



Turkish Media's Role in Armenian-Turkish Relations*

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The complex and evolving relationship between Armenia and Turkey stands as a critical flashpoint in the modern Eurasian geopolitical landscape, with repercussions stretching beyond their borders. This study endeavors to fill a gap in the existing literature by examining how Turkish media influences public perception and communicates foreign policy objectives, particularly in the aftermath of the Third Artsakh War and the ongoing reconciliation process. This study is Undertaking an extensive analysis of the Turkish English-language press discourse surrounding the Armenian-Turkish conflict. Special attention is devoted to specific discourses such as the Artsakh problem and the “Zangezur corridor.” By closely scrutinizing media narratives, this section aims to provide invaluable insights into how the Turkish press portrays and molds the narrative surrounding the conflict. The findings of this research contribute to a deeper understanding of how media discourse shapes public policies and perceptions, impacting the diplomatic and geopolitical landscape in the region. The study sheds light on the complex interplay between media representation, foreign policy objectives, and the intricacies of post-war reconciliation efforts. Ultimately, the research underscores the pivotal role of media in the Armenian-Turkish conflict's broader geopolitical context, where regional and global players are deeply entwined.

[Key Words: Turkey-Armenia relations, media analysis, post-soviet transformation, Artsakh problem, Zangezur corridor]

* This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea(NRF-2023S1A5A2A03085570).

I . Introduction

One of the most critical flashpoints in the modern Eurasian geopolitical landscape, especially in the post-Soviet area undergoing transformation, is the complex relationship between Armenia and Turkey. This issue has far-reaching implications beyond just the two nations, with events in the region influencing various geopolitical players. The situation remains complex even after the Artsakh (Karabakh) war of 2020, where Armenia and Turkey are engaged in an indirect conflict while attempting a reconciliation dialogue. This conflict involves not only regional actors but also has a global dimension, with numerous international players involved. As M. Kamrava points out, a “new Great Game” is unfolding in Eurasia (Kamrava 2017).

Despite its relevance and significant coverage in international and local media, there have been limited attempts to explore the Armenian-Turkish conflict in a broader geopolitical context and to comprehensively study its dynamics, particularly in the post-war period. While there is some literature on the diplomatic aspects, little has been done to analyze how mainstream discourses on both sides shape state and public policies. This topic gains further importance due to the active nature of the Armenian-Turkish conflict in the post-Soviet area, affecting several sub-regions, including the Middle East, the Caucasus, Eastern Europe, and the Black Sea region. The involvement of almost all global players directly or indirectly makes the Armenian-Turkish conflict a significant concern. For instance, the Zurich Process in 2008-2009, where Switzerland mediated between the two countries aimed at the establishment of diplomatic relations and bilateral protocols, involved participation from various countries, including the US, France, and the EU.

This research aims to focus on media analysis, given the increasing significance of media worldwide, including in Turkey. The study seeks to

explore how Turkish media reflects the country's foreign policy objectives and effectively communicates them to the public. Notably, there is a lack of studies on these aspects and their impact on Armenian-Turkish relations, particularly in the aftermath of the Third Artsakh War and the ongoing reconciliation process between the two countries.

The article is divided into six sections. After the introduction, the second section includes a literature review on the role of media in shaping public opinion. The following section delves into the current stage of Armenian-Turkish relations post the Third Artsakh War, examining ongoing negotiations. It provides a comprehensive analysis of post-war dynamics and the trajectory of relations within this specific context. Section 4 describes the 2023 war and section 5 delves into the media analysis. By closely examining media discourse, this article aims to provide valuable insights into how the Turkish press portrays and shapes the narrative surrounding the Armenian-Turkish conflict.

II. Literature Review

In order to comprehensively analyze the media, particularly the Turkish media, it is crucial to grasp its role and influence within society. This entails understanding how the media shapes public opinion, influences societal sentiments, and contributes to the dissemination and amplification of specific discourses. The media has the power to sway public perception, shape narratives, and influence the collective consciousness of a society. It acts as a platform for the exchange of information, ideas, and perspectives, and plays a significant role in shaping the social, political, and cultural landscape. The media plays a significant role in shaping and framing public discourse, acting as an intermediary between politicians and the public. However, there

remains ongoing debate and no definitive consensus regarding the exact nature and extent of the media's influence in this regard. The media, serving as the primary connection between leaders and the public, play a central role in the foreign policy marketplace. The conventional conveyor-belt analogy fails to capture the true nature of this link. Within the framework of the marketplace, the media can be better described as intermediaries or information traders. They navigate a delicate position, as they are accountable to two actors with divergent interests: leaders and the public. The media depend on leaders to obtain access to information, which is the vital commodity in the market (Baum & Potter 2008).

In order to grasp the present state of the media in Turkey, it is essential to delve into the events that have unfolded in recent years, particularly since 2016. The distinction between the pre-2016 and post-2016 periods has brought about a substantial transformation in the media landscape. In Turkey, the majority of media outlets are owned by prominent business conglomerates. These entities initially entered the media industry during the 1980s, a period marked by a military coup and the rise of neoliberal economic policies. Representatives of the growing neoliberal economy, including influential businessmen like Aidyn Dogan, began acquiring newspapers and commercial TV channels. However, their primary objective was not to generate profits but rather to secure favorable treatment from the authorities through their media holdings, which would facilitate the expansion of their core business operations. This arrangement entailed providing positive media coverage of the government that supported them while downplaying or suppressing criticism.

