

## Turkish-Georgian relations in the context of Turkey's regional policy at the current stage

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**Abstract:** The South Caucasus has always been a vital link and an artery between the West and the East. For centuries the rich lands and strategic location of this region attracted the attention of strong neighbors who tried to include the region in their borders. After the First World War and the independence of the South Caucasus states, the region turned into one of those points of the world where began a big game for influence. This game ended with the sovietization of the South Caucasus.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the South Caucasus has become a focus of global transformations and political upheavals. At the current age, here are appearing the profits of regional as well as global actors of international relations.

The disintegration of USSR created vast opportunities for Turkey to spread its influence not only in the South Caucasus region, but also in Central Asia. In conditions of Karabakh conflict, Armenian-Turkish, Armenian-Azerbaijani complicated relations, Georgia assumed significant role in the context of Turkey's regional policy, realizing an important function of a corridor between Turkey and Turkic speaking countries of Central Asia and South Caucasus.

Based on these facts and giving special importance to the transportation of Caspian energy resources Turkey has been developing close relations with Georgia since the mid-1990s and has successfully reached a high level of cooperation in almost all spheres.

In the article has been analyzed the role of South Caucasus in the foreign policy of Turkey. Has been reviewed the main aspects of Turkish-Georgian relations at the current stage. Special attention was paid to the place of Georgia in foreign policy of Turkey. General conclusions were made in regard to Turkey's foreign policy towards Georgia for the effectiveness of vector and further progress.

The author contends that despite the fact that Georgia is trying to diversify its foreign policy Turkish-Georgian bilateral relations will continue to develop at a fast pace.

**Keywords:** Turkey, Georgia, South Caucasus, regional policy, bilateral relations

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## Турецко-грузинские отношения в контексте региональной политики Турции на современном этапе

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**Аннотация:** Южный Кавказ является жизненно важным звеном и артерией между Западом и Востоком. Богатые земли и стратегическое расположение этого региона на протяжении столетий привлекали внимание сильных соседей, пытающихся включить данный регион в свои границы. После окончания Первой мировой войны и обретения странами Южного Кавказа независимости регион превратился в один из тех точек мира, где началась «большая игра» за влияние. Эта игра закончилась советизацией Южного Кавказа. После распада СССР Южный Кавказ оказался в центре глобальных трансформаций и политических потрясений. На современном этапе в этом регионе выражаются интересы как региональных, так и глобальных акторов международных отношений. Среди этих акторов Турция также внедряется в регион с целью создания зоны своего влияния. В условиях Карабахского конфликта, армяно-турецких, армяно-азербайджанских сложных отношений Грузия приобрела заметную роль в контексте региональной политики Турции в плане реализации функцию коридора между Турцией и тюркоязычными странами Центральной Азии и Южного Кавказа. Основываясь на этих фактах и придавая особое значение транспортировке энергетических ресурсов, Турция с середины 1990-х годов стала развивать тесные отношения с Грузией и успешно достигла высокого уровня сотрудничества практически во всех сферах.

В данной статье анализирована роль Южного Кавказа во внешней политике Турции. Рассмотрены основные аспекты турецко-грузинских отношений на современном этапе. Особое внимание уделено месту Грузии во внешней политике Турции. Сделаны обобщающие выводы касательно эффективности и перспектив внешней политики Турции в отношении Грузии.

Несмотря на то, что Грузия пытается диверсифицировать свою внешнюю политику, турецко-грузинские двусторонние отношения будут продолжать развиваться быстрыми темпами.

**Ключевые слова:** Турция, Грузия, Южный Кавказ, региональная политика, двусторонние отношения

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## INTRODUCTION

After the collapse of the USSR, cardinal changes occurred in the system of international relations. The emergence of the new states of the former Soviet Union caused a geopolitical transformation, which in turn led to the emergence of new geostrategic regions. The collapse of the Soviet Union signaled a “new world order” and forced global and regional actors to overestimate their foreign policy.

