

UDC 327(479.243)

DOI [https://doi.org/10.32689/2523-4625-2022-5\(65\)-12](https://doi.org/10.32689/2523-4625-2022-5(65)-12)

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THE ROLE OF TURKEY IN THE SECOND KARABAKH WAR AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CENTRAL ASIA

РОЛЬ ТУРЕЧЧИНИ У ДРУГІЙ КАРАБАСЬКІЙ ВІЙНІ ТА ЇЇ НАСЛІДКИ ДЛЯ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЇ АЗІЇ

The role of the Turkey and the reasons for the support of Azerbaijan in the Second Karabakh war are under consideration. The armament provisions and the regular joint exercises showed the military support of Turkey for Azerbaijan as well as the opportunity for Turkey to demonstrate its military and technological capabilities in the Second Karabakh war. It is determined that the Turkish weaponry showed the weakness of the military planning and technologies of Russia. It is suggested that using of the Turkish drones in the Karabakh war changed the concept of war. It is established that Central Asian nations are beginning to view Azerbaijan as a bridge to the West and as a matter of outstanding role of Turkey in the Second Karabakh war this new image of Azerbaijan will only increase Turkey's advances in the Turkic republics of that area. It is determined that Turkey can expand eastward over the Caspian Sea thanks to Azerbaijan's geographic position, which will be important in stabilizing Turkey's approach to Central Asia. The most vivid example of this is the planned corridor that passes from southern Azerbaijan to Nakhichevan, an exclave of Azerbaijan. The Second Karabakh War's aftermath and the Turkish leadership's sequential official travels to Central Asian nations are instructive of the growing importance of the Central Asia for Turkey. The institutional and military backgrounds of increasing cooperation with Central Asian countries is revealed as well. It is concluded that nationalistic and panturkic rhetoric and practice being currently on the agenda of foreign policy of Turkey aimed at Central Asia. If previously Turkey cooperated with Central Asia on the low politics, after the Second Karabakh war Turkey turned to high politics questions, using the low politics as the background for high politics issues. Based on their shared language and racial heritage, Turkey and Central Asian nations are forming a strategic, security, and military partnership. The emergence of political dimension in the cooperation is illustrated by the Turkic unanimity in the position paper “Turkic World Vision – 2040”.

Key words: Second Karabakh war, Turkey, drones, Central Asia.

Розглядається роль Туреччини та причини підтримки Туреччиною Азербайджану у Другій карабахській війні. Положення про озброєння та регулярні спільні навчання показали військову підтримку Азербайджану з боку Туреччини, а також можливість для Туреччини продемонструвати свій військовий і технологічний потенціал у Другій карабахській війні. Визначено, що турецьке озброєння показало слабкість військового планування і технологій Росії. Запропоновано, що використання турецьких безпілотників у війні за Карабах змінило концепцію війни. Встановлено, що країни Центральної Азії починають розглядати Азербайджан як міст із Заходом, і через видатну роль Туреччини у Другій карабахській війні цей новий образ Азербайджану лише посилить прогрес Туреччини в тюркських республіках цього регіону. Визначено, що Туреччина може розширюватися на схід через Каспійське море завдяки географічному положенню Азербайджану, що буде важливим для стабілізації підходу Туреччини до Центральної Азії. Найбільш яскравим прикладом цього є запланований коридор, який проходить з півдня Азербайджану до Нахічевані, ексклаву Азербайджану. Наслідки Другої карабахської війни та послідовні офіційні поїздки турецького керівництва до країн Центральної Азії свідчать про зростаюче значення Центральної Азії для Туреччини. Також розкриваються інституційні та військові передумови розширення співпраці з країнами Центральної Азії. Зроблено висновок, що на порядку денному зовнішньої політики Туреччини, спрямованої на Центральну Азію, зараз стоїть націоналістична та пантюркська риторика та практика. Якщо раніше Туреччина співпрацювала з Центральною Азією у сфері низької політики, то після Другої карабахської війни Туреччина звернулася до питань високої політики, використовуючи низьку політику як фон для питань високої політики. На основі спільної мови та спадщини Туреччина та країни Центральної Азії формують стратегічне, безпекове та військове партнерство. Поява політичного виміру у співпраці проілюстрована тюркською одностайністю в позиційному документі «Тюркське бачення світу – 2040».

