



## TURKEY'S INTEREST AND STRATEGIES IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

In the early 1990s, the days of Turkey sharing a land border with the USSR ended and it discovered its Caucasian neighbours. For the first time in several centuries (with the exception of 1918-1920), Turkey and Russia have no land frontier. Turkey was highly cautious not to provoke Moscow in its first contacts with the former Soviet countries putting forward an all-encompassing approach. The newly rediscovered Caucasian borderlands transformed the Turkish-Soviet border in an area of instability and brought the risk of a direct confrontation with Russia, reminding of the recurrent Turkish-Russian wars of the past centuries. The development of the perception of the former Soviet geography as a Turkic world is being strengthened by the American regional strategy prone to see Turkey as the Western bulwark against Russia. Turkey; wary to lose its strategic asset within NATO, accommodates well during the 1990's with its function of flank and frontline state within the Alliance. In the 1990's the ambiguous idea of Turkishness<sup>2</sup> becomes an important thread in the conduct of the Turkish policy in the region leading to a confrontational stance with Russia and pro-Azerbaijani bias in regional conflicts.

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline project is the cornerstone of Turkey's policy towards South Caucasus. Turkish regional policy will remain locked in the framework of the BTC pipeline: this narrow approach is limiting Turkey's engagement and the shaping of strategic thinking. The strengthening of the bilateral Turkish-Russian links will help to overcome the remaining tensions in the 2000's. Turkey will progressively overcome the legacy of the Cold War in its relationships with Russia, which has a direct impact on Turkey's strategy in South Caucasus.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.tepav.org.tr/en/ekibimiz/s/1133/Burcu+Gultekin+Punsmann\\_+PhD](http://www.tepav.org.tr/en/ekibimiz/s/1133/Burcu+Gultekin+Punsmann_+PhD)

<sup>2</sup> Turkishness is a vague ethno-religious notion which intends to define the very essence of being Turkish. The notion existed in the Turkish Penal Code until 2008.

### **The rediscovery of the South Caucasian neighbours**

Turkey's renewed concern for the future of South Caucasus began in January, 1990, when Soviet forces entered Baku following attacks on the Armenian minority and several hundred Azeri demonstrators were killed. At the popular level, there was widespread sympathy for the Azeri in Turkey. However, the government adopted a very cautious approach, insisting that the events in Azerbaijan were purely an internal Soviet affair and refusing to recognize Azerbaijan's abortive declaration of independence, issued on January, 20th.

In March, 1991, President Turgut Ozal visited Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan as well as Moscow, and regular flights started between Istanbul and Baku. The following month saw the first visit ever by a senior Turkish official to Armenia, when the Turkish ambassador in Moscow, Volkan Vural came to Yerevan to discuss the improvement of bilateral relations. The Yilmaz government decided to take the risk of recognizing the independence of all the ex-Soviet states before the US and other western powers made the same decision: one of its last acts, before leaving office, was to recognize Azerbaijan on 9 November, 1991. The incoming Demirel government followed this lead, by recognizing all the other states of the ex-USSR on 19 December.

The post-Cold War context radically altered the scheme of border exchanges. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the independence of the Caucasian states, Turkey had to deal with new neighbours. The closure of its only border crossing with Armenia in 1993 and the opening of new border posts with Georgia and Nakhichevan are the most significant events in the early 1990s. Turkey 'discovered' her new neighbour, Georgia, with the opening of Sarpi border gate in 1989, the opening of a second gate at Türkgözü and a 1994 measure that granted Ardahan the status of border city. The opening of Dilucu crossing in 1993 created links between Iğdır and the Autonomous Republic of Nakhichevan. The opening of the frontier at Sarp was warmly anticipated by officials and business people on the Black Sea coast and the Trabzon Chamber of Commerce, in particular, had lobbied hard over the issue. Sarp will become the gateway to the other South Caucasian republics. In the meantime, Kars – historically known as Serhat Kars – had lost its status as a border city. On 3 April, 1991 after Armenian forces attacked Kelbajar, the Turkish government retaliated by halting the supply of wheat across Turkish territory to Armenia. After the official closure of Doğu Kapı/Akhourian in 1993, direct land communications with Armenia were severed and the proposal to open a second gate at Alican/Makara, near Iğdır, was postponed. The opening of Dilucu border post between Iğdır and Nakhichevan in May 1992 was of vital importance to the isolated Azerbaijani enclave, but it ran into a cul-de-sac.

