

Citation List: Heyet, M. R. (2026). Türkiye-Azerbajjan relations in the post-independence period. In Ş. Aktürk & A. Balcı (Eds.), *Azerbaijan and Türkiye in world politics* (pp. 399-414). Turkish Academy of Sciences Publications.

CHAPTER 25

TÜRKİYE–AZERBAIJAN RELATIONS IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

Mehmet Rıza HEYET

TÜRKİYE–AZERBAIJAN RELATIONS IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

Mehmet Rıza HEYET

Ankara University

Abstract

This study examines Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations in the post-independence period through three major phases: diplomatic recognition and institutionalization (1991-1994), strategic cooperation (1994-2010), and the era of alliance and partnership (2010 onwards). In the first phase, Türkiye enhanced Azerbaijan's international legitimacy as the first state to recognize its independence and supported its territorial integrity during the Karabakh crisis. The second phase was characterized by strategic cooperation centred on major energy projects such as BTC and BTE, which positioned both countries at the core of regional energy security, while Azerbaijan's assistance during the 1999 Marmara Earthquake reflected the reciprocal nature of this partnership. In the third phase, bilateral relations advanced to the level of a formal alliance, with Türkiye's decisive support in the 2020 Karabakh Victory and the subsequent declaration of alliance through the 2021 Shusha Declaration; during this period, SOCAR's investments constituted Azerbaijan's strategic economic support for Türkiye, and the assistance provided during the 2023 earthquakes highlighted the humanitarian dimension of solidarity. The study further argues that initiatives such as the Zangezur Corridor and the Trump Corridor, emerging through US mediation, present both opportunities and risks for the future trajectory of bilateral relations. Overall, Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations are assessed not merely as an interest-based alliance but as a strategic partnership grounded in shared history, identity, and mutual assistance.

Keywords

Türkiye-Azerbaijan Relations, Strategic Alliance, Karabakh War, Energy Diplomacy, Zangezur Corridor

Introduction

Azerbaijan, which gained its independence with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, quickly found itself grappling not only with its own state-building process but also with regional geopolitical balances. Türkiye was the first country to recognize Azerbaijan during this period, re-institutionalizing the historical closeness between the two states within the framework of international law. The frequently emphasized notion of One Nation, Two States became not just a sentimental slogan of brotherhood but also a strategic principle guiding regional policies (Yilmaz, 2015, p. 118).

The purpose of this study is to examine Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations at different stages of the post-independence period, analyze the development of the strategic partnership, and assess the role played by other regional countries in these relations. The study also demonstrates that Türkiye-Azerbaijan rapprochement should be considered not only at the bilateral level but also within the context of the Turkic World and the broader Eurasian landscape.

Several important methodological issues should be taken into account when considering Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations. First and foremost, these relations are shaped on a foundation where cultural, historical, and social ties are intensely felt, beyond classical interstate diplomacy (Cornell, 2017, p. 33). As Azerbaijani researchers emphasize, the roots of these ties lie not only in a common language, religion, and history, but also in shared traumas experienced during the Soviet era (Aliyev, 2003, p. 22). Therefore, these relations are not only based on interests but also on identity.

However, the role of regional and global powers has at times facilitated and at times complicated bilateral relations. Russia's historical influence in the South Caucasus, Iran's sensitivity on its northern borders, and the West's energy security concerns have directly influenced the course of Turkish-Azerbaijani relations (de Waal, 2003, p. 51). The Iranian factor, in particular, is central to this study. Because of its shared cultural and religious ties with Azerbaijan and its rivalry with Türkiye, Iran has sought to play a key role in shaping the course of relations between the two countries (Afshari, 2019, p. 25).

A review of the literature reveals that while numerous studies on Turkish and English on Turkish-Azerbaijani relations exist, the inclusion of Azerbaijani, Persian, and Russian sources allows for a holistic understanding of the subject. For example, works published by the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences provide an insider's perspective on Azerbaijan's post-independence foreign policy. Similarly, the Iranian journal *Central Asian and Caucasian Studies* (فصلنامه مطالعات آسیای مرکزی و قفقاز) provides important insights into how Iranian scholars evaluate Turkish-Azerbaijani relations. In Russia, publications produced by the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) reveal Moscow's security concerns, particularly in the context of the Karabakh conflict (Ivanov, 2019, p. 74).

This multilingualism not only allows for the comparison of different perspectives but also reveals the multilayered nature of relations. Because Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations cannot be explained solely by the bilateral dynamics of the two countries; they can also be understood within a broader context, including Russia's historical influence, Iran's security concerns, the West's energy supply security strategies, and the integration goals of the Turkic World.

In conclusion, Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations can be examined in three main phases in the post-independence period: (1) the establishment of diplomatic relations and institutionalization efforts between 1991 and 1994; (2) the period of strategic cooperation and energy diplomacy between 1994 and 2010; and (3) relations reaching the level of alliance and partnership in the post-2010 period. Throughout this process, the Iranian factor has consistently remained a balancing factor. The following sections of this study will examine these three phases in detail, discuss their economic, cultural, and security dimensions, and assess current challenges and opportunities.

1. Early Diplomatic Foundations of Türkiye - Azerbaijan Relations

The geopolitical vacuum that emerged in the South Caucasus following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 accelerated the struggle for influence among regional and global powers, along with the quest for independence by new states. Azerbaijan, one of the first republics to declare its independence during this period, sought international recognition. Türkiye's recognition of Azerbaijan (November 9, 1991) and the subsequent establishment of diplomatic relations demonstrated that the brotherly ties between the two countries had been re-established on an institutional basis (Çelikpala, 2011, p. 56).

