

THE HIGHLIGHTS OF TURKEY-GEORGIA RELATIONS DEVELOPMENT IN THE EARLY 1990s¹⁵

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Keywords: *establishment of diplomatic relations, dynamics and the progress of bilateral relations, mutual official visits, economic support of Georgia.*

Introduction

After the regaining of state independence, Georgia was engaged in the civil war and ethno-territorial conflicts. Despite the challenging political situation and conflicts in the country, the process of development of the Georgia-Turkey relations was quite dynamic. Georgia was the “main land gate” for Turkey to the former Soviet region. Meanwhile, Turkey was a “road” for Georgia to the West and the World. In fact, Georgia had no other option to choose, as during that period all countries bordering with Georgia needed such a partner as well. All the countries of the South Caucasus had a difficult time while building a sustainable statehood. Iran as one of the great countries of the region, was not accepted by the West, and the establishment of relations with Iran could forever close the gate to the West for Georgia. The only beneficial partner for newly independent Georgia was Turkey, as this country was getting support from the West and could fill the power vacuum, which at that time was dominating in the former Soviet region. Georgia was able to secure the huge financial inflow to the country by establishing neighborly relations with Turkey. These finances were very important for country’s dilapidated economy. One the other hand, Georgia was optimistic that the involvement of Turkey in the process of the establishment of peace and stability in the region could become a counterbalance to Russia. E. Shevardnadze could understand this fact very well and whenever he was having official visit he would raise a point about peace and solidarity in the region.

At the same time, Turkey also had no other option of establishing relations, creating economical plans with Azerbaijan and Turkish-speaking Central Asian countries. The main reason was Armenia – its geographical location and, of course, the hostile attitude towards it. Turkey’s plan was to export hydrocarbon reserves from Caspian Sea to the Western markets, so there was no other choice then to establish neighborly relations with Georgia. There was no alternative option for both countries that itself was the reason for the dynamic development of the Turkey-Georgia relations from the beginning.

The Establishment of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Georgia

In the early 1990s, the border which had existed for decades between Turkey and Soviet Union was eliminated. Turkish government couldn’t avoid the formation and development of new independent countries neighboring its borders. However, Ankara’s hostile attitude toward Armenia, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, created serious obstacles to develop good relations between two countries. This fact gave Georgia a unique place in Turkey’s politics for neighboring countries. Georgia’s geographical location made this country very important for Turkey from economic, military and political aspects. Georgia became a “gate” for Turkey a “road” which could take Turkey to Central Asia and the Caucasus.

¹⁵ Հոդվածն ընդունվել է 30.03.2018:

Հոդվածը տպագրության է երաշխավորել ԵՊՀ քաղաքական ինստիտուտների և գործընթացների ամբիոնը:

It was December 16th, 1991 when Turkey, along with other former Soviet countries, recognized the independence of Georgia.[1] However, Turkey was not in a rush to start diplomatic relations with Georgia. Turkey's primary objective was to support Baku in the conflict around Nagorno-Karabakh.[2] Besides there was an instability in Georgia due to civil war which broke in autumn of 1991 and ethnic conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. All these were obstacles on the way of Turkey to start solid diplomatic relations with Georgia.[3]

After the relative regulation of the internal situation in Georgia, Turkey has taken steps to establish formal relations with Tbilisi. Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs Hikmet Çetin, came to Georgia with official visit on 21st of May in 1992. Two countries signed an agreement to establish diplomatic relations. [4] Decision was taken to open embassies in the capital cities of both countries as well as Turkish consulate in Batumi and Georgian consulates in Istanbul and Trabzon.[5] During the official visit of Hikmet Çetin, the president of Georgia E. Shevardnadze mentioned the chaotic condition after the collapse of the Soviet Union and underlined, that the relations with all those neighboring countries, which had chosen the democracy as a model of development, were very important for Georgia, as they could be a good example to follow. [6] The president E. Shevardnadze also mentioned that "Turkey is that good example for Georgia", and they expect Turkey help Georgia become a member of international organizations such as the UN, World Bank, etc. Thus, we can argue that E. Shevardnadze visibly expressed Georgia's expectations from Turkey as a neighboring country; Turkey was a "road" for Georgia to the West, a "window" to the World.

