



THE HISTORICAL DYNAMICS OF THE SECOND KARABAKH WAR AND THE SHIFT IN TURKEY'S POLICY: THE EFFECTS OF THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

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ABSTRACT

After the end of the Cold War, Turkey's Caucasus policy has undergone changes in the period from the 1990s to present, while the Nagorno-Karabakh policy has also changed. The change in both Turkey's Caucasus policy and Nagorno-Karabakh policy was most evident in the second Nagorno-Karabakh War. The policies implemented by Turkey during the war and the role it assumed are proofs of this change. The change, on the other hand, expresses a transition from discursiveness to activism. This transition is due to three main reasons; first, the dynamics in domestic politics, second, Turkey's capacity increase in all areas, and third, the impact of the Syrian Civil War. All these reasons paved the way for Turkey to follow more specific and more operational policies in its Nagorno-Karabakh policy. The second Nagorno-Karabakh War, containing important clues for understanding Turkey's policies in both Azerbaijan and the Caucasus, is an event that has a subtext and a background for a better understanding of Turkey's regional power goals.

Keywords: Turkey's Nagorno-Karabakh Policy, Nagorno-Karabakh Issue, II. Nagorno-Karabakh War, Turkey's Caucasus Policy, Turkey-Azerbaijan Relations

İKİNCİ KARABAĞ SAVAŞININ TARİHSEL DİNAMİKLERİ VE TÜRKİYE'NİN POLİTİKASINDAKİ DEĞİŞİM: SURİYE İÇ SAVAŞININ ETKİLERİ

ÖZ

Soğuk Savaş'ın sona ermesinden sonra 1990'lardan günümüze kadar geçen süreçte Türkiye'nin Kafkasya politikasında değişimler yaşanırken Dağlık-Karabağ politikası da değişime uğramıştır. Türkiye'nin hem Kafkasya politikası hem de Dağlık-Karabağ politikasındaki değişim en belirgin olarak II. Dağlık-Karabağ Savaşı'nda gözlemlenmiştir. Türkiye'nin savaş süresince uyguladığı politikalar ve üstelendiği rol, bu değişimin delilleridir. Değişim ise söylemsellikten eylemselliğe doğru bir geçişi ifade etmektedir. Bu geçiş başlıca üç ana nedenden kaynaklanmaktadır; birincisi, iç politikadaki dinamikler, ikincisi, Türkiye'nin her alanda kapasite artışı ve üçüncüsü, Suriye İç Savaşı'nın etkisi. Tüm bu nedenler, Türkiye'nin Dağlık-Karabağ politikasında daha belirgin ve daha operasyonel politikalar izlemesinin yolunu açmıştır. II. Dağlık-Karabağ Savaşı, Türkiye'nin hem Azerbaycan hem de Kafkasya politikalarının anlaşılması için de önemli ipuçları barındırmaktadır. II. Dağlık-Karabağ Savaşı, Türkiye'nin bölgesel güç hedeflerinin daha iyi anlaşılması için de alt metni ve arka planı olan bir olaydır. Bu bakımdan Dağlık-Karabağ politikasındaki eylemsel bir politikaya geçişin görüldüğü II. Dağlık-Karabağ Savaşı, aynı zamanda Türkiye'nin Azerbaycan ile zaman ilerledikçe işbirliği alanlarını çok daha fazla arttıracak ve stratejik işbirliği hedeflerinde ideal noktaya taşıyacağı da garantörü niteliğindedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye'nin Karabağ Politikası, Karabağ Meselesi, II. Karabağ Savaşı, Türkiye'nin Kafkasya Politikası, Türkiye-Azerbaycan İlişkileri

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Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, new opportunities emerged in the Caucasus in the 1990s and Turkey started to have new dreams both regionally, and for Azerbaijan specifically, which gained its independence. However, as time progressed, relations with Azerbaijan did not reach the desired level from the Turkey's point of view. This situation also affected Turkey's policies on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In the years of the 1990s, the main reasons for this were undoubtedly Turkey's internal dynamics and lack of capacity. However, besides these, the international conjuncture also created obstacles for Turkey to pursue a policy at the expected and desired level in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; consequently, during the 1990s, while Turkey's goals in relation to Azerbaijan remained at a discursive level, operationally inadequate, the same situation was also experienced in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. After 2002, the fact that AK Party came to power alone strongly, its foreign policy manifesto prompted new dynamics. Besides, after İham Aliyev ascended to power in 2003, the political environment over Nagorno-Karabakh began to change. In addition to all these, Turkey's growing capacity for action in the foreign policy and the developments occurred in the Middle East inevitably paved the way for Turkey to exhibit a more reactive approach in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict compared to previous years. Although the rhetoric of brotherhood is at the forefront in Turkey's relations with Azerbaijan, the benefits that the two countries would derive from each other grew into a more necessary and strategic requirement in today's international system. In this context, the need of Azerbaijan for Turkey in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Turkey's needs for Azerbaijan in various aspects, especially for energy security, increased the cooperation areas of the two countries more than before 2002, and this situation encouraged Turkey to follow more proactive policies in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Even though Turkey's interests with Azerbaijan were not coincided from time to time, and various events deteriorated the relations between the two countries, the relations of the two countries, which claim to be brothers, have always had to go forward. In this regard, especially in the second Nagorno-Karabakh War, the diplomatic and military support provided by Turkey, independent of external factors, enabled to be clearly seen the change in Turkey's Nagorno-Karabakh policy compared to the past years. In the present study, the change and transformation in the policy that Turkey followed in the Nagorno-Karabakh issue from the past to present were addressed and the reasons for this change and transformation were tried to be analyzed.

