

On the Issue of the Nature and Dynamics of the Development of Russian-Turkish Relations in the Post-Soviet Period

Grigor M. Arshakyan^{1a}✉, Aram V. Safaryan^{2b}✉

¹V. Bryusov State University, Yerevan, Armenia

²Yerevan State University, Yerevan, Armenia

^agarshakyan@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3286-384X>

^baramsafaryan@yahoo.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6422-3647>

Abstract. The article examines the development of Russian-Turkish relations over the past 30 years, the main aspects of geopolitical relations and, in particular, the conflicts in the South Caucasus and adjacent regions. The authors believe that the key ones are the two Karabakh wars, the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict and the five-day Georgian-South Ossetian war, as well as the Ukrainian crisis, the Libyan and Syrian conflicts, in which Moscow and Ankara have different interests. The new configuration of forces in the South Caucasus will largely depend on the outcome of the resolution of these conflicts. The authors identify the main patterns in the development of bilateral Russian-Turkish relations, which are characterized by a combination of confrontation, competition and cooperation. The article was based on the results of a scientific discussion held at the National Communications Development Research Institution (NIIRC), Moscow, Russia in 2022.

Keywords: Russia, Turkey, South Caucasus, Central Asia, geopolitical rivalry, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Abkhazia

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Introduction

After the Soviet Union collapsed, the whole area of Great Eurasia suffered certain transformations, which introduced new features into the relations between the region's countries. The collapse of the USSR made the former soviet republics independent, turned them into new actors on the international arena, capable of formulating their interests

and approaches. Over the last 30 years the interests of the newly-established states became outlined with more precision and predictability. Their political role in regional and international affairs in general became more intense.

Under these circumstances Russian-Turkish relations gained a substantial development. Bearing the stamp of the previous centuries, these relations however, conceived new realities that attracted attention of scholars from various countries. The present article aims to study, analyze and evaluate the dynamics and the logic that have been driving the development of Russian-Turkish relations in the recent thirty post-soviet years. This research is important as a way to understand what is to be expected in their prospective development and what new realities may develop in the regions, which aspects or these relations are of confrontational and competitive nature and which are rather of cooperative nature.

After the year 1991 the independent Russia was passing through a stage of dramatic changes in political and economic sphere, that were to determine its status in the contemporary world. Having ceased to be a superpower, Russia made attempts to reinforce its positions, trying to articulate and promote its national interests, first and foremost, among the neighboring states (8; 19). With this regard, an important issue to address is the current outcome of the 30-year-long development process, in which Russia, defending its interests, developed its relations with traditionally competitive states, the Republic of Turkey being among the Southern ones. Europe gave its consent to Turkey's pretensions with respect to its expansion towards soviet South Caucasus and Central Asia (4:347; 11:5), where the Turkic republics of the above-mentioned regions were willing to develop amicable relations, based on linguistic and ethno-cultural unity on the one part (28:6), and Turkey, that was seeking an opportunity to expand its influence, casting a glance over the West, as the European Union had set a veto on its aspirations in the Western direction, on the other. Against this background the relations between Turkey and Russia became more wide-reaching and versatile.

Materials and Methods

While creating this article the authors studied materials provided by both Russian and Turkish official sources, they analyzed the primary inferences made in the publications by Russian, Turkish, Armenian and other foreign scholars, who have been researching separate stages and full chapters of the theme under scrutiny over the last thirty years. The present study was done by using comparative and empirical methods, as well as the systemic analysis method. The monographs and articles by Russian-speaking, English-speaking and Turkish-speaking authors were studied in the original.



