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# The Relations between Turkey and the Caucasus

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## Abstract

*This article examines Turkish foreign policy towards the Caucasus and argues that Turkey regards the region as a land of opportunity and influence. It first looks into the transformation of Turkish foreign policy in the last decade and its subsequent impact on its policy towards the countries in the Caucasus, namely Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. The article argues that Turkey's international stance has been repositioned from being the "buffer-zone" of the Cold War, to the "model country" of the post-Soviet era and finally to the "central country" of the new international order, which influenced its policy towards the Caucasus. Finally, the article posits that Turkey is an energy corridor which connects the region to Europe and effective use of energy resources and healthy integration of the region to the world economy would bring peace and stability to the Caucasus.*

## Key Words

Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Caspian energy, Turkish-Armenian protocols.

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## Introduction

The end of the Cold War, the new wave of globalization, the events of 9/11, the rise in international terrorism, the increased tension between the East and the West signal a new world order, and the necessity for countries to re-position themselves within this new context. Along with many other countries, Turkey has gone through a process of re-positioning itself in line with the new international setting. Since the end of the Cold War, Turkey is no longer the buffer zone of the West. The European Union's rejection of Turkey's entry bid in 1989 added insult to injury and contributed to the emergence of a sense of alienation in Ankara. Turkish policy makers reached a conclusion that Turkey's former strategic value in the West had substantially decreased. The newly emerging republics in the former Soviet south had created a potential sphere of influence. For these emerging independent nations Turkey is considered a model, with its democratic and secular identity and its free-market economy. This role as a model country was encouraged by Turkey's Western

allies with the expectation that Turkey's influence would limit the roles of Russia and Iran in this region.<sup>1</sup> However, the economic crises in the 1990s and the political unrest in the country prevented Turkey from having an effective role in the region. Consequently, the role of the “model” or “bridge” country that was ascribed to Turkey by the West was inconclusive. The power vacuum in Central Asia and the Caucasus that was anticipated to be filled by Turkey was eventually filled by Russia.

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As a result of Turkey's new foreign policy, the policy makers' perception of the neighbouring regions has undergone a deep transformation. Democratization, reform, political stability and economic development have been the domestic sources of this transformation. The AK Party's rise to power, the initiation of the EU accession process and the search for new markets as a result of economic development have triggered a fast transformation. Turkey has

repositioned itself within the new world order by prioritizing concepts such as interdependency, economic cooperation, regional integration, proactive foreign policy, as well as peace and stability.

In that respect, one may argue that Turkey has gone through a process of “de-securitization”, i.e., dragging issues out of the context of security and into the space of political discourse.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, Turkey's view towards its own region has been shaped through this new lens. For instance, while security, perception of threat and competition are still valid concepts in the formation of foreign policy in the Caucasus, Turkey views the region as a land of opportunity and influence.<sup>3</sup> Turkey has been actively implementing its “zero problems with neighbours” principle, one of the key concepts of its foreign policy in this region. This new approach aims at maintaining peace and stability by forging economic and social relations with the countries in the region. In this regard, it is foreseen that the Caucasus, which is one of the important centres of oil and gas reserves in the world, can be integrated into the world economy through Turkey as a reliable energy source. This point of view will not only benefit the economy in Turkey, but also serve stability and peace in the region through economic interdependence and cooperation.

## Turkey's Approach towards the Caucasus

Turkey's policy for the Caucasus should be analysed within the context of the newly emerging regional policy in the 2000s. Turkish foreign policy towards neighbouring regions is determined by four principles. The first of these principles is the establishment of the mechanisms of high-level political dialogue which allows the improvement of relations between countries, through expediting problem solving and crisis management. The next step is the establishment of High Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSCC) agreements between prime ministers and relevant ministers.

In addition, a public forum is suggested for developing relations at the societal level. The second principle is economic interdependence. Efforts at developing collaborative economic projects and encouraging free trade and circulation of labour are based on the principle of mutual economic benefit in regional policy. The third principle is to develop regional policies which include all actors in the region. The last principle is to co-

exist in peace, diversity and tolerance of differences. Turkish foreign policy in the Caucasus has been based on these principles since the AK Party assumed power in 2002.

