



Critical Constructivism and “Nakhichevan Crisis”: How did Türkiye Reconstruct its National Interest?

Eleştirel Konstrüktivizm ve “Nahçıvan Krizi”: Türkiye Nasıl Ulusal Çıkarını Yeniden İnşa Etti?

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ABSTRACT

Since Armenia's independence, the development of relations between Türkiye and Armenia has been a highly contentious issue in both countries. The disputes predominantly revolved around the events of 1915 and have consistently dominated Turkish-Armenian relations. This study employs a critical constructivist perspective to examine the “Nakhichevan Crisis,” the only foreign policy crisis between Türkiye and Armenia, spanning from May 1992 to September 1993.

According to critical constructivist scholars, national interests are not solely objective realities; they are shaped by social and cultural influences. The primary hypothesis of this article is that the deeply entrenched historical protracted conflict has significantly impeded the progress of relations between Türkiye and Armenia. The chosen methodology for this research involves process tracing, utilizing the prominent Turkish political resource known as the “Ayn Tarihi” Journal (History of the Month) beside of secondary resources. Furthermore, parliamentary debates have also been included in the analysis to establish a comprehensive understanding.

The preservation of Nakhichevan's autonomous status, rooted in contractual law, has wielded a considerable impact on the formulation of Turkish national interest. However, the prevailing notion that “Türkiye has the right to intervene” in Nakhichevan was initially voiced by Heydar Aliyev and later gained widespread acceptance and turned into dominant representation. This notion has functioned as a substantial barrier hindering the bilateral relations between Türkiye and Armenia, a situation that persisted until the outbreak of the Second Karabakh War.

ÖZ

Ermenistan'ın bağımsızlığını kazanmasından bu yana Türkiye ile Ermenistan arasındaki ilişkilerin geliştirilmesi konusu her iki ülkede de oldukça tartışmalı bir konu olmuştur. Ağırlıklı olarak uyuşmazlık 1915 Olayları etrafında gelişmiş ve Türk-Ermeni ilişkilerini sürekli olarak etkilemiştir. Bu çalışma, Türkiye ile Ermenistan arasındaki tek dış politika krizi olan ve Mayıs 1992'den Eylül 1993'e kadar uzanan “Nahçıvan Krizi”ni eleştirel konstrüktivist bir bakış açısıyla incelemektedir.

Eleştirel konstrüktivist akademisyenlere göre, ulusal çıkarlar yalnızca nesnel gerçekler olarak görülemez sosyal ve kültürel olarak üretilir. Bu makalenin birincil hipotezi, derin tarihsel kökleri olan uzun süreli çatışmanın Türkiye ile Ermenistan arasındaki ilişkilerin geliştirilmesini önemli ölçüde engellediğidir. Bu araştırma için ikincil kaynakların yanı sıra “Ayn Tarihi” Dergisi olarak bilinen önde gelen Türk siyasi hayatı kaynağından yararlanarak süreç izleme yöntemi tercih edilmiştir. Ayrıca, kapsamlı bir anlayış oluşturabilmek için parlamento tartışmaları da analize dahil edilmiştir.

Nahçıvan'ın ahdi hukuka dayanan ozerk statüsünün korunması, Türk ulusal çıkarlarının formüle edilmesinde önemli bir etki yaratmıştır. Ancak “Türkiye'nin Nahçıvan'a müdahale etme hakkı vardır” görüşü, öncelikle Heydar Aliyev tarafından dile getirilmiş ve daha sonra yaygın olarak kabul görmüştür ve baskın temsile dönüşmüştür. Bu anlayış, İkinci Karabağ Savaşı'nın patlak vermesine kadar devam eden Türkiye ve Ermenistan ikili ilişkilerinin önünde önemli bir engel oluşturmıştır.

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1. Introduction

The “Nakhichevan Crisis” represents a unique foreign policy crisis within the protracted conflict¹ between Türkiye and Armenia during the Republican era. This crisis was not initiated by the dynamics of the bilateral relationship, but rather by Armenia's violation of the Nakhichevan Autonomous Region's contractual status as established in international treaties. The Armenian militia's occupation of Nakhichevan and their opening of artillery fire on the region near the Turkish border led to a foreign policy crisis between the two nations. Türkiye's primary concern in this situation was the protection of Nakhichevan's autonomous status, which served as the catalyst for the crisis (Öztığ, 2018, pp. 416-419).

The concept of “national interest” for Türkiye in this context revolved around the question of whether it had the right to intervene in the issue or not. Foreign policy crises generally depend on the “definition of a threat” to a state's interests for initiation. No decision or action can be taken or presented contrary to national interests in foreign policy. Additionally, many events are characterized as crises in the foreign policy agenda, highlighting the importance of defining the concept of crisis (Hermann, 1993, p. 206).

According to Hermann (1993), a crisis is “a situation characterized by short time and surprise in the face of a threat to the fundamental objectives of the decision-maker, turning the situation into an undesirable one” (p. 206). However, Brecher and Wilkenfield (1997) argue that the element of surprise is not a necessary condition for crises (p. 31). They define protracted conflict as “a situation inherent in the identity of three or more crises between sovereign states, lasting at least ten years, involving elements of war or milder violence, and/or involving allies or patrons of the countries that are parties” (Brecher, 2016, p.4). In this article, the crisis definition provided by Aksu and his colleagues is adopted. Consequently, a crisis is understood as a situational change that may occur suddenly or within a certain period of time on any issue within the foreign policy agenda. This change forces decision-makers to choose among limited options while considering risks, dangers, threats, or attacks that increase the likelihood of entering a military conflict or war (Aksu, 2017b, pp. 31-32).

In this study, the research question “How is it possible for Nakhichevan's status to be constructed as Türkiye's national interest?” will be examined from a critical constructivist perspective. Specifically, the study will explore the impact of the historical antagonistic relationship between Türkiye and Armenia on the construction of Nakhichevan's status as a national security interest. To investigate the transformation of the contractual legal status derived from international treaties into Türkiye's national interest, this study will utilize primary sources, such as the Journal of “Ayn Tarihi”² (History of the Month), and secondary resources, in addition to analysing parliamentary debates. The methodology employed in this research is process tracing, focusing on the examination of discourses to better understand the construction of Nakhichevan's status as a

national interest for Türkiye. The main hypothesis of this article is the discourse of Heydar Aliiev has become the dominant representation in the process of Nakhichevan Crisis.

