

TURKEY'S RELATIONS WITH THE TRANSCAUCASUS AND THE CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS

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The Transcaucasus is a region of major strategic concern for Turkey. Developments in post-Soviet Central Asia, on the other hand, generally have much less impact on Turkish security interests. However, from the viewpoint of Ankara, there are actual and potentially important linkages between the Transcaucasus and Central Asia. As a 'Turkic' state, Azerbaijan, together with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Turkey, participates in the Turkic Summits and in other gatherings of official Turkic states. The possible construction of new oil and gas pipelines across the Transcaucasus and the Caspian Sea from Central Asia to Turkey also would interconnect the two regions.

In the post-Cold War era officials in Ankara have attempted to stress the significant role of Turkey as a regional stabilising power in the Balkans, the Middle East and the Transcaucasus. Rather than

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acting unilaterally, Turkish officials have endeavoured to ensure that disputes and problems in these regions are handled by various security institutions and fora such as the UN, NATO and the OSCE.¹ Moscow is seeking to re-establish its dominance in the Transcaucasus. It will not be possible for Ankara to check single-handedly the revival of Russian influence in the region. Turkish officials have thus opted to press their case in the above institutions and have insisted that previously signed and ratified international treaties should be respected. In addition, the Turkish government has also sponsored the formation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) which includes Russia within its ranks.

Turkey and the newly independent Central Asian republics are not geographically contiguous. There is a problem of access. Overland routes to connect Turkey with the region would need to traverse Iran, or pass through the Transcaucasus and Russia, or run via the Transcaucasus and the Caspian Sea. Improved telecommunication linkages and the opening of new airline connections can only partially offset this problem of access. Nevertheless, in recent years Turkish officials and businessmen have established close ties with the Central Asian Turkic states. If the new pipelines are to be constructed across or around the Caspian Sea to the Turkish Mediterranean coast, Turkey's economic and political ties with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in particular would assume much greater importance.

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The commandeering of the ferry boat *Avrasya* by Chechen sympathisers—many of whom were Turkish nationals—in the Turkish

¹ For one argument along these lines see Kemal Kirişçi, "New Patterns of Turkish Foreign Policy Behaviour", in Çiğdem Balın et al. (eds.), *Turkey: Political, Social and Economic Challenges in the 1990s*, Leiden, New York and Köln: E.J.Brill, 1995, pp.1-21.

Black Sea port of Trabzon in January 1996 drew international attention to the links between Turkey and developments in the south of the Russian Federation immediately to the north of the Transcaucasus. Currently, there are an estimated 25,000 Turkish citizens of Chechen decent. There are approximately ten million inhabitants of Turkey whose families originate from the north Caucasus and the Transcaucasus. Parts of these territories were once administrated by the Ottoman Empire. There are today at least 47 official Caucasian solidarity associations active in Turkey. These groups invariably press the Turkish government to take a firmer stand against Russian involvement in the Transcaucasus and against Russian military operations in Chechnya. Although sensitive to these lobbies, Turkish officials are also careful not to antagonise unnecessarily their large Russian neighbour to the north. For example, if they perceive Turkey to be too sympathetic to the Chechen cause, Russian officials will always play the so-called 'Kurdish Card' and perhaps allow the PKK influenced 'Kurdish Parliament-in-Exile' to hold more meetings in Moscow. One should also take into account that officials in Ankara, eager for Turkey to become an important regional stabilising power, are stressing the need to settle disputes in the Transcaucasus by peaceful means. They are also underlining the importance of preserving the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all states in the region, including Russia.

Many Russian officials believe that if Russia were to undertake a 'strategic withdrawal' from the Transcaucasus this would lead to a loss of control in the north Caucasus which would result in the disintegration of the Russian Federation itself.² Tensions in the north Caucasus would certainly threaten Russia's 'soft underbelly' –the agriculturally rich area of the Kuban. Moscow is thus aiming to:

- 1) re-establishing permanent Russian military bases in

² Pavel Baev, "Russia's Policy in the North Caucasus and the War in Chechnia", *Former Soviet South Project Briefing*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, No.2, March 1995, p. 3

Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia,

2) deploy Russian border troops to guard the external frontiers of the three Transcaucasian states,

3) press for an exclusive CIS (i.e. Russian) peacekeeping presence in the region,

4) station more Russian tanks and armoured vehicles in the north Caucasus even though this violates the terms of the CFE Treaty.

Russian officials are also determined to maintain and expand their influence in the area by ensuring that Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan route their oil and gas exports via Russia. It would seem therefore that Russian and Turkish interests are bound to clash in the Transcaucasus given Ankara's opposition to a restoration of Russian military, political and economic dominance in the region.

Nevertheless, one should also bear in mind that Turkey and Russia are important trade partners. In 1994 trade turnover between the two states totalled over \$1.85bn. This amounted to almost 58 per cent of Turkey's total trade turnover with all CIS countries.³ Russia is a major supplier of oil and gas for the Turkish consumer. In 1995, for example, Turkey procured 6bn cubic metres of natural gas from Russia and there are plans to import 14bn cubic metres by 2002 through joint venture arrangements.⁴ Turkish businessmen are heavily involved in the Russian market through various contracting deals and credit agreements. The Turco-Russian relationship is thus a complex and multifaceted one.

3 Trade turnover figures provided by the Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu (Foreign Economic Relations Board), Istanbul.

4 *Yeni Yüzyıl*, 15 January 1996.

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The close ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious and historical links between Turkey and Azerbaijan are well-known. Although President Haidar Aliev is more circumspect in his diplomacy than his immediate predecessor Ebulfez Elçibey, relations between Baku and Ankara remain warm.

Both Turkish and Armenian businessmen are keen to look to the future rather than dwell on the problems of the past. Commercial relations will not flourish until diplomatic ties are established. According to Ankara, relations will not be normalised until the Armenian government openly renounces territorial claims on Turkey. Another condition is that Yerevan should use its leverage and compel the Karabakh Armenians to withdraw from territories occupied in Azerbaijan beyond the disputed enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh. There has been speculation that if Turkish-Armenian relations could be normalised, Turkey could then spearhead a Benelux-type model of economic cooperation with the three states of the Transcaucasus.⁵ Moscow though would probably attempt to forestall the formation of such an economic union.

Armenian officials refused to allow Turkey to mediate between the warring parties in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. Various attempts by the Turkish authorities to launch peace initiatives with Russia, the US, Iran and Georgia also proved unsuccessful. However, together with the US and Russia, Turkey was a co-author of the UN Security Council Resolution 882 which called for a ceasefire and emphasised the need to preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. A ceasefire was finally achieved due to the combined efforts of Russia and the OSCE Minsk Group (of which Turkey is a member).

Turkey is firmly opposed to an exclusively CIS (i.e., in effect

⁵ *Cumhuriyet*, 4 August 1995.

Russian) peacekeeping presence in the Transcaucasus. Fierce lobbying in the then CBCE by Turkish delegates failed to prevent Russia from deploying a CIS peacekeeping force in July 1994 to separate the Georgian and Abkhazian combatants, although Turkey did provide a small contingent for the UN observer mission which was despatched to monitor the situation in Georgia. In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, Turkish officials are vigorously insisting that if a definite peace settlement could be reached, an OSCE, and not a CIS, peacekeeping force should be deployed. The OSCE summit in Budapest in December 1994 declared that such a force would be formed under a UN Security Council mandate. Turkey has offered to send up to 480 troops but Armenia has voiced its disapproval.

The background to Russia's violation of Article 5 of the CFE Treaty with regard to the restrictions on the number of tanks, armoured combat vehicles and artillery pieces in the so-called flank areas has been extensively discussed.⁶ Turkish officials were adamant that Russia should keep to the original terms of the Treaty, and were bitterly disappointed when Russia failed to adhere to Article 5 by the November 1995 deadline. Two weeks later, at Turkey's urging, the issue was discussed in the NATO Defence Planning Committee. In Article 11 of the final communiqué, Alliance members expressed their concern at the violation of the CFE Treaty. Turkish officials are probably hoping that some form of compromise arrangement could be agreed upon in the CFE Review Conference in May 1996.

Ankara is also concerned that Azerbaijan should not yield to pressure from Moscow and permit the reopening of Russian military bases and allow the stationing of Russian border troops on Azerbaijani territory. In both Armenia and Georgia a significant

⁶ For one excellent discussion of the CFE Treaty and Russia's opposition to Article 5 see, Richard A. Falkenrath, "The CFE Flank Dispute: Waiting in the Wings", *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 4, Spring 1995, pp. 118-144.

Russian military presence has been restored. Hitherto, the authorities in Baku have only consented to lease to the Russians a former Soviet radar station in north Azerbaijan. But at the CIS summit in Moscow in January 1996 Azerbaijan, together with Moldova and Turkmenistan, refused to be part of a planned unified air defence system for the CIS⁷. Officials in Ankara must be hoping that Azerbaijan will not offer more concessions to Moscow.

Interestingly, Turkey, Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia together with other Black Sea littoral states and Greece, Albania and Moldova are members of BSEC. This cooperative arrangement has originally sponsored by Turkey and officially inaugurated in summer 1992. The emphasis of the BSEC is to coordinate activities at the governmental and non-governmental level in a number of technical fields with a particular emphasis on economy, the environment, transportation and telecommunications. Sensitive political and military issues are avoided. In the longer term, the BSEC may help to promote a climate of trust in the Black Sea region, but for the foreseeable future the BSEC's role appears to be limited.

With regard to the Transcaucasus, the record has shown that Ankara's attempts to base its policy to a great extent on the effectiveness of various security institutions and fora has been only partially successful. This is not necessarily because of shortcomings in Turkish lobbying. The operational constraints of organisations and institutions must be taken into account. And concerning the violations of the CFE Treaty, other related issues need to be borne in mind such as the controversial question of NATO's possible extension eastwards.

7 Open Media Research Institute, No.15, p.1, 22 January 1996, *Daily Report*.

8 See for example Gareth M. Winrow, "Turkey in Post-Soviet Central Asia", The Royal Institute of International Affairs, Former Soviet South Project No. 1, 1995.

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Relations between Turkey and the newly independent states of Central Asia have been analysed in detail elsewhere⁸. An extensive network of political, economic and cultural ties has developed. For example Turkish officials are involved in the training of Central Asians diplomats, administrators, bank managers, religious personnel, military officials, etc. The Turkish Eximbank has approved or is preparing to offer credits totalling over \$1 billion to Tajikistan and the four Central Asian Turkic states. Trade turnover between Turkey and post-Soviet Central Asia remains insubstantial. The figures for 1994 were less than \$500 million, which was approximately only one quarter of the amount of Turco-Russian trade in the same year⁹. Trade between Turkey and Central Asia could increase considerably if new oil and gas pipelines were constructed bypassing Russia. Through oil and gas exports –some of which could be consumed by Turkey– the Central Asians would be able to generate hard currency earnings and possibly purchase more Turkish goods.

The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is heavily involved in seeking to institutionalise ties with Azerbaijan and the Turkic states of Central Asia. Three Turkic Summits have been convened. The ministries of culture and education from these states meet regularly. Inter-parliamentary cooperation has been launched. There are also plans to foster closer ties between the foreign ministries. A common 'ethnic' link is here stressed. It would seem that Turkish officials are giving less priority to the larger and more unwieldy Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) which also includes within its ranks Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan.

⁹ Calculations made by the author from figures provided by the Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu (Foreign Economic Relations Board), Istanbul.

Undoubtedly, at the end of 1991, with the unforeseen disintegration of the Soviet Union and the sudden emergence of independent 'Turkic' states, there was an initial euphoria in Turkey at the prospects of re-establishing ties with long-separated 'Turkic cousins'. The media and officials in Turkey, the US, Western Europe and Central Asia whipped up this enthusiasm. The Central Asian leaderships were desperate for economic and political support. Western governments were keen to promote the so-called 'Turkish model' in Central Asia as an alternative to a possible Iranian-inspired radical Islamic model. In February 1992 the then Turkish Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel confidently announced that with the break-up of the Soviet Union a "gigantic Turkish world" was emerging stretching from the Adriatic Sea to the Great Wall of China¹⁰. Turkish officials would adopt a more cautious line after the 'failure' of the first Turkic Summit held in Ankara in October 1992 when the Central Asian heads of state refused to approve plans for a Turkic Common Market and a Turkic Development and Investment Bank. By this time the Central Asians were eager to cultivate closer political and economic relations with other states in addition to Turkey. Still dependent on Russian military and economic support, they were also careful not to provoke Moscow by binding themselves too closely to Turkey.

The second and third Turkic Summits assembled in Istanbul in October 1994 and in Bishkek in August 1995 have resulted in more institutionalisation of ties between Turkey and the Turkic states. Interestingly, though, the Bishkek Declaration also expressed support at the efforts of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to set in motion and expand "integration processes" in Central Asia in which Turkey was not involved¹¹. The Declaration was referring to the initial attempts of the three Central Asian states to establish

¹⁰ *Cumhuriyet*, 24 February 1992.

¹¹ The text of the Bishkek Declaration of 28 August 1995 was provided to the author by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

cooperation in the economic and military spheres. One month before the Bishkek Summit these states had launched the operation of a Central Asian Bank for Economic Cooperation and Development. They are also working to form a Central Asian peacekeeping battalion separate from the CIS and under the aegis of the UN.

It would seem that the Turkish MFA is now pursuing a cautious and realistic line with regard to the Turkic Central Asian states. The Turkish Ministries of Culture and Education, however, would seem to be aspiring to place Turkey at the centre of what they perceive to be an emerging Turkic world. The Education Ministry is involved in projects to standardise history and literary textbooks for schools in Turkey and in the Turkic republics and to broadcast open university programmes to these states from Turkey. The Ministry of Culture is leading the work of the Turkic Cultures and Arts Joint Administration (TÜRKSÖY) whose membership includes, interestingly, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan from within the Russian Federation.

There are non-official groups in Turkey which are seeking to promote Turkey's relations with post-Soviet Central Asia by underlining common ethnic ties. This includes for instance the activities of the Research Foundation of the Turkish World and the Turkish Cultural Research Association. Alparslan Türkeş, the leader of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), has been instrumental in convening in Turkey three general assemblies of the Turkic States and Turkic People's Friendship and Cooperation Group. These non-official, consultative gatherings, which have included delegates from the Turkic peoples of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Yakutia—in the Russian Federation—have discussed among other matters the possibility of establishing a High Council of Turkic Republics. Although not sponsored by the Turkish MFA, the late President Turgut Özal, the then Prime Minister Tansu Çiller and President

Demirel have addressed these general assemblies.

Other non-official links between Turkey and the newly independent Turkic states include the activities of Islamic Sufi orders based in Turkey. For example, Fethullah Gülen, the leader of the Nurcu sect, has claimed to have founded over 150 schools in Central Asia and the Transcaucasus.¹² In contrast, according to the figures of the Turkish International Cooperation Agency released in October 1995, the Turkish Ministry of Education has opened 12 schools.¹³

When President Demirel became the first President of Turkey to officially visit Tajikistan and Mongolia in September 1995, the Turkish press wildly speculated that Turkey was interested in forming and leading a so-called Eurasian Union.¹⁴ During his trip to Tajikistan Demirel was reported to have stated that 'Eurasia' also included Tajikistan, Mongolia and Afghanistan in addition to the newly independent Turkic states in the region.¹⁵ The Tajik President İmamali Rakhmanov urged Demirel to use his influence to help bring about peace in neighbouring Afghanistan. This was presumably an indirect reference to Turkey's contacts with the Uzbek warlord General Dostum who controls a wide swathe of the territory in northern Afghanistan. One should not forget that there are also Turkic peoples in the Chinese north western province of Xinjiang. The Turkish government is careful not to interfere in the internal affairs of China with regard to Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Uighur minorities. However, representatives of these people have found sanctuary in Turkey and are working to keep alive their dreams of liberating 'Eastern Turkestan'.

12 *Turkish Daily News* (TDN), 6 July 1995.

13 *Eurasian File*, no. 43, October 1995/2, p. 5.

14 *Yeni Yüzyıl*, 12 September 1995.

15 *TDN*, 12 September 1995.

In contrast to the Transcaucasus, there are few problems in Turco-Russian relations with regard to Central Asia. It would seem that most Turkish officials are aware of the limitations of Turkey's role and influence in the region. For the foreseeable future Russia will remain the dominant actor in Central Asia. The Central Asian leaders themselves, fearful of the possible spread of religious radicalism and concerned at the potential fragmentation of their states from regional and sub-ethnic cleavages, are eager to remain under a loose Russian security umbrella. They are also keen to continue to benefit from economic support from Russia and from other states interested in the region such as Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Israel, the US and the members of the EU. These states share a common concern to preserve stability in Central Asia. However, with the possible exception of the authorities in Tajikistan, the Central Asian leaders wish to avoid becoming totally dependant again on Moscow. The construction of new oil and gas pipelines from Central Asia to the outside world, bypassing Russia, would enable the former Soviet republics to retain a measure of economic and political independence. In this context, Turkey is potentially a very important partner for those Central Asian states well-endowed with oil and gas reserves.

THE PIPELINE ISSUE

Many commentators have noted that Moscow is determined to ensure that any new oil and gas pipelines constructed across Central Asia and the Transcaucasus should also cross Russian territory in order for Russia to maintain control over the former Soviet republics.¹⁶ Moscow is also seeking to preserve its grip on energy resources by insisting that the Caspian Sea is not an international sea but a lake. Thus, in the opinion of Russian officials, all Caspian Sea-related beyond the coastal waters of littoral states should require the

¹⁶ See for example, Stephen Blank, "Energy, Economics and Security in Central Asia: Russia and its Rivals", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 1995, p. 383.

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prior consent of all those states. This would enable Russia to veto the development of offshore oil fields and would enable Moscow to obstruct the possible construction of underwater oil and gas pipelines. The Turkish authorities are pressing for the building of new pipelines from Central Asia and the Transcaucasus to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. Turkey would benefit economically from the royalties and transportation costs and could also consume some of the oil and gas thereby lessening Turkish dependence on Russia and Iran. Russian influence in the region could eventually diminish as a consequence of the construction of new pipelines to Turkey, while conversely Turkey could acquire more of a voice in regional affairs.

At present oil produced in Kazakhstan is transported to Russia across several pipelines including one route from the Tengiz oil field to the Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiisk via the highly unstable area of Grozny. In April 1993 the American oil company Chevron formed a joint venture with the Kazakh government to extract more oil from the rich deposits in Tengiz. However, the Russian authorities are only prepared to allow limited amounts of oil from Tengiz to be conveyed through their current pipeline system. A new pipeline must be constructed. The Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) was formed –whose members are Russia, Kazakhstan and the Oman Oil Company– to plan and finance the construction of a new pipeline from Tengiz to Novorossiisk which would avoid the area around Grozny. The CPC has encountered financial and technical problems and at the same time of writing the Kazakh government was seriously considering establishing an alternative consortium whose members would include Chevron, British Gas, Mobil, Agip and the Russian oil company Lukoil.¹⁷

The Turkish government and the officials in the Turkish State Pipeline Agency (BOTAS) have been striving to ensure that a

¹⁷ *Monitor* (The Jamestown Foundation), Vol. 2, No. 7, 10 January 1996.

substantial portion of the oil produced at Tengiz should be transported to Ceyhan. Here, a new oil pipeline from Tengiz transporting Kazakh oil should link up with a future Baku-Ceyhan pipeline which could also convey oil from the Caspian shelf off Azerbaijan. In early 1995 the US administration publicly supported Turkish proposals concerning the construction of another new pipeline for Tengiz oil. However, when visiting Almaty in August 1995 Prime Minister Çiller failed to secure definite commitments from Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev. The Kazakh leader was only prepared to consider the establishment of a new consortium open to all interested states which could evaluate all possible new routes for transport of Tengiz oil including the Ceyhan option.¹⁸ Nazarbaev's caution was not surprising given that Turkish officials had yet to obtain firm pledges for the construction of a Baku-Ceyhan pipeline.

The route or routes for a new oil pipeline or pipelines from Tengiz is thus to a great extent dependent on what route or routes will be eventually chosen for the transport of oil from the offshore Caspian oil fields near Baku. On 20 December 1994 the Azerbaijani government agreed to the formation of the Azerbaijan International Oil Consortium (AIOC), which would be responsible for the development of these extensive oil fields. In this \$7.14bn oil production-sharing agreement involving a number of international oil companies, the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) was finally allocated a 6.75 per cent stake. Two routes are under serious consideration for the transportation of oil when production will begin to reach maximum capacity. These are the Baku-Novorossiisk and Baku-Ceyhan options.

For oil to flow from Baku to Novorossiisk an existing pipeline between the two ports must be upgraded and in certain sections

¹⁸ *Yeni Yüzyıl* and *TDN*, 16 August 1995.

¹⁹ "Caspian Oil - of Pipelines and Hubble-bubbles", *The Economist*, 25 March 1995.

rebuilt. There is also a need to reverse the flow of oil in the existing Grozny-Baku link. Russian officials have been considering the construction of a longer and more expensive pipeline from Baku to Novorossiisk via Komsomolsk which would bypass strife-ridden Chechnya.¹⁹ BOTAŞ officials have been drawing attention to certain drawbacks to the use of Novorossiisk. The port has a limited loading capacity –refurbishment will be costly– and bad weather over long spells throughout the year prevents the loading of oil and other shipments. Collisions on the Bosphorus are not uncommon and the passage of more super tankers through the narrow straits could pose serious dangers to the inhabitants of Istanbul.

The current terminal facilities at Ceyhan are superior to those at Novorossiisk and favourable weather is guaranteed the year round. BOTAŞ officials have stated that sufficient amounts of oil will be produced at Tengiz and by the AIOC in the Caspian to enable oil to be transported to both Novorossiisk and Ceyhan. Turkey is willing to finance the whole of the construction of a new oil pipeline across Turkish territory. The threat of sabotage from PKK guerrillas in eastern Turkey could compel officials in Ankara to consider the building of longer and more expensive pipeline route to Ceyhan via Sivas.

No definite decision has been made with regard to the future transportation of oil to be extracted by the AIOC. Instead, on 9 October 1995, the AIOC appeared to procrastinate when announcing that 'early oil' to be produced from the Caspian offshore oil fields could be transported to Novorossiisk via Baku and also to the Georgian Black Sea port of Soupsa. A decision has yet to be reached on the final route/s for the larger quantities of oil which will eventually come on tap. The Çiller government was relieved to hear that the AIOC had not decided to export all the early oil to Novorossiisk. That would have placed in grave doubt the Baku-Ceyhan option for later oil produced. Oil conveyed to Soupsa could

be carried through the Bosphorus and then to international markets since only relatively insubstantial quantities of oil would be transported. A Baku-Soupsa oil pipeline will be considerably more expensive than the Baku-Novorossiisk alternative and would not be ready until mid-1997. A line to Novorossiisk could be in service as early as the start of 1997.²⁰ The AIOC is looking favourably at Turkish proposals to finance the construction of the Baku-Soupsa oil pipeline.²¹ Chevron may also become involved in the project. In January 1996, top Chevron executives held discussions with the Georgian officials in Tbilisi concerning the pipeline and the responsibility of transporting oil from Tengiz to Soupsa. In a further complication, though, also in January 1996, the Kazakh Prime Minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin and the Iranian Vice-President Hassan Habibi held talks about the possible export of Kazakh oil via Iran through swap arrangements.²²

Concerning alternative routes for the transport of Turkmen gas, Turkish officials have been supporting a project to construct a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Central Europe via Turkey and possibly Iran. In October 1994, in Turkmenistan, the heads of state of Turkey, Pakistan, Iran and Turkmenistan attended the symbolic inauguration of the construction of the pipeline. Surprisingly, Russia is represented in the steering committee which was formed to realise the project. Perhaps Moscow believes that the project will not materialise due to the high financial outlay required—around \$7bn. Turkmenistan would then remain dependent on the Russian pipeline system for the transport of most Turkmen gas beyond the CIS. Certainly, the above project has run into serious difficulties. In August 1995, in Ashgabat, Turkmen President Sepermurad Niyazov

20 *Country Report, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan*, The Economist Intelligence Unit, 4th Quarter 1995, pp. 34-35.

21 *Yeni Yüzyıl*, 24 January 1996.

22 *Monitor*, The Jamestown Foundation, Vol. 2, No. 9, 12 January 1996 and Vol. 2, No.16, 24 January 1996.

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informed Prime Minister Çiller that plans to build a Turkmen pipeline to Central Europe across Turkish territory were no longer a priority. Instead, Niyazov proposed that some Turkmen gas could be delivered to Turkey via a future upgraded and extended pipeline running across Russia and Georgia.²³ Presumably, Moscow would have to approve of this. Niyazov appears more interested in transporting Turkmen gas to Iran. In September 1995, Turkmenistan and Iran signed an agreement to build in two years a gas pipeline 140km in length which could link Turkmenistan with the pipeline network in northern Iran.²⁴

Visiting Tashkent in July 1995, Prime Minister Çiller, in talks with Uzbek President Islam Kerimov referred to plans for a Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Georgia-Turkey gas pipeline. Çiller indicated that a summit meeting could be held in Turkey in autumn 1995 to discuss these plans with the leaders of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Georgia and Azerbaijan.²⁵ The summit meeting was not held and little more has been heard of the Uzbekistan-Turkey gas pipeline. The pipelines issue has figured prominently in agendas of each of the Turkic summits. Turkish officials are probably disappointed at the lack of progress over plans to build pipelines across Turkey. Deliberations over the possible future routes of new oil and gas pipelines are notoriously slow and painstaking. Planning, feasibility studies and other technical and financial problems need to be addressed. Politics is also involved. Turkey, Russia and also Iran are involved in effect in a competitive game over who gets what, when and how with regard to the oil and gas which is meant to come on tap from Central Asia and the Transcaucasus.

²³ *Hürriyet*, 19 August 1995.

²⁴ *Monitor*, The Jamestown Foundation, Vol. 1, No. 118, 18 October 1995.

²⁵ *Hürriyet* and *TDN*, 11 July 1995.

CONCLUSION

In post-Soviet Central Asia, Turkey is likely to continue to cultivate closer relations with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan bearing in mind their considerable oil and gas reserves. At present Turkish companies such as TPAO and Birleşmiş Mühendisler Bürosu (BMB) are heavily involved in developing new oil fields in Kazakhstan. Uzbekistan will also remain an important partner for Turkey because of its economic potential and its political influence in Central Asia. Officials in Ankara will endeavour to maintain close relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia in particular because of their critical position with regard to the pipelines issue. With the exception of the pipelines question, it would seem that Turkish and Russian interests in Central Asia coincide. Both states are supportive of the measures to preserve stability in the region.

Turco-Russia relations in the Transcaucasus are much more problematic. It appears that the officials in Ankara would prefer in practice to erect a buffer zone in the Transcaucasus between Turkey and Russia. Moscow seems determined to re-establish complete influence and control in the region. These objectives appear to be irreconcilable. Stability in the Transcaucasus would provide less opportunities for Moscow to interfere in the politics of the region. Projecting stability in the region through encouraging the active involvement of institutions such as the UN and the OSCE and by attempting to ensure that international treaties are respected is clearly in Turkey's interests. The situation in the region though remains highly fragile if not volatile. The Nagorno-Karabagh problem could again explode. And an assassination or successful *coup d'état* against Aliiev or Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze could jeopardise Turkey's pipeline ambitions and provide Moscow with further opportunities to reacquire total dominance in the Transcaucasus.