthen cooperation with Turkey. Among them are Ankara's political clout in the Near East, that is, its political, military, and economic potential in this region, its close ties with the U.S., its membership in NATO, and so on. During our republic's transition to a market economy, Turkey's business experience, investments in the Azerbaijan economy, and the expansion of cooperation between business circles in both countries also played their role. Ankara is comprehensively and unequivocally supporting Baku in its conflict with Erevan. To some extent this support had a great impact on many international organizations changing their attitude toward the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

When the Soviet Union was in the process of collapse, Azerbaijan's struggle for independence did not go unnoticed by the Turkish leadership; in particular, even before the Soviet Union disintegrated, Turkish President T. Ozal made his first visit to Azerbaijan in March 1991. And on 9 November of the same year, Turkey was the first country in the world community to recognize Azerbaijan's independence. On 14 January, 1992, diplomatic relations were established between the two states. Then several agreements were signed, which formed the international legal base for further expansion of bilateral relations. On the whole, this period was characterized by an upswing in Turkic self-awareness not only in Turkey, but also in the republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus. In order to coordinate Turkic integration, an Agency of Cooperation and Development (TIKA) was created in 1992 at the Turkish Foreign Ministry. In October-November of the same year, a summit of the leaders of the Turkic-speaking states was held in Ankara, after which such meetings became a regular phenomenon.

Rapid Azerbaijani-Turkish rapprochement could not help but concern other regional nations with interests in the Central Caucasus, primarily Russia. The policy of official Baku, aimed at eliminating the Russian bases in the country, as well as its desire to enlist western companies in the production and transportation of Azerbaijani hydrocarbons dealt a significant blow to Moscow's interests. After Heydar Aliiev came to power in the summer of 1993, the government of our country began steering a course toward rapprochement and normalization of relations with Russia, while also strengthening comprehensive ties with Turkey at an accelerated rate under the new conditions. According to the Turkish Foreign Ministry, between 1991 and 1999, more than 100 Turkish-Azerbaijani agreements were signed on cooperation in the economic, cultural, and other spheres,¹² as a result of which Baku became Ankara's main ally in the region. As Heydar Aliiev noted at one time, “Turkey is a fraternal country, we are two countries of the same people.”¹³

Ankara is focusing great attention in its Central Caucasian policy on settlement of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. By supporting Baku, it is essentially counterbalancing Moscow, which is giving preference to Erevan in this context. But it should be noted here that Turkey is still less involved in this conflict than Russia. Official Ankara has noted several times that it supports Baku in the conflict, but it has no military participation in the conflict. Its assistance was felt not only during the active hostilities, but also after the truce entered in May 1994, which made it possible to expand Azerbaijani-Turkish mil-

¹¹ See: K.S. Gajiev, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

¹² See: W. Gareth, *Turkey and the Caucasus. Domestic Interests and Security Concerns*, London, 2001, p. 5.

¹³ *Ekho*, 26 April, 2004.

itary cooperation, support Azerbaijan in international organizations, and put pressure on the Armenian side. (In particular, in 1995, the Turkish Foreign Ministry instituted the position of ambassador on settlement of the Karabakh conflict.)

In 1997, it became known that Russia had given Armenia a large number of weapons totaling 1 billion dollars, which again raised the tension in the Karabakh issue. For example, this fact forced Azerbaijan and Turkey to activate their military and political relations. For this purpose on 5-8 May, 1997, Heydar Aliiev made an official visit to Turkey, during which nine documents were signed, the most important being the Declaration on Intensifying Strategic Cooperation between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey.