From a historical perspective, the region entered a tumultuous period following the disintegration of the USSR and the end of the Cold War. The end of the Soviet hegemony resulted in the formation of new governments in the region. The difficulties of transition into

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countries in the Caucasus are well aware that saving the region requires the effective use of energy sources, and a healthy integration with the global economy. Turkey comes to the fore at this point and increases the potency of the region. It functions as an energy corridor that connects the region to Europe. Turkey's EU accession process and its increasing influence in the international arena, together with its stability, make

the country a trustworthy and powerful actor in the region.

On the road to its EU membership, the role that Turkey plays in the region is of increasing importance. Turkey has taken brave steps in terms of national security, military-civilian and state-society relations and democracy. These improvements are reflected in a foreign policy that favours cooperation, interdependency, peace, and stability. As it moved closer to the West, Turkey also strengthened its relations with the East. Lately, Turkey's active policy towards the Middle East and the Islamic World has been criticized, and even interpreted as a shift of axis. These analyses ignore the fact that Turkey's close ties with the Caucasus are of equal importance. The new steps taken by Turkey are reflections of its new multidimensional foreign policy. Turkey is no longer a "bridge" country; it is now a "central country" in the region, and must develop its policies accordingly.<sup>4</sup> In line with this new foreign policy, the Caucasus is a potential region of influence and opportunity. Turkey's policy towards the Caucasus aims to develop political and economic relations with the countries in the region and help them develop mechanisms of internal stability, prosperity as well as regional peace and security. The Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TİKA) plays an active role in the region.<sup>5</sup> A large portion, 44,44 per cent, of TİKA's developmental

aid was dedicated to the Caucasus and the Middle East. This aid has been offered in the areas of economic and industrial infrastructural development, health and education, academic collaboration, internship programs for regional students in Turkey, Turkish language programs and efforts to increase business relations.<sup>6</sup> In addition to TİKA, the Turkish Businessmen and Industrialist Confederation (TUSKON) and Foreign Economic Relations Council (DEİK) are also active in the region. For instance, TUSKON has initiated the "Turkey-Eurasia International Commerce Bridge" in order to manage Turkey's commercial relations in the region. The aim of the bridge is to transform the Black Sea, Mediterranean and the Caspian Sea into free commerce zones.<sup>7</sup> In December 2010, TUSKON organized its second summit, with 500 businessmen from 12 countries in Eurasia and 1200 businessmen from Turkey. It hosted 72 senior economic officials from Eurasian countries. In May 2008, a similar event was carried out by the Marmara Group Foundation, called the Eurasian Economic Summit.<sup>8</sup>

Turkey's increasing international commerce with Eurasian countries is a result of its emerging business interests in this region. The volume of commerce between Turkey and Azerbaijan was 326 million USD in 2000; in 2010 this number increased to 1.059 billion. Additionally, Turkey sits atop Georgia's

import and export rankings. For Azerbaijan, it is the second in exports and fifth in imports. The fact that the borders are closed between Armenia and Turkey prevents direct commerce between the two countries. Accordingly, Turkish products make their way to Armenia mostly through Iran and Georgia.

## Relations with Azerbaijan

Turkey's relations with Azerbaijan are determined by historical, cultural, ethnic and religious connections as well as mutual good will. The Baku-Tibilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline, which has been active since 2006, and the Baku-Tibilisi-Erzurum (BTE) natural gas pipeline constitute the two important dimensions of the relations.<sup>9</sup> These pipelines are critical in transporting Azerbaijani oil and natural gas to Europe. The BTC pipeline is about 1800 km long, and its agreement was signed after a series of negotiations between Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkey, Georgia and various private companies. The total daily capacity of BTC is 1 million barrels and annual capacity is 50 million tons.

