
**GEOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SOUTH
CAUCASUS FOR INTERESTS OF TURKEY**

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ABSTRACT:

This research work delves into the evolving dynamics of Georgia's role in shaping Turkey's foreign policy strategies. The study seeks to understand the multifaceted dimensions of the bilateral relationship between Turkey and Georgia, particularly exploring the factors that have influenced the evolving role of Georgia in Turkey's foreign policy calculus. Through a comprehensive analysis of diplomatic, economic, and security dimensions, the research uncovers the intersecting interests and mutual dependencies that have led to a deepening of ties between the two countries. Special attention is given to the strategic significance of the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region in anchoring Turkey's foreign policy objectives and the role that Georgia plays in this context. Additionally, the study assesses the impact of regional developments, including energy security, infrastructure projects, and geopolitical alignments, on shaping Turkey's approach towards Georgia. Insights gained from this research contribute to a nuanced understanding of the intricate linkages between Georgia's regional significance and Turkey's broader foreign policy framework, ultimately shedding light on the complexities of contemporary geopolitical dynamics and regional cooperation initiatives.

Keywords: Geostrategic Position, Energy Security, Trade and Economic Integration, Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy, Strategic Partnerships

Introduction

The South Caucasus region has been a focal point of Turkey's foreign policy due to its significant geopolitical importance, characterized by historical, strategic, economic, and security considerations. Geopolitical dynamics in the South Caucasus have direct and indirect implications for Turkey's national interests, regional influence, and broader international engagement.

❖ **Geostrategic Position:**

Turkey's geographical proximity to the South Caucasus positions it as a key actor in regional geopolitics. The strategic location of the South Caucasus at the intersection of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East provides Turkey with a gateway to diverse markets, transportation routes, and cultural ties. This geostrategic positioning enables Turkey to pursue its ambitions as a regional power and facilitates its efforts to enhance connectivity and influence across geopolitical landscapes.



The South Caucasus is a geopolitical crossroads where various regional and global powers have strategic interests. Turkey's engagement in the region is shaped by its efforts to maintain influence, promote stability, and counterbalance the interests of other actors, including Russia, Iran, and the European Union. In light of these factors, Turkey prioritizes its engagement with the South Caucasus to advance its economic, energy, security, and geopolitical interests. This includes participation in regional infrastructure projects, diplomatic initiatives, and institutional cooperation aimed at fostering stability, economic development, and enhanced connectivity in the South Caucasus region. The geostrategic position of the South Caucasus holds significant interest for Turkey due to several key factors. These factors include geographic proximity, energy resources, trade routes, historical and cultural ties, and geopolitical considerations. The South Caucasus region, comprising countries such as Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, shares borders with Turkey. This proximity creates natural linkages and mutual interests in regional stability, security, and economic cooperation. The strategic location of the South Caucasus as a bridge between Europe and Asia also makes it crucial for Turkey's broader geopolitical strategies.

❖ **Energy Security:**

The South Caucasus serves as a critical corridor for energy transport, particularly for Azerbaijan's oil and gas exports to global markets. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) gas pipeline are vital components of Turkey's energy security architecture, allowing the country to diversify its energy sources and reduce dependence on a single supplier. These energy corridors strengthen Turkey's strategic position as an energy hub and contribute to its broader energy security objectives. [4]

Several joint energy projects in the South Caucasus region have enhanced regional cooperation, increased energy security, and facilitated the transportation of oil, natural gas, and electricity. Some prominent joint energy projects in the region include:

1. **Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Pipeline:** The BTC pipeline is a major energy infrastructure project that transports oil from Azerbaijan's Caspian Sea fields to the Turkish port of Ceyhan via Georgia. This project, which began operations in 2006, is a joint effort involving Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. It plays a crucial role in diversifying export routes for Caspian energy resources and reducing dependence on traditional transit routes.

2. **Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) Gas Pipeline:** The BTE pipeline, also known as the South Caucasus Pipeline, connects the Shah Deniz gas field in Azerbaijan to Turkey via Georgia. It is a key part of the Southern Gas Corridor, designed to deliver Caspian natural gas to European markets. This joint project has strengthened energy cooperation between the South Caucasus countries and Turkey, promoting regional integration and enhancing Turkey's energy diversification.

3. **South Caucasus Gas Pipeline (SCP):** The SCP is a 692-kilometer natural gas pipeline that runs from the Sangachal terminal near Baku, Azerbaijan, to the Georgia-Turkey border. This pipeline, owned and operated by a consortium of international energy companies, facilitates the transportation of natural gas from Azerbaijan to Georgia and Turkey. It represents a significant investment in regional energy infrastructure and has contributed to energy security and economic development in the South Caucasus and Turkey.