Ключові слова: Друга Карабахська війна, Туреччина, безпілотники, Центральна Азія.

Formulation of the problem. Abraham Accords, which were brokered by the US, considerably weakened Turkey's role in the Middle East. As a consequence, Turkey replaced the Islamic card and talk of Muslim unity by the Turkish nationalism. Ankara increases its presence in Central Asia as a result of the new realities in the Middle East. The war in Nagorno Karabakh has practically confirmed this vector change. A deciding factor in the Second Karabakh war was Turkey's strong political, moral and military support for Azerbaijan. The victory of the Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh war gave Turkey the new opportunities to expand strategic power into Central Asia.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The Turkey's influence on the Central Asia countries is investigated by Turkish scholars M. Efe Çaman and M. Ali Akyurt [12], Tuba Eldem [19] as well as by European scholars Toni Alaranta and Kristiina Silvan (Finnish Institute of International Affairs) [2]. Although the Second Karabakh war has not been viewed before as the main factor for the growing advances of the Turkey in the Central Asia.

The aim of the article is to present the impact of the Second Karabakh war and the role of Turkey in this war for Central Asia. In order to achieve the purpose of work, a detailed investigation of this question was made.

Presenting the main material. The moral and technical support of Turkey helped Azerbaijan to resolve the conflict by military means, something what the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which was created to resolve the crisis that began with the occupation of Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh, and its co-chairs were supposed to do peacefully for more than two decades already. This was a real assurance of the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions without the help of the Minsk Group or the co-chairs. Undoubtedly, Turkey's influence on the processes in Karabakh proved the urgency of resolving the issue of doubtful effectiveness of the Minsk Group, because this can become a precedent for the role of international organizations in resolving conflicts around the world.

Turkey has repeatedly called on the Minsk Group, formed to mediate the conflict and led by France, Russia and the United States, to urge Armenia to withdraw from the region.

Already by the beginning of the war, France, represented by President Macron, declared: "France remains extremely concerned by the warlike messages Turkey had in the last hours, which essentially remove any of Azerbaijan's inhibitions in reconquering Nagorno-Karabakh.

And that we won't accept" [21]. Such subversive rhetoric on the part of France runs counter to mediator's essential role that are expected to be impartial between two parties to a conflict. Moreover, without any evidence made public, Macron claimed that Turkey had funneled hundreds of Syrian jihadi fighters to join Azerbaijan's forces.

Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian warned Azerbaijan to strictly respect its obligations and warned Turkey to respect the armistice or else it would face European sanctions. At the same time, "France reconfirms its full friendship with the Armenian people in view of our close human, cultural and historical ties. We are on Armenia's side in this dramatic context" [3].

Russia, the co-chair of the Minsk Group, has undermined its reputation as an impartial mediator too. Russia sold arms to Azerbaijan, but it also supplies weaponry to Armenia on long-term credit. Moreover, Armenia hosts Russia's 102th military base in Gyumri and relies on Russia's military support for multiple purposes. The recent delivery of Iskander missiles to Gyumri casted a shadow on Russia's role as an objective mediator in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan [5]. Only due to decades-long military support from Moscow, Armenia was able to sustain military occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh. By selling weapons while at the same time ensuring Armenia with defense guarantees, the kremlin retained a capacity to influence the dynamic of the conflict with its escalating or de-escalating cycles. The abovementioned situations had reputational losses for Minsk process.

Likewise, on the USA side, being a presidential candidate, Biden warned that the United States under his presidency could impose sanctions on Azerbaijan under section 907 of the U.S. Freedom Support Act [17]. Washington's calls ignored Azerbaijan's repeated offers of a ceasefire conditional on Armenian forces' withdrawal from the seven inner-Azerbaijani districts adjacent to Nagorno Karabakh.