Türkiye not only recognized Azerbaijan's independence, but also contributed to the institutionalization of the diplomatic process by immediately opening an embassy in Baku and spearheading Azerbaijan's establishment of a representative office in Ankara. During this period, Türkiye's assistance was not limited to diplomatic recognition; it also extended to areas such as media, transportation, healthcare, and education (Yılmaz, 2015, p. 121). The launch of Turkish television channels in Azerbaijan, in particular, facilitated the rapid revival of cultural ties suppressed during the Soviet era.

As Azerbaijani scholars emphasize, these years were also a turning point in the reconstruction of national identity. Aliyev (2003, p. 28) considered the establishment of diplomatic relations with Türkiye "a symbol of Azerbaijan's return to the international family."

The most decisive factor in the period between 1991 and 1994 was undoubtedly the war that broke out in Nagorno-Karabakh and the occupation of approximately 20% of Azerbaijan's territory. Armenia's post-Soviet invasion attempts in and around Nagorno-Karabakh led to a severe security crisis immediately after Azerbaijan gained independence. Türkiye was one of the first states to defend Azerbaijan's territorial integrity during this period. However, Türkiye's decision to close its border crossings with Armenia during the same period (1993) was noted as an indication that Ankara had taken a clear stance in favor of Azerbaijan (de Waal, 2003, p. 93).

However, Türkiye's reluctance to resort to military intervention was the subject of both support and criticism within the Azerbaijani public. On the one hand, Türkiye's diplomatic support served as a morale boost; on the other, the inadequate intervention on the ground fostered perceptions that Azerbaijan was being isolated (Cornell, 2017, p. 67).

While Iran recognized Azerbaijan's independence after Türkiye, it largely maintained its neutrality in the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis. However, Iran's actual policies have always been met with skepticism in Baku. This is because Iran maintained commercial and logistical cooperation with Armenia in the early years of the war, reinforcing the perception among the Azerbaijani public that «Türkiye is a brother, Iran is a rival» (Afshari, 1398/2019, p. 27). Iranian sources, however, offer a different perspective. Iranian researchers argue that Tehran is attempting to play a mediator role in the Karabakh issue and wants to maintain regional balance against the possibility of a military engagement by Türkiye (Hosseini, 2001, p. 44). This approach is closely linked to Iran's concerns about the strengthening of Turkish identity in Northern Azerbaijan. Millions of Azerbaijani Turks in Southern Azerbaijan saw the rapprochement on the Baku-Ankara line as a source of inspiration for their own identity struggle (Shaffer, 2002, p. 91).

The years 1992-1993 were characterized by both political instability and the severe consequences of war for Azerbaijan. While relations with Türkiye were emotionally strong during the presidency of Abulfaz Elchibey, the weakness of state institutions made it difficult to institutionalize these relations. With the coming to power of Heydar Aliyev in 1993, Turkish-Azerbaijani relations assumed a more balanced and institutional structure (Çelikpala, 2011, p. 59).

Aliyev's policy of balance allowed Azerbaijan to develop close relations with Türkiye while maintaining minimal relations with Russia and Iran. This policy paved the way for the deepening of Turkish-Azerbaijani relations in the energy and security dimensions in subsequent years (Hasanlı, 2010, p. 37).

In summary, we can say that the period 1991-1994 was a period in which the foundations of Turkish-Azerbaijani relations were laid. Türkiye's early diplomatic support strengthened Azerbaijan's international legitimacy. Türkiye's diplomatic stance during the Karabakh crisis demonstrated Ankara's support for Baku; however, its refrain from military intervention also revealed the limits of relations. The Iranian factor, meanwhile, further highlighted both the challenges and the importance of Türkiye-Azerbaijan rapprochement during this period.

2. Energy Diplomacy and the Deepening of Strategic Cooperation

The rise to power of Heydar Aliyev in 1993 marked a critical turning point in Azerbaijan's foreign policy, ushering in a more balanced and predictable course. Aliyev's «politics of balance» allowed Azerbaijan to both maintain minimal relations with regional actors such as Russia and Iran and institutionalize its rapidly deepening strategic partnership with Türkiye (Hasanlı, 2010, p. 44). This approach transformed relations between the two countries from a short-term friendship into a long-term strategic alliance.

During this period, Türkiye provided significant support to Azerbaijan in strengthening its international legitimacy and opening its energy resources to global markets. In particular, the oil agreement signed by Heydar Aliyev in 1994, known publicly as the «Contract of the Century,» paved the way for Azerbaijan to bring Caspian energy resources to Western markets (Cornell, 2017, p. 89). Türkiye played an active role in both the diplomatic and technical infrastructure of this process; with Ankara's support, it made Azerbaijani energy diplomacy visible on a global scale (Shaffer, 2002, p. 117).

The most concrete examples of strategic cooperation have been implemented through energy projects. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Oil Pipeline, which began operations in 2006, increased the geopolitical importance of both countries by transporting Azerbaijani oil directly to global markets via Türkiye. The BTC has become not only an energy pipeline but also a symbol of the Türkiye-Azerbaijan partnership that inspires confidence in the West (Çelikpala, 2011, p. 62).

Furthermore, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) Natural Gas Pipeline, which opened in 2007, further advanced the two countries' strategic integration in the energy sector. These projects, often referred to as the Southern Energy Corridor in Western literature, demonstrate that Türkiye and Azerbaijan are positioned not only as energy exporters but also as architects of regional energy security (Roberts, 2009, p. 41). Here, it's important to note not only Türkiye's contributions to Azerbaijan but also the strategic support Azerbaijan provided to Türkiye. Azerbaijan, through the BTC and BTE projects, not only opened its own resources to the global market but also strengthened Türkiye's status as an energy transit country. The representative offices and small-scale investments SOCAR opened in Türkiye during this period laid the groundwork for major projects like the STAR Refinery and Petkim in the years to come (SOCAR, 2009).

