

TURKEY AND THE CAUCASUS

Mutual interests and influences in the post-Soviet era

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Introduction

As noted at various points in this volume, the historical trajectory of the Caucasus – both north and south – has been influenced by the policies of three regional powers since at least the seventeenth century (see Chapters 6, 7 and 22). Namely, the Russian Empire, Iran and the Ottoman Empire were all of major consequence to the development of the wider Caucasus through the early twentieth century. To be sure, there has been considerable historical continuity in this regard, as the successor states of these former imperial powers remain influential actors in the region. In this chapter, we will focus on Turkey and its policies towards the Caucasus with an emphasis on the post-Soviet period.

The presence of the Caucasus in Turkish history and vice versa dates back to at least the sixteenth century, when the Ottomans attempted to extend suzerainty over the region. Due to the region's domination by imperial Russia and the Soviet Union, as well as by various Iranian dynasties, the Ottoman and Turkish approach to the Caucasus must be understood in the context of relations and competition amongst major regional powers. The Treaties of Gulistan (1813) and Turkmenchai (1828) ushered in a stronger Russian presence in the Caucasus at Qajar expense and augured increasingly frequent Russo-Ottoman conflict, which eventually saw tsarist control extend into northeast Anatolia following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78. Russia returned Kars *oblast'* to the Ottomans in accordance with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (1918), while the incipient Soviet state ceded certain administrative prerogatives to its border regions of Nakhchivan/Nakhichevan (Azerbaijan) and Ajara/Adjara (Georgia) as part of the Treaty of Moscow and Treaty of Kars (1921), both signed with post-Ottoman Turkey.

Nevertheless, Soviet control effectively precluded any meaningful Turkish influence in the Caucasus for most of the twentieth century, and it has only been since the end of the Soviet Union that a clear Turkish policy vis-à-vis the Caucasus has come to fruition. While Turkey has cultivated significant influence in the security, economic and soft power spheres in the Caucasus for most of the post-Soviet period, Ankara's ability to retain its soft power prerogatives in the wake of recent regional and domestic political crises is less certain.

The northern Caucasus and its place in Turkish history

Between 1568 and 1878, the Russian and Ottoman Empires fought several wars over contiguous imperial borderlands, and most of these conflicts involved control of the Caucasus to some extent. The Ottomans suffered defeat in almost all of these wars and bore the brunt of major population shifts following Russian military victories. Indeed, the Russian Empire's expansion into the Caucasus led to the displacement of many local Muslim populations, most of whom subsequently resettled in Anatolia and other Ottoman provinces.

Although the exact number of migrants during this period is uncertain, approximately 15,000 Caucasians are estimated to have resettled in Ottoman territory between 1780 and 1800. An additional 12,000 refugees resettled around 1820, while some local Caucasian elites continued a gradual process of emigration over the first half of the nineteenth century. By the 1850s, however, population outflows accelerated in the wake of Russia's war against *muridism* in the north-eastern Caucasus, which culminated in the capture of Imam Shamil in 1859 (Karpas 1985). Similarly, scorched earth policies in the north-western Caucasus led to the mass exodus of Circassians and other northern Caucasian ethnic groups to various Ottoman cities in 1864 (Chochiev 2007). As such, an estimated 700,000 northern Caucasians fled to the Ottoman Empire between 1780 and 1876. The ethnic composition of these population shifts is duly challenging to determine with certainty, although essentially the entire Ubykh population and most Shapsugs were deported from the north-western Caucasus in 1864. The Abkhaz, Abazas and Kabardians faced partial deportation around the same time (see Chapter 14). In any case, religion was the primary shared feature among refugees from the northern Caucasus, as the Russian Empire's advance into the region disproportionately affected local Muslim populations. From the Ottoman perspective, moreover, ethnic distinctions were of secondary importance, and most migrants from the northern Caucasus simply came to be known as *Çerkes*/Cherkess (Karpas 1979; McCarthy 1995).

Major population shifts picked up pace in the southern Caucasus against the backdrop of the 1877–78 Russo-Turkish War and the Treaty of Berlin (1878), which saw the Ottomans cede Ajara and several territories in north-eastern Anatolia to Russia. Newfound Russian suzerainty – in conjunction with economic and spiritual encouragement from Ottoman authorities – prompted many Georgian-speaking Muslim elites to emigrate from Ajara, although Russia was able to entice some emigrants back by offering safeguards to Muslim legal institutions and Ottoman-style tax collection (Pelkmans 2002: 256). Net Muslim population outflows were significant in any case; between 1878 and the First World War an additional 700,000 Muslims from the wider Caucasus are thought to have emigrated, while various Christian populations resettled in Ajara and Kars *oblast'* (Karpas 1985). In the early Soviet years, moreover, various Muslim communities again left the Caucasus and were settled by the Ottomans and Turks in various cities across the Balkans, Anatolia, and Arab provinces such as Syria, Jordan, and even Palestine to fulfil specific administrative and security duties. Conversely, the First World War also saw major population shifts amongst Armenians in the wider region. In addition to the 1915 Ottoman massacre and deportation of Armenians, the Turkish re-conquest of eastern Anatolia spurred large-scale emigration of Ottoman Armenians to the southern Caucasus and effectively brought the demographic centre of the Armenian population under Soviet hegemony (Suny 1993: 131).

