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## ЗОВНІШНЯ ПОЛІТИКА ТУРЕЦЬКОЇ РЕСПУБЛІКИ В РЕГІОНІ ПІВДЕННОГО КАВКАЗУ

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У статті дано оцінку та проаналізовано зовнішню політику Турецької Республіки в регіоні Південного Кавказу в пострадянський період. Особливий акцент зроблено на дослідженні відносин Туреччини з такими державами, як Вірменія, Азербайджан та Грузія. У зовнішній політиці Туреччини Південний Кавказ займає одне з пріоритетних місць. Важливість всебічного вивчення цього ключового регіону стає дедалі очевиднішою. Те, що відбувається на Південному Кавказі, має не лише регіональне значення, а й глобальне значення, у тому числі пов'язане з такими питаннями, як геополітика, економіка та безпека. Регіон Південного Кавказу історично відіграє важливу роль для Туреччини. Цей регіон багато століть був місцем геополітичної боротьби різних держав. Розпад СРСР призвів до появи геополітичного вакууму на Кавказі. Виникла абсолютно нова регіональна політична система, яка давала нові можливості та нові загрози, як регіональні, так і глобальні. Цими змінами скористалася Турецька Республіка, яка багато століть претендувала на вплив у цьому регіоні. Поява в регіоні Південного Кавказу нових республік не тільки дала можливість Туреччині створити буферну зону з Російською Федерацією, але й спричинила виникнення нових зон міждержавних і міжетнічних конфліктів. Анкара відразу зрозуміла, що потрібно швидко заповнити вакуум влади в регіоні, скористатися економічними можливостями, а також створити систему, в якій Туреччина могла б впливати на політичне життя в регіоні Південного Кавказу. З усіх республік Південного Кавказу найактивніше Туреччина розвиває відносини з Азербайджаном. В основі відносин лежить етнічна та лінгвістична близькість, але також і економічна та військова співпраця. У 2020 році Туреччина допомогла Азербайджану відвоювати територію Нагірного Карабаху у Вірменії. Таким чином Туреччина теж отримала можливість більшого впливу в цьому регіоні. Також Туреччина посилила економічний вплив на Грузію за допомогою інвестицій у регіон Аджарії та міста Батумі. Єдиною республікою, яка ще залишається ворожою до Туреччини, є Вірменія. Туреччина використовує різні методи, такі як економіка та військова допомога, для встановлення власних інтересів у регіоні. Для Грузії Туреччина використовує інвестиції та капітал, тоді як для Азербайджану Туреччина використовує військову допомогу та підтримку на міжнародній арені. Головне завдання Туреччини в регіоні південного Кавказу – витіснення з цього регіону Російської Федерації та забезпечення власної енергетичної безпеки за рахунок контролю над нафтовою та газотранспортною системою, яка йде із Середньої Азії та Азербайджану до країн Європейського Союзу.

**Ключові слова:** Туреччина, південний Кавказ, Грузія, Азербайджан, геополітика, економіка, енергетика.

### **Petriaiev Oleksii. Foreign policy of the Republic of Turkey in the South Caucasus region**

The article assesses and analyzes the foreign policy of the Republic of Turkey in the South Caucasus region in the post-Soviet period. Particular emphasis is placed on the study of Turkey's relations with such states as Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. In Turkey's foreign policy, the South Caucasus occupies one of the priority places. The importance of a comprehensive study of this key region is becoming increasingly clear. What is happening in the South Caucasus does not only have regional significance, but also has global significance, including those related to such issues as geopolitics, economics and security. The South Caucasus region historically plays an important role for Turkey. This region has been a place of geopolitical struggle of various strong powers for many centuries. The collapse of the USSR led to the emergence of a geopolitical vacuum in the Caucasus. A completely new regional political system emerged that provided new opportunities and new threats, both regional and global. These changes were taken advantage of by the Republic of Turkey, which for many centuries claimed influence in this region. The emergence of new republics in the South Caucasus region enabled Turkey not only to create a buffer zone with the Russian Federation, but also to create a new zone of interstate and interethnic conflicts. Ankara immediately realized that it needed to quickly fill the power vacuum in the region, take advantage of economic opportunities, and create a system in which Turkey could influence the political life of the South Caucasus region. Of all the republics of the South Caucasus, Turkey is most actively developing relations with Azerbaijan. The relationship is based on ethnic and linguistic affinity, but also on economic and military cooperation. In 2020, Turkey helped Azerbaijan retake the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenia. Thus, Turkey also got the opportunity to have more influence in this region. Also, Turkey has increased its economic influence on Georgia, with the help of investments in the region of Adjara and the city of Batumi. The only republic that still remains hostile to Turkey is Armenia. Turkey uses various methods such as economy and military aid to establish its own interests in the region. For Georgia, Turkey uses investments and capital, while for Azerbaijan, Turkey uses military assistance and support in the international arena. The main task of Turkey in the South Caucasus region is to oust the Russian Federation from this region and ensure its own energy security by controlling the oil and gas transportation system that goes from Central Asia and Azerbaijan to the countries of the European Union.