### **The energy based bipolar security approach: factor for polarization**

However despite increasing interaction on the Turkey-South Caucasus borderland, Turkey had to accommodate during the 1990's with not only its old function of flank state but also with that of the new frontline country within NATO. In the early 1990's, Turkey emerges as the new front line state within NATO. It was assumed that a new Cold War with Moscow would likely take the form of friction on Russia's southern periphery rather than a more direct confrontation in Europe. The security challenges were perceived as being harder, more direct and more likely to involve the use of force in

the Eastern Mediterranean, especially on Turkey's borders. American energy politics elaborated in a logic of confrontation with Russia, fostered Turkey's regional stance.

The BTC project is the cornerstone of Turkey's policy towards South Caucasus. Turkey has been an important actor in the conception of the project, its finalization proves to be a real success for Turkish diplomacy, which required a constant effort and the disentanglement of a complex web of problems. The Caspian-Mediterranean pipeline through Turkey matters mainly because of its regional political implications rather than for economic considerations. In a traditional bipolar scheme, Turkey pursues a political and strategic gain by positioning itself in the US-Russian relationship.

The BTC pipeline was officially inaugurated on July, 13<sup>th</sup>, 2006 at a ceremony held in Ceyhan with extensive press coverage. The day was depicted as an historical one. Oil from BTC, excepted on the long run to reach 2 million barrels a day, is viewed as enhancing the diversity of non-OPEC supply sources. The transit and exploitation revenues of the pipeline will depend on the volume of oil that will be transported. Between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> year, revenues will range between 140-200 million USD, between 17<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> year between 200-300 million USD. The revenues are not expected to be higher than those of the Turkish-Iraqi oil pipeline before the BTC reaches its maximum capacity of 1 million b/d.

At the same time that Turkey was gaining support among regional countries for her preferred pipeline choice, she has also been increasing her security ties. Azerbaijan and Georgia launched a major campaign to expand their military and security relationships with NATO. Azerbaijan has invited US, NATO or Turkey to establish a military base, membership for its role as a bulwark against Russian expansionism. Both Azerbaijan and Georgia have expanded military contacts, training and exercises with Turkey and have proposed cooperation with NATO in protecting oil pipelines. The three partner countries attempted to enshrine their willingness to cooperate in a BTC related official document. This process led to the signature of the *"Protocol among the Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Republic of Turkey relating to the provision of security for the East-West energy corridor"*, on July, 23, 2003.

The regional security framework set under the aegis of Turkey aims at ensuring the status quo. The nascent regional security system, concentrated on the "pipeline protection", contribute to deep-freeze the conflicts and accentuates the polarization by further promoting a bipolar regional order that has the potential to aggravate regional tensions and introduce additional security concerns into the unstable region.

Turkish regional policy locked in the framework of the BTC pipeline project contributed strongly to freeze the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict. Turkish diplomatic capabilities in the region had been severely curtailed by the security versus economy trade-off set up between Azerbaijan and Turkey. Turkish policy toward the region had become hostage to security relations with Azerbaijan; furthermore an openly pro-Azerbaijani stance on regional issues had become the cost of the realization of the BTC pipeline.

### **Turkey-Azerbaijan-Armenia triangle and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict**

Between autumn 1991 and the spring 1992, it appeared likely that Turkey might be able to develop good relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Following ambassador Vural's visit to Yerevan, a high level delegation from Armenia was received by Ekrem

Pakdemirli, deputy premier in the outgoing Yilmaz administration. There was much discussion of the development of trade between the two countries, in particular the expansion of the port of Trabzon to serve the transit trade with Armenia, which was proposed by an American-Armenian-Turkish consortium in February, 1992. Apparently, Turkey was urging Azerbaijan to reconsider the revocation of Nagorno-Karabagh's autonomy in a bid to diffuse the dispute.