Prior to their cultural and linguistic assimilation, northern Caucasian migrants played an important role in both Ottoman and early republican Turkey's military and political structures (Kaya 2004). Under Ottoman rule, many were resettled in far-flung provinces to secure the frontier and repress political uprisings. During the Turkish War of Independence

(1919–23), northern Caucasians served as an important military bulwark against the occupying forces and, in some cases, came to fill important administrative roles following the establishment of the Turkish Republic (Çelikpala 2006). In more recent times, the most important military figure in Turkey, Chief of General Staff Doğan Güreş, was a descendant of northern Caucasian migrants (Gingeras 2011).

Caucasian migrants created various cultural and political associations in order to defend their rights and preserve their ethnic identity. In 1908, the organisation *Çerkes İttihad ve Teavün Cemiyeti* ('Circassian Association for Unity and Solidarity') was established in Istanbul, while various others were created around the time of the First World War, including *Türkiye Şimali Kafkasya Cemiyeti* ('North Caucasian Association of Turkey') and *Kafkasya Mühacirler Komitesi* ('Committee of Caucasian Refugees'). The early republican period witnessed the emergence of new organisations such as *Kafkas Kurtuluş Komitesi* ('Committee for the Liberation of the Caucasus') and *Kafkasya İstiklal Komitesi* ('Committee for the Independence of the Caucasus'), although these entities were not permitted to engage in anti-Soviet activities due to Turkey's 1925 signature of a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union (Çelikpala 2006). Ankara's policy of promoting Turkish identity among its ethnic minorities, moreover, meant that many of Turkey's Caucasian associations lost relevance in the interwar period (Wessenlink 1996).

The Soviet Union's short-lived territorial claims to Kars, Ardahan and Artvin after the Second World War (Suny 1994: 284–285) – as well as Turkey's eventual alignment with the Western Bloc and accession to NATO in 1952 – spurred widespread anti-communism in Turkey. This development abetted Turkey's Caucasian associations in two ways. Firstly, anti-communism engendered positive relations between some northern Caucasian associations and various anti-communist nationalist circles, although such alliances admittedly had little impact on domestic politics. Of slightly greater import were those associations that pursued anti-Soviet initiatives in Europe and in the US, often in conjunction with Western media outlets such as Radio Free Europe. Among these associations, the most famous were *Dosteli Dayanışma Demegi* ('Association for Friendship and Solidarity') and *Kafkas Kültür Demegi* ('Caucasian Cultural Association'), established in 1946 and 1953, respectively. Nevertheless, Caucasian mobilisation within Turkey remained marginal until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, when the descendants of North Caucasian migrants – despite their cultural assimilation into the Turkish state – created a number of new associations (Bezanis 1994).

Three broad ideological orientations were evident among Turkey's North Caucasian associations. Some associations supported cultural and linguistic integration in Turkey and cooperated closely with Turkish nationalist groups (Erciyes 2008), whereas other associations sought to retain their cultural particularities and promoted the idea of eventually returning to their historic homeland if political conditions in the former Soviet Union allowed. The third orientation featured a comparative neglect of the ethnic dimension of north Caucasian identity, adhering instead to a more conservative and Islamist ideology. While their impact on Turkish foreign policy was marginal during the Cold War, Caucasian associations as a whole gained more influence in relations between Turkey and the post-Soviet space, particularly with the Russian Federation and the Republic of Georgia.

In the Russian Federation, Turkey's Caucasian associations began to develop business and cultural contacts with 'their' respective titular national republics soon after the fall of the Soviet Union. The associations' most visible role in Turkish-Russian relations, however, emerged during the conflict in Chechnya. While not all of them were of Chechen origin, Turkey's Caucasian associations by and large expressed solidarity with Chechen separatists during the First Chechen War (1994–96) and mobilised in support of the Chechen cause. Some descendants of Caucasian migrants even joined forces with Chechnya's separatists in

combat against Russian forces (Gafarli 2014). Additionally, many Turkish municipalities organised events in support of Chechen independence, and in several cities certain streets took on Chechen names.

For its part, official Ankara was somewhat ambivalent towards the first Russo-Chechen conflict. Turkey expressed support for Russia's territorial integrity but did not prevent pro-Chechnya mobilisation among domestic Caucasian associations (Olson 1996). Likewise, Turkey refused to recognise Chechnya's independence, although on several occasions it hosted Chechen separatist leader Dzhokhar Dudaev and permitted the separatist movement to establish a small representation in Turkey. Ankara's official stance changed markedly during the Second Chechen War (1999–2009). Indeed, Turkey expressed unambiguous support for Russian territorial integrity, due in part to the Islamist character of the conflict as well as concerns that Russia could potentially stoke separatism amongst Turkey's own Kurdish population. Moreover, Ankara cooperated with Moscow in monitoring and repressing pro-Chechen voices in Turkey, particularly after the seizure of the Istanbul Swissôtel by pro-Chechen gunmen in 2001 (Larrabee and Lesser 2003: 113). On the other hand, Turkey remained a haven for Chechens of all stripes during and after the Second Chechen War and Ankara allowed a large number of Chechen rebels to seek refuge in Turkey. Russia's suspected involvement in a spate of assassinations against Chechens in Turkey since 2008, however, suggests that the relatively lax barriers to establishing residence in Turkey did not translate into political protection, particularly for Chechens with links to separatist and Islamist groups (see BBC 2016; Vatchagaev 2015, 2016).

