

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA

**Turkey's Policy toward South Caucasus: The cases of Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia Conflicts**

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## Contents

Abstract.....	5
Introduction.....	6
Literature review.....	9
Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia Conflicts: Short Background.....	18
<b>Chapter 1: Turkey’s foreign policy in the South Caucasus between 1991 and 2010.....</b>	<b>24</b>
1.1 Turkey’s foreign policy in the end of the Cold War: 1991-2002.....	24
1.2 Turkey’s foreign policy in the South Caucasus: 2002-2008.....	26
1.3 Turkey’s foreign policy in the South Caucasus: 2008-2010.....	28
<b>Chapter 2: Turkey in Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazian conflicts: different conflicts, different approaches.....</b>	<b>30</b>
2.1 Turkey and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.....	30
2.2 Turkey and the Abkhazian conflict.....	35
2.3 Factors influencing Turkish policy choices towards the conflicts (interview findings).....	41
Conclusion.....	46
Bibliography.....	49
Appendix 1.....	54
Appendix 2.....	54

## **Abstract**

The purpose of the current Master's thesis is to study Turkey's Foreign Policy toward South Caucasian conflicts, namely Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia and to identify the factors that influence its foreign policy formulation towards Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazian conflicts. The current research also reviews what has changed in the Turkish foreign policy so far.

The research provides background about the conflicts, further parallels are drawn to changes in Turkey's foreign policy and change of its approach towards the conflicts over Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia. The essay also discusses Turkey's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazian conflicts separately and later provides with findings on Turkey's approach towards both conflicts and the factors influencing its foreign policy formulation and concludes by stating that Turkey had different approaches towards both conflicts because its foreign policy is shaped through different channels and different factors influence its foreign policy formulation.

## **Introduction**

The current Master's Thesis is about the role of Turkey in the Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazian conflicts from 1991 until 2010. Turkey was among the first countries to recognize the independence of three South Caucasian states (Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia). After the official recognition Azerbaijan and Georgia were quick to establish diplomatic relations with Turkey. However, Turkey established no diplomatic ties with Armenia till these days. On the one hand it has a firm pro Azerbaijani stance concerning Nagorno-Karabakh issue. It supports the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and sealed its border with Armenia. On the other hand it infiltrates in Abkhazia through trade, and at the same time recognizes the territorial integrity of Georgia. In the paper, we are going to discuss the factors influencing the foreign policy formulation of Turkey and show that Turkey's foreign policy towards breakaway regions of Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia are shaped through different factors, thus, are demonstrated in different ways. Kinship, different lobbying groups, different geopolitical interests of Turkey including its ambition of becoming an energy hub can be distinguished to be the main principles standing behind those factors that formulate foreign policy of Turkey towards the South Caucasus: Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

The urgency of the problem lies in Turkish new foreign policy towards South Caucasian conflicts after the Collapse of the Soviet Union. The advent of AKP, later on the five day crisis between Georgia and Russia changed the foreign policy priorities and formulations of Turkey. The soccer diplomacy led to the attempts for establishing bilateral relations between Armenia and Turkey also directed to the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. In addition to this, Russia abolished embargo on Abkhazia and recognized Abkhazia's independence in 2008.

The current Master's Thesis consists of 2 chapters. In the first chapter we will talk about the changes of Turkey's foreign policy in the South Caucasus after the end of the Cold War, and elaborate on each stage of the change and the factors influencing that change. Later on, in Chapter 2, we will talk about Turkey's approach towards Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazian conflicts and the factors influencing its foreign policy formulation. For that purpose, secondary sources and interviews with experts will be the main basis for the analysis of data and findings will be provided afterwards. In the conclusion, the main results will be discussed.

The current research will try to identify Turkey's approach towards Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazian conflicts, thus, the following research questions will be addressed.

- *What is Turkey's role in both conflicts?*
- *What factors form Turkey's foreign policy regarding both conflicts?*
- *How Turkey's positions on both conflicts differ?*

The hypotheses of the current study derived from the research questions is the following:

*H1 Turkey has different approaches towards supposedly identical Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazian conflicts.*

*H2 Different factors influence Turkey's foreign policy formulation towards Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazian conflicts.*

The methodology of the current study is qualitative and uses an explanatory research design, as the research includes cause-and-effect relationships. The research includes secondary sources, interviews and content analysis.

Secondary sources are used to see the previous researches on the current issue. Expert interview are conducted with six experts from April 11-23, with 3 being from Armenia, two from

Turkey and one from America. The choice can be explained by the fact that it is interesting to have opinions from different sides to have counterarguments. The list of the experts interviewed with their names and titles will be provided in Appendix 1. Further on, content analysis of the interviews was conducted.



## Literature Review

South Caucasus is characterized by armed conflicts that disturb the stability and peace in the region.<sup>1</sup> In 1991, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union three South Caucasus states namely Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia became independent and Turkey was among one of the first countries to recognize the sovereignty of newly born South Caucasian republics. In addition, this period was marked by various territorial disputes: frozen conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South-Ossetia.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union Turkey confronts a new world, where regional and global alliances are responsible for shaping foreign policy. Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic, it has constantly pursued a foreign policy based on “peace at home and peace in the world” principle, established by the president and the Republic’s founding father Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.<sup>2</sup> As Michael Reynolds posits this main concept behind which was to bury imperial past, focus on internal developments and avoid foreign entanglement had its costs. It was well demonstrated after the end of the Cold War when Turkey’s neighborhood went tremendous political and economic transformation<sup>3</sup> and new Turkish foreign policy started to be formulated.

There is a huge volume of literature on Turkey’s foreign policy after the Cold War. According to author Gülbahar Yelken Aktaş during the Cold war bipolar system, Turkey had little opportunities to maneuver strategically in the international area. Bipolar system obliged it

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<sup>1</sup> Görgülü, Aybars, and Onnik Krikorian. "Turkey's South Caucasus Agenda: The Role of State and Non-State Actors." *TESEV & EPF* (2012): 1-8.

<sup>2</sup> Murison, Alexander. "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy." *Taylor & France* 42, no. 6 (2006): 945-964.

<sup>3</sup> Reynolds, Michael A. "Turkey's Troubles in the Caucasus." *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 4 (2008): 15-23.

to be placed in one of the two rival powers: USSR and US.<sup>4</sup> In addition as Ahmet Davutoglu outlines the end of the Cold war was marked by the emerging new notion of Turkey as a bridge country.<sup>5</sup> This is mainly because Turkey's location gives it an easy access to the Caucasus, Balkans and Middle East. Hence, the collapse of the Soviet Union brought also the collapse of the bipolar system enhancing opportunities for Turkey. Thus, Turkey comes to the fore, functioning as an energy corridor linking the region to Europe and increasing the capabilities of the region. The status of EU member candidate granted to Turkey triggered cycle of long-due reforms. According to Bülent Aras and Pinar Akpınar its EU accession process initiative, influence in the international arena and its stability, make Turkey trustworthy and as well as powerful actor in the region. The newly emerging republics have created a potential area of influence and newly emerging nations considered Turkey as a model country with its secular and democratic identity and free market economy. This concept of the role model country was prompted by western allies of Turkey, anticipating that Turkey's influence will reduce Russia's and Iran's role in the region.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Turkey has also control of Dardanelles and Bosphorus straits. So this geography offers opportunities for Turkey in the region.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to Gülbahar Yelken Aktaş and Ahmet Davutoglu, other authors Cagri Oztemir<sup>8</sup> Devrim Deniz, and Evelina Schulz<sup>9</sup> consider that the end of the Cold war resulted in shift of the foreign policy preferences of the sides of the divide. Throughout the Cold War

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<sup>4</sup> Aktaş, Gülbahar Y. "Turkish Foreign Policy: New Concepts and Reflections." *Thesis (M.A.), Middle East Technical University*, (2010): 38-42.

<sup>5</sup> Davutoğlu, Ahmet. "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007." *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 1 (2008): 77-96.

<sup>6</sup> Aras, Bülent, and Pinar Akpınar. "The Relations between Turkey and the Caucasus." *Center for Strategic Research* 15, no. 3 (2011): 53-68.

<sup>7</sup> Uzer, Umut. "Turkish Foreign Policy analysis." In *Identity and Turkish Foreign Policy The Kemalist Influence in Cyprus and the Caucasus*, 55-88. London: 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Ozdemir, Cagri. "The "new" Turkish Foreign Policy in the 21st century: A Neorealist Assessment of the rationale behind it." MSc Dissertation, *The University of Edinburgh*, (2013): 6-10.

<sup>9</sup> Devrim, Deniz, and Evelina Schulz. "The Caucasus: Which Role for Turkey in the European Neighborhood?" *Insight Turkey* 11, no. 3 (2009): 179-180.

period, Turkey, being an important ally and a part of Western Alliance lost its main significance when the Soviet threat disappeared as West no more needed Turkey's help as a frontline against the Soviet Union.

Görgülü, Aybars, and Onnik Krikorian claim that located on the border of the South Caucasus, Turkey tried to create peaceful and stable environment in the region and play objective and constructive role in the South Caucasus. Marianna Vindimian states that during this newly changing environment Turkey's ambitions of new Turkic century within a territory stretching from Adriatic to the Great Wall of China were fruitless. Indeed Turkey was among the first countries to recognize also sovereignty of Central Asian Republics, however, it soon realized that because of its poor financial condition, its role in the Central Asian countries proved to be inflated and costs of involvement were more than gains. So beginning of the 1990s was marked by a period of confusion, while Turkey was searching for a new role. In addition to this, Turkey's strategic importance was decreasing, "West" was abandoning it, and security threats pressing from the neighborhood disappeared.<sup>10</sup>

Malik Mufti and Nickolas Danforth pinpoint that in accordance to the changes, Ankara's foreign policy remains pro-Western and NATO based. However, Turkey should no longer base its foreign policy on the principle of "caution" and should take bold steps. For instance, the case of Abkhazia, where request of Turkish aid failed and the case of Nagorno-Karabakh during the late 1991, when the war erupted Turkey rejected Azerbaijani offer of concluding a mutual defense pact. Furthermore, the struggle of shaping Turkey's foreign policy was in action between supporters of boldness and defenders of caution. There were even cases when Turkish leaders tended to act more forcefully but were restrained by the diplomats of foreign ministry. For

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<sup>10</sup> Vindimian, Marianna. "Evolution of Turkish Foreign Policy towards Georgia." *ISPI* (2010): 1-9.

example, Armenian victories in 1993, provoked president Özal to offer a military intervention but it got disagreement from the foreign ministry.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, Nickolas Danforth considers Turkey's foreign policy pragmatic. In their approach toward East or West, the ideologies that shape domestic politics of Turkey, seldom influenced Turkish leaders. From the perspective of Turkey, the most important risk is that their decisions would be made according to their ideology rather than rhetoric.<sup>12</sup>

After September 11 events Turkey's position has changed and its new position has two basis: an ideational and a geographical. Later on since AKP became the dominant party in Turkey in November 2002, "new paradigm" emerged in Turkish foreign policy. This paradigm, also known as Strategic Depth doctrine got its resonance amidst AKP electorate and leadership. Ahmet Davutoğlu, (a chief foreign policy advisor to the Prime Minister Erdoğan) became the architect of new Turkish foreign policy concept.<sup>13</sup>

Turkey's new foreign policy is based on 5 concepts: balance between security and freedom, zero-problems with neighbors, developing relations with neighbors and beyond, Rhythmic (pro-active) diplomacy, Multi-dimensional foreign policy.<sup>14</sup> Domestic and international changes are other reasons in the list to transform Turkish foreign policy deeply.<sup>15</sup> With a new view towards the region Turkey started to prioritize concepts such as economic cooperation, interdependency, regional integration, peace and stability as well as proactive foreign policy. Democratization, political stability, reform and economic development have been domestic sources of this transformation. Though security, competition and perception of threat

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<sup>11</sup> Mufti, Malik. "Daring and Caution in Turkish Foreign Policy." *Middle East Journal* 52, no. 1 (1998): 32-50.

