



TESAM Akademi Dergisi

Journal of TESAM Academy

ISSN 2148-2462 / E-ISSN 2458-9217

Russian-Turkish Factor in Nagorno-Karabakh Based on Materials in Russian Media

*Dağlık Karabağ Çatışmasında Rus-Türk Faktörü (Rusya Medyasındaki
Materyallere Dayalı Olarak)*

Abstract

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which erupted in the late 1980s and passed into the military stage in 1991, had been frozen for many years. The sudden hostilities unleashed in Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2020 led to the regional destabilization in the South Caucasus. Unlike previously, this time the conflict saw the active role of Turkey that primarily affected Russia's national interests and the issues of its geopolitical power in the post-Soviet space. Secondly, it also affected the interests of the West, which for 30 years could not find a solution to the conflict. Unlike the West, which failed to solve the Nagorno-Karabakh problem in 30 years, regional actors represented by Russia and Turkey achieved a significant shift in solving the problem in a short period of time. Based on the materials in the Russian media, the article analyzes the key positions of two actors - Russia and Turkey on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The article reveals the interests of the two parties in the conflict settlement, explains Turkey's support to Azerbaijan in the conflict against Armenia and reflects Russia's subsequent interests (all according to the materials in Russian media). Special emphasis is laid on factors and related interests which make Russian-Turkish cooperation possible.

Keywords: Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia, Turkey, Regional Security, Status Quo.

Öz

1980'lerin sonunda patlak veren ve 1991'de askeri aşamaya geçen Dağlık Karabağ sorunu uzun yıllar askıda beklemiştir. Eylül 2020'de cereyan eden ani çatışmalar Güney Kafkasya'da bölgesel istikrarsızlığa sebep oldu. Öncekinden farklı olarak, bu kez çatışmada Sovyet sonrası bölgede

Svetlana SARIBAYOVA

Doktora Öğrencisi,
Sakarya Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler
Enstitüsü, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü.
sv.saribeyli@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0001-9987-4864

Cilt / Issue: 10(1) 227-245

Geliş Tarihi: 16.06.2022

Kabul Tarihi: 23.01.2023

Atf: Saribayova, S. (2023). Russian-Turkish factor in Nagorno-Karabakh based on materials in Russian media. *Tesam Akademi Dergisi*, 10(1), 227-245. <http://dx.doi.org/10.30626/tesamakademi.1129745>

Rusya'nın jeopolitik konularını ve ulusal çıkarlarını temelden etkileyen Türkiye'nin aktif dahil gözlemlenmiştir. İkinci olarak, ayrıca Türkiye'nin rolü çatışmaya 30 yıl boyunca çözüm bulamayan Batı'nın çıkarlarını etkilemiştir. Dağlık Karabağ sorununu 30 yıl boyunca çözemeyen Batı'nın aksine, Rusya ve Türkiye tarafından temsil edilen bölgesel aktörler sorunu kısa sürede çözmek için önemli bir değişimi gerçekleştirmiştir. Bu makale, Rus medyasındaki yayınlara dayanarak, Dağlık Karabağ çatışmasında iki kilit aktör Rusya ve Türkiye'nin pozisyonlarını analiz etmiştir. Makale, tamamen Rus medyasındaki materyallere dayanarak, çatışmanın çözümünde iki tarafın çıkarlarını açıklar ve Ermenistan'a karşı Türkiye'nin Azerbaycan'a desteğini anlatır ve Rusya'nın devam eden süreçteki çıkarlarına değinir. Rusya-Türkiye işbirliğini mümkün kılan unsurlara ve ilgili çıkarlara özellikle değinilmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Dağlık Karabağ, Rusya, Türkiye, Bölgesel Güvenlik, Statüko.

Introduction

The international situation in the 21st century can be described as a century of conflicts. The collapse of the Soviet Union exposed the problems hidden behind the Iron Curtain. The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is potentially dangerous not only for regional security, but also for the entire world community, especially since the solution to this problem is stagnant, since the parties are setting extremely high provisions for each other.

Since the escalation of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh in the 90s it has been a growing threat to the regional security of the Caucasus and the entire Middle East. The geopolitical significance of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem is also growing amid the discovery of large hydrocarbon deposits in the Caspian region and the related international projects of the construction of strategic transport routes directly close to the conflict. In general, the ethnopolitical conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh has a negative impact on the prospects for the development of the regional economies and the general situation of global security and stability.

The unsettled territorial and ethnopolitical dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan affects issues that are fundamental for the sovereignty of both countries. Their interaction in the breaks between hostilities in the context of the "status quo" acquires a nature of a "zero-sum game".

