

# KARABAKH PROBLEM IN THE LIGHT OF GLOBAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS\*

(KÜRESEL VE BÖLGESEL GELİŞMELER IŞIĞINDA KARABAĞ SORUNU)

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**Abstract:** *In this study, we will analyze the impact of regional and global developments on the Karabakh problem which has an important place in terms of the relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan and the relations between Turkey and Armenia. In this regard, we will first discuss the historical change and transformation in the Karabakh region. Secondly, after briefly mentioning the developments in the region during the Ottoman Empire and the Soviet era, we will especially focus on the warplane crisis between Russia and Turkey and its impact on the relations between Turkey and Armenia and the Karabakh problem. In this study, both direct and indirect impacts of regional and global developments on the relations between Turkey and Armenia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan and the Karabakh problem will be analyzed in general terms.*

**Keywords:** *Turkey, Armenia, Karabakh, Azerbaijan, Armenian.*

**Öz:** *Bu çalışmada Türkiye-Ermenistan ve Türkiye-Azerbaycan ilişkileri açısından önemli bir yere sahip olan Karabağ sorununda, bölgesel ve küresel gelişmelerin etkileri ele alınacaktır. Bu çerçevede ilk olarak Karabağ bölgesinin tarihsel süreçte geçirmiş olduğu değişim ve dönüşüm ele alınacaktır. Daha sonra Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Sovyetler Birliği döneminde Karabağ bölgesinde yaşanan gelişmelere kısaca değinildikten sonra güncel gelişmeler ışığında, özellikle de Türkiye-Rusya arasında yaşanan uçak krizinin Türkiye-Ermenistan ilişkileri ve Karabağ sorununu nasıl etkilediği değerlendirilecektir. Çalışmada genel hatlarıyla küresel ve bölgesel gelişmeler doğrudan ve dolaylı olarak Türkiye-Ermenistan ve Ermenistan-Azerbaycan ilişkilerine etkileri ve Karabağ sorununa yansımaları üzerinde durulacaktır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Türkiye, Ermenistan, Karabağ, Azerbaycan, Ermeni.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Relations between Turkey and the Russian Federation entered a new era with the downing of the Russian warplane within the rules of engagement in accordance with international law. A serious crisis began between Turkey and Russia due to a Russian bomber aircraft crossing Turkey's border with Syria on November 24, 2015, while bombing positions near the Syrian border and continuing to violate the border despite warnings. Statements by Russia following the incident and Moscow's policies to directly pressure Turkey brought Turkey-Russia relations nearly to a halt.<sup>1</sup>

*In the past centuries, the region saw numerous turmoils and changes. Persian, Ottoman and Turkestani sultans conquered these provinces and drew different borders, built castles, and named them differently.*

These developments, in addition to Turkey-Russia relations, led to several changes in relations of countries in the region with one another as well as with Turkey. In this context, the effects of the crisis on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenian and Azerbaijan became a current issue. Following the plane crisis between Turkey and Russia, a new process began in which the ceasefire between Armenian and Azerbaijan was violated by Armenia and the sides began to mutually accuse each other.

Therefore, it would be beneficial to touch upon the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict before analyzing the aircraft crisis between Turkey and Russia.

According to history books, the frontiers of Karabakh are: From the south, the Aras River, from the Khudafarin Bridge to the Siniq Korpu Bridge. What is known as the Siniq Korpu today is found on the territory of the Kazakh, Shamsaddin, and Demirchi-Hasanli communities and is named as the Golden Bridge by Russians. From the east - the Kura River, which joins with the Aras River in Javad village and flows into the Caspian Sea. From the north - the Goran River, which flows from the Elizavetpol frontier of Karabakh to Kura River that reaches the Araz river at different. From the West - the high mountains of Karabakh, which are called Kushbek, Salvarti and Erikli. In the past centuries, the region saw numerous turmoils and changes. Persian, Ottoman and Turkestani sultans conquered these provinces and drew different borders, built castles, and named them differently.<sup>2</sup>

1 Vügar İmanbeyli, "Uçak Krizi" ve Türkiye-Rusya İlişkileri", *SETA Perspektif*, Issue: 119, December 2015, p. 1.

2 Mirza Cemal Cavanşir Karabağî, "Karabağ Tarihi" (Trans. Muhammet Kemaloğlu), *Hikmet Yurdu*, Year: 7, Volume: 7, Issue: 14, July-December, 2014/2, p. 212. Also see: Elvin Valiyev, *XVIII. Yüzyılın İlk Yarısında Güney Kafkasya: Osmanlı, Safevi ve Rusya Kışkacında*, Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Tarih Anabilim Dalı, Yeni Çağ Tarihi Bilim Dalı, Konya, 2014, (Unpublished master's thesis).

