



Turkey, the Karabakh Conflict and the Legacy of the Eastern Question

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Abstract

The article addresses the discursive, political and geopolitical evolution of the so-called Eastern Question by focusing on its Armenian dimension from the nineteenth century until the present. It examines major stages of the Question's historical reconfiguration in terms of its key protagonists, beneficiaries and the ramifications for modern Turkey's relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan. It contends that the legacy of the Eastern Question has continued to shape Turkey's policy in the Caucasus in general and its positioning towards the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over Karabakh, in particular.

Keywords

Armenia – Azerbaijan – Eastern Question – Great Powers – Karabakh – Russia – Turkey

1 Introduction

Since the early 1990s Turkey (Türkiye), after half a century of political, economic and cultural estrangement, has resumed its multifaceted engagement with the Caucasus, alongside post-Soviet Central Asia and the post-communist Balkans. In 1992 Turkey became a founder of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation, with its headquarters in Istanbul; and during the 2000s and the 2010s asserted itself as a key player in major regional energy and

transportation projects, including the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) gas pipelines, the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), and the Trans-Caspian East-West Middle Corridor (known as the “Middle Corridor”) initiative connecting China and Turkey via Turkic Central Asia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.¹ Among the channels for Turkey’s political, economic and cultural expansion in the Caucasus, alongside Central Asia, have been Ankara-spearheaded Turkic international organisations, including the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (the Turkic Council), the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking Countries (TURKPA), the International Organisation of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY) and the Yunus Emre Institute. A key agency of Turkey’s Sunni Islamic influence has been the Directorate of Religious Affairs – *Diyanet* (Balci 2022, 191–2). Central to Turkey’s increased influence in the region has been its alliance with Azerbaijan; in 1994 Ankara and Baku subscribed to the ‘one nation-two states’ special relationship which in 2010 was upgraded to a Strategic Partnership. In 2020, Turkey’s military and other support to Azerbaijan was an important factor in the Second Karabakh War and its outcome. The article argues that an underlying factor of Turkey’s multi-faceted activism in the Caucasus and its drive towards a strong alliance with Azerbaijan, including its unequivocal backing over the Karabakh conflict, has been the legacy of the Eastern/Armenian Question.

The discussion employs historical and geopolitical perspectives to analyse the discursive and political evolution of the Eastern/Armenian Question and its role in Turkey’s Caucasus policy and its positioning towards Karabakh, in particular. In doing so, it utilises a wider temporal and spatial notion of Eastern/Armenian Question, thus transcending the nineteenth century’s “Age of Questions” (Case 2018), and focuses on the Question’s material dimension, rather than its well-researched politico-diplomatic aspects.² The article consists of three parts, the first providing historical background for the emergence of the Eastern/Armenian Question and the ways in which it was politically, militarily and discursively instrumentalised by the Great Powers prior to and during World War I; the second examining the Question’s political and historiographical transformation after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the establishment of the Republic of Turkey and the Soviet Republic of Armenia, as well as during World War II and the Cold War; and the third analysing the

1 The “Middle Corridor” initiative was launched by President Erdoğan in 2015. It runs parallel to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), unveiled in 2013 by President Xi Jinping (in office 2012–). Unlike the BRI it by-passes Iran.

2 See, for example, Anderson 1972; Bloxham 2005; Case 2018; Clayton 1974; Davison 1963; Heraclides 2020; Johnston and Steinberg 2023; Kévorkian 2006; Kirakossian 2004; Macfie 2014; Stamatopoulos and Tyran 2018; and Uras 1988.

Question's transformation following the demise of the Soviet Union and the eruption of the Karabakh conflict, and its impact on Turkey's policy towards the Republic of Armenia and the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR, Artsakh).³ The article uses an inter-disciplinary area studies approach while consciously avoiding such theoretical frameworks as post-colonial studies, liberal imperialism, or liberal/illiberal peace, which it perceives as being potentially epistemologically misleading due to, arguably, the intrinsic Eurocentricity of such theoretical frames. It nevertheless recognises the limited usefulness of some such theoretical models for the study of non-Western societies (including Turkey, Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia) for comparative purposes. The article draws on diverse primary and secondary sources including the author's interviews with Turkish historians, policymakers and journalists conducted in Ankara and Istanbul in May 2022, as well as extensive Turkish, Western and Russian scholarship on the subject.

2 The "Eastern Question" Prior to the Republic of Turkey

2.1 *Before the Congress of Berlin of 1878*

In the nineteenth century European politico-diplomatic parlance the Eastern Question referred to the Great Powers' concern over, or even right to protect, the Ottoman Greek, Serbian, Bulgarian, Armenian and other Christian and non-Muslim peoples from their government, the Sublime Porte, and the empire's Muslim majority. As such it presented an early version of humanitarian intervention.⁴ Meanwhile, the Question's origins go back long before, to the fifteenth century when, following the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the representatives of several Christian European states were granted capitulations (*imtiyazats*) by the Sublime Porte. Those capitulations enabled them to interact directly with various Ottoman Christian and other non-Muslim confessional communities (*ahl al-dhimmi*), which in accordance with the *millet* (a confessional community) system,⁵ had religious, cultural, legal and tax autonomy from the Ottoman authorities. The largest among these *millets* were those of the Greeks (*millet-i Rum*) and Armenians (*millet-i*

3 Here I use the term "Nagorny Karabakh" (Mountainous Karabakh, Rus.) to describe a geographical region. I use the more commonly employed term "Nagorno-Karabakh" to refer to the НКАО, the NKR, as well as the conflict.

4 For an in-depth analysis of the concept of "humanitarian intervention" and its political and geopolitical intent, see Chomsky 1999.

5 On the *millet* system in the Ottoman Empire, see Davidson 1963 and Murphy 2017.

Ermeniya).⁶ The *millet* system still did not prevent Greeks, Armenians and representatives of other non-Muslim confessions from occupying important posts in the Ottoman bureaucracy, including those of cabinet ministers, governors, ambassadors and senior civil servants (Çiçek 2017, 312). Arguably, the system ensured the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional character of Ottoman society, while preventing the ethno-national development of the empire's Turkish and non-Turkish subjects. It is indicative that until the early 1920s the term for an ethno-national minority (*azinlik*),⁷ which had been actively used in the European political and diplomatic milieu, did not even exist in the Turkish political vocabulary. Until the seventeenth century – that is during the period when the Ottomans enjoyed relative political and military superiority over their European counterparts – the Europeans' meddling in the Ottomans' internal affairs in the name of Christian solidarity remained marginal.

The situation changed in 1697 when the Habsburg Empire, alongside its allies within the Holy League (*Sacra Ligua*),⁸ defeated the Ottomans in the Great Turkish War of 1683–99. In 1699, the Austrians, Poles and Venetians seized parts of the Ottoman Christian-majority lands in central and eastern Europe.⁹ The Habsburgs acquired the provinces (*eyalets*) of Eğri and Varat, much of the Budin province and parts of the Temeşvar and Bosnian provinces – the territories corresponding to parts of present-day Hungary and Croatia. The Poles seized Ottoman Podolia corresponding to parts of contemporary western Ukraine and eastern Moldova, while the Venetians acquired Dalmatia. By comparison, in south-eastern Europe and the Caucasus the Ottomans managed to withstand the territorial and political pressure from imperial Russia and other Great Powers for another century. However, following the Russo-Ottoman war of 1768–74, St. Petersburg gained the right to interfere in Wallachia and Moldavia¹⁰ and to act as the protector of the Sublime Porte's Christian Orthodox subjects, including their right to sail under the Russian flag. Consequently, imperial Russia backed the anti-Ottoman uprisings of 1787, 1804 and 1815 in Serbia leading first to the Serbian Principality's comprehensive autonomy and, subsequently, to its

6 The Greek Ecumenical Patriarchate was established in 1453 and the Armenian Patriarchate in 1461. Until the nineteenth century *millet-i Ermeniya* united Armenians from Apostolic, Catholic and Protestant Churches.