Between 1994 and 2010, Türkiye provided higher education scholarships to thousands of Azerbaijani students; this process strengthened public sympathy for Türkiye in Azerbaijan. Cultural projects carried out through TİKA during the same period contributed to the opening of schools, libraries, and cultural centers in Azerbaijan (TİKA, 2007).

Meanwhile, Azerbaijan also supported Türkiye in various ways during this period. The 1999 Marmara Earthquake, in particular, was noted as a moment when brotherly ties were solidified. Immediately after the earthquake, Azerbaijan sent search and rescue teams, provided humanitarian supplies, and organized aid campaigns for thousands of earthquake victims (Aliyev, 2000, p. 15). This aid strongly reflected the Azerbaijani public's awareness of standing with Türkiye and created a strong perception among the Turkish public that Azerbaijan's brotherly ties existed not only in words but also in practice.

Moreover, Azerbaijani businesspeople's investments in Türkiye increased in the 2000s, and economic relations were nourished not only by intergovernmental projects but also by private sector initiatives. Thus, mutual dependence deepened.

During this period, the Iranian factor also remained significant. Iran opposed the BTC and BTE projects, demanding that energy routes pass through its territory. However, Türkiye-Azerbaijan cooperation frustrated Iran's expectations in this direction (Afshari, 2019, p. 30). Iranian researchers state that these projects «exclude Iran from the regional energy equation» (Hosseini, 2001, p. 48).

On the other hand, Iran recognized that Azerbaijan's strategic rapprochement with Türkiye strengthened the identity consciousness among South Azerbaijani Turks; therefore, it often viewed cooperation on the Baku-Ankara line with skepticism (Shaffer, 2002, p. 134). Similarly, Russian literature has highlighted the assessment that Türkiye-Azerbaijan cooperation "reduces the traditional spheres of influence" of Russia and Iran (Sergeev, 2008, p. 92). In other words, the 1994-2010 period marked a period in which Turkish-Azerbaijani relations transformed into a strategic partnership and mutual assistance solidified. Türkiye played an active role in opening Azerbaijan's energy diplomacy to the West and gaining international legitimacy, while Azerbaijan strengthened Türkiye's geostrategic position through energy projects and economic investments. Furthermore, as seen in the example of the 1999 Marmara Earthquake, the humanitarian support Azerbaijan provided to Türkiye clearly demonstrates that brotherly ties are not one-way but two-way.

This period also marked a period in which Iran was constantly engaged as a competitive actor, while the Türkiye-Azerbaijan partnership played a decisive role in regional energy policies.

3. From Strategic Partnership to Formal Alliance

The 2010s marked a period in which Turkish-Azerbaijani relations evolved from a strategic partnership to an alliance. During this period, relations between the two countries were not limited to energy and diplomacy; they also deepened in defense, security, cultural interaction, and social solidarity. The strong personal friendship between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and İlham Aliyev, in particular, played a significant role in stabilizing relations (Çelikpala, 2015, p. 74).

A characteristic feature of this period was the declaration that the parties were no longer just brothers but also official allies. The institutional basis for this was established by the Shusha Declaration signed in 2021.

The Second Karabakh War of 2020 was a turning point in Turkish-Azerbaijani relations. Türkiye provided diplomatic, logistical, and military technological support to Azerbaijan during the war; unmanned aerial vehicles (UCAVs), in particular, tipped the balance in Azerbaijan's favor (Kucera, 2021, p. 19). Furthermore, Türkiye's defense of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity on international platforms provided a significant moral advantage to the Baku government. The war's conclusion with Azerbaijan's victory in just 44 days not only signified the restoration of territorial integrity but also demonstrated the concrete strength of the Turkish-Azerbaijani brotherhood on the ground (de Waal, 2021, p. 47).

The Shusha Declaration, signed on June 15, 2021, elevated relations between the two countries to the level of an official alliance. This document pledged that one side would provide assistance to the other in the event of an attack, establishing a NATO-like principle of mutual defense (Cornell, 2022, p. 5).

The Declaration also emphasized the following areas of cooperation:

- Joint defense and security policies,
- Military exercises and training,
- Transportation and energy projects,
- Cultural and youth exchange programs,
- Mutual solidarity against terrorism and external interventions.

Thus, the Shusha Declaration is seen as a document that will shape the future of bilateral relations and the security architecture of the Turkic World (Aliyev, 2021, p. 12).

In the post-victory reconstruction of Karabakh, Türkiye played an active role in engineering, infrastructure, and humanitarian aid. Turkish companies played a significant role in road, bridge, and housing projects in Karabakh, while institutions such as TİKA and AFAD conducted humanitarian aid activities on the ground (TİKA, 2021).

However, it's not just Türkiye's contribution to Azerbaijan that should be mentioned here, but also Azerbaijan's strategic support to Türkiye. SOCAR's increased investments in Türkiye is one of Azerbaijan's most significant economic contributions to Türkiye. The STAR Refinery, which began operations in 2018, strengthened Türkiye's energy supply security and made Azerbaijan one of Türkiye's largest investors (SOCAR, 2021).

One of the most striking examples of mutual assistance in Turkish-Azerbaijani relations is the solidarity shown by Azerbaijan during major earthquakes in Türkiye.

- As in the 1999 Marmara Earthquake and the 2011 Van Earthquake,
- Azerbaijan was one of the first countries to send aid in the 2023 Kahramanmaraş Earthquake.

Search and rescue teams, field hospitals, and volunteer groups arrived in Türkiye from Azerbaijan within hours of the earthquake. The Azerbaijani people organized extensive aid campaigns, and the "Azerbaijan Neighborhood," established in Maraş and providing life for thousands of earthquake victims, became a lasting and meaningful symbol of this support (APA News, 2023).

This example demonstrates that brotherhood is tangibly experienced not only on the battlefield but also in times of disaster. Therefore, Turkish-Azerbaijani relations possess a reciprocal nature that cannot be reduced to the asymmetry of helper and assisted.

