

What's Happening in Azerbaijan-Türkiye Relations?

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Almost everyone knows about the special role and weight of Türkiye in Azerbaijan's engagement with partner countries. In addition to strategic partnership and alliance, this relationship based on brotherhood is seen not only in rhetoric but in official documents. In other words, the sentimental content is at least as important as the contractual-legal basis in the comprehensive and deep relations between the two countries. Even sentimental attitudes and behavior—let us say that one side condemns the other side for a move incompatible with the principle of fraternity—are in some cases beyond the legal-formal aspect and become the main factor determining these bilateral relations. Yet this overlooks the fact that each country is separate and independent, and their interests may differ in many ways. It seems that now comes the next such case. The publication of critical articles against Türkiye in Azerbaijan's official media (as well as on websites close to official Baku) in late July-early August 2024, has prompted the titular question of this piece.

Addressing a meeting of his ruling AK Party in his hometown of Rize on 28 July, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said: "We must be very strong so that Israel can't do these ridiculous things to Palestine. Just like we entered Karabakh, just like we entered Libya, we might do similar to them." Baku responded to President Erdoğan's statement on an unofficial level the day after the speech. Citing an unnamed high-ranking representative from Azerbaijan's Defense Ministry, [1news.az](https://www.1news.az), a website close to official circles, reported that any statement about participation of soldiers of any country other than Azerbaijan in military operations to restore the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan has no basis in fact.

Türkiye and Pakistan provided only political support during the 44-day war.

It would be wrong to dismiss this response as a standard statement. In general, it would be incorrect to look upon Baku's reaction as purely an issue triggered by President Erdoğan's statement and limited in this context. It is more likely a manifestation of Azerbaijan's accumulated discontent due to actions and policies of the Turkish government. Of course, Erdoğan's statement suggests that Azerbaijan would not have had success in the in the Second Karabakh War without Türkiye's help. But the promptness of the Azerbaijani response gives reason to believe that Baku's discontent cannot be linked simply to Erdoğan's statement on Israel and Palestine. This conclusion is supported by a phrase that appears in an [article](#) in the official state newspaper *Azərbaycan*: "In order not to cast a shadow on the relations between the two states, there were issues that we ignored many times. But it is not right to go over these issues now." The article does not disclose Erdoğan's name. It claims that the Turkish Army's entrance into Karabakh is regarded as "repeating the vile lies spread by Armenians" and "bringing grist to the Armenian mill," it and emphasizes that Azerbaijan has paid every last penny for the bullets, ammunition and military machinery it imported from Türkiye.

The main issue causing dissatisfaction for Azerbaijan is the continuation of Türkiye's policy of rapprochement with Armenia without any preconditions. In order to hammer out a peace agreement, Azerbaijan urged Armenia to amend its constitution because the constitution refers to Armenia's Declaration of Independence, which makes territorial claims against Azerbaijan. However, Türkiye has not demanded this of Armenia. Special envoys from Türkiye and Armenia, Sardar Kılıç and Ruben Rubinyan, respectively, convened at the Alican-Margara border crossing of the two countries on 30 July 2024 to resume discussions aimed at normalizing ties between the two countries. Their 5th meeting since the launch of

reconciliation efforts had a positive tone, the sides reaffirmed their commitment to the agreements reached earlier (the launch of cargo flights, opening of the land border for the citizens of third countries). This included the continuation of the normalization process without any preconditions. The envoys agreed to evaluate technical requirements for the launch of the Akyaka (Türkiye) – Akhurik (Armenia) railway and to streamline visa procedures for holders of diplomatic or official passports. All this shows that Türkiye does not consider constitutional change in Armenia a prerequisite for peace and cooperation.

An [article](#) in *Qafqazinfo*, an online resource close to Azerbaijani official circles, containing accusations against the Turkish government was published the day after the Kılıç-Rubinyan meeting. The article, which has a harsher content than the article in *Azərbaycan*, presents the normalization of ties with Armenia without any preconditions as a result of a task Türkiye was given by the West. In Azerbaijan it is no secret that on websites close to the government, this type of articles—especially on such sensitive issues as foreign policy and relations with Türkiye—cannot be published without coordinating with the presidential administration and in many cases, such analytical articles are prepared on the basis of talking points sent by the administration. This is a method that Baku has long used to convey certain ideas to other parties that are not conveyed in face-to-face meetings and that deserve no diplomatic tact whatsoever.

Having declared that it will not maintain any contacts with Armenia until Azerbaijan's territories are freed from occupation, Türkiye has long pursued its policy in the South Caucasus in coordination and synchronization with Baku. The Azerbaijan-Armenia peace process and the Türkiye-Armenia dialog have been conducted in parallel since the Second Karabakh War. However, in recent months this parallelism and coordinated activity have been disrupted. Armenia's rapprochement with the West—the purchase of ammunition from

France; the development of ties with the United States in the military sphere; the activities of the European Union observer mission in Armenia—is presented in Baku’s official rhetoric and propaganda as a threat and preparation for a new war against Azerbaijan. On the contrary, on 19 June 2024, a phone conversation was held between President Erdoğan and Prime Minister Pashinyan. The Turkish Presidency’s Directorate of Communications released an official statement under the title “Türkiye and Armenia committed to normalizing relations.” It stated that “The two leaders underscored their political will to fully normalize the relations between Türkiye and Armenia without preconditions.” This, of course, was not to the liking of Baku.

