Turkish–Azerbaijani Relations
One nation – two states?

Edited by Murad Ismayilov and Norman A. Graham
An east-west axis of Azerbaijan and Turkey has grown into prominence within the broader structure of regional dynamics in Eurasia over the past two decades. Yet few, including among policy advisers and policymakers in either of the two states, have attempted to look deeper into the forces that lie behind the workings of this important regional nexus, a reality that resulted in a dual crisis in bilateral relations towards the end of the second decade of interaction.

This volume investigates the underlying causes that shaped the dynamics within the structure of the bilateral relationship between Azerbaijan and Turkey. It features chapters by both scholars from the region and international experts in the field, and therefore provides both in-house and outside perspectives on developments within the complex structure of the relationship. With its analysis portfolio including historical, political, economic, socio-cultural, ideological, and international underpinnings of this regional alliance, the volume offers the most systematic and broad ranged analysis of the matter available to date.

The book will serve as an important resource for students and scholars of post-Soviet Studies, Central Asia and the Caucasus, and the Middle East, while also being of interest to those of International Relations and political science disciplines.

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The idea for the project that gave birth to the present volume was conceived within the walls of ADA University (then known as Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy) a few years ago as a response to the bewilderment in which many Azerbaijanis were left by Turkey’s attempted rapprochement with Armenia in 2008 and the recognition of poor knowledge of their Turkish brethren which those developments prompted in Baku at the time. The project has since benefited considerably from the generous support that ADA has made available in various forms, including the continuous backing that the university’s rector, Ambassador Hafiz Pashayev, personally invested to keep it going. We also wish to extend thanks to all who have contributed their feedback to help us improve the volume at various stages of its production, particularly to the participants of the workshop on Turkey–Azerbaijan relations kindly organised by the Center for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies (CERES) of Michigan State University on 25 August 2015. Any shortfalls that remain are our responsibility.

Murad Ismayilov and Norman A. Graham

1 November 2015
## Abbreviations

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<td>ACG</td>
<td>Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli</td>
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<td>AIOC</td>
<td>Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia</td>
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<td>AKP</td>
<td>Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)</td>
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<td>ANAP</td>
<td>True Path Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASALA</td>
<td>Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATIB</td>
<td>Azerbaijan–Turkey Business Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTC</td>
<td>Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan</td>
</tr>
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<td>BTE</td>
<td>Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTK</td>
<td>Baku-Tbilisi-Kars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRRRC</td>
<td>Caucasus Research Resource Centers</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSCE</td>
<td>Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSCP</td>
<td>Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform</td>
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<td>DYP</td>
<td>Motherland Party</td>
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<td>FDI</td>
<td>Foreign direct investment</td>
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<td>FTA</td>
<td>Free trade agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>MHP</td>
<td>Nationalist Action Party</td>
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<td>NK</td>
<td>Nagorno-Karabakh</td>
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<td>OBT</td>
<td>Obsolescing bargaining theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSCE</td>
<td>Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>PKK</td>
<td>Kurdish Worker’s Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCWRO</td>
<td>State Committee for Work with Religious Organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOCAR</td>
<td>State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic</td>
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<td>TANAP</td>
<td>Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline</td>
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<td>TPAO</td>
<td>Turkish Petroleum Corporation (Türkiye Petrolleri Anonim Ortaklığı)</td>
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<td>TRNC</td>
<td>Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus</td>
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<td>TUSIAB</td>
<td>Turkish Business Association in Azerbaijan</td>
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<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organization</td>
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1 Together but apart for twenty years
Azerbaijan and Turkey in pursuit of identity and survival

Murad Ismayilov

Azerbaijan’s relationship with Turkey, given the outwardly intimate nature of its dynamics, has often been described as a cornerstone underpinning Baku’s post-independence foreign policy strategy (e.g. Soltanov 2009). Yet few, including among policy advisers and policymakers in either of the two states, have attempted to look deeper into the forces that underlay the workings of the bilateral dynamics over the first two decades of the world free of the Soviet Union and the Cold War. The result was a dual crisis in bilateral relations towards the end of the second decade of interaction (around negotiations on a bilateral gas deal and around Turkey’s attempted rapprochement with Armenia) on one hand and (particularly) an overall sense of distressful surprise, most notably within the Azerbaijani political and social spectrum, by which the crisis was met on the other (Goksel 2009; Kardaş 2009; Phillips 2012; Shiriyev and Davies 2013; also Osipova and Bilgin 2013). While policymakers on both sides have now taken steps towards addressing the omissions of the past that the recent crisis served to lay bare, few if any within academia have ventured into the study of the underlying causes that shaped and conditioned the dynamics within the structure of bilateral relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan since the time of the latter’s independence. It is this question that the introductory essay – and the collection of chapters that follow – is meant to address.

Several factors, many often overlooked and their interpenetrating linkages often neglected, need to be accounted for if one is to develop a clear understanding of the evolving nature of Azerbaijan–Turkey relations and the constitutive influences behind their dynamics. Perhaps most importantly, the nature of bilateral dynamics between Baku and Ankara has been subject to, and in many ways a reflection of, the two states’ own evolving self-perception as to their geography and geopolitics the latter prompted, state capacity and ambitions it worked to generate and ultimately the nature of state polity and indeed its identity.

