

# The South Caucasus in the Global Struggle

---

Araz Aslanli\*

The republics of the South Caucasus, which were under the control of the Moscow-centric authorities for most of the 20th century, gained political sovereignty within the modern international relations system following the disintegration of the USSR. This coincided with the South Caucasus' emergent role as one of the important arenas for regional and global struggles. Due to its geopolitical location, natural resource wealth, and other factors, the South Caucasus has since become a target for the influence of major world powers. Based on this general picture, this study focuses on the importance of the South Caucasus for the West (especially the US), Russia, Turkey, Iran, China and other powers. The paper analyzes their respective struggles to establish and increase sphere of influence in the region. The central argument is that compared to other regional powers and neighboring states, the US and Russia managed to develop effective and influential policies in the South Caucasus.



---

\* Araz Aslanli is a lecturer at Azerbaijan State University of Economics (UNEC), Department of Economics and Management.

### *Introduction*

From a historical perspective, the nations coalescing around Baku, Yerevan, and Tbilisi were never important actors in the global struggle. During the shaping of the contemporary international relations system (especially following the two world wars), the manifestation of Russia's 'extreme imperialist aspirations' on the one hand, and the failure of the regional and global environment to prevent these steps on the other meant that the South Caucasus states were unable to develop their independent national identities within the structure of the nation state system. Thus, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia were only able to join the system of modern international relations following the disintegration of the USSR.

Despite the fact that the South Caucasus is controlled by Moscow-centric political entities during the majority of the 20th century, and accordingly, were sometimes completely isolated from the world, the region has been among the primary targets of the influence of global and regional actors. This was especially true following World War I and during World War II, largely due to Azerbaijan's petroleum resources. At various points following World War I (during 1918-1921), Britain, Turkey, and Germany were engaged in the Caucasus, seeking to defy the Russians. The Caucasian republics, who gained a chance of surviving for a short time, were seeking to take advantage of the struggles between the great powers in their own favours. However, after the Communists (Bolsheviks), who excelled in Russian civil, gained control in the Caucasus (1920-1921), the influence of foreign powers became very limited, if not absent at all.

With start of the Second World War, the Caucasus once again became a battlefield for great powers. After the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Turkey did not support the plans of Germany (followed by Germany's attack on the USSR) to open a frontline towards Soviet Union (towards South Caucasus) via Turkey's Anatolia. Although Germany moved into the Caucasus through Ukraine in 1942, it was only effective in the North Caucasus, failing to gain control over the South Caucasus and Azerbaijani oil reserves, the latter being of particular importance.

Meanwhile, Azerbaijan's natural resources were described as

“the raw material that determines the fate of the World War II” (about 90% of the petroleum-based fuels used by the Soviet Union were provided by Baku<sup>1</sup>), while Azerbaijan’s geography (‘South Azerbaijan’ or ‘Iranian Azerbaijan’) was considered a “starting point for the Cold War.”<sup>2</sup>

With the end of the Cold War, the South Caucasus has become a key arena of regional and global struggle. These young states, trying to protect their sovereignty without fully understanding what independence really is, have also faced the domestic political and military turmoil along with threats to their territorial integrity (both Azerbaijan and Georgia).

There are three important stages for South Caucasus in this new era: the end of the Cold War, the September 11 terror attacks, and the August 2008 War. The late 1980s and early 1990s offered opportunities and risks for the new independent republics. The focus was on maintaining independence, territorial integrity, and internal stability, as well as coping with ethnic and separatist conflicts, energy agreements, and seeking answers to the question of a united Caucasus against Russia, or war within the Caucasus.

The 9/11 attacks became the grounds for the US to intervene ‘everywhere’, its actions largely being unchecked. This was also the basis for the US’s involvement in the region in the early 2000s. The South Caucasus was targeted as part of Washington’s ‘Great Middle East’ project, a clear signal that Washington, in its desire to reshape the world, attaches special importance to the region. While the United States pursued this angle, other powers have tried to develop relations with the regional countries for their own purposes and to prevent the US and other competitors from gaining a strong foothold in the region.