The shift in Turkish media landscape occurred during a crucial period, departing from the previous dominance of "journalist families" who, despite their affiliations with authorities or centers of power, possessed journalistic backgrounds and professional expertise (Geghamyan 2018). This

transformation coincided with the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power in 2002. In the initial phase, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his associates leveraged the media networks associated with Fethullah Gülen, which proved successful in disseminating their perspectives. Notably, the daily newspaper “Zaman”, owned by the Gülen movement, enjoyed the highest circulation in Turkey during that time and served as a primary platform for promoting the government’s agenda (Geghamyan 2018).

However, starting from the 2010s, as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the AKP consolidated their authoritarian aspirations and openly pursued unilateral power, they began targeting the Turkish press. Gradually, media resources shifted towards business companies that maintained close relationships with Erdoğan and his associates. Over time, Erdoğan managed to exert direct and indirect control over approximately two-thirds of the Turkish media. This control involved not only altering the editorial policies of previously opposition-oriented publications but also suppressing, imprisoning, deporting, and shutting down media outlets led by dissenting journalists and editors.

This environment became even more restrictive after 2013 when the entire media network affiliated with Fethullah Gülen came under government control due to the conflict with the Gülenists. The situation further intensified in 2016 with the implementation of a state of emergency following the attempted military coup (Geghamyan 2018). Instances of self-censorship have been documented, and even the opportunities provided by the internet for free expression have proven inadequate in countering this trend. Turkish authorities have implemented stringent controls over the internet, closely monitoring online traffic on platforms like Twitter and Facebook through an extensive network of trolls and users.¹⁾

1) The Turkish Interior Ministry reports that over 400 individuals who posted messages criticizing the Turkish military operation in Afrin were arrested on charges of “online terrorism” (Geghamyan 2018).

III. The Third Artsakh War and Regional Order

The Third Artsakh War started on September 27, 2020, with Azerbaijan's "Iron Fist" operation the "stars" of which became Israeli "Harop" and Turkish "Bayraktar" TB2 drones. Cities like Stepanakert and Shushi were targeted, with the St. Ghazanchetsots Cathedral bombed twice. "Human Rights Watch" (2020) documented indiscriminate weapons use. The war ended on November 9, with Azerbaijan gaining 75% of Artsakh, including seven adjacent territories. A Trilateral Statement between the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia was signed. The agreement included Russian peacekeepers stationed in Artsakh for five years, extendable if no objections arise. Armenian forces were obliged to withdraw, leaving a geographically isolated area with compromised viability. Territorial changes extended beyond Nagorno-Karabakh and its surrounding districts, including the territory of the former Soviet autonomy, such as Hadrut, Martuni, and Martakert. Nevertheless, displaced population showed resilience by returning after hostilities ceased.

The Trilateral Statement allowed uninterrupted Lachin corridor traffic until a new highway's construction within 3 years. However, Azerbaijan violated the agreement by blockading the corridor and forcing displacement of the people of Artsakh, creating a humanitarian crisis.

The Turkish-Azerbaijani alliance was strengthened with the "Declaration of Partnership" signed in June 2021 in Shushi, acknowledging Turkey's support during the Third Nagorno-Karabakh War. The declaration includes increased military cooperation, improving the East-West transport corridor, and the "Zangezur Corridor," aimed to unblock transportation routes between Azerbaijan and Nakhijevan, letting the the two sides to take joint actions for the sustainable development of the Turkic world (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan 2021).

The so-called “Zangezur Corridor” refers to clause 9 of the Trilateral Statement (President of Russia 2020), aimed to unblock transportation routes in the region, including those connecting Azerbaijan and Nakhijevan. Additionally, it was specified that these routes would be monitored by the Border Service of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB). Thus, it becomes apparent that the above-mentioned corridor is not simply a road passing through the territory of the RA but has an extraterritorial nature. However Armenian authorities dispute the corridor’s nature.

After the Third Artsakh War, Armenia lost both military and diplomatic security zones. The issue of Nagorno-Karabakh’s status (read self-determination) is no longer on the table, and the Trilateral Statement’s context for negotiations has changed due to Armenia’s recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan during several trilateral meetings in Brussels between Azerbaijan’s President, the EU President, and Armenia’s Prime Minister. Many officials in Armenia and Artsakh still inertially refer to the Trilateral Statement of November 9, but in fact it is no longer valid. From this point, the recent statement by Russian Foreign Ministry is notable, where is noted that Armenia’s recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan during EU summits in October 2022 and May 2023 has significantly altered the conditions of the November 9, 2020 Statement signed by Russia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia leaders. The Russian peacekeeping contingent’s position in the region is also affected by this development (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2023).