The earliest records on the Karabakh region go back to the fourth millennium BC. Hurrians were among the people who lived in the region in that period. Furthermore, it is recorded that the Urartu also lived in the region in the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC and later the Saka settled to the region. In 250s BC the Arsaks, who were from the Üçoklar tribe that belonged to the Oghuz tribal union, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD the Turkic Caucasian Albanians, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the Romans, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century the Sassanids, in the 6<sup>th</sup> century the Huns, and in the 7<sup>th</sup> century the Khazars are also known to have ruled over the region.<sup>3</sup>

Stating that the dominance of Muslim forces in the Karabakh region began in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Aliyev describes the developments in the period until the Ottoman conquest of the region as follows:

*The Karabakh region entered under the rule of Muslim forces in the 7<sup>th</sup> century onward. In 642, Arabic Muslim armies, then in 646, the Muslim Oghuzes began to dominate the region. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, revolts broke out in the region against the Muslim administration. These revolts reached a peak in the 8<sup>th</sup> century under the leadership of Babek who was of Turkic origin. This revolt was suppressed in 837, and the rebel leader Babek was brought to Samarra and executed there in 838. The Sajid Dynasty, a Muslim Turkic principality, ruled over the region between the years 892-930. Beginning from the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the region saw the influx of the Seljuks. In 1064, Alp Arslan, who returned from his campaign to Georgia, and in 1076, his son and heir Malik-Shah settled the area entirely. From 1256 onward, the Karabakh region came under the rule of the Turkic Ilkhanates. After 1396, Timur, who returned from his Kipchak campaign, conquered the region. During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the region was mostly under the rule of the Akkoyunlu. Until the Ottoman conquest at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the region was ruled by the Safavids.<sup>4</sup>*

Being one of the most ancient regions of Azerbaijan and being situated between the Lesser Caucasus Mountains and the Kura and Aras rivers, Karabakh, prior to the Common Era and in the Middle Ages, was a part of the Christian Caucasian Albanian state, which was located within the current borders of the

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3 Toğrul Aliyev, *Dağlık Karabağ Sorunu ve Uluslararası Örgütler*, Ankara Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Ankara, 2006, p. 5-6, (Unpublished master's thesis). Taken from the following source: Cemalettin Taşkıran, *Geçmişten Günümüze Karabağ Meselesi*, Ankara, Genel Kurmay Basımevi, 1995, p. 31.

4 Toğrul Aliyev, *ibid.*, p. 6-7.

Republic of Azerbaijan. The mountainous region of Karabakh<sup>5</sup> was a province of the Caucasian Albania known as Artsakh Orkhistine.<sup>6</sup> The local community were the Christian Caucasian Albanians. Following the Arab invasion in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, while a portion of the community converted to Islam, a large part remained as Christians. As a result of the efforts of the Armenian Church, which was a dogmatic part of the Arab Caliphate and the Caucasian Albanian Church, a large portion of the population of Artsakh became both Gregorianized and Armenianized. In the Middle Ages, the region became a part of the Ottoman and Persian Empires. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, after Nader Shah lost his power, many khanates, including the Karabakh Khanate, were formed in the Azerbaijani geography. With the construction of the Shusha Fortress by Panar Ali Khan, which was the khan of Karabakh and an Azerbaijani Turk, Shusha became the capital of the Karabakh Khanate. In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the rulers of Shusha and a large portion of its population were Muslim Azerbaijani Turks.<sup>7</sup>

Stating that the Azerbaijanis<sup>8</sup> came from the Oghuz tribe, researchers indicate that the region was unified until 1828. With the Treaty of Turkmenchay, the territories of Azerbaijan were divided among Russia and Iran. Thus, the North and South Azerbaijan regions were formed and the term “Azeri” began to be used after the Ilkhanates (one of the Turkish clans that lived in that region). The region, which was completely Turkified, had previously seen the Assyrian-Babylonian rivalry as well as the Persian-Greek-Macedonian rivalry. Parthians and Romans, Sassanids and Byzantines also clashed in this region. According to researchers indicating that the Arab-Sassanid, Arab-Byzantine, Turkmen-Mongol raids took place in this region, the region also saw the Ottoman-Persian, Ottoman-Russian, Russian-Persian rivalries. Pointing out that Azerbaijan became Turkified within three periods, researchers indicate that these periods are the Kara Koyunlu, Ak Koyunlu and Saffavid periods, which took place after the Seljuk and Mongol period. Stating that Russia’s conquest of Azerbaijan was not difficult, researchers indicate that the Ottoman Empire did not sufficiently pay attention to the Caucasus at the time. On the other hand, since Persia was dealing with internal disorder, Russia, taking advantage of the situation, conquered Azerbaijan. Russia, which first attempted

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5 In Azerbaijani Turkish, Karabakh means “black garden”. Gülşen Paşayeva, Irada Bağirova, Kamal Makili-Aliyev, Ferhad Mehdiyev, “SSCB’de Yarı-Özerkliğin Hukuki Durumu: Dağlık Karabağ Özerk Bölgesi Örneği”, *Uluslararası Suçlar ve Tarih*, 2013, Issue: 14, p. 71-72.

6 Gülşen Paşayeva, *ibid.*, p.71. Taken from the following source: Movses Kalankatutcy, *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Oxford University Press, London, 1961, p. 26; F. Mamedova, *Politicheskaya istoriya i istoricheskaya geografiya Kavkazskoy Albanii*, Baku, 1986, p. 104-105.