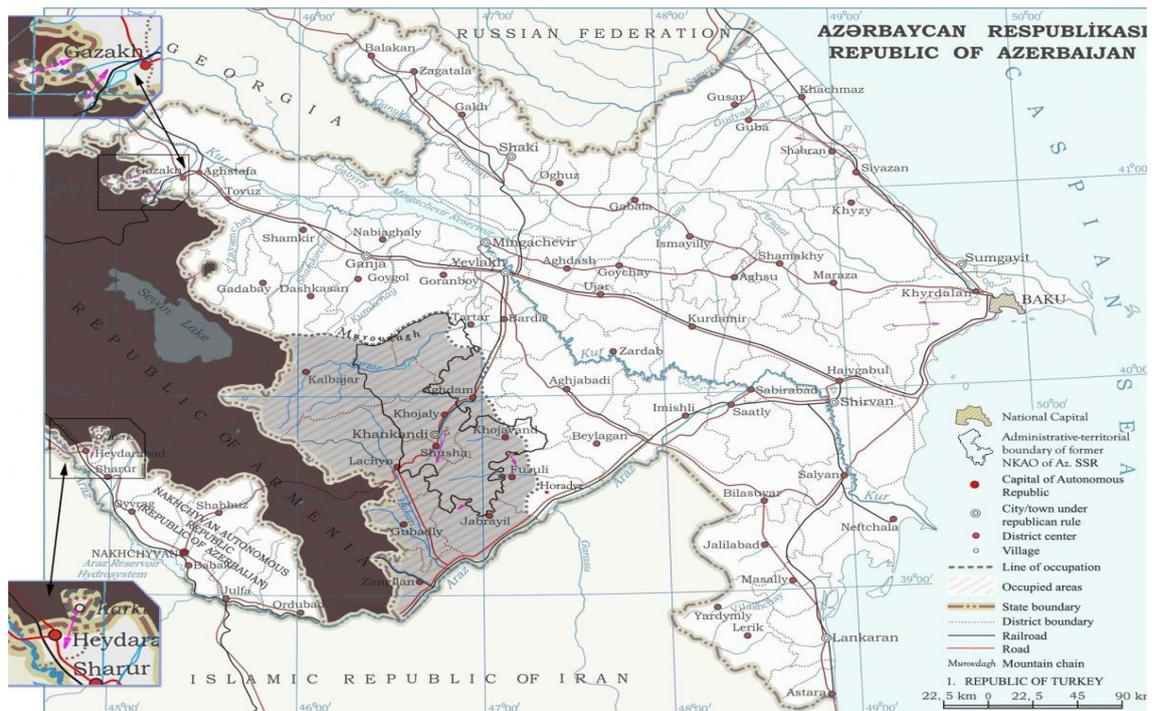
First of all, Turkey's policies on the Caucasus, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the 1990s were discussed. Afterwards, it was aimed to understand and analyze the change detected by a deductive approach and comparison by addressing Turkey's policies in the Caucasus, Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, after 2002. In addition, determining what meanings the Nagorno-Karabakh policies of Turkey include and to what extent they changed, in the second Nagorno-Karabakh War occurred in 2020 was aimed. On the other hand, the study contains important clues not only for understanding how and to what extent Turkey's policies on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict changed, but also for Turkey's relations with regional and global actors and the future of its foreign policy.

1. Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: General Explanation

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, also known as the Karabakh conflict or the Upper-Karabakh conflict, started in 1988 as a Soviet Union issue, 3 years before Azerbaijan and Armenia gained their independence (Askerov, 2020, p. 55).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Azerbaijan declared its independence in August of the same year. After the independence of Azerbaijan, Armenians living in

Nagorno-Karabakh declared the "Artsakh Armenian Republic" and turned to the strategy of separating Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan. However, the Azerbaijani parliament reacted by stating that this circumstance was against to the Azerbaijani Constitution. In September 1991, Yeltsin and Nazarbayev mediated the Zheleznovodsk Communiqué between Armenia and Azerbaijan and it ensured Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Despite the joint peace communiqué, mutual attacks continued in the region (Broers, 2019, p. 279). In the month of November in 1991, the helicopter carrying Russian and Kazakh observers, journalists and Azerbaijani officials was shot down by Armenia, and this incident caused a great outrage. Following the incident, Azerbaijan closed the railway to Armenia and abolished the Autonomous Status of Nagorno-Karabakh and connected it to Baku. In 1992, although the parties came together in Moscow and reached an agreement on a ceasefire, the Armenian forces committed a massacre with their attacks organized on Khojaly in the next period (De Waal, 2004, p. 160). Azerbaijan officially stated that the 366th Russian regiment also participated in this attack. On March 24, 1992, the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) decided a conference to be held in Minsk, the capital of Belarus, for a solution in Nagorno-Karabakh. However, despite all the efforts of the Minsk Group for the solution, the Armenian side continued its attacks and occupations. The fact that Armenia is a member of the CIS led to Russia also engaging in supportive activities in these actions of Armenia. The confusion and power vacuum Azerbaijan experienced within itself caused that the Armenians took the control of many places from Azerbaijan in 1993. The domination of former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) by Armenia, which is under Russian control, served the interest of Russia, which wanted to dominate the Caucasus (Özçelik, 2017, pp. 446-450).