“Along with many other countries, Turkey has gone through a process of re-positioning itself in line with the new international setting” [1]. As professor Mustafa Aydin mentions, “Turkey, once a distant outpost of NATO on the European periphery, moved to the centre of the problematic post-Cold War international politics” [2]. Former Prime Minister of TR professor Ahmet Davutoğlu points out that “after the end of Cold War in the early 1990s, a new notion of Turkey emerged as a bridge country” [11]. In the context of the new world order Turkish policy makers had a fear that Turkey could lose its strategic importance to the West. The emergence of the new independent Turkic-speaking states in the post-Soviet space opened up new opportunities for Turkey in terms of spreading its influence in the South Caucasus and the Central Asian region and regain its importance in the eyes of the Western states, as a “bridge” between East and West. Using this historic opportunity and relying on the close ethnic, religious, linguistic, historical and cultural ties, that exist for centuries with the states of the Caucasus and Sentral Asia, Turkey intended to become a regional leader. To implement this policy, Turkey assumed the role of “big brother” for the Turkic-speaking states, offering them a “Turkish model” of development. The West, actively supported Turkey in terms of this policy with the aim of reducing Iranian influence and preventing the strengthening of Russian positions in the region. However, the “Turkish

model” collapsed, because “soon it became clear that Turkey’s financial and technological means were too limited to meet the immense socio-economic needs of the underdeveloped former soviet republics” [2]. Besides Turkey’s patronizing attitude did not sit well with many Central Asian officials, which after Soviet Union collapse did not want to replace one form of domination by another [24].

Despite the ambitions of the Turkish Republic, until the late 1990-s, it continued to be an outpost of Western interests and its foreign policy was passive enough. Turkey’s main foreign policy objective was Westernization and preservation of the status quo. As Murat Ülgül argues, “Turkey dealt with the neighboring areas mainly from a security perspective” [26].

The search for a new place for Turkey in world and regional politics has taken on new outlines since 2002, when the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve kalkınma partisi, AKP) came to power. In the framework of neo-Ottoman ideology, a new approach was developed in Turkish foreign policy, based on the doctrine of “strategic depth” (“Stratejik Derinlik”, authored by professor A. Davutoğlu [11]). In the first years of the AKP government, the initiation of the EU accession process and the search for new markets for Turkish goods shaped Turkey’s regional policy. In the South Caucasus region strategic goals of the country have been building around energy projects. The years between 2009 and 2013 are considered as “golden years” of the AKP government, when Turkey’s foreign policy became more active and ambitious. M. Ülgül analyzing different opinions of western and Turkish scholars on axis-shift arguments, points out that “Turkey’s traditional policy of the preference for the status quo basically changed” [26]. During “golden years” (and also now) Turkey’s aim was to become not only a regional, but also

a global power and leader country. In regional terms a key aspect of the Turkish policy was the “zero-problem policy” with neighboring countries, involving an increase in political dialogue, economic interdependence and cultural harmony. The main goal of this strategy was the inclusion of new countries and actors in its sphere of influence, due to the active development of the economy, science, technology, education and diplomacy.

The South Caucasus has become one of those regions where Turkey began to vividly pursue its new strategy of foreign policy. In this context Turkey paid special attention to Georgia, which in conditions of Karabakh conflict, Armenian-Turkish, Armenian-Azerbaijani complicated relations, became the only corridor connecting Turkey with its most important South Caucasus partner — Azerbaijan, as well as with the Turkic-speaking countries of Central Asia. Georgia also acquired the role of an important transit country in the context of the transportation of Caspian energy resources. Based on these facts Turkey has been developing close relations with Georgia and has successfully reached a high level of cooperation in almost all spheres at the current stage.

Since 2013 the South Caucasian vector of Turkey’s foreign policy has been overshadowed in connection with the “Arab spring”, especially the “Syrian issue”. However, the South Caucasus continues to be one of the most important priorities of foreign policy of Turkey.

The article consists of 4 main sections. In the first section will be analyzed Georgia’s role in the Turkey’s South Caucasus policy. The following section will review Turkish-Georgian military-political relations. In the third section will be analyzed Turkey’s economic policy towards Georgia. The forth section will review Turkey’s “soft power” policy in Georgia. The final section includes the main conclusions.

## THE ROLE OF GEORGIA IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS POLICY OF TURKEY

The South Caucasus region has been at the center of political interests of Turkey for centuries. “The strategic importance of the Caucasian region for Turkey can be explained by a combination of political, economic, cultural, historical and ethnical factors” [3]. Until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some regions of the South Caucasus were part of the Ottoman Empire and, accordingly, had historical and cultural ties with it. The Russian Empire and the USSR became a barrier for Turkey in terms of implementing its policy in the South Caucasus. The disintegration of the USSR opened up new opportunities for Turkey in terms of revitalizing its regional policy and spreading its influence not only in the South Caucasus, but also in the Central Asian region as a whole. Turkey’s interests in the South Caucasus region were due to the fact that it tried to acquire new markets for exports and also sought to meet the growing domestic demand for fuel from the energy resources of Central Asia and the Caspian region. On the other hand, Turkey was interested in transporting these energy resources to Europe through its territory [23], thereby becoming an “energy bridge and terminal between Europe and Asia” [13]. In other words, after the collapse of the Soviet Union Turkey started to view the South Caucasus region as a “transport route and supply corridor for energy resources from the Caspian basin”.