All these public statements showed a mediating power tilting toward one of the sides. Independent solution of the Nagorno-Karabkh issue by Azerbaijan with the support of Turkey discredited the effectiveness of the Minsk Group. The biased attitude of the Western co-chairs, namely France and the United States, which openly supported Armenia, impeded the progress of conflict resolution and inflicted reputational losses for Minsk group. Not coincidentally, in January 2022, Turkey forwarded an OSCE proposal to have the Donbas peace talks of the Trilateral Contact Group in Istanbul instead of Minsk.

In the Global Firepower rankings, the Azerbaijani army ranks 64th globally among

138 militaries, while neighboring Georgia and Armenia claim the 89th and 111th positions, respectively. The arsenal of the Azerbaijani army includes weapons both domestically produced and purchased from foreign markets, such as Israel, Russia, Turkey, the US, China, Belarus, and others [1]. Thus, Azerbaijan can be said to have one of the strongest militaries in the South Caucasus region.

But Azerbaijan owes its victory not only to its military strength, but also to the help of Turkey. Ankara gained significant diplomatic leverage as a result of its indirect presence in the region. Though Russia acted as the conflict's main mediator and mediated the cease-fire agreement that ended hostilities in early November, it had to take Turkey's interests seriously.

In the stage of the operation, Turkish drones have been a game-changer. In addition to the actual military supply, the transition of Turkish military experience has become a major factor in Azerbaijan's apparent battlefield advances too. Ultimately, this has played a vital role, as Azerbaijan's military units have obviously performed much better than in previous occasions.

In the Second Karabakh war, Turkey showed that its military capabilities and technologies have the ability to transform the way the world thinks of war and conflict due to the demonstration of its military technologies, mainly unmanned aerial vehicles and drones, especially the well-known Bayraktar drones (TB2s). Turkey's drones, unlike Azerbaijan's Israeli-made "kamikaze" drones, are multi-purpose. Moreover, they also tend to be technologically advanced to some of Armenia's outdated Russian military hardware. TB2s were not the only Turkish equipment Baku deployed, however. Azerbaijan bought \$123 million of armaments from Ankara in the first nine months of 2020, a six-fold increase over last year. Along with previous purchases, this gave Baku an array of Turkish-made armoured cars, multiple rocket-launcher systems and guided munitions. Turkey's Bayraktar TB2 armed drones purchased by Baku played a significant role in Azerbaijan's victory in Karabakh [25]. On 17 October 2020 a video was released by the Azerbaijani Armed Forces, showing the destruction of two radar elements part of an active Armenian S-300 SAM site being hit by Bayraktar TB2 [4].

The six-week war turned into a litmus test for Turkish and Russian weapons, with Russia underperforming. The director of the Institute of the World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Science, Fedor Voytlovskii, asserts that the conflict "demonstrated the potential of the Turkish

defense-industrial complex very clearly... Turkey will be able to attract many potential buyers on the global weapons market" [31].

According to information compiled from data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), while 94 percent of the military equipment purchased by Armenia was purchased from Russia during the reporting period, some of this equipment was donated to Armenia [23]. Among the military equipment that Russia supplies to Armenia are the S-300 and Tor air defense systems, the Iskender short-range ballistic missile system, and the Su-30 combat aircraft.

The cost of military equipment of the Armenian Armed Forces, destroyed or taken as trophies by the Azerbaijani army during the Second Karabakh war, according to the minimum scenario of the assessment, is at least \$ 3.8 billion [30].

Many anti-aircraft missile systems, which Armenian armed forces were fitted out with, including S-300, the Russian media celebrated as an effective defence against an air attack. Worth noting that the conflicts of recent years in Syria, Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh have tarnished the reputation of the S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems and the Pantsir anti-aircraft missile system.

Absolutely all means of radio-electronic confrontation, including the Repellent system designed for collecting signal intelligence on enemy UAVs and suppressing their control systems, turned out to be useless against Turkish drones, whereas a portion of these complexes was simply destroyed [15]. In any event, should Yerevan's military-political leadership opt for Western suppliers – whether because of real deficiencies of the Russian EW assets, or for internal political reasons – that shift would represent a huge reputational loss for Russia and a large economic blow for its domestic arms manufacturers since other potential buyers might be discouraged from dealing with Moscow.