**Key words:** Turkey, South Caucasus, Georgia, Azerbaijan, geopolitics, economy, energy.



**Introduction.** The South Caucasus is located at the junction of Europe and Asia, for centuries it was on the border of clashes of civilizations, world religions and states. This region has access to two seas, the Black and the Caspian, and occupies an important geopolitical position. At the present stage, in the context of the transformation of international relations, the South Caucasus region, due to its energy resources and geopolitical location, has become the focus of attention of external political forces. This region is a strategically important transport hub where trade routes and communications cross from East to West, and from South to North. In Soviet times, the region had fairly well-developed roads and railways, seaports, industry, oil, minerals, ores, a system of sanatoriums and tourism. Despite the fact that after the collapse of the USSR, many industries and agriculture fell into decay, the South Caucasus gradually recovered economically.

The collapse of the Soviet Union coincided with the time when the Turkish economy was developing rapidly and was looking for new markets for its products. The Republic of Turkey was ready to explore new markets in the young republics. In the nineties, in the South Caucasus, Turkey began to supply its own consumer goods, while importing timber, iron ore, coal and other raw materials from the region.

Today, Turkey actively participates in the political and economic life of the region. Its main interests lie in the military strengthening of Azerbaijan as the main ally of the Republic of Turkey in the region, as well as in opposition to the Army, which is the main allies of the Russian Federation in the region. Turkey is also interested in its own energy security and hopes to become intermediaries in the sale of energy resources to European countries, thereby making them dependent on itself.

**The article main goal** is to study the political strategy of the Republic of Turkey in the South Caucasus region.

**Recent literature review.** The topic of Turkish interests in the South Caucasus region was studied by such scholars as Bogdan Novak, Elena Osmolovskaya, Ksenia Pashaeva, Evanthia Balla, Mustafa Aydin, Burcu Gultekin, Soner Cagaptay, Yesim Arat and etc.

**The main research material.** Modern Turkey is pursuing a policy of expansion of territories that once belonged to the Ottoman Empire. Its political and military influence today extends to the Levant, the Balkans, the Mediterranean region, the Black Sea region and the South Caucasus.

Thus, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, new states of the South Caucasus region were formed, such as Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, territorially associated with the Republic of Turkey. Thus, a historical opportunity has opened up for Turkey to actively develop its foreign policy in this region, considering it as part of the Turkic world.

Analyzing the political and economic geography of the Caucasus, one can notice that in this region there are only two states that are militarily strong, these are the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey. The buffer zone for these two countries are the three Caucasian states, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, of which only Azerbaijan has a developed economy due to the export of oil, gas and refined products. Armenia and Georgia do not have such a developed economy.

Turkey and Azerbaijan have a lot in common. The languages of the two countries are very similar, as they are the Turkic branch of the Altaic language group; both countries are Muslim. At the same time, Sunni Islam is professed in Turkey, while in Azerbaijan the majority of the population professes Shiite Islam.

From the point of view of strategic significance for Turkey, the South Caucasus is important for two reasons. The first reason is that through the Caucasus Turkey gets access to the countries of Central Asia, which do not have a common border with Turkey. The second reason is Turkey's energy security, based on the oil and gas fields that Azerbaijan owns, and access to the Caspian Sea coast opens up economic ties with the gas fields of Turkmenistan.

Since Turkey has a developed economy, but its own energy resources are not enough, it is forced to buy them from other countries. One of these countries, respectively, is Azerbaijan. For example, in 2007 the main gas pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum was opened [1].

To transport Caspian oil to Turkey, bypassing Russia, Iran, and Armenia, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline was also opened in 2006, which increased Turkey's energy security [2].

The main geopolitical problem for Azerbaijan was the issue of the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, occupied by Armenia in the early nineties. To resolve this conflict, Baku and Ankara signed an agreement to create a military alliance. Former State Adviser of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Foreign Relations Vafa Mirzaaga oglu Guluzade has repeatedly stated that Armenia is Russia's outpost in the South Caucasus, respectively, Armenia and Russia are the main enemies for Azerbaijan. In the long term, the Russian Federation may pose a threat to Azerbaijani independence, from which Azerbaijan is forced to rely on the Republic of Turkey, the adviser explained. He also believed that Azerbaijan was slowly and gently integrating into the Republic of Turkey, the closest state to Azerbaijan. On this basis, military cooperation is developing between Turkey and Azerbaijan [3].



