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## **A PARADIGM SHIFT IN TURKISH-AZERBAIJANI RELATIONS? RESULT FOR TURKISH ARMENIAN RECONCILIATION PROCESS BETWEEN 2008 AND 2010**

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### **Abstract**

Turkish-Azerbaijani relations have been almost unique since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Turkey has sustained special relationships with the newly independent Azerbaijan since the 1990s. These relations are grounded in linguistic and cultural characteristics, as well as common interests. Despite mutually very close ties, Turkey and Azerbaijan have entered an extra ordinary period regarding Turkish-Armenian Protocols in 2009. Azerbaijan almost abandoned her traditional diplomacy that requires a balance between Turkey and Russia, and moved to a new foreign policy concept predominating towards Russia. This different kind of partnership became especially important when the Turkish government initiated policies on the normalization of relations with its neighbor, Armenia.

If we consider that the bilateral relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan have been unique until Protocols established, how should we analyze the paradigm shift in Azerbaijan? In this framework, some questions should be taken into consideration: Was Azerbaijan a real partner for Turkey and was Turkey a vital bodyguard for Azerbaijan? And were bilateral relations between these states as important as supposed for many years?

This paper examines the possible dimensions of the relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan. From the historical perspective to Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation process, Turkish-Azerbaijani relations are underlined. In this paper, these complex questions and the pros and cons of their relations will be investigated in the light of Protocols and results.

**Key words:** Turkey, Azerbaijan, economic and political relations

**JEL Classification:** F15, P48, N95

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## Introduction

Despite common declarations of fraternity, Turkish-Azerbaijani relations have a relatively short history, notwithstanding bilateral diplomacy during the period of Mehmet Emin Resulzade's Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, which became the first democratic state in the Muslim world between 1918-1920. At that time, the fading Ottoman Empire attempted an unsuccessful movement to re-establish control over the territory of present-day Azerbaijan following the first World War. From the founding of the Republic of Turkey until 1991, Azerbaijan had been considered a part of Soviet Turkestan in the eyes of Turkish people, and state elites had limited knowledge about this country during the Cold War.

After the Soviet Union collapsed, Turkey became the first country to recognize Azerbaijani independence in January 1992, and established full diplomatic ties within a year. During the era of Ebulfeyz Elchibey, Baku stressed fundamental relations with Turkey in accordance with the personal efforts of Turgut Özal who was president of Turkey when the USSR dissolved. Özal had been a passionate advocate of Azerbaijan until his death in mid-April 1993, while Elchibey, along with pan-Turkic ideologues in the Popular Front regime was an ardent supporter of the expansion of Turkish influence in Azerbaijan.

When Haydar Aliyev consolidated political power after the removal of Elchibey in 1993, Turkish state elites subsequently expressed a willingness to continue cordial relations. Yet, relations between the two countries became a bit subdued during Aliyev's presidency, as he sought to develop pragmatic relations with Russia and Iran, which ranged from stagnant to hostile during Elchibey's period in office. Aliyev's more realistic policies started to reshape his country's domestic politics and foreign relations after he gained control of leading institutions in Azerbaijan. Furthermore, due to its size, population and energy resources, Azerbaijan became the most important country in the South Caucasus, a trend which was already anticipated during his presidency.

Both post-Özal and post-Elchibey era in the two countries coincided with a similar process in their domestic systems. While Turkey had experienced a long period of internal instability until 2002, Azerbaijan witnessed relative political stability with the monopoly over governing institutions by Aliyev's family. In this sense, it could be argued that an autocratic regime or political instability eventually complemented one another. Despite the unique conditions experienced by the two states, they both improved their diplomatic and economic ties with each other. These new conditions

were dependent on the mutual introduction of realistic political and economic initiatives.

On the other hand, when the new Turkish government opted for normalization of its relations with Armenia during 2009, Azerbaijan began to seek various alternatives for regional projects. That was almost first experience for bilateral relations which exhibited a kind of turbulence. This paper seeks to analyze the basic features of Turkish-Azerbaijani relations from independence in 1991 to the year of 2010, and to identify the possible causes of the shift in their diplomatic relations.

### **1. The Place of Azerbaijan in Turkey: 1991-2010 Period**

In the post-Soviet era, Azerbaijan regained its independence, while Turkey`s political environment has changed in both its domestic situation and foreign relations. Throughout the 1990s, Turkish foreign policy was much more ideological and identity-based, yet has become more pragmatic since that time. This shift in orientation is particularly evident in Turkey`s relations with Azerbaijan and the newly independent republics of Central Asia. In the early 1990s, Turkey attempted unsuccessfully to play a “big brother” role toward these republics. In contrast, among the post-Soviet nations, Azerbaijan presented a unique opportunity for Turkey`s new political shift beginning in 2002, because of its geographical proximity, hydrocarbon reserves and common cultural characteristics (Öniş&Yılmaz 2009: 8). In this case, Turkey`s relations with Azerbaijan were both historically friendly and grounded in more pragmatic mutual economic and political interests.