Turkey established diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia in 1992. Armenia hasn't met the Turkish demand to state officially its recognition of the Treaty of Kars of 1921.<sup>3</sup> Armenia considers that its accession to OSCE in 1992 proves its alignment with the principle of the immutability of international borders. However, it was not this dispute, but the exacerbation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that ultimately led to the closure of the Turkish-Armenian border.

The closure of the border at the height of the war in Karabakh is the Turkish retaliation to Armenia's occupation of the Azerbaijani territories. Consequently, the issue of the opening of the border is perceived as an issue of the lifting of the decade-old Turkish blockade on Armenia, and had been linked to the question of the political settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the liberation of Azerbaijani occupied lands. Any potential shift from this traditional stance raises concerns in Azerbaijan, which fears it could weaken its position in the search for a political settlement of the Karabakh dispute. The fear that should the border be reopened, Azerbaijan would lose its main leverage on Armenia is widespread. Consequently, Azerbaijan is pressing Turkey to maintain the status quo because the blockade can be effective only if Armenia is isolated from both sides. A decision to open the border in the current context would be tantamount to the renunciation of a symbolical but powerful gesture of support. In this respect, it is believed that opening the border would jeopardise Turkish-Azerbaijani relations, give economic and moral support to Armenia, and affect negatively the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

This line of argumentation fails to question the efficiency of Turkish support to keeping the border closed and has taken for granted that the economic blockade provided leverage on Armenia within the peace talks. The main issue should then be to assess whether Turkey's boycott of Armenia has brought about a solution; how has it helped Azerbaijan on the negotiation table; and whether Azerbaijan is today close to bring the Armenian side to a major concession. It might be time for Turkey to renounce a policy that have not produced any positive result and to start normalising relations with Armenia in order to be able to contribute more actively to the resolution of the Karabakh issue and to help Azerbaijan's interests more effectively.

As a matter of fact the Turkish support to Azerbaijan expressed by keeping the border closed proved nothing more than a symbolical gesture. For the last seventeen years, Turkey's boycott of Armenia hasn't brought about a solution. It seems hardly difficult to

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<sup>3</sup> The Treaty of Kars (Turkish: Kars Antlaşması, Russian: Карсский договор / Karskiy dogovor) was a "friendship" treaty signed (treaties are entered into by states, and not by a handful of politicians sitting in parliament/government) between the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, which in 1923 would declare the Republic of Turkey, and representatives of Soviet Armenia, Soviet Azerbaijan and Soviet Georgia (all of which formed part of the Soviet Union after the December 1922 Union Treaty) with participation of Bolshevik (maybe neutral in English, but pejorative and judgmental in Russian) Russia. It was a successor treaty to the earlier Treaty of Moscow of March 1921 and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk marking Russia's exit from World War I, established contemporary borders between Turkey and the South Caucasus states.

argue that the insistence to keep the border with Armenia closed had any positive impact on the resolution of the Karabakh problem. Moreover, Turkey's policy has limited Ankara's potential influence on Armenia. While being a permanent member of the Minsk group and supporting its work, poor Turkish-Armenian relations have hindered Turkey's prospects of playing an active mediating role in the Karabakh conflict. Hence the status quo has not been helpful to Turkey in terms of achieving her policy objectives. The status quo is also hardly beneficial for Azerbaijan.

The signing of the Turkish-Armenian protocols in Zurich on 10 October 2009 opened a historical window of opportunity for the normalization of the relations. Both sides have poured in months of effort to work out the extremely careful of the texts, which set the ground of the bilateral inter-governmental consensus. The protocols incorporate a detailed outline for establishing diplomatic ties, opening the common border and improving bilateral and human to human relations according to a set of principles and a timetable.