*With the end of the Cold War, the South Caucasus has become a key arena of regional and global struggle. These young states, trying to protect their sovereignty without fully understanding what independence really is, have also faced the domestic political and military turmoil along with threats to their territorial integrity (both Azerbaijan and Georgia).*

1 Aliyev-heritage.org (2016) ‘Oil strategy of Azerbaijan’, Available at: <http://aliyev-heritage.org/en/oilstrategy.html> (Accessed: 10 July 2016); Agayev, V., Akhundov, F., Aliyev, F., and Agarunov, M. (1995) ‘World War II and Azerbaijan’, *Azerbaijan International*, Summer (3.2), pp. 50-55, 78; Inews (2013) ‘Президент Азербайджана принял участие в торжественной церемонии по случаю Дня Победы’, 09.05.2013, Available at: <http://www.1news.az/chronicle/20130509104445890.html> (Accessed: 15 October 2014).

2 Fawcett, L. (2009) *Iran and the Cold War: The Azerbaijan Crisis of 1946*, Cambridge Middle East Library; Hasanli, C. (2006) *At the Dawn of the Cold War: The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, INC. Lanham-Boulder-New York-Toronto-Oxford.

The events of August 2008 imposed significant limitations on the US in the South Caucasus. Russian influence and opportunities in the region have increased, while the US's influence and reputation have suffered considerable damage. In terms of the struggle over the region, the effects of the recent Ukrainian crisis must also be taken into account.

*The end of the bipolar system and new areas of tension*

The second half of the 1980s saw significant changes in the global system. The bipolar global system of the Cold War era fell by the wayside. During the Cold War, the power struggle was between the Western Bloc (NATO) led by the US, and the Eastern Bloc (Warsaw Pact countries) led by the USSR. The vast majority of states were either members of these blocs or allies. Others states were, in general, areas of struggle for these great powers. During this period, the threats of either 'Soviet (communist) danger' or 'US imperialism' pressured the countries to take sides. Even states with widely divergent interests and even conflicting views could easily belong to the same bloc due to the scale of these threats.

*The disintegration of the Soviet Union was accompanied by the struggle for filling the emerging power gaps as well as with the ethnic conflicts within/between the newly independent republics.*

The disintegration of the Soviet Union was accompanied by the struggle for filling the emerging power gaps as well as with the ethnic conflicts within/between the newly independent republics. In this process, it was noteworthy that struggles emerged even between countries that were in the same bloc, or formerly allied. For example, at this stage, the US, the European Union (EU) led by France and Germany, and Japan began to draw more attention as separate power centres. In addition, the continuation of the existing struggles of Russia, China, and Iran gave rise to an interesting set of contradictions in terms of regional and global conflicts.<sup>3</sup>

The United States, a global superpower; Russia, trying to regain its position as a global power; the regional powers like China and the EU, trying to become global powers; and Turkey and Iran, both trying to strengthen their positions as regional powers, have continuously been developing and revising their strategies to attain their goals in Eurasia. At certain stages, Israel can also

3 Brzezinski, Z. (1998) *Büyük Satranç Tahtası*, Istanbul, Sabah Yayınları, pp. 40-42.

be included in this mix (in the context of energy interests and relations with Iran). In particular, these strategies were focused on the new republics emerging from the ruins of the Soviet Union. In this struggle, in which the United States, the only global superpower, and many regional powers and candidates for regional power are involved, there are multiple and ever-changing convergences and alliances.

When it comes to the South Caucasus - Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia – these new states only emerged with the disintegration of the Soviet Union. External forces fighting for regional influence have sometimes sought to take advantage of disputes between those states, either by treating them separately or as a whole.

#### *The Importance of the South Caucasus for the Foreign Powers*

So, why the [South] Caucasus?<sup>4</sup>

When the Cold War came to an end, the South Caucasus region was of great importance for the West, especially the US, Russia, Turkey, Iran, China and other states, in accordance with their strategic purposes.<sup>5</sup> Below, the importance of this region for each external power fighting for regional influence in the post Cold War era is categorized.

#### *For the West, especially the US:*

1. Surrounding Russia which was viewed as a threat;
2. Surrounding Iran which was viewed as a threat;
3. Having a share and a voice in the exploitation of the region's natural resources (economic, commercial, and strategic reasons);
4. Providing safe transportation of the regions' natural resources to international markets (thus having both alternative natural resources and creating diversified routes for regional states);
5. Use as an alternative market;
6. Use as a security base ('anti-terrorist activities') and other

4 The Caucasus represents a wider geographical area and includes the North Caucasus consisting of Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and other regions along with the South Caucasus consisting of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. Undoubtedly, during the period we examined, important developments also took place in the North Caucasus, and these developments were in fact important in terms of the destiny of the Caucasus in general terms. However, here only the South Caucasus countries have been studied.

