

Turkey-Azerbaijan relations after 15 July: Expectations, Solidarity and Cooperation

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The 15 July failed coup in Turkey changed the country's foreign policy priorities. Since then, the country has redefined its relations with a number of countries based on how they responded to the coup attempt, and whether they cooperated with Ankara in apprehending the penetrators, the FETÖ. Given that 2017 marked the 25th anniversary of the establishment of official diplomatic relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan, and that the two countries have had steady and mutually supportive policies throughout this time, this paper examines whether the post-15 July environment has led to changes in the relationship. Specifically, the paper analyzes Azerbaijan's response to the 'fight on FETÖ', and the development of relations following the coup attempt. Our assessment of the post-15 July political developments suggests that bilateral relations have affirmed the path dependency of the two countries. The attempted coup and its consequences have not had any kind of negative impact on relations; on the contrary, the support Azerbaijan showed to Turkey in the 'fight on FETÖ' has deepened mutual trust, thereby further strengthening the path dependent solidarity and cooperation.

Keywords: Turkey, Azerbaijan, military coup, solidarity, ally, partnership



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Introduction

Azerbaijan recently celebrated the 25th anniversary of the establishment of official diplomatic relations with Turkey. For the majority of this time, the two countries have enjoyed a steady and supportive relationship, with some exceptions, such as Turkey's attempt at a rapprochement with Armenia in 2008. This concluded with the signing of two protocols in 2009 aiming to establish diplomatic relations and reopen the Turkey-Armenia border. Azerbaijan felt betrayed by this initiative, given the implications for Turkey's support on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, which was not included in the protocols. However, Turkey soon regained Baku's trust, persuaded by Azerbaijan's calls to refrain from harming its national cause and facilitating Armenia's illegal occupation of Azerbaijan territories in Nagorno-Karabakh – also noting that Yerevan was already far from being ready to reach a possible compromise on the 1915 events. This single example, taken from a close relationship spanning two and a half decades, clearly represents Azerbaijan's influence over and importance for Turkey. The relationship works both ways: Azerbaijan joined Turkey's fight against FETÖ (Fetullah Terrorist Organization) as early as April 2014, demonstrating the significance of the bilateral relationship for Baku. Nevertheless, and as expected, this path dependency in bilateral relations continued after the 15 July coup attempt; the heads of two countries came together several times and launched several new projects as well as finalizing many others, including the opening of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) Railway route in late October 2017. This paper, at this juncture, further examines the current state of affairs regarding the path dependent bilateral expectations, solidarity, and cooperation, with a specific focus on the ways in which Turkey's response to the coup-attempt and its perpetrators has influenced its foreign policy.

Fight against FETÖ, 15 July, and Turkey-Azerbaijan relations

Azerbaijan was the first external location in which the Gülen movement opened its institutions, of course with the support and guarantees that Turkey provided to the Azerbaijani authorities. For years, the movement was considered as means to build cultural and transnational ties between Turkey and Azerbaijan. Despite

local concerns about the movement's activities in Azerbaijan, Turkey's formal and informal backing made the movement a trusted organization which was given several incentives that resulted in the establishment of Gülenist universities and several education institutions throughout the country. With exactly the same motivation, as soon as Turkey declared the Gülen movement as an existential threat, Azerbaijan took action. Following Prime Minister Erdoğan's visit to Azerbaijan in early April 2014¹, official Baku arrested several 'home-grown' Gülenists. Upon the orders of President İlham Aliyev, eight Turkish citizens who were senior members of the movement were deported. They included the CEO of the Çağ Öğretim İşletmeleri (the company that owned the Gülen movement's schools and university in Azerbaijan), the rector of Qafqaz University, and a top businessman affiliated with the movement.² As the first international destination of the movement, Azerbaijan also became the first country to support Turkey in its war against the Gülen movement (also known as FETÖ) beyond national borders.

In the local context, however, the movement's activities had long been viewed with suspicion. Some had always seen the movement as a threat to Azerbaijan due to its 'secret agenda'; Azerbaijan's Sheikh ul-Islam Allahshükür Pashazade, for instance, criticized the movement for not truly complying with religious principles, introducing *bidaat* and imposing Turkish Sunni Islam, while secular groups fiercely criticized the Gülen movement for "brainwashing youth" and using "financial, political and social capital to acquire more power and influence and then to 'Islamize' legislation and civil society"³. These critical voices, however, remained marginal; the Gülen movement and the Turkish government were allies and at the level of society, people did not know about the (ideological) differences between the Gülen movement and the Turkish government. However, starting with Erdoğan's visit in April 2014 (perhaps even earlier, given the open war between the movement and the government in Turkey that broke out in early January 2014) media and official

1 See the coverage at the official website of Turkey's ministry of foreign affairs, www.mfa.gov.tr/basbakan-erdogan-azerbaycan_da.tr.mfa (Accessed: 15 September 2017).