As with Russia, the Republic of Georgia had to take account of Turkey's minorities of North Caucasian descent in its bilateral relations with Ankara. During Tbilisi's ethno-territorial disputes with its breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the early 1990s, Turkish citizens of Abkhazian and Ossetian extraction tried to influence Turkish policy in support of their ethnic compatriots (Kapanadze 2014). Indeed, the *Kafkas-Abhazya Dayanışma Derneği*, ('Caucasus Abkhazia Solidarity Association'), created in August 1992 with the participation of 42 cultural associations, was very active in sending humanitarian aid to Abkhazia and even facilitating the transport of Turkish citizens to the region to fight alongside Abkhaz military units. After the conflict, Turkey's Abkhaz population continued to present challenges for Georgia-Turkey relations and occasionally sent ships to deliver supplies to Abkhazia, despite Tbilisi's sea blockade of the region. A comparable degree of mobilisation among Turkey's ethnic Georgian population in support of Georgia, on the other hand, was not observed. Indeed, Turkey's Georgians adhere to Islam, mostly have limited comprehension of the Georgian language, and are comparatively more integrated than other Caucasian populations in Turkey. As such, most Turkish Georgians do not identify strongly with the Georgian state or its emphasis on Orthodox Christianity, and any ties to Georgia are generally confined to Ajara (Weiss 2016: 14–15).

Turkey's policy towards the South Caucasus

Security, energy, and soft power define Turkey's interests in the South Caucasus. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, regional conflicts and their potential spillover effects emerged as the main point of concern for Turkey vis-à-vis the South Caucasus (Oskanian 2011). Abkhaz and South Ossetian separatism had a destabilising effect both on internal Georgian politics and Russia-Georgia relations, while armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the breakaway region of Nagorny Karabakh forced neighbouring countries into an increasingly precarious situation. As such, Turkey's main priority was to remain

neutral and thus prevent spillover onto its own territory and Caucasian minorities, and although Ankara has naturally been supportive of Azerbaijan in the Karabakh conflict, this support was exclusively political and did not entail Turkish military involvement.

Turkey's overarching position towards these regional ethno-territorial disputes has been to facilitate peaceful conflict resolution. Two initiatives in particular underline Ankara's mediating role. In the late 1990s, for example, then-President Süleyman Demirel proposed the creation of the *Caucasian Stability Pact* for the resolution of the Karabakh conflict (German 2012). Similarly, in the wake of the Russo-Georgian War (2008), then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan revived the initiative in the form of the *Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform* as a means of cooling Tbilisi's hostilities with South Ossetia and Russia (Fotiou 2009).

The second – and arguably more consequential – element in Turkey-South Caucasus relations is the energy issue. The Caspian basin is well known for its abundant oil and gas resources. During the Soviet period, these resources fell under the jurisdiction of the only two littoral Caspian states at the time, namely, the Soviet Union and Iran. With the independence of former Soviet republics in the early 1990s, the number of Caspian Sea littoral states increased to include Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, in addition to Iran and the Russian Federation (see Chapter 23).

Energy is a key element in Turkey's South Caucasus policy for two reasons. Most importantly, Turkey has developed aspirations as an East-West energy corridor thanks to its strategic geographic position (Winrow 2013). In this regard, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline has been a mainstay in Turkey's interest as an energy hub. Indeed, after several years of intense negotiations between transit countries, the United States and major oil companies, BTC was commissioned in 2006 and connected the Sangachal terminal in Azerbaijan with the Ceyhan marine terminal on Turkey's Mediterranean coast (BP Azerbaijan 2018). BTC has transported primarily crude oil from the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli (ACG) field and condensate from the offshore Azerbaijani Shah Deniz gas field (Uludağ et al. 2013). Additionally, Kazakhstan commenced intermittent BTC crude exports from its Tengiz field in late 2008 (Reuters 2008), while Turkmenistan has shipped intermittent volumes through the system since 2010 (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 2010). Kazakhstan may likewise export incremental crude volumes from expansions at its Kashagan field via BTC in the future (Reuters 2017).

In addition to crude and condensate transport, Turkey has assumed an increasingly important role as a hub for natural gas from Azerbaijan. Notably, the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) was developed in conjunction with BTC to transport gas from Shah Deniz. Commissioned in 2006 and extending from the Sangachal terminal to Erzurum in eastern Turkey, SCP initially supplied the Azerbaijani and Georgian markets and began feeding gas into Turkey's distribution network in July 2007. Moreover, the South Caucasus Pipeline Expansion (SCP Expansion) received a positive final investment decision in late 2013 (BP Azerbaijan 2018). The project aims to provide incremental gas transport capacity from the Shah Deniz expansion and will connect with the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) at the Turkey-Georgia border (BP Georgia 2018), thus allowing Turkey to transport gas further to European markets (Austvik and Rzayeva 2016). Apart from its nascent role as an energy hub, Turkey relies heavily on imported oil and gas. While Turkey imports oil primarily from Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Kuwait (*Hürriyet Daily News* 2017), Azerbaijan has supplied between 7.3 per cent and 14 per cent of Turkey's natural gas since 2010 (Energy Market Regulatory Authority 2018: 8).