With Azerbaijan emerging from the ruins of the Soviet Union and Turkey coming out of the ashes of the Cold War, the starting phase of Azerbaijan–Turkey fraternal partnership in the early 1990s fell on the period when neither of the two states had yet to develop a clear grasp not only of the other side, but also – and even more dramatically – of its own self. Neither Ankara nor Baku had yet to advance a clear ‘post’ identity – a post-colonial, post-Soviet identity for
Azerbaijan and a post–Cold War identity for Turkey – and a definite foreign (and domestic) policy agenda the latter understanding would entail. As the Cold War ended, Turkey found its role as a US and NATO-backed “regional gendarme” (ICG 2010, 1) in the backyard of the Soviet Union increasingly redundant and was prompted to search for a new regional identity to embody (cf. Cowell 1990). Consequently, the quest to fill the ideational gap left by the end of the Cold War formed a motivational backbone behind Turkey’s foreign policy engagement choices over the past two decades. Following independence and given territorial losses amidst which the latter emerged and the overall regional security context in which it was set to survive, Azerbaijan, in turn, was left to look to devise numerous strategies conducive to its assuming full sovereignty over the territory it was legally meant to govern, besides and in addition to the need to address the challenges associated with post-colonial state-building. In many ways, with some 16 percent of its territory left occupied by Armenian forces and Nagorno-Karabakh consequently enjoying de facto independence, reversing the consequences of the war and restoring the territorial integrity of the state has since arisen as the most powerful stimulus, and the conditioning force, behind the emerging pattern of foreign policy engagements of Azerbaijan in the early years of its independent existence.

Given the above, Azerbaijan – at the time of its post-independence encounter with Turkey – had yet to formulate a post-Soviet foreign (and indeed domestic) policy agenda beyond a mere preservation of independence and responding to the occupation of its lands, while Turkey had yet to move beyond its quest to find a new – regional and/or international – purpose to follow. It was this sense of ambivalence surrounding a new contextual setup of their existence and the first – tentative – answers thereto they tried to develop that prompted Ankara and Baku to unconditionally embrace each other at the initial stage of their ‘post-identity’ encounter: each emerged as the best or the only choice for what was the other’s passing agenda, or – on one level – a lack thereof. For Ankara, a newly emergent sense of belonging with and assuming leadership of the rising Turkic world and a foreign policy hinged around the newfound Turkic, if post-Soviet, brethren (Azerbaijan and the four Turkic Central Asian republics) that the latter entailed came to be largely believed to provide a sought-for cornerstone to underpin the state’s new post–Cold War identity. And this, in many ways, motivated Turkey’s engagement in the early 1990s with Azerbaijan, which was viewed as a crucial gateway to the rest of the Turkic republics in Central Asia; a role embodied, in the first instance, by ‘the Bridge of Hope’ across the Araz River at Sadarak, Nakhchivan, inaugurated amidst pomp on 28 May 1992 as the first – and critical – tangible link tying Turkey to Azerbaijan and “the greater ‘Turkic’ world to the east” and, as such, “the first step in the dawning of the promised ‘Turkic’ twenty-first century” (Goltz 1999, 209). In Baku, in turn, Turkey was largely viewed as the sole friendly government amidst a largely unfriendly neighbourhood and, thus, the only potential ally in the country’s efforts to successfully address the effects of Armenian aggression on one hand and the looming danger that Russian and Iranian post-imperial ambitions stood to pose on the other.
Consequently and as commendable a trajectory as Azerbaijan’s early stage of relations with Turkey were (e.g. Goltz 1999, ch. 15), the particular – transitionally passing – context to which the latter owed its rise rendered the bilateral dynamics that followed contingent on the further unfolding of the parallel processes of self-reflection in which Baku and Ankara engaged and the states’ individual, often divergent, pursuits of foreign and domestic policies in which these processes found their expression. While this process of self-reflection was partly (more so for Baku than for Ankara) a continuously evolving product of bilateral interaction, it was also a function of a number of other factors, including the states’ individual engagements with the rest of the international community, the evolution of their individual material capacities and their perception thereof and domestic political changes of sorts. It is these latter factors – and their evolution – that need to be accounted for if one is to understand how and why the nature and structure of Azerbaijan–Turkey relations today are different from what they were two decades ago; and it is some of these contingencies to which the discussion now turns.

Georgia

Georgia has been among the key contingencies upon which bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey evolved the way they did over the past two decades. In many ways, Turkey’s post–Cold War engagement with Azerbaijan had until recently (indeed until the 2008/9 crisis) never been inseparable from the dynamics within the trilateral setup among Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Georgia and emerged and unfolded across this trilateral terrain. Economic and geopolitical factors underlying the essence of bilateral relations between Baku and Ankara – including energy and pipeline politics on one hand and European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations of the two states on the other – worked simultaneously, indeed primarily, to boost and mould trilateral channels of communication and discourse, with every single item on the bilateral agenda working to prompt the need for, and feeding the dynamics within, the trilateral institutional setup with which the bilateral dynamics was tightly conjoined (and without which it was unimaginable in the form and shape it has grown to assume). Cooperation in regional transport infrastructure development in particular (including multibillion-dollar energy pipeline projects and the soon-to-be completed Kars-Baku railway) – the very lifeline of bilateral relations as it was – has evolved and unfolded on a strictly trilateral terrain and was technically inconceivable without Georgia’s direct involvement.

Indeed, among the only elements within the structure of bilateral relations to have been independent of the trilateral dynamics are such practices as the engagement of Turkish businessmen in Azerbaijan and mutual student exchanges, as well as the operation of Turkish educational establishments (including numerous lyceums and the Qafqaz University) and Turkish-sponsored mosques in Azerbaijan, none of which was indeed unproblematic.1 It is only now – with Azerbaijan’s direct investments in the Turkish economy significantly augmented
following the 2008/9 crisis (Socor 2013) and as a function of Baku’s dramatic rise in economic power on one hand and bilateral cooperation in the military sector sizably intensified (e.g. Day.az 2013a, 2013b) on the other – that the bilateral engagement between Azerbaijan and Turkey has started to generate some notable dynamics of its own; a development still paralleled by a significant upgrade of relations within the trilateral setup as well, including as embodied in the Trabzon Declaration the three states signed in June 2012 and regularly held foreign ministerial trilateral meetings to which the declaration paved the way (Cecire 2013; Veliyev 2014).