2 World Bulletin (2014) 'Azerbaijan deports 8 affiliates of Fethullah Gulen', 23 April 2014. Available at www.worldbulletin.net/hizmet-movement/134491/azerbaijan-deports-8-affiliates-of-fethullah-gulen (Accessed: 15 September 2017).

3 Aliyev, F. (2012) 'The Gulen Movement in Azerbaijan', 27 December. Available at www.hudson.org/research/9864-the-gulen-movement-in-azerbaijan (Accessed: 15 September 2017).

circles began to refer to the Gülen movement as an organization that could represent a similar threat to Azerbaijan, mainly via its schools and by infiltrating key government bodies and positions.⁴ Thus, by early 2014, several news articles warned of a similar ‘parallel state’ in Azerbaijan (similar to Turkey). It was suggested that Gülenists had infiltrated into state bodies in Azerbaijan, and that the movement had members and control in high-level bureaucracy and even Parliament.⁵ Lists of the alleged Gülenist infiltrates were published. In the meantime, the Gülen movement’s university (Qafqaz University), several colleges and examination prep schools (Araz courses) were handed over to SOCAR.⁶ Only a month after Erdoğan’s visit, in June, SOCAR announced the closure of those institutions due to the financial burden they entailed.⁷

Following the 15 July coup attempt, Azerbaijan’s support for Turkey and its fight against FETÖ continued. Azerbaijani president Ilham Aliyev officially denounced the attempt on 16 July, before the government had fully gained control over it.⁸ Aliyev’s official statement was followed by a phone call by the Foreign Minister Elmar Memmedyarov to his counterpart Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, expressing, on behalf of his country, unconditional support to the democratically elected government of Turkey.⁹ Several other ministers, members of parliament, political party leaders and political figures in

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4 Virtual Azerbaijan (2014) ‘Bakı nurçuların “İşıq evləri” ilə doludur’, 30 November. Available at virtualaz.org/bugun/14130 (Accessed: 16 September 2017).

5 Haber7 (2014), ‘Fethullah Gülen’e mektup: Deşifre olduk!’, 5 March. Available at www.haber7.com/guncel/haber/1134033-fethullah-gulene-mektup-desifre-olduk (Accessed: 15 September 2017).

6 Radikal (2014) ‘Gülen Cemaati Azerbaycan’da okullarını devretti’, 6 March. Available at www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/gulen-cemaati-azerbaycanda-okullarini-devretti-1179812/ (Accessed: 15 September 2017).

7 Oxu (2014), ‘Azərbaycanda bütün “Araz” kursları bağlandı’, 18 June. Available at oxu.az/society/29329 (Accessed: 16 September 2017); Daily Sabah (2014), ‘Gülen-Affiliated schools in Azerbaijan face closure’, 19 June. Available at www.dailysabah.com/education/2014/06/19/gulenaaffiliated-schools-in-azerbaijan-face-closure (Accessed: 15 September 2017); Hürriyet (2014), ‘Azərbaycan, Gülen ilə bağlı okulları kapattı’, 19 June. Available at www.hurriyet.com.tr/azerbaycan-gulen-ile-baglantili-okullari-kapatti-26638932 (Accessed: 15 September 2017).

8 Star (2016) ‘Azərbaycan Cumhurbaşkanı Aliyev’dən darbe təşəbbüsünə sert kinama’, 16 July. Available at www.star.com.tr/dunya/azerbaycan-cumhurbaskani-aliyevden-darbe-tesebbusune-sert-kinama-haber-1125924/ (Accessed: 25 September 2017).

9 Milli (2016) ‘Elmar Məmmədیارov Çavuşoğluna zəngətdi’, 16 July. Available at <https://news.milli.az/politics/452394.htm> (Accessed: 25 September 2017). Also see the following public announcement of the ministry on the same day MFA Azerbaijan 2016, ‘TürkiyədəbaşvermişhadisələrəiləbağlıX arıcıışlarNazirliyinibəyanatı’, 16 July. Available at www.mfa.gov.az/news/909/4219 (Accessed: 25 September 2017).

