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About us

The Journal of Armenological Issues is sponsored by the Institute for Armenian Studies at Yerevan State University.

The Institute for Armenian Studies, Yerevan State University (IAS, YSU) is an Armenian state research Institute and think tank. The predecessor of the Institute for Armenian Studies was the Center for Armenian Studies, established in 1968. The IAS was established in July 2008 by the decision of the Academic Council of YSU.

Since 2023, the scope of scientific and expert research of YSU Institute for Armenian Studies has been significantly expanded, and the toolkit of research methods and skills has been enriched and modernized. Retrognostic, diagnostic, and prognostic studies are now being performed at IAS.

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Since 2014, the Institute for Armenian Studies has been publishing the journal of Armenological Issues (AI) in Armenian, featuring comprehensive research materials on various aspects of Armenian Studies.

The Journal of Armenological Issues (AI) is an internationally renowned, peer-reviewed academic journal for the promotion of research into all aspects of Armenian studies. The Journal covers several disciplines, including history, political science, International relations and diplomacy, social studies, diaspora studies, religion, economy, thought, literature and the arts, from the early Ancient period to the present day. Published twice a year, it welcomes contributions from established and senior scholars, as well as encouraging work from younger scholars at the start of their academic careers. Each issue of the journal comprises research papers and reviews of scholarship in Armenian Studies.

The Journal, with its new format, aims to promote and foster an ongoing dialogue between scholars from Armenia and other countries, the expression of differing world views and beliefs, and evaluations of new methodologies.

The Journal of Armenological Issues is a vibrant, lively periodical hosting continuing discussions on identity and memory, state and diaspora, relationships between gender, ethnicity and nationalism, and Middle Eastern politics and society.

The Journal of Armenological Issues also contains articles on unique and interesting facets of Armenian identity and Armenia's policy not found in other publications. At the same time, it maintains high standards through the employment of innovative and up-to-date comparative and interdisciplinary methodology. It contributes not only to the study of Armenia and Armenian society, but also to the theoretical understanding of collective memory, political, cultural, citizen/state relations, social communication and other topics which head the contemporary agenda of the social sciences and humanities.

“YOU CAN’T BUILD A TOWER OUT OF TEARS!”: IRREDENTA AND STRUGGLES FOR INDEPENDENCE IN THE (POST) SOVIET SOUTH CAUCASUS

Tessa Hofmann*
Independent scholar

Abstract

This article examines Soviet administrative and nationality policies in the South Caucasus, using the examples of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. From the perspective of Georgia, which was doubly affected, these policies were guided by the imperial principle of “divide and conquer”; from the perspective of the affected ethnic groups—Abkhazians, (South) Ossetians, and Karabakh Armenians—they were characterized by the violation of the right to national self-determination. The latter, along with the right to secession and the principle of territorial integrity, were enshrined in all Soviet constitutions (1918, 1924, 1936, and 1977), yet in late- and post-Soviet reality, they constituted irreconcilable principles of international law. The independence and irredentist aspirations of the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, located on the border with the Russian Federation, received economic, financial and military support from Russia, enabling them to escape Georgian control since the 1990s and, at the latest, since 2008. In the conflict between Azerbaijan and the irredentist movement of Nagorno-Karabakh as well as the Republic of Armenia, however, Russia remained passive or dashed Armenian hopes. The Azerbaijani starvation blockade and deportation of the Armenian population in 2023 were classified as genocide by international and national human rights organizations and marked the end of the De Facto Republic of Artsakh. The last part of this article addresses inconsistencies in international law regarding separatism and irredentism. Using the European examples of Kosovo, Catalonia, and Scotland, the inconsistent approval or rejection of such separatism is explained, and the respective motives are examined. In the concluding discussion, we take as our starting point the assertion by political scientist Stephen Krasner, who speaks of “organized hypocrisy”: states profess adherence to norms of international law but apply them in a highly selective manner.

Keywords: Georgia; Azerbaijan; Armenia; Soviet Union; Abkhazia; South Ossetia; Nagorno Karabakh; Secession; Irredentism; International Law; Remedial Secession; National Self-Determination; Territorial Integrity.

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“You can’t build a tower out of tears!”

This Ossetian proverb is based on the realization that suffering cannot serve as a basis for anything.

Soviet nationality policy was not only painful but also contradictory: on the one hand, it claimed to protect the rights of small nationalities and ethnic groups; on the other hand, this genuine or supposed protection served as a tool for controlling larger ethnic groups. It thus played both off against each other in the interest of maintaining its own imperial power. This was already evident in the four-tier administrative structure: The Soviet Union consisted of 15 Union Republics, including the Russian SFSR as the largest and dominant republic. Below the Union Republics were the Autonomous Soviet Republics, two of which were located in the South Caucasus: the Abkhazian Autonomous Soviet Republic (8,600 sq km) and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Soviet Republic (5,500 sq km, 9 February 1921–1991; predecessor since 28 April 1920: Nakhchivan Autonomous Region), where Armenians constituted the relative majority of the population, at about 40%, until the Soviet era. They were largely expelled or murdered in the course of the massacres and expulsions carried out by Kemalist and Islamist forces in 1919–1920. Under Soviet rule, Nakhchivan’s autonomous status was intended to strengthen its ties with Azerbaijan while simultaneously allowing for a degree of self-governance.

In addition, Soviet Azerbaijan and Georgia each possessed an autonomous region: Nagorno-Karabakh had been promised to the Soviet Republic of Armenia by the Soviets on several occasions from late 1920 through mid-1921, but was then assigned to Soviet Azerbaijan in June 1921 despite its almost exclusively Armenian population of over 90 percent, after the Azerbaijani head of government had threatened a counterrevolution. Georgia ruled over the Autonomous Region of South Ossetia (approx. 3,885 km²; officially the State of Alania since 2017).

Below the level of autonomous regions, autonomous districts existed as the smallest and least autonomous administrative units of the USSR. These were found primarily in the RSFSR, but not in the South Caucasus.

Secession (breakaway) and irredenta represent fundamentally opposing political aspirations: secession involves the separation from an existing state structure, perceived as liberation, while irredenta involves annexation or unification with another existing state, or the merger of several territories into a new one. The term originates from Italy’s national revolutionary movement in the 19th century: the claimed territory abroad was referred to as *Irredenta* (Italian: ‘terra irredenta’—the [as yet] unliberated land, lost land, literally: the unredeemed). From a politically isolated minority in the Italian-speaking Swiss canton of Ticino, irredentism was also applied to Italian-speaking Switzerland.¹ Let us examine the potential for

¹ Gilardoni, Silvano. „Irredentismus.“ In: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Schweiz*. 21. August 2008, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/017428/2008-08-21/>.

conflict associated with secession and irredentism using the South Caucasian examples of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Apsny (Abkhazia): A Minoritized Titular Nation, a Stable De Facto Republic Under Russian Patronage

The modern state of Abkhazia covers an area of 8,664.59 square kilometers. Along with the neighboring Circassians and Kabardians, the Abkhaz titular nation belongs to the North-West Caucasian ethnic groups. Their homeland on the eastern shore of the Black Sea, together with the mountainous hinterland, provided the picturesque backdrop for a tragedy that led to the presumably permanent displacement of over a quarter of a million people.

In contrast to the Georgians, who emphasize Abkhazia's connection to Georgia, the Abkhaz perspective underscores Abkhazia's autochthonous nature and autonomy throughout its entire history.² Georgian claims to Abkhazia stem from the dynastic ties between the two countries that have existed since the early Middle Ages: From the late 8th to the 10th century, Western Georgia was under the rule of the Abkhazian Kingdom, which was governed by a branch of the Bagratids; in the 10th century, Georgian was introduced as the official and liturgical language in Abkhazia.

Until the mid-18th century, Christianity and Islam—the latter had been successfully proselytized under Ottoman rule—coexisted alongside pre-Christian and pre-Islamic practices. Under Russian rule, religious affiliation formed the dividing line along which Abkhaz nobles were oriented either pro- or anti-Russian. Since an anti-Russian stance generally went hand in hand with adherence to Islam, no religiously motivated anti-Russian alliances of convenience with the Christian Georgians emerged.

The *muhajiroba*—the expulsion and mass exodus of North Caucasian Muslims in the 1860s—contributed significantly to the consolidation of Islam. After Abkhazia came under Russian rule from 1810 to 1829, large segments of the local Muslim population joined the North Caucasian resistance against Russian rule and, along with the Circassians and Ubykhs, suffered the consequences of the final military defeat in 1864. Of an estimated total population of up to 500,000 before 1864, 400,000 Muslim Abkhazians were forcibly resettled or fled. They found refuge as religious refugees, as *muhacirler* (*muhajirun*)³, into the Ottoman Empire, provided they survived the crossing in overcrowded ships as well as hunger and epidemics upon arrival. In their place, the Tsarist authorities settled Christian refugees from the Ottoman Black Sea regions, primarily Armenians and Pontic Greeks, as well as Georgians from Mingrelia, which borders Abkhazia; at the same

² Evers, Frank. *Mission Information Package South Caucasus*. Hamburg: CORE (Centre for OSCE Research; Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH); October 2003, p. 37.

³ Originally, the term “Muhacir” referred to a companion of the Islamic religious founder and prophet Muhammad during his flight in 622 CE.

time, the Orthodox counter-mission was intensified: 21,336 Muslim Abkhaz are said to have been converted to Christianity between 1866 and 1902.⁴ However, the return of descendants of the *muhacirler* from Turkey, as well as intensified ties with North Caucasian Muslims, have led to a modest resurgence of Islam in recent years. It is difficult to determine the actual number of Muslims and returnees in post-Soviet Abkhazia. In the two mosques in Aqwa (Ak̄a; Georgian: Sochumi; Russian: Sukhum) and Gudauta, approximately 200 Muslims are said to practice their religion. The material support for mosque construction and the repatriation assistance for the descendants of former *muhacirler* from Abkhazia, which were discussed in December 2008 at a meeting between the Deputy Mufti of Abkhazia, Timur Dsyba, with the head of the Turkish Religious Affairs Directorate (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı), nevertheless alarmed parts of the Russian media⁵, as did the alliance between the Abkhaz and militant North Caucasians, which Russia fears⁶. According to the 2011 census, 60 percent of Abkhazia's inhabitants are Christian Orthodox, 16 percent are Muslim (Sunni), and 24 percent are non-denominational or belong to other religious groups.⁷

As early as the beginning of the 20th century, the Abkhaz had become a minority in their homeland. The Abkhaz diaspora, estimated today at 500,000 to 600,000 people, consists predominantly of the descendants of the *muhacirler* living in Turkey. The marginalization of the Abkhaz in their country of origin remained unchanged in the decades that followed. The last Soviet census in 1989 revealed that in the Autonomous Soviet Republic of Abkhazia, the titular nation numbered 93,300, ranking second after the Georgians (239,900), closely followed by Armenians (76,500) and Russians (74,900). In the post-Soviet census of 2003, Abkhazian authorities reported a total population of 215,962, comprising only 45,953 Georgians, 94,606 Abkhazians, 44,870 Armenians, 23,420 Russians, and 1,486 Greeks. This was rejected as exaggerated not only by Georgian authorities but also by organizations such as the *International Crisis Group*; the latter estimated Abkhazia's total population in 2006 at between 157,000 and 190,000, similar to the Encyclopedia Britannica (2006: 177,000).⁸ The last census in 2011 recorded a total population of 240,705. By that time, Georgians (Mingrelians and Swans) formed the second-largest minority group with a population of 46,455.⁹ Unofficial sources estimated that the Abkhaz and Armenian communities were

⁴ Sanikidze, George; Walker, Edward W. *Islam and Islamic Practices in Georgia*. Berkeley: University of California, 2004, p. 20 ff. - https://iseees.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/2004_04-sani.pdf

⁵ Mel'nikov, Andrej. „Рука Анкары: Турция предлагает мусульманам Абхазии свою поддержку“. [The Hand of Ankara: Turkey Offers Its Support to the Muslims of Abkhazia.] *Novaya Gazeta Religii*, 3 Dec 2008.

⁶ Smirnov, Andrei. “North Caucasus Rebels Seek to Expand into Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Azerbaijan.” *North Caucasus Weekly*, Vol. 9, Issue 36, 26 September 2008.

⁷ <http://www.portal-credo.ru>.

⁸ <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Abkhazia>.

⁹ “Abkhazia in numbers 2011”. 2011.

roughly equal in number.¹⁰ By January 2025, the estimated total population of Abkhazia stood at 244,000.¹¹

Most citizens of Abkhazia have dual nationality: “Russia has (...) issued passports to the citizens of Abkhazia since 2000 (as Abkhazian passports cannot be used for international travel) and subsequently paid them retirement pensions and other monetary benefits. More than 80% of the Abkhazian population had received Russian passports by 2006. As Russian citizens living abroad, Abkhazians do not pay Russian taxes or serve in the Russian Army. About 53,000 Abkhazian passports had been issued as of May 2007.”¹²

Status issues and cultural conflicts defined Abkhazian-Georgian relations throughout the 20th century. In the spring of 1921, Abkhazia and Georgia were, for a brief period, on equal footing in terms of status: Georgia as an independent republic, and Abkhazia—which had been militarily conquered by the Soviets—as a Soviet Socialist Republic, which a year later was incorporated as such into the Transcaucasian Soviet Republic. Ten years later, in 1931, however, Abkhazia lost its status as a Soviet republic and, in violation of the agreement concluded with Georgia in 1921, was placed under Georgia’s authority as an Autonomous Soviet Republic. There, Abkhazian schools were closed in 1946. Abkhaz intellectuals who complained to Stalin in a letter of protest were reprimanded by the Party, without the school closures being reversed.

After World War II, the head of Stalin's secret police, Lavrenti Beria, continued the settlement policy in Abkhazia that had been initiated in the 19th century. Alongside numerous Georgians, Russians also settled in Abkhazia as part of this renewed resettlement of non-Abkhazians. In 1977, 133 Abkhazian intellectuals protested to the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Leonid Brežnev, against the forced Georgianization of their people and, for the first time, demanded annexation to the Russian Federation. Moscow unsuccessfully attempted to resolve the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict by improving the economic situation. The Aidgylara (“Unity”) People’s Front, founded in December 1988¹³, demanded the restoration of the former Soviet Republic of Abkhazia, thereby triggering Georgian counter-demonstrations as well as strikes in Georgia and Abkhazia. Tbilisi’s attempt to establish a branch of Tbilisi University in the Abkhazian capital of Aqwa exacerbated the conflict with Abkhazia beginning in May 1989; by the end of June 1989, protest demonstrations and strikes led to numerous armed clashes and prompted the deployment of special forces. In July

¹⁰ Tekushev, Islam. “An unlikely home”. *openDemocracy*, 5 January 2016, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/unlikely-home/>.

¹¹ Kemp, Simon. “Digital 2025: Abkhazia.” *DataReportal*, 3 March 2025, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-abkhazia>

¹² “Abkhazia”, *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abkhazia>.

¹³ Beissinger, Mark R. *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 224.

1992, Abkhazia's representative body, the Supreme Soviet, declared the region's independence.

This was followed by the militarization of the conflict: allegedly to pursue the ousted president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, and his supporters, as well as to regain control of the railway links from Russia, Georgian armed forces and paramilitary units entered Abkhazia on 14 August 1992. Supported by its North Caucasian allies and by Russia, Abkhazia withstood the poorly coordinated Georgian attack. During the thirteen months of fighting, war crimes were committed on both sides, most notably on 27 September 1993 during the recapture of the capital, Aqwa, by Abkhazian and Chechen forces. The massacres on that day and the following days claimed the lives of 7,000 people, including 100 prominent figures. The total number of victims of the 13-month Georgian-Abkhazian war, the associated massacres, and war crimes is estimated at 10,000 to 30,000 Georgians and 3,000 Abkhazians.¹⁴

“After the secessionist war and ethnic cleansing—ethnic Georgians, who had made up 46% of the pre-war population in Abkhazia, were forced to flee—and with the infrastructure and economy in shambles, in the first years following the 1993 Russia-brokered ceasefire, Abkhaz authorities and society alike remained in survival mode (...). The situation was further aggravated when Russia joined the CIS-sponsored economic blockade of Abkhazia.

Only toward the end of the 1990s did the situation begin to improve, primarily as a result of Russia easing the blockade. Although the final sanctions were not formally lifted until 2008 (...), from around the turn of the millennium, Moscow gradually adopted a more openly pro-Abkhaz position (...). This culminated in the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, which, although mainly fought in and around South Ossetia, also spilled over into Abkhazia, where local forces, with Russian assistance, took control of the last remaining part of the former Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic still controlled by Tbilisi.”¹⁵

A ceasefire brokered by the United Nations on 14 May 1994 was enforced by a CIS peacekeeping force. Compliance with the agreement was monitored until 2008 by a 121-member *United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia* (UNOMIG). On 9 August 2008, UNOMIG partially suspended its activities in Abkhazia. It withdrew its observers stationed in the upper Kodori Valley because it anticipated a military operation by Abkhazia against Georgian-controlled Upper Abkhazia. In the view of the UN Security Council, UNOMIG's area of responsibility had been “unclear” since that date.

Negotiations to end the conflict have been held repeatedly under the auspices of the United Nations, so far in vain. Key points of contention included the

¹⁴ <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Abkhazia>

¹⁵ Blakkisrud, Helge; Kemoklidze, Nino. “Strategic Triangles, Actors and Agency: Georgia and Abkhazia in a Changing Regional Context.” *Caucasus Survey*, 15 Sept. 2023, https://brill.com/view/journals/casu/11/2-3/article-p111_1.xml?srsId=AfmBOopU9l2Unnigl_zM2V-p1wnCUIhSKbw4HERXNIIglv1PtIjWynSS.

repatriation of Georgian refugees and a political solution based on Georgia's territorial integrity. Both efforts failed due to the Abkhazian government, which insists on complete independence and rules out the return of refugees.

The reintegration plans of the then-Georgian government initially met with the approval of the UN, to whose General Assembly President Saakashvili had presented a three-stage plan for resolving the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia on 22 September 2004. The first stage called for confidence-building measures involving non-governmental organizations, students, journalists, doctors, athletes, and mothers. In the second stage, the conflict zones were to be demilitarized under international supervision. Finally, in the third stage, Georgia intended to grant Abkhazia and South Ossetia the greatest possible autonomy. The reality, however, was quite different. Similar to the approach taken in South Ossetia, on 27 September 2006 Saakashvili established an Abkhazian government-in-exile or opposition government under Malchas Aksichabaia in the village of Chchalta in the Upper Kodori Valley, after police and security forces had rounded up the regional Svan warlord and former Shevardnadze envoy Emsar Kwiziani and his 200 paramilitaries in late July 2006. When, one day after the Georgian attack on South Ossetia, Abkhazia made good on its threat and opened a second front against Georgia, the Georgian army was forced to withdraw from the Upper Kodori Valley on 13 August 2008. With that, Georgia lost its last vestige of control over Abkhazia.

Since 1993, the United Nations has repeatedly affirmed that, under international law, Abkhazia belongs to Georgia. Some international law experts consider Abkhazia to be a stabilized *de facto* regime that is beyond the sovereignty of Georgia.

Initially, Russia continued to delay recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, on 16 April 2008, the outgoing Russian president Vladimir Putin instructed his government to establish official ties with both *de facto*-republics, leading to Georgia's condemnation of what it described as an attempt at "de facto annexation" and criticism from the European Union, NATO, and several Western governments. Following Kosovo's declaration of independence, the Russian parliament released a joint statement reading: "Now that the situation in Kosovo has become an international precedent, Russia should take into account the Kosovo scenario... when considering ongoing territorial conflicts."¹⁶

Five states—in the order of Russia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, the Pacific island nation of Nauru, and Syria—recognized Abkhazia as an independent state between 2008 and 2018. The states of Vanuatu and Tuvalu revoked their recognition in 2013 and 2014. There are no diplomatic relations between Abkhazian and Georgian government authorities. However, the Georgian government elected in 2012 under Bidzina Ivanishvili signaled a willingness to engage in dialogue for the

¹⁶ "Recognition may come 'this year,' South Ossetian leader says; report. *UNOMIG*, 21 Feb. 2008, <https://web.archive.org/web/20080531165158/http://www.unomig.org/media/headlines/?id=10173&y=2008&m=02&d=21>.

first time in mid-2013 and also admitted to some misconduct during the 2008 Caucasus War.

A 2010 nationwide representative survey by John O'Loughlin and colleagues (University of Colorado Boulder) revealed major differences in orientation across the four main ethnic groups in Abkhazia: while 79% of the ethnic Abkhaz polled preferred independence, a majority of the Armenians (51%) and a substantial share of the Russians (38%) preferred Abkhazia to become a part of the Russian Federation.¹⁷ Among the Georgians/Mingrelians, overt support for reintegration with Georgia was surprisingly low, less than 20%—but this might be explained by this group's discomfort with answering this question (nearly 30% opted for "hard to say" or "refuse to answer").¹⁸ The survey's authors comment: "We find empirical evidence for optimism within society, with Abkhaz being the most optimistic among the four principal ethnic groups. Almost a quarter of them declare that they are in an excellent mood, and another 60 percent feel they are in an average or normal mood. Similarly, Armenians (87 percent) and Russians (83 percent) report an excellent or normal mood, in contrast to only 57 percent for Georgians/Mingrelians (...). This 30-point gap between Georgians and others is crucial, and the difference undoubtedly influences, and is influenced by, the related political, social, and economic conditions in the republic."¹⁹ Nearly 50% of the Georgian minority support Abkhazia's continued existence as an independent state, while less than 20% consider a return to Georgia necessary. A return to Georgia is almost unanimously rejected by all other population groups.²⁰

Economically, Abkhazia is heavily dependent on Russia, by far its most important trading partner; nearly all food is imported from there. According to various sources, Russia funds between "nearly 40 percent" (Amnesty International) and three-quarters ("Wikipedia") of Abkhazia's budget. The second most important trading partner is Turkey, with its Abkhaz diaspora of half a million people. Georgia continues to this day to attempt to enforce a trade embargo against Abkhazia, which hinders the region's economic recovery.

To avoid an overly one-sided dependence on Russia, various Abkhaz governments in the past and present have pursued an approach of multivektoral foreign policy (*mnogovektornost'*). "Unlike in most other post-Soviet de facto states, the political class in Abkhazia is highly mobilized. Whereas the chaotic, impoverished immediate post-war period was accompanied by relative political stability under President Vladislav Ardzinba (1994–2005), the struggle over his successor sparked a political crisis. After loud protests and mobilization in the streets, Moscow's preferred successor was forced to step down and hand the

¹⁷ O'Loughlin, J., Kolosov, V.; Toal, G. "Inside Abkhazia: Survey of Attitudes in a De Facto State." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 27, 2011, 1: p. 31f. [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpglclefndmkaj/-https://abkhazworld.com/Pdf/Inside_Abkhazia_Survey.pdf](https://abkhazworld.com/Pdf/Inside_Abkhazia_Survey.pdf).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31f.

presidency to his opponent, Sergei Bagapsh (Abkhaz president 2005–2011). This debacle sent two important signals.

First, it demonstrated that the Abkhaz political elite was not ready to take their cues from Moscow: their perception of Abkhazia's best interests did not necessarily always coincide with Moscow's, and the 2005 succession crisis showed that, in such cases, Moscow's designs might be successfully challenged. Moreover, although it has remained fundamentally important for Abkhaz authorities to secure continued support from their Russian patron for everything from ensuring military security to providing healthcare services and educational opportunities that the de facto state itself cannot afford, Abkhaz politicians must still strike a balance: if perceived as being too subservient or selling out Abkhaz interests, politicians risk being severely punished by the local electorate.

Second, it proved to the political class and the public alike that political scores could be settled in the streets. The succession crisis thus set a precedent for street politics. Time and again, the opposition has filled the streets, demanding concessions and personnel reshuffles. In fact, the two presidents who succeeded Bagapsh—first Aleksander Ankvab (2011–2014) and then Raul Khajimba (2014–2020)—were both forced to step down amid large-scale street protests.”²¹

South Ossetia: A Divided Majority

Table 1: Ethnic Composition of the Autonomous Region of South Ossetia and the Post-Soviet De Facto Republic, 1926–2015²²

	Census 1926	Census 1939	Census 1959	Census 1970	Census 1979
Ossetians	60.351 (69,1 %)	72.266 (68,1 %)	63.698 (65,8 %)	66.073 (66,5 %)	65.077 (66,4 %)
Georgians	23.538 (26,9 %)	27.525 (25,9 %)	26.584 (27,5 %)	28.125 (28,3 %)	28.187 (28,8 %)
Russians	157 (0,2 %)	2.111 (2,0 %)	2.380 (2,5 %)	1.574 (1,6 %)	2.046 (2,1 %)
Armenians	1.374 (1,6 %)	1.537 (1,4 %)	1.555 (1,6 %)	1.254 (1,3 %)	953 (1,0 %)
Jews	1.739 (2,0 %)	1.979 (1,9 %)	1.723 (1,8 %)	1.485 (1,5 %)	654 (0,7 %)
Other	216 (0,2 %)	700 (0,7 %)	867 (0,9 %)	910 (0,9 %)	1.071 (1,1 %)
Total	7.375	106.118	96.807	99.421	97.988

	Census 1989	Census 2007	Census 2012	Census 2015
Ossetians	65.223 (66,2 %)	47.000 (67,1 %)	45.950 (89,1 %)	48.146 (89,9 %)
Georgians	28.544 (29,0 %)	17.500 (25,0 %)	4.590 (8,9 %)	3.966 (7,4 %)
Russians	2.128 (2,2 %)	2.100 (3,0 %)	515 (1,0 %)	610 (1,1 %)
Armenians	984 (1,0 %)	900 (1,3 %)	–	–
Jews	396 (0,4 %)	650 (0,9 %)	–	–
Other	1.243 (1,3 %)	1.850 (2,6 %)	515 (1,0 %)	810 (1,5 %)
Total	98.527	70.000	51.572	53.532

The Ossetians are considered indirect descendants of the northeastern Iranian equestrian and steppe peoples of the Scythians and Sarmatians, as well as direct

²¹ Blakkisrud, Helge; Kemoklidze, Nino, op. cit.

²² Russian State Archive of Economics website ethno-kavkaz.ru / “RGAE: Russian State Archive of Economics” Ethno-Kavkaz website.

heirs of the Alans, who were also Iranian and ruled over what would later become southern Russia from the 1st century AD until they were driven into the North Caucasus by the Huns in 374. Here they intermingled with indigenous mountain peoples, who adopted the Iranian language and culture of the Alans; the Ossetian name for the country, Iryston, and the ethnonym Iron point to this Iranian ancestry. The South Ossetians emerged from the southernmost of the four Alano-Ossetian tribes, the Tualläg, and found refuge from the Mongols in the Georgian principality of Samakhablo. This protracted ethnogenesis came to an end in the 18th century. Today, only 16% (2015: 48,146) of the total 700,000–800,000 Ossetians live in South Ossetia.

The Ossetians living south of the main Caucasus mountain range formed only small settlements that were feudally dependent on local Georgian lords. Poverty and a shortage of arable land thus led to a constant exodus to the fertile Georgian plains. Consequently, for example, at the end of Soviet rule, the Ossetian population in the Gori district bordering South Ossetia—numbering about 100,000—was larger than that remaining in South Ossetia, where, according to the 1989 census, Ossetians made up 66% (65,200) of an overall population of 99,000 (see Table 1); across all of Soviet Georgia, 165,000 Ossetians were counted in 1989. Since then, the Ossetian language has stood isolated within the Iranian language family and exhibits similarities with both the non-Iranian South Caucasian languages and the neighboring North Caucasian languages to the east, and even with Turkish.

The Christian missionary work in Ossetia, which originated directly from Byzantium in the 6th and 7th centuries, was completed with the establishment of an Alanic archdiocese in 921. Beginning in the 16th century, the Islamic mission originating from the Kabardians to the west achieved considerable success among the North-West Caucasians, including the North Ossetians. As a result, up to 61% of all Ossetians profess Islam. However, neither Christianity nor Islam was able to supplant the beliefs and traditions of far older, pre-Abrahamic faiths, especially since Christianity was limited for long periods of history to the Alano-Ossetian warrior and tribal nobility. From their indigenous Caucasian ancestors, the Ossetians adopted, among other things, the cult of sacred groves, which was once widespread in the Eastern Caucasus, and from their Alani ancestors, remnants of the ancient Iranian cult of the elements and ancestors. Although a literary language for the Ossetians did not develop until the end of the 18th century, the Ossetians possess a rich oral tradition of poetry. Their most important contribution to world literature is the cycle of legends surrounding the heroic Nart clan.²³

Unlike the Chechens and Circassians, the Ossetians did not participate in any of the anti-Russian uprisings that periodically shook the North Caucasus from the 18th century onward. From 1767 to 1774, Ossetia, which found itself in a

²³ Dumézil, George. *Le Livre des Héros: Légendes sur les Nartes*. Paris: UNESCO Collection of Representative Works, 1965.

precarious position between Iran, the Russian and Ottoman Empires, relinquished its independence and was incorporated into the Russian Empire. When Russia annexed Georgia at the beginning of the 19th century, it elevated the South Ossetian settlement areas to an “Ossetian District” (“Osetinskij okrug”) within the Tiflis Governorate. Although this administrative unit existed only until 1834, it became, in the minds of the South Ossetians, the nucleus of their claims to autonomy.

