



**The Strengthening of Turkey's Role in the South Caucasus
in the Post-Soviet Period**

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Abstract

Turkey is a state with strong political, military, and economic capabilities located in the Middle East region. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, it particularly intensified its relations with the countries of the South Caucasus region (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan). In the initial stage, the problems within the country itself, the difficulties that arose in the political and economic spheres, to a certain extent, prevented Ankara from becoming the leader of the "Turkish world" and demonstrating its political capabilities and power at the regional level. To expand its influence in the South Caucasus, Turkey strives to establish good neighbourly relations with all three states in the region and skilfully utilizes its existing religious, ethnic, cultural, and geographical proximity to them in order to create the image of a leading regional actor. On its path to achieving this goal, it actively cooperates with the South Caucasus countries in the energy, political, and military spheres, and also pays particular attention to expanding trade and economic contacts in this region. Having come to power in 2002, the Justice and Development Party of the Republic of

Turkey correctly understands its country's geopolitical significance, is not afraid of risks, and seeks to fill the vacuum that has emerged in the governments of the post-Soviet states. The risks are seen in the threat of confrontation with the Russian Federation, as despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, it does not intend to renounce the countries of the South Caucasus and remains one of the complex political players in the region. Since the 1980s, Turkey has taken active steps to balance the influence of Iran and Russia, as well as to weaken the influence of non-regional actors in the South Caucasus. According to Davutoglu's new foreign policy doctrine, Turkey's aspiration to become a leading regional country should not be incompatible with the interests of international actors (Grigoriadis I, 2010: 7). The coming to power of Recep Tayyip Erdogan for a new term will further intensify Ankara's Caucasian policy.

Keywords: Georgia; Turkey; Region; Politics; Azerbaijan; Iran; Caucasus; Armenia.

Introduction

The modern world order is in a constant state of flux. Consequently, the relationships between blocs, countries, and regions also exhibit a changing nature. This frequently creates situations where regulating interactions between subjects of international law becomes challenging. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the South Caucasus was not immune to the global processes and political fluctuations unfolding worldwide, and events in this region from the late 20th century onwards drew global attention. Today, the global interests of both regional and international actors clash in this territory, and Turkey is one of the main actors among them.

This issue is quite topical, particularly as the South Caucasus experiences both a clash and convergence of Turkish and Russian interests. Russia considers itself the sole and powerful actor capable of assuming the role of mediator in the region, while Turkey, for its part,

desires to take on the mediation of regional conflicts itself. Due to the strategically advantageous location of the South Caucasus, increasing positions in this region is particularly important for both Russia and Turkey in terms of increasing their influence.

Research Objective:

To investigate the place of the South Caucasus in Turkey's foreign policy and how its influence has been reflected in this region during the post-Soviet period in the Caspian and Black Sea regions.

Research Questions:

* What factors determined the change in Turkey's foreign policy course in the South Caucasus during the post-Soviet period?

* By what means does Turkey attempt to pursue its interests in the countries of the South Caucasus region?

* What are the specific characteristics of the Turkish ruling party's Caucasus policy?

Hypothesis:

In the post-Soviet period, Turkey's foreign policy has undergone a transformation. It pursues an active and pragmatic foreign policy in the South Caucasus region, which is strategically important for it, aiming to balance the influence of the two main actors, Iran and Russia, and to become the main regional power in the South Caucasus itself. In this regard, great importance is attached to maintaining peace and security in the countries of the region.

Object of the Research:

Turkey's Foreign Policy

Subject of the Research:

The Change in Turkey's Foreign Policy Course in the South Caucasus.