5 Dugin, A. (2003) *Rus Jeopolitiği - Avrasyacı Yaklaşım*, İstanbul, Küre Yayınları, pp. 365-367.

global policies; and, in line with these aims, as a bridge to reach Turkestan - Central Asia (the Turkestan region is also important as it is surrounded by Russia from the south, Iran from the east, and China from the north-west).

The first of these reasons remains relevant since the end of the Cold War, and the validity and importance of the second, the third and the fourth have only increased over time. The increasing importance of the second factor stemmed from Iran's nuclear program and especially from the Iran-West tensions, which escalated under Ahmadinejad. Even though the relations between the West and Iran have partially thawed under Rouhani, these problems have not been fully resolved, and with the first months of the Trump Administration in the US, both sides have made harsh statements against each other. The basis for the growing significance of the third and fourth factors is Russia's strategic use of the energy card in its foreign policy, and to a certain extent, the importance attached to the Europe's energy security by both the European Union and the US.

After the events of September 11, the importance of the sixth factor increased, and the US and the West, in general, ensured their connections with Central Asia through the South Caucasus region. Given that Central Asia is located between Iran and the four nuclear powers (Russia, China, India, and Pakistan), and in the context of the global assertions of these countries (other than Pakistan), the importance of the South Caucasus as a gateway to Central Asia is gradually increasing.

*For Russia:*

1. To achieve a shorter path southwards (to the Indian Ocean, as a part of its expansionist strategy) and to strengthen its aspirations to become a global power by keeping the region under control;
2. To keep Turkey and Iran (due to their ambitions in the north-eastward/ eastward directions) and other states (those who seek to reach Russia's borders through Iran and Turkey) away from its borders;
3. To limit/terminate the separatist attempts of different ethnic groups in its southern regions of Russia (the North Caucasus), thus reducing concerns about territorial integrity;

4. To prevent (or at least limit) the transportation of natural resources into the world market or to limit this process, thereby maintaining its market dominance; to prevent the new states from strengthening their independence and ensure that they remain dependent on Russia to the greatest extent possible;
5. To limit the possibility of the West, specifically the United States, from reaching ‘Turkestan’ through this region;
6. The Caucasus region has a strategic position in relation to the Caspian and the Black Sea regions. Losing the Caucasus would mean losing those two regions;
7. Russia’s military presence in the Caucasus is important in terms of its global claims;
8. Russia’s imperial past and desire to regain its position as a global power remain a factor in its continued attempts to control the Caucasus.

*For Turkey:*

As the Cold War came to an end, Turkey’s interests in the Caucasus overlapped with those of the West. Although this became increasingly less applicable during the 2000s, some common issues have remained. In general, the importance of the Caucasus for Turkey has changed along with Ankara’s priorities in its relations with the US, the EU, Russia, and Iran. Beyond the common approaches with the West, the followings also deserve attention:

*As the Cold War came to an end, Turkey’s interests in the Caucasus overlapped with those of the West. Although this became increasingly less applicable during the 2000s, some common issues have remained.*

1. The application of the ‘near abroad’ doctrine (although officially this was not announced in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War). This doctrine was elaborated more precisely during Ahmet Davutoglu’s time as Foreign Minister;
2. To limit the possible dangers and threats stemming from regional countries like Armenia, and other the regional countries towards itself, originating from Russia, Iran, China, and other countries;
3. To build good neighborly relations and strategic partnerships as much as possible;
4. To diversify energy sources by accessing natural resources in the region for its own domestic needs;

5. To facilitate the transportation of the Caspian's natural resources to international markets via Turkey, both to gain direct economic benefits and to create an alternative transit route for the countries of the region, and to secure the dependence of regional countries; to make Turkey a key energy transit country;
6. To gain a reliable way to reach 'Turkistan' (due to ethnic-religious reasons and goals, unlike the West and the US);
7. To gain additional leverage in relations with other great powers competing for influence in the region.