Starting in 1918, pro-Soviet movements emerged in North Ossetia and the North Caucasus, which also spread to South Ossetia. With the collapse of the Tsarist Empire in 1917, South Ossetia came under the rule of the now independent Georgia.

The South Ossetians demanded national rights and recognition of their “Soviet Republic,” which they had proclaimed under Bolshevik influence on 6 May 1920, initially for the Ruk district, and then on 8 June 1920 for all of South Ossetia. As early as 17 May, Soviet Russian Foreign Minister Georgij Čičerin warned the Georgian government in a note against military intervention: “(...) Georgia’s interference in the affairs of Ossetia would constitute an unjustifiable interference in the affairs of another state.”²⁴ Nevertheless, beginning on 12 June 1920, Georgian government troops crushed the Ossetian uprising in a bloody punitive expedition, killing nearly 5,000 people and driving up to 20,000 Ossetians (out of a total Ossetian population of 130,000 at the time) from their previously burned villages into the Soviet Russian district of Tersk. A telegram from the South Ossetian Regional Committee of the RCP(b) to Lenin dated 18 June 1920 states:

“The communist units in South Ossetia have almost run out of ammunition. The brutal Menshevik gangs have burned down the villages. A total of 25 large villages have been burned, not counting the small ones. All peaceful inhabitants, young and old, are being mercilessly slaughtered. Such is the grim government order. Working-class Ossetia, which is shedding its blood in an unequal, arduous struggle, awaits decisive aid.”²⁵ Many of the displaced persons and refugees died from cold, hunger, and disease, which is why the forced resettlement lives on as genocide in the historical memory of the South Ossetians.

South Ossetia was declared an autonomous region covering 3,700 square kilometers on 22 April 1922 at the instigation of Stalin, whose father, Visarion Džugaev, is said to have been Ossetian²⁶. Genuine cultural autonomy was lacking,

²⁴ Central Foreign State Archives of the Georgian Soviet Republic, Fund 1864, op. 1, File 100, Sheet 63. Quoted from: Čelechsaty, Kazbek (ed.) *Osetija i osetiny* [Ossetia and the Ossetians]. Vladikavkaz; Saint Petersburg: Association of Creative and Scientific Intelligentsia of the IR, 1994. p. 148.

²⁵ Quoted from: Čelechsaty, op. cit., p. 149.

²⁶ Such speculations are particularly popular among the Ingush, who are involved in a territorial conflict with the North Ossetians. The rumor likely stems from a poem (1939) by the Georgian Georgi Leonidze about Stalin’s childhood, in which it was mentioned that Stalin’s ancestors came from the South Ossetian village of Geri. Since the poem passed censorship, it was regarded as a reliable source. As early as 1933, the prominent Russian-Jewish poet Osip Mandelstam also alluded to Stalin’s Ossetian origins in his epigram “*Мы живем под собою не чуя страны. . .*” (*We live*

however: until 1954, the South Ossetians were required to use the Georgian alphabet.

Only Russian was taught in the nominally Ossetian elementary schools of South Ossetia. Even during the Soviet era, South Ossetia was separated from North Ossetia by a time zone and differing cultural-political practices.

Georgia's anti-Soviet independence movement put the South Ossetians in a bind in 1989. They feared that in an independent Georgia no longer controlled by Moscow, they would be entirely at the mercy of Georgian authorities. The established Communist Party rulers of South Ossetia were additionally alarmed by the threat of losing power as a result of the shift in the political center of power from distant Moscow to nearby Tbilisi, without the Kremlin serving as the supreme arbiter and decision-making authority. Consequently, on 10 November 1989, the South Ossetian Regional Soviet submitted a request to the Georgian Parliament for the elevation and recognition of South Ossetia as an Autonomous Soviet Republic, which was, as expected, rejected.²⁷ Instead, 13 days later, a march organized by Georgian nationalist organizations—which were still in opposition at the time—set out for the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinval with 20,000 participants (40,000 according to Ossetian sources), chanting chauvinistic slogans (“Georgia for the Georgians”). Units of the central Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs, which positioned themselves between the conflicting parties, prevented major bloodshed at the time.

The decision by the Supreme Council of Georgia to declare Georgian the official language nationwide and the ban on regional parties in the summer of 1990 caused tensions between the Ossetians and the central government in Tbilisi to escalate. On 20 September 1990, South Ossetia declared itself a democratic republic within the still-existing USSR and boycotted the Georgian parliamentary elections. Georgian President Gamsakhurdia declared the elections held in South Ossetia in December 1990 to be illegitimate and completely revoked South Ossetia's autonomous status on 11 December 1990. When, a year later, the South Ossetian government attempted to implement its declaration of independence in

beneath ourselves, unaware of the country. . .)—though perhaps only for the sake of the rhyme (“osetina” rhyming with “malina”); his epigram ends with the lines:

Кому в пах, кому в лоб, кому в бровь, кому в глаз.

Что ни казнь у него—то малина

И широкая грудь осетина.

Some get it in the groin, some in the forehead, some in the eyebrow, and some in the eye.

Whatever punishment he metes out—it's a raspberry

And the broad chest of the Ossetian.

Mandelstam was less fortunate than Leonidze, who came after him, for his poem led to the poet's arrest, imprisonment, and death in December 1938. - According to other speculations, Stalin was of Jewish descent.

²⁷ For a chronology of the 1989–1994 conflict period based on political statements, press coverage, and other contemporary documents, see Čelechsaty, *op. cit.*, pp. 271–384.

practice, a civil war broke out. Once again, South Ossetian villages were burned to the ground, as were Georgian schools and homes in the capital, Tskhinval. In a region where close interethnic relations and numerous binational marriages had existed until the summer of 1990, approximately one thousand people died as a result of interethnic violence. About 100,000 South Ossetians from the former Autonomous Region as well as from the rest of Georgia fled to North Ossetia, while 23,000 Georgians fled South Ossetia. The similarities in the situations of 1920 and 1990—armed action by the two independent Georgian republics against South Ossetia's attempts at secession—were perceived there and within the Ossetian community in Russia as a repetitive genocide²⁸; South Ossetians who had fled to Russia appealed to Russian and international human rights organizations to call Georgia to order.

The Ossetian-Georgian war ended on 24 June 1992 with the agreement on the principles for resolving the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, signed in Sochi by Boris Yeltsin and Eduard Shevardnadze. In addition to the ceasefire, it provided for a demilitarized security zone of about 15 km on both sides of the southern border of the former Autonomous Region, as well as a four-party joint monitoring commission to oversee the ceasefire, chaired by Russia and with the participation of Georgia, North Ossetia, and South Ossetia. Furthermore, a peacekeeping force consisting of three contingents—Russia, Georgia, and South Ossetia—each comprising 500 troops and headquartered in Tskhinval was formed. A memorandum signed in Moscow in 1996, with the participation of the OSCE mission in Georgia, reaffirmed the mutual renunciation of violence.

The Georgian government's stated intention, following the "Rose Revolution" of 2003, to bring "separatist" regions back under its control immediately led to a renewed destabilization of the situation in South Ossetia. As early as June 2004, interethnic violence broke out there once again. Saakashvili's attempt in 2006 to undermine the authority of the South Ossetian government under Eduard Kokoity by establishing a pro-Georgian rival government led by former South Ossetian Defense Minister and Prime Minister Dmitry Sanakoev was approved by the European Union but only contributed to further escalation. Even at that time, the Brussels-based *International Crisis Group* criticized the Saakashvili government's actions as one-sided and significantly exacerbating the conflict.

Even more disastrous was the attempt to forcibly bring South Ossetia back under Georgian control by military means. On the night of 7 to 8 August 2008, Saakashvili ordered the Georgian Minister of Internal Affairs to attack Tskhinval, with air support, ground troops and artillery deployed, including internationally condemned cluster bombs. In response, the South Ossetian parliament requested emergency assistance from Russia in the early morning of 8 August—a scenario reminiscent again of the situation in 1920. According to German international law

²⁸ See Čelechsaty, op. cit., p. 271; *Južnaja Ossetija: I krov', i pepel...* [South Ossetia: Both Blood and Ashes...]. (Vladikavkaz: Association of Creative and Scientific Intelligentsia of the IR, 1991).

expert Otto Luchterhandt, who has examined the respective shares of blame borne by Georgia and Russia, Georgia violated the mandatory prohibition on the use of force enshrined in the UN Charter (Art. 2(4) of the Charter of the United Nations). This is because, according to prevailing opinion, the prohibition on the use of force also protects “stabilized de facto regimes,” that is, state-like entities with partial capacity under international law, such as the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus”²⁹ or Nagorno-Karabakh. Through its attack, Georgia also violated essential norms of international humanitarian law and the laws of war (Art. 3 and 18 of the Fifth Geneva Convention of 1949, as well as Art. 48, 51, and 59 of its First Additional Protocol of 1977), such as the prohibition on attacking the civilian population, civilian objects, and “unprotected places.” At the same time, Georgia’s attack on the headquarters of the Russian peacekeeping force provided Russia with a legally acceptable justification for armed intervention under international law, as the killing of twelve Russian soldiers and the wounding of another 150 established Russia’s right to self-defense. A total of 30,000 people fled to North Ossetia, and another 15,000 to Georgia; over 1,400 civilians were killed, according to South Ossetian and Russian sources.

As a result of the war in Georgia, Russia, followed by Nicaragua³⁰, recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. “Georgia has now lost both territories—largely through its own fault—probably forever,” O. Luchterhandt concludes.³¹ On 9 May 2026, Moscow and Tskhinval signed an “Agreement on Deepening Alliance and Cooperation.”³²

Since 1990, South Ossetia has eluded the control of the central government in Tbilisi with the help of Russian troops. 95% of the residents of the Republic of South Ossetia have since also acquired Russian citizenship. As a result of the conflict over South Ossetia and the associated economic decline, the population has steadily decreased since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The current population figure is unknown. An estimate from 2010 suggested that there were only about 30,000 people left in South Ossetia, of whom about 2,500 were Georgians. The South Ossetian government, however, puts the population at about 72,000, while the Russian news agency RIA Novosti estimated the population at about 80,000.

²⁹ Luchterhandt, Otto. “Völkerrechtliche Aspekte des Georgien-Krieges.” In: Bungarten, Pia; Buhbe, Matthes (Hg.): *Krieg um Südossetien: Analysen und Perspektiven aus Hauptstädten der Welt*. Berlin: Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung, Oktober 2008, p. 8.

³⁰ Following the recognition on 5 September 2008, Georgia severed diplomatic relations with Nicaragua.

³¹ Luchterhandt, op. cit., p. 10.

³² Gvadzabia, Mikheil. “Tbilisi says Russia advances annexation steps in Georgia after new South Ossetia deal”. *Open Media*, 15 May 2026, https://oc-media.org/tbilisi-says-russia-advances-annexation-steps-in-georgia-after-new-south-ossetia-deal/?fbclid=IwY2xjawR1eeJleHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETFIT3BHNmRLUFFjYVg2UGlwc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODIwMDg5MgABHk0XZYRkZpRzQjurxrMdlOwmM3t-2HY0wi9mz8E8ksXAjckZBxes9LRMUQrV_aem_iaFgcIOckFoyI3XoO9IRRA.

The majority of the population remains Christian Orthodox, though there are also some Muslim South Ossetians.

Artsakh: An Irredenta Ended in Genocide

The Armenian name for the region derives from the Urartian provincial name Urdekhe. In fact, Artsakh had belonged to the Kingdom of Urartu in the 8th century BCE. After the collapse of the Armenian monarchy in the 11th century, there was no longer any sovereign noble rule in the Armenian Highlands, with the exception of Artsakh and neighboring Syunik. Only in the remote northeastern border regions were elements of Armenian statehood able to survive into modern times. The indigenous Armenian population of these regions has a history spanning nearly three thousand years, in contrast to the Azerbaijanis, who only formed a short-lived republic under this ethnonym in 1918. In the mid-19th century, the question of the cultural and ethnic autonomy of the Azerbaijanis arose among the Russian-aculturated intellectual Enlightenment thinkers in the South Caucasus. Various responses were developed—Pan-Turkic, Pan-Islamic, and regionalist—though initially the political and cultural orientation toward the Ottoman Empire prevailed. This pro-Turkish orientation paved the way for Ottoman troops to enter Baku in 1918. Toward the end of World War I, regionalist forces prevailed over Pan-Turkism. They were supported primarily by Great Britain, and later by Soviet Russia. Due to economic and military competition with both Germany—which was allied with Ottoman Turkey—and the Soviet Russians, who allied with Kemalist Turkey shortly thereafter, the British were keen to push back both rivals in the South Caucasus and thus to create and strengthen a national Azerbaijani buffer state under their control between Iran, Turkey, and Russia, which was pushing southward. This did not prevent Northern Azerbaijan from becoming the first South Caucasian country to be Sovietized in April 1920.

Under Mustafa Kemal, Turkey ensured that the Soviet-Azerbaijani region of Nakhchivan was placed under Soviet Azerbaijan's control through the Soviet Russian-Turkish Friendship Treaty signed in Moscow on 16 March 1921. This success encouraged the Azerbaijanis to strike a second blow. They found support in the Georgian Stalin, whom the Azerbaijanis in turn supported in Georgia's claims to the Georgian-Muslim region of Adjara, including the important Black Sea port of Batumi: an Azerbaijani-Georgian alliance against Armenia, tolerated by the Soviet Russian state. In an alliance of convenience with Stalin, the Soviet Azerbaijani Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, Nariman Narimanov, convened a plenary session on 5 July 1921 to revoke the previous day's resolution, which had assigned Karabakh to Soviet Armenia.³³ According to the revised resolution, Nagorno-Karabakh was to belong to Soviet Azerbaijan as an autonomous region. No referendum was held among the affected population, just

³³ Mikaeljan, Vardges; Churšudjan, Lendruš. *Nekotorye voprosy istorii Nagornogo Karabacha*. Erevan 1988, p. 53.

as none had been held in Abkhazia or South Ossetia. Of the historic Artsakh's former 12,000 square kilometers, only the central third was granted autonomous status; a direct connection to the Soviet Republic of Armenia was thus severed. Anyone wishing to travel from there to the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region had to take a long detour via the city of Kirovabad (Armenian: Gandzak). The connection between Soviet Armenia and Karabakh was largely severed during the 70 years of Soviet rule.

Between 1929 and 1932, all 100 village churches and the 18 hermitages in Artsakh were forced to close. For decades, the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church appealed in vain to the Soviet Azerbaijani government to be allowed to reopen at least one or two churches in Artsakh. It was not until the fall of 1988, following months of protests by the people of Artsakh and Soviet Armenia, that the reopening of the famous Gandzasar Monastery and a church in the historic capital of Shushi was promised.

Following the Turkish model, Soviet Azerbaijan engaged in both active and passive destruction of sacred and secular Armenian cultural monuments in Artsakh, and particularly in the already de-Armenianized Nakhchivan, in order to destroy evidence of current and former Armenian settlement. Of the 1,600 officially registered architectural and cultural monuments in Artsakh, only 64—and mostly Muslim ones—were maintained by Soviet Azerbaijan. The majority, such as the Amaras Monastery founded in the 4th century, were left to decay or even deliberate destruction, as was the case with the Church of Khutavank (5th century), which was misused as a cattle shed; inside, manure had been smeared onto the walls in a layer one meter thick. In 1986, saboteurs blew up this early Christian structure under the pretext of “geological fieldwork.”³⁴

Soviet Azerbaijan discriminated against the Armenian population of Artsakh in all areas of life and culture. The government in Baku deliberately kept the Armenian exclave in a state of economic and social underdevelopment, even though the production of meat, milk, and wine was well above the Azerbaijani average. The Artsakhians were not allowed to use the water from their rivers and mountain streams for their own fields and gardens. The militia, as well as key positions in the administration, were disproportionately held by Azerbaijanis, while incomes were far below those in comparable Azerbaijani towns.³⁵ Armenian history was not to be taught in schools. There was a lack of Armenian-language textbooks, and Artsakh was culturally bled dry. When an Armenian-language theater was finally permitted to open in capital of the Autonomous Region, Stepanakert, the Armenian theater in Baku—where over 200,000 Armenians lived

³⁴ Ajvazjan, Suren. *Open Letter to Mikhail Gorbachev*, 5 March 1987, p. 5 (Russian).

³⁵ Hofmann, Tessa. “Einleitung”. In: *Panzer gegen Perestrojka: Dokumentation zum Konflikt in und um §Arzach* (“Karabach”). Hg. Von der Armenischen Kolonie zu Berlin e.V. / Armenisch-Apostolische Kirchengemeinde Berlin und dem Verband Armenischer Vereinigungen im deutschsprachigen Raum. Bremen: Donat-Verlag, 1989, p. 18.

until 1990—was forced to close.³⁶ Large segments of the working population were forced to leave their homeland and relocate to the industrial cities of Azerbaijan for lack of work-places and low payments. The monument *We Are Our Mountains*, inaugurated in 1967, alludes to the aging population as a result of these state induced demographic policy and is popularly known as “Tatik u Papik” – Grandmother and Grandfather; it became the region’s unofficial symbol.

As an autonomous region, Karabakh had no right to secession but could only apply to the Baku government for withdrawal from Soviet Azerbaijan and ask the Soviet Republic of Armenia for admission. Since 1986, signatures had once again been collected in Artsakh in support of joining Soviet Armenia. In August 1987, Artsakh Armenians submitted a petition addressed to Party Leader Gorbachev and signed by 75,000 petitioners. From late 1987 through mid-February 1988, three Artsakh delegations traveled to Moscow to seek a response to their mass petition. When they returned empty-handed, demonstrations and strikes began in Artsakh. On 20 February 1988, the Artsakh Council of People’s Deputies approved the annexation to Armenia. A few days later, the industrial city of Sumgait saw the first in a series of pogroms against the Armenian population, with the perpetrators provided with lists of residents. The massacres in Sumgait, Kirovabad—now once again known as Ganja—and Baku between 1988 and January 1990 triggered mutual expulsions and mass exoduses: approximately 500,000 Armenian displaced persons and war refugees from Azerbaijan and Karabakh, as well as 724,000 Azerbaijani war and internally displaced persons from Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia.

In two military attacks in violation of international law, Azerbaijan attempted to force Artsakh back under its control. This failed in the First Karabakh War (1991–May 1994). In the Second Karabakh War (fall 2020), Azerbaijan—which for years had engaged in an arms race that was hopeless to win for Armenia—succeeded in recapturing one-third of the former Autonomous Region. The remaining De Facto-Republic of Artsakh was thereafter connected to the Republic of Armenia only via the Lachin Corridor. In December 2022, Azerbaijan imposed a nine-month hunger blockade on Karabakh. Russia, which had intervened on behalf of the Armenians during the Second Karabakh War and brokered a ceasefire, did not intervene this time to lift the blockade, much to the Armenians’ disappointment. In Artsakh, public transportation collapsed due to a lack of fuel, and imports and exports to Armenia were no longer possible. The number of premature births and stillbirths rose. On 19 September 2023, Azerbaijan launched another military attack on the starving population of Karabakh and drove them out completely. 120,000 people were uprooted. They are not welcome by the political leadership of the Republic of Armenia under Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan; he publicly denounced them as deserters, cowards, and ungrateful, and does not advocate for their right of return

³⁶ Galoyan, G.A.; Chudaverdyan, K.S. (Red.): *Nagornyy Karabach: Istoričeskaja spravka*. [Nagorno-Karabakh: Historical Reference]. Yerevan 1988, p. 58.

and homeland or compensation for their lost property. National and international human rights organizations, as well as experts in international law, including the first Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Dr. iur. Luis Moreno Ocampo, have assessed the starvation blockade and the deportation of the Armenian population as genocide. This was not the first time Armenians had experienced Azerbaijani mass violence. Interethnic conflicts erupted in the South Caucasus during every crisis of the Russian central government: in 1905, 1918–1920, and 1988–1990. Armenians were usually the victims, particularly in Karabakh in March 1920, when irregular Muslim units massacred 20,000 Armenians in Shushi.

The De Facto Republic of Artsakh existed for 33 years without any international recognition or support, not even from the five states that had recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The Republic of Armenia, with which Artsakh was in an economic and monetary union, likewise did not dare to grant formal recognition, let alone annex the region. The irredentist demand “Miatsum!”—“Unification!”—which in 1988 led a million people to demonstrate in the Armenian capital Yerevan and resulted in the joint resolution on the “reunification of the Armenian Soviet Republic and the Nagorno-Karabakh region” by the National Council of Artsakh and the Supreme Council of the Armenian Soviet Republic on 1 December 1989, was indeed incorporated into Armenia’s Declaration of Independence of 23 August 1990, which in turn forms the preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia³⁷, but was never realized.

Artsakh received economic support primarily from the Armenian diaspora, particularly in the United States.

Assessment under International Law

International law recognizes two principles that are difficult to reconcile: the right to national self-determination and the protection of territorial integrity. Both of these, as well as the right to secession, were enshrined in all three Soviet constitutions of 1924, 1936, and 1977; however, in the late and post-Soviet reality, they became highly contentious principles. Even international law scholars offer conflicting answers to the question of which legal principle takes precedence. Among the proponents of “remedial secession” (the right to self-defense), according to which the right to secession may take precedence over territorial integrity under certain conditions, the following international law scholars are found within German academia:

- Jochen A. Frowein (former director of the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law) is cited in the debate on the right to self-defense, even though he himself takes the strict position that secessions are

³⁷ <http://www.parliament.am/legislation.php?sel=show&ID=2602&lang=eng;>
<https://www.president.am/en/constitution-2015/>

legitimate only in exceptional cases and in the event of serious human rights violations.³⁸

- Eyal Benvenisti (international law scholar and former UN Special Rapporteur) argues in his work that the right of peoples to self-determination may, under certain circumstances, justify secession, particularly in cases of systematic oppression. His work explores when and how secession can be justified.³⁹

- Antje-Verena von Ungern-Sternberg (professor of international law) argues in her publications that the right to self-determination can allow for secession in extreme cases, such as in the event of persistent and severe human rights violations.⁴⁰

- Stefan Oeter (international law scholar and professor at the University of Hamburg) discusses in his works the possibility of remedial secession as a last resort in cases of serious violations of the right to self-determination.⁴¹

- Ulrich Fastenrath (Professor of International Law at TU Dresden) is among those who recognize remedial secession as a theoretically possible exception to the principle of territorial integrity.⁴²

- Otto Luchterhandt⁴³ (Professor Emeritus at the University of Hamburg) has spoken out in particular in favor of the right to self-determination for Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) and South Ossetia.

However and as mentioned before, these positions are not uncontroversial and are the subject of heated debate in the literature on international law. The prevailing view continues to emphasize the primacy of territorial integrity or acknowledges the possible legitimacy of secession only in extreme cases—such as genocide or systematic oppression. In an article on the website of the German “Federal Agency for Civic Education” (Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung), O. Luchterhandt reaches the following conclusion regarding Nagorno-Karabakh’s right to self-defense: “Although the Republic of Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh is not

³⁸ Frowein, Jochen A. *Das De Facto-Regime im Völkerrecht: Eine Untersuchung zur Rechtsstellung nichtanerkannter Staaten und ähnlicher Gebilde*. Köln/Berlin, 1968.

³⁹ Benvenisti, Eyal. “De facto Regimes in International Law”. In: Wladyslaw Czapinski/Agata Hleczkowska (eds.): *Unrecognised Subjects in International Law*. Warsaw: Scholar Publishing House, 2019, pp. 59–78.

⁴⁰ Walter, Christian; Ungern-Sternberg, Antje von; Kavus, Abushow (eds.). *Self-Determination and Secession in International Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

⁴¹ Oeter, Stefan. “The Role of Recognition and Non-Recognition with Regard to Secession”. In: Walter / Ungern-Sternberg / Abushow, op. cit., pp. 45–67; idem, “The Kosovo Case – An Unfortunate Precedent”. *Zeitschrift für öffentliches ausländisches Recht und Völkerrecht*, 2015, Vol. 75, pp. 51–74; https://www.zaoerv.de/75_2015/75_2015_1_a_51_74.pdf.

⁴² Fastenrath, Ulrich. *The Law of State Succession*. Heidelberg 1996.

⁴³ Chair of Public Law and Eastern European Law, Director of the Department of Eastern European Legal Research, Faculty of Law, University of Hamburg (1991–2008); numerous publications on constitution, law, and politics in Central, Southeastern, and Eastern Europe (USSR/Russia/CIS) as well as on international law; Since 1992, active as a constitutional and legal advisor in German government programs (GTZ/GIZ; IRZ Foundation), for political foundations, and in EU TACIS projects, primarily in Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan; in 2009, international law expert for the EU mission investigating the background of the 2008 war in Georgia.

internationally recognized, it meets all the criteria of a de facto state and therefore possesses partial subjectivity under international law according to internationally recognized doctrine. The most important consequence of this is that the Republic of Artsakh is protected against external attacks by the general prohibition on the use of force under international law pursuant to Art. 2(4) of the UN Charter and, in the event of its violation—in principle no differently than the Republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia—can invoke the right to self-defense under international law (Art. 51 UN Charter). As Art. 51, sentence 1, expressly states, this right can and may be exercised not only 'individually,' i.e., by the Republic of Artsakh alone, but also 'collectively.' The military assistance provided to the Republic of Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh by the Republic of Armenia was therefore not a violation of international law.”⁴⁴

Luchterhandt's colleague Hans-Joachim Heintze (Ruhr University Bochum) disagrees on the same website: “Professor Luchterhandt also fundamentally shares the view regarding the continued validity of internal state borders, but at the same time argues that Azerbaijan forfeited its sovereign rights over Nagorno-Karabakh because it unilaterally and arbitrarily seceded from the Soviet Union in 1991, thereby forfeiting its claim to territorial integrity. It was therefore not a subject of international law during this transitional phase. This cannot be accepted, because all Soviet republics were de jure sovereign states at all times under the USSR Constitution. This is evident from the mere fact that Ukraine and Belarus, which had the same status as the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan, have been member states of the UN since 1945.

The Soviet Constitution granted the Union Republics a fundamental right to secede, invoking the right of peoples to self-determination. Nagorno-Karabakh, as an autonomous region, had no claim to state independence, however.”⁴⁵ Heintze rejects a right of self-defense for Artsakh, citing Armenian crimes against Azerbaijanis, without going into causal, chronological, quantitative, and qualitative details: “In particular, it should be noted that there have also been massive attacks by Armenians on Azerbaijani population groups. Above all, these crimes have never been addressed by either side; no attempt was made to create the conditions for peaceful coexistence between the majority (sic!; TH) of Azerbaijanis and the Armenian minority. Instead, a military solution was repeatedly sought, which claimed many lives on both sides and ultimately led to the formation of the ‘state’

⁴⁴ Luchterhandt, Otto. „Meinung: Das Völkerrecht und der Berg-Karabach-Konflikt Nationale Selbstbestimmung und Sezession der armenischen Minderheit oder Wahrung der territorialen Integrität Aserbaidshans?“ *Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung*, 7.12.2021, <https://www.bpb.de/themen/kriege-konflikte/dossier-kriege-konflikte/344244/meinung-das-voelkerrecht-und-der-berg-karabach-konflikt/>

⁴⁵ Heintze, Hans-Joachim. „Kriege und Konflikte; Meinung: Berg-Karabach und die Grenzen des Selbstbestimmungsrechts.“ *Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung*, 7.12.2021, <https://www.bpb.de/themen/kriege-konflikte/dossier-kriege-konflikte/344172/meinung-berg-karabach-und-die-grenzen-des-selbstbestimmungsrechts/>.

of Nagorno-Karabakh and the military occupation of Azerbaijan's neighboring provinces."⁴⁶

In addition to the lack of enforcement bodies and the United Nations' enforcement deficits, there are further serious obstacles to the enforcement of international law and thus to the punishment, prevention, and deterrence of genocide and war crimes. These include current U.S. sanctions against three judges of the International Criminal Court in The Hague, as well as rulings by a Russian court in 2025 against eight former and current judges of the ICC, which jeopardize the judicial independence of this key institution of international law.⁴⁷

A major obstacle lies in the differing perspectives on and handling of domestic and international issues. Let us take more or less recent cases of separatism as an example: The differing international assessments of separatist movements—such as in the cases of Kosovo, Scotland, Catalonia, or Nagorno-Karabakh—can be explained less by inconsistent legal principles than by an interplay of international law, power politics, historical narratives, and strategic interests. The discrepancy in perception is thus structural in nature and not accidental. Specifically: As already mentioned in connection with the Soviet constitutions, international law contains two principles of equal standing but that are contradictory:

- the right of peoples to self-determination
- the inviolability of state borders

There is no clear hierarchy between these two principles, even though some international law scholars give priority to the right to self-determination. International actors therefore choose which principle to emphasize depending on the situation. In the case of Scotland, self-determination within a constitutional framework would be legitimate as long as London agrees. Catalonia's self-determination, on the other hand, amounts to a breach of the Spanish Constitution, as it emphasizes the principle of territorial integrity. The recognition of Kosovo's right to self-determination is portrayed as a "special case" (*sui generis*) to avoid setting a supposed precedent (although the three *de facto* republics in the South Caucasus welcomed the recognition of Kosovo's right to self-determination for precisely this reason, unlike Russia). But it was precisely this precedent that occurred with the recognition of Kosovo and led to the further destabilization of universal legal principles, as Stephan Oeter noted: "If the United States and the EU can behave as if they were exempt from international legal rules, then Russia can do the same—so seems to be the inherent logic. Here lies the deeply disquieting aspect of the sequence of the cases of Kosovo, Abkhazia, Crimea, and 'Novorossiia.' From a Russian perspective, the West has begun to destroy the shared normative understanding regarding issues of secession and (non-)recognition, and now Russia has begun to disregard the established set of

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Jürgens, Johanna; Suchy, Clara: "Erst sperren sie ihre Kreditkarte, dann Amazon, Airbnb und den Rest." [Interview with Slovenian judge Beti Hohler of ICC]. *Die Zeit*, 23 April 2026, No. 18, pp. 17-18.

international legal rules as well. One should have kept these consequences in mind when manipulating the legal framework on secession and recognition in the case of Kosovo.”⁴⁸

In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan was emphasized almost unanimously, without taking into account the arbitrariness that had led to the forced annexation in 1921 of the Region, which was then 94.4 percent inhabited by Armenians.⁴⁹ Moreover, at the time of the Soviet-Azerbaijani declaration of independence from the USSR, the Nagorno-Karabakh region was no longer under Azerbaijani control, so that no violation of existing sovereignty can be said to have occurred here. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan’s rather incoherent interpretation prevailed internationally.