While numerous foreign and Turkish researchers are working on current issues in Turkish foreign policy, which allows for the analysis of Turkish foreign policy and the discussion of Turkey's interests in the South Caucasus, particularly in Georgia, the Georgian scientific community is certainly not spoiled with numerous studies on this

topic. In the process of working on the research, we were greatly helped by scientific studies by various authors: E. Makaradze in his work "Turkey's Strategy in the South Caucasus and Relations with Georgia in 1991-2008" (Makaradze E, 2018) interestingly talks about Turkey's interest in the independent states that emerged in the Caucasus after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and also talks about its ambitious plans for the Caucasus region, the economic, military and political cooperation of Georgia-Turkey-Azerbaijan, as well as joint active actions aimed at regional development and integration; M. Manchkhvili's "Turkish Foreign Policy in 1990-2008" (Manchkhvili M, 2014) is a substantial textbook translated from Turkish, beginning with the works of former Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. The textbook comprehensively and interestingly presents the function and role of state institutions in the country's political life, reviews Turkey's foreign policy system, and highlights the significance of this country's geopolitical location in terms of pursuing an active regional and global policy. In Z. Beridze's work, "Relations between Turkey and the South Caucasus countries in the 1990s" (Beridze Z, 2019), the author discusses: Turkey's geostrategic goals in the South Caucasus and the Russian factor; the convergence and clash of political interests between Turkey and Iran in the South Caucasus; the formation of Turkish-Georgian political and cultural relations after the collapse of the Soviet Union; and Turkish-Georgian economic partnership, it also interestingly discusses the prospects for the restoration of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Armenia and the joint energy projects that significantly impact the cooperation between Turkey and the countries of the South Caucasus region; L. Khozrevanidze L. in his monograph "Modern Aspects of Turkish Foreign Policy" (Khozrevanidze L, 2019) discusses the modern aspects of the domestic and foreign policy of the Republic of Turkey. The author talks about the country's foreign policy towards the South Caucasus, Turkey's favourable geopolitical location, characterizes its political system, and shares his views with us; during the Justice and Devel-

opment Party's rule, Turkey's foreign policy is associated with the name of Ahmet Davutoğlu, the chief advisor on foreign policy issues to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government. Davutoğlu's "Zero Problems in a New Era" (Davutoglu A, 2013) is a significant source for our work. The Turkish diplomat's strategic vision and new foreign policy doctrine are interestingly discussed by Ioannis Grigoriadis in his work "Davutoğlu's Doctrine and Turkish Foreign Policy" (Grigoriadis I. 2010). According to Davutoğlu, Turkey's favourable geographical location allows it to pursue a foreign policy oriented towards its own interests, which involves establishing peaceful relations with its neighbours and using existing linguistic, historical, or cultural ties between them for this purpose. G. Machavariani, in his article "The Nature and Peculiarities of Georgia-Turkey Relations at the Modern Stage" (Machavariani G. 2017), examines the cooperation between these two countries in various fields after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The present study can be utilized by specialists, academics, and researchers interested in the relationship between Russia, Turkey, and Georgia for further investigation of this issue.

Methods

The scientific article is based on research methods such as: the comparative-historical method, content analysis, and systems analysis.

Results

The hypothesis was confirmed. Significant changes occurred in Turkey's foreign policy course in the post-Soviet period. It has complex relations with Armenia, and attempts to normalize these relations create certain problems in its relationship with Azerbaijan. However, cooperation between these two countries is extremely important for Ankara in terms of regional security. Therefore, Turkey abandoned problematic relations with neighbouring countries and prioritized the "zero problems with neighbours" principle to address the challenges facing the country, which has made Turkey a prominent country in both the regional and international systems. By implementing joint

investment, economic, transport, energy, and other projects, it pursues its interests in the South Caucasus countries and opposes the shift of power in the region in favour of any other political actor.

Discussion

Establishing lasting peace in the South Caucasus region has been determined by the interests of the main geopolitical players in this region for centuries. Strengthening positions in the post-Soviet space is in the interests of three main regional actors – Iran, Turkey, and Russia – which are trying to shift the balance of power in the South Caucasus countries in their favour. Naturally, each actor has a different vision of its country's place and role in both international and regional politics, and accordingly, the views and opinions of the governments in power and the current political elites in these countries differ significantly from one another in this regard.

The Caucasus is not a peaceful region, as territorial conflicts have been ongoing here for years between several neighbouring states. Various governmental and non-governmental organizations from America and European countries are involved in their resolution, but a peaceful settlement has not been achieved to this day. These conflicts between different states, political entities, and political movements naturally did not arise suddenly and have been hindering the peaceful development of the South Caucasus for three decades already, preventing the consolidation of the region's countries' efforts in addressing common problems. Furthermore, the South Caucasus countries' membership in the Soviet Union for quite a long time to some extent even caused their distancing from neighbouring states in various fields.