Conversely – and despite high-level political assurances that would suggest otherwise – overall market conditions could hinder further expansion of Turkey’s natural gas linkages with the South Caucasus beyond the SCP Expansion and TANAP in their current forms, at least for the foreseeable future. In particular, gas supply from new field development in Azerbaijan has an uncertain commercial outlook in the wider European context, as liquefied natural gas and Russian gas from existing and new pipelines (for example, TurkStream) are likely to prove more competitive. Nor is the long-term demand outlook in Europe guaranteed to provide a sufficient price environment for new Azerbaijani gas and the corresponding transport infrastructure that it would require (Pirani 2018). While sanctioned upstream projects in Azerbaijan will continue to serve the domestic Turkish market and parts of Europe, Turkey’s revamped national energy policy seeks to reduce dependence on imported natural gas (Rzayeva 2018) and could thus dampen expectations for new infrastructure projects in the South Caucasus. In any case, however, Turkey’s overarching energy diversification policy and the investments made in TANAP and SCP to date have already cemented strategic trilateral relations between Ankara, Tbilisi and Baku (Valiyev 2015). Even if these linkages do not see expansion in the near-term, existing projects nevertheless underscore the importance of a stable and friendly South Caucasus for Turkey’s regional energy ambitions.

Turkish policies towards the individual states of the South Caucasus

The three countries of the post-Soviet South Caucasus fall under Ankara’s *politique de voisinage*, calibrated in each case in accordance with their varied ethnic, political and geostrategic particularities. In this section, we will examine the drivers behind Turkey’s specific foreign policy approach vis-à-vis each Caucasian country, as well as how Ankara integrates the South Caucasus into its wider foreign policy orientation. For various reasons, Azerbaijan is Turkey’s most cherished regional partner, whereas Armenia–Turkey relations are the most complicated. In terms of geopolitics, however, Georgia is arguably the lynchpin of Turkey’s relations with the Caucasus and Central Asia as a whole.

Turkey’s relations with Georgia

For Turkey, Georgia is not simply a neighbour but represents a more-or-less unhindered gateway to the wider Turkic world (Ter-Matevosyan 2014). Indeed, the only ethnically Turkic entity with which Turkey shares a border is Nakhchivan, an Azerbaijani exclave sandwiched mostly between Armenia and Iran. As such – and considering both Turkey’s and Azerbaijan’s tenuous relations with Armenia – Georgia’s strategic importance for Turkey’s commercial access to Azerbaijan and the republics of Central Asia cannot be underestimated. In addition to major energy infrastructure projects such as BTC, SCP and TANAP, the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars (BTK) railway is another key component in Turkey’s commercial relations with the wider region and has further cemented positive trilateral relations between Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan (Cecire 2013b: 119). Commissioned in October 2017 with initial annual transport capacity of one million passengers and five million tons of freight, BTK has drawn accolades from Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and the European Union (EU) alike as an important interconnector between Europe and the Far East (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 2017).

Likewise, Turkey’s bilateral economic relations with Georgia have seen steady growth over the past decade. In the realm of trade, the two countries signed a free trade agreement in 2007. Georgian imports from Turkey subsequently witnessed a compound annual growth

rate over the ensuing decade of around 7.5 per cent, climbing from \$700 million in 2007 to over \$1.35 billion in 2016 and making Turkey the largest import partner (around 18 per cent of total import volumes). By contrast, Georgia's imports from Russia stood at \$675 million in 2016, with other major trading partners such as Azerbaijan (\$495 million) and China (\$550 million) accounting for even less (World Bank 2018). Georgian export volumes to Turkey over the same period have been slightly less dynamic, with flat compound annual growth and 2016 exports amounting to around \$170 million. Nevertheless, exports to Turkey did see an uptick immediately following the implementation of the free trade agreement, standing at approximately \$260 million and \$220 million in 2008 and 2009, respectively (World Bank 2018).

Trade developments have been complemented by relaxed travel regimes. In 2009, Turkey and Georgia implemented a visa-free travel regime and further removed passport requirements in 2011 (Cecire 2013a: 2). Following the cessation of visa requirements, year-on-year tourism from Turkey to Georgia in 2010 increased by nearly 40 per cent to 530,000 visitors, while the number of Turkish visitors in 2012 increased by more than 100 per cent to around 1.5 million (Georgian National Tourism Administration 2018). Travel infrastructure has likewise kept pace, with the Batumi International Airport in Georgia's Autonomous Republic of Ajara falling under joint Turkish and Georgian operatorship. Efforts to establish a 'one-window model' at the two countries' common border crossings are underway.

In the political realm, Ankara has traditionally been a strategic partner for Tbilisi and something of a gateway to Europe and the West. Turkey is the only NATO member that borders Georgia and still aspired towards EU accession – at least officially – throughout the early 2000s. Accordingly, the development of positive relations with Ankara dovetailed with Tbilisi's own ambitions for Euro-Atlantic integration and access to Europe (Göksel 2013: 1). Moreover, cultivating good relations with Turkey has been key for Tbilisi's economic diversification away from Russia, and this process has enjoyed continuity across successive Georgian administrations.