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The natural gas from Azerbaijan has been transported alongside the BTE

pipeline to Turkey since 2007. The decision to do so was taken while oil was being extracted for the BTC pipeline. By this agreement, which is valid for 15 years, Turkey will receive 6.6 billion cubic meters of natural gas from the field of Şah Deniz I in Azerbaijan. The gas that Azerbaijan anticipates to provide for Nabucco is expected to be extracted from the Şah Deniz II field, which will be ready in 2016. The situation with Nabucco is more complicated than it seems. Since Nabucco is a gas transportation company, the last word belongs with the company, once the agreement is signed between governments. Consequently, if Azerbaijan wants to give gas to Nabucco, it can bypass Turkey. Another important aspect is the fact that Nabucco is a gas transportation company and increases the cost and therefore the price of natural gas. The most profitable option for Azerbaijan is to transfer the natural gas through a direct line to the Eastern and Southern European countries. The plans for transferring compressed gas to Romania have not been realized, largely because of the high cost of transportation through the Black Sea. Consequently, the bigger picture shows us that even though the Nabucco project concerns two countries, it is a matter that goes much beyond the bilateral relations.<sup>10</sup>

In late October 2011, Prime Minister Erdoğan and President Aliyev signed two agreements during HLSCC meeting for selling gas from the Shah Deniz-2 in 2017

to Turkey and for transit of gas from Shah Deniz-2 through Turkey in 2017-2042. These two agreements finalised the terms of Turkey's purchase of natural gas and opened up new prospects for transport of gas to European markets. Turkey is likely to obtain re-export rights in the transport deal. These projects also helped to strengthen Turkey's projection of itself as a regional hub, as well as justifying the feasibility of the Nabucco pipeline.<sup>11</sup>

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Turkey's relations with Azerbaijan play an important role in determining relations with other countries in the region. For instance, the relations with Azerbaijan have a great impact on the relations with Armenia. Without doubt, the largest issue is that of Karabagh. In the years following Azerbaijan's independence, the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan resulted in great losses. This included the entirety of the Nagorno Karabagh region. Almost one fifth of Azerbaijani soil was annexed by Armenia. About 1 million Azeris were forced to emigrate. This situation still continues today.<sup>12</sup> While Armenia

considers its presence in Karabagh legitimate and a natural right, Azerbaijan deems the situation an "occupation." The official stance taken by Turkey and the UN is in agreement with Azerbaijan. Turkey insists that the Karabagh issue be resolved by the two countries on a diplomatic plane through the use of international channels. The Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (CSCP) that was established by Turkey after the Georgia-Russia crisis of 2008 aims to realize this goal. However, it is hard to say that the Minsk process that was initiated and carried out by the U.S., Russia and France (one of the most significant attempts at diplomacy so far) has been a success. Even though the parties came together on various platforms and occasions, no progress was made regarding the dispute.<sup>13</sup> As mentioned by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, "We, as Turkey, desire the issue to be resolved in a peaceful way. We support all efforts in this regard; however, it is concerning that the Minsk group has not been able to resolve the issue in the past 16 years. The recent conflicts in the region illustrate just how fragile the situation in the Southern Caucasus is."<sup>14</sup>

The close connections between Azerbaijan and Turkey and the cooperation in the field of energy have made Azerbaijan the most important country for Turkey in the region. In the past years, Turkish and Azeri collaborations

have been developed between NGOs, universities and research institutes. The Qafqaz University founded by Turkish entrepreneurs has become a respectable educational institution.<sup>15</sup> It was decided during Prime Minister Erdoğan's trip to Azerbaijan on May 17, 2010 that the HLSCC would be founded. Prime Minister Erdoğan and President Aliyev co-chaired the first HLSCC meeting in İzmir, Turkey's trade-attractive Aegean city, on 24 October 2011. The two sides had an extensive agenda for cooperation in economy and politics and accordingly signed agreements ranging from investment promotion to police education.<sup>16</sup> During the HLSCC meeting, State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic and Turkey's Turcas Oil Company agreed to build a refinery, which entails a 5 Billion USD investment, scheduled to go online in 2015.

