

TREMBLING CHESSBOARD

THE EFFECTS OF CHANGING RUSSIAN-TURKISH RELATIONS IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of shifting dynamics in Russian-Turkish relations on the foreign policies of South Caucasian states. Since 2016, the interaction between those two actors has changed significantly and had an impact on many regions, including the Caucasus. Analyzing this new mode of Russo-Turkish relations post-2016 and its implications for the region is essential to better comprehend the foreign policy decisions of the South Caucasian states. Therefore, the study begins by delving into the strategic approaches of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey in the region. Then, the article provides a concise overview of the bilateral relations between these two nations. Subsequently, it evaluates the overall geopolitical status of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, considering how their foreign policies might be influenced by the evolving relations between Russia and Turkey. The article concludes that the altered relationship between Russia and Turkey significantly impacts the foreign policies of regional countries. Specifically, the study suggests that Azerbaijan is pursuing a relatively autonomous foreign policy and adopts a strategy of balance, aiming to sustain relationships with both Russia and Turkey without becoming overly reliant on either. This became evident especially after the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020, after which Baku pushed for even tighter relations with both Ankara and Moscow. Armenia, on the other hand, seeks to diminish Russian influence by seeking external support in its conflict with Azerbaijan and exploring opportunities for inclusion in new transit routes. In this context, Yerevan has been seeking closer links with the Western actors, the Islamic Republic of Iran and India. Georgia, the third case of the study, maintains its claim to Abkhazia and South Ossetia but avoids involvement in regional conflicts to prevent antagonizing Russia, following a cautious and observant strategy, in order to avoid any escalation that would turn the country into another front in the current crisis between the West and Russia.

Key words:

Russia; Turkey; South Caucasus; Armenia; Azerbaijan; Georgia; foreign policy; small states

The post-Soviet space is undergoing significant transformation, compelling the small states in the South Caucasus to adapt their foreign policies to these new realities. Despite having relatively fewer material resources, small states face limited options in responding

to these structural changes. In line with the realist framework, small states often react to these structural constraints through bandwagoning or balancing. As the level of threat escalates, small states tend to increasingly adopt realist strategies [Jesse, Dreyer 2016: 22].

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Additionally, the expanding literature on this subject implies that small states may possess a diverse range of strategies. These vary from responses that directly oppose the hegemon and its interests to embracing neutrality or accommodating approaches [Lobell et al. 2012: 147].

The roles of Russia and Turkey in the region, along with their relations, are crucial factors that post-Soviet countries, particularly those in the South Caucasus, must consider when shaping their foreign policies. In 2016, following the rift caused by Turkey's downing of a Russian fighter jet in 2015 and the consequent sanctions, Russia and Turkey managed to reconcile their differences and rebuild their relationship. This was evidenced by their revived dialogues across multiple spheres. Analyzing this new mode of Russo-Turkish relations post-2016 and its implications for the region is essential to better comprehend the foreign policy decisions of these countries.

Therefore, this article scrutinizes the effects of Turkey's altered relations with Russia on the foreign policies of neighboring countries—Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia—using the realist approach on small state foreign policy. Initially, the study assesses the significance of the South Caucasus for Russia and Turkey, and briefly evaluates their relations from a regional standpoint. It then delves into how the new Russo-Turkish relationship affects the policies of South Caucasian countries. In summary, the article suggests that Azerbaijan is pursuing a relatively independent foreign policy and employing a balancing strategy by carefully nurturing ties with both Russia and Turkey to avoid direct influence by either. Meanwhile, Armenia, in its efforts to participate in new transit routes in the region, is seeking ways to diminish Russian dominance by seeking an offshore balancer in its conflict with Azerbaijan. On the other hand, Georgia remains steadfast in its claims to territorial integrity regarding Abkhazia and South Ossetia, yet adopts a passive stance in regional conflicts to avoid provoking Russia.

This study follows a qualitative, historical, and comparative methodology to examine the effects of changing Russian-Turkish relations

on the foreign policies of the South Caucasus states. To examine this effect, we follow the realist literature of the small states' foreign policies. Data for the qualitative analysis is composed of primary sources such as official documents, agreements, statements of the leaders and news sources, and secondary literature including scholarly works, expert opinions, and think-tank reports. We take the new form of Russian-Turkish relations as the independent variable of the study. Hence, we begin by explaining the pre-2016 regional strategies of these two actors and then highlight how they came up with the current form of bilateral relations within the context of its reflection in the Caucasian region. The second part of the study is devoted to adaptation strategies of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. Through qualitative research focusing on their changing behavior, we examined data from political, military, or economic agreements in the post-2016 era, official statements, news, and secondary literature that highlights their foreign policy trajectories. And by that, we sought the traces of how they reacted to the Russian-Turkish rapprochement. Here, the main aim is to expose the reasons for their different approaches to regional politics through a comparative analysis. Since all three South Caucasian actors chose a different path, the comparison provided us with three clear examples of how small states adapt to changing regional dynamics.

Keeping the near abroad in order: Russia in the South Caucasus

The South Caucasus region has historically been a contentious arena where regional powers contend for control. Post-World War I, the Soviet Union solidified its dominance, fostering a period of relative stability. However, the Union's dissolution precipitated the resurgence of historic and emergent tensions. Separatist movements in the Southern and Northern Caucasus evolved into localized conflicts involving separatists and the central authorities of the Russian Federation and newly formed republics in the South. Armenia and Azerbaijan grappled over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, predominantly inhabited by Armenians but recognized internationally as Azerbaijani terri-

tory. To the north, Abkhazia and South Ossetia disputed with Tbilisi over demands for independence or increased autonomy. Markedonov [2021: 81] suggests that these initial conflicts can largely be traced to events in the final Soviet era and its subsequent dissolution, alongside separatists' attempts to reassess the statuses of former union and autonomous entities. Nonetheless, from 2008 onwards, these de facto states became pivotal points of contention between Russia and Western powers.