7 It appears that the first use of the term *azinlik* in relation to a particular *millet* occurred in the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923.

8 The Holy League, which existed between 1684 and 1699, united the Habsburg Empire, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Venetian Republic and Tsarist Russia.

9 The border between the Habsburg and Ottoman empires was demarcated in 1701.

10 In 1775 north-western Moldavia (Bukovina) was ceded to Austria.

de facto independence.¹¹ Following the Russo–Ottoman War of 1806–12, Russia established its control over Christian-majority Bessarabia (in present-day Moldavia/Moldova and western Ukraine),¹² while by the Treaty of Adrianople of 1829 the Russo-Ottoman frontier in eastern Europe was drawn along the Dniester River. During the Greek War of Independence of 1821–9, Russia (alongside Great Britain and France) backed the Orthodox Christian Greeks against the Ottomans, culminating in the creation of the Kingdom of Greece, the borders of which were confirmed by the London Protocol of 1832.¹³

In the Caucasus and adjacent regions, in the course of the eighteenth century the Russians made considerable inroads in the Iranian and Ottoman domain. In northern Iran, they established control over Derbent, Baku and the territories surrounding it in Shirvan province, as well as Gilan, Mazandaran and Astrabad (Konovalov 2020, 243). The Ottomans were pushed out of the north-western Caucasus, the Crimea and other parts of the Black Sea region, including the ports of Azov, Kerch, Enikale and Kherson. By the Treaty of Jassy of 1792, Turkey recognised Russia's annexation of eastern Georgia and by the aforementioned Treaty of Adrianople of 1829 re-confirmed Russia's suzerainty over Georgia's principalities of Kartli-Kakheti, Imeretia (Imereti), Mingrelia and Guria, as well as the Caucasus khanates of Erivan and Nakhichevan, both of which had a mixed Muslim-Christian (Armenian) population. Russia's expansion in the Balkans and especially in the Caucasus, framed in religious terms, provoked strong opposition from the other Great Powers, especially Great Britain which until then had portrayed itself as the defender of the Ottomans' sovereignty, as it had been more concerned with preventing the Ottomans becoming pawns of France or Russia and thus endangering Britain's rule in India. However, following the Liberals' return to power in 1846, London strengthened its role in the Eastern Question's debate by presenting itself as the leader of the implicitly anti-Russian liberal project of reforms aimed at the Ottoman Empire (Parry 2022, 6, 12), dubbed the "sick man of Europe." The other factor was the so-called Great Game, the spiralling Russo-British geopolitical rivalry in Central and Eastern Asia. Accordingly, London's official rhetoric was

11 Serbia's de facto independence was legally endorsed in the Akkerman Convention of 1828, the Treaty of Adrianople of 1829 and the Treaty of Hatti-Sharif of 1830.

12 Subsequently, St. Petersburg was forced to renounce its claims to other parts of the Danubian Principalities. It also temporarily returned Anapa, Poti and Akhalkalaki to the Ottomans.

13 London succeeded in asserting its leading role in the post-Greek War settlement and afterwards. In 1878 the British established its protectorate over Cyprus, which it subsequently annexed and absorbed within the British Empire. By the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 London retained Cyprus, which it ruled until 1960.

amended towards the need to unite Britain, France and *Tanzimat*-minded Ottoman ministers¹⁴ behind the principle of legal equality among the various religious communities in the Ottoman Empire. Since then Great Britain has remained at the forefront of the struggle against Russia/the USSR/post-Soviet Russia, as demonstrated by the 1946 Winston Churchill Fulton speech and Boris Johnson's anti-Russian leadership at the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022.¹⁵

The Eastern Question culminated during the "Great Eastern Crisis of 1875–8" related to a series of anti-Ottoman uprisings in Christian-majority Montenegro, Bulgaria, Herzegovina and Romania all of which received various degrees of support from Russia, Austria-Hungary, Germany and France. In 1878 the Russians defeated the Ottomans in Bulgaria, and by the Treaty of San Stefano signed in March 1878, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Serbia and Romania gained their independence. The "de-Ottomanisation" of the Balkans, Greece and other non-Anatolian parts of the empire was accompanied by the large-scale massacres and territorial displacement of the indigenous Muslim and other Muslim populations (Shaw 1985, 1004; Naess 2017, 63; Şimşir 2014). In the Caucasus and adjacent parts of Turkey, according to the San Stefano Treaty, the Russians established their control over Turkey's Ardahan, Batum, Kars, Olti, Beyazet and Alashkert – that is, areas with substantial Armenian populations. Importantly, by the Treaty's article 16, Russia acquired the exclusive right to "oversee the reforms in Turkey's Armenian-populated areas towards the establishment of Armenian autonomy" (Çiçek 2017, 315). In *Realpolitik* terms, therefore, the Eastern Question reflected the geopolitical interests of Russia, Britain and other Great Powers which interfered in Ottoman Turkey's internal affairs with the aim of its political destabilisation and the partitioning of large chunks of its territory among themselves and the various Ottoman Christian communities under their indirect control or protection. It is this aspect of the Eastern Question which has been at the core of Turkish scholarship on the subject.¹⁶

14 *Tanzimat* (lit. Reorganisation) referred to a series of modernising reforms which were implemented in 1839–76 by the Ottoman elite in the attempt, albeit unsuccessful, to prevent the empire's economic and political decline.

15 Great Britain's short-term alliance with Russia/USSR during World War I and World War II was tactical in nature: in the first case it was superseded by the British military intervention in the Caucasus in 1918 and in the second case by Great Britain's leading role at the start of the Cold War (1946–91).

16 See for example, Ağırtaş 2017; Akça 2002 and 2009; Başak 2018; Güzel, Çiçek and Bilgiç 2017; Öke 1988; and Şimşir 2005.

2.2 *The Eastern Question's Armenian Dimension*

By the late 1870s the Great Powers had largely 'solved' the Eastern Question in central and south-eastern Europe and had turned their attention to the Armenians who constituted the bulk of the Ottoman Empire's remaining Christian population. For geographical, political, and religious reasons Russia remained a key instigator and beneficiary of the Armenian component of the Eastern Question. Following its annexation of the khanates of Erivan and Nakhichevan, Russia sought to create a "Christian buffer zone" along its southern borders through the relocation of Christian Armenians from Ottoman Turkey and Iran to the predominantly Muslim Caucasus, as well as its territorial expansion into north-eastern Anatolia. St. Petersburg embarked on the mass resettlement of Armenians (via Nakhichevan) from Iran and Turkey to the southern Caucasus (referred to as Transcaucasia)¹⁷ alongside the expulsion of Sunni and Shi'i Muslims from the wider Caucasus to Turkey and Iran. An especially large exodus of Muslims (referred to as *muhajirs*) from the northern Caucasus to Turkey took place in the 1860s and early 1870s.