During this visit, there was also a discussion about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the president of Georgia confirmed and assured that Georgia strongly agreed with the position of the Turkish government on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue.[7] The attitude of E. Shevardnadze towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can be explained because Georgia was also engaged in such a conflict over the South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Therefore, he perceived the issue in the light of maintaining the territorial integrity of Georgia. At the same time, Georgia's relations with Armenia were good, but there was no intention to develop strategic partnership. All these facts had an important role in adopting the strategy to support Turkey's position. Meanwhile, E. Shevardnadze suggested to establish "Caucasian Advisory Union" for ensuring peace and stability in the region. [8] It is important to underline that, E. Shevardnadze was the first to propose the idea of establishing peace and stability in the Caucasus region. However, Turkey used and continues to use this idea as its own on several occasions.

During the visit, Turkey also discussed the possibility of giving economic support to Georgia. It was going to be a humanitarian help, in particular 50.000 tons of wheat [9]. This kind of support was very important for Georgia at that time, because after the collapse, all former Soviet countries were left in poor conditions, struggling for their day to day life. As for Turkey, this was a diplomatic action to please Georgia and break historic hostility between the two countries.

On June 25, 1992, during the summit held in Istanbul, Georgia and Turkey, as well as 9 other Black Sea area countries, signed a document to find the Black Sea Area Economic Corporation. [10] E. Shevardnadze also suggested to develop the infrastructure which would unite Foreign and Defense ministers of all countries in the Black Sea area. [11] This would aim to control security in the region. Furthermore, the president of Georgia offered to postpone any discussions to solve border and territorial conflicts among the countries of the Black Sea area till the year 2000. He thought, that throughout that period all the countries of the region would develop close economic relations, whereupon constitutional changes could solve all the conflicts in the region.[12]

We can argue, that as an expert politician, E. Shevardnadze has realized, that Georgia is connected to all geopolitical processes in the region. Hence, the peace and stability in the Caucasus region would increase the chances of Georgia to apply for membership in international

organizations, get financial support, etc. That was the reason for Shevardnadze to come up with the idea of ensuring peace and stability in the Caucasus region.

The progress of bilateral relations between Turkey and Georgia

During the summit, held in Istanbul, E. Shevardnadze invited Turkey's Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel for an official visit to Georgia. [13] Turkey's Prime Minister visited Georgia on 30th of July, in 1992. This official visit had a historic significance for Georgia and Turkey's bilateral relations. It was a great event for newly independent Georgia. Turkey was a NATO member country and it was for the first time in the history of Georgia have such a high-ranking guest from the West. They're many officials in the delegation of S. Demirel, such as the minister of Foreign Affairs H. Çatin, State Minister Javid Çaghar, members of parliament and businessmen. The Prime Minister had meetings with the Chairman of Georgia's State Council, as well as with the Prime Minister Tengiz Sigura and the President E. Shevardnadze. [14] They have discussed questions about establishing and developing economic, cultural, political, and educational relations between two countries. All necessary prerequisites for developing relations were existing. During the visit countries signed following agreements:

- Establishment of friendship, cooperation, and good neighborly relations between Turkey and Georgia,
- Strengthening of trade and economic cooperation,
- Protection and promotion of investments,
- Exploitation of land, air and sea transport,
- Corporation in science, education, culture and sport. [15]

To promote and involve the private sector in mutual trade economic cooperation, Turkish "Eksim Bank" was going to provide \$20.000.000 grand to the Government of Georgia. In addition, Turkey was planning to provide \$50.000.000 extra grand to the Government of Georgia.

Turkish and Georgian officials also discussed their influence and role to keep peace and stability in Caucasian region. In this context, the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh has been discussed. Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was considered hazardous as it could expand and become a treat for territorial integrity of regional countries. They have discussed the options how to help and solve the conflict in peace and without military actions.[16] It is important to mention, that in the context of regional security and stability there was no any discussion on Georgia-South-Ossetia and Georgia-Abkhazia conflicts.