Hence, the South Caucasus stands out as one of the most critical regions in terms of Russia's periphery security [Sushentsov, Neklyudov 2020: 128]. Moscow's primary motives include upholding regional stability and retaining influence in the area. According to Markedonov and Suchkov [2020: 7], one of Moscow's key objectives in the South Caucasus is to maintain regional stability and curb the spread of radicalism. Meanwhile, MacFarlane [2020: 206] highlights Russia's ambition to assert dominance over the post-Soviet space and deter external players from intervening in the region as a substantial factor guiding its strategies in the South Caucasus. Correspondingly, Stent [2019: 114] argues that a fundamental aspect of Moscow's foreign policy is to prevent former Soviet republics from distancing themselves from Russia's influence, seeking integration into other institutions, and countering such aspirations through economic and military pressure. Fears concerning the South Caucasian states' pursuit of NATO membership prompted Moscow to establish geopolitical strongholds in the region [Suchkov 2018: 316]. To achieve these objectives, Moscow maintains its military presence and endeavors to sustain significant economic and diplomatic influence in the South Caucasus.

In accordance with Russian foreign policy concerning the South Caucasus, Moscow seeks to maintain its military bases in the region. Presently, the Russian army maintains bases in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Armenia, and deploys peacekeeping forces in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Russian presence expanded post-2008 war, with the enlargement of the military base in Abkhazia and the establishment of a new base in South Ossetia [Rogozinska, Olech 2020]. The Gyumri base in Armenia, however, holds paramount strategic importance among the Russian military posts in the South Caucasus. Additionally, Russia and Armenia collaborate on border control and coordinate joint forces [MacFarlane 2020: 310], along with a partnership agreement for joint air defense established in 2016 [Coyle 2021: 56].

Regarding Armenia's conflict with Azerbaijan, Russia's military cooperation solely covers Armenia's internationally recognized borders, excluding the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Rather than taking sides, Moscow chose to broker a peace agreement between the warring parties in 2020, preventing Baku from seizing control of the entire Nagorno-Karabakh. Subsequently, around 2000 Russian peacekeepers were deployed to the disputed region. This attempt by Moscow to act impartially in the 2020 War laid the foundation for the Declaration on Allied Interaction between Azerbaijan and Russia in February 2022. A critical element of this declaration emphasized mutual respect for territorial integrity and inviolability of state borders, reaffirming Moscow's stance on Nagorno-Karabakh as Azerbaijani territory¹.

Following the 2020 ceasefire, Russian peacekeeping forces returned to Azerbaijan to monitor the corridor between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. Furthermore, as part of this process, a joint Russian-Turkish monitoring post was established near the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Hence, Russia not only maintained its presence in the South Caucasus but also secured an additional foothold in Azerbaijan, where the last Russian base closed in 2012. Broers [2020] notes that this maneuver demonstrated Russia's continued dominance in the region, enabling Russia to deploy its military to Azerbaijan and reach a deal without Western involvement. Additionally, it

¹ Declaration on allied interaction between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation. *President of the Republic of Azerbaijan*. 2022. 22 February. URL: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55498> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

curbed Turkey's increasing influence over Azerbaijan.

Beyond military presence, Russia plays a crucial role as an arms exporter for both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Between 2011–20, Russia supplied 93.7% of Armenia's and 60% of Azerbaijan's arms [Wezeman, Kuimova, Smith 2021]. Despite both countries aiming to diversify their arms suppliers, Russian dominance in this sector is likely to persist due to existing military infrastructure based on Soviet and Russian equipment from decades past.

For the preservation of its economic influence in the South Caucasus, Russia holds a strategic position across the region. Notably, Armenia's decision in 2013 to join the Eurasian Economic Union, instead of signing the association agreement with the EU, was pivotal. This was a necessity for Yerevan as Russia constitutes the largest export market for Armenian products². Given its landlocked status and strained relations with neighbors Turkey and Azerbaijan, Armenia remains heavily reliant on Russia for its energy supply, with Russia providing 85% of Armenia's natural gas in 2019³. Furthermore, Russia subsidizes the energy supply to Armenia, solidifying its economic ties. However, in return, Russian state and private entities acquired a significant portion of Armenia's major assets. For instance, by 2014, Gazprom gained 100% ownership of Armenia's natural gas pipelines⁴. These instances underscore Armenia's considerable economic dependency on Russia [Coyle 2021: 93].

Regarding economic relations with Azerbaijan, the focal point revolves around energy sources in the Caspian basin and asso-

ciated infrastructure projects. Pipeline ventures like the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) were established to transport Azerbaijani oil and gas to European markets, circumventing Russia. The demarcation of the Caspian Sea, rich in mineral resources, was another contentious topic. However, the littoral states of the Caspian resolved most disputes by signing the "Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea" in 2018, regulating oil and gas extraction. Moreover, "The Declaration on Allied Interaction" between Azerbaijan and Russia pledges to "refrain from carrying out any economic activity that causes direct or indirect damage to the interests of the other Party"⁵. Russia is the principal importer of goods to Azerbaijan, although Baku hesitates to join Russia's economic integration projects, particularly until the resolution of its conflict with Armenia⁶.

While Tbilisi and Moscow have had contentious relations since the USSR's dissolution, their bilateral economic interactions have remained significant, notably for Georgia. During the Saakashvili period, political disputes extended into the commerce sector. Preceding the 2008 war, with the so-called "wine scandal" Russia imposed bans on critical Georgian exports like wine and mineral water⁷. This continued with an expansion of embargo on Georgian goods and deporting Georgian citizens, leading to significant economic repercussions for Georgia due to lost remittances⁸. Nonetheless, Russia persisted as one of Georgia's most substantial trade partners [Petrov 2023].