Iran has been uneasy about the new geopolitical balances that emerged following the 2020 Karabakh War. The emergence of the Zangezur Corridor carries the potential to diminish the strategic importance of Iran's northern borders. Consequently, Iran has adopted a more cautious approach in its relations with both Azerbaijan and Türkiye, occasionally attempting to intervene with harsh statements (Afshari, 2019, p. 33).

Iranian researchers argue that the Türkiye-Azerbaijan alliance «unilaterally altered regional balances» (Hosseini, 2022, p. 60). Similarly, Russian sources assess the Shusha Declaration as "the first step of a Turkish military alliance" (Petrov, 2022, p. 18).

In short, the post-2010 period marked the phase in which Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations transitioned into a full-fledged alliance. The 2020 Karabakh Victory reinforced the military and diplomatic dimension of this alliance, and the Shusha Declaration elevated relations to an institutional level.

Azerbaijan's earthquake aid to Türkiye and SOCAR's strategic investments demonstrated that brotherhood is not one-sided, but mutual. In return for Türkiye's military and diplomatic support to Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan clearly contributes to Türkiye's energy security, disaster management, and economic development.

During this period, the Iranian factor served as an external pressure factor, leading to an even closer rapprochement between the two countries. Tehran's concerns further unified the Baku-Ankara axis; ultimately, the One Nation, Two States principle officially transformed into One Nation, Two Allied States.

4. Economic Interdependence and Cultural Connectivity

The economy is one of the strongest pillars of Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations. Bilateral trade volume, which has increased rapidly since the 2000s, has exceeded \$7 billion by 2023, and the parties have set a target of \$15 billion (Ministry of Commerce, 2023). Trade is not limited to energy products; it has also expanded into construction, food, machinery, textiles, and services.

Türkiye has become one of Azerbaijan's largest trading partners, while Azerbaijan has become Türkiye's largest economic partner in the Caucasus. This process has transformed economic dependence from a one-way relationship to a mutual one.

The most concrete example of Azerbaijan's economic support for Türkiye is SOCAR's investments. SOCAR entered the Turkish market with the privatization of Petkim in 2008 and, in subsequent years, became one of Türkiye's largest investors with the STAR Refinery (2018) and TANAP projects. SOCAR's total investment in Türkiye has exceeded \$20 billion (SOCAR, 2021).

These investments have contributed not only to the diversification of Azerbaijan's energy revenues but also to the strengthening of Türkiye's energy supply security. Therefore, SOCAR demonstrates that the economic relations between the two countries operate not only at a company level but also at the level of strategic state policy (Cornell, 2017, p. 145).

From Türkiye's perspective, SOCAR's investments have diversified Türkiye's energy imports and reduced its dependence on foreign sources. From Azerbaijan's perspective, these investments are a concrete demonstration of the strategic support provided to its brother country.

Energy cooperation not only means Türkiye importing oil and natural gas from Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan also accesses European markets through Türkiye, thus adding economic and geopolitical value to Türkiye as a transit country (Roberts, 2009, p. 53). This dual benefit has made energy diplomacy a win-win model in relations between the two countries.

The most prominent area of cultural relations has been education. Since 1992, Türkiye has provided support to thousands of Azerbaijani students through YÖK scholarships and Türkiye Scholarships. Some of these students have pursued academic careers in Türkiye, while others have returned to Azerbaijan, building intellectual bridges between the two countries (Yılmaz, 2015, p. 126).

Meanwhile, Azerbaijan has also offered various opportunities to students from Türkiye. Institutions such as Baku State University, ADA University, and Azerbaijan Medical University have allocated quotas to students from Türkiye, and hundreds of Turkish students have studied in Baku within the framework of the Erasmus and Mevlana Exchange Programs (AMEA, 2018).

This mutual exchange is important not only for individual careers but also for social memory. Bonds established through education have evolved into lasting collaborations in diplomacy, trade, and academia in the years to come.

Mutual contributions in the cultural sphere are also noteworthy. Azerbaijani Cultural Associations in Türkiye, Yunus Emre Institute, Maarif Foundation schools, and TRT representatives in Baku are building lasting cultural ties between the two nations (TİKA, 2021).

Meanwhile, Azerbaijan has also strengthened its cultural presence in Türkiye. Cultural events sponsored by SOCAR, concerts by Baku Music Academy artists in Türkiye, and «Azerbaijan Days» events have been important tools for mutual recognition.

Furthermore, the solidarity between the peoples of the two countries is not limited to official institutions; it has also manifested itself in natural disasters. As previously mentioned, Azerbaijan provided swift and comprehensive support to Türkiye during the 1999 Marmara Earthquake, the 2011 Van Earthquake, and especially the 2023 Kahramanmaraş Earthquake (APA News, 2023). This support demonstrates that cultural brotherhood is integrated with humanitarian aid.

In short, economic and cultural relations are among the most important pillars ensuring the sustainability of Türkiye-Azerbaijan cooperation. Energy projects and SOCAR investments have institutionalized the economic dimension of the relationship, while educational and cultural exchange programs have created a lasting bond at the social level.

A particularly important point to emphasize here is the reciprocal nature of the relations. While Türkiye played a role in Azerbaijan's opening up of its energy resources to the West and its academic integration, Azerbaijan, in turn, provided significant support to Türkiye through SOCAR investments, student

admissions, cultural events, and humanitarian assistance. Thus, the One Nation, Two States approach has transformed into an institutionalization of mutual assistance not only at the political, but also at the economic and cultural levels.

5. Institutional Cooperation within the Turkic World

The emergence of independent Turkic Republics in the early 1990s opened a new geopolitical space for Türkiye and Azerbaijan. During this period, efforts to institutionalize cooperation based on shared history, language, and culture gained momentum. The Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States (Turkic Council), established in 2009 with the Nakhchivan Agreement, evolved into a more comprehensive structure in 2021, renamed the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) (Aydın, 2022, p. 14).

