

THE ECHOES OF ARMENIAN-TURKISH RELATIONS IN GEORGIA

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DOI 10.56673/18294502-22.14-127

Introduction

The contemporary Caucasus is characterized by relatively new conflicts as well as controversies inherited from the past. Georgia, twenty percent of which is occupied by neighboring Russia, is trying to build good-neighborly, in some cases strategic, cooperation with its other three neighbors.

Relationship with Turkey

Euro-Atlantic integration is a declared foreign policy priority of Georgia. Thus, its relationship with Turkey, which is a member state of NATO and at the same time a candidate for EU membership, is particularly important for Georgia. Turkey was one of the first countries to recognize Georgia's independence on 16 December 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and diplomatic relations between the two countries were established on 21 May 1992.

The cooperation between Georgia and Turkey is of a strategic nature and is developing successfully in the political, security and defense spheres as well as in the trade-economic, cultural, humanitarian and energy fields. Turkey is the largest trading partner of Georgia with whom a free trade regime exists. The Turkish private sector is also one of the largest investors in the Georgian economy. Furthermore, citizens of both Georgia and Turkey enjoy a simplified travel regime between the two countries.

Turkey is a strong supporter of Georgia's territorial integrity. Among other things, this implies unwavering support for a non-recognition policy, both inside and outside the country (e.g., in the Middle East and within international institutions). Given the importance of this issue for Georgia, this appears to be a strong point in the bilateral relations of the two countries.

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Relationship with Armenia

Diplomatic relations between Georgia and the Republic of Armenia were established on 17 July 1992. Georgia and the Republic of Armenia have close friendly relations based on the principles of good neighborliness, cooperation and mutual respect, a tradition that goes back for over a millennium. There is a free trade agreement between the countries. Armenia is an important trade partner of Georgia. Cooperation in the field of tourism is also growing. Bilateral relations were reinforced by the Velvet Revolution that occurred in Armenia as, given the prospect of democratic developments in Armenia, it may give a strong synergistic impetus to cooperation between the two countries. It is strategically important for Georgia to have a European-style democracy in the neighborhood.

Armenian-Turkish relations through the prism of Georgia

The echo of the armed confrontation on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border has reached Tbilisi. The clash, which happened a few dozen kilometers away from the Georgian border, rattles not only the stability of the two countries, but also, if there were to be any escalation of the conflict, could threaten to bring many serious consequences for Tbilisi too.

The risks are related to both internal (endogenous) factors such as relations with ethnic and religious minorities and external (exogenous) factors, including the engagement of at least two major regional players, Russia and Turkey, in the confrontation. So, in the event of any renewal of hostilities, the conflict would most likely have some kind of physical effect on the territory of Georgia. Any escalation of the conflict will ultimately call into question the credibility of the entire South Caucasus as an important transit area. As the stability of this zone thus plays a central role in the region's security, including its economic dimension, at the end of the day, Georgia has a strong interest in securing stability and the peaceful transformation of conflicts.

Improvement of Armenian-Turkish relations would ease tensions in the region, which in turn would open a window for extensive energy and transport transits as well as other transnational projects. The substantial involvement of Armenia in these projects would significantly improve its security environment.