

Trends in the Friendly Communications Development between Turkey and Azerbaijan

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Abstract. This article provides an analysis of the trends in the development of friendly Azerbaijani-Turkish communications. The increasing integration of the two states determines not only the bilateral, but also the foreign policy communications of the countries. Azerbaijan pursues a multi-vector and sovereign foreign policy, but many of the decisions directly meet the interests of the Turkish-Azerbaijani alliance and contribute to further integration. Turkization and strengthening of cooperation with NATO are the main accents of the current Azerbaijani agenda on the world stage.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, Turkey, foreign policy communication, communication regime, strategic partnership, Turkish-Azerbaijani relations

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Introduction

In the friendliness rating “Communication regimes of neighboring countries - 2022” [3], published by the National Research Institute for the Development of Communications, the Republic of Azerbaijan is in 7th place. Compared to the previous year, the country decreased by two positions. First of all, the authors of the report attribute this to the weakening of foreign policy strategic communication with Russia against the backdrop of deepening integration with an important regional player - the Republic of Turkey, as well as the introduction of the concept of the “Turkic world”. Despite the signing of the Declaration on Allied Cooperation between Russia and Azerbaijan, analysts note the formation of a civilizational rift and a weakening sense of the common historical past of the two countries.

Türkiye is officially declared a priority partner of Azerbaijan, and bilateral relations are characterized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan¹ as “friendly and fraternal”. In this regard, a common policy of the two states is being formed on a number of issues, including international relations.

The author used the works of researchers on similar topics, Russian, Turkish, Azerbaijani and other foreign researchers: V.A.Avatkov [1, 5]; A.G.Ibragimov [2]; V.V.Komleva [3]; E.F.Parubochaya [4]; R.Ibrahimov [6], A.Valiyev, N.Gafarova [7]; E.Mikail, Y.Atun, A.Atun [8], who have studied individual stages and problems in the topic under study over the past thirty years.

The purpose of the study is to identify the causes, conditions and trends in the formation of friendly foreign policy communications between Turkey and Azerbaijan.

Materials and Methods

When writing the article, materials from Russian, Azerbaijani and Turkish official sources were studied (reports of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, speeches of top officials of states, publications of government bodies and international organizations, integration associations. The research is based on the comparative method and the method of system analysis.

Results

Multi-vectorism and pragmatism are the fundamental principles of the foreign policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Like any independent state, the country directs its foreign policy to achieve national interests [1]. Article 10 of the Constitution² it states that Azerbaijan builds its relations with other countries and the outside world on the basis of international law and the interests of the country, the country wants dominance in the South Caucasus by using its interaction with Turkey, as well as friendly relations with Moscow.

Azerbaijan, like any other state, forms its foreign policy taking into account a number of factors. Among them, it is necessary to highlight the geographical location: Azerbaijan is located at the crossroads of major transport routes, which makes it an important player in regional and international affairs. Most of its borders with neighboring countries lie across seas and rivers, allowing it to control transport routes and influence the regional economy.

¹ On the results of 2022: press release of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan. The official website. Available from: <https://mfa.gov.az/files/PR%20End-of%20Year%2028.12.2022.pdf>

² Constitution of the Azerbaijan Republic. Official website of the President of Azerbaijan. Available from: <https://ru.president.az/azerbaijan/constitution>

Our foreign policy is a peace-loving policy; we do not intend to violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of any state. But at the same time, we will try to ensure the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of our republic through foreign policy at any cost,” said Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev [2].

The de facto model of relations with elements of the “union state” of Turkey and Azerbaijan has a significant impact on key decisions of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The foreign policy agenda was no exception. Despite the proclaimed multi-vector nature, the narrative of “Turkization” and alignment of interests with Turkey is the leitmotif of the country’s foreign relations [8].

Türkiye occupies a special place in the foreign policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan. It was the first country to recognize the independence of Azerbaijan. The connection between the countries has a long history based on common culture, history and traditions. Even at a time when Azerbaijan was part of the Soviet Union, official relations existed between the two republics. Visits to Baku of the Prime Minister of the Turkish Republic Süleyman Demirel in 1967 and the President of the Turkish Republic Cevdet Sunay in 1969³ played a big role in the development of these ties.

The parties are interested in developing bilateral relations. For Azerbaijan, Turkey is an ally and support in the international arena, and the growing influence of Azerbaijan contributes to strengthening the role and power of Turkey in world politics. Turkey’s position in the Caucasus is ensured mainly by Azerbaijan, so Turkey feels the need for ever closer relations. The republic is the main “conductor” of the spread of pan-Turkic ideas in the modern world.

“We are one nation, two states”⁴, – this phrase accurately characterizes the history, reality and prospects of relations between the two countries (5). Both countries support each other in international organizations such as the UN and OSCE and cooperate on regional and global issues.