(Justice for Khojaly, 2020)

Figure 1: The Nagorno-Karabakh region before 2020

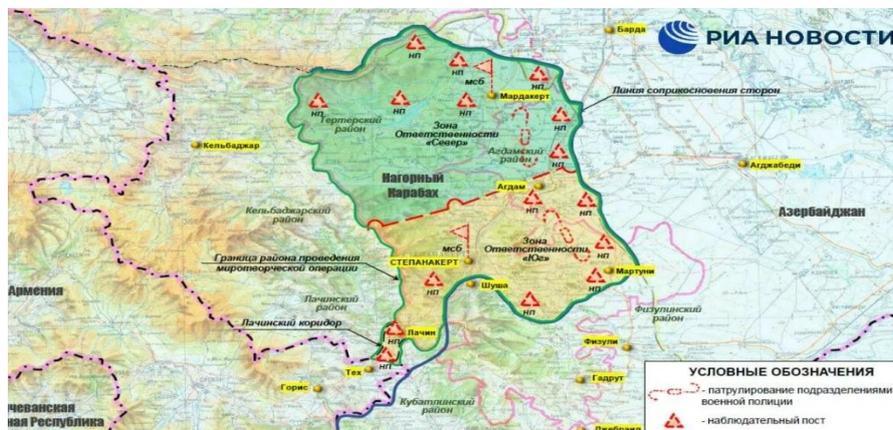
At the end of the total clashes in 1993, Armenian forces had been occupied seven adjacent regions besides the area of Former NKAO. "Bishkek Protocol" was signed between

Armenia and Azerbaijan in Moscow in 1994 with Russia's mediation and since then, although the Karabakh Dispute has been seen as a frozen Post-Soviet issue, the violence incidents have never completely ended between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the region. Just as the two countries did not have diplomatic channels, they saw each other as the main enemy (Askerov, 2020, pp. 55-56).

In 1994, the Minsk Group, co-chaired by the USA, Russia and France, was established by the OSCE for the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The aim of the group was to establish peace by frequently bringing the leaders of the two sides together; however as neither sides accepted the targeted solution proposals, the Minsk Group failed. The problem left behind more than 30,000 human casualties, and nearly one million refugees and forcibly relocated people. The former NKAO was regarded as a part of Azerbaijan by the international community, but Armenia maintained its insistence on the independence of the former NKAO (Askerov, 2020, p. 56). But Even after 1994, armed conflicts often occurred between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the border areas.

By the year of 2020, the second Nagorno-Karabakh War started with the clashes erupting on the contact line on September 27; and the balances in the Nagorno-Karabakh problem, which has not been resolved since 1990, changed in favor of Azerbaijan after Azerbaijan won the war with the support of Turkey, although Turkish Armed Forces did not directly fight against Armenia in the area.

Azerbaijan was considered to have won a victory by reclaiming its lands and ending the uncertainty experienced by hundreds of thousands of refugees who have been waiting to return to their homes for 30 years. While it was speculated that Azerbaijan's victory was final and Turkey was the playmaker, a new balance emerged all of a sudden with the intervention of Russia. With an online peace agreement mediated by Russia, the deployment of Russian peacekeeping forces in Khankendi was brought to the agenda. Afterwards, Russia established the full control in the region deploying its Military Forces. Russia stepped in and intervened at the last minute to block developments beyond its control. Although Armenia had a dissatisfaction towards Russia because of not intervening earlier, it also considered the possibility that the presence of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh would come to an end if the war continued. On the other hand, although the circumstance seems to be the victory of Azerbaijan, there were uncertainty and anxiety experienced about what the fate of the region would be with the settlement of Russia in the region (Ismailov, 2020).



(Haberrus, 2020)

Figure 2: The region where Russian peacekeeping forces will be deployed

Although there are comments in various analyzes that Turkey's prestige increased and Azerbaijan won a decisive victory, the intervention of Russia and the deployment of its military forces in the region are of great importance for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the fate of the region, and also creates a disadvantageous situation for both sides of the war. Because since Nagorno-Karabakh passed from Armenian occupation to Russian military domination, it is predicted that both Armenia and Azerbaijan became more dependent on Russia in the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and Russia will use this situation as a leverage for both countries. In addition, this circumstance brings on regional advantages for Russia increases its regional dominance. In conclusion, when all aspects of the second Nagorno-Karabakh War were considered, it is thought that even though there are, of course, victories and gains for the winner of the war, Azerbaijan and its supporter Turkey, Russia is the most profitable country of the war with the developments occurred (Dündar, 2020; Milliyet, 2021).

2. Turkey's Foreign Policy Dynamics towards the South Caucasus in the 1990s

While carrying out alliance relations with the West throughout the Cold War, Turkey has shaped its security and foreign policy through its 'geostrategic importance'. However, when the Cold War ended, European countries found themselves in an increasingly secure environment in the international arena, while Turkey found itself in a security vacuum in which there are areas of conflict on three sides, and its geostrategic importance now became a subject of debate. Besides this security vacuum and its concern, great opportunities arose for Turkey, and accordingly Turkey became quite excited about these opportunities and advantages. Because Turkey had common cultural and religious ties with the newly independent countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia geography. While the USA supported Turkey's influence in the former Soviet geography, Russia overlooked these initiatives (Oran, 2010, pp. 369-370).

As the Cold War conditions gradually disappeared in the 1990s, various changes have occurred in the Turkish Foreign Policy towards the region and different dynamics have emerged. With the international environment enabling a more active foreign policy, Turkey began to act with a more active foreign policy understanding in the former Soviet Turkish regions (Ege, 2008, p. 332). Turkey suddenly attempted to be effective on the region, hesitated due to the changes in the Caucasus. But Turkey's goals of playing a more active and effective role in the Caucasus faced various obstacles. Firstly, Turkey's financial and technological capability was not sufficient to meet the socio-economic demands in the region and it became clear in a short time (Oran, 2010, pp. 369-370).