## Normalization of Turkish-Armenian Relations

Armenia perceives the close ties between Azerbaijan and Turkey as a threat to its national security. In return, Armenia follows a balance policy, and allies itself with Russia and Iran. Russia, in particular, appears as

a strategic partner of Armenia. After the collapse of the U.S.S.R. Armenia gained independence; however, although twenty years have passed since the Cold War, concepts such as security, threat and competition dominate the vocabulary of Armenian foreign policy. This deep-rooted perception results in perpetuating problems with Turkey and other neighbouring countries, with the exception of Iran, and only causes Armenia to inflict more self-harm. For example, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline bypasses Armenia and goes through Georgia. In addition, domestic instability, economic difficulties and increasing rates of unemployment in Armenia continue in a precipitous downward spiral. The Armenian economy is dependent on Georgian ports, and when Russia bombed these ports in 2008, it pushed Armenia into a more precarious situation. In another light, the crisis between Russia and Georgia has compelled Turkey to revise its relationship with Armenia. From the Turkish perspective, the status quo in the Caucasus was no longer sustainable. Turkish policy makers initiated a multidimensional policy toward the Caucasus, primarily focusing on creating regional and bilateral mechanisms to deal with Russian-Georgian crisis,

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Azerbaijan-Armenia problem and Turkish-Armenian normalization. From the Turkish perspective, it would make sense for Armenia to explore opportunities for regional cooperation.

The major reason for the disruption in Turkish-Armenian relations is the difference in disposition and conceptualization of their foreign policies. Moreover, Turkey's stance on the Karabagh issue supporting Azerbaijan, and the pressure Armenia receives from its diaspora, prevent both countries from putting theory into action. Consequently, in order to normalize the bilateral relations between Armenia and Turkey and open the closed borders between two countries, both countries signed protocols in October 2009. However, the Armenian Constitutional Court issued a statement that the protocols should be interpreted and applied on condition of being in compliance with the Armenian constitution and, in particular, paragraph 11 of the Declaration of Independence. This paragraph reads that: "The Republic of Armenia stands in support of the task of achieving international recognition of the 1915 Genocide in Ottoman Turkey and Western Armenia."<sup>17</sup> In response, the Turkish foreign ministry immediately issued a critical statement that "this decision contains preconditions and restrictive provisions which impair the letter and spirit of the protocols."<sup>18</sup>

The protocols signed by Armenia and Turkey are effective foreign policy tools in normalizing the relationship

between these countries, and still hold the potential to be utilized successfully. Turkish and Armenian foreign ministers have given their word, before the eyes of the entire world, to resolve the issues that have been dragging on since the previous century.<sup>19</sup>

In the normalization process of Turkish-Armenian relations, first, there is the challenge of putting forth the protocols in the parliaments, and second, the struggle to overcome psychological barriers in the respective societies. At the same time, the ruling parties have to manage internal affairs in a way that will minimize risks. There are strong oppositions in both countries and the majority of the societies have a tendency to react in a nationalist manner. From a larger perspective, Turkish-Armenian relations are of great importance to state and non-state actors from the U.S. to Europe and Russia, due to influences of the Armenian diaspora and the unending Cold War atmosphere in the Caucasus.<sup>20</sup>

In another dimension, it is asserted that the confusion continues because of the populist approach that impedes the process. Prime Minister Erdoğan draws much criticism by linking the situation to the Karabagh problem. While questioning Erdoğan's stance, the opposition's reaction must also be addressed. From an objective point of view, Erdoğan's approach is easily discernible as the only one supporting the normalization process. The opposition

parties criticize normalization attempts with Armenia and use nationalist rhetoric for cornering the ruling party. One should consider that in the recent years societal demands have played a considerable role in the foreign policy making process in Turkey, which appears as an obligatory aspect for legitimizing the normalization process. In this regard, both countries must consider the normalization process as a unique opportunity.<sup>21</sup>

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The guiding principle of Turkish foreign policy, “zero problems with neighbours,” has not been successful in normalizing relations and solving problems with Armenia. Having reached a reasonable level of close relations even with Greece, Turkey still has not achieved this political normalization with Armenia. Regardless, this process has seen improvements in social, cultural and economic areas. Turkey was one of the first countries to recognize Armenia’s independence. Although Armenia does not border the Black Sea, in 1993 Turkey invited Armenia to join the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation as a founding member. Moreover, in

spite of the fact that the Armenian-Turkish border is still closed, there are direct flights between the two countries.