The direction for the development of regional cooperation is set by the widespread idea of Turkization. Until 1991, Turkey was the only independent Turkic state in the world, therefore, after the collapse of the USSR, on the initiative of the President of the Republic of Turkey Turgut Özal, the first Summit of Turkic-speaking states was held in Ankara in 1992, where the participants announced the establishment of political and economic unity. Two decades later, in the Azerbaijani city of Nakhichevan, the creation of the Turkic Council (from 2021 - the Organization of Turkic States), which today unites 5 states, will be officially announced. Nakhchivan Agreement⁵ includes many areas of cooperation, including the development of common positions on foreign policy issues.

³ Azerbaijani-Turkish relations. Heydar Aliyev Heritage International Online Library. Available from: <https://lib.aliyevheritage.org/ru/4610295.html>

⁴ The Presidents of Azerbaijan and Turkey made joint statements to the press. Oxu.Az. Available from: <https://ru.oxu.az/politics/503712?ysclid=lftcchroca252281486>

⁵ Nakhichevan Agreement on the establishment of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-speaking States (Nakhichevan, October 3, 2009). Available from: https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30486433&pos=1;-15#pos=1;-15

The organization is active within the framework of the adopted strategic documents: the Concept of the Turkic World until 2040 and the Development Strategy of the Organization of Turkic States in 2022-2026. It is important to develop the transport interconnection of the Turkic states, including the Trans-Caspian International Corridor “East-West”, and the development of the Southern Energy Corridor. In addition to practical issues, Turkey, within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States, is trying to resolve a number of ideological issues, for example, giving the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus observer status of the organization. This would mean recognition of this state by all members of the organization. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan declared compliance with international law, the UN Charter and support for the territorial integrity of states, that is, they did not allow Turkey’s plans to be realized⁶. 2023 has been declared the Year of the Heyday of Turkic Civilization.

Relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan are based not only on Turkic, but also Islamic principles and are determined, for example, by trilateral contacts between Turkey-Azerbaijan-Pakistan. The dialogue between the three countries, according to the Chairman of the Grand National Assembly (Parliament) of Turkey Mustafa Şentop, is at a level that only a few peoples and countries can achieve, because it is based “on the bonds of brotherhood, common history, culture and religion.” Şentop called Turkey, Azerbaijan and Pakistan “the three leading democracies of the Islamic world”⁷.

Another trilateral alliance plays a significant role in regional cooperation: Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey, which jointly implemented cost-effective energy and transport projects that became a strong foundation for the existing geopolitical axis Ankara-Baku-Tbilisi. Since the inception of Azerbaijan’s energy industry, Turkey has provided significant support to the development of the oil industry in order to strengthen its own energy security. The South Caucasus Pipeline, as an important component of the Southern Gas Corridor, allows Azerbaijani gas and oil from other countries to enter European markets: the Balkan countries and Italy. Opportunities are being sought to increase the throughput capacity of the project; over time, Azerbaijan expects to become a guarantor of Europe’s energy security, contributing to the diversification of sources and routes of gas and oil⁸. At the opening ceremony, President İlham Aliyev thanked partners from the USA and Great Britain for their assistance in implementing the project.

A regional economic zone is being formed between the three states [6]. Ties with Georgia will expand as a natural component of relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey, because it is this country that is the geographical link between the Turkic states, which will

⁶ Islamov D. Summit of the Organization of Turkic States in Samarkand: between illusion and reality // INF. 23.11.2022. Available from: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/columns/postsoviet/sammit-organizatsii-tyurkskikh-gosudarstv-v-samarkande-mezhdu-illyuziei-realnostyu/>

⁷ Mustafa Şentop: Turkey, Azerbaijan and Pakistan are the three leading democracies of the Islamic world. Media.az. 21.07.2022. Available from: <https://media.az/politics/1067869268/mustafa-shentop-turciya-azerbaydzhan-i-pakistan-tri-veduschie-demokratii-islamskogo-mira/>

⁸ İlham Aliyev took part in the official opening ceremony of the Southern Gas Corridor. May 29, 2018. Official website of the President of Azerbaijan. Available from: <https://president.az/az/articles/view/28797>

also stimulate its development as regional projects are implemented. For example, the built Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway is an important transport and logistics corridor for the region, although its capabilities are far from being fully used. In 2022, 432,284 tons of cargo were transported along the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line, in total for 2017–2022 the total volume of cargo transportation on this line amounted to 1,347,585 tons⁹.

The initiative of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey to build the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway made it possible to close the “One Belt – One Road” through the ports of Aktau and Baku and ensure connectivity with the transport infrastructure of the Republic of Turkey. This gave impetus to the development of relations with China. The European Union approved the opening of the railway and called it the main element of transport arteries connecting the European Union with Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Central Asia. In an official statement¹⁰ it is indicated that this railway will create new business conditions and increase the quality of trade. It should be noted that Azerbaijan has been a participant in the EU Eastern Partnership program for many years.

It was Azerbaijan that, in the first years after gaining independence in 1991, built relations with the Western world through the intermediary support of Turkey. This applies not only to the implementation of energy and logistics projects, but also to Azerbaijan's relations with NATO. Over three decades, these relationships have strengthened. In November 2022, Azerbaijan hosted “NATO Days” – a series of events in which representatives of the General Staff of the alliance's allied forces in Europe took part. This year, Azerbaijan's partnership with NATO has retained its strategic importance. High-level dialogue and practical cooperation between the parties continued. This is stated in the year-end report of the foreign ministry of the Transcaucasian republic released on December 29, 2022¹¹.