7 Gülşen Paşayeva, *ibid.*, p. 71.

8 “Azer” means fire in Persian.

to win over local tribes but failed, got hold of Azerbaijan through conquest. With the 1813 Treaty of Gulistan, Russia divided Azerbaijan into two. On the other hand, The Treaty of Turkmenchay divided Azerbaijan between Russia and Persia. With the Ottoman-Russian war, which broke out after the Treaty of Turkmenchay, the Ottoman Empire lost to Russia in the Balkans and the Caucasus. With the Treaty of Edirne, the Ottoman Empire ceded Nakhichevan and Erivan to Russia. Thus, Russia planned to be effective in the Caucasus by settling Russians to the region. However, this plan, which took away the lands of the *aghas* and *beys* in Azerbaijan, was a failure for Russia in the long run. Dealing also with the longstanding problem of Imam Shamil, Russia adopted a law in 1846 and gave back the *aghas* and *beys* their lands. By establishing the Erivan Governorate, the Tsar attempted to prevent direct contacts between Turks and Azerbaijanis. Thus, the Tsar also laid the foundations of a Christian Armenian population loyal to him. In that period, the Russians also laid the foundations of an Armenian province by expelling the Turkish population from the region for various reasons. Russians also claimed that the Azerbaijanis were Tatars, thus were not related to either the Turks or Persians. Banning the Turkish language, they also attempted to convert Muslims to Orthodox Christianity. Russians even established the “Union to Promulgate Christianity” in order to Christianize the Muslims. In the 1820s and 1830s, the Russian Empire brought 150,000 Armenian families from Iran and Turkey to Azerbaijan and resettled them in Erivan. In general, the Russians attempted to separate Azerbaijanis from their Turkic identity, language, religion and lands. By bringing the Armenians to Azerbaijani territories, they established an Armenian province and local Turks were exiled from their lands.<sup>9</sup>

### THE HISTORY OF THE KARABAKH REGION

In the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the South Caucasus region came under the rule of two great Turkic Empires -the Ottoman Empire and the Saffavid Empire. While a large portion of the South Caucasus (Kartli, Kakheti, Shirvan, Ganja-Karabakh, Erivan and Nakhichevan) was under Saffavid rule, the western part of the South Caucasus (Saatabago, Imereti, Abkhazia and Guria) was under Ottoman rule. The South Caucasus under the Saffavid rule was divided into the Shirvan, Ganja-Karabakh and Chukhur-Saad *beylerbeyliks*, which were ruled by *beylerbeys* appointed by the Shah.<sup>10</sup> After annexing the

9 Betül Aslan, *I. Dünya Savaşı Esnasında “Azerbaycan Türklerinin “Anadolu Türklerine “Kardeş Kömeği (Yardımları)” ve Bakü Müslüman Cemiyet-i Hayriye’si, Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Yayınları, Ankara, 2000, p. 1-17.*

10 Elvin Valiyev, *XVIII. Yüzyılın İlk Yarısında Güney Kafkasya: Osmanlı, Safevi ve Rusya Kısacında, Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yeni Çağ Tarihi Bilim Dalı, Konya, 2014, p. 34, (Unpublished master’s thesis). Taken from the following source: Sadık Müftü Bilge, *Osmanlı Çağında Kafkasya 1454-1829 (Tarih-Toplum-Ekonomi), Kitabevi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2012, p. 127.**

South Caucasus, the Ottoman Empire, in order to collect taxes regularly, conducted censuses and divided the region. As a result of the divisions, the South Caucasian territories annexed by the Ottoman Empire were split into three provinces: Tbilisi, Ganja-Karabakh, and Erivan.<sup>11</sup>

When looked at the process of the region's transfer from the Ottoman Empire to Russia, it is seen that the first important phase was the Treaty of Kurekchay, which was signed in 1805 between the Karabakh Khanate and Russia. This treaty, which would join Karabakh to Russia, was signed with Azerbaijani Turks. Therefore, this treaty could be regarded as an important indicator that the ethnicity of the region was largely Turkic.<sup>12</sup>

According to the first official census conducted by Russia in 1832, %64 of the population of Karabakh was Azerbaijani Turk, while %34 was Armenian. The Armenian migrations in large number especially after the First World War and the resettlement of these Armenian migrants to Karabakh increased the number of Armenians in the region, and an artificial Armenian region was created within Azerbaijani territories.<sup>13</sup>

As it is seen, between the years 1813-1827, Russia settled Armenians in Azerbaijani territories in order to create a group that would support its policies. With the Treaty of Turkmenchay, Armenians from Iran were resettled to the Caucasus. Armenians especially from Iran were resettled to the most fertile lands of Karabakh. Since the Tsarist government gave precedence to Armenians, numerous Armenians were brought to Baku and were ensured to have a say in different fields such as petroleum.<sup>14</sup> In brief, Tsarist Russia was willing to settle Armenians to this region. Armenians were encouraged by Tsarist Russia to migrate from the Ottoman Empire and Persia and were settled to border regions. With the Treaty of Edirne signed after the 1828-1829 Ottoman-Russian war, Armenians living in Ottoman and Persian lands were brought to areas in the South Caucasus in which Azerbaijanis were the majority. Following the 1853-1856 Crimean War and the 1877-1879 Ottoman-Russian war, many Armenians were settled to the South Caucasus, especially to Karabakh. Therefore, Russia's expansion in the South Caucasus throughout

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11 Elvin Valiyev, *ibid.*, p. 81.

12 Araz Aslanlı, "1828 Yılından Sonra Karabağ Topraklarında İdari Değişiklikler", *Ermenistan-Azerbaycan Dağlık Karabağ İhtilafı: Bölgesel Barış ve Güvenliğe ve Komşuluk İlişkilerine Bir Tehdit*, AVİM Yayınları, Ankara, 2014, p. 24.

13 Mustafa Gökçe, "Yukarı Karabağ Sorunu ve Türkiye-Ermenistan İlişkileri Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme", *Turkish Studies*, Volume 6/1, Winter 2011, p. 1112. Taken from the following source: S. Gömeç, *Türk Cumhuriyetleri ve Topulukları Tarihi*, Akcağ Yay., Ankara 1999, p. 22-23.