In the early 1990s, the political discourse of the leaders of Turkey towards the Caucasus (and also Central Asia) was quite ambitious. Turkey proposing the initiative of the “Turkish model” for the newly-formed Turkic-speaking republics, aimed to become a regional power [27], which in general is determined by “exercising considerable influence on the behavior of its neighbors and regional affairs in general” [22]. Many scholars view Turkey’s goals for that period as unrealistic. In particular, Efe

Çaman and Ali Akyurt characterize this phase of Turkey's foreign policy as euphoric, enthusiastic and sentimental policy [4]. Mustafa Aydın also mentions that "In the meantime, however, an atmosphere of euphoria existed in Turkey" [2]. According to Balcı Turkish regional policy in pre-AKP period was unrealistic. British researcher G. Winrow argues, that the "sudden repeated discovery of almost forgotten peoples of the Turkic origin led to the inflated hopes and unrealistic expectations on behalf of certain Turkish officials" [3].

In the context of this policy, Turkey in the South Caucasus gave priority to Azerbaijan, with which it has ethnic, cultural, historical and linguistic ties. Turkish-Armenian relations remained complicated, despite attempts at political dialogue. The normalization of bilateral relations became a hostage of the Karabakh conflict. Ahmet Davutoğlu in his book notes that Turkey perceived the South Caucasus region in the context of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict [11]. In these conditions, Georgia became the only springboard for Turkey in terms of penetration into Azerbaijan and Central Asia Turkic-speaking republics. This shows that the role of Georgia in regional politics of Turkey, first of all, is determined by the geographic location of the country.

During the first years of Georgia's independence, Turkey's policy towards this country was very passive. This was due to the fact that Turkey was most interested in rapprochement with Azerbaijan and the Central Asian states in the context of the "Turkish model", and the main goal of its policy towards Georgia was to maintain her internal stability, in terms of a reliable corridor.

Since the mid-1990s, Georgia's role in Turkey's regional policy increased. The reasons for the activation of Turkey's foreign policy towards Georgia were Georgia's membership in the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent states), which implied the strengthening of

Russia's influence in the region, as well as the collapse of the "Turkish model" in the Turkic-speaking countries. But the most important regulator of the activation of bilateral relations was the fact that Georgia in conditions of Karabakh conflict, Armenian-Turkish, Armenian-Azerbaijani complicated relations became a priority for Turkey in the energy projects of the region. West, especially US, began to actively support Georgia's role in terms of energy policy, as they tried to make new pipelines bypassing Russia and Iran [28]. Already in 1999, during the Istanbul Summit of the OSCE, it was decided to connect Georgia to these large-scale projects, as a transit state.

The importance of Georgia in Turkey's foreign policy was noted in the statement of Turkish former Prime Minister M. Yılmaz, who in 1998, during his official visit to Georgia, characterized this country as a state with which Turkey has common interests and Turkey is ready to develop cooperation with him in all spheres.

At that time, the main goal of Turkey's foreign policy towards Georgia was not only to maintain her internal stability, but also to spread its own influence within the country.

The regional policy of Turkey has intensified since 2002, when AKP came to power. Turkey's foreign policy was expressed in the doctrine of "strategic depth" (Stratejik Derinlik), authored by professor Ahmet Davutoğlu (former Minister of Foreign Affairs (2009-2014) and former Prime Minister of Turkey (2014-2016)). A. Davutoğlu in his interview for CNN, mentions, that if in 1990s "a new notion of Turkey emerged as a bridge country" [10], now Turkey is a central country, first of all due to its geographical position and historical assets. Turkey's regional policy is determined by several principles: establishment of high-level political dialog with other countries, economic interdependence, development of regional policies by including all actors in region, co-exist in peace, diversity

and tolerance of differences [1]. In the first years of the AKP government, Turkish regional policy became cautious and flexible. Nigyar Göksel argues that “in contrast to the early nineties, now Turkey makes sure that the rhetoric about regional domination does not outpace specific achievements in this field” [17]. This approach was due to the fact that Turkey admitted Russia’s role in region, taking into account her interests. In the “golden years” of AKP government Turkey’s foreign policy became more ambitious. K. Kardaş, in connection with this, mentions that “the pursuit of an ambitious regional policy has also dominated the discussions on AK Party’s foreign policy in the last decade” [22].