<sup>12</sup> Danforth, Nicolas. "Ideology and Pragmatism in Turkish Foreign Policy: From Atatürk to the AKP." *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (2008): 84-95.

<sup>13</sup> Davutoğlu, Ahmet. "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007." *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 1 (2008): 78.

<sup>14</sup> Aktaş, Gülbahar Y. "Turkish Foreign Policy: New Concepts and Reflections." *Thesis (M.A.), Middle East Technical University*, (2010): 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid* 38

were still important aspects of formation of foreign policy in Caucasus, however, Turkey started to view the region as a land of new opportunities and influence. The new view aims to maintain peace and stability and at the same time foster social and economic relations in the region. During the Cold war Turkey was given the role of the “buffer-zone” by the west, after the dissolution of the Soviet union, it was considered a model country, however with its new foreign policy it has raised and became active and influential; actor, thus, positioning itself as a “central country”.<sup>16</sup> However remembering the massacre of Armenians in 1915, the way Turkey treats Kurds and its invasion to the Cyprus, it can be said that Turkey cannot be considered to be a central or a model country.

March 2003 was a turning point for both Turkey’s foreign policy and its relationship with the EU. All in all, the period of capture of Öcalan and EU Helsinki Summit in 1999 to March 2003 when Turkey refuses the United States to use its territory in the Iraq conflict<sup>17</sup> are signs that Turkey wants to get an image of a country that prioritizes liberties and democracy and at the same time skillfully manages security problems at home. Turkey also aims to intervene in global issues to transfer from a central to a global power. This transformation is due to the performance of all actors engaged in foreign policy. This means that its success is not only a result of state policies but also activities of business organizations, civil society and other organizations that operate under the new vision.<sup>18</sup>

In accordance with Michael A Reynolds’s statement outlined also above, Turkey’s traditional hesitant foreign policy before 2002, no longer served the interests of the country, so

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<sup>16</sup> Aras, Bülent, and Pinar Akpınar. "The Relations between Turkey and the Caucasus." *Center for Strategic Research* 15, no. 3 (2011): 64-65

<sup>17</sup> Özdemir, Cagri. "The "new" Turkish Foreign Policy in the 21st century: A Neorealist Assessment of the rationale behind it." MSc Dissertation, *The University of Edinburgh*, 2013:7-8.

<sup>18</sup> Davutoğlu, Ahmet. "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007." *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 1 (2008): 83-89.

during this period, Turkey has taken steps to normalize relations with Armenia which could break the deadlock of Nagorno-Karabakh. However, Turkish diplomacy still needs some preparation as old institutional practices continue confining Turkish foreign policy.<sup>19</sup>

Energy projects were also very important during this period for the foreign policy formulation of Turkey, namely Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) pipelines which were supposed to link Caspian oil and gas resources to Europe. Thus, these projects were important factor and incentive for Turkey to contribute to the regional prosperity and cooperation in the region.

As Shabnam Alammadova,<sup>20</sup> Nimet Beriker,<sup>21</sup> Haydar EFE<sup>22</sup> and Kevork Oskanian<sup>23</sup> claim the conflicts over Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh raise Turkey's concern about the stability and energy security in the region. However, the surviving status quo as well as stale negotiation processes under auspices of the OSCE Minsk group challenges the authors' above mentioned statement. The negotiation processes are still pregnant with producing peace and security in the South Caucasus.

In the midst of Russia-Georgia war Turkey tries it hand as a mediator and suggested the three South Caucasian states of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform.<sup>24</sup> However, Turkey can't try its hand in the mediation of the conflicts due to its strategic partnership with Azerbaijan on the one hand (as long as it is biased) and Georgia and the presence of Russia in the South Caucasus on the other hand. Besides, the case of

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<sup>19</sup> Reynolds, Michael A. "Turkey's Troubles in the Caucasus." *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 4 (2008): 15.

<sup>20</sup> Alammadova, Shabnam. "Hostland interests and Diaspora Behavior: Study of Nagorno-Karabakh and Northern Ireland Conflicts in the Post-Cold War Era." *UPPSALA UNIVERSITY* (2011): 4-57.

<sup>21</sup> Beriker, Nimet. "Turkey's Role in the South Caucasus." In *Conflict in Post-Soviet Europe The South Caucasus: Are there Scenarios for Resolution?*, 175-181. Berlin: Federal Foreign Office, 2009.

<sup>22</sup> EFE, Haydar. "Turkey's Role as an Energy Corridor and Its Impact on Stability in the South Caucasus." *OAKA* (2011): 1-24.

<sup>23</sup> Oskanian, Kevork. "Turkey's global strategy: Turkey and the Caucasus." *London School of Economics and Political Science* (2012): 24-26.

<sup>24</sup> Reynolds, Michael A. "Turkey's Troubles in the Caucasus." *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 4 (2008): 16-18.

Nagorno-Karabakh is a best illustration of the fact that Turkey's attempts to be a mediator are failure.

Kevork Oskanian, Jos Boonstra and Neil Melvin outline that Turkey's role in the South Caucasus cannot be discussed without its broader relationship with the Russian federation. Ankara's South Caucasus influence continues to rise. Meanwhile, the vision of influential state players have increased in the South Caucasus, particularly with the role of Russia and Turkey's active foreign policy alongside with US modest but continuing financial support to Georgia.<sup>25</sup> Inharmonious activities by the aforementioned actors is not likely to bring a positive change in the conflicts of the region, due to Russia's alliance with Armenia and anti-Georgian positions, as well as Turkey's bond with Azerbaijan.<sup>26</sup> Turkey needs to conform Russia's interests before consolidating its own influence. Obviously it is in Russia's interest to keep Turkish-Armenian relations in stalemate as it maintains Armenia to be dependent on Russia and, thus, holds Russia's leverage not only in Armenia but also in the region.

Turkey's policy towards South Caucasus is part of Turkey's role in the world and for each case of events is based on cost versus gain calculations this is also true about Armenia and Georgia concerning conflicts in the region. Turkey sees Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a main obstacle to political stability regional cooperation and economic development in the South Caucasus. Normalization of relations with Armenia, according to Turkish policy, as above mentioned, depends on the formers normalization of relations with Azerbaijan. Thus, Turkey's

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<sup>25</sup> Boonstra, Jos, and Neil Melvin. "Challenging the South Caucasus Security Deficit." *FRIDE*(Stockholm), April, 2011, 4-25.

<sup>26</sup> Oskanian, Kevork. "Turkey's global strategy: Turkey and the Caucasus." *London School of Economics and Political Science* (2012): 25-27.

relation to Armenia in case of Nagorno-Karabakh is counterproductive and based on its regional interests.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, Zulfugar Agayev states that the improvement of bilateral Turkish-Armenian relations depends on a final breakthrough in the negotiations led by OSCE surrounding the breakaway territory. Under domestic pressure and in reaction to Azerbaijan's vehement opposition, Ankara has linked the progress of the protocols to progress in the negotiations surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh. Thus, Turkey's lack of direct influence over the peace process frustrates its policymakers.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand Sabri Sayari outlines that the conflicts awakened danger of Turkey's involvement and Ankara led more cautious foreign policy trying to avoid direct involvement in the conflicts, thus, choosing not to get involved in a conflict with Russia.<sup>29</sup>

What comes to Turkish-Georgian relations, according to some authors such as Marianna Vindimian<sup>30</sup> and Kevor Oskanian<sup>31</sup> Turkish-Georgian relations steadily developed mainly since 1994, when Georgia became an irreplaceable bridge linking Turkey with Azerbaijan and Central Asian energy stores to Europe. During the 1992-1993 war between Abkhazia and Georgia Turkey had official pro Georgian position, but never objected flow of volunteers to Abkhazia.<sup>32</sup> Turkish foreign policy towards Abkhazia is contradictory since the Georgia-Abkhazia war. This is due to the following factors which prevent Turkey to play more active role in the settlement of Abkhazia conflict: First Turkey supports Georgia's territorial integrity as it doesn't want to

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<sup>27</sup> Devrim, Deniz, and Evelina Schulz. "The Caucasus: Which Role for Turkey in the European Neighborhood?" *Insight Turkey* 11, no. 3 (2009):183.

<sup>28</sup> Agayev, Zulfugar. "Azerbaijan: Turkey Could Prove Spoiler for Nagorno-Karabakh Peace." *Eurasianet*, April 7, 2004, 1-2.

<sup>29</sup> Sayari, Sabri. "Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War era: The challenges of multi-regionalism." *Journal of International Affairs* 54, no. 1 (2000): 175.

<sup>30</sup> Vindimian, Marianna. "Evolution of Turkish Foreign Policy towards Georgia." *ISPI* (2010): 1-9.

<sup>31</sup> Oskanian, Kevork. "Turkey's global strategy: Turkey and the Caucasus." *London School of Economics and Political Science* (2012):24-25.