14 Betül Aslan, *ibid.*, p. 30-33.

the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to fundamental changes in the demographical and political landscape of the region. In Karabakh, in particular, the Armenian population rose from 19,000 up to approximately 119,000 as a result of migrations between 1831-1916.<sup>15</sup>

Although border disputes in Nagorno-Karabakh date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is possible to say that these reasons were the cause for war between Azerbaijan and Armenia within the process from the dissolution of the short-lived Transcaucasian Federation in early 1918 immediately after the First World War and Azerbaijan's, Armenia's, and Georgia's demand for independence, until the region coming control under Soviet control in 1920.<sup>16</sup> In this context, although the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region was established within the borders of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, it is possible to say that the first steps for the resolution of the conflict was taken in 1918. At the time, talks were held between the Azerbaijan People's Republic (APR) (1918-1920) and Armenia. Until the settlement at the Paris Peace Conference, the APR government appointed Hosrov Bey Sultanov as the Governor of Karabakh and Zangezur.<sup>17</sup> A temporary agreement, according to which the mountainous part of Karabakh inhabited by Armenians was within the borders of the APR, was signed between the Karabakh Armenians and the APR in August 1919. The resolution of the problem, agreed upon by both sides, was based on the "cultural self-determination" of the Armenian population of Karabakh.<sup>18</sup> Afterwards, Azerbaijan, and Armenia was occupied by the Red Army. However, the conflict between both countries continued in the 1920s. In 1923, a decree for the establishment of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous

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15 Gülşen Paşayeva, *ibid.*, p. 72.

16 Mehmet Merdan Hekimoğlu, "Self-Determinasyon Hakkı Bağlamında Dağlık Karabağ Sorunu", *Uluslararası Hukuk ve Politika*, Volume. 11, Issue. 41, p. 103-105. Taken from the following source: L. Jerry Johnson, *Crossing Borders - Confronting History: Intercultural Adjustment in a Post-Cold War World*, University Press of America, Lanham, 2000, p. 142.

17 Gülşen Paşayeva, *ibid.*, p.73.

18 Gülşen Paşayeva, *ibid.*, p.73. Taken from the following source: Vremennoye soglasheniye arмян Nagomogo-Karabakha s Azerbaydjanskim Pravitelstvom, 26 avgusta 1919 g., parag. 2 // K istorii obrazovaniya NKAO Azerbaycanskoj SSR, Sbornik dokumentov i materialov Baku, 1989, p. 25.

Region (NKAR) was prepared by the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR). In 1924, Nagorno-Karabakh was approved as a part of the Azerbaijan SSR. Later on, Armenians in other regions of Azerbaijan began to settle into Karabakh. This led to a change in the demographics of Nagorno-Karabakh. It is possible to say that Armenian administrators' discriminatory policies towards Azerbaijanis during the Bolshevism period played a role in the Armenian population becoming the majority in the region compared to the Azerbaijani population.<sup>19</sup>

As a result, it is seen that the Karabakh region, which was ruled as an inseparable part of the Ottoman central administration beginning from 1590, frequently changed hands among the Ottoman, Russian, Turkish, and Persian dynasties. While the region was under the rule of Turkic states and dynasties from the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards, it came under the possession of Russia with the 1828 Treaty of Turkmenchay and the 1829 Treaty of Edirne. As a result of Russia's ethnic policies, Karabakh and Erivan systematically became Armenianized. Hereby, Russia tried to create an ally in the Persian and Ottoman border that it could use for its policies. This policy by Russians also aimed at creating a Christian barrier between Turks and Azerbaijanis.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, it is possible to say that the policy to increase the Armenian population in Nagorno-Karabakh began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and gained even further momentum during the Soviet period. However, these policies also led to the emergence of numerous problems. In the Soviet period, Karabakh was given to Azerbaijan by Stalin.<sup>21</sup> In 1988, representatives from NKAR had applied for the transfer of NKAR from the Azerbaijan SSR to the Armenia SSR. However, this request was turned down by USSR. While the NKAR declared its secession from Azerbaijan SSR in 1988, this decision was declared illegal by the Azerbaijan SSR. Rejecting NKAR's decision to join Armenia SSR, the USSR decided to establish a commission to support and monitor NKAR's independence. It was also decided that the commission would be led by the USSR committee. Through this commission, the administration of NKAR was taken away from Azerbaijan SSR. However, in official statements, it was stated that NKAR was a part of Azerbaijan SSR.<sup>22</sup>

It is possible to say that, although the Soviet era was uneventful with regards to the Karabakh conflict, the Soviet administration's strategies led to the

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19 Gülşen Paşayeva, *ibid.*, p. 74-75.

20 Yusuf Sarımay, "Osmanlı Arşivlerinde Karabağ", Ermenistan-Azerbaycan Dağlık Karabağ İhtilafı: Bölgesel Barış ve Güvenliğe ve Komşuluk İlişkilerine Bir Tehdit, AVİM Yayınları, Ankara, 2014, p. 22.