Results

Controversies Regarding the Issue of Conflicts and their Establishment

The differences in interests between Russia and Turkey in what concerns the issue of Nagorno Karabakh, Georgian Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts began to manifest themselves clearly in 1991 and 1992. It became evident that Turkey pretended to increase its presence in the South Caucasus, endeavoring to fill the vacuum that appeared after the Soviet Union collapsed (22:2). Russia had all necessary resources and managed to prevent Turkish interference in the above-mentioned conflicts. Thus, when Turkey tried to deploy its troops on the border with Armenia and punish it for expansion in the Karabakh conflict zone, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the President of the Russian Federation Gennady Burbulis and Commander-in-Chief of the CIS Troops Marshal Yevgeny Shaposhnikov made it absolutely clear to Turkey that its actions could lead to World War III (20:64; 26:203). It had a deterrent effect and forced the official Ankara to refrain from implementing punitive measures against Armenia. Since the OSCE Minsk Group was formed in March 1992, Turkish diplomacy tried at all costs to intensify its presence in the process of political normalization of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, aiming to expand its presence in the South Caucasus by supporting Azerbaijan in every possible way (7; 21). Between the 1990s and 2020 it failed to implement the plan, as Armenian diplomacy was convinced that Turkey could not be an objective intermediary, being biased while defending and promoting Azerbidzhan's interests. In the course of the Abkhaz conflict, Turkey was trying to defend Georgia's interests, nevertheless it had its own strategies, which aimed to create large Abkhazian communities of kinsmen residing in Turkey (10; 12; 16). Turkey did not resort to military intervention while handling the issue, having in mind the influence of Russia on the one hand, and trying to benefit from its active neutrality and become more efficient in its endeavors to participate in regional affairs on the other.

Rather indicative is Turkey's position in what refers to the August 2008 Georgian-South Ossetian, which may appear to be different from all other positions, even those of other allies. Turkey did not support the position of Europe with respect to that war (24; 27). It is now obvious that it was the Georgian side that started the war in order to expel the Russians from South Ossetia, however a differently directed development of events caused great international tension, and Europe made attempts to become actively engaged in overcoming the consequences of the war.

By maintaining its neutral status and using intensively its political, diplomatic and military arsenal while dealing with the region's states, Turkey managed to obtain benefits in its relations with Russia, simultaneously gaining increasing strength in term of its presence in Georgia (and across the South Caucasus).

For example, at the end of 2007, the free trade agreement between Turkey and Georgia came into force, which made it possible for Turkey to become Georgia's largest trading partner. Therefore, in 2011, the trade turnover between the two countries went beyond \$1.5

billion. Georgia had never achieved such an index in economic relations with any other country¹. In the period between 2000 and 2011 Turkey invested in Georgia \$1.4 billion, which made up 16% of the total foreign direct investments in Georgia². Georgia became the first former soviet republic to allow Turkey gain dominance over Russia in terms of priority in economic partnership (13:28). As a result, Turkish-Georgian relations gained great momentum during Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili's presidency, and it was him, who gave the name of "golden age" to this period in Turkish-Georgian bilateral relations (25:21). Ankara's aspirations were then clearly articulated by Turkish Prime Minister R. T. Erdogan: "America is our ally, and the Russian Federation is an important neighbour. The Russian Federation is our number one trading partner. We get 2/3 of our energy from the Russian Federation. We are acting in accordance with our national interests. We cannot ignore the Russian Federation" (9).

The current conflict in Libya is provoked by the confrontation between the Government of National Accord (PNC), located in Tripoli, and the House of Representatives of Libya, being located in Tobruk, and supported by the Libyan National Army (LNA), led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar³. Russian and Turkish positions did not coincide during the Libyan crisis of 2014. They supported different sides of the conflict, providing them military-technical and diplomatic patronage.

Since the moment of escalation in the Libyan conflict, Russia has been unofficially providing military support to Marshal Khalifa Haftar's⁴ LNA forces, seeking to strengthen its geopolitical influence in the regions controlled by the LNA, on the one hand, but it continues its dialogue with the NTC, reluctant to lose the possibility to promote their mutual cooperation in the future and to lose a chance to sign large-scale agreements when Libya starts getting reconstructed on the other hand. At the same time, Moscow claims to play an important role in the possible settlement of the Libyan conflict.