Scholars differently assess the South Caucasus policy of Turkey [10, 4, 1, 7, 21, 6, 22, 18, 19]. In particular, Şaban Kardaş, M. Çaman and M. Akyurt argue that Turkey has elaborated comprehensive regional policy in the South Caucasus, due to which it has become a regional power. K. Kirişçi and A. Moffat pointing out Turkey’s close ties with Azerbaijan and Georgia, and efforts to normalize relations with Armenia, argue that Turkey can play “role of leading policy” [21]. M. Çelikpala and Veliyev the South Caucasus policy of Turkey consider in the context of strategic axes Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia and Russia-Armenia-Iran. Another group of scholars claim that Turkey has different interests in the south Caucasus countries, and that’s why its policy is not integrated and comprehensive in this region.

Despite these different points of view, scholars share common opinion on the fact that Georgia due to its geopolitical location plays key role in the regional policy of Turkey. First of all Turkey’s common border with Georgia became that “territory” where the interests of the Turkic-speaking states are united. Balcı, Göksel, Çelikpala argue, that Georgia is a critical strategic, most stable and direct link between Turkey and Azerbaijan, as well as

Central Asian. Georgia participates in transport projects of regional importance. In this context it is very important to mention the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway (the completion time is expected in 2017). This railway will connect Azerbaijan, Georgian and Turkish railways (826 km). It will connect European countries with Asian countries, bypassing Russia and Armenia. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway will boost trade between Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, volume of which will be about \$10 billion per year.

Since February 2016 also has began the transit of electricity (approximately 80 megawatts of power) from Azerbaijan to Turkey via Georgia. In fact, Georgia has acquired the status of a transit-service country for Turkey.

Georgia’s role is very huge in the energy policy of Turkey. Georgia’s engagement in Caspian energy projects as a transit country has strengthened Georgia’s role in Turkey’s foreign policy and has made the two countries necessarily interdependent. Due to the efforts of Turkey and the support of the West, today Georgia participates in the energy projects of the region (the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline (June 2006), the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline (Mart 2007), the Trans-Anatolian and Trans-Adriatic gas pipelines (the construction of the last two should be completed by 2019)).

The role of Georgia in the strategic initiatives of Turkey is also important. At the current stage, Turkish-Georgian bilateral relations have become an integral part of the “strategic trio”: Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia. As a result of this, the meetings of the foreign ministers of the three countries are held starting from 2012 (2 times a year), with a view of discussing the issues of regional cooperation. Since 2014, trilateral military cooperation has been also deepening, in the context of ensuring the safety of pipelines [7]. In Batumi in May 2017, in a regular meeting of defense ministers of the

3 countries, was stressed the need for cooperation in this field. Since 2012, Turkish-Georgian-Azerbaijani military exercises "Caucasus Eagle" (Caucasus Eagle) with the participation of special operations forces of the three countries are taking place.

All this facts show that Georgia has profound and indispensable role in the regional policy of Turkey. P. Akpinar and B. Aras claim, that "it is in Turkey's best interests to continue positive relations with Georgia, considering border security and energy resources" [1].

Turkey, in turn, is a key country in Georgia's foreign policy. Georgia views Turkey as a counterweight to Russia, with which she has complicated relations. Georgia overcame its economic problems due to Turkish market, especially after August war in 2008. Second, Georgia views Turkey as its guide to integration into NATO and the EU. In addition, Georgia is interested in its "key role in the transit of Caspian hydrocarbons to foreign markets" [16].

These facts, as well as the influence of external factors, conditioned the formation and further development of bilateral Turkish-Georgian relations.

The military-political aspect in Turkish-Georgian relations at the current stage

Turkey became the first state in the world to recognize Georgia's independence after the collapse of the USSR (December 16, 1991). Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established on May 21, 1992. On June 30, 1992 between the two states was signed the treaty on "Friendship and Cooperation", which became the basic document of the legal framework of bilateral relations.

The initial period of the Turkish-Georgian relations were highlighted by a certain tension, which was caused by the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. Turkish government officially supporting the territorial integrity of Georgia, "by no means restricted the activities of the groups/associations of Abkhaz or Caucasian origins

within Turkey" [5]. Over time, Turkey's involvement in the solution of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict created a good image of Turkey in the eyes of the Georgian politics. After the Georgian-Abkhaz war Turkish-Georgian relations moved to a new stage of rapprochement, a stage of building mutual trust. In this period Turkish-Georgian bilateral relations were expressed mainly in the military sphere. On April 25, 1998, between Georgia and Turkey was signed a memorandum of cooperation and mutual consent in the military field. As a result, Georgia received 5.5 million dollars for the reconstruction and modernization of military facilities, for the construction of a training center for the Georgian military academy and for financing the Georgian army [14]. In addition, Georgian soldiers were given the opportunity to receive education in Turkish military educational institutions. Turkey began to train Georgian soldiers in the framework of the NATO program. According to the agreement of 1998, Ankara provided Tbilisi with 1,125 million dollars for the reconstruction of the military airfield in Marneuli with the help of Turkish specialists, in exchange for which Turkey was given the right to use this airport for free and 5 years without a queue.