Azerbaijan declared their support on the same day.¹⁰

Following the coup attempt, Azerbaijan took several steps as part of fight against FETÖ. Several statements were made from the President's Office and the government, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, regarding Azerbaijan's commitment to joining the fight against FETÖ. It was admitted that the Gülen movement constituted a security threat to Azerbaijan, and several investigations were initiated, particularly regarding 'infiltrations' of strategic state institutions.¹¹ The minister of internal affairs Ramil Usubov stated that in Turkey's steps, Azerbaijan is determined to put an end to the activities of FETÖ in Azerbaijan.¹² Azerbaijan's religious authority, by the same token, ratified the final declaration of the Eurasian Islamic Council's 9th meeting in Istanbul which stated that:

FETÖ cannot be regarded as a religious community. FETÖ is a terrorist group that uses power to serve its own interests and exploits religion

...delegates have agreed that FETÖ cannot be regarded as a religious community. FETÖ is a terrorist group that uses power to serve its own interests and exploits religion that uses shady religious sources to produce knowledge, that destroys the unity of Islam, that violates the rights of the individual and the state, that abuses forms of worship like donations and alms, that tries to destroy tawhid... in the name of dialogue between religions and is hiding behind a cloak of religion.¹³

Within the scope of FETÖ investigations in Azerbaijan, Qafqaz University was shut down and its facilities were handed over to

10 For further declarations of supports from several other political figures within Azerbaijan see the compilation prepared by the Voice of America at the following link VOA(2016)'Azərbaycanda Türkiyədə dövlət çevrilişi cəhdipislinir', 16 July. Available at https://www.amerikaninsesi.org/a/turkey_destek/3420925.html (Accessed: 25 September 2017); IHA (2016) 'Paşayeva: 15 Temmuz'da Azərbaycan da uyumadı', 3 September. Available at www.ih.com.tr/haber-pasayeva-15-temmuzda-azerbaycan-da-uyumadi-584743/ (Accessed: 25 September 2017).

11 Trend News Agency (2016), "Novruz Məmmədov: Azərbaycanadakı FETÖ tərəfdarlarının hamısı üzə çıxarılacaq," 20 August. Available at az.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/2651126.html (Accessed: 25 September 2017).

12 APA (2016) 'Ramil Usubov: 'FETÖ-nün Azərbaycanda təşkilatlanmasına qarşı bundan sonra da lazımi addımlar atılacaq', 31 August. Available at apa.az/xeber-az/hadise/ramil-usubov-feto-nun-azerbaycandaki-teskilatlanmasina-qarsi-bundan-sonra-da-lazimi-addimlar-atilacaq.html (Accessed: 25 September 2017).

13 Anadolu Agency (2016) '9. Avrasya İslam Şurası bildirisinden: FETÖ dini cemaat olarak nitelenemez', 14 October. Available at aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/9-avrasya-islam-surasi-bildirisinden-feto-dini-cemaat-olarak-nitelenemez/664849 (Accessed: 25 September 2017).

On 1 November 2016, a rally named “15 July – The Voice of the People” was organized in Baku, and Azerbaijan’s support to the Turkish people was publicly expressed

another university.¹⁴ Zaman Azerbaijan was also closed down.¹⁵ The television license of ANS was revoked due to an interview it conducted with Fethullah Gülen.¹⁶ On 1 November 2016, a rally named “15 July – The Voice of the People” was organized in Baku, and Azerbaijan’s support to the Turkish people was publicly expressed.¹⁷ A photo exhibition organized by TİKA, TRT, and Anadolu Agency in Baku on “15 July – Rise of National Will” on 22 September 2016 was attended by high level officials from the Presidential Office, ministers, MPs and NGO representatives. Participants spoke out in fierce condemnation of FETÖ and the coup attempt.¹⁸

Throughout 2017, FETÖ has remained a primary concern in Turkey-Azerbaijan relations. Public opinion has been cautious about FETÖ ‘infiltrations’ in strategic public institutions, and several people have been taken into custody as part of the investigations. On several occasions, Azerbaijan has expressed its support to Turkey in its fight against FETÖ, and the 15 July ‘martyrs’ have been commemorated. An Azerbaijani filmmaker directed a documentary on the subject, featuring the Azeris who took part in the resistance against the coup plotters on 15 July 2016.¹⁹ On the anniversary, a prayer service was held in Heydar Mosque in Baku, dedicated to those killed during the military coup attempt. In the Friday sermons in Azerbaijan on 14 July, the coup attempt was condemned and the martyrs were memorialized²⁰. President Aliyev also issued a message commemorating the anniversary, expressing condolences for those killed by the

14 Yenişafak (2016) ‘Azerbaycan’dan FETÖ hamlesi’, 17 August. Available at www.yenisafak.com/dunya/azerbaycandan-feto-hamlesi-2512757 (Accessed: 25 September 2017).