Modern air defense systems are poorly adapted to the "drone war". Low-flying microdrones like the Turkish Kargu kamikaze, that were used in Karabakh war, are difficult to detect with air defense radars precisely because of their small size. The working height of Bayraktar drones (6 kilometers) is simply inaccessible for the old military air defense systems and most portable anti-aircraft missile systems, which was demonstrated in Karabakh, where the Armenians mainly used just such complexes.

Russian manufacturers and the military argue that their systems have no problems in the fight against drones like the Turkish ones [29]. Over the past two years, Russian troops have consistently

conducted successful drills to counter UAVs of various sizes and types. However, such statements cannot be trusted. Thus, following the results of joint Russian-Armenian drone countermeasures in the summer of 2020, a few months before the conflict in Karabakh, it was announced that the Armenian army was well-prepared to defeat the Turkish Bayraktars [8]. As a result of the war, it became clear that Turkish technology can create integral systems of network-centric (remote) warfare. Thanks to the technical contribution of Turkey to the Karabakh war, it marked the triumphant victory of the sixth-generation weapons (unmanned and high-precision) over the weapons of previous generations. Already, under the influence of the outcome of the Karabakh war, tanks have begun to lose their role as the basis of the ground forces: they will not be able to endlessly build up their defense against high-precision weapons, including cheap ones and attacking from above.

Two important points need to be emphasized. First, the conflict showed the efficacy of drones: the qualitative edge as opposed to the quantitative one turned the battlefield to the Azerbaijani's favour. We are talking not just about units of weapons, but also about armament cost. Drones are low-cost, high-reward type of a weapon, especially when we compare its price to air-defense systems and ground equipment. Second, the role Turkey played in the Second Karabakh gave birth to the drone diplomacy of Turkey and made it attain other regions, especially Central Asia.

The real grounds for the support demonstrated by Turkey towards Azerbaijan should be found in the agreements and on the institutional level. From 1992 to the present day, the two fraternal countries have signed about 100 agreements and protocols in the field of defense. Exactly 18 years after the establishment of diplomatic relations in January 1992 and the signing of the Agreement on the Development of Cooperation, an agreement was signed between the two countries, which significantly expanded cooperation in the military field. The Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance, signed between the two countries in Baku on August 16, 2010, states that cooperation will be carried out in cases where it is necessary to preserve the territorial integrity of either of the two countries.

Already on September 15, 2010, Turkish President Abdullah Gul and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev decided to establish a High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council between the two countries. Within the framework of the Memorandum signed between the two countries in 2013, joint military exercises are held annually, including TurAz Kartalı, which

makes an important contribution to strengthening coordination and cooperation between the defense structures of the two countries.

Military cooperation between the two countries has been strengthened by new signatures, the most recent of which was made at YDSK meetings in February 2020. Speaking after a meeting held in Baku on February 25, 2020, Azerbaijani President Aliyev said that the armies of the two countries held 13 joint military exercises during 2019 within the framework of agreements on cooperation in the military sphere and security. Additionally, Erdogan approved the dates of entry into force of a number of agreements with Azerbaijan, among which of them an agreement that was signed on October 31, 2017 about the military-financial cooperation between the governments of Azerbaijan and Turkey, under which Turkey provided assistance to Azerbaijan with weapons worth 200 million Turkish liras [32]. The Turkish defense company ASELSAN (Military Electronic Industries) has developed some ammunition in Azerbaijan in this regard, and therefore the smart drone has played a role in the development of repellents.

Joint exercises. NATO member Ankara trained and still trains the Azerbaijani army not only in the framework of international missions as part of the NATO task force (Kosovo, Afghanistan), but also in joint exercises. Joint military exercises have been held since 2000. In this context, triple exercises are being conducted in Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia in accordance with the scenario of peacekeeping missions, including the protection of the oil pipeline within the scope of "Eternity" exercise. These exercises are held annually to this day.