Meanwhile, the Turkish Republic, which aspires to play a dominant role in the region and seeks to revive the "former greatness" of the Ottoman Empire, actively supports the Government of National Accord of Libya (1:24). Thus, at the end of November 2019, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Faiz Saraj, the head of the UN, recognized the Government of National Accord of Libya, signed a memorandum on military cooperation and mutual understanding on delimitation of the maritime jurisdiction areas. However, Russia and Turkey did not clash directly in this sphere either, being entirely possible the use of confidential diplomatic channels to keep the process under control.

1 Cecire M. Zero Problems 2.0: Turkey as a Caucasus Power. *World Politics Review*, 20.09.2012. Available from: <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/12354/zero-problems-2-0-turkey-as-a-caucasus-power>.

2 Archvadze I. The Georgian market in the shadow of the Turkish economy, 13.02.2012. Available from: http://georgiamonitor.org/detail.php?ID=3348&sphrase_id=245212.

3 Bocharov I. Prospects for the settlement of the Libyan conflict, 04.05.2021. Available from: https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/livijya-konflikt/#_ftn17.

4 Erdogan announced 2 thousand fighters of the Wagner PMCs in Libya, 25.12.2019. Available from: <https://www.interfax.ru/world/689392>; Putin – about the mercenaries of the Wagner PMCs in Libya: "They do not represent the interests of the Russian state", 13.01.2020, Available from: <https://www.rline.tv/news/2020-01-13-putin-o-naemnikakh-chvk-vagner-v-livii-oni-ne-predstavlyayut-interesov-rossiyskogo-gosudarstva/>.

Another significant challenge in the Russian-Turkish relations is the “Syrian conflict”. In the Syrian confrontation, Russia supported Bashar al-Assad and asserted its right to be present in the Syrian Arab Republic⁵. Moscow’s interests in Syria, and in the Middle East in general, are of a strategic nature, since instability in this region may pose a threat to another region which is of no less importance for Russia both strategically and in terms of national security. What is meant here is the South Caucasus, which might make a way for any threat to penetrate easily into one of the points of Islamic radicalism in Russia located in the North Caucasus (2:112).

Turkey used to support and keeps doing so with regard to the opposition political organizations, providing them political financial and military aid⁶. There are even subsidiary offices of these organizations in Turkey⁷ (31), Turkey even proclaims itself the patron of its Muslim compatriots, having sheltered more than 2 million Syrian refugees⁸.

Turkey is concerned about the escalation of the Kurdish issue provoked by the Syrian crisis, which is considered a serious threat to Ankara both domestically and internationally⁹. In the domestic Syrian conflict, Ankara conducted an anti-Assad policy, seriously supporting the opposition forces which fought against the Assad regime, including the Islamic State terrorist group (ISIL), and held a diplomatic and propaganda struggle against the official Damascus¹⁰.

An important issue, however, is the fact that Russia and Turkey, as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran, demonstrated common strategy in handling the struggle against the Islamic State terrorist group, which constituted a ground for creation of a trilateral Russia-Turkey-Iran framework for conflict solving at the presidential level¹¹. This framework appeared to be the most viable of all in terms of advancing the stabilization process in Syria. Let us recall that the Geneva framework, created for this purpose, failed to show any significant results and did not last long, as well as the Astana framework, although it did enjoy some successes. Then, despite all the differences in policies, Russia, Turkey and Iran

⁵ Meeting with military officers of the Russian Armed Forces, 17.03.2016, Available from: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51526>; Ramani S. Russia’s Strategy in Libya, 07.04.2020. Available from: <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/russias-strategy-libya>.