There have been many improvements regarding Armenian heritage in socio-cultural life in Turkey. For instance, many buildings, including the Akdamar Church, Armenian Catholic Church in Diyarbakir, historic Armenian houses in Beykoz and the Armenian Church in Ordu, which have historical and sentimental value for the Armenians, have been restored. Also, on September 6, 2008, President Abdullah Gül paid a visit to Yerevan the a guest of Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan to watch the Turkey-Armenia soccer game. Furthermore, as part of the 2010 Istanbul Cultural Capital events, an exhibition featuring the documentation of works by renowned Armenian architects was displayed in Istanbul. In December 2008, as part of a campaign, 200 Turkish intellectuals have apologized for the “Great Catastrophe” that Ottoman Armenians suffered in 1915.<sup>22</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered this initiative an instance of alternative democratic voices.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the fact that currently there are no official diplomatic relations between Turkey and Armenia; diplomacy took place backstage up until the recent deadlock in the implementation of the protocols. After Turkey had turned

down Iran's offer to mediate between the two countries, on the grounds that Turkey already has direct contact with Armenia, the diplomatic initiatives were made public.<sup>24</sup> As mentioned earlier, the primary Turkish opposition parties, the MHP and the CHP (Nationalist Action Party and Republican Peoples' Party, respectively), did not welcome endeavours in normalizing the relationship, while their Armenian counterparts, the ultranationalist Dashnak Party and the diaspora reciprocate this opposition. Turkey's closest ally in the region, Azerbaijan, has remained silent throughout this process, perhaps hoping that it will help with the resolution of the Karabagh conflict. The opposition in Azerbaijan is also strongly against the improvement of Turkish-Armenian relations.<sup>25</sup>

As a result of this deadlock in finalizing the protocols, Turkish-Armenian relations have been put on hold, and the revival seen in 2009 has been at a standstill throughout 2010. Turkey has used this time to deepen its relationship with Azerbaijan, which had been weighed down by Turkey's sympathetic approach to Armenia.<sup>26</sup> On August 16, 2010, Turkey signed the Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance treaty with Azerbaijan, which was followed by the HLSCC treaty on September 15, 2010.

## Relations with Georgia

Turkish-Georgian relations have been steadily improving in recent years. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey was one of the first countries to recognize Georgia's independence. Turkey has also given support in the political development and restructuring of Georgia and kept it as a close ally, considering its important role in regional stability. Turkey and Georgia also cooperate in terms of their military powers, as the two countries have signed several military agreements. The Turkish army has made contributions to modernizing the Georgian army.<sup>27</sup> It must be noted that Turkey always had to be cautious, considering the possibility that its close relationship to Georgia might disturb Russia. However, this situation did not prevent Turkey from helping in the modernization of the Batumi Airport, which in turn resulted in the decision to make the airport available to both countries. Turkey utilizes the Batumi Airport for domestic flights. Hence, the visa requirements have been mutually abolished as well.