<sup>32</sup> Sharia, Vitaly. "Abkhazia in the Midst of Russia, Georgia and Turkey." *Caucasus Institute* (Yerevan), 2008, 113-124.



deteriorate its relations with Georgia and next because it has its own domestic problems with Kurdish separatists. However, Turkey doesn't forbid its citizens of Abkhazian origin to have contact with their homeland, neither does it prevent Turkish private companies to trade and fish in Abkhaz water.<sup>33</sup> However, the end of the Abkhazia-Georgia war was marked with a new stage in the relations between Abkhazia and Turkey and also its Abkhazia Diaspora. After the war direct maritime connection started between Turkey and Abkhazia. <sup>34</sup>

Some scholars such as Diana Kerselyan, Irakliy Khintba, and Vakhtang Kolbaia state that Turkey is playing an important role in Abkhazia. Turkey is the second trade partner to Abkhazia after Russia. Abkhazia and Turkey had economic cooperation before Russia's political recognition of Abkhazia; however, the economic cooperation with Abkhazia became more tangible after Russia removed the embargo in March 2008. Though Turkey lacks behind from Russia in terms of the economic cooperation, it still plays an important role in the Abkhazian region also due to the huge Abkhazian Diaspora in Turkey and Muslim community in Abkhazia.<sup>35</sup>

As Mustafa Aydin<sup>36</sup> and Sergey Minasyan state, Turkey had and still has hesitant and cautious foreign policy towards South Caucasus, particularly Nagorno-Karabakh conflict where he was forced to take sides and follow active foreign policy. As Sergey Minasyan posits in regional context, Turkey's vector should be taken into account separately. Armenian-Turkey reconciliation effort in 2008 accelerated by 5 day war between Georgia and Russia had an impact both on the long-term prospects on Karabakh conflict and on political background.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid 119

<sup>34</sup> Ibid 117

<sup>35</sup> Kerselyan, Diana, Irakliy Khintba, and Vakhtang Kolbaia. "International Engagement in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict resolution process." *International Alert* (2010): 18-86.

<sup>36</sup> Aydin, Mustafa. "Turkish Foreign Policy Framework and Analysis." *Center for Strategic Research*, 2004, 58.

<sup>37</sup> Minasyan, Sergey. "Nagorno-Karabakh After Two Decades of Conflict: Is Prolongation of the Status Quo Inevitable?" *Caucasus Institute* (Yerevan), August, 2010, 33-34.

In case of Georgia Turkey realizes the importance of bilateral relations with Georgia. In the present situation it is the only country that can help Turkey to realize its ambitions of becoming an energy hub. That is the reason it still infiltrates in Abkhazia but recognizes territorial integrity of Georgia and keeps good strategic relations with it.

Concluding from the analysis of the literature, we can say that Turkey started to play some role in the South Caucasus since the end of the Cold War. Attempts to have an influence in the South Caucasus were limited to Azerbaijan which was at war with Armenia at that time and needed Turkey's strategic and military support. In case of Abkhazia, Turkey could have some influence if its actions were not constrained by Russia's presence and influence in the region. The literature also revealed that with its new foreign policy and the energy projects in the region, as well as with various influencing factors mentioned above, priorities of Turkish foreign policy has changed in the South Caucasus and stability was one of the main priorities to be mentioned. These changes were marked by the suggestion of Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform, and also with the soccer diplomacy with Armenia though they had failed.

## **Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia Conflicts: Short Background**

### ***Nagorno-Karabakh***

The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh goes back to the times when Turkic-speaking nomads invaded to the North of Karabakh leading to clashes with local Armenians.<sup>38</sup> Young Turk government trying to realize its ambitious pan-Turkist policy during the WWI, has implemented its lamentable genocide plan of annihilation of Armenians throughout the Ottoman Empire, thus, had to occupy the Russian Trans Caucasus in order to set a link with the Turkic

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<sup>38</sup> *Nagorno-Karabakh issue*. 2014. Accessed April 10, 2014. <http://www.mfa.am/en/artsakh/>

speaking community in the Russian empire. The occupation resulted in the creation of Azerbaijani state under the awning of Ottoman military leadership, aiming at securing Turkey's geopolitical interests based on the idea of religious and ethnic solidarity.<sup>39</sup>

The origins of the conflict can be separated into 3 stages. First starting in 1917, second 1921-1923 and finally in 1988. Nagorno-Karabakh conflict began in 1917, when as a result of the collapse of the Russian Empire three ethnic republics of Transcaucasia were formed: Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Nagorno-Karabakh population assembled their first congress and proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh an independent political unit, and later elected the Government and the National Council. In response Azerbaijani People's Republic took a military action. From 1918 to 1920 Azerbaijan together with the support of military units of Turkey conducted massacres against the population of Armenia (40,000 were killed and deported only in Shusha). Later, in 1919, to prevent the further military conflict, Azerbaijan and Karabakh signed a preliminary agreement, according to which they had to discuss the issue of the status during the Paris Peace conference.<sup>40</sup> In 1920, November 30, after the establishment of Soviet regime in Armenia, the Revcom of Azerbaijan<sup>41</sup> declared that it recognizes the Nagorno-Karabakh, Nakhijevan and Zangezour as Armenia's inseparable parts. Further on, this was reconfirmed during the plenary session by the Caucasian Bureau of the Communist party of Russia, held in Georgia, Tbilisi in 1921, July 4. However, on the next day the leaders of Azerbaijan renewed their claims over Nagorno-Karabakh. So, under the pressure of Moscow and also Stalin's interference the decision was reviewed after which Nagorno-Karabakh was incorporated to Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan refused to grant autonomy to Nagorno-Karabakh.

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<sup>39</sup> Demoyan, Hayk. *Turkey and the Karabakh Conflict in 1990s: A Comparative Historical Analysis*. Yerevan: Prospectus, 2006, 224.

<sup>40</sup> *Nagorno-Karabakh issue*. 2014. Accessed April 10, 2014. <http://www.mfa.am/en/artsakh/>

<sup>41</sup> Revolutionary Committee - the main Bolshevik instrument of power at that time

However, following the two year struggle of the Karabakh people and also by the insistence of Russian Communist Bolshevik Party (RCbP)<sup>42</sup> in 1923 Nagorno-Karabakh became an Autonomous Oblast within the Azerbaijani SSR, Armenians were very disappointed, taking into account the fact that at an early stage they had been promised Karabakh by the Soviets.<sup>43</sup>

Autonomous Region was established on the small portion of the land. Nagorno-Karabakh was partitioned, with one part becoming autonomous while the other larger part was merged to the Soviet Azerbaijani administrative regions. It was done deliberately in such a way that geographic and physical ties between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous region were neutralized. The borders of the autonomous region excluded a lot of areas of Nagorno-Karabakh: Kelbajar, Gulistan, Karakhat(dashkesan), Shamkhor, Lachin etc.<sup>44</sup>

In the upcoming years the question of Nagorno-Karabakh was not resolved but stayed frozen for almost 70 years. During the time of being as Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast within the Azerbaijani SSR, the leadership of Azerbaijan was constantly violating the rights of Armenian population.<sup>45</sup> For example, according to some narratives socio-economic discrimination against Armenians in Karabakh was one of the factors that caused the desire to transfer sovereignty to the Armenian SSR.<sup>46</sup> The people of Nagorno-Karabakh and authorities of Armenian SSR have sent numerous applications to the Soviet central authorities to review the decision of incorporating Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan, however, they were rejected and the initiators were mainly prosecuted.

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<sup>42</sup> Constitutionally fixed national entities within USSR

<sup>43</sup> Cornell, Svante E. "Turkey and the Conflict in Nagorno Karabakh: A Delicate Balance." *Taylor & Francis Group* 34, no. 1 (1998): 51-72.

<sup>44</sup> *History and Current Realities - NKR*. 2014. Accessed April 10, 2014. <http://www.nkr.am/en/history-and-current-realities/79/>.

<sup>45</sup> Saroyan, Mark. "The "Karabakh Syndrome" and Azerbaijani Politics." In *Minorities, Mullahs and Modernity: Reshaping Community in the Former Soviet Union*, edited by Edward W. Walker, 175-176. Berkeley: Regents the University of California, 1997

<sup>46</sup> Dehdashti-Rasmussen, Rexane. "The Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh: Causes, the Status of Negotiations, and Prospects." *The Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy*, (2006): 190.

The current phase of the conflict began in 1988, when using Gorbachevian language of glasnost, perestroika and democratization, Armenian deputies to the region's provincial council gathered in Stepanakert to roll out in legal form their long yearned aspirations for union with Nagorno-Karabakh. In response Azerbaijani authorities organized ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population on the Azerbaijani territory, especially in Sumgait, Kirovabad and Baku. Tense political struggle marked with bloody intercommunal conflict reached its climax in 1990 mid-January with anti-Armenian violence in Baku.<sup>47</sup>

In 1991 a referendum was held according to which population of Nagorno-Karabakh declared the establishment of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.<sup>48</sup> This was in accordance with the international and USSR laws of that time.<sup>49</sup> In 1994 a ceasefire was signed between Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan, which is still in effect.

### ***Abkhazia***

The roots of the Abkhazian conflict go back to 1918s when after the collapse of the Russian Empire, both Georgia and Abkhazia established their independence, after which in May of the same year Democratic Republic of Georgia occupied and annexed Abkhazia. The following years from 1918-1921 Abkhazia backed by Caucasian regional organizations fought for its liberty. Later in 1931 Stalin subordinated Abkhazia to Georgia. Mass deportation of Georgians (mainly Mingrelians) to Abkhazia began.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Saroyan, Mark. "The Karabakh Syndrome and Azerbaijani Politics." In *Minorities, Mullahs and Modernity: Reshaping Community in the Former Soviet Union*, edited by Edward W. Walker, 175-176. Berkeley: Regents the University of California, 1997

<sup>48</sup> Hakobyan, Tatul. "Soviet Hardliners' Last Comeback." In *Karabakh Diary, Green and Black: Neither War nor Peace*, 107. Antelias 2010.