For its part, Turkey has generally striven for good political relations with Georgia and has always expressed support for Georgia's territorial integrity against the backdrop of separatist movements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This has not always been easy given the existence of a well-organised Abkhaz minority in Turkey, which maintains economic relations with the de facto Republic of Abkhazia and lobbies for Turkish support of the separatist entity (Winrow 2009). While Tbilisi has not been able to prevent such material support, Georgian authorities have made greater efforts to supervise commercial and political cooperation between Abkhazia and Turkey's Abkhaz minority and have on occasion seized Abkhazia-bound vessels originating in Turkey.

Whereas Turkey and Georgia have maintained positive high-level economic and political relations, certain circles in Georgia have a negative perception of Turkey from a cultural standpoint. In large part, these negative perceptions are driven by Turkey's historical presence in Georgian regions such as Ajara and Samtskhe-Javakheti and the Islamicisation that occurred under Ottoman suzerainty. Such feelings have been particularly exacerbated in Ajara, where Turkey's strong commercial and cultural presence is viewed by some Georgians as revanchist (Balci and Motika 2007). The Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) and other organisations with close ties to the church have helped aggravate local attitudes towards Turkey and Islam more generally (Göksel 2013), and during the post-Soviet period they have effectively sought to redefine Georgian nationhood as inextricably linked to Orthodox Christianity. According to this narrative, Ajara – where ethnic Georgian Sunni Muslims account for around one-third of the region's population of 335,000 (Liles and Balci 2019: 288) – represents a historical aberration whereby Islam was imposed by force under

Ottoman domination. Moreover, the GOC and Georgian nationalist circles bemoan the presence of Turkish religious foundations in Georgia and their material aid to domestic Muslim communities, while at the same time calling for Turkey to restore Georgian Orthodox monasteries located in eastern Turkey.

Finally, the Gülen affair in Turkey, which will be described in greater detail below, has had negative implications for Turkey-Georgia relations and arguably Turkish foreign policy as a whole. As in many other countries, the Gülen movement – with its seven schools and International Black Sea University (IBSU) in Georgia, as well as multiple commercial entities – was an excellent instrument of soft power for Turkey. As long as the Gülen movement remained on good terms with the Turkish government, the movement benefited in Turkey and abroad from the support of the Turkish state. With the collapse of the alliance between Gülen and Erdoğan in Turkey, however, the dispute has extended to other countries, with Turkish diplomacy working towards the closure of the movement's establishments. Turkey has exerted notable pressure on the Georgian government to end the activities of Gülen-affiliated schools. For the Georgian government, these schools are important due to the quality of their education. Nor is it easy to declare them illegal after having supported them for many years.

Nevertheless, by early 2017, Tbilisi seemingly began to cave in to Ankara's demands. In February 2017, Georgia's Ministry of Education revoked the licence of the Gülen-linked Şahin Friendship School in Batumi, which had come under criticism from the Turkish consulate in Batumi immediately after the 2016 coup attempt against Erdoğan (OC Media 2017a). In May 2017, shortly after a visit by Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım to Tbilisi, Georgian authorities arrested Emre Çabuk, the manager of the Private Demirel College in Tbilisi (OC Media 2017b). The Ministry of Education shuttered the college's operations several months later, while Georgian authorities pushed forward with extradition proceedings against Çabuk (OC Media 2017c). Moreover, the Ministry of Education banned IBSU from admitting new students in August 2018 on alleged tax penalties. The ban followed statements by Turkey's ambassador to Georgia, in which she claimed that the Gülen movement was using Georgia as a base to organise operations against Turkey and criticised Tbilisi for not dismantling Gülen-affiliated schools more quickly (OC Media 2018).

Turkey's relations with Armenia

Of the three South Caucasian states, Turkey has by far the most complicated relations with Armenia. While these complications have numerous drivers, the two countries have fundamentally divergent narratives of their common history, particularly as relates to the Ottoman state's mass killing of parts of its Armenian population during the First World War.

As with other former Soviet republics, Turkey-Armenia diplomatic relations commenced in 1991. The Turkish-Armenian border was initially open for humanitarian purposes until 1993, when Turkey closed the border in solidarity with Azerbaijan over the Nagorny Karabakh conflict (Welt 2013). The border has remained closed and relations between the two countries remain conflictual, although some serious attempts have been made to improve relations. We will explain the main points of friction between the two countries, as well as failed efforts to resolve them and the potential for future normalisation.

Between 1991 and 2008, Turkey and Armenia pursued very few state-level initiatives for the improvement of relations. However, Armenian and Turkish business and civil society were able to maintain dialogue during this period. A good example of these initiatives was the

Turkish Armenian Business Forum, which has played a tremendous role in cross-border dialogue (Punsmann et al. 2012).