Iran

Iran has been another regional contingency both driving the two states further together and pulling them apart. On the one hand, the continuously looming threat that Azerbaijan perceived Iran as posing to its sovereignty and indeed independence, particularly in light of Iran’s rising nuclear challenge across the region, has always served as among the key factors drawing Azerbaijan closer into, and keeping it firmly within, Turkey’s “orbit of gravitational attraction” (Harvey and Maus 1990, 83). Ideologically divergent from, and thus alien to, a secular vision of statehood that Ataturk’s Turkey and post-Soviet Azerbaijan had come to share by the time of the latter’s independent rise, Iran and its regional presence stood to engender rather negative security dynamics across the region upon which Azerbaijan’s brotherly bonds with Turkey materialised into a tangible alliance and by virtue of which bilateral relations thrived (Yanarocak 2013; Zasztowt 2012). Iran’s relations with Turkey had also been traditionally tense and, following a brief period of Davutoglu-inspired rapprochement in 2008–2010, were shattered again in 2011 under the weight of the Syrian crisis and Ankara’s expressed commitment to hosting elements of NATO’s missile defense system.

Adding to these historically conditioned negative dynamics in Iran’s interaction with Azerbaijan and Turkey has been Iran’s standoff with the West more broadly and the US in particular and the Western sanctions that this tension worked to generate (Vatanka 2013), an international and regional power configuration that effectively excluded Iran as a possible partner in the efforts by Baku and the West (the US) in the early-1990s to set in place an institutional infrastructure for regional cooperation, particularly in energy. Indeed, Iran’s involvement with Caspian energy politics – either as a shareholder in the 1994 Contract of the Century or as a transit country for ‘main oil’ to have flowed from Azerbaijan – was effectively blocked by the United States at the time, thus rendering Turkey as the sole transit route for Azerbaijan’s regional infrastructural efforts to follow. Iran’s forced exclusion from regional energy politics did not, in and by itself, generate negative security dynamics in bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Iran. These dynamics were also attributable to many other factors, not least the ‘Elchibey factor’ in the Azerbaijan of the early 1990s, the question of Azerbaijani minorities in Iran—and Tehran’s threat perception thereof—and, in large measure associated with and derived from the latter, Iran’s support for Armenia in the
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Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its alleged support for Shia radicalism on the Azerbaijani proper. However the perceived “imbalance between Iran’s regional importance and its lack of involvement in [the] Azerbaijani oil industry” (Hemming 1998, 53) has certainly worked to sustain – and further aggravate – tension and as such has carved out a vicious circle by virtue of which Turkey’s importance for Azerbaijan’s energy and security agenda was only bound to rise over time.

This became all too clear in July 2001, when, in what was the most serious among Iran’s disruptive efforts in the region so far, an Iranian gunboat ejected two Azerbaijani survey ships from a contested area in the southern Caspian that the ships were set to explore. At the same time, Iranian jets several times violated Azerbaijan’s airspace, and it eventually took Turkey to send military jets on a “demonstrative flight over Baku” to have the crisis peacefully resolved (Aliyev 2003, 310; Cornell 2011, 330–332; Lelyveld 2001); a dramatic sequence of events that came to express the workings of the resulting tripartite dynamics in their full potential, including by laying bare the role that these dynamics play in imparting the sense of recurrent urgency and essentiality to Azerbaijan’s continuously close association with Turkey.

The recent efforts to institutionalise interaction within the troublesome triangle into regular, biannual discussions of the intra-regional dynamics at the foreign ministry level (primarily among the three parties directly involved) have so far failed to significantly ease the tensions underlying Iran’s relations with its Turkic neighbours to the north and west, thus sustaining the security conditions that had brought Azerbaijan and Turkey closer together in the first place (Zasztowt 2012, 5–6).

This being so, Iran has also, on the other hand, served as an annoying hindrance to the way towards a deeper partnership between Azerbaijan and Turkey. Thus and for a markedly long time, Azerbaijan – unlike Georgia, which has enjoyed a visa-free regime with its now strategic partner Turkey since 2009 and a passport-free regime since 2011 (Today’s Zaman 2011b) – could not afford to embrace and benefit from an open border and visa-free regime with friendly Turkey, lest that prompt or indeed intensify Iranian pressure on Azerbaijan to act likewise towards its southern neighbour; an item Iran has never taken off the agenda of its engagement with Baku. Indeed, following Turkey’s suggestion in 2009 to introduce a visa-free regime with Azerbaijan (and Georgia), Iran allegedly went as far as to threaten “to cut off the critical supply line between Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic if Azerbaijan lifted visa requirements for Turks but not for Iranians” (Bozkurt 2011). In early 2010, it went further and introduced unilaterally a visa-free regime for Azerbaijani (save journalists) traveling to Iran for one month or less (many of whom, particularly from Azerbaijani regions bordering Iran, do indeed travel often to Iran, mostly for commerce, health care services, or to pay a visit to Shia pilgrimage sites like Mashad), in order to step up moral pressure on Baku to respond in kind (Eurasianet 2010). In November 2013, Baku finally moved to abolish visa requirements for “certain categories of Turkish citizens,” including “scholars, athletes, businessmen, famous people, and Turkish citizens, closely related to Azerbaijan,” based on a list to have been devised by the country’s Ministry of Economic Development (Trend.az 2013).
Israel