Turkey, especially over the past 15 years, from a military point of view to reduce dependence on foreign, regional and more active foreign policy from a global point of view, giving preference to a breakthrough and Azerbaijan, following a similar policy, has deepened the nature of bilateral military relations.

The already mentioned TurAz Kartalı is an air defense exercise every year that continues to this day to visit Turkey and Azerbaijan. After the clashes in the Tovuz region in July 2020, the scope of the joint exercises held from July 29 to August 10 2020 was expanded. In five cities of Azerbaijan, the air force participated in the exercises more extensively than ever, and special forces units underwent ground-tactical training. Turkey trains officers in the Azeri armed forces and Turkey has become Azerbaijan's third-largest supplier of weapons. Azerbaijan and Turkey held joint military exercises in July and August 2020 before the counterterror operation

in Karabakh started, and Turkey left two of its F-16 fighter jets in the Azeri city of Ganja. Meanwhile, Turkey's arms sales to Azerbaijan have increased sixfold this year. According to exports data Turkey's military exports to its ally Azerbaijan have risen six-fold from 2019 to 2020, with sales of drones and other military equipment rising to \$77 million last month alone before fighting broke out over the Nagorno-Karabakh region [22].

Moreover, against the backdrop of heightened tensions between Baku and Moscow Turkey and Azerbaijan conducted "Joint Commando Operation" exercise between 06-10 September 2021 in Lachyn. The exercises, which ended on September 10, did not appear to have a large-scale character. Neither side has released figures on the number of military personnel who took part in the exercises, but published photographs and videos of the exercise show only very small units. It should be noted that the exercise was conducted against the backdrop of the exercises held by Russian peacekeepers in the Lachyn corridor. Thus, the essence of the exercises was not in the scale, but in the political message, which they clearly contained: for the first time, Turkish troops were deployed in the territories that Azerbaijan conquered from Armenia during last year's war, marking the challenge to Russia.

The processes taking place in the world and in the region, also noted that at that time the obligations of Turkey and Azerbaijan constituted a significant strategic alliance. The integration of the Turkish and Azerbaijani armies will be a good example for other Turkish states in the future. Ramil Mammadli, chairman of the Caspian Defense Research Center, emphasized that this is an important message for the Turkish world [26].

Thus, the oft-repeated set of geopolitical concerns is related to Turkey's growing ambitions in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Since Armenia—Russia's client and ally—found itself on the losing side, whereas Azerbaijan and its Turkish ally clearly won, Ankara's influence in the post-Soviet space will grow exponentially and supplant Moscow. The victory of Azerbaijan supported by Turkey gives powerful motivating incentive for Central Asia. This new configuration created a new reality whereby the dominance of Russia in the Central Asia comes to an end.

Even though Central Asian countries the Second Karabakh war showed the most restrained position, at the same time the conflict in Karabakh will have certain consequences for the region. The foreign policy bodies of the Central Asian states almost immediately after reaching an agreement between the President of Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister of Armenia

and the President of Russia on November 9 on a complete ceasefire and hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh, issued statements welcoming the said agreement.

Ankara has done a shift in foreign policy as far as Turkey does not play the Islamic card anymore, but now rather more nationalistic, and of Turkish nationalism. On 19 February 2021, the 1st Meteorological Forum of the Turkic World was held in Ankara. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan addressed the participants of the Forum of Meteorologists: "Both the Karabakh war and the pandemic have demonstrated the importance of the unity, solidarity and equality of the Turkic world in all spheres, from defense to diplomacy, from health care to agriculture, from tourism to energy. We again made sure that we are a very large 300 million family that speaks the same language, professes the same religion, has the same history and culture" [9].