Turkey's interest in the region could not move beyond being sentimental in the years between 1991 and 1995. Between 1995 and 2001, however, Turkey turned to policies more appropriate to its capacity and acted by taking into account the regional policies of Russia and China. The most important and effective politics of Turkey in the 1990s was undoubtedly the gains and policies it followed in delivering the energy in the Caspian Basin to the world market. The best example of this is the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline (Erdoğan vd. 2015).

2.1. Turkey's Azerbaijan Policy in the 1990s

A new era began in Turkey's foreign policy with the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. In this context, the South Caucasus region became a region with a strategic position both in terms of foreign policy and international relations for Turkey. In this respect, Azerbaijan also positioned in a very important place for Turkey, as it is Turkey's gateway to the Caucasus and Central Asia, in addition to sharing a common language, culture and history. Various treaties have been signed during the periods of Turgut Ozal and Ebulfez Elcibey also indicated a strong potential for the future in the

direction of developing the mutual relations in a multi-faceted way and towards bringing them to the level they should be. During Turgut Ozal's administration, Turkey endeavored to provide various kinds of support for Azerbaijan to become stronger and gain a respectable position in the international arena; and joint steps were taken by Turkey and Azerbaijan in many fields, especially in political, military, economic and cultural relations. Significant projects with partially effective results on a regional scale were also carried out (Gürler, 2015, pp. 69-79).

While Turkey initially took steps on political, military, economic and cultural issues, its initiatives became mostly limited to economic and cultural issues due to Russia's "Near Abroad" policy. Whereas since 1995, weaknesses emerged in Turkey's policies towards the region and Azerbaijan, and expectations were not met sufficiently. Turkey established Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) in 1992 for works such as coordinating aid to the region and Azerbaijan, and informing entrepreneurs in Turkey about investment in the region. Although there was an ever-increasing trade volume between Turkey and Azerbaijan until 1998, the expectations in this regard could not be met due to a sharp decline occurred in 1999. In the early 1990s, the facts that Turkey's Azerbaijan policy included concrete projects such as BTC, and the smooth running of political relations brought about a "strategic partnership" and a successful policy was implemented. But, since the second half of the 90s, Turkey faced the realities in Azerbaijan policy as in the region and was not able to implement the policies it desired due to lack of capacity (Erdoğan vd. 2015).

In the 1990s, various unexpected developments in Turkey – Azerbaijan relations also occurred and these had a disruptive effect on the relations between the two countries. The sale of wheat from Turkey to Armenia during the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict in 1992 left a negative memory in the relations between the two countries. In 1995, the emergence of the fact that Turkish citizens were behind the coup attempt by Rushen Javadov against Heydar Aliyev again led to negativity in the relations between the two countries (Ekşi, 2009, p. 103). However, despite the negative developments experienced, the highest level of cooperation was aimed by both sides in the relations, so various steps were tried to be taken in this direction (Gürler, 2015).

2.2. Turkey's Policy Towards the Karabakh Conflict in the 1990s

Turkey's approach to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue initially caused a negative effect on Azerbaijani side at the very beginning of the dispute. In one of his speeches Turgut Ozal evaluated the conflict as "an internal conflict of the Soviets" and said that "Azerbaijanis are Shiites thus they are more close to Iran than Turkey". Although this misinterpretation caused a cold shower in Baku at the beginning, Turkey always exhibited an attitude in Azerbaijan's side and wanted the conflict to be concluded in favor of Azerbaijan (Ekşi, 2009, p. 103). Turkey always emphasized the importance of solving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from the moment it started. By giving importance to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, Turkey, in the meantime, became closer to the other Turkic republics. Resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict became extremely important both diplomatically and in terms of domestic politics in the 1990s. The President of the Republic, Turgut Ozal, and the Council of Ministers warned Armenia in different ways; Turkey brought the issue to the agenda at the United Nations (UN), even stressed that it was ready for a military intervention, and tried to announce this situation to the world through the media. The next President, Suleyman Demirel, on the other hand, expressed the manifesto of Turkey's policy on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the 90s. Demirel stated that a political approach in an intermediary role would be correct on the grounds that Turkey's involvement in the war would cause tensions with the USA, as well as with Russia, in

addition to a religious conflict. Turkey made diplomatic initiatives at the UN, European Union (EU) and OSCE in the ensuing process (Safarov, 2020).

Perhaps one of the most important reasons why Turkey did not officially launch an attempt and intervention in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict outside of diplomacy in the 1990s was the harsh statement made by the Joint Chief of Staff of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Marshal Shaposhnikov, that Turkey's intervention would lead to the Third World War. With this statement, Turkey completely put out of mind about the possibility of intervening. In addition, Russia's support for Armenia and the absence of an ally, to support Turkey were again among the reasons that tied Turkey's hand. Under the influence of the Armenian lobby in the US, the US opposed the intervention of Turkey and applied an embargo against Azerbaijan. Besides, the Armenian Genocide allegations are not independent of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It can be said that all these had an effect on the policy of Turkey towards the issue.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict arose at a time when there was no political stability in both Turkey and Azerbaijan, and there were internal turmoils in Azerbaijan. These situations both prevented the healthy functioning of the relations between the two countries and became one of the factors that hindered Turkey from providing arms aid and conducting military intervention. That's why Turkey wanted to assume rather the role of "impartial mediator" and in this framework, it was especially effective in making the OSCE put the issue on its agenda. However, the statements made by the then President Turgut Ozal in favor of Azerbaijan caused this neutral mediation to lose its reality and brought about its end.

Although Turkey could not officially provide military aid in the Nagorno-Karabakh War in the 90s, it supplied various aids to Azerbaijan in different fields. For example, upon the occupation of Kelbajar by Armenia, Turkey closed its borders to Armenia, giving significant support to Azerbaijan and making it feel that it was not alone. By the time when the Armenian-Turkish negotiation began in 2021, Turkey generally kept the state borders closed and always continued its support to Azerbaijan on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue (Yilmaz, 2010, p. 28).