<sup>49</sup> *Nagorno-Karabakh issue*. 2014. Accessed April 10, 2014. <http://www.mfa.am/en/artsakh/>

<sup>50</sup> *Министерство Иностранных дел Республики Абхазия*. 2014. Accessed April 10, 2014. <http://mfaapsny.org/en/apsny/historyofabkhazia.php>

The alienation between Abkhazia and Georgia grew with the Georgian historiography, according to which Abkhazia historically was an alias for Western Georgia, nevertheless, Abkhaz persisted on their distinct ethnic and historical origin.<sup>51</sup> As for Abkhazians, they state that they have lived as neighbors to Kartvelians, particularly Svans and Mingrelians in the face of common external threats such as threats coming from Arabs, Turks etc. They admit sharing aspects of general Caucasian culture with Kartvelians, though they remain a distinct Northwest Caucasian people. They rebelled the Kartvelian intrusion to their land and constant attempts to Kartvelianize or Georgianize their people. They perceive that their territorial integrity be reestablished either as a separate and full republic of USSR or share their fate with other Caucasian people as a constituent of some Mountain Caucasian republic. Nevertheless, Georgia's perspective on this issue is that any territory that is included within the borders of (Soviet) Georgia is indisputably declared to be a Georgian land. And all the articles dealing with the problem of Abkhazia since the latest troubles erupted in 1989 described Abkhazia as an indivisible part of Georgia or Georgian territory from the earliest times.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, as mentioned above, in the Georgia's nationalist literature Abkhazians are described as an original Georgian tribe that with the current of the time has become a mixture of Circassians and Georgians.<sup>53</sup>

The situation in the USSR in the 1980s encouraged both the Georgians and Abkhazians to come up with claims of independence from the Soviet Union, as other republics did. Gorbachev's perestroika period gave new hopes to Abkhaz , that they could finally resolve the

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<sup>51</sup> Khutsishvili, George. "Challenges to peace building: Managing spoilers during conflict resolution." In *The Abkhazia and South Ossetia cases: Spoilers in a nearly collapsed peace process*, edited by Edward Newman, and Oliver Richmond, 282-299. New York: United Nations University Press, 2006.

<sup>52</sup> Hewitt, B G. "Abkhazia: a problem of identity and ownership." In *Transcaucasian Boundaries*, edited by John F. R. Wright, Suzanne Goldenberg, and Richard Schofield, 2005 ed., 190-226. London: UCL Press, 1996.

<sup>53</sup> Cornell, Svante E. "National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New States of Eurasia." In *Small Nations and Great Powers: A study of ethnopolitical conflict in the Caucasus*, 2005 ed., and 129-183. United Kingdom: Curzon Press, 2001:151..

problem of Abkhazia and get the status they used to in 1921 (Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia) with distinct treaty ties with Georgia.<sup>54</sup> The climax of the dispute was the 1991 all-union referendum on the new union treaty of Gorbachev. Georgian population did not take part to the referendum as the Georgian Government prohibited them. However, Abkhazian electorate took part and overwhelmingly voted to enter the proposed union of sovereign republics as an autonomous republic.<sup>55</sup>

At the end of 1991 Georgia made a move to withdraw from the Soviet Union, thus, annulled all Soviet legislation and also the one that subordinated Abkhazia to Georgia. So in 1992 Abkhazia adopted the Constitution of 1925 and effectively got independence, though unrecognized internationally. Georgia responded by a military aggression in 1992 and after facing a fierce defense Georgia withdrew in autumn, 1993. A ceasefire was signed between Georgia and Abkhazia in 1994.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Министерство Иностранных дел Республики Абхазия*. 2014. Accessed April 10, 2014. <http://mfaapsny.org/en/apsny/historyofabkhazia.php>.

<sup>55</sup> Otyrba, Gueorgui. "War in Abkhazia: The Regional Significance of the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict." In *National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, edited by Roman Szporluk, 286. New York: M.E. Sharp, 1994.

<sup>56</sup> *Министерство Иностранных дел Республики Абхазия*. 2014. Accessed April 10, 2014. <http://mfaapsny.org/en/apsny/historyofabkhazia.php>.

# **Chapter 1: Turkey's foreign policy in the South Caucasus between 1991 and 2010**

## ***1.1 Turkey's foreign policy in the end of the Cold War: 1991-2002***

As it was already mentioned the end of the Cold War also put an end to the bipolarity. Turkey was no longer between the two rivals USSR and US and after the collapse of the Soviet Union West no more needed Turkey as a frontline against the Soviet Union.

However, newly independent Turkic republics presented interest for the West. That is why Turkey tried to use its kinship connections, undertake a role of a ‘younger brother’ and take Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kirgizstan and Kazakhstan under its control. If it was the case Ankara could again restore its strategic importance for the West and increase its role as a key player. Though nationalism was strong in the newly independent republics, they just got rid of the other “elder brother” (Soviet Union) and still wanted to enjoy their independence.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, Turkey's ambitions of new Turkic century within a territory stretching from “Adriatic to the Great Wall of China” were fruitless because of its poorly developed economy.<sup>58</sup> Taking into account the fact that newly independent republics were in an economic crisis and the main tool to have an influence on them could be financial help. However, Turkey was itself in a bad economic condition. Turkey was not successful in the South Caucasus either. Though all the countries in the region of South Caucasus were in a state of war giving opportunities for actions, however, South Caucasus still presented a geo-political interest for Russia. This didn't allow Turkey to increase its influence. Turkey could particularly enhance its influence in Abkhazia and Ajaria, and it could have some success if these territories were not in the full control of Russia. Armenia was under the umbrella of CSTO and Russia prevented Turkey's military threat to Armenia in 1992. So the only newly independent republic that was under Turkey's influence was

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<sup>57</sup> Shakaryan, Artak. *Other side of Ararat: Decoding Turkey*, 121-128. Yerevan: Zangak, 2011.

<sup>58</sup> Vindimian, Marianna. "Evolution of Turkish Foreign Policy towards Georgia." *ISPI* (2010): 1-9.



Azerbaijan which was in a state of war at that time and needed not an economic but a strategic help of Turkey. Turkey helped and simultaneously expanded its influence in Azerbaijan.<sup>59</sup>

Until the Kelbajar operation that took place in March-April 1993 Turkey was trying to understand its role and even had attempted to play a role of a mediator.<sup>60</sup> However, some contacts between Turkey and Armenia began in 1992 when Volkan Vural, Turkey's Ambassador to Russia visited Yerevan to meet with Levon Ter-Petrosyan and discuss the prospects of mutual agreement of establishing good neighborly relations and later in 1993 Turkey invited Armenia to join the Organization of Black Sea economic Cooperation as a founding member.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, during that period Turkey had a nationalist policy, "open" Pan-Turkism. We saw that in the case of Azerbaijan: he explicitly showed military support to Azerbaijan, military exercises near the borders of Armenia<sup>62</sup> and blockade of Armenia late in 1993s, thus, siding with Azerbaijan in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>63</sup>

After 1993 at least until 2000 no vivid development was discerned in the Turkish Armenian relations. Two, three meetings have taken place between Demirel and Levon-Ter-Petrosyan, but the reality is that until 2002 there was a status quo.<sup>64</sup>

What comes to Abkhazia, from 1991-1993 there was no relationship between Turkey and Abkhazia, Turkey was slow to react, though it was closer to Abkhazia.<sup>65</sup> He wanted both to keep normal relations with Georgia and to have an influence in Abkhazia.<sup>66</sup> If we take into account the fact that Turkish Circassians were taking part in the war, then, we may consider that that level of

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<sup>59</sup>Shakaryan, Artak. *Other side of Ararat: Decoding Turkey*, 124-125. Yerevan: Zangak, 2011

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Sergey Minasyan, *Head of department at Caucasus Institute*, Yerevan, 23 April, 2014

<sup>61</sup> Iskandaryan, Aleksander, and Sergey Minasyan. "Pragmatic Policies vs. Historical Constraints: Analyzing Armenia Turkey Relations." *Caucasus Institute* (2010): 7-8.

<sup>62</sup> Artak Shakaryan, Yerevan State University, Turkish Studies, Faculty Member, 15 April, 2014

<sup>63</sup> Iskandaryan, Aleksander, and Sergey Minasyan. "Pragmatic Policies vs. Historical Constraints: Analyzing Armenia Turkey Relations." *Caucasus Institute* (2010): 8.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Sergey Minasyan, 2014

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Sergey Minasyan, 2014

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Artak Shakaryan, 2014

relationship existed.<sup>67</sup> But they were not formal and Turkey was closing its eye on it. After the ceasefire from 1993-2008 no essential development could be discerned.<sup>68</sup>

### ***1.2 Turkey's foreign policy in the South Caucasus: 2002-2008***

In 2002, November with the advent of Justice and Development Party, Turkey's foreign policy went through significant changes. Four Foreign Ministers during AKP administration were Yaşar Yakış, Abdullah Gül, later came Ali Babacan and his successor Ahmet Davutoğlu in 2009. Though during this period Davutoğlu was a chief advisor to Prime Minister of foreign affairs, however, his political ideas were present in the Turkish foreign policy while he was a chief advisor. During AKP administration Turkey adopted a set of new foreign policy principles that aimed at increasing Turkey's role in the world affairs and make it a global player in the future. His new foreign policy principles developed relations with some of its neighbors, particularly in the Middle East.<sup>69</sup>

The energy factor plays a key role in the foreign policy of Turkey. The completion of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline in 2006 was significant for the development of Turkey's ambitions of becoming an energy hub. Turkey was also supporting the Nabucco pipeline project which was worth 7.9 billion euro. It was a new gas bridge from Asia to Europe and it was meant to connect the world's richest gas regions, that is the Caspian(Middle East) and Egypt to the European market. The main aim of this project was to limit dependence of Europe on Russia gas. This was especially true when five day war occurred between Russia and Georgia, when EU

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<sup>67</sup> Johnny Melikian, Head at Center for Political and Legal Studies, April 11, 2014

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Sergey Minasyan, 2014

<sup>69</sup> Kara, Mehtar. "'Axis Shift' in Turkish Foreign Policy during AKP Administration: New Fundamental Foreign Policy Principles and Challenges." *Thesis (M.A.), Eastern Mediterranean University*, (2011): 1-4.

decided to diversify energy resources.<sup>70</sup> However, the Nabucco pipeline was cancelled in Summer 2013 because of geopolitical factors and business considerations. Instead, Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) that is funded by Turkey and Azerbaijan is planned to operate in 2018.<sup>71</sup>

During this period no vivid development of relations could be discerned. However, Erdogan's two conditions for the opening of borders with Armenia during his visit to Kars in 2003: to give up territorial claims from Turkey and stop also the Genocide claims, shows that there was a subtle shift in the position of Turkey regarding Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It shows that NK is not priority for Turkey's foreign relations. However, this statement was followed by another statement by the Azerbaijani Ambassador who claimed that there was some misunderstanding and that Erdogan had also mentioned Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>72</sup> This was followed by Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan's letter to the Armenian President Robert Kocharyan ( April 10, 2005), with a suggestion for the two countries to establish a commission of historians to study the events and developments that took place in 1915.<sup>73</sup> Though Kocharyan rejected the suggestion, it was at least some sign from Turkey that it wants to take some steps towards normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey and wants to settle some disputes present between them.