Russia's predominance in the Armenian discourse was partially counterbalanced by the aforementioned Great Britain-led liberal project and by Protestant and Catholic missionary activities. In July 1878, London orchestrated the revision of the San Stefano Treaty and its substitution by the Berlin Treaty, which was less favorable for Russia. In particular, the aforementioned article 16 was replaced by article 61 which legitimised the involvement of Great Britain and other Great Powers in the implementation of the reforms in the Armenian-populated areas of Ottoman Turkey (Çiçek 2017, 315). A constituent part of this involvement was the promotion among Armenians of liberal values and the notion of themselves as a minority group within the largely Muslim and Turkish Ottoman Empire. The Berlin Congress introduced the notion of "minority" in relation to the Ottoman Armenians, thus terminologically separating the Eastern Question from the Armenian Question. On the other hand, the confessional cohesion of the Ottoman Armenian community was undermined because of the influx into the region of missionaries (especially from the United States of America/USA), who converted a considerable number of Armenians to Protestantism and Catholicism (Ariğ 2017). Furthermore, American and European missionaries framed the Armenian-Turkish relations in religious terms and instilled the civilizational superiority of Christian Armenians over Muslim Turks (Herrick 1912, 220). Consequently, the previously

17 For discussion of imperial Russia's resettlement policy in the southern Caucasus, see Blauvelt 2020 and Imranli-Lowe 2015.

unified *millet-i Ermeniya* fragmented into the Gregorian Armenian, Protestant Armenian and Catholic Armenian communities.

The promotion of liberal political discourse among the Armenian intellectual elite by Constantinople (Istanbul)-based British, French and other European consuls, together with the advance among this elite of ideas of nationalism emanating from the Balkans and central Europe, as well as the sectarian compartmentalisation of the grassroots Ottoman Armenian communities, facilitated the rise of an Armenian ethno-national unifying ideology which, unlike the *millet* system, was directed against Istanbul (Çiçek 2017, 314; Zürcher 2021, 20). This ideology became the basis for the formation of several Armenian revolutionary parties, including the Black Cross Society (*Sev Khachkasmakerbutin*, 1878), the Protectors of the Fatherland (*Pashtpan Haireniats*, 1881), the Armenakan Party (1885), the Hunchakian Revolutionary Party (1887), and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF, *Dashnaktsutyun*, 1890),¹⁸ which unleashed campaigns for various degrees of autonomy or even independence of the empire's Armenian-populated areas from the Sublime Porte. A corollary was a series of anti-Ottoman Armenian revolts, including a major uprising in Van in 1896, as well as pro-Russia Armenian armed attacks on Turkish military positions, accompanied by considerable loss of lives on both sides.

2.3 *World War I (1914–1918) and Its Aftermath*

In February 1914, the Armenian Question reached a critical point when St. Petersburg and London imposed the Yeniköy Accord on the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), the Young Turks' ruling government.¹⁹ At the core of the Accord was the 'Reform Plan' designed to effectively remove the Armenian-populated provinces of Bitlis, Diyarbakir, Erzurum, Harput, Sivas, Trabzon and Van from Ottoman suzerainty. The situation was aggravated further when at the outbreak of World War I in July 1914 the Armenian revolutionary leadership intensified its agitation for the transfer of the Armenian-populated areas of eastern Anatolia under imperial Russia's suzerainty or at least for their comprehensive autonomy under international control. In addition, the Armenian radical activists formed a number of voluntary regiments to assist the Russian troops on the southern flank of the war front. It was in these critical conditions and in fear of a large-scale Armenian rebellion that the CUP leadership undertook its fatal decision for the mass relocation of Armenians from the empire's

18 On Armenian revolutionary parties, see Nalbandian 2018.

19 The Young Turks came to power as a result of the so-called "Young Turks Revolution" of 1908. In April 1909 they deposed Sultan Abdul Hamid II (r.1876–1909) and assumed de facto control of the empire.

eastern frontier zone to its inner regions of Urfa, Aintab, Maraş and Konya, in the course of which, culminating in April 1915, over 600,000 Armenians lost their lives (Zimmerer 2008, 8).²⁰ These horrific atrocities, which after World War II were widely referred to as genocide,²¹ would become hallmarks of the Armenian Question. Most contemporary Turkish scholars and politicians, while not disputing the facts of massacres committed by Kurdish and Turkish militants against Armenians during this period, view these terrible events as “atrocities” rather than “genocide”²² and as the shared tragedy of Ottoman Armenians, Kurds and Turks – tragedy which, they argue, could have been avoided if it had not been for the persistent and destructive interference of the Great Powers (Güger 2022, Çiçek 2022, Doster 2022, Naess 2017). It should also be noted that there is widespread resentment among Turkish politicians, academics and journalists as well as the wider public about what they perceive as the internationally politicised singling-out of the genocide against Armenians and its presentation on a par with the Holocaust, compared with the lack of such international agitation in relation to other genocides, including against native Americans. Echoing Brendon C. Cannon, who opposes the use of the word “genocide,” they emphasize the contextualisation of the atrocities committed against Ottoman Armenians, the highly politicised nature of the Armenian genocide and the need to move the discussion from the political domain to historical studies (Güger 2022, Cannon 2016, Çiçek 2022).

In January 1916 the CUP leadership’s fears about imperial Russia’s annexationist intentions regarding Turkey’s eastern territories were confirmed by the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement on the Allies’ partitioning of the Ottoman Empire. Although the Agreement was largely about the division of the Ottoman Middle East between Great Britain and France, it also implied the transfer to Russia of Erzurum, Van and Bitlis, the territories to the south of Van and on the Black Sea coast west of Trabzon, as well as the Straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles (Çiçek 2017, 443). In October 1917 imperial Russia’s annexation of parts of eastern Anatolia was prevented by the Bolshevik Revolution which put Russia on a collision course with its former allies within the

20 According to some other sources, the number of Armenians who lost their lives exceeded 1.2 m. See, for example, *The Armenian Genocide (1915–16): In Depth*. Holocaust Encyclopaedia. <<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-armenian-genocide-1915-16-in-depth>>, accessed on 13 February 2023.

21 There is extensive Western scholarship on the Armenian genocide. See, for example, Akçam 2012; Bloxham 2005; de Waal 2015; Kévorkian 2006; Kieser 2018; Morris and Ze’evi 2019; and Suny 2015.

22 Taner Akçam and some other Western-educated and Western-based Turkish academics use the term “genocide.” See Akçam 2012.

Entente. In November the Bolsheviks published the Sykes-Picot Agreement and annulled Russia's participation in it. They demobilised the Russian army and disbanded the Caucasian front, thus leaving Armenian armed units face to face with Ottoman troops and enabling the Ottomans to recover some of the lands they lost to the Russians in 1878. By the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk of 3 March 1918 between Bolshevik Russia, Turkey and the Central Powers,²³ Turkey retook Ardahan, Kars and Batum. In May 1918 Ottoman troops under the command of Nuri Killigil (Nuri Pasha) advanced towards the southern Caucasus and seized Baku, which was later transferred to the control of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR, 1918–20) that sided with Ottoman Turkey. In late September 1918, Turkey, having suffered a series of defeats at other fronts, retreated from the region. This turbulent period also witnessed the first direct military and political links between the Turks and Caucasus Azerbaijanis, on the one side, and between Anatolian and Caucasus Armenians, on the other. These collaborations were accompanied by atrocities against and the mass displacement of the local Armenian and Azerbaijani populations (Baberovski 2010, 166; Saporov 2020, 126). The outlined developments also shifted the epicentre of the "Armenian Question" to the Caucasus – a shift which would be instrumentalised after the collapse of the USSR and during the Karabakh conflict, in particular.