Heads in Baku were also raised when President Erdoğan canceled his scheduled visit to attend the Informal Summit of Heads of State of the Organization of Turkic States in Shusha on 6 July to instead attend the Euro 2024 quarterfinal match in Berlin between Türkiye and the Netherlands. To see this as a political message to Azerbaijan would be incorrect; it is natural that the Turkish head of state wanted to watch his national team’s important match. But his absence as the Turkish leader at the summit of Heads of Turkic States reduces the weight of the event regardless, and this definitely did not satisfy the host, Azerbaijan.

In Ankara, the prevailing view is that there are no serious obstacles left to the establishment of bilateral ties with Armenia now that all Azerbaijani territories are free from occupation. Moreover, the presence in power of a pragmatic politician like Nikol Pashinyan, who is not a radical Armenian nationalist and wants to open his country to the world through Türkiye, creates fertile ground for regional peace and cooperation. Journalist Barçın Yinanç, who is close to Turkish diplomatic circles, writes in this regard: “I know that Ankara thinks that Pashinyan, who is trying to move Armenia out of the Russian orbit, and is taking risks for peace by standing against the radical political group in Karabakh, represents a

real chance for regional peace.” The author further maintains that because of Türkiye’s dependence on Azerbaijan for regional policy, Ankara is unable to take the necessary steps, and as a result the void in the region is filled by other powers.

Brief historical background: Looking back over the recent past, we can see that sometimes there were periods of frosty relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye and even some crises. The most serious crisis occurred following the signing of the Zurich Protocols between Türkiye and Armenia in October 2009. At that time the Azerbaijani authorities protested strongly against the move, lowering the Turkish flags that fly in Baku’s Martyrs’ Alley, the burial place of Ottoman soldiers who fought for the liberation of Baku in 1918, and closing for repairs the Mosque of the Martyrs built by Türkiye. In addition, Azerbaijan organized serious propaganda campaigns throughout Türkiye. If we look a bit in the past, the involvement of Turkish intelligence officers in the uprising in Azerbaijan in March 1995 caused tensions between Baku and Ankara, and the latter replaced its ambassador to Azerbaijan at Baku’s request. Relations normalized somewhat later, thanks to friendly personal ties between Presidents Heydar Aliyev and Süleyman Demirel.

Calling the current situation in bilateral relations a crisis would not be an adequate assessment. *Misunderstanding* would be the more accurate expression at this stage. Following the [meeting](#) between Azerbaijani presidential aide Hikmet Hacıyev and Ambassador of Türkiye to Azerbaijan Cahit Bağcı on 7 August 2024, local media outlets discontinued the publication of critical articles about Türkiye’s policy. There is no doubt that Baku expects Ankara to return to its previous synchrony in regional geopolitics. At the same time, the Azerbaijani authorities are interested in reconciliation rather than rivalry between Türkiye and Russia in the region: Acting in the form of a geopolitical triangle with Ankara and Moscow provides Baku with a sense of security in which case

rapprochement with Russia can be more easily explained and justified to the internal community. Türkiye's unilateral and unconditional development of dialog with Armenia, its lack of participation in the pressure on Yerevan, and the Turkish-Russian conflict of interests in the region take Baku threatens Baku's security.

Ankara is unwilling to let the misunderstanding between Türkiye and Azerbaijan escalate into a serious problem. Relations have deepened so much over the past period that undermining them could create a headache for the current Turkish government, the ruling party of which, having been defeated in the last municipal elections, has seen its position weakened in domestic politics and is battling an economic crisis and high inflation. Azerbaijan in 2009 succeeded in channeling public opinion in Türkiye against the Erdoğan government and now has a greater opportunity to do the same again. Overall, Azerbaijani investments in Türkiye have reached US\$20 billion, with SOCAR expanding its activities in that country's energy and media sectors. In Türkiye, *Haber Global* TV channel, which belongs to the *Global Media* group, is owned by persons close to the Azerbaijani authorities and has the ability to influence local public opinion. In addition, a lion's share in the rebuilding and other projects carried out in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan was given to holdings close to Erdoğan's government.

This point is also clearly stated in the said article in the newspaper *Azərbaycan*: "Along with large transnational Turkish holdings, dozens of other Turkish companies, thousands of Turkish engineers and master craftsmen are working to rebuild Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur. Azerbaijan has created sufficient conditions for the private sector of the brotherly country to participate in this process, i.e., making profit and transferring large funds to the Turkish budget. What other country has created such favorable conditions for Turkish companies?" Here the article is hinting to Türkiye that if relations deteriorate Türkiye may lose these opportunities.

If Türkiye puts forward Azerbaijan's public demand to change the Armenian constitution as a condition for its normalization process with Armenia as well; or, conversely, if Baku rejects this precondition and postpones the demand for constitutional change until after the peace agreement, this misunderstanding will disappear. That is, one of the parties needs to take a step back.