Türkiye and Azerbaijan became the founding and guiding actors of the OTS, transforming this organization into a platform focused not only on culture but also on economic and security.

In addition to the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Association (OTS/TDT), other joint institutions are also important in Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations:

- TURKSOY (1993): Established to protect and promote the cultural heritage of the Turkic World. Both Türkiye and Azerbaijan have played a leading role in this organization’s activities. For example, Baku and Ankara have hosted TURKSOY events numerous times (TÜRKSÖY, 2020).
- TÜRKPA (2008): The Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic-Speaking Countries was established, headquartered in Baku. Azerbaijan’s hosting has made Baku one of the diplomatic centers of the Turkic World.
- International Turkic Academy (2010): Developed joint scientific projects and published works, particularly those emphasizing the shared heritage of Turkic history.

The leadership roles of both Türkiye and Azerbaijan in these institutions are noteworthy. Türkiye has primarily demonstrated its institutional and diplomatic capacity, while Azerbaijan has provided both financial and organizational contributions.

Azerbaijan’s support for Türkiye in the cooperation between these institutions should also be emphasized. For example, the “Bahtiyar Vahapzade Year” events organized by TURKSOY in 2018 were a joint initiative of Ankara and Baku, but the majority of its funding was provided by Azerbaijan (Aliyeva, 2019, p. 77). Furthermore, the fact that TURKPA is headquartered in Baku demonstrates Azerbaijan’s readiness to share Türkiye’s burden within the Turkic World. Thus, the institutions have achieved a dual-centered structure, not just one centered in Ankara.

This institutionalization, shaped by Türkiye–Azerbaijan leadership, was met with skepticism by other actors in the region. Iran, in particular, viewed the strengthening of the TDT as a factor that increased identity awareness among South Azerbaijani Turks and distanced itself from this development (Hüseyni, 2022, p. 66). While Russia appears neutral in official discourse, academic literature frequently comments that these institutions are «structures that limit Russia’s influence in Eurasia» (Sergeev, 2010, p. 105). Therefore, Moscow has occasionally attempted to develop counterbalancing policies through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union.

The Türkiye–Azerbaijan partnership shapes not only bilateral relations but also the future of the Turkic World. At the TDT summits held after the 2020 Karabakh Victory, the two countries advocated for joint action to accelerate Turkic World integration. Here, Azerbaijan, while supporting Türkiye, emerged as a leading country within the Turkic World, presenting its own independent vision.

Azerbaijan’s role is also crucial in economic cooperation. Serving as a bridge between Central Asia and Türkiye, particularly via the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan is at the center of the Middle Corridor Project. This role has enabled Türkiye to establish direct ties with Turkestan (Central Asia), and Azerbaijan has become Ankara’s closest ally in this process (Cornell, 2022, p. 9).

In summary, we must say that these joint institutions have strengthened not only the cultural and diplomatic dimension of Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations but also the strategic partnership. The leadership of both countries in institutions such as OTS/TDT, TURKSOY, TURKPA, and the Turkish Academy is noteworthy. The financial, logistical, and diplomatic contributions Azerbaijan has provided to Türkiye during this process once again demonstrate that brotherhood is a two-way street. Iran and Russia's skepticism about this institutionalization, however, demonstrates that Türkiye-Azerbaijan cooperation is not merely a bilateral matter; it has also gained a dimension that directly impacts the regional balance of power.

6. Geopolitical Constraints and Strategic Opportunities

The Zangezur Corridor, which emerged after the 2020 Karabakh Victory, has emerged as both a strategic opportunity and a regional crisis in Turkish-Azerbaijani relations. This corridor aims to connect Azerbaijan directly to Türkiye via Nakhchivan, thus enabling the unification of the Turkic World between West and East by land (Cornell, 2022, p. 11). For Türkiye, this corridor will increase the effectiveness of the «Middle Corridor» project by providing direct access to Turkestan (Central Asia). For Azerbaijan, this route will both strengthen its geopolitical position and increase transit revenues. Therefore, the corridor forms the basis of a shared strategic vision for both countries.

Armenia has been the actor who has reacted most strongly to the Zangezur Corridor. The Yerevan administration perceived the opening of this corridor as a «threat to its territorial integrity» and objected to the process being shaped outside its sovereignty (de Waal, 2021, p. 63). Furthermore, some political actors in Armenia describe the Türkiye-Azerbaijan rapprochement as a geopolitical siege.

However, there are also differing trends in Armenian domestic politics. Some circles argue that the opening of the corridor could provide economic benefits and contribute to Armenia's emergence from its isolation. These debates complicate Yerevan's stance on the process.

Iran is one of the countries most openly opposed to the Zangezur Corridor. The Tehran government believes that the opening of this route would shift the geopolitical balance in the South Caucasus to its detriment. Iran currently provides the Azerbaijan-Nakhchivan connection through its own territory. The opening of the Zangezur Corridor would diminish Iran's geopolitical importance (Afshari, 2019, p. 36).

Iranian scholars view this development not only as an economic but also as an identity-based issue. According to them, the corridor could strengthen integration with the Turkic World and create a nationalist wave among South Azerbaijani Turks (Hosseini, 2022, p. 68). Therefore, Iran has sent messages against the process through both diplomatic and military exercises. According to Salimi (2024, p. 4), while the Zangezur Corridor will provide significant advantages to Türkiye and the Central Asian Turkic republics, it will weaken Iran's geopolitical importance for Türkiye and Azerbaijan. Furthermore, because it directly connects China to Europe, it will eliminate Iran's geostrategic superiority in the region and the world. While Soleimani (2022, p. 8) and Müşfik (2022, p. 43) argue that the Zangezur Corridor will weaken Iran's bargaining power vis-à-vis Türkiye and Azerbaijan, Nafisi (2024, p. 5) argues that Russia's abstention on this issue is contrary to Iran's strategic interests and regional stability.