Israel has been another major player with a stake in Azerbaijan–Turkey relations and, as such, with a significant role, intended or otherwise, in the unfolding of its dynamics. Indeed, its association with both states, particularly in the security (including energy security) realm, by the late 1990s had grown so intense that many, in academia and among policymakers alike, tended to describe the triangular relationship, and the nature of interaction therein, as a “trilateral axis” or indeed “entente,” one often juxtaposed to a regional alignment among Russia, Iran, Armenia, and Syria (Murinson 2008, 2013). The events of 2010, when relations between Turkey and Israel hit an all-time low following the death of nine Turkish citizens (including four who were actual Turks) from an Israeli attack on the Turkish, if officially non-governmental, aid boat Mavi Marmara headed to the then blockaded Palestinian city of Gaza (Athanasiadis 2011; Huber and Tocci 2013; Schleifer 2010), only laid bare that individual dynamics within each of the bilateral setups constitutive of the security triangle were stronger than, if not entirely independent of, one another on one hand and the overall tripartite dynamics on the other. Back then and despite Turkey’s pressures on Baku to side with it in its standoff with Israel, Azerbaijan – difficult though it was, particularly given Turkey’s long-standing support for Azerbaijan’s position in the conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh – stood firm in its continued cooperation with Tel Aviv, even when at times Turkey and Israel found themselves on the brink of military confrontation (Abbasov 2011a; Shiriyev 2012a). For Israel, in turn, Azerbaijan’s value as “a moderate Moslem partner” in the non-Arab Orient has grown exponentially as Turkey demonstratively let that role off its shoulders, a reality that, particularly given an allegedly continued Islamisation trend in Turkey, stood to boost Tel Aviv’s interest “in Azerbaijan’s independence from any Turkish influence” on one hand and Baku’s growing capacity for “a positive influence in Turkey” on the other (Geifman and Course 2013; also Liphshiz 2013; Mamedov 2013).

The endurance of Azerbaijan–Israel bilateral dynamics through the crisis of shattered trilateralism should perhaps come as no surprise. Indeed and apart from other related indicators, Israel has traditionally topped the list of Azerbaijan’s key trade partners over the last several years, reaching – with the bilateral trade turnover of 1,357 billion USD – the second place on the ladder (second only to Italy) as of 1 July 2012. Azerbaijan, in turn, has been a stable leader, among the Moslem and former Soviet Union states, in the list of Israel’s trade partners. Azerbaijan being among Israel’s key energy suppliers, indeed second only to Russia, its importance for Israel has clearly not been limited to the demands of its energy security alone, but has also been a function of Tel Aviv’s active efforts to counter the perceived Iranian threat on one hand and enlist support of a friendly Moslem state amidst an unfriendly, predominantly Arab-Moslem, regional environment on the other. That being so and with Tel Aviv’s alleged role as Baku’s major supplier of high-tech hardware (including for Azerbaijan’s energy sector) and modern military equipment on one hand and the role the
American Jewish diaspora is claimed to have grown to play over the last decade in Baku’s efforts to balance against the alleged sway that Armenian lobby groups hold over the US government. The nature of relations the two enjoyed with each other had long evolved into one of strategic partnership independent of external shocks, including the effects of the 2010 Mavi Marmara incident. Indeed and as an expression of ever-growing ties, including after this crisis, it was in May 2013 that Azerbaijan’s foreign minister, Elmar Mammadyarov, paid an official visit to Israel, the first time an Azerbaijani foreign minister had undertaken such a move.

**The United States of America and ‘the West’ more broadly**

Not unlike Iran, the US proved a crucial, if undeniably dubious, underlying factor in the unfolding of Azerbaijan–Turkey bilateral dynamics, both by helping – through firm political and material support it rendered for the realisation of the pipeline infrastructure projects in the region (Ismayilov 2012) – make an energy-based partnership between the two states a plausible reality in the 1990s, and – as a zealous propagator of Turkish–Armenian rapprochement as delinked from the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Ismayilov 2014; Ismayilov and Tkacik 2010) – by helping bring the bilateral relationship to a near halt in the late 2000s.

The West more broadly, in turn, and Euro-Atlantic aspirations it stood to invite, served as yet another critical variable factoring in Azerbaijan–Turkey bilateral dynamics, serving – particularly on a perceptual level of ideas – as a post-imperial modernising force whose ‘recognition’ both countries sought at one point and as a neo-imperial power center whose pursuit of dominance and control and neo-orientalist ways of regional engagement were to be rejected at another.

Indeed, with Russia and Iran perceived as posing an existential threat to its statehood and with some 16 percent of its territories occupied by Armenia, Azerbaijan was born into an objectively hostile neighbourhood, Turkey (with whom the country shares only 8 kilometers of border) and Georgia being the only neighbours perceived as genuine friends. In view of the above and given the inherent weakness of its post-colonial statehood and its incapacity to pursue the country’s security agenda on its own on one hand and the prevalent position ‘the West’ was seen to occupy in the structure of international relations in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War on the other, international – and primarily Western – recognition of its statehood emerged in the 1990s as a top priority for Azerbaijan in pursuit of security, economic development and lasting independence. With these assumptions in mind, Azerbaijan joined the CSCE/OSCE® in January 1992 and became a signatory to its Helsinki Final Act in July 1992 and to its Charter of Paris in December the following year; a nearly instinctively progressing sequence of moves which, combined with the extension of United Nations membership to the state in March 1992, as well as individual acts of recognition effected through different bilateral frameworks, came to amount, to use Alexander Wendt’s wording, to “thin” – or juridical – recognition that Azerbaijan, and its independent statehood, was certain to secure from the West and the broader
international community. A deeper level of recognition from, and hence a deeper extent of legitimacy accorded by, the West (that is, to use Wendt’s wording again, *thick* Western recognition) was needed, however, if Baku was to have the discursive act of Western, and international, recognition translated into actual support and if it was to have the protective shield of Western power underpin the country’s pursuit of sovereignty and independence vis-à-vis Russia and Iran on one hand and its quest for territorial integrity vis-à-vis Armenia on the other. In light of the above, Baku’s foreign policy – as that of many other post-Soviet states – had speedily emerged as a function of the country’s struggle for ‘thick’ – Western – recognition, its principal objective lying in devising, and managing, the mechanisms by which ‘thick’ recognition could be sought and ultimately sustained. Two basic pathways have come to underlie Azerbaijan’s pursuit of the struggle for thick recognition: the struggle for recognition of its cultural affinity with the West (effected through the mechanism of ‘imitation’) and the struggle for recognition of its practical worth (effected through pipeline/energy diplomacy) (Ismayilov 2014, 2012).