In 2020, before the start of the second war in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan bought an impressive \$123 million worth of military equipment from Turkey. Also, Bayraktar unmanned aircraft were purchased, which allowed Azerbaijan to gain a strategic military advantage during the hostilities. Before the start of the conflict in Karabakh, Turkey and Azerbaijan held joint military exercises [4].

The war in Nagorno-Karabakh ended with the victory of Azerbaijan in 2021. In the city of Shusha, in the territory of Karabakh, Turkish President Erdogan and Azerbaijani President Aliyev signed a declaration on the further development of cooperation in the fields of politics, economy, culture, trade, education, sports, energy security and military cooperation. During the meeting, Erdogan said that he does not rule out that Turkish military bases may appear on the territory of Azerbaijan in the near future.

The visit of President Erdogan to the city of Shusha was shown as a triumph and a symbol of Turkey over Armenia. The possible appearance of Turkish military bases on the territory of Azerbaijan means that NATO bases will be located near the Russian borders of the North Caucasus [5].

Turkey's expansion into the South Caucasus region is slow but permanent. Turkey, having taken a wait-and-see position, is patiently waiting for the right moment to take the next expansion step in the South Caucasus region. Azerbaijan's desire to return the territories of Nagorno-Karabakh and the fear of Russia's expansion into the South Caucasus naturally pushed Baku into the arms of Ankara.

Another zone of interests of the Republic of Turkey in the South Caucasus is the Georgian region of Adzharia with the capital Batumi. Turkey is interested in Georgia from the standpoint of its geopolitical position among the Turkic-speaking people of the South Caucasus and its transit position in regional energy transport projects. Turkey's active foreign policy towards Georgia is aimed at strengthening its positions in this country and, in general, in the South Caucasus, and at minimizing the influence of the Russian Federation in this region.

Adjara has a long border with the Republic of Turkey. In 2019, President Erdogan at the UN podium stated that: *"Our physical borders do not differ from the borders in our heart. How can Rize be distinguished from Batumi? Many historians believe that Cyprus, Aleppo, Mosul, Thessaloniki, Batumi. Only by losing independence, we will lose interest in these territories"* [6].

Turkey believes that Batumi and Adjara are the original territories of the Ottoman Empire, which means it is Turkish land. For many years, Turkey has been actively investing in infrastructure development projects in Batumi, and small and medium-sized Turkish businesses are expanding. Neighborhoods appear in the city in which only Turkish is spoken. Batumi Airport was built by a Turkish construction company. The Georgian border for Turkish citizens is conditional, they are exempted from border control, there is a visa-free regime.

Due to the fact that gambling is prohibited in Turkey, Turkish businessmen are actively investing in the construction of entertainment facilities, hotels and resorts. Batumi has become a city of entertainment, a kind of Black Sea Las Vegas, where people come for the weekend to play in the casino. Thus, the entire network of gambling and hotel business is almost entirely owned by the Turks.

Also, religious expansion is being carried out by Turkey. One third of the population of Adjara are Muslim Georgians, therefore, Turkey is actively involved in the construction of mosques and minarets.

The soft expansion of the Republic of Turkey in Adjara began after the Rose Revolution and the coming to power of Mikheil Saakashvili, who called on partners to invest in the post-Soviet republic. Two countries responded to this call – the United States and Turkey, each of which has its own geopolitical interests. At the same time, it is Turkey, at the level of historical memory, that considers Adjara its territory [7].

Thus, using soft power, Turkey has formed political, economic, cultural and educational mechanisms for regional cooperation with Adjara, aimed at the gradual expansion of this region, forming the political and economic axis Turkey-Adjara-Azerbaijan. To this end, Turkey strengthens its influence on the ethnic and religious level by gradually resettling ethnic Turks and Meskhetian Turks in Adzharia. Religious levers of influence are actively used, as evidenced by the construction of new mosques. On this basis, the export of political Islam among Muslim Georgians is actively carried out. From an economic standpoint, Turkey is shaping its energy security, while at the same time solving the issue of creating a hub for the supply of Azerbaijani oil and Turkmen gas to the European Union [8].

The collapse of the USSR opened up new opportunities for Turkey in the South Caucasus, as a result of which the Republic of Turkey has become one of the most important countries in the region. Turkey's foreign policy is aimed at establishing its geopolitical influence in the South Caucasus. Turkey's main strategic goal is to become an intermediary and distribution center for energy flows.



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