15 Yenişafak (2016) ‘Azerbaycan FETÖ okulunu kapattı’, 21 Temmuz. Available at www.yenisafak.com/gundem/azerbaycan-feto-okulunu-kapatti-2497287 (Accessed: 25 September 2017); Eurasianet (2016) ‘Azerbaijan: University, Paper Closed as Anti-Gülen Cleanup Continues’, 20 July. Available at www.eurasianet.org/node/79781 (Accessed: 25 September 2017).

16 Avazturk (2016) ‘Azerbaycan’da FETÖ operasyonu’, 17 August. Available at www.avazturk.com/haber-azerbaycan-da-feto-operasyonu-16333.html (Accessed: 25 September 2017).

17 See https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10154662192838703&id=564243702 (Accessed: 25 September 2017).

18 TİKA (2016) ‘Azerbaycan’da 15 Temmuz TİKA’nın Destegiyle “İhanetten Zafere” Fotoğraf Sergisi ile Anlatıldı’, 22 September. Available at www.tika.gov.tr/tr/haber/azerbaycan'da_15_temmuz_tika'nin_destegiyle_ihanetten_zafere_fotograf_sergisi_ile_anlatildi-24879 (Accessed: 25 September 2017).

19 Anadolu Agency (2017) ‘Azerbaycanlı yönetmenden 15 Temmuz belgesi’, 01 August. Available at aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/azerbaycanli-yonemenden-15-temmuz-belgesi/873633 (Accessed: 25 September 2017).

20 Azernews (2017) ‘Azerbaijan was always with Turkey in its difficult days – envoy’, 15 July. Available at <https://www.azernews.az/nation/116259.html> (Accessed: 25 September 2017).

coup plotters, and stating Azerbaijan's solidarity with Turkey²¹. Turkey's diplomatic mission in Baku organized a commemoration which was attended by the President, several ministers, MPs, and high level bureaucrats.²²

Comments by Turkey's Ambassador to Azerbaijan, Erkan Özoral, confirmed that Azerbaijan's endeavors to combat FETÖ are well received by Turkey;

“Azerbaijan started its fight against FETÖ before 15 July. Azerbaijan was closely following the FETÖ reality in parallel with the developments in Turkey. It took the necessary precautions before the 15 July process. FETÖ's schools were shut down; some steps were taken against its media bodies. Following 15 July, these steps were further intensified. More solid steps were taken for getting rid of FETÖ institutions... We have seen support in Azerbaijan on this issue [FETÖ] and have no doubt that this support will continue hereafter”.²³

Gratitude was also expressed by Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım in his meeting with President Ilham Aliyev in Germany at the Munich Security Conference, during which he stated that “Azerbaijan's attitude towards fight against FETÖ is praiseworthy”.²⁴ Appreciation from the Turkish side has been expressed on many other occasions. Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, in a meeting with his Azerbaijani counterpart, stated that Turkey is happy with the measures taken by Azerbaijan against FETÖ.²⁵ In a working group meeting with his Azeri counterpart, Turkish Deputy Minister of National Education Orhan Erdem expressed that Turkey appreciates Azerbaijan's decisive policies towards FETÖ and the closure of the schools throughout the

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21 IHA (2017) ‘Azerbaycan Cumhurbaşkanı Aliyev’den 15 Temmuz mesajı’, 14 July. Available at www.ih.com.tr/haber-azerbaycan-cumhurbaskani-alievden-15-temmuz-mesaji-657923/ (Accessed: 25 September 2017).

22 Anadolu Agency (2017) ‘15 Temmuz 136 ülkede anıldı’, 18 July. Available at aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/15-temmuz-136-ulkede-anildi/863986 (Accessed: 25 September 2017).

23 Anadolu Agency (2017) ‘Türkiye'nin Bakü Büyükelçisi Özoral: FETÖ'nün Azerbaycan'da beli kırıldı’, 25 January. Available at aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/turkiyenin-baku-buyukelcisi-ozoral-fetonun-azerbaycanda-beli-kirildi/734424 (Accessed: 25 September 2017).

24 A Haber (2017) ‘Başbakan Yıldırım: Azerbaycan'ın FETÖ tutumu takdireşayan’, 18 February. Available at <https://www.ahaber.com.tr/gundem/2017/02/18/basbakan-yildirim-azerbaycanin-feto-tutumu-takdire-sayan> (Accessed: 25 September 2017).