Given that the territory of the South Caucasus is situated between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, surrounded by Turkey, Iran, and Russia, this region became an arena for the geopolitical confrontation of these three major states after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The dissolution of the USSR created favourable conditions for strengthening Turkey's role in Georgia and Azerbaijan, while

in Armenia, it facilitated the consolidation of the positions of Iran and Russia.

The strengthening of Turkey's role in the post-Soviet space is mainly due to the desire of the ruling authorities to restore the influence and power the country held during the Ottoman Empire. The recent geopolitical shifts in the world have given Ankara the opportunity to expand its influence in its neighbourhood (Aleksanyan, 2017:32). Turkey was one of the first countries to support the independence of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia and establish diplomatic relations with them. However, good neighbourly relations could not be maintained in Turkish-Armenian relations. In this case, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict complicated matters; moreover, after Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijan's Kalbajar region in 1993, the border between the two countries was closed (Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Türkiye's Relations with Southern Caucasus Countries, 2022).

Since the 1990s, Turkey's aspiration and ambition to become a major regional power in the South Caucasus has been actively opposed by Russia, which quickly reaffirmed its dominance. The strengthening of Turkey's influence in the region was somewhat hindered by the changes taking place in the country's domestic politics, such as internal political battles, frequent changes of government, and economic problems. Turkey tried to become an "indispensable" participant in the events taking place in the region (Collection of the Caucasus Institute, 2008: 22), but it was also well aware that any of its activity in the South Caucasus should not cause Russia's dissatisfaction, as it was and is significantly dependent on Russian natural gas (63%) and oil (29%) (Göksel, 2008: 15). Today, Turkey is actively trying to free itself from this dependence and obtain the necessary reserves of natural gas and oil from Azerbaijan and other countries.

Seeking to expand its influence in the South Caucasus, Ankara attached particular importance to maintaining close ties with Azerbaijan. The closeness between Turkey and Azerbaijan is best described by the expression "one nation, two states" (Hovsepian, 2021: 21). Tur-

key pays special attention to the cultural and linguistic unity of Turkic-speaking countries and peoples. Their connection is further strengthened and solidified in many cases by a shared religion as well. Furthermore, today Turkey is among the countries that are part of the world's leading economic G20. A significant portion of its capital is invested specifically in Azerbaijan. They are partners in major regional projects that have been implemented or are currently underway in the South Caucasus, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, and others. The cooperation between these two states does not only encompass the economic and political spheres; they also share experience in military affairs. It is known that Turkey has numerous and well-equipped armed forces. In the ongoing war with Armenia, it supplied Azerbaijan with modern weapons and also sent military advisors to this country (Demourian, 2020: 2). This, on the one hand, created fertile ground for Azerbaijan's military superiority, and on the other hand, more or less strengthened its influence over the countries of the region.

The security of the South Caucasus and the establishment of regional peace have largely depended on the resolution of the Karabakh issue and the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations. This conflict dates back to the 1920s, after the Soviet authorities initially assigned Armenian-populated Karabakh to Armenia and then, a few days later, to Azerbaijan, taking into account Turkey's interests (Gekjian, 2012:247). Thus, two major regional players decided the Karabakh issue years ago, creating a foundation for further escalation of the conflict. Shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and subsequently from 1988, tensions re-emerged between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis residing in Nagorno-Karabakh. Despite numerous international attempts to cease military operations, neither the 1991 Zhel-eznovodsk Declaration nor the "Minsk Group" established in 1992 under the mediation of the USA, Russia, and France – according to which the parties undertook to cease hostilities – could ensure a swift

and peaceful resolution to the conflict. While Turkey's initial support for Azerbaijan was only diplomatic, urging the opposing sides to cease fire, Turkey later expressed distrust towards the Minsk Group member states, and there was increasing open discussion about its potential involvement in the conflict (Maghaladze, 2020:1). This indeed materialized in the renewed Karabakh conflict in 2020. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called on the Armenian government to withdraw from Nagorno-Karabakh and stated that Ankara would provide military assistance to Baku if necessary (Górecki W, Chudziak M. 2021:3).