Like Azerbaijan, Turkey, too, pursued its own struggle for Western recognition in the 1990s. Although a product of pre–Cold War and Cold War contextual dynamics to which its efforts at nation- and state-building trace their lineage, Turkey’s struggle for recognition, too, has its roots in a triple quest for security, identity and welfare. Indeed, stripped of its Ottoman-era European and Arab land possessions by the time of independence and with the remaining territory still contested, among others, by the Armenians and the Kurds from the inside and the British and the Greeks from the outside, modern Turkey was born in 1922 into a very hostile environment (e.g. Ahmad 2003, 78–87). Consequently and with ‘thin’ recognition of its post-independence borders secured through the Treaty of Lausanne it signed with a group of European powers (and Japan) on 24 July 1923, Turkey – still in need of deeper levels of recognition to ensure the durability of its latter achievement and more effectively address internal and external challenges to its modern-day existence, including by meeting its “desire to secure greater welfare” (Dismorr 2008, 37) – launched what was effectively a struggle for ‘thick’ Western recognition, one effected primarily through what came to be known as Ataturk’s ‘modernisation’ project, an imitative set of efforts involving massive-scale top-down transformation of political, economic, social and cultural properties of Turkish statehood and of officially launched with the proclamation of the Turkish Republic on 29 October 1923 and the abolition of the Caliphate on 3 March 1924.

For Turkey, therefore, not unlike for Azerbaijan, “gaining Western recognition of the republic’s sovereignty was key to . . . survival as an independent nation” (Fuller 2008, 28); ‘westernisation,’ understood in this sense, being “really a defensive process, a form of nationalism, a quest for the most efficient means to match the West’s success in order to fend it off and to reduce dependency upon outsiders for national security” (Fuller 2008, 15). NATO membership Turkey acquired in February 1952 having been its most significant achievement on the path of recognition to date, it has been regarded as meeting the country’s
demands for security, leaving its quest for identity (a desire to be regarded as a ‘European nation’) and welfare largely unaddressed, the kind of gap full EU membership\textsuperscript{14} was conceived as necessary to mend. The “project of European integration,” then, has grown to signify, to Ankara, “the fulfilment of Mustafa Kemal’s world vision and ultimate dreams” (Bozarslan 2006, 28), the kind of understanding that prompted Turkey to conclude the Association Agreement with the EEC in September 1963 and submit its formal application for full EC membership in April 1987. Although Turkey reached a customs union agreement with the EU in 1990 and acquired an EU candidate status in December 1999, with EU accession negotiation talks officially launched in October 2005, the country’s EU membership still remains a remote, if not entirely unrealistic, possibility. One way or another, this mission grew to top the agenda of Turkish governments in the post–Cold War period until recently, particularly following the ascendance of the AKP to power in November 2002, and as such significantly shaped and conditioned the dynamics of the country’s domestic and foreign policy practices over the past two decades (e.g. Ahmad 2003, 175–188; Dismorr 2008, esp. 47–97).

Consequently and in view of the above, the struggle for Western recognition – and the pursuit of cultural and geopolitical legitimation the latter entailed on one hand and a secular and modern vision for statehood in the region it shaped on the other (cf. Karademir 2012) – worked to mould a shared aspirational ground upon which post–Cold War dynamics of engagement between Azerbaijan and Turkey (and indeed Georgia), particularly in the energy and pipeline infrastructure sector but more broadly as well, emerged and further evolved. Indeed and in many ways, what drew Azerbaijan’s close attention to, and closely aligned it with, Turkey in the wake of the Soviet collapse was not so much ethnic Turkic bonds which Azerbaijan also happens to share with post-Soviet states in Central Asia and not a historical embeddedness in a shared time and culture on which Azerbaijan finds itself closer to Iran,\textsuperscript{15} but rather common values of secular, modern, national statehood embedded across a traditional milieu of indigenous culture of which Baku believed it had a model in post-Ottoman Turkey to emulate.\textsuperscript{16}

For both countries since then, an upgrade in domestic material capital they have evolved to possess (including as a function of success of cooperative practices in which they mutually engaged)\textsuperscript{17} on one hand and continuous ‘non-recognition’ their struggle would persistently face on the other, have worked to undermine the need for, and consequently the struggle for, external recognition. For both, this found expression in a dramatic diversification of their foreign policy engagements away from their regional proximities on one hand and the West on the other (Goksel 2012; Ismayilov 2014) towards embracing cultural brethren in the Middle East (and broader Eurasia) on one hand and exploring unchartered lands in Africa and Latin America on the other (e.g. Steckler and Altman 2011; also Baev 2014; Ismayilov 2014; Kramer 2010; Kucera 2013; cf. Tezcur and Grigorescu 2013). As such and given the prevalence of a bilateral framework upon which the latter pursuits have been sought and realised by each
of the two states, their attempts to found and revive a Turkic Union of sorts being perhaps the only exception in this respect (Ismayilov 2012, 222), the latter shift, if still following a largely similar route and direction for both, worked to shatter the common platform their earlier, unconditional, struggle for Western recognition had served to establish and as such undermined the foundation upon which bilateral dynamics had evolved and unfolded in the early aftermath of Baku’s independence.

Still, for Turkey, this shift in the recognition game, including away from an exclusively Westward orientation, has evolved in sync with – indeed was an extension of – a parallel transformation of the domestic landscape of political legitimation away from staunchly secularist and homogeneously nationalist dictates of modernity towards religiously inspired notions and understandings, a development started (following the early, if controversial, legacies of Turgut Ozal and Necmettin Erbakan [Economist 2011; Laciner 2009; Yayla 1997]) with the AKP’s advent to power in 2002 (e.g. Geybulla 2014; Steckler and Altman 2011) and one set to secure a further gap with still unequivocally secular and modernising (and nationalising) Azerbaijan. In many ways, while the AKP government – no longer as secular as the Baku government was ready to accept and embrace (e.g. Bagdadi 2011; Phillips 2012) – now seems to have espoused a post-nationalist/post-modern developmental pathway for Turkey to follow, Azerbaijan is still struggling, particularly in light of its continued quest to resolve the territorial conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh, to stabilise the contours of its modern agenda of post-colonial nation- and state-building and, as such, has increasingly likened Ankara’s growing religious dispositions to those of Tehran in terms of the potential threat they stand to pose to the homogeneously secular nature of its idealised – and culturally sterilised – society and statehood.