² Hergnyan S. 2020 – Armenia's Top 10 Foreign Trade Partners. Hetq. 2021. March 10. URL: <https://hetq.am/en/article/128368> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

³ International Energy Agency (2022). *Armenia 2022 Energy Policy Review*. IEA

⁴ Gazprom increases its stake in ArmRosGazprom to 100%. TASS. 2014. February 5. URL: <https://tass.com/economy/717612> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

⁵ Declaration on allied interaction between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation. *President of the Republic of Azerbaijan*. 2022. 22 February. URL: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55498> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

⁶ The State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. (2022). *Foreign Trade by Countries*. URL: <https://stat.gov.az/source/trade/?lang=en> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

⁷ Россия осталась без молдавских и грузинских вин [Russia is left without Moldovian and Georgian Wine]. *Lenta*. 2006. March 28. URL: <https://lenta.ru/news/2006/03/28/wine/> (accessed: 10.11.2023).

⁸ Georgians deported as row deepens. BBC. 2006. October 6. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5412672.stm>. (accessed: 09.11.2023).

To summarize, the South Caucasus remains marked by historical conflicts and contemporary power struggles. Russia aims to secure stability, assert dominance, and prevent foreign interference in the region by upholding military bases and economic influence. Following the 2008 and 2020 conflicts, Moscow solidified its military presence in the area, effectively minimizing external influences. Additionally, Russia holds a strategically advantageous economic position in the region. While only Armenia is a member of Russian-led international organizations, Moscow continues to be a significant trade partner for both Georgia and Azerbaijan.

Trade, Energy and Security:

Ankara in the Caucasus

In the early 1990s, Ankara sought to establish influence in the newly independent states, leveraging Moscow's declining authority in the region. As Balta pointed out [2019: 74], Ankara's objective during this phase was to reassert its significance in the eyes of Western partners post-Cold War. The new Turkic republics viewed Turkey as a potential model to emulate [Sanai 2020: 146]. Yet, Ankara faced limitations in resources required to assert its political and economic dominance over these states [Köstem 2019: 113]. Moreover, the "Turkish model" and the perceived "elder brother" stance were seen as patronizing by the administrations of the new republics [Oran 2002: 394].

Over time, Ankara shifted its approach to a more pragmatic stance, emphasizing bilateral economic gains and an egalitarian partnership rather than the paternalistic "elder brother" role. Within this framework, Georgia and Azerbaijan emerged as natural regional allies for Ankara [Köstem 2019: 112]. The oil and gas reserves in Azerbaijan presented a favorable opportunity. During Moscow's preoccupation in the 1990s, Ankara, Tbilisi, and Baku established a deal to build pipelines, namely the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline (BTC) and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipeline (BTE), inaugurated in 2006. Despite this, the focus on identity remained. While Central Asia remained the ancestral homeland of the Turkish

people [Fidan 2010: 110], the South Caucasus was regarded as a pathway leading to it.

Ankara's goals in the South Caucasus appear centered on two key concerns: bolstering security to ensure access to Central Asia and strengthening economic ties to position Turkey as an energy and trade hub. In terms of security, Ankara aimed to maintain regional stability and prevent the area from becoming another Russia-USA confrontation zone. Economically, Turkey aimed to enhance energy cooperation and establish new trade routes to access Eurasian markets. Over time, Turkey has increasingly wielded its military, economic, and soft power instruments with more frequency and effectiveness.

Nevertheless, following Vladimir Putin's rise to power, Moscow managed to regain and amplify its influence in the region. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, a significant milestone was the Russian-Georgian War in 2008. Ankara's reaction was multifaceted. Firstly, it aspired to resolve the region's issues among the Caucasus states sans external involvement. To this end, Ankara emphasized the primacy of the Montreux Convention to deter the US Navy's entry into the Black Sea [Aydın 2020]. Ankara refrained from confrontation in the Black Sea, activating relevant mechanisms in the Montreux Treaty to halt American military vessels from accessing Georgian ports [Konovalov 2020: 156]. This was consistent with Ankara's objections to extending "Operation Active Endeavor" by NATO from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea in 2006 [Aydın 2009: 281].

Secondly, in response to the 2008 War, Ankara proposed the creation of the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform as an attempt to resolve regional matters among the South Caucasian states and Russia. This project aimed to normalize relations among these countries, establishing regional peace and stability. While the intended results were not achieved, the platform indicated Ankara's determination to prevent conflicts in the Black Sea region. However, this initiative drew criticism from the West due to its prominent role for Russia, perceived as the main aggressor in 2008 [Çelikpala 2019: 12].

Ankara attempted to improve its relations with Armenia in 2009 through the “football diplomacy”. Although unsuccessful, this initiative demonstrated Ankara's desire to increase influence in the region while maintaining stability. It was also linked to the potential vulnerability of the Georgian energy route, evident during the shutdown of the BTC oil pipeline in the 2008 War [Osakanian 2011]. This effort indicated Ankara's strategy to secure and diversify access to Eurasia, even though it was short-lived due to public disapproval and objections from Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The Ukraine Crisis in 2014 and Russia's intervention in the Syrian Civil War altered Ankara's perceptions and strategies. With an increased Russian military presence in Crimea, Gyumri, and Syria by 2015, Turkey re-evaluated its threat perception, particularly in the Black Sea region. Conflicting positions in Syria led to the downing of a Russian jet by the Turkish Air Force, potentially escalating tensions. On a rhetorical level, Turkey hardened its stance regarding Russia's activities around its borders. President Erdogan expressed concerns about the Black Sea potentially becoming a “Russian Lake” due to NATO's absence in the area⁹.

Consequently, Turkey started augmenting its presence in the Caucasus. The annual “Caucasian Eagle” military exercises were initiated in collaboration with Azerbaijan and Georgia in 2015, reflecting increased military cooperation. Additionally, Turkey supported Georgia's NATO membership. Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu expressed bewilderment over NATO's inaction regarding Georgia despite accusations of Turkey's close relations with Russia¹⁰. This signaled Turkey's active role in the region, aiming to counterbalance Russia's influence while supporting regional allies' integration into NATO.

In the economic sphere, Ankara continued its strategy of diversifying energy resources and trade routes. In addition to new pipeline projects with Russia, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway, connecting Baku to Kars through Georgia, was inaugurated in 2017.