*For Iran:*

1. First of all, to create a space for expansion during the first years of regional countries' independence (drawing upon ethnic and religious factors in the southern Georgia and in Azerbaijan, home to significant numbers of Azerbaijani Turks, and the isolated situation of Armenia);
2. To prevent the projects of great powers (especially the US and Russia) pertaining to Iran;
3. To limit the effects of the influence of independent Azerbaijan over Azerbaijani Turks within its territory;
4. To prevent foreign companies from extracting or transporting the region's natural resources to international markets (in addition to obstructing Western penetration into this region, and preventing them from creating alternative energy access routes);
5. As the controversy over the Iranian nuclear program intensified during the 2000s and Iran was increasingly positioned as a military and political target of the Western powers (especially the US and Israel), the neighbouring regions, especially the South Caucasus, emerged as 'national security risks' for Iran.

*For China:*

1. To gain a new market and area of economic interest to serve its emergence as a new global power;
2. To limit the threats from the region and over the region (in particular, American attempts to contain China and attempted incursions on China's territorial integrity), to reduce the activities of China's counterparts as much as possible in this region;



3. Accessing the energy resources in the region and improving its own resource diversity;
4. To hinder the energy routes that travel westward through the region, notably the Trans-Caspian energy cooperation, and projects that can challenge China's use of the natural resources of the eastern shores of the Caspian;
5. On the other hand, to benefit from the East-West transport projects ('Iron Silk Road');
6. Reduce escalation of ethnic problems in China and support for risky activities in terms of China's territorial integrity, for example, official and/or unofficial support for the 'Eastern Turkistan' region in China through the Caucasus.

It is possible to further expand the list of external forces competing for influence over the South Caucasus and the reasons for this struggle. For example, the EU and several European countries (especially France, Germany, and the United Kingdom) are occasionally seen as stakeholders to this struggle distinct from the United States. The EU attaches great importance to the South Caucasus in regard to energy security, as reflected in multiple official EU documents. It is also the main topic of the talks between senior EU officials and the South Caucasus states. The EU runs the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership program, as well as transport, transport and communication projects involving the South Caucasus countries. EU countries are investing heavily in the South Caucasus, and the Brussels is a leading model for the South Caucasus countries in terms of development, horizontal problem solving, integration etc.

Similarly, occasionally, Israel, Arab states, Japan, and others are entering this competition for influence. In this study, we will limit our focus to the most important states in this regard, and key driving factors of their behavior.

### *Regional policies of foreign powers*

After the end of the Cold War, important powers with interests in the South Caucasus developed policies in line with the basic priorities mentioned above. The levels of engagement and success varied. However, almost all the powers 'followed a certain line' and they have not made sharp turns in their South Caucasus policies.

### *Regional Policy of the US*

During and shortly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the United States worked to develop good relations with the region's states and engaged in the region in line with its strategic objectives. However, especially since the beginning of 1993, the combination of a stronger Russia and unsuccessful foreign policies of the regional countries led the US to make some concessions to Russia. Since the US was afraid of Russia's potentially aggressive response to losing its sphere of influence, Washington, guided by Strobe Talbott, then Deputy Foreign Minister in 1994, followed a 'Russia first' track.<sup>6</sup>

This policy viewed the region as Russia's backyard and entailed reducing barriers to Russia's attempts to strengthen its position in the former Soviet geography, as well as limiting the attempts by young states to resist Moscow's imperialist endeavors and to

*The views of Madeline Albright, Secretary of State at the Clinton Administration in late 1996, played a key role in the change of US policy. Albright's view was that Russia should be prevented from filling the region again.*

receive external (Western) support in this direction. It is interesting to note that in his speech at John Hopkins University on July 21, 1997, Talbott emphasized that the US "will no longer keep closed eyes towards Moscow's hegemonic policies in this area".<sup>7</sup>

The views of Madeline Albright, Secretary of State at the Clinton Administration in late 1996, played a key role in the change of US policy. Albright's view was that Russia should be prevented from filling the region again.