The so-called 'football diplomacy' initiative emerged as the first serious official push for normalisation between Turkey and Armenia. Specifically, in 2008 Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan invited his Turkish counterpart Abdullah Gül to Yerevan to watch a coincidentally scheduled World Cup qualifying match between the two countries' national teams (de Waal 2010). Two weeks later, Gül invited Sargsyan to Bursa to watch the return match. These two high-level meetings occurred against the backdrop of Turkey's 'zero problems with neighbours' policy, which was formulated by then-Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu (Gamaghelyan and Sayan 2018). Indeed, the wider political and regional setting was conducive to such initiatives, given the lack of major conflicts in the region, Turkey's generally positive image abroad, and the dynamism of the Turkish economy. Encouraged by these first meetings and with support from the United States, France, Russia and Switzerland, Turkey and Armenia continued to work towards normalisation through the Zürich Protocols. These protocols refer to two bilateral accords signed in 2009 by Armenia and Turkey that established a roadmap for bilateral normalisation (de Waal 2010). The Protocols required ratification from both Turkish and Armenian parliaments and mentioned neither the genocide issue nor Armenia's conflict with Azerbaijan. It was exactly because they neglected the importance of these two major questions that the Protocols did not achieve their objective.

Indeed, the genocide issue is sacrosanct for the Armenian state and diaspora. Both entities contend that the mass extermination of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in 1915 constituted genocide and believe that the Armenian state should work towards international recognition of the tragedy accordingly. Armenian officials say that they did not push the recognition of the genocide by Turkey as a pre-condition for ratification, although this issue obviously complicated the Zürich Protocols when they reached Armenia's National Assembly for approval (Goshgarian 2005).

While the Turkish reaction to the initiative was not particularly negative, Turkey's relations with Azerbaijan proved to be a major obstacle. The de-linking of the Nagorny Karabakh issue from the reconciliation process elicited strong protest from Baku, and Azerbaijan was able to exert major pressure on Turkey to reject the Protocols (Hill et al. 2015). Azerbaijan contends that Nagorny Karabakh and the surrounding districts occupied by Armenian forces must be returned to Azerbaijani jurisdiction. Considering Baku's aim is to isolate Armenia to the fullest extent possible, the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border fundamentally contradicted Azerbaijan's goal of encirclement. Azerbaijani authorities mobilised against the Protocols on two fronts. First, Azerbaijan utilised its strategic position in regional energy matters to discourage Turkish ratification. Just after the Zürich meeting, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev declared that his country was ready to revise its energy policy; Russia's Lukoil and Azerbaijan's national oil company SOCAR¹ subsequently signed a \$500 million contract to deepen energy relations. Additionally, Azerbaijan leveraged its ethnic and cultural links with Turkey, mobilising various nationalist networks and associations inside Turkey to sway public opinion against the normalisation process.

In summary, forces hostile to normalisation – namely, Azerbaijan and nationalist circles within Turkey and Armenia – managed to torpedo the ratification of the Protocols in both parliaments. The onset of the Arab Spring and the resulting security problems that it began to pose to Turkey subsequently sounded the death knell for Turkey's 'zero problems with neighbours' policy. Accordingly, Turkey abandoned normalisation attempts with Armenia and shifted its focus to more imminent security concerns, including the aggravation of the Kurdish issue in the context of the Syrian civil war, as well as security threats posed by the Assad regime and the so-called Islamic State.

Some positive aspects of bilateral relations have remained despite the failure of the rapprochement. Business and migration connections between Turkey and Armenia still exist (Görgülü 2008), and according to non-official sources, around 7,000 Armenians from Armenia work in Turkey. There are also charter flights between Istanbul and Yerevan and many Turkish products can reach Armenia through Georgian territory. Moreover, public debate on the Armenian genocide in Turkey is no longer taboo (Göksel 2015). Commemorations to genocide victims take place every year and are tolerated by Turkish authorities. In April 2014, then-Prime Minister Erdoğan, now president, made a surprising official declaration, in which he expressed his condolences to the descendants of the Armenians who perished in 1915. While Erdoğan did not specifically use the term 'genocide', such public condolences could conceivably serve as a basis for improved future relations between Turkey and Armenia. On the other hand, there have also been government attempts to minimise the importance of the genocide, as Turkish authorities in 2015 scheduled centenary observations of the Gallipoli Campaign to 24 April, which Armenians commemorate as the beginning of the genocide (Yackley 2015).

Turkey's relations with Azerbaijan

Turkey and Azerbaijan have a very close relationship due to numerous ethnic and cultural points of similarity. The Turkish and Azeri languages are mutually intelligible, and both countries claim descent from the Oghuz group of Turkic tribes. Azerbaijan has typically been the most eager participant in Turkey's various pan-Turkic organisations in the fields of education, culture and politics. While there are major differences in religious demographics – that is, Turkey is primarily Sunni while Azerbaijan is approximately 65 per cent Shi'a – confessional differences do not pose an obstacle to positive relations between the two countries. Indeed, secularism is officially enshrined in both Turkey's and Azerbaijan's constitutions. The 'Armenian factor', moreover, serves as another point of convergence for the two countries.