A crucial development indicating Ankara's intention to strengthen its presence in the region occurred in 2020 during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. Before this conflict, Ankara firmly supported the existing status quo in the region. While providing unwavering political support to Azerbaijan, this support had not extended to military assistance. However, Turkey shifted its policy during the 2020 war by supplying military aid to Baku before and during the conflict, through arms sales and organizational support. Following the war, Turkey established a presence in the region by inaugurating a joint monitoring center with Russian troops in Azerbaijan. The Shusha Declaration signed in June 2021 between Turkey and Azerbaijan emphasized the depth of bilateral relations.

Turkey remains a significant trade partner for both Azerbaijan and Georgia. Collaboration has extended to military production, evident in reports confirming Azerbaijani-Turkish cooperation on Turkey's indigenous fighter jet project Kaan, a development unprecedented in Azerbaijan's air force, which had primarily utilized Russian and Soviet-made aircraft¹¹.

Supporting Georgia's territorial integrity, Turkey augmented its economic and political cooperation, leading some experts to characterize Turkey as a “merchant hegemon” in its relations with Georgia. Bilateral ties resulted in a free trade agreement and a visa-free travel regime.

Economic relations with Armenia are less significant due to closed borders and a lack of diplomatic ties. Ankara emphasizes that the resolution of conflicts between Armenia and

⁹ Erdoğan: Karadeniz adeta Rusya'nın bir gölü haline dönüşüyor [Erdogan: The Black Sea is becoming a Russian Lake]. *Sputnik Türkiye*. 2016. May 11. URL: <https://sputniknews.com.tr/20160511/erdogan-karadeniz-rusya-nato-1022683225.html> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

¹⁰ Turkish foreign minister calls for enlarged NATO, Georgia membership. *Reuters*. 2020. January 23. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-davos-meeting-turkey-georgia-idAFKBN1ZM117> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

¹¹ Azerbaijan, Türkiye to cooperate in creation of Turkish fifth-generation fighter. *Azernews*. 2023. July 27. URL: <https://www.azernews.az/business/212790.html> (accessed: 17.08.2023).

Azerbaijan is a prerequisite for initiating the process of economic and stability improvement with Armenia¹².

The cultural affinity with Turkic countries forms the foundation for expanding Ankara's presence in the region, compensating for Turkey's geographical distance from Central Asia [Sanai 2020: 320]. Azerbaijan not only serves as a partner but also represents Turkey's main gateway to Central Asia. At a domestic level, Turkey's aid agency TIKA has emerged as Ankara's principal soft power tool in the region, executing diverse projects spanning education, administrative support, development assistance, and cultural initiatives [Ipek 2015: 179]. Other institutions such as Diyanet, YTB, Yunus Emre centers, and TURKSOY actively contribute to bolstering Turkish influence. Their activities are notably active within Georgia, particularly within Muslim communities [Shamarina 2020: 233]. The establishment of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) at the intergovernmental level underscores a clear push for increased integration among Turkic nations [Mustofaev 2022: 110]. In addition to institutional methods, Turkey's entertainment industry, notably TV series, serves to promote the Turkish language and culture, particularly among the younger generation, not just in Azerbaijan but also in Georgia.

Ankara's principal goal revolves around securing energy and trade routes within the region, resolving conflicts among regional actors without external interference. This commitment is evidenced by Ankara's backing of a platform following the 2008 war and its support for Russian initiatives in resolving the 2020 conflict without invoking OSCE participation. Additionally, Ankara's efforts to normalize relations with Armenia after both the 2008 and 2020 conflicts underscore Turkey's intentions. This also aligns with Turkey's aim to diversify alternative routes to Eurasian markets. Therefore, a comprehensive peace process covering Armenia-Azerbaijan, Turkey-Armenia, and Georgia-Russia aligns best with Ankara's regional strategy.

Changing dynamics in Russia-Turkey relations

The aims and concerns of Moscow and Ankara in the South Caucasus have remained significant aspects of their bilateral relations. Turkey's objective to link Caspian and Central Asian hydrocarbon resources to European markets conflicts with Russia's energy diplomacy, while Turkey's direct support to Azerbaijan challenges the existing regional status quo. Nevertheless, they found common ground on certain issues, like preventing US involvement in the Black Sea region and enhancing energy cooperation through projects such as the TurkStream pipeline. The most challenging situation emerged from the south when both countries became involved in the Syrian civil war on opposing sides.

In 2015, tensions escalated between Russia and Turkey as the Russian military provided direct support to Bashar Assad, opposed by Ankara. Relations soured further when a Russian SU-24 was shot down by the Turkish Air Force, leading Moscow to impose harsh sanctions against Ankara. This marked the lowest point in bilateral relations since the imperial era. However, in 2016, the two nations began re-establishing communication and found a shared platform. Despite competing interests and support for opposing sides in various conflicts, they acknowledged each other as legitimate actors and sought common interests in different regions, including the South Caucasus [Köstem 2022]. This wasn't merely about finding mutual understanding on specific issues, but the initiation of a new phase in their interaction.

The aftermath of the jet crisis prompted a realignment in bilateral relations. Moscow and Ankara resumed existing energy projects and the coup attempt in Turkey in 2016 hastened their rapprochement. Turkish authorities accused the US of supporting the coup attempt [Kubicek 2021]. Köstem [2021] defines the post-2016 Russian-Turkish mode of interaction as "strategic alignment" Kutlay and Öniş [2021: 1088], focus on the international level

¹² Türkiye, Azerbaijan eye stronger ties amid rapprochement with others. *Daily Sabah*. 2023. July 31. URL: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkiye-azerbaijan-eye-stronger-ties-amid-rapprochement-with-others> (accessed: 17.08.2023).

and argue that the desire to seek strategic autonomy from Washington's hegemony is the driving force behind this reconciliation.

This new mode of interaction encompasses two key components: 1) advancing cooperation when it's deemed beneficial; 2) seeking common ground on disagreements to prevent confrontation rather than striving for immediate full resolution. This fresh phase in bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia has seen cooperation in the energy sector (continuation of the Turkish Stream, Akkuyu NPP, discussions of a gas hub in Turkey), diplomatic initiatives (such as the Astana process, Turkey-Russia-Qatar talks, the grain corridor, and the Antalya diplomatic forum), and an increase in economic interaction. Within the context of this new interaction pattern, Ankara has deepened cooperation with Moscow in unconventional areas, such as the S-400 deal, an unexpected move for a NATO member. Cooperation in the energy field between the two countries has also persisted.