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<sup>70</sup> *Policy Under the Justice and Development Party*, 288-289. Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University, 2012.

<sup>71</sup> Weiss , Clara. "European Union's Nabucco pipeline project aborted." *World Socialist Web Site*, July 13, 2013.

<sup>72</sup> Ablov, Shamkhal. *Possible Turkish-Armenian rapprochement and position of Azerbaijan*. Caspian Weekly, 2008. Accessed April 16, 2014. <http://en.caspianweekly.org/main-subjects/caucasus/297-possible-turkish-armenian-rapprochement-and-position-of-azerbaijan.html>.

<sup>73</sup> "Armenia-Turkey: The Great Debate." *European Stability Initiative* (2009): 28.

### ***1.3 Turkey's foreign policy in the South Caucasus: 2008-2010***

As it was mentioned above, after the advent of the AK party the expression of “strategic depth” became popular in the political and academic circles. Turkish foreign policy was defined by: pro-active foreign policy” and “zero-problems with neighbors” which were the main characteristic aspects of Turkish foreign policy.<sup>74</sup> However, Turkish-Armenian rapprochement and protocols on opening the borders can be considered as a test for the policy of zero problems with neighbors’.<sup>75</sup> Thus far Armenia is the only neighborly country that Turkey didn’t manage to set that “zero-problem” policy, though it already took some steps towards its realization.<sup>76</sup>

After 2008 Turkey’s foreign policy tries its hand at mediator’s role in regional conflicts.<sup>77</sup> The August war showed that the stability of Georgia can easily be distorted and it demonstrates a great risk for the security of the energy projects. Thus, some steps were taken towards the normalization of relations with Armenia. The first step was the soccer diplomacy after which the protocols to open the boarders should have been signed by both sides.<sup>78</sup> However, the signing of the protocols was circumvented by the Turkish side and the opening boarders with Armenia failed by the beginning of 2010.<sup>79</sup> This lead some economists to refer that Davutoğlu’s zero problem policy with neighbors had failed.<sup>80</sup> However, this was a subtle step forward towards the normalization of relations from 2008-2009.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Policy Under the Justice and Development Party*, 288-289. Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University, 2012.

<sup>75</sup> Görgülü, Aybars. "The Litmus test for Turkey's New Foreign Policy: The Historical Rapprochement with Armenia." In *In Another Empire? A Decade of Turkey's Foreign Policy Under the Justice and Development Party*, 288-289. Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University, 2012.

<sup>76</sup> Adam, Laura B. "Turkey's Foreign Policy in the AKP Era: Has there been a Shift in the Axis?" *Turkish Foreign Policy Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (2012): 140-141.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid 141

<sup>78</sup> Görgülü, Aybars, Aleksandr Iskandaryan, and Sergey Minasyan. "Turkey-Armenia Dialogue Series: Assessing Rapprochement Process." *TESEV* (2010): 9-11.

<sup>79</sup> Punsman, Burcu G. "Turkey's Interest and Strategies in the South Caucasus." *TEPAV evaluation note* (2012): 4.

<sup>80</sup> Oran, Baskin. "A Proactive Policy with Many Hunches on the back." In *Another Empire? A Decade of Turkey's Foreign Policy Under the Justice and Development Party*, edited by Kerem Öktem, Ayşe Kadioğlu, and Mehmet Karli, 15-20. Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Press 382, 2012.

<sup>81</sup> "Turkey-Armenia Manual." *European Stability Initiative* (2010): 8.

In case of Abkhazia from 2008-2010, there was some latent relationship but not on the formal level. In 2009, Sergei Bagapsh, the ex-president of Abkhazia visits the Abkhazian Diaspora in Turkey. There is some relationship in a certain format between Abkhazia and North-Cyprus.<sup>82</sup> However, Turkey and Georgia are strategic partners and somehow depend on each other and Turkey has a firm stance on the territorial integrity of Georgia. Besides Russia's factor in the conflict also keeps Turkey back from deepening relations with Abkhazia. There is some clash of interests.

To conclude we can see that all in all there is some pattern of changes in case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Turkey's approach to it. Until 1993 some subtle help from Turkey, after that blockade and till 2000 some deadlock in the relations, then from 2003-2004 some shift in the statements, not linking NK to normalization of Turkish Armenian relations rather connecting it with territorial claims of Armenia and the genocide issue. Later on the soccer diplomacy gives new light to the relations from 2008-2010, though they have failed.

In case of Abkhazia, we see that no formal relations are present between Turkey and Abkhazia. This can be explained by the fact that Turkey tried to stay away from Abkhazia because of the Russian and Georgian factors. However, the fact that there is some trade between Abkhazia and Turkey is that Ankara can't stop it due to the huge Abkhazian lobby in Turkey.

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with Johnny Melikian, 2014

## Chapter 2: Turkey in Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazian conflicts: different conflicts, different approaches

### 2.1 Turkey and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

After gaining independence Azerbaijan using its energy strategy has gone through the second oil boom, thus, a century later, Azerbaijan shifted from internationally isolated, economically weak and unknown country into a strategically important one due to its energy resources.<sup>83</sup> At the foreign policy level, Turkey had close relationships with Azerbaijan since its independence day and was the first to formally recognize Azerbaijan as a state.<sup>84</sup>

During that time a feeling of kinship existed between Azerbaijan and Turkey.<sup>85</sup> Turkey is regarded to be a fraternal state of Azerbaijan.<sup>86</sup> Due to its linguistic, religious and ethnic similarity with Azerbaijan, Turkey always supported it in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>87</sup> From 1992-1994 numerous times statements came from the Turkish side threatening a military intervention into Armenia,<sup>88</sup> however, it did not happen. There are several factors standing behind this. First is the domestic balance between opposing views. Second, Turkey's ties with West were a major constrain and it would likely undermine one of its objectives that is EU membership. Russia was the third factor which responded promptly each time Ankara wanted to increase its involvement in the conflict. The fourth factor is the legacy of 1915 massacres of Armenian in Western Armenia. It was a powerful barrier for taking other violent action against

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<sup>83</sup> Pashaeva, Gulshan. "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict in the Aftermath of the Russia-Georgia War." *Turkish Policy Quarterly* (2009): 56.

<sup>84</sup> Cornell, Svante E. *Azerbaijan Since Independence*. Armonk: M.E.Sharpe,Inc., 2010,153.

<sup>85</sup> Aliyev , Elbay. "Azerbaijan-Turkish Relations (1992-2012): A Foreign Policy Account." (2012): 4.

<sup>86</sup> Cornell, Svante E. *Azerbaijan Since Independence*. Armonk: M.E.Sharpe,Inc., 2010,153.

<sup>87</sup> Minasyan, Sergey. "Nagorno-Karabakh After Two Decades of Conflict:Is Prolongation of the Status Quo Inevitable?" *Caucasus Institute* (Yerevan), August, 2010, 33-36.

<sup>88</sup> Demoyan, Hayk. *Turkey and the Karabakh Conflict in 1990s: A Comparative Historical Analysis*. Yerevan: Prospectus, 2006:225.

Armenia. Fifth, from 1984 it was fighting one of the powerful Kurdish unrest and it could hardly afford a second military operation in the Caucasus. And finally the invasion in Cyprus lead to the deterioration of relations with Europe and United States and Turkey did not want to have another such an experience. These were the reasons Ankara was afraid that intrusion in Karabakh could bring a similar situation.<sup>89</sup>

According to Hayk Demoyan Turkish involvement in the conflict can be said to be implemented through the following principles: Turkey threatened of military intervention and used force for pressuring on the Armenian side, carried out the energy and transportation blockade of Armenia, provided military support to Azerbaijan and lobbied the interest of Azerbaijan in international organizations.<sup>90</sup> Due to Ankara's cautious diplomacy as well as relatively short-term goals in the South Caucasus, Turkey's initiatives towards Azerbaijan have been moderate. However, its long term goals are ambitious and they include support for independence of Azerbaijan, sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh, prevent or limit Russia's influence in the region, participate in oil and export production of Azerbaijan, and a friendly Azerbaijani administration.<sup>91</sup>

So it can be said that the claims that there is no link between both Turkish-Armenian relations and the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh should retire from Turkish foreign policy. After sealing the borders with Armenia, the government of Turkey said that it would remain closed until forces of Armenia withdraw from the Azerbaijani territory. And this policy is in place for 21 years.<sup>92</sup> Though some shift occurred after 2008, the prospects of normalization of

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<sup>89</sup> Cornell, Svante E. *Azerbaijan Since Independence*. Armonk: M.E.Sharpe,Inc., 2010, 369-371.

<sup>90</sup> Demoyan, Hayk. *Turkey and the Karabakh Conflict in 1990s: A Comparative Historical Analysis*. Yerevan: Prospectus, 2006:225-226.

<sup>91</sup> Bolukbasi, Suha. "Ankara's Baku-Centered Transcaucasia Policy: Has It Failed?" *The Middle East Journal* 51, no. 1 (1997): 80-85.

<sup>92</sup> Welt, Cory. "To link or not to link?Turkey-Armenia normalization and the Karabakh Conflict." *Caucasus International* 2, no. 1 (2012): 54-55.

Turkish-Armenian diplomatic relations in the absence of progress on the Karabakh conflict are dim.<sup>93</sup>

According to Mehdieva three stages can be distinguished in Azerbaijan's attitude towards Turkey. The first one is from 1991-1993 and is identified as a period of expectations and great hopes during which Turkey's ability to help Azerbaijan was overestimated. The second stage starts from 1993 to 1997 and is identified by new cooperation policy where pragmatism and national interest became the core stones of relations and understanding of Turkey's limitations. The third stage started in 1997 during which relations with US have grown and, thus, Azerbaijan no more needed to rely on Turkey as intermediary with West. Azerbaijan already had more space for maneuvering.<sup>94</sup> However, the energy factor is not less important.

Though Turkish-Azerbaijani relations are determined by religious, cultural, ethnic and historical links as well as good will, nonetheless, two other important factors constitute dimensions of their relations, which are the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline active since 2006 and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) pipeline of natural gas due to which strategic friendship between Azerbaijan and Turkey has evolved to present days. These pipelines are very important as they transport Azerbaijani gas and oil to Europe.<sup>95</sup>

Close connections and cooperation between Azerbaijan and Turkey in the field of energy have made Azerbaijan the most important country in the region for Turkey as pipeline projects helped Turkey to strengthen the projection of itself as a regional energy hub.<sup>96</sup> Azerbaijan depends on Turkey, thus, it cannot afford to wreck its relations with Turkey. It depends on

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid 53

<sup>94</sup> Mehdiyeva, Nazrin. *Power Games in the Caucasus : Azerbaijan's Foreign and Energy Policy Towards the West, Russia and the Middle East*. London, (2011):154-155.