A central, albeit uncoded, criterion is the idea of “remedial secession,” that is, secession as a last resort in the face of massive, systematic oppression. In the case of Kosovo, ethnic violence, expulsions, and a NATO intervention led to the moral and humanitarian legitimization of secession. In the cases of Scotland and Catalonia, there is no comparable repression, which is why the “self-defense” criterion does not apply. In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan, both sides claim victim status. Although Azerbaijan started the violence in late February 1988, followed by two wars, the international community largely supports Azerbaijan’s claim to the region.

Statehood does not arise automatically in the international system, but through recognition. The willingness of existing states to recognize new state formations or to accept secessions and irredentism depends on their own interests. Kosovo was recognized by the U.S. and large parts of the EU, but blocked by China and Russia. A statehood for Nagorno-Karabakh independent of Azerbaijan and under Karabakh-Armenian leadership has not been recognized by any UN member, not even by the Republic of Armenia itself. Similarly, there is no willingness to recognize Scotland or Catalonia, as this would normalize secession in Europe. Recognition thus follows power dynamics, not normative consistency.

International reactions often reflect strategic calculations: The recognition of Kosovo was intended to weaken Serbia and roll back Russian influence in the Balkans. The non-recognition of Catalanian independence serves to protect a core EU state and was also driven by fear of domino effects, for example in Belgium, Italy, and France. The rejection of an independent Nagorno-Karabakh or one united with the Republic of Armenia stemmed from the energy interests of the EU, the Turkey-Azerbaijan axis, and the pushback against Russian spheres of influence. It follows that principles of international law are rarely enforced against one’s own interests.

⁴⁸ Oeter (2015), op. cit., p. 74.

⁴⁹ In the 1920s, the NKAO had a population of 131,500 people, 94.4 percent (124,136) of whom were ethnic Armenians and only 5.6 percent (7,364) of whom were ethnic Azerbaijanis. – Herzig, Edmund; Kurkchian, Marina. *The Armenians: Past and Present in the Making of National Identity*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005, pp. 66, 121.

Many states also fear that recognizing separatist movements will backfire on them:

- Spain (Basque Country, Catalonia)
- China (Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang)
- Russia (Chechnya)
- France (Corsica)

Consequently, cases like Kosovo are rhetorically declared “unique,” even though the logic of the argument could easily be applied elsewhere. The normative inconsistency in the assessment and recognition—or non-recognition—of independence or secessionist movements is thus a hallmark of the international system. This is characterized by

- the absence of a world state and the increasing erosion of universal principles and structures;
- the absence of binding legal enforcement;
- the dominance of political power over legal equality.

In this context, the American political scientist Stephen D. Krasner speaks of “organized hypocrisy”: states profess adherence to norms but apply them selectively.⁵⁰

Conclusion

The international perception of separatist aspirations is determined by:

1. Selective application of principles of international law;
2. Narratives of violence and human rights;
3. Power-political interests;
4. Alliance solidarity and fear of setting a precedent;
5. Recognition as a political act.

Consequently, it is not legality under international law that determines legitimacy, but rather the political compatibility, or connectivity of a secessionist movement. In the context of secession or separation (efforts to break away or achieve independence, e.g., of a region from a state), compatibility refers to whether and how the demands or positions of a secessionist movement can align with existing political, legal, or social structures. It is therefore a matter of the compatibility or suitability of a secessionist movement’s goals with the following five aspects:

- Legal and constitutional framework: In this context, compatibility refers to whether the demands of the secessionist movement are compatible with the applicable laws or the state’s constitution. In Spain the question of the compatibility of Catalonia’s independence efforts with the Spanish Constitution is under discussion. The Spanish Constitution does not recognize the right to secession, which is why the demands of the Catalan government are considered

⁵⁰ Krasner, Stephen D. *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 25.

incompatible. In Canada, the question of Quebec's compatibility with the Canadian constitutional framework was discussed within the context of the Clarity Act. The law established the conditions under which secession would be constitutionally possible.

In a legal context, the criterion of constitutional compatibility is whether the demands of the secessionist movement can be legally implemented or whether they violate existing laws.

- Political and democratic legitimacy: Are the secessionist efforts compatible with democratic principles (e.g., majority decisions, minority rights) or political processes (e.g., negotiations, referendums)? Catalonia's independence referendum (2017) was deemed unconstitutional by Spain and thus lacked democratic legitimacy. In the United Kingdom, by contrast, the Scottish independence referendum (2014) was considered democratically legitimate, as both the Scottish government and the British Parliament facilitated the vote. The key to acceptance here lay in the recognition of the democratic process. In Belgium, however, the question of Flemish secession is the subject of heated debate. Any potential secession would have to be compatible with Belgian constitutional principles and the rights of the French-speaking minority in Flanders. The fundamental question in a democratic context is: Are the demands of the secessionist movement supported by democratic mechanisms, or do they jeopardize them?

- Social and cultural acceptance: Connectivity may also depend on whether the goals of the secessionist movement meet with approval or at least understanding among the population or other actors (e.g., neighboring regions, the international community). In Catalonia, there was a strong social movement for independence, while other regions of Spain rejected it. The potential for success was limited here, as the majority of the Spanish population opposed secession. In South Sudan, the potential for success of the independence efforts was strengthened by international recognition (e.g., by the UN). The international community accepted the referendum as legitimate. The question here is: Do the demands of the secessionist movement find social or international support, or are they met with rejection?

- International and geopolitical conditions: This concerns the question of whether secession is compatible with the interests of other states or international organizations (e.g., EU, UN). The recognition of Kosovo by numerous Western states shows that the Kosovar secessionist efforts were compatible with international norms (e.g., the right to self-determination). In contrast, Russia's annexation of Crimea was not recognized internationally because it violated international law. The Russian position's compatibility with international norms was therefore low. The fundamental question in the geopolitical context is thus: Is secession recognized as legitimate by the international community, or is it considered a violation of international law?

- Economic and practical feasibility: Compatibility can also refer to whether a secession is economically viable or practically feasible. The Scottish government argued that an independent Scotland would be economically viable, e.g., through

its own oil and gas reserves. Critics, however, pointed to uncertainties, such as the currency issue or Scotland's accession to the EU. The Catalan economy, in turn, is heavily intertwined with Spain. Secession would have significant economic consequences, such as withdrawal from the EU or the loss of the Spanish domestic market. The fundamental question here is: Is secession economically viable, or would it lead to serious disadvantages?

When applied to the three South Caucasian post-Soviet *de facto* republics discussed in this article, however, a sixth criterion of connectivity emerges: geographical location. Abkhazia and South Ossetia are, in the literal sense, connectable due to their border location between Georgia and Russia. Post-Soviet Russia, after several years of hesitation, has made use of this and has provided both regions with permanent military, political, and economic protection since at least 2008. Not sharing a border with Russia, the *De Facto* Republic of Artsakh found itself in a significantly less favorable situation. At the same time, Nagorno-Karabakh lacked international—and above all regional—acceptance in all five other aspects of connectivity.

Table 2: Refugees, Displaced Persons and Deportees by Ethnicity

Azerbaijanis (from Soviet Armenia, Autonomous Region of Nagorno Karabakh 1988-1992)	724,000
Armenians (from Soviet Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh 1988-2023)	640,000
Georgians (from Abkhazia and South Ossetia)	194,000 (from Abkhazia) 23,000 (from South Ossetia) Total: 217,000
Total of Displaced and Deported Persons; Refugees	1.364.000

The ambiguities in international law and its inconsistent application, and especially the status and significance of national self-determination, the right to self-defense, and the right to a homeland, led to the flight, displacement, and deportation of over 1.3 million South Caucasians, with members of ethnic minorities in the affected Soviet republics and autonomous entities being particularly vulnerable. It is currently unclear whether those people will ever be granted the right to return to their homeland, and if so, under what circumstances and with which guarantees. There is therefore a high risk that the unresolved status issues of international law will lead to renewed conflicts and mass violence, particularly in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. Equally concerning, however, is the idea of accepting the status quo and the consequences of expulsion and deportation “for the sake of peace.”

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Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

FRANCE-TURKEY RELATIONS AMID GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS: AN ANALYSIS OF BILATERAL DYNAMICS AND REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS (2012-2019)

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Abstract

This article examines the dynamics of France-Turkey relations between 2012 and 2019, a period marked by recurring tensions yet characterized overall by structural continuity and sustained engagement. It argues that, beyond shifting geopolitical developments, bilateral relations were significantly shaped by the evolving domestic and foreign policy priorities, strategic recalibrations, and changing perceptions of both states. These transformations influenced the scope and direction of political dialogue and multi-sectoral cooperation. Despite periodic crises, deep-rooted interdependence functioned as a stabilizing factor, ensuring the preservation and relative continuity of the relationship throughout the period under study. To analyze these dynamics, the study adopts a multidisciplinary methodological framework grounded in strategic analysis. This is complemented by event analysis, which facilitates the identification and examination of pivotal moments and significant developments shaping bilateral relations. Furthermore, content analysis is employed to systematically assess diplomatic communications, policy documents, official statements, and media coverage, offering insights into the narratives and discourses influencing Franco-Turkish interactions. By integrating these methods, the study achieves a nuanced understanding of the political, diplomatic, and legal factors that guided the evolution of France-Turkey relations throughout the period under review..

Keywords: *France-Turkey Relations, European Union, negotiations, economic cooperation, Syrian conflict, geopolitical realities, bilateral strategic dialogue, multilateral diplomacy, NATO, foreign policy priorities.*

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A new phase in Franco-Turkish relations emerged in 2012 with the election of François Hollande, marking a recalibration rather than a rupture in bilateral engagement. The subsequent period was characterized by both intensified interaction and structural adaptation, shaped by domestic political adjustments as well as evolving regional power configurations in which both states played active roles.

Hollande's Conciliatory Approach and Early EU Accession Dynamics (2012–2014)

François Hollande, elected as the 24th President of the French Republic, adopted a comparatively more conciliatory and constructive discourse toward Turkey than his predecessor, Nicolas Sarkozy. His approach signaled a relative recalibration in the tone and diplomatic posture of France with respect to Ankara, reflecting both ideological differences and a broader reassessment of bilateral and regional priorities. An analysis of Hollande's position and intended policy toward Turkey indicates that he did not assume a rigid stance on the issue of Turkey's accession to the European Union.¹ His approach was grounded in the existing status of the negotiation process between Turkey and the European Union, emphasizing that accession talks had commenced long before without any predetermined or irrevocable outcome having been established.² Moreover, President Hollande did not refrain from articulating his intention to strengthen economic relations with Turkey, which, in his view, had suffered during Sarkozy's presidency. In doing so, he signaled the beginning of a normalization phase in Turkish–French relations.³

In the late 2000s, Ankara projected an ambitious legislative harmonization timeline aimed at accelerating its convergence with EU norms, initially framing 2013 as a symbolic milestone. European institutions, however, refrained from recognizing this target as a binding accession deadline.⁴ A similar strategic projection emerged in 2012, when Turkish leadership publicly associated prospective EU membership with the centenary year of the Republic in 2023.⁵ These symbolic timelines reflected not merely diplomatic optimism but a broader attempt to embed the accession process within Turkey's long-term state narrative.

¹ End France's Block on Turkey's EU Bid, President Hollande, 15.05.2012, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2012-05-14/end-france-s-block-on-turkey-s-eu-bid-president-hollande>, (accessed November 3, 2025).

² Hollande: "pas d'adhésion de la Turquie à l'UE" dans "le prochain quinquennat", 11.04.2012, https://www.lepoint.fr/politique/hollande-pas-d-adhesion-de-la-turquie-a-l-ue-dans-le-prochain-quinquennat-11-04-2012-1450615_20.php, (accessed November 3, 2025).

³ Les 60 engagements de Hollande, 26.01.2012, https://www.liberation.fr/france/2012/01/26/les-60-engagements-de-hollande_791303/, (accessed November 3, 2025).

⁴ Turkey targets 2013 for EU legal compliance, 30.03.2007, <https://euobserver.com/enlargement/23813>, (accessed November 3, 2025).

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Yet, as negotiations progressed, the accession framework gradually shifted in meaning for both sides, evolving from a structured integration pathway into a politically contested and strategically recalibrated process shaped by domestic transformations and geopolitical constraints.⁶ Former President Abdullah Gül further indicated that any eventual accession outcome would require domestic ratification through a referendum, underscoring the increasing internal politicization of the issue. For his part, Turkish President Abdullah Gül stated that, upon the completion of the accession process, Turkey would hold a referendum on its membership in the European Union.⁷

In June 2013, amid escalating domestic unrest in Turkey linked to the Gezi Park protests, several European actors reassessed their stance on the accession process.⁸ Germany's decision to halt progress on a negotiation chapter signaled the increasing interconnection between domestic political developments in Turkey and EU-level institutional responses.⁹ Turkish officials warned that such measures risked undermining the broader political framework of EU-Turkey engagement.¹⁰ Within this evolving context, France adopted a cautious yet strategically calibrated position, maintaining its veto over several chapters while postponing definitive decisions until after the 2014 European Parliament elections. Hollande's approach thus combined diplomatic signaling with institutional restraint, culminating in his January 2014 state visit to Ankara, which aimed to stabilize bilateral dialogue without fundamentally altering France's structural position within the EU framework.¹¹

Consolidation, Economic Engagement, and Bilateral Cooperation

In his address to the French community living in Turkey, President Hollande emphasized the significance of bilateral economic ties, noting that Turkey is part of Europe and stressing that France should uphold its commitments by allowing the

⁶ Merkel reassures Turkey on EU talks, Erdogan raps Cyprus, 04.11.2012, https://www.yahoo.com/?err=404&err_url=https%3a%2f%2fnews.yahoo.com%2fmerkel-reassures-turkey-eu-talks-erdogan-raps-cyprus-154249524.html, (accessed November 5, 2025).

⁷ Gül: 'Biz de AB üyelğini referanduma götüreceğiz', 12.02.2013, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150715021324/http://www.euractiv.com.tr/ab-ve-turkiye/article/gul-biz-de-ab-uyeligini-referanduma-goturecegiz-027101>, (accessed November 5, 2025).

⁸ Turkey protests spread after violence in Istanbul over park demolition, 21.05.2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/31/istanbul-protesters-violent-clashes-police>, (accessed November 5, 2025).

⁹ Germany blocks Turkey's bid to join EU, 21.06.2013, <https://www.ft.com/content/2432cc2c-d9c0-11e2-bab1-00144feab7de#axzz2WsY07fBe>, (accessed November 5, 2025).

¹⁰ Turkey welcomes new chapter in EU talks, wants more progress, 05.11.2013, <https://web.archive.org/web/20131109234257/http://www.todayszaman.com/news-330679-turkey-welcomes-new-chapter-in-eu-talks-wants-more-progress.html>, (accessed November 5, 2025).

¹¹ The President of France Visits Turkey, 27.01.2014, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/25243594.html>, (accessed November 5, 2025).

opening of new negotiation chapters.¹² He also reiterated France's support for advancing additional chapters in the EU accession process. Notably, Chapter 22, concerning Regional Policy and the Coordination of Structural Instruments - which had been temporarily suspended during Sarkozy's presidency - was reopened shortly after Hollande took office.¹³ During his visit, Hollande met with Turkish President Abdullah Gül, reaffirming France's commitment to respecting and honoring its obligations in the context of Turkey's EU accession. This statement reflected an effort to rebuild diplomatic trust and demonstrate continuity in France's formal responsibilities within the European Union framework. He further highlighted that the accession process could help Turkey assess its potential, showcase its capabilities, and provide opportunities to strengthen institutional and operational competencies.¹⁴

Highlighting the mutually advantageous and strategically important trade and economic relations between France and Turkey, President François Hollande noted that France's share of the Turkish market had fallen to around three percent. This observation reflected growing concern in Paris over the country's declining economic footprint in Turkey and emphasized the need to strengthen bilateral commercial ties amid a more competitive global environment. Hollande also reiterated his commitment to expanding the operations of French companies in Turkey, while encouraging Turkish entrepreneurs to consider investment opportunities in France.¹⁵

Political Crises and Shifts in Bilateral Trajectory (2013-2017)

Despite France's ongoing diplomatic initiatives, several significant events - including the 2013 Gezi Park protests, the attempted coup in Turkey in 2016, the arrest of French journalist Olivier Bertrand in November 2016, and the April 2017 constitutional referendum - had a notable impact on bilateral relations.¹⁶ The referendum led to amendments in 18 articles of the Turkish Constitution, introducing a shift from a parliamentary system to a presidential one, eliminating the office of the Prime Minister, and reorganizing the number and structure of

¹² Allocution Devant La Communauté Française à Istanbul, Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Étrangères, 26.06.2014, <https://tr.ambafrance.org/Cumhurbaskani-Francois-Hollande>, (accessed November 5, 2025).

¹³ Hollande declines to open new EU chapter in Turkey, 28.01.2014, <https://euobserver.com/foreign/122889>, (accessed November 11, 2025).

¹⁴ Hollande évoque l'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Union européenne, 28.01.2014, https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/monde/video-hollande-evoque-l-adhesion-de-la-turquie-a-l-union-europeenne_1317928.html, (accessed November 11, 2025).

¹⁵ President Hollande of France pays a state visit to Turkey, 28.01.2014, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/president-hollande-of-france-pays-a-state-visit-to-turkey.en.mfa>, (accessed November 11, 2025).

¹⁶ Hollande tries to calm France's complicated relationship with Turkey, 28.04.2014, <https://www.france24.com/en/20140128-hollande-france-complicated-relationship-turkey>, (accessed November 11, 2025).

deputies in the Grand National Assembly, among other changes.¹⁷ In response, France voiced criticisms and, alongside other evolving political developments, undertook a reassessment of its policy approach toward Turkey. This resulted in a more measured adjustment of France's diplomatic strategy and engagement, reflecting both normative principles and pragmatic considerations.

In August 2014, Turkey held its presidential elections, resulting in the election of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan - who had previously served as Prime Minister from 2003 to 2014 and led the moderately conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) - as the country's 12th President.¹⁸ Erdoğan's tenure inaugurated a distinct period in the political history of the Republic of Turkey, marked by significant institutional, structural, and geopolitical developments that shaped the trajectory of the nation during his presidency.¹⁹

Macron's Strategic Partnership Doctrine and Economic Continuity (2017-2019)

During this period, relations between Turkey and the European Union continued to develop, though they increasingly showed signs of gradual decline. This downward trend was influenced by a combination of objective factors, such as evolving geopolitical circumstances and institutional changes, as well as subjective elements, including the shifting foreign policy priorities and strategic recalibrations of individual EU member states, the EU collectively, and Turkey itself. Collectively, these dynamics contributed to a slowdown in the accession process and weakened its earlier transformative potential. Social surveys conducted in 2015 indicated that only around 20 percent of Turkish citizens supported EU membership for Turkey, a sharp decrease from the 75 percent recorded in previous years.²⁰

In January 2015, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan publicly stated that Turkey was no longer prioritizing its EU accession process.²¹ Comparable positions had been expressed earlier by Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç, while the Minister for EU Affairs, Volkan Bozkır, indicated that the negotiations could not proceed in the format expected by the European Union, adding that Turkey's democratic institutions were, in some respects, more advanced than those of certain

¹⁷ The New Turkish Republic: The Dreams and Actions of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan 10.01.2017, <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/rus/articles/2017/01/10/7059808/>, (accessed November 11, 2025).

¹⁸ Recep Erdoğan: The 12th President of Turkey, 11.08.2014, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/26524853.html>, (accessed November 12, 2025).

¹⁹ Gabrielyan H., Turkey Before the Presidential Elections, 29.07.2014, http://noravank.am/arm/articles/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=12844, (accessed November 12, 2025).

²⁰ Turkey Is Not Interested in the Question of Joining the EU — President, 24.01.2015, <https://www.trend.az/world/turkey/2356772.html>, (accessed November 12, 2025).

²¹ Turkey's Erdogan to hold migration talks with EU, 05.10.2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34440998>, (accessed November 12, 2025).

European states.²² These remarks illustrated a wider viewpoint among Turkey's political elite, raising doubts about whether the European Union truly upheld democratic principles or, in reality, functioned as an exclusive "Christian club" that marginalized non-Christian countries.²³ The discourse was aimed at formulating a policy approach that aligned domestic public opinion with the state's strategic objectives and foreign policy priorities, seeking coherence between internal legitimacy and Turkey's international positioning.

A renewed impetus in Turkey-EU relations emerged with the signing of the EU-Turkey Refugee Agreement in March 2016. The deal aimed to prevent the accession negotiations from becoming indefinitely stalled and to facilitate the potential for visa liberalization for Turkish citizens traveling to Europe. Despite these initiatives, however, the accession process largely stagnated from 2016 onward, due to ongoing structural, political, and strategic challenges on both sides. The European Union voiced concerns regarding human rights issues and shortcomings in the rule of law within Turkey.²⁴ By 2017, EU officials indicated that certain policies implemented by the Turkish government were inconsistent with the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership. In response, President Erdoğan announced that Turkey no longer regarded itself as an EU candidate country, further heightening the tensions already present in the bilateral relationship.²⁵

In 2017, the French Republic conducted its presidential elections, resulting in the victory of Emmanuel Macron, former Minister of the Economy, Industry, and Digital Affairs (2014-2016), who secured 66.1 percent of the vote.²⁶ Macron's presidency inaugurated what can be characterized as the fourth historical phase in France-Turkey relations, a period distinguished by notable structural shifts and significant events that together rendered it particularly dynamic and complex.

Throughout the 2017 campaign, national debates were predominantly focused on economic and security challenges, with candidates proposing strategies aimed at addressing these pressing issues. Voter concerns and electoral platforms emphasized fiscal stability and economic performance, which subsequently influenced the context in which France approached its bilateral economic and trade interactions with Turkey. As a result, policy toward Turkey occupied a

²² Meeting of heads of state or government with Turkey - EU-Turkey statement, 29.11.2015, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/11/29/eu-turkey-meeting-statement/>, (accessed November 12, 2025).

²³ Turkey-European Union Relations, https://www.ab.gov.tr/turkey-eu-relations_4_en.html, (accessed November 12, 2025).

²⁴ New clashes likely between Turkey, Europe, 22.06.2017, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2017/06/turkey-european-union-relations-possible-collision.html>, (accessed November 12, 2025).

²⁵ Turkey doesn't need EU anymore, but won't quit talks: President Erdoğan, 01.10.2007, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-doesnt-need-european-union-president-erdogan-says-120199>, (accessed November 12, 2025).

²⁶ Macron beats Le Pen in French presidential election - as it happened, 19.05.2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2017/may/07/french-presidential-election-emmanuel-macron-marine-le-pen>, (accessed November 12, 2025).

comparatively marginal position in the political discourse, marking a clear departure from previous electoral cycles where foreign policy and bilateral relations had figured more prominently.

Emmanuel Macron's positions on Turkey's EU accession during and after his presidential campaign reflected a careful evaluation of the state of Turkey-European Union relations at the time. He reiterated the approach previously expressed by former President Nicolas Sarkozy, emphasizing that a strategic partnership between Turkey and the EU would constitute a more viable path for engagement than pursuing full membership. Macron further developed this perspective during President Erdoğan's official visit to Paris, proposing the establishment of such a partnership as a means to prevent potential stagnation or setbacks in the ongoing accession process.²⁷ In doing so, he implicitly signaled skepticism regarding the likelihood that Turkey's accession negotiations would advance at the expected pace or ultimately result in full EU membership. At the same time, Macron highlighted the enduring importance of Turkey for France, particularly as a reliable trade partner, and affirmed his commitment to fostering and strengthening mutually beneficial bilateral relations and sectoral cooperation.

Despite occasional fluctuations and periods of political tension, France-Turkey trade and economic relations maintained a steady course of development. These economic ties played a crucial role in sustaining mutual interdependence and enhancing the structural connectivity between the two nations, thereby reinforcing the broader framework of bilateral engagement even amid challenging political circumstances. As of 2017, the volume of bilateral trade between Turkey and France amounted to USD 14.657 billion, reflecting a 9.4 percent increase compared to the previous year.²⁸ In 2018 and 2019, France ranked as Turkey's sixth-largest trading partner, while Turkey was France's fourteenth-largest partner. French investments in Turkey totaled USD 6.7 billion, whereas Turkish investments in France reached USD 7.6 billion.²⁹ These figures testify to the deepening of mutually beneficial trade and economic relations, which, despite the emergence of political and economic challenges and contradictions, continued to progress without significant disruption. This continuity preserved avenues for constructive sectoral dialogue and facilitated ongoing opportunities for joint cooperation.

By 2018, relations between Turkey and the European Union, which had already been experiencing a gradual decline, had progressed along a trajectory increasingly

²⁷ Face à Erdogan, Macron propose un «partenariat» plutôt que l'intégration de la Turquie à l'UE, 06.01.2018, https://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2018/01/06/face-a-erdogan-macron-propose-un-partenariat-plutot-que-l-integration-de-la-turquie-a-l-ue_5238179_3214.html, (accessed November 12, 2025).

²⁸ Commercial and Economic Relations between Turkey and France, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/commercial-and-economic-relations-between-turkey-and-france.en.mfa>, (accessed November 15, 2025).

²⁹ Turkey exports to France, <https://tradingeconomics.com/turkey/exports/france>, (accessed November 15, 2025).

suggestive of deadlock. This situation was influenced both by complex geopolitical developments and by adjustments in foreign policy priorities and strategic orientations on the part of Turkey and the EU. Consequently, bilateral interactions underwent shifts, some of which reflected negative trends. On June 26, 2018, the EU General Affairs Council formally noted that Turkey was moving further away from the European Union, effectively halting accession negotiations and suspending any consideration of opening or closing additional negotiation chapters.³⁰ The Council also highlighted serious concerns regarding setbacks in the rule of law and fundamental rights, including freedom of expression.³¹ Following this, on February 20, 2019, the European Parliament committee voted in favor of suspending Turkey's accession negotiations, a decision that elicited strong criticism from the Turkish government.³²

It is crucial to recognize that the downturn in Turkey-European Union relations - one of the most significant contexts shaping France-Turkey interactions - combined with the pronounced disagreements and disputes between the parties, directly affected the trajectory of bilateral development and consolidation. These circumstances placed clear limitations on the scope of further cooperation within this framework. The outcome largely reflected each nation's strategic imperative to advance its political and economic interests, implemented through deliberate policies and measures that were guided by coherent planning and a logical sequence of actions aimed at achieving clearly defined objectives.

It is therefore understandable that Turkey has not completely dismissed the option of sustaining its relationship with the European Union. This position reflects a pragmatic acknowledgment of the EU's continuing strategic, economic, and political importance for Ankara, even amid ongoing stagnation and tensions in the accession process. As highlighted in official statements, the EU faces a period characterized by increasing international risks and internal challenges, necessitating the development of stronger cooperative mechanisms and the reinforcement of existing partnerships.³³ Within this context, Turkey considers its accession to the European Union both significant and necessary. This perspective demonstrates Turkey's strategic orientation toward safeguarding its national interests and suggests the potential for further strengthening bilateral ties, contingent upon security considerations and the broader objective of effectively advancing its national priorities.

³⁰ EU Council issues strong message about Turkey's obligations, 26.06.2018, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2018/06/26/eu-council-issues-strong-message-about-turkeys-obligations/>, (accessed November 15, 2025).

³¹ Council conclusions on Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association, 26.06.2018, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/35863/st10555-en18.pdf>, (accessed November 15, 2025).

