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**The issue of communications in the context of the South  
Caucasian policy of Turkey  
(the late of 19th and 20th centuries)**

In the 19th century, the process of weakening and decline of the Ottoman Empire continued. It was lagging behind European countries in military, political, socio-economic and scientific-technical spheres. In such conditions, the Ottoman military and administrative-state system was weakened and as a result the Empire began to lose territories and her dependence on European countries increased. Part of the Ottoman elite understood that the Empire needs modernization and the renovation plans were adopted, which are well known by the name Tanzimats. However, it soon became obvious that the reforms had failed and the condition of the Empire had worsened. It should be noted that the modernization process which started in the Empire was under the economic and political influence of European countries. Besides, the major powers fought to gain concessions or economic advantages in various areas. Mainly Great Britain, France and Germany gained important advantages in different territories of the Empire. After the middle of the 19th century, communications, particularly the construction of railways, became an important part of the politics of the Ottoman Empire and European countries.

The goal of the research is to show how Turkey's policy has changed towards communications since the second half of the 19th and during the 20th centuries and it was presented in the context of Turkey's South Caucasus policy.

We have divided Turkey's policy related to communications, first of all railways, into three stages, keeping in mind both chronological boundaries and state policy. The first phase includes the second half of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, until the end of the World War I. The second phase includes the period of the republic, from the declaration of independence in 1923 to the beginning of the 1990s, the collapse of the USSR. The third phase begins in the 1990s and practically continues until today, when Turkey made the issue of communications as one of the most important aspects of her foreign policy in the South Caucasus.

The first period is characterized by the fact that European countries began to invest in the construction of railways in the Empire. In the initial period, England and France had a great interest in the construction of railways, and in the 1880s, also Germany. During this period, the railways in the Ottoman Empire were mainly built by European companies and were financed by European countries. The first group of railways in the Ottoman Empire was built by British companies. British influence continued until the 1880s, when German interests in the Ottoman territories increased. During this period, the Ottoman government also sought to build railroads, which would connect the Balkans with the Ottoman Empire. This program is popularly known by the name "Rumeli Railways". The project was introduced by the Ottoman regime, but was mainly implemented by the Austrian businessman Baron Hircsh. The other was the Anatolia-Baghdad railway project, which was to be built by German companies. The main aim of the construction of the railway was to connect Baghdad with Istanbul and European cities. Essentially, this project was important in that, as railways would be built in the Anatolian part of the Empire.

The Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire were of great importance for the railway construction policy. As a result of this war, the Kars region was

passed to Russia. Russia began building railways in the South Caucasus and Kars became an important centre. On the other hand, the Russians got the privilege to build railways in the northern part of Anatolia. It should be noted that Russia did not play a significant role in the projects to build railways in the Ottoman Empire. During this period, the Ottoman leadership gave more attention to the Balkans and the Middle East, therefore the South Caucasus was not considered an important direction of their policy.

The second period begins with the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey. During this period, the Turkish government adopted a policy towards railways, which was fitting into the context of Mustafa Kemal's etatism policy. Enterprises, including railways, owned by foreign capital, were nationalized. As a result of the Turkish-Armenian war of 1920, Kars was passed to Turkey; therefore, a part of the railway created here by Russia came under Turkish control. However, not long after, the South Caucasus was included in the Soviet Union, so Turkey's relations with the South Caucasian republics were severely limited. A railway connection was established between the Soviet Union and Turkey, but Turkey had no opportunity to operate in the South Caucasus region.

The third period begins with the collapse of the USSR, as a result of which Turkey gets an opportunity to carry out activities in the post-Soviet region. The South Caucasus is becoming one of the priority directions of Turkey's policy. This region is of interest to Turkey in several ways. First, it should ensure the connection between Turkey and the Turkic countries of Central Asia. Second, ensure Turkey's trade and economic activities with Eastern countries, particularly China. Thirdly, Turkey will become a regional power by gaining influence in this region. It should be noted that since the beginning of the 1990s, Turkey put forward the idea of being a bridge country or a hub between

the East and the West, so communication projects, including railways, were greatly emphasized. Turkey initiated a number of projects, among which the Baku-Tiflis-Kars transport hub should be highlighted.

Thus, Turkey's policy regarding communications, particularly railways, has undergone significant changes over the past centuries. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Ottoman leadership did not pursue its own communications policy. This sphere was completely under the influence of the great powers. The Ottoman regime, in fact, did not conduct an active policy towards the South Caucasus region, which was part of the Russian Empire. During this period, the Empire's focus was mainly on the Balkans and Asia Minor.

After the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the policy on communications changed. Basically, Turkey started to conduct more active and independent policy. On the other hand, Turkey's policy towards the South Caucasus was limited, which was due to the sovietization of the region. There was a railway between Turkey and the USSR, but it did not provide extensive activity for the Turkish side.

Turkey's communications policy changed radically after the collapse of the USSR, when, among other fields, Turkey got a wide range of activities here. After the end of the Cold War, Turkey's aim was to become a bridge between East and West, thereby increasing her place and role in the region and the world, therefore, the South Caucasus gained importance in ideological, political and economic aspects. The problem of communications has gained great importance in the current geopolitical developments, which determines Turkey's active policy towards them.