<sup>95</sup> Aras, Bülent, and Pinar Akpınar. "The Relations between Turkey and the Caucasus." *Center for Strategic Research* 15, no. 3 (2011): 57-60.

<sup>96</sup> Pashaeva, Gulshan. "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict in the Aftermath of the Russia-Georgia War." *Turkish Policy Quarterly* (2009): 59.



Turkey at least as much as Turkey depends on Azerbaijan: both in the political sphere and in regional energy supply projects.<sup>97</sup>

Relations with Armenia have gained momentum in the last few years when Akhtamar Church (in Eastern Turkey, situated on Lake Van) was reopened in Turkey on March 29, 2007. This was a good will gesture between Turkey and Armenia, and Armenia's Deputy Culture Minister Gagik Gyurjyan's visit to the opening ceremony gave a positive tone to the normalization process. Following this event, a turning point was marked in the Armenian-Turkish relations, when Armenian president Serzh Sargsyan invited Turkish president Abdullah Gül, to watch the 2010 World cup football match between the Turkish and Armenian football teams in Yerevan.<sup>98</sup> Gül gave a positive answer and a diplomatic normalization process between Armenia and Turkey came under the spotlight. A roadmap had been agreed upon in April 2009, after which two initialized protocols took place in August 2009: Protocol on establishment of diplomatic relations and on development of mutual relations. Foreign ministers of the two countries signed the documents after six weeks of heated debate, in 2009, October 10 in Zurich.<sup>99</sup>

Gül's short trip raised debates in the Turkish press and political scene, like in Armenia in Turkey also were ultra-nationalist actors who categorically opposed the rapprochement process.<sup>100</sup> As Hakan Yavuz claims there is no public support to open the borders with Armenia or establish diplomatic relations.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, there is a huge Azerbaijani Diaspora in Turkey (the number of Azerbaijanis range from 500,000 to a million)<sup>102</sup> which adds link between the

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<sup>97</sup> Minasyan, Sergey. "Nagorno-Karabakh After Two Decades of Conflict:Is Prolongation of the Status Quo Inevitable?" *Caucasus Institute* (Yerevan), August, 2010, 36.

<sup>98</sup> Görgülü, Aybars, Sabiha S. Gündoğar, Aleksander Iskandaryan, and Sergey Minasyan. *Turkey-Armenia Dialogue Series:Breaking the Vicious Circle*. Istanbul: TESEV-Caucasus Institute Joint Report, 2009:7-8.

<sup>99</sup> Göksel, Nigar D. "Turkey and Armenia Post-Protocols: Back to Square One?" *TESEV* (2012): 1.

<sup>100</sup> Görgülü, Aybars, Sabiha S. Gündoğar, Aleksander Iskandaryan, and Sergey Minasyan. *Turkey-Armenia Dialogue Series:Breaking the Vicious Circle*. Istanbul: TESEV-Caucasus Institute Joint Report, 2009:8.

<sup>101</sup> Hakan Yavuz, Assistant Professor at Department of Political Science, The Middle East Center, April 23, 2014

<sup>102</sup> Globe, Paul. "Azerbaijan in the World." *Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy* 1, no. 2 (2008): 6.

societies of Turkey and Azerbaijan. It sometimes also acts as a foreign policy lobby in its own.<sup>103</sup> This is also the case with Igdir where the majority of population has Azerbaijani origins.<sup>104</sup>

To conclude Turkish foreign policy over Nagorno-Karabakh is influenced by different factors. First are the close ethnic, historic and fraternal ties between Turkey and Azerbaijan. Second are various lobbying groups in Turkey, third is Turkey's ambition to become an energy hub and for that reason it depends on Azerbaijan and can't do something that hurts the latter's interest. Though in the new stage of Turkish-Armenian relations known as football diplomacy Turkey did not refer to Nagorno-Karabakh at the first stage of the process and during the live interview on Turkish TV of Foreign Minister of Turkey Ali Babacan said that no other problems remain to delay the agreement between Armenia and Turkey. Furthermore, he claimed that the issue of "Azerbaijani occupied lands" were very complex and stated that Armenia and Turkey should focus on their track. Such remark makes a ground for assumption that Turkish-Armenian normalization process could in fact be separated from the Azerbaijani issue.<sup>105</sup> However it is not the case taking into account the fact that Turkey always and still supports Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. On the other hand, Turkey has proved by Turkish Armenian protocols that it is not predictable. Now it has dependency on Azerbaijan due to its energy resources, however, Turkey has other interest in the region and wants to become a regional power in the South Caucasus. Now its foreign policy towards Nagorno-Karabakh is directly linked and depends on relations with Azerbaijan. What can happen when a new government comes is not clear but it can certainly change the formulation of Turkey's foreign policy towards

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<sup>103</sup> Oskanian, Kevork. "Turkey's Global Strategy: Turkey and the Caucasus." *LSE IDEAS* (2011): 26.

<sup>104</sup> Adilgizi, Lamiya. *Azerbaijan appreciates Turkey's stand on Nagorno-Karabakh - Today's Zaman, your gateway to Turkish daily news*. 2011. Accessed April 2, 2014. <http://todayszaman.com/news-243173-azerbaijan-appreciates-turkeys-stand-on-nagorno-karabakh.html>.

<sup>105</sup> Mehtiyev, Elhan. "Turkish-Armenian Protocols: An Azerbaijani Perspective." *Insight Turkey* 12, no. 2 (2010): 43.

Nagorno-Karabakh and, thus, improve relations with Armenia due to its long strategic interest in the South Caucasus.

## ***2.2 Turkey and the Abkhazian Conflict***

From the very start of the Abkhazian conflict Turkey had a different stance than it was in case of Nagorno-Karabakh. Russian factor as well as other stakeholders, primarily domestic ones were responsible for that position. Russia was supporting Abkhazia during the war of 1992-1993. After the end of the Cold War both Turkey and Russia tried to strengthen mutual trust and good neighborliness and diversified areas of cooperation. In 1992 a treaty on “Principles of Relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation” was signed by both sides. This treaty marked a new era in the Russian-Turkish relations. The principles of the treaty were the following: equity of mutual interests and rights, none use of force and threat in solving problems, respect of political independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty. This was signed by both sides adding new dimensions to the bilateral cooperation.<sup>106</sup>

Due to its historic relations with Abkhazia Turkey is interested in maintaining and deepening its relations with Abkhazia. At the outbreak of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict politically influential and more powerful and active Abkhazian Diaspora<sup>107</sup> has emerged in Turkey. Among the North Caucasian Diaspora groups, Turkish Abkhazians are particularly active (they mainly live in the Northern part of Turkey). Though some experts don't consider Abkhazian Diaspora to be really powerful and influential they have founded two main committees in Turkey: The Caucasus-Abkhazia Solidarity Committee, at the national level the

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<sup>106</sup> *Turkey's Political Relations With Russian Federation / Rep. of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. Sukhum: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Abkhazia, 2014. [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey\\_s-political-relations-with-russian-federation.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-political-relations-with-russian-federation.en.mfa).

<sup>107</sup> *Turkish citizens of North Caucasian origin are usually referred to as Circassians, Cherkess, Adyges who belong to the same linguistic group as the Abkhaz*

main North Caucasian body and Caucasus-Abkhazia Cultural Associations. These were main committees to support Abkhazia during the war.<sup>108</sup> The first one was mainly successful in increasing business ties with their homeland and increasing trade. The Abkhazian Diaspora was also active in seeking ways to reopen the ferry links<sup>109</sup> between Sukhumi( Abkhazia) and Trabzon ( Turkey).<sup>110</sup>There may be approximately 500, 000 to 1,000,000 Turkish Citizens of Abkhaz ethnic origin,<sup>111</sup> however, the war and subsequent deteriorating living conditions have made many ethnic Abkhazians to leave the republic and the number of remaining may be about 65,000 or less.<sup>112</sup>

Marianna Vindimian posits that Abkhazian Diaspora in Turkey is influential; therefore, Turkey finds it difficult to prevent the Diaspora's community from trading with Abkhazians though Turkey's good strategic relationship with Georgia. As it was previously mentioned, Turkish-Georgian relations steadily developed mainly since 1994, when Georgia understood its importance as an irreplaceable bridge linking Turkey with Azerbaijan and Central Asian energy stores to Europe. Turkish-Georgian relations has developed and reached to the level of strategic partnership in a set of fields, mainly energy, security and defense.<sup>113</sup> Georgia is considered to be a strategic partner for the following reason. First, in the wake of Nagorno-Karabakh issue Georgia was the only direct corridor for Turkey to reach Azerbaijan, Caspian Sea and other Turkic republics. Second Georgia is the best option of transporting Caspian energy via Turkey to

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<sup>108</sup> Gültekin-Punsmann, Burcu, Argun Başkan, and Kemal Tarba. "Abkhazia for the Integration of the Black Sea." *TEPAV-ORSAM*, December, 2009, 29-31.

<sup>109</sup> It should also be noted that until 1996 passenger ships were travelling between Sukhum and Trabzon but later CIS imposed sanctions on Abkhazia. This was due to the maritime embargo since 1990s after the conflict between Abkhazia and Georgia began. It was later removed by Russia in March 2008. This embargo officially closed maritime link between Abkhazia and Turkey

<sup>110</sup> Eissler, Eric R. "Can Turkey De-Isolate Abkhazia." *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (2013): 132.

<sup>111</sup> Gültekin-Punsmann, Burcu, Argun Başkan, and Kemal Tarba. "Abkhazia for the Integration of the Black Sea." *TEPAV-ORSAM*, December, 2009, 29-31.

<sup>112</sup> Walker, Edward. "No Peace, No War in the Caucasus: Secessionist Conflicts in Chechnya, Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh." *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*(New York), February, 1998, 3-20.