On 30 October 1918 Turkey formally withdrew from World War I by signing the humiliating Armistice of Mudros, according to which the Allies (except Russia) gained control over the Turkish Straits of Dardanelles and Bosphorus and large parts of the Ottoman Empire, including Istanbul. This temporarily tilted the balance of power in favour of the Democratic Republic of Armenia (DRA/The First Republic of Armenia, 1918–1920) and the Dashnak guerrilla units under the command of Andranik Ozanian which arrived from eastern Anatolia. In November 1918 the Dashnaks seized Karabakh's Shusha (Shushi), as well as Zangezur and Jabrayil, while Baku, Artvin and adjacent areas in eastern Anatolia were transferred under the control of Great Britain. The British occupying forces under the command of General William M. Thomson remained in Baku for over a year. In August 1920, Great Britain and other Great Powers pressured Istanbul to sign the Treaty of Sèvres confirming the de facto partition of the bulk of the Ottoman Empire between Great Britain, France, Greece and Italy and the recognition of Armenia as a "free and independent state" within wider borders which included the Ottoman territories of Erzurum, Trabzon, Van and Bitlis provinces.

23 In November 1918 the Brest-Litovsk treaty was invalidated by the Armistice between the Allies and Germany; it was annulled by Bolshevik Russia.

Inside Anatolia the Sèvres Treaty triggered a mass mobilisation which turned the course of the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1923).²⁴ In September 1920 Turkish troops under the command of General Kazim Karabekir re-invaded the southern Caucasus. By November 1920 the Turks had re-established their control over Kars, Alexandropol' (Gyumri) and other Armenian-dominated areas. On 3 December 1920 the leaders of the collapsing DRA signed the Alexandropol' Treaty, by which they returned to Turkey all the Ottoman territories granted to them by the Treaty of Sèvres. Of special significance was Turkey's recapturing of the Kars region, together with the Surmalu *uyezd* (district) of the Erivan *guberniya* (province), containing the Armenian spiritual symbol of Mount Ararat, as well as over half of the territory of the DRA. Since then, in both the Armenian and Turkish collective memories, the Sèvres and Alexandropol' treaties have been politically and emotionally charged with both pride and shame.

3 The Eastern/Armenian Question in the Bipolar World

3.1 *The Atatürk-Lenin Pact*

In the course of the Turkish War of Independence the Turkish National Movement under the leadership of Angora/Ankara-based Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk, 1881–1938) prevented the complete dismemberment of the empire and safeguarded the political survival of its Turkish-majority Anatolian core. Under these extreme circumstances the Kemalists (unlike their Ottoman predecessors) embarked on a nation- and state-building project along Turkish ethno-national lines, thus excluding Armenians (as well as Greeks and other Ottoman Christians) from it. Among the implications of this policy was yet another wave of anti-Armenian (as well as wider anti-Christian) reprisals in the name of Anatolia's Turkish national homogenisation. However, unlike the earlier anti-Armenian atrocities these attacks were not interlinked with anti-Russian political and military campaigns. Furthermore, Kemalist Turkey and Bolshevik Russia, which was no longer a party to the "Armenian Question," equally faced direct Western military interventions, economic sanctions and diplomatic non-recognition.²⁵ As a result they opted for a strategic partnership against

24 The Turkish War of Independence was fought against Greece in the west, France in the south, Great Britain and loyalists around Istanbul and the DRA in the east.

25 Soviet Russia effectively acted as a de facto state until 1923/4 as it was not recognised by the major Western European states, while its non-recognition by the USA persisted until 1933.

Great Britain, other Allied Powers and Greece and in doing so they compromised about, or downplayed, issues of contention. Thus, Ankara agreed to the demilitarisation and internationalisation of the strategically important Turkish Straits (as per the Sèvres Treaty), while Moscow accepted the transfer of the Kars region from Russia to Turkey (as per the Brest-Litovsk Treaty).

On 16 March 1921 the governments of Vladimir Lenin (Ulyanov, 1870–1924) and Mustafa Kemal signed the Moscow Treaty (Treaty on Friendship and Fraternity) which was framed as an anti-imperialist alliance (*Godovoi Otchet NKID* 1958, 804). The government of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (ArSSR) which in December 1920 superseded the DRA, as well as those of Soviet Azerbaijan and Georgia, were not signatories. By this treaty the Lenin government accepted the retention of Western Armenia, including Kars, Ardahan, Artvin and Mount Ararat, as well as the southern part of the former Batum *oblast'*, the Surmalu *uyezd* and the western part of the Alexandropol' *uyezd* within the borders of Turkey. In exchange, Turkey agreed to the transfer of the northern part of the Batum *oblast'* to the jurisdiction of Soviet Georgia. Of special significance was the agreement to allocate the regions of Nagorny Karabakh (Artsakh)²⁶ and Nakhichevan, which were contested between the Caucasus' Azerbaijanis and Armenians, within the borders of Soviet Azerbaijan and to include Alexandropol' (Gyumri) as well as the eastern part of the former Alexandropol' *uyezd* within the borders of Soviet Armenia. On 13 October 1921, the Caucasus-related provisions of the Moscow Treaty were reiterated in the Kars Treaty, signed by the representatives of Kemalist Turkey, Soviet Russia and the newly established Soviet republics of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

On 17 December 1925 Moscow and Ankara signed the Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality, by which they committed to the principles of non-aggression and neutrality in their relations. Arguably, Moscow's military, financial and economic assistance to Ankara was an important factor in the latter's victory in the War of Independence and, ultimately, in the establishment in October 1923 of the Republic of Turkey.²⁷ The Treaty of Lausanne of 1923, which was signed two months earlier,²⁸ became a cornerstone of the independent Turkish Republic (Kiliç 2022). The Treaty signified the backing down by the Allied Powers in their

26 At the formal level, the decision on the politico-administrative status of NKAO was made by the *Kavburo* (the Bolsheviks' Caucasian Bureau) on 5 July 1921 (Saparov 2020, 129).

27 Kemalist Turkey's gratitude to Soviet Russia during the former's critical period is symbolised by the grandiose Republic Monument (*Cumhuriyet Aniti*) in Taksim Square in Istanbul. The monument depicts Atatürk and other founders of the Republic of Turkey together with Bolshevik military commanders Kliment Voroshilov and Semen Aralov.

28 The Treaty's signatories were Turkey, Great Britain, France, Italy, Greece, Romania and Yugoslavia.

plans to partition Anatolian Turkey and to impose their control over its finance and armed forces. The Allied Powers recognised Turkey's independence within the present borders, albeit the British annexed Ottoman Cyprus,²⁹ while the Italians retained the Ottoman Dodecanese. The collaboration of Ankara and Moscow also enabled them to withstand Western pressure over the status of the strategic Turkish Straits. By the international Montreux Convention, which was signed on 20 July 1936, Turkey asserted its control over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. The Convention, which remains in force until the present, also guaranteed free passage through the Straits of civilian vessels in peacetime, but restricted passage of naval ships not belonging to the Black Sea states. Overall, the Lausanne Treaty and the Montreux Convention marked the diminished geopolitical role of the Eastern/Armenian Question against the backdrop of the Soviet-Turkish alliance against the rest of the Great Powers.