Energy politics, converging agendas and sectoral dependence

Energy politics proved an important structural contingency behind the dynamics of Azerbaijan’s relations with Turkey over the past two decades, bringing the two states together yet monopolising the overall space of interaction in the oil era of the 1990s and setting the states apart, yet ultimately prompting them to expand the conceptual boundaries of engagement at the gas stage of cooperation in the late 2000s.

Indeed, few would question the central role that energy and pipeline politics played in carving out a structural landscape upon which Azerbaijan’s relations with Turkey unfolded in the 1990s. Critical as energy-based partnership was in bringing Azerbaijan and Turkey together in the early 1990s, it quickly evolved to dominate the structure of bilateral relations, such that the space of mutual engagement between the two states was effectively confined to energy-related cooperation only, the former’s success imaginable as a mere extension of success of the latter, and the engagement patterns of the former following the demands of and limited to the conceptual boundaries imposed by the latter. The dynamics
within the broader realm of bilateral relations became a function of, and was effectively subordinated to, the needs and dictates the states’ energy agenda stood to suggest. The energy dimension of bilateral interaction aggressively prioritised, other – alternative or additional – areas around which cooperation could potentially unfold and ultimately thrive were left utterly ignored; a reality also reflected, until recently, in gross under-institutionalisation of bilateral contact outside the demands of the energy sector.

Having embraced each other at a time of mutual weakness, however, neither Azerbaijan nor Turkey could afford to harbour ambitions beyond a mere survival or stabilisation of their statehoods at early stages of their energy-bolstered contact. As they grew in capacity (Ismayilov 2014; Kenes 2013), their concomitantly rising ambitions prompted them to claim leadership outside their national confines; ambitions they sought to pursue within the overlapping regional boundaries and leadership – vis-à-vis the broader region and vis-à-vis the West (the EU) – of which they sought legitimacy in terms of the intersecting range of capital they stood to share, whether that be richness in energy resources (Azerbaijan) or transit capacity for those riches (Azerbaijan and Turkey). The latter convergence of leadership agendas and the tension it served to engender found its ultimate expression in the negotiation crisis the two states suffered in 2009–2010 over a gas transit deal they sought to strike (an impasse tightly linked to the crisis in bilateral relations that unfolded around Turkey’s attempts at rapprochement with Armenia at the time; hence its ‘dual’ nature): Turkey’s newfound, or newly bolstered, ambition to emerge as a key energy hub for its energy-thirsty EU partners – a goal that would entail the proactive purchase, and the subsequent storage in Turkey, of Caspian (primarily Azerbaijani) gas with its subsequent re-export to Ankara’s partners further afield under an exclusively Turkish brand and at a higher price – was hard to reconcile with Azerbaijan’s aspiration to use its energy (now primarily gas) card in pursuit of equality and equality-based partnership with, and hence its desire to market its gas directly to, the EU (the latter otherwise critical of the country’s human rights record). The nature of Azerbaijan’s gas diplomacy and recognition the latter was meant to secure in the late 2000s, then, was qualitatively different from its oil diplomacy of the 1990s, when Baku’s reliance on the energy card and its pursuit of Western recognition had primarily been set to achieve, through Western support and involvement, sustainable security and independence (rather than equality and equality-based partnership with the West that the gas stage of the country’s energy diplomacy was meant to secure), an agenda that could have squarely reconciled with Turkish desire to emerge as a strategic energy hub in the region.18 One way or the other, the dual crisis in Azerbaijan–Turkey relations was finally resolved with, and translated into, the Shah Deniz II agreement the two states signed in June 2010 and the broader – multifaceted – agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support they signed in December of the same year and, with the latter agreement setting the stage for the deepening of existing relations into a number of non-energy sectors (including education, health, military, and industry), ultimately helped widen the conceptual landscape and institutionalise
(de-individualise) the operational setup upon which bilateral ties could further develop (Shiriyev 2012b; also Abbasov 2011b; Shiriyev and Davies 2013).

**The endogenous process of interaction**

Processual contingencies have also been crucial, if grossly underappreciated, in defining the nature and dynamics of interstate interaction. Although some back in the final days of Azerbaijan’s Soviet existence might have argued – in good faith or otherwise – that “the Soviet Azeri people knew everything about Turkey and loved and appreciated every bit of it” (Goltz 1999, 5), to the extent the latter half of the statement was true, that would rather have been a function of euphoric ignorance than a result of total knowledge. It is only as the two states moved closer to each other in the early 1990s and immersed themselves in mutual learning through various platforms of mutual engagement that they gradually came to appreciate the extent of similarity and difference that had accrued between the two nations over some seven centuries of historical disengagement. For Azerbaijanis at least, such encounters and the many platforms upon which they happened have speedily evolved into endogenous loci of mutual learning by virtue of which the newly acquired knowledge of the other was often absorbed as part of Self on one hand and was reflected upon in a reflexive act of self-appraisal on the other. While Turkey’s recognition of Azerbaijan in November 1991 generated the strongest momentum by which the latter kinds of endogenous channels were brought to bear (nearly overwhelmingly on the Azerbaijani part of the bilateral equation) – partly because Turkey was the first country to recognize Azerbaijan’s independence and as such the first, and for some brief time the only, bridge linking Azerbaijan to the world beyond and to the existing patterns of practical knowledge of modernity and statehood (Goltz 1999, 106–107) – at least five platforms have gradually stabilised into continuous loci of communication and discourse to underlie the two nations’ mutual engagement and cultural interpenetration over the past two decades: Turkish, if mostly non-governmental, educational establishments in Azerbaijan (Araz pre-University preparatory courses, Turkish lyceums, the Qafqaz University, and a theology department at the Baku State University) (Balci 2013); Turkey-sponsored mosques in Azerbaijan (Goksel 2011); Azerbaijani students pursuing education in Turkey (and their activities upon return to the homeland, including various kinds of publication efforts) and Turkish students receiving education in Azerbaijan; Turkish businessmen in Azerbaijan and the converse; and the Turkish media operating in Azerbaijan, including Turkish television (particularly Turkish soap operas) broadcast across the country (cf. Balci 2014b).