While this Iranian stance poses a challenge for Türkiye and Azerbaijan, it has also become an external pressure factor that further strengthens their cooperation.

The Zangezur Corridor is also part of the broader Middle Corridor project. This trade route, which originates in China and extends via Turkestan to Europe via the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, and Türkiye, is of global importance (Roberts, 2020, p. 22).

In this context, Türkiye-Azerbaijan cooperation underpins not only bilateral relations but also the security and efficiency of Europe-Asia trade lines. The security of the northern route, particularly following the Russo-Ukrainian war, has become a matter of debate, increasing the importance of the Middle Corridor.

Azerbaijan's connections with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan via the Caspian Sea, and Türkiye's customs integration with the European Union, make this project even more attractive. Therefore, the Middle Corridor reflects the global strategic dimension of Türkiye-Azerbaijan cooperation.

Russia approaches Türkiye-Azerbaijan cooperation with caution. While Moscow has attempted to maintain its influence by deploying peacekeepers in the region following the 2020 Karabakh War, the Turkish-Azerbaijani rapprochement has narrowed Russia's traditional sphere of influence (Ivanov, 2021, p. 39). In Russian academic circles, the Shusha Declaration and the Zangezur Corridor process are interpreted as the «rise of the Turkish military-political bloc» (Petrov, 2022, p. 19). These comments clearly reflect Moscow's concerns about the process.

Azerbaijan's support for Türkiye is also significant in the current process. SOCAR investments strengthen the energy security of the Turkish economy; Azerbaijani businesspeople are making new investments in Türkiye. Furthermore, Azerbaijan provides Ankara with a strategic advantage by acting as a transit country in Türkiye's connection with Turkestan.

Meanwhile, Türkiye also plays a supportive role in Azerbaijan's efforts to integrate with the West. The two countries are institutionalizing this mutual assistance around the concept of shared vision.

Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations currently face both challenges and significant opportunities. The Zangezur Corridor provides a concrete example of these opportunities and challenges. While the reactions of Iran and Armenia represent obstacles to this process, the Middle Corridor project demonstrates the global dimension of this cooperation.

The Türkiye-Azerbaijan partnership has become both a bilateral friendship and a focal point of power shaping the geopolitical architecture of Eurasia. Azerbaijan's economic and geopolitical contributions to Türkiye here demonstrate that the relationship is not asymmetrical, but a mutual and balanced alliance.

In August 2025, a historic agreement was signed in Washington between Azerbaijan and Armenia, mediated by the US. This agreement marked the first time that the parties recognized each other's territorial integrity and renounced each other's territorial claims after decades of conflict in the South Caucasus (Reuters, 2025).

The most striking element of the agreement is the opening of the transit route, publicly known as the «Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP). This corridor aims to connect Azerbaijan directly to Türkiye via Nakhchivan and also reshape regional transportation lines by passing through Armenian territory (Forbes, 2025). According to the agreement, the corridor's operation and development will be under US auspices for 99 years, and infrastructure, transportation, energy, and communications projects will be carried out by an international consortium (Al Jazeera Studies, 2025).

However, the agreement also brought with it various risks and debates. Reactions rose within Armenian domestic politics, claiming the corridor represented a «compromise on sovereignty,» with some opposition groups describing the agreement as «geopolitical pressure» (Caucasus Analytical Digest, 2025). Iran, on the other hand, was one of the actors who reacted most strongly to the agreement. The Tehran administration believes that the opening of the corridor will diminish the strategic importance of Iran's northern borders and strengthen nationalist tendencies among South Azerbaijani Turks (Al Jazeera Studies, 2025). Consequently, Iran's revolutionary leader Ali Khamenei and some officials close to the IRGC made their displeasure clear with harsh statements following the agreement. However, the same level of sensitivity was not evident in the presidential talks.

Russia's stance is also noteworthy. Moscow believes the agreement excludes it and considers this process «an attempt by the US to gain influence in the South Caucasus.» In Russian academic circles, the interpretation of the Trump Corridor as “the first permanent victory of the Turkish-Western partnership in the region” clearly reflects Moscow's concerns (Petrov, 2025).

Overall, the Trump Corridor carries a dual character in terms of Turkiye-Azerbaijan relations:

- On the one hand, it is a strategic opportunity that will contribute to the unification of the Turkic World by strengthening the Middle Corridor.
- On the other hand, it is a geopolitical risk that brings with it the possibility of regional instability due to the reactions of Iran and Russia.

For the Turkiye-Azerbaijan alliance, this development demonstrates that the partnership is not merely bilateral but has become a multilateral process involving global actors. Therefore, the One Nation, Two States approach has now acquired the dimension of two allies acting together within the global balance.

7. Overall Assessment and Future Outlook

Turkiye-Azerbaijan relations have not been limited to diplomatic contacts between the two states in the post-independence period; they have evolved into a multi-layered, multi-dimensional, and multilateral model of cooperation. While the One Nation, Two States philosophy underlies this process, over the last thirty years this understanding has become more institutionalized and evolved into the One Nation, Two Allied States formula.

This process can be examined in three main phases:

This development presents significant opportunities for Turkiye and Azerbaijan. For Turkiye, the corridor will strengthen its access to Central Asia by establishing a direct land link to Nakhchivan; for Azerbaijan, it will diversify transit routes to Western markets. The US involvement provides both financial and diplomatic advantages to the project.

1. The 1991–1994 period marked the phase of diplomatic recognition and the establishment of relations. Turkiye's status as the first country to recognize Azerbaijan played a critical role in Azerbaijan's gaining international legitimacy. However, the shadow of the Karabakh crisis during the same period also revealed the limits of relations.

