AZERBAIJAN-GEORGIA-TURKEY: An Example of a Successful Regional Cooperation

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Caucasus has been a region of conflict and competition on the international political agenda. Through 20 years of struggle for independence, the countries of the South Caucasus have failed to create an area of prosperity that encompasses the whole region. Political differences among these countries have prevented the establishment of regional prosperity through economic cooperation. In this unstable context, political, social, economic, and commercial ties between Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey have led to the creation of an exemplary cooperation mechanism and environment. This paper assesses how and why bilateral relations initiated among Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey in the 1990s have transformed into a trilateral strategic relationship, and through which priority areas this trilateral partnership has been deepened and enhanced.

Keywords: Caucasus, Trabzon Declaration, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Cooperation, regional cooperation

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Introduction

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Caucasus has attracted remarkable attention in the international political agenda as an important sub-region. In Eurasia, due to its pivotal location in the east-west and the north-south axes through its connection with the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea, the Caucasus region seems strategically stuck between East and West. Located in the south of the region, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia have not been able to build a relationship of trust and stability among themselves since the collapse of the Soviet Union due to historical conflicts. The mutual distrust prevailing in the region has consequently led these countries to pursue cooperation with actors outside the region. In this context, the Russian Federation, both as a regional and a global player, that could be defined as a Caucasian state due to its connection with the Northern Caucasus, is one of the main actors shaping the region. On the other hand, Turkey and Iran are the other regional actors, which play an effective role in shaping the region with their historical, cultural and contemporary links and interests. In the global context, in addition to the expectations of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia as regional actors, the relations between the Russian Federation, the European Union (EU) and the United States (US) lead to a geopolitical rivalry by forming some strategic sub-Caucasian areas in accordance with the interests and perspectives of the different parties. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, expert analysis on this region focuses on two main strategic axes of alliance: the strategic axis of Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia vis-à-vis the strategic axis of the Russian Federation-Armenia-Iran. The formation, evolution, and competition of these two main axes indicate the principal framework, which determines the geopolitical character and the future expectations of the modern Caucasus after more than 20 years of independence.

 Whereas the latter axis is accepted as a continuation of a traditional structure, which assumes the domination of Russia’s regional expectations, and a geopolitical sub-region excluded from the rest of the world; the former reflects the effort of constructing a prosperous, pluralistic, and modern region, which is in favor of the Euro-Atlantic Alliance. While the Russia-Armenia-Iran axis, instead of resolution, aims at the continuation of ongoing conflicts by creating and maintaining an authoritarian and Moscow-led region through the threat or the use of force; the priority of the Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia axis is to aspire to international cooperation by building stable, reliable, and self-sufficient nation-states.

Turkey is the transformative element of the first axis; its policies towards the Caucasus center around Azerbaijan, and Georgia, as they require the sustainment of the countries that have adopted western values and peaceful cooperation through the promotion of regional political and economic cooperation. Turkey supports the resolution of every issue confronted by these countries, without interfering in their domestic affairs within the parameters of the exigencies of international law. This support is granted through political, cultural, and military policies within the context of commercial and economic relations.

The fact that Azerbaijan and Georgia have a common approach with Turkey’s vision eliminates whatever concern may arise regarding the realization of this axis. The results of the concrete projects and activities that the three countries collectively developed throughout the 1990s have become visible in the 2000s. In accordance with the increasing opportunities and capabilities of Turkey and Azerbaijan, the approach of building a trilateral strategic alliance supported by shared experiences stimulates the implementation of regional projects and the expectation of a common future. After more than 20 years of independence, Azerbaijan and Georgia, through the confrontation of some challenges, have become an integral element of the international economic and political system by transforming themselves into active members of international institutions. In this process, by taking advantage of its experience and established relations with the West in addition to its strategic partnership with the Russian Federation, Turkey has developed and implemented concrete projects, and thus provided these countries with a wide range of leeway and collaboration.

The bilateral relations that the three countries established in the mid-1990s and reinforced in the 2000s were officially transformed into trilateral relations with the Trabzon Declaration of 8 June 2012. This date marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the three countries. The trilateral cooperation has focused on the improvement of common political, economic, and commercial interests as well as the collective and peaceful resolution of regional security issues via the establishment of a strategic partnership. With,
albeit, different discourses, the parties share similar future expectations, interests, and threat perceptions. Redefining this region could be regarded, at the same time, as a redefinition of the regional equilibrium in an effort to create new rules of engagement.

Trilateral cooperation is a political framework aimed at the realization of relevant projects in the triangular area encompassing the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. The three countries intend to create a strategic area both within the Southern Caucasus as well as in interaction with the Caspian, the Mediterranean, and the Black Sea basins. While Azerbaijan’s strategic relevance stems from its boundary with the Caspian basin; for Georgia and Turkey, the Black Sea is key; while for Turkey, its link to the Mediterranean is also significant. In this respect, the trilateral mechanism between Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan is considered as a constructive opportunity to promote the transformation of a region that spans the Caucasus from the Caspian to the Mediterranean into a space of peace, stability, and prosperity. For example, the possibility that the alternative pipelines schemes, that are supposed to transport Central Asian energy resources to western markets, pass through Turkey and Georgia via Azerbaijan concern the energy security of all three countries as well as Turkey’s ambition to be a regional energy hub. The flow of Azerbaijan’s oil to the Mediterranean via the Ceyhan terminal is the primary reason why it prioritizes the developments in this region. Similarly, Azerbaijan is concerned with developments in the Black Sea region as much as Georgia and Turkey are, as it transports its energy resources to the Black Sea via the Supsa and Kulevi oil terminals.

The three parties always express their adherence to the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act, and the fundamental principles and norms of international law. The added emphasis on the respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, the peaceful settlement of disputes, the inviolability of internationally recognized borders, the sovereign equality of states, and refraining from the threat or the use of force against the territorial integrity and political independence of states are, undoubtedly, of significant importance with regard to the regional context formed after the Russo-Georgian war of August 2008. The expectation is to invest in a better future for the region by collectively establishing regional peace, stability, and prosperity. In doing so, cooperation principally in the energy, transportation, and communication sectors, and then expanded to the sectors of trade, economy, politics, and even security is a way forward. The existing projects and the ones under development are regarded as concrete steps taken to support the establishment of a trilateral strategic alliance process.

This paper assesses how and why bilateral relations initiated between Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey in the 1990s have been transformed into a trilateral strategic relationship, and through which priority areas this trilateral partnership has been deepened and enhanced.

Strategic Transformation from Bilateral Relations to Trilateral Cooperation

Among regional and global actors, the South Caucasus is one of the principal regions of various historical conflicts due to its geopolitical location and its natural resources. In this respect, the post-Soviet period indicates a time when the countries of the region were in pursuit of new national identities in their domestic and foreign policies. At the regional level, a period of geopolitical struggle commenced with the intervention of Turkey, Iran, and the Russian Federation as regional actors alongside more global players such as the EU and the US.

The regional organizations, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Organization for Democracy and Economic Development GUAM (ODED-GUAM) that emerged during this period have been transformed into instruments of the geopolitical struggle of the various stakeholders; while they have played a role as influential elements for the regional states in pursuit of their identity. Each of the South Caucasian countries became a member of the CIS, but Georgia left it after the war with Russia broke out in 2008. Whereas neither Georgia nor Azerbaijan accepted to join the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) that was designed to be the military wing of the CIS, Armenia has become its most active member state. Similarly, Armenia became a member of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union while Azerbaijan and Georgia have abstained from joining. Even though these three South Caucasian countries have cooperated within the framework of NATO’s Partnership for Peace Program since 1994, their preference was to maintain this at different levels of involvement. All three are members of the Council of Europe as well as partners of the EU via its Eastern Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP).
brief, in the over 20-year period since independence, the South Caucasus states have conspicuously aimed at reaching an optimum balance to create peace and stability in the face of intense geopolitical competition.

The most significant foreign policy issue for Georgia and Azerbaijan in the post-Soviet period is the recognition of their independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity by neighboring states. The partnership between these two countries is mainly founded upon this condition. The existence of similar problems and the anticipation of their resolution through various alliances conforming to both countries’ expectations suggest that Turkey is a country of priority for both. As a matter of fact, Western states, especially the United States, promoted Turkey as a ‘model state’ for the Caucasian countries during the period of their independence.1 In that respect, the effect of the breakup of the Soviet Union on Turkey’s foreign and security policies was fundamentally structural. Promoted as a ‘model state’ since the beginning of the 1990s, Turkey had to review its foreign and security policies to produce a new vision towards Eurasia that took into account the ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural similarities with the countries in the former Soviet space. This was rapidly followed by the establishment of political relations with the former Soviet states in addition to the improvement of their military, economic, and commercial ties.