Turkey's assistance to Azerbaijan significantly contributed to the latter's military success in this conflict. Besides supplying modern, state-of-the-art military equipment, sources confirm that Turkey facilitated the transfer of thousands of Syrian fighters to Azerbaijani territory, which further increased the latter's military potential (Khushtudyan, 2020:1). With his loud and clearly stated position in favour of Baku at international meetings, Erdoğan reminded Russia that it had its own claims in the Black Sea region and the post-Soviet space and would try to prevent the balance of power in the South Caucasus from shifting in favour of another state (Maister, 2020:1). However, the political complexities and the severance of diplomatic ties that had persisted in Armenian-Turkish relations for years effectively determined Armenia's choice – to establish relations with Russia. The large Armenian population in Russia also greatly facilitated the rapprochement between the two countries. Thus, not only the difficulties in Turkish-Armenian relations but also the large Armenian diaspora in Russia compelled Armenia to make a political choice in the latter's favour.

There is no alternative to establishing peace. In recent times, the main aspect of Turkey's South Caucasus policy has become coexisting with neighbouring states without confrontation, and establishing investment, economic, and trade ties with them. The role of the Caucasus region as a transit corridor connecting Europe and Asia is significantly large. From a geopolitical perspective, its favourable strategic

location compels Turkey to prevent instability in the South Caucasus and, stemming from its political ambitions, to occupy a leading position in the extraction and transportation of Caspian energy resources (Beridze, 2019:91).

Back in 2000, the "Caucasus Stability Pact" proposed by Süleyman Demirel aimed to address issues related to regional security. The pact was initially approved by the then-government of Georgia, followed by Armenia and Azerbaijan. Furthermore, between 1998 and 2008, at the initiative of the President of Armenia, the implementation of a 3+3+2 platform was planned, which would unite Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan on one side, and Iran, Russia, and Turkey on the other, with the addition of the USA and the European Union (Manchkhashvili, 2014:95). However, this initiative ended without success. Turkey made a similar initiative for the second time after the August 2008 war (Dzamukashvili S, 2022). This time, the "Caucasus Security Platform" envisioned the involvement of Turkey, Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, through which Ankara attempted to create a reality in the South Caucasus tailored to its interests. However, neither initiative yielded results in terms of regulating security issues in the region (Makaradze, 2018:173), as Russia was not interested in establishing peace in the region and the growth of influence of other actors. Following this, the current Turkish government established the "Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency" (TIKA) in the Balkans, Central Asia, and the South Caucasus countries, whose goal is cooperation in the economic sphere and the financing and implementation of various projects (Makaradze, 2018:172).

It was precisely between 2002 and 2008 that Turkey's ruling party began developing a new strategy in foreign policy, in which the renowned Turkish politician and diplomat Ahmet Davutoğlu played a significant role. He formulated his theses in his 2001 book "Strategic Depth" and urged the current government to establish peaceful relations with neighbours and pursue a "dynamic and multidimensional" foreign policy: "The Turkish people must begin to see their neighbours

not as sources of problems and potential threats, but as arenas for cooperation and partnership," he stated (Davutoğlu, 2013).

In December 2020, the presidents of Turkey and Azerbaijan, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Ilham Aliyev, initiated the "regional cooperation to ensure lasting peace and stability in the South Caucasus." This platform is known as the 3+3 format. From the outset, the regional format meetings implied the participation of six states. Following the first meeting held in Moscow in December 2021, the next "3+3" format meeting took place in Tehran on October 23, 2023, attended by the foreign ministers of Russia, Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Armenia (the Georgian side refrained from participating in the meetings due to the fact that 20% of Georgia's territory is occupied by Russia). Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan stated that resolving problems through dialogue between Azerbaijan and Armenia would ensure stability and lasting peace in the South Caucasus (Moskovskoye Vremya, 2023:1). Furthermore, while the "3+3" format initially envisioned cooperation in the fields of transport, economy, and politics, at the meeting held in Istanbul in October 2024, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov highlighted the humanitarian aspect and spoke about the necessity of cultural relations (Kunchulia, 2020:1). It is also worth noting that in June-August of last year, Turkey and Azerbaijan officially applied for membership in BRICS (Machaidze, 2024). Russia, another regional actor, holds significant influence in this organization (Baunov A. 2024). Turkey will likely attempt to use this platform to its advantage, aiming to normalize relations with Iran. Therefore, it can be assumed that the possible accession of Turkey and Azerbaijan to BRICS will cause certain changes in the region's political and economic life.