21 Araz Aslanlı, *ibid.*, p. 24.

22 Gülşen Paşayeva, *ibid.*, p. 76-77.



simmering of the problem within Azerbaijan. In this sense, it is propounded that Moscow applied double standards regarding the Karabakh conflict and pursued pro-Armenian policies in this “uneventful period”.<sup>23</sup>

It should be underlined that the Karabakh region, which is described by researchers as important in terms of both local geography and geopolitics, is also symbolic for Armenians in terms of the realization of the dream of “Greater Armenia”. Within the scope of this policy, researchers indicate that the years between 1838-1953 was referred as the “exiling period of guilty peoples” in the Soviet Union. Within this framework, according to Mustafayev who states that the Soviet Union (Russians) had declared its own Turkic and Muslim citizens “public enemy” despite the fight they put up and the victory they won during World War II, Russia’s main objective was to remove Muslims from Armenia.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Toğrul Aliyev indicates that, although Armenians generally make claims that Karabakh was forcibly taken away from them and attached to Azerbaijan by the Soviet administration, the truth and official documents show the opposite.<sup>25</sup>

Ultimately, as a result of Soviet migration policies, it is seen that ethnic borders do not conform to political borders. The 1979 Soviet census shows that there were 104 different nationalities in the Soviet Union. As seen in the Karabakh example, this structure formed by the Soviet Union laid the groundwork of ethnic conflicts during the dissolution of the Soviet Union, since various nationalities, despite their differences, were living under a single precise political system.<sup>26</sup>

### THE EFFECTS OF REGIONAL AND GLOBAL DEVELOPMENTS ON THE KARABAKH CONFLICT

Due to its geopolitical, geostrategic, and geoeconomic features, the Caucasus region is of vital importance with respect to the realization of many projects such as Nabucco Project, South Stream Project, North Stream Project, Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan Oil Pipeline Project, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum Gas Pipeline Project, Blue Stream Project, Turkish Stream Project, TANAP. Therefore, it is possible to say that there is a competition among China, EU, Iran, Turkey, and

23 Toğrul Aliyev, *ibid.*, p. 17.

24 Beşir Mustafayev, “Sovyetler Döneminde Rusya’nın Dağlık Karabağ Politikası”, *Karadeniz Araştırmaları*, Fall 2013, Issue 39, p. 53.

25 Toğrul Aliyev, *ibid.*, p.13.

26 Mustafa Gökçe, “Yukarı Karabağ Sorunu ve Türkiye-Ermenistan İlişkileri Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme”, *Turkish Studies*, Volume 6/1, Winter 2011, p. 1113.

especially Russia and the US for the energy resources of the region such as oil and natural gas.

When looked from this aspect, it is possible to say that the relations of especially Azerbaijan, which is located in the Caspian Basin, and other countries in the region with global powers is of particular importance for the countries in the region. At this point, Turkey's geopolitical and geostrategic importance comes into play. The determination of which course to use to transfer energy especially from the Caucasus and Central Asia to the world is largely associated with the policies of global and regional powers. This increases the possibility of issues in the region being deliberately revived by global and regional powers.

The most recent example of this came to the fore with the plane crisis between Turkey and Russia. Along with the crisis, several developments took place with regard to the Karabakh conflict, which is described as a "frozen conflict". As mentioned above, the Karabakh region, which is directly or indirectly affected by global and regional developments due to its geographical and strategic importance, this time became a current issue in consequence of the Russia-Turkey crisis. In the wake of the crisis, the actions taken by Russia with regard to the Armenian question and the Karabakh issue appeared in the press with the word "war" as follows:

*...Russia, which has a more aggressive foreign policy following the plane crisis, now plays the Armenian card. Puppet Armenia, which relies on Russia's military bases and power, declared war on Azerbaijan, which has drawn closer to Turkey. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which caused tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia since the 1990s, thanks to also Russia, led to a new crisis between the two countries. Speaking on the issue, Artsrun Hovhannisyan, the spokesman of occupant Armenia's Defense Ministry, said: "this is war. We must use the word war." As the reason for the war, he cited Azerbaijan's assault against them in Karabakh. Thus, Armenia declared that the ceasefire signed with Azerbaijan in 1994 was no more...<sup>27</sup>*

The fact that Armenia violated the ceasefire following the plane crisis between Russia and Turkey revealed once more that Armenia was pursuing a Russia-led foreign policy. Furthermore, it is argued that tightening relations especially in economic terms between Turkey and Azerbaijan, following the plane crisis had bothered Moscow and therefore Armenia was put into action. There were

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27 "Rus Gazıyla Savaş", *Star*, 25.12.2015.

also statements made indicating that through military agreements between Russia and Armenia, 7,000 Russian troops would be deployed near Armenia's border with Turkey, Russia and Armenia would unite their air defense systems against Turkey, and Russia would reinforce its military base in Armenia with combat helicopters.<sup>28</sup>

According to researchers who indicate that Russia increased its military potential in the Caucasus, especially in Armenia, in order to increase its influence in the settlement process of the Karabakh conflict, Russia lately took serious steps to prolong the lease of the Russian 102<sup>nd</sup> military base in Armenia and to define a new status for the military base. Nevertheless, the countries in the region, especially Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey failed to be responsive with regard to these actions by Russia.<sup>29</sup>

Since both the South Caucasus and energy projects concerning the region are of great interest for global and regional powers, the Karabakh conflict, similarly to numerous other issues concerning the region, is the center of attention for these powers. Therefore, it is possible to say that the strategic importance of the region gives rise to the dynamism and permanence of the problems in the region.