Turkey considered the breakup of the Soviet Union as a historical opportunity and described itself as a ‘regional power’, that could be influential in the ‘Turkic world’ spatially situated in the northern Caucasus and the Persian Gulf and extending across the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China.2 The main debate of this period was whether this state of play could have induced Turkey further to a position to impose its influence for the first time in its Republican history in the neighboring regions and to have a significant role in the Black Sea region, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. It was believed that Turkey had the opportunity to reach that goal through common historical, ethnic, religious, and linguistic linkages aided by the fluidity of the global order. In this respect, the maintenance of the territorial integrity and the independence of the newly emerged states has been the primary basis upon which Turkey built its relations with these post-Soviet states.

In brief, it could be argued that common interests between Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey and the existence of a similar worldview have paved the way for their partnership.3 In other words, mutual needs and common interests in the sectors of security, energy, transportation and commerce as well as regional and global developments are the main determinants that bring these three countries together. In shaping the policies and projects in the aforementioned sectors, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey have come to consider each other as priority partners, mainly because of their geographic and political affinities. Azerbaijan and Turkey have regarded each other as crucial and natural partners with the emphasis on the ‘one nation with two states’ motto. Accordingly, Turkey recognized the independence of Azerbaijan on 9 November 1991 before it did so for all the other former Soviet Republics. Consequently, Turkey was the first country to have recognized Azerbaijan’s independence. The ‘Protocol on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan’ was signed on 14 January 1992 in Baku and immediately came into effect.4

Georgia, being the only Caucasian country with a Black Sea coast, has been the geographic link between Turkey and Azerbaijan. As for Azerbaijan, Georgia is a political and economic partner that helps build ties with the West, especially with Turkey, in addition to being a military-strategic partner of the Atlantic Alliance. Aware of this significance and strategic connection, Turkey recognized the independence of Georgia simultaneously with that of the other former Soviet Republics on 16 December 1991. Diplomatic relations with Georgia were established with a protocol during a visit of Hikmet Çetin, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs at that time, to Tbilisi on 21 May 1992.5 This was followed by an official visit of the Turkish Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel on 30 July 1992, who was the first prime minister to have paid a visit to newly independent Georgia. The ‘Agreement on Friendship, Cooperation and Good Neighborliness between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Georgia’ signed during this visit constitutes the main framework document of bilateral relations between the two countries. Composed of 15 articles, the agreement calls not only for mutual respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the two countries, but also refers to the Kars Treaty signed in 1921 to define the border between Turkey and Georgia.6 This reference is meaningful in that it confirms the post-Soviet recognition of Turkey’s boundaries as agreed upon during the Soviet period. A similar agreement was also signed with Azerbaijan.
These agreements make up the basis of all dimensions of the trilateral relationship. As for their importance for Azerbaijan and Georgia, these agreements offer a concrete response to their efforts to find regional and international support against secessionist groups as well as ethnic conflicts that they confront in the region. Through these contracts, the parties have committed themselves to prevent the activities of any organization, group, or individual in their own territories that aims to change the territorial integrity and legal order of the other party through the use of force.

Hence, by basing their relations on a framework of multidimensional cooperation, these countries have preferred to act together to overcome a possible geopolitical isolation of the Caucasus. By supporting the territorial integrity of Georgia against secessionist groups, Azerbaijan has secured the transit of oil and natural gas pipelines via Georgia thereby increasing its strategic weight in the international arena.

Common security and foreign policy values formed collectively by Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia mainly underline the maintenance of the independence of the Caucasian countries politically and economically as well as peaceful cooperation with each other, coupled with the adoption of western values. The parties have often accentuated the recognition of the independence and territorial integrity of the countries of the Caucasus and their protection by all means available to the international community. This perspective which is in conformity with the national interest of the three countries has met all expectations to date.

Between 1990 and 1995, new opportunities as well as risks and threats shaped these three countries’ common objectives and provided guidance for their decision-makers as to how to attain them. In particular, for Turkey the priorities included the reacquisition of the country’s strategic importance after the end of the Cold War; the anticipation of being the main Western actor in Central Asia; the opportunity to control natural resources including energy resources; and the expectation that economic and commercial relations were expected to increase. For Georgia and Azerbaijan, the possibility of the peaceful resolution of the instability and conflicts in the region as well as their economic development through permanent, close, and balanced relations with the West, were the main challenges. They also possess a common risk and threat perception such as the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh by Armenia regarded as a primary threat to regional stability despite the collapse of the Soviet Union; the possibility of the expansion of ethnic conflicts in Georgia; the impact of global competition on the regional balance; and new instabilities that could possibly emerge.

Between 1990 and 1993 following the breakup of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan and Georgia sought to build constructive relations with Turkey in pursuit of stability in an environment of political tumult and disorder. Between 1993 and 1995, mutual optimism and the hope for a common future dominated the relations between Turkey and the countries in the region. The close personal relationship among Süleyman Demirel, Haydar Aliyev and Eduard Shevardnadze, the respective presidents of the three countries at the time, played an important role in establishing these constructive relations. Signed between Azerbaijan and western partners including Turkey on 20 September 1994, the agreement, also called as ‘the Contract of the Century’, called for the transportation of Azerbaijan’s oil to western markets through a pipeline to be constructed via Georgia and Turkey. This contract to be concretized with the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline, also marked the beginning of trilateral relations between the three countries as these became official in 2012.

Especially after 1995, the balance between opportunities and risks under the influence of regional and global developments offered a strategic vantage point with the momentum that the Contract of the Century brought into the regional cooperation context and to the policies of Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia. This strategic point of view is also the result of a necessity to bring about a comprehensive and effective approach, which also takes into account the expectations and limits of the three countries. This meant cooperating harmoniously as well as complying primarily with the western countries and institutions. By focusing on the security issue in the 1990s, the leaders of these three countries had not considered any difference between the regional interest of the West and theirs. Hence, the regional foreign and security policies of the three countries were based on collective action mainly with Western allies and international organizations. This made sense considering the regional balance as well as the economic, commercial, and political conditions of that period. On the other hand, defining the regional priorities jointly with the western priorities and interests serves the policy of balancing promoted by Azerbaijan; it is compatible with the foundations of Turkish foreign policy; and could be regarded as a priority for Georgia as well.
The common ground of the policies is to balance them with western actors represented in this case by Turkey, without alienating Russia and Iran as much as possible. The evaluations of the region’s decision-makers as well as the approaches of the western countries, including the United States, was to integrate the post-Soviet states in the global system. At the beginning, the leaders sought to find solid ground by consolidating the limited resources of these three countries with the help of western resources and support/programs.

Turkey thus sought to outpace its regional competitors by applying the positive effects of regional policies and cooperation to other aspects of foreign policy. The fact that Azerbaijan and Georgia had similar expectations has helped in the implementation of a swift and comprehensive trilateral cooperation process. The focus was on enhancing economic and commercial relations within the trilateral relationship; hence the energy sector has become the leading force in transporting the resources of Azerbaijan via alternative routes to western markets. In this respect, the route and the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Pipeline, one of the most important projects of the 1990s, was handled with regard to the regional power balance and global context. Furthermore, the relations of the three countries with their western allies and the structure of their regional policies depended on the success of this project. The BTC Pipeline is the leading force in creating a regional balance centered on Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, which, at least initially, was also supported by the United States. The deepening and improvement of relations over the course of a decade have enabled the development of a foreign and security policy dimension between the three countries.

The second half of the 1990s and, especially, the beginning of the 2000s are the periods when the trilateral cooperation was formed and enhanced. During this time, the parties propounded a planned approach to various issues with more concrete and regional dimensions taken into account. To consolidate the physical ties, in addition to the first border crossing between Georgia and Turkey – the Sarp border gate, a second border crossing called Turkgozu (Posof)–Ahiska was opened in August 1995. As a result, the distance between Baku, the capital city of Azerbaijan, and Turkey was reduced by another 300 kilometers. Bilateral agreements signed at the time during reciprocal visits contain military cooperation and security issues as well as political, social, economic, and commercial aspects. All these agreements and contracts complement each other, in that they widen and deepen the trilateral relationship. The ‘Declaration on Deepened Strategic Cooperation’ signed in May 1997 between Turkey and Azerbaijan to move to upgrade their bilateral relations to a “strategic partnership” is of critical importance. This declaration includes the transportation of Caspian oil from Azerbaijan via Turkey to international markets; the formal condemnation of Armenia because of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue as well as its withdrawal from the occupied territories. Adopted on 29 October 1998, the ‘Ankara Declaration’, in conformity with the previous agreement of 1997, placed the energy issue bilaterally in a pivotal position and transformed the energy-centered collaboration of the BTC project into a regional cooperation one excluding Armenia. This declaration signed by the leaders of Georgia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkey and Azerbaijan as well as the US Secretary of Energy, called for the realization of the BTC pipeline project as “the main oil pipeline” to transport the hydro-carbon resources of the Caspian Sea to the world’s markets. This declaration elevated the bilateral relationship between Turkey and Azerbaijan to a trilateral one with the involvement of Georgia, thereby providing a strategic point of view regarding the Caucasus. Since that time, pipelines, land and railway networks, commercial and economic agreements enable to trace the visible effects of a strategic balance centered on Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan. This development is of importance in that it creates a regional alliance that meets the expectations of Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Consecutively signed on 18 November 1999 in Istanbul, the ‘Intergovernmental Declaration on the Principles for Implementing the Trans-Caspian Pipeline’ among Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkmenistan symbolizes the regional dimension of relations. Following the adoption of this agreement, the 9th Turkish President, Suleyman Demirel, visited Tbilisi on 14-15 January 2000; while another protocol between Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan was signed on 9 May 2000. By placing Georgia closer to a central position in regional Caucasian politics, this protocol allowed for a regional cooperation process intertwined with a sea, land, and air transportation network as well as the BTC oil and gas pipelines. Shevardnadze would hence comment that “Georgia is not the southern wing of Russia, on the contrary the northern wing of Turkey” in October 2001 while on
a visit to Washington. As regards bilateral relations, the impact of Russia’s harsh attitude towards Georgia is undoubtedly as observable as the latter’s policy of integration with the West. Accordingly, Turkey stands out as the only neighboring state, which could balance the Russian Federation and support Georgia in its international relations by drawing the attention of the western world to this country. Constructive relations with Azerbaijan also imply a Caucasus-centered solidarity, cooperation and security process.