Speaking at a Victory parade in Baku, Erdogan de facto announced the need to restore historical justice. In particular, he hinted at the need to unite the regions inhabited by ethnic Azerbaijanis from Iran, by citing an excerpt from a poem in which the Aras river was mentioned. The poem by the Azerbaijani poet Bakhtiyar Vagabzade about the division of lands south and north of the Araks as a result of the Gulistan (1813) and Turkmenchay (1828) treaties. It was said that "the river was divided by force" between the countries [6]. Previously, the route from Azerbaijan to Nakhichevan lay through the territory of Iran. The new corridor through Armenia reduces Tehran's influence on Baku, while Ankara gains access to Azerbaijan without the need to cross Iranian or Georgian territory. In a word, a new geopolitical reality is emerging in the Transcaucasus and neighboring southern countries.

Turkey also turned out to be among the beneficiaries – the peace agreement obliged Armenia to provide its territory for the transport corridor between Azerbaijan and its exclave Nakhichevan, bordering Turkey. The latter can provide a direct route to the Caspian Sea, and from there to the Central Asian region. This totally corresponds to the new initiative called Asia Anew, announced by Turkish Foreign Ministry on 6 August 2019 with the aim to improve ties with Asian countries in different areas. The relations with the Central Asian republics, which are included in the scope of the initiative, are one of the main and strategic priorities of Turkey's foreign policy. Turkey occupies a key position in regional and global connectivity projects that are important in terms of food security, energy security and supply chain continuity. In this context, the

project “Middle Corridor” is one of the important components of a particularly important revival of the historical Silk Road. This project, which will connect Turkey to Central Asia via Georgia, Azerbaijan and the Caspian Sea, and from there to Afghanistan, Pakistan and China, will open up serious economic opportunities for all countries along the route.

As complementary to China's Belt and Road Initiative, Turkey has proposed Middle Corridor project. In order to align Turkey's proposed Middle Corridor project with China's Belt and Road Initiative, Turkey signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Harmonizing the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road and Middle Corridor Initiative in 2015. The unblocking of all economic and transport connections in the region would enhance the attractiveness of the Middle Corridor [28]. Ankara speaks openly about the benefits associated with this. The President's spokesman, Speaker Ibrahim Kalyn said that the opening of the corridor “is at least as important as the liberation of Karabakh” [20]. Parliament Speaker Mustafa Shentop called it the revival of the historic Silk Road. “We will transfer our infrastructure investments and expertise in this area to Central Asia... We will also expand our economic, cultural, political and military ties with our brothers [in the region]” [14].

Earlier, the ex-editor of the pro-government newspaper *Yeni Şafak* Ibrahim Karagul left a tweet from which it follows: Armenia should not have a common border with Iran. Nakhichevan and Azerbaijan will unite, opening the road to Central Asia and sending into oblivion the Soviet legacy in the form of the division of the Turkic world, with the prospect of forming a single Turkish space from the Aegean Sea to western China [18].

Turkey and Azerbaijan's relationship with Nakhichevan dates back to ancient times. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey, said the following words to them when he sent his delegation to Russia for the Moscow Agreement that will determine the fate of the region. “Nakhichevan is the Turkish gate. Do your best by taking this matter into consideration” [7]. Thus, Atatürk's vision is still clearly understood over 100 years later. The opening of the Nakhichevan corridor is not only the emergence of a corridor stretching from Azerbaijan to Turkey, it is a bridge between East and West. Nakhichevan and Azerbaijan will change the trade corridor between routes in the region, Turkey will be connected directly with Central Asia.

Thanks to this connection, Anatolia and the Turkish world will be inextricably linked. Railway

works, which constitute one of the sections of this road, which caused a stir throughout the region, have picked up speed. After the completion of the construction of the Kars-Igdir-Nakhichevan railway, which began in 2018, the historic Silk Road will also be revived.

The opening corridor will create new trade potential. Location, distance and use of a possible line in Nakhichevan; bilateral and multilateral trade will bring new economic life to the region until it reaches freight tourism. Thus, Turkey will increase the export potential of Central Asia and strengthen Turkey's position in the region.

Erkan Gul, chairman of the board of Azure Group stated that the road will reduce access to the Turkic republics of Central Asia. According to his calculations, there will be a reduction of 1000 kilometers. Gul also stated that they will save time and stipulated, “This will also affect costs. As export costs decline, exports to the region will also increase” [24].