Frequent trilateral meetings in Brussels diminished the Artsakh issue’s importance, with terms like “Nagorno-Karabakh”, “Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh,” and “People of Nagorno-Karabakh” replaced by “ethnic Armenian population in Karabakh” (European Council 2022). Recent meetings in Brussels affirmed Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity, including Artsakh (86.6 thousand sq/km based on Almaty declaration) (European Council 2023). Along with this the consequences of the humanitarian crisis, war crimes of

Azerbaijani side are remaining open; it's enough to mention that many prisoners of war from the Armenian side still remain in Azerbaijan, while the Armenian side returned all Azerbaijani POWs right after the signing of the truce.

IV. Artsakh fully under Azerbaijani occupation 3 years after the Third Artsakh war: Ethnic cleansing and forced displacement

On September 19, Azerbaijani forces breached the Artsakh ceasefire, launching rocket strikes that damaged both military positions and civilian infrastructure, including Stepanakert, the capital of Artsakh. They used drones, military aircraft, and various weapons to attack Martakert and villages of Askeran, targeting buildings, schools, and vehicles, even though no military facilities or equipment were present (Artsakh Defense Army 2023).

Intense frontline combat accompanied UAV, missile, and artillery strikes (NKR InfoCenter 2023). Azerbaijan framed these actions as “anti-terrorist operations,” labeling Artsakh authorities as “separatists.” The Armenian Prime Minister’s recognition of Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity, including Artsakh (European Council 2023), in Brussels served as an impetus for the war. Consequently, three years after the 2020 Third Artsakh War, Azerbaijan has fully occupied and depopulated Artsakh.

After enduring a nine-month blockade and receiving no support from the Republic of Armenia during the war, Artsakh authorities, on September 21 in Yevlakh, negotiated with Russian mediation, ultimately capitulating to Azerbaijani demands. Alongside addressing wounded and humanitarian concern, these “agreements” involved withdrawing Artsakh Defense Army units from combat positions, disbanding the army, and initiating political

consultations on Artsakh's future and its people.

The Armenian side reports at least 200 killed and 400 wounded, with 18 civilians, including 6 children, among the casualties (NKR InfoCenter 2023).

Over 120,000 Artsakh residents (hence the entire population) faced forced displacement, indicating ethnic cleansing. Hate speech on Azerbaijani social media during the war worsened the insecurity faced by Artsakh Armenians, where information on missing residents was shared, accompanied by bounties ("Tatoyan" foundation 2023). Throughout the conflict, hate speech against Armenians in Azerbaijan remained consistently high.

As a result of the September 19-20 war, Azerbaijan abducted and illegally detained military and political leaders of Artsakh, soldiers and civilians. It is important to mention that Azerbaijan had a pre-prepared "black list" of Artsakh officials and military figures. Several individuals from this list, including Russian-Armenian businessman and former Artsakh State Minister Ruben Vardanyan, former Deputy Commander of the Artsakh Armed Forces Davit Manukyan, former Commander of the Armed Forces Levon Mnatsakanyan, former Artsakh Foreign Minister David Babayan, former Presidents of the Republic of Artsakh Arkadi Ghukasyan, Bako Sahakyan, Arayik Harutyunyan and President of the Parliament Davit Ishkhanyan were abducted and illegally detained.

According to Azerbaijan's Prosecutor General Kyamran Aliyev, Azerbaijani side has created a joint investigation group in the Prosecutor General's Office, which is conducting fake investigations related to Armenian detainees (Elçin 2023).

Crucially, Turkey provided unwavering support during the 2020 and 2023 wars, with top officials openly expressing enthusiasm and assuring Azerbaijan of their backing in the war. Since the beginning of the war, the Turkish Minister of Defense (Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Azerbaijan 2023) and the Chief of General Staff (Ministry of Defense of the Republic of

Azerbaijan 2023) have spoken to their counterparts in Azerbaijan and expressed full support for Azerbaijan in the war.

The second significant development was the intensification of the discourse surrounding the so-called “Zangezur corridor,” both officially and in the media. Following the complete occupation of Artsakh, Turkey and Azerbaijan embarked on a crucial mission: establishing a connection between Nakhichevan and mainland Azerbaijan. This linkage aims to provide Turkey direct access to the Caspian Sea basin and Central Asia. On September 25, the presidents of Turkey and Azerbaijan met in Nakhijevan, where they laid the Nakhijevan-Igdir gas pipeline, a component of the corridor (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan 2023). The project encompasses not only a highway but also railroads and gas pipelines.

It’s spectacular how “Forbes” (Kaylan 2023) highlights a changing geopolitics with Central Asia’s rise post-Afghan war, emphasizing the “Middle Corridor” connecting Turkic nations, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, and Turkey. Accordingly, Armenia is seen as an obstacle, and this initiative could challenge Iran, Russia, China, and Armenia as well. Thus, the corridor’s significance extends beyond Turkey, attracting countries aiming to counterbalance Iran and China, such as the US and the EU.