After the OSCE’s Istanbul Summit in 1999, Suleyman Demirel came up with the formulation of a ‘Stability Pact for the Caucasus’ in support of the resolution of Azerbaijan and Georgia’s issues. This is a significant initiative that brought international attention to the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and Georgia as well as the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh. Both Aliyev and Shevardnadze took a position in favor of this proposal to balance the influence of the Russian Federation on the regional chessboard.

Bilateral relations between Turkey and Georgia as well as between Georgia and Azerbaijan have simultaneously attained a strategic dimension and paved the way for a trilateral perspective in the second half of the 1990s. The fact that Georgia and Azerbaijan established their national armies and consolidated their military structures, has contributed to the control of frozen conflicts such as Karabakh and Abkhazia as well as other ethnic issues. It has also granted a regional dimension to energy cooperation. To that end, especially with American and western support, NATO has become an organization to cooperate with, while bilateral agreements rendered the military relationships more institutional and consistent.

As a consequence, an irrevocable alliance was formed through reciprocal visits and various signed agreements between 2000 and 2004. In this respect, Georgia has become a neighboring country with which Turkey was able to construct cooperation probably at the highest level, with the least problems. A series of political, economic, commercial, cultural, and military cooperation agreements were signed during Shevardnadze’s visit to Ankara in January 2001, elevating bilateral relations between Turkey and Georgia to the level of a strategic partnership. It could also be interpreted as an indication that Turkey, by having a second strategic partner from the Caucasus in addition to Azerbaijan, could adopt policies that are more effective both in the Caucasus and in the Black Sea region.

The year of 2001 marks a turning point with regard to the operability of the military dimension of this trilateral alliance. The dissonance between Iran and Azerbaijan regarding the Araz seabed in the Caspian Sea caused military tensions, when an Iranian warship threatened an Azerbaijani research vessel on 3 July 2001. The violation of Azerbaijan’s airspace by Iranian jets aggravated the tension. Following Azerbaijan’s statement that it considered these acts as a provocation on the part of Iran, Turkish Chief of General Staff Hüseyin Kivrkoğlu paid an official visit to Azerbaijan. Turkey’s reaction to this provocation was through a demonstration by Turkish Stars (the aerobic demonstration team of the Turkish Air Force - TN) in Baku during this visit on 24 August 2001, which was seen by an estimated 1 million spectators.

The 9/11 attacks in the United States is another global factor that contributed to the deepening and the enhancing of the tripartite security cooperation between Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. Following these events, Georgia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Irakli Menagarishvili and Turkey’s his Turkish counterpart Ismail Cem discussed the establishment of a cooperation mechanism including Azerbaijan, with the purpose of fighting against terrorism.

The appearance of some changes in Turkey in 2002, in Azerbaijan in 2003, and in Georgia in 2004 did not have any negative effect on trilateral relations, thereby affirming their consistency and stability. Likewise, during his visit to Azerbaijan on 4-5 March 2004, the new Georgian leader Michael Saakashvili declared that, “Georgia and Azerbaijan are partners and fellow countries”; a statement confirming that no change or trouble in the cooperation process would occur due the change of the leadership. Following Russia’s blockage on the import of wine and agricultural products, both major export commodities of Georgia, in addition to the increases in the price of natural gas since 2005, Azerbaijan and Turkey became partners of greater importance for Georgia. As a result, mutual commercial relations further intensified while Azerbaijan increased the sale of natural gas to Georgia. At that time, Azerbaijan helped Georgia overcome the crisis by selling an extra amount of more than 1 million cubic meters of natural gas from its own reserves. In a speech he delivered at Tbilisi State University, Georgian President Saakashvili praised Ilham Aliyev, the President of Azerbaijan, for these ‘heroic steps’ in 2011.
The Russia-Georgia war in 2008 is another incident accelerating the pace of this trilateral alliance. The ‘reset’ policy that the US adopted towards Russia after this war, the EU’s decreasing impact in the region, and Turkey’s political vision to become more active towards the region, all allowed for the reemergence of the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey alliance and for it to be more active. On the other hand, the developments in the Middle East in addition to the crises in the axis Russia-Ukraine-EU axis have brought about significant challenges with regard to regional security. The global economic crisis also revealed the necessity to increase the economic power of this alliance as well as the interaction between its partner states. The Russian sanctions against Georgia and Azerbaijan’s pursuit of new markets in addition to its efforts to improve other economic sectors besides oil contributed to the solidarity among the three countries, also in conformity with Turkey’s regional expectations.

In short, intensive bilateral relations were deepened and institutionalized during İlham Aliyev’s term in Azerbaijan and Mikhael Saakashvili’s in Georgia. Though the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 and the normalization process between Turkey and Armenia had some negative effects; failure of rapprochement process together with the reciprocal visits allowed for the recuperation of institutional cooperation and the regional balance since 2010. During Turkish President Abdullah Gul’s visit to Baku on 16-17 August 2010, the ‘Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance’ was concluded between the two countries, reviving the solidarity after two years of bilateral tensions.\(^6\) During the bilateral negotiations, detailed references to the essential measures for a more stable and secure Caucasus were made. In that respect, the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue within the framework of Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity and Armenia’s withdrawal from Azerbaijan’s occupied territory were also emphasized as Turkey’s priorities. Assuring that Turkey would always be in consultation with Azerbaijan and continue to put forth an intense effort for the resolution of regional issues, Turkish President Abdullah Gul stated that “addressing to all Azeri brothers and sisters, he once more announced that Turkey would always be in support of and in solidarity with Azerbaijan.”\(^7\)

In brief, when taking account of the period from the collapse of the Soviet Union until the official foundation of trilateral cooperation in 2012, it can be observed that the parties had a similar political point of view regarding the resolution of regional issues and the construction of a common future; consequently, they created the essential institutional structures to realize their common interests. The network of economic and commercial ties stood out as the main building block in transforming the trilateral cooperation into a strategic one. Likewise, the policies of the three countries to form an alliance of interest and create regional activism by means of commercial and economic relations among themselves have evident results. An increasing volume of foreign trade and a growing economic interaction has brought about substantial results. This process encouraged by the construction of alternative pipelines, particularly the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) pipelines, has reached its recent level of cooperation through enhanced economic and commercial relations also backed by the advancement of land and railway networks. Thus, significant western interest and support in the region was also obtained. Concisely, it took almost 20 years to constitute the necessary framework that would transform bilateral strategic relations into a regional strategic alliance, including therein the security aspect of political, economic, and commercial interactions. As a result, on 8 June 2012 the Trabzon Declaration was signed to put into effect a cooperation mechanism.\(^8\) This declaration, marking the 20th anniversary of the mutual recognition of the three countries, allowed for the formation of a trilateral mechanism composed of their ministers of foreign affairs. This mechanism introduced an institutional cooperation process that is supported by an action plan that was made public in the period that followed.

**Trilateral Cooperation between Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan**

The trilateral cooperation process between Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan is a mechanism and a cooperation initiative with strategic dimensions. Backed by concrete projects, this long-term and goal-oriented initiative aims at creating a democratic, pluralistic, and prosperous region by connecting the Caucasus to the West. When taking into account the discourses of the leaders of these three countries, this strategic initiative could be regarded as a comprehensive project towards integration through regional political, economic, and commercial cooperation. The geopolitical and strategic dimensions of the relationship consist of establishing a stable and secure connection between Azerbaijan
and Turkey, who consider each other as ‘one nation with two states’, and in consolidating Georgia’s link to the West via Turkey.

Following an invitation by the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu, the three ministers of foreign affairs gathered on 8 June 2012 in Trabzon, a Turkish city on the Black Sea. This was the first trilateral meeting of these countries’ ministers of foreign affairs, which at the same time initiated the trilateral cooperation process. With the participation of Ahmet Davutoğlu, Azerbaijani Minister of Foreign Affairs Elmar Memmedyarov, and Georgian Minister of Foreign Affairs Grigol Vashadze, the meeting provided fertile ground for discussions on the consolidation of regional stability and security as well as on the improvement of cooperation based on mutual and regional interests. Emphasizing the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations; the Trabzon Declaration, the output of this summit, stated the parties’ “determination to build a better future for the region characterized by peace, stability, cooperation and increasing wealth and welfare”.