Assembling the Turkic-speaking states under the aegis of Turkey has strongly revived after the victory of Azerbaijan. On the 12th of November, 2021 the eighth summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States, known as the Turkic Council, was hosted by Erdogan and was attended by the presidents of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, which are full members of the organization along with Turkey, as well as Turkmenistan's president and Hungary's prime minister holding observer status at the body [13]. The meeting focused on a wide range issues. Most notable was the adoption of the document “Turkic World Vision – 2040”, setting targets on foreign policy, security, economic cooperation, intercommunal ties and relations with foreign actors until 2040. What is more noteworthy is that the adoption of this concept paper exactly in 2021, proposed by the Organization, coincided with the 30th anniversary of the independence of the states of Central Asia.

What distinguishes the “Turkic World Vision – 2040” document and previous documents is adding a new dimension to the cooperation. The Turkic republics, perhaps for the first time, spoke about political problems in the Turkic world. By congratulating Azerbaijan on the liberation of most of the lands from occupation, the Turkic republics for the first showed unanimity in their official support for Azerbaijan. As for the problem of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border, the leaders of the Turkic republics said they support the efforts of fraternal Kyrgyzstan. The fact that the Turkic republics for the first time were unanimous on these issues is in itself an important advancement. The proposal to create

a Central Asia-Caucasus platform and the decision to deal with regional issues as an organization, is an important step forward too.

At the summit, both Erdogan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the importance of the so-called Zangezur corridor. As already noted, for Turkey such a route would mean a key link in prospective transport, communication and infrastructure projects that would bring together the Turkic world and bolster the Trans-Caspian East-West Middle Transport Corridor.

Such ventures are extremely beneficial to Turkey, as the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh has long been a source of economic hardship for the nation. Turkmenistan's natural gas exports could provide a significant economic boom for Ankara if the Caucasus landscape is reconfigured and the required infrastructure is established, allowing Turkey to become a central connecting point between the Central Asia and Europe as an energy hub. The centerpiece of this concept is the proposed Trans-Caspian Pipeline (TCP). This long-debated project would pump gas from Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan and onward into the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) that runs via Turkey into southeastern Europe.

Such Turkey's advancements in Central Asia challenge Russia and China's presence there. On the other hand, counterbalancing Russia and China in the region can help Turkey to upgrade its relations with EU and USA administration. Turkey's active policy towards Turkish-speaking Central Asian provides a good alternative in the region as a Western ally opposite Iran, China and Russia.

Besides economic and cultural ties, Turkey is eventually setting the military cooperation between Turkey and Central Asian states. The Organization of Eurasian Law Enforcement Agencies with Military Status (TAKM) was set up in 2013 by Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia with the aim of strengthening cooperation between law enforcement agencies in the countries concerned. The charter of the organization allows all Eurasian countries where gendarmerie law enforcement units are present to become a member. The Turkish gendarmerie command is more than a simple police force and can be equated with conventional military force. The gendarmerie was active in Turkey's Operation Euphrates Shield, which took place in Syria from August 2016 to March 2017.

Actually, TAKM was modeled on the FIEP – an alliance of Euro-Mediterranean gendarmerie and law enforcement forces with military status – to which Turkey joined in 1998. The acronym TAKM comes from the names of its

founders: Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia, four Turkic-speaking countries.

Turkey is currently conducting joint programs and military exercises with Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. Many of these countries are also members of the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP), so Turkey as a NATO member can apply the NATO standard of interoperability.

According to Turkish experts within the framework of the Turkic Council, it is necessary to focus on strengthening joint military potential, including specific activities within the framework of technical cooperation. The overall military potential and technical cooperation could be brought to concrete steps within the framework of the Turkic Council.

It is remarkable that against the dramatic information background linked to the Second Karabakh war, the visit to Kazakhstan on the 26th of October 2020 [16] and Uzbekistan on the 27th of October 2020 [27] of Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar turned out to be less noticeable. Thus, even in the wake of Nagorno-Karabakh war Turkey expanded its influence in Central Asia. Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar's visit to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan was not a coincidence, and it resulted in signing a military and technological cooperation agreement between Turkey and Uzbekistan with Uzbekistan President Savkat Mirzijoyev. Both in Nur-Sultan and in Tashkent the corresponding agreements on military and military-technical cooperation were signed.