1.1. Critical Constructivism

Constructivism posits that there is no objective social reality independent of our understanding and interpretation of it. In this view, political constructs, anarchy, values, norms, and institutions are products of a process of social construction in international relations. Consequently, the identities of actors shape their interests. Zehfuss (2012) contends that an actor's identity is not only crucial in defining interests, but also instrumental in shaping politics (p. 12). Language serves as a powerful tool in this construction process, with international politics being formed within the framework of human interactions. According to Onuf (2013), “saying is doing” and “speaking is the most significant means of bringing the world into our existence” (p. 29).

Critical constructivism asserts that multiple social realities can coexist simultaneously due to the existence of diverse human communities, actors, social groups, and societies in the world. While mainstream approaches to international relations (IR) are dominated by concepts such as power, threat, and interest, critical constructivists argue that these concepts should not be viewed independently from individuals' perceptions and conceptualizations. Traditional IR approaches tend to treat these concepts statically and within a narrow framework, neglecting the relationship between the subject of “national interest” and identity.

Critical constructivists maintain that states possess no ontological status beside of various practices. They emphasize the importance of examining the production and reproduction of state practices in relation to identity and difference. In this context, “national interest” is not just a reality but also a product of social and cultural processes. The conceptualization of national interest is a matter of “interpretation” and “producing answers.” As such, national interest should be analysed as a discursive practice. For critical constructivists, interests are produced, reproduced, and transformed through the discursive practices of actors. When an issue or event is conceptualized as a “national interest”, it represents both the situations defined by the actors themselves and the events they have encountered. Given that there is no fixed identity of the “other” independent of time and space, the concept exhibits a performative character. Identity should be treated as an ongoing process, with its construction and transformation never reaching a final, complete state.

According to Laffey (2000), identity is consistently constructed in relation to an external representation (p. 431). As the conceptualization of national interests hinges on “interpretation” and “producing an answer”. Discourse plays a crucial role in the production of national interest (Weldes, 1999, p. 4). Despite mainstream studies in international relations acknowledging the importance of personal or national interests in understanding and explaining state behaviours and other social actors, the

¹ Crises within protracted conflicts tend to have more severe triggers compared to other types of crises, with a heightened perception of threats to core values and an increased likelihood of resorting to violence in crisis management (Aksu, 2017a, p. 71).

² Ayn Tarihi is a semi-formal resource of publishing since 1923 for international, political, domestic or social issues on Turkish political life (Bulut, 2012, pp. 28-35).

processes through which these interests are constructed remain unclear (Weldes, 1999, p. 10).

Critical constructivists argue that discourse is not neutral, and reality is not one-dimensional. However, they do not deny the existence of a material reality. Instead, they posit the meaning of this reality is constructed through discourse. Issues, problems, and dynamics in world politics depend on discourse. Campbell (1992) emphasizes that “danger is not an objective situation, and it cannot exist independently of the subject matter that could become a threat” (p. 1). Insecurity is not a natural phenomenon but rather a social and cultural production. Security and insecurity are ontologically distinct. Like the identity, security is produced through a process of mutual construction. The context of identity formation transpires in relation to the “self”, the “other”, or “multiple others” (Weldes et al., 1999, pp. 9-11). Identity and security, encompassing both the self and the other, are not predetermined. National interest is subject to subjective definitions, and it is essential to reveal actors' interest representation in the process at a specific point of action (Gözen, 1999, p. 6). In short, individuals define both themselves and others during the representation process (Weldes et al., 1999, p. 14).

The production of meaning within certain representations enables the emergence, circulation, and/or establishment of some discourses as social realities. Consequently, intersubjective nature of meaning exists solely within the categories provided for representing and understanding the world. Foreign policy analysis focuses on the decision-making of individuals who are influenced by the world they inhabit. Since the ultimate analysis is conducted by real people acting on behalf of the state, foreign policy analysis centres on decision-makers and the decision-making process (Weldes, 1998, p. 218). Decision-makers operate within a specific domain of success in foreign policy (Hudson, 2014, p. 6), ascribing meaning to their own world and creating reality. As the authority to make decisions on behalf of the state is determined by law according to the political regime, the final decision-making unit is construed as the official stance of the state or its “national interest” (Das, 2009, p. 971). Hence, it can be argued that the real individuals authorized to make decisions on behalf of states represent national interest through dominant representation, allowing for the construction, reconstruction, or transformation of those interests.

1.2. Historical Construction of Hostility in Turkish-Armenian Relations

The independence efforts of Ottoman Armenians following the 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War were perceived as “betrayal” by Turks and as “revolution” by Armenians. Ottoman Armenians were forced to leave their lands due to the “Law of Relocation and Settlement” in 1915, enabling them to rebuild their identity through the trauma

experienced during World War I. Armenians were forcibly deported from their homes, creating a “chosen trauma”.³ The claims on Eastern Anatolia have been perceived as a threat to both Türkiye's sovereignty over its borders and Turkish identity. Consequently, Ottoman Armenians were removed from their lands (Göl, 2005, pp. 121-122). Thus, Armenian identity became a “victimized diaspora/victim nation” in contrast to Turkish identity (Öztürk, 2015, p. 152).