This three-page document expressed the countries’ satisfaction with the current level of bilateral relations and political dialogue among the three countries as well as their firm determination to explore the possibilities to further expand their cooperation in the political, economic, cultural and humanitarian fields.

Overall, the Trabzon Declaration is a comprehensive document, which summarizes the 20 years’ history of bilateral relations as well as the projects implemented during that time; it also stresses the collective vision of the three countries regarding their future aspirations. The document includes concrete issues and project recommendations related to this vision.

The issues of democracy, rule of law, human rights, free market economy, political sovereignty, and territorial integrity were strongly emphasized in this declaration, where it was also noted that necessary initiatives would be taken to handle the conflicts in the Caucasus by peaceful means. To that end, close cooperation with the international community was encouraged, while the three countries committed to support each other’s membership in international organizations as well as taking on active roles therein. In this context, the struggle against terrorism, extremism, secessionism, narcotics and transnational crimes as global issues of priority were also brought up to emphasize a trilateral cooperation process in congruence with other international actors.

Following the statement on the satisfaction with the level of the trilateral relations attained, the determination to expand the scope of the cooperation in terms of politics, economy, culture, and infrastructure was expressed. This declaration particularly asserts that the BTC oil pipeline, the BTE natural gas pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway projects are concrete successes and the main axes of “efficient, multidimensional and goal-oriented” top-level economic cooperation and political dialogue among the three countries. Also enriched by a successful historical experience, the parties’ determination to realize efficient projects that would grant new dimensions to political, economic, and commercial relations with the international community and organizations was also proclaimed in this document. The implementation of joint projects as well as the augmentation of foreign investments is also targeted through cooperation in commerce, energy, transportation, finance, and banking.

In that respect, the Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia Business Forum held in February 2012, was particularly referred to in terms of the priorities that it had identified for the cooperation and concrete projects. In the Forum’s declaration, a second meeting was to be held on 9 June 2012 in Kars, with some discussion recommendations such as:

- The creation of a favorable environment for encouraging the inflow of foreign direct investments;
- The support for tourism industry as a source of economic benefit and employment;
- The importance of the agricultural sector for poverty reduction and food safety issues and cooperation in this field in terms of exchange of experience and information on new technologies;
- The need to improve the competitiveness of the Southern Transport Corridor and in this regard the need to diversify collaboration among their relevant authorities;
- The restoration of the Great Silk Road with other integrated trilateral transport projects consisting of highways and railways in order to create trilateral economic integration;
The integration of the new Baku International Sea Trade Port project with the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway Project to transform this line into a main artery in the East-West Transport Corridor.

This declaration was concluded with the decision to set up a joint experts group to draft an action plan for 2013-2015 as well as to hold the second Trilateral Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in the second half of 2012 in Georgia and the third one in the first half of 2013 in Azerbaijan.

Taking into account the results of this declaration, it is evident that the parties intend to meet periodically at top-level to be able to establish an efficient legal and institutional structure. Thus, the preparation of the 2013-2015 Action Plan indicated the parties’ willingness to follow a concrete agenda in the upcoming meetings. In this context, it could be argued that this initiative aimed at creating a common strategic area and an appropriate cooperation within this framework.

The press release after the meeting and its implications reveal the fact that this trilateral cooperation process was not only limited to the three countries as it also provided a foundation for significant projects in the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea triangle. Established as a result of “a historic step”, this trilateral mechanism was believed to “provide a significant opportunity to transform the Black Sea, the Caucasus and the Caspian region into a field of peace, stability and prosperity”, as Davutoglu stated at the joint press conference. He also stressed that this trilateral cooperation not only brought in a great potential of cooperation among the three countries but also brought together Eurasia’s most crucial transportation lines at an intersection: “As our latest important project, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway will become one of the most important lines when it is connected to the Marmaray; which will come out as the railway format of the Great Silk Road connecting China to London. So, the ancient Silk Road returns with all its aspects, and energy, railway and other trade lines.”

Besides, having emphasized that this trilateral cooperation mechanism did not exclude any country or party, an implicit but constructive message was transmitted to Armenia on condition that the latter acknowledges the main issues set forth in the declaration. During the press conference, the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan Elmar Memmedyarov expressed his belief that the existing cooperation would further improve through these meetings; while his Georgian counterpart Grigol Vashadze stressed that this trilateral cooperation mechanism could set a good example for everyone. These statements created a hopeful atmosphere for the future of the relations.

The Batumi Summit of Ministers of Foreign Affairs

As projected in the Trabzon Declaration, the second Trilateral Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia was held in Batumi, Georgia on 28 March 2013. The realization of this meeting and the continuation of the process brought up by the Trabzon Declaration are of particular importance because of the political change in Georgia after parliamentary elections on 1 October 2012. Though expected at any time after the Russia-Georgia war in 2008, the change in the Georgian government had put into question Georgia’s stance towards the regional political equilibrium. Any possible fundamental change would be perceived as a threat to the over 20 years of political, economic, and commercial investments by both Turkey and Azerbaijan. The trilateral mechanism is therefore important in preventing any kind of shift in Georgia’s position in the regional strategic axis. The Batumi meeting also helped overcome the tension resulting from the newly elected Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili’s comments on the trilateral cooperation and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) Railway project. In this respect, it was of crucial importance that the second meeting was held in Batumi and that the Georgian Minister of Foreign Affairs proclaimed that “Georgia had a close relationship and friendship with its strategic partners Turkey and Azerbaijan.” On the other hand, the possibility that Saakashvili could be excluded from Georgian domestic politics after the presidential elections held in November 2013, attracted the attention onto the process of the trilateral cooperation. As stated above, this mechanism is, in a sense, an initiative to keep Georgia as a constituent part of this principal 20 years old regional axis constituted.

In brief, with the participation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia Maia Panjikidze, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan Elmar Mammadyarov, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey Ahmet Davutoglu, the Batumi meeting carried on the process initiated by the Trabzon meeting while assembling the parties irrespective of the impacts of domestic or external developments. At this meeting, the ministers
of foreign affairs discussed the opportunities of further expanding the regional cooperation process to issues of common interest to all parties. They also exchanged views on visa exemption and the free movement of goods. The most significant outcome of this summit is the acceptance of the Trilateral Sectoral Cooperation Action Plan for 2013-2015, which was drafted by the experts assigned during Trabzon meeting. At the end of this meeting the ministers yet again signed a Joint Communique indicating the importance of the concrete trilateral projects in different fields.

This declaration starts with a reference to the Joint Declaration signed in Trabzon, which laid out the new format of regional cooperation as an important platform for both political dialogue and the implementation of specific trilateral projects. Similarly, the Batumi declaration also refers to the political sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of the internationally recognized borders of the states as well as the peaceful settlement of conflicts in the region. The necessity to ensure a safe and dignified return of the internally displaced persons to their places of origin was also underscored.

The most concrete output of this summit is the ratification of the Trilateral Sectoral Cooperation Action Plan for 2013-2015, which laid out the road map to be followed by Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. Projecting a large-scaled cooperation in energy, transportation and communication, this plan also gives precedence to the issues of environmental protection, culture, education, and sports. Also, with special emphasis on the implementation of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) Railway Project in terms of its significance for the region’s international reputation, this project was proclaimed to become a key component of the transport corridor, connecting Europe and Asia. Expressing the necessity of the timely conclusion of the railway project’s construction, this joint declaration underlined that this route would become the shortest and the most effective “central route” for the transit of the cargoes of the ISAF forces in Afghanistan.

At the post-meeting press conference, the ministers reiterated the importance of trilateral cooperation. Georgia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Maia Panjikidze declared that, “Georgia had a close and friendly relationship with its partners Turkey and Azerbaijan”; while Azerbaijan’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Elmar Mammadyarov commented that “this declaration conveyed Armenia a clear message that it was better to join the club rather than to remain outside.”

The Ganja Summit of Ministers of Foreign Affairs

After the end of Mikhael Saakashvili’s second term, Giorgi Margvelashvili was elected as Georgia’s new president in the presidential polls of 27 October 2013. Some experts claimed that in this new era for Georgian politics, Georgia would establish closer ties with Russia to the detriment of the trilateral cooperation process between Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. However, Margvelashvili paid his first international presidential visit to Turkey and the second one to Azerbaijan.

Almost immediately after these elections, the third Trilateral Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia was held in Ganja, Azerbaijan on 19 February 2014. At this summit, the parties conducted discussions on the progress made during the period since the Trabzon Statement and the proclamation of the Trilateral Sectoral Cooperation Action Plan for 2013-2015. Another statement was adopted at the end of this meeting, which declared the parties’ satisfaction with the development of relations among the three countries and emphasized the importance of further enhancing cooperation in politics, trade, and economy as well as the diversification of this cooperation to include humanitarian fields such as environmental protection, culture, science, healthcare, tourism, and sport.