3.2 *World War II and the Cold War*

Following Atatürk's death in 1938, the Soviet-Turkish alliance began to crumble. The critical point occurred in June 1941 when İsmet İnönü, who succeeded Atatürk, refused to back the USSR against the invasion by Nazi Germany, referring to Turkey's adherence to neutrality. The Stalin leadership interpreted Turkey's position as a deviation from the 1925 Moscow Treaty and a covert siding with the aggressors. During World War II (1939–45) relations between the two countries deteriorated even further.³⁰ In March 1945 the Soviet government denounced the Moscow Treaty and pushed for territorial, political, and military concessions from Turkey. These included the transfer to the USSR of the Kars region, the southern part of the Batum *oblast'* and the former Erivan *guberniya's* Surmalu *uyezd* (with Mount Ararat), as well as the revision of the Montreux Convention. In particular, Moscow proposed to place the Turkish Straits under joint Soviet-Turkish control, allowing in the case of war the passage of Soviet troops and naval warships through Turkish territory and the Straits, and the establishment of a Soviet naval base in the Straits (Ivanov 2002). Against the backdrop of the unfolding Cold War Ankara then made a U-turn from its anti-imperialist pact with the Soviets towards rapprochement with its former adversaries – the United Kingdom (UK) and the USA. In March 1946 the Turkish leadership reacted favourably to Winston Churchill's infamous Fulton speech and, a year later, Turkey was included (alongside Greece) into

29 In 1960 the British were forced to recognise Cyprus's political independence, albeit they retained their military bases in Akrotiri and Dhekalia.

30 For more on the break-down of the Soviet-Turkish alliance during World War II, see İsci 2021.

the USA's lavish financial and military assistance package within the Truman Doctrine of the USSR's containment. In February 1952 Turkey joined the USA-headed NATO³¹ directed against the USSR. In 1955, alongside Iran, Iraq and Pakistan, it also joined the UK-headed anti-Soviet military alliance, the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO, known as the Baghdad Pact, 1955–79). Some Turkish political scientists, however, regard Ankara's turn to the West as a bad move which set Turkey on the wrong political path and advocate its geopolitical re-orientation towards Russia and the wider Eurasia (Doster 2022, Perinçek D. 2006, Perinçek 2000).

Overall, in the post-World War II period, Turkey's relations with the West, the USSR, and Soviet Armenia, in particular, were determined by the logic of the Cold War. Following Turkey's NATO accession, it turned into the most easterly outpost of the West in the latter's confrontation with the USSR and its allies (Kiliç 2022). The Americans were allowed to establish their air base in Incirlik where, in the 1990s they also deployed around 50 B61 nuclear bombs. Turkey's centrality in the global confrontation was revealed during the 1962 Cuban crisis which brought the world to the brink of nuclear war, when the crisis was defused by Washington's removal of its missiles from Turkey (as well as southern Italy) in exchange for Moscow's removal of its missiles from Cuba. Its strategic importance was also evidenced during the 1974 Cyprus crisis when the USA did not prevent it from invading the northern part of the island and the establishment in 1983 of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, even if the UK and some other Western states verbally condemned it. Moscow, in its turn, spearheaded the creation in 1955 of the Warsaw Pact³² and sponsored the establishment of pro-Soviet regimes in Syria and Iraq, both of which border Turkey. It sealed off the borders between Turkey (and Iran) and Soviet Armenia and Azerbaijan and significantly restricted Turkish (as well as Iranian) political and cultural influence in the region.

This period witnessed yet another reconfiguration of the Eastern/Armenian Question, this being the spatial, political and societal separation of the USSR's Armenians from their ethno-confessional brethren in the rest of the large

31 NATO stands for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization which was established in April 1949 by the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Portugal for the military containment of the USSR. Since then the number of NATO member states has risen to thirty.

32 The Warsaw Pact (1955–91) was a USSR-spearheaded defence counterbalance to NATO. It comprised Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania and the USSR.

Armenian diaspora.³³ The USSR's Armenians underwent comprehensive Sovietisation and acquired some all-Soviet socio-political and cultural characteristics which they also shared with Soviet Azerbaijanis. This was evidenced, for example, in the good neighbourhood relations between Azerbaijani and Armenian residents in Baku, Ganja, Georgia and Russia (Ismayilov 2022). By comparison, the socialisation of diaspora Armenians in the USA (primarily in California and New Jersey), France and other countries of the West and Latin America occurred along different lines which made of the genocide issue the cornerstone of their national identity. As a result, for representatives of the second and third generations of diaspora Armenians the name "Turks" signified the existential enemy (Kanlidere 2022). Since the late 1940s, following the 1948 United Nations (UN) Convention of Genocide, some diaspora leaders began to interlink the normalisation of Turkish-Armenian relations with Ankara's recognition of the Armenian genocide,³⁴ while some raised the issue of Ankara's reparations to the families of victims, and ultimately "the return of eastern Anatolia to the Armenians" (Gunn 2017, 76). At the academic level, the genocide discourse was supported through the development in the USA and Western Europe of genocide scholarship.³⁵ Interestingly, some commentators point to the role of the US political establishment in the promotion of genocide studies focusing on past genocides at the time of the American atrocities against the Vietnamese during the Vietnam War (1955–75) (Buenos 2017, 90–1).

An extreme manifestation of the anti-Turkey political activism within the Armenian diaspora was the terrorist acts against Turkish political figures and nationals by members of the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) and the armed wing of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) inspired by the example of "Operation Nemesis" in the early 1920s.³⁶ Between 1973 and 1988, these organisations were responsible for the

33 In 2018, the size of the Armenian diaspora ranged between 8 and 10 m, including in the Russian Federation – 2.3m; in the USA – 1.5m; in France – 0.5m; in Georgia – 450,000; in Ukraine – 400,000; in Lebanon – 230,000; in Australia – 167,230; in Turkey – 100,000; in Canada – 55,740; and in UK – 15,000. For comparison, the population of the Republic of Armenia was 2.9 m (Bolsajian 2018, 31).

34 As of 2023, governments and parliaments of 34 countries (out of the 193 members of the United Nations), including such countries with sizable Armenian diasporas as the USA, France, Canada, Argentina and Russia.

35 For the discussion of the genocide studies see, Bloxham and Moses 2010 and Stone 2008.

36 "Operation Nemesis" was the ARF's assassination campaign aimed at the Ottoman and Azerbaijani leaders implicated in the massacre of Armenians in September 1918. It was masterminded by Shahan Natalie, Armen Garo and Aaron Sachaklian. Among its victims were Talaat Pasha and around twenty other senior CUP members. On the "Operation Nemesis," see more in Megrobian MacCurdy 2015.

killing of around 90 and the wounding of many hundreds of ethnic Turks³⁷ in North America, Western Europe, the Middle East and the South Pacific (Gunn 2017, 73). In Turkey, victims of the Armenian terrorism became venerated as martyrs (*şehitler*). For example, the AVİM's daily bulletin starts with homage to a particular diplomat martyr (*şehit diplomat*) assassinated by Armenian terrorists. Most importantly, for many Turkish politicians and the wider Turkish public, the Western location of most perpetrators of these crimes was reminiscent of the Great Powers' interference in Ottoman affairs under the name of the Eastern/Armenian Question.