When viewed from this aspect, it is seen that, although ethnic conflicts in the South Caucasus, such as in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Karabakh maintain its actuality, states reawake these conflicts upon foreign policy developments. Within this context, Turkey's and Karabakh's strategic and geopolitical importance automatically comes into prominence. Turkey being a neighbor to Caspian, Middle Eastern and South Mediterranean countries which possess more than 70 percent of world's hydrocarbon reserves is a feature that further increases Turkey's strategic and geopolitical importance. Therefore, in regional and global terms, it is possible to say that Turkey is an important actor in almost all regional energy projects.

The fact that the Caucasus region is ranked first in terms of natural gas and second in terms of oil causes regional and global powers to be interested in the Caucasus. The Caucasus region, which is rich in terms of resource reserves, hosts many pipeline projects for transferring the rich resources of the Caucasus to other geographies, especially to the West.

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28 "Rus Gazıyla Savaş", *Star*, 25.12.2015.

29 Ali Asker, "Kafkasya'daki Silahlanma: Rusya-Türkiye İlişkilerinin Neresinde?", *21. Yüzyıl*, October 10, Issue 22, p. 21.

When looked to the Karabakh conflict in terms of global developments, the resumption of clashes between the sides especially after the plane crisis between Turkey and Russia became one of the most significant indicators of how the Karabakh conflict, which is a regional conflict, could be affected by global developments. Soon after the plane crisis, the ceasefire in Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan was violated and the two countries began to accuse each other. Following the increasing tension between Azerbaijan and Armenia on the Karabakh conflict, in statements by the Armenian side, the fact that the clashes had never stopped and that they were used to this situation are expressed as such:

*When looked to the Karabakh conflict in terms of global developments, the resumption of clashes between the sides especially after the plane crisis between Turkey and Russia became one of the most significant indicators of how the Karabakh conflict, which is a regional conflict, could be affected by global developments. Soon after the plane crisis, the ceasefire in Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan was violated and the two countries began to accuse each other.*

*...The war in Karabakh has never ended. There is a ceasefire, but Azerbaijan has been violating it in different ways since the first day; they were using cannonballs first and now, they are using tanks and mines. Since they don't gain anything with the attacks, they intensify the attacks and try different ways of attacking. There are even traditional attack dates like December 31, January 6, April 24 and other religious or national holidays...<sup>30</sup>*

There is no doubt that the plane crisis between Turkey and Russia affected the Karabakh conflict and thus, the Turkey-Armenia relations. When viewed from

this aspect, statements by the Armenian side reflected how Armenia was affected by the Turkey-Russia crisis as follows:

*...I believe that the tension will not turn into a war. As long as NATO is there, I personally do not see such a threat. However, there will definitely be economic and political crises. Russia's impact on Turkey will be asymmetrical. Erdoğan, like Mikheil Saakashvili, is on Putin's "black list" now; putting the relationship between Turkey and Russia aside, he is a personal enemy now. There is no doubt that Turkey will act in accordance with its own interests, but a political ground for solving this problem will be found. What is important for us is Armenia's position during this process. We shouldn't let anybody use us. We have to avoid this. We have to keep a level head and we shouldn't be used by Russia*

30 Alin Ozinian, "Karabağ'daki çatışmalar masaya güçlü oturabilmek için", *Agos*, 21.12.2015.

*and Turkey. Even if things get worse, we shouldn't trust anybody and we have to act in line with our own interests. At the end of the day, we have military agreements with Russia and we are unable to develop relations with Turkey. However, it is illogical to pick a side based on these. We have to first think for ourselves...*<sup>31</sup>

Azerbaijan, which is the other party to the Karabakh issue, stating that they are ready give any kind of support to reduce the tension between Russia and Turkey, gave the message that they are ready to do their share for the resolution of the issue.<sup>32</sup> Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Memmedyarov's following statements reveal that the crisis indirectly affected Azerbaijan as well:

*Of course, the tension between Russia and Turkey concern us. I discussed this issue with both my Turkish and Russian counterparts. We are endeavoring for this issue to remain in the past and not bring harm to both Turkey and Russia as well as other countries. Turkey is a strategic partner of Turkey. We have strategic relations with Russia as well. Both countries are among the biggest trade partners of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan is making efforts for resolution of the crisis and reestablishment of relations between the two countries.*<sup>33</sup>

The Karabakh issue, which went through three phases (pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods) and survived up to the present day, maintains its topicality and is affected by both global and regional developments. The most recent example of this is the crisis between Turkey and Russia. The crisis, which began with the downing of the Russian jet that violated Turkish airspace, triggered the tension between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and led to low intensity clashes between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces after a long time.<sup>34</sup>

The plane crisis between Russia and Turkey, although indirectly, affected the Karabakh issue and led to the violation of the ceasefire between Azerbaijan and Armenia.<sup>35</sup> When looked at the news in the Armenian and Azerbaijani press, it is seen that relevant countries have made statements revealing their sides in the conflict.

*...The crisis between Turkey and Russia, which began on September 24 with the downing of the Russian jet that violated Turkish airspace,*

31 Alin Ozinian, "Karabağ'daki çatışmalar masaya güçlü oturabilmek için", *Agos*, 21.12.2015.

32 "Azerbaycan'dan flaş Rusya Türkiye açıklaması", *İnternet Haber*, 27.11.2015.

33 "Azerbaycan'dan Türkiye-Rusya açıklaması", *Yeni Şafak*, 02.02.2016.

34 "Türk-Rus krizi, Karabağ tansiyonunu yükseltti", *HaberRus*, 27.12.2015.

35 "Türk-Rus krizi, Karabağ tansiyonunu yükseltti", *HaberRus*, 27.12.2015.