All these joined together to mould a societal glue by which the two nations have grown to increasingly tie on to each other, such that the dominance of personalities and leaders in conditioning the dynamics of bilateral relations in the 1990s (one embodied in the intimately close personal relationship between Azerbaijan’s Heydar Aliyev and Turkey’s Suleiman Demirel [Aliyev 2012, 53–54]) was gradually replaced and taken over by the societal dominance in that respect,
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a reality shift exposed in the midst of processes that underlay Turkey’s attempted, yet ultimately unsuccessful, rapprochement with Armenia in 2008/09. Indeed, that Azerbaijan managed, during the attempted rapprochement between Armenia and Turkey, to prompt the latter’s AKP government to reconsider its intended actions, Baku’s success in that attributed by many to its active work with, and its resultant sway over, public opinion inside Turkey, apart from and in addition to its direct involvement with the Ankara government (including through its use of the energy card) (Goksel 2009), worked all too well to bring the latter reality to light and display the obvious power ‘citizen’ diplomacy has evolved to play in conditioning the underlying dynamics between the two nations, particularly in light of the fact that personal chemistry between the incumbent leaders – of which there has now been allegedly little – was no longer capable of performing that role.

The above are just a few agential, structural, and processual parameters of contingency within which Azerbaijan’s relations with Turkey have unfolded over the past two decades, a clear grasp of which is critical if one is to develop sound understanding of the underlying dynamics behind the workings of this important regional axis. It is some of these contingencies that are the subject of discussion in the chapters to follow.

More specifically, building on and amplifying some of the points developed above and focusing in particular on the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict in and around Nagorno-Karabakh and the part the latter played in boosting Turkey’s place in Baku’s foreign policy calculations, Chapter 2 maps out a broader picture of structural dynamics that underlay the milestone shifts in Azerbaijan’s engagement with Turkey over the past twenty years and as such lays bare the contextual, including historical, landscape upon which Baku’s relations with Ankara developed and identifies some general stimuli to which they were bound to respond. Chapter 3 examines changing contours of Azerbaijan’s place in Ankara’s geopolitical calculations over the past two decades in light of Turkey’s evolving – and conflicting – self-perception as a regional – Eurasian – power. Chapter 4 focuses on the past two decades of interaction among Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Georgia to demonstrate the mutually embedded nature of bilateral and trilateral dynamics within this subregional setup at the initial stage of engagement in the 1990s on one hand and the subsequent (and gradual) endogenisation of each of those individual dynamics on the other. Chapter 5 looks at the political and economic conditions that underlay the evolving patterns of mutual trade and investment between Azerbaijan and Turkey over the past twenty years, while Chapter 6 focuses specifically on the experiences of Turkish businesspeople in Azerbaijan over that period, including in the context of a broader discussion of corruption and state–business relations in post-independence Azerbaijan. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the volume with an analysis of the ways in which Baku’s post-independence engagement with Turkey interfered with the evolving contours of the religious and political landscape of post-Soviet Azerbaijan and how the perceived change in the dynamics of that influence reflected on Azerbaijan’s evolving perception of Turkey, particularly in terms of the statehood model the latter has been taken to exhibit.
Notes

1 The Baku government has never been enthusiastic about the operation of Turkish-sponsored mosques across the country, for example, since, given the latter’s Sunni disposition (and their lying outside the reach of state control), they have been perceived as introducing and promoting a sectarian – Sunni/Shia – divide across the largely Shia Azerbaijani social spectrum, thereby transforming the dominant cultural, indeed nationalised, representations of Islam into a more genuine – religious – understanding (and practice) of the faith (cf. Balci and Goyushov 2013); a perception that might have factored in the ruling elite’s decision to close down in 2009, if for allegedly legitimate (technical) reasons, both of the two ‘Turkish’ mosques (sponsored/built by the Turkish Directorate for Religious Affairs, or Diyanet) operating in the capital (one of which was later reopened) (Muradova 2009; RFE/RL 2009; World Bulletin 2009). Also, notwithstanding an allegedly important contribution that the Baku Turkish Anadolu lyceum (so far the only high school in Baku sponsored and operated directly by the Turkish government) made to raising educational standards in Azerbaijan’s secondary education provision (particularly at an initial stage of the country’s independence) and despite numerous efforts on the part of the Turkish government to that effect, the Azerbaijani government has been consistently reluctant to allow for the second such Turkish government-sponsored school to open in Baku. Other Turkish (if non-governmental) educational establishments operating in the country as part of the so-called Gülen (or Hizmet) movement, of which there were at least twenty-seven (including the Qafqaz University, a private school, and twelve lyceums and at least thirteen Araz pre-university preparatory courses dispersed across the country’s various regions), had been recurrently facing political and broader societal pressure and scrutiny of various kinds, given the clandestine nature of the movement’s operation and its allegedly subversive longer-term political agenda, until they, save the university, were finally decreed to close down in June 2014, including as an extension of recent political developments in Turkey itself (Aliyev 2013; Balci 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Muradova 2014).

2 What has been hailed as the Contract of the Century is a production-sharing agreement that SOCAR signed with the international, mostly Western, oil consortium in September 1994.