Both countries regularly conduct joint military exercises and training, and coordinate their actions in the field of security and counter-terrorism (4). Large groups of personnel of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces, as well as many representatives of the commanding staff, are trained and undergo additional training courses in Turkish military educational institutions. In 2021, the Shusha Declaration on strategic cooperation between Turkey and Azerbaijan was signed¹², one of the provisions of which states that now military actions against one of the countries automatically mean a declaration of war on the second. The prospect of creating a Turkish military base in Azerbaijan has been discussed for a long time.

The Karabakh issue is one of the most important in relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan. Turkey supported Azerbaijan in the conflict with Armenia, providing its army with support, helping to transport weapons and ammunition. Turkey's influence has

⁹ Cargo transportation on the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line exceeded 1 million tons. Report.az. 16.01.2023. Available from: <https://report.az/ru/infrastruktura/gruzoperevozki-po-zheleznodorozhnoj-linii-baku-tbilisi-kars-prevysili-1-mln-tonn/>

¹⁰ EU Statement on opening of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway. October 30, 2017. An official website of the European Union. Available from: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/34825_en

¹¹ On the results of 2022: press release of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan. Available from: <https://mfa.gov.az/files/PR%20End-of%20Year%2028.12.2022.pdf>

¹² The Shusha Declaration on Allied Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey. Available from: <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/52122>

grown significantly in the region and it has attempted to seize the mediation initiative, weakening Russian influence in the region. Officially, Turkey says it hopes for the signing of a peace agreement and the establishment of good neighborly relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and supports initiatives aimed at improving infrastructure, increasing prosperity, revitalizing energy and trade routes and strengthening regional connectivity in Karabakh¹³.

Russia's important role in resolving this conflict cannot be denied. Baku strives to maintain its own position in international relations, especially with Moscow. Official Baku is developing relations with the Russian Federation, highly appreciating its participation in the settlement of the Karabakh conflict, and is building deep economic and humanitarian ties with Russia. In 2022, these connections were transferred to the level of allies¹⁴. Another example of following one's own interests is the partnership with Israel, where on March 29, 2023, the official opening of the diplomatic mission of the Republic of Azerbaijan took place. Relations between the two countries are traditionally characterized by respect and mutually beneficial military, economic, and humanitarian partnership¹⁵, as well as joining forces against Iran.

Azerbaijani researchers express hope that the South Caucasus region in general and Azerbaijan in particular will become a place where the interests of Russia and Turkey do not collide, but coincide [7]. Baku will continue to be an important energy supplier to Europe and will continue to expand its network of gas pipelines to Turkmenistan, taking into account Russian interests. The resolution of the Karabakh conflict will bring both Russian and Turkish companies to the region for restoration and will open up new business opportunities for everyone. Finally, Russian political and diplomatic efforts related to resolving the Karabakh problem will be crowned with success, and Karabakh will become an example of the effectiveness of Russia's new foreign policy doctrine.

Conclusion

The strong ties between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan are “strategic” and “allied”; unofficially, politicians of the two countries declare a single people, thus influencing the formation of the communication regime of Azerbaijan. Turkization in various manifestations stimulates integration processes among member countries of the Organization of Turkic States, but the absolute leaders of integration are Turkey and Azerbaijan. The strengthening of this trend creates a civilizational (including

¹³ Relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan. The official website. Available from: <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-azerbaycan-siyasi-iliskileri.tr.mfa>

¹⁴ Declaration on Allied Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Azerbaijan. The official website of the President of the Russian Federation. 22.02.2022. Available from: <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/5777>

¹⁵ Grigoriev A. Azerbaijan – Israel: the “iceberg” of cooperation acquires new facets (I). Military-political analytics. Online Magazine. 7.04.2023. Available from: <https://vpoanalytics.com/2023/04/07/azerbajdzhan-izrail-ajsberg-sotrudnichestva-obretaet-novye-grani-i/>

cultural-historical) rift between Azerbaijan and a number of partner states, for example, Russia.

Azerbaijan demonstrates the importance of maintaining and increasing dialogue with the Russian Federation, which confirms the change in the status of bilateral relations to the rank of “allied” in 2022. However, at the same time, Azerbaijan demonstrates the emergence of foreign policy interests in the person of states unfriendly to the Russian Federation. The rapprochement with the “priority partner” – Turkey – determines the tendency to strengthen communication with NATO countries.

The joint foreign policy of Turkey and Azerbaijan, implemented in many areas in relations with the European Union, China, Georgia, Pakistan and others, demonstrates its mutual benefit for both countries.

Azerbaijan pursues a multi-vector and sovereign foreign policy; however, many of the decisions directly meet the interests of the Turkish-Azerbaijani alliance and contribute to further integration. Continuing a consolidated policy is a risk for maintaining an independent foreign policy, however, at the moment, Azerbaijan, due to the presence of a large amount of energy resources and geopolitical conflict, retains significant resources to ensure national interests and maintain sovereign positions in the region.

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