³² 'Change it now!' Turkey FURIOUS as EU votes to STOP accession talks, 21.02.2019, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1090402/EU-news-turkey-membership-eu-turkey-accession-latest-news>, (accessed November 15, 2025).

³³ Türkiye-Avrupa Birliği İlişkileri, 19.07.2019, <https://www.ab.gov.tr/4.html>, (accessed November 15, 2025).

Geopolitical Challenges: NATO, Defense Cooperation, and Eastern Mediterranean Tensions

During this period, the trajectory of France-Turkey relations was significantly shaped by a range of geopolitical developments, in which both countries pursued distinct strategic objectives. These dynamics highlight the complex interplay between bilateral priorities and broader regional and international considerations in directing the course of their relationship. In particular, Turkey's agreement with Russia on the acquisition of the S-400 missile defense system - despite its status as a NATO member - should be understood not solely from an economic standpoint but within a wider geopolitical framework.³⁴ This approach recognizes Turkey's role as a key participant in NATO's collective missile defense system and underscores its strategically important position within the Alliance, contributing to the overall security and stability of Europe's defense architecture.

From the European Union's perspective, Turkey, as a key NATO member, functions as a strategic gateway to the Middle East, a region where France seeks to maintain substantial engagement to safeguard its national interests. In this context, the evolution and deepening of Turkish-Russian relations, alongside Turkey's multifaceted and multi-vector foreign policy, carry significant strategic and economic implications for France.³⁵ This is especially pertinent given Turkey's repeated declarations concerning the establishment of its own missile defense system, officially confirmed by President Erdoğan in November 2018.³⁶

In this context, it is important to highlight that in 2018, Turkey entered into agreements with the Franco-Italian consortium Eurosam, as well as with Turkish firms Aselsan and Roketsan, to carry out a series of studies and research initiatives aimed at developing Turkish air and missile defense capabilities.³⁷ These efforts were intended to lay the groundwork for the trilateral implementation of Turkey's air and missile defense programs and to create a foundation for mutually advantageous collaboration between Turkey, France, and Italy in this sector, thereby promoting both strategic and industrial objectives.

It can be emphasized that, from NATO's perspective, the significance of these developments lies in their collaborative design and implementation alongside other Alliance members. This collective methodology enhances both operational

³⁴ Turkey signs deal to get Russian S-400 air defence missiles, 12.09.2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-41237812>, (accessed November 15, 2025).

³⁵ West's reluctance to share tech pushes Turkey further into Russian orbit, 10.01.2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2020/01/10/wests-reluctance-to-share-tech-pushes-turkey-further-into-russian-orbit/>, (accessed November 15, 2025).

³⁶ Erdogan's Turkey: Key events and developments, 20.06.2018, <https://www.france24.com/en/20180620-turkey-timeline-recep-tayyip-erdogan-key-events-developments-grip-power-coup-election>, (accessed November 15, 2025).

³⁷ Turkey Signs Agreement with Eurosam for SAMP/T, 20.07.2017, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/turkey-signs-agreement-eurosam-samp/t/>, (accessed November 21, 2025).

cohesion and the strategic interoperability of the Alliance. Furthermore, the initiative was carefully aligned with NATO's broader security and defense framework, as the system under development was intended to serve as an advanced, fully integrated iteration of the SAMP-T air defense system previously developed by Eurosam.³⁸

Turkey's acquisition of the Russian S-400 Triumph system is interpreted by the European Union - particularly through the lens of France - not merely in the context of EU-Russia or NATO-Russia relations, or the sanctions imposed on Russia, but within the broader framework of NATO's collective security architecture. This approach situates the EU's and NATO's growing concerns, emerging contradictions, and operational challenges within a comprehensive strategic perspective. The significance of this view is further underscored by statements from NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, who observed that Washington, Paris, and Rome were engaging with Ankara to explore alternatives to the Russian Triumph system.³⁹ These discussions ultimately reached a successful resolution, exerting a moderately stabilizing influence on bilateral relations and positively shaping their developmental trajectory.

Several additional factors have shaped France-Turkey relations, including the gradual intensification of disagreements over the Syrian conflict⁴⁰, tensions stemming from the European Union's migration crisis and its ramifications, the strengthening of Russian-Turkish defense and economic cooperation⁴¹, and France's persistent critique concerning limitations and violations of human and civil rights in Turkey.⁴² Notably, the Committee to Protect Journalists reports that during the tenure of the Justice and Development Party, media personnel faced the highest number of attacks in the nation's history⁴³. Collectively, these issues remain key sources of political tension, with the two countries often holding divergent and conflicting positions on these matters.

³⁸ Khojayan K., April 24 in France: Domestic and Foreign Motivations for Declaring it as the National Day of Remembrance of the Armenian Genocide. *Lraber of Social Sciences*, no. 3, Yerevan, 2019, pp. 32-33.

³⁹ Turkey starts talks with France, Italy over air defense systems, Stoltenberg says, 20.09.2017, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/905894/turkey-starts-talks-with-france-italy-over-air-defense-systems-stoltenberg-says.html>, (accessed November 21, 2025).

⁴⁰ Macron's criticism of Syria invasion 'sick and shallow', says Erdoğan, 29.11.2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/29/macrons-criticism-of-syria-invasion-sick-and-shallow-says-erdogan>, (accessed November 21, 2025).

⁴¹ Political, economic cooperation between Turkey, Russia continue to deepen, 23.11.2018, <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2018/11/23/political-economic-cooperation-between-turkey-russia-continue-to-deepen>, (accessed November 21, 2025).

⁴² 'Turkey's advances, influence detrimental to France', 26.03.2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/turkeys-advances-influence-detrimental-to-france/2189078>, (accessed November 21, 2025).

⁴³ Turkey's Press Freedom Crisis, 09.02.2013, <https://cpj.org/reports/2012/10/turkeys-press-freedom-crisis-summary/>, (accessed November 21, 2025).

France-Turkey relations have long been characterized by polarization, particularly in the context of the Syrian crisis⁴⁴, which continues to represent one of the most sensitive areas in bilateral interactions. France's approach is guided by its strategic priorities and policy framework, focusing on restoring and maintaining regional stability, preventing and addressing international and transnational crimes, and advancing its national interests through initiatives aimed at optimizing the realization of its strategic objectives. In managing the crisis, France seeks to establish conditions conducive to a reliable and inclusive political process, working collaboratively with its allies and promoting the resumption of negotiations to facilitate a constructive resolution.⁴⁵ France aims to maintain its involvement in Syria through a fourfold strategy, composed of interconnected and mutually reinforcing elements, with the goal of achieving a durable and comprehensive resolution to the conflict. This strategy encompasses continued operations against the Islamic State in coordination with international coalition partners, the provision of humanitarian aid to affected civilian populations, and the facilitation of a swift political solution to the crisis - primarily by supporting United Nations-led initiatives, which remain the principal avenue for ending the conflict and restoring lasting peace in the region.⁴⁶

Since 2014, France has undertaken a series of military operations in Syria and Iraq, primarily targeting Islamic State-affiliated fighters. Among these, Operation Chammal, initiated in September 2014 and continuing into 2015, consisted exclusively of airstrikes, with no deployment of ground forces, as emphasized by President Hollande.⁴⁷ Notably, on November 13, 2015, Paris suffered terrorist attacks claimed by the Islamic State as retaliation for the operation, prompting an intensification of French military actions in Syria.⁴⁸ Following these attacks, French forces intensified their strikes against the terrorist organization in Syria. More broadly, French interests in the Middle East - particularly in Syria and Lebanon - have historically occupied a central and often overriding position within the country's foreign policy and diplomatic priorities. This prominence is rooted not only in France's long-standing historical ties and close relations with these states but also in the evolving strategic importance of the Eastern Mediterranean region. Frequently, French objectives in the region have come into tension with

⁴⁴ Syria: The story of the conflict, 11.03.2016,

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868>, (accessed December 1, 2025).

⁴⁵ War in Syria: Understanding France's position,

<https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/syria/war-in-syria-understanding-france-s-position/>, (accessed December 1, 2025).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ France plans further air strikes against IS: President, 19.09.2014,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140923035119/http://www.mathrubumi.com/english/news/latest-news/france-plans-further-air-strikes-against-is-president-152050.html>, (accessed December 1, 2025).

⁴⁸ Paris attacks: French police launch raids as military strikes Isis in Syria, 14.11.2015,

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/15/paris-attacks-car-found-with-kalashnikovs-as-gunmans-relatives-questioned>, (accessed December 1, 2025).

Turkish strategic aims, creating a pronounced conflict of interests within a geopolitically critical area.

Syria, Eastern Mediterranean, and the Dynamics of Bilateral Tensions

France–Turkey relations over the Syrian conflict became increasingly strained following France’s declaration that, in the wake of the U.S. military withdrawal from Syria, it intended to maintain a presence in the country to safeguard the interests of the local Kurdish population.⁴⁹ France’s active support for Kurdish self-defense units - viewed by Turkey as terrorist organizations - further heightened tensions, particularly in Manbij, where Turkey had prepared corresponding military operations. Additionally, France offered to mediate in the Turkish-Kurdish conflict after bilateral relations reached a critical juncture in January 2018. Turkey responded firmly, rejecting any external attempts to facilitate dialogue or mediation with groups it considered terrorist, asserting that friendly nations should not legitimize acts of terrorism.⁵⁰ Shortly thereafter, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu publicly accused President Macron of sponsoring terrorism, referencing France’s stance on the Kurdish issue.⁵¹

France–Turkey relations reached a particularly high level of tension with the launch of Turkey’s Operation Peace Spring on October 9, 2019 - marking Turkey’s third major military intervention in Syrian territory since 2016, following Operations Euphrates Shield (2016–2017)⁵² and Olive Branch (2018).⁵³ As with previous operations, this initiative underscored the divergent positions of the two countries: on one side, Turkey’s foreign policy priorities and objectives, which had been reshaped since 2014; on the other, France’s increasingly assertive and uncompromising political stance, whose maximalist approach continued to shape the dynamics of bilateral relations.

It is important to recognize that the Syrian issue significantly influenced France–Turkey relations, not only on a bilateral level but also within multilateral frameworks, most prominently NATO, which holds critical importance for both nations.⁵⁴ This dynamic further heightened tensions and led to a reevaluation and

⁴⁹ Fearing Islamic State revival, France warns U.S., Turkey after Syria moves, 07.10.2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-security-turkey-france-idUSKBN1WM1IR>, (accessed December 7, 2025).

⁵⁰ Syria war: France offers to mediate between Turkey and Kurds, 20.03.2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-43592323>, (accessed December 7, 2025).

⁵¹ Macron is a sponsor of terrorism, says Turkish foreign minister, 28.10.2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50584935>, (accessed December 7, 2025).

⁵² Gabrielyan H., Turkey’s ‘Operation Euphrates Shield’, 04.04.2017, http://www.noravank.am/arm/articles/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=15597, (accessed December 7, 2025).

⁵³ Operation ‘Olive Branch’: Statistics on Turkish Casualties and Wounded, 27.01.2018, <https://razm.info/120762>, (accessed December 7, 2025).

⁵⁴ Macron takes swipe at halting NATO reaction to Turkey’s Syria incursion, 18.10.2019,

reinterpretation of mutual perceptions both inside and outside the Alliance. These developments directly impacted the policies pursued by each country, often resulting in conflicting approaches and occasionally prompting adjustments to the broader trajectory of bilateral relations.

Tensions between France and Turkey escalated sharply in November 2019, when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan issued highly provocative remarks aimed at French President Emmanuel Macron, following France's criticism of Turkish military operations in northern Syria. Erdoğan challenged Macron's understanding of Middle Eastern affairs, asserting that while Turkey held a critical position within NATO, Macron lacked the necessary insight. He also criticized Macron's experience with counterterrorism, linking it to domestic unrest exemplified by the Yellow Vest protests, thereby underscoring the ongoing and intensifying strain in bilateral relations.⁵⁵

In response to these remarks, Turkey's ambassador to France was summoned to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide clarifications, as the French authorities regarded Erdoğan's statements as a serious affront.⁵⁶ This episode also influenced the trajectory of bilateral relations in the period immediately preceding and during the NATO summit in London.⁵⁷

It is therefore unsurprising that in December 2019, President Macron publicly stated that no consensus could be achieved with Turkey regarding the definition of terrorism, particularly concerning disputes over Kurdish armed groups and Ankara's military operations in northern Syria. These operations targeted one of France's key partners in the fight against the Islamic State, generating tension not only in bilateral relations but also within NATO itself. Turkey's role and policies have long represented a critical agenda item, given their implications for international and regional security structures.⁵⁸ Macron's remarks, made before and after NATO's seventieth-anniversary summit in London, underscored the complexity of the challenges involved and the persistent friction surrounding this strategic actor.⁵⁹

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-security-turkey-macron-idUSKBN1WX1QX>, (accessed December 7, 2025).

⁵⁵ 'You Should First Have Your Brain Checked': Erdoğan Insults Macron, 29.11.2019, <https://armeniasputnik.am/world/20191129/21260453/du-skzbic-qo-uxexy-stugir-erdoxany-viravorele-makronin.html>, (accessed December 22, 2025).

⁵⁶ The Turkish Ambassador in Paris Has Been Summoned to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Provide Explanations, 29.11.2019, <https://artsakhpress.am/arm/news/117720/parizum-turqiayi-despany-kanchvelu-e-fransiayi-agnbacatruyunner-talu.html>, (accessed December 22, 2025).

⁵⁷ 'Sometimes allies don't agree on all issues,' NATO's secretary general says, 03.12.2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/12/02/nato-summit-stoltenberg-responds-to-turkey-france-brain-dead-spat.html>, (accessed December 22, 2025).

⁵⁸ Turkey's crisis with the West: how a new low in relations risks paralyzing NATO, 19.11.2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/11/turkeys-crisis-with-the-west-how-a-new-low-in-relations-risks-paralyzing-nato/>, (accessed December 22, 2025).

⁵⁹ NATO 70th Anniversary: Leaders' Meeting in London - What's it all about?, 27.11.2019,

Another source of contention in France-Turkey relations concern the exploitation of gas reserves discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean, off the coast of Cyprus. This issue continues to generate disputes and intensify existing tensions, thereby impeding further bilateral cooperation.⁶⁰ Notably, the French energy company Total is among the three principal firms that have commenced drilling on the Cypriot continental shelf - a development that has elicited growing concern from Turkey due to its claims and strategic interests in the region's gas resources.⁶¹ The situation has escalated to the extent that both French and Turkish naval forces were deployed near the drilling sites in the Eastern Mediterranean.⁶²

Meanwhile, the leaders of both countries engaged in a series of public statements and criticisms, further intensifying tensions. Notably, on 7 May 2019, the French government called on Turkey to halt drilling in Cyprus's "exclusive economic zone," prompting a sharp rebuttal from President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who stated: "What are you talking about? We share a coast with Cyprus. Turkey is a guarantor country in the Cyprus issue. Greece and the United Kingdom are also guarantors. And who are you, anyway?"⁶³ The dispute also manifested in concrete actions: earlier, Cypriot authorities detained the crew of a Turkish vessel that had begun oil and gas drilling off the Cypriot coast⁶⁴. This episode illustrates how competition over resources in the Eastern Mediterranean has become a persistent source of friction in France-Turkey relations.

Conclusion

Between 2012 and 2019, the evolution of France-Turkey relations, though subject to ongoing changes, generally followed a discernible pattern of development. This trajectory was shaped not only by a complex set of geopolitical events but also by

<https://www.westminster.ac.uk/events/nato-70th-anniversary-leaders-meeting-in-london-whats-it-all-about>, (accessed December 22, 2025).

⁶⁰ Gevorgyan A., *The Impact of Global and Regional Developments on Turkey's Involvement in International Energy Processes*, Yerevan State University, Center for Civilizational and Cultural Studies, Analytical Bulletin, No. 9, Yerevan, 2016, p. 91, <https://ccsysu.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/5Arshak.pdf>.

⁶¹ French, Italian Companies Will Drill for Energy off Cyprus, 21.02.2021, https://www.thenationalherald.com/archive_general_news_greece/arthro/french_italian_companies_will_drill_for_energy_off_cyprus-255060/, (accessed December 22, 2025).

⁶² Turkey Is No Longer a Partner in the Eastern Mediterranean: Macron Criticizes Erdoğan, 10.09.2020,

<https://armeniasputnik.am/world/20200910/24419358/turqian-arevelyan-mijergrakan-tsovum-aylevs-gorcynker-che-makrony-qnnadatele-erdoxanin.html>, (accessed December 22, 2025).

⁶³ Erdoğan to Macron: 'Who Are You, After All?'

<https://www.ermenihaber.am/am/news/2019/06/17/%D4%B7%D6%80%D5%A4%D5%B8%D5%B2%D5%A1%D5%B6-%D5%84%D5%A1%D5%AF%D6%80%D5%B8%D5%B6/157430>, (accessed December 22, 2025).

⁶⁴ What now for Turkey in Cyprus and eastern Mediterranean?, 23.10.2020,

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/10/turkey-eastern-mediterranean-turkish-cypriots-elections.html#ixzz6srgjKA6b>, (accessed December 22, 2025).

internal and external political adjustments, shifting strategic priorities, and the continuous reassessment of national interests and perceptions in both states. Together, these elements framed the outlook for the future of bilateral ties and multilateral collaboration, reflecting the historical and enduring interdependence between the two countries, which has consistently underpinned the continuity of their relationship.

The progression of relations during the two distinctive periods - 2012-2017 and 2017-2019 - was largely driven by the pursuit of national interests and the determination of both parties to maximize the achievement of their strategic objectives. The resolution and management of key political and economic developments during these phases were guided by this rationale, while differences in policy approaches further amplified the complexity and sensitivity of emerging issues within the broader bilateral framework.

As of today, it is increasingly evident that France and Turkey maintain sharply divergent positions on several critical international matters, particularly in regions affected by global conflicts. This fundamental divergence continues to generate turning points and shifts in the trajectory of their relations, keeping the bilateral dynamic in a state of ongoing adjustment, characterized by alternating phases of advancement and retrenchment.

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Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

BETWEEN ALLY AND THREAT: CONSTRUCTING RUSSIA IN AZERBAIJAN'S OFFICIAL RHETORIC

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Abstract

Following the 44-day war of 2020, Azerbaijan has been consistently reshaping its role and position in international politics. In this context, its relations with regional powers, primarily Russia, are of particular interest. This study examines how Azerbaijan's official rhetoric constructs and shapes the narrative around the perception of Russia. The research focuses on how Baku's official discourse, operating within the realities of 2020-2025, balances the concurrent and competing perceptions of Russia as both a "threat" and an "ally". The research demonstrates that Azerbaijan employs a model of "symmetric partnership", where the allied relationship does not imply political dependence. Instead, it serves to advance economic and security interests while maintaining ample room for geopolitical maneuvering.

Keywords: *Russian Federation, Republic of Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh, North-South Transport Corridor, South Caucasus, sovereignty.*

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Introduction

After the 2020 war, Azerbaijan has been consistently reformulating, rebuilding, and refining its role and place within the international order and world politics. It asserts greater agency and autonomy, seeking to consolidate its self-perceived status as a middle power and to secure international recognition of that status. In this context, relations with regional powers — primarily Russia and Iran — are of particular interest with respect to shifts in the regional order and the evolving pattern of cooperation and competition between emerging and established regional powers.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian-Azerbaijani relations experienced a complex and contradictory course, fluctuating between Mutalibov's strongly pro-Russian policy and Elchibey's explicitly anti-Russian stance.¹ The situation stabilized under Heydar Aliyev, who forged a pragmatic and balanced foreign policy, combining the development of energy projects with the West with a strategy of avoiding confrontation with Moscow.²

Under Ilham Aliyev's tenure in Azerbaijan, particularly following the 2020 Karabakh war, Russia temporarily expanded its military and political presence in the region by deploying its peacekeepers.³ According to Yemelianova, the outcome of the 2020 Karabakh war can be viewed as a transactional exchange, wherein Russia tacitly supported Azerbaijan's assumption of control over Nagorno-Karabakh in return for the opportunity to establish a temporary military presence.⁴

The concentration of Russian resources on the Ukrainian front due to the war, coupled with Baku's growing assertiveness, allowed Azerbaijan to gradually

¹ Galina M. Yemelianova, 'The De Facto State of Nagorno-Karabakh: Historical and Geopolitical Perspectives', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 75.8 (2023), pp. 1336–59, doi:10.1080/09668136.2023.2214708.

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³ Yemelianova, 'The De Facto State of Nagorno-Karabakh'.

⁴ Ruben Elamiryan and others, 'Russia and the Conflicts in the South Caucasus: Perspectives from Armenia and Azerbaijan', with Aris, Stephen and others, preprint, ETH Zurich, 30 October 2021, p. 14 p., application/pdf, 14 p., doi:10.3929/ETHZ-B-000514342.

neutralize Moscow's leverage and achieve the withdrawal of Russian troops from Nagorno-Karabakh in 2024, which had been stationed there since the 44-day war.⁵

Since the beginning of 2025, relations escalated due to a series of incidents, including the downing of an Azerbaijani civilian aircraft in December 2024 and actions taken against Azerbaijanis in Yekaterinburg.⁶

There is a substantial body of literature analyzing Azerbaijan-Russia relations since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and in recent years a number of new studies have addressed this relationship in light of the post-2020 context. Broadly, this corpus focuses on the implementation of strategy — energy diplomacy, military-technical cooperation, transport corridor politics, and patterns of hedging or balancing between great powers. This study adopts a different approach: rather than asking how cooperation or competition is enacted in practice, it asks how official rhetoric constructs and shapes the narrative of Azerbaijan's perception of Russia's role. It examines how this discourse navigates between coexisting, and at times competing, framings of Russia as threat and as ally — a tension captured in the characterization of the relationship as “frenemies”.⁷

Accordingly, this study poses the following research question: How does Azerbaijan's official rhetoric balance “allied cooperation” with Russia and the emphasis on its own sovereignty in the context of the 2020-2025 post-conflict realities?

For this purpose, this paper focuses on speeches of Azerbaijani president Ilham Aliyev that encompasses the period between 2020 and 2026. Using the method of Ethnographic Content Analysis it tries to reveal how Russia is constructed in Azerbaijani official rhetoric.

The paper is structured as follows: first it introduces the methodological approach employed for data collection and analysis, followed by a brief historical overview. Then, it presents the main analysis where extracted textual fragments are grouped into key thematic categories and conclusion, where key findings are summarized.

⁵ Irakli Sirbiladze, *Russia's Leverage Before the War in Ukraine*, The End of Russia's “Unipolar Moment” in the South Caucasus (German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2024), pp. 7–11 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep62978.6> [accessed 24 April 2026].

⁶ Denis Cenuşa, ‘The Nature of the Azerbaijan-Russia Relations: Through Crisis to More Symmetry’, *Geopolitics and Security Studies Center, GSSC (Previously Known as Eastern Europe Studies Centre, EESC)*, 2025 <https://www.gssc.lt/en/publication/the-nature-of-the-azerbaijan-russia-relations-through-crisis-to-more-symmetry/> [accessed 24 April 2026]; Merhat Sharipzhan, Current Time, ‘Deaths Of Azerbaijanis After Russian Police Raid Fuel Diplomatic Row With Baku’, News, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 17:36:07Z <https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan-russia-police-raid-deaths-caucasus-diplomacy/33460707.html> [accessed 3 July 2026]; ‘Russian Raids On Azerbaijanis In Yekaterinburg Trigger Diplomatic Crisis Between Moscow and Baku’, *Caucasus Watch*, 30 June 2025 <https://caucasuswatch.de/en/news/russian-raids-on-azerbaijanis-in-yekaterinburg-trigger-diplomatic-crisis-between-moscow-and-baku.html> [accessed 3 July 2026].

⁷ Tabib Huseynov, *AZERBAIJAN-RUSSIA: FRENEMIES FOREVER?*, 2025.

Methodology

The research was conducted using the Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) method developed by David Altheide.⁸ Unlike quantitative content analysis, which relies on calculating the frequency of words and concepts, ECA is a qualitative and flexible approach. It allows the researcher to read "between the lines," delving into the context, hidden meanings, and rhetorical nuances of official texts. The choice of this method is justified by the fact that it enables the researcher to remain flexible, continuously reviewing and adapting analytical categories throughout the study to align with emerging data.

To construct the dataset, purposive sampling was applied. The study material was collected from the official website President.az, covering the period from 2020 to 2025. The research targeted President I. Aliyev's speeches, interviews, and official statements containing the keywords "Russia" or "Russian". Overall, 55 official sources from the specified period were extracted and analyzed, alongside several key bilateral documents concerning Russian-Azerbaijani relations.

In line with the logic of ethnographic content analysis, a specific analytical protocol was developed to guide data collection and interpretation. This included guiding questions such as:

1) how is Russia framed or referred to in the given text (e.g., as a partner, ally, or mediator), and

2) what is the tone of this reference (positive, neutral, or negative)? This protocol was not static; it was continuously tested, enriched, and revised during direct engagement with the texts, thereby reflecting emerging patterns.

In the final stage of the analysis, the extracted textual segments and concepts were grouped according to core thematic directions. The main thematic categories established are: "allied interaction", "regional security", "transport communications", "economic relations", "humanitarian and historical ties" as well as the most crucial concept in the context of this study: "sovereignty-balancing". Such a thematic classification provides a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of Azerbaijan's diplomatic discourse directed toward Russia.

Allied Interaction

In Azerbaijan's official rhetoric, the concept of "allied interaction" with Russia is not static. While early statements in 2020-2021⁹ were dominated by neutral-

⁸ David Altheide, 'Ethnographic Content Analysis', *Qualitative Sociology*, 10 (1987), pp. 65–77, doi:10.1007/BF00988269.

⁹ 'Interv'yu Il'khama Aliyeva nemetskomu telekanalu ARD, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev's Interview with the German TV Channel ARD, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/45111> [accessed 14 June 2026]; 'Obrashcheniye Prezidenta Azerbaydzhana Il'khama Aliyeva k Narodu, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Address to the Nation by the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/45924> [accessed 26 April 2026].

positive terms such as “partner” and “neighbor” the discourse later shifted, first transitioning into a “strategic partnership”¹⁰ and subsequently being institutionalized at the highest level.¹¹

Central and foundational to this evolution is the Declaration on Allied Interaction signed on February 22, 2022.¹² It is characterized not only as a primary political document but also as an instrument that has elevated interstate ties to a new qualitative level in both form and content.¹³ Official Baku regularly reaffirms the existing “strong political will” at the leadership level to implement the provisions of the declaration, emphasizing that it is not merely declarative but aimed at concrete results.¹⁴

One of the crucial tools for legitimizing this allied relationship is “personal diplomacy”¹⁵. In official texts, the tone towards the Russian leadership is highly positive and respectful.¹⁶ Frequently resorting to a discourse of gratitude, the state alliance is reinforced by emphasizing the personal interactions, joint decisions, and mutual trust between Presidents Aliyev and Putin; for example, the cessation of the

¹⁰ Il'kham Aliyev Oznakomilsya v Dashkesane s Deyatel'nost'yu Integrirovannogo Regional'nogo Pererabatyvayushchego Kompleksa "Chovdar" ZAO AzerGold, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Familiarized Himself with the Activities of the "Chovdar" Integrated Regional Processing Complex of AzerGold CJSC in Dashkasan, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/52522> [accessed 26 April 2026].

¹¹ V Sochi Sostoyalas' Dvustoronnyaya Vstrecha Mezhdru Il'khamom Aliyevym i Prezidentom Rossii Vladimirom Putiny, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Bilateral Meeting Between Ilham Aliyev and Russian President Vladimir Putin was Held in Sochi, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/54419> [accessed 26 April 2026].

¹² ‘Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Mezhdunarodnoy Konferentsii Na Temu "Yuzhnyy Kavkaz: Razvitiye i Sotrudnichestvo", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Attended the International Conference "South Caucasus: Development and Cooperation", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/55909> [accessed 26 April 2026]; ‘Il'kham Aliyev Vystupil Na Shushinskom Global'nom Mediaforume, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Spoke at the Shusha Global Media Forum, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/60544> [accessed 26 April 2026].

¹³ ‘Sostoyalas' Vstrecha Il'khama Aliyeva s Predsedatelem Pravitel'stva Rossii, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Meeting was Held Between Ilham Aliyev and the Prime Minister of Russia, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/65170> [accessed 26 April 2026].

¹⁴ ‘Il'kham Aliyev Vystupil Na Shushinskom Global'nom Mediaforume, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Spoke at the Shusha Global Media Forum, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan].

¹⁵ Tizoc Chavez, ‘Presidential Transitions and the Role of Personal Diplomacy’, *Congress & the Presidency*, 53.1 (2026), pp. 3–32, doi:10.1080/07343469.2026.2638762.