In January 2000 Turkey with Georgia took the initiative to create a "South Caucasus stability pact", the aim of which was to establish more constructive relations between the South Caucasus republics (first of all Azerbaijan and Georgia) with the participation of Turkey and the West. "The pact was designed to increase Turkey's profile in region and enhance Western involvement in the area" [24]. However the initiative collapsed, caused by Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and disagreement of Russia.

In Turkish-Georgian relations a new stage has gained momentum since 2002 (when the AKP came to power in Turkey) which can be divided into three sub-periods. The first period of Turkish-Georgian relations includes the

years between 2002 and 2008. In this period activating its South Caucasus policy, Turkey managed to achieve its objectives in relation to Georgia. The main aspects of cooperation between the two countries became energy, transit, security cooperation. The success of the Turkish policy has been also facilitated by Georgia's foreign policy. After the Rose Revolution (2003), under the rule of President M. Saakashvili, cooperation with Turkey was proclaimed one of the main priorities of the country's foreign policy (The Concept of National Security of Georgia 2005). In political term Turkish-Georgian relations were expressed by mutual visits of dignitaries of the two states. Turkey continued to support Georgia in the military sphere, retaining its role as one of the main military donors of this country. In 2005, Turkey provided the Armed Forces of Georgia with 1 million 550 thousand dollars, in 2006 — 1,8 million dollars, and in 2008 — 2,125 million dollars.

The South Ossetian war of 2008 became a watershed in Turkish policy towards Georgia in the following senses. First of all, Turkey's neutral position at the outset of the war showed that Turkish-Georgian relations are to a certain extent subject to Turkish interests in the region. This fact produced certain tension between strategic partners. Second, Turkey, being a NATO member, has had to balance its relations with Georgia and USA, as well as Russia, which is an important trade partner and Turkey's biggest source of natural gas [1]. "Turkey's diplomatic initiative to create the "Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform" by only grouping regional actors to manage regional problems, quickly showed the limitations of Turkey's power in its immediate surroundings". Third, the strengthening of Russian positions in the region and the peak of the deterioration of Russian-Georgian relations pushed Turkey to intensify the South Caucasus policy. One of the objects of the "ze-

ro-problem policy" became Georgia. Despite the fact that this policy was not successful as a whole and in the academic and political circles it is discussed that Turkey's neighbors has turned into "zero partners" [15], in case of Georgia this policy worked by and large.

In the context of this strategy, Turkey has begun to implement a more active policy towards Georgia. This is evidenced by the official visits of the former Prime Minister (2003-2014) and the current president (since 2014) of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Georgia during this period. So, if from 2003 to 2007 the number of these visits were 2, then from 2008 to 2011 the visits were annual (4 visits).

In the military sphere, there were also active relations. In 2009 Turkey provided Georgia with ammunition of \$ 1 million. In 2010, the military trade turnover between the two countries amounted to more than 3 million 350 thousand dollars. The two countries also participate in joint exercises within NATO. Turkish-Georgian relations during "golden years" of AKP in Turkey and presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili in Georgia can be determined as peak of warm bilateral relations. In this sub-period Turkey succeeded, among other instruments, to acquire political and military levers of influence in Georgia and create a prosperous platform for advancing its interests.

The beginning of the conditional third sub-period in the Turkish-Georgian relations starts in 2012, which was caused by internal and foreign transformations. In October 2012, the opposition coalition Georgian Dream, having won in the parliamentary elections in Georgia, began to seek ways to diversify the country's foreign policy and begin implementing a pragmatic policy in the region. The reason for the new approach was the fact that the anti-Russian, clearly oriented pro-Western and in the context of this pro-Turkish policy of Georgia under the administration of President M. Saakashvili (2004-2013) led the country in



political, economic, energy dependence not only from Turkey but also from Azerbaijan. To prevent further deepening of this phenomenon, the Georgian Dream Coalition developed and adopted in Parliament a resolution on the directions of Georgia's foreign policy. According to this resolution Georgia has taken a course of preserving its pro-Western stance in foreign policy, while at the same time refusing anti-Russian rhetoric in favor of a dialogue with Russia. The analysis of this document shows that Georgia while supporting multi-lateral cooperation with Turkey and Azerbaijan, is trying to reduce its economic and energy dependence on this states by intensifying relations with Russia and Iran. This trend is also due to the involvement of Turkey in the Middle East game, which "slowed down" the activity of the South Caucasus foreign policy vector of Turkey. This is evidenced by the map of R. T. Erdogan's foreign visits, according to which, since 2012, he has not visited Georgia.