Today, the normalisation process between Turkey and Armenia seems to have come to a vacuum. The prospect that the protocols would be brought back on the agenda appears quite slim after the decision of the President of Armenia Serge Sarkisyan to halt their ratification by the parliament on 22 April 2010. The common understanding is that the process is on standby. The process would have required speed and clarity. But the pace proved to be slow and paved with ambiguity. Besides, talks became captive of domestic politics on both sides. The linkage between the normalisation of Turkish-Armenian relations and the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which reemerged as a condition put forward by Turkey, has spoiled the process. At this stage, the continuing interruption of the Turkish-Armenian bilateral relations is more likely to dissipate the international attention focused on the region and decrease the chances to reach, in a foreseeable future, any settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

**Turkish interest in strengthening Georgian independence: however a neighbour before being a pipeline route**

The importance of Georgia for Turkey can by no means be underestimated. Developing its relations with Turkey has helped Georgia strengthen its independence. On the other hand, with the closure of the Turkish – Armenian border, Georgia became Turkey's gateway to the South Caucasus and Central Asia. The BTC pipeline best symbolises this connection. Georgia first perceived as a pipeline route, becomes a neighbour. The return of the war to the region in 2008 demonstrated major risks associated with the functioning of the East-West transit and transportation corridor via Georgia. However from a Turkish perspective, the instability and unpredictability caused by war in the area immediately beyond Turkey's northeastern border is a much higher source of concern than the disruption of the pipeline supply.

Turkish-Georgian borderland is fully open to human and trade interactions. Batumi airport built and managed by the Turkish company TAV is being used for domestic THY flight connections. The Sarp/i village once divided by the security fence of the Cold War is being reunified through intense cross-border cooperation. Adjara is integrating with the Turkish Black Sea coast. The closed village of Gogno is hosting dinners between Turkish and Georgian business partners. Inspired by the European experience, Turkish and Georgian authorities have been working at making meaningless the border

dividing them. In this context, the state of Russian-Turkish relations has become a major source of concern for the Turkish government.

### **Overcoming the legacy of the Cold War: Turkish-Russian rapprochement and South Caucasus**

The strengthening of the bilateral Turkish-Russian links will help to overcome the remaining tensions in the 2000's. Turkey will progressively overcome the legacy of the Cold War in its relationships with Russia, which has a direct impact on Turkey's strategy in South Caucasus. Russia becomes progressively the main partner among former Soviet space.. In addition the unease with the American regional ambitions in the Black Sea region and the willingness to conduct of a more confident and autonomous foreign policy helps Turkey to get emancipated from the logic of the Cold War.

In 2003-2004 in the aftermaths of the invasion of Iraq, both Turkey and Russia become wary that the Bush administration's activism in the Black Sea-South Caucasus region could be a major factor of instability. First, that there was no need for NATO to enter the region because existing regional structures were adequate and already in concert with NATO operations. Second, any regional initiative must include Russia, as well. Ankara believed that antagonizing Moscow would destabilize the region. Russia was a key party to the resolution of the frozen conflicts in the region.

The historical reconciliation process between Turkey and Russia should generate the same degree of enthusiasm as did the French – German reconciliation process. The two traditional foes found a political common ground. Economics and private sector actors have been the driving force in this rapprochement. These two countries that waged war against each other sixteen times in history, realised that they have no reason to fight. In the 1990's the scene appeared to be set for a revival of the 400-year-old Turkish-Russian competition. The post Cold War regional context provided the ground for arguments about the "inborn" hostility allegedly existing between the two peoples. Turkey and Russia always had regions over which their interests and claims clashed. Before becoming the frontier between the Republic of Turkey and the USSR in 1921, the Transcaucasus had been the contact zone between the Ottoman and the Russian empires. This contact was all the more violent because for many decades, the two empires had fought rather than traded. The Transcaucasus, standing out as a grey area between two rival political entities and serving as a buffer zone, had been an area of confrontation.

The advanced many-faceted partnership that was promoted by the Russian and Turkish governments is based on the good mutual understanding that progressively helped overcome a long history of continuous conflict between the two countries, full of negative images that amalgamated into a knot of suspicion, resentment, fear of each other, and a legacy of haunting minds. The Turkish – Russian reconciliation process is all the more exciting since it involves civilian actors, business communities, and tourism.

Russia has become Turkey's first supplier in natural gas and the main partner in regional energy projects. Though still interested in east-west energy projects, energy has stopped being a factor of polarization in the South Caucasus from the Turkish perspective. According to IMF 2010 data, Turkey is the third fastest growing energy market coming just behind China and India and ahead of Brasil. Developing a global and pragmatic



energy strategy based on market principles becomes in this respect a necessity. The gas dispute between Azerbaijan and Turkey is as a matter of fact merely a commercial one over gas prices even if the momentum in the Turkish-Armenian relations might have pushed Azerbaijan to become more assertive out of irritation. In June 2010, Turkey and Azerbaijan have signed a long-awaited memorandum of understanding for the shipment of 11 billion cubic meters of natural gas from Azerbaijani's Shah Deniz field to Turkey. The Shah Deniz II will decide of the viable option for the Southern gas corridor.