⁶ Syria rebels said to receive missiles via Turkey, Hurriyet, 01.08.2012. Available from: <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/syria-rebels-said-to-receive-missiles-via-turkey-26899>; Erdogan: Turkey, FSA close to capturing Syria’s Al-Bab, 12.02.2017. Available from: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/erdogan-turkey-fsa-close-to-capturing-syria-s-al-bab/748823>.

⁷ The main groups of the Syrian opposition. Dossier, 06.01.2015. Available from: <https://tass.ru/info/848044>.

⁸ “Our country has been home to the highest number of refugees for the past 7 years”, said Erdoğan, 20.06.2022. Available from: <https://www.tcgb.gov.tr/en/news/542/138450/-our-country-has-been-home-to-the-highest-number-of-refugees-for-the-past-7-years->; The Mediterranean Sea should become a symbol of hope for refugees and migrants, 07.04.2017. Available from: <https://news.un.org/ru/story/2017/04/1302881>.

⁹ Markedonov S. Russian-Turkish relations and security problems in the Caucasus region, 30.05.2016. URL: <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/valday/Rossiiskoturetskie-otnosheniya-i-problemy-bezopasnosti-Kavkazskogo-regiona-18188>.

¹⁰ Brooker P. S. Russia vs. Turkey: Competition for Influence, 12.12.2015. Available from: <http://www.valuewalk.com/2015/12/russia-vs-turkey-competition-for-influence/>.

¹¹ Andreeva A. “To end the presence of terrorists in Syria”. What Putin, Erdogan and Raisi agreed on, 1907-2022. Available from: <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2022/07/19/15153638.shtml>.

assumed the responsibility for ending hostilities and boosting the peace process in Syria. The armed forces of Russia and Turkey were never directly engaged in the confrontation, discounting the fact that a Russian military aircraft was once downed by Turkey¹², and that of the murder of the Russian ambassador to Turkey¹³, which, however, did not lead to a dramatic deterioration in their bilateral relations.

Finally, the issue of Ukraine. Turkey did not recognize the reunification of Crimea with Russia¹⁴ (14:169). Turkey considers itself to have the right to patronize the Crimean Tatars as its compatriots. Turkey supported and keeps supporting Ukraine on the international arena (17). Russian – Turkish interests have also clashed in the recent year, in the course of the special military operation in Ukraine. During this year, Turkey has increased the supply of UAVs¹⁵ to Ukraine and provides it comprehensive support¹⁶. Turkey condemned Russia’s actions in Ukraine, nevertheless, it did not join the global sanctions of the Western world¹⁷. It is worth noting, that Turkey’s policy in handling this issue is quite well received in the Western world, since the official Ankara has not been touched by its sanctions. The authors believe that Russia paid heed to Turkey’s position with regard to the Ukrainian crisis, at the same time it considers a success the fact that Turkey did not open a new front against Russia, but instead it became sort of a channel to realize various economic and political communications¹⁸.

Turkey’s Competing Strategies

By impeding Turkey to become a full-fledged member of the European Union, the global West actually pushed Turkey to head to the East seeking to increase its influence and presence. Neo-Ottomanism, being the ideological basis of the new Turkish advance, encourages official Ankara to expand to all countries and among those peoples which once used to be part of the Ottoman Empire (30:118). What is more, Turkey is realizing its potential for integration with Azerbaijan and the Turkic states of Central Asia within the framework of the “Big Turan” ideology. It is here, that the competitive interests of Turkey

¹² Skorobogaty P. A Russian bomber was shot down in Syria, 24.11.2015. Available from: <http://expert.ru/2015/11/24/turetskie-pvo-sbili-voennyj-samolet/>; Shaheen K., Walker S., Putin condemns Turkey after Russian warplane downed near Syria border, The Guardian, 24.11.2015. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/24/turkey-shoots-down-jet-near-border-with-syria>.

¹³ Vashchenko V. The Russian ambassador was assassinated in Ankara, 19.12.2016. Available from: <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2016/12/19/10437899.shtml>.