Azerbaijan is currently asserting a claim to populate 300 Armenian settlements, indicating territorial ambitions (“Tatoyan” foundation 2023). This aligns with the illegal organization of the “Community of Western Azerbaijan,” backed by the state, implying claims over several regions in Armenia. At the UN General Assembly on September 23, the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister reiterated intentions for the so-called “resettlement” of Azerbaijani citizens in Armenia (Abbasova 2023).

The issue of the return of Artsakh Armenians to their land remains suspended, as Azerbaijan’s policy of ethnic cleansing and clearly expressed Armenophobia poses a threat to the population of Artsakh, and therefore

there are currently no guarantees of security for Artsakh Armenians.

Azerbaijan's so-called "anti-terrorist" justification for ethnic cleansing mirrors Turkey's actions in Iraq and Syria. Turkey has invaded inside the recognized borders of both Iraq and Syria under the pretext of "fighting terrorism". The danger lies in setting a precedent where Turkey's actions may extend to Armenia.

V. Coverage of Armenian-Turkish relations in Turkey's English-language media 2020-2023

This section is dedicated to the analysis of Turkey's English-language media. Selection of media as a target of this research aims at discovering discourse construction for local and foreign audiences. To this end materials from the Turkish state and pro-government mainstream English-language media have been chosen. Among these news outlets, there is one state agency ("Anadolu Ajans 1 /Agency") and two pro-government agencies ("Daily Sabah" and "Hürriyet Daily News"). It is spectacular somehow that "Hürriyet Daily News" is positioning itself as a "liberal media", but in fact it is totally under state control. We will divide into 2 subchapters according to the discourse points of Armenian-Turkish, so-called, reconciliation-Artsakh issue, "Zangezur corridor".

1. Artsakh issue

When referring to Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) a wording like "*territorial integrity of Azerbaijan*", territory "*liberated by Baku*" or "*liberated from Armenian occupation*" is frequently used in all articles of all the three news agencies. A more vivid image can be seen in the following citations from

“Daily Sabah”: “We find the recent statements of Armenia **positive**, they say that they are ready to recognize the **territorial integrity of Azerbaijan**. Statements on mutual recognition are positive, we support this”, Çavuşoğlu said at an event in Antalya (Aydoğan 2023).

*“In 2020, Azerbaijan **liberated areas that Armenia had illegally occupied in and around the mountain enclave**” (“Armenia will accept Karabakh”, 2023). Or “Most of the territory was **liberated by Baku** during a war in the fall of 2020 which ended after a **Russian-brokered peace agreement** and opened the door to normalization” (“Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Armenia normalization”, 2023).*

The same pattern can be watched in case of 2 other news agencies. Here is an example from “Hurriyet Daily News”: “Çavuşoğlu also again congratulated Azerbaijan on the first anniversary of its **victory in the Nagorno-Karabakh region**, which previously had been under **Armenian occupation** for 28 years” (“Turkic grouping to change its name”, 2021). “Speaking at the foreign ministers’ meeting one day before the summit on Friday in Istanbul, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov hailed **Turkey’s high-level political and moral support for Azerbaijan in its victory in the Second Karabakh War**” (“Turkic grouping to change its name”, 2021).

*“The minister underlined that Azerbaijan believed that **with the assistance of Turkey** and other friendly countries, the reconstruction process of the **liberated territories** would allow the **displaced Azerbaijani population to return to their homelands**” (Erkuş 2021).*

A similar wording is also used in articles of “Anadolu Agency”: “While the first one has more or less been resolved, with **Azerbaijan regaining its lands in 2020** after three decades of Armenian occupation, the second one “has proven far more difficult to surmount, as it is a deeply emotional and sensitive topic for both sides,” said Akar” (Çakmak 2023).

*"Relations between the two former Soviet republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan have been tense since 1991, when the **Armenian military occupied Nagorno-Karabakh**, a territory internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, and seven adjacent regions.*

*In the fall of 2020, in 44 days of clashes, **Azerbaijan liberated several cities, villages and settlements from Armenian occupation. The Russian-brokered peace agreement is celebrated as a triumph in Azerbaijan**" (Eruygur 2023).*

The back of the article is always supplemented by this or a similar paragraph, and this tendency is also characteristic of all three news outlets. We can observe a similar example in the other two news outlets, where the conclusion of the article is made with similar lines. For example, in the "Daily Sabah" news, the following lines are most often found at the end of articles on related topics: *"New clashes erupted on Sept. 27, 2020, and the 44-day conflict saw **Azerbaijan liberate** several cities and over 300 settlements and villages that were **occupied by Armenia** for almost three decades"*

A tripartite agreement was brokered by Russia to bring an end to the war in November 2020" (Özler 2022).

"Turkey was a key backer of Azerbaijan during the 44-day war" ("Turkey ratifies bill on Shusha Declaration", 2022).

Thus, we can see that the materials are presented not only in a similar wording, but also in a similar style, which forms a certain narrative about the conflict in the reader's mind. From the highlighted parts basic units of the discourse can be identified. Those are *"Armenia... occupied"*, *"Azerbaijan liberated"*. *"Assistance of Turkey"* is also emphasized, thus underlining Turkey's indirect involvement and the fact that it is the main beneficiary of the Third Artsakh War. This line can be observed in following citations as well: *"During the phone call, President Erdoğan noted that **Azerbaijan's victory in Nagorno-Karabakh**, which was won following a great struggle, created new opportunities for regional peace and stability, and said that*

Turkey will continue to support and contribute to Azerbaijan, in all areas, in this new period,” read a statement by the Presidential Communications Directorate late January 17 (“Turkish, Azerbaijani leaders discuss”, 2021).