Stressing the importance of cooperation in energy, the agenda included the project called “Shahdeniz-2” – one of the largest energy projects in the world – in terms of adding a new line to the Southern Gas Corridor composed of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline. The decision on the Stage 2 development of the Shahdeniz field was noted as “historic”, in that it would significantly accelerate the trilateral cooperation. This statement also eliminated any doubts regarding the necessity of a trilateral cooperation.

Speaking at the joint press conference, Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu stressed that this trilateral cooperation would set an example of good neighborly relations and also pointed out that “in the period after the Cold War, one of the problem-free and most structural relations had developed among Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The joint projects carried out by the three countries also constituted projects toward peace.”
Adding another dimension to the trilateral format of the regional cooperation, a decision was taken to schedule the first Presidential Summit between Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia to be hosted by Georgia. This decision implied that the trilateral format of the last two years matched the parties’ expectations. As agreed in Ganja, the first leaders’ summit was held on 6 May 2014 in Tbilisi with the participation of the President of Turkey Abdullah Gul, the President of Azerbaijan İlham Aliyev and the President of Georgia Giorgi Margvelashvili. This summit is of importance in that it reaffirmed that the change of power in Georgia did not have any negative impact in terms of the content and future of the trilateral strategic relations. In that respect, this meeting also reiterated the common vision that had been previously laid out at the level of foreign affairs ministers. A business council meeting was also included as part of the summit, which indicated the willingness of the parties’ to add a new dimension in their relations.

**The Kars Summit of Ministers of Foreign Affairs**

The fourth Trilateral Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey was held on 10 December 2014 in Kars, Turkey with the participation of Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlut Çavusoglu, Georgian Foreign Minister Tamar Beruchashvili, and Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan Elmar Memmedyarov. As a continuation and repetition of previous meetings, views were exchanged on the possibilities of developing regional cooperation regarding issues of common interest to all three countries while the decisions adopted at previous meetings were reviewed. In the joint statement issued at the end of this meeting, the ministers expressed their satisfaction with the growing trilateral cooperation between their countries and reaffirmed their strong commitment for further enhancing their cooperation based on the strategic partnership, good neighborly relations, as well as mutual respect and trust among the three countries. Georgian minister Beruchashvili expressed the view that the trilateral cooperation “had significantly improved and attained a new level”. Drafted at the end of the summit, the Kars Statement is a comprehensive declaration where the parties’ views on economic and political issues as well as the strategic partnership were laid out.

Another project, which was introduced at the Kars Statement, is called the Trans Anatolian Pipeline Project (TANAP). This project called for the construction of a natural gas pipeline to transport the products of the Shahdeniz field, which was projected at Ganja summit, to western markets. With this project, Azerbaijan as the supplier country, and Turkey and Georgia as transition countries have decided for the first time to establish a pipeline network using their own resources without any contribution from final consumer countries. This alone could reaffirm that the impact of this trilateral cooperation could transcend the region to a global level.

In the light of these evaluations, it is of importance to acknowledge that the strategic partnership, which has flourished based on bilateral relations since the 1990s and attained a trilateral perspective with the introduction of the Trabzon statement, has been enhanced particularly through economic and commercial relations in principal sectors such as energy and security.

**Economic and Commercial Cooperation**

Trilateral relations among Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, especially in terms of energy and transport projects, are based on economic and commercial ties. These projects mainly focus on the regional integration as well as the establishment of a steady connection between the region and global markets. In this sense, the Sarp border gate located between Georgia and Turkey connects the latter to the South Caucasus and Central Asia. This also points to the strategic importance of Georgia for Turkey and Azerbaijan.

In all statements regarding the trilateral cooperation, it was underlined that the relations regarding trade, energy, and transport would not only impact the region; also they would lead the area from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea into prosperity. Further emphasis was also given to the development of these relations and their contribution to the welfare, stability, and security of the region.

The trilateral Turkish-Azerbaijani-Georgian Business Forums have shaped the general framework of the economic and commercial relations. By identifying the areas and the sectors in which the parties were strong and determined to collaborate, these forums provided convenient ground for the ministers of economy and commerce to meet the representatives of the business world.

At the end of these initiatives, the parties sought ways to improve their trilateral trade volume, as
this has not yet reached the desired level. The total volume of trade among these three countries amounts to around 4.2 billion USD. This equates to 3% of Turkey’s foreign trade volume, 8% of Azerbaijan’s, and 20% of Georgia’s.\textsuperscript{47}

Azerbaijan’s investments in Turkey amount to 5 billion USD, which it aims to increase by 20 billion USD by 2020. According to the Azerbaijani Minister of Economy Sahin Mustafayev, the total amount of Turkish capital in Azerbaijan is around 4.7 billion USD and approximately 1.5 billion out of this amount is invested in industries other than oil. Turkey ranks first among the countries investing in Azerbaijan. More than 2000 Turkish companies operate in Azerbaijan, while more than 1000 Azerbaijani companies are active in Turkey.

Whereas the capital investment of Turkish companies in Georgia amount approximately to 1.1 billion USD; Georgian investments in Turkey are about 32 million USD.\textsuperscript{48} While there are more than 300 Azerbaijani companies in Georgia, more than 150 Georgian companies operate in Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani companies in Georgia employ around 8000 people. These companies have undertaken projects in the construction, tourism, and transport sectors.\textsuperscript{49} The Minister of Economy of Azerbaijan Sahin Mustafayev has stated that Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan aimed at improving their economic relations so as to make joint investments in other countries.\textsuperscript{50} According to the evaluation of Turkey’s former Minister of Economy Zafer Caglayan, a team was formed to draft a free trade agreement between Turkey and Azerbaijan and further negotiations were ongoing. This draft is projected to facilitate the trade among the three countries through the free movement of commodities and to increase their volume of trade with each other.\textsuperscript{51}

Russia’s embargo on the import of some Georgian export commodities such as agricultural products as of December 2005; and wine and mineral water as of May 2006 helped increase the level of trilateral commercial relations. The agreement on mutual visa exemption between Turkey and Georgia in 2006 also enabled to enhance bilateral relations and trade. After the Free Trade Agreement, which was signed between Turkey and Georgia on 21 November 2007, came into effect in 2008; Turkey and Azerbaijan achieved the first two ranks in Georgia’s foreign trade.\textsuperscript{52} Azerbaijan’s market has gained particular importance especially for Georgian fruit and vegetable products.\textsuperscript{53} The core of the economic relations between these two countries is mainly composed of energy, transport, banking, construction, communication technologies, trade, and tourism.

### Volume of Georgia’s Foreign Trade with Turkey and Azerbaijan (billion USD)\textsuperscript{54}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>TURKEY</th>
<th>AZERBAIJAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1.203 (21 %)</td>
<td>811 (16 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1.105 (16,5 %)</td>
<td>708 (10,6 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1.500 (16,2 %)</td>
<td>1.036 (11,2 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>1.535 (15 %)</td>
<td>1.260 (12 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1.528 (14,2 %)</td>
<td>1.361 (12,6 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>1.966 (17,2 %)</td>
<td>1.182 (10,3 %)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Energy Interdependence

Energy cooperation is the main element of the trilateral relationship. This trilateral cooperation has been improved with the addition of a new dimension initiated by the construction of the BTC Pipeline. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Crude Oil Pipeline Project, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) Natural Gas Pipeline Project, the Trans Anatolian Pipeline Project (TANAP), and the Trans Adriatic Natural Gas Pipeline Project (TAP) are the energy transport corridors connecting these three countries physically. Furthermore, these are key partner countries of the EU-funded INOGATE (Interstate Oil and Gas Transportation to Europe) program which deals with the oil and gas transport from and through the Caspian and Central Asia to Europe. Among the three; Azerbaijan is the supplying country with its considerable amount of fossil resources, Georgia is the transporting partner with its geographic location, while Turkey is the gateway with access to global markets and international partners.\textsuperscript{55} In this respect, energy pipelines are the key component of the trilateral relationship.

On 25 May 2005, the BTC pipeline was inaugurated in Baku;\textsuperscript{56} on 12 October 2005, the inauguration ceremony was held at Georgia’s Turkey border;\textsuperscript{57} and the first oil pumped, reached Ceyhan on 28 May 2006. While the tanker transporting Azerbaijan’s crude oil departed from Ceyhan, Adana on 2 June 2006, the official ceremony at Ceyhan terminal was held by Turkey on 13 July 2006.
The BTC crude oil pipeline project is, in a sense, the foundation stone of the establishment of Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey trilateral relations. This project has helped Azerbaijan discard the threat of isolation in the region by offering its fossil resources to the world's markets. For Georgia, the project has contributed to its energy procurement as well as to its geopolitical value; whereas Turkey has enjoyed the benefits of being a regional energy hub.