25 See the official statement by the ministry at MFA Turkey (2016) ‘Dışişleri Bakanı Çavuşoğlu'nun Azerbaycan ziyareti’, 3 December. Available at www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-cavusoglu_nun-azerbaycan-ziyareti.tr.mfa (Accessed: 25 September 2017).

country.²⁶ Finally, in the conference entitled ‘Islamic solidarity in the example of Turkish-Azerbaijani relations’, organized in Istanbul by Turkey’s religious authority Diyanet in appreciation of Azerbaijan’s celebration of 2017 as a year of Islamic solidarity in Azerbaijan, Diyanet’s president Professor Dr. Ali Erbaş stated:

“I would like to thankfully remember Sheikh ul-Islam Allahshükür Pashazade and Mubariz Gurbanlı, who stood with our people and state through personally visiting Turkey [after the coup attempt], for the support they provided [to Turkey] against 15 July FETO putsch; [and] would like to gratefully mention the Qur’an recitations and prayers made in Azerbaijan mosques for our [15 July] martyrs²⁷.”

Spheres of further cooperation – a review of post-15 July bilateral relations

Post-15 July bilateral relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan have remained on track, backed by a close alliance going back 25 years. Yet, Azerbaijan’s anticipated support for Turkey’s fight against FETÖ has strengthened the foundations of the relationship,

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which has been particularly important for Turkey, that has for some time been marginalized, especially by the West. In fact, the results of the annual Turkish foreign policy public opinion survey conducted by Kadir Has University confirm this. Two recent surveys suggested

that Azerbaijan has been Turkey’s closest friend, according to 59.3 percent of respondents in 2016 and 71.3 in 2017.²⁸ This result also confirms that Azerbaijan’s support for Turkey has also met the expectations of the general public.

Turkey’s historical approach to Azerbaijan reveals another

26 MEB (2017) ‘Erdem, Türkiye ve Azerbaycan ortak çalışma grubu toplantısına katıldı’, 04 April. Available at www.meb.gov.tr/erdem-turkiye-ve-azerbaycan-ortak-calisma-grubu-toplantisina-katildi/haber/14004/tr# (Accessed: 25 September 2017).

27 Diyanet (2017) ‘Diyanet İşleri Başkanı Erbaş, ‘Türkiye-Azerbaycan Örneğinde İslam Dayanışması’ adlı uluslararası konferansın açılışına katıldı’ 25 September. Available at <https://www.diyamet.gov.tr/de-DE/institutionellen/Detail/10388/diyamet-isleri-baskani-erbas-turkiye-azerbaycan-orneginde-islam-dayanismasi-adli-uluslararası-konferansin-acilisina-katildi> (Accessed: 25 September 2017).

28 The reports are accessible at the following links Kadirhas TDP Survey (2017) ‘Khas Türk Dış Politikası Kamuoyu Algıları Araştırması 2017 Yılı Sonuçları Açıklandı’, 20 July. Available at www.khas.edu.tr/news/1588; Kadirhas TDP Survey (2016) ‘Kadir Has Üniversitesi Dış Politika Kamuoyu Algıları Araştırması Sonuçları Açıklandı’, 18 May. Available at www.khas.edu.tr/news/1367 (Accessed: 25 September 2017). The surveys also suggested that the U.S. is increasingly considered Turkey’s arch enemy.

example of meeting of the expectations of Azeri people. It has been 25 years since the signing of the Agreement on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey on 14 January 1992; on the very same day, the Consulate General of Turkey in Baku was upgraded to an embassy, becoming the first embassy in Azerbaijan. Since then, more than 200 bilateral agreements have been signed, strengthening the legal framework that has ensured the continuous development of bilateral ties. This also reflects the rising number of high-level official visits and the realization of socio-economic, scientific, and cultural ties.²⁹

Aliyev's letter to Erdogan on the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries reflects the appreciation of such ties:

“The brotherly Turkey is the first country, with which Azerbaijan established diplomatic relations in its independent history... Ties between our countries and nations have deep historical roots. ‘One nation, two states’ principle has covered all spheres of Azerbaijan-Turkey relations that have no analogues in the world... Based on friendship and brotherhood, our relations have today reached the level of strategic partnership thanks to our joint efforts. Azerbaijani-Turkish partnership contributes to welfare of our peoples, prosperity of our countries and establishment of peace and stability in the region³⁰.”