Nevertheless, the Turkish-Georgian relations continue their active pace of cooperation. Georgia continues to be open to Turkish policy, which creating an area of influence in the neighboring country in almost all spheres, promotes its interests both within the country and in the region. Since 2012 bilateral relations have started to develop in the context of Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia trilateral relations. This phenomenon was discussed in the first section of this article.

Turkey and Georgia continue to actively cooperate within the framework of NATO. From 10 to 12 November 2016 in Georgia, were held "Georgia-NATO-2016" international exercises, which were also attended by Turkish servicemen.

It is important to note the fact that Turkey stands for the territorial integrity of Georgia and supporting Georgia's position, does not recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This approach is fixed in the

official page of the Turkish Foreign Ministry, and this rhetoric is preserved in all statements of the Turkish officials at the entrance of meetings with their Georgian counterparts. Georgia in turn in international organizations supports the Turkish-Azerbaijani position with regard to the Karabakh conflict.

In bilateral political relations, in addition to mutual understanding, there are also some problems in parallel with the overpopulation of Meskhetian Turks in Georgia, the construction of a cascade of hydroelectric power stations on the Chorokh river (Adzharia), some changes with the visa regime, construction of a mosque in Adjara, close relations of Turkey with Abkhazia.

Despite the fact that these problems appear on the agenda of the two countries from time to time, they manage to circumvent these problems by placing emphasis on the development of bilateral relations.

#### **TURKISH-GEORGIAN ECONOMIC RELATIONS AT THE CURRENT STAGE**

After the collapse of the USSR, the expansion of economic relations with Georgia became an important part of the regional policy of Turkey. The latter began to consider Georgia as a springboard for penetration into Azerbaijan and the Turkic-speaking states of Central Asia. Georgia, in turn, began to accept Turkey as a direct economic exit to the West. These facts indicate that bilateral economic relations were built on mutual interests. In addition to geopolitical factors, the establishment of close economic relations was facilitated by the existence of common land and sea borders.

The foundations of bilateral Turkish-Georgian economic relations are laid in two important documents. The first one is a treaty on "Friendship and Cooperation" (1992), which includes an article on investment and protection of investment capital, and the second one is the agreement on "Trade and Eco-

conomic Cooperation" (1992). In addition, an economic joint commission [9] and the Turkish-Georgian Business Association were established [13, p. 49]. At that time, the Turkish "Exim" bank provided Georgia with a loan of about 50 million dollars.

Nevertheless, until the mid-1990s, due to Georgia's internal political instability and Turkey's desire to realize primarily the above-mentioned "Turkish model", Turkish-Georgian economic relations have been passive and ineffective.

The situation has changed since the mid-1990s, when Georgia has already become part of regional energy and transport projects. Turkey for promoting its regional policy has become an active pace to enter the economic sector of Georgia, thereby creating an area of influence within the country and providing a reliable corridor to the Turkic-speaking states. This policy of Turkey has been intensively developed since the middle of the 2000s [8].

The whole picture of the evolution of the dynamics of the Turkish-Georgian economic relations is clearly shown by the statistical data provided by the National Strategic Office of Georgia. If in 1995-2003 the trade turnover between Turkey and Georgia did not exceed 200 million US dollars, then this figure doubled since 2004-2007. For example, in 2005 trade between the two countries amounted to \$ 405 million (including imports from Turkey amounted to \$ 283 million, exports - \$ 122 million). This jump was due not only to Georgia's foreign policy after the Rose Revolution, but also to the active economic policy of Turkey in the region. The fact is that Turkey reacted very clearly and quickly to the deterioration of Russian-Georgian relations, when Russia placed an embargo on the export of Georgian wine, mineral waters, fruits and vegetables. Turkey offered new initiative projects to Georgia, as a result of which the two countries signed the Free Trade Agreement and on the prevention of

double taxation of income and the prevention of non-payment of taxes (2007). Due to this agreement, the Turkish-Georgian close relations in the context of regional projects and the deterioration of Russian-Georgian relations, Turkey has become the main trading partner of Tbilisi. According to the statistical data, the trade turnover between the two countries in 2016 reached \$ 1.51 billion, where only imports from Turkey amounted to \$ 1.33 billion.