Indeed, the National Security Strategy document released in October 1998 highlighted the importance of the region for US regional policies.<sup>8</sup>

The "Silk Road Strategy Law", which envisioned a route linking the region to international markets, passed in 1999 by the US, clearly outlines the policies of the US towards Central Asia and the Caucasus.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, the National Security Strategy Document, published in December 1999, emphasized that the US

6 MacDougall, J. (1997) 'A New Stage In U.S.-Caspian Sea Basin Relations', *Central Asia*, Available at: [http://www.ca-c.org/dataeng/st\\_04\\_dougall.shtml](http://www.ca-c.org/dataeng/st_04_dougall.shtml) (Accessed: 15 July 2016).

7 Elekdag, S. (1997) 'Second Sharing of World Petroleum', *Milliyet*, 18 August.

8 *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*, Available at: <http://clinton2.nara.gov/WH/EOP/NSC/html/documents/nssr.pdf> (Accessed: 15 July 2016).

9 Erhan C. (2003) 'The Central Asian Policy of the U.S. and New Expansion after 11 September', *Stradigma*, November, Available at: <http://www.stradigma.com/turkce/kasim2003/vizyon.html> (Accessed: 10 August 2016).

should actively pursue regional policies.<sup>10</sup>

After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the US's global expansionist policies gained strength and Washington increased its engagement in the South Caucasus within this framework. Concrete steps towards the realization of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, strong deployment initiatives in Georgia, the implementation of long-term programs to train the Georgian army in this framework and Mikheil Saakashvili's coming to the power, the aims for acquisition of a military base in Azerbaijan confirmed by Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld<sup>11</sup>, and statements by US officials that the safety of the Caspian has always been their security<sup>12</sup> were among the indicators of increasing US interests towards the region at the time. But the August 2008 war destabilized the US position and image in the South Caucasus.

The image of the US in Azerbaijan was also damaged by the failure to meet the expectations regarding the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the efforts to improve Turkey-Armenia relations. Interventions by the Obama administration positively affected the US-Armenian relations. The question on whether Bidzhina Ivanishvili's election to the post of Georgia's prime minister (and Saakashvili's departure from Georgia to settle in Ukraine) is "a new 'counterrevolution' of Russia against the US or 'Georgia's own game', has not yet found its answer.

*The image of the US in Azerbaijan was also damaged by the failure to meet the expectations regarding the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the efforts to improve Turkey-Armenia relations.*

### *Regional policy of Russia*

Following an initial period of confusion, Russia soon recovered from the collapse of the USSR. The concept of the 'near abroad', which expresses the special interests of Russia in the former Soviet Union, was first expressed in the article written by then Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozirev on 2 January 1992. In

10 *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*, Available at: [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/other\\_pubs/nss99.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/other_pubs/nss99.pdf) (Accessed: 10 August 2016).

11 At a joint press conference with Azerbaijani Defense Minister in Baku on December 3, 2003, Rumsfeld explained that they had negotiated the issue of military deployment in Azerbaijan for two years and informed on the nature of the military power they planned to deploy (see Azerbaijan's official News Agency Azertac, Available at: <https://azerbaijan.usembassy.gov/uploads/images/1liV-VuTVhSiSjzY1pp0E0A/PR-120203.pdf> (Accessed: 30 August 2016).

12 Kirach, G. (2004) 'What the US is pursuing in the Caspian', 14 Mart, Available at: <http://www.haberaliz.com/detay.php?detayid=893>, (Accessed: 15 August 2012).

his speech at the CSCE Conference in Stockholm at the end of 1992, Kozirev explained that the former Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR) should be united in a federation or confederation in terms of military and economy.<sup>13</sup> The view that Russia should have special privileges in its near abroad solidified among the official circles of Russia following Yeltsin's new year speech in early 1993, in which he declared that Russia should be more active in protecting Russians in this area. In February 1993, Boris Yeltsin demanded that the UN should grant authority to the army of the Russian Federation to intervene as a peacekeeping force in the conflicts in the territory of the former Soviet Union. In the same month, the Foreign Policy Doctrine - based on the philosophy of near abroad - was announced by the Russian Security Council and came into force in April.<sup>14</sup> After resolving the internal opposition via the parliamentary raid in October 1993, Russian dominance began to strengthen in the region, and the Kremlin declared a new doctrine in November 1993.<sup>15</sup> During this time, anti-Russian and nationalist leaders in the South Caucasus countries were ousted from power. Russia has sought to regain its authority in the region, aware that there was no counter initiative on the part of the US. But the mid-1990s onwards witnessed a growing US-Russia battle for the region.

