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CHAPTER 8

AZERBAIJAN-TÜRKİYE RELATIONS: A TRANSITION FROM SHARED HISTORICAL HERITAGE TO STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AND ALLIANCE

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Abstract

Azerbaijan–Türkiye relations are rooted in profound historical, cultural, and ethno-national ties. Throughout history, the two countries have consistently demonstrated mutual solidarity, providing political, moral, and strategic support to one another, particularly during periods of severe challenge. Following Azerbaijan’s restoration of state independence, bilateral relations have entered a phase of sustained and upward development, significantly strengthening the regional and international standing of both states. The guiding principle of “One Nation, Two States” has evolved into a comprehensive political and strategic framework that underpins Azerbaijan–Türkiye cooperation across multiple domains. A landmark manifestation of this alliance is the Shusha Declaration on Allied Relations, signed on 15 June 2021 in the city of Shusha by the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Türkiye, İlham Aliyev and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. This declaration elevated bilateral relations to the highest level of strategic partnership and formalized the allied character of cooperation between the two states. Another notable example of Azerbaijani–Turkish solidarity was demonstrated following the devastating earthquake of February 2023 in Türkiye. The inauguration of the “Azerbaijan” residential quarter in Kahramanmaraş, constructed at the initiative of the Azerbaijani leadership, symbolized humanitarian cooperation and brotherhood beyond political and diplomatic frameworks. The participation of both presidents in the opening ceremony underscored the depth of mutual commitment and shared responsibility. In contemporary foreign policy, Türkiye occupies a central position within Azerbaijan’s regional and strategic priorities. Shared linguistic, religious, and ethnic foundations have facilitated the expansion of cooperation in political, economic, military, cultural, scientific, and educational spheres. As a result of consistent high-level political dialogue, bilateral agreements, and institutionalized cooperation mechanisms, Azerbaijan–Türkiye relations continue to strengthen, contributing to regional stability and enhancing both countries’ influence within the international system.

Keywords

Azerbaijan, Türkiye, National Identity, Globalization, Strategic Partnership

Introduction

The relationship between Azerbaijan and Türkiye is a profound and multifaceted connection, deeply rooted in a shared historical heritage that has evolved over centuries. From cultural and linguistic ties to mutual support in political and economic endeavors, the two nations have forged a strong bond that transcends geographical boundaries. This article aims to explore the historical context that laid the groundwork for the dynamic partnership between Azerbaijan and Türkiye, highlighting key milestones and events that have shaped their interactions. As both countries navigate the complexities of the modern geopolitical landscape, their alliance has transitioned from historical camaraderie to a robust strategic partnership and alliance, reflecting a commitment to mutual interests and regional stability. By examining the factors that contribute to this evolving relationship, we gain insight into the significance of Azerbaijan-Türkiye relations in the broader context of international politics and regional cooperation.

1. Early Foundations of Azerbaijan-Türkiye Relations

The early twentieth century marked a formative period in Azerbaijan-Türkiye relations. During the Balkan Wars and the First World War, Azerbaijani volunteers provided assistance to the Ottoman Empire, reflecting early manifestations of transnational solidarity. Despite living under colonial conditions (tsarism and later Bolshevism), Azerbaijan did not spare fraternal assistance to Türkiye. As early as 1912-1913, Azerbaijani volunteers participated on the Turkish side in the Balkan and First World Wars (on the Eastern Front). The Azerbaijani societies provided material and moral assistance to the population affected by the war in the eastern regions of Türkiye. During the First World War, thousands of Azerbaijani volunteers, including nurses, participated in the battle between the Ottoman Empire and the Entente powers in 1915-1916 in Çanakkale. Charitable organisations in Azerbaijan also offered material and moral support to populations affected by warfare in Anatolia. The victory at Chanakkale is also a great event in the history of the Turkic world, including the history of Azerbaijan. The heroism of the Anatolian Turks in confronting the enemy on the battlefield inspired the people of Azerbaijan to fight for their national rights and independence.

A plan of events was prepared with the participation of the presidents of Türkiye and Azerbaijan to celebrate this victory. The events were held both in Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and in different countries of the world. As a peak event, a solemn ceremony dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the victory was held in Çanakkale on April 24 with the participation of heads of state and government of different countries of the world.

The establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918 represented a critical moment in bilateral relations. Türkiye was the first state to recognise the ADR, providing both political and military assistance during a period of instability. One of the founders of the ADR, Nasibbey Yusifbeyli, noted the importance of this support, stating: "... In this case, we can be happy that the foreign force that should come here is friendly and fraternal Türkiye" (History of Azerbaijan, 2008, p. 324).