At the very initial phase of the healing of the bilateral relations, the assassination of the Russian ambassador to Turkey, Andrei Karlov, in December 2016 posed a significant threat to Russian-Turkish relations and put the rapprochement into a serious test. Tensions had risen due to Russia's involvement in the Syrian Civil War, supporting the Damascus regime against opposition forces in northern Syria, which had sparked criticism and protests in Turkey. The assassination occurred amid this strained atmosphere, posing a potential risk to the already fragile relations. However, both nations adopted a cautious approach, preventing the incident from escalating into a new crisis. Both sides called the murder of the ambassador "a provocation to Russia and Turkey"¹³. This cautious handling of the situation not only averted a diplomatic fallout but also showed the improving ties between Ankara and Moscow.

Russia and Turkey established new approaches to resolve the central issue of the Syrian

Civil War through the Astana peace process, involving Moscow, Ankara, and Tehran. The primary aim was to avoid conflicts like the jet crisis through ongoing coordination [Mamedov, Lukyanov 2018]. Markedonov [2018: 43] proposed extending the Moscow-Ankara-Tehran framework to address conflicts in the South Caucasus, leveraging the positive results seen in the Syrian crisis. This format, successful in Syria, excluded Western actors [Kortunov 2019]. The 2020 Azerbaijani-Armenian War further exemplified the cooperation between Russia and Turkey. Although the conflict was mostly resolved due to Russian initiatives, Moscow acknowledged Turkey's role by establishing a joint observation post [Trenin 2020].

Notably, Turkey maintains strong support for Ukraine in its conflict with Russia, while simultaneously engaging in cooperation with Russia, potentially affecting Ukraine adversely. Examples of this dual approach include Turkey's provision of arms and aid to Ukraine, along with its involvement in the Grain Deal. Conversely, Turkish trade with Russia has escalated to a level where Western actors threatened Turkey with the possibility of imposing sanctions. Furthermore, Ankara has shown significant interest in participating in President Putin's initiative to establish Turkey as a gas hub.

This new mode of relations between Russia and Turkey has also influenced the policies of the South Caucasus states, prompting Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia to reassess their foreign policies.

Azerbaijan: Settling an old score

The aftermath of the war saw Azerbaijan adopting a more proactive foreign policy, characterized by: 1) a closer relationship with Russia; 2) forging an alliance with Turkey; 3) increased confrontation with the Islamic Republic of Iran; 4) fostering closer military cooperation with Israel; 5) advancing energy cooperation with the EU; and 6) bolstering Azerbaijan's position through infrastructure projects.

¹³ Ambassador assassination "a provocation" says Russia and Turkey. *Euronews*. 2016. December 19. URL: <https://www.euronews.com/2016/12/19/ambassador-assassination-a-provocation-says-russia-and-turkey> (accessed: 09.11.2023).

Since the dissolution of the USSR, Baku has pursued a multi-directional foreign policy, straddling relations between Western powers and Russia rather than aligning solely with either the pro-Russian approach of Yerevan or the pro-Western stance of Tbilisi [Idan & Shaffer 2011: 255]. Instead of seeking membership in the CSTO under Moscow's security umbrella, Azerbaijan has opted for balanced bilateral cooperation. Keeping Russia from intervening on Armenia's side has remained a primary focus of this strategy. However, after the Second Karabakh War, this equilibrium has tilted more in favor of a stronger partnership with Moscow, underscored by the signing of "the Declaration of Allied Relations" with Russia in February 2022. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan's relations with Russia encounter friction, particularly concerning Russian peacekeeping operations. For instance, Azeri officials have occasionally voiced discontent, notably in Nagorno-Karabakh¹⁴. Dissatisfaction with the 2020 deal was evident when a civilian initiative from Azerbaijan blocked the Lachin corridor due to purported environmental concerns¹⁵. Additionally, Baku has openly expressed support for the territorial integrity of Ukraine¹⁶.

The second facet of Azerbaijan's foreign policy post-2020 is the deepening of ties with Turkey. While the bilateral relationship has historically been close under the popularized slogan of "one nation – two states", Ankara-

Baku relations reached an unprecedented level following the conflict. This deepening cooperation encompasses military collaboration, Turkey's outspoken diplomatic support, and economic solidarity. This trend continued after the conflict's end with the declaration of an alliance in 2021, incorporating a clause for mutual military assistance along with prospects for cooperation in economy, infrastructure, energy, and education.

Conversely, relations between Baku and Tehran have experienced a downturn since 2020. Iran has grown increasingly concerned about Azerbaijani and Turkish geopolitical advancements in the region, especially given the calls for "Greater Azerbaijan," which has sparked unease in Tehran¹⁷. Responding to this, the Iranian military conducted drills on the Azerbaijani border¹⁸. Azerbaijani officials perceived these exercises as hostile actions, accusing Iran of threatening Azerbaijan, its secular structure, and repressing the Azeri minority in Iran¹⁹. Despite the strained relations, Azerbaijan remains Iran's primary trade partner in the South Caucasus, and bilateral trade has witnessed a significant upswing [Kaleji 2023: 15].

Increasing military cooperation and improved relations between Azerbaijan and Israel have sparked reactions from Iran²⁰. The strengthening collaboration between Azerbaijan and Israel, making Israel the primary arms supplier among Azerbaijan's military pur-

¹⁴ Aliyev obvinil Minoborony Rossii v nevyopolnenii obeshchaniya po Karabakhu [Aliyev accused the Russian Defense Ministry of failing to fulfill the promise on Karabakh]. *Kommersant*. 2022. July 15. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5468445> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

¹⁵ Blokirivka Lachinskogo koridora [Blocking of the Lachin Corridor]. *RIA Novosti*. 2022. December 17. URL: https://ria.ru/20221217/lachinskiy_koridor-1839358844.html (accessed: 10.03.2023).