“Azerbaijanis celebrated the signing of a deal early Tuesday ending the longstanding conflict over Upper Karabakh, also known as Nagorno-Karabakh.

They took to the streets after President Ilham Aliyev described the agreement reached to halt fighting over the region as the defeat of Armenia...

*“Azerbaijan and Turkey are **one nation with two states.**”*

*“Thank you very much. **Turkey and Azerbaijan are brothers.** We have won together”* (Rehimov & Ozkan 2020).

*“Following the war over Karabakh in which **Türkiye supported Azerbaijan against Armenia,** Turkish-Armenian relations have entered a new phase, with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan saying **Türkiye is ready for dialogue** with Armenia. **Azerbaijan also supports the process**”* (“Türkiye, Armenia to reopen”, 2023).

*“Similar to how **Türkiye helped Azerbaijan liberate its Karabakh region** from three decades of **illegal Armenian occupation** and transformed itself into an energy hub straddling the east and the west, **Türkiye will also bolster its transport infrastructure with Azerbaijan.** Erdoğan elucidated”* (“Erdoğan slams continued PKK”, 2023).

Calling the Artsakh authorities “separatists” is also part of the Turkish-Azerbaijani discourse on Artsakh. Here are several such examples: *“In this regard, at the beginning of April, the central administration of Azerbaijan twice invited the residents of Karabakh to Baku to discuss any problems openly, but they refused to come. Some **separatist groups** living in Karabakh have captured the will of the people and want negotiations to continue only through the Russian peacekeepers.*

*However, Azerbaijan is **strongly opposed to a third party** in the process of reintegration of the Armenians of Karabakh, whom it defines as its own*

citizens" (Veliyev 2023).

*"The truce allowed Azerbaijan to reclaim control over large parts of Karabakh and surrounding areas that the **Armenia-backed separatists controlled**" ("Mother of deceased Armenian", 2023).*

*"**Armenian separatists** in Nagorno-Karabakh broke away from Azerbaijan as the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, and the ensuing conflict has claimed around 30,000 lives" ("Turkey ready to reciprocate", 2021).*

*"The region's **separatist leader Arayik Harutyunyan** called on those who had fled to come back and not to take part in protests, saying the ceasefire was justified" ("Anger mounts in Armenia", 2020).*

"...The checkpoint established by Azerbaijan will not create obstacles for civilians.

*Baku said it cannot turn a blind eye to Armenia's constant **supplying of weapons and manpower to separatists** during the beginning of the return of **internally displaced persons**, including to the Lachin district" (Amuyeva & Abdullayev 2023).*

Another point worth noting is the use of the expression "**internally displaced persons**", by which Azerbaijan refers to the Azerbaijani population, once residing in Artsakh. By actively replicating this thesis, Azerbaijan also speaks about the "**great return**", which, in fact, expresses not only the so-called return of Azerbaijan to Nagorno-Karabakh, but also the plans of the Azerbaijani side to settle the occupied territories. However, there is an important circumstance. Azerbaijanis have never been a majority in Artsakh, and the scale that the Azerbaijani president talks about is exaggerated and false. It is also important to know the historical context of how Azerbaijanis gradually expanded in the region, while the Armenian population, on the contrary, decreased. If in 1921 Armenians made up 94.4% of the population of the region, then according to the data of 1930 this figure was 83.1% (Khojabekyan 1991). In 1923, when Autonomous Region of Nagorno-Karabakh was formed, its population was

157.3 thousand people, including 149.6 thousand Armenians and 7.7 thousand Azerbaijanis. In other words, Armenians were the majority. In 1989, a new census was held in Nagorno-Karabakh on January 12. According to census data the population was 189,1 thousand people, of which 145,5 thousand, or 76.9% Armenians (Danielyan 1989), 40,7 thousand, or 21.5% Azerbaijanis. As can be seen from the data, during the years when Nagorno-Karabakh was an autonomy within Soviet Azerbaijan, the percentage of the Azerbaijani population increased from 4.9 to 21.5, and the percentage of the Armenian population decreased from 94.8 to 76.9 (Mayilyan 2011). In other words, even during the Soviet years it was obvious that Artsakh could not remain Armenian within Azerbaijan. Repressions against Artsakh Armenians led to a significant decrease in the Armenian population of Artsakh over 68 years. Nothing has changed since then, moreover everything has got even worse with the rising level of anti-Armenian sentiments and Armenophobia in Azerbaijan. This is a clear sign that leaving Artsakh within Azerbaijan will bring a new disaster for people of Artsakh.