*triggered the Azerbaijan-Armenia tension. Azerbaijani and Armenian forces, after a long break, began to engage in low intensity clashes. The fact that the fighting broke out right after Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's visit to Baku on December 3-4 drew attention. Davutoğlu had announced during that visit that Turkey would get closer with Azerbaijan. Russia, on the other hand, responded to this move by turning towards Armenia. First, Moscow reinforced the base in Erivan with six combat and transport helicopters (Mi-24-Mi-8). Afterwards, it signed an agreement with Armenia to establish a joint air defense system. The agreement also includes military cooperation, training support, vehicle-equipment grants and joint military exercises. Armenia toughened its stance towards Baku following the signing of the agreement in Moscow. Armenian Defense Ministry spokesperson Artsrun Hovhannisyanyan, during the week, said that the ceasefire had ended and described the increasing clashes along the Karabakh border line as 'war' ...<sup>36</sup>*

It is clearly seen from the developments regarding the Karabakh issue how Russia tries to use the Caucasus as in the past with regard to the plane crisis with Turkey. The leader of the Just Russia Party Sergey Mironov's statement via Twitter during crisis days, "We have just submitted a bill on responsibility for failure to acknowledge the fact of a genocide of Armenians by Turkey in 1915,"<sup>37</sup> is a sign on how regional and global powers act in a disingenuous manner with regards to not only the Karabakh issue but also the Armenian controversy. Similarly, how the plane crisis will change the balances in the South Caucasus is indicated in the Armenian press as follows:

*...Reciprocal steps would be taken, which can be considered as a new challenge for the South Caucasus region. "This will be a signal for a longer-term planning in Russia's policy in the South Caucasus..."<sup>38</sup>*

Another sign that reveals that the plane crisis between Russia and Turkey was well received by Armenia is the statements by Armenian Agriculture Minister Sergo Karapetyan who took action to turn this crisis into an opportunity. In his statement, Karapetyan said that the crisis between Turkey and Russia could provide Armenia with new opportunities for the export of agricultural products.<sup>39</sup>

36 "Türk-Rus krizi, Karabağ tansiyonunu yükseltti", *HaberRus*, 27.12.2015.

37 Varduhi Balyan, "Türkiye-Rusya gerginliği Ermenistan'ı da olumsuz etkiler", *Agos*, 30.11.2015.

38 "Milletvekili: Rusya-Türkiye krizi, Dağlık Karabağ çatışması üzerinde doğrudan etkide bulunmaz", *News.am*, 02.12.2015.

39 "Ermenistan Tarım Bakanı: Türk-Rus Krizi İhracatımız İçin Fırsat", *Haberler*, 27.11.2015.

The most important problem for Azerbaijan, which has great importance for Turkey in terms of ethnical, religious, cultural structure as well as geopolitics,<sup>40</sup> is Karabakh. Turkey's policy with regards to Karabakh has brought it face to face with Russia and Iran. The most obvious example of this was the plane crisis between Russia and Turkey. Statements made by Armenian and Azerbaijani officials following the crisis clearly revealed how interstate relations could affect issues in the region.

Besides the Karabakh issue and Armenian question, Russia's activities with regard to terrorist organizations has brought the Karabakh region to the fore once again. Statements made by researchers in previous years claimed that Russia was the only country that supported PKK, and was striving to protect the PKK from Turkey's blows. It was indicated that as part of the negotiations conducted by Russia with regard to the placement of PKK to Armenia, PKK leaders had come together in Moscow and that it was envisaged to move the PKK from Northern Iraq to Qandil Mountains, then to Armenia.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, following the plane crisis between Turkey and Russia, Karabakh region came to the fore once more with opening of a representation in Moscow by the PYD, which is the Syrian extension of the PKK. It is claimed that Russia, which uses the Kurdish card in every opportunity and pursues a policy of becoming effective in the whole geography, wanted to establish itself as the US's counterpart in the Middle East and in regions in which Turkey is effective. For this reason, the main reason behind Russia's hostile attitude towards Turkey is its desire to corner Turkey and hold it captive. Therefore, Russia, just like it used the Armenian question in the past, is using matters such as the Kurdish issue, the Karabakh issue and the opening of PYD representation in Moscow, as trump cards against Turkey today.<sup>42</sup>

In relation to the Turkey-Russia crisis, statements in Russia indicating that the Treaty of Kars has expired and the Treaty should not be recognized by Russia<sup>43</sup> also provides clues about policies Russia will pursue in the South Caucasus in the long run. According to this, Russia, with the steps it has taken with regards to the PKK, actually aims to both form a pro-Russian structure in Karabakh and to intimidate Turkey. Russia's plan to *de facto* settle in the South Caucasus once again and to deploy the PKK in Karabakh in order to ease a Russian intervention in the region was covered in the press as follows:<sup>44</sup>

40 Çağrı Kürşat Yüce, *Kafkasya ve Orta Asya, enerji Kaynakları Üzerinde Mücadele*, Ötüken Yayınları, İstanbul, 2006, p. 353-354.

41 "PKK'yı Dağlık Karabağ'a Rusya Yerleştiriyor", *Gün Seher*, [www.byegm.gov.tr](http://www.byegm.gov.tr), 15.03.2016.