3 While Azerbaijan’s president Heydar Aliyev did discuss, in June 1994, with his Iranian counterpart Rafsanjani the possibility of Iran’s inclusion in the Contract of the Century – and an agreement to that effect was signed in Baku on 12 November that year – given Washington’s unconditional opposition, SOCAR was ultimately forced to disallow Iran’s participation in April 1995. Ironically, Iran’s National Gas Export Company was to receive, according to the November 1994 agreement, a 5 percent share in the Contract of the Century, considerably more than 1.75 percent that the Turkish State Oil Company received (Aliyev 2003, 182–183). In a similar fashion, while the Iranian route was considered by experts, including those in the AIOC, economically most feasible for the transportation of ‘main oil’ of the Caspian – the initial framework agreement signed on 9 March 1992 between Azerbaijan and Turkey envisaged the construction of an oil pipeline that would run from Baku through Iran and Nakhchivan to the Turkish port of Yumurtalik – the US opposition blocked this option and effectively removed it from the political agenda (Goltz 1999, 253–254; Joﬁ 1999; LeVine 2007, 348–349).

4 Elchibey’s open criticism towards Iran’s human rights performance and his active efforts to advocate the creation of Great Azerbaijan through the unification of post-Soviet Azerbaijan and the Iranian Azerbaijan provinces was an important factor in alienating Iran towards its northern neighbour (e.g. Goltz 1999, 58–64).

5 E.g. Cornell (2011, ch. 12); also Shaffer (2000, 2002, esp. ch. 1).
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6 The first such discussion among foreign ministers of Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Iran was held in April 2011 in the Iranian city of Urmia (Today’s Zaman 2011a); the second meeting took place in March 2012 in Azerbaijan’s Nakchivan (Zasztowt 2012, 5); the third, and latest, meeting, was held in March 2014 in Turkey’s Van.

7 Azerbaijan has traditionally been resistant to opening up its borders to Iran, lest the move further spur drug trafficking from that country, which is already very intense and hard to control (Bozkurt 2011; cf. Ekici and Unlu 2013); further facilitate cross-border infiltrations therefrom, including by alleged terrorists, Islamic radicals, and spying agents (see, for example, BBC News 2012; The Telegraph 2012; Theodoulou 2012); or “trigger a huge influx of refugees” from what is seen as politically unstable Iran to Azerbaijan (Bozkurt 2011).

8 Indeed, Israeli arms supplies to Azerbaijan date back to the crucial years of the early 1990s when Baku was still involved in the active phase of its war with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. For further detail on, and analysis of, the nature and evolving dynamics of relations between Azerbaijan and Israel, see, for example, Bourtman (2006); Ismayilov (2013); Murinson (2013); Perry (2012); Shiriyev (2012a). On Azerbaijan’s indigenous Jewish population, see Eshman (2013).

9 At the time Azerbaijan acquired independence, the organisation was called the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). It was renamed to become the OSCE by a decision of the Budapest Summit in December 1994.

10 Alexander Wendt conceptualises “the struggle for recognition” among states and individuals as the micro-level driving force behind structural change and collective identity formation. Picking up from Georg W. F. Hegel’s (1977) Phenomenology of Spirit, Wendt defines recognition as “a social act that invests difference with a particular meaning [in which] another actor (‘the Other’) is constituted as a subject with a legitimate social standing in relation to the Self.” Elaborating further on the concept, Wendt differentiates between “thin” forms of recognition, which he defines as recognition of a state “as an independent subject within a community of law,” and “thick” recognition, which “is about being respected for what makes [a state] special or unique” (Wendt 2003, esp. 511–512). For a conceptualisation of the struggle for recognition, also see Fukuyama (1992) and Honneth (1996).

11 “Imitation” refers to a process by which a state “tries to conform as closely as ever possible to the rules [and norms] which govern life” in the temporal and social context in which it has emerged (Ringmar 2002, 122). Conceptualising it as an evolutionary mechanism of “cultural selection,” by which state identities evolve at a micro-level of interaction, Wendt (1999, 324–325) defines “imitation” as a process in which “actors adopt the self-understandings of those whom they perceive as ‘successful.’ ” For a detailed conceptualisation of the struggle for recognition and its workings in the context of post-Soviet Azerbaijan, including the underlying tension between “imitation” and “pipeline politics” as two modalities by virtue of which Azerbaijan’s struggle for recognition was effected, see Ismayilov (2012).


13 For a fine, if brief, overview of Ataturk’s reforms, see, for example, Morris (2005, 35–37); Fuller (2008, 25–31); also Ahmad (2003, 85–86).

14 Before 1992, the EU was called the European Economic Community (EEC).

15 Indeed, even on the mutual intelligibility of one another’s languages (particularly on the part of the Turkish population), the two states are not as close as the typological similarity between Azerbaijani and Turkish might suggest (Sagin-Simsek and Konig 2012).

16 In the same vein, Georgia’s Saakashvili pointed explicitly a number of times to modern Turkey’s founder Ataturk as a role model he was willing to emulate in his state-building efforts at home (e.g. Mekhuzla 2006; Mitchell 2006, 674–675; Ostrovsky 2004).
With billions in oil revenues flooding the Azerbaijani economy, the country has gone through what was in fact an exceptionally robust GDP outturn and, with an average annual growth rate of 21 percent registered in 2006–2010 (as opposed to a −6.3 percent average annual growth in 1990–2000), found itself among the fastest-growing economies in the world in recent years (International Monetary Fund 2012, 4). As of 2011, the overall volume of the country’s economy (expressed in terms of nominal GDP) has increased 18.5 times since independence, such that it came to account for over 80 percent of the GDP of the entire South Caucasus (e.g. Bayramov 2012; Mammadyarov 2013). Turkey, in turn, had seen its economy grow some 6 percent annually and its per capita GDP tripled between 2002 and 2008, “one of the highest sustained rates of economic growth” the world saw at the time, landing the country among the world’s 20 largest economies (Steckler and Altman 2011, 27, 43).

For a fine, if brief, analysis of the evolving nature of Azerbaijan’s energy partnership with Turkey, see Kardaş (2014). Also see Kardaş (2013), Yilmaz and Kilavuz (2012).

As of mid-2014, six to seven thousand Azerbaijani students were pursuing their education in Turkey’s universities.

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Turkish-Azerbaijani relations


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Geopolitics versus ideology


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