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President Aliyev's statements are not simply diplomatic courtesy; they are borne out in day-to-day bilateral relations. Relations have progressively intensified since they were first established, and the 15 July coup attempt has not caused any damage. On the contrary,

29 Baghirov, F. (2017) ‘25th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey’, Daily Sabah, January 17. Available at <https://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2017/01/17/25th-anniversary-of-diplomatic-relations-between-azerbaijan-and-turkey> (Accessed: 25 September 2017); Bulut, A. T. (2017) ‘Measuring political agenda setting and representation in Turkey: Introducing a new approach and data set’, *Party Politics*, 23(6), 717-730; Tufekci, O. (2016) “Türkiye'nin Rusya ve Kafkasya Politikası 2015”, in Duran, B., Inat, K. (eds.) *Türk Dış Politikası Yıllığı 2015*, Ankara, Seta Yayınları, pp. 317-340; Tufekci, O. (2017) “Türkiye'nin Rusya ve Kafkasya Politikası 2016”, in Duran, B., Inat, K. (eds.) *Türk Dış Politikası Yıllığı 2016*, Ankara, Seta Yayınları, pp. 375-396.

30 Avim (2017) ‘Ilham Aliyev: One Nation, Two States Principle Covers All Spheres of Azerbaijan-Turkey Relations’, 16 Ocak. Available at <http://avim.org.tr/en/Bulten/ilham-aliyev-one-nation-two-states-principle-covers-all-spheres-of-azerbaijan-turkey-relations> (Accessed: 03 November 2017).

due to the solidarity declared in Azerbaijan by the authorities and the public, they have deepened and strengthened. In particular, the recent the High Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSC) meetings, the recently commissioned Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway, and the TANAP project, which will be operational in 2018, are clear manifestations of the solidarity between Azerbaijan and Turkey in the post-15 July context. We shall now turn to these practical manifestations of cooperation and solidarity in greater detail.

The High Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSC) was established in 2010 at the Presidential level in order to strengthen

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bilateral relations. The HLSC has convened six times to date, and the most recent session was held on 31 October 2017 in Baku. Through the HLSC both parties have thus far signed 36 agreements. The volume of trade between Turkey and Azerbaijan was approximately 500 million dollars during the early 2000s, and has increased steadily during the following years and the volume has decreased since 2013.

However, it is expected that the loss will be regained and that trade will remain on an upward trend as of 2017. Accordingly, special attention should be given to energy and transportation investments; not only are these billion dollars investments, they are also strategically and geopolitically crucial projects.

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline is the clearest manifestation of mutual commitment to solidarity. The foundations for the \$4 billion project were laid in late 1990s, and since then it has functioned as a ‘chain’, connecting Azerbaijan and Turkey via Georgia. The BTC pipeline carries oil from the Azeri-Chirag-Deepwater Gunashli (ACG) field and condensate from Shah Deniz across Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey and links the Sangachal terminal on the shores of the Caspian Sea with the Ceyhan marine terminal on the Turkish Mediterranean coast. The construction began in 2002 and ended in 2005. Together with the costs of filling the pipeline with oil, 3.6 billion dollars were spent on BTC oil pipeline. The total daily capacity of BTC was one million barrels per day from March 2006 to March 2009.³¹ Since March 2009 it has been expanded to 1.2 million barrels per day. From 15 July 2016, the BTC gained further significance, as Kazakhstan has resumed the transportation of oil via the BTC

³¹ Aras, B. and Akpınar, P. (2011) ‘The Relations between Turkey and the Caucasus’, *Perceptions*, 16(3), p. 57.

pipeline. In 2017 alone, according to the Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 90,000 tons of Kazakh oil were exported through Azerbaijan via the BTC.³²

Along with the BTC, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum Natural Gas Pipeline, which aims to supply Turkey with natural gas from the Shah Deniz field in the southern Caspian Sea region of Azerbaijan, was realized under the Turkey-Azerbaijan Intergovernmental Agreement signed on 12 March 2001. BOTAŞ and SOCAR signed a 15-year Natural Gas Purchase-Sale Agreement for the transportation of 6.6 billion m³ of Azerbaijan natural gas to Turkey annually. Another 15-year agreement was signed in 2011 that by 2018 will enable Turkey to import gas from the second phase of the Shah Deniz.³³ The pipeline was perceived as a parallel to the BTC oil pipeline, and similar to BTC, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipeline has also brought Turkey and Azerbaijan closer together. Increasing gas transportation through the pipeline conveyed a symbolic message after 15 July 2016. Accordingly, during January-October 2017, the pipeline carried 5973,7 million cubic meters of gas, a 3,4% increase in comparison with the same period in 2016.³⁴

In 2012, intergovernmental agreements were signed for the transportation of Azerbaijani gas to Europe through Turkey via the Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP).