In particular, Russia was unhappy with Georgia's policies – for utilisation of Georgia by the US as base' in the framework of Washington's expansion in the region, as well as for Georgia's support provided for Chechen fighters. Russia supported Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Ajaria, territories which were trying to break away from Georgia. The relations between these two countries were strained in the Saakashvili era because of Georgia's unwavering NATO aspirations, the support given by Russia to separatist regions, and Russia's military bases in the country. The real rupture in relations came with the August 2008 war. Russia invaded Georgia and then recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Relations only began to thaw after Bidzina Ivanishvili became prime minister.

13 Jafersoy, N. (2000) *From State-Center Level to Equal Status: Azerbaijan-Russia Relations (1991-2000)*, Ankara, ASAM, pp. 19-20.

14 Tuncer, I. (1998) 'New Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation: Near Abroad and Turkey', Ed. Özcan, G., and Kut, S., *Longest Ten Years*, Istanbul, Bükre, p. 450.

15 FAS, 'The Basic Provisions of the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation', Available at: <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/russia-mil-doc.html> (Accessed: 15 September 2016).

Armenia the country in the region where Russia is enjoying the greatest influence. In addition to its existing military bases in Armenia, Russia relocated major part of its military equipment and soldiers from the bases in Georgia to Armenia. In addition, Russia owns major economic assets of Armenia, in return for the country's debts to former. Armenia is dependent on Russia for its energy needs. However, at times the Armenian public and even the authorities have expressed views on the inconveniences of Armenia-Russia relations.

Azerbaijan, on the other hand, is a country where Russian interests are generally balanced. Here, the notion of equilibrium means balancing the interests of Azerbaijan and Russia in bilateral relations, as well as balancing Azerbaijan-Russia relations with Azerbaijan's other external relationships. Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabkh territory remains under occupation by Armenia, and Baku believes that it will be very difficult to solve this problem without the contribution of Russia. Thus and while continuing to develop relations with the West, Azerbaijan does not ignore Moscow. Nonetheless, Azerbaijan did not extend the lease on Russia's Gabala Radar Base in contravention of Russia's wishes. Baku's rationale was that this was necessary in order to achieve complete independence, and similarly denied US requests for military bases in Azerbaijan.

*Azerbaijan, on the other hand, is a country where Russian interests are generally balanced. Here, the notion of equilibrium means balancing the interests of Azerbaijan and Russia in bilateral relations, as well as balancing Azerbaijan-Russia relations with Azerbaijan's other external relationships.*

### *Regional policy of Turkey*

Turkey was one of the first states to recognize the independence of all three South Caucasian republics. In the following periods, Turkey's relationship with each of the regional countries was different. The attitudes of the region's countries to Turkey and Turkey's own priorities played an important role in this regard. For example, Armenia responded to Turkey's first positive steps with territorial claims and allegations of the so-called 'Armenian genocide'.<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, the relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan became multidimensional, while the relationship (especially the military dimension) between Turkey and Georgia also underwent

16 For the recent history of Turkey-Armenia relations and the current situation, see: Cabbarli, H., and Aslanli, A. (2003) 'Turkey-Armenia Border Gate: Aim or Tool?', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol.4 (42), October, pp. 56-62.

*On the other hand, the relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan became multidimensional, while the relationship (especially the military dimension) between Turkey and Georgia also underwent important developments. The Turkey-Georgia-Azerbaijan trilateral regional cooperation format has been developed, along with the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipelines, and Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line, all of which connected these countries.*

important developments. The Turkey-Georgia-Azerbaijan trilateral regional cooperation format has been developed, along with the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipelines, and Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line, all of which connected these countries.

Russia has been unsettled by Turkey's 'bold' position in the South Caucasus. However, former Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Chiller's statement in Moscow in 1993 - "We look at the region from the different window with Russia"<sup>17</sup>, - alleviated Russia's concerns in part. In subsequent periods, Turkey did not make any attempts to undermine Russia's interests in the region and tried to develop common policies with Moscow in the South Caucasus. The attitude of Ankara during the August 2008 events and other important developments demonstrated this position.