3. Turkey's Foreign Policy Dynamics towards the South Caucasus After 2002

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey wanted to take important steps in Central Asia and the Caucasus in the early 1990s, but due to its lack of capacity, these efforts resulted in disappointment. Besides, there were various problems occurred in the way Turkey implemented its foreign policy (Gürler, 2015). In the period after 2002, the dynamics of Turkey's foreign policy changed evidently. The biggest indicator of this change is undoubtedly understood from the new concepts that was introduced into use or found area of use. Some of these concepts are; Strategic Depth, Center State, Multi-dimensional Foreign Policy, Zero-problem with Neighbors, New Diplomatic Style, Win-win Strategy, Active Foreign Policy, Alliance of Civilizations, Energy Hub and Corridor, Civilizational Geopolitics, Neo-Ottomanism and Model-country. In particular, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu strived to establish the intellectual and theoretical background of Turkey's new foreign policy in a long-term and proactive manner (Balcı vd. 2011; Önen, 2020, p. 200).

After 2002, strong AK Party government alone, as well as the improvements occurred in the political and economic fields paved the way for Turkey to take more solid steps in foreign policy and expanded its capacity to act (İnat, 2014). Although it took time for Turkey to strengthen in foreign policy, it is necessary to address Turkey's foreign policy in a single period in general after 2002. As a matter of fact, the period after 2002

continued uninterruptedly as the AK Party's Foreign Policy and was accepted as such (Balci, 2013).

Turkey's relations with the Caucasus, which declined after the 90s due to various domestic politics and international reasons, intensified again after 2002, because of AK Party's foreign policy goals with coming to power. Turkey tried to concentrate on the region through various institutions and agencies. Undoubtedly, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) is in the forefront among these institutions. TIKA became more functional undergoing a structural transformation in this period. It wanted the environment of uncertainty and confusion brought on by the war in the Caucasus to end quickly and pioneered the establishment of the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (CSCP) in this direction (Denizhan, 2010, p. 22). Besides all the initiatives Turkey took, there are very important dynamics shaping Turkey's Caucasus policy. These are as following;

- 1) Ensuring the continuation of the existential alliance with Azerbaijan,
- 2) Turkey's place in global energy policies,
- 3) Georgia's desire to join NATO,
- 4) Being number one trade partner with South Caucasus countries,
- 5) Citizens of Caucasian descent in Turkey (İsaev, 2017).

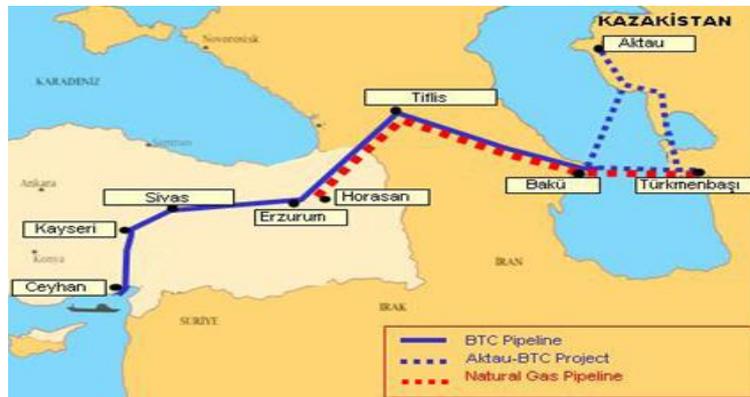
Until the Syrian Civil War, Turkey had a mission in foreign policy towards solving problems with its neighbors and improving relations in different areas. Turkey followed a foreign policy that prioritize and advance diplomacy and assume a mediator/facilitating role with both western and eastern countries (Inat, 2014). After the Syrian Civil War, however, Turkey acted with a more pragmatic and interventionist approaches due to the events occurring in its region. This is due to the environment created by the civil war and Turkey's relations with regional and global actors. The situation is evident from the investments made by Turkey in the defense industry and the operations and actions carried out cross-border (Özpek, 2017; Çelikkol, 2018). In relation to that, since 2011, Turkey has turned to a more active and multi-probable foreign policy, especially energy security, although it was not able to exhibit a pragmatic approach with the same foreign policy method in the Caucasus, as in other regional issues. While Turkey acted with the United States and Arab Gulf states together towards Syria until 2015-2016, it independently began to carry out military operations against terrorist groups such as ISIL (Islamic States in Iraq and Levent) and PYD-YPG (Kurdish People's Democratic Party) and changed Syrian policy to an important degree.

3.1. Turkey's Approach to Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh Dispute After 2002

Azerbaijan has always been in a very important position for Turkey from the past to present. Besides its cultural ties, Azerbaijan had a strategic importance for Turkey in terms of its regional goals. Turkey relied on two countries for being able to develop its cross-border activity areas and policies within the near sea basin and to increase its weight. With the fact that Albania in the Balkans and Azerbaijan in the Caucasus gained a stable and strong regional position, it was foreseen that Turkey's effectiveness in both regions would increase; that is why Azerbaijan was also of importance for Turkey on a regional basis, besides its background (Davutoğlu, 2001, pp. 127-128).

After 2003, when the İlham Aliyev period began, Turkey's relations with Azerbaijan, like the Heydar Aliyev period, were seen to use ethnic elements, but the areas of cooperation increased more. In this scope, while the social and cultural cooperation was

developed, political relations were maintained at a high standard and even the High Level Strategic Cooperation Council was established and serious steps were taken in the economic, military and cultural fields. Very important and large projects such as BTC oil pipeline, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) gas pipeline, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line were realized in this period. It was declared that a cooperation would be made in the NABUCCO project (Oraz Besikci, 2016).



(Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008)

Figure 3: BTC and BTE pipeline projects

However, Turkey's Azerbaijan policy could not have always progressed in the desired direction, and it had to take into account various dynamics. After 2002, The AK Party government's near abroad policy based on close cooperation, and a policy of zero problems with neighbors encouraged Armenia and Turkey to get closer and established a ground for signing of a protocol in Zurich to ensure normalization with also the participation of the CSCE co-chairs. This circumstance caused Azerbaijan to react and negatively affected the relations between the two countries. Thereupon, Turkey tried to appease Azerbaijan by giving assurances that it would not open its borders with Armenia until the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was resolved. But, Azerbaijan resorted to various sanctions and even, Turkish flags were hauled down in martyrdoms. Besides, the fact that Azerbaijani flags were seized by Turkish authorities in the football match in Bursa in 2009 exacerbated Azerbaijan's reaction even more. Turkey, on the other hand, asserted that this rapprochement with Armenia would contribute to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. One of the incidents that affected Turkey's Azerbaijan policy in the period after 2002 was the South Ossetia war occurred in 2008. The South Ossetia war experienced in the year of 2008 in Georgia adversely affected the Turkey-Azerbaijan relations. Because Azerbaijan, which followed a policy of balance between Turkey and Russia for a long time, started to fall under the influence of Russia which increased its influence in the region with the South Ossetia War. As a consequence, this led to the fact that Turkey needed stronger arguments in its Azerbaijan policy.

However, after these developments, the Turkish Prime Minister of the time, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, visited Baku, made a speech in the Azerbaijani Parliament, and the two countries restored their relations to their former level through the processes took place afterwards. Hence, the level of "Strategic Partnership" was reached again. Besides giving importance in its Azerbaijan policy after 2002, as it was in the 90s, Turkey followed a course in which cooperation areas were further increased (Yilmaz, 2010).

On the other hand, the facts that Turkey's energy need increased in the period after 2002, and various developments occurred in the world and in the region, Azerbaijan

became strategically important in terms of Turkey's energy security. The location of Azerbaijan is very important for Turkey to benefit from the Caspian Basin energy resources. Likewise, Turkey is a gateway to the West for Azerbaijan to transport its energy resources to Western countries (Ekşi, 2009, p. 107).

Although the relations between the two countries deteriorated in certain issues after 2002, the Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance Agreement was signed on August 16, 2010, and a very important agreement was reached in terms of the relations of the two countries, such as developing the armed forces, holding joint exercises and improving military cooperation. After signing the agreement, it was taken a decision by İlham Aliyev and the then President of Turkey Abdullah Gul to establish a High Level Strategic Cooperation Council (YDSK). Within the framework of these agreements and cooperation, the two countries conducted many joint military exercises. In addition to selling military equipment to Azerbaijan, Turkey provided Azerbaijan to cooperate with a Turkish defense industry company, the Military Electronics Industry Inc. (ASELSAN), for the development of military technology. By means of all these opportunities, aids and trade enabled by Turkey, Azerbaijan strengthened militarily and was able to participate in activities within NATO (Göksedef, 2020b).

In the period after 2002, Turkey continued the use of diplomatic channels for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. For this purpose, Turkey considered that its rapprochement with Armenia would contribute to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, but Turkey's diplomatic efforts did not produce desired results. Although there were high expectations from the talks on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict held in Munich in 2009, the inability to reach a result showed that the problem was multidimensional beyond Turkey's efforts. Because the continuation of Armenia's occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and its occasional attacks against Azerbaijan were not subjected to any sanctions by either Russia or the OSCE. The religious connection between Armenia and Russia and the West was the reason that Azerbaijan was alone in this problem, except for Turkey. Although Turkey took steps towards normalization with its neighbors, its attitude and policies in favor of Azerbaijan on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue has never changed (Ekşi, 2009, p. 99).

3.2. Turkey's Policy in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War

The Karabakh War started on September 27, 2020, on the line of contact between Azerbaijan and Armenia established after 1994 and ended with the signing of a ceasefire under the mediation of Russia on November 10, 2020 (Hasanov et al. 2020).

Turkey's policies in the second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020 were highly evident and open, and Turkey's support for Azerbaijan also found a place on the international agenda. In his address to the public, Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan said that there were 150 high-level military personnel from the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) at the command points of the Azerbaijan Armed Forces and that these senior Turkish soldiers led the operation. In addition, Pashinyan argued that there were also special forces soldiers belonging to the Turkish Armed Forces and militants from Syria alongside the Azerbaijani army units (AGOS, 2020). Such claims were voiced not only by Pashinyan but also by many people throughout the war and were featured in the news of various media outlets. Various Western media insisted that Turkey sent 4,000 opposition fighters from Syria to the region to fight on the side of Azerbaijan also gained an international dimension and reported that there were Syrian dissidents who lost their lives in the conflicts. However, they were not confirmed as a truth and Azerbaijani President İlham Aliyev also reacted saying that these allegations were lies and Armenian propaganda (Göksedef, 2020a).

