

## POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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### **TURKEY-RUSSIAN COMPETITION IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AFTER THE AZERBAIJAN –ARMENIAN WAR**

***Abstract.** In modern times, the South Caucasus is a region of geopolitical importance that allows Central Asia to open to the Black Sea and from there to Anatolia and Europe, influencing the interests of Russia, Turkey and Iran. The South Caucasus, a transitional region between East and West, North and South, occupies a special place in the emerging world order after the Cold War. As you know, Turkey is located in the middle of the three most important crisis regions in the world. Two of these regions, the South Caucasus and the Middle East in particular, are not only of interest to the world powers for their energy resources, but also a competitive area for them. It is difficult to say that such a situation is positive for the security of the region.*

***Keywords:** Cold War, Turkey, Russia, Caucasus*

After the collapse of the USSR, the confrontation between the East-West block was replaced by new friendly relations. Under the circumstances, Turkey changed its foreign policy in order to find new allies to defend its interests on the international platform. The establishment of two independent states in the South Caucasus, Turkey's foreign policy priorities have been identified: first, to prevent the return of Russia to South Caucasus; to support the independence and territorial integrity of the states of the region, and the second was to achieve the safe transportation of energy resources of the Caspian Basin to Western markets [3, p.458].

Underlying Turkey's policy in the South Caucasus, security demanded that the region become a stable neighbor. The goal was to create a NATO-like, EU-controlled entity in the Caucasus. It would be easier to solve "frozen problems" through this institution. For this purpose, the idea of a "Common Caucasian House" put forward by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev and the

President of Georgia E. Shevardnadze deserves special attention. President of Azerbaijan H. Aliyev: Establishing peace in Azerbaijan, the whole Caucasus region and the world is our most important wish [4, p.106] - his voice was able to draw the world's attention to the existence of peace and stability in the Caucasus. However, the regional interests of the major powers did not allow the project to be implemented.

Russia wanted to resolve two main issues by keeping the South Caucasus under its control. The first was to maintain security in the southern region of Russia, and the second was to keep Western countries out of the region as much as possible [7, p.28]. In this respect, the positions of Russia and Iran coincided, but contradicted the positions of Turkey. Georgia and Azerbaijan, which are trying to break free from Russia's influence, are on Turkey's side in this regard. Despite Russia's current problems and economic difficulties, its sufficient military presence threatened the countries of the region. The fact that the South Caucasus is a "safe zone" is important for Turkey. K. Filiz, one of the Turkish authors, emphasized that the modern security complex is completed as a union of states in which the international problems of the countries of the region cannot be analyzed and solved separately [8, p.4]. Based on the concept of "zero problems with neighbors", Turkey tried to implement its foreign policy by cooperating in the form of "rhythmic diplomacy" [5, p.103].

For this purpose, in April 2002, the leaders of Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia signed the "Trabzon Agreement" in Trabzon [6, p.698]. With this agreement, an alliance of Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan was formed in the region, which began to worry neighboring Russia and Iran. It was no coincidence that the Iranian Foreign Minister paid an unscheduled visit to Moscow in early May 2002. The main issues discussed during the visit were the status of the Caspian Sea, regional security and the influence of Western countries in the region [8]. The Trabzon Declaration was on the agenda of the Turkish, Azerbaijani and Georgian media, as well as the Russian and Iranian media. At the meeting, along with the security of the South Caucasus, Azerbaijan's support for Azerbaijan's position on the oil and gas pipelines that will pass through the three countries, along with further strengthening the isolation of Armenia, also affected the interests of Russia and Iran. Touching upon

the importance of the Trabzon Declaration [1, p.36-37], President H.Aliyev noted: “The agreement signed here “reflects the interests of all three states and brings these states closer economically. From this point of view, there is no doubt that the Trabzon summit was a success for Azerbaijan”. [11]

This Security Pact, which was to be established on the initiative of the Republic of Azerbaijan by Heydar Aliyev, was to be included in the United States along with the Caucasus states and Turkey. This pact was to be based on the model 3 + 3 + 2 (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia + Russia, Turkey, Iran + USA and EU) [10, p.131]. However, Azerbaijan's proposal was not welcomed in Russia, Armenia and Iran. Thus, Russia, which considers the US interference in the processes in the region unacceptable, did not unequivocally accept Iran's exclusion in the formation of the regional security system [6, p.697]. The reason was Turkey's participation in the project with the United States and, as a result, the weakening of Russia's position in the South Caucasus. Therefore, the Russian-Iranian-Armenian triangle was placed against the US-Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia alliance that could be formed in the South Caucasus. In general, the Caucasus Platform for Stability and Cooperation is a positive diplomatic move by Turkey, which is deeply concerned about regional security. This is an indication of Turkey's intention to take the initiative in the region and to develop good relations with its neighbors. However, both the complex ethnic and political structure of the South Caucasus and the conflicting regional geopolitical interests of the United States and Russia make it difficult to create an environment of lasting stability in the region. Nevertheless, by implementing this platform, Turkey was trying to show that hopes for peace in the Caucasus have not been completely extinguished. There are still a number of forces that are hindering the realization of this platform for peace in the South Caucasus region, which is part of Turkey's eastern security.

Mr Pashinyan agreed with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev to de-escalate tensions and set up the first military hotline between the two countries. In August 2019 Mr Pashinyan told crowds of ethnic Armenians assembled in the main city in Karabakh, Stepanakert, that "Artsakh is Armenia, full stop." Artsakh is the Armenian name for Karabakh. The remarks angered Azerbaijan and were repeatedly condemned by President Aliyev.

Fighting broke out in July this year on the international border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, some 300 km (185 miles) away from Nagorno-Karabakh. By the end of the month Turkey's military was taking part in large-scale joint exercises in Azerbaijan. The latest conflict broke out on 27 September. Armenia said Azerbaijan fired the first shots. Azerbaijan said it was launching a "counter-offensive" in response to Armenian aggression. Fighting came to an end in November when both sides agreed to sign a Russian-brokered peace deal. Under its terms, Azerbaijan holds on to several areas that it gained control of during the conflict and Armenia will withdraw troops from them. Almost 2,000 Russian peacekeepers will monitor the truce [2].

Turkey's interference in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has undoubtedly brought a new dimension. While Ankara tried to initiate stability platforms in the South Caucasus in both 2000 and 2008, the current effects of a general militarisation of Turkish foreign policy are now also being felt in this region. In Europe there is talk of Turkey no longer as a difficult partner, but as a 'threatening' one.

Any attempt to change the status quo in the post-Soviet space undermines Russia's credibility and reputation. Russia has been quick to punish threats to the status quo, witness Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. It also threatened Moldova after 2014 by increasing its military exercises in Transnistria from a few dozen to a few hundred per year. Russia reacted unexpectedly calmly to Baku's invasion. Most surprisingly, it repeatedly rejected Yerevan's request for military assistance on procedural grounds. Moscow's ability to stop the Azeri offensive immediately after the fall of Shushi revealed its control. Russia would only have allowed the change of status quo if its expected gains exceeded the related risks and costs. This occurred, while the Kremlin used Baku to pull its chestnuts out of the fire.

### **Conclusion**

Russia, inherited from the USSR, is a major threat to the South Caucasus states with its great power and imperialist ideals. . The unification of the South Caucasus into an independent and peaceful state will ensure that Turkey is also in a state of security, although the aggressive policy of Armenia, which is backed by Russia,

does not allow it. While Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey cooperation seeks to establish security and lasting peace in the region, Russia and its ally Armenia are making every effort to delay this process.

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