This pipeline project has also paved the way for other relevant projects and placed the energy issue in the core of the trilateral cooperation process. In this context, the establishment of a linkage among the Black Sea, the Mediterranean and the Caspian basins is targeted. To this end, the parties also recognize the importance of including the Central Asian countries in this linkage initiated with the BTC project. The Trabzon statement also refers to the transportation of the energy resources of Azerbaijan and Central Asian countries to international markets by emphasizing the importance of further deepening the already existing successful cooperation between Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. In particular, the inclusion of Kazakhstan in this energy network will strengthen the cooperation between it and Azerbaijan, by upgrading the status of the pipelines and the geopolitical importance of the three countries. Any such development is expected to encourage Turkmenistan to participate in this cooperation mechanism.

Subsequently, the BTE Natural Gas Pipeline project was developed to transport the natural gas produced in the Shahdeniz field to the international markets via Georgia and Turkey. The construction of the pipeline with an annual capacity of 30 billion cubic meters commenced in 2004 and was completed at the end of 2006. The first delivery of gas from the Shahdeniz field was made through this pipeline on 13 March 2007.

The success of the BTC and the BTE projects and the income they have generated have created new financial resources and helped the trilateral relationship acquire a new dimension. Three new agreements signed at the meeting of the High Level Strategic Cooperation Council between Turkey and Azerbaijan, held in Izmir on 26 October 2011, are the most concrete outcomes of these aforementioned projects. Of the three, the most important one is the agreement related to the transit of the natural gas to be extracted from the Shahdeniz-2 field to the European market. This agreement was signed between the Turkish Minister of Economy Taner Yıldız and the President of SOCAR (the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic) Rovnag Abdullayev. Additionally, an agreement on the purchase and sale of natural gas between Turkey and Azerbaijan was signed by BOTAS (Turkish Petroleum Pipeline Corporation) and SOCAR under the Shahdeniz-2 Project; and BOTAS and BP have also signed agreements on natural gas transport to Europe.

On 26 December 2011, Turkey and Azerbaijan signed a memorandum of understanding establishing a consortium to build and operate the Trans-Anatolian natural gas pipeline; and following this, the final agreement signed on 26 June 2012 heralded a new project starting from Azerbaijan’s border to Europe via Georgia and Turkey. Described as ‘small Nabucco’ at the beginning, TANAP stands out as a trilateral project realized without the interference or assistance of third parties. As a result of mutual trust, this project constitutes the core of the trilateral strategic cooperation laid out in the Trabzon Declaration. This pipeline project, expected to bring a fundamental change to the energy balance in the region, has led Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan to cooperate with the aim of being involved in the European gas market. This project furthermore enhances Turkey’s policy of being a regional energy hub.

The TANAP project, of which the foundation was laid on 20 September 2014 in Baku and which marked the 20th anniversary of the ‘Contract of the Century’, is expected to allow the first Azerbaijani gas exports to Turkey in 2018 and to Europe in 2019. The planned capacity of this pipeline is 16 billion cubic meters, 6 billion out of which is to be exported to Turkey and 10 billion to Europe. In brief, the trilateral energy
cooperation will be further consolidated. Hence, we could conclude by emphasizing SOCAR’s contribution to this partnership.

SOCAR is Azerbaijan’s biggest company and investor in both Turkey and Georgia. Founded in 2006, the company SOCAR Georgia Petroleum is operating in the wholesale and retail sale of oil in Georgia. While the share of Azerbaijan’s SOCAR is 51%, Petro-Trans Company is the shareholder with 49% ownership. SOCAR Georgia Petroleum respectively holds 72% of the oil market and 61% of the diesel market in Georgia. Since 2006, SOCAR has invested around 400 million USD in Georgia.

SOCAR exports oil and oil products to the world markets via the Black Sea through the Kulevi Oil Terminal operating since 2008. It signed three important agreements with Georgia in 2013. Under these, SOCAR covers the natural gas needs of the nursery schools in Georgia and awards scholarships to 30 top university students designated by the Georgian ministries of education and health. Under the agreement signed between SOCAR and the Patriarchate of Georgia, the natural gas for the religious sites is supplied free of charge. With the agreements signed between the Georgian ministries of energy and economy, SOCAR is to distribute natural gas to 100,000 consumers until 2017. A project drafted in 2014 calls for an increase to this number by 275,000 total in the near future.62

SOCAR started to operate in the Turkish market in 2008 by purchasing 51% of Turcuas’ share. By purchasing an additional 25% stake of the company in 2011, SOCAR Energy Turkey became a joint venture with capital amounting to 2.6 billion USD.63

The big refinery project integrating petro-chemistry, energy, and logistics, to be built on the Petkim Peninsula by SOCAR, has also helped upgrade relations. This project includes the Star Refinery with a capacity of 10 million tons of crude oil, the Petkim plant producing petrochemicals, Turkey’s third biggest and the Aegean’s biggest container terminal, and the Wind Power Plant to contribute to Turkey’s renewable energy capacity. The Socar companies that were founded successively in Turkey are as follows: Socar Gas is expected to sell an annual amount of 1.2 billion cubic meters in natural gas in Turkey; Socar Fiber is expected to contribute to Turkey’s fiber optics infrastructure works; the Socar Turkey Energy Distribution company is to operate as fuel oil distribution company with the completion of the Petkim project.64 For this integration project, OCAR plans to invest 9 billion USD in Turkey. Together with the TANAP project, SOCAR’s total amount of investments in Turkey is expected to reach 18 billion USD.65

The Central Hub of the East-West Transportation Corridors

The increase in the trade volume between East and West has also brought an added value to the transportation dynamics on the Central Asia-Caspian Sea-Black Sea line. The geographical locations of Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are pivotal for the east-west and north-south transportation lines.

The EU-funded TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia) project is of significant importance for the East-West transport corridor. With Azerbaijan and Georgia having participated in 1993 and Turkey in 2000, the TRACECA program supports the integration of the communication and transportation lines of the member states. This transport corridor between Asia and Europe connects Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. The parties had also expressed their support for the TRACECA program in the Trabzon Declaration of 2012.

Starting from Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine), the TRACECA corridor contains Turkey as well. Passing through the Black Sea and reaching the ports of Poti and Batumi in Georgia, it connects this region to Turkey via the South Caucasus transport networks. Passing through Azerbaijan via the TRACECA line, the Caspian ferryboats arrive in Central Asian countries via the Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan railway networks. The transportation networks of these countries end up in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, arriving at the borders of China and Afghanistan.

TRACECA Map

15
The increase of merchandise transportation starting at the Asia-Pacific region and ending in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Europe results from the improvement of the new transport corridor. This also brings about the access of the TRACECA countries to the international market and thus the expansion of the market, as well as its connection with the Trans-European networks.67

The main goals of the TRACECA program are as follows: developing economic relations, trade and transport communications in the regions of Europe, Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, and Asia; facilitating access to the international market of road, air, and railway transport and commercial maritime navigation; ensuring traffic safety, the security of goods and environmental protection; harmonizing the transportation policies and the legal structure; creating a fair competition between different types of transport. The Basic Multilateral Agreement (MLA) drafted to these ends, was signed at the TRACECA Summit – Restoration of the Historic Silk Road held in 1998 in Azerbaijan; and in 2000, the Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) was founded in Georgia. The member states of TRACECA are Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Romania, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Mongolia. Although Turkmenistan is a participant in the Tacis-TRACECA Program, it is not a signatory of the MLA. In 2000, the IGC was formed in order to apply the regulations of the MLA; and in 2001, the Permanent Secretariat as the executive body of the IGC TRACECA was established in Baku.68

One of the main routes of the TRACECA program is the Aktau-Baku-Tbilisi-Poti/Batumi Railway network. Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Georgia collectively work for the improvement of this network. The fiber optic cable of this railway between Baku and Poti/Batumi was installed through the European Commission’s financial support. Oil and oil products are the most important transport commodities of this network. This railway line is also an integral part of the China-Central Asia-Caucasus-Europe line, which is also supported by the member states as well as the United Nations. With the railway line reaching the border of Kazakhstan and China on one side and the railway line between Baku and Poti on the other side; the commercial maritime links between Kazakhstan and Baku will be connected.

The New Baku International Sea Trade Port on the Caspian Sea, Aktau port in Kazakhstan, and Turkmenbashi port in Turkmenistan are projects under the framework of the TRACECA program. Azerbaijan has undertaken to construct the Alyat port located about 65 km to the south of Baku, to consolidate its role as a transportation hub both in the Caspian Sea and between the East and the West. The total cost of this project, is about 870 million manats (1.1 billion USD). Under the framework of the TRACECA project, this port will be of logistical importance in terms of transportation on the Central Asia-South Caucasus-Black Sea-Europe route as well as between the north and the south. At the first stage, the capacity of the port is expected to reach 10 million tons of cargo and 40 thousand containers; at the second stage, 17 million tons of cargo and 150 thousand containers; and at the third stage, 25 million tons of cargo and 1 million containers. In fact, the Alyat port has been designed to accommodate a capacity of 11.5 million containers to meet the constantly increasing transportation demand.