Since the 1990`s, Turkey and Azerbaijan have developed their common ties despite some obstacles. Turkey has been one of the biggest trading partners for Azerbaijan for at least two decades. Total trade volume has permanently increased for the last ten years from \$0.3 to \$2.1 billion dollars until 2009 (UN, 16.05.2010). At the same time, Turkey is the biggest investor in the non-oil and gas sectors in Azerbaijan with \$2.1 billion dollars in between 1993 and 2005 (Turkish Embassy in Baku, 2005).

Turkish export products to Azerbaijan have mainly consisted of industrial goods, such as foodstuffs, textiles, construction materials, communications technology, electronics, automobiles, and raw materials. The GSM company, the country`s largest firm, is owned by Turkish entrepreneurs, who are also very active in banking and transportation. Because of this dynamism, between 2003 and 2012, Turkish construction companies undertook projects worth \$8 billion in Azerbaijan`s rapidly developing infrastructure (Kardaş&Macit, 2015: 41).

Although it has not invested substantially in the oil and gas sector in Azerbaijan, Turkey's energy needs could also be considered as an important factor in their bilateral relations. Turkey's energy production has become more dependent on oil and especially natural gas for the last ten years. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline became operational in 2006 and Turkey has been purchasing 6 bcm/year natural gas from Azerbaijan since 2007 (BOTAŞ, 15.02.2007). Among other gas purchase agreements, this deal was more advantageous for Turkey's energy policies than other contracts because it has provided some additional privileges to export this amount.

In fact, Azerbaijan has concluded 28 production-sharing agreements with different oil companies, mostly western-owned firms. The BTC pipeline has a maximum transit capacity of one million barrels per day. A parallel Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) gas export pipeline opened in September 2006, and in October 2008, the first tanker carrying oil from Kazakhstan's Tengiz field departed for Azerbaijan. New pipeline and delivery route systems, such as Nabucco, which is a proposed natural gas pipeline project through the southern corridor to Europe are currently being considered and negotiated (US Department of State, 02.02.2011). On the other hand, Turkey's interests to diversify its gas supplies have extended to Turkmen gas reserves since 1999, when Turkey and Turkmenistan concluded a purchase agreement. According to this agreement, Turkey would buy bcm/year of Turkmen gas, and another 14 bcm/year would be transported to Central Europe along a pipeline extension running through Turkey. Azerbaijan was located at the center of that project, which was called the Trans-Caspian Natural Gas Pipeline.

From a realist geopolitical perspective, Turkey's main concerns towards Azerbaijan consist of four elements. These are as follows: limiting Russian influence in the region; decreasing Iranian Islamic propaganda effects in the country; increasing nationalist ties with Azerbaijan; and finally, looking for economic benefits of new investment areas and utilizing hydrocarbon reserves of that country (Sadri, 2003: 186). In addition, Turkey closed its Armenian borders to implement the previously signed declaration of friendship and cooperation with Azerbaijan in June 1993. Since then the borders between Turkey and Armenia have remained closed because of the Armenian invasion of Azerbaijani territory. However, as Turkey has followed open and liberal economic policies since 1980, this decision has eventually proven to be unrealistic and opposite to the policies implemented in today's globalized world. Turkey has consequently ignored Armenia's importance as a neighbor and prioritized its ties with Azerbaijan and Georgia in the Caucasus region.

Thus, Turkish-Azerbaijani relations from the political and economic perspective have depended on a variety of several factors. These include new foreign policy instruments introduced by Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and regional projects both implemented and proposed in the Caucasus and Caspian Basin as well as the historical background of the relations between the two countries. These historical ties consist also of political, military, educational, and regional prospects.

*Firstly*, with respect to the international summits of Turkish-speaking countries, Turkey and Azerbaijan have played a crucial role. Seven out of ten of the Turkic summits have been held either in Turkey or in Azerbaijan. In the 9<sup>th</sup> summit that was held in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic in 2009, the leaders decided to establish a permanent body for further cooperation between Turkic states. In the 10<sup>th</sup> Turkic Summit which was held in Istanbul on September 15-16, 2010, Turkish president Abdullah Gul declared that they are from now on "one nation, but also six states", in a takeoff on Heydar Aliyev's original "one nation, two states" slogan describing the relationship between Turkey and its close ally, Azerbaijan (Lomsadze, 05.02.2011).