Turkey was the first country to recognise Azerbaijan's independence in 1991 and in 1992, nationalist forces came to power in Azerbaijan in the form of President Abulfaz Elchibey. As a committed pan-Turkist and former nationalist dissident who served prison time for anti-Soviet activities in the 1970s, Elchibey sought to deepen relations with Turkey at the expense of Russian and Iranian influence. Turkey-Azerbaijan relations blossomed during this period, but severe economic crises and Azerbaijan's poor performance in the Karabakh conflict forced Elchibey from power in 1993. He was replaced by the equally charismatic Heydar Aliyev, whose experience in the upper echelons of the Soviet ruling apparatus was in sharp contrast to Elchibey's origins amongst the nationalist intelligentsia. As a former KGB major general, First Secretary of Azerbaijan's Communist Party in 1969–82 and full-fledged Politburo member from 1982–87, Aliyev had deep experience in positions of influence and power (see Chapter 10). Following his re-emergence in 1993, he eschewed Elchibey's pan-Turkic ideology and opted for a multifaceted foreign policy that was more likely to benefit Azerbaijan in the long run, considering the country's weakness and precarious geopolitical position in the early 1990s (Cornell 2011). Of course, Aliyev's cultivation of relations with Russia, Iran and the West did not preclude warm relations with Turkey. Although some nationalist circles in Turkey perceived Aliyev as pro-Russian, the reality was in fact quite different. Before coming to power, while in retreat in his native Nakhchivan, Aliyev formed an excellent relationship with Süleyman Demirel, who served as Turkish prime minister several times and was president from May 1993 to May 2000. Despite his departure from Elchibey's policy, Aliyev's realism ultimately fostered more sustainable Turkey-Azerbaijan relations.

A major early manifestation of Aliyev's realism vis-à-vis Turkey was the 'contract of the century', which was signed in 1994 and envisioned the long-term development of various offshore oil and gas assets (Reuters 2017). For context, Azerbaijan has been a major producer of hydrocarbons since the nineteenth century, although these resources were largely geared towards domestic consumption during the Soviet period, with some exports via the Black Sea port of Novorossiisk. Following independence, Azerbaijan's leadership developed an interest in alternative export routes for its oil and gas resources. In order to lessen Azerbaijan's reliance on Russian export infrastructure, Heydar Aliyev threw his support behind export routes transiting Turkey with the support of the West and major international oil and gas companies. As such, construction on the BTC pipeline began in 1999 with the first oil shipments from Azerbaijan arriving in Ceyhan in 2006 (Yesevi and Tiftikcigil 2015). The aforementioned SCP was constructed in conjunction with BTC and commenced gas deliveries into Turkey's distribution network in 2007, while the SCP Expansion and TANAP will support the export of Shah Deniz natural gas to Europe.

Ethnic brotherhood and the oft-repeated mantra of 'one nation, two states' notwithstanding, good bilateral relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan were energised by this energy infrastructure and have been underpinned more by economic and commercial interests rather than simply common culture and language. Close economic relations have reached other sectors as well, with more than 600,000 Azerbaijani tourists visiting Turkey in 2015 and over \$11 billion in projects completed by Turkish contracting firms as of the end of 2015. Likewise, Azerbaijan is set to become a major foreign investor in Turkey. SOCAR has made considerable investments in Turkey, while Turkish construction companies feature prominently in Azerbaijan (Kardas and Macit 2015).

Turkey also undertook soft power initiatives towards Azerbaijan in the fields of education and culture. Just after the fall of the Soviet Union, Turkey awarded scholarships to thousands of students from the former Soviet Union in order to consolidate relations between Turkey and ethnically majority-Turkic former Soviet republics. Azerbaijan was a major player in this educational cooperation and the initiative allowed many Azerbaijani students to obtain degrees from Turkish universities. Simultaneously, many Turkish students travelled to Azerbaijan for higher education. Such exchanges likewise extended into the spheres of art and literature. Religious cooperation also grew despite confessional differences. Namely, the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, or simply *Diyanet*, has restored and constructed mosques in Azerbaijan and even established a faculty of theology at Baku State University.

In the non-governmental sector, Turkish nationalist and religious organisations have established various programmes and activities in Azerbaijan. Up to mid-2016, the most active of these was the Gülen movement, which is a global religious network with interests in education, business, media and even politics (Balci 2017). Indeed, Gülen affiliates had created various schools and educational centres in post-Soviet Azerbaijan as well as the influential Qafqaz University in Baku when relations between this movement and the Turkish government were good. In 2012, relations began to sour between the Gülen movement and the Justice and Development (AKP) government under Erdoğan's leadership. The main reason for the rift was a rivalry that gradually emerged between the two groups in Turkey's domestic political and foreign policy domains. Initially very close to the government, the Gülen movement cultivated a desire for greater autonomy and political power following its growing influence in the early 2000s. Domestically, the movement was comparatively more nationalistic and opposed the Erdoğan government's attempts at resolving the Kurdish issue. The two groups also had conflicting visions on key questions in the foreign policy sphere. When the Erdoğan government adopted a more

conciliatory posture towards Israel, for example, the Gülen movement largely criticised the initiative. Relations completely deteriorated after the failed coup d'état attempt in July 2016, which Erdoğan attributed to the Gülen movement and its infiltration of the Turkish state. Declared a terrorist organisation by Turkey, this movement has come under constant pressure from Ankara since 2016, both domestically and abroad.