The August 2008 war between Georgia and Russia put under strain Turkish-Russian bilateral relation and shed light to the cost of the return of the Cold War. Turkey was concerned with a potential escalation of tensions between the former Cold War rivals. In the aftermaths of the war, Russia, despite the fact that it disliked encroachments into its spheres of influence, recognised the existence of commonality of interests with Turkey and welcomed the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform proposed by Turkey within her mediation efforts in the context of increasing polarization and harsh rhetorics t.

The sense that stability is tantamount to the preservation of the status quo developed in the Turkish and Russian regional discourses. This perception of a common understanding between the two countries on the need to shut down South Caucasus to extra-regional intervention gave rise to speculation by third parties that whether there would be an eventual establishment of a Turkish-Russian condominium therein. Turkey seems still concerned with the preservation of the status quo in the South Caucasus as a means for maintaining regional stability, despite all the divides, blockades and trade restrictions that characterised the area.

### **Linkage with the EU's action in the region**

The neighbourhoods of the EU and Turkey are increasingly overlapping. This is particularly true for the Black Sea region, where countries are full-fledged partners in the ENP. The new European neighbours are indeed the old neighbours of Turkey. This fact will not be altered, whether Turkey is included in the Union in the future or not. The Black Sea region can be defined as the overlapping Turkey/EU neighbourhood. The EU-Turkey accession process can enhance Turkey's capacity to contribute to stability, security and prosperity in her region, and at the same time help the EU to become a full fledged foreign policy player. Only the linkage between Turkey's EU accession process and the ENP would transform the latter into a sound strategy, thereby contribute to the development of more coherent and effective European external relations, and make it an efficient tool supporting sub-regional integration. From this stems the need to analyze the possibilities and ways of linking Turkey-EU relations with the further development of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the European Union.

Regardless of its definitive status within the EU, a close and sustainable integration and inclusion of Turkey into the EU is a major priority as a geostrategic project within international governance of the south eastern border of the EU.

The emancipation of Turkey from the logic of the Cold War which has prevailed in the 1990's brings a new room for manoeuvre in South Caucasus. Turkey had traditionally kept a low profile in the region, her discourse and actions echoing American policy

objectives. Furthermore, the strategic alignment with Azerbaijan has curtailed Turkey's involvement in regional conflict settlement efforts. Turkey was concerned with the preservation of the status quo in the South Caucasus as a means for maintaining regional stability, despite all the divides, blockades and trade restrictions that characterised the area. The 2008 war in Georgia showed that status quo is unsustainable. The Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (CSCP) announced in the context of the 2008 war by Turkey is an innovative in the sense that it links for the first time explicitly regional stability and conflict resolution. The Caucasus Platform aims at developing a functional method of finding solutions to the problems within the region, and is based on the acknowledgment that tensions stem from a profound lack of confidence among states of the region. It brings also about a new development: for the first time, good Turkish – Russian understanding is used to resolve problems in the common geographic neighbourhood. Turkish-Russian relations steadily developed throughout the 1990's while, on a parallel track, Moscow and Ankara have been extremely cautious to prevent a spill over of tension emanating from the Caucasus into their bilateral relations. There is a pressing need to transfer the unique economic cooperation between Russia and Turkey – a cooperation that verges on interdependence – to the South Caucasus. The analysis of the new pattern of the Turkish-Russian relations reveals the positive impact on bilateral political relations of a pragmatic approach based on business initiative. The Caucasus region had historically suffered from being a grey area of confrontation in the managed rivalry between Turkey and Russia. The current Turkish-Russian rapprochement could affect positively the region, and is looking therefore to willingness and ways to transfer the model of economic cooperation between Russia and Turkey that verges on interdependence to South Caucasus.