*Secondly*, military cooperation between the two states (i.e. the establishment of the Azerbaijan-Turkey Military Pact in 1992) is another important factor in their relations. Although Turkey has not been officially involved in the Caucasus Wars including the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, military cooperation between the two states was in their minds since end of the Karabakh War. In 1998, General Cevik Bir, Deputy Chief of Turkey's General Staff declared: "Students from these countries are trained in our military colleges in order to adapt them to western systems and practices. Approximately 2,300 students have graduated from Turkey's military colleges and another 1,700 students continue their training" (Bir, 1998). The phrase "these countries" mostly referred to Georgian and Azerbaijani students, as well as those from certain Central Asian republics.

Moreover, prominent Azeri State Advisor for Foreign Affairs Vefa Guluzade had called for the US and Turkey to take the initiative to create a NATO-run military base in Azerbaijan in 1999. In 2002, Azerbaijan formally announced its pursuit of candidacy to join the Alliance through the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). At the same time, Baku has sought to maintain a balance in its security relations between East and West. Moscow continues to operate a military station for radio monitoring and early warning at Gabala in northern Azerbaijan (Nation, 2007: 16). The policy of East-West balance is very important for the country because of Russia's crucial role in managing the Karabakh problem. Despite limitations for

closer relations, Turkish military assistance to this country exceeded \$200 million as of 2010 and Azerbaijan plans to take part in the ATAK helicopter project, which is currently a joint venture between Turkey and Italy.<sup>1</sup>

*Third* dimension of the place of Azerbaijan in Turkish foreign policy has depended on the regional projects that could accelerate bilateral cooperation in the region since the 1990s (Dikkaya&Özyakışır, 2008: 93-118). As a result of regional cooperation efforts between Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey in oil and natural gas connections such as the BTC Oil pipeline (from Baku to Ceyhan) and South Caucasian Natural Gas Pipeline, also known as the Southern Corridor for natural gas transportation (from Baku to Erzurum) are active. It is expected that the Kazakh contribution to BTC oil pipeline and the Turkmen contribution to Southern Corridor through the Trans-Caspian natural gas pipeline which was signed in 1999. This regional cooperation project would develop with the possible implementation of Nabucco Natural Gas Project and Kars-Tbilisi-Baku (KTB) railroad project.

Additionally, Turkey supported Azerbaijan in its intentions to become a member of regional organizations, such as Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC), and Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) in the early years of the independence. These regional initiatives expanded Turkey's regional influence especially towards the Caucasus and Central Asia. Membership in the ECO and OIC provided Azerbaijan with increased international recognition among Muslim states. In addition to multilateral relations, Turkey's efforts to build new energy routes via Georgia became Azerbaijan important. Final step in this cooperation was a trilateral agreement between three states in Caucasus is the KTB railroad project, which is still under construction. In many ways, this project reflected a case study in regional self-reliance without having any direct Western or US financial support (Ismayilov, 20.02.2010).

*Fourth* factor is clearly business relations and trade/capital flows mostly from Turkey to Azerbaijan. Trade data and its components demonstrated that Turkish-Azerbaijani trade relations had been growing since the beginning of independence. Trade relations and the effects of interest groups are very crucial in developing relations. Furthermore, capital flows from Turkey to Azerbaijan and possible Azeri investments in Turkey, such as the construction of the Heydar Aliyev oil refinery in Ceyhan, are the basic arguments for Turkish investors' role in the establishment of an Azerbaijani market economy.

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<sup>1</sup>"Turkey-Azerbaijan Military Cooperation Deepens to the Tune of \$200 Million",  
<http://www.artsakank.com.cy/en/news/general/2010/turkey-azerbaijan-military-cooperation-deepens-tun> (13/01/2011).

Another important instrument regarding the capital/human flows has been the Turkish human capital investments in Azerbaijan. This development has expanded the influence of Turkish language in Azerbaijan as well as in other post-Soviet Turkic countries. Because of the efforts of the state elites and the civil society movements; Turkey has opened Azerbaijani Turkish-language schools, including Islamic schools, and has trained Azeri students in its universities and colleges. Turkey hopes these students will return to their native countries to constitute a Turkish-speaking professional class that will replace the traditional Russian-speaking political and economic elite. An important instrument for achieving this goal is the establishment of Turksat, which beams Turkish TV programs to Azerbaijan via satellite (Hunter, 2001: 9-10). Turkey has also demonstrated the role of educational exchange as a foreign policy tool since the mid-1990s. Turkish policy makers thought that educating today's students meant creation of the elites who would later oversee the transformation towards a market economy and democracy in their native countries (Yank, 2004: 293-294).