The support that Turkey gave to Azerbaijan in the second Nagorno-Karabakh War was so evident and open that the allegations that Turkey was directly involved in the war by taking this support one step further began to be discussed. As a matter of fact, Shushan Stepanyan, the Press Spokesperson of the Ministry of Defense of Armenia, posting a statement through her facebook page said *“F-16 fighter jets belonging to the Air Force of the Republic of Turkey took off from Ganja Air Base in the Republic of Azerbaijan at 10:30 this morning. An F-16 fighter jet belonging to the Turkish Air Force, performing a combat mission, shot down a Su-25 type aircraft belonging to the Armenian Air Force in Armenian airspace. The pilot died heroically.”* (BBC News Türkçe, 2020). Earlier, also the Spokesperson of Armenian Ministry of Defense Artsrun Hovhannisyan accused Turkey of directly attacking Armenia, but could not provide details (Armenian News Agency, 2020). Similar allegations that Turkey gave direct support to Azerbaijan also appeared in the Russian media. According to these allegations, senior military personnel and trainers from Turkey took part in the conflicts and sometimes even led them. The Turkish side, on the other hand, denied that it provided direct military support to Azerbaijan; however, as Turkey already gave the necessary support to Azerbaijan under the conditions of the 21st century through technical and weapon assistance, it did not need to be directly involved. In fact, a mutual aid agreement was signed between Turkey and Azerbaijan in 2010 and the Turkish government emphasized that it would be involved in the war in case that the third state participate (Sarıkaya, 2020).

Before the second Nagorno-Karabakh War, Turkey made great efforts to improve the combat capability of the Azerbaijani army and brought unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) produced in Turkey to the Azerbaijan army. The active and successful use of these UAVs in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War is an important factor in raising allegations to Turkey that it directly supports Azerbaijan and it is the best example of Turkey's strong support to Azerbaijan (Sokiryanskaya, 2020). Especially after Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline was opened in 2005, Azerbaijan's income from energy resources skyrocketed and this situation contributed to the modernization of Azerbaijani army to an important degree. Azerbaijan purchased almost every class of UAVs from Turkey and Israel in 10 years and intensely used the systems in the war in 2020. One of the most remarkable developments in the Second Karabakh War is the intense and active use of UAVs in an interstate war for the first time. Azerbaijan also used UAVs and artillery units in the Second Karabakh War with the support of extensive electronic warfare activities while Turkey implemented a such doctrine in the “Operation of Spring Shield” in İdlib, Syria before. Thus, focusing on this similarity, commentaries that Turkey transferred not only UAVs but also its doctrine to Azerbaijan were brought (Özgen, 2021, pp. 106-117).

Turkey's policies in Azerbaijan and in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War were harsher and more open compared to past periods. There are various and complex reasons for this related to the dynamics of Turkey's domestic and foreign policy. These are as following

- 1) Turkey, compared to past years, became a country that was relatively more stable in domestic politics and had a higher capacity and capability to act economically, politically and militarily.
- 2) Again in comparison with past years, Turkey started to have regional goals and implemented and strived to implement various action plans for these goals (Öztarsu, 2020).
- 3) The armed conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh threatened Turkey's pipelines and transport corridors providing energy security.

4) Since the government's support for Azerbaijan in Turkey would ensure that it could receive the support of not only nationalists, but also the entire society, except for a very small group, the government had the opportunity to take advantage of this situation.

5) At a time of pandemic and economic difficulties, the government desired to distract citizens from domestic problems through foreign policy activities (Sokiryanskaya, 2020).

6) The deterioration of Turkey-US relations after the Syrian Civil War, various problems experienced between the two countries and the US Congress' acceptance of the so-called Armenian Genocide bill caused the USA to lose its influence over Turkey in the Nagorno-Karabakh issue compared to past years. Thus, Turkey found itself the right to implement its own policies more independently on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and to maximize its own interests.

7) The struggle between Turkey and Russia in the Syrian Civil War, incidents such as the aircraft crisis and collaborations caused that Turkey exhibited a more courageous approach, despite all the weight of Russia in the Caucasus (Hale, 2019).

8) The experience Turkey had by carrying out many military operations in the northern Syria paved the way for it to transfer those experiences to Azerbaijan more willingly and confidently in the second Nagorno-Karabakh War, and to act more decidedly on this issue.

9) The possibility that Azerbaijan's potential victory would increase Turkey's regional influence, as well as increase its exports in the defense and aviation sectors created a driving force for Turkey (Köker, 2020).

3.3. The Political Influences of the Syrian Civil War on Turkey's Approach to the Second Karabakh War

When Russia was directly involved in the Syrian Civil War in 2015, a new relations began to be formed between Russia and Turkey, which is one of the most important supporter of opposition groups (Samoylov, 2018, pp. 163-167). While they have behaved attentively against each other since the Cold War period, the possibility of their direct confrontation as involved states in the Syrian Civil War emerged (Köse, 2021, p. 41). Therefore, Russia's attacks against opposition groups in Syria caused a tension with Turkey and the shooting down of a Russian war plane by Turkey brought the tension to peak (İmanbeyli, 2015, pp. 2-3). But after the crisis, Russian-Turkish relations gradually softened and summits were held between them in order to finish the war in Syria (Samoylov, 2018, pp. 175-179). Owing to the crises and agreements between them during the Syrian War, the ways of dialogues become diversified in order to resolve diplomatic tension between the two states (Kemaloğlu, 2021). In particular, relations formed by Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan and direct cooperation caused by their leaderships became a reference for the resolution of future problems. At this point, while Turkey behaves more attentively to Russia in the policies towards the former Soviet states, it understood Russia's policies better and Russia began to approach to Turkey's aims more understandingly in new relations which developed especially during the Syrian Civil War. Therefore, Turkey acted more actively and clearly in the Second Karabakh War. This situation is an important regional dynamism in Turkish foreign policy.