¹⁶ ‘Il'kham Aliyev Obratilsya k Narodu, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/44435> [accessed 26 April 2026].

war and the ensuing stability are directly attributed to President Putin's personal intervention.¹⁷

- *"Of course, we highly appreciate your personal role in this matter".*
- *"I would like to once again express my gratitude to you for the role you played in the settlement of the Karabakh conflict..."*
- *"We expect the continuation of your active personal role and the role of Russia in achieving these goals".*
- *He emphasizes the personal contribution of the Russian President: "Through the mediation of the Russian Federation and personally President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, a trilateral Statement was signed..."*

Notably, the Azerbaijani side places special emphasis on the stability of the relations. The rhetoric is clear: the form and nature of cooperation have not changed,¹⁸ all "roadmaps" are being implemented,¹⁹ and problematic issues requiring resolution between the two countries "simply do not exist"²⁰. This discourse aims to present Russian-Azerbaijani relations as a stable partnership.

Azerbaijan does not limit its relations strictly to the military-political level. Special importance is attached to ongoing projects in transport infrastructure, energy, trade, economy, and humanitarian spheres.²¹ Remarkably, cooperation is

¹⁷ 'V Sochi Sostoyalas' Dvustoronnyaya Vstrecha Mezhdru Prezidentom Azerbaydzhana Il'khamom Aliyevym i Prezidentom Rossii Vladimirom Putinyom, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Bilateral Meeting Between the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and Russian President Vladimir Putin was Held in Sochi, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'.
¹⁸ 'Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu General'nomu Direktoru Mezhdunarodnogo Informatsionnogo Agentstva "Rossiya Segodnya" Dmitriyu Kiselevu, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Dmitry Kiselyov, Director General of the International Information Agency "Rossiya Segodnya", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/67537> [accessed 26 April 2026].

¹⁹ 'Il'kham Aliyev Oznakomilsya v Dashkesane s Deyatel'nost'yu Integrirovannogo Regional'nogo Pererabatyvayushchego Kompleksa "Chovdar" ZAO AzerGold, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Familiarized Himself with the Activities of the "Chovdar" Integrated Regional Processing Complex of AzerGold CJSC in Dashkasan, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'.
²⁰ 'Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye Vo 2-Om Shushinskom Global'nom Mediaforume, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Attended the 2nd Shusha Global Media Forum, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/66533> [accessed 26 April 2026].

²¹ 'Il'kham Aliyev i Pervaya Ledi Mekhriban Aliyeva Posetili Fizulinskiy, Zangilanskiy, Lachinskiy i Dzhebrail'skiy Rayony, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva Visited Fizuli, Zangilan, Lachin, and Jabrayil Districts, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/50632> [accessed 14 June 2026]; 'Prezidenty Azerbaydzhana i Turtsii Vystupili s Zayavleniyami Dlya Pressy, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Presidents of Azerbaijan and Turkey Made Press Statements, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/48792> [accessed 14 June 2026]; 'Interv'yu Il'khama Aliyeva Telekanalu "Evron'yus", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev's

highly valued not only at the federal level but also at the level of the subjects of the Russian Federation (e.g., Tatarstan,²² Dagestan,²³ Chechnya²⁴), making the alliance network denser and more multi-layered. This multifaceted interaction is combined with the rejection of Western (particularly French) mediation, explicitly viewing Russia as the preferred primary partner stemming from historical logic.²⁵ This, in turn, serves official Baku's strategy of keeping extra-regional powers out of the South Caucasus. Russia is juxtaposed against France, which Baku accuses of maintaining a "biased and pro-Armenian"²⁶ stance.

Economic Ties

In Azerbaijan's official rhetoric, the discourse on economic relations with Russia is characterized by a pronounced pragmatism.

One of the key narratives in this direction is energy diplomacy and the discourse of "non-competition". Given Europe's temporary energy crisis in light of the Russo-Ukrainian war, Azerbaijan has found itself in an in-between position. Official Baku openly acknowledges that the European Union has approached it with a request to increase gas supplies.²⁷ However, to maintain allied trust with

Interview with Euronews TV Channel, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/60723> [accessed 26 April 2026].

²² 'Sostoyalas' vstrecha Il'khama Aliyeva s Raisom Respubliki Tatarstan Rustamom Minnikhanovym, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Meeting was Held Between Ilham Aliyev and Rais of the Republic of Tatarstan Rustam Minnikhanov, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/60297> [accessed 26 April 2026].

²³ 'Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Rukovoditelya Respubliki Dagestan Rossiyskoy Federatsii, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Received the Head of the Republic of Dagestan of the Russian Federation, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/58102> [accessed 26 April 2026].

²⁴ Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Prokhodyashchey v Shushe Mezhdunarodnoy Konferentsii Na Temu "Formirovaniye Geopolitiki Bol'shoy Yevrazii: Ot Proshlogo k Nastoyashchemu i Budushchemu", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the International Conference in Shusha on "Shaping the Geopolitics of Greater Eurasia: From Past to Present and Future", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/59576> [accessed 26 April 2026].

²⁵ 'Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastnikov 53-Go Zasedaniya Soveta Rukovoditeley Organov Bezopasnosti i Spetsial'nykh Sluzhb Gosudarstv-Uchastnikov SNG, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Received the Participants of the 53rd Meeting of the Council of Heads of Security Agencies and Special Services of CIS Member States, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/61538> [accessed 26 April 2026].

²⁶ 'Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Myunkhene v Plenarnom Zasedanii Na Temu "Preodolevaya Gory? Postroyeniye Bezopasnosti Na Yuzhnom Kavkaze", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in a Plenary Session in Munich on "Moving Mountains? Building Security in the South Caucasus", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/58996> [accessed 26 April 2026].

²⁷ 'Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Telekanalu "Evron'yus", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Euronews TV Channel, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/62438>

Russia, Aliyev routinely emphasizes in his speeches that Azerbaijan “has never intended and has no intention to compete with Russian gas in the European market”, asserting that this policy is purely commercial in nature.²⁸ Furthermore, he firmly denies reports regarding the re-export of Russian gas to Europe, characterizing them as “informational manipulation”²⁹ and instead highlights, as a gesture of goodwill, the assistance provided to Russia's Gazprom in supplying gas to Armenia through Azerbaijani territory.³⁰

Another important layer is the discourse surrounding military-technical cooperation and food security. Russia is presented as a reliable partner and a major supplier of food commodities (grain, fertilizers)³¹. Highly praising Russian military equipment, Aliyev emphasizes that, unlike Armenia, Azerbaijan purchases it strictly at “market prices” without ever complaining about its quality.³² Such ironic comparisons (which are also present in rhetorical questions directed at Armenia regarding its trade turnover growth)³³ are aimed at positioning Azerbaijan as a

[accessed 26 April 2026]; ‘Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Forume "Karabakh: Vozvrashcheniye Domoy Spustya 30 Let. Dostizheniya i Trudnosti", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the Forum "Karabakh: Back Home After 30 Years. Accomplishments and Challenges", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/62400> [accessed 26 April 2026].

²⁸ ‘‘Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Mezhdunarodnoy Konferentsii Na Temu "Yuzhnyy Kavkaz: Razvitiye i Sotrudnichestvo", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Attended the International Conference "South Caucasus: Development and Cooperation", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’; ‘Prezident Frantsuzskoy Respubliki Emmanuel' Makron pozvonil Prezidentu Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki Il'khamu Aliyevu, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron Called the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/56842> [accessed 14 June 2026].

²⁹ Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Mestnym Telekanalam, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Local TV Channels, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/67871> [accessed 26 April 2026].

³⁰ ‘Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Prokhodivshey v Universitete ADA Mezhdunarodnoy Konferentsii Pod Nazvaniem "Novyy Vzglyad Na Yuzhnyy Kavkaz: Postkonfliktnoye Razvitiye i Sotrudnichestvo", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Attended the International Conference "A New Glimpse at the South Caucasus: Post-Conflict Development and Cooperation" at ADA University, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/51088> [accessed 26 April 2026].

³¹ ‘Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Mestnym Telekanalam, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Local TV Channels, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

³² ‘Il'kham Aliyev Provel Press-Konferentsiyu Dlya Predstaviteley Mestnykh i Zarubezhnykh SMI, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Held a Press Conference for Representatives of Local and Foreign Media, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/50738> [accessed 26 April 2026].

³³ Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye Vo 2-Om Shushinskom Global'nom Mediaforume, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Attended the 2nd Shusha Global Media Forum, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

solvent, independent, and non-subsidized partner. At the same time, the military-technical discourse adapts to new realities. Official Baku shows understanding toward the fact that Russia has temporarily exited the global arms market due to the war, yet expresses readiness to resume purchases in the future.³⁴

Within the economic rhetoric, the theme of resilience against geopolitical shocks occupies a distinct place. Aliyev continuously notes a steady growth in trade turnover (with an increase of around 17%, reaching up to 4.5 billion dollars as of 2024)³⁵ and the successful implementation of seven “roadmaps”.³⁶ To underscore its independence from Western economic influence, special emphasis is placed on the high percentage of transactions conducted in national currencies (70% for Azerbaijani exports and 50% for Russian exports),³⁷ as well as the transit of Russian oil through Azerbaijani territory.³⁸ Notably, to emphasize its own energy sovereignty, Aliyev invokes historical memory, recalling the 2006-2007 crisis when Baku demonstratively rejected Russian gas following a sharp price hike by Gazprom³⁹.

Parallel to this, Azerbaijan’s stance on integration projects, particularly the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), is highly telling. At the discursive level, Aliyev warmly welcomes the entry of Russian capital into the country (for instance, KAMAZ investments) and partnerships in shipbuilding and

³⁴ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Dal Interv’yu General’nomu Direktoru Mezhdunarodnogo Informatsionnogo Agentstva “Rossiya Segodnya” Dmitriyu Kiselevu, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Dmitry Kiselyov, Director General of the International Information Agency “Rossiya Segodnya”, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

³⁵ ‘Sostoyalas’ Vstrecha Il’khama Aliyeva s Predsedatelem Pravitel’sтва Rossii, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Meeting was Held Between Ilham Aliyev and the Prime Minister of Russia, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

³⁶ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Oznakomilsya v Dashkesane s Deyatel’nost’yu Integrirovannogo Regional’nogo Pererabatyvayushchego Kompleksa “Chovdar” ZAO AzerGold, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Familiarized Himself with the Activities of the “Chovdar” Integrated Regional Processing Complex of AzerGold CJSC in Dashkasan, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

³⁷ V Astane sostoyalas’ vstrecha Il’khama Aliyeva s Prezidentom Rossii Vladimirom Putinyem, Ofitsial’nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Meeting Between Ilham Aliyev and Russian President Vladimir Putin was Held in Astana, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/66383> [accessed 26 April 2026].

³⁸ ‘Sostoyalas’ Vstrecha Il’khama Aliyeva s Rukovoditelyami Vedushchikh Kompaniy Germanii, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Meeting was Held Between Ilham Aliyev and Heads of Leading German Companies, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/59166> [accessed 26 April 2026].

³⁹ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Dal Interv’yu Mestnym Telekanalam, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Local TV Channels, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/58555> [accessed 26 April 2026].

pharmaceuticals;⁴⁰ however, he draws a clear line, stating that Azerbaijan has no plans to join the EAEU and is guided purely by pragmatism.⁴¹

Transport Communications

In Azerbaijan's official rhetoric, the theme of transport communications occupies a distinctive place. Analysis reveals that within this discourse, Azerbaijan attempts to position itself as an indispensable logistical hub, simultaneously utilizing transport projects as leverage to strengthen its position in regional processes.

The central axis here is the International North-South Transport Corridor. In official texts, Aliyev routinely emphasizes the global significance of this project and the importance of joint work with Russia.⁴²

The rhetoric adapts to new geopolitical realities, particularly against the backdrop of the Russo-Ukrainian war and sanctions. Aliyev notes that the corridors passing through Azerbaijani territory have become vitally necessary for Russia, highlighting that the development of this project aligns directly with Russian interests.⁴³ In this context, Azerbaijan presents itself as a partner that has already completed or is currently modernizing the necessary infrastructure on its territory.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ 'Il'kham Aliyev Vstretilsya s Predstavatelyami Obshchestvennosti Dzhebrail'skogo Rayona, Zalozhil Fundament Memorial'nogo Kompleksa i Vosstanovleniya Goroda, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Met with Representatives of the Public of Jabrayil District, Laid the Foundation for a Memorial Complex and the Restoration of the City, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/53343> [accessed 14 June 2026].

⁴¹ 'Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Mezhdunarodnom Forume Na Temu "COP29 i Zelenoye Videniye Dlya Azerbaydzhana", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the International Forum on "COP29 and Green Vision for Azerbaijan", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/65580> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁴² 'Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Mezhdunarodnom Forume Na Temu "COP29 i Zelenoye Videniye Dlya Azerbaydzhana", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the International Forum on "COP29 and Green Vision for Azerbaijan", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'; 'V Astane sostoyalas' vstrecha Il'khama Aliyeva s Prezidentom Rossii Vladimirom Putiny, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [A Meeting Between Ilham Aliyev and Russian President Vladimir Putin was Held in Astana, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'.

⁴³ 'Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Telekanalu "Evron'yus", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Euronews TV Channel, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'.

⁴⁴ 'V Universitete ADA s Uchastiyem Il'khama Aliyeva Sostoyalas' Mezhdunarodnyy Forum Na Temu "K Novomu Miroporyadku", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [An International Forum "Towards a New World Order" was Held at ADA University with the Participation of Ilham Aliyev, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/68514> [accessed 26 April 2026]; 'Il'kham Aliyev i Prezident Vladimir Putin Vystupili s Zayavleniyami Dlya Pressy, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev and President Vladimir Putin Made Press Statements, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/66707> [accessed 26 April 2026].

Azerbaijan declares that both the railway and highway sections of the project within its borders are fully ready, and Baku can accommodate at least 15 million tons of cargo traffic moving south from Russia.⁴⁵ By emphasizing the project's "global significance" Aliyev also promotes the Azerbaijan-Russia-Iran trilateral format, which involves not only transport networks but also the interconnection of power transmission lines.⁴⁶

Another crucial component of the transport communications discourse involves the narrative surrounding the so-called "Zangezur Corridor" and Armenia's sovereignty.

The analysis uncovers a clear tactic: particularly between 2020 and 2024, Aliyev deliberately marginalizes Armenia from the decision-making process, recognizing Russia as the primary subject of negotiations. He justifies this by asserting that Armenia's railway network is "100 percent owned by Russian Railways"⁴⁷. In official speeches, Armenia is characterized as a "dependent country" and a "small, poor satellite" of Russia.⁴⁸ Such aggressive rhetoric aims to legitimize the claim that the opening of the "Zangezur Corridor" presented as a logical offshoot of the North-South route, is coordinated with Russia and directly serves the interests of Russia (and other regional players).⁴⁹

⁴⁵ 'Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Mezhdunarodnom Forume Na Temu "COP29 i Zelenoye Videniye Dlya Azerbaydzhana", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the International Forum on "COP29 and Green Vision for Azerbaijan", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan].

⁴⁶ 'Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Sekretarya Vysshego Soveta Natsional'noy Bezopasnosti Irana, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Received the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/67879> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁴⁷ 'Il'kham Aliyev prinyal uchastiye v mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii v Baku na temu "Vdol' Srednego koridora: geopolitika, bezopasnost' i ekonomika", Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the International Conference in Baku "Along the Middle Corridor: Geopolitics, Security and Economy", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/57968> [accessed 26 April 2026]; 'Il'kham Aliyev Obratilsya k Narodu, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan].

⁴⁸ 'Il'kham Aliyev prinyal uchastiye v mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii v Baku na temu "Vdol' Srednego koridora" [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the International Conference in Baku "Along the Middle Corridor"].

⁴⁹ 'Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Telekanalu "Al'-Arabiya", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Al Arabiya TV Channel, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/69968> [accessed 26 April 2026]; 'Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Telekanalu "Evron'yus", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Euronews TV Channel, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]; 'Prezident Frantsuzskoy Respubliki Emmanyuel' Makron pozvonil Prezidentu Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki Il'khamu Aliyevu, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron Called the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]; 'Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Mestnym Telekanalam, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an

Furthermore, throughout 2022-2024, at the discursive level, Baku “defended” Russian interests in Armenia by referencing the November 10 (9) Statement and demanding that control over the corridor be handed over to Russian border guards. Aliyev mockingly raised a rhetorical question as to why Armenia opposes the Russian presence in the corridor when they already control Armenia’s airport and borders.⁵⁰

Beyond infrastructure, Azerbaijan underscores its role as an energy and logistics mediator. Aliyev openly states that Azerbaijan is acting as a mediator between Ukraine and the EU in negotiations to continue the transit of Russian gas to Europe, and is ready to make the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline available for Russian oil exports, a move that aligns with Baku’s commercial interests.⁵¹

In the political arena, this economic and logistical interdependence is reinforced by institutional initiatives. Aliyev highly values cooperation with the EAEU (highlighting Putin’s invitation) and particularly promotes the “3+3” regional cooperation format.⁵² References to this format and the joint Russian-Turkish monitoring center in Aghdam⁵³ (between 2020-2022) are indicative of Azerbaijan’s strategy, which sought to monopolize regional security and logistics issues among regional powers (Russia, Turkey, Iran), thereby blocking the entry of extra-regional (Western) forces and solidifying the Moscow-Ankara-Baku axis.

Interview to Local TV Channels, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/63017> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁵⁰ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Dal Interv’yu Mestnym Telekanalam, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Local TV Channels, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁵¹ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Prokhodyashchey v Shushe Mezhdunarodnoy Konferentsii Na Temu "Formirovaniye Geopolitiki Bol'shoy Yevrazii: Ot Proshlogo k Nastoyashchemu i Budushchemu", Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the International Conference in Shusha on "Shaping the Geopolitics of Greater Eurasia: From Past to Present and Future", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]; ‘Il’kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye Vo 2-Om Shushinskom Global’nom Mediaforume, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Attended the 2nd Shusha Global Media Forum, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁵² ‘Il’kham Aliyev prinyal uchastiye v mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii v Baku na temu "Vdol' Srednego koridora: geopolitika, bezopasnost' i ekonomika", Ofitsial’nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the International Conference in Baku "Along the Middle Corridor: Geopolitics, Security and Economy", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]; ‘Il’kham Aliyev Prinyal Sekretarya Vysshego Soveta Natsional'noy Bezopasnosti Irana, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Received the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁵³ ‘Il’kham Aliyev prinyal uchastiye v mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii v Baku na temu "Vdol' Srednego koridora: geopolitika, bezopasnost' i ekonomika", Ofitsial’nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the International Conference in Baku "Along the Middle Corridor: Geopolitics, Security and Economy", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

Humanitarian and Historical Ties

In Azerbaijan's official rhetoric, humanitarian and historical ties serve a dual purpose: on the one hand, they legitimize the "allied" relationship with Russia as a historically justified necessity; on the other hand, they reframe historical facts to favor Azerbaijan's territorial and political ambitions.

Aliyev frequently employs the terms "Tsarist Russia" and the "Russian Empire" not with historical neutrality, but with a sharply critical tone.⁵⁴ He presents the "resettlement of Armenians" under early 19th-century treaties (Kurakchay, Gulistan, Turkmenchay) as a deliberate process aimed at "altering the religious composition in the new lands of the empire".⁵⁵ This claim occupies a cornerstone position in Azerbaijani propaganda, attempting, on the one hand, to deny the indigenous presence of Armenians in the region, and on the other, interpreting it as a blow dealt by the empire to "Azerbaijani statehood". Furthermore, the actions of the Russian Empire are portrayed by Aliyev in a negative light, particularly regarding the dissolution of the "Albanian Church" and its subordination to the Armenian Church. Aliyev's claim aligns with official Azerbaijani historiography but contradicts the widely accepted approach in historical science and, in fact, reality, according to which the Catholicosate of Gandzasar was the Catholicosate of Caucasian Albania (Aghvank) of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The purpose of this discourse is evident: to depict the Armenian presence in the region as "artificial" and the product of imperialist policies, thereby denying Armenia's claim to the territories.⁵⁶

Even in more contemporary realities, a tone of hostility persists. Aliyev portrays the activities of the Armenian diaspora in Russia (such as the cases involving

⁵⁴ 'Il'kham Aliyev dal interv'yu turetskomu telekanalu Haber Türk, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Turkish TV Channel Haber Türk, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/42869> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁵⁵ 'Interv'yu Il'khama Aliyeva Nemetskomu Telekanalu ARD, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev's Interview with German TV Channel ARD, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/45111> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁵⁶ 'Leo, Hayots' patmut'yun, Yerkeri zhoghovatsu, h. III [Leo, History of Armenia, Collected Works, vol. III] (Yerevan, 1973); Lernik A. Mkrtumyan, Aghvanits' (Gandzasari) Kat'oghikusut'yuny [Lernik A. Mkrtumyan, The Catholicosate of Aghvank (Gandzasar)], <https://orient.sci.am/archive/58/article-6nRqkxoeY3TSj9h4li0pgrZwWvKNCIAO2HcFQuP.pdf> [accessed 4 July 2026]; 'Henrik Svazyan, Aghvanits' Yekeghets'in [Henrik Svazyan, The Church of Aghvank], https://arar.sci.am/Content/254851/file_0.pdf [accessed 4 July 2026]; 'Hayk Karapetyan, Gandzasari Kat'oghikusut'yune ZHE. Dari Verjin Yev ZH-E Dari Skzbin [Hayk Karapetyan, The Catholicosate of Gandzasar at the End of the 17th and Beginning of the 18th Century], https://arar.sci.am/Content/253999/file_0.pdf [accessed 4 July 2026]; George Bournoutian, *From the Kur to the Aras: A Military History of Russia's Move into the South Caucasus and the First Russo-Iranian War, 1801-1813* (BRILL, 2020).

Ruben Vardanyan or the film about Garegin Nzhdeh) as “propaganda of fascism” that also threatens Russia.⁵⁷

Conversely, the humanitarian discourse is exceedingly warm and positive. Aliyev emphasizes the “brotherly ties” between Azerbaijan and Russia and the friendship between their peoples.⁵⁸ In this context, the “special care” given to the Russian language in Azerbaijan is of significant importance, highlighting Russian-language tuition in over 320 schools and the presence of branches of Moscow universities.⁵⁹

The presentation of Soviet ties in Aliyev’s rhetoric is designed to strengthen bilateral trust by underscoring the positive legacy of the Soviet era. Particular emphasis is placed on the joint victory in the Great Patriotic War.⁶⁰ Additionally, highlighting Heydar Aliyev’s role in the construction of the BAM (Baikal-Amur Mainline) plays an important part in this rhetoric.⁶¹

Overall, Aliyev speaks of the Russian side as an “ally” and a “friend” utilizing symbols such as language and history to secure Moscow’s trust. However, these “concessions” in the cultural arena provide Azerbaijan with the necessary maneuverability in the political arena.

Sovereignty-Balancing, Regional Security

The central and arguably most complex layer of Azerbaijan’s official rhetoric is the discourse on “sovereignty and balancing”. In this regard, a sharp transformation in tone is observed: while the warmth of partnership prevails in economic and transport matters, on issues concerning sovereignty, Baku’s discourse becomes rigid, demanding, and occasionally markedly critical.

⁵⁷ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Obratilsya k Narodu, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁵⁸ ‘Interv’yu Il’khama Aliyeva Avtoritetnomu Rossiyskomu Zhurnalu “Natsional’naya Oborona”, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev’s Interview with the Prestigious Russian Magazine “National Defense”, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/53199> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁵⁹ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Provel Press-Konferentsiyu Dlya Predstaviteley Mestnykh i Zarubezhnykh SMI, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Held a Press Conference for Representatives of Local and Foreign Media, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁶⁰ ‘Sostoyalas’ Vstrecha Il’khama Aliyeva s Predsedatelem Pravitel’sтва Rossii, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Meeting was Held Between Ilham Aliyev and the Prime Minister of Russia, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁶¹ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Prinyal Ministrov Inostrannykh Del, Natsional’noy Oborony i Nachal’nika Natsional’noy Razvedyvatel’noy Organizatsii Turtsii, Ofitsial’nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Received the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, National Defense, and the Head of the National Intelligence Organization of Turkey, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/46077> [accessed 26 April 2026].

Azerbaijan spares no effort in demonstrating that good relations with Russia are anchored exclusively on mutual respect for independence, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of borders,⁶² and that “national interests always come first”.⁶³

The most vivid episode of this balancing act and the demonstration of diplomatic “red lines” is the reality surrounding aviation incidents. When an Azerbaijani civilian aircraft was shot down over Russian territory,⁶⁴ Aliyev’s rhetoric became unprecedentedly harsh. The international investigation, which included specialists from Azerbaijan, Russia, Brazil, and ICAO revealed that the aircraft was damaged from the outside, and Azerbaijan announced the discovery of fragments of a Russian “Pantsir-S” missile.⁶⁵

Aliyev characterized the initial Russian official versions (a bird strike) as “delirium”, “absurdity” and “nonsense”⁶⁶ openly blaming Russian representatives and demanding an investigation by an international, rather than a Russian, committee. Furthermore, Aliyev compared this to the “accidental” downing of a Russian helicopter by Azerbaijan in 2020, when Baku immediately apologized and punished those responsible, whereas Russia, according to Aliyev, was trying to “cover up” the incident.⁶⁷

⁶² ‘Deklaratsiya o soyuznicheskom vzaimodeystvii mezhdru Rossiyskoy Federatsiyey i Azerbaydzhanskoy Respublikoy’ [Declaration on Allied Interaction between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Azerbaijan] <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/5777> [accessed 24 April 2026].

⁶³ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Panel’nom Zasedanii Na Temu "Strategicheskoy Vzgl'yad: Yevraziya" Davosskogo Vsemirnogo Ekonomicheskogo Foruma, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in a Panel Session on "Strategic Outlook: Eurasia" at the Davos World Economic Forum, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/35647> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁶⁴ R/K "Azatutyun", ‘Bakvits' Grozni t'rch'ogh mardatar ink'nat'ir e kortsanvel [Passenger Plane Flying from Baku to Grozny Crashed]’, Lurer, "Azat Yevropa/Azatutyun" radiokayan [News, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty] <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/bakvits-grozni-trchogh-mardatar-inknatir-e-kortsanvel-/33252276.html> [accessed 18 June 2026].

⁶⁵ ‘Adrbejanakan ink'nat'iri kortsaman hetak'nnut'yan ardyunk'nery khraparakven arajika orerin [The Results of the Investigation into the Crash of the Azerbaijani Plane Will Be Published in the Coming Days]’, 4 February 2025 <https://www.1lurer.am/hy/2025/02/04/Ադրբեջանական-ինքնաթիռի-կործանման-հետաքննության-արդյունքները-կհրապարակվեն-առաջիկա-օրերին/1259729> [accessed 18 June 2026].

⁶⁶ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Azerbaydzhanskomu Televideniyu, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Azerbaijani Television, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/67806> [accessed 26 April 2026]; ‘Il’kham Aliyev Vstretitsya s Chlenami Semey Pogibshego v Aviakatastrofe Ekipazha i Vyzhivshimi Bortprovodnikami, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Met with the Family Members of the Crew Killed in the Plane Crash and the Surviving Flight Attendants, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/67842> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁶⁷ ‘Il’kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Telekanalu "Al-Arabiya", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Al Arabiya TV Channel, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

The final resolution of the Azerbaijani civilian aircraft incident occurred on April 15, 2026, when Russia and Azerbaijan issued a joint statement.⁶⁸ The parties officially confirmed that the plane crashed in Russian airspace as a result of an unintentional strike by an air defense system. The Russian side agreed to pay financial compensation to the families of the victims and the survivors.⁶⁹

The resolution of this tough stance, Vladimir Putin's personal apology, is presented in official texts not merely as a diplomatic gesture, but as an indicator of Azerbaijan's "state power and international prestige" emphasizing that this was the first instance of Russia apologizing to another state.⁷⁰

Another pillar of the sovereignty discourse is geopolitical independence, particularly against the backdrop of the Ukrainian crisis. Despite the declaration of alliance with Moscow, Aliyev openly and "without concealing it" states that Azerbaijan supports the territorial integrity of Ukraine.⁷¹

Moreover, Azerbaijan does not hesitate to openly criticize the instruments of Russian influence in the South Caucasus. For example, in his speeches, Russian peacekeepers face severe criticism, whom Aliyev accuses of allowing the "infiltration of Armenian mines".⁷² At the same time, he expresses dissatisfaction and criticism regarding instances where peacekeepers allowed foreign citizens (e.g., members of the French Parliament) to enter Nagorno-Karabakh without Azerbaijan's permission. His tone on this issue is strictly cautionary: he asserts that the peacekeepers were informed that no foreigner could go there without their permission.⁷³ An even harsher discourse is applied against the activities of Ruben

⁶⁸ 'Russia, Azerbaijan Reach Agreement on Resolving Aftermath of AZAL Plane Crash', TASS, <https://tass.com/politics/2117461> [accessed 18 June 2026].

⁶⁹ 'Vlasti Chechni Ob'yavili Traur v Svyazi s Aviakatastrofoy Pod Aktau - Gazeta.Ru | Novosti [Chechen Authorities Declared Mourning in Connection with the Plane Crash Near Aktau - Gazeta.Ru | News]', Gazeta.Ru, 27 December 2024 <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/-2024/12/27/24731846.shtml> [accessed 18 June 2026].