The role of the Caucasian Islamic Army under the command of Nuru Pasha was particularly significant. Despite the difficult times Türkiye itself experienced at that time, it fulfilled its mission of liberation with honor. The Caucasian-Islamic army under the command of Nuru Pasha, together with the forces of the ADR, won heavy battles and liberated Baku in September 1918. As later emphasised by İlham Aliyev, "During the Armenian-Muslim conflict in 1918, the Turkish army and Turkish financial support saved the Azerbaijani people from the danger of destruction" (Aliyev, 2009, p. 186). These events laid the historical foundations for a relationship characterised by mutual political and military support. M.A. Rasulzadeh later wrote about those difficult and historical moments that "in the circumstances that arose at that time, hope remained only in Türkiye, and this brotherly nation had to take Azerbaijan from the hands of the enemies" (History of Azerbaijan, 2008, p. 352).

2. Interrupted Ties and the Soviet Period

The incorporation of Azerbaijan into the Soviet Union resulted in a rupture of official relations between the two countries. Despite this interruption, the sense of shared identity persisted. Turkish political and military figures, including Kazim Karabekir, continued to express concern for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and political future, emphasising the need to preserve its status within regional agreements.

The recognition of Nakhchivan as part of Azerbaijan under the Treaty of Kars was a notable outcome of Turkish diplomatic efforts during this period. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's widely cited statement—"Azerbaijan's joy is our joy; its sorrow is our sorrow"—symbolised the enduring sense of solidarity that survived despite geopolitical constraints.

3. Restoration of Relations after 1991: From Solidarity to Strategy

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan declared its independence on 18 October 1991. Türkiye was again the first state to recognise Azerbaijan's independence, doing so on 9 November 1991 (Hasanov, 2005). Diplomatic relations were formally established in January 1992, creating a legal and institutional basis for bilateral cooperation (National Encyclopedia of Azerbaijan, 2007, p. 332). Thus, wide opportunities were opened for the development of multilateral relations between the two countries, and in February 1992, agreements were signed between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye and the Republic of Azerbaijan on the exchange of letters on visa-free travel. Throughout the 1990s, Azerbaijan–Türkiye relations expanded rapidly across political, economic, military, and cultural domains. The return of Heydar Aliyev to political leadership in Azerbaijan in 1993 marked a new phase in bilateral relations. His articulation of the concept "One Nation, Two States" provided a clear ideological framework for cooperation, emphasising strategic partnership while respecting state sovereignty. Heydar Aliyev paid his first official visit to Türkiye as the Head of State on February 8-11, 1994. During the visit, a number of important documents were signed between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Türkiye. These included protocols on cooperation and mutual assistance, cooperation in the economic, scientific-technical and cultural spheres, agreements on mutual promotion and protection of investments, an agreement on the development of friendship and comprehensive cooperation, and other documents (Azerbaijan newspaper, 1994). President Heydar Aliyev highly valued the founder of the Republic of Türkiye, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and characterized him as an exemplary figure in the interests of all Turkic-speaking peoples. While visiting Atatürk's grave during an official visit to Türkiye on February 8, 1994, he wrote these sincere words in his memorial book: "The sacred name and unfading face of the unforgettable Atatürk sheds a bright light on the future path of friendship and brotherhood between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, which has been going on for thousands of years." (Aliyev, 2003, p. 5).

During the official visit of Turkish President Suleyman Demirel to Azerbaijan on December 7-9, 1995, a number of important documents were signed and the framework of bilateral relations was further expanded. (National Encyclopedia of Azerbaijan, 2007, p. 332). In 1996, a number of documents on cooperation in the military, technical and scientific fields were signed between Azerbaijan and Türkiye. (National Encyclopedia of Azerbaijan, 2007, p. 332). Thus, as a result of the expansion of the legal and normative basis of mutual relations, wide opportunities opened up for the future development of cooperation in the economic, technical, military, scientific and cultural fields.

The development of comprehensive relations between the two countries was always in the focus of H. Aliyev's attention. In his speech at the ceremony organized on the occasion of the anniversary of the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye on October 29, 1994 at the Gulustan Palace, H. Aliyev assessed the friendship and brotherhood between Azerbaijan and Türkiye as follows: "The Republic of Türkiye, recognizing the independence of Azerbaijan, and at the same time using its authority and influence in the world, has played an important role in defending the position of our republic. The friendly and brotherly relations of the two brotherly countries have brought us closer and united us even more" (Aliyev, 1997, p.