¹⁴ The UN Resolution Against Russia’s Ukraine Annexations: How Didi the Middle East Vote? 18.10.2022. Available from: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/un-resolution-against-russias-ukraine-annexations-how-did-middle-east-vote>.

¹⁵ Unmanned aerial vehicles.

¹⁶ Topju E. Bayraktar: what is the role of Turkish drones in the war in Ukraine, 09.03.2022. Available from: <https://www.dw.com/ru/bayraktar-kakova-rol-tureckih-bespilotnikov-v-vojne-v-ukraine/a-61054407>.

¹⁷ Banerjee B. Turkey on Russia-Ukraine crisis, 31.05.2022. Available from: <https://thekootneeti.in/2022/05/31/turkey-on-russia-ukraine-crisis/>.

¹⁸ Putin highlighted the successful cooperation between Russia and Turkey on Syria and Libya, 29.09.2021. Available from: <https://tass.ru/politika/12534529>.

and Russia objectively converge. Back in the early 90s, Turkey, following the instructions of the United States, began to develop its Eurasian project, with a view to rapprochement with the countries of the South Caucasus, the Turkic-speaking peoples residing in the territorial entities of the Russian Federation in the North Caucasus, the Volga region and the Turkic states of Central Asia (6). The Turkish ideology of Eurasianism implied a consolidation of all the members of the vast expanses of Eurasia under Turkish leadership. At that time, Russia, having lost the cold war, was considered to have little resources to prevent and even less to resist the process (18).

Turkey's activities in the zones being traditionally under Russian influence were a step-by-step advancement. For example, official Ankara considered it acceptable to cooperate with Russia in creating a framework for comprehensive cooperation in the South Caucasus. Back in 2008, Turkey proposed to create a "Platform for Stability and Cooperation in the Caucasus" participating the three widely recognized republics of the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), along with Turkey and Russia (15; 29). It is hard to believe that Ankara did not understand it. At that time, that framework did not find significant response. However, after Armenia's defeat in the 44-day war in 2020 after the ceasefire brokered by President Vladimir Putin was announced, the possibility to establish new relations became more realistic. In compliance with the agreement between Russia and Turkey, in the immediate vicinity of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone, in the city of Aghdam, there was deployed a monitoring center, where Russian and Turkish military personnel were represented in equal parts¹⁹.

According to the authors this new step symbolized the idea, that against the background of the new realities, Russia gave it consent to Turkey's expansion of to the South Caucasus. It is worth pointing out, however, that Azerbaijan, which has strategic alliance with Russia, excellent relations with Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, is in no hurry to become a member of the CSTO, which announced in the Shusha Declaration on allied relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey²⁰. Under these circumstances, having excellent relations with Georgia and proclaiming the concept of "one nation – two states" with Azerbaijan as leverage, Turkey is carefully but consistently taking steps to finally settle its relations with Armenia so that Armenia, neither objectively nor subjectively, could prevent its integration with Azerbaijan.

The Turkic-speaking republics of Central Asia are consistently, step by step, go towards extension and deepening of multifaceted cooperation with Turkey. Having started with linguistic and cultural cooperation, they now cooperate on a wide range of issues, including defense and security areas²¹. One cannot but imagine how the first President of

¹⁹ There opened a Russian-Turkish monitoring center in Karabakh, 30.01.2021. Available from: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/10584995>.

²⁰ Tashjian Y. "Shushi Declaration" and its Implications on the South Caucasus and Beyond, 29.06.2021. Available from: <https://armenianweekly.com/2021/06/29/shushi-declaration-and-its-implications-on-the-south-caucasus-and-beyond>.

²¹ Turkic states should develop common security concept, Erdoğan says, Daily Sabah, 11.11.2022. Available from: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkic-states-should-develop-common-security-concept-erdogan-says>; Subbotin I. Erdogan is encouraged to create a Turkish military block, 12.01.2022. Available from: https://www.ng.ru/world/2022-01-12/1_8343_turkey.html.