The Baku-Tbilisi-Akhalkalaki-Kars Railway

The idea of connecting Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey with a railway line was first brought up at the Joint Transport Commission in 1993. In 2002, the Ministers of Transport of the three countries signed a protocol confirming the route and a feasibility study was conducted in 2005. On 25 May 2005, a trilateral communique related to the Baku-Tbilisi-Akhalkalaki-Kars (BTAK) Railway project was signed in Baku. On 7 February 2007, the final agreement was signed in Tbilisi by the Turkish Minister of Transport Binali Yildirim, Georgia’s Minister of Economy and Development Giorgi Kvirikashvili and Azerbaijan’s Minister of Transport Ziya Mammadov. Furthermore, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Georgia’s President Mikheil Saakashvili and Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev signed the Tbilisi Declaration envisaging a regional cooperation process and mutual support in terms of transportation, electric power, and natural gas.69 This project was included in the Master Plan on the Trans-European Railway (TER) networks sponsored by the UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe). As Armenia did not take part in this project, it was not included in TRACECA; thereby resulting in the BTK Railway project’s exclusion from TRACECA.

The Baku-Tbilisi-Akhalkalaki-Kars Railway70
Given the fact that the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway bypassed Armenia, as a result of the efforts of Armenia’s lobbies in the United States, the US Congress prevented US financial institutions from providing funding for the project. On 12 July 2005, the US Congress passed a bill banning financial support for the BTK project, as it was deemed to isolate Armenia in the region. Therefore, the transit countries had to take on the financial funding of the project.

The total length of the BTAK Railway is 105 km. The construction costs of the line between Kars and Akhalkalaki with a length of 76 km are covered by Turkey. For the construction of its 29 km part in Georgia, as well as the restoration and the reconstruction of the railway line between Akhalkalaki and Marabda, Azerbaijan agreed to loan 775 million USD to Georgia. The amount of 200 million USD of this loan has been allotted at an interest rate of 1% for 25 years and the remaining amount of 575 million USD has been granted with 5% interest rate for 25 years. 585 million USD of the credit has already been transferred for use for the construction of the railway.

The BTAK’s capacity is expected to reach 1 million passengers and 15 million tons of freight. After the completion of the Aktau-Urumchu Railway project and following its integration with the BTAK railway line; this railway corridor, passing through Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan and connecting the Central Asia-South Caucasus-China railway with Europe, will provide cargo transport between Asia and Europe. With the completion of the BTAK railway, the Trans-European and the Trans-Asian railways will be combined and the cargo and passengers will be transported to Europe and Asia via Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. This project will also enable Georgia to avoid from being isolated by rail. Georgia’s railway connection to Russia passes through Abkhazia and this route has been blocked because of the war.

By completing the Marmaray project, Turkey has enabled railway access from Istanbul to Europe. On the other hand, another railway line is being constructed between Kars and Edirne. As per the terms of the agreement signed in 2010 between Turkey and China, this fast train railway line will be completed via a credit granted by China. This will help combine the BTAK with the Marmaray.

This way, the BTK project will constitute an integral part of the Iron Silk Road of the 21st century. The project will improve the transportation capacity of the regional countries, increase their strategic importance for the East-West network and accelerate their integration among themselves.

The BTK Railway project also attracts the attention of the neighboring countries. It is in competition with the transport lines passing through these neighboring regions. Its aim is to have access to the European market through the Kazakhstan-China-Mongolia railway. Diplomatic negotiations are currently underway to integrate the project with China’s New Silk Road Project.

**Indivisibility of Security**

Although the trilateral cooperation between Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Georgia is not essentially a security and military cooperation mechanism; it has some impact on security issues as well. Each state evaluates the security issue under the perspective of the ‘indivisibility of security’. Apart from the military perspective, this evaluation takes new components into consideration such as the environment and the economy, and regards the threats to these accordingly. Principally in the Trabzon Declaration, this approach is demonstrated in all summit declarations. In this respect, the three countries all consider their security issues under the terms of interdependency. Consequently, similar threats and similar security issues are perceived; thereby resulting in the effort to search for solutions in accordance with the common interests of all three parties.

Each country regards the other as a strategic partner and attaches the requisite importance to their security and defense doctrines. Under Georgia’s National Security doctrine, Turkey, as the only NATO member state in the region, is recognized as one of the leading states of the region and as a pivotal military ally. This doctrine indicates that Georgia gives priority to the improvement of its relations with Turkey in terms of security and defense. The same document also defines Azerbaijan as a strategic partner.

The security issue as put forth in the Trabzon Declaration is mainly centered on the occupations, the threat or use of force, and ethnic and territorial conflicts. The fact that Georgia’s and Azerbaijan’s sovereignty and independence are still under threat after more than 20 years of political independence, as well as the fact that their territorial integrities and the inviolability of their borders have not been fully
established, are the principal indicators of this security issue. In this regard, Georgia and Azerbaijan suffer the same fate in the region.

Thus, the threat perception of these two states requires a multilateral and stability-oriented approach as well as closer cooperation with the West. In this sense, Turkey stands out as a partner that supports the peaceful resolution of the conflicts through the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty and with the participation of the international community. With this approach, Turkey is the prominent actor that has created the trilateral cooperation process in the security area.

From this perspective, this trilateral cooperation in security is not a military alliance in the traditional sense. The evaluations of the decision-makers manifest that this approach results from the parties’ need to protect their investments and their future against traditional and modern threats. The declarations signed so far call for cooperation in three areas in terms of security: the protection of the sovereignty and the independence of states, cooperation against secessionism and the threats against territorial integrity, and cooperation against non-traditional security threats. The emphasis on the sovereignty and independence is of vital importance for Azerbaijan and Georgia, whose territories are partly under occupation.

On the other hand, under the agreement signed in Nakhchivan on 19 August 2014, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Georgia will hold joint military exercises; thereby demonstrating that bilateral security relations have been upgraded to a trilateral level. In this trilateral meeting of defense ministers, the security challenges as well as the military and political situation in the region were discussed, while the protection of the oil and natural gas pipeline plants were negotiated. The ensuing agreement integrated the military and security cooperation aspect into the bilateral relations between the three countries with the aim of consolidating the battle capacity of their military forces. The ministers also agreed to hold such meetings twice a year, to organize joint seminars and round-table conferences, to establish a tripartite military education and cooperation mechanism in the military-technical sphere.

The basic approach to strengthen this cooperation mainly points to a close cooperation with western institutions and actors. In this context, both the Trabzon Declaration and other related declarations and statements refer to cooperation with NATO and other security establishments and programs. Turkey, hence, plays a key role in enhancing both Georgia’s and Azerbaijan’s cooperation with the Atlantic Alliance. This cooperation, initiated under NATO’s Partnership for Peace Program signed in 1994 between NATO and Georgia and Azerbaijan, was consolidated with their forces’ participation under Turkey’s command in NATO’s military exercises in Kosovo and Afghanistan. By establishing military schools in both countries, Turkey also trained their troops.

The prospects for enhancing the trilateral security cooperation to the sector of military industry are also on the table and could conceivably be developed in the future.

On the other hand, this tripartite alliance is not against cooperation with the other states in the region. Whereas Turkey and Azerbaijan try to give the impression that it is not aimed against neither Iran nor Russia; Georgia emphasizes that it is not targeted against Armenia. Georgia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Grigol Vashadze stated that this trilateral cooperation process was not established against anybody and more importantly, was in favor of improved relations with the other regional states.76

Conclusion

The abovementioned trilateral meetings could be argued to have elevated, in a four-year period, the level of cooperation from the discursive perspective to a strategic partnership supported by concrete programs and projects. Based on the meetings and statements, the main topics of this cooperation could be summarized as follows:

1. As a result of the trilateral meetings and negotiations, the relations among the three countries have been institutionalized; and the mechanisms whereby their related ministries, organizations, or representatives periodically assemble, discuss common goals and interests and evaluate their feasibility, have been established. Through these mechanisms, it is possible to achieve the agreed upon objectives and which legal and institutional measures to take and how to overcome gridlock by discussing them at the most top-level. These mechanisms have also allowed for trilateral presidential or ministerial meetings as well as trilateral business council meetings with the participation of both public and private sector representatives. The declarations
and statements issued after these meetings could be regarded as documents that demonstrate how the parties perceive this cooperation and whereby their public and the international community are informed about the improvement of this partnership.

2. The most significant reason and agenda of the partnership is to restore the peace, stability, and welfare in the Caucasus through this trilateral mechanism. The parties constantly affirm their adherence to the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act, and the fundamental principles and norms of international law. Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, the peaceful settlement of disputes, the inviolability of internationally recognized borders, and refraining from the threat or use of force are especially emphasized. They explicitly declare that they do not recognize the fait accompli in the Caucasus and that the resolution of these conflicts requires international cooperation in terms of the sovereignty and inviolability of borders.

3. As a response to the criticism that this process excludes Armenia, the parties have stressed that, on condition that it respects the borders of its neighbors and support the peaceful resolution of disputes, the cooperation process is open to Armenia as well. On every occasion, it is reiterated that Armenia has become the missing link of this cooperation process because of its irreconcilable and occupying position; and that it should assume an attitude showing respect for fundamental principles recognized by the international community. This will also help build a better future for the Caucasus characterized by peace, stability, cooperation, and welfare.