2. The 1994–2010 period marked the strategic cooperation phase. The «Deal of the Century» and the BTC and BTE projects transformed the two countries into strategic partners in the energy sector. During this period, Azerbaijan not only strengthened Turkiye's energy security but also solidified its brotherly bonds through humanitarian assistance to Turkiye, as it did during the 1999 Marmara Earthquake.

3. The post-2010 period marked the alliance and partnership phase. The 2020 Karabakh Victory and the 2021 Shusha Declaration elevated relations to the level of a formal alliance. Azerbaijan's earthquake aid to Turkiye and SOCAR's massive investments were the strongest indicators underscoring reciprocity.

Economic and cultural relations are the main pillars ensuring the sustainability of this process. SOCAR investments ensure Turkiye's energy security, while Turkiye's support during the Karabakh War and the opportunities it offers in education have added new dimensions to relations between the two countries. This mutual support has nourished the rhetoric of brotherhood with concrete economic and social gains.

The Iranian factor has been a constant balancing factor in Turkish-Azerbaijani relations. Iran, which maintained relations with Armenia under the guise of neutrality in the 1990s, was uneasy about being excluded from energy projects in the 2000s. During the 2020 Karabakh War and the subsequent Zangezur Corridor discussions, it openly sought to limit the Turkish-Azerbaijani partnership. However, these policies have often brought the Baku-Ankara line closer and strengthened the partnership.

Russia has similarly been concerned about being left out of the process; however, Turkiye-Azerbaijan cooperation has had the effect of limiting Russia's traditional influence in the South Caucasus. In particular, the Shusha Declaration and the agreement reached through the US in 2025 show that Moscow's role in the region is shrinking.

The agreement signed under US mediation and the transit route project, known publicly as the Trump Corridor, are elevating Turkish-Azerbaijani relations to a global dimension. While this corridor represents a strategic opportunity that facilitates the unification of the Turkic World, it is also a complex development that could create new tensions due to the reactions of Iran and Russia. For Türkiye and Azerbaijan, this process requires managing risks as well as seizing opportunities.

In light of all these developments, the most important characteristic of Turkish-Azerbaijani relations is the principle of «reciprocity.» Türkiye was the first country to recognize Azerbaijan’s independence and has consistently supported it in energy and security. Azerbaijan, in turn, has supported Türkiye through SOCAR investments, educational and cultural collaborations, and rapid aid in the event of natural disasters, demonstrating brotherhood in practice.

In conclusion, the Turkish-Azerbaijani partnership is a “common destiny” that transcends traditional alliances. This unity carries a strategic integrity that concerns not only the two states but the entire Turkic World. In the coming period, projects such as the Zangezur Corridor, the Middle Corridor, and the Trump Corridor will be new arenas where this cooperation will be tested on a global scale. Türkiye and Azerbaijan’s willingness to act together will be decisive for both the regional security architecture and the future of the Turkic World and Eurasia.

References

- Afshari, S. (2019). Son on yılda Azerbaycan ve Türkiye ilişkileri [Azerbaijan–Turkey relations in the last decade]. *Orta Asya ve Kafkasya Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 23(4), 19-40.
- Al Jazeera Centre for Studies. (2025, August 14). *Azerbaijan–Armenia agreement: US entry upsets balance of power in South Caucasus*. September 15, 2025. <https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/policy-briefs/azerbaijan-armenia-agreement-us-entry-upsets-balance-power-south-caucuses>
- Aliyev, H. (2000). *Azerbaycan–Türkiye kardeşliği: Nutuklar ve beyanatlar* [Azerbaijan–Turkey brotherhood: Speeches and declarations]. Azerneshr.
- Aliyev, H. (2003). *Bağımsızlık yolunda Azerbaycan* [Azerbaijan on the path to independence]. Azerneshr.
- Aliyev, İ. (2021). *Şuşa Beyannamesi: Nutuklar ve imza töreni* [The Shusha Declaration: Speeches and signing ceremony]. Presidential Administration Publications.
- Aliyeva, S. (2019). Türk dünyasında kültür alanında iş birliği: TÜRKSOY örneği [Cultural cooperation in the Turkic World: The case of TÜRKSOY]. *Azerbaycan Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 5(2), 70-82.
- APA News. (2023, February 20). *Azerbaijan builds “Azerbaijan Mahallesi” in Kahramanmaraş for earthquake victims*. September 15, 2025. <https://apa.az>
- Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences. (2018). *Azerbaycan–Türkiye eğitim iş birliğinin raporu* [Report on Azerbaijan–Turkey educational cooperation]. ANAS Publications.
- Caucasus Analytical Digest. (2025, August 12). *Trump makes a move in the Caucasus*. September 15, 2025. <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13887-trump-makes-a-move-in-the-caucasus.html>
- Cornell, S. E. (2017). *Azerbaijan since independence*. Routledge.
- Cornell, S. E. (2022). *The Shusha Declaration and the future of Turkish–Azerbaijani relations*. Central Asia–Caucasus Institute, Silk Road Paper.
- Çelikipala, M. (2011). Türkiye–Azerbaycan ilişkilerinde stratejik ortaklık [Strategic partnership in Turkey–Azerbaijan relations]. *Ortadoğu Analiz*, 3(28), 55-63.
- Çelikipala, M. (2015). Türkiye–Azerbaycan ilişkilerinde lider diplomasisinin rolü [The role of leader diplomacy in Turkey–Azerbaijan relations]. *Ortadoğu Analiz*, 7(65), 70-82.
- de Waal, T. (2003). *Black garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through peace and war*. NYU Press.
- de Waal, T. (2021). The Karabakh War of 2020: Causes and consequences. *Survival*, 63(4), 43–62.
- Forbes. (2025, August 10). *The Armenia–Azerbaijan peace deal and the new Trump Corridor*. September 15, 2025. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/melikkaylan/2025/08/10/the-armenia-azerbaijan-peace-deal-and-the-new-trump-corridor/>
- Hasanlı, C. (2010). *Azerbaycan’ın dış politikası (1991-2003)* [Azerbaijan’s foreign policy (1991–2003)]. Elm Publishing.
- Hüseynî, M. (2001). İran dış politikası ve Karabağ krizi [Iran’s foreign policy and the Karabakh crisis]. *Orta Asya ve Kafkasya Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 6(2), 35-52.
- Hüseynî, M. (2022). İran dış politikası ve ikinci Karabağ Savaşı sonrası Güney Kafkasya’daki gelişmeler [Iran’s foreign policy and developments in the South Caucasus after the Second Karabakh War]. *Orta Asya ve Kafkasya Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 25(1), 55-72.
- Ivanov, A. (2019). Rusya ve Güney Kafkasya: Zorluklar ve perspektifler [Russia and the South Caucasus: Challenges and perspectives]. *MGIMO University Journal*, 12(2), 70–85.
- Ivanov, A. (2021). İkinci Karabağ Savaşı sonrası Güney Kafkasya [The South Caucasus after the Second Karabakh War]. *Russia and the Modern World*, 2(112), 33–45.
- Müşfik, Z. (2022). Zengezur güzergâhının gerçekleşmesinin İran’ın ekonomi güvenliği üzerindeki sonuçları [Geopolitical and geostrategic consequences of the Zangezur route for Iran’s economic security]. *Economic Security*, (105), 41–48.