Although Turkey severed official interstate relations with Armenia in 1993, and Armenia is not involved in any energy or transport projects implemented in the region with the participation of Turkey and Azerbaijan, Ankara remains an active trading partner for Armenia to this day (Marabyan, 2022:131). The disagreement between these two countries was the reason why, instead of the already existing Kars-

Gyumri railway line, the construction of a new railway, the Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku railway, was carried out (Marabyan, 2022: 132).

In recent years, significant shifts have occurred in Armenia's foreign policy course regarding Turkey: while Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan emphatically asserted "Karabakh is Armenia" during a visit to Karabakh in 2019, he made a statement in 2020 indicating his readiness to make certain compromises on the Karabakh issue (Maghaladze, 2020:1). This decision of his drew both supporters and opponents within the country: a segment of the population did not support the establishment of good neighbourly relations with Turkey, seemingly unable to forget the genocide committed against Armenians by the authorities of the Ottoman Empire in 1915. However, a certain portion did not oppose the political course chosen by the government.

Armenia's ruling circles believe that if there were no border restrictions between Armenia and Turkey, the share of trade between these two countries would increase even further. This, in turn, would lead to a growth in Turkey's influence in Armenia and, consequently, weaken Russia's role in the South Caucasus region. However, for Yerevan, Moscow represents the main military force that claims it can oversee the Zangezur corridor connecting Nakhichevan and Azerbaijan. Russia itself is satisfied with the presence of Russian peacekeepers in the South Caucasus, and Iran also does not protest the deployment of Russian troops in the region, as it is not in its interest to have a new military conflict near its borders, nor the activation of the Zangezur corridor, given that in this case, Turkey would be able to connect with Azerbaijan by land. For Iran, which supplied Armenia with weapons, oil, and other necessary resources during the Karabakh conflict, Turkey represents one of its strongest adversaries in the South Caucasus. Russian peacekeepers, on the other hand, create a certain obstacle to the large-scale political activities of Turkish diplomacy and hinder the growth of its influence in the South Caucasus. However, it is worth noting that Ankara's involvement in the Karabakh conflict

and Azerbaijan's victory, directly due to Turkish military assistance, can already be considered confirmation of the latter's triumph and the expansion of its political influence in the region (Antadze, 2020:3).

Regarding Georgia-Turkey relations, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and Georgia's declaration of independence in 1991, Ankara established diplomatic relations with our country in 1992. In the same year, Turkish Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel visited Georgia, and the two neighbouring states agreed to cooperate in the fields of education, science, culture, and sports (Svobodnaya Gruziya, 2000:1). Against the backdrop of Turkish-Armenian confrontation and heightened Armenian-Azerbaijani tensions, Georgia occupies an important place in Turkey's foreign policy (Sukiasyan S. 2016:162). For Ankara, this small neighbouring country is of interest not only in terms of pursuing an active and rational regional policy but also as a kind of corridor for connecting with the Turkic-speaking countries of Central Asia (Aleksanyan L, 201 7:310).

As Turkey is a member state of NATO, and Georgia aspires to become a member of this military alliance, maintaining peaceful relations with our southern neighbour is extremely important for our country in this situation. Georgia, together with Turkey, participates in several significant energy and transport projects. These joint projects, on the one hand, positively impact economic development, and economic cooperation, in turn, has a substantial influence on politics and contributes to the formation of new policies in the region.