Thousands of Azerbaijani students have graduated from Turkish universities and have been employed at different places and positions in the country, and thousands of students have received education from both public and private companies in Azerbaijan since the beginning of independence. Turkish trainers working in Azerbaijan are actually continuing a historical responsibility. Turkish schools that are as old as Azerbaijan's independence are playing an important role in the country's struggle for a brighter future. On the other hand, there are significant numbers of Azerbaijani students studying in Turkish universities whom have been organized in lobbying activities (Goksel, 2008: 124).

In another word, Turkey has made a link between education and creating a common Turkish identity with respect to educational and exchange programs, which have been implemented since the collapse of the USSR. Azerbaijan responded positively to Turkish initiatives and it has been the good example of the mutual commitment to social development since independence.

## **2. The Place of Turkey in Azerbaijan: 1991-2010 Era**

Since 1994, Baku has pursued four major policy goals. The most important aim is to facilitate economic development by exporting oil products. Second, Baku intends to decrease its traditional dependence on Russia. Third, state elites of this country intend to strengthen its power base economically and militarily to regain its lost territory. Finally, Azerbaijani leaders' self-image of their republic is a secular one (Sadri, 2003:

187-188). To achieve each of these goals, either directly or indirectly, Turkey has been a good strategic partner for Azerbaijan. As previously mentioned, Turkey helped the country as much as possible when it was in chaos and had security problems at both the domestic and international level.

**Table 1:** Azerbaijan-Turkey “High Politics” Diplomatic Portfolio 1991-2010

<i>Date</i>	<i>Instrument Type</i>	<i>Issue Area</i>
24/1/1992	Agreement	Friendship, Collaboration and Neighbourship
28/2/1992	Protocol	Cooperation
?/?/1992	Treaty	Mutual Military Training
2/11/1992	Agreement	Cooperation and Solidarity
9/2/1994	Treaty	Friendship and Comprehensive Collaboration
9/2/1994	Protocol	Cooperation and Mutual Assistance
9/2/1994	Agreement	Political Consultations
4/10/1994	Agreement	Cooperation
10/6/1996	Treaty	Military Training, Technical and Scientific Areas
31/10/1996	Protocol	Cooperation of Armed Forces Support Staff
5/5/1997	Statement	Expansion of Strategic Collaboration
8/9/1997	Agreement	Cooperation and Political Consultations
24/7/1999	Treaty	Military Grant to Armed Forces
16/5/2000	Agreement	Military Grant
28/2/2001	Agreement	Military Grant
22/3/2001	Protocol	Development of Nakhchivan 5 <sup>th</sup> Army
14/5/2002	Agreement	Military Grant
29/8/2003	Protocol	State Border Service Assistance
25/6/2003	Agreement	Military Grant
3/4/2003	Protocol	Cooperation of Military Intelligence
23/7/2003	Protocol	Safety of the West-East Energy Corridor
13/4/2004	Agreement	Long-Term Economic and Military Cooperation
22/6/2004	Agreement	Military Grant
6/6/2005	Agreement	Military Grant
14/7/2006	Agreement	Military Grant
26/2/2007	Duty Instruction	High-Level Azerbaijan-Turkey Military Dialogue
13/7/2007	Agreement	Military Grant
6/11/2007	Agreement	Partnership and Cooperation

*Source:* Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Table 1 below presents a summary of bilateral diplomatic instruments in “high politics”, or vital security and economic areas, concluded between Baku and Ankara between 1991 and 2010. This data demonstrates the prevalence of direct military aid and security assistance in Azerbaijan-Turkey relations.

On the other hand, following independence, Azerbaijan found itself located in the center of the Russian-Turkish-Iranian geopolitical triangle, consisting of historical and religious ties with Iran; ethnic, ethno-linguistic and traditional intellectual links



with Turkey; and political, intellectual and linguistic ties with the Russian Federation. Therefore, observers have often suggested that Azerbaijani foreign policy instruments must be continually calibrated in order to maintain an effective balance between them (Mehdiyeva, 2003: 271). Since the beginning of independence, the country had changed presidents only four times in twenty years. While the first president, Ayaz Muttalibov had continued to rely on Russian support (between September 1991 and March 1992), the second president Elchibey pursued Westernization through unity with Turkey (between June 1992 and August 1993). Finally, in October 1993, Haydar Aliyev, who became the third president of Azerbaijan until October 2003, introduced the “balanced” foreign policy doctrine, which sought to reinforce national sovereignty and autonomy by establishing positive diplomatic relations with each of the global and regional powers.