The thesis of the “*great return*” can also be applied to the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia, regarding which Azerbaijan expresses its ambitions, creating a fictitious organization called the “West Azerbaijani Community” and claiming the current territory of the Republic of Armenia as “historical Azerbaijan”. One of the tenets of this organization is “the return of Azerbaijanis formerly residing in the territory of the Republic of Armenia to their places of residence,” from which they had once allegedly been “evicted”. Here are a few similar quotes from the press: “*The opening ceremonies, which featured the recitation of the Surah Al-Fath, also reminded participants of Karabakh’s return to Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijani victory. The region, which was liberated from Armenian occupation and, subsequently, land mines, currently witnesses a rapid development drive. As part of Azerbaijan’s “Great Return” project, the government has been building*

infrastructure including highways, railways, airports and smart cities" (Duran 2022).

*"The ambassador pointed out that the **great victory** has given the **internally displaced** compatriots a "chance to return to their native lands..." (Aliyev 2022).*

*"After 44 days of the **Patriotic War**, the first task of our state was to prepare for the **great return**, to restore our cities and villages that were plundered and destroyed under the enemy occupation for 30 years," Mammadov said* ("Opening of Zangezur corridor", 2022).

*"The envoy underlined that "important work" is being done to ensure **the great return** to the **liberated territories**.. "We hope that the work done to restore the region will be completed soon and our **compatriots who have been displaced for more than 30 years will return to their lands**", Mammadov said* (Aliyev 2022).

It is noteworthy that in order to emphasize the "sacredness" of the war and the resulting victory, Azerbaijan refers to it as a "**patriotic war**," an expression also widely used in the Turkish press. In turn, the Armenian side is called a "total defeater" in order to show their dominant and more advantageous position at the negotiating table: *"The symposium was held by the Parliamentary Assembly of and Atatürk Center in Azerbaijan to mark the 30th year of independence of Turkic republics, Azerbaijan's victory in the **Patriotic War**..."* ("Zangezur corridor, important result", 2021).

*"History is rich with examples of achievements gained through Turkish states' support to each other," she said, highlighting Ankara's support to Baku during the **Patriotic War** last year* ("Zangezur corridor, important result", 2021).

*"On Nov. 8, Azerbaijan celebrated Victory Day on the first anniversary of the liberation of Shusha (Shushi-ed.), **the pearl of Karabakh**, which played a crucial role in the fate of the **Patriotic War**", Mammadov* ("Zangezur, Lachin corridors", 2021).

2. Zangezur Corridor

Clause 9 of the Trilateral Statement (President of the Russian Federation 2020), endorsed by the leaders of Armenia, Russia, and Azerbaijan, outlined the intention to unblock all transportation routes within the region, including those connecting Azerbaijan and Nakhijevan. Additionally, it was specified that these routes would be monitored by the Border Service of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB). While the statement does not explicitly define the nature of these routes as a corridor, signifying unimpeded transport without customs inspections, Azerbaijan endeavors to interpret this provision as such. On the other hand, Armenia, at least in its public stance, refutes this particular interpretation (The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia 2021).

In this regard Turkish media also mentions the reluctance of Armenian government about mentioning the term “corridor”: *“Pashinian claimed following opening remarks at the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council that Aliyev’s statements on Baku’s initiation of the creation of the Zangezur corridor were “an expression” used to put forward territorial claims against Armenia.*

The Zangezur region was part of Azerbaijan, though the Soviets gave it to Armenia in the 1920s, leaving Azerbaijan deprived of its direct overland route to Nakhchivan” (“Azerbaijan, Armenia seek peace”, 2023).

“Armenia should put an end to false excuses to evade its commitments to link the Zangezur corridor and roads/railways, according to the tripartite declaration signed in November 2020,” the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry said in a statement” (“Azerbaijan rejects Armenia’s alternative”, 2022).

It’s very important to note, that in most of the cases the back of articles about “Zangezur corridor” has the following content: **“Zangezur was part of Azerbaijan,** but in the 1920s, the Soviets gave the region to Armenia. After

this move, **Azerbaijan lost its link with Nakhchivan** and some parts of the railway between the two countries were destroyed”.

As in case of Artsakh here again attempts are made to claim historical rights to the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia. Most commonly we can meet those examples in the articles of “Daily Sabah” which is famous for its nationalistic rhetoric. Here are few more examples: *“It also noted that ignoring previous negotiations between the two countries and proposing three “unrealistic” checkpoint options to connect Azerbaijan to its western exclave Nakhchivan is “not a good policy”.*

Zangezur was part of Azerbaijan, but in the 1920s, the Soviets gave the region to Armenia. After this move, Azerbaijan lost its link with Nakhchivan and some parts of the railway between the two countries were destroyed (“Azerbaijan rejects Armenia’s alternative”, 2022).

*“Today a part of southern Armenia bordering Iran, **Zangezur, is the only connection between Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. The territory was part of Azerbaijan until the Soviets gave it to Armenia in the 1920s and severed Baku’s link with Nakhchivan**”* (“Azerbaijan secures key point”, 2023).

“We will achieve this despite the CHP chair who overlooks Karabakh and the Zangezur Corridor just to look cute for certain people,” he (Erdogan-ed.) said.