In 2010, Turkey's relations with Georgia followed a positive course. The Kars-Tbilisi-Baku railway line was initiated in the same year. Annual trade volume exceeded 1.5 billion dollars. In the first half of 2010, Turkey became the biggest trade partner of Georgia with a volume of 496 million dollars.<sup>28</sup>

Although the seizing of Turkish ships on a commercial trip to Abkhazia had created a temporary crisis between the two nations, Georgia ordered the release of the ships in December 2010 after a year-long negotiation.<sup>29</sup> Today there are many strategic projects between Turkey and Georgia, from commerce to energy, defence to security.<sup>30</sup> In Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's words, for Georgia Turkey is a "friend" and "the window opening to Europe."<sup>31</sup>

It is in Turkey's best interests to continue positive relations with Georgia, considering border security and energy resources. Georgia plays a key role in transporting Azerbaijani oil to the world market.<sup>32</sup> Three projects deserve special attention: the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan crude oil pipeline project; the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipeline project; and the Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku Railway Project that is estimated to be completed in 2012 as part of the East-West transportation line of the New Silk Road project. It is crucial to note here that it was a difficult process to have all the countries including the EU, Georgia, U.S., Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan and private companies approve the agreements. This competition over energy resources and pipeline routes is known as the "New Big Game," referring to the 19<sup>th</sup> century rivalry between Russia and Britain.

The ethnic conflicts in southern Ossetia and Abkhazia have generated serious unrest, affecting Turkey as well.

The Russian military intervention brought anxiety and violence into this region, which has caused trouble for Turkey. During the 2008 crisis between Georgia and Russia, Turkey took immediate action, sending food aid and building 100 houses for the refugees in Gori.<sup>33</sup> In one view, the reason behind Russia's reaction was anxiety over Georgia gaining economic independence through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Crude Oil Pipeline Project.<sup>34</sup> The BTC pipeline was a serious blow to Russian dominance in the energy geopolitics of the region. In this equation Turkey is dependent on Georgia, since the only alternative route for the region's natural resources is through Armenia. The conflict between Russia and Georgia, therefore, has added more burdens on Turkey's shoulders regarding the region. Being a NATO member, Turkey has had to balance its relations both with Georgia and the U.S., as well as the Russian Federation. The important fact is that Turkey is Russia's seventh biggest trade partner, whereas Russia is at the top of Turkey's trade list.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, Russia is also Turkey's biggest source of natural gas. Consequently, this crisis has put Turkey in a difficult position in keeping its rapport with all the countries in the region.

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In 2008, Turkey proposed the establishment of the CSCP, in hopes that conflicts may be resolved within the region through cooperation and new foreign policies developed by the respective countries. The CSCP has been formed as a platform between Turkey, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and the Russian Federation, based on international norms and principles, and built on the premise that it will protect peace in the region while encouraging economic cooperation. All the mentioned countries have reacted positively to this suggestion. The fundamental principles of the CSCP are in the process of establishment through meetings with the deputy secretaries and consultants. So far, there have been a total of three meetings. The first was held in December 2008, the second in January 2009, and the last one in April 2009.

For a long time now, the thesis that Turkey and Russia will have a conflict of interest due to Turkey's long-standing focus on Western countries, and Russia's assertive policies regarding Eurasia, has been continuously discussed. However, Russia's privileged position in the ex-Soviet territories has been balanced out by reciprocal Turkish-Russian relations and Turkey's multifaceted foreign policy. Furthermore, Turkey has the tendency to assume the bilateral negotiator role in case of any tensions that may rise between the

EU and Russia. Turkey perceives Russia as an indispensable partner in regional entrepreneurial and political initiatives.<sup>36</sup> Recent agreements made with Russia are not only crucial for the respective countries, but their positive influence extends to the political and economic terrains of a larger geographical area from Eastern Europe to China. Turkey and Russia have many disagreements about regional and international issues. Regardless of the discord and competition their relationship causes in the region, it follows a positive course in general and hints at how regional systems will be shaped in the new international order.<sup>37</sup>

## Conclusion

During the Cold War era, the West gave Turkey the role of being the "buffer zone," which, after the U.S.S.R collapsed, yielded to the mission of becoming the "model country." However, Turkey failed to play this role in the 1990s due to economic crises and domestic turmoil. Thus, the vacuum in the region was filled mainly by Russia. Nevertheless, in the past ten years, Turkey has risen as an active and influential actor in line with its new foreign policy. Turkey no longer situates itself as a "buffer" or "model" but rather as a "central country." It has the strength to influence policies in the region as a result of its democratic reforms, political stability and economic growth.