4. Regional Electricity Interconnections: Various projects aimed at enhancing electricity interconnections among the countries in the South Caucasus region have been pursued to promote energy cooperation and supply diversification. For example, the construction of high-voltage transmission lines and grid interconnections has facilitated the exchange of electricity between Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey, contributing to more efficient energy markets and improved energy security. [5]

These joint energy projects have not only bolstered cooperation among the South Caucasus countries and Turkey but have also had broader geopolitical ramifications, as they have reduced the region's reliance on traditional energy transit routes and enhanced Europe's energy diversification strategies. Additionally, the development of these energy infrastructure projects has facilitated economic growth, technology transfer, and institutional collaboration, contributing to regional stability and prosperity in the South Caucasus. [1]

❖ Trade and Economic Integration:

Turkey views the South Caucasus as an important economic partner and seeks to deepen trade and investment ties with countries in the region. Leveraging its historical and cultural connections, Turkey aims to expand economic cooperation, boost trade volumes, and promote regional integration. The South Caucasus represents a potential market for Turkish goods and services, aligning with Turkey's economic ambitions and its pursuit of increased economic interdependence with neighboring countries. Enhancing trade and economic integration between Turkey and the South Caucasus presents both challenges and opportunities, influenced by geopolitical dynamics, infrastructural considerations, regulatory frameworks, and market potentials. Analyzing these factors can provide insight into the prospects for deeper economic cooperation and the obstacles that need to be addressed.

Challenges:

1. Geopolitical Complexities: The geopolitical complexities of the South Caucasus, including unresolved conflicts and regional tensions, pose challenges to enhancing trade and economic integration. Some of these complexities have the potential to hinder the development of stable trade routes, limit investment opportunities, and create uncertainties for businesses looking to engage in cross-border activities.
2. Infrastructural Limitations: The existing infrastructure in the South Caucasus, including transportation networks and energy corridors, may present limitations for seamless trade and economic integration. Insufficient infrastructure can lead to higher transportation costs, delays in trade flows, and hinder the efficient movement of goods and services between Turkey and the South Caucasus nations.
3. Regulatory Hurdles: Divergent regulatory frameworks and administrative barriers within the South Caucasus region can complicate trade processes and impede economic integration. Harmonizing regulations, customs procedures, and trade standards is essential for creating a more conducive environment for cross-border trade and investment.

4. Market Access and Diversification: Both Turkey and the South Caucasus countries face challenges related to market access and diversification. For the South Caucasus, gaining access to Turkey's large and dynamic market presents opportunities, but also requires addressing trade barriers and product standards. At the same time, Turkey seeks to diversify its exports and strengthen its economic ties beyond its traditional trading partners. [2]

Opportunities:

1. Strategic Location: The strategic location of the South Caucasus as a bridge between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East presents significant opportunities for trade and economic integration with Turkey. Leveraging this geographical advantage can lead to the development of efficient transit corridors, facilitating trade and creating new economic opportunities for both regions.

2. Energy Cooperation: The energy cooperation potential between Turkey and the South Caucasus, including the expansion of existing pipelines and the development of renewable energy projects, offers opportunities for deeper economic integration. Energy collaboration can contribute to energy security, infrastructure development, and economic growth in both regions.

3. Market Potential and Diversification: The South Caucasus countries offer market potential for Turkish businesses seeking new opportunities for export diversification. Similarly, Turkey's robust economy and diversified industrial base present opportunities for South Caucasus companies looking to expand their market reach and engage in mutually beneficial trade partnerships.

4. Economic Partnerships and Investment: Strengthening economic partnerships and fostering foreign direct investment between Turkey and the South Caucasus can create opportunities for joint ventures, infrastructure development, technology transfer, and industry-specific collaborations. This can serve as a catalyst for economic growth, job creation, and the transfer of expertise within the region.

Addressing the Challenges:

To address the challenges and leverage the opportunities for enhancing trade and economic integration between Turkey and the South Caucasus, several key steps can be taken:

1. Regional Cooperation and Dialogue: Strengthening regional cooperation mechanisms, fostering constructive dialogue, and addressing geopolitical tensions through diplomacy and conflict resolution efforts are crucial for creating a conducive environment for economic cooperation and trade facilitation.

2. Infrastructure Development: Investing in the development of transportation networks, logistics infrastructure, and energy corridors can contribute to overcoming infrastructural limitations and enhancing connectivity between Turkey and the South Caucasus, paving the way for smoother trade and economic integration.

3. Regulatory Alignment: Working towards regulatory alignment, standardization of trade procedures, and the simplification of administrative processes can help reduce barriers to

trade and create a more harmonized business environment that encourages cross-border economic activities.

4. **Capacity Building and Skills Development:** Investing in capacity building, skills development, and knowledge transfer initiatives can help businesses and professionals in the South Caucasus to better meet international trade standards and capitalize on market opportunities with Turkey.