4 The Karabakh Conflict and the Armenian Question

4.1 *The First Karabakh War*

In the late 1980s, the Armenian Question found a new focus in the South Caucasus. In February 1988, in the context of the Gorbachevian perestroika, Karabakh (Artsakh) Armenians demanded the Kremlin withdraw the Armenian-majority Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous *Oblast'* (NKAO) from Azerbaijan's jurisdiction and include it (*miatsum*, Ar.) within Armenia.³⁸ The Karabakh unification movement soon evolved into the Pan-Armenian National Movement (PANM) under the leadership of the Karabakh Committee. Between 1988 and 1990 Moscow undertook different approaches to diffuse the situation, including the refusal of Armenian appeals for political concessions, economic subsidisation of the NKAO, the imposition of direct rule in the territory and the backing of Azerbaijani counter-insurgency operations. In May 1990 PANM won the parliamentary elections in Armenia, thus signifying the centrality of the Karabakh issue for modern Armenian statehood. Importantly, Armenia became the first Soviet republic to form a non-communist government under the leadership of Levon Ter-Petrossian (b. 1945). Meanwhile, the Kremlin's protracted ineffectiveness in dealing with the conflict was further aggravated by the rising inter-communal violence interpreted through the historical schema of "Armenian-Turkish animosity," and ultimately by the anti-Gorbachevian

37 Among their victims were 31 Turkish diplomats and members of their families, including the Turkish Consul General of Los Angeles and his assistant who were shot by Gourgen Yanikian, and the Turkish administrative attaché to Greece and his 14-year daughter who were assassinated by Monte Melkonian, a native of California, who in the late 1980s would fight for Karabakh's independence (Gunn 2017, 73, 79).

38 For a detailed discussion of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, see, for example, Ataman and Pirincci 2021; Broers 2019; Cornell 2005; de Waal 2013; Yavuz and Gunter 2022; and Zürcher 2007.

putsch in August 1991 (Broers and Yemelianova 2020, 241). In the conditions of the USSR's imminent disintegration the NKAO's leaders amended their goals from *miatsum* towards Nagorno Karabakh's political self-determination. In September 1991 the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR/The Republic of Artsakh) was established and in December, following a referendum, it proclaimed its independence.

In the wake of the break-up of the Soviet Union and Moscow's partial military withdrawal from the region the conflict escalated into the Armenian-Azerbaijani war, later referred to as the First Karabakh War (1988–94). During this conflict Armenians established control over the "Lachin Corridor" connecting the NKR with Armenia, occupied the Azerbaijani town of Shusha (Shushi) and the districts of Kelbajar, Aghdam, Fuzuli, Jabrayil, Gubadly and Zangelan, hence creating a security buffer zone around the self-proclaimed NKR. All of these regions' Azerbaijani populations – more than half a million – were expelled in their entirety (Broers and Yemelianova 2020, 242), while on the other side a significant number of Azerbaijan's Armenians were forced to flee to Armenia. In May 1994, following the Moscow-brokered ceasefire, the Karabakh conflict was "frozen" and remained "semi-frozen" for 26 years despite numerous mediation attempts towards its resolution by Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Iran and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) Minsk Group.³⁹ In the course of the war over 30,000 people lost their lives, many thousands were wounded and over 700,000 Azerbaijanis and over 400,000 Armenians were displaced (Zürcher 2007, 180). Atrocities against civilians were conducted on both sides, including massacres in Sumgait, Baku, Khojaly and Maraga.

At the onset of the conflict the Armenian diaspora was apprehensive of the conflict's potentially destabilising repercussions for Soviet Armenia.⁴⁰ However, from the early 1990s the diaspora largely internalised the Karabakh issue by interlinking it with the Armenian Question and portraying modern Azerbaijanis as kindred of those Ottoman Turks who were implicated in the Ottoman Armenian massacres (Deveci-Bozkuş 2020, 138). Accordingly, it began to provide media, political, financial, as well as some military backing to the NKR and Armenia. A number of the diaspora's representatives were directly included in

39 The Minsk Group was established in December 1994 at the OSCE summit in Budapest; from 1997 the Group was co-chaired by Russia, the USA and France.

40 Thus, in September 1988, the leaders of the diaspora's three major parties – the Dashnaks (ARF), Hunchaks (SDHP) and Ramgavars (ADL) – issued a joint statement denouncing the Karabakh Committee's *miatsum* movement and calling for a return to the Soviet status-quo.

Armenia's decision-making process, especially its foreign policy,⁴¹ while some pro-Armenian foreign “volunteers” took part in front-line fighting.⁴² The rise in the diaspora of pro-Karabakh political and media activism also impacted, through the medium of various Armenian lobbying organisations, on the USA's and the European Union (EU)'s stance on the Karabakh conflict. The significant political, media and academic role of the Armenian diaspora during the Karabakh conflict and especially in its lengthy duration was highlighted by all my interviewees (Gücer 2022, Deveci-Bozkuş 2022, Kanlidere 2022, Pirinççi 2022). A striking example was the diaspora's fierce opposition to the 2009 Zurich Protocols which envisaged the re-opening of the Turkish-Armenian border and the creation of a joint Turkish-Armenian historical commission for the investigation of the tragic events of the 1890s and 1915. Then diaspora leaders strongly criticised the Protocols on the grounds that they were opening historical facts to debate and that they de facto recognised the existing borders between Turkey and Armenia. They welcomed the formal cancellation of the Protocols by Armenia in March 2018 as “correction of a grave mistake of putting interests of Armenia before the Armenians worldwide” (Sassunian 2018).

On the other side, the Karabakh conflict accelerated the rapprochement between Azerbaijan and Turkey. From the first days of the war Turkey unambiguously sided with Azerbaijan along the lines of Turkic fraternity. It denounced Armenia as the aggressor and closed the Turkish-Armenian border. The bilateral special relations were cemented under presidents Abulfaz Elchibey (in office 1992–93) and Turgut Özal (in office 1989–93), respectively. A corollary was a further modification of the Armenian Question by interlinking Turkey-Armenia relations with the resolution of the Karabakh conflict. Following the Zurich Protocols' failure, Ankara adopted a parallel approach towards the normalisation of its relations with Yerevan and the liberation of the occupied Azerbaijani territories adjacent to the self-proclaimed NKR. It also increased its military assistance to Baku, as per the Strategic Partnership Agreement of 2010. The dynamic of the Karabakh conflict was affected by the ineffectiveness of the Minsk Group consisting of representatives of the USA, France and Russia, whose geopolitical agendas increasingly diverged. Additionally, the growing distancing between the USA and France, both of which had large Armenian diasporas, on the one side, and Russia, whose substantial

41 For example, between 1998 and 2008, Armenia's Foreign Ministry was headed by Vartan Oskanian, a native of Aleppo and a Harvard graduate. Oskanian is also a founder of an online Armenian-English media outlet *The Civilitas Foundation* (www.civilnet.am).

42 Among these was the charismatic ASALA militant Monte (Avo) Melkonian who was killed in 1993 in Karabakh.

Armenian diaspora was of a more conciliatory orientation towards Karabakh, on the other, strengthened the political role of the USA and France Armenian diasporas, which were viewed from both Ankara and Baku through the prism of the Eastern/Armenian Question.