Cooperation on gas transportation extends beyond Azerbaijan's ability to meet Turkey's increasing gas demand. In 2012, intergovernmental agreements were signed for the transportation of Azerbaijani gas to Europe through Turkey via the Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP).³⁵ The TANAP Project plans for the construction of a 1,850 km long pipeline with a capacity of 32 billion m³ per year, running from the Georgian border to the Greece. The pipeline is expected to start transporting gas to Turkey in 2018.³⁶ The coup attempt and the following troubles

32 Kosolapova, E. (2017) 'Kazakhstan resumes oil transportation via BTC pipeline', 11 May. Available at <https://en.trend.az/business/energy/2752453.html> (Accessed: 02 November 2017).

33 Rzayeva, G. (2014) 'Natural Gas in the Turkish Domestic Energy Market: Policies and Challenges', (Oxford: Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, NG 82), p. 6; also see Suleymanov, E., Bulut, C. and Rahmanov, F. (2017) 'Economic and Political Analysis of Azerbaijan-Turkey Energy Relations' SSRN, June 22. Available at <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3060066> (Accessed: 03 November 2017).

34 Report News Agency (2017) 'Gas transportation via Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline up 3.4%', 17 November. Available at <https://report.az/en/energy/gas-transportation-via-baku-tbilisi-erzurum-pipeline-up-3-4/> (Accessed: 20 November 2017).

35 Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources (2017) 'Natural Gas Pipelines and Projects,' Available at <http://www.enerji.gov.tr/en-US/Pages/Natural-Gas-Pipelines-and-Projects> (Accessed: 11 November 2017).

36 Gül Yesevi, Ç. and Yavuz Tiftikçigil, B. (2015) 'Turkey-Azerbaijan Energy Relations: A Political and Economic Analysis', *International Journal of Energy Economics and Policy*, 5(1), pp. 27-44.

The coup attempt and the following troubles Turkey faced have not changed anything regarding the TANAP project.

Turkey faced have not changed anything regarding the TANAP project. As of today, almost 80% of the project has been completed, and it will be fully completed by the end of 2018. As President Aliyev stated at the presidential session at the 22nd World Petroleum Congress in Istanbul, these two flagship energy initiatives have “contributed to not only regional but also the global energy map”, strengthening both Azerbaijan and Turkey’s hands in global energy politics.³⁷

Another strategic project serving the path dependent solidarity of Turkey-Azerbaijan is the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, which was initiated in 2005. Construction began in 2007, and the first train departed from Baku on 30 October 2017.³⁸ The aim is to integrate the BTK route with China’s One Belt One Road initiative, transporting across the Eurasian landmass within just 15 days and forming a strategic transit corridor with the capacity to transport up to 17 million tons of cargo and over 3 million passengers annually by 2030. Through this project, not only will the capacity for transport of goods between Turkey and Azerbaijan increase, but bilateral ties will also deepen. This was clearly articulated during the opening ceremony of the railway in Kars by President Erdoğan and President Aliyev; both presidents unequivocally declared the ‘one nation, two states’³⁹ expression, projecting a common fate fortified by a strategic partnership.⁴⁰ Following the opening of the BTK railway, bilateral agreements were signed between Turkey and Azerbaijan during the last HLSC on 31 October 2017, primarily in the field of culture, aimed at addressing the damage caused by FETÖ, which has particularly affected the education systems of both countries.⁴¹

37 Zengin, D. (2017) ‘Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline is 77 pct complete’, Anadolu Agency, 10 July. Available at <http://aa.com.tr/en/economy/trans-anatolian-natural-gas-pipeline-is-77-pct-complete/858285> (Accessed: 11 November 2017).

38 For further information please see: Jardine, B. (2017) ‘Full Steam Ahead: Long-Awaited Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway Opens’, Eurasianet, 30 October. Available at <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/85776> (Accessed: 11 November 2017); Daily Sabah (2017) ‘First train of Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway to hit tracks today’, 29 October <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/2017/10/30/first-train-of-baku-tbilisi-kars-railway-to-hit-tracks-today> (Accessed: 11 November 2017).

39 This is such a common rhetoric by both leaders, see for instance Sputnik (2016) ‘Erdoğan ile Aliyev’den *tek millet, iki devlet* vurgusu’, 24 April. Available at <https://tr.sputniknews.com/asya/201604251022368004-turkiye-azerbaycan-erdogan-aliyev/> (Accessed: 11 November 2017).

40 Akşam (2017) ‘Azerbaycan ile dayanışmamız birilerini rahatsız ediyor’, 31 October. Available at www.aksam.com.tr/siyaset/azerbaycan-ile-dayanismamiz-birilerini-rahatsiz-ediyor/haber-674717 (Accessed: 11 November 2017).