In conclusion, while challenges such as geopolitical complexities, infrastructural limitations, and regulatory hurdles exist, the strategic location, energy cooperation potential, market opportunities, and avenues for economic partnerships present clear opportunities for enhancing trade and economic integration between Turkey and the South Caucasus. Addressing the challenges and leveraging these opportunities through regional cooperation, infrastructure development, regulatory alignment, and capacity building efforts can contribute to unlocking the full economic potential of the relationship between Turkey and the South Caucasus. [6]

❖ **Security and Stability:**

The South Caucasus region directly impacts Turkey's security environment. Conflicts and geopolitical tensions in the South Caucasus, such as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, have implications for Turkey's security interests, especially considering its proximity to the region. As such, Turkey has a vested interest in promoting stability, conflict resolution, and peaceful coexistence in the South Caucasus to mitigate the spillover effects of instability on its own borders and to foster a conducive environment for economic and diplomatic engagement. [8]

❖ **Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy:**

Turkey recognizes the historical, cultural, and ethnic affinities it shares with the South Caucasus countries. Utilizing soft power and cultural diplomacy, Turkey seeks to strengthen its influence and deepen its ties with the people and governments of the region. Cultural exchanges, educational collaboration, and public diplomacy initiatives play a role in enhancing Turkey's cultural presence and influence in the South Caucasus, contributing to its broader foreign policy objectives in the region.

❖ **Strategic Partnerships:**

Turkey has proactively cultivated strategic partnerships with Azerbaijan and Georgia, recognizing the geopolitical significance of these relationships. Close cooperation with Azerbaijan in the energy sector and defense collaboration, as well as the strategic partnership with Georgia, underline Turkey's efforts to solidify its presence and influence in the South Caucasus. By engaging in joint infrastructure projects, security cooperation, and diplomatic initiatives, Turkey aims to advance its strategic interests and position itself as a key player in shaping the region's geopolitical landscape.



Through a comprehensive geopolitical analysis, it becomes evident that Turkey's multifaceted engagement in the South Caucasus is driven by a combination of strategic imperatives, economic interests, security considerations, and historical ties.

Moreover, the potential for energy cooperation between Turkey and the South Caucasus countries, particularly Azerbaijan and Georgia, holds significant promise for mutual economic benefits, energy security, and regional integration. Several key factors contribute to the potential for enhanced energy collaboration in the region, encompassing infrastructure projects, natural resource reserves, and geopolitical considerations. [3]

Firstly, the strategic location of the South Caucasus region, specifically Azerbaijan, as a key energy producer, presents opportunities for energy cooperation with Turkey. Azerbaijan's substantial hydrocarbon reserves, including oil and natural gas, make it an important player in the global energy market. The proximity of Azerbaijan to Turkey offers the potential for the development of energy corridors, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) gas pipeline, which have already established critical energy links between the two countries.

Secondly, Turkey's growing energy demand and its goal to diversify its energy sources create a conducive environment for collaboration with South Caucasus countries. As Turkey seeks to reduce its reliance on a limited number of suppliers and transit routes, the availability of Azerbaijani gas and the potential for additional gas supplies from the South Caucasus, including the development of new energy infrastructure and interconnections, can significantly contribute to Turkey's energy security objectives.

Moreover, the development of new energy projects and infrastructure, such as the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC), presents opportunities for deeper energy cooperation between Turkey and the South Caucasus. The SGC, comprising the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), aims to transport natural gas from the Caspian Sea to Europe, with Turkey serving as a key transit country. This project not only enhances regional energy connectivity but also positions Turkey as a pivotal hub for energy transit and trade, strengthening its role in the broader European energy landscape.

From a geopolitical perspective, energy cooperation between Turkey and the South Caucasus countries contributes to regional stability and fosters economic interdependence. By building energy partnerships, enhancing infrastructure connectivity, and promoting joint energy projects, the countries in the region can bolster their economic ties, mitigate geopolitical risks, and contribute to the overall stability and development of the South Caucasus.

Additionally, the potential for renewable energy cooperation, including hydropower and wind energy, presents avenues for broader energy collaboration between Turkey and the South Caucasus countries. As the global energy landscape evolves toward greater sustainability and renewable energy sources, exploring joint initiatives in the renewable energy sector could further deepen energy cooperation and contribute to shared environmental goals.

Furthermore, the existing institutional frameworks and agreements, such as the Energy Charter Treaty and bilateral energy agreements, provide a basis for fostering closer energy

ties between Turkey and the South Caucasus countries. By leveraging these mechanisms and exploring opportunities for regulatory alignment, investment facilitation, and technology transfer, the countries can create an enabling environment for sustained energy cooperation. [7]

In conclusion, the potential for energy cooperation between Turkey and the South Caucasus countries is underpinned by the convergence of energy interests, infrastructure development, regional interconnectivity, and geopolitical imperatives. By capitalizing on these opportunities, the countries can strengthen their energy security, enhance economic integration, and contribute to the stability and prosperity of the broader region.

Recognizing the mutual benefits of energy collaboration, efforts to deepen cooperation in the energy sector can serve as a catalyst for broader economic and strategic engagement between Turkey and the South Caucasus countries, aligning with the shared goal of fostering sustainable and mutually beneficial partnerships.

As a result, an in-depth examination of the region's geopolitical significance for Turkey provides valuable insights into the complexities of Turkey's foreign policy priorities, regional aspirations, and its evolving role in shaping the dynamics of the South Caucasus.

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