After meeting resistance from the OSCE Minsk Group, Azerbaijan found an ally in Turkey. What is more, as we have already noted, at that time the question of the "Armenian genocide" was one of the top priorities on the agenda, and Ankara was interested in coordinating its activity with Baku. On 12-17 March, 2001, Heydar Aliiev made another trip to Turkey, during which bilateral talks were held on the Karabakh problem and on the question of Turkish-Armenian relations. What is more, an agreement was reached on the sale of Azerbaijani energy resources to Turkey (on the very first day of the visit a total of nine agreements were signed). On 14 March, Heydar Aliiev spoke in the Turkish parliament, where he expressed his dissatisfaction with Ankara's passivity as part of the MG and said that he hoped for closer relations between Ankara and Baku in opposing Erevan's claims. In turn, Turkish President A. Sezer confirmed his country's official position and said that diplomatic relations with Armenia would only be possible if it returned the territory it occupied to Azerbaijan.

In March of the same year, an agreement was signed on expanding cooperation between the defense departments of the two countries, which Erevan evaluated as diplomatic maneuvering before the upcoming negotiations in Key West. They were held on 3-10 April, 2001. At that time, the Turkish press frequently criticized its government, accusing it of passivity in this issue. Commenting on this criticism, the country's leadership stated that it was using all the potential available to it, although it admitted that this was not a lot. The Karabakh problem was one of the issues Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem discussed with U.S. State Secretary Colin Powell during his first visit to the United States. Ismail Cem again proposed holding trilateral Azerbaijani-Armenian-Turkish negotiations on the Karabakh problem, which he first voiced in February 2001, but which the Armenian side rejected. However, on the whole, the degree of Turkey's participation in resolving this conflict is still rather indeterminate. Several observers expect its role in this process to increase soon, but another viewpoint is also quite widespread: many nations do not want Ankara to become involved in this opposition and would prefer to see Iran or Russia as mediator, rather than Turkey.

Nevertheless, in recent years, Ankara has clearly been striving to take Moscow's place in Baku's military and defense sectors, which are priorities for our country under conditions of the continued occupation of a fifth of its territory by Armenia. What is more, because of the disputed oil fields in the Caspian, Azerbaijan still has strained relations with Iran. Along with this, expansion of military cooperation with Turkey is viewed in Azerbaijan as a way of coming closer to NATO in the hope that should a crisis situation arise in the Caspian or in the region of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines, the West will help protect these projects. Baku is clearly steering a course toward greater military cooperation with Ankara and has stated it is in favor of accelerating the transfer of the Azerbaijani army to NATO standards, which was confirmed during a visit by Turkish Defense Minister S. Cakmakoglu to Azerbaijan in September 2000.¹⁴ At that time, the discussion focused on creating a NATO stronghold on the Apsheron Peninsula and on incorporating Baku into Ankara's defense system.¹⁵ In the past ten years, hundreds of Azeri soldiers have studied (and continue to study) in Turkish military academies, and dozens of Turkish officers are participating in force development in Azerbaijan.¹⁶

¹⁴ See: *Turkish Daily News*, 21 September, 2000.

¹⁵ See: *Izvestia*, 27 January, 1999.

¹⁶ See: D.B. Malysheva, "Turtsia i Iran v borbe sa vliianie v Zakavkazie," *Rossia i Zakavkazie: poiski novoi modeli obshchenia i razvitiia v izmeniaushchetsia mire*, Moscow, 1999, p. 47.

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In closing it should be noted that some observers evaluate the expansion of military cooperation among Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia as the precursor of a military alliance among these three states. At the moment, their national interests largely coincide. But Russia and Armenia are also drawing closer to each other, which has already led to the creation of a military alliance between Moscow and Erevan. In this situation, military cooperation among Ankara, Baku, and Tbilisi does not exclude a transfer of their relations in this sphere to a qualitatively new level. The antiterrorist campaign carried out by the U.S. and its allies in Afghanistan, as well as the war on Iraq gave another boost to progress in this area.

In this way, the first years of the new century have been marked by increased activity in the Caucasian vector of Turkey's foreign policy. This has become a very important geopolitical factor, without which it would be impossible to achieve political stabilization, settle conflicts, and ensure the development of integration processes in this region.