The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over the status of Nagorno-Karabakh

is one of those conflicts, which make it impossible to achieve stable progress not only in the Caucasus region, but also in the entire system of international relations. In the event of the slightest aggravation of the confrontation between Yerevan and Baku, the situation may become uncontrollable, which may lead to a global war in the long run. This is explained by the fact that at all stages of the escalation in Nagorno-Karabakh, interests of other countries, some of which determine the face of the world politics, were closely intertwined. The USSR's successor - Russia, neighboring countries - Turkey and Iran, as well as external players such as the United States and EU countries, which have increased their presence in the South Caucasus in the last two decades- demonstrated their interest in resolving this confrontation. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has become a subject, albeit not a primary one, of the election campaign in the United States, as well as the domestic political agenda in Turkey and France.

Claiming for world hegemony, the United States are very interested in the Central Caucasus region. The presence in the region and control over the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict could allow the United States to weaken the influence of Russia in the region, to establish its hegemony in the South Caucasus and over the Caspian oil and to gain access to routes leading to energy-rich Central Asia (Фридрихсон, 2012, p. 29).

Given that the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh takes place on the northwestern border of Iran, it is clear that the national and regional security of Iran depends directly on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Iran has to balance between Baku and Yerevan. Many ethnic Azerbaijanis live in Iran, mostly in the north of the country, near the borders with Azerbaijan and Armenia. The Iranian authorities are concerned about the possibility of separatist sentiments among them. Iran also worries about Turkey's strengthening in the region, and Israel's support for Azerbaijan.

Such actors as Russia and Turkey play a special role in the conflict resolution. For Russia it is important to find a solution to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh without the interference of the West, to once again demonstrate its influence in the region. The Kremlin is also interested in maintaining good relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Thus, for Russia, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a powerful lever of pressure on the parties to the conflict. Russia retains a central role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which, to a certain extent, is due to the

desire to stop the risks of resumption of hostilities in the conflict zone, as well as the desire to preserve and strengthen the role of a “regional broker” (Waal, 2021). One way or another, Moscow always advocates for a peaceful format for resolving the problem, which dictated active initiatives to resolve the military conflict in the fall of 2020.

The problem of Nagorno-Karabakh is of particular importance for Turkey. Participation in the process of its settlement contributes to the strengthening of Turkish positions in Azerbaijan. In addition, for Ankara, the speedy solution of this problem is not only ensuring the stability of future energy projects with its participation, but also increasing prestige in the eyes of other Turkic countries. Turkey’s unwavering support for Azerbaijan in the 2020 military clashes has played a considerable role in the region’s worst outbreak of conflict since the 1990s. Although Turkey has always supported Azerbaijan in its determination to regain the sovereignty over breakaway Karabakh, it did not play a significant political-military role in the previous phases of the conflict with Armenia.

The broadest interpretation of the regional order due to the escalation of hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh is presented in the materials of numerous publications of the modern media space, recognizing them as socio-political constructs of media influence. In this regard, given the need to determine the role and place of the Turkish factor in Nagorno-Karabakh and its significance for Russian politics, it seems expedient to consider the trends in the geopolitics of the regional conflict, reflected in the media, as repeaters of modern socio-political narratives.

A Brief History of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

Nagorno-Karabakh is an administrative-territorial entity located in the Transcaucasus between Azerbaijan and Armenia (a self-proclaimed republic not recognized by any UN member state).

Map 1

Map showing the place of Nagorno-Karabakh in the region



Source: Nagorno-Karabakh: Statement by the High Representative/Vice President Josep Borrell, Accessed: 02.09. 2022, <https://www.avrupa.info.tr/en/eas-news/nagorno-karabakh-statement-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-10444>

The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, that had previously taken place in 1918-1920, broke out with renewed vigor immediately after the USSR collapse, and was marked by the severity and Armenia's unwillingness to recognize Azerbaijan's sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh. The attempt by Yerevan to achieve its goals by establishing allied relations with other countries did not justify themselves and turned the South Caucasus into an explosive region, which, with further political degradation, could become a new hotbed of large-scale war.

For many years, the region lived under existing "status quo", and external forces continued to actively maximize their interests around Nagorno-Karabakh, due to which the permanent position of "no war, no peace" remained unchanged. It begs the question of why the new phase of the conflict occurred in the fall of 2020 and what external factors contributed to this?

The so-called “freezing of the conflict” since the 1990s caused tendencies, which include permanent tensions in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, and occasional incidents in Nagorno-Karabakh (the largest hostilities occurred in 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2020) that marked the early 21st century as a new stage in the conflict’s history.