It is particularly important to highlight Georgia's cooperation with Turkey from a military-political standpoint. Turkey actively assists our country in the implementation of various military programs, the training of armed forces, and the enhancement of combat readiness, so that the Georgian army aligns with NATO standards (Khozrevanidze, 2019:129). The partnership between Georgia and Turkey in the security and defence sphere is facilitated by the fact that Turkey recognizes Georgia's territorial integrity and supports its membership in Euro-Atlantic structures. Simultaneously, it is precisely through

Georgia that Turkey's energy and political interests, based on the resources of the Caspian Sea, pass. Against the backdrop of complicated relations with Armenia due to the Karabakh conflict, Georgia is needed by Turkey as a kind of connecting bridge, a territory through which it will transport Caspian energy resources to Western markets, bypassing Russia (Machavariani, 2017:4). This very idea formed the basis of the agreement signed in November 1999 between Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey regarding the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline of global significance on Georgian territory (2002) (Ekedahl & Goodman, 1997:257). A little later, an agreement was also signed on the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline (2007).

During the administration of M. Saakashvili, starting from 2004, Turkey's influence in Georgia increased significantly. This is evidenced by the Georgian President's visit to Ankara on May 20 of the same year and meetings with President A. Sezer, Prime Minister Erdoğan, and other officials, where President Mikheil Saakashvili stated that Georgia and Turkey are "natural allies and friends." During the three-day official visit, the parties agreed on bilateral cooperation (Civil Georgia, 2004:1). During the same period, the then-chairman of the Adjara Autonomous Republic, Aslan Abashidze, resigned from his post. Three years later, in accordance with the agreement concluded between Georgia and Russia in Sochi in 2006, Russia withdrew its military bases from Batumi (November 13, 2007) and Akhalkalaki (June 2007). This was followed by the strengthening of Turkey's military-political influence and the weakening of Russia's role in the South Caucasus. However, Georgia still holds an important place in the Kremlin's Caucasian policy (Civil Georgia, 2007).

Following the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, Turkey gradually strengthened its positions in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti. The fact that Kvemo Kartli is populated by ethnic Azerbaijanis who share a common language and culture with Turkey further facilitates the growth of Turkish influence. The Georgian Muslims living in Adjara

also represent a strong foothold for Ankara. The Free Trade Agreement signed between Georgia and Turkey in 2007 and the visa-free travel regime in place since 2012 further simplifies the free movement of labour migrants between these two neighbouring states. Turkey also has its business interests in relation to Abkhazia and, to protect them, tries to strengthen its positions in this territory as well, which causes dissatisfaction from the Georgian authorities and has an unfavourable impact on the relations between these two neighbouring countries.

The Turkish side has also tried to firmly establish itself in our country's educational sphere. The Çağlar educational network in Georgia included six educational institutions: the International Black Sea University (IBSU), the Demirel College, the Şahin School-Lyceum, the Nikoloz Tsereteli International School, the Niko Nikoladze School-Lyceum in Kutaisi, and the David Aghmashenebeli School in Marneuli. All the aforementioned educational institutions belonged to "Hizmet," declared a terrorist organization by Erdoğan, whose founder, Fethullah Gülen, was accused of attempting to orchestrate a coup d'état against the current Turkish government (2016). The dismantling of the Çağlar educational network should seemingly have weakened Turkey's influence in Georgia, but the fact remains that Ankara continues to be one of the influential political players in our country (Pipia, Vardiashvili, Mikadze L. 2018).

In conclusion

With its economic capabilities and existing or planned energy projects, Turkey has gained real opportunities to increase its influence in the South Caucasus region. Its involvement in the Karabakh conflict was a kind of signal from Turkey that it has to present itself as an influential player in the countries of this region. On the path to achieving this goal, it actively used this conflict to expand its political influence. Turkey is connected to the South Caucasus through crucial joint projects. The realization of such grand projects naturally requires a lot of time and financial resources. In parallel with the current global and unpredictable economic and political processes, the Turkish

government manages to utilize all the instruments at its disposal and to occupy a leading position in the strategically important South Caucasus region for it. This is happening in conditions where the geopolitical confrontation between Turkey, Iran, and Russia for this region continues to this day. Gekjian, O. (2012). *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy*. London: Ashgate, <https://tinyurl.com/24rb5jdb> (25.03.2025).

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