From the Armenian perspective, the First World War continued with the 1918 Forward Operation (Türk İleri Harekatı) and the founding wars on the Eastern Front in 1920.⁴ The Turkish Forward Operation resulted in dissolution of Transcaucasian Republic (22 April-28 May 1918) and Azerbaijan declared its independence (Jane, 2020a, pp. 124-125). The Ottoman Army extended its involvement to Nakhichevan and mitigate a genocide targeting Turkish population and actively contributed to establishment of Nakhichevan Aras Republic.⁵ According to Turan and Öztan (2018) Turkish nation-statehood process is primarily based on the marginalization of Armenians and Greeks (p. 34). Since then, this enmity, fueled by traumas and historical hostilities, has been transmitted between generations. Even Armenians who did not experience this trauma have continued to view Turks as their “other” (Çevik-Ersaydı, 2011, p. 103). From the Armenian perspective, the Eastern Front of the Turkish War of Independence is regarded as an “occupation” (Hovannisian, 1974, p. 38). The contractual statuses of states, established through the Gyumri, Kars, and Moscow Agreements, as well as Armenia's incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1920, marked the end of Armenia's brief independence (Hovannisian, 1997, p. 303). The Lausanne Peace Treaty subsequently concluded the contractual status of these agreements concerning Turkish borders, effectively closing the “Armenian question” at the state level (De Waal, 2016, p. 125). This issue would not resurface until the 1960s, since when adversarial perceptions, discourses, and policies have been reflected in bilateral affairs.

The deep historical roots and perceptions in the protracted conflict between Türkiye and Armenia have sustained their adversarial relationship. This enmity has reproduced itself between the two countries, with its establishment occurring during the process of nation formation for both parties. Identity construction is based on narratives of the events of 1915, and mutual identity construction is multidimensional. It spans a lengthy period of time, fuels the adversarial relationship between the two nations, and continuously reconstructs their identities.

When the Soviet Republics declared independence, Türkiye adopted a positive stance, supporting their independence for regional stability and territorial integrity in the Caucasus. Türkiye recognized all the Trans-Caucasus republics that

³ The term *chosen trauma* is employed to characterize events that elicit strong emotions, such as humiliation and victimization, experienced by members of one group at the hands of another group. Volkan and Itzkowitz (2002) argue that although no group deliberately selects to be victimized, it is their choice to dwell on the event (p. 20). In this context, the group's collective memory and identity become intertwined with the trauma, and it serves as a powerful symbol that shapes the group's perception of itself and its relationship with other groups.

⁴ The historical-sociological research tradition emphasizes that violence and war are essential elements in shaping and constructing states. As Tilly

(1985) asserts, “war makes states and states make wars” (p. 181). The externalization of war and internal centralization are simultaneous processes. Mann (1988) supports this perspective, stating that “war, war preparation, and the military are fundamental concepts of modern states” (p. 124).

⁵ Ottoman officers having retired from active service strategically positioned alongside of diverse regions Nakhichevan Aras Republic fortifying defence of this burgeoning republic (Karamanlı, 2006, p. 295-296).

left the USSR. Nevertheless, the Turkish-Armenian conflict remained unresolved. Türkiye decided not to exchange ambassadors with Armenia. In response, Armenian foreign policy aimed to develop bilateral relations with as many countries as possible. On August 23, 1990, the Supreme Council of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic issued a Declaration on Independence. This declaration states that⁶ “The Republic of Armenia supports the establishment of international recognition for the 1915 Genocide in Ottoman Türkiye and Western Armenia” (İşyar, 2017, p. 306).

The Turkish elites have depicted Western Armenia as the areas where Armenians once resided within Ottoman Türkiye, largely referring to Eastern Anatolia. This representation suggests that 1921 Armenia does not recognize Türkiye's national borders or the Moscow and Kars Agreements. Although these terms were not included in Armenia's 1995 constitution, they have remained a focal point on the Turkish agenda. Consequently, Türkiye has stated that if Armenia recognizes Türkiye's territorial integrity, there could be an exchange of ambassadors in addition to the AGIC Charter.⁷

The combination of arguments surrounding the Law of Relocation and Settlement and the Karabakh Conflict has perpetuated the conflict between Türkiye and Armenia during periods of crisis. While Türkiye officially recognized Armenia's independence on December 16, 1991, alongside other countries leaving the USSR (Aydın, 2011, p. 119), Ankara's additional conditions for Yerevan were not met (Balci, 2017, p. 228).

Ankara's refusal to establish diplomatic relations with Yerevan was instigated by debates in the Armenian parliament, which challenged the validity of the Moscow and Kars Agreements. Although these agreements have not been officially terminated, Türkiye remains wary that Armenia may pursue a revisionist policy without official border confirmation. Conversely, Yerevan has insisted on not meeting any other preconditions for de facto recognition (Mirzoyan, 2010, p.67). Collective narratives on both sides contribute to threat perceptions, hindering the development of bilateral relations. The Turkish-Armenian border remains closed, reflecting a consistent pattern in Turkish foreign policy. The historical hostile relationship between the two countries is grounded in the significance of Turkish-Azerbaijani relations and the events of 1915. Both Türkiye and Armenia act out of fear and insecurity in their bilateral relations. The closure of the border stems from the Turkish perception of Armenia as a threat (Mirzoyan, 2010, pp. 55-56). In the protracted conflict between Türkiye and Armenia, it is crucial to consider not only material factors but also psychological components.

1.3. Contractual Law in the Nakhichevan Crisis

Contractual law can be characterized as the legal framework constructed through international agreements or treaties, encompassing mutual declarations and acceptances made

by one or more states concerning their existence, sovereignty, independence, or borders. As such, it establishes a status that shapes the trajectory of bilateral relations within the parameters agreed upon by the signing parties. When an agreement is duly enforced, it serves as a guarantee for peace, tranquillity, and security between the involved parties (Çolak, 2017). However, the preservation of contractual law in practice is not always feasible. In such instances, contractual law can be violated in three distinct manners (Aksu & Çolak, 2019, p. 21):

- Breaching a previously agreed-upon political-legal arrangement between the parties,
- Despite the existence of a contract between the parties, one or all parties may have disagreements regarding the interpretation of the formal status or current situation, or the current agreement may lack an explicit provision addressing the situation at hand,
- The nonexistence of a mutually accepted contractual law among all parties, with one of them seeking to alter the current situation in its favour by creating an act or fait accompli.