The pivotal points in this process point to the rise of the AK Party, the beginning of the EU membership process, the restructuring of civil-military relations, and democratic reforms overcoming the focus on security. One other crucial element is the search for new markets for rising foreign trade and economic growth. In this course, Turkey has repositioned itself both regionally and globally. Having revisited its relationship with the Caucasus, it is a top priority for Turkey to bring peace, security, and stability to the region.

The Caucasus is a region where East-West energy lines pass through and it is constantly stirred by international power struggles. After the Russian-Georgian crisis, the status quo is not sustainable due to high security risks, which may trigger regional and international conflicts. Turkey's history with three countries in the region - Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia - goes back a long way. These relations sometimes benefit Turkey, whereas at other times they may be quite disadvantageous, overshadowed by history. Turkey has initiated regional cooperation with Azerbaijan and Georgia, but Armenia remains distant due to certain problems between the two countries. In these times of global crises and political turmoil, Turkey's priority is to resolve issues so that the region can prosper through cooperation. The Eurasian territory of the Caucasus

requires a multifaceted diplomacy for the EU and the West. However, the recurring conflicts and the risk of going to war loom over the future of the Caucasus.

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The EU has only begun to pay attention to this region after the war between Russia and Georgia. French President Sarkozy's attempts at resolving the issue have proved successful. The Eastern Partnership has emphasized the importance of the three countries and helped generate a clear path regarding relations with the EU. Although the EU's influence will manifest itself in time, expectations are low. During the Bush administration, when the U.S. focus was steered away from the Caucasus, Turkey had been, at first covertly, then openly pursuing diplomatic relations, such as the CSCP initiative, which the U.S. found out about much later. Turkey's diplomatic endeavours since 2004 have demonstrated a constructive approach in the politics of this region, independent of the U.S. leadership, opening up a new space.

Turkish-Russian relations have also seen a steady rise in recent years, going through golden times since the Moscow Treaty that ended the First World War ninety years ago. As a token of trust, Prime Minister Erdoğan made a trip on March 15-16, 2011 on the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Moscow Treaty, and became the first Turkish Prime Minister to visit Tatarstan. During the Cold War era, Eurasia and the Caucasus were shaped by a dialectic which centered on conflict. The positive course that Turkish-Russian relations follow, as well as their commitment to resolving issues, is of great benefit, especially to the Caucasus. The power struggle between Russia and the U.S. prolonged the Cold War. The crisis between Russia and Georgia has clearly shown that the status quo cannot continue to rule this region, because the threat does not only affect the Caucasus any more, but the entire world. Turkey's active diplomacy, the CSCP initiative, the positive course of Turkish-Russian relations, and the Russian leadership in dealing with the Azerbaijan-Armenia struggle demonstrates that the Cold War has just ended. The trust between Turkey and Russia, and their similar approach to resolve matters within the region, is a sign that these countries will create new opportunities for the region in the near future. The resolution between Turkey and Armenia will depend on how Azerbaijan and Armenia deal with the frozen conflict. Chronic problems

persist, although it is obvious that the status quo cannot be sustained any more, and there are positive signs of new policies being implemented. In addition, Turkey keeps Russia-Georgia relations under a close watch, and facilitates their good relations with special attention which is received well by both countries.

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Turkey is well aware that peace and stability in the region hangs by a thin thread. Often, the country is stuck between the U.S. and Russia; however, it manages continuously to gain power with its confident and principled approach. Turkey holds on to the trans-Atlantic identity in its foreign policy and strives to carry out a policy that prioritizes its regional characteristics. Having adopted a multidimensional approach in international politics, an all-encompassing political dialogue and cooperation in regional politics, and a strategy that supports high-level integration in bilateral relations, Turkey has become a playmaker in the Caucasus, and a key actor taking initiative in resolving regional conflicts.

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