In fact, Muttalibov paid the political price for his clear Russian-oriented policies while Elchibey reaped the cost his anti-Russian and anti-Iranian approaches. Moreover, because of imbalanced policies, Azerbaijani territory was invaded by Armenia, while the country faced separatist movements such as the Lezgin resistance in the north and the attempted Talish secession in the south. Furthermore, within the first six months of Haydar Aliev’s presidency, despite being the strongest president of the republic since independence, Azerbaijan lost a significant portion of its territory (Aslanli, 2010: 140).

For more than two decades, nearly all presidents in Azerbaijan have faced the security dilemma of preserving the stability of their regimes through the conflict over Karabakh, whereas the outcome of the Karabakh War has been a primary threat to the internal stability of the entire country. The political survival of Azerbaijan’s presidents have been determined by this conflict since the beginning of independence. Hence, the Karabakh conflict remained critical in determining priorities in Baku’s foreign policy. Moreover, it needed to begin oil exports to increase its revenues. A wealthier Azerbaijan could support a modern army, which in turn would enable greater leverage against Russia and Armenia. However, exporting oil from the landlocked Caspian region through Russia would increase Russia’s leverage over Azerbaijan (Ipek, 2009: 229-30).

The Karabakh War with Armenia brought Azerbaijan dramatic results with refugee problems (almost 1 million people), casualties (nearly 20 thousand) and disabled people (more than 50 thousand) in addition to the economic cost of war and the loss nearly %20 of its total surface area, at the same time. One could say that the war on Karabakh against Armenia and its consequences in Azerbaijan became closer to

Turkey. Elchibey defended anti-Russian and anti-Iranian policies during his relatively short presidency, strongly refused Russian demands for the return of its military bases and control over Azerbaijan's energy exports, and endorsed pan-Turkism as the ideology of the Azerbaijan Popular Front.

Additionally, Russian demands were perceived as unacceptable for the sovereignty of an independent country. Thus, Russia provided support to the Armenian side and the shift in the balance of power toward Armenian forces led to battlefield victories over Azerbaijani forces.

Elchibey initially achieved some success in the war and gave priority to developing a strategic partnership with Turkey, and considered radical solutions to overcome Azerbaijan's security dilemma. He also prioritized expanding contacts with the West as a key factor in strengthening national independence. Accordingly, Elchibey's administration set a pro-Western course for Azerbaijan's foreign policy. The country's rich oil resources were an important policy instrument (Ipek, 2009: 231). Because of pro-Western and pro-Turkish policies, he gave large priorities to European, US, and Turkish oil companies and excluded Russia from oil contracts.

Naturally, the clear opposition to Russian influence through its remnant Soviet army and national oil companies brought Azerbaijan internal chaos and instability in addition to the loss of Karabakh, including areas of Azerbaijani territory outside of the Karabakh enclave. Power struggles initiated by local militia leader Surat Huseynov in Baku coincided with the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ganja. Moreover, with the support of the Armenian diaspora in the US, Azerbaijan was excluded from US foreign assistance under Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act beginning in April 1992 until the waiver policy introduced in 2001. Armenian forces took further advantage of the ferment in Azerbaijan and occupied several districts neighboring Karabakh. A dramatic refugee problem started with the Lezgin minority's uprising in the northern provinces. In the summer of 1993, Azerbaijan was in chaos and threatened to collapse into a multitude of regions fighting against the central authorities in Baku.

After some domestic struggles between his base of support in Nakhchivan and the Elchibey government in Baku, Haydar Aliyev gained power in a short time. His foreign policy opted for closer relations with Russia. Aliyev visited Moscow and agreed to rejoin the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in September 1993. He also invited the Russian Lukoil to join the oil projects in its Caspian offshore fields. Consequently, a 10% share of the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic

(SOCAR) was transferred to Lukoil. Aliyev’s strategic approach toward Russia was to gain its support, particularly with regards to the Karabakh conflict. Although a cease-fire was signed in May 1994 between the two Caucasian countries, Armenia controlled the Karabakh region and seven other districts of Azerbaijan between Karabakh and the territory of Armenia. Table 2 below indicates the extent of efforts to engage in security and economic cooperation with Moscow since the late 1990s, despite fundamental disagreements with its regional policies.