One of the key factors in Turkey's policy towards the region in recent years has been its efforts to develop relations with Armenia, and the consequences of this for Turkey-Azerbaijani relations. Secret initiatives seeking to change improve relations between Turkey and Armenia emerged at the beginning of 2008, resulting from the aggressive policies of Armenia in the early 1990s.<sup>18</sup> The Zurich Protocols were signed with great ceremony in Switzerland on October 10, 2009.<sup>19</sup> However, the process ended with mutual recriminations. In terms of Turkish-Azerbaijani relations, the signing of the "Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance Agreement between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey"<sup>20</sup> and the establishment

17 Mahirgizi, V. (2010) 'Russia and Turkey: Azerbaijan's importance in cooperation', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 30 June.

18 Hürriyet (2008) 'The traffic of meeting with Yerevan is very important', 18 July; Akgun, M (2008) 'Does Azerbaijan mortgage leave?', *Referans*, 23 July; Hürriyet (2008) 'We have problems with Armenia', 24 July.

19 CBC (2009) 'Turkey, Armenia agree to forge ties', Available at: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2009/10/10/turkey-armenia.html> (Accessed: 26 February 2016); BBC (2009) 'Armenia and Turkey normalise ties', Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8299712.stm> (Accessed: 26 February 2016).

20 TBMM, 'Report of the Foreign Affairs Commission with the Draft Law on the Approval of Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance Agreement between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan (1/979)', Available at: <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/sirasayi/donem23/yil01/ss645.pdf> (Accessed: 26 February 2016); Mediaforum (2010) 'Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance Agreement between Turkey and Azerbaijan', Available at: <http://www.mediaforum.az/az/2010/12/15/AZ%C6%8FRBAYCANLA-T%C3%9CRK%C4%B0Y%C6%8F-ARASIN-DA-STRATEJ%C4%B0-T%C6%8FR%C6%8FFDA%C5%9ELIQ-054430699c02.html> (Accessed: 26 February 2016).

of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council of Turkey and Azerbaijan<sup>21</sup> in Istanbul on 15-16 September 2010 restored good bilateral relations.

In regard to relations between Turkey and Georgia, progress has been made in some directions (mutual investments, visa free regime, reciprocal travel via national identity card, etc.), while the expectations in the other directions have not been fully realized. Notably, despite the Council of Europe's decision, Georgia has not fully fulfilled its obligations on the return of Akhiska Turks to their homeland. In the first years of the Saakashvili administration, Georgia made amendments to the status of the Ajaria, contrary to international agreements to which Turkey is also a party. On the other hand, Turkey's attitude towards the Abkhazian issue (even in the context of unofficial actors) has not fully satisfied Georgia.

### *Regional policy of Iran*

Iran's response to the independence struggles of the South Caucasus republics was cautious; Tehran even warned the Muslims majority 'not to hurry up' in declaring their independence from the USSR. Within the framework of the interests expressed in the first part, Iran had a strong relationship with Armenia and Azerbaijan from the beginning, but a limited one with Georgia.

Iran's policy towards Azerbaijan during June 1992 - June 1993 was negative, meanwhile, its policy towards Armenia was positive.<sup>22</sup> This stemmed from both the strategic preferences of Iran and the policies of then President Ebulfez Elchibey towards Iran. As soon as Heydar Aliyev came to power, he introduced policies that reduced Iran's concerns. However, tensions periodically surfaced between Azerbaijan and Iran, in particular, due to debates on the Caspian's legal status and support for one another's opposition groups.<sup>23</sup>

*Iran's response to the independence struggles of the South Caucasus republics was cautious; Tehran even warned the Muslims majority 'not to hurry up' in declaring their independence from the USSR.*

Iran has not limited its relations with Armenia despite its occupation of Azerbaijan territories, and Tehran and Yerevan

21 Hurriyet (2010) 'Turkey-Azerbaijan strategic signing', 15 September, Available at: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/15791668.asp> (Accessed: 26 February 2016).

22 Shaffer, B. (2002) 'Is there a Muslim Foreign Policy?', *Current History*, November, pp: 382-387.

23 Kohen, S. (2001) 'Caspian is Restless', *Milliyet*, 14 August.



continue to cooperate on electricity and natural gas-based projects. The excessive willingness of Iran in this direction have not brought the Iranian-Armenian relations to the desired level because of obstacles by Russia and to a certain extent the West.