¹⁶ *Cornell S.* Russia's southern neighbors take a stand. *The Hill*. 2022. URL: <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/3479461-russias-southern-neighbors-take-a-stand/> (accessed: 17.08.2023).

¹⁷ *Taştekin F.* Tensions simmer as Azerbaijan-Turkey alliance unsettles Iran. *Al Monitor*. 2022. November 21. URL: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/11/tensions-simmer-azerbaijan-turkey-alliance-unsettles-iran> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

¹⁸ *Kucera J.* Iran's military starts "massive" drills on Azerbaijani border. *Eurasianet*. 2022. October 20. URL: <https://eurasianet.org/irans-military-starts-massive-drills-on-azerbaijani-border> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

¹⁹ *Özgenç T.* Azerbaijan to protect all Azerbaijanis, including those in Iran: President. *AA*. 2022. November 25. URL: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/azerbaijan-to-protect-all-azerbaijanis-including-those-in-iran-president/2748046> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

²⁰ Why Azerbaijan needs to distance itself from Israel. *Tehran Times*. 2021. October 11. URL: <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/465911/Why-Azerbaijan-needs-to-distance-itself-from-Israel> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

chases, has resulted in a heightened Iranian response²¹. This relationship has been underscored by the opening of the Azerbaijani embassy in Israel, marking the first Shi'ite Muslim country to establish such diplomatic representation. Recent statements by the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan during a visit to Turkey, proposing the establishment of an Azerbaijan-Turkey-Israel platform²², further underscore the deepening ties between Azerbaijan and Israel.

Baku's economic policy primarily revolves around connecting Caspian hydrocarbon resources to global markets. The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) initiated the transportation of Azeri gas to the EU through Georgia and Turkey in 2021²³. Azerbaijan aims to augment gas volume, particularly during the ongoing European energy crisis. However, the nation's natural gas production falls short of satisfying European demand, necessitating connections to the reserves of other Caspian states, notably Turkmenistan. The resolution of the Kepez/Sardar dispute and the establishment of the shared Dostlug gas field is a significant step in this direction²⁴.

Azerbaijan is striving to enhance its geopolitical significance by positioning itself as a logistics and trade hub. The Aktau port of Kazakhstan already dispatches oil and other commercial goods to Europe through the port of Baku and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, known as the Middle Corridor²⁵. Another significant project, the North-South route, poised to connect the Indian market to Russia via

Iran's Chabahar port and Azerbaijan, received a boost with a trilateral agreement in 2022²⁶.

The establishment of the so-called Zangezur corridor from the Nakhchivan exclave to Azerbaijan through Armenia has emerged as a new logistics initiative following the Karabakh war. Although Article 9 of the 2020 ceasefire agreement mentions this mechanism, there has been no progress, leading to recurring clashes with Armenia. This corridor would reduce Baku's reliance on Iran to connect to Nakhchivan and circumvent Armenia to reach Turkey.

In summary, Azerbaijan is pursuing an active multi-directional diplomatic approach to capitalize on the advantageous position gained post-2020, balancing relationships with various actors in the region. However, this policy entails significant risks due to conflicting interests among Baku's partners. Closer ties with Russia could potentially impede increased gas provisions to the EU amid the ongoing crisis in Ukraine. Additionally, the strained relations with Iran may contribute to regional instability.

Armenia: Between the rock and a hard place

The consequences of the 2020 war have presented challenges for Yerevan, both internally and externally. Opposition to Prime Minister Pashinyan has constrained the administration's flexibility in reaching a final peace agreement with Baku. This not only jeopardizes Pashinyan's position but also raises questions about the long-term partnership with Russia, due to Moscow's hesitance in intervening within the CSTO framework. While certain

²¹ Arms Trade Importer/Exporter TIV Tables. *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*. URL: <https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/values.php> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

²² Türkiye, Azerbaijan eye stronger ties amid rapprochement with others. *Daily Sabah*. 2023. July 31. URL: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkiye-azerbaijan-eye-stronger-ties-amid-rapprochement-with-others> (accessed: 17.08.2023).

²³ TAP transports first 5 bcm of natural gas to Europe. *Trans Adriatic Pipeline*. 2021. September 16. URL: <https://www.tap-ag.com/news/news-stories/tap-transport-first-5-bcm-of-natural-gas-to-europe> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

²⁴ Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan Finally Reach Deal On Lucrative Caspian Sea Energy Field. *RFE/RL*. 2021. January 21. URL: <https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan-turkmenistan-deal-caspian-energy-field-dostlug-/31061674.html> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

²⁵ Kumenov A. Kazakhstan starts exporting oil through Middle Corridor from New Year. *Eurasianet*. 2022. November 11. URL: <https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-starts-exporting-oil-through-middle-corridor-from-new-year> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

²⁶ Azerbaijan, Russia, Iran ink declaration on development of North-South Transport Corridor. *News.Az*. 2022. September 9. URL: <https://news.az/news/azerbaijan-russia-iran-ink-declaration-on-development-of-north-south-transport-corridor> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

factions advocate for a more pro-Russian policy, there's a counter-movement pushing for withdrawal from this organization²⁷. This option was contemplated at the highest levels when Prime Minister Pashinyan recently declined to sign a joint declaration within the CSTO²⁸.

Although it is improbable for the Armenian-Russian relationship to suddenly deteriorate, the perception of Russia's reluctance to intervene on Armenia's side has led Yerevan to seek alternative partners in its struggle against Azerbaijan. The Pashinyan administration's attempts to foster closer ties with the EU faced opposition both in Moscow and within pro-Russian circles in Armenia, even before the 2020 war, mainly due to Russia's aim of excluding Western actors from the region.

Armenia has sought the involvement of Western actors, especially France and the United States, in resolving the conflict since the war's conclusion. US House of Representatives Speaker Pelosi's visit to Yerevan and her declaration of support for Armenia against Azerbaijan and Turkey marked an attempt in this direction²⁹. French President Macron's criticisms of Baku have drawn a strong response from Azeri President Aliyev, causing tensions and indicating France's alignment with Armenia³⁰.