**Table 2:** Azerbaijan-Russian Federation “High Politics” Diplomatic Portfolio 1991-2010

<i>Date</i>	<i>Instrument Type</i>	<i>Issue Area</i>
6/10/1992	Agreement	Activity of Border Armies of Russian Federation
12/10/1992	Contract	Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Security
3/7/1997	Agreement	Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Security
3/7/1997	Protocol	Azerbaijan/Russia Military Cooperation
14/6/2000	Protocol	Azerbaijan/Russia Security Council Cooperation
25/12/2000	Agreement	Personnel in Military Education Enterprises
9/1/2001	Joint Declaration	Foundations of Cooperation in Caspian Sea
25/1/2002	Agreement	Terms of Use of Gabala Radar Station
25/1/2002	Contract	Long-Term Economic Cooperation (to 2010)
23/9/2002	Agreement	Allocation of Border Areas of Caspian Sea Bed
23/9/2002	Agreement	Mutual Activity and Cooperation of MNS/FSB
27/2/2003	Agreement	Military and Technical Cooperation
6/2/2004	Declaration	Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Security
4/4/2008	Agreement	Terrorism, Illicit Trafficking and Organised Crime
3/7/2008	Declaration	Friendship and Strategic Partnership
30/6/2009	Agreement	Natural Gas Supply

*Source:* Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Haydar Aliyev’s long-term strategy was to attract multiple countries’ investment in the oil and gas sector in order to strengthen national security. The investment of various energy companies from the US and Europe was sought to catalyze the formation of an international pro-Azerbaijani lobby to bolster Azerbaijan’s position in the Minsk Group, the primary diplomatic platform for negotiations on the Karabakh conflict. Strengthening Azerbaijan’s independence and national security always has been at the core of Azerbaijan’s foreign policy despite periodic swings under four different presidents between 1992 and 2003. The harnessing of its rich oil resources and relations with Western oil companies were an important policy instrument in achieving these foreign policy goals.

Like geopolitical variables, economic factors have led Azeri elites to establish closer ties to the West (via Turkey), while maintaining a working relationship with Russia. In addition to these variables, Azerbaijani foreign policy is based on the predominant role in formulating and implementing of the central leadership. With the accession to

the presidency of Heydar Aliyev in 1993, the leadership issue allowed the country to pursue in such that way (Sadri, 2003: 182).

Azerbaijan looked upon Turkey, in its short history, as its closest partner in the region because of common, ethnic, linguistic and cultural ties. It has also benefited from participating along with the Central Asian Turkic states in Turkic Summits that were sponsored by the Turkish government. Turkey has offered Azerbaijan credits, aid and various kinds of technical assistance in order to create a market economy and to build its democratic institutions. Azerbaijan has also become more important to Turkey in recent years because of its oil and gas reserves and of its geographical location as an important transit country on east-west energy and transportation routes avoiding Russia and Iran (Winrow, 2000: 8).

### **3. A Paradigm Shift Between Turkey and Azerbaijan Regarding Turkish Protocols with Armenia?**

Could it be argued that the Turkish-Azerbaijani honeymoon ended regarding Turkish Protocols with Armenia? If we consider the past as given, this would be difficult to suppose. If, however it can be questioned, what kinds of disputes are there between the two nations? Despite Turkey`s efforts to become a strategic partner for Azerbaijan, the two countries have already experienced some problematic issues since the presidency of Haydar Aliyev.

First of all, the personalist leadership of Aliyev and his presidency (together with the son Aliyev`s administration) in Azerbaijan shaped the country`s approach to domestic and foreign policy. Because of his policies, today`s Azerbaijan is less democratic, less respectful of human rights, and less clear in its foreign policy goals. Haydar Aliyev and his family established an authoritarian and patrimonial political regime in Azerbaijan. As Winrow has suggested, Aliyev was more circumspect in his diplomacy towards Turkey than his immediate predecessor Elchibey (Winrow, 1996: 132). Many entrepreneurs and visitors have witnessed such policy towards Turkish citizens when entering the country during the years of Protocols crises. Following days of the declaration of initiatives on the normalization of the relations with Armenia, Turkish officials and Turkish citizens started to perceive that they were regarded as important enemies in Azerbaijan. These perceptions mainly resulted from Baku`s rapid signals of foreign policy change towards Turkey.

In fact, Haydar Aliyev distributed oil deals to American, British, French, Russian, Turkish, and Iranian companies in order to create material interests in those countries

to serve as the basis for pro-Azerbaijani policies (Cheterian 2008: 370). This strategy has not however elicited significant support from these countries, excluding Turkey's sealing of its border with Armenia. Turkey's support to Azerbaijan in the international sphere regarding the Karabakh issue was implemented at a time when the country was in danger. However, the Turkish reconciliation process with Armenia caused strong protests in Azerbaijan both in the public sphere and among state elites.

The change in Turkey's approach toward Armenia has depended on the AKP government's foreign policy initiatives for the last several years. Throughout the incumbency of this Party, there has been a constant emphasis on the use of soft power, an improvement of relations with all neighboring countries aptly summarized by the motto "zero problems with neighbors," as well as the vision of a more ambitious role for Turkey as an active regional and global power extending well beyond the realm of favorable bilateral relations (Öniş, 2011: 50). This policy provided the country an important international influence, although disturbances emerged within Azerbaijani state elites. In this respect, the adage "one nation, two states" which was emphasized by Haydar Aliyev would become clearly meaningless.

