



**Some aspects of modern Georgian-Turkish relations
(social analysis)**

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Abstract

The significance of the research topic lies primarily in the proximity of the Republic of Turkey as our neighboring country. Over the course of history, our relations have experienced fluctuations, marked by periods of both conflict and peaceful coexistence. Currently, we maintain amicable neighborly ties with Turkey, considering it a strategic partner of our state. Establishing positive relations with this country, given its robust political and economic influence, will play a pivotal role in addressing various challenges faced by our nation.

The relevance of our research stems from the predominant examination of contemporary Georgian-Turkish relations based on official documents or historical sources. While these sources hold considerable importance, they fail to capture the perspective of ordinary Georgian citizens towards Turkey. To address this gap, we conducted a comprehensive sociological survey of respondents in Batumi, delving into various aspects of their attitudes towards Turkey.

Considering the opinions of our population alongside official structures' viewpoints will enable us to strategically plan and implement measures to enhance relations with Turkey. The research focused on specific issues, including visits to Turkey over a defined period, the purposes behind respondents' and their relatives' visits to Turkey, attitudes towards Turkish citizens arriving in Batumi, evaluation of the quality of various imported products from Turkey (with specific product names and issuing companies, if possible), and the impact of advertisements for various Turkish goods. Additionally, we examined the overall assessment of Georgian-Turkish business relations, the attraction of Turkish investments, challenges faced by those working in Turkey, the feasibility of extending the validity period of work visas in Turkey, the qualification level of guides accompanying tourist groups from Turkey, the qualitative assessment of Turkish film productions shown on Georgian TV channels, the necessity to study documents about Georgia preserved in Turkish archives, and a general evaluation of the current state of Georgian-Turkish relations with prospects for development.

Keywords: Georgia; Turkey; trade relations; tourism; political relations.

Introduction

Following Georgia's independence, Turkey promptly recognized this status on December 16, 1991, establishing partnership relations between the two nations. Over time, these relations have evolved into strategic cooperation encompassing political, trade-economic, and cultural-humanitarian spheres. Notably, Turkey stands as one of Georgia's largest trading partners, benefiting from a free trade regime between the two countries. Georgia's pivotal role as a bridge connecting Turkey with Central Asia and China holds significant importance for Turkey's trade, economic, and political objectives. Turkey actively supports Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, understanding that safeguarding the security and stability of its neigh-

bordering country is crucial for its own security. A testament to the strong neighborly relations with Turkey is the simplified transportation arrangement enjoyed by citizens of both countries, allowing them to cross the border solely based on an identity card. Additionally, the approval of a Georgian language teaching program in Turkish secondary schools since 2015 reflects positively on bilateral relations, offering anyone interested the opportunity to learn the Georgian language.

In our view, approaching Georgian-Turkish relations from a sociological perspective will provide additional insights, allowing for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of these relations.

Methodology

The objective of our research was to investigate and present various aspects of Georgian citizens' attitudes towards Turkey through sociological surveys conducted among respondents in Batumi.

Based on the research objectives, the target group for our sociological study was identified as citizens of Georgia residing within the administrative territory of Batumi.

The primary aim of the research was to identify key factors, as revealed through sociological surveys, that either facilitate or impede the development of multifaceted relations between Georgia and Turkey.

The sociological research conducted was anonymous, enhancing the sincerity and credibility of the respondents' responses.

The sociological research was conducted using a questionnaire, following the principle of selective sampling of interviewees. Respondents were asked various types of questions, including open-ended ones, enabling detailed and comprehensive responses to the inquiries posed.

In addition to survey responses from the respondents, the research drew upon a range of relevant sources pertaining to the topic, including internet resources.

A total of 100 respondents participated in the interviews.

Results

The sociological research conducted among Batumi respondents revealed various aspects of Georgian-Turkish relations as perceived by the local populace. These aspects range from personal interactions with Turkish individuals to assessments of the bilateral relations between our two states. Notably, the research delved into issues that have not received widespread public attention, such as the perception of Turkish tour guides leading groups in Georgia. Moreover, respondents provided insights into potential mechanisms to swiftly and effectively address any misunderstandings between our nations, thus serving as valuable preventive measures.

The results of the sociological research offer an assessment of the current state of relations between our countries and propose avenues for improvement. This can be viewed as a form of public diplomacy, as it provides a platform for dialogue and understanding between the two nations.

We believe that such a comprehensive sociological study, capturing the subjective views of Georgian citizens - particularly residents of Batumi - on Georgia-Turkey relations, can serve as a valuable blueprint for similar research endeavors. By presenting an authentic portrayal of the relationship between our countries, it can guide future research efforts aimed at enhancing bilateral understanding and cooperation.