The same picture of evolution can also be traced in Turkey's investment policy towards Georgia. Thus, in 1997-2003, Turkey's direct investments in Georgia amounted to \$ 203 million. Since 2004, Turkish investments in the country have reached 834 million US dollars. Turkish investment is expressed mainly in the sphere of industry, services, in the construction and modernization of state and military facilities, railways and highways, and so on. Turkey is already in the top five in terms of investment in Georgia. The Turkish investment policy in Georgia has also created more levers of control over the Georgian economy.

One of the largest Turkish companies in Georgia is Türksell, which acquiring the controlling shares Geosell (Geosell) has become dominant in the telecommunications industry of the country, because 90% of the population is a subscriber of this connection.

Turkey makes investments in the industrial sector. In Georgia is known the company Şener Arda Group (Şener Arda Group), which realizes its activity in heavy industry, construction, logistics, food industry. This company established a joint Turkish-Georgian Batumi Limited Enterprises, which built the railway platform and the terminal of the port of Batumi, in return receiving the right to operate this terminal for 30 years.

Among other companies in Georgia, the Turkish Şişecam concern is known, which is considered one of the largest glass producers in Europe. There are also Turkish construction

companies in Georgia, like Baytur, Borova, Burc, Ustay, Zafer, etc. Among implemented projects are known the construction of the Turkish embassy in Tbilisi and the Georgian one in Ankara, the construction of an oil terminal in Supsa, etc. In accordance with the bilateral agreement of 2005, the Turkish joint concern TAV & Urban modernized Tbilisi International Airport, built a new airport building and reconstructed the Batumi airport. The concern was also able to obtain the agreement of the Georgian side for the management of airports and flight services.

Turkey provided its presence in the banking industry of Georgia. In 1998, in Georgia was established a branch of Elmak Bank, which in 2001 was registered as a branch of Ziraat Bank. There are also Exim Bank, Turkish-Georgian Didibank. Since 2012, the branch of Ishbank is operating in Batumi. The second branch of the bank in 2014 was opened in Tbilisi. The purpose of Turkish banks is to lend to the commercial process, and also to finance individual projects.

The development of the Turkish-Georgian economic relations was also promoted by the agreement on the cancellation of visa regime (2011). According to this agreement the citizens of Turkey and Georgia has the right to cross the Sarpi border with internal passports on the principle of "one window" [21], which stimulates the Georgian labor force to look for jobs in Turkey.

It is important to note the fact that in Georgia Turkish companies operate with the help of only Turkish specialists and workers, thanks to which Turkey decides the creation of jobs for its citizens. This is precisely the peculiarity of the Turkish business, which is moving forward with the strengthening of the demographic basis. This policy is mainly expressed in Adjara, towards which Turkey has a special strategy. Turkey considers Adjara within its geopolitical borders, and tries to connect with

it by economic, political, regional and cultural threads. Turkey's investment policy in Adjara is rather developed. In Batumi, most of the hotels exist thanks to Turkish capital. In this city there are areas where almost all the shops belong to the Turks. Turkish businessmen in Adjara make investments in the agricultural sector, in tourism, and in the textile industry.

Comparing annual indicators of Turkish goods imports into Georgia and Turkish investments in this country, it can be noted the following interesting fact. Thus, the volume of Turkish imports to Georgia on average 10 times exceeds the volume of Turkish investments and it can be concluded that Turkey views Georgia as a broad consumer market, and through capital investment seeks to ensure its control over the vital branches of the country.

These all facts show that Turkish-Georgian close relations led them to economic interdependence. Due to Georgian open and Turkish active foreign policy two states from neighbors have turned to strategic, economic partners. It is fact, that Turkey's "zero problems with neighbors" is successful towards Georgia in general.

#### **"SOFT" POWER POLICY OF TURKEY IN GEORGIA**

Many researchers in analyzing Turkish-Georgian relations pay less attention to Turkish-Georgian cultural ties, which intensively influence bilateral relations. Turkey uses cultural ties as a one of the most important instruments of "soft power".

The "soft power" strategy in Turkey's foreign policy acquired special significance after 2002, when the AKP came to power. The main goal of this strategy is the inclusion of new countries and actors in its sphere of influence, due to the active development of the economy, science, technology, education and diplomacy. The main directions of the "soft power" policy of Turkey are as follows:

- Cultural cooperation and language advancement,
- Cooperation in the field of education and science,
- Economic cooperation.