When the son of Haydar, İlham Aliyev came to power he pursued the similar policies of his father. Despite inheriting his father's approach with respect to the balance among regional powers (i.e. Russia, Turkey and Iran), son Aliyev's policies towards Turkey became less clear. Even though some researchers argue that this ambivalence was the result of the Russo-Georgian War in August 2008, further explanations are needed to analyze. Aliyev observed that the Western powers have few incentives to become involved in any struggle in the region, and were unable to protect regional infrastructure projects from the threat of Russian troops during August 2008. In addition, İlham Aliyev felt that his own regime could be under threat by Russia.

Because of the August 2008 events, Azerbaijan seems to be slowly drifting towards Russia by suggesting Turkish negotiations with Armenia on the normalization of relations. This development has been an important cornerstone of foreign policy change of Azerbaijan towards Turkey. However, Turkey declared it will not open its borders with Armenia if the Karabakh problem remains unsolved and one of the main goals of Turkey was to resolve the dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia (Anatolian News Agency, 26.04.2010); Azerbaijan started to follow Russian-oriented strategies. The most important feature of this policy change resulted from the August 2008 events after the Russian army's military operations in Georgia, which came very close to the Azerbaijani border.

Relations with Azerbaijan, Turkey's long time "fraternal republic" however witnessed difficulties due to the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement in late 2009. Still, bilateral ties remain strong thanks to the readjusted oil and natural gas deals in favor of Azerbaijan recently (Babacan, 2010: 7). Turkey's new policy which has been implemented for the last few years based on the multidirectional doctrine of "zero problem with neighbors" requires the normalization process of its relations with Armenia. That policy made some troubles in the eyes of Azerbaijani state elites, although opposition party leaders (like Isa Gambar of the Musavat Party in Azerbaijan) argued that this policy would enable further development of strategies toward resolving the Karabakh problem.

After the Russo-Georgian War in August 2008, a rise in anti-Western approaches in Azerbaijan's foreign policy was observed following the visit of Turkish President, Abdullah Gul, to Yerevan to observe a national football match and meet Armenian President Serj Sarkisyan in September. Azerbaijan showed its reaction through several steps: When tensions arose between Turkey and Azerbaijan in energy related negotiations, Azerbaijan signed a natural gas agreement with Russia. It also signed the Moskov Declaration on 2 November 2008, against the use of military power in resolving the Karabakh problem. The last step of Azerbaijan was the participation in the Nabucco agreement ceremony in Ankara with only a single minister present (Aslanli, 2010: 143). Azerbaijan's shuttle diplomacy in gas sales to the EU and Turkey have also been considered untrustworthy by many observers.

One of these activities is the proposed Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania Interconnect (AGRI) project, which involves the construction of an Azerbaijani gas-processing terminal on Georgia's Black Sea coast and the transportation of gas by ship to Romania for further shipment to Europe's domestic gas pipeline network. On 12 May 2010, an agreement was signed by the Ministers of Azerbaijan, Romania, and Georgia to conduct a feasibility study for the project. According to preliminary data, the project will cost 4.6 billion Euros. If the project is realized, Azerbaijan will gain access to the European market, bypassing Russia and Turkey (Pritchins, 2010: 127). Although this alternative route is less feasible than other options, such as Nabucco and other Southern Corridor pipelines that are partly constructed, Azerbaijan has tried to respond to Turkish and EU supported projects.

In this respect, the agreement on gas sales to Russia from Azerbaijan could be considered as another reaction against Western and Turkish regional strategies. When the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border was on the agenda in Spring 2009 and relations with Azerbaijan became cooler, Russian President Medvedev came to Baku

in July and signed a 500 million cubic meter gas agreement. Though many political observers regarded this deal as “Turkey’s absolute failure”, Ilham Aliyev stated with restraint that this deal was the “realization of Azerbaijan’s demand for forming market conditions” (Mahirgizi, 2010). It is clear that Azerbaijanis do not buy the message that progress in the Turkey-Armenia rapprochement will encourage progress in the Karabakh peace process. Analysts across the political spectrum in Baku suggest that Russia has stepped up diplomatic efforts to lure Azerbaijan away from its political, security, and energy links to the West.<sup>2</sup> These links in the end, extend to Turkey and its geopolitical interests towards the Caucasus.