In Azerbaijan, Turkish pressure led to the official closure of educational and business entities associated with the movement in 2013, although many of these institutions continued to function under different names and new ownership. However, after the failed coup d'état in Turkey, Turkish pressure on Azerbaijan accelerated and all Gülen movement establishments were closed. The AKP-Gülen rupture has arguably strengthened Turkey's bilateral relations with Azerbaijan. Indeed, during a joint press conference in Baku in July 2018, Erdoğan thanked President İlham Aliyev for Azerbaijan's cooperation in the campaign against Gülen and promised to improve transport infrastructure and medical services between Turkey and Nakhchivan (Turan *İnformasiya Agentliyi* 2018a). Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu reemphasised Ankara's gratitude shortly thereafter (Turan *İnformasiya Agentliyi* 2018b). Despite the positive role played by the Gülen movement in business and education, moreover, Azerbaijani authorities are generally wary of any independent religious mobilisation and had a longstanding tenuous relationship with Sunni missionaries from Turkey (International Crisis Group 2008: 9). Thus, Turkey's crackdown on Gülen essentially paved the way for increased Azerbaijani repression against independent Sunni actors.

While Turkey-Azerbaijan relations have mostly flourished in the post-Soviet era, other obstacles have emerged from time to time. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the two countries' common adversary – Armenia – helped tarnish bilateral relations to a certain degree, and specifically as relates to Turkey's attempted normalisation with Armenia in the late 2000s. In the 'zero problems with neighbours' context, as noted above, Turkey engaged in talks with Armenia regarding the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border and a wider reconciliation. As described in previous paragraphs, this rapprochement foundered amongst disagreements over the de-linking of the Armenian genocide and Karabakh issues from the peace process. It is still unclear whether Turkish and Armenian negotiators had a clear conception of these two issues at the time. What is certain is that Azerbaijan criticised the rapprochement attempts given that Karabakh is vital to its interests with Turkey. More importantly, Baku threatened to rethink its relations with Turkey, especially on strategic questions such as energy (Mikhelidze 2010). The Turkish-Armenian rapprochement attempts have shown the limits of the 'one nation, two states' mantra between Turkey and Azerbaijan, and that an eternal honeymoon in bilateral relations was not guaranteed (Ismailzade 2006).

The rapprochement temporarily damaged relations between Baku and Ankara, although it did not prevent positive developments thereafter. Ankara confronted the choice between normalisation with Armenia and rupture of the special relationship with Azerbaijan and opted for the continuity of friendship with Azerbaijan. In the years following the Zürich Protocols, Turkish officials visited Azerbaijan several times to provide assurances of their solidarity with Baku, after which traditionally positive cultural, economic and political relations recovered. One prominent example that the Turkish-Armenian normalisation attempt did not derail was continued bilateral work towards the SCP Expansion and TANAP, which were approved by the project's commercial partners in 2013.

Conclusion

Since the end of the Soviet Union, Turkey has again emerged as an important regional power in the North and South Caucasus on both societal and state levels. Given the number of Turkish citizens with North Caucasian roots, political developments in the

region have had implications for Turks of Caucasian extraction. The First and Second Chechen Wars were illustrative of this trend, considering their impact on domestic issues and mobilisation in Turkey as well as Turkey's bilateral relations with Russia.

In the South Caucasus, the independence of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan in the early 1990s necessitated an entirely new Turkish foreign policy approach towards the region. Each of these states has a specific place in Turkey's foreign policy, with Azerbaijan taking precedence due to its ethno-linguistic proximities to Turkey and abundant oil and gas resources. Likewise, Georgia plays a major part in Turkey's geopolitical calculations due to its role as an energy transit nexus as well as the access it provides to the wider Turkic world. As for Armenia, there is still a latent desire in Turkey to normalise relations and open the border, although the complexities of Caucasian geopolitics and Turkey's more immediate interests in the Middle East will likely preclude any normalisation in the near term.

Apart from security and commercial interests, Turkey cultivated significant soft power in the South Caucasus in the spheres of culture, education and even religion. At least two domestic political narratives surrounding identity and geopolitics bolstered internal support for these soft power initiatives. The first narrative involved ethno-linguistic identity and the need to show solidarity with ethnically Turkic populations in the post-Soviet space. While the Turkish state's flirtations with full-blown pan-Turkism were limited, discourse surrounding ethnic kinship has remained and served to strengthen Turkey's ties with Azerbaijan. The second narrative belied a nostalgia for Turkey's bygone imperial power and could be viewed as a sort of 'neo-Ottomanism'. An underlying desire to enhance Turkey's position in former Ottoman spheres of influence underpinned Ahmet Davutoğlu's foreign policy concept from 2009–14. In this vein, the Caucasus occupied an important role as a corridor between Turkey and the wider Turkic world with all its cultural proximities, potential markets and resource abundance.

Prior to the failure of the Arab Spring, Turkish soft power under the AKP was particularly prominent in Azerbaijan and Georgia, despite the latter's somewhat negative societal attitudes vis-à-vis Turkey's historical presence in the region. Turkey's increasing involvement in Middle Eastern conflicts, however, led to an authoritarian turn in Turkish politics and Turkey's securitisation of a number of regional issues. As such, there have been negative implications not only for Turkish soft power, but also for the concept of Turkey as a development model for other Muslim countries in the region. Although Turkey will retain significant commercial influence in the South Caucasus for the foreseeable future, its ability to project soft power into the region is less clear.

Note

- 1 SOCAR (est.1992) stands for the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic.

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