Other contributing and related factors were the improving relations of both Azerbaijan and Turkey with Russia and the deterioration of their relations with the West. In the case of Azerbaijan, after a short honeymoon in the context of the “Deal of the Century” of 1994,⁴³ relations soured due to the West’s growing criticism of what it perceived as Azerbaijan’s diversion from a law-based democratic system towards political authoritarianism and its encroachment on civil liberties and freedom of speech (Altstadt 2020, 172). In the case of Turkey, this trend reflected Ankara’s gradual shift towards a multi-vector foreign policy in the context of the unravelling unipolar international system. Ankara’s international repositioning manifested itself in its increasingly selective approach towards its commitments within the NATO alliance (for example, its purchase of the Russian S-400 air defence system and its procrastinating response to Sweden’s NATO membership ambitions); the toughening of its stance on divided Cyprus and the Aegean Sea islands; and its increased influence in the ex-Ottoman regions, including the Balkans, Syria and Libya. Other aggravating issues included the stalemate over Turkey’s EU admission and the EU-Turkey tensions over Syrian refugees, the PKK⁴⁴ and the FETÖ.⁴⁵ Importantly, Ankara’s political and geopolitical repositioning has been accompanied by its willingness to confront its painful legacy associated with Armenian genocide in the late Ottoman period. Since the 2000s, the discussion of this extremely politically and emotionally sensitive issue has been gaining momentum in both Turkish political and academic circles.⁴⁶ In 2014 President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (in office 2014–) offered condolences to the victims of the Ottoman massacres, while Turkish historians have been

43 The “Deal of the Century” referred to a 30-year contract on the development of new oil fields between the Azerbaijani state oil company and 13 world major oil companies.

44 PKK stands for *Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan* (The Kurdish Workers’ Party). It is a Kurdish Marxist organisation which was founded in 1978 by Abdullah Öcalan (b.1948). PKK is dedicated to the creation of independent Kurdistan.

45 FETÖ stands for *Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü* (Fethullahist Terrorist Organisation).

46 For example, the Armenian Question and Turkey-Armenia relations dominate the agenda of the Center for Eurasian Studies (*Avrasya İncelemeleri Merkezi*, AVİM, est. 2009) – a leading Turkish think-tank, which since 2013 has been headed by Ambassador Alev Kiliç. AVİM publishes two Armenia-centred journals – *Ermeni Araştırmaları* (Armenian Studies, in Turkish) and *Review of Armenian Studies* (in English).

reassessing the role in these tragic events of both internal and external actors and beneficiaries.⁴⁷

4.2 *The Second Karabakh War*

The aforementioned developments, as well as the futility of the Minsk Group's mediation enabled Baku to “unfreeze” the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by force. A facilitating factor was the 2018 “Velvet Revolution” in Yerevan, which brought to power an administration under Nikol Pashinyan (in office 2018–). Unlike previous Armenian leaders,⁴⁸ who made Karabakh the cornerstone of their policy, Pashinyan prioritised Armenia's internal problems – such as fighting corruption, strengthening the economy and the promotion of political liberalism.⁴⁹ The “Revolution” implicitly signified the diminishing political weight of local agency in Karabakh embodied in the leadership of the NKR. On 27 September 2020 the Azerbaijani army, backed by Turkey, launched a liberation war against Armenia. In the course of the 44 day-long Second Karabakh War, in which over six thousand Armenian and Azerbaijani military lost their lives,⁵⁰ Azerbaijan restored its sovereignty over a large part of those territories that for nearly 30 years had been occupied by Armenia, and it was on the verge of re-taking Nagorny Karabakh. It was only due to Moscow's intensive diplomatic efforts that the war was stopped and the NKR's fall was prevented. Baku's military success was due to nation-wide mobilisation and its military superiority as a result of its comprehensive oil-funded military modernisation and the use of drones and other sophisticated weapons coming from Israel, Russia and especially Turkey. On 10 November 2020 President Aliyev and Prime-Minister Pashinyan signed a cease-fire deal brokered by President Vladimir Putin (in office 2002–2008; 2012–) and agreed to the exclusively Russian peace-keeping mission along the line of contact between the two protagonists. Accordingly, Moscow deployed around 2,000 Russian peacekeepers in the remaining part of Nagorny Karabakh and along the “Lachin Corridor” to last for at least five years. On 11 January 2021 the presidents of Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan adopted

47 See, for example, Ağirtaş 2017; Akça 2002; Akçam 2012; Başak 2018; Göçek 2015 and Güzel, Çiçek and Bilgiç 2017.

48 Armenia's two long lasting presidents Robert Kocharyan (in office 1998–2008) and Serzh Sargsyan (in office 2008–2018) previously occupied senior positions in the NKR leadership.

49 On Armenia's “Velvet Revolution,” see Broers and Ohanyan 2020.

50 In the course of the war the Armenian side lost around 3,360 soldiers, with dozens missing. The estimated losses of Azerbaijan were around 3,000 military personal and over 90 civilians (Valiyev 2021, 80).

another joint statement on the post-war development of Karabakh and the unblocking of its economic and transport communications so as to facilitate the cross-regional movement of people, goods and energy. The project's ultimate goal was to revitalise the north-south route going from Russia to Armenia and Iran via Azerbaijan, including the building of transport links (both roads and railway) between the western regions of Azerbaijan and the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic (NAR) (de Waal 2021).

The outcome of the Second Karabakh War enabled Turkey, whose aims, at least for the time being, have converged with those of Russia (Pirinççi 2022), to further enhance its collaboration with Azerbaijan and to consolidate its positions in the South Caucasus. On 11 November 2020 Turkey secured its presence in the region in the form of the joint Russo-Turkish Monitoring Centre which was to survey the implementation of the trilateral agreement of 10 November 2020. On 30 January 2021 a Monitoring Centre was opened in the Azerbaijani village of Qiyameddinli in the Aghdam district, its members including one Turkish general and 38 other Turkish military personnel. On 15 June 2021 presidents Aliyev and Erdoğan further advanced their bilateral relations by signing the Shusha Declaration on Allied Relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey. At its heart was the two countries' mutual military assistance, their collaboration over the Southern Gas Corridor (the South Caucasus, Trans-Anatolian and Trans-Adriatic Pipelines) and the so-called "Zangezur (Meghri) Corridor" between Nakhichevan and Azerbaijan's mainland.⁵¹ In September 2021 the Turkish military representation mission headed by four Turkish generals was opened in Baku. Turkey has also succeeded in integrating the "Zangezur Corridor" project into its "Middle Corridor" initiative (Suleymanov 2022). The Second Karabakh War also paved the way for the full-fledged engagement in the conflict's mediation of the region's other major power – Iran – which, alongside Georgia, provided Armenia during the conflict with the only land outlets to the outside world. It is significant that it was Iran which in October 2020 put forward the "three plus three" plan – that is the participation of Russia, Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia in the Karabakh settlement. However, this initiative was not welcomed by Georgia due to its continuous, albeit declining, opposition to Russia's increased presence in the region (Kardaş 2022, Kiliç 2022).

51 It should be noted that prior to this, the possibility of the opening of the "Zangezur (Meghri) Corridor" was already explored by presidents Robert Kocharyan and Heydar Aliyev at their meeting in Paris in January 2001.

Unlike in the past, a Karabakh peace settlement was envisaged within the wider strategy of the restoration/creation of cross-regional transport, energy, economic and human inter-connectedness. The regional, rather than internationalised, imperative also implied the parallel normalisation of both Armenia-Azerbaijan and Armenia-Turkey relations through direct contacts of the leaders or other senior officials of the three states despite considerable differences over the process's priorities between Ankara and Baku (Kanlidere 2022). Thus, Azerbaijan's main concern has been over the return and accommodation of Azerbaijani internally displaced people (IDPs) and the "Zangezur Corridor," while Turkey has been preoccupied with the border delimitation and the development of transport and economic links between the two countries and across the region (Deveci-Bozkuş 2022). An important factor in the normalisation progress has been the continuing leadership of Nikol Pashinyan, who did not belong to the "Karabakh clan," and therefore has been better positioned to negotiate the peace deals with both Azerbaijan and Turkey in isolation from the status of Karabakh (Deveci-Bozkuş 2022, Kardaş 2002, Pirinççi 2002). Among the first steps in that direction were, for example, the appointment in December 2021 by Armenia and Turkey of special envoys to help to normalise relations between the two countries and the resumption, in February 2022, of commercial flights between Armenia and Turkey. In the bigger picture, the war and its outcome signaled the strengthening of the regional dimension for the settlement of the Karabakh conflict and, subsequently, the weakening of its international dimension, which arguably contributed to the conflict's stagnation along the lines of the Eastern/Armenian Question.