The Turkish-Armenian normalization process has been the major source of legitimization for the CSCP. Today three years after its announcement, the principles, decision-making mechanisms and structure of the CSCP still remain to be worked out. Innovative and pragmatic confidence-building mechanisms should help to address the disputes between Russia and Georgia, and Armenia and Azerbaijan, Turkey and Armenia. Abkhazia and South Ossetia may also be included. The EU could, on the one hand, take the lead and include the CSCP in the context of ENP, possibly in the framework of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)-EU interaction and in coordination with the EU-Russia dialogue.

### **Domestic actors and the Caucasus**

Given the size of Turkey and the complexity of the regional geopolitical context, issues related to the Caucasus are not ranking high in the set of priorities in Turkish politics. Today the region matters mainly because of the geographical proximity: Turkey as a major neighbour country can't stay aloof to the internal dynamics in the region. Instability across the border will necessarily affect Turkey.

The economic significance of the region is rather negligible. The strategic thinking developed in the 1990's, which essentially focuses on the transit potential of the region is still up to date. South Caucasus and more precisely Georgia is Turkey's gateway to the Caspian Sea and Central Asia. In the 1990's BTC focused energy politics pushed on the forefront advocates in the energy and business circles, well connected in the Demirel administration, for closer relations with Azerbaijan. Today the main focus of the



business and energy circles interested in Eurasia is on Russia. The Southern gas corridor doesn't gather the same degree of enthusiasm as the BTC did in the 1990s.

Therefore we can hardly talk of a push for a business driven political activism in South Caucasus. In the political discourse, economically speaking, Azerbaijan doesn't matter more than Russia since Russia has become the major partner in the former Soviet space. However it matters more than Armenia: the fear to jeopardize business relations with Azerbaijan has been hindering efforts at normalizing relations with Armenia.

Pan-Turkism enjoyed a brief spell of popularity among Turkish politicians in the first half of 1990's but afterwards withdrew to its traditional social niche, the Turkish nationalist milieu. The activism of extreme-right pan-Turkic circles is the main driving force behind the pro-Azeri lobby. Neither the size of the Azeri origin population, rather small, nor the strength of business links between Turkey and Azerbaijan can be enough to explain the efficiency of this pro-Azeri lobby. The capacity of organization and mobilization together with close linkages with the Azerbaijani official structures prove rather essential. The motto "two states, one nation" which has been dictating official relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan bears features of a pan-Turkic logic in presenting Turkishness as the natural link. This expression was first pronounced by the Azerbaijani President Elchibey referring to the bond between Turkey and the Turkic Republics of the former Soviet space, during the first visit to Baku of Arparslan Türkeş, the leader of the Turkish Nationalist Movement. Turks and Azeris are depicted as one same nation divided by history into two separate states. This leads to the understanding that Azerbaijani and Turkish national interests are identical. The notion of solidarity is the main reason behind the pro-Azerbaijani stance of Turkey in the standoff over Nagorno-Karabakh between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

In numerical terms Northern Caucasian diaspora is much more significant than ethnic Azeri groups. First Abkhazian immigrants in Anatolia settled in 150-160 villages. Today their grandchildren are thought to be numbering between 700.000-1.000.000 whereas the figures for the wider North Caucasian Diaspora range between 2 to 7 million. It is not possible to obtain official data because official census studies do not collect ethnic data in Turkey. The census until 1965 included a question on the native language. The estimations of today are a projection based on the census of 1965 and the size of the population forced to emigration from Northern Caucasus in 1864. In some occasions, Turkish officials use the figures of some 600.000 or 700.000 Abkhazians and 7 million North Caucasians in their press comments and speeches. Even with these figures, there are more Abkhazians in Turkey than in Abkhazia and more North West Caucasians than in the North West Caucasus. The Georgian-Abkhazian War (14 August 1992 - 30 September 1993) boosted the solidarity feelings and worries of many Abkhazians in Turkey towards their homeland Abkhazia. Caucasian-Abkhazian Solidarity Committee (CASC) gained a significant importance soon after this date. It evolved into a pro-Abkhazian lobbying organization recognized by both Abkhazian and Turkish authorities. The representative of Abkhazia in Turkey was also hosted by the CASC. During the war, the CASC worked to publicize the Abkhazian cause in Turkey and provide humanitarian aid to Abkhazia through contacts with the president, government, the Turkish National Assembly and the media. It organized Turkey-wide aid campaigns and public meetings in Istanbul, Ankara and Adapazari in 1992. Other North Caucasian associations like Kaf-Der (Caucasian Association – Kafkas Derneği; later Kaf-Fed, Caucasian Federation – Kafkas Federasyonu) actively supported the CASC in its activities. Participation of