Despite high-level visits, there have not been significant developments in Iran-Georgia relations, and Georgia's military relations with the US have impeded the deepening of relations.

### *Regional policy of China*

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, China was more focused on Central Asia With regard to the South Caucasus; there was a 'Cold War' with Azerbaijan during the Elchibey administration.

*However, China and Georgia (along with Azerbaijan) continue their partnership, especially in the context of the Silk Road project and the importance accorded to territorial integrity. It is noteworthy that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization did not openly support Abkhazia and South Ossetia after the August 2008 war, despite Russia's insistence.*

The former Azerbaijani government's 'East Turkistan' rhetoric annoyed China to the extent that China even sold missiles to Armenia.<sup>24</sup> Today, China has particularly good relations with Azerbaijan and to a lesser degree with Armenia. However, China and Azerbaijan have ensured high-level mutual cooperation, due to China's growing interest in the region's energy resources and and transport potential.

Although China was one of the first countries to recognize Georgia's independence, relations are not especially developed. However, China and Georgia (along with Azerbaijan) continue their partnership, especially in the context of the Silk Road project and the importance accorded to territorial integrity. It is noteworthy that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization did not openly support Abkhazia and South Ossetia after the August 2008 war, despite Russia's insistence.

### *Conclusion*

First of all, predictions about regional and global events at the end of the Cold War have not been fully realized. Neither the EU nor Japan has developed to the extent envisioned back in 1991, while some new powers emerged, and others have developed faster than anticipated. On the one hand, the EU is experiencing severe economic problems due to integration problems brought

<sup>24</sup> Our Century (2003) 'China attaches special attention to developing relations with Azerbaijan', February, Volume 41 (757).



by enlargement, the economic system, and the global economic crisis. These factors all pose a threat to the continued cohesion of the EU.

Japan has learned from the regional and global economic crises, due to the impact of natural disasters on the Japanese economy and oil prices. On the other hand, the global influence of China, India, and Brazil, along with Turkey's regional strength, have all grown beyond expectations. Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), led by Russia and China, began to gain international attention as an alternative to Western structures.

Over the past decade, the South Caucasus has grown in importance because of its strategic location, natural resources, etc., as well as its borders with the Black Sea, Caspian basin, Iran and Central Asia, which are the key important areas in the new global struggle. In particular, the South Caucasus (a source of oil and natural gas) has gained permanent position on the Western agenda due to the region's significant role in ensuring the European energy security. The importance of the South Caucasus as a transit route has increased for the West due to the military presence of the US and its allies in Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks, and for Iran and Russia due to the encirclement of Iran from almost all directions. This list includes scenarios related to the geography of the developments in Syria, the Iranian scenarios, and the Arab uprisings. All these indicate that the challenges faced by the South Caucasus and the struggle for regional influence will increase.

*Over the past decade, the South Caucasus has grown in importance because of its strategic location, natural resources, etc., as well as its borders with the Black Sea, Caspian basin, Iran and Central Asia, which are the key important areas in the new global struggle.*

The US and Russia have maximized their interests in the Southern Caucasus. These two governments successfully pursue regional strategies based on current opportunities as well as historical relations, following active policies to that effect. On the other hand, it is worth emphasizing that the EU has only been active in the recent years, while Turkey, despite its serious attempts in recent years, was able to develop relations below its capability. Among the EU countries, noteworthy are: the UK's major achievements in the context of natural resources; France's achievements in political and economic relations with regional states and its active role in regional problems related to the Armenian occupation of

Azerbaijan's territories; Germany's activities in the region on education, health, financial issues, and military cooperation. The EU has taken steps to improve relations with the South Caucasus countries. Initiatives by NATO, especially the US, to engage in the region are not endorsed by Russia.<sup>25</sup>

While the Russian-US conflict in the region continues in the form of a 'Cold War', Turkey, Iran, China, Israel, Germany, and some Arab countries are expected to be active to varying degrees in this competition.

---

<sup>25</sup> NATO (2003) 'Interview with Russia's NATO Ambassador', *NATO Review*, Available at: <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2003/issue3/turkish/interview.html> (Accessed: 31 March 2016).