<sup>113</sup> Vindimian, Marianna. "Evolution of Turkish Foreign Policy towards Georgia." *ISPI* (2010): 1-9.

international markets, bypassing Iran and Russia. Later on, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan , Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipelines and Kars-Tbilisi-Baku (KTB) railway projects aimed to strengthen Turkey's ties with the Caspian Basin and the Caucasus. So Georgia was playing a key role in this projects, thus, Turkey supported Georgia during the Abkhazian war.<sup>114</sup>

Strategic partnership with Georgia was hindering Turkey from being present at Abkhazian economy and did not establish official ties with Abkhazia. Turkey tried to avoid taking sides and endeavored to stay away from the conflict. This position was due to a variety of factors. First, aforementioned good strategic relationship with Georgia and second maritime embargo imposed on Abkhazia in 1996 and finally Russians presence in the region and the Abkhazian conflict particularly. However, after the August war between Georgia and Russia in 2008 and after Russia's recognition of independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Turkey started to infiltrate in Abkhazia. Turkey's understanding of the regional development was the main cause for promoting itself as a peaceful mediator between Georgia and Russia, hoping that this could lead to the normalization of relations of two confronting communities and lead to the resolution of the Abkhazia conflict.<sup>115</sup> Turkish leadership does not recognize the independence of Abkhazia, though allows Turkish businesses to conduct trade with Abkhazia. Ships carry various goods between the two countries. Turkish fishermen fish in Abkhazia waters, in addition Abkhazia sells Turkish businessmen wood, scrap metal and coal. According to estimates of experts, in 2007, 30 percent of the Abkhazia budget was made up through trade with Turkey and goods imported from Turkey made up 45 percent.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Karasar, Hasan A. "Saakashvili Pulled the Trigger: Turkey between Russia and Georgia." *SETA Policy Brief* no. 20 (2008): 2.

<sup>115</sup> Vindimian, Marianna. "Evolution of Turkish Foreign Policy towards Georgia." *ISPI* (2010): 8.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid* 9

Diplomatic contacts between Abkhazia and Turkey lay an important role in the de-isolation of Abkhazia.<sup>117</sup> Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, during his visit to Tbilisi stated that they wanted to get to know Abkhazia and would try to reconcile its relations with Georgia. However, Turkish diplomats did not stop there. In September 2009, Turkish Deputy of Foreign Affairs Unal Cevikoz and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia, Sergei Shamba, met in Abkhazia to discuss maritime communication.<sup>118</sup> Turkey has sent its senior diplomats twice to Abkhazia for meeting with the Prime Minister of Abkhazia, Turkish ambassador to Georgia was among those who made a recent trip to Abkhazia in 2010. During the meeting the theme of discussion was establishment of trade relations with Abkhazia.<sup>119</sup> It is clear that Turkey gives signs about the possible changes in its political position towards Abkhazia, and wants to play more active role in Caucasus. Turkey demonstrated particular interest in the Abkhazia conflict settlement process since the “confidence-building” meetings took place in the country during which western ambassadors commissioned to Georgia made several visits to Sukhumi and presented their country’s view on the conflict settlement.<sup>120</sup>

Turkey is a major stakeholder and potential mediator in the South Caucasus. As a NATO member Turkey has shown delicate approach in its diplomatic activity, involving Caucasus Stability and Cooperation pact initiative proposed on August 11. Turkey also executed its right of regulating traffic through the Bosphorus in a way that helped hinder the escalation of the military situation beyond Georgia.<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, Turkey’s potential role as a mediator is quite questionable. Turkey always tries to have a mediator role but the reality is that it always tries to

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<sup>117</sup> Eissler, Eric R. "Can Turkey De-Isolate Abkhazia." *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (2013):133.

<sup>118</sup> Kerselyan, Diana, Irakliy Khintba, and Vakhtang Kolbaia. "International Engagement in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict resolution process." *International Alert* (2010): 18-86.

<sup>119</sup> Eissler, Eric R. "Can Turkey De-Isolate Abkhazia." *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (2013): 133.

<sup>120</sup> Kerselyan, Diana, Irakliy Khintba, and Vakhtang Kolbaia. "International Engagement in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict resolution process." *International Alert* (2010): 18-86.

<sup>121</sup> Stepanova, Ekaterina. "South Ossetia and Abkhazia:Placing the Conflict in Context." *SIPRI*(2008): 1-4.

get dividends from the conflicting parties and pursues its own interests. So far Turkey didn't succeed in its attempts to come up as a mediator. Best illustrations can be the following cases: Syria-Israel, USA-Iran, in addition South Caucasus Stability Pact didn't have a success either. However, Turkey had always put and still puts itself in that ampulla and she positions itself as a mediator.<sup>122</sup>

Turkey plays an active role in the education process in Abkhazia and also has a strong influence on Muslims in Caucasus. In 1995, Basharan College was opened in Abkhazia in 1995. It was a private Turkish high school, which provided education to Abkhazians in very harsh conditions, without water or electricity, caused by the embargo which cut links with Turkey. Though some of the subjects taught are in Russian and English, students also take Turkish language and literature classes.<sup>123</sup>

Although the leadership of both South Ossetia and Abkhazian regions profess mainly Christian Orthodoxy, the majority of Abkhazia population is Muslim.<sup>124</sup> Turkey's Presidency of Religious Affairs, Diyanet, offers help to Muslims in the region. One proof of their activity is the considerable number of young Muslims studying abroad during the last decade.<sup>125</sup>

Turkey eschews confrontations and looks up to maximize its economic gains. Turkey's foreign policy aimed at integrating regional economies as well as economic calculations has played an important role in Turkey's engagement in the Caucasus. Countering Russian interest in the region can do no good to Turkey. Ankara's foreign policy towards Caucasus is characterized as a balancing act both towards the outside actors competing for influence and actors in the

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<sup>122</sup> Interview with Artak Shakaryan, 2014

<sup>123</sup> Gültekin-Punsmann, Burcu, Argun Başkan, and Kemal Tarba. "Abkhazia for the Integration of the Black Sea." *TEPAV-ORSAM*, December, 2009, 11-31.

<sup>124</sup> Kilpadi, Pamela. "Islam and Tolerance in Wider Europe." *Open Society Institute* (Budapest), 2006, 66-67.

<sup>125</sup> Sanikidze, George, and Edward W. Walker. "Islam and Islamic Practices in Georgia." *Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies* (Berkeley), January 8, 2004, 15.

region. The economic interdependence that Turkey created with its neighbors in the region will contribute to Turkey's political and strategic influence.<sup>126</sup> Turkey is the second trade partner to Abkhazia after Russia. Abkhazia and Russia had economic cooperation before Russia's political recognition of Abkhazia, however the relationship between the two began to take legal nature.<sup>127</sup> After 2008 trade between Turkey and Abkhazia has increased due to the fact that Turkish nationals of Abkhaz descent started to view Abkhazia as a potential location to initiate a business and deepen ties with homeland.<sup>128</sup>

To conclude, though supporting Georgia's territorial integration, Turkey infiltrates in Abkhazia issue both politically and economically becoming an important stakeholder in the conflict resolution. Despite the fact that Turkey initially avoided getting involved in the Abkhazian conflict based on the Russian presence in the conflict and Turkey-Georgia good strategic partnership, it turned into one of the principal mediators in the Abkhazian "frozen" conflict.

The fact that Turkey infiltrated in Abkhazia by economic partnership, education projects, religious communities in Abkhazia and due to the Abkhazian Diaspora in Turkey, shows that Turkey's foreign policy is characterized by a balancing act between the actors. This position is caused by Turkey's desire to become major actor in the South Caucasus. Turkey's involvement in the peace process in Abkhazia doesn't demonstrate serious interest in making compromises or tend to peaceful end-play. Turkey's choices are based on its strategic geopolitical position and also energy-related and economic concerns. This strategy is mainly to gain material benefits from the process and also strengthen its position in the South Caucasus.

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<sup>126</sup> Göksel, Nigar. "Turkish policy towards the Caucasus: A Balance Sheet of the Balancing Act." *Center for Economic and Foreign Policy Studies*, 2011, 6-24.

<sup>127</sup> Kerselyan, Diana, Irakliy Khintba, and Vakhtang Kolbaia. "International Engagement in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict resolution process." *International Alert* (2010): 18-86.

<sup>128</sup> Eissler, Eric R. "Can Turkey De-Isolate Abkhazia." *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (2013): 132-133.



### ***2.3 Factors influencing Turkish policy choices towards the conflicts (interview findings)***

Almost all of the experts interviewed consider that Turkey cannot have a unitary approach towards Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia conflicts, as the conflicts are different, outlining that no country should have a similar approach to any question, as each of the issues has its own peculiarities and treating them in the same way is not right.<sup>129</sup>

According to Egemen Bezci the main reason behind it is that Nagorno-Karabakh conflict plays a more deeper role regarding the national identity formation of Turkey, as well as real-politik calculations towards the region (particularly on the TANAP energy project).<sup>130</sup> In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict Turkey supports Azerbaijan and doesn't conceal it being a Minsk member country. It has a tough stance that NK territory together with the other 5 regions be returned to Azerbaijan.<sup>131</sup>

What comes to Abkhazia, if it remains independent Turkey will have more influence or in case it is incorporated to Georgia, it still can have some influence. Tough the Georgian factor and its reaction should also be considered here. In addition if Russia has more influence in the area, Turkey, taking into account that factor, will try to influence Abkhazia as much as it is possible. Besides, in case of the Abkhazian conflict Turkey can orient itself what we can't say about Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, no matter how close are the two conflicts looking back to the development of the history, Artak Shakaryan outlines that the actors, conflict/clash of interests are essentially different. Iran's factor is not present in the Abkhazian conflict, while it is present in the NK conflict. Abkhazia has a border with Russia, NK doesn't have. Abkhazia theoretically can become part of Russia and NK cannot. Besides Sergey Minasyan posits that

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<sup>129</sup> Interview with arttak Shakaryan, 2014

<sup>130</sup> Egemen Bezci, Research fellow at the Sakarya University, Turkey, April 20, 2014

<sup>131</sup> Interview with Johnny Melikian, 2014

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Johnny Melikian, 2014

Turkey has an experience of involving Abkhazian social elites into its field of economy which it does not have in case of Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>133</sup>

However what is interesting one of the interviewers has quite a different opinion on this issue. According James W. Warhola, the Turkish government tends to view the situations in a similar fashion, that is, the territorial integrity of the respective countries (Azerbaijan and Georgia) was forcibly violated by a militarily stronger entity (Armenia-back-by-Russia regarding NK, and Russia itself regarding Abkhazia). As such, each amputation of the territory from its respective country was a violation of international law, a threat to regional peace and stability, and simply illegitimate. This is largely (and perhaps exclusively) why the Republic of Turkey does not recognize the independence of Abkhazia, nor does it recognize Nagorno-Karabakh as being independent; rather, each of these territories is still, by rights, a part of Georgia and Azerbaijan, respectively.<sup>134</sup> However, the assumptions of the interviewer can be considered to be subjective and without prove because as it was mentioned in one of the previous chapters, this is not against and does not violate the international law.