42 Sevil Nuriyeva, "PKK'nın Yukarı Karabağ'a yerleştirilmesi kime yarar?", *Star*, 13.03.2016.

43 Sevil Nuriyeva, *ibid.*

44 Sevil Nuriyeva, *ibid.*

*...When the Soviet Union's role in the establishment of the PKK is taken into consideration and when the demographic structure in the former Soviet republics is examined thoroughly, it is possible to accurately grasp malicious plans against Turkey. The emergence of politicians stating that "the Treaty of Kars has expired and the Treaty shouldn't be recognized by Russia" is not a coincidence. Today, Azerbaijan's territory of Nagorno-Karabakh is at the hands of Armenia thanks to the support of Russia and it is a well-known fact that Armenia does not act in Karabakh without Russia's permission. Therefore, the deployment of PKK in Nagorno-Karabakh is actually a product of Russia's ill-intentioned ideas...<sup>45</sup>*

It is seen that problems between the countries of the region will increase as long as Armenia continues its uncompromising policies towards Azerbaijan and Turkey. Several researchers believe that, although the diaspora is happy with the said policies of Armenia, these policies will do more harm than good to Armenia. It is indicated that in case Armenia continues its current policies, the already poor relations with Turkey could reach a complete impasse and therefore, more support to Azerbaijan could be at Turkey's agenda, leading an unhappy Armenia to base its policies completely on Russia.<sup>46</sup>

The fact that both international organizations and countries of the region could not resolve the Karabakh conflict since 1994 is, as mentioned above, directly related to global powers evaluating the issue within the scope of their own interests. However, Azerbaijan's growing strength and international law decisions in favor of Azerbaijan are indicators of the fact that Armenia is the losing party in the matter of the Karabakh issue. Especially the ECtHR's judgement dated 16 June 2015 is extremely important. It is possible to say that the judgement, which indicates that Karabakh is not independent, has removed the possibility of Karabakh being recognized by other countries. Similarly, the fact that the parliamentary and local election held last year in Karabakh was not recognized by many countries could be regarded as a development against Armenia's independence thesis with regard to Karabakh. Lastly, the Political Affairs Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe pointed out that Karabakh was not independent and adopted a draft resolution, which indicated that the expulsion of Azerbaijanis in the region resembled the concept of ethnic cleansing (however, this draft resolution's impact became limited when the draft resolution failed to be adopted in the plenary session of

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45 Sevil Nuriyeva, *ibid.*

46 Ömer Engin Lütem, "Ermenistan: 2015 Bilançosu", *Avrasya İncelemeleri Merkezi 2015 Yıllık Rapor*, AVİM Yayınları, Ankara, 2016, p. 133.



the Assembly). Although Armenia thinks that it will ensure its security by siding with Russia, the fact that Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, which are Muslim members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, seem to support Azerbaijan could be regarded as a critical development that could weaken Armenia's hand.<sup>47</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The fact that Turkey, which borders the South Caucasus and is heavily dependent on outside energy sources, is geographically located right in the middle of producer and consumer countries makes Turkey a natural energy bridge. Oil and natural gas pipeline projects in Eurasia are the most important projects for Turkey in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, the instability and uncertainty in countries with oil and natural gas reserves as well as in countries where pipelines will cross prevents the development of economic relations that will benefit all sides.<sup>48</sup> Turkey-Armenia relations is an example of this. Closed borders between the two countries due to issues such as Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Armenian question, causes Armenia to be excluded from many projects, especially those in the energy field, and leads to problems in economic and political relations. Therefore, with regards to the power struggles in the region, it is possible to say that, in terms of regional peace, it would be more beneficial in the long run for the countries in the region to adopt a peaceful attitude rather than becoming a party of the problem.

In the light of developments, it is possible to say that Russia will preserve the status quo in the Caucasus, especially in the South Caucasus, in the long run. When viewed from this aspect, a settlement with regard to ethnic and other issues in the region that will harm Russia's interests or sideline Russia is unlikely to be achieved. Therefore, it is possible to say that the resolution of the Karabakh conflict will first have a regional effect, then a global effect. As a matter of fact, the resolution of the Karabakh conflict will have a global effect as it will affect both Turkey-Armenia and Turkey-Azerbaijan relations besides Armenia-Azerbaijan relations.

Although the Russia's reinforcement of its bases in Armenia came to the fore more frequently following the plane crisis between Turkey and Russia, the regional aspect of the issue must also be pointed out. With the reinforcement of these bases, it is possible to say that Russia has been involved in activities

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47 Ömer Engin Lütem, *ibid.*, p. 134.

48 Çağrı Kürşat Yüce, *ibid.*, p. 366-367.

that will ease an intervention not only towards Turkey, but also towards the Caucasus, which it describes as its backyard. Therefore, as noted earlier, it must be mentioned that global and regional problems have many different dimensions and effects in the present day. When looked at regional and global developments from this aspect, it is seen that ethnic and other problems are used against a possible challenge as well as a means in the struggle for influence in the Caucasus, especially in the South Caucasus.

Ultimately, the crisis between Turkey and Russia led to the escalation of the Karabakh conflict. The outbreak of low intensity clashes on the Azerbaijani-Armenian front line and Russia's reinforcement of its air power in Armenia suggests the possibility of Russia taking the revenge of its downed jet via Armenia.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the opening of a PYD office in Moscow, claims regarding the deployment of the PKK in Karabakh, and statements with regards to the Armenian question is significant in terms of how Karabakh has been placed at the center of global developments.

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49 "Türk-Rus krizi, Karabağ tansiyonunu yükseltti", *HaberRus*, 27.12.2015.

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