Azerbaijan has focused on projects in the Zangezur corridor, which will include highways and rail lines stretching across territories in Armenia’s Syunik region” (“Zangezur corridor, important result”, 2021).

*“One of the most important aspects of the **Zangezur corridor is that it will connect the Turkic world. Thus, the geography of the torn Turkic world will be connected** with transport and logistics projects... **Zangezur was part of Azerbaijan, but in the 1920s, the Soviets gave the region to Armenia. After this move, Azerbaijan lost its direct overland route with Nakhchivan**”*

(“Opening of Zangezur corridor”, 2022).

“The history of the last century clearly shows that the Soviet government cut off Zangezur, the historical region of Azerbaijan, in 1920 and gave it to Armenia. Therefore, if Armenia claims a status for Armenians in Karabakh, why shouldn’t Azerbaijan claim a status for Azerbaijanis from West Zangezur?” Aliyev asked, underlining that Azerbaijanis have lived over a wide geography” (Rehimov 2022).

One of the most important parts of Turkish discourse regarding “Zangezur Corridor” is that it *“will connect the Turkic world”*. The main objective of building this corridor is the connection between Turkey with Turkic countries of Central Asia. In a narrower context, the priority is given to connecting Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan, but in a broader context, Turkey’s land connection with Azerbaijan is crucial, through which it would have access to the Caspian Basin and thence to Central Asia. Let’s observe some examples of paragraphs from outlets: *“Today a part of southern Armenia bordering Iran, Zangezur, is the only connection between Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. The territory was part of Azerbaijan until the Soviets gave it to Armenia in the 1920s and severed Baku’s link with Nakhchivan”* (“Azerbaijan secures key point”, 2023).

“The corridor would establish a land connection between Azerbaijan and historic ally Türkiye, allowing Ankara to open into Central Asian Turkic states and even Russia” (“Azerbaijan secures key point”, 2023).

“Turkey cares deeply about the realization of the Zangezur corridor that will connect Nakhchivan to Azerbaijan, which is followed closely by the Azerbaijani administration as well... This corridor allows Turkey to be connected with Azerbaijan and the rest of the Central Asian Turkic Republics via a land route, said Şentop” (“Turkey’s parliament speaker”, 2021).

“Baku and Ankara have pressed actively for the reopening of a historic land link uniting Azerbaijan with its exclave of Nakhchivan and further on to

Turkey via Armenia's Syunik province, as stipulated in last November's cease-fire agreement.

*Russia has supported plans to reopen land communications but **shares Armenia's rejection of the corridor*** ("Azerbaijan calls for starting demarcation", 2021).

*"Erdoğan also stressed the importance of **the Zangezur corridor**, which will give Azerbaijan unimpeded access to the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic, and said the corridor would **establish a direct highway connection between Turkey and the region**" ("Afghan economy needs to be revived", 2021).*

*"The corridor- set to be built in the wake of last year's Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, in which Azerbaijan liberated some 300 settlements from Armenian occupation- is set to **connect western Azerbaijan to its autonomous exclave of Nakhchivan**" ("Turkic grouping to change its name", 2021).*

*"Azerbaijan continues intensively the construction of a railway that will pass through **the Zangezur corridor**.*

*Once constructed, **the corridor will connect Azerbaijan's western provinces and Nakhchivan via Armenia, further stretching to China, Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, the Caucasus and Türkiye**" (Rehimov 2023).*

*"Aliyev also noted that the **Zangezur corridor**, which envisions a connection between Azerbaijan and its autonomous region of Nakhchivan through Armenia, was not just an economic and transportation project, but a **strategic one as well**.*

*"The realization of this project was also reflected in the trilateral statement of Nov. 10, 2020. True, there is no word '**Zangezur corridor**' in it because I included the term in the geopolitical lexicon afterwards. However, it is explicitly stated there that there should be a **transport connection between the western regions of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, and Armenia should provide it.**" he said" (Eruygur 2023).*

Currently, Azerbaijan's main communication with Nakhijevan (as well as

with Turkey) goes through Iran and Georgia, which creates additional dependence on these countries for Baku. In the case of Iran, which borders with Nakhijevan (about 164 km), this situation provides Tehran with additional leverage on both Azerbaijan and Turkey. Given the prevailing circumstances, guaranteeing uninterrupted communication with Nakhijevan emerges as a paramount imperative within the domain of state governance and risk management for the Azerbaijani leadership. This is also mentioned in the 9th clause of the Trilateral statement of November 9, 2020, which includes not only “*unblocking all the economic and transport communications in the region*” and “*guaranteeing security of transport communication between the western regions*” of Azerbaijan and Nakhijevan, but also implies “*construction of new transport communications linking the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic with the western regions of Azerbaijan*”.

Here are the vivid examples from Turkish media: “*Iranian officials consider the opening of the Zangezur Corridor, which will connect the Nakhchivan region with mainland Azerbaijan, as a detrimental development for Iran. The corridor will alternatively make a great contribution to Azerbaijan, since Turkey will now have a direct communication link with its kin states in Central Asia. In other words, Turkey will no longer be dependent on Iranian territory to reach the Central Asian republics. Therefore, Iran strongly rejects the opening of this corridor, which will provide a strategic advantage to both Azerbaijan and Turkey*” (Ataman 2021).