⁷⁰ 'V Dushanbe Sostoyalas' Vstrecha Prezidenta Azerbaydzhana Il'khama Aliyeva s Prezidentom Rossii Vladimirom Putinyom v Formate Odin Na Odin, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A One-on-One Meeting Between the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and Russian President Vladimir Putin was Held in Dushanbe, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/70298> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁷¹ 'Il'kham Aliyev v Gorode Chernobbio Dal Interv'yu Ital'yanskoy Gazete Il Sole 24 Ore, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to the Italian Newspaper Il Sole 24 Ore in Chernobbio, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/57095> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁷² 'Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Mestnym Telekanalam, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Local TV Channels, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan].

⁷³ 'Pod predsedatel'stvom Prezidenta Il'khama Aliyeva sostoyalos' soveshchaniye v videoformate, posvyashchennoye itogam 2020 goda, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Video Conference Chaired by President Ilham Aliyev Dedicated to the Results of 2020 was Held, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/49933> [accessed 26 April 2026].

Vardanyan in Artsakh. He is labeled as a “Russian citizen” who was “smuggled” into Karabakh.⁷⁴ Similarly, during the 44-day war of 2020, Russian political circles are criticized for supposedly “supporting Nikol Pashinyan, who is considered ‘anti-Russian’”,⁷⁵ or for “allowing ethnic Armenian oligarchs to send weapons and mercenaries from Russia”.⁷⁶

Finally, sovereignty is constructed by portraying Armenia as dependent on external powers. As proof of its own full independence, official rhetoric constantly notes that, unlike Armenia, where Russia has a military base and controls the borders, there is “not a single Russian soldier” on Azerbaijani territory.⁷⁷ Aliyev also recalls that Russia was part of the OSCE Minsk Group (accused of “monopolizing” the issue for many years), a format that has finally “died”,⁷⁸ and that relations must now be built on new, peer-to-peer rules.

In Azerbaijan's official discourse, the interpretation of security relations with Russia is distinguished by multi-layered balancing. Ilham Aliyev's rhetoric reflects a complex tightrope walk: on one hand, Russia's role as a key regional security actor is recognized and legitimized;⁷⁹ on the other hand, threats are reconceptualized, and its own sovereignty is strictly defended, especially under the circumstances created by the Russo-Ukrainian war.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ ‘Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Myunkhene v Plenarnom Zasedanii Na Temu "Preodolevaya Gory? Postroyeniye Bezopasnosti Na Yuzhnom Kavkaze", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in a Plenary Session in Munich on "Moving Mountains? Building Security in the South Caucasus", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁷⁵ ‘Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Turetskomu Telekanalu A Haber, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Turkish TV Channel A Haber, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/43250> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁷⁶ ‘Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Myunkhene v Plenarnom Zasedanii Na Temu "Preodolevaya Gory? Postroyeniye Bezopasnosti Na Yuzhnom Kavkaze", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in a Plenary Session in Munich on "Moving Mountains? Building Security in the South Caucasus", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁷⁷ ‘Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Telekanalu "Al'-Arabiya", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Al Arabiya TV Channel, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁷⁸ ‘Il'kham Aliyev Obratilsya k Narodu, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁷⁹ ‘Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Telekanalu "Al'-Dzhazira", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Al Jazeera TV Channel, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/41429> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁸⁰ ‘Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Myunkhene v Plenarnom Zasedanii Na Temu "Preodolevaya Gory? Postroyeniye Bezopasnosti Na Yuzhnom Kavkaze", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in a Plenary Session in Munich on "Moving Mountains? Building Security in the South Caucasus", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

The Azerbaijani official narrative consistently highlights Russia's role in halting the 44-day war in 2020 and resolving the September 2022 escalation.⁸¹ He characterizes Russia not only as a great power but also as a regional country with a direct interest in maintaining stability in the South Caucasus. Aliyev notes that Russia differs from Western actors because, according to him, it is located within the region itself and has a better understanding of local political and security realities.⁸²

During the studied period, the most dynamic shift occurred in the rhetoric regarding Russian peacekeepers. Between 2020 and 2022, he frequently describes them as an "important factor of stability" and notes that no serious incidents were recorded in their zone of responsibility.⁸³ He also publicly thanks the peacekeepers and emphasizes that numerous operational issues are resolved with their participation.⁸⁴ However, the emphasis on sovereignty is already visible here. Aliyev constantly reminds that the presence of the peacekeepers is temporary and based on Azerbaijan's consent.⁸⁵

Prior to their withdrawal in 2024, official Baku employed a tactic of harsh rhetorical pressure, questioning their effectiveness.⁸⁶ The discourse frequently

⁸¹ 'Pod Predsedatel'stvom Il'khama Aliyeva Sostoyalos' Soveshchaniye, Posvyashchennoye Itogam Shesti Mesyatsev Etogo Goda, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Meeting Chaired by Ilham Aliyev Dedicated to the Results of the First Six Months of This Year was Held, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/56665> [accessed 18 June 2026]; 'Il'kham Aliyev prinyal uchastiye v zasedanii Soveta glav gosudarstv SNG v Astane, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Attended the Meeting of the CIS Heads of State Council in Astana, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/57566> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁸² 'Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastnikov 53-Go Zasedaniya Soveta Rukovoditeley Organov Bezopasnosti i Spetsial'nykh Sluzhb Gosudarstv-Uchastnikov SNG, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Received the Participants of the 53rd Meeting of the Council of Heads of Security Agencies and Special Services of CIS Member States, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'.

⁸³ Interv'yu Il'khama Aliyeva Avtoritetnomu Rossiyskomu Zhurnalu "Natsional'naya Oborona", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev's Interview with the Prestigious Russian Magazine "National Defense", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'.

⁸⁴ 'V Sochi sostoyalos' trekhstoronnyaya vstrecha mezhdru Prezidentom Rossii Vladimirom Putiny, Prezidentom Azerbaydzhana Il'khamom Aliyevym i prem'yer-ministrom Armenii Nikolom Pashinyanom, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A Trilateral Meeting Between Russian President Vladimir Putin, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan was Held in Sochi, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/54420> [accessed 14 June 2026].

⁸⁵ 'Il'kham Aliyev Provel Press-Konferentsiyu Dlya Predstaviteley Mestnykh i Zarubezhnykh SMI, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Held a Press Conference for Representatives of Local and Foreign Media, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'.

⁸⁶ 'Pod predsedatel'stvom Prezidenta Il'khama Aliyeva sostoyalos' soveshchaniye v videoformate, posvyashchennoye itogam 2020 goda, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki [A

raised the deployment of Armenian-made mines in the peacekeepers' zone of responsibility in 2021,⁸⁷ the downing of the Azerbaijani civilian aircraft by the Russian side and the subsequent justifications characterized by Aliyev as “kindergarten-like” and the transportation of “illegal ore” through the Lachin (Berdzor) corridor.⁸⁸

All this served to legitimize the installation of the Lachin (Berdzor) checkpoint. Aliyev’s statement that Azerbaijan did not ask the Russian side but simply informed them of its actions is characteristic. However, following the end of the conflict and the premature departure of the peacekeepers, the discourse softens sharply. The withdrawal is presented as proof of the trust and the “high level of alliance” between the two leaders, demonstrating that the two sides manage to resolve even the most sensitive issues without confrontation.⁸⁹

In this context, Ilham Aliyev categorically denies all accusations of ethnic cleansing or the forced displacement of Armenians. According to the official Azerbaijani view, the departure of the Armenian population after the September 2023 events was their “own decision”.⁹⁰ According to him, Azerbaijan provided “the most comfortable conditions possible” for those leaving. Aliyev strongly criticizes France and certain representatives of the European Union (such as Josep Borrell) for spreading “false narratives” and “black propaganda” regarding ethnic cleansing.⁹¹

Video Conference Chaired by President Ilham Aliyev Dedicated to the Results of 2020 was Held, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁸⁷ Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Forume "Karabakh: Vozvrashcheniye Domoy Spustya 30 Let. Dostizheniya i Trudnosti", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the Forum "Karabakh: Back Home After 30 Years. Accomplishments and Challenges", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'; 'Il'kham Aliyev Vystupil Na Shushinskoy Global'nom Mediaforume, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Spoke at the Shusha Global Media Forum, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁸⁸ 'Sostoyalas' Vstrecha s Uchastnikami III Shushinskogo Global'nogo Mediaforuma, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [A Meeting was Held with the Participants of the 3rd Shusha Global Media Forum, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/69421> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁸⁹ 'Sostoyalas' Vstrecha Prezidenta Il'khama Aliyeva i Prezidenta Vladimira Putina Odin Na Odin, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [A One-on-One Meeting was Held Between President Ilham Aliyev and President Vladimir Putin, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’, <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/65564> [accessed 26 April 2026].

⁹⁰ ‘ Il'kham Aliyev Dal Interv'yu Telekanalu "Evron'yus", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Euronews TV Channel, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'; 'Interv'yu Il'khama Aliyeva Telekanalu "Evron'yus", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev's Interview with Euronews TV Channel, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]’.

⁹¹ ‘ Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastnikov 53-Go Zasedaniya Soveta Rukovoditeley Organov Bezopasnosti i Spetsial'nykh Sluzhb Gosudarstv-Uchastnikov SNG, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Received the Participants of the 53rd Meeting of the Council of Heads of Security Agencies and Special Services of CIS Member States, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan]'; ‘V Universitete ADA s Uchastiyem Il'khama

In Aliyev's rhetoric, Russian-Turkish cooperation gains special significance. He frequently presents the joint Turkish-Russian monitoring center as a new and effective format for ensuring security in the region.⁹² In his view, the foundation of regional stability is not Western intervention, but rather the cooperation between Russia, Turkey, and other states of the region. This idea is most clearly expressed through the support shown for the "3+3" format, where Russia is viewed as a key participant in regional security.⁹³

Conclusion

The complex and dynamic mechanisms of constructing Russia's image in Azerbaijan's official rhetoric during the 2020-2025 period highlight that Baku's discourse toward Russia is built on a foundation of dualism. The primary sources for this research were the speeches, statements, and other materials published on the official website of the President of Azerbaijan. This selection is justified by the fact that in Azerbaijan's political system, the formulation and implementation of foreign policy are largely concentrated in the hands of the country's president. At the same time, the use of such a source base has certain limitations. In particular, exclusively studying the president's statements does not always allow for a complete reconstruction of the entire process of attitude formation and communication, considering the multi-layered nature of diplomatic practices, strategic communication, and political messaging. Attitudes and discourses regarding foreign policy are also formed and disseminated through other official and unofficial platforms, which are subjects for separate studies.

In the official discourse of the Azerbaijani leader, Russia is presented through various formulations: neighbor, partner, and subsequently, ally, which was codified in the 2022 Moscow Declaration. This shift is presented not as a coincidence, but as the result of the "strong political will" and personal trust between the leaders of the two countries, allowing relations to remain stable even amidst global geopolitical crises.

Aliyeva Sostoyalsya Mezhdunarodnyy Forum Na Temu "K Novomu Miroporyadku", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [An International Forum "Towards a New World Order" was Held at ADA University with the Participation of Ilham Aliyev, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan].

⁹² 'Il'kham Aliyev Prinyal Uchastiye v Forume "Karabakh: Vozvrashcheniye Domoy Spustya 30 Let. Dostizheniya i Trudnosti", Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Participated in the Forum "Karabakh: Back Home After 30 Years. Accomplishments and Challenges", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan].

⁹³ 'Il'kham Aliyev Vystupil s Rech'yu Na V S'yезде Azerbaydzhantsev Mira v Shushe, Ofitsial'nyy Sayt Prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Delivered a Speech at the 5th Congress of World Azerbaijanis in Shusha, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/55859> [accessed 18 June 2026]; 'Il'kham Aliyev dal interv'yu Anatoliyskomu agentstvu Turtsii, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoj Respubliki [Ilham Aliyev Gave an Interview to Turkey's Anadolu Agency, Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan], <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/53249> [accessed 18 June 2026].

On the one hand, Azerbaijan constructs Russia as an indispensable ally and partner. This is manifested through the emphasis on bilateral economic relations, the development of the “North-South” transport corridor, as well as the preservation of humanitarian and historical ties and the Russian language. This discourse serves as a tool to mitigate tensions with Russia and encourage “allied interaction”.

On the other hand, in the post-conflict period, Azerbaijan strives to consolidate its status as a state with greater autonomy, consistently balancing Russian influence and emphasizing its own sovereignty. The premature departure of the Russian peacekeepers is presented in the official discourse as a manifestation of high-level trust. At the same time, the denial of ethnic cleansing and the framing of the depopulation of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh as the population's “own decision” demonstrate how Azerbaijan legitimizes its actions by rejecting any possibility of external (including Russian) intervention.

The research reveals that in Azerbaijan's rhetoric, allied ties do not imply political dependence. On the contrary, Baku employs a model of “symmetric partnership”, where any action threatening its own sovereignty meets with a harsh, demanding, and sometimes critical response. This allows Azerbaijan to present itself as an independent regional power in its relations with Russia.

Nevertheless, Azerbaijan positions itself as an indispensable geo-economic hub for Russia. Official rhetoric exploits the Western sanctions imposed against Russia, emphasizing the vital importance of the routes passing through Azerbaijani territory for Moscow. Simultaneously, by promoting the “3+3” format, Baku seeks to monopolize regional security together with Russia, pushing out extra-regional forces. Aliyev initiated this discourse as early as 2020, and by April 2022, he was already speaking about the necessity of its continuation.

In summary, during the studied period, Azerbaijan's official rhetoric constructed a model of relations with Russia based on a “symmetric partnership”. It allows for the utilization of the economic and security advantages provided by allied relations, while simultaneously maintaining ample room for geopolitical maneuvering.

Azerbaijan attempts to keep Russia at a close enough distance to neutralize threats, and at a far enough distance to emphasize its own independent role in the region.

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63. 'Sostoyalas' vstrecha Il'khama Aliyeva s Raisom Respubliki Tatarstan Rustamom Minnikhanovym, Ofitsial'nyy sayt prezidenta Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki', <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/60297> [accessed 26 April 2026].

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

THE POSITIONS OF THE SOUTH CAUCASUS COUNTRIES ON THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

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Abstract

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the long-standing conflicts in the Middle East, whose impact and repercussions extend beyond the borders of the region. This article examines the positions of the South Caucasus states (Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan) on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and aims to show how foreign policy priorities and alliances, as well as existing ties with the conflicting parties, influence these positions. The importance of the topic is also due to the war that began in 2023 between Israel and the Hamas group. The situation in the conflict zone also affects the South Caucasus, considering the security and energy ties between the two regions. The study was conducted based on the analysis of official positions, voting results on United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions, and other documents. The study shows that the three South Caucasus states support the “two-state solution” principle, but the approaches expressing this differ, taking into account each country's alliances and foreign policy interests.

Keywords: *South Caucasus, Middle East, Israel, Palestine, UN resolutions, conflict, strategic ties, energy.*

Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the proclamation of independent republics coincided chronologically with a period of Arab-Israeli negotiations, when there was considerable optimism about resolving the long-standing conflict. These diplomatic efforts, however, did not lead to a resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Following a large-scale Hamas attack on the morning of October 7, 2023, the Gaza–Israel war began, which lasted for two years (as of January 2026, a ceasefire has been established).

The purpose of this research is to examine the positions of the South Caucasus states on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and, in particular, the Israel–Hamas war

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that began in 2023. The importance and timeliness of this issue are also due to the fact that the war has not been limited to Gaza and Israel, but has also drawn in other states. Parallel to this, military operations have been ongoing between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah, Israel has launched numerous airstrikes on southern Lebanon and the capital, Beirut, and in June 2025, a 12-day war broke out between Israel and Iran, which also involved the United States. At this stage, the Houthis from Yemen have also had limited participation in the war. The above testifies to the broad regional nature of the conflict and its potential for expansion.

Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan have officially supported the “two-state solution” principle. The “two-state solution” principle dates back to 1947. UNGA Resolution 181, which proposed dividing the British Mandate of Palestine into two states - Jewish and Arab, and placing Jerusalem under international administration¹. Resolution 242, adopted by the UN Security Council after the 1967 Arab-Israeli Six-Day War, also expressed this idea, emphasizing the principle of “respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of every State in the region,” as well as their right “to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries.”² The principle of the “creation of two states,” Israel and Palestine, is enshrined in UN Security Council Resolution N 1397 (2002), which affirms a vision for the region where “two states, Israel and Palestine, will live side by side within secure and recognized borders.”³

Georgia and Azerbaijan recognized the statehood of Palestine as early as 1992 and established diplomatic relations with it⁴. Armenia recognized the State of Palestine in June 2024 during the ongoing military operations in Gaza, after which it established diplomatic relations.⁵

The study of the South Caucasus countries' positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was conducted based on official positions, the results of UNGA vote tallies, the study and analysis of other documents. In addition, the history and current state of the South Caucasus countries' relations with Israel, as well as the influence of relations with the region's most influential states, were analyzed.

¹ The Question of Palestine, Resolution 181 (II). Future government of Palestine, UN, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-185393/>.

² Resolution 242 (1967) / [adopted by the Security Council at its 1382nd meeting], of 22 November 1967, UN Digital Library, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/90717?ln=en&v=pdf>.

³ Resolution 1397 (2002) Adopted by the Security Council at its 4489th meeting, on 12 March 2002, <https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/SRES1397.pdf>.

⁴ Countries, recognized the State of Palestine, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the State of Palestine, <https://www.mofa.pna.ps/en-us/mediaoffice/countries-recognized-the-state-of-palestine>.

⁵ ՀՀ ԱԳՆ հայտարարությունը Պաղեստինի Պետության ճանաչման վերաբերյալ, 21 հունիսի, 2024, [Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RA on the Recognition of the State of Palestine, June 21, 2024], https://www.mfa.am/hy/interviews-articles-and-comments/2024/06/21/mfa_statement/12706.

Armenia's Position

The Middle East is an important focus in Armenia's foreign policy agenda, both because of its neighboring location and the impact of regional developments on international politics.

The National Security Strategy of Armenia states that developments in the Middle East affect Armenia's security. The strategy also states that “the continuous expansion of cooperation with Middle Eastern countries is one of the priorities of the Republic of Armenia.”⁶

After declaring independence, Armenia, among other countries, also established diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992⁷; however, the two countries did not open embassies. The Armenian embassy in Tel Aviv was only opened in 2020⁸, which had drawn the ire of Iran. The latter, among other objections, had characterized it as a move contrary to the interests of the Palestinian people.⁹ It should be noted that in the fall of 2020, during the war in Artsakh, Armenia recalled its ambassador from Israel in protest of the continued supply of Israeli weapons to Azerbaijan.¹⁰ Subsequently, the two sides mutually restored diplomatic presence: Armenia appointed a new ambassador to Israel in 2021, and Israel appointed a (non-resident) ambassador to Armenia in 2022.¹¹

One of the most contentious aspects of Armenia–Israel relations is Israel's military cooperation with Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan and Israel are strategic partners. Israel is one of Azerbaijan's major suppliers of military munitions. The Azerbaijani side emphasizes the significance of Israeli munitions in its victory in the Karabakh

⁶ ՀՀ ազգային անվտանգության ռազմավարություն, 2020, էջեր 6, 12, [National Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia, 2020, pp. 6, 12], <https://www.mfa.am/filemanager/security%20and%20defense/AA-Razmavarutyun-Final.pdf>.

⁷ Israel, Bilateral Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, <https://www.mfa.am/en/bilateral-relations/il#:~:text=General%20information,Consul%20of%20Israel%20in%20Armenia>.

⁸ Իսրայելում պաշտոնապես բացվել է Հայաստանի դեսպանատունը, ԱՐՄԵՆՊՐԵՍՍ, 18.09.2020, [The Embassy of Armenia has been officially opened in Israel, ARMENPRESS, 09.18.2020], <https://armenpress.am/hy/article/1028117>.

⁹ Opening Armenia's embassy in Tel Aviv contradicts with interests of Palestinian nation, MEHR News Agency, 15.03.2020, <https://en.mehrnews.com/news/156763/Opening-Armenia-s-embassy-in-Tel-Aviv-contradicts-with-interests>.

¹⁰ PM Pashinyan: “Israel should ask itself the question – is it not fighting de facto alongside mercenaries against Nagorno-Karabakh?”, The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, 03.11.2020, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2020/11/03/Nikol-Pashinyan-Interview-Jerusalem-Post/>.

¹¹ Իսրայել, Երկկողմ հարաբերություններ, ՀՀ արտաքին գործերի նախարարություն, [Israel, Bilateral Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RA], <https://www.mfa.am/hy/bilateral-relations/il>.

war.¹² Israel mainly supplied Azerbaijan with combat and reconnaissance drones, which gave the Azerbaijani side a significant advantage in the war.¹³

Despite prospects for relations with Azerbaijan and its position on preserving Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, regarding Nagorno-Karabakh, Israel abstained during the vote on UNGA Resolution N A/RES/62/243 (2008) regarding “the preservation of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and the withdrawal of Armenian forces.”¹⁴

One of the most complex issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the status of the Old City of Jerusalem, which also directly concerns Armenia, given the presence of the Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem. During the Camp David II negotiations held in the United States in July 2000, it was proposed to divide the Old City into two parts, establishing Israeli control over the Jewish and Armenian quarters, while the Christian and Muslim quarters would be under Palestinian control. This option was opposed by Yasser Arafat, leader of the Palestinian Fatah movement.¹⁵ The Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem opposes the idea of separating the Armenian Quarter from the Christian Quarter, which would also divide the Armenian community. For the Patriarchate, free and uninterrupted access to the holy sites is important, and in the event of a division of the city, that normal process would be disrupted.¹⁶

Furthermore, since the 1990s, the Jerusalem municipality has been making attempts to appropriate the property of the Armenian Patriarchate, as was the case in recent years regarding the “Cows’ Garden” adjacent to the patriarchate. The “Cows’ Garden”, which occupies 25% of the Armenian Quarter, was to be transferred to the Israeli side for 99 years under a contract, which had been signed with the Armenian Patriarchate, after which the Armenian side unilaterally canceled it and went to court.¹⁷ Another issue concerned an attempt to appropriate

¹² As Azerbaijan claims final victory in Nagorno Karabakh, arms trade with Israel comes under scrutiny, CNN, 04.10.2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/04/middleeast/azerbaijan-israel-weapons-mime-intl>.

¹³ As Azerbaijan claims final victory in Nagorno Karabakh, arms trade with Israel comes under scrutiny, CNN, 04.10.2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/04/middleeast/azerbaijan-israel-weapons-mime-intl#:~:text=Azerbaijan%20%E2%80%9Cused%20Harop%20kamikaze%20strike,-ate%201980s%20and%20early%201990s>.

¹⁴ The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, UN Digital Library, 2008, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/632041?ln=en>.

¹⁵ Yasir Arafat: We Will Never Betray Armenians, ARMENPRESS, 08.10.2002, <https://armenpress.am/en/article/514297>.

¹⁶ Dividing Jerusalem: Armenians on the Line of Confrontation, CIVILNET, 18.12.2017 <https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/384235/dividing-jerusalem-armenians-on-the-line-of-confrontation/>.

¹⁷ «Կովերի պարտեզում» կրկին բախումներ են, Ազատություն ռադիոկայան, 04.04.2024, [Clashes again in the “Cows’ Garden,” Radio Liberty, 04.04.2024], <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32891316.html>.

property belonging to the Armenian Patriarchate located outside the Old City—“due to unpaid property taxes since 1994.”¹⁸

These issues have not been definitively resolved. These disputes are primarily handled by the Patriarchate and the local community in Israeli courts. As for the official position of the Armenian side on the above-mentioned issues, it should be noted that the Government of Armenia opposes any action that could change the status quo of the Old City of Jerusalem, as noted in 2024 during political consultations between the foreign ministries of Armenia and Jordan.¹⁹

The recognition of the Armenian Genocide is another thorny issue in Israel-Armenia relations. Israel has not officially recognized the Armenian Genocide. The issue has been periodically the subject of internal discussions in the Knesset, but it has not received sufficient support. In April 1994, on the occasion of the Armenian Genocide Memorial Day, Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister, Yossi Beilin, had announced the recognition of the Genocide by Israel. However, the government did not accept this announcement, considering it Beilin's personal opinion, and continued its policy of denial.²⁰

In his research, Ben Aharon (Ben Aharon, E., 2023) notes regarding Israel's state policy on the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, that Israel participated in Ankara's campaign to deny the Armenian Genocide as part of the normalization of relations with Ankara in the late 1980s and early 1990s.²¹ Individual viewpoints and academic discussions recognizing the Armenian Genocide cannot influence Israel's official policy, which aims to maintain strategic relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, as well as to maintain the uniqueness of the Holocaust in the international discourse.²²

In 2001, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres denied the Armenian Genocide, calling it “Armenian demands.” He also stated that “Israel rejects attempts to draw parallels between the Holocaust and ‘Armenian accusations’.”²³

¹⁸ Jerusalem authorities move to seize Armenian Patriarchate properties over taxes, CIVILNET, 19.02.2025, <https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/818275/jerusalem-authorities-move-to-seize-armenian-patriarchate-properties-over-taxes/>.

¹⁹ Քաղաքական խորհրդակցությունների Հայաստանի և Հորդանանի արտաքին քաղաքական գերատեսչությունների միջև, ՀՀ արտաքին գործերի նախարարություն, 16.05.2024, [Political consultations between the foreign ministries of Armenia and Jordan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia], 16.05.2024, https://www.mfa.am/hy/press-releases/2024/05/16/Kostanyan_Jordan/12649.

²⁰ Charny, W. I. (2021). Israel's failed response to the Armenian genocide. Denial, State Deception, Truth versus politicization of history. Boston. p. 120.

²¹ Ben Aharon, E. (2023). Between Geopolitics and Identity Struggle: Why Israel Took Sides with Azerbaijan in the Nagorno Karabakh Conflict, Frankfurt am Main: PRIF Report, 1, Frankfurt, ISBN: 978-3-946459-84-2, p. 16, DOI : 10.48809/prifrep2301 , <https://shorturl.at/Jz6xq>.

²² Ibid.

²³ Quote by Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, Assembly of Turkish American Associations, <https://www.ataa.org/reference-center/armenian-issue-revisited/quote-by-israeli-foreign-minister-shimon-peres/>.

Israel's deep economic and military ties with Azerbaijan, as well as its commercial relations with Turkey, also greatly influence its failure to recognize the Armenian Genocide.

Israel, on the other hand, has used the issue of recognizing the Armenian Genocide as a diplomatic tool in its relations with Turkey. When Turkish-Israeli relations are strained, discussions on recognizing the Armenian Genocide become active in the Knesset. However, a bill recognizing the Armenian Genocide has not yet been passed by the Knesset. In 2018, there was a bill on the matter that was withdrawn due to a lack of government support.²⁴

After 2021 After US President Joe Biden recognized the Armenian Genocide, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that it recognizes the “horrific suffering and tragedy of the Armenian people,” but again did not recognize the Genocide.²⁵

In September 2025, Israeli Prime Minister B. Netanyahu said in an interview that he recognizes the Armenian Genocide.²⁶ In response, the Turkish Foreign Minister condemned Netanyahu's statement, calling it “an attempt to exploit past tragedies for political purposes.”²⁷

On the issue of Palestine, Armenia maintained neutrality after its independence, essentially staying clear of the repercussions that could arise from its policy regarding the Republic of Artsakh. While not recognizing the state of Palestine on one hand, on the other, since its first decade of independence, Armenia has supported the Palestinian people's self-determination²⁸, sovereignty²⁹, and In the

²⁴ Retzach ha-am ha-Armeni / HaKnesset dachatah et hatsa'at ha-chok shel Ch"K Lapid le-tsiyun Yom Retzach ha-am ha-Armeni, Atar ha-hadashot Davar, 15.02.2018. [Armenian Genocide / The Knesset rejected MK Lapid's bill to designate a day for commemorating the Armenian Genocide, Davar News Agency], <https://www.davar1.co.il/110409/>.

²⁵ Foreign Ministry: Israel recognizes 'terrible suffering' of Armenians, The Times of Israel, 24.04.2021, https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/foreign-ministry-israel-recognizes-terrible-suffering-of-armenians/.

²⁶ Israeli PM Netanyahu acknowledged the Armenian genocide during a podcast, marking a first for Israel, although no official Knesset resolution supports this recognition, Euronews, 27.08.2025, <https://www.euronews.com/2025/08/27/israels-prime-minister-benjamin-netanyahu-recognises-armenian-genocide-for-first-time>.

²⁷ Turkey rejects Netanyahu's recognition of Armenian genocide as politically motivated, The Times of Israel, 27.08.2025, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/turkey-rejects-netanyahus-recognition-of-armenian-genocide-as-politically-motivated/>.

²⁸ The right of the Palestinian people to self-determination : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, 2011, UN Digital Library, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/724161?utm_source=.com&v=pdf.

²⁹ Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, 2011, UN Digital Library, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/724283>.

UN, it has supported the Palestinian side in granting Palestine observer status³⁰, not establishing diplomatic missions in Jerusalem³¹, and on other issues.

As for the Palestinian side's position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it was expressed in Mahmoud Abbas's statement in 2011 during his visit to Azerbaijan that "Azerbaijan and Palestine have the same problem: both of their lands are occupied, and both have refugees."³² In addition, during Abbas's tenure, the Palestinian embassy opened in Baku in 2011³³, a significant step in bilateral relations that demonstrated a willingness to establish closer ties with Azerbaijan.