Armenia's foreign policy historically emphasizes its relationship with Iran, especially since Iranian authorities declared in

2007 that economic sanctions on Iran could threaten Armenia's national security. Following the 2020 war, Iran seeks closer ties with Yerevan to maintain its land connection to Georgia and secure a foothold in the EAEU market by investing in Armenia. This alignment is driven by mutual concerns regarding Baku's burgeoning relations with Turkey and Israel.

Iran and Armenia's deepened relations create an "axis of exclusion", given Moscow's reluctance to support Armenia. Iranian officials have openly expressed their readiness to take measures if Armenia's territorial integrity is endangered³¹. Diplomatic relations have strengthened, with Iran establishing a consulate in Armenia's Syunik region, aiming to bolster security for both nations and foster development along the North-South route. Additionally, both neighbors operate a joint free trade zone on their border to enhance bilateral economic cooperation.

Armenia seeks to strengthen its ties with India through infrastructure projects linked to Iran's Chabahar port. The goal is to serve as a transit hub on the Persian Gulf-Black Sea axis, aligning with Russia's North-South transportation project³². This Armenia-Iran-India connection might extend to the military sector through the acquisition of Iranian equipment such as Shahed-136 drones or Indian products, raising concerns among Azeri officials regarding Indian arms exports to Armenia³³.

²⁷ Yerevan Protesters Demand Armenia's Withdrawal from CSTO. *Hetq*. 2022. September 17. URL: <https://hetq.am/en/article/148401> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

²⁸ Chirciu D. Putin meets with Pashinyan after Armenian premier refuses to sign CSTO declaration. *AA*. 2022. November 24. URL: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/putin-meets-with-pashinyan-after-armenian-premier-refuses-to-sign-csto-declaration/2746701> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

²⁹ Gall C. Nancy Pelosi Visits Armenia Amid Conflict With Azerbaijan. *The New York Times*. 2022. September 17. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/17/world/europe/nancy-pelosi-armenia.html> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

³⁰ Azerbaijan cancels Armenia talks, says Macron cannot take part. *Reuters*. 2022. November 25. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/planned-brussels-meeting-between-armenia-azerbaijan-leaders-scrapped-interfax-2022-11-25/> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

³¹ Mehdi S.Z. Iran warns against border changes amid Azerbaijan-Armenia flare-up. 2022. September 14. URL: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/iran-warns-against-border-changes-amid-azerbaijan-armenia-flare-up/2685462> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

³² New chapter: Iran inaugurates consulate in Kapan, Armenia. *Tehran Times*. 2022. October 22. URL: <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/477844/New-chapter-Iran-inaugurates-consulate-in-Kapan-Armenia> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

³³ Assistant to Azerbaijani President meets with Indian Ambassador. *Azeri-Press Agency (APA)*. 2023. July 26. URL: <https://apa.az/en/foreign-policy/assistant-to-azerbaijani-president-meets-with-indian-ambassador-to-country-408450/> (accessed: 17.08.2023).

Georgia: Taking a wait-and-see approach

For Tbilisi, the return of the Russian army to Azerbaijan presents the risk of potential military containment by Russia. Since the Rose Revolution, Georgia has adhered to an asymmetrical balancing strategy in its relationship with Russia. This approach involves considering Turkey as a “gateway to the West” and a balancing actor in regional policies. However, the positive upswing in Russian-Turkish cooperation, combined with Ankara’s deteriorating relations with Western actors, raises the possibility of Georgia being isolated. There’s a concern that any move to end Armenia’s isolation by Turkey and Azerbaijan as part of a potential peace agreement could potentially undermine Georgia’s significance as a transit country by diversifying energy and transportation routes.

Despite strained relations since 2008, interactions between Russia and Georgia still hold significance, especially for the latter. Georgia is cautious about cooperating with Russia on regional platforms and is striving to diversify its economy, aiming to reduce dependency on Russia. For instance, in response to the Crimean crisis in 2014, Georgia signed the Georgia-EU Association Agreement in June of the same year, differing from Armenia’s decision to join the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). However, commercial relations between the two nations remain crucial for Georgia’s economic well-being. Moreover, Tbilisi refrained from joining the international sanctions regime against Moscow after the Ukraine Crisis. Former Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia, Grigory Karasin, acknowledged Russia’s approval of Georgia’s situation, suggesting that the West seeks to pressure the country due to its “very calm relations” with Russia³⁴.

Nonetheless, Georgia’s primary objectives revolve around maintaining its sovereignty and territorial integrity while aspiring to join European and Euro-Atlantic organizations, as

outlined in its National Security Concept³⁵. Given Tbilisi’s reluctance to engage in regional cooperation and dialogue platforms, it is reasonable to argue that a policy of “passive neutrality” characterizes Georgia’s foreign policy approach.

Turkey stands as Georgia’s closest neighbor in terms of cooperation. The ruling Georgian Dream party came to power with objections against Turkish economic and cultural influence in the country [Shamarina 2020: 235]. However, this did not progress beyond political discourse, and positive relations persisted. Bilateral trade between the two countries is highly liberalized, allowing companies from both nations to operate freely with few regulations. Additionally, Turkey serves as the top exporter in the Georgian market³⁶ and is a leading investor in Georgia [Yurdakal 2021].

Main truck routes to Central Asia and the Caucasus, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, and the BTC pipeline demonstrate an advanced level of partnership in logistics. Transit fees constitute an important income for the Georgian economy. However, Tbilisi’s stance on regional transportation liberalization remains unclear, as it could involve the restoration of Soviet-era train routes passing through Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While this could bring significant economic benefits, Tbilisi is reluctant to accept such a development as it could be seen as compromising its stance on territorial integrity. Moreover, the potential route connecting Baku to Nakhchivan through Armenian territory, bypassing Georgia, threatens its role as a transit country [Avdaliani 2022: 310].