“*Iran... anticipates that with the opening of the Zangezur corridor, its connection to the Black Sea will be prevented since its link with Armenia will be removed. This situation is considered a border change and geostrategic regression to Iran’s detriment*” (Ketenci 2022).

“*Iran began to oppose the Zangezur corridor because of the idea that it would cut off its connection with the South Caucasus. Even though Aliyev announced several times that Iran could also benefit from this corridor, the*

Iranian side did not take this into account" (Veliyev 2021). As mentioned above, the main beneficiary of this policy in the region is Turkey which has been pursuing the goal of uniting with Turkic world since the beginning of the 20th century. By endorsing the idea of establishing a Turkic state within South Caucasus through political and military means, the Ottoman leadership aimed not only to secure a stronghold against Russia and Iran in the South Caucasus but also to establish a strategic foothold for expanding its influence across the wider periphery, encompassing the Iranian Plateau, North Caucasus, and Central Asia. Within Turkish/Ottoman political ideology, all these sub-regions were (and continue to be) perceived as integral components of the Turkic world, which Turkey should unify under its own auspices as a sphere of influence. In other words, this is the prominent policy of "Pan-Turkism" which has grown into "neo-Osmanism" in the 21st century.

That's the reason behind the statements of the Turkish authorities who claim about strategic importance of the "Zangezur corridor". The Turkish media, naturally, by repeating those statements shapes this discourse and keeps it alive for the public: "*A key **corridor connecting contiguous Azerbaijani territory to its exclave of Nakhchivan is set to "unite the entire Turkic world"... "Both Turkey and Azerbaijan will take necessary steps for the realization of the Zangezur Corridor", President Ilham Aliyev also said Tuesday***" ("Turkey ready to reciprocate", 2021).

*"Most recently, Aliyev stated on Sunday that the **Zangezur corridor will strengthen Azerbaijan's ties with Turkey.***

*Aliyev told Turkey's Transport and Infrastructure Minister Adil Karaismailoğlu in Baku that the opening of the corridor will further **strengthen relations between Turkic nations**" ("Zangezur corridor between Turkey", 2021).*

"The top Turkish diplomat also said that the economies of the member countries deserve further improvement, adding: "In order to connect our economies, we have to improve our cooperation and collaboration in the

field of logistics and transportation.”

*The Zangezur corridor will improve logistics between member countries, said Çavuşoğlu, adding that this will **improve to the welfare of the entire Turkic world*** (“Turkic grouping to change its name”, 2021).

*“The Zangezur corridor is located in a region that is of interest to several countries including Iran, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Türkiye... If implemented effectively, a route that will run through the Caspian and Türkiye between Central Asia and Europe will exist with **unrestricted access**. Therefore, there would be an **increase in Türkiye’s trade volume** not only with Azerbaijan but also with the entire Middle East region. With the opening of the Zangezur corridor, the economic, logistic, and **political ties of the Turkic states** will be strengthened. The **Zangezur corridor** has the potential to be **the rising star of the Turkic world*** (Ketenci 2022).

*“The provision regarding the opening of the Zangezur corridor, one of the main provisions of the Tripartite Declaration signed on Nov. 10, 2020, between the presidents of Azerbaijan and Russia and Armenia’s prime minister, is a **“great political achievement, a historic victory,”** Azerbaijan’s ambassador to Turkey told Anadolu Agency (AA) in an exclusive interview”* (“Opening of Zangezur corridor”, 2022).

Among these propaganda theses, it is necessary to properly understand the true meaning of the “Zangezur corridor,” which is not so much to bring peace and prosperity to the region, but to establish here a monopoly. After all, if the corridor is opened, all transport routes of the South Caucasus will come under Turkish-Azerbaijani control. Taking into account the already existing concept of the “Middle Corridor”, which starts from the south-east of China, passes through Central Asia and the South Caucasus (Georgia and Azerbaijan) and reaches Europe, we can say that in case the “Zangezur corridor” opens, there will be no alternative transport route in the region, except for Azerbaijan and Turkey. Therefore, Turkey’s role as a regional

power will increase even more. It is no coincidence that the Turkish-Azerbaijani tandem calls the opening of the “Zangezur corridor” a *“great political achievement, a historic victory”*. Turkish President Erdogan made a similar statement, stating that *“the opening of the Zangezur corridor is a political issue”* (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye 2021).

In their pursuit of implementing the “Zangezur corridor,” Turkey and Azerbaijan are employing not only diplomatic endeavors but also exerting military pressure on Armenia. The President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, publicly expressed this sentiment in April 2021: *“We will implement the Zangezur corridor whether Armenia wants it or not. If it wants it, it will be easier to solve this issue; if it does not want it, we will solve it by force”* (“Алиев пригрозил Армении”, 2021).

Focusing on the transformation of the South Caucasus into an energy and transport hub, the Turkish-Azerbaijani tandem has been actively lobbying for the corridor. Regular references to the “Middle Corