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Historical Cultural Ties and Political Contributions

Abstract

The article is devoted to a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of Azerbaijani-Turkish relations - from ancient ethnocultural ties to modern strategic partnership. The author emphasizes that the relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye) are not limited to diplomatic interaction between the two states, but are based on common ethnogenetic, linguistic, religious and cultural roots dating back to the Oghuz Turks. The study traces the main stages of the historical rapprochement of the two peoples: from migrations and cultural interactions during the Seljuk and Ottoman eras, through a short-term strategic partnership during the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, to the period of official rupture under Soviet rule and the subsequent restoration of close ties after Azerbaijan gained independence in 1991.

Keyword: Turkic unity, Strategic partnership, Common historical and cultural roots, Military and energy cooperation

Tarihsel Kültürel Bağlar ve Politik Katkılar

Öz

Makale, Azerbaycan-Türkiye ilişkilerinin evriminin - eski etnokültürel bağlardan modern stratejik ortaklığa - kapsamlı bir analizine ayrılmıştır. Yazar, Azerbaycan ve Türkiye arasındaki ilişkilerin iki devlet arasındaki diplomatik etkileşimle sınırlı olmadığını, Oğuz Türklerine kadar uzanan ortak etnogenetik, dilsel, dinsel ve kültürel köklere dayandığını vurgulamaktadır. Çalışma, Selçuklu ve Osmanlı dönemlerindeki göçler ve kültürel etkileşimlerden, Azerbaycan Demokratik Cumhuriyeti dönemindeki kısa süreli stratejik ortaklığa, Sovyet yönetimi altındaki resmi kopuş dönemine ve



Azerbaycan'ın 1991'de bağımsızlığını kazanmasının ardından yakın bağların yeniden kurulmasına kadar iki halkın tarihsel yakınlaşmasının ana aşamalarının izini sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelime: *Türk Birliği, Stratejik Ortaklık, Ortak Tarihi ve Kültürel Kökler, Askeri ve Enerji İşbirliği*

Introduction

The relations formed between Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye) are not limited only to interstate diplomatic relations, but are also based on deep ethno-cultural, historical and spiritual roots. These relations have maintained their continuity despite many geopolitical changes, ideological conflicts and global events over the centuries. Both peoples, as the successors of the Oghuz Turks, have the same language family, common religious and mythological concepts, and a similar historical and cultural past. In modern times, these relations have risen to the level of strategic alliances and have become a model that contributes to the unity of the Turkic world not only regionally but also globally. The purpose of this article is to examine the main stages of historical relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye), to analyze the political, economic, military and cultural aspects of these relations, and at the same time to determine the prospects for future integration. From a methodological point of view, this research was conducted within the framework of a historical-sociological and systematic approach, and was mainly based on historical sources, academic publications, intergovernmental documents and scientific research.

1. Common History and Ethno-Cultural Roots Between Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye)

One of the factors that forms the basis of relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye) is undoubtedly the fact that both peoples belong to the same ethnic origin - the Oghuz Turks. This common origin was further strengthened by their language, customs and traditions, mythological views and worldviews. The process of formation of the Turkic ethnos began in Central Asia and created a new geopolitical order in Anatolia and the South Caucasus from the 11th century.

2. Oghuz Turks and Historical Migrations

The migration process of the Oghuz Turks, starting from Central Asia in the 7th–11th centuries, played an important role in the Turkification of the Caucasus and Anatolia. Especially during the Seljuk Empire, the number of Turks in Anatolia and Azerbaijan rapidly increased, and a common Turkish culture, along with Islam, took root in this geography. The political activities of both the Seljuk and later Ottoman and Safavid empires were factors that strengthened the historical connection between Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye).

3. Historical Context of Relations Between the Ottomans and Azerbaijan

During the rise of the Ottoman Empire, the Azerbaijan region was in the spotlight due to both its strategic position and cultural potential. Despite the political rivalry of both states during the Safavid–Ottoman conflicts, common religious and ethnic roots ensured that these conflicts did not completely contradict the interests of the Turks. As researcher Altay Göyüşov noted:

“The roots of historical relations between the Ottoman state and Azerbaijan were based not only on political, but also on religious and cultural affinities” (Göyüşov, 2010, p. 20). Interactions are also clearly observed in the literature and architecture of this period. The presence of elements close to Ottoman poetics in the poetry of Shah Ismail Khatai, the use of similar motifs in divan literature are evidence of this.

4. Geopolitical and Diplomatic Context Until the 20th Century

In the period up to the 20th century, Azerbaijani-Turkish relations developed mainly against the background of mutual interests between the empires, military-strategic relations and religious-cultural affinities. During this period, the growing influence of Russia and Iran in the region led to the division of Azerbaijani lands and the severance of ties with the Ottomans.

5. The Azerbaijani Factor Between the Qajars and the Ottomans

In the relations between the Qajars and the Ottomans in the 19th century, Azerbaijan played the role of a buffer zone between these two states. As a result of the Russo-Iranian and Russo-Ottoman wars, the Azerbaijani lands were divided into Northern (under Russian rule) and Southern (under Qajar rule), which led to the weakening of cultural ties between the Ottomans and Azerbaijan.

6. Preservation of Cultural Memory

Nevertheless, certain values have been preserved between Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye) through cultural memory. Anatolian motifs are often found in Azerbaijani folk epics and oral folk literature. At the same time, the activity of poets and scholars from Azerbaijan in Istanbul during the Ottoman period played a kind of cultural bridge.

7. Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and Ottoman Relations (1918–1920)

The period of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) is of particular importance in Azerbaijani-Turkish relations. During this period, mutual political and military cooperation between Azerbaijani Turks and the Ottoman state reached its peak, and the concept of Turkish unity was transferred to the official political level for the first time.

8. The Role of the Caucasian Islamic Army

As a result of the agreement reached between the Ottoman state and the Azerbaijani National Council in 1918, the Caucasian Islamic Army, led by General Nuru Pasha, advanced towards Baku and liberated the city from Armenian-Bolshevik forces in September. This event became a symbol of unity between the two peoples, not only from a military perspective, but also from a moral and political perspective.

“The sympathy that the Azerbaijani Turks had for the Ottoman army was not only an expression of military assistance, but also of a common national identity” (Ruinten, 2005, p. 63).

9. Diplomatic Recognition and Cooperation

The Ottoman state was the first country recognized by the ARF. Azerbaijan had diplomatic missions and cultural missions in Istanbul, and students were sent to Istanbul universities for education. These students later occupied an important place in the scientific and state administration of Azerbaijan. Cooperation with Turkey (Türkiye) was one of the main priorities in the foreign policy of the ARF.

*The End of the ADR and Severance of Relations

With the overthrow of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic by the XI Red Army in April 1920, Azerbaijan came under Soviet rule and relations with Turkey (Türkiye) were officially severed. However, the fraternal relationship that had developed during this period left a deep mark on the people's memory.

10. Official Separation, Unofficial Closeness in the Soviet Era (1920–1991)

During the Soviet era, relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye) were completely suspended at the official level, and a repressive policy was pursued against the ideas of pan-Turkism and pan-Turanism. The USSR leadership considered the ideology of Turkism dangerous and seriously persecuted its carriers.

*The Fight Against Pan-Turkism

Starting from the 1920s, thousands of intellectuals in Azerbaijan were subjected to repression under the stigma of "pan-Turkist", "pan-Islamist" and "nationalist". At that time, those who sympathized with Turkey (Türkiye) or tried to establish ideological ties with this country were severely punished.

*Informal Maintenance of Cultural Ties

Despite political obstacles, cultural ties between Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye) were maintained informally. Turkish motifs were evident in Azerbaijani literature, and Anatolian

influences in music. For example, writers such as Mammad Araz, Mirza Ibrahimov, and Bagir Jabbarzadeh expressed their spiritual attachment to Turkey (Türkiye) in their works.

“Despite political barriers, cultural ties between Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye) were maintained indirectly, and connections were maintained through literature and music” (İsmayilov, 2002, p. 78)

*Continuing Interest in Azerbaijani Culture in Turkey (Türkiye)

In the opposite direction, Azerbaijani culture, especially in the fields of literature and music, was the focus of attention in Turkey (Türkiye). Classics such as Muhammad Fuzuli, Nizami Ganjavi, and Jalil Mammadguluzadeh were read, analyzed, and presented as the common wealth of Turkish literature in Turkey (Türkiye).

*Cold War and Isolation

During the Cold War, which lasted from 1945 to 1990, Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye) belonged to different political poles. This made it impossible to officially restore relations. Nevertheless, as a result of the reforms (perestroika, glasnost) that took place in the USSR towards the end of the 1980s, Azerbaijani intellectuals began to openly demand the restoration of relations with Turkey (Türkiye).

11. Strategic Partnership in the Era of Independence (1991–2024)

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the restoration of Azerbaijan's state independence, Azerbaijan-Turkey (Türkiye) relations entered a new stage unprecedented in history. The Republic of Turkey (Türkiye), as the first state to recognize Azerbaijan's independence, revealed the symbolic and strategic nature of these relations.

*Establishment of Diplomatic Relations

In 1992, official diplomatic relations were established between Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye). That year, the Turkish Embassy in Baku and the Azerbaijani Embassy in Ankara began operating. Since then, numerous mutual visits and joint statements at the level of heads of state have proven that these relations are built on solid foundations.

“Turkey (Türkiye), being the first state to recognize the independence of Azerbaijan, has demonstrated an exemplary position for other Turkic republics” (Ruinten, 2005, p. 58). “One Nation, Two States” Doctrine The phrase “One Nation, Two States”, introduced into the political lexicon by Heydar Aliyev, constitutes the ideological foundation of Azerbaijani-Turkish relations. This concept includes not only ethnic and historical affinities, but also parallels in political, economic and military cooperation.

*Strategic Agreements and Alliances

Since the 2000s, relations between the parties have been elevated to an institutional level. The “High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council” protocol signed in 2010 laid the foundation for the continuation of bilateral relations in an official strategic format. In 2021, these relations gained official alliance status with the Shusha Declaration.

***Karabakh Victory and Turkey (Türkiye)'s Support**

During the 44-day Patriotic War that took place in the fall of 2020, Turkey (Türkiye) stood by Azerbaijan both politically and in information terms. The open support provided by Turkey (Türkiye) during the war was met with great enthusiasm by the Azerbaijani people. At this stage, military cooperation with Turkey (Türkiye) deepened further and a new regional stability model was formed in the post-war period.

12. Joint Projects in Economic Cooperation and Energy

Economic cooperation between Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye) has developed in a multifaceted manner since independence. Bilateral trade, investment, transport and especially the energy sector have become the main pillars of these relations.

The “Contract of the Century” and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Project

The “Contract of the Century,” signed in 1994, was a major turning point in the development of Azerbaijan’s energy resources into international markets. One of the key infrastructure elements of this agreement is the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline, which runs to the Turkish port of Ceyhan. The project was fully operational in 2006 and has since become one of the main guarantors of energy security in the South Caucasus region.

***TANAP and TAP – New Energy Corridors**

The Trans-Anatolian Gas Pipeline (TANAP) and Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) projects have strengthened Azerbaijan’s role in the European energy market by transporting Azerbaijani gas to Europe, and have transformed Turkey (Türkiye) into an energy transit country.

“The geostrategic position of Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye) with their natural resources reveals mutual dependence and synergy in energy cooperation” (Azərbaycan Respublikasının Xarici Siyasətinin Əsas İstiqamətləri (1991–2016), 2016).

***Bilateral Trade and Investment Relations**

In the 2020s, the annual trade turnover between Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye) exceeded 5 billion US dollars. Turkey (Türkiye) has been one of the largest foreign investors in Azerbaijan, and has played an important role in the country’s economy, especially through companies operating in the infrastructure, construction, energy and telecommunications sectors. Turkey (Türkiye) is also actively participating in the recovery and reconstruction process in

Karabakh. The projects implemented by Turkish companies in Zangilan, Fuzuli and Agdam are practical results of this cooperation.

***Transport and Logistics**

The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway line has taken transport relations between the two countries to a new level. This project plays the role of an important Euro-Asian link not only for Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye), but also for Central Asia and China.

13. Military and Security Cooperation

Military cooperation between Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye) has become one of the main strategic pillars of relations since the independence. This cooperation is not limited to arms supply and military exercises, but also includes coordination of security systems in the region and partnership in the defense industry.

***Adoption of NATO Standards and Military Training**

Since the mid-1990s, Turkey (Türkiye) has played an important role in adapting the Azerbaijani Army to NATO standards. The professionalism of the Azerbaijani Army has been increased through the training of Azerbaijani officers in Turkish Military Academies, joint military training and commander courses.

***Joint Military Exercises and Agreements**

Joint military exercises such as “TurAz Qartali”, “Qardashlig”, “Mustafa Kemal Atatürk”, which have been held regularly since 2002, prove the high level of operational coordination between the armed forces of the two countries. These exercises bring strategic cooperation with Turkey (Türkiye) to the forefront in Azerbaijan's military doctrine.

***Karabakh War and Shusha Declaration**

During the Second Karabakh War in 2020, Turkey (Türkiye) provided Azerbaijan with indirect support in terms of military technology and strategy, in addition to political and information support. The Shusha Declaration, signed in June 2021 after the war, created the legal basis for official alliance relations between the two countries. The Declaration confirms the strategic alliance in the fields of military defense, security, defense industry, energy and communications.

“The Shusha Declaration proves that the two states have common geopolitical interests and that the principle of full coordination in military security is applied” (Azərbaycan Respublikasının Xarici Siyasətinin Əsas İstiqamətləri (1991–2016), 2016, p. 125).

14. Development in the Field of Science, Education and Culture

Azerbaijan-Turkey (Türkiye) relations in the field of science, education and culture have achieved deep integration not only at the state level, but also in the public, scientific and cultural environments. Cooperation in these areas plays an important role in strengthening the scientific and cultural foundations of the common Turkish identity.

***Inter-University Cooperation and Educational Programs**

Since the 1990s, a number of cooperation agreements have been signed between Azerbaijani and Turkish universities, and student exchange programs have expanded. Higher education institutions such as ADA, Baku State University and UNEC have implemented joint projects with Hacettepe, Ankara and Istanbul Universities. Hundreds of projects have been implemented through the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), and teaching materials, laboratories and scientific equipment have been provided.

***Turkology and Joint Academic Projects**

Research on the Turkish language, literature and culture has been expanded at Azerbaijani universities at the initiative of the Yunus Emre Institute and TURKSOY. Joint academic research is being carried out within the framework of agreements signed between ANAS and the Turkish TÜBİTAK.

***Cultural Projects and Festivals**

Mutual visits of artists of the two countries, theater performances, exhibitions and concerts promote cultural integration. Initiatives such as the “Türkvizyon” music competition and the “Cultural Capital of the Turkic World” are aimed at promoting the common cultural identity of Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye). Baku was selected with this title in 2012, and Shusha in 2023.

“Cooperation established in the fields of science, education and culture is not just an element of diplomatic relations, but a rationalized form of spiritual closeness” (Hüseynova, 2018, p. 56).

15. Common Synergy in the Context of the Turkic World

Azerbaijan-Turkey (Türkiye) relations are not only bilateral, but also serve as a model for integration between wider Turkic-speaking countries. The main platform in this area has been the Organization of Turkic States (OTS).

***Leadership in the Organization of Turkic States**

The Turkic Council (now TTS), established in 2009 at the initiative of Turkey (Türkiye) and Azerbaijan, has over time become a political, economic and cultural platform. The prospect

of opening the Zangezur corridor and establishing a common information space are of particular importance in terms of strengthening the TDT.

**Coordination in the fields of Media, Transport and Security*

The creation of joint television channels in the Turkic world, trade initiatives with national currencies and joint transport routes (the Middle Corridor project) demonstrate the coordinated activities of Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye).

**The Concept of Turkic Unity and Future Prospects*

Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye) are the main locomotives ideologically and practically in the integration of the Turkic states. In this regard, the “Turan Joint Platform”, “Common Heroic History Study” and other initiatives may give impetus to the formation of a single Turkic political, economic and cultural space in the near future.

“Azerbaijani-Turkish relations are no longer bilateral, but act as the basis of a multipolar Turkic system” (İsmayilov, 2002, p. 47).

Conclusion

The relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye) should be assessed not only within the framework of the interests of the two states, but also as a continuation of the pan-Turkic national identity, common cultural and historical memory. These relations, which have been formed over many centuries and have not essentially broken despite the changing political conditions at different times, have, on the contrary, become even stronger in the people’s memory. The first official relations established between the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and the Ottoman state at the beginning of the 20th century were of strategic importance in terms of military and diplomatic cooperation. The role of the Caucasian Islamic Army in the liberation of Baku and the activities of Ottoman diplomats in Azerbaijan prove that these relations were built on the basis of political brotherhood. Although formal relations were suspended during the Soviet period, the survival of the idea of Turkicness at the informal and cultural level did not allow these ties to be completely severed. With the restoration of Azerbaijan's independence in 1991, relations between the two countries entered a qualitatively new stage. Turkey (Türkiye) being the first state to recognize Azerbaijan's independence, and the fact that both states took a unified position in the geopolitical processes taking place in the region, showed that these relations had a strategic nature. Energy and transport projects such as Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, TANAP and BTK, and political documents such as the Shusha Declaration, have formed the structured foundations of this union. At the same time, the number of joint projects in the fields of science, education and culture has increased, and a common Turkish identity has been

strengthened among the younger generations through inter-university cooperation, joint scientific conferences and cultural festivals. In the military field, the application of NATO standards, joint exercises and technical cooperation have allowed the two countries to harmonize their defense strategies. The initiative position of the Azerbaijan and Turkey (Türkiye) tandem within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States lays the foundation for a new stage of integration in the entire Turkic world. The Zangezur corridor, the Middle Corridor, the establishment of common information and energy spaces are strategic projects that create synergy between the Turkic peoples. Taking all this into account, it can be said that Azerbaijani-Turkish relations are not only a legacy of the past, but also a vision of the future. These relations play the role of a carrier of Turkish unity, security and development on a regional and global scale. In the future, it is necessary to further deepen these relations, institutionalize them and promote unified positions in the international arena for the sake of common interests.

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