Palestine's support for the Azerbaijani side in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict is also evidenced by a statement made by the Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Azerbaijan, Nasser Abdul Karim Abdul Rahim, in one of his interviews, in which he noted that the Palestinian side supports the UN resolutions on the Nagorno Karabakh issue, and that "the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan must be preserved within its internationally recognized borders."³⁴

Notably, the Palestinian Hamas group congratulated Azerbaijan after the 2020 war for "liberating Nagorno Karabakh from the Armenian occupation." The organization's spokesperson also praised "Turkey's support for Azerbaijan, a Muslim nation, and their goals."³⁵ Naturally, the Palestinian group, being a close ally of Turkey, is promoting the Turkish agenda on this issue.

A practical change in Armenia's policy on the conflict occurred recently against the backdrop of the ongoing military operations in Gaza: Armenia, a proponent of the "two-state" solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, recognized the independence of Palestine on June 21, 2024, amid the military operations in Gaza.³⁶

³⁰ Resolution adopted by the General Assembly 67/19. Status of Palestine in the United Nations, The Question of Palestine, UN, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-187149/>.

³¹ General Assembly Overwhelmingly Adopts Resolution Asking Nations Not to Locate Diplomatic Missions in Jerusalem, Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, UN, 21.12.2017, <https://press.un.org/en/2017/ga11995.doc.htm>.

³² Presidents of Azerbaijan and Palestine made statements for the press, President of The Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, 28.06.2011, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/2550#:~:text=Azerbaijan%20and%20Palestine%20have%20similar,Thank%20you%20for%20your%20attention>.

³³ Palestine's embassy opens in Baku, Azerbaijan State News Agency: AZERTAC, 29.06.2011, https://azertag.az/en/xeber/palestines_embassy_opens_in_baku-608379.

³⁴ Colloquy with Ambassador Nassir Abdul Karim Abdul Rahim - Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the State of Palestine, Caucasus International, <http://cij.az/post/colloquy-with-ambassador-nassir-abdul-karim-abdul-rahim---relations-between-the-republic-of-azerbaijan-and-the-state-of-palestine-292>.

³⁵ Hamas congratulates Azerbaijan over Karabakh victory Abu Zuhri hails Turkish support to Azerbaijan and Muslim causes, Anadolu Agency, 10.11.2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/azerbaijan-front-line/hamas-congratulates-azerbaijan-over-karabakh-victory/2038618>.

³⁶ ՀՀ ԱԳՆ հայտարարությունը Պաղեստինի Պետության ճանաչման վերաբերյալ, ՀՀ արտաքին գործերի նախարարություն, 21.06.2024, [Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RA on the Recognition of the State of Palestine, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RA,

This move has been met with a harsh reaction from Israel and has taken on political resonance³⁷, as the recognition occurred at a rather heightened phase of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—with casualties, violence, and an internationally tense situation, thus giving it a more explicit political subtext. Diplomatic relations between Armenia and Palestine were established on September 27, 2024.³⁸

Although Armenia's recognition of Palestinian independence was a significant political step, it does not, in essence, represent a change in Armenia's policy, but rather expresses Armenia's support for the “two-state solution” principle in the conflict. This decision may have been influenced by the extensive Israeli-Azerbaijani cooperation in recent years, which is directly aimed at undermining Armenia's security. Turkey was the first to welcome Armenia's recognition of Palestinian independence.³⁹ Iran also welcomed Armenia for the decision, calling it a “positive and bold step.”⁴⁰ Essentially, one of the goals of recognizing Palestine could also have been to form a positive perception in the Islamic world. In 2024, in addition to Armenia, a number of other countries also recognized the independence of Palestine.⁴¹

Georgia's Position

The National Security Concept of Georgia states that developments in Central Asia and the Middle East play an important role for Georgia, and that maintaining stability and security in these regions is in Georgia's interest. At the same time, the concept emphasizes that Georgia will continue its economic cooperation with Middle Eastern countries.⁴²

Georgia maintains balanced relations with the region's power centers. Considering the country's positioning as a regional transit state, as well as its policy of diversifying economic relations— Georgia prioritizes the development of trade

June 21, 2024], https://www.mfa.am/hy/interviews-articles-and-comments/2024/06/21/mfa_statement/12706 :

³⁷ Armenia, Israel, Middle East, News, Palestine Israel summons Armenia ambassador hours after his country recognises Palestine state, Middle East Monitor, 22.06.2024, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20240622-israel-summons-armenia-ambassador-hours-after-his-country-recognises-palestine-state/> .

³⁸ ՀՀ ԱԳ նախարարի հանդիպումը Պաղեստինի վարչապետի հետ, ՀՀ արտաքին գործերի նախարարություն, 28.10.2024, [Meeting between the Armenian Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister of Palestine, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RA, 28.10.2024], https://www.mfa.am/hy/press-releases/2024/09/28/Armenia_Palestine/12869 :

³⁹ Türkiye welcomes Armenia's recognition of Palestine as state, Anadolu Agency, 22.06.2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkiye-welcomes-armenia-s-recognition-of-palestine-as-state/3255017>

⁴⁰ Iran considers Armenia's recognition of State of Palestine as courageous and positive, ARMENPRESS, 28.06.2024, <https://armenpress.am/en/article/1194673> .

⁴¹ Which countries recognise Palestine in 2024?, ALJAZEERA, 29.11.2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/11/29/which-countries-recognise-palestine-in-2024> .

⁴² National Security Concept of Georgia, “9. Economic security policy”, p. 23, <https://mod.gov.ge/uploads/2018/pdf/NSC-ENG.pdf> .

partnerships with neighboring countries, an example of which is the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement signed with the United Arab Emirates in 2023.⁴³

Georgia seeks to use its geographical position to connect the energy resources of the Caspian Sea and the Middle East with European markets through strategic projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and “The Middle Corridor”.⁴⁴ Since 2007, oil has also been supplied to Israel via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline⁴⁵, making Georgia a participant in the supply of energy resources to the Middle East. Given the above, Georgia is strategically important to Israel from the perspective of controlling the Caspian Sea oil and gas pipelines.

Georgia officially adheres to the “two-state solution” principle in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Georgia recognized the statehood of Palestine as early as 1992 and established diplomatic relations with it.⁴⁶ On April 24, 1992, a representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization visited Tbilisi and was received by Eduard Shevardnadze, Chairman of the State Council of Georgia.⁴⁷

On November 29, 2012, Georgia, along with 138 other countries, voted in favor of a UNGA resolution that granted Palestine observer status at the UN.⁴⁸ With this, Palestine gained international status: This move has caused the displeasure of Israel, as noted by Yuval Fuchs, the Israeli ambassador to Georgia.⁴⁹

In the context of Georgian-Palestinian relations, it should be noted that the Palestinian HAMAS movement welcomed Russia’s recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.⁵⁰

⁴³ Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement Between Georgia and United Arab Emirates, https://www.economy.ge/uploads/files/sagareo_vachroba/2024/geo_uae_cepa_eng.pdf.

⁴⁴ Starr, S. F., Cornell, E. S. (2005). The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: Oil Window to the West, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program –A Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center, p. 85, https://www.silkroadstudies.org/resources/pdf/Monographs/2005_01_MONO_-Starr-Cornell_BTC-Pipeline.pdf.

⁴⁵ Investigating the countries and companies behind Israeli crude oil and fuel supply chains, Data Analysis, Oil Change International, March 2024, <https://www.oilchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Israel-Gaza-Fuel-Data-v2.pdf?utm>.

⁴⁶ Countries, recognized the State of Palestine, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the State of Palestine, <https://www.mofa.pna.ps/en-us/mediaoffice/countries-recognized-the-state-of-palestine>.

⁴⁷ Sakartvelo – Palestina: (utsnauri) urtiertobebis istoria, Radio Tavisupleba. 27.10.2023, [Georgia – Palestine: (strange) history of relations, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 27.10.2023], <https://shorturl.at/WsjLi>.

⁴⁸ General Assembly Votes Overwhelmingly to Accord Palestine ‘Non-Member Observer State’ Status in United Nations, Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, UN, 29.11.2012, <https://press.un.org/en/2012/ga11317.doc.htm>.

⁴⁹ UN vote on Palestine causes controversy in Georgia, Democracy and Freedom Watch, 03.12.2012, <https://dfwatch.net/un-vote-on-palestine-causes-controversy-in-georgia-53599-15123/>.

⁵⁰ ХАМАС приветствует признание независимости Абхазии и Южной Осетии, Газета.Ru, 26.08.2008, [Hamis welcomes recognition of independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Gazeta.Ru, 26.08.2008], https://www.gazeta.ru/news/lenta/2008/08/26/n_1262987.shtml.

Diplomatic relations between Georgia and Israel were established in June 1992.⁵¹ Israel appointed its ambassador to Georgia in 1993, and Georgia appointed its ambassador in 1998, after accrediting ambassadors in its neighboring countries and in Iran.⁵² Bilateral relations have had a positive development dynamic since 1991. In particular, President Eduard Shevardnadze visited Israel in 1998 and 2000. Military cooperation deepened especially during the tenure of Mikheil Saakashvili. Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili has made efforts to strengthen military and defense cooperation with Israel.⁵³ A delegation led by Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili signed a visa-free agreement in Israel in 2014.⁵⁴ In this way, official visits and the signing of agreements continued under subsequent leaders as well.

Israel is one of Georgia's key partners in the fields of security and technology. As early as the 2000s, Israeli military support played a major role in the modernization of the Georgian army.⁵⁵ In 2008, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs offered rhetorical support to Georgia, declaring that it “recognizes the territorial integrity of Georgia.”⁵⁶ During the Russo-Georgian conflict, Israel made arms deliveries to Georgia⁵⁷, but, despite the aforementioned statement, was forced to periodically suspend arms sales to Georgia—to appease Russia's grievances.⁵⁸

The importance of Israel for Georgia is also emphasized in Georgia's National Security Concept, where, among China, Japan, South Korea and other countries, with which Tbilisi “aims to develop political dialogue and economic cooperation,” Israel is also mentioned.⁵⁹ Georgia's strategic importance for Israel is primarily due to its geographical location, through which Israel seeks to strengthen its position

⁵¹ Israel-Georgia Bilateral relations since 1991, Bilateral Relations, Embassy of Israel in Tbilisi, <https://url-shortener.me/IGJ>.

⁵² Bishku, B. M. (2009). The South Caucasus Republics and Israel, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 45:2, 295-314, DOI: [10.1080/00263200802697415](https://doi.org/10.1080/00263200802697415), p. 307.

⁵³ Ivanishvili Goes To Israel Hoping To Mend Ties, *eurasianet*, 28.06.2013, <https://eurasianet.org/ivanishvili-goes-to-israel-hoping-to-mend-ties>.

⁵⁴ Israel-Georgia Bilateral relations since 1991, Bilateral Relations, Embassy of Israel in Tbilisi, <https://url-shortener.me/IGJ>.

⁵⁵ How Israel Trained and Equipped Georgia's Army, *WIRED*, 19.08.2008, <https://www.wired.com/2008/08/did-israel-trai/>.

⁵⁶ Ambassador's Welcome Speech, Embassy of Georgia to the State of Israel, <https://israel.mfa.gov.ge/en/welcome>.

⁵⁷ According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute database, During 1991-2024, the period of arms deliveries from Israel to Georgia was from 2007 to 2009, with the quantity accounting for 0.3 percent of the total arms exported from Israel. The supplied military equipment included mainly missiles, air defense systems, as well as aircraft, artillery, and armored vehicles. SIPRI, Arms Transfer Database,

<https://armstransfers.sipri.org/ArmsTransfer/CSVResult>.

⁵⁸ Georgia, The Database of Israeli Military and Security Export, <https://dimse.info/georgia/>.

⁵⁹ National Security Concept of Georgia, “7.4. Cooperation with the nations of the various regions of the world.”, <https://mod.gov.ge/uploads/2018/pdf/NSC-ENG.pdf> p. 21.

around Iran's northern borders, as well as secure the routes of energy pipelines coming from the Caspian Sea, which are important for Israel's energy security.⁶⁰

Regarding Israel-Georgia economic relations, in 2024, the volume of imports from Israel to Georgia amounted to \$22.4 million, which is about 38% more than in 2023 (while the import volume from Palestine in 2024 was only \$16.3 thousand).⁶¹ The export volume from Georgia to Israel in 2024 was \$37 million, which is 0.56 percent of Georgia's total exports. The volume of exports from Georgia to Palestine in 2024 was \$67,000.⁶² In 2024, Georgia and Israel expressed their readiness to begin negotiations on a free trade agreement between the two countries.⁶³ At the beginning of 2025, bilateral trade increased by 61%.⁶⁴ According to the data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia, in 2024 Israel made \$37 million in direct investments in Georgia, ranking 8th among the largest direct investors.⁶⁵

Although thousands of Jews emigrated from Georgia to Israel after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Georgia's independence, the Jewish community of Georgia serves as a link in strengthening relations between the two countries.⁶⁶ The Jewish community in Georgia is the second largest in the South Caucasus. In 2023, 1,500 Jews lived in Georgia⁶⁷ (7,200 in Azerbaijan⁶⁸ and around 500 in Armenia, which has the smallest Jewish population in the region⁶⁹).

In UNGA votes, Georgia mostly abstains from voting for resolutions against Israel or does not participate in the vote at all. This is explained both by the desire to avoid a deterioration in relations with Israel and by a cautious approach to getting involved in complex regional conflicts that do not directly affect Georgian interests. In 2023, against the backdrop of the military escalation in Gaza, Georgia's position was also expressed at the level of official statements: Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili condemned the terrorist attacks on Israel and its

⁶⁰ Rousseau, R. Georgia-Israel: Close Allies to Economic and Political Standoff, Georgia, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Volume 8 Issue 105, 06.01.2011, <https://jamestown.org/georgia-israel-close-allies-to-economic-and-political-standoff/>.

⁶¹ Georgia Imports By Country, Trading Economics, <https://tradingeconomics.com/georgia/imports-by-country>.

⁶² Georgia Exports By Country, Trading Economics, <https://tradingeconomics.com/georgia/exports-by-country>.

⁶³ Georgia and Israel to Commence Free Trade Talks in 2024: Strengthening Bilateral Ties and Economic Collaboration, FCHAIN Corporation, 05.09.2023, <https://f-chain.com/georgia-and-israel-to-commence-free-trade-talks-in-2024-strengthening-bilateral-ties-and-economic-collaboration/>.

⁶⁴ New Trade Trajectory: How Economic Ties with Israel Strengthened and What It Means for Georgia, BTUAI, 20.05.2025, <https://btuai.ge/en/new-trade-trajectory-how-economic-ties-with-israel-strengthened-and-what-it-means-for-georgia/>.

⁶⁵ Foreign Direct Investments, Q1 2025 (PRELIMINARY), National Statistics Office of Georgia, p. 5, <https://www.geostat.ge/media/71124/Foreign-Direct-Investments---Q1-2025.pdf>.

⁶⁶ Georgia, World Jewish Congress, <https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/about/communities/ge>.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Azerbaijan, World Jewish Congress, <https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/about/communities/AZ>.

⁶⁹ Armenia, World Jewish Congress, <https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/about/communities/AM>.

citizens, and expressed his condolences to the Israeli government and people.⁷⁰ President Salome Zourabichvili stated in her message: “Georgia expresses its full solidarity with the State of Israel in these difficult times.”⁷¹ The Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, Shalva Papuashvili, wrote on the social network X that “unfounded, cruel, and inhumane aggression against the State of Israel is unacceptable.” He stressed that Georgians support “brotherly Israel.”⁷²

Georgia's position on the conflict is influenced by external factors: Georgia, which shares a northern border with Russia, is located not far from Iran and has strategic geographical importance for both Israel and the US, which partly explains the support these countries show for Georgia.⁷³ The US and the EU are important partners for Georgia in terms of security and its aspirations to join the EU, therefore in its foreign policy, including its position on the conflict, Georgia's policy does not contradict the positions of these partners.

Georgia, on the other hand, maintains close economic and political ties with Turkey, which is one of its largest investment and trading partners.⁷⁴ Although Turkey is one of the harshest critics of Israel's policy, this has not affected oil supplies from Azerbaijan to Israel, which pass through Georgia and Turkey.⁷⁵

Azerbaijan's Position

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Azerbaijan seeks to maintain strategic ties with Israel, while simultaneously providing political support to the Palestinian side in international forums, in line with the position of the Islamic world. The National Security Concept of Azerbaijan (2007) states: “The Republic of Azerbaijan's relations with Middle Eastern countries have great potential, and efforts will

⁷⁰ Irakli Garibashvili (@GharibashviliGe), “I strongly condemn terrible terrorists attack on the state of Israel and Israeli citizens, the loss of lives, and serious injuries to many. Heartfelt condolences to the Government and People of the State of Israel, wishing speedy recovery to all those injured.”, X, 07.10.2023, <https://x.com/GharibashviliGe/status/1710626397796872674>.

⁷¹ Parliament Speaker: Georgian people support brotherly Israel, Georgian Public Broadcaster, 07.10.2023, <https://1tv.ge/lang/en/news/parliament-speaker-georgian-people-support-brotherly-israel/>.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Yellinek, R. Georgia's Relations with Israel and the US, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA) Perspectives Paper No. 1,588, 29.05.2020, <https://besacenter.org/georgia-relations-israel-us/>.

⁷⁴ Foreign Direct Investments, National Statistics Office of Georgia, <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/191/foreign-direct-investments>. Mariam Kvrivishvili: Turkey is Georgia's top trading partner, which is a confirmation of the strong economic ties and growing dynamic of cooperation between the two countries, Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia, 31.07.2025, <https://url-shortener.me/IW>.

⁷⁵ Investigating the countries and companies behind Israeli crude oil and fuel supply chains, Data Analysis, Oil Change International, March 2024, <https://www.oilchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Israel-Gaza-Fuel-Data-v2.pdf?utm>.

continue to be directed toward the development of bilateral relations with these countries.”⁷⁶

Azerbaijan is developing strategic ties with the region’s power centers, primarily with Israel and Turkey, with which it also has close cooperation in the fields of intelligence and security.⁷⁷ Turkey is Azerbaijan’s strategic partner⁷⁸, with which Azerbaijan’s political and military alliance is based on the “one nation, two states” principle.⁷⁹ Turkey is also important for Azerbaijan in the energy sector, particularly in terms of exporting energy resources through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas (TANAP) pipelines.⁸⁰ Turkey also participates in the modernization of the Azerbaijani army and in joint military exercises.⁸¹

Israel is Azerbaijan’s next important partner in the Middle East, with which it has relations of strategic importance, as described by Israel’s Foreign Minister Eli Cohen.⁸² Diplomatic relations were established in 1992.⁸³ Israel opened its embassy in Baku in 1993, however, Azerbaijan did not reciprocally open its embassy in Israel at the time, essentially not wanting to worsen relations with Islamic countries and preserve their support on the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.⁸⁴ Azerbaijan opened its embassy in Israel in 2023, 30 years after diplomatic relations were established, which Israeli Foreign Minister E. Cohen considered “proof of the

⁷⁶ National Security Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “4.1.5.2. Cooperation with non-regional countries”, Approved by Instruction No. 2198 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 23.05.2007, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/154917/Azerbaijan2007.pdf>, p. 14.

⁷⁷ Good Relations between Azerbaijan and Israel: A Model for Other Muslim States in Eurasia?, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 30.03.2005, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/good-relations-between-azerbaijan-and-israel-model-other-muslim-states-eurasia>.

⁷⁸ National Security Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “4.1.5.1. Cooperation with regional countries”, Approved by Instruction No. 2198 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 23.05.2007, p. 13, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/154917/Azerbaijan2007.pdf>.

⁷⁹ Press statements by President Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Official web-site of President of Azerbaijan Republic, 15.09.2010, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/736/print>.

⁸⁰ Joint energy projects with Azerbaijan aimed at stability in region – Erdogan, Caspian Oil & Gas, 31.10.2019, <https://caspianoilgas.az/zh/news/joint-energy-projects-with-azerbaijan-aimed-at-stability-in-region---erdogan-2217>.

⁸¹ Shusha Declaration on Allied Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey, Official web-site of President of Azerbaijan Republic, 16.06.2021, <https://url-shortener.me/J6X>.

⁸² Eli Cohen: We see Azerbaijan as a strategic partner, AzeMedia, 19.04.2023, <https://aze.media/eli-cohen-we-see-azerbaijan-as-a-strategic-partner/#:~:text=Eli%20Cohen:%20We%20see%20Azerbaijan,Media>.

⁸³ The State of Israel, Bilateral diplomatic relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the State of Israel, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://www.mfa.gov.az/en/category/asia-and-oceania/israel>.

⁸⁴ In Unprecedented Move, Baku Opens Embassy in Tel Aviv, Jamestown, 30.11.2022, <https://jamestown.org/program/in-unprecedented-move-baku-opens-embassy-in-tel-aviv/>.

strengthening of bilateral relations.”⁸⁵ After Turkey and Egypt, Azerbaijan was the third Muslim-majority country to establish bilateral political and economic relations with Israel.⁸⁶

In 1997, Israeli Prime Minister B. Netanyahu visited Baku and met with the President of Azerbaijan.⁸⁷ During the meeting, the parties discussed the Iranian threat, as well as issues of intelligence cooperation between Israel and Azerbaijan. This meeting is considered the starting point of the alliance between the two countries.⁸⁸

Two Israeli presidents (Shimon Peres in 2009⁸⁹, and Isaac Herzog in 2023⁹⁰) have visited Baku to discuss bilateral cooperation. Israeli Prime Minister B. Netanyahu also paid an official visit to Baku in 2016.⁹¹ However, no president of Azerbaijan has yet made an official visit to Israel. A number of meetings have taken place at international forums (meetings in Davos in various years⁹², the last was in 2025 with I. Herzog⁹³, and in 2024 at the Munich Security Conference⁹⁴).

In 2012, the parties signed an agreement whereby Azerbaijan agreed to purchase military technology, including drones, from Israel for \$1.6 billion.⁹⁵ After the publication of the agreement, the Azerbaijani ambassador to Iran was summoned to the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs— to provide explanations regarding the deal.⁹⁶ After this agreement, to ease relations with Iran, Azerbaijan's

⁸⁵ Azerbaijan to open embassy in Israel today, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Israel, 29.03.2023, <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/azerbaijan-to-open-embassy-in-israel-today-29-mar-2023>.

⁸⁶ Ismayilov, E. (2013). Israel and Azerbaijan: The Evolution of a Strategic Partnership, *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 7:1, 69-76, p. 69, DOI: [10.1080/23739770.2013.11446535](https://doi.org/10.1080/23739770.2013.11446535).

⁸⁷ Netanyahu Meets with President of Azerbaijan in Baku, Israel Line, Friday, August 29, 1997, Federation of American Scientists (FAS), <https://irp.fas.org/news/1997/970829-il.htm>.

⁸⁸ Khalifa-zadeh, M. (2013). Israeli-Azerbaijani Alliance and Iran, *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 17, No. 1, p. 61, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371702100_ISRAELI_AZERBAIJANI_ALLIANCE_AND_IRAN.

⁸⁹ President of Israel meets his Azerbaijani counterpart in Baku, 28.06.2009, <https://www.trend.az/azerbaijan/1495204.html>.

⁹⁰ Azerbaijani and Israeli Presidents held one-on-one meeting, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, 30.05.2023, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/60043>.

⁹¹ PM Netanyahu Meets with Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev, Prime Minister's Office, Government of Israel, 13.12.2016, <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/eventazerbaijan131216>.

⁹² Israel-Azerbaijan bilateral relations, Embassy of Israel Baku, <https://embassies.gov.il/azerbaijan/en/the-embassy/bilateral-relations>.

⁹³ Ilham Aliyev met with President of Israel in Davos, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 21.01.2025, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/67973>.

⁹⁴ Ilham Aliyev met with President of Israel Isaac Herzog in Munich, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 16.02.2024, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/64156/images/2>.

⁹⁵ Israel Signs \$1.6 Billion Arms Deal With Azerbaijan, Haaretz, 26.02.2012, <https://www.haaretz.com/2012-02-26/ty-article/israel-signs-1-6-billion-arms-deal-with-azerbaijan/-0000017f-e101-d804-ad7f-f1fb56700000>.

⁹⁶ Azerbaijan Rejects Iran Complaints Over Israel Arms Buy, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, 29.02.2012, https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan_rejects_iran_complaints_over_israel_arms_deal/-24500432.html.

Minister of Defense, Safar Abiyev, visited Tehran and gave assurances about the friendly relations between Iran and Azerbaijan, and that “Azerbaijan will not allow its territory to be used against Iran.”⁹⁷

The parties have also developed energy cooperation, which promoted the development of Israel's economy in the 1990s and 2000s.⁹⁸ Azerbaijan has become an important player in stabilizing Israel's energy security. The 2020 Artsakh War elevated Israeli-Azerbaijani cooperation to a new level, particularly in the field of military technology. In an interview with the Israel Hayom newspaper, the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister noted the importance of Israeli munitions in Azerbaijan's victory in the war.⁹⁹ Since the late 2000s, Azerbaijan has become one of the main importers of Israeli military equipment.¹⁰⁰ Between 2017 and 2020, over 60% of Azerbaijan's arms imports came from Israel.¹⁰¹ In 2024, a new agreement was signed between the parties on cooperation in the defense industry.¹⁰²

Azerbaijan also established diplomatic relations with the Palestinian National Authority in 1992¹⁰³, and in 2011 the Palestinian embassy opened in Baku.¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, on the same day as the decree to open an embassy in Israel, the Azerbaijani parliament also approved a bill to establish an Azerbaijani representative office in the State of Palestine, thus maintaining a balance between the sides.¹⁰⁵ The opening of a representative office was also mentioned by Azerbaijan's Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2023. during a visit to Ramallah, and the Palestinian Authority's foreign affairs official, Riyad al-Maliki, expressed hope

⁹⁷ Iran, Azerbaijan try to soothe tensions after Israel weapon ties, Alarabiya English, 13.03.2012, <https://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012%2F03%2F13%2F200339>.

⁹⁸ Khanin, Z., Grinberg, A., Azerbaijan: One of the Pillars of Israel's Regional Security System – A Brief Overview for the Trump Administration, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA), 15.01.2025, <https://url-shortener.me/OSB>.

⁹⁹ Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov in an exclusive interview with Israel Hayom, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 04.04.2021, <https://url-shortener.me/OVT>.

¹⁰⁰ Khanin, Z., Grinberg, A., Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Wezeman, P., Kuimova, A., Wezeman, S., Trends In International Arms Transfers, 2021, SIPRI Fact Sheet, March 2022, p. 6, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/fs_2203_at_2021.pdf.

¹⁰² Азербайджан и Израиль подписали новый документ о военном сотрудничестве, Sputnik Армения, 26.09.2024, [Azerbaijan and Israel have signed a new document on military cooperation, Sputnik Armenia, 26.09.2024], <https://am.sputniknews.ru/20240926/azerbaydzhan-i-izrail-podpisali-novyy-dokument-o-voennom-sotrudnichestve-81119509.html>.

¹⁰³ The State of Palestine, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://www.mfa.gov.az/en/category/asia-and-oceania/palestine>.

¹⁰⁴ Palestine's embassy opens in Baku, The Azerbaijan State News Agency, 29.06.2011, https://azertag.az/en/xeber/palestines_embassy_opens_in_baku-608379.

¹⁰⁵ Azerbaijani Parliament approves opening of embassies of Azerbaijan in Israel, Albania and Kenya, Report News Agency (Report.az), 18.11.2022, <https://report.az/en/milli-majlis/milli-majlis-approves-opening-of-embassies-of-azerbaijan-in-israel-albania-and-kenya>.

that “the level of the representation will be raised to the level of an embassy.”¹⁰⁶ According to information published on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, Trade turnover with Israel in 2023 amounted to approximately \$1.35 billion,¹⁰⁷ while trade turnover with Palestine in the same period was significantly less—only \$454 thousand.¹⁰⁸

One of the key areas of cooperation between Israel and Azerbaijan, as already noted, is energy. In 2021, Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi noted that Azerbaijan is the largest supplier of energy resources to Israel.¹⁰⁹ As early as 2023, the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) was granted a license to conduct natural gas exploration off the coast of Israel.¹¹⁰ In 2024, Israel ranked first among the destinations for Azerbaijani oil exports by volume, with supplies totaling 523,500 tons and a value of approximately \$297 million.¹¹¹ In the war that began in Gaza following Hamas's October 7, 2023, attack on Israel, Azerbaijan has adopted a neutral stance, maintaining its relations with Israel, but avoiding calling Hamas a terrorist organization.¹¹² On October 7, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan condemned the violence against civilians in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict zone in a post on X and called for an immediate de-escalation.¹¹³

In June 2024, after a meeting with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev stated that the war in Gaza must end and that Azerbaijan's position on the creation of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital is clear.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁶ Palestine welcomes Azerbaijan's decision to open diplomatic office in Ramallah, Anadolu Agency, 31.03.2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/palestine-welcomes-azerbaijans-decision-to-open-diplomatic-office-in-ramallah/2860343>.

¹⁰⁷ The State of Israel, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://www.mfa.gov.az/en/category/asia-and-oceania/israel>.