On the other hand, the relations between Turkey and the Western states with which Turkey cooperated in the beginning of the Syrian Civil War worsened in course of time. Especially after the United States and Western states began to support PYD – YPG, which Turkey regards as a terrorist group, diplomatic crises happened between Turkey and the

Western states. These crises caused Turkey to pursue unilateral policies despite the fact that Turkey is the member of NATO. Under the insecure circumstance, the influences of the Western states on Turkey decreased in the issues and the cooperation declined. In this way, After the Syrian Civil War, the power of Western states to influence and direct Turkey's policy in the Second Karabakh War decreased. Because of the tension and crisis between Turkey and the United States during the Syrian Civil War, various sanctions against Turkey were brought to agenda. For example, the proposal for the recognition of the so-called "Armenian Genocide" was approved in the US Senate. Thus, Turkey behaved more independently from the Western states during the war and completely supported Azerbaijan (Köse, 2021, p. 76-77).

Turkey's diplomacy with Russia since the Syrian Civil War continued also in the Second Karabakh War. Thus, Turkey clearly stated its political approach towards Russia, not harming Russia's interests. In this way, Turkey's policies in the Second Karabakh War inside the former Soviet geopolitical area became much clearer than the past in the process. Turkey implemented the ground of dialogue and cooperation with Russia since the Syrian Civil War also to the other fields. While Turkey primarily awaited Russia's approach in the former Soviet area before, it began to apply a more coordinated policy with Russia. This diplomacy achievement of Russia and Turkey caused the formation of two paradigms in Turkish foreign policy: 1) Turkey's faster policy making. 2) Turkey's clearer and more proactive policy implementation. The Second Karabakh War appears as the best example. The two states continued dialogues established in Syria also in the Second Karabakh War. In this way, Turkey carried out its policies clearly and proactively without waiting for Russian intervention (Suyundikova, 2021, pp. 138-143). Even during the Russian Occupation of Ukraine, Erdogan's close dialogue with Putin was emphasized.

On the other hand, the crises between Turkey and the United States during the Syrian Civil War provided an "invisible legitimacy" for Turkey's implementation of more independent policies contrary to the United States' interests. Contrary to the outcome desired by the USA and the West, Turkey did not hesitate to apply its policies and increased its motivation (Köse, 2021, p. 79).

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, from the past to present, an evident and significant change has been observed in Turkey's Nagorno-Karabakh policy due to various dynamics and reasons. However, it was clearly observed that this change was not discursive but operational. The second Nagorno-Karabakh war occurred in 2020 revealed this change explicitly. The policies Turkey followed in the Nagorno-Karabakh War contain important clues not only about Turkey-Azerbaijan relations, but also about the Turkish Foreign Policy.

There exist very important outlines of the change Turkey experienced in the Nagorno-Karabakh policy; the first of which is the political, economic and military strengthening of Turkey compared to the 1990s. The second is related to the fact that the ruling bloc in Turkey wanted to disperse the pressure of the process experienced in domestic politics with foreign policy moves. Third one is the experiences Turkey had with the USA and Russia in the Syrian Civil War. Here, Turkey's Nagorno-Karabakh policy emerges, shaped by the change Turkey experienced, the dynamics in its domestic policy and the Syrian Civil War triangle. On the other hand, among the sub-reasons brought out by these general reasons, Turkey's isolation in its region and its independent policies come to the fore. These factors were also reflected in its policies in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. Because both the problems Turkey had with the countries, it sees as allies and the fact that the so-called Armenian Genocide was accepted by the USA and Western countries with an unscientific approach caused Turkey to follow a more radical and

explicit policy in this regard compared to the past. The acceptance of the so-called Armenian Genocide in a way that is contrary to the reality by the USA and Western countries caused these countries, especially the USA, to lose their power to influence Turkey in the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. These led Turkey to become isolated and pursue a more independent policy in this issue and even to implement policies that are the exact opposite of the rhetoric of these countries.

Turkey's desire to transfer its operational experience gained in Syria in line with its goals of becoming a regional power to countries for which it is now of strategic importance for itself manifested in the second Nagorno-Karabakh War after Libya.

Turkey's success in UAV technology and the initiative to use it operationally in the fields it wants are undoubtedly very important in terms of Turkey's revealing its power and proving itself. Of course, even though Azerbaijan was the winner of the war in the end, Turkey also had significant gains through this.

In conclusion, The second Nagorno-Karabakh War, in which Turkey's activism manifested itself, contains important clues about Turkey's policy towards the Caucasus region, and her relations with Russia and the United States besides the Caucasus states for today and for the future. This change found its best field of application in the second Karabakh War that took place in 2020. Especially the change Turkey experienced and the political developments in the surrounding geographies are the biggest reasons for this. In Turkey's region, there were massive developments, even was at a global level. Therefore, while the Nagorno-Karabakh policy in the previous periods remained at the discursive sense and did not reach the required level, from the year 2002 onwards, together with Turkey's regional goals in the foreign policy, the axis of Turkey's Nagorno-Karabakh policy has moved rapidly and also somewhat reactively from the discourse of friendship and brotherhood to an operational and radical level. More institutionalized relations with Azerbaijan, especially in energy, military and political fields, made it possible to experience the transition from discourse to realpolitik.

The second Nagorno-Karabakh War, in which Turkey's activism in the Nagorno-Karabakh policy manifested itself, contains important clues about Turkey's relations and policies with the Caucasus region, Russia and the United States for today and for the future. It is possible to state that Turkey is inclining towards a more independent, more transitional and implementing foreign policy to the extent its capacity and strength allow. In this respect, the second Nagorno-Karabakh War which reveals the transition to an active policy in the Nagorno-Karabakh policy, is also a kind of a guarantor that as time progresses, Turkey will increase the areas of cooperation with Azerbaijan much more, and carry it to the ideal level in its strategic cooperation goals.

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