thousands in these street meetings surprised not only Turkish officials but also Abkhazians and other Circassians themselves. The war in Abkhazia helped to transform the diaspora into a political factor in the context of relations between Turkey and Abkhazia. In addition to the mainstream humanitarian solidarity and political activism, even a number of young people including some girls went to Abkhazia to fight on the Abkhazian side as volunteers. The activities of the Diaspora during the Georgian-Abkhazian war were relatively successful to publicize the Abkhazian cause in Turkey but it never developed into a full political impact on Turkish authorities to influence Turkish foreign policy on Georgia. Turkish official policy line maintained to consider the Abkhazian issue as an internal problem of Georgia to the dismay of Diaspora.

### **Turkey and South Caucasus in the near future**

Turkey is an important soft power for the South Caucasus. With the economic growth and liberal visa policy, Turkey's force of attraction has been increasing tremendously: Turkey has become a major destination for work, tourism and shopping. In terms of human and geographical proximity, Turkey is the only factor which can compete with Russia in South Caucasian societies.

Because of its proximity and its critical size, Turkey's support for the reform process in the region can have a high efficiency. Turkey has an interest in projecting stability across the border: the progressive integration process between Ajdaria region and the Turkish Black Sea coast is a good example of how Turkish actors can positively impact on dynamics on the other side of the border.

The neighbourhoods of the European Union (EU) and Turkey are increasingly overlapping. This is particularly true for the Black Sea region, where countries are full-fledged partners in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The new European neighbours are indeed the old neighbours of Turkey. This fact will not be altered, whether Turkey is included in the EU in the future or not. The Black Sea region can be defined as the overlapping Turkey/EU neighbourhood. The EU-Turkey accession process can enhance Turkey's capacity to contribute to stability, security and prosperity in her region, and at the same time help the EU to become a full fledged foreign policy player. Only the linkage between Turkey's EU accession process and the ENP would transform the latter into a sound strategy, thereby contribute to the development of more coherent and effective European external relations, and make it an efficient tool supporting sub-regional integration. From this stems the need to analyze the possibilities and ways of linking Turkey-EU relations with the further development of the ENP and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the European Union. Regardless of its definitive status within the EU, a close and sustainable integration and inclusion of Turkey into the EU is a major priority as a geostrategic project within international governance of the south eastern border of the EU.

Political engagement and strategic planification is needed if Turkey wants to transform its soft power and force of attraction into a vector for influence. The emancipation of Turkey from the logic of the Cold War which prevailed in the 1990's brings a new room for manoeuvre in South Caucasus. Turkey had traditionally kept a low profile in the region her discourse and actions echoing American policy objectives. Furthermore, the strategic alignment with Azerbaijan, has curtailed Turkey's involvement in regional conflict settlement efforts. Turkey was concerned with the preservation of the status quo in the South Caucasus as a means for maintaining regional stability, despite all the divides, blockades and trade restrictions that characterised the area. The Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (CSCP) announced in the context of the 2008 war in Georgia came as an innovation in the sense that the Turkish diplomatic discourse linked for the first time explicitly regional stability and conflict resolution. The Turkish-Armenian normalization process has been the major source of legitimization for the CSCP. Today three years after its announcement, the principles, decision-making mechanisms and structure of the CSCP still couldn't be worked out.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has a high cost for Turkey. As the failure of the last attempt of normalizing relations with Armenia has shown, it is curtailing Turkey's capacity to conduct a sovereign policy in the region. However Turkey can't impact much on the settlement of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as long as it doesn't have bilateral political relations with Armenia. As a matter of fact, the efficiency of any Turkish policy in South Caucasus is conditionalized by the prospect of the settlement of a conflict totally external to Turkey.

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