To comprehensively discuss this matter, it is crucial to first outline the formation of Nakhichevan's status. The autonomous status of Nakhichevan under Azerbaijani sovereignty is founded upon the Treaty of Moscow, signed on March 16, 1921, and the Treaty of Kars, signed on October 13, 1921. Furthermore, the Treaty of Gyumri, dated December 2, 1920, determined the Turkish-Armenian border and resolved to “determine the form of government by holding a plebiscite” in the Nakhichevan, Stathakis, and Shakur regions while also deciding to “refrain from interfering with Armenia's administration in the area” (Soysal, 1989, pp. 19-20). The Treaty of Gyumri, despite not entering into force due to incomplete ratification, aimed to “establish a local administration under Türkiye's protection” in the region. Subsequently, the Treaty of Moscow and the Treaty of Kars replaced it. The Treaty of Kars served as a solution to the issue of Turkish and Armenian borders until a final resolution was achieved. The Treaty of Gyumri was intended as a ‘temporary solution’ to the Armenian issue. The Treaty of Kars, a 1921 Treaty of Friendship, was established between Türkiye and Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia (Soysal, 1989, p. 18). The Turkish government secured the acceptance and ratification of Türkiye's eastern borders, as established by the Treaty of Moscow, by Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia (Tellal, 2008, p.170). Additionally, the Treaty of Moscow granted autonomy to the Nakhichevan region (Tuncer, 2017, p.52).

Article 5 of the Treaty of Kars stipulates that “The Government of Türkiye and the Soviet Governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan have agreed that the Nakhichevan region shall be an autonomous region under the protection of Azerbaijan, within the borders specified in Annex III to the Treaty” (Soysal, 1989, pp. 43-47). In accordance with

⁶ During this strategic process, the focus was initially placed on neighbouring countries, followed by former Soviet Republics, and ultimately on nations with significant Armenian diaspora populations, including Syria, Lebanon, France, the United States, and Argentina (Demir, 2005, p.111).

⁷ Hence, diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Armenia have never been established. In summary, the conditions for establishing diplomatic relations include:

- Withdrawal of territorial claims,
- Declaration that existing borders between Türkiye and Armenia are not open to any debate and will not be changed in the future, even through peaceful means,
- Ensuring that "Armenian genocide" allegations are not raised (Chrysanthopoulos, 2002, p.25).

the boundaries outlined in Annex 1 C of the Treaty of Moscow,⁸ the parties agreed to establish a “self-governing territory under the auspices of Azerbaijan, provided that the Nakhichevan autonomy shall never relinquish the protection of the right to be vested in a state for a fraction of a second” (Akipek, 1966, p. 5). The protection of Nakhichevan was entrusted to Azerbaijan under the condition that it would never be ceded to another state. This implies a contractual status created by the agreements at the state level. However, the interpretation of these agreements was a contentious issue during the Nakhichevan Crisis. Following the Nakhichevan Crisis, the violation of the contractual status established by the treaties was construed as a threat to Turkish national interests.

Indeed, on the website of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Consulate General of Nakhichevan, it is stated:

“With the Treaty of Moscow signed between Türkiye and the Soviet Union on March 16, 1921, Nakhichevan was placed under the protection of Azerbaijan on the condition that it maintained an autonomous structure and was not ceded to another state[...] The same point was confirmed by the Treaty of Kars (October 13, 1921) signed between Türkiye, the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia” (A Brief History of Nakhichevan, naxcivan-cg.mfa.gov.tr).

To understand how Nakhichevan's status became a matter of Turkish national interest, it is essential to examine the relevant discourses. The Nakhichevan Crisis coincided with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 1988. During this period, Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict and occupation of Karabakh were perceived by Türkiye as an “internal affair” of the USSR. However, establishing and developing relations with Armenia was contingent upon the resolution of the Karabakh conflict. Therefore, it can be argued that Türkiye's “relations with Armenia are held hostage to their relations with Azerbaijan” (Larabee and Lesser, 2003, p. 107).

2. Turkish-Armenian Relations During the Nakhichevan Crisis

Armenian militia forces, initiated artillery attacks on the Sarak area of Nakhichevan, which is situated close to the Turkish border on May 3, 1992. Nakhichevan President Heydar Aliyev informed the Anadolu Agency on May 4 that “Armenians subjected the town of Sarak, in proximity to the Turkish border, to intense artillery fire, resulting in significant destruction of numerous buildings” (Şihmantepe, 2016, p.128). On May 5, 1992, Aliyev expressed to the Cumhuriyet newspaper his request for Turkish intervention in the situation. Concurrently, Minister of Foreign Affairs Hikmet Çetin met with U.S. Secretary of State James Baker to discuss the attacks in Nakhichevan, and Ankara communicated Turkish concerns about the issue on May 7 by inviting officials from the U.S. Embassy.

Initially, Nakhichevan's autonomous status was not regarded as Türkiye's “national interest” during the early stages of the crisis. During this time, Armenian militia forces persisted with their attacks, occupying the

Azerbaijani city of Shusha and the village of Gunnuk. However, Shusha is not part of Nakhichevan, but rather Nagorno-Karabakh (Öztiğ, 2018, p.418). Subsequently, Turkish Prime Minister Demirel contacted U.S. President George Bush, asserting that Türkiye would not tolerate any violation of Nakhichevan's territorial integrity. The Sadarak region of Nakhichevan, which is located in close proximity to the Turkish border and holds strategic significance, was subjected to further attacks by Armenian militias on May 18, 1992. From the Turkish perspective, the fall of Sadarak could potentially disrupt the territorial connection between Türkiye and Nakhichevan. As a result, the attacks on Sadarak were perceived as a threat to security.

Upon returning to the country, Turkish Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel convened an urgent meeting with the Council of Ministers. The Council decided to issue an official statement “cautioning” Armenia. On May 18, 1992, Heydar Aliyev requested “military assistance” from Türkiye due to the escalating attacks by Armenians. He informed that the Lachin region, which connects Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, had also been captured by Armenian forces. Aliyev announced that the number of casualties and injuries in the clashes was rising, and Armenian militias were advancing towards the Hasret Bridge on the Turkish-Nakhichevan border with heavy weaponry. Aliyev also disclosed to the press that he had requested military support from Türkiye (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992, p.80).

As the attacks on Sadarak escalated, Heydar Aliyev emphasized on May 19 that “Sadarak could fall at any moment” (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992, p.80), reiterating his call for Türkiye to intervene militarily. Türkiye responded to the Armenian government's silence by deploying additional troops along the Armenian border in response to the Nakhichevan attacks carried out by militias. Despite statements from Turkish decision-makers regarding military intervention, the Armenian militia forces' attacks on Nakhichevan persisted. In addition to Türkiye's contractual obligations and strategic sensitivity towards Nakhichevan's autonomous status, the Nakhichevan administration emerged during the crisis by actively seeking Turkish direct assistance (Aydın Tarihi, Mayıs 1992, p.80). Indeed, Nakhichevan President Heydar Aliyev consistently reminded Türkiye of its “contractual obligations” (Öztiğ, 2018, p.419).

While the Armenian militias' attacks on Nakhichevan continued, reports indicated that the “CIS troops were put on red alert” along the Nakhichevan border. François Heisburg, the director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, cautioned Türkiye against intervening in Armenia, stating that it “would be a grave mistake” since “Western allies view Armenia as a victim of history and regard it with sympathy” (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992, p. 119). In May 1992, Russian Commander of the Commonwealth of Independent States Marshal Yevgeni Shapsonikov warned that “Türkiye's military intervention could lead to a third world war” (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992, p. 120). By May 21, 1992, the conflict in Sadarak remained unresolved as strategic locations such as the Reds and Mil Hills fell to Armenian gangs (Windrow, 2001, p.175). On May 21,

⁸ According to this agreement, the territory of Nakhichevan includes Ararat Station, Saray Bulak Mountain, Coal Mountain, Sayat Mountain, Kurtkulak Village, Gamasur Mountain, Gokdag, and the area to the east of

the administrative boundary of the Old Nakhichevan district (Soysal, 1989, p. 38).

Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel announced that the situation in Nakhichevan had “eased” (Cumhuriyet, 21 May 1992). Demirel further reported on May 22 that “Armenia had been subjected to diplomatic pressure due to Türkiye's initiatives” (Arcayürek, 1992). According to Demirel, the alert status of Russian troops along the border and CIS commander Shaposhnikov's statements were merely “tactics” (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992, p. 120). Nonetheless, Demirel emphasized that Azerbaijan had not requested military assistance from Türkiye and that no such possibility existed (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992).

On May 28, 1992, reports indicated that clashes between the Defence Army, Popular Front militias, and Armenians persisted in the Sadarak district. The opening of the “Bridge of Hope” (*Hasret* in Turkish), which connects Türkiye with Nakhichevan, was attended by Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel, Deputy Prime Minister Erdal İnönü, Acting President of Azerbaijan Isa Kamberov, and President of the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic Heydar Aliyev on the same day (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992). The Nakhichevan-Türkiye connection was reestablished after a period of 70 years (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992). In his statement, Demirel emphasized:

“Anyone who attempts to use force should be aware that there is always someone more powerful. Those who believe that borders can be altered through force will be left empty-handed. Rest assured that your 60 million brothers and sisters in Türkiye stand with you under all circumstances” (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992).

Minister of Foreign Affairs Erdal İnönü emphasized the fraternal ties between Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and Nakhichevan during his speech (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992). The high-level attendance at the opening ceremony of the Bridge of Hope served as a symbolic demonstration of Türkiye's commitment to the status of Nakhichevan. In fact, a day after his speech at the bridge's inauguration, Demirel asserted that “Nakhichevan's status quo would not change without Türkiye's consent” (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992).

On May 30, Demirel announced to the press that he did not believe the tensions in Nakhichevan would escalate and stated, “either the world public opinion will demonstrate strength or new conflicts will be inevitable” (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992). Armenian militiamen continued attacks on the villages of the Ordubad region of Nakhichevan on May 31 with artillery fire in the Soyuk, Genze, Chotam, and Chilid regions (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992).

Meanwhile, Heydar Aliyev attended the 3rd Izmir Economy Congress at Demirel's invitation. Türkiye once again demonstrated its support for Nakhichevan. Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosian told Cumhuriyet newspaper that a “peaceful solution to the Karabakh conflict could be achieved through the normalization of Türkiye-Armenia relations” (Aydın Tarihi, June 1992). Ter-Petrosian announced Armenia's readiness to establish diplomatic relations with Türkiye. During the Izmir Economic Congress, Demirel met with an Armenian delegation consisting of Armenian Deputy Prime Minister Hrant Bagratyan, Deputy Ambassador Türkiye Desk Chief Murat Bacolyan, and Armenian Representative to Moscow Felix Namikoonian. In the meeting, Demirel emphasized that

“Türkiye does not harbor a hostile attitude towards Armenia and, in fact, recognized all the Turkic Republics and Armenia during the Soviet Union's disintegration” (Aydın Tarihi, June 1992, p. 156-157). On the same day, responding to Petrosyan's statement, Hikmet Çetin specified that “it is difficult for Türkiye to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia at the current stage” and noted that “Armenia should first withdraw from the Azerbaijani territories it occupies” (Aydın Tarihi, June 1992). From that point forward, Türkiye's precondition for establishing relations became the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Aydın Tarihi, June 1992).

Demirel mentioned to Petrosyan on June 14, 1992, in Rio that getting along with Türkiye depended solely on Armenia's peace with Azerbaijan. From this perspective, Turkish-Armenian relations began to be linked to Armenia-Azerbaijani relations during the crisis period (Aydın Tarihi, June 1992, p.181).

The perception of Armenia as a “security threat” and the ongoing conflict between Türkiye and Armenia accelerated the consideration of military options against Yerevan in 1992. Armenia's expansionist policy on Nakhichevan, similar to the Nagorno-Karabakh occupation, made such discourses possible (Balçı, 2011, p. 317). With the occupation of Kalbajar in 1993, Turkish decision-makers' rhetoric began to toughen. President Turgut Özal stated that the issue was no longer solely about Armenian-Azerbaijani relations; instead, the “Karabakh issue” transformed into Armenia's “dream of a great Armenia” and Türkiye “should consider taking military measures” (Aydın Tarihi, April 1993, p.22). According to Özal, “a serious maneuver on the Armenian border” (Aydın Tarihi, April 1993, p. 23) was necessary. While Türkiye put troops on alert, performed military maneuvers, and applied coercive diplomacy on the border, Armenian Deputy Defense Minister Vazgen Manukyan emphasized that the “Yerevan administration does not accept the principle of immutability of borders” (Aydın Tarihi, April 1993, p. 24).

On September 3, 1993, a security meeting held in Ankara discussed the possibility of requesting parliamentary authorization to send troops to Nakhichevan. The meeting was attended by President Süleyman Demirel, Prime Minister Tansu Çiller, Minister of Foreign Affairs Hikmet Çetin, Minister of National Defense Nevzat Ayaz, and Chief of General Staff General Doğan Güreş. They decided that “if an attack occurred on Azerbaijan, Türkiye would consider sending troops.” During the same period, Turkish planes began reconnaissance flights along the Turkish-Armenian border. It can be argued that Turkish decision-makers started to apply coercive diplomacy when Turkish military forces began building up along the Armenian border on September 11, 1993 (Öztiğ, 2016).

At this stage, the discourse of using force to prevent changes in Nakhichevan's status did not appear in the opposition parties' statements. Turkish decision-makers demonstrated through their actions that Nakhichevan's status was within the scope of “Türkiye's national interest.” Armenian soldiers digging trenches along the Turkish-Armenian border signalled a serious war threat originating from Armenia.

The increased possibility of mutual use of force led to Turkish coercive diplomacy being effective; although clashes in Nakhichevan ceased, skirmishes in Sarak continued in 1994 and 1996 without causing another crisis (Öztiğ, 2016). Nakhichevan's attempt to unilaterally change the outcome of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and annex it to Armenian territory during this period was thwarted thanks to Türkiye's reactions. Prime Minister Tansu Çiller reportedly said, "If anyone tries to enter a corner of Nakhichevan, I will go to the parliament and obtain war authorization" (Zaman, 2014, p.114).

2.1. Representations in the Nakhichevan Crisis

During the early stages of the crisis, Türkiye maintained a relatively distant approach. However, as the crisis escalated, different representations emerged in the public discourse. Competing narratives were prevalent during the Nakhichevan crisis, and it can be argued that two primary representations regarding Nakhichevan's status, based on contractual law and treaties, emerged. The first representation claimed that "Türkiye does not have the right to intervene in Nakhichevan," while the second asserted that "Türkiye has the right to intervene." The latter, supported by Heydar Aliyev, became Türkiye's dominant discourse during and after the crisis. However, the issue remained highly controversial among Turkish politicians and decision-makers. The dominant representation, constructed by Heydar Aliyev, turned Nakhichevan's status into a matter of Turkish national interest. Opposition parties framed any change in Nakhichevan's autonomous status as a threat to Turkish territorial integrity.

Nakhichevan President Heydar Aliyev argued in an interview that "Armenians easily captured Karabakh because of the inability of Azerbaijanis" and that they were "waiting for help from Türkiye." According to Aliyev, Nakhichevan has never been an "Armenian territory" and is an "ancient Turkish land" (Cumhuriyet, 15 May 1992). Intense debates occurred within the Turkish parliament during the crisis.

On the other side of the crisis, Armenia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement expressing concern about potential Turkish intervention in the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992, p. 94). Prime Minister Erdal İnönü called Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Raffi Hovannisian on May 18, 1992, stating, "we cannot allow the occupation of Nakhichevan [...] We will not accept the change of borders." Turkish Commander of Land Forces Muhittin Fisunoğlu announced that the army was prepared for a possible operation, with necessary military measures taken and deployments along the border (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992, p. 109). Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel clarified that there was "no intention of intervening in Armenia". Minister of State and Deputy Prime Minister Erdal İnönü maintained that "Türkiye would do its best against Armenia's expansionist policy." Minister of Foreign Affairs Hikmet Çetin criticized international organizations for their inaction in response to Armenian attacks, asserting that these organizations had been ineffective.

2.1.a. "Türkiye Has No Right to Intervene"

Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel stated that Türkiye's intervention in Nakhichevan, based on its guarantor status, could lead to a situation similar Cyprus. However, Demirel

believed that Armenians would not invade Nakhichevan due to Türkiye's contractual protection (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992, p.88). In contrast, Democratic Left Parthy (Demokratik Sol Parti/DSP) Chairman Bülent Ecevit argued that Türkiye should assist as a guarantor state in resolving the Nakhichevan issue (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992, p.88). On May 10, 1992, Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi/ANAP) Chairman Mesut Yılmaz held a press conference about attacks on Nakhichevan, criticizing the government for its perceived incapability in handling the situation. Yılmaz claimed that Demirel ignored "calls for help from the Nakhichevan administration" (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992, p.104-105). Ecevit insisted that "Türkiye must intervene in Nakhichevan as soon as possible, or Armenia would demand territory from Türkiye after occupying Nakhichevan" (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992, p. 109).

These discussions were also evident in the Turkish parliament. On May 20, 1992, Minister of Foreign Affairs Hikmet Çetin, Motherland Party Chairman Mesut Yılmaz, and DSP Chairman Bülent Ecevit delivered off-the-agenda speeches regarding the Nakhichevan crisis.

Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel declared "Türkiye's intervention based on its guarantor over Nakhichevan will put Türkiye in the situation in Cyprus". But according to Demirel Armenians would not invade Nakhichevan because "it is under Türkiye's contractual umbrella" (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992, p.88). Despite Demirel, DSP Chairman Bülent Ecevit defended Türkiye should "provide assistance as a guarantor state for the solution of the Nakhichevan problem" (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992, p.88). On May 10, 1992, Motherland Party Chairman Mesut Yılmaz hold a press conference about attacks on Nakhichevan and criticized government. According to Yılmaz, "the government remained incapable" on Nakhichevan issue. According to Bülent Ecevit, Demirel "denies the calls for help from the Nakhichevan administration" (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992, p.104-105). Bülent Ecevit stated "Türkiye must intervene in Nakhichevan as soon as possible, otherwise Armenia will also demand territory from Türkiye after occupying Nakhichevan" (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992, p. 109).

That discussions also reflected to the Turkish parliament. Minister of Foreign Affairs Hikmet Çetin, Motherland Party Chairman Mesut Yılmaz and DSP Chairman Bülent Ecevit made off-the-agenda speeches on 20 May 1992 regarding the Nakhichevan Crisis. Hikmet Çetin explained that with the evacuation of Lachin city, situated between Karabakh and Armenia, control was handed over to the Armenians, establishing a "physical connection between Armenia and Karabakh." Türkiye and Heydar Aliyev maintained direct contact during this time (TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, 78. Birleşim, 20.05.1992, 1. Oturum, p. 204):

"Armenians periodically escalate their attacks with artillery and rocket fire from their territory along the Nakhichevan border. These long-range shots have even reached the Sharor District Governorate, 20 kilometres from the border. Mr. Aliyev informed me that he had spoken to Armenian President Petrosian twice by phone, and Petrosian promised to halt the artillery and rocket fire. However, in my recent conversation with them, I learned that although the attacks have diminished, they have not ceased completely. We are sending a

delegation to Nakhichevan immediately to assess the situation on the ground. Our delegation will attempt to identify the full extent of the attack on Nakhichevan and make observations.”

Minister of Foreign Affairs Hikmet Çetin objected to Türkiye's armed intervention in the Nakhichevan Crisis. Çetin believed that it was unnecessary to resort to immediate armed conflict in response to the aggressive behaviour of a small country (Armenia), advocated for diplomacy as a first resort. He faced criticism for his diplomatic initiatives in response to armed attacks but defended his stance to remain calm on the matter in the parliament (TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, 78. Birleşim, 20.05.1992, 1. Oturum, p.205). Çetin emphasized efforts to gain international community support and reminded that “the situation on the battlefield is temporary” (TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, 78. Birleşim, 20.05.1992, 1. Oturum, pp. 205-206):

“Nagorno-Karabakh is, from the point of view of international law, Azerbaijani territory. Türkiye will never allow this legal fact to be changed by force and international law to be violated. Moreover, it is evident that the Armenians directed their attacks on Nakhichevan and occupied Lachin City outside Nagorno-Karabakh. As emphasized during yesterday's extraordinary Cabinet meeting, Armenia will be held responsible for the severe consequences this will entail.” (TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, 78. Birleşim, 20.05.1992, 1. Oturum, p. 206)

SHP (Social Democratic Populist Party/Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti) Ankara deputy Mümtaz Soysal noted that “Nakhichevan was established as an autonomous state under Azerbaijan's protection, and the Moscow and Kars Treaties did not grant the same guarantor status as the London and Zurich Agreements did for Cyprus”. In this respect, Soysal argued that Cyprus and Nakhichevan were not “under the same conditions”. According to the Treaty of Moscow, Nakhichevan is “an autonomous region under the protection of Azerbaijan” and there is no mention of it being “inalienable to a third state”. Mümtaz Soysal emphasized, “On the issue of Nakhichevan, the treaty signed as early as 1921 states that Nakhichevan's protection is under Azerbaijan's rule” (TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, 78. Birleşim, 20.05.1992, 1. Oturum, p. 220).

Soysal's perspective was also supported by Minister of Foreign Affairs Hikmet Çetin. According to Çetin, the Moscow Agreement established Nakhichevan as an “autonomous region under the protection of Azerbaijan” and guaranteed two points. The Treaty of Moscow was signed with the Soviet Union, while the Treaty of Kars was signed between Türkiye, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Both treaties addressed Nakhichevan's borders and status. Çetin argued that “Türkiye did not have the right to intervene based on these treaties, as they did not grant such authority” (TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, 78. Birleşim, 20.05.1992, 1. Oturum, pp. 226-227).

2.1.b. “Türkiye Has the Right to Intervene”

In the Nakhichevan Crisis, the question of whether Türkiye has the right to intervene due to its contractual obligations from the agreements has been widely debated. The argument supporting Türkiye's right to intervene is most

clearly defended by Şevket Kazan, who spoke in the Turkish parliament on behalf of the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi). According to Kazan: “Our intervention in Nakhichevan... is because of our rights arising from the exceeding of the moment” (TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, 78. Birleşim, 20.05.1992, 1. Oturum, p. 212): “Türkiye has some active responsibilities in the face of the attack on Nakhichevan; Article 3 of the Treaty of Moscow of March 16, 1921, is very clear. [...]”

Speaking on behalf of the Motherland Party, Mesut Yılmaz (TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, 78. Birleşim, 20.05.1992, 1. Oturum, p. 208) said:

“In the face of an incident involving an armed attack, if you undertake a diplomatic effort to prevent an armed response to that incident, the effectiveness of this diplomatic initiative depends on the inclusion of the element of deterrence. Otherwise, you won't be able to prevent these attacks by teaching Armenia a moral lesson and conducting telephone diplomacy with third countries. Türkiye has this deterrent; Türkiye hasn't used this deterrence.”

According to Mesut Yılmaz, the statements that Türkiye will not intervene in the issue have encouraged the Armenians. He argued that “Türkiye should intervene in the matter. Because “[...] Lachin is not in Karabakh, Lachin is in Azerbaijan” (TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, 78. Birleşim, 20.05.1992, 1. Oturum, p. 209.) President Turgut Özal stated that “the centers captured by Armenians in Karabakh and Nakhichevan should be retaken, and Türkiye has a duty in this regard” (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992, p. 118). Nakhichevan President Heydar Aliyev said at a press conference that “Türkiye's diplomatic initiatives have yielded positive results,” and therefore, a Turkish military intervention was not needed.

Azerbaijani Parliament Speaker Isa Kamberov declared, “according to the Treaty of Kars, Türkiye has the authority to send troops to Nakhichevan” and that “the Armenian administration is aware of this” (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992, p. 118). Nakhichevan President Heydar Aliyev stated, “according to the Kars Agreement, they have the right to ask for help from Türkiye” and that “they will not hesitate to resort to this method if the Armenian attacks do not stop” (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992, p. 121). Aliyev indicated they were “ready for an agreement on the condition that Armenia gives back the hills it has taken” (Aydın Tarihi, May 1992, p. 121).

However, after the crisis, Hikmet Çetin noted that “for the development of Türkiye-Armenia relations, peace must first be established in Karabakh and Nakhichevan” (Aydın Tarihi, June 1992, p. 166). Since then, Turkish-Armenian relations have been trapped in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, although they have never been good. The rapprochement opportunity following Armenia's independence from the USSR has been neglected due to Türkiye's support for Azerbaijan in the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. This situation has continued. While the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh persisted throughout July, on August 24, 1992, Süleyman Demirel stated that Türkiye was evaluating the passage of Turkmenistan's natural gas to Türkiye through Armenia if the Karabakh Conflict ended (Aydın Tarihi, September, p. 121). Although Türkiye recognized Armenia

as an independent state in 1991, Türkiye made attempts between 2008 and 2009 to normalize relations with Armenia. However, since all these attempts were tied to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, progress was made in the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations, but they collapsed due to strong pressure from Azerbaijan (Branch, 2018, p. 54). For example, the news that the border between Türkiye and Armenia would be opened as of 2004 caused discomfort on the Azerbaijani side, and Türkiye assured that the border would not be opened until the occupation ended (Eraslan & Özdemir, 2021, p. 320).

During the Second Karabakh War, Armenia launched a bombing attack on the city of Ordubad in the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic on October 17, 2020. This action was perceived by Turkey as an Armenian attempt to draw it into the conflict (BBC News Türkçe, 2020). Turkey strongly condemned the attack and characterized it as a “novel and perilous instance” of Armenian efforts, which were viewed as an expansion of the conflict's scope beyond the occupied Azerbaijani territories (Dışişleri Bakanlığı'ndan Ermenistan'a Tepki, 2020). Second Karabakh War has ended with a ceasefire agreement between Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. According to Article 9 of the ceasefire agreement, economic and transportation lines must be established between Nakhichevan and Azerbaijan. Turkey and Azerbaijan defended the transit route of the line in question should be via the Zangezur corridor on (Jane, 2023, p. 74). Second Karabakh War resulted in significant gains of Azerbaijan and Türkiye played a crucial role in Azerbaijan's victory by providing political, diplomatic, technical, and military support (Eraslan & Özdemir, 2021, p. 318).

As noted by Jane, (2020b) Russian Federation has significantly extended its sphere of influence over the frozen conflicts in Caucasia since 2008, employing a combination of diplomacy and the exertion of hard power (pp. 210-211). Subsequent the war, Russia deployed peacekeeping forces to the region effectively helped freeze the conflict on its terms (Karaoğlu, 2022, p.54). Concurrently the normalization process between Türkiye and Armenia has regained prominence. The officialization of the alliance between Türkiye and Azerbaijan was formalized through Shusha Declaration (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ile Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti Arasında Müttefiklik İlişkileri Hakkında Şuşa Beyannamesi, 2021). It has set a goal of economic and political integration of cooperation between the two countries. Through a Russian initiative, special representatives for normalization were appointed in 2021 for both countries. The border between Türkiye and Armenia was reopened on February 6, 2023, after being closed for thirty years due to an earthquake. This reopening marked a significant milestone in the normalization process between the two countries and could pave the way for further cooperation and improved relations. However, the long-term effects of this process and its potential impact on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remain to be seen.

3. Conclusion

The independence efforts of Ottoman Armenians following the 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War were perceived as

“betrayal” by Turks and as a “revolution” by Armenians. Due to the Law of Relocation and Settlement in 1915, Ottoman Armenians were forced to leave their lands, an event that enabled them to reconstruct their identity through the trauma experienced during World War I. This led to the creation of a “chosen trauma,” as Armenians were uprooted from their homes. As the Soviet Republics proclaimed their independence, Türkiye embraced a favourable position by endorsing their aspirations for self-governance. This backing aimed to promote stability within the region and uphold the territorial integrity of the Caucasus. However, when the Nakhichevan crisis erupted Türkiye has changed its position and refused to developed relations with Armenia.

The preservation of Nakhichevan's autonomous status, as derived from contractual law, has become a significant aspect of Türkiye's national interest following the Nakhichevan Crisis. The deep historical roots and mutual distrustful perceptions between Türkiye and Armenia have largely influenced the decision-makers' views in both countries. The Nakhichevan Crisis remains the only crisis between Türkiye and Armenia during the republican period, and it has shaped their bilateral relations ever since.

Nakhichevan President Heydar Aliyev has shaped dominant representation during and after the Nakhichevan Crisis. The discourse clearly stated Heydar Aliyev was formulated within the framework of Turkey's national interests later on. The Turkish decision-makers approached the issue with restraint but supported the preservation of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Despite Minister of Foreign Affairs Hikmet Çetin's statement that the Moscow Treaty did not give Türkiye the right to intervene in Nakhichevan, opposition parties and Prime Minister Özal shared the view that the problem should be addressed. Additionally, the Khojaly massacre in 1992 shaped the perspective of Turkish decision-makers, which was read as a protracted Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, leaving Nakhichevan's status vulnerable and threatening Azerbaijan's territorial integrity.

Attempts to improve Turkish-Armenian relations have faced resistance. However, after the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, a special representative was appointed for normalization with the Russian initiative. While the long-term effects of this process remain uncertain, the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations could potentially pave the way for increased cooperation and understanding between the two nations. It is crucial for both countries to continue working towards a future built on dialogue, cooperation, and mutual understanding, while keeping in mind the lessons of history.

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