Discussion

Regarding the responses of the surveyed individuals to the questions posed in the sociological questionnaire, they exhibit considerable diversity. Analysis shows that 34.7% of respondents have never visited Turkey, 17.3% visited once, 20.1% visited three times, and 27.9% have visited many times. Overall, a majority of respondents (65.2%) have visited the Republic of Turkey at least once.

Concerning the purposes for which respondents traveled to Turkey, the reasons vary considerably. Respondents provided multiple answers to this question, including buying medicines and inexpensive products, seeking medical treatment, recreational purposes, tourism, guest visits, scientific missions and expeditions, participation in official

delegations or duties, visiting relatives, collecting folklore and linguistic materials from Turkish citizens of Georgian origin, employment opportunities, touring as part of folklore ensembles, visiting Georgian cultural monuments, attending exhibitions, symposia, and festivals within cultural-creative programs, and for business-related matters.

Turkish citizens are present in Georgia, including Batumi, for various reasons. Overall, the attitudes toward them are as follows: 36.4% of respondents hold a positive attitude toward Turkish citizens; 42.5% are neutral; 10.7% express a negative sentiment. Additionally, 10.4% of respondents found it challenging to provide a definitive answer to this question. Consequently, the majority of surveyed Batumi residents (78.9%) do not harbor negative feelings toward Turkey.

In addition to the standard responses, respondents had the opportunity to elaborate on their opinions further. We highlight the viewpoint of one respondent, summarized as follows: "Our attitude toward Turks is basically that of good neighbors. Georgians are known for their hospitality and extend warmth to all foreign visitors (not exclusively Turks) who come to explore and experience the country. However, in other circumstances, our attitude toward foreigners may be less welcoming."

Currently, there are extensive trade and economic relations between Georgia and Turkey. We also addressed this topic with a few questions. When asked to evaluate the overall quality of Turkish products imported to Georgia, the responses were as follows: 27.4% of respondents believe that Turkish products are generally of high quality; 46.8% think that Turkish products are of average quality; 9.7% of respondents perceive products imported from Turkey as being of poor quality; and 16.1% of respondents did not provide a definitive answer to this question.

A thematic continuation of the aforementioned issue was to inquire about the Turkish products purchased in trade networks. Respondents mentioned various manufacturers and types of products,

including companies like "Beko," "Tachi," "Waikiki," "Ipekol," "Karaca," etc. The types of products mentioned encompassed a wide range, including food products, household appliances, medicines, clothing, linens, shoes, dishes, fabrics, fruits, and more.

The respondents' opinions regarding the advertisement of Turkish products when making purchases were distributed as follows:

- 35.2% of them mainly buy Turkish products due to the influence of its advertisement;
- 12.7% partially trust advertising when buying Turkish products, mainly considering the advice of friends and relatives;
- 25.0% pay the main attention to the high quality of Turkish products when making a purchase and trust advertising less;
- 27.1% of the respondents consider only the price of goods as important when purchasing products of Turkish production.

In the questionnaire, respondents expressed their opinions about which segment of the Georgian economy is more promising for attracting Turkish investments. The following sectors were designated: construction, medicine, light and food industry, tourism, hotels, trade, road construction, agriculture, high-tech production, etc.

Respondents also expressed concerns about attracting Turkish investments, highlighting two main points:

- a) Turkish investors in Georgia pay significantly lower wages to employees compared to Turkey for the same activities.
- b) Turkish investments in Georgia may not be favorable if they involve the employment of Turkish labor, which is unprofitable for the Georgian side.

Respondents expressed various views on Turkish-Georgian business relations and their prospects. Some of the opinions expressed include:

- "Cooperation in the business sector is necessary, but it should be based on equality. Georgia's interests should not be compromised."
- "Business relations with Turkey are expected to deepen further, given our country's geographical location and the free trade regime."

- "Georgian-Turkish economic ties are seen as discriminatory due to the trade imbalance. Turkey exports various products to Georgia while few products are exported from Georgia to Turkey, mostly wine. The unequal trade conditions are exacerbated by the fact that Turkish products imported to Georgia are often subsidized, making it difficult for Georgian products to compete. Turkish state support for its entrepreneurs is seen as unfair."

- "Active business relations with Turkey benefit Georgian citizens by fostering the development of local businesses."

- "There is a need to expand business relations with Turkey beyond traditional sectors of the economy."

- "Cooperation with Turkey in scientific, technical, and military production is deemed necessary due to Turkey's significant achievements in these areas."

- "Turkey finds it highly profitable to invest in Georgia due to low taxes and cheap labor costs."