Turkey's Prime Minister also had meetings with Georgia's MPs. In the Parliament, speaking about bilateral relations, E. Shevardnadze mentioned that Turkey **was** not only supporting Georgia financially, but was also willing to have an input to build democracy in Georgia. He also pointed to Turkey's importance in the "Black Sea Area Economic Corporation". It was obvious, that the President of Georgia was showing benevolence and willingness to start strategic partnership with Turkey. He was trying to pass the following message to the West - "Turkish model " can be used in Georgia as well.

Now let's discuss few points of Agreement on Friendship, Cooperation, and Good Neighborly Relations between Turkey and Georgia. Below are the most important facts.

- Turkey and Georgia highlight the importance of developing relations based on the idea of sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, no interference in internal affairs.
- They confirm the legitimacy of the Treaty signed on the 13th of October 1921 in Kars.
- They expressed their willingness to follow all provisions resulting from the Treaty of Kars.
- They underlined that there is no possibility of boundary changes between Georgia and Turkey (resulting from the Treaty of Kars). This was the ground to establish good relations.

• Turkey and Georgia agreed to adapt all provisions resulting from the Treaty of Kars to their own Constitution and requirements of the International Law. [17]
Hereby, we can argue, that for both Turkey and Georgia it was far-reaching diplomatic step to reaffirm all provisions, resulting from the Treaty of Kars. Georgia was trying to:

- preserve the authority towards Adjara, [18]
- ensure the territorial integrity of the state,
- determine the state border with Turkey.

Speaking about Turkish benefits to confirm all provisions, resulting from the Treaty of Kars, we can underline that, Turkey:

- was guaranteed to utilize the port of Batum without special charges,
- determining the state border with Georgia, [19]
- Reinsuring the enforcement of autonomy of Adjara. [20]

Meanwhile, it should be noted, that the reconfirmation of the Treaty of Kars was not welcomed in the Parliament of Georgia. In March 1993, this agreement was submitted for approval in the Parliament. The members of Union after “Meraban Kostova” ignored to present for discussions as they did not agree that the border between Georgia and Turkey should be decided by the provisions resulting from the Treaty of Kars.[21]

During the visit of S. Demirel an agreement was achieved about Shevardnadze’s official visit to Turkey. However, the visit was being postponed because of belligerency and political conflicts in the country. The visit happened only in January 1994. Meanwhile Russia started suppressing Georgia. Russia was just recovering after Soviet collapse and could understand Shevardnadze’s plans. Russia was trying the best to make Georgia to join Commonwealth of Independent Post Soviet States.

The political situation was not stable in Turkey as well. The antagonism between T. Ozal and S. Demirel was developing further and leaving negative impact in all aspects of the country. On May 16th, 1993 after T. Ozal’s sudden death, Turkish National Assembly with most votes elected Prime-Minister S. Demirel as Turkey’s 9th president. [22] As an experienced politician, S. Demirel could understand that Georgia’s integration in former Soviet Union Countries block gives Russia an opportunity to re-establish Russian influence in the Caucasus area. In 1994, January 13, against the background of these events, E. Shevardnadze visited Ankara.[23] This visit was a historical event for E. Shevardnadze, because the Georgian president was visiting NATO member country for the first time. During the visit both parties signed declaration about peace, solidarity, and cooperation. Through this declaration both countries confirmed the support to establish peace, independence, and democracy in the region.[24] Beside both parties signed agreements on trade and economic affairs.[25] E. Shevardnadze expressed his gratitude to Turkey for supporting Georgia to keep its border firmness and territorial integrity.[26]

There was a perception, that this kind of relation development was creating an opportunity to see strategic partnership between Turkey and Georgia in near future. However, the relations took another rout of development in the future. As Greek researcher E. Karagiannis mentioned “Both parties were optimistic that they can establish peace and solidarity in Caucasus Region. However, Georgia’s actions were limited only by signing the agreement about friendship and partnership with Russia”. [27] Along with the agreement on friendship and partnership, there were other agreements between Russia and Georgia. Especially noticeable is the agreement on Russian border troops activities on the territory of Georgia. [28] This agreement allowed Russia to put his border troops along the border of Georgia and Turkey, to provide security and oversight. The border between Georgia and Turkey gained the status of an external border of CIS. Russian border troops were providing both land and marine security.[29] Russia took this step to give a hint and make sure Turkey and its strategic partner NATO understand that the whole Caucasian

Region is geopolitical and strategic profit area for Russia, and any activities to be carried out in the region first must be agreed with Russia.