41 Azernews (2017) ‘Azerbaijan, Turkey sign agreements’, 31 October. Available at <https://www.azernews.az/nation/121421.html> (Accessed: 11 November 2017).

In the post-15 July context, in addition to the depth and breadth of bilateral relations, both countries have maintained successful cooperation in order to protect their national interests at the international level, via organizations such as the United Nations, European Security and Cooperation Organization, the Council of Europe, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization, the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking Countries and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Similarly, they have benefited from cooperation with other Turkic states under the aegis of the Turkic Council, TURKSOY (Joint Administration of Turkic Culture and Art), TURKPA (the Parliamentary Assembly of the Turkic Speaking Countries), Turkish Business Council, International Turkic Academy, and The Turkic Cultural Heritage Fund.⁴² There have been several meetings which have brought together representatives from Turkey, Azerbaijan, and other Turkic states after the coup attempt. The first meeting of the ministers of communications and high technologies of the Turkic Council states was held in Baku on 28-29 November 2016, followed by a second meeting in Istanbul on 9 November 2017. The 34th Meeting of the Permanent Council of Culture Ministers of TURKSOY was held in Sheki, Azerbaijan 1 December 2016, and the Fourth Meeting of Official Foreign Policy Research Centers of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (Turkic Council) was held in Baku on 10 November 2017. In the post-15 July environment, such interstate bodies and meetings have become even more important for Turkey; together with Azerbaijan, Turkey has been able to expand its fight against FETÖ throughout the Turkic world.

During the opening ceremony of the railway in Kars by President Erdoğan and President Aliyev; both presidents unequivocally declared the 'one nation, two states' expression, projecting a common fate fortified by a strategic partnership.

Conclusion

The 15 July failed coup in Turkey has changed the country's foreign policy priorities. Since then, Ankara has redefined its relations with a number of countries based on how they responded to the coup attempt, and whether they cooperated with Ankara in apprehending the penetrators, the FETÖ. Given that 2017 marked the 25th anniversary of the establishment of official diplomatic relations

42 See Tufekci, O. (2017) *The Foreign Policy of Modern Turkey: Power and the Ideology of Eurasianism*, London: I.B. Tauris; Tufekci, O. (2017) "Turkish Eurasianism: Roots and Discourses", in Tufekci, O., Tabak, H. and Akilli, E. (eds.) *Eurasian Politics and Society: Issues and Challenges*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 1-35.

between Turkey and Azerbaijan, and that the two countries have had steady and mutually supportive policies throughout this time, this paper has examined whether the post-15 July environment led to changes in the relationship. Specifically, the paper has analyzed Azerbaijan's response to the 'fight on FETÖ', and the development of relations following the coup attempt.

Our observation of the post-15 July political developments suggests that the relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan in the post-15 July context confirmed their path dependency. Thus, following the coup attempt, there have been no negatively changes to bilateral relations. On the contrary, Azerbaijan's support for Turkey in its fight against FETÖ has deepened mutual confidence and trust, thereby further strengthening the path dependent solidarity and cooperation.

Accordingly, Azerbaijan followed Turkey's lead in declaring the Gülen movement as a national security threat in April 2014. This support continued after the coup attempt, and with the backing of the public, the Azerbaijani government joined Turkey's fight against FETÖ with confidence and dedication throughout. Baku lent its diplomatic support at the presidential level to the democratically elected government in Ankara even before the putsch had been fully quashed. Azerbaijan's public institutions - including the Islamic authority - denounced the Gülen movement. The various commemorations and public services for the martyrs of on the first anniversary of the plot have all reassured Turkey that Azerbaijan remains a reliable strategic partner in a path dependent manner.

Although religion and kinship have facilitated mutual trust, reliance and expectations⁴³, Azerbaijan's support for Turkey on FETÖ cannot be explained simply with a reference to religious or kin solidarity. The cooperation is built on strategic and existential foundations, and is built on almost always meeting mutual expectations. The ongoing development of bilateral ties and the perception of Azerbaijan as Turkey's 'only friend' among the majority of the Turkish public confirm this. In the post-15 July context, the two countries have continued to cooperative and have taken clear steps to further the solidarity, as clearly demonstrated by the achievements in the HLSC meetings, the BTK railway, and the TANAP project.

43 Tabak, Hüsrev (2017) "Manifestations of Islam in Turkey's Foreign Policy", in Tabak, Hüsrev, Tüfekçi, Özgür and Chiriatti, Alessia (eds) *Domestic and Regional Uncertainties in the New Turkey*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 85-104.