Regarding the factors that shape Turkish foreign policy in the South Caucasus, James W Warhola considers that Turkey is primarily driven by the quest for political stability in the region, in order to create and sustain the conditions for continued economic growth and development, for itself and for the region as a whole. A major factor presenting a threat to such stability is of course the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute itself, which has both immediate consequences (the ever-present threat of overt, escalating conflict) and derivative consequences, such as the closed border with Armenia. Stability, predictability, and security appear to him to

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<sup>133</sup> Interview with Sergey Minasyan, 2014

<sup>134</sup> Interview with James W. Warhola, *Professor of Political Science and Chair of the Political Science Department at the University of Maine*, April 23, 2014

be the most desired geo-political characteristics, which Turkey has sought to bring about and sustain. In the process of seeking those traits, it has of course pursued a formal policy of “zero problems with neighbors”, which has proven much easier to enunciate as an ideal than it has been to realize in concrete practice. The conflict in Syria is a particularly pronounced case in point, but other examples could be cited as well, for instance, disputes with Iraq over the details of the autonomous Kurdish region.<sup>135</sup>

As Hakan Yavuz claims there are two factors that Turkey cannot ignore: ethnic solidarity with Azeri Turks and the public, which is in support of Azerbaijan. Second, national interest of Turkey. Turkey buys gas and oil from Azerbaijan and they have huge investment in Turkey, mainly in the fields of construction, banking etc. One more issue is the following: According to Hakan Yavuz Armenia always enters into the Turkish public debate as an accuser of Turkey or occupier of Azerbaijani territory. There is no public support to open the border with Armenia or establish diplomatic relations.<sup>136</sup>

Meanwhile Artak Shakaryan distinguishes the following factors that influence on the foreign policy formulation of Turkey. Azerbaijan as a “younger brother”, investments of Azerbaijan in Turkey, the influence of the Azerbaijani lobby on the inter political life of Turkey, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan gas pipeline, Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku railway project, where Azerbaijan is a gateway to Central Asia. Furthermore, Russia and Iran counteraction, that is, the more Turkey is absent in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict the stronger will be the latter two. This contradicts Turkey’s interests.<sup>137</sup>

Another factor according to Sergey Minasyan influencing Turkey’s foreign policy formulation regarding NK conflict is Armenia with its Diaspora and the Genocide issue. The

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<sup>135</sup> Interview with James W. Warhola, April 2014

<sup>136</sup> Interview with Hakan Yavuz, 2014

<sup>137</sup> Interview with Artak Shakaryan, 2014

Armenian factor for Turkey is not just a factor of Turkish-Armenian relationships but it is also the continuation of relations with the West. And also the fact that the Armenian factor is used by the West as a leverage to have an influence on Turkey. On the other hand it is the continuation of Turkey's policy towards Russia where Russia is Armenia's strategic partner.<sup>138</sup> Artak Shakaryan adds that if Armenia has a success in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it is possible that its efforts will be more concentrated on the International recognition of the Genocide issue. The same is true about the Armenian lobby. If now their efforts are split, dealing a little bit with the NK issue and a little bit with the Genocide issue, in case the Nagorno-Karabakh issue gets some solution it will be more anti-Turkey.<sup>139</sup>

Furthermore Sergey Minasyan questions the above mentioned Azerbaijani factor in the policy formulation of Turkey in the context of the protocols. He considers that Azerbaijan is not the most important factor, though it can have some influence on Ankara's foreign policy formulation towards Nagorno-Karabakh. He considers that for example in the case of the Turkish-Armenian protocols, first domestic factors in Turkey had more influence, second they understood that normalization of the relations will no way freeze or reduce the Genocide problem, blackmailing from the Azerbaijani side had also its role in it. Sergey Minasyan says that he has personally talked to Davutoglu during the process of Turkish-Armenian rapprochement, however the latter has stated that they have no problem and will solve the Azerbaijani issue. What has changed is a serious philosophical question.<sup>140</sup>

Abkhazian case also needs a close scrutiny. As James W. Warhola assumes the amputation of Abkhazia from Georgia, by Russia, was of course seen by Turkey as unwelcomed and illegitimate, for example, the formal statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs offers that,

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<sup>138</sup> Interview with Sergey Minasyan, 2014

<sup>139</sup> Interview with Artak Shakaryan, 2014

<sup>140</sup> Interview with Sergey Minasyan, 2014

where the ministry claims that simultaneously with developing relations with Georgia, Ankara also pursues a policy towards defining a solution to The Abkhazian conflict within the internationally recognized borders of Georgia.<sup>141</sup>

Artak Shakaryan and Johnny Melikyan distinguish the following factors as the main principles of influencing Turkish foreign policy towards Abkhazia conflict: Turkish-Georgian relationships, BTC gas pipeline project, Black Sea basin and a superiority in there, Russian factor in Abkhazia, Turkish business (especially coal business) and religious factors in Abkhazia, the huge number of Armenians in Abkhazia (Armenians in Abkhazia are the once that had fled during the slaughter in 1915, they also cover middle level positions in the governments), Abkhazian lobby in Turkey. On the contrary Johnny Melikyan posits that the Diaspora is a factor for Abkhazian foreign Policy and not Turkey. For Turkey Abkhazia is factor by which they have a leverage of influence on Georgia, to show that if they have bad neighborly relations with Turkey and break their transit to some extent, Turkey at the same manner can have another level of relationships with Abkhazia. Furthermore, Artak Shakaryan adds the fact that USA is more interested that Abkhazia is incorporated to Georgia. For example, if in case of Nagorno-Karabakh USA has no certain position, in case of Abkhazia it has. In its turn this position has also an influence on Turkey as the latter can't take steps explicitly.

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<sup>141</sup> Interview with James W. Warhola, 2014

## Conclusion

The aim of the current master's essay was to find out and understand Turkey's approach towards the South Caucasian conflicts, namely Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia. The research tried to reveal the factors that have an influence on the formulations of Turkey's foreign policy towards both conflicts. Several studies were conducted to see Turkey's role in the NK and Abkhazia conflicts and the factors shaping its foreign policy priorities. According to those studies, several factors were distinguished. In case of Nagorno-Karabakh those factors were Azerbaijan with its religious, cultural, ethnic and historical links, energy factor and Turkey's ambition to become an energy hub, various lobbying groups in Turkey, Europe and United States, Russia and the genocide issue, as well as domestic problems like the Kurdish issue. In case of Abkhazia the following factors can be distinguished: Russian factor as well as the factor of USA, Abkhazian Diaspora in Turkey and the factor of religion also the point that Turkey has close maritime connections with Abkhazia. Each of these factors separately stands behind the foreign policy formulation of Turkey through all the stages mentioned in the research.

In order to see what other factors shape Turkey's foreign policy towards Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as to understand whether it pursues different policies in both cases a qualitative analysis of data was conducted which has revealed the following findings. Azerbaijan as a "younger brother", investments of Azerbaijan in Turkey, Russia and Iran counteraction are major factors for its foreign policy formulation. That is, the more Turkey is absent in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict the stronger will be the latter two. This contradicts Turkey's interests. As also mentioned previously Genocide issue is a major concern for Turkey's policy. In case the Nagorno-Karabakh issue gets some solution it will be more anti-Turkey as the efforts

of the Armenian Diaspora will be driven to the international recognition of Genocide. That is why the current situation of status quo plays in the interest of Turkey.

On the contrary Ankara pursues a policy towards defining a solution to the Abkhazian conflict within the internationally recognized borders of Georgia which is not the case in the NK conflict. Turkish-Georgian relationships, BTC gas pipeline project, Black Sea basin and superiority there, Russian factor in Abkhazia, Turkish business and religious factors, the huge number of Armenians in Abkhazia, Abkhazian lobby in Turkey were found to be the main factors shaping foreign policy of Turkey.

So we can sum up by saying that Turkey's foreign policy vis-à-vis Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh is manifested through different channels, thus, has different stances and positions towards both conflicts. Turkey wants to keep good relations with Georgia and at the same time to deepen cooperation with Abkhazia, while in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh it sealed its borders with Armenia and supports Azerbaijan's position in the conflict. Moreover, it does not have a Muslim Community in Nagorno-Karabakh which he has in case of Abkhazia. Furthermore, as some experts state Abkhazia is not a priority for Turkey, while Nagorno-Karabakh is. Ankara wants to help its brother to get back all the regions that according to their assumptions are the Azerbaijani territories. However, it can't be the case as the data reveal that Turkey does infiltrate in Abkhazia and is dependent on its businesses particularly in the field of coal business. The Diaspora factor and also the large community of Armenians there are also major factors Ankara cannot close its eyes on. It is against its interests. Though in both conflicts Turkey recognizes territorial integrity of Georgia and Azerbaijan respectively, it still has maritime relations with Abkhazia, also tried to establish some Diplomatic connections with that breakaway region. Though those relations are on informal level, the same is not true about

Nagorno-Karabakh where Turkey has a firm position and pro-Azerbaijani stance. So, it is misleading to think that Turkey may have a similar approach to these both conflicts.

Thus, the research accepts the suggested hypotheses, particularly:

*H1 Turkey has different approaches towards Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazian conflicts*

*H2 Different factors influence Turkey's foreign policy formulation towards Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazian conflicts.*



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## Appendix 1

### List of interviewers

Artak Shakaryan, *Yerevan State University, Turkish Studies, Faculty Member*, 15 April, 2014

Egemen Bezci, *Research fellow at the Sakarya University, Turkey*, April 20, 2014

Hakan Yavuz, *Assistant Professor at Department of Political Science, The Middle East Center*,  
April 23

James W. Warhola, *Professor of Political Science and Chair of the Political Science Department  
at the University of Maine*, April 23, 2014

Johnny Melikian, *Head at Center for Political and Legal Studies*, April 11, 2014

Sergey Minasyan, *Head of department at Caucasus Institute, Yerevan*, 23 April, 2014

## Appendix 2

### Questionnaire for the semi-structured interview

1. To what stages can you split Turkey's foreign policy from 1991-2010 regarding conflicts on Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia?
2. How would you describe Turkey's role in the resolution of the conflicts?
3. How would you describe, escalation or settlement of the conflicts is more of Turkey's interest, and why?
4. Would you agree that Turkey has a unitary approach towards both conflicts? (If not why?)
5. What factors influence its foreign policy formulation regarding these both conflicts?