Georgia has become one of the most important objects of application of the “soft power” of Turkey. Ahmet Davutoğlu, pointing out intense economic interdependence with Georgia, Turkey’s relations with this country considers as “the most striking example of Turkey’s success in the region” [10]. Ivan Chkhikvadze claiming some problems in Turkish-Georgian relations, in general supports Davutoğlu’s point [8]. In parallel with economic and military-political activity, Turkey successfully increased its diplomatic and cultural presence in Georgia, which contributes to the strengthening its role in the country, as well as in region.

The main agencies and institutions implementing Turkey’s “soft power” policy in Georgia are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, the Ministry of Public Diplomacy, the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA), the Yunus Emre Foundation and the Turkish Religious Affairs Department (Diyanet).

TIKA began to implement large-scale projects in Georgia since 1994. These projects occupy a special place in the Turkish-Georgian economic cooperation, tourism, culture, education, healthcare, humanitarian assistance, and also the rehabilitation and construction of schools. Since 2000, it has been implementing the “Turkology” project, within the framework of which in higher educational establishments of Georgia were established departments of Turkic studies. The aim of these departments is to expand the scope of research about Turkey and increase the level of interest of Turkey among Georgians. In terms of the number of implemented projects, Georgia, in the framework of TIKA, ranks second in the post-Soviet space after Kyrgyzstan [25]. This fact un-

derlines the special importance of Georgia in Turkey’s foreign policy and the productivity of the Turkish “soft power” in this country.

With the participation of Yunus Emre fund in 2012 in the Tbilisi State University after I. Javakhishvili, was opened the cultural center of Yunus Emre, the purpose of which is a comprehensive study of Turkey. The center conducts cultural events, days of Turkish culture in Georgia, implements scientific projects and conducts training courses in the context of Turkic studies.

Due to Diyanet Turkey introduces to Georgia the Turkish interpretation of Islam, thereby expanding its influence on the Muslim minority of the country. It should be noted that Diyanet has strong ties with the Muftiate, which is the official body representing the interests of Adjarian Muslims [20]. In Georgia with the help of Diyanet are realized restoration and construction of mosques, propaganda of Islam, selection of Georgian students for study at theological courses in Turkey.

These institutions also successfully implement the activities of public diplomacy, which is aimed at the formation of a positive image of Turkey in Georgia. The task of improving the interconnection between these institutions is carried out by the Ministry of Public Diplomacy under the Prime Minister of Turkey. Public diplomacy as a driving tool of “soft power” successfully forms an attractive image of Turkey in Georgia.

Recently, Turkish Georgians (known by the name “Chevenbury” (“ours”)), who have strong ties in Adjara, are viewed by Turkey as a powerful tool of “soft power” in this region. In the context of these intentions, Turkey created the Turkish-Georgian cultural and educational foundation in 2000, which carries out joint conferences, seminars, cultural events.

Despite the fact that Turkey is actively implementing its policy towards Georgia in accordance with the strategy of “soft power”,

Turkey still has a great deal of work in terms of education, civil society development and cultural programs in Georgia.

## CONCLUSION

The South Caucasus has been and remains at the center of political interests of Turkey. The spread of its influence in the region is a vital part of the Eurasian policy of Turkey. In political current conditions Georgia is an important part of the South Caucasus policy of Turkey. This country realizes an important function of a corridor between Turkey and Turkic speaking countries of Central Asia and South Caucasus. Georgia's important role in the regional policy of Turkey is conditioned by its presence in transport and energetic projects of regional importance. In addition, Turkish-Georgian relations should be viewed in the context of Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia relations, which are developing at a fast pace.

At the political-military level Turkey and Georgia enjoy close relations. On the other hand it is important for Turkey to build a dialog with regional superpower, its trade and

energetic partner Russia. In conditions of Russian-Georgian complicated relations, it is difficult for Turkey to formulate policy, which will satisfy Georgian and Russian expectations at the same time.

The close economic Turkish-Georgian relations and cooperation of the two states in the context of energy policy led to economic interdependence. Georgia is viewed by Turkey as an important trade and economic partner and a platform for investment. Georgia in turn views Turkey as window to western markets.

Due to policy of "soft power" Turkey increasingly spreads its influence on the culture, education, military and political life of Georgia.

The Turkish-Georgian close relations and positive image of Turkey within Georgia provide favorable conditions for the further implementation of the "soft power", as a result of which the Turkish influence in the country will be felt even more. Important to mention that despite the fact that Georgia is trying to diversify its foreign policy Turkish-Georgian bilateral relations will continue to develop at a fast pace.

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