Kazakhstan (maybe other leaders of the Central Asian states as well) managed (in formal or informal circumstances) to persuade the prominent figures of Russian political elite to extend a hand of cooperation to the leaders of Turkey and expand this cooperation to the Turkic-speaking republics. In this context, Russia, especially during the presidency of Vladimir Putin, faces the need to find an adequate pattern for peaceful coexistence.

Cooperation in the Name of Peaceful Coexistence

Throughout the entire post-Soviet period, and during the last 10-20 years in particular, Russia has positioned itself as a Eurasian power. It assumed leadership in the course of Eurasian integration, being positive that the potential of its influence and attractiveness were absolutely sufficient to consolidate some of the post-Soviet countries around it. Supporters of Eurasian integration (who have long been following the development of the process) confirm that from the very beginning of the confrontation between the Western world and Russia, Russia has been seriously reflecting on the issue of how to develop the process of economic integration to make it possible to find a chain of new opportunities to ensure economic development and, at the same time, to safeguard an atmosphere of peaceful coexistence and security in the Greater Eurasia region (3).

Since Russia itself is positive that it can become the axis and locomotive of the new phase of Eurasian integration, it will continue developing its relations with Azerbaijan and with Central Asian countries expecting them to be inspired by the appealingness of becoming part of the great Eurasian partnership. And here, again, taking into consideration the prospective cooperation with China, Iran, Turkey, Egypt and other countries, Russia seriously casts its glance at Turkey.

Russia considers a political success the fact that Turkey did not directly join the sanctions imposed by the Western world. In 2021, the volume of economic cooperation between Russia and Turkey preponderated \$33 billion²². Russia is building a nuclear power plant in Turkey at its own expense (23:42). Importantly, Turkey is developing a project to build another nuclear power plant near Sinop with the help of Russia²³.

Assisted by Russia, Turkey is building a giant gas hub, pretending to become the main gas supplier in Southern Europe. This is a strategic issue for a large group of EU countries. Turkey's role in this issue is really becoming highly-demanded, as there obviously arise difficulties in direct communication between Russia and the EU²⁴. While maintaining partnership relations with Ukraine and military-political alliance with the United States and the EU, Turkey consistently pushes forward its mediation role in resolving various

²² Trade between Russia and Turkey in 2021 r., 12.02.2022. Available from: <https://russian-trade.com/reports-and-reviews/2022-02/torgovlya-mezhdu-rossiy-i-turtsiy-v-2021-g/>.

²³ Demidov A. Putin and Erdogan have discussed the Project of building another atomic power station on the coast of the Black Sea, 29.09.2022. Available from: <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2022/09/29/18674965.shtml?ysclid=lakxqpc6a745131527>.

²⁴ Telephone conversation With the President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan, 11.12.2022. Available from: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70064>; Putin claimed that the gas hub in Turkey is a realistic and quickly realizable project. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/business/870424>

problems arising between Russia and Ukraine. The agreement between Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia achieved on November, 9, 2020, proclaimed the end of the Second Karabakh War. It was also envisaged to create a Russian-Turkish joint military observation mission in Aghdam, immediately adjacent to the conflict zone.

Therefore, the authors consider Russia to have given its consent to a parallel Turkish-Russian military presence in Azerbaijan. It is very important that in order to support economic development in the South Caucasus, Russia does cooperate with Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran within the "3+3" framework²⁵. Although Georgia has not yet accepted the proposal to cooperate within the above-mentioned framework, this framework seems adequate in what regards the use of multilateral cooperation to strengthen regional security and stability. In the South Caucasus, in the same manner as in Syria, the trilateral framework proposed by the presidents of Russia, Turkey and Iran appears to be highly efficient and keeps paying off.