4.3 *Emerging Challenges*

The Karabakh peace settlement has been affected, however, by a number of internal, Armenia-Azerbaijan bilateral and international factors. In Armenia, the credibility of the Pashinyan government has been challenged by Armenian hard-liners who have accused him of national betrayal and have pushed for his resignation and the cancellation of the ceasefire agreement of 10 November 2020. They have been at the forefront of anti-Pashinyan protests in Yerevan which persisted, albeit on a lower scale, despite Pashinyan's victory in the parliamentary elections in June 2021.⁵² Both Baku and Ankara regard the Karabakh

52 The anti-government protests in Yerevan peaked in May and again in September 2022. In the first case demonstrators demanded Nikol Pashinyan's resignation because of the lost war, while in the second they opposed Pashinyan's readiness for a peace deal with Baku without discussing the status of Karabakh.

issue as resolved, that is as its being part of Azerbaijan.⁵³ This position is rejected by many Karabakh Armenians, the radical opposition in Armenia, as well as by many in the political establishments in the West (the USA, France and the EU) and especially in the Armenian diaspora, where there are still expectations for Nagorny Karabakh's autonomy or some other form of special status (Kiliç 2022). It is symptomatic that in April 2021, when the Pashinyan government was engaged in the discussion of practicalities for normalisation of Armenia-Turkey relations, the US President Joe Biden made a statement on the recognition of the anti-Armenian atrocities of the late Ottoman period as genocide. At the inter-state level, despite the Russian peace-keeping mission, the ceasefire deal has been sporadically violated in Karabakh and along the Armenian-Azerbaijan border. In September 2022, in the course of the so called "two-day-war," nearly 300 servicemen were killed, and dozens wounded on both sides, although the majority were Armenians. Since December 2022 and at the time of writing, the "Lachin Corridor" has been blockaded by dozens of Azerbaijani protestors thus leaving the Armenian population of Nagorny Karabakh without access to essential goods and services.⁵⁴

And, of course, the Ukrainian War (referred as the Special Military Operation in Russia), which began in February 2022, has inevitably affected the post-Second Karabakh War's developments. Among its implications has been the increasing assertiveness in the region of both Azerbaijan (as evidenced by the aforementioned "two-day war" in September 2022) and Turkey, emboldened by Russia's distraction in Ukraine as well as the political re-engagement of the West. Thus, at the EU and other pan-European level, between April and August 2022, in Brussels, the European Council President Charles Michel brokered four meetings on border delimitation and the peace treaty format between President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan. In October 2022, both Aliyev and Pashinyan were invited to the inaugural gathering of the European Political Community (EPC) which had an explicitly anti-Russian agenda. At the unilateral level, Pashinyan has been seeking greater involvement in the Karabakh process of France and the USA. In March and September 2022, in Paris, French President Emmanuel Macron held talks with Prime-Minister Pashinyan,

53 It is significant that the term "Nagorny Karabakh" ceased to be used in both Azerbaijani and Turkish political discourses and was replaced by "Karabakh."

54 According to Amnesty International, the protesters who opposed the alleged illegal mining of natural resources in Nagorny Karabakh have been backed by the Azerbaijani authorities. Amnesty International, 9 February 2023, available at <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/02/azerbaijan-blockade-of-lachin-corridor-putting-thousands-of-lives-in-peril-must-be-immediately-lifted>>, accessed on 18 April 2023.

while in September 2022 the then US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Yerevan and reassured Prime-Minister Pashinyan of the US's "strong support for a lasting peace over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh" (Gall 2022). In October 2022 Yerevan expressed its interest in the deployment in Armenia of observers from the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia, as well as in the establishment of the EU Civilian Mission in Armenia (EUMA) within the framework of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP).

5 Conclusion

Modern Turkey continues to be haunted by the legacy of the Eastern/Armenian Question which it associates with destructive external interference in its domestic and foreign policies. As we have noted, the origins of the Eastern Question go back to the fifteenth century capitulations granted by the Sublime Porte to some Christian European powers. The capitulations provided the European Powers with extraterritorial rights and enabled them to bypass the Sublime Porte in establishing direct links with Christian and other non-Muslim communities on the territory of the Ottoman Empire. From the eighteenth century, in the conditions of the Ottomans' declining imperial might, the Eastern Question turned into a major tool of the European Powers' interference into Ottoman Turkey's internal politics with the aim of its further destabilisation leading to either direct annexation of some of its territories or the imposition of indirect control over the empire's Christian-populated regions. At the discursive and propaganda levels, however, the Eastern Question had different frames, ranging from Christian solidarity, as in the case of imperial Russia, to the promotion of liberal values, as in the case of Great Britain. In the 1870s, the Eastern Question culminated in the Ottomans' loss of its Balkans territories as a result of a series of uprisings by various non-Muslim Ottoman subjects. Since then the focus of the Great Powers' interference, particularly by imperial Russia and Great Britain, which were engaged in a wider geopolitical contestation – the Great Game – shifted to the Armenian-populated parts of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the Eastern Question evolved into the Armenian Question. Among the latter's tragic implications were inter-communal violence, mass population displacement, the horrific atrocities against Armenians and Russia's annexation of parts of eastern Anatolia. During World War I, and especially after Bolshevik Russia's withdrawal from the War, it was Great Britain which assumed "leadership" in the Armenian Question (Başak 2018). A major factor was the newly emerged critical alliance between Soviet Russia and

Kemalist Turkey which largely safeguarded Turkey's survival, albeit in much reduced borders, against British and other European powers' advance.

The next stage of the Armenian Question, as perceived from Turkey, occurred after the breakdown of Soviet-Turkish relations during World War II and the Cold War. Then it became associated with the anti-Turkish discursive, political, as well as terrorist activities emanating from the primarily Western-based Armenian diaspora. And finally, the Karabakh conflict, which erupted in 1988, shifted yet again the reconfigured Armenian Question to the Caucasus. As this article shows, the Question has had an impact on Turkey's approach towards the Karabakh conflict and Turkey's wider Caucasus policy. This has been evidenced in its unequivocal and multi-faceted support of Azerbaijan, its reservations about the perceived multi-layered agendas of the members of the OSCE Minsk Group, as well as its resentment about the political influence of the Armenian lobbies in the USA and France. Since the 2000s, Ankara, which significantly improved its relations with Russia, has favored the regionalisation of the Karabakh issue as the optimal way to address the Armenian Question. It has therefore welcomed the outcome of the Second Karabakh War which opened the possibility for a regional rather than international peace settlement, involving an interregional parallel Azerbaijan-Armenia and Turkey normalisation. However, from February 2022 the conflict's regionalisation format has been undermined by geopolitical tremors emanating from the Ukrainian War. Still, the visit of the Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan to Ankara in February 2023 – at the time of Turkey's horrific earthquake disaster leaving over 50,000 dead and many millions homeless, and the subsequent opening of the Turkish-Armenian border to allow humanitarian aid from Armenia to Turkey, may suggest that the shared humanity of these two peoples belonging to one historical region will ultimately prevail enabling them to jointly overcome the legacy of the Eastern/Armenian Question.

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