On April 2-5, 2016, the largest and bloodiest escalation took place on the line of contact in Karabakh since the ceasefire was signed in 1994. This was followed by negotiations in Moscow in April 2016 at the level of the heads of the General Staffs of the Armed Forces of Armenia and Azerbaijan, during which the parties reached a fragile agreement on a ceasefire and stabilization of the situation. Later, during the meeting of the Russian, Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders on June 20, 2016, a Trilateral Statement (Abushov, 2019, p. 77) was published. The document reflected the parties’ determination to normalize the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh (Коммерсантъ, 20.07.2016). The “April War” of 2016 is considered to be a harbinger of Azerbaijan’s brilliant victory in 2020.

Situation in Nagorno-Karabakh: Reasons and factors of war in 2020

The events of 2020 referred to as the “Second Nagorno-Karabakh War” formed a modern stage in the escalation in Karabakh. It should be assumed that previous local and border skirmishes were not considered a war, since they were clearly local in nature and did not cover a large territory. In other words, they were distinguished by their small scale making it impossible to term them a full-fledged military confrontation.

The war erupted on September 27, 2020. Azerbaijan said it launched the counteroffensive Operation Iron Fist in response to Armenia’s shelling of Azerbaijani settlements in the same month (Russel, 2020), while Yerevan claimed that Baku was first to unleash the war.

With the start of military clashes on September 27, in addition to the conflict itself, the international community was interested in the positions of the main regional actors - Russia and Turkey.

Russia is interested in both domestic and regional stability, therefore such conflicts as the one in Nagorno-Karabakh, which can violate order within Russia itself, require immediate solution (Лента.ру., 25.12.2020). Therefore, Russia’s position shocked the world community, which expected Moscow to interfere immediately and not allow the further escalation of the conflict, calling on the parties to maintain peace. From the very beginning of the conflict in 2020, Russia “remained silent” and

did not respond to the calls of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who was unable to resist Azerbaijan and hoped for Moscow's support. Russia's stance may be linked to several factors. First of all, Moscow understands that Azerbaijan is gradually becoming stronger, especially in the military sphere, and the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh can no longer remain unresolved. Moreover, despite Russia's close cooperation with Armenia, Moscow's relations with Azerbaijan are at a much higher level in many areas. This can be seen in the trade turnover, and in the volume of investments, and in many other examples. Another reason for Russia's "silence" is that it wants to punish Pashinyan for creating anti-Russian sentiments in the country and inclining towards the West (Лента.ру., 25.12.2020). It can be assumed that Russia's position was also influenced by Turkey's involvement in the conflict. According to Gazeta.ru with reference to The Wall Street Journal, Russia allowed Turkey to support Azerbaijan to sow a split within NATO (Новая Газета, 03.12.2020).

From the very beginning of the war, the Republic of Turkey demonstrated political support for Azerbaijan. The presence of close political, economic, humanitarian ties with Azerbaijan give Turkey the right to participate in the conflict settlement. Moreover, Nagorno-Karabakh is not a common foreign policy issue, but the one that could lead to repercussions affecting both the domestic and regional balances. Firstly, the return of the occupied territories under Azerbaijan's control and the change in the balance of power in its favor are in Turkey's interests, since Azerbaijan has traditionally been a strategic partner for Turkey. Secondly, a peaceful settlement in Nagorno-Karabakh opens up the possibility of developing relations not only between Armenia and Azerbaijan, but also between Turkey and Armenia.

Throughout the hostilities, Armenian officials occasionally accused Turkey of assisting Azerbaijan by sending troops. Turkey supplied Azerbaijan with the state-of-the-art equipment, including drones that largely contributed to Azerbaijan's victory. While Azerbaijan was equipped with such advanced technologies, Armenia's army was in a deplorable state, due to the lack of funding from the Armenian government. The last fact seems surprising considering the donations allocated by Armenian Diaspora living abroad.

Meanwhile, during the war Armenia involved what it calls "volunteers," who were the citizens of foreign countries. By some reports, Yerevan also attracted mercenaries from Syria, Libya and other countries. As one

example of such volunteers, we can cite the leader of the far-right neo-Nazi French group Zouaves Paris (ZVP) who said he joined Armenian ranks in Nagorno-Karabakh to fight Azerbaijanis (Anadolu Agency, 02.11.2020).

The conflict ended on November 10, 2020, with the signing of a trilateral statement on ceasefire that provided for the two sides to stop where they were at the moment of signing the document and deployment of Russian peacekeepers (Kremlin.ru, 10.11.2020).

The second Karabakh war led to a change in the balance of power in the region. First of all, Russia is now much more involved in the Karabakh problem. Moscow deployed its peacekeepers to Nagorno-Karabakh to ensure the security of local population. Turkey's position has strengthened, which can be seen from the creation of a joint center with Russia on the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Turkey has demonstrated its readiness to use military force to solve foreign policy problems, regardless of other global actors such as the United States and EU countries, especially France.

Analyzing the reasons why the escalation of the conflict took place precisely in 2020, it should be assumed that in this case the impact is based on a wide range of both global and regional factors, by which we mean the Covid-19 pandemic (economic problems in Armenia, expressed in the form of a drop in incomes of the population, a decrease in GDP growth rates, an increase in unemployment and, as a result, an increase in socio-cultural tensions at the level of civil society). As a result, the government of Armenia, led by Nikol Pashinyan, had no way out but to distract the attention of the general public by turning its eyes on Nagorno Karabakh. Armenia was interested in determination of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh as a subject not controlled by Azerbaijan. Yerevan clearly hoped Russia will provide its assistance to Armenia this time too, as it did during what is referred to as the First Karabakh War.

Armenia's aspirations to have this region under its control is understandable given the importance of the strategic location of this region, control over which could contribute to more active participation of a state in regional and interregional projects, such as China's One Belt, One Road initiative or Russia's Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), chains of movement of goods, works, services and capital.

Meanwhile, it is unclear what Yerevan relied on by unleashing the hostilities against Azerbaijan, given the quite complicated ties with its key ally in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) – Russia, manifested

in the anti-Russian protests in Armenia in the period between 2018 and 2020. The declining influence of Russia at the indicated time deprived Armenia of the strategic ally, which could assist the state as much as Turkey do to Azerbaijan, what also contributed to the strengthening of Azerbaijan's positions in the indicated conflict.

War in Nagorno-Karabakh: Turkish factor

The role of Nagorno-Karabakh lies in the status of the so-called 'buffer zone', 'link connecting the regions,' and the control over this region allows to ensure the integrity, security, efficiency of trade and economic interaction of a wide range of states. The indicated aspects directly relate to the regional dimension of the strategic importance of Nagorno-Karabakh (Есипов, 2020).

Turkey's most significant contribution to Azerbaijan's victory in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020 was not 'the drones and military advisors' (Meduza.io, 19.11.2020), as media often say, but rather three decades of painstaking army building. As Turkic states, Turkey and Azerbaijan have developed a close relationship over the past three decades. This cooperation has played a decisive role in building up the military potential of Azerbaijan.

These efforts began at the end of the Cold War. After Azerbaijan regained independence in 1991, the country had two options: to build an army based either on the legacy of the Red Army or on Western standards. Baku chose the latter, not least because of Turkey's offer of assistance. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and Azerbaijan's independence, the two countries interacted under the motto of 'one nation, two states.' (Yalçınkaya, 2021). The first agreement on cooperation in military training between Azerbaijan and Turkey was signed in 1992. As part of this agreement, the process of building the Azerbaijani army began in the military educational institutions of Turkey, in addition, Ankara contributed to the creation and reorganization of military educational institutions in Azerbaijan (Çetiñnkaya, 2020, p. 15). Relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan suffered greatly in 2008, when Turkey pursued a policy of rapprochement with Armenia. In this context, the media outlet Al-Jazeera quotes the words of the former Turkish diplomat S. Ülgen, a representative of the Istanbul independent analytical center for economic and foreign policy studies Edam, that "the failure of diplomatic efforts between Turkey and Armenia has become an impetus for the deepening of Turkish-Azerbaijani relations" (Keddie, 2020). In this context, political-military cooperation reached its peak with the signing of the Agreement

on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support in 2010, which became the basis for cooperation in the areas of security and the economy. Since then, Azerbaijani servicemen have participated in Turkish military exercises and made military visits to Turkey. The process of creating the army in Azerbaijan also fit NATO's policy on partner countries. According to Sergei Markedonov, a representative of the Center for Euro-Atlantic Security of the Institute for International Studies at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, Azerbaijan's participation in NATO-led operations made it possible for the Alliance to understand that the military from the former USSR can achieve the required standards of the alliance in restructuring the military forces and the army, with the special merits of Turkey, as the leader of this process (Маркедонов, 2018). As noted by the Russia news portal Moskovsky Komsomolets, Turkey's ability to create an army was one of the leading factors contributing to Azerbaijan's victory in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War (Московский комсомолец, 12.11.2020).

At the same time, in addition to defining the framework of bilateral relations, the Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support contains firm obligations for the signatories. Under Article 2 of the Agreement, the parties agreed to assist each other in the event of a security threat. Thus, in accordance with the 2010 Agreement, Turkey could actively support Azerbaijan with military operations on the ground after the resumption of clashes in Karabakh. This would be in accordance with international law, but there would be a risk of a clash between Ankara and Moscow. Therefore, Turkey cautiously limited its support to Azerbaijan and was extremely careful not to engage in direct confrontation with Moscow in its backyard and to keep channels of dialogue open.

From the moment the war in Karabakh erupted Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan voiced support for Azerbaijan's counteroffensive (Rbc.ru, 27.09.2020). President Erdogan also blamed the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group for failing to resolve the conflict over nearly 30 years.

Moskovsky Komsomolets reported that from the point of view of Turkey, this format is neither neutral nor effective, since no solution to the problem has been found for almost thirty years and "if all the co-chairs of the organization sympathize with the Armenian side, then someone must represent the interests of Azerbaijan" (Московский комсомолец-Турция, 11.10.2020). As reported by Lenta.ru, since the intensification

of the conflict, Turkey has clearly expressed its commitment to the Azerbaijani side and was ready to provide Baku with full support “both on the ground and at the negotiating table” (Лента.ру, 01.07.2021). At the same time, as reported by Gazeta.ru, official Ankara has constantly emphasized its interest in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict together with Russia, while Russia called on both Azerbaijan and Armenia to a mutual cessation of hostilities” (Газета.ру, 06.10.2020).

On the initiative of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, for the first time after the escalation between Azerbaijan and Armenia, on October 14,2020, telephone conversation took place between the presidents of Turkey and Russia. During the conversation, Russian President Vladimir Putin voiced the hope that ‘Turkey, as a member of the OSCE Minsk Group will make a constructive contribution to the de-escalation of the conflict’ (Kremlin.ru, 14.10.2020)

If we analyze the coverage of Turkish participation in the conflict in Russian media outlets, we can see a significant divergence of viewpoints regarding Turkey’s immediate interests. On the one hand, Gazeta.ru claimed that with Azerbaijan’s support, Turkey actively sought to strengthen its status as a regional power, participating in the negotiation process of the Minsk Group, but actively defending its own positions of a tough foreign policy (Газета.ру., 14.12.2020). On the other hand, as reported by Lenta.ru, “it is fundamentally important for Turkey to demonstrate its soft and hard power in three worlds: the former Ottoman world (“neo-Ottomanism”), the Islamic world and the Turkic world, and therefore Turkey, regardless of circumstances, solidarizes with the Turkic states of the post-Soviet space, demonstrating itself as the center of the Turkic world.” (Лента.ру, 04.08.2020).

The frequently used (above) statement in Turkey regarding Azerbaijan “one nation, two states” was proposed by the former President of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, back in the 1990s and does not lose its relevance to this day.

Intertwining of Russian-Turkish interests in Nagorno-Karabakh

From the point of view of Russian state media outlets such as Kommersant, the expectation of official Ankara to play a leading role in overcoming confrontation was based not only on its role as a member of the Minsk Group, but also on its special relationship with Moscow (“Коммерсантъ”, 23.10.2020).

Also, Kommersant repeatedly noted that “Russia and Turkey have entered into an uncompromising struggle for the title of peacekeepers.” (Коммерсантъ, 2020) This can be immediately explained by several factors that also entail the traditional mechanism of balancing Russian-Turkish relations, the fragility and plasticity of Russian-Turkish relations.

First, Turkey’s commitment to Azerbaijan poses an unexpected challenge for Russia, which, as traditionally emphasized in most Russian media, views the entire South Caucasus region its exclusive zone of influence (Интерфакс, 28.05.2021). The interference of external players in this region is unacceptable for Russia, especially since in this context the external entity is a NATO member, which, as has been repeatedly reported in media outlets, intends to create a military base in close proximity to Russia. In particular, Gazeta.ru, referring to the statements of the Turkish leader, noted that “the President of Turkey allowed the creation of a Turkish military base on the territory of Azerbaijan to jointly protect the borders.” (Газета.ru, 18.06.2021). As can be judged from the material published by Vedomosti, the hypothetical possibility of a Turkish military base on the territory of Azerbaijan is a matter of Russia’s close attention. In particular, it is noted that the Russian side recognizes Turkey as a player that is interested in stabilizing the situation in the South Caucasus and any steps taken must be consistent with peacekeeping and diplomatic goals, while statements on militarization, from Moscow’s point of view, ‘can only increase the growth of tension in already problematic region.’ (Ведомости, 18.06.2021).

On the other hand, the deterioration of relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey is not in the interests of the Russian Federation. This is due to the fact that Russia in this conflict faced several tasks at once given Turkey’s role: it was necessary to strengthen its own influence in the region along with non-interference in a hot conflict near its own borders; it was important to support Armenia as an ally in the CSTO and prevent the expulsion of the Armenian community from the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh; not to provoke Azerbaijan into the threat of a repetition of the Georgian scenario of 2008, but at the same time to prevent the total victory of Baku; and most importantly, to maintain a balance between avoiding an increase in Western influence on the conflict (via Turkey) and maintaining normal relations with Ankara. We agree with the fair assertion of Sushentsov, a representative of the Russian think tank Valdai International Discussion Club, that all of the above can be grouped together into a single goal - to retain strategic initiatives in regional affairs and strengthen own presence in these matters (Сушенцов, 2020).

Turkey's active support for Azerbaijan in Karabakh complicated the situation for Russia as the main peacemaker. Nevertheless, it can be said that the interests of Moscow and Ankara were similar in a number of spheres, which may indicate the existence of cooperation in resolving the problem of a peaceful settlement. For example, as noted by Kortunov, a representative of the Russian International Affairs Council analytical center, Moscow and Ankara have recently been closely cooperating in Syria, and this experience shows that both actors strive to manage regional conflicts while distancing themselves from Western players in their peacekeeping activity (Кортунув, 2021)

Meanwhile, speaking in an interview with Russia 24 news channel, Russian President Vladimir Putin said 'Turkey did not violate international law by supporting Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. He noted Baku was reclaiming its own territories and was within its rights to choose any advisers, including Turkey.

Opposition newspaper Novaya Gazeta, in its material on Russian-Turkish interaction on regional conflicts, comes to the conclusion that the impetus for the beneficial symbiosis of the two countries was the distancing from the West after 2014- 2016. Since this period, Russia has worsened its relations with the West amid the start of the conflict with Ukraine, while the foreign policy vector of Erdogan's government shifted towards independence from the United States after US support for the military coup and regular accusations of "authoritarianism" of the Turkish government (Сокирянская, 2020). Based on this, Russia probably remained neutral in the conflict in Karabakh due to the solid foundation for strengthening Russian-Turkish relations, expressed in extremely tense relations with the West, along with the priority of preserving their own regimes and ensuring the security of their borders from foreign interference.

Another reason why Moscow remained neutral in Nagorno-Karabakh was the anti-Russian policy of government of Nikol Pashinyan. In particular, in an interview with Regnum, E.Prigozhin, noted that Armenia and Azerbaijan had the opportunity to stop the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh with the voluntary involvement of Russia in a peaceful settlement, but after Prime Minister Pashinyan came to power, Yerevan turned its back to Russia, demonstrating aspirations for the United States and the West, and this made the war possible (Regnum, 01.10.2020).

If we follow the above interpretation, then the decisive question for Russia in relation to Armenia and Azerbaijan is to what extent the governments

of the respective countries are loyal and friendly to Moscow. In order for Russia to be able to maintain its zone of influence in the South Caucasus, it was important for it to have friendly and partnership relations with the Armenian government. Thus, the “hard power” line in Erdogan’s foreign policy course towards Armenia also benefited Russia: Ankara’s support of Baku helped Moscow restore its former relations with Armenia, which had “cooled down” after the Armenian revolution in 2018. But based on the materials in RBC, at the same time, to protect its partner in the CSTO, Russia has drawn a ‘red line’ for Turkish participation in relation to the internationally recognized territory of Armenia (РБК, 11.10.2020).

Furthermore, Turkey and Russia attach a great importance to cooperation in Syria, which they cannot put at risk (Сучков, 2020). Regardless of opposing positions, the Syrian factor draws Turkey and Russia together: Moscow cares about countering regime change in Syria, Turkey, for its part, wants to use military operations in Syria to prevent the emergence of a Kurdish state on its border (Гостев, 2018). Last but not least, Ankara controls the Straits, which are important gateways for Russia to Syria.

Thus, it should be noted that the following pillars of the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement in the Russia-Turkey tandem have strengthened in the Russian media space: firstly, by analogy with cooperation in Syria, cooperation and consensus on Nagorno-Karabakh affects the most sensitive key issues of both states – issues of their stability and security. Second, the main feature of this cooperation is the preference given to bilateral coordination without Western states. Accordingly, both Russia and Turkey are on the path of accelerated alienation from the West. Thirdly, although Ankara is not a “strategic ally” of Moscow, most media are inclined to believe that it can still be called a “very close partner” in a number of regional settlements, including Nagorno-Karabakh. Therefore, the option of excluding the West from local conflicts, while allowing Turkey to strengthen itself as a regional power, turned out to be the most acceptable for Russia.

Conclusion

Most of the reviewed media materials agree that following the results of the armed conflict in 2020, Turkey has strengthened its own position in the Caucasus by strengthening the strategic link “Ankara - Baku”. The study demonstrates that, despite the general tension in Russian-Turkish relations, the leaders of the two countries can get along with each other for the sake of maintaining relations. Their historical fragility is especially acute during periods of certain regional conflicts, when the

distance from the “strategic partner” to the “historical enemy”, especially in the media, can change and be overcome literally by the hour. On the other hand, it is precisely this constant balancing that makes it possible to keep relations at the level of plasticity.

As the analysis has shown, not only state, but also opposition media and media resources agree that partnership with Turkey enables Russia to pursue its own policy and ensure regional interests without any special losses, to resolve regional conflicts without the participation of the United States and the West. In particular, opposition media outlets consider that resolving regional issues without Western intervention is important for Russia, and in the case of the Karabakh war in 2020, this factor outweighed the prevention of the strengthening of regional powers such as Turkey. This position is intertwined with a number of materials from independent media, where the emphasis is laid on the fact that the goal of acting in the region without the help and pressure of the West is also important for Turkey, which, for these reasons, is ready to cooperate with Russia in resolving third-party conflicts that it considers vital for the state. In fact, all media outlets are unanimous in the opinion that the so-called “anti-Western platform” was a decisive moment for the adoption of a new status quo between Azerbaijan and Armenia. This also provided an opportunity for Turkey to participate as an observer in the conflict settlement with the leading position of Russia through the military presence in Karabakh.

Summarizing all of the above, it can be stated that, in the interpretation of the Russian media, the Russian approach to Nagorno-Karabakh with Turkish participation presupposes the intensification of efforts of states in the field of regional and interregional interaction, which makes it possible to strengthen Russia’s role in international affairs, reduce tension and impart elements of adaptability to current and potential challenges and threats to the new world order.

Declaration

In all processes of the article, TESAM's research and publication ethics principles were followed.

There is no potential conflict of interest in this study.

The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

References

Abushov, K. (2019). Russian foreign policy towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: Prudent geopolitics, incapacity or identity? *East European Politics*, 35(1), 72-92.

Anadolu Agency. (02.11.2020). 'Fascist' French group leader vows fight for Armenia. Accessed: 02.09.2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/azerbaijan-front-line/fascist-french-group-leader-vows-fight-for-armenia/2028479>.

Çetinkaya, G. (2020). Military Dimension of Turkey-Azerbaijan Relations and Gendarmerie-Centered Aids (1992-2014). *Bilecik Şeyh Edebali Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 5(1), 15-40.

Keddie, P. (30.10.2020). What's Turkey's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict? Al Jazeera. Accessed: 03.09.2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/10/30/whats-turkeys-role-in-the-nagorno-karabakh-conflict>.

Kremlin.ru. (10.11.2020). Заявление Президента Азербайджанской Республики, Премьер-министра Республики Армения и Президента Российской Федерации. Accessed: 02.09.2022, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64384>.

Kremlin.ru. (14.10.2020). Телефонный разговор с Президентом Турции Реджепом Тайипом Эрдоганом от 14 октября 2020 г. Accessed: 03.09.2022, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64204>.

Meduza.io. (19.11.2020). После карабахского конфликта все говорят о революции дронов. Accessed: 02.09.2022, <https://meduza.io/feature/2020/11/19/posle-karabahskogo-konflikta-vse-govoryat-o-revoljutsii-dronov>.

Rbc.ru. (27.09.2020). Минобороны Армении заявило о вмешательстве Турции в конфликт в Карабахе. Accessed: 10.01.2023, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/27/09/2020/5f70d2ac9a794778d658f2ea>.

Regnum. (01.10.2020). Пригожин: Турция вправе влиять на карабахский конфликт. Accessed: 03.09.2022, <https://regnum.ru/news/3078837.html>.

Russell, M. (2020). Armenia and Azerbaijan on the brink of war. European Parliamentary Research Service Review, Accessed: 02.09.2022, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2020/659267/EPRS_ATA\(2020\)659267_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2020/659267/EPRS_ATA(2020)659267_EN.pdf).

Waal, T. (2021). Unfinished Business in the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict.

Carnegie Europe. Accessed: 02.09.2022, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2021/02/11/unfinished-business-in-armenia-azerbaijan-conflict-pub-83844>.

Yalçinkaya, H. (2021). Turkey's Overlooked Role in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. German Marshall Fund. Accessed: 02.09.2022, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/turkeys-overlooked-role-second-nagorno-karabakh-war>.

Ведомости. (18.06.2021). В Кремле отреагировали на возможное создание военной базы Турции в Азербайджане. Accessed: 03.09.2020, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/2021/06/18/874684-v-kremle-otreagirovali-na-vozmozhnoe-sozdanie-voennoi-bazi-turtsii-v-azerbaidzhane>.

Газета.ru. (14.12.2020). "Турецкое влияние растёт": как изменился расклад сил в Закавказье. Accessed: 03.09.2022, https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2020/12/14_a_13399123.shtml?updated.

Газета.ru. (06.10.2020). Нагорный Карабах: Анкара предложила Москве сотрудничество. Accessed: 03.09.2022, <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/2020/10/06/13283683.shtml>.

Газета.ru. (18.06.2021). "Вопрос времени": станет ли Азербайджан членом НАТО. Accessed: 03.09.2020, https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2021/06/17_a_13649840.shtml.

Гостев, А. (26.01.2018). Оливковая ветвь в хищных клювах. Accessed: 03.09.2020, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/28998759.html>.

Есипов В. (21.11.2020). Эксперты о ситуации в Карабахе: мир с далеко идущими последствиями. Deutsche Welle. Accessed: 03.09.2020, <https://www.dw.com/ru/jeksperty-o-situacii-v-karabahe-mir-s-daleko-idushhimi-posledstvijami/a-55678239>.

Интерфакс. (28.05.2021). Россия, стремясь сохранить геополитическое влияние на Южном Кавказе, стала самым ярким лоббистом Зангезурского коридора. Accessed: 03.09.2022, <http://interfax.az/view/835946>.

Коммерсантъ. (23.10.2020). Дипломатией бьют по всему фронту. США, Россия, Франция и Турция хотят играть главную роль в карабахском урегулировании. Accessed: 02.09.2020, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4547282>.

Коммерсантъ. (20.07.2016). Нагорный Карабах добрался до Санкт-Петербурга. Accessed: 02.09.2022, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3018103>.

Коммерсантъ. (12.11.2020). Карабах не выдержит двоих. Россия не позволит Турции патрулировать зону бывшего конфликта. Accessed: 02.09.2022, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4567626>.

Кортунов, А. (09.03. 2021). Сирия: в середине длинного цикла. Российский совет по международным делам. Accessed: 03.09.2022, <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/siriya-v-seredine-dlinnogo-tsikla/>.

Лента.ру. (25.12.2020). "Они считают, что Москва предала их" Как война за Карабах изменила отношения Армении и России. Accessed: 10.01.2023, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2020/12/25/allies/>.

Лента.ру. (01.07.2021). Турция строит новую Османскую империю. Какое место в ней займет Азербайджан? Accessed: 03.09.2022, https://lenta.ru/articles/2021/07/01/tur_az/.

Лента.ру. (04.08.2020). "Эрдоган любит играть по своим правилам" Турция разжигает войну между Арменией и Азербайджаном. Зачем ей влезать в конфликт в Карабахе? Accessed: 03.09.2022, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2020/08/04/erdogan/>.

Маркедонов, С. (21.08.2018). Расширяя евразийское НАТО. Присоединится ли Азербайджан к ОДКБ? Московский центр Карнеги. Accessed: 03.09.2022, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/77074>.

Московский, комсомолец. (12.11.2020). Турецкий аналитик назвал неочевидные причины победы Азербайджана в Карабахе. Accessed: 03.09.2022, <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2020/11/12/tureckiy-analitik-nazval-neochevidnye-prichiny-pobedy-azerbaydzhana-v-karabakhe.html>.

Московский комсомолец-Турция. (11.10.2020). Стратегическая подножка от Москвы Анкаре. Accessed: 03.09.2022, <https://mk-turkey.ru/blog/povestka/2020/10/11/strategicheskaya-podnozhka.html>.

Новая Газета (03.12.2020), "Мы доверяли России, но мы просчитались" Бывший посол Армении в РФ Степан Григорян — о военном и политическом поражении в Карабахе, Accessed: 13.01.2023, <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2020/12/03/88213-my-doverjali-rossii-no-my-proschitalis>.

РБК. (11.10.2020) Алиев: "У России есть масса инструментов, чтобы убедить Армению". Accessed: 02.09.2022, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/11/10/2020/5f81ab079a794798280e3908>.

Сокирянская, Е. (07.11.2020). Бранный мир. Сирия, Ливия, Карабах: зачем Россия и Турция периодически накаляют отношения, оставаясь при этом взаимовыгодными партнерами? Новая газета. Accessed: 03.09.2022, <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2020/11/07/87874-siriyskiy-ubiytsa-bratskiy-vozhd-livii-i-karabah-zachem-rossiya-i-turtsiya-periodicheski-nakalyayut-svoi-vzaimootnosheniya-ostavayas-pri-etom-krayne-vygodnymi-drug-dlya-druga-partnerami-issledovanie-ekateriny-sokiryanskoy>.

Сучков, М. (01.10.2020). Хотели как в Сирии. Пойдет ли Россия на сделку по Карабаху с Турцией? Россия в глобальной политике. Accessed: 03.09.2022, <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/hoteli-kak-v-sirii/>

Сушенцов, А. (10.11.2020). Россия и Турция после обострения кризиса в Нагорном Карабахе. Международный дискуссионный клуб Валдай. Accessed: 03.09.2022, <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/rossii-i-turtsiya-posle-obostreniya-krizisa/>.

Фридрихсон, Н. (2012). Политика США и России в вопросе урегулирования Нагорно-Карабахского конфликта: Формирование новых трендов. Кавказ и Глобализация 6(4), 27-33.