Georgia’s diplomatic situation, shaped by differences with Russia, has prompted a more passive foreign policy stance to avoid potential trouble from Moscow. This delicate balance requires Tbilisi to approach various regional issues cautiously. For example, trilateral cooperation with Baku and Ankara necessitates wariness of Russia’s reaction, participation in inclusive regional plat-

³⁴ “The West is twisting Georgia’s arm over its relations with Russia” – Grigory Karasin. *JAM News*. 2023. August 2. URL: <https://jam-news.net/karasin-georgia-russia/> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

³⁵ National Security Concept of Georgia. *Ministry of Defence of Georgia*. 2018. URL: <https://mod.gov.ge/uploads/2018/pdf/NSC-ENG.pdf> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

³⁶ Gürcistan Ülke Profili [Georgia Country Profile] *Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Türkiye*. 2022. URL: <https://ticaret.gov.tr/data/5ef464c013b8767a58021859/G%C3%BCrcistan%20%C3%9Cİke%20Profili-Ekim2022.pdf> (accessed: 10.03.2023).

forms in the Caucasus is hampered by the unresolved Abkhazian/South Ossetian issues preventing diplomatic engagement with Russia, and keeping relations with Ukraine at a distance to avoid provoking Russia. In essence, Tbilisi adopts a cautious “wait and see” strategy, being careful not to provoke Russia while maintaining its stance on territorial integrity.

* * *

The year 2016 marked a significant turning point in the relationship between Russia and Turkey. After the well-known jet crisis that strained their ties, the two nations successfully worked towards reconciliation. The coup attempt in Turkey in the same year further solidified the already improving relations, with Russia's supportive stance playing a crucial role. Post-2016, their cooperation extended beyond traditional areas, like energy infrastructure projects, to encompass domains like conflict resolution and arms trade.

This article delves into the impacts of the new mode of relations between Russia and Turkey on the foreign policies of South Caucasian countries. It analyzes how small states might react to changing dynamics in the regional balance of interests.

In our first case, Azerbaijan has been increasing its regional influence through its material capability and by strengthening bilateral relations with Russia and Turkey. Baku is also advocating for a trilateral Georgian-Turkish-Azerbaijani partnership to transport its hydrocarbon resources to European markets. However, the current trend could encounter resistance if Baku faces pressure from the West due to the ongoing conflict with Armenia. Worsening relations with Iran pose another

threat to regional stability. In summary, Baku has maintained relative independence in its foreign policy by fostering close ties with both Russia and Turkey, thus avoiding falling under direct influence from these countries.

Armenia, on the other hand, finds itself in a challenging position. The country could not secure the unconditional support it sought from the CSTO during the 2020 war and following border clashes. This might lead to pro-Western sentiments, urging Yerevan to align with Tbilisi's pro-European course and potentially alter the balance of power in the South Caucasus. These developments have left Armenia, Russia's most important ally in the region, vulnerable, potentially resulting in distancing from Russia and leaning towards the US or the EU. In brief, the country is seeking ways to mitigate the effects of Russian influence with the aid of an offshore balancer to support its dispute with Azerbaijan.

Georgia, since the early 2000s, has viewed Turkey as a “gateway to Europe” and a balancing actor. A robust Turkish-Russian alignment would necessitate a reevaluation of its foreign policy. Georgia perceives Russia as the occupier of its territory and refrains from participating in regional platforms due to the presence of the latter. However, Tbilisi's reluctance to engage in sanctions against Russia, combined with the significant influx of Russian migrants into Georgia and flourishing bilateral trade, could potentially improve relations between the two countries. Consequently, Georgia is adjusting to evolving conditions by pursuing a neutral stance in regional conflicts, aiming to avoid provoking Russia. Simultaneously, it remains committed to preserving its territorial integrity concerning Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

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ТРЯСУЩАЯСЯ ШАХМАТНАЯ ДОСКА

ВЛИЯНИЕ ИЗМЕНЕНИЙ В РОССИЙСКО-ТУРЕЦКИХ ОТНОШЕНИЯХ НА ЮЖНЫЙ КАВКАЗ

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Резюме

В данном исследовании рассматривается влияние динамики российско-турецких отношений на внешнюю политику государств Южного Кавказа. С 2016 г. взаимодействие этих двух игроков существенно изменилось и оказало влияние на многие регионы, в том числе и на Кавказ. Анализ

нового режима российско-турецких отношений после 2016 г. и его последствий для региона необходимо для лучшего понимания внешнеполитических решений государств Южного Кавказа. В этой связи исследование начинается с рассмотрения стратегических подходов Российской Федерации и Турецкой Республики в регионе. Затем в статье даётся краткий обзор двусторонних отношений этих двух государств. Далее оценивается общий геополитический статус Азербайджана, Армении и Грузии, рассматривается возможное влияние динамики отношений между Россией и Турцией на их внешнюю политику. В статье делается вывод о том, что изменившиеся отношения между Россией и Турцией оказывают существенное влияние на внешнюю политику стран региона. В частности, в исследовании делается вывод о том, что Азербайджан проводит относительно автономную внешнюю политику и придерживается стратегии баланса, стремясь поддерживать отношения как с Россией, так и с Турцией, не становясь чрезмерно зависимым ни от одной из них. Особенно это стало заметно после Второй карабахской войны 2020 года, после которой Баку стал стремиться к ещё более тесным отношениям как с Анкарой, так и с Москвой. Армения же стремится уменьшить влияние России, добиваясь внешней поддержки в конфликте с Азербайджаном и изучая возможности включения в новые транзитные маршруты. В этом контексте Ереван стремится к более тесным связям с западными игроками, Исламской Республикой Иран и Индией. Грузия сохраняет свои притязания на Абхазию и Южную Осетию, но избегает участия в региональных конфликтах, чтобы не вызвать противодействие со стороны России, придерживаясь осторожной и осмотрительной стратегии, чтобы избежать любой эскалации, которая превратит страну в ещё один фронт в текущем кризисе между Западом и Россией.

Ключевые слова:

Россия; Турция; Южный Кавказ; Армения; Азербайджан; Грузия; внешняя политика; малые государства.