Conclusions

In summary, we can state that the development of Turkey-Georgia relations in the early 1990s had the following characteristics:

- *Georgia was the “main land gate” for Turkey to the former Soviet region, at the same time Turkey was a “road” for Georgia to the West and international organizations, and window to the World.*
- *Due to the establishment of good neighborly relations with Turkey, Georgia could ensure financial flows to the country, which were necessary to restore the devastated economy of Georgia.*
- *Georgia was optimistic, that the involvement of Turkey in the process of establishing peace and stability in the region could become a counterbalance to Russia.*
- *Turkey, which was trying to become a bridge between the West and the East, considered the relations with Georgia in the light of its own regional and geopolitical profits.*
- *Considering these profits, Turkey proved financial, economic, and military support to Georgia.*
- *With adaption of all provisions, resulting from the Treaty of Kars, Turkey received an important prerogative for the regional policy in Caucasus.*

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provide the patronage of Adjara to Georgia.
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trying to dispel its historical fears. Back in 1945, the territorial claims of the USSR towards
Turkey also included the revision of the south part of Batumi province and Artvin, Ardahan,
Oltin (these three cities are historical Armenian lands) to Georgia. On December 14th, 1945,
the Georgian “Communist” newspaper publish an article edited by two Georgian academics
– S. Janashiani and N. Bedzenashvili. The headline of the article was “Our legal claims
towards Turkey”. In this article, Georgia clearly expressed its ambitions against above
mentioned historical Armenian lands. (For more see, Մելքոնյան Բ., ԽՍՀՄ-Թուրքիա
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ԱՄՓՈՓԱԳԻՐ

**Թուրքիա-Վրաստան միջպետական հարաբերությունների ձևավորման հիմնական առանձնահատկությունները 90-ականթթ. սկզբներին
Արտակ Զարգարյան**

Բանալի բառեր՝ Դիվանագիտական հարաբերությունների հաստատում, երկկողմ հարաբերությունները դիմամիկան ու զարգացումը, երկկողմանի պաշտոնական *այցելություններ, տնտեսական աջակցություն Վրաստանին*:

Հոդվածում ներկայացված է Թուրքիա-Վրաստան միջպետական հարաբերությունների ձևավորումն ու զարգացումը՝ Թուրքիայի հարավկովկասյան քաղաքականության հոլովույթում: Հոդվածը կենտրոնանում է 90-ական թթ. սկզբներին Թուրքիա-Վրաստան միջպետական հարաբերությունների հիմնական ոլորտների վրա, բացահայտում է այդ հարաբերությունների ձևավորման գործընթացում Վրաստանի նախագահ Է. Շևարդնաձեի ունեցած դերն ու ներդրումը:

РЕЗЮМЕ

**Основные аспекты развития межгосударственных отношений между Турцией и Грузией в начале 90-х годов
Артак Заргарян**

Ключевые слова: *установление дипломатических отношений, динамика и прогресс двусторонних отношений, официальные взаимные визиты, экономическая поддержка Грузии.*

В статье рассматривается процесс развития отношений между Турцией и Грузией в свете региональной политики Турции на Южном Кавказе и политики Турции в отношении Грузии. Основное внимание в этой статье уделяется интерпретации и оценке ключевых аспектов развития турецко-грузинских отношений в начале 1990-х годов, а также объясняется роль и вклад президента Грузии Э. Шеварднадзе в этом процессе.

SUMMARY

**The Highlights of Turkey -Georgia Relations Development in the early 1990s
Artak Zargaryan**

The article introduces Turkey-Georgia relations development process in the light of Turkey's regional policy in the South Caucasus and Turkey's policy towards Georgia. The core focuses of this article are on interpretations and evaluations of the main aspects of the development of Turkey-Georgia relations in the early 1990s, and the explanations of the role and contribution of the President of Georgia E. Shevardnadze to this this process.