432). H. Aliyev expressed his heartfelt words in a statement given to the press on May 5, 1997, while on an official visit to Türkiye: “Our countries and peoples are united by our historical roots, historical past, traditions, culture, language, and religion” (Aliyev, 2000, p. 276). Azerbaijan’s relations with Türkiye were developing with greater success from year to year. A solid foundation for fruitful cooperation between the two countries was laid within the framework of regional and international organizations. This cooperation is successfully implemented in such prestigious international and regional organizations as the UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Turkic PA, Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States (later the Organization of Turkic States), ECO, Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The oil strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the issue of bringing the energy resources of the Caspian Sea to the world market, occupies a very important place in the mutual relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye. The adoption by Azerbaijan of a decision that fully reflects the interests of Azerbaijan and Türkiye in determining the route of the Main Export Pipeline was a clear expression of brotherhood between the two countries. On November 18, 1999, at the OSCE Istanbul Summit, the Presidents of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Türkiye signed an agreement “On the transportation of crude oil through the territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Republic of Türkiye through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Main Export Pipeline” and adopted a decision on the construction of a gas pipeline for the transportation of natural gas extracted from the “Shah Deniz” field to Türkiye via the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum route (National Encyclopedia of Azerbaijan, 2007, p. 333).

4. Institutionalisation of Strategic Partnership in the 21st Century

The early twenty-first century witnessed the institutional consolidation of Azerbaijan–Türkiye relations. Energy cooperation emerged as a central pillar of this partnership, particularly through the implementation of major infrastructure projects such as the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku–Tbilisi–Erzurum gas pipeline. These projects strengthened Azerbaijan’s integration into global energy markets while enhancing Türkiye’s role as an energy transit hub. The implementation of the above-mentioned agreement and decision was successfully continued. On July 13, 2006, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline was inaugurated. (President Ilham Aliyev and culture, 2008, p. 211-212). On November 18, 2007, natural gas extracted from the Shah Deniz field was delivered to the European border. (Aliyev, 2009, p. 354) Thus, Azerbaijan’s natural gas resources were connected to the Türkiye – Italy – Greece natural gas pipeline. This connection played an important role in Azerbaijan’s accession to the European space.

Military cooperation also intensified, including joint training initiatives and participation in peacekeeping missions. At the same time, collaboration expanded in education, science, and culture, further reinforcing societal links between the two states.

The development of relations in the field of science and education in accordance with the goals and interests of our state, the establishment of centers and schools named after Heydar Aliyev in Türkiye, and the holding of joint cultural events give special meaning to modern relations.

The signing of an agreement on the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project between three states (Azerbaijan, Georgia and Türkiye) in Tbilisi on February 7, 2007 was another significant event in the relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye. This line was to connect Asia with Europe. According to the agreement, a new 98-kilometer railway line was built in the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars direction, costing \$ 422 million (Aliyev, 2009, p. 353).

5. The Shusha Declaration and Contemporary Implications

The unwavering brotherhood and comprehensive cooperation between Azerbaijan and Türkiye once again demonstrated itself brilliantly in the 44-day Patriotic War in 2020. The military, political and moral support provided to us by the brotherly country once again showed that even in the most difficult moments, the

brotherly country is always with us and defends us with all its capabilities. A significant milestone in contemporary relations was the signing of the Shusha Declaration on Allied Relations on 15 June 2021. Signed in the city of Shusha following Azerbaijan's victory in the 2020 conflict, the declaration elevated bilateral relations to the level of formal alliance. It outlined cooperation in political, military, economic, cultural, and security fields, effectively codifying the principles underlying the "One Nation, Two States" concept. With this declaration, the allied relations between our countries were raised to a new, highest level of strategic partnership.

Recent humanitarian cooperation, including Türkiye's response to natural disasters in Azerbaijan and Azerbaijan's assistance following the 2023 earthquake in Türkiye, further illustrates the practical application of this partnership. In official statements, both presidents emphasised that such cooperation represents the realisation of the "One Nation, Two States" philosophy in practice.

Thus, after Azerbaijan regained its state independence, it is an undeniable fact that its comprehensive relations with brotherly Türkiye have developed on an upward trajectory, serving the strengthening and development of our countries. There is no doubt that the aforementioned friendly and brotherly relations will contribute to the increase in the power of our countries in the political-economic, socio-cultural, and military spheres, and to the strengthening of our positions in the international arena. The first place in the foreign policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan belongs to the Republic of Türkiye. Our relations, which have developed on an upward trajectory based on religious, linguistic, and ethnic ties, have created conditions for strengthening the bonds of cooperation and brotherhood in all areas. As a result of the policies pursued by Presidents Ilham Aliyev and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, meetings held, business trips, and agreements concluded, relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye in the economic, cultural, military, scientific, and educational spheres are constantly developing.

Conclusion

The historical evolution of Azerbaijan-Türkiye relations demonstrates that the concept of "One Nation, Two States" has developed from a symbolic expression of shared identity into a comprehensive strategic framework. Rooted in early twentieth-century solidarity, shaped by periods of interruption, and revitalised after 1991, this relationship has become a defining element of regional politics in the South Caucasus. By institutionalising cooperation across multiple sectors and aligning strategic interests, Azerbaijan and Türkiye have transformed historical affinity into a durable partnership. As such, the concept of "One Nation, Two States" continues to function not only as a rhetorical device but also as a guiding principle shaping bilateral relations in the contemporary international system.

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