Actually, despite Haydar Aliev’s excessive efforts in balancing regional powers, none of the Russian presidents visited Azerbaijan until Vladimir Putin’s first official trip to Baku in 2001 (Aslanli, 2010: 141). Furthermore, Neither Haydar Aliyev’s warmer approach to Russia nor Ilham Aliyev’s frequent visits to Russia have solved the Karabakh problem. On the other hand, Turkey has consistently demonstrated its willingness to support the Azerbaijani position on the Nagorno Karabakh issue by closing its borders with Armenia since 1993. Thus, it could be argued that Azerbaijan, despite its sultanic rule, has regarded democratic Turkey as a tool for managing its international disputes.

However, Russian-oriented policies in Azerbaijan began in Haydar Aliev’s time, while Ilham Aliev succeeded his father without any foreign policy experience and presented his country’s priorities freely to Russia. Azerbaijan’s main foreign policy dilemma consists of the solution of the Karabakh problem and the use of the country’s hydro-carbon reserves in support of its resolution, whether through negotiation or force. In this case, oil and gas have not been satisfactory instruments for this purpose. On the other hand, Azerbaijan has observed that having energy reserves alone is not enough for any considerable solution of Karabakh problem, but also requires sufficient international support (Alkan, 2010: 160-165).

## Conclusions

Azerbaijan has been the closest partner of Turkey in the Caucasus because they share common ethnic, linguistic and cultural features. Turkey has also become the main supporter of Azerbaijan in its transition period toward a market economy and its war against Armenia in the struggle for Nagorno Karabakh that took place from February 1988 to May 1994. Turkish strategic efforts to consolidate Azerbaijan’s

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<sup>2</sup> “WikiLeaks: Azerbaijan's Unstable Relationship with Turkey, US, and Russia”,  
[http://azerireport.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2631&Itemid=53](http://azerireport.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2631&Itemid=53) (23/02/2011).

independence, preservation of its territorial integrity and realization of its economic potential arising from the rich natural resources of the Caspian Sea have accelerated bilateral relations.

Azerbaijan and Turkey have subsequently built upon their linguistic and cultural ties to form a very close economic partnership that sees Turkey negotiating to buy natural gas from Azerbaijan and the two co-operating, along with neighboring Georgia, in such infrastructure projects as the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline, the South Caucasus Pipeline and the Kars-Tbilisi-Baku railway, all of which bypass Armenia despite a recent thawing in diplomatic relations between Ankara and Yerevan, that make them key players in European energy security.

Azeri soldiers have been training in Turkish NATO-sponsored institutions and military schools for years. Military cooperation agreements have already been signed between the two countries and efforts are moving forward legally. Additionally, Turkish education institutions have been working very actively in Azerbaijan since 1990s. Thousands of Azerbaijani students at both the undergraduate and graduate level have been trained in Turkey and they are very eager for further integration between the two countries.

After Turkish-Armenian reconciliation efforts in 2009, Turkish Azerbaijani relations have entered an extra ordinary period. This period has some consequences as follows:

Turkey and Azerbaijan and their cooperation in the region have depended on mutual interests since the presidency of Haydar Aliyev, beginning in 1993. The most important factor in these relations has been national security problems of Azerbaijan, such as economic weakness, Armenian invasion of the Karabakh region, and oil and gas pipelines bypassing Russia or Iran.

Turkey`s formal alliance relationship with Western Europe and the US have accelerated Azerbaijan`s interest toward Turkey since its independence. On the other hand, the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 showed that Azerbaijan should revise its balanced policy between regional and global powers. Among these powers, Russia became the most important partner for Azerbaijan. Despite Russian support to Armenia during the Karabakh War and Russian military bases located in Armenia for decades, Azerbaijan has preferred to remain close to Russia.

This policy could be explained by the insecure policies of Ilham Aliyev, who has still reaction the regime changes in its neighboring country, Georgia. Aliyevs` Azerbaijan



is now more of an autocratic regime that has ignored the importance of Western-style democratic developments in its country because of its possible personal effects. On the other hand, Turkey`s position and its increasing influence in the region have disturbed son Aliyev for many years. Even if Aliyev has achieved no lucrative results in regaining the territories occupied by Armenian troops for 18 years, that result would not be important for his regime. Furthermore, the regime which was established by the Aliyevs would depend increasingly on Russian support that suffered considerably from the “colored revolutions” in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan from 2003-2005.

Finally, it could be argued that Aliyev`s ambivalent attitudes towards the West, particularly the US and Turkey, will increase after the popular revolutions in the Arab countries in recent years. Many observers claim that the Aliyev regime has already ignored these developments throughout the world. Turkey and Azerbaijan would eventually become closest partners, if Azerbaijan struggles with the political paradox of contemporary Azerbaijan. On the other hand, the turbulence existed during crises over Protocols taught both countries should have developed their ties based on more optimal, rational, and institutional levels.

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