- Nafisi, S. (2024). İran'ın Rusya, Türkiye, Azerbaycan üçlüsüne tepkisi [Iran's reaction to the Russia–Türkiye–Azerbaijan triangle]. *Ektesat News*. September 15, 2025. <https://www.egtesadnews.com>
- Petrov, A. (2025). Amerikan-Azerbaycan projesi “Trump Koridoru”: Rusya için zorluklar [The U.S.–Azerbaijan “Trump Corridor” project: Challenges for Russia]. *MGIMO University Journal*, 16(3), 15-23.
- Reuters. (2025, August 11). *Azerbaijan, Armenia publish text of US-brokered peace deal*. September 15, 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/world/azerbaijan-armenia-publish-text-us-brokered-peace-deal-2025-08-11>
- Roberts, J. (2009). *The role of Azerbaijan in European energy security*. Chatham House.
- Roberts, J. (2020). *The Silk Road reconnected: The Middle Corridor and Eurasian trade*. Chatham House.
- Salimi, R. (2024). Coğrafi sınırlara karşı tehdit: Neden Zengezur Koridoru'nun açılması İran'ın kırmızı çizgisidir? [Why is the opening of the Zangezur Corridor Iran's red line?]. *khabaronline*. September 15, 2025. <https://www.khabaronline.ir> (code: 1951407)
- Sergeev, I. (2008). Türkiye ve Azerbaycan: Enerji iş birliği ve bölgesel güvenlik [Türkiye and Azerbaijan: Energy cooperation and regional security]. *International Processes*, 6(2), 85-98.
- Sergeev, I. (2010). Sovyet sonrası bölgede bölgesel örgütler ve Rusya'nın çıkarları [Regional organizations in the post-Soviet space and Russia's interests]. *International Processes*, 8(3), 100-112.
- Shaffer, B. (2002). *Borders and brethren: Iran and the challenge of Azerbaijani identity*. MIT Press.
- SOCAR. (2009). *Annual report 2008-2009*. SOCAR Press.
- SOCAR. (2021). *Annual report 2020-2021*. SOCAR Press.
- Süleymani, A. (2022). Güney Kafkasya'nın İran için jeopolitik fırsatları ve tehditleri [Geopolitical opportunities and threats of the South Caucasus for Iran]. *Iran Diplomacy*. September 15, 2025. https://www.dpiq.ir/article_220673_8d325bT38394d5d724868f4f4ca3cc686.pdf
- T.C. Ministry of Trade. (2023). *Türkiye-Azerbaycan dış ticaret verileri* [Türkiye-Azerbaijan foreign trade data]. Ministry Publications.
- TİKA. (2007). *Faaliyet raporu 2006-2007* [Activity report 2006–2007]. TİKA Publications.
- TİKA. (2021). *Azerbaycan faaliyet raporu 2020-2021* [Azerbaijan activity report 2020–2021]. TİKA Publications.
- TURKSOY. (2020). *Annual report 2019–2020*. TURKSOY Publications.
- Yılmaz, H. (2015). Türkiye-Azerbaycan ilişkileri: Enerji diplomasisi perspektifi [Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations: An energy diplomacy perspective]. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 12(3), 115–134.

About the Author

Mehmet Rıza Heyet

Ankara University | [mrheyet\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:mrheyet@gmail.com), [mrheyet\[at\]ankara.edu.tr](mailto:mrheyet[at]ankara.edu.tr) | ORCID: 0000-0003-3336-6597

Dr. Mehmet Rıza Heyet is a faculty member in the Department of Contemporary Turkic Languages and Literatures at Ankara University. He also serves as the Director of the Tabriz Research Institute and as the editor of *Varlıq* journal. He completed his undergraduate studies in Philology at Baku State University and received his master's and doctoral degrees from Ankara University. His academic work focuses on Turkology, identity politics, and political and cultural developments in the Turkic World, with particular emphasis on relations among Iran, Azerbaijan, and Türkiye. Within this framework, he conducts strategic and analytical studies on the South Caucasus, Iranian Turks, regional power dynamics, and integration processes in the Turkic World. His scholarly output includes books, articles, and editorial work published in leading academic journals in Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and Iran. Heyet has received the Samad Behrangî Literary Award from the Azerbaijan Writers' Union, among other distinctions, for his contributions to Turkish literature and culture.