Currently, a significant number of Georgians are employed in Turkey. The primary reason cited by the majority of respondents is unemployment in Georgia. One respondent succinctly summarized this sentiment, stating, "The main reasons for seeking work in Turkey are unemployment and low wages." Turkey offers employment opportunities for certain types of labor, coupled with comparatively higher wages, which attracts many Georgians seeking better prospects.

Regarding the duration of work visas for Georgians legally employed in Turkey, opinions among respondents vary. While 5.2% advocate for a six-month extension, 10.7% propose a one-year validity period. A majority of 53.4% support the issuance of multi-year work visas, and 20.4% suggest lifetime visas for Georgian workers in Turkey. There are 10.4% of respondents who did not provide a response to this question.

The majority of respondents emphasize the importance of guides who are knowledgeable about the histories of both Georgia and Turkey for Turkish tourist groups visiting Georgia, including Batumi. Specifically, 82.5% believe that only Georgian citizens with such

knowledge should serve as guides, while 1.2% prefer Turkish guides. Another 6.7% suggest that each group should have both Georgian and Turkish guides, and 9.6% find it difficult to provide a clear answer to this question. Given the significance of this issue, it may be beneficial to address it during high-level discussions between Georgia and Turkey.

It was intriguing for us to gauge the viewership rates of Turkish film productions, particularly Turkish TV series, among the respondents. The results are as follows: 17.4% of respondents indicated that they often watch Turkish series and other Turkish film productions; 21.7% watch them less frequently; 19.5% rarely tune in, while 41.4% of respondents do not watch Turkish films at all. Notably, a majority of respondents (58.6%) reported watching Turkish movies with some degree of frequency, underscoring the significant interest in Turkish TV series among the audience.

As it is widely recognized, numerous significant documents pertaining to Georgia are housed within the state archives of Turkey. Nearly all respondents expressed the urgency of transferring copies of these documents to Georgia for scientific processing.

Regarding the question of whether the government of Georgia acts in the best interests of the country in its relations with Turkey, the responses were varied: 21.4% fully agreed with the current course of the Georgian government's relations with Turkey, while 37.2% mostly agreed. Additionally, 15.8% expressed agreement to a greater extent than disagreement, while 20.6% disagreed with the policy of the Georgian government's relationship with Turkey. A small percentage, 5.0%, did not offer their own opinion on this matter.

The final question of the sociological research aimed to gather insights on the respondents' perceptions regarding the future of Georgian-Turkish relations and potential measures to deepen them. Here are some selected responses:

- "Georgian-Turkish relations should develop more intensively, benefiting both countries. These relations will have a good perspective if the interests of both parties are taken into account."

- "Georgian-Turkish relations will deepen if the Georgian churches located on the territory of Turkey are protected and cared for."

- "Georgian-Turkish relations will rise to a higher level if Turkey selflessly helps us in the development of our economy."

- "It will be beneficial if Turkey offers some trade and economic benefits to Georgia."

- "In the future, relations with Turkey will advance if the customs checkpoint in Sarp is canceled and our citizens can cross the border freely (similar to the countries of the Schengen zone in Europe)."

- "The deepening of Georgian-Turkish relations is crucial for ethnic Georgians living in Turkey and for the preservation of Georgian historical and cultural monuments."

- "For the positive development of Georgian-Turkish relations, it is necessary to treat their customs positively and to respect them when they visit us in Georgia. Similarly, Turks should also behave respectfully towards our citizens when they are in Turkey."

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the sociological research conducted to assess the current state of Georgian-Turkish relations among respondents from Batumi, it is evident that they provided insightful and qualified responses to the questions posed. These responses allow for several conclusions to be drawn.

Firstly, a significant number of respondents have ties with Turkey, either through personal visits, employment opportunities, or regular consumption of Turkish products. Some respondents also mentioned participating in official cultural events in Turkey. Additionally, many Batumi residents are employed by Turkish businesses, indicating a strong economic connection between the two regions.

Overall, most respondents viewed the current level of Georgian-Turkish relations positively, recognizing its considerable impact on their socio-economic well-being. However, they also highlighted specific issues and challenges within these relations that warrant furt-

her investigation and effective solutions. Addressing these challenges is essential for maximizing the potential for cooperation between the two countries.

In conclusion, it is evident that the active cooperation between our two countries plays a crucial role in strengthening the political, economic, and strategic development, as well as the security, of the region. This sentiment was echoed by the Speaker of the Turkish Parliament, Numan Kurtulmush, during his meeting with the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, Shalva Papuashvili, on September 29, 2023. Kurtulmush affirmed Turkey's support for the territorial integrity of Georgia and expressed the intention to continue fostering excellent relations between the two nations through mutual efforts. He conveyed warm regards from the Turkish people to their Georgian counterparts, emphasizing the commitment to maintaining friendship between the countries indefinitely (Kurtulmush, 2023).

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