As for the Turkic world, Russia, seeking to safeguard its security and internal stability without setting Turkey apart in handling these processes, is looking for new forms of cooperation with the Turkic world. Both confrontation with the Western world and the ongoing cooperation as part of the plan to establish a large Eurasian partnership in the foreseeable future, will push Russia and Turkey to maintain the established relations at the current level and find mutually agreeable solutions to all the issues mentioned here.

The authors are positive, that Russia and Turkey will keep demonstrating signs of confrontation, competition and cooperation in their policy, therefore, the political course of both larger and smaller countries of the region, while being part of the processes involving these two major actors, should set their political course in consonance with the logic of these realities.

Conclusions

During the post-Soviet period, Russia and Turkey have gained extensive experience in developing a common attitude to political and ethnic conflicts. It is worth pointing out, that in the course of these conflicts, relations between Russia and Turkey, even faced with confrontation, never went below a certain reasonable level. On all occasions, there operated military-political and diplomatic channels of communication, incentivizing the parties to give consideration to each other's fundamental interests.

We can hardly dispute the position stated by Armenian orientologists, who, like many previous authors, claim that in the course of their history, Russian-Turkish relations have passed through various periods of "ebb and flow" (5:36), which on each occasion left their mark on the political and economic processes in the region.

The Turkic-speaking countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia are interested in cooperation between Russia and Turkey in this large region. In the South Caucasus

²⁵ Diplomats of the "3+3" format countries discussed countering common challenges in the region, 10.12.2021. Available from: <https://tass.ru/politika/13171839>.

region, Turkey has become an important actor bearing substantial influence on its close allies Azerbaijan and Georgia. Russia seeks to play such a role in this region that, would help preserve its traditional areas of influence on the one hand, and promote, together with Turkey and Iran, pacification, security-building and stability in the South Caucasus, on the other hand. Against this background, the factor of particular importance is the constructiveness to be demonstrated by the South Caucasus countries, including Armenia, whose role is determined by their unwillingness to fall out of the proclaimed regional processes. The increasingly strong positions Russia has in the neighboring regions, especially in the Black Sea region and in the Middle East, which pose risks to Turkey's plans to become a regional leader, provoked Ankara to make another attempt to reconsider the issue regarding its influence in the South Caucasus, and take part in the military aggression, Azerbaijan implemented against Artsakh (the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic) in September 2020. As a result of the 44-day Artsakh war, Moscow, on the one hand, strengthened its military presence in the region by deploying a peacekeeping mission in the conflict zone and establishing its control over strategically important regional communication centers, and on the other hand it did not resist Ankara's entering the region, in fact Moscow established a dialogue with Ankara and recognized its interests in the South Caucasus, which used to be a vitally important area of Russian interests.

A significant novelty in Russian-Turkish relations was that Turkey, despite its membership in NATO and close relations with the United States, both in the Syrian conflict and in the Karabakh conflict, displayed willingness to cooperate with Russian military forces. In Syria, this cooperation manifested itself in joint patrols and coordinated operations, and in the Karabakh conflict it was implemented in joint monitoring of post-conflict settlement.

Despite the proxy wars led by Ankara and Moscow in conflict zones in different regions, Russia and Turkey do not pass to direct confrontation, given the difficulties in international cooperation and deep bilateral multi-vector trade and economic relations, the key role belonging to energy cooperation. This fact determines the current nature of Russian-Turkish relations, which are competitive and cooperative simultaneously.

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About the authors

Grigor M. ARSHAKYAN. DSc (Polit.). Associate Professor, Brusov State University, Yerevan, Armenia. Address: 42, st. Tumanyan, Yerevan, Republic of Armenia. garshakyan@mail.ru
Aram V. SAFARYAN. CandSc (Philol). Associate Professor of Political Science, Director of the Center for Russian Studies, Faculty of International Relations, Yerevan State University, Address: 1 Alex Manoogian, Yerevan, 0025, Republic of Armenia/ aramsafaryan@yahoo.com

Contribution of the authors

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