¹⁰⁸ The State of Palestine, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://www.mfa.gov.az/en/category/asia-and-oceania/palestine>.

¹⁰⁹ Azerbaijan tiftákh misrád sakhár be-Yisra'el, Yisra'el HaYom, 28.04.2021, [Azerbaijan will open a trade office in Israel, 28.04.2021], <https://www.israelhayom.co.il/article/874439>.

¹¹⁰ Rettig, E., Azerbaijan's Entry into Israeli Waters May Open New Export Routes with Turkey, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA), 09.04.2025, <https://besacenter.org/azerbaijans-entry-into-israeli-waters-may-open-new-export-routes-with-turkey/>.

¹¹¹ Chasifa: Yetzo ha-neft le-Yisrael derech Turkiya nimshach lamrot ha-cherem. Elu ha-sibot, Globes, 03.05.2024, [Exposure: Oil exports to Israel via Turkey continue despite the boycott, 03.05.2024], https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001477916#google_vignette.

¹¹² Challenges in Azerbaijani-Israeli Strategic Relationship After October 7, Azerbaijan, Volume 21 Issue 90, 06.12.2024, <https://jamestown.org/challenges-in-azerbaijani-israeli-strategic-relationship-after-october-7/>.

¹¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, X, 07.10.2023, <https://x.com/AzerbaijanMFA/status/1710709167499939878>.

¹¹⁴ Azerbaijani president calls for ending ‘tragedy’ in Gaza as soon as possible, Anadolu Agency, 08.06.2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/azerbaijani-president-calls-for-ending-tragedy-in-gaza-as-soon-as-possible/3244451>.

Due to the war in Gaza, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Egypt, and some other countries came under some pressure— to halt trade cooperation with Israel.¹¹⁵ But there is information that, despite these pressures, Azerbaijan did not stop oil supplies to Israel during the war. According to Oil Change International, from November 1, 2023, to October 1, 2025, Israel received 17.9 million tons of oil from 12 countries, of which about 70% was received from Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan.¹¹⁶

In Turkey (as well as at Azerbaijani embassies in other countries), activist groups were holding protests against the supply of Azerbaijani oil to Israel via the Port of Ceyhan.¹¹⁷ However, the Turkish side insisted that such shipments were not taking place after Turkey's trade embargo against Israel.¹¹⁸ One of Israel's largest news outlets noted that "Azerbaijan is the only Muslim country that supports Israel in the war," and that throughout the war, Azerbaijan has not stopped supplying fuel to Israel, contrary to the campaign initiated by Iran against Muslim countries that supply fuel to Israel.¹¹⁹

Israel's relations with Azerbaijan should be seen as an attempt to mitigate its isolation in the Muslim world and as part of its "Periphery Doctrine."¹²⁰ The doctrine was introduced as early as the 1950s— by Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, and its purpose was to build alliances with non-Arab, non-Muslim states and minorities in the Middle East to counter the surrounding hostile Arab states. The doctrine has undergone changes over the years due to geopolitical and social developments, but it remains part of the State of Israel's strategic thinking. The doctrine's scope has been expanded to include Greece, Cyprus, the South Caucasus, and others.¹²¹ The Israel-Azerbaijan cooperation also serves as an effective tool for strengthening the U.S. strategic presence in the Caspian Sea basin. According to Ben Aharon (Ben Aharon, 2024), Israel's attempts to find new alliances in the South Caucasus and Central Asia had to be consistent with the

¹¹⁵ Challenges in Azerbaijani-Israeli Strategic Relationship After October 7, Azerbaijan, Volume 21 Issue 90, 06.12.2024, <https://jamestown.org/challenges-in-azerbaijani-israeli-strategic-relationship-after-october-7/>.

¹¹⁶ Behind the Barrel: An update on the Origins of Israel's Fuel Supply, Oil Change International, November 2025, p. 2, <https://oilchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Behind-the-Barrel-3.pdf>.

¹¹⁷ Azerbaijan's silence over Gaza is not surprising, Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT), 12.12.2024, https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/en/cp_article/azerbaijans-silence-over-gaza-is-not-surprising/.

¹¹⁸ Turkish Energy Ministry denies supplying Israel with Azerbaijani oil amid growing protests, Turkish Minute, 11.11.2024, <https://turkishminute.com/2024/11/11/turkish-energy-ministry-denis-supplying-isral-with-azerbaijani-oil-amd-growing-protests/>.

¹¹⁹ Azerbaijan: Ha-medina ha-muslemit ha-yehida ba-olam she-tomekhet be-Yisrael b'milchama, Azerbaijan: Ynetnews, 05.12.2023, [The only Muslim country in the world that supports Israel in the war, 05.12.2023], <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/sjtv1p2rp>.

¹²⁰ Lindenstrauss, G. (2015). Israel-Azerbaijan: Despite the Constraints, a Special Relationship, Tel-Aviv University, The Institute for National Security Studies, Strategic Assessment, Volume 17, No. 4, p. 74.

¹²¹ Ben Aharon, E. (2024). Israel's Foreign Policy and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Reflection on Regional Security and Diplomacy, Journal of Genocide Research, p 6, DOI: [10.1080/14623528.2024.2406100](https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2024.2406100).

global strategy of its main ally, the United States. In other words, Israel is “implementing” U.S. foreign policy objectives in these regions.¹²²

As has already been noted, a significant part of Israel-Azerbaijan cooperation is in the energy sector, in which cooperation with Turkey in a trilateral format is also important. It should be noted that Turkey is highly dependent on imported oil and gas.¹²³

One of the main directions of Israel-Azerbaijan cooperation is countering Iran. The National Security Concept of Azerbaijan states that the Republic of Azerbaijan attaches importance to its relations with Iran, which is one of the key objectives of its foreign policy.¹²⁴ However, relations between the two sides are strained for several reasons, including Iran - Armenia partnership ties, as well as the presence of a significant Azerbaijani population in Iran.¹²⁵ In this regard, Iran's concern is linked to their potential political aspirations under the idea of “secession and the creation of a Greater Azerbaijan.”¹²⁶ In 2023, Israeli Foreign Minister E. Cohen stated that “Israel and Azerbaijan share the same perception of the Iranian threat.”¹²⁷ Tehran has often expressed concerns about Israeli intelligence activities being conducted through Azerbaijani territory.¹²⁸

According to Bulent Aras, the Israel-Azerbaijan cooperation is aimed at countering Russian pressure and Iran's growing ties with Armenia.¹²⁹ Azerbaijan also values Israeli support in countering the Armenian diaspora, especially in the US and Europe.¹³⁰ For years, Azerbaijan has utilized the services of Jewish organizations in the US, some of which have engaged in lobbying activities to advance Azerbaijani interests in opposition to Armenian lobbying groups.¹³¹ The Israel-Azerbaijan partnership is primarily perceived in terms of security challenges, such as the Iranian threat, but the parties have strong economic ties and can be said to be mutually dependent on the partnership. They complement each other's needs: Azerbaijan provides Israel with oil, while Israel helps develop technology in

¹²² Murinson, A., The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, Israel, The Ties between Israel and Azerbaijan, p. 15, <https://besacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/MSPS110-web.pdf>.

¹²³ Esen, M. E., Coal, Oil, Gas, and Nuclear: Risks in Turkey's Growing Energy Demands, Fikra Forum, The Washington Institute, 22.10.2025, <https://url-shortener.me/CXVN>.

¹²⁴ National Security Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “4.1.5.1. Cooperation with regional countries”, Approved by Instruction No. 2198 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 23.05.2007, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/154917/Azerbaijan2007.pdf>, p. 14.

¹²⁵ Azeris in Iran, Minority Rights Group, <https://minorityrights.org/communities/azeris-2/>.

¹²⁶ Avdaliani, E. (2020). Defying Geography: The Israel-Azerbaijan Partnership, BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 1,723, August 31, p. 3, <https://besacenter.org/israel-azerbaijan-partnership/>.

¹²⁷ Azerbaijan to open embassy in Israel today, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Israel, 29.03.2023, <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/azerbaijan-to-open-embassy-in-israel-today-29-mar-2023>.

¹²⁸ Iran expresses concern about Israel's presence in Azerbaijan, Iran Insights, 02.02.2025, <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202502029415>.

¹²⁹ Aras, B. (1998). Post-Cold War Realities: Israel's Strategy In Azerbaijan And Central Asia, Middle East Policy, Vol 5, Issue 4, p. 74, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4967.1998.tb00370.x>.

¹³⁰ Khalifa-zadeh, M.. cited work, p. 61.

¹³¹ Ismayilov, E. cited work, p. 70.

Azerbaijan's military, industrial, and agricultural sectors.¹³² Azerbaijan's strategic relations with Israel are often compared to an iceberg, with only a small part visible while the larger part is hidden, as the two sides cooperate not only in energy and communications but also in the military and intelligence sectors.¹³³

The Positions of the South Caucasus states in UNGA Vote on Resolutions Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Although relations with Palestine are not at a very high level, however, in the UN General Assembly (as well as in other international forums) Azerbaijan consistently votes in favor of resolutions that primarily criticize Israeli actions and support the protection of Palestinian rights.¹³⁴

According to the UN Watch database, of the South Caucasus states, Azerbaijan has voted the most in favor of UNGA resolutions related to the conflict, which are predominantly “anti-Israel” in content. Specifically, Azerbaijan voted in favor of 185 resolutions and did not abstain in any vote¹³⁵, while Armenia voted in favor of 161 resolutions and abstained on 23¹³⁶, and Georgia voted in favor of 118 resolutions and abstained on 63.¹³⁷

An analysis of the votes shows that they are mainly annual updates of the same resolutions with insignificant changes. In other words, in 2015-2025, the 23 resolutions on the conflict for which Armenia has abstained have four main contents:

- “On the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People”, which reaffirms the support of the UNGA for the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in particular the right to self-determination, independence, sovereignty and return. Since 2015, Armenia and Georgia have abstained from the annual votes on this resolution, while Azerbaijan has voted in favor.¹³⁸

¹³² Göksel, O. (2015). Beyond Countering Iran: A Political Economy of Azerbaijan-Israel Relations, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 42:4, 655-675, p. 657, DOI: [10.1080/13530194.2015.1048973](https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2015.1048973).

¹³³ Яшлавский, А. (2024). Война в секторе Газа, Центральная Азия и Южный Кавказ: Эхо конфликта. Конфликты и проблемы безопасности, с.133, DOI: 10.20542/2073-4786-2024-3-122-137. [Yashlavsky, A. (2024). The War in Gaza, Central Asia, and the South Caucasus: Echoes of Conflict, *Conflicts and Security Issues*, p. 133],

¹³⁴ Azerbaijan, Voting record on Israel resolutions, UN Watch Database, https://unwatch.org/database/country-info/?country_voted=24133.

¹³⁵ Azerbaijan, Country Information, UN Watch Database, <https://unwatch.org/database/country/azerbaijan/>.

¹³⁶ Armenia, Voting record on Israel resolutions, UN Watch Database, <https://unwatch.org/database/country/armenia/>.

¹³⁷ Georgia, Voting record on Israel resolutions, UN Watch Database, <https://unwatch.org/database/country/georgia/>.

¹³⁸ Armenia, Voting record on Israel resolutions, UN Watch Database, <https://unwatch.org/database/country/armenia/>.

- Regarding “the Secretariat’s Division of Palestinian Rights”, which affirms that the Division of Palestinian Rights continues to make a more useful and constructive contribution to raising international awareness of the Palestinian question and the need for a peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question in accordance with international law, based on UN resolutions and efforts in this regard, as well as in providing international support for the rights of the Palestinian people.¹³⁹ Since 2015, Armenia and Georgia have abstained from the annual votes on this resolution, while Azerbaijan has voted in favor.

- “On the work of the Special Committee to investigate Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs in the occupied territories since 1967”, which reaffirms the General Assembly's support for the Special Committee established in 1968, for monitoring and reporting on Israeli violations of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories and other occupied Arab territories since 1967. The resolution expressed concern about the continuing adverse impact of the illegal actions and measures being taken by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.¹⁴⁰ The voting pattern for the South Caucasus countries is the same as for previous resolutions: Armenia and Georgia abstained, and Azerbaijan voted in favor.

- A resolution “On the situation of public health in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan”, requesting the Director-General to report and make practical proposals for the occupied Palestinian territories, including the health situation and physical and procedural barriers to accessing health care in East Jerusalem and the occupied Syrian Golan.¹⁴¹ For the vote on this resolution, Armenia abstained from 2015-2019, while from 2020-2025, it voted in favor. Georgia abstained from the 2024-2025 votes, while Azerbaijan voted in favor of these resolutions.

Georgia has abstained mainly from the following resolutions:

- “On the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to their natural resources” (1997), which Armenia and Azerbaijan voted in favor of.¹⁴²

- “On the Syrian Golan”, “The Occupied Syrian Golan”, and “Human rights in the Golan”, which considers Israel's presence in the Golan a gross violation of international law and calls on it to withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan.¹⁴³ Armenia and Azerbaijan have voted in favor of these annual resolutions.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² A/RES/51/190, Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, UN. General Assembly (51st sess.: 1996-1997), UN Digital Library, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/232072?ln=en&v=pdf>.

¹⁴³ Georgia, Voting record on Israel resolutions, UN Watch Database, <https://unwatch.org/database/country/georgia/>.

- “On the situation of Palestinian women and the assistance for them”, which blames the “Israeli occupation for the problems facing Palestinian women.”¹⁴⁴ Azerbaijan voted in favor of this resolution in 2017, 2018, and 2019¹⁴⁵, and Armenia in 2019.¹⁴⁶
- “On ensuring accountability and justice for all violations of international law in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.”¹⁴⁷
- “On the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and the obligation to ensure accountability and justice”,¹⁴⁸ calling on Israel to respect international law, to cease human rights violations and ensure accountability for abuses in the occupied territories. It also reaffirms the need for justice and the protection of Palestinian civilians under occupation.
- Georgia has abstained from votes on UNGA resolutions adopted after the 2023 escalation of the military situation in Gaza, specifically on the immediate establishment of a humanitarian ceasefire and cessation of hostilities (A/RES/ES-10/21)¹⁴⁹, for the release of hostages without preconditions and the provision of humanitarian access (A/RES/ES-10/22)¹⁵⁰, and for the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people, including the right to an independent Palestinian state (A/RES/ES-10/23)¹⁵¹, regarding the demand to end Israel's “illegal presence” in the occupied Palestinian territories.
- On the admission of new members to the UN (May 14, 2024), which raises the status of the State of Palestine in the UN General Assembly, granting it additional rights and privileges, but not full membership.¹⁵² Armenia and Azerbaijan voted in favor of this resolution.
- “On the need to respect and preserve the territorial integrity and unity of the occupied territories of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, as well as the illegality of Israel's settlement-building activities and all other unilateral measures” (December 10, 2024). Armenia and Azerbaijan voted in favor, while Georgia

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ E/RES/2017/10 (2017), E/RES/2018/10 (2018), E/RES/2019/28 (2019), Azerbaijan, Country Information, UN Watch Database, <https://unwatch.org/database/country/azerbaijan/>.

¹⁴⁶ E/RES/2019/28 (2019), Armenia, Voting record on Israel resolutions, UN Watch Database, <https://unwatch.org/database/country/armenia/>.

¹⁴⁷ Georgia, Voting record on Israel resolutions, UN Watch Database, <https://unwatch.org/database/country/georgia/>.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Protection of civilians and upholding legal and humanitarian obligations : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, 2023, UN Digital Library, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4025240?ln=en>.

¹⁵⁰ Protection of civilians and upholding legal and humanitarian obligations : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, 2023, UN Digital Library, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4029732?ln=en>.

¹⁵¹ Admission of new Members to the United Nations : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, 2024, UN Digital Library, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4046991?ln=en>.

¹⁵² A/RES/ES-10/23 (2024), Georgia, Voting record on Israel resolutions, UN Watch Database, <https://unwatch.org/database/country/georgia/>.

abstained.¹⁵³ Moreover, Georgia had voted in favor of a similar resolution in 2022 (as had Armenia and Azerbaijan).¹⁵⁴

- “On the Gaza ceasefire” (December 16, 2024), which calls for an immediate, unconditional, and permanent ceasefire to be respected by all parties, and reaffirms the demand for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, as well as the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. This resolution also reaffirms its commitment to the vision of two states.¹⁵⁵ Armenia and Azerbaijan voted in favor of this resolution.

- The 2017 vote on Resolution ES-10/19, which criticized US policy on Jerusalem and invalidated the US decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, (Armenia and Azerbaijan voted in favor), Georgia did not participate.¹⁵⁶

Conclusion

The South Caucasus is connected to the Middle East by historical, security, and cultural ties. In the conflict, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan support the “two-state solution” principle. The South Caucasus states are guided by their foreign policy priorities when forming their positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but other factors also influence them. This research shows that all three countries maintain neutrality regarding the conflict, which, however, is manifested differently in practice: Armenia's position does not contradict that of its partner Iran, with which Armenia's ties are of vital importance from a security, energy, and trade perspective. Positive relations with Arab states are also important for Armenia. A significant step by Armenia was the recognition of Palestinian independence and the establishment of diplomatic relations in 2024. Although this move is consistent with Armenia's support for the “two-state solution” principle, given the timing of the move and the situation in the region, it can also be seen as Armenia's diplomatic response to the deepening military-technical cooperation between Israel and Azerbaijan.

Georgia's position represents a more neutral approach, motivated by a desire to maintain relations with its Western partners. Among the South Caucasus countries, Georgia has the most often abstained from votes on resolutions criticizing Israel, a position that is also close to that of the US and the EU. Its policy is driven by the desire to protect its status as a strategic energy transit hub by facilitating oil flows from the Caspian Sea to Israel, without getting involved in conflicts that do not directly concern it.

¹⁵³ A/RES/79/81, Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, UN Digital Library, 2024, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4068138?ln=en>.

¹⁵⁴ A/RES/77/25, Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, 2022, UN Digital Library, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3996093?ln=en>.

¹⁵⁵ A/RES/ES-10/26, Demand for ceasefire in Gaza : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, 2024, UN Digital Library, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4069197?ln=en>.

¹⁵⁶ Status of Jerusalem: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, 2017, UN Digital Library, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1327556?ln=en>.

Azerbaijan has the most developed ties with Israel in the region, especially in the areas of oil supply and military cooperation. Azerbaijan officially supports Palestinian independence, but it never harshly criticizes Israel. Of the South Caucasus states, Azerbaijan is the only one that has not abstained from votes on UNGA resolutions with anti-Israel content related to the conflict, despite having the closest strategic cooperation with Israel. This behavior is aimed at developing military and economic ties with Israel while maintaining legitimacy in the Muslim world.

The position of each South Caucasus country expresses its proclaimed national interests, which takes into account the level and prospects of economic and security ties with Israel and Palestine, and relations with other actors.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

“FOUNDATIONS OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ARMENIA”: PEDAGOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FEATURES OF A UNIVERSITY COURSE

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Abstract

This article presents the structure, content, and pedagogical-methodological features of the university course *Foundations of Archaeology and the Archaeology of Armenia*, taught within the *History* educational program at the Faculty of Humanities, YSU Ijevan Branch. The course aims to facilitate students' development of a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the multilayered historical past through the integration of written (historical) sources with archaeological data. The article emphasises the role of archaeology as a foundational historical discipline, the importance of applying interdisciplinary and contemporary teaching methods, and the need to cultivate analytical and critical thinking skills in future historians.

Keywords: *Armenian archaeology, University Course, Critical Thinking, Interdisciplinary Approach, Teaching Methods.*

Introduction

Archaeology is a historical discipline that investigates the processes of formation and development of human civilizations. Several fundamental issues of the historical past—such as human origins, the transitions to agriculture and urban lifestyles, the transmission of knowledge and skills, and the formation and development of beliefs and religions—continue to be central subjects of inquiry in historiography and, more broadly, the social sciences. From this perspective, the role of archaeology is especially crucial, as it is impossible to find—or at least approach—the answers to these fundamental questions without studying the structures, artifacts, and other preserved remains of ancient societies. Archaeology enables a more profound understanding of the present and the developmental

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trends of contemporary civilization by drawing upon the historical experience and lessons of the past.

The university course *Foundations of Archaeology and the Archaeology of Armenia*, taught within the *History* educational program at the Faculty of Humanities of YSU Ijevan Branch, is designed to support students in developing a rigorous and in-depth understanding and analysis of the multilayered past through the systematic integration of written (historical) sources with archaeological data.

Significance and Contemporary Relevance of the Course

In the system of contemporary historical education, archaeology functions as a fundamental discipline that enables the reconstruction of the prehistoric and historical past on the basis of material culture evidence, thereby supplementing—and often reinterpreting—the information conveyed by written sources.¹ The study of the main stages in the development of human societies—human origins, the formation of a productive economy, and the emergence of settlements—becomes possible precisely through the comprehensive analysis of archaeological data.²

In this context, the university course '*Foundations of Archaeology and the Archaeology of Armenia*' plays an important role in the professional formation of future historians. The relevance of the course is also determined by the exceptional position of the territory of Armenia in the processes of the formation of the world's earliest civilizations, the material heritage of which cannot be fully understood without the application of archaeological methods.³

The course syllabus: structure and teaching methods

The course program is structured based on a progressive complexity approach. In the initial phase, students are introduced to the subject, objectives, key concepts, and methods of archaeological study, including stratigraphy, classification of archaeological sources, typology, and dating techniques.⁴ Subsequently, students study related disciplines of archaeology—such as paleoanthropology, archaeobotany, and geology—which are considered integral components of interdisciplinary research in contemporary international archaeology.⁵ After this series of preparatory lectures, students begin studying the history of archaeology and examining the results of significant excavations and archaeological discoveries carried out worldwide and in Armenia during the 20th and 21st centuries.⁶

The teaching process combines lectures, thematic discussions, the use of visual materials (maps, photographs of monuments and artifacts, videos), as well as

¹ Renfrew & Bahn, 2016.

² Trigger, 2006.

³ Smith, 2005; Avetisyan, Bobokhyan, 2021.

⁴ Drennan, 2009; Khnkikyan, 2009.

⁵ Reitz & Shackley, 2012; Simonyan, 2024.

⁶ Grant, Gorin & Fleming, 2001; Khnkikyan, 2009.

analyses of the results of renowned international and Armenian archaeological projects. The approaches presented are generally aligned with the “student-centered” and “problem-based learning” models widely implemented in European and American universities.⁷

Within the framework of the course, visits are also organized to archaeological museums in the Tavush region (such as the “Ijevan History and Ethnography Museum”, the “Ijevan Wine and Cognac Factory Museum”, etc.). In the contemporary world, this is known in archaeological pedagogy as the “experiential learning” method, which supports theoretical knowledge, while the museum is regarded as an important educational environment for teaching archaeology. The aim of this method is to provide students with visual and hands-on experience through direct engagement with material culture specimens and archaeological primary sources (finds).⁸

The instructional and methodological approaches applied in the course

The course is grounded in an interdisciplinary and comparative methodological framework. Archaeological material is examined within the context of historical, socio-economic, and cultural processes, avoiding an isolated and purely descriptive approach.⁹ Particular attention is paid to the integration of archaeological data with written and epigraphic sources, which constitutes a key methodological requirement in contemporary archaeological research.¹⁰

The development of critical thinking is emphasized throughout the course. Students are encouraged to evaluate the potential and limitations of various dating methods, the relative nature of scientific hypotheses, and the diversity of interpretations. This approach aligns, to a certain extent, with internationally recognized directions in *reflexive and interpretative archaeology*. According to these approaches, the archaeologist’s possible “scientific presuppositions” are also taken into account in the interpretation of results, and the findings are provided with in-depth socio-cultural analyses.¹¹

Within the course framework, a combined methodological approach is employed, encompassing a comparative analysis of archaeological field data, historiographical sources, and material culture remains. In particular, the study of the excavation results from the Erebuni and Teishebaini sites provides an opportunity to examine the principal characteristics of urban organization and military culture in the Kingdom of Urartu.¹²

From a methodological perspective, particular importance is attached to the contextual analysis of archaeological material from the Hellenistic capital of

⁷ Harutyunyan, 1992; Boud & Feletti, 1997; Grant, Gorin, & Fleming, 2001; Hmelo-Silver, 2004.

⁸ Al-Jahwari et al., 2019.

⁹ Hodder, 2012.

¹⁰ Moreland, 2001.

¹¹ Shanks & Tilley, 1992; Thomas, 2004.

¹² Avetisyan & Avetisyan, 2006; Avetisyan & Bobokhyan, 2010.

Artashat (Artaxata), the medieval capitals of Dvin and Ani, and a number of other notable sites. This approach allows for an assessment of the role of the territory of Armenia within the regional trade and cultural networks established during the Classical and Medieval periods.¹³

The course also employs a regional study approach focused on the Tavush region, within which the archaeological monuments—including fortresses, cemeteries, monasteries, and churches—are examined from the perspective of landscape archaeology and the preservation of material cultural heritage. This approach contributes to the development of students' analytical thinking and fosters a conscious attitude toward the historical and cultural heritage of their community.¹⁴

The main thematic directions of the course

The thematic scope of the course encompasses the main phases of archaeology, from the Paleolithic period to the Late Middle Ages. Through individual topics, the course presents the prehistoric settlements of Armenia, classical and medieval cities, cemeteries, and monuments of both secular and religious architecture. This material is examined within the context of regional and global processes, drawing parallels with archaeological data from other areas of the Near East.¹⁵

During the course, a number of key topics and well-known monuments are discussed in detail, highlighting the rich material culture of Armenia. Among the lectures, particular interest is generated by the discussion of theories of human origins, which addresses African and Near Eastern perspectives, as well as the significance of hominid findings in the Armenian Highlands.¹⁶ In the section on the age of dinosaurs, the emphasis is placed on geological chronology and the dinosaur tracks discovered in Armenia, introducing students to the fundamentals of palaeontology.¹⁷

The course places significant emphasis on the analysis of well-known archaeological findings. For example, the world's oldest shoe, discovered in the Areni-1 cave (dating to the mid-4th millennium BCE), serves as an excellent case study of how organic materials can be preserved and provide information on the lifestyles, technologies, and climatic conditions of prehistoric societies.¹⁸

The results of systematic excavations at the palace complex of Prince Chesar Orbelyan, Amberd, Baghaberd, Lori Fortress, and other fortresses are discussed as valuable sources on the feudal structures of medieval Armenia, political centralization, and defensive architecture.¹⁹ These and many other examples enable

¹³ Aghasyan et al., 2009; Avetisyan & Bobokhyan, 2021.

¹⁴ Ellaryan, 1980.

¹⁵ Yesayan, 1992; Kohl, 2007; Avetisyan & Avetisyan, 2006; Avetisyan & Bobokhyan, 2021.

¹⁶ Adler et al., 2014; Beyin, 2015.

¹⁷ Averianov & Atabekyan, 2005.

¹⁸ Pinhasi et al., 2010.

¹⁹ Harutyunyan, 1978; Gharibyan, 2009; Grigoryan et al. 1, 2025; Grigoryan et al. 2, 2025.

students to directly connect theoretical methodologies with the local material heritage.

Learning Outcomes and Emerging Competencies

By the end of the course, students acquire a broad set of knowledge, skills, and competencies in line with the standards of contemporary higher education. Upon completion of the course, students:

- develop a structured understanding of archaeological methods and core concepts in the field of archaeology,
- are able to distinguish and classify different types of archaeological sources,
- develop skills in the comparative analysis of archaeological and written sources,
- are able to interpret archaeological material within its historical and cultural context,
- cultivate critical thinking and the capacity to assess scientific hypotheses,
- are aware of the role and significance of Armenia's historical and cultural heritage within global civilizational processes.

These competencies correspond to the learning outcomes defined in international educational programs within the disciplines of history and archaeology (learning outcomes).²⁰

Conclusion

The university course “*Fundamentals of Archaeology and Armenian Archaeology*” is designed to provide undergraduate students in history (bachelor's level) with comprehensive scientific training. Analysis of the course structure and content demonstrates that it successfully combines the universal theoretical principles of archaeology with the study of Armenia's archaeological heritage. The interdisciplinary approach and the application of various methods in the learning process contribute to the development of students' independent thinking, research skills, and critical analytical abilities.

One of the key achievements of the course is the transformation of students' historical awareness from a one-dimensional interpretation based exclusively on written sources toward a multi-layered understanding of the past, enriched by evidence derived from material culture. The study of archaeological excavation results from across the territory of Armenia—including Paleolithic, Neolithic, and Chalcolithic sites; Bronze and Iron Age settlements and cemeteries; Urartian fortress-settlements; Classical-period habitations and burial grounds; as well as medieval fortresses and secular and religious monumental architecture—enables students to situate local history within a global civilizational framework and to evaluate its contribution to the shared history of humankind.

²⁰ Fry et al., 2009.

Critical-thinking-oriented tasks promote not only effective knowledge acquisition but also the formation of professional independence, a core objective of contemporary higher education. Familiarity with the principles of reflexive and interpretive archaeology equips students with the ability to critically engage with academic literature, assess the advantages and limitations of various methodological frameworks, and develop pluralistic interpretations of historical phenomena.

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The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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