4. The driving forces transforming the trilateral relations into a strategic partnership are the economic and commercial relations. Especially the cooperation in the field of energy has gained a new dimension with international projects such as the BTC, the BTE, and the TANAP. This allows the three countries to grow into an integral part of the international system in the economic and commercial context.

5. This partnership accelerated by the cooperation in energy and supported by the transport and communication sectors, turns into a more complicated and efficient strategic partnership. The parties also aim for further improvement of the cooperation in the transport sector with the construction of the alternative line, called as the Southern Gas Corridor, which connects Asia to Europe via Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. In this respect, the Great Silk Road project, the unique project to connect Europe and Asia, is expected to integrate with the already existing land, sea, and rail transport connections. The new Baku International Sea Trade Port project, the new Deep Water Sea Port of Anaklia project, and the integration of the Marmaray with the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway project are constantly highlighted.

As a result, gradually deepened and enhanced, the trilateral cooperation in the Caucasus between Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey offers a mechanism to serve the common interests and expectations of the three countries in a wide span of issues from the economy and trade to security. This development could be viewed as a regional cooperation process with a positive influence in an international environment created after the annexation of Crimea by Russia. The fact that this cooperation process is open to the other states in the region, on condition that they adhere to the fundamental principles and norms of international law and that they take a stand against occupations, augurs a bright future for the region.

Endnotes

1. Turkey, on every occasion, has been presented as a model to former Soviet countries with its parliamentary democracy, economic and commercial structure based on a relatively free market economy, and a secular state structure. It was believed that this would turn Turkey into the main connection point between the ‘new world’ and the West. Turkish decision-makers evaluated these discourse and policies as a fulfillment of Turkey’s expectations and a restoration of its strategic importance and position, which had been thought would be lost. See: Mustafa Aydin, “Turkey and Central Asia: Challenges of Change”, Central Asian Survey, Vol. 15, No. 2 (June 1996), pp. 157-177; Andrew Mango, “The Turkish Model”, Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 29, No. 4 (October 1993), pp. 726-757.

3 For a detailed assessment of this topic, see: Mithat Çelikpala, "Son Yırmı Yılda Türkiye’nin Azerbaycan, Gürcistan ve Ukrayna’ya Yönelik Diş Politikası ve Bu Ülkelerdeki Faaliyetleri" [Turkey’s Foreign Policy toward Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine in the last twenty years], Bağımızlıkların Yirmi Yılında Azerbaycan, Gürcistan ve Ukrayna Türk Dilli Halklar-Türkiye ile İlişkiler [In the 20th Anniversary of Independence Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine - Turkish Speaking Peoples, Relations with Turkey] Ismail Aydingin and Çiğdem Balım (eds) (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Yayınları, 2012), pp. 311-401.


6 For the complete text of the agreement, see: "Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ile Gürçistan Cumhuriyeti Arasında Doğuş Sürecinde Türkiye-Azerbaycan İlişkileri" [The Agreement on Friendship, Cooperation and Good Neighborly Relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Georgia], Resmi Gazete [Official Journal], 29 September 1992, p. 2.

7 Rich in terms of natural resources but landlocked, Azerbaijan needs this trilateral cooperation to be able to transport its energy resources in the Caspian Sea to the international markets. The reasons why Georgia, which is located in the north-west of Azerbaijan, is the unique and natural neighboring country for the latter to cooperate, are as follows: the security challenges confronted in the east mainly because of the confinement of the Caspian Sea and the instabilities in the Central Asian countries; the instability in the Northern Caucasus, principally in Chechnya, as well as the disputes with the Russian Federation; the isolated position of its southern neighbor, Iran, because of the international sanctions; the occupation of Azerbaijan’s territory in Nagorno-Karabakh and the area surrounding this region by Armenia.


14 For detailed information, see: Çelikpala, op. cit., n. 3.


16 Put forward by Süleyman Demirel in January 2000 after the outbreak of the Second Chechen War and following its repercussions in the Caucasus region, the ‘Stability Pact for the Caucasus’ had been launched so as to be under the umbrella of the OSCE. For a modeling study related to this pact, see: Sergiu Celac, Michael Emerson and Nathalie Tocci, A Stability Pact for the Caucasus, CEPS Working Document 145 (Brussels: CEPS, 2000).

17 Signed on Eduard Shevardnadze’s official visit to Turkey on 4 April 1996, the ‘Agreement on Military Education, and Technical and Scientific Cooperation between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Georgia’ is the fundamental determinant in these relations. See: Resmi Gazete [Official Journal], 26 August 1996, p. 5. Consecutively, on the 9th President Süleyman Demirel’s official visit on 14-15 July 1997, various documents including the Protocol on Cooperation in Military Education were signed. Furthermore, with the agreements signed during the Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz’s official visit on 13 March 1998, the traditional relations gained a strategic perspective encompassing the military aspect, as well. See: “Demirel: Kafkas’da Smir desar Kalkmali” [Demirel: Borders should be eliminated in the Caucasus], Yeni Yüzyıl, 16 July 1997; “Georgia and Turkey Agree to Strengthen Cooperation”, Turkish Daily News, 16 July 1997.
18 "Azerbaijan and Georgia, see: Kornely Kakachia and Zaur 7-8 (July 2013), (Baku: Center for Strategic Studies), p. 20.


20 Hooman Peimani, Conflict and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2009).


25 Ibid.

26 Signed on 16 August 2010 in Baku, the ‘Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan’ was ratified on 26 April 2011. See: Resmi Gazete [Official Journal], 28 May 2011.


29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Held on 16 February 2012 in Tbilisi with the participation of the ministers of economy of the three countries, the Turkey-Georgia-Azerbaijan Business Forum dealt with the issues related to their economic reforms; the harmonization of their tax policies, transportation systems, banking regulations, and freight operations; and the functioning of the statute law and the infrastructure. As a result, it was noted that the decision-makers of these three countries should take the necessary steps to revive the historic Silk Road and that they should promote a project on the ‘three sea projects by three countries’. See: “Tiflis’te Türkiye-Gürcistan-Azerbaycan İş Forumu Yapıldı” [Turkey-Georgia-Azerbaijan Business Forum held in Tbilisi], Haberler.com, 16 February 2012, http://www.haberler.com/tiflis-te-turkiye-gurcistan-azerbaycan-is-forumu-3367199-haberi/.


33 “Dışişleri Bakanlığı Ahmet Davutoğlu’nun, Azerbaycan Dışişleri Elmar Memedyarov ve Gürcistan Dışişleri Bakanı Grigol Vashadze ile Ortak Basın Toplantısı” [The Joint Press Conference with Mr. Ahmet Davutoglu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mr. Elmar Memmedyarov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, and Mr. Grigol Vashadze, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Trabzon], op. cit., n. 32.

34 Ibid.

35 “Türkiye–Azerbaycan–Gürcistan Dışişleri Bakanları Üçlü Toplantısı” [Trilateral Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia], Resmi Gazete [Official Journal], 32.
36 Soon after his coming to the government, the Georgian Prime Minister Ivanishvili stated in an interview to the Rezonans newspaper on 20 December 2012 that the construction of the BTK Railway line caused some questions and referring to his visit to Azerbaijan, that “he would have to explain softly to their friendly country that at a certain stage, it would not benefit Georgia and it should be regulated.” The tension caused by this statement was shortly attenuated following Ivanishvili’s visit to Baku and through mutual negotiations. Vasili Rukhadze, “Russia May Gain in South Caucasus, as Georgian Government Wavers on Regional Railway Projects”, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 10, No. 18 (31 January 2013), http://www.jamestown.org/regions/thecaucasus/single/?tx_ttnews%5Bpointer%5D=5&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=40399&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=642&cHash=6a2b3fa9fb8df48e31e480f19a93d46#.VOCiPmsVgg.

37 “Türkiye – Azerbayan – Gürcistan” [Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia], op. cit., n. 35.


39 Ibid.


41 “Türkiye-Azerbaycan-Gürcistan Dışişleri Bakanlığı Üçlü Toplantısı Gence’dede düzenlendi” [Trilateral Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia was held in Ganja], Mfa.gov.tr, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye_azerbaycan_gurcistan-disisleri-bakanlari-uclu-toplantisi-gence-de-duzenlendi.tr.mfa.


43 “Türkiye-Azerbaycan-Gürcistan Dışişleri Bakanlığı Üçlü Toplantısı” [Trilateral Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia], op. cit., n. 42.


47 See: http://mfa.gov.ge/.


50 “Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey”, op. cit., n. 49.


57 “Azerbaycan nefti Türkiye serhedine çatdı” [Azerbaijan’s oil arrived at Turkish border], 525-ci Gazete, 12 October 2005.


66 TRACECA Turkey National Secretariat: http://www.traceca.org.tr/.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.


75 Actually, besides bilateral cooperation, the three countries’ special forces conducted the first trilateral military training under the name of the ‘Caucasus Eagle 2012’ military exercises in November 2012.

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