Even though there is the huge potential for military cooperation, the problem is that Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are members of the *Collective Security Treaty Organization* (CSTO), a military-political organization, which also includes Armenia. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan are members of the *Eurasian Economic Union* (EAEU). In addition, all countries in the region, together with Armenia and Azerbaijan, are full members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Also, with the exception of Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, all countries in the region are members of associations of the countries of the Turkic world, such as Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States (CCTS), International Organization of Turkic Culture, Turkish Agency for Cooperation and Coordination, which automatically makes them allies of Turkey and Azerbaijan, although not all of them have brilliant ties with Ankara.

The conflict in Karabakh proved the viability of building a strategic, security and military alliance with the states of Turkish origin, and the Turkish

Defense Minister's trip to Central Asia was another step in that direction. Official visits have increased Turkey's outreach to Central Asia. Cavusoglu traveled to Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan from March 6 to 9, 2021. Cavusoglu said that Uzbekistan is interested in Turkish defense products and is collaborating with various Turkish companies in response to a query about defense cooperation. Since Turkish-made weapons made headlines during the Second Karabakh War, export to Central Asian countries is a distinct possibility. According to reports, Uzbek leaders were particularly interested in Turkish arms. Cavusoglu also said that Ankara and Uzbekistan were working on a preferential trade agreement and a free trade agreement. Other topics discussed included oil, commerce, and transportation.

Turkey has used the Turkic Council as an instrument to extend its political and military influence in Central Asia. Significantly, Turkey is also pursuing a program of defense cooperation with the two largest Central Asian states, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which presents a direct challenge to Russia. Kazakhstan, a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a military alliance led by Russia, has entered into a military cooperation agreement with Turkey that encompasses the defense industry, intelligence-sharing, joint exercises, information systems, and cyber-defense, as well as military training and military scientific and technical research. In November 2020, a Kazakh military delegation visited Turkey's Unmanned Aircraft Systems Base Command in Batman for several days to view the latest Turkish UAVs. After Azerbaijan and Ukraine, Kazakhstan would be the third former Soviet country to purchase these drones [10].

Uzbekistan also signed a similar agreement with Turkey in late October 2020 during a visit by the Turkish defense minister [11]. Some observers

argued that this visit may raise certain debates about the creation of an "Army of Turan" and a NATO-style military bloc of all Turkic-speaking states led by Ankara. Though unrealistic for the time being, these initiatives, all of which appear to be conducted in stark defiance of Russian interests given they are directed at countries historically within Moscow's orbit, suggest that Ankara is heading on a rivalry course with Moscow rather than towards a detente.

Another intriguing aspect of Turkey's policy for the Central Asia is how well it aligns with the West's approach to Russia and the two regions. This opens up the possibility of Turkey and the West cooperating. Both want to receive energy and put the end to the Central Asia's reliance and dependence on Russia and China in infrastructure realm. Thus, Turkey and the West have strategic goals that are close, if not identical.

Conclusions. Turkey played an outstanding role in gaining the victory by Azerbaijan. This helped to implement the idea of building the corridor running through Zangezur (Armenia) territory from Azerbaijan's south to Nakhichevan. Azerbaijan will be crucial in anchoring Turkey's approach to Central Asia, as the country's geographic location enables Turkey to advance eastward across the Caspian. Turkey is building a strategic, security and military alliance with Central Asian countries based on ethnic and linguistic proximity. Official visits of Turkey's leadership to Central Asian countries in the wake and after the Second Karabakh War are indicative in this regard. Showing unanimity in the position paper "Turkic World Vision – 2040" indicates the emergence of political dimension in this cooperation. As a result of the weakened position of Russia, the coinciding strategic interests of Turkey and the Europe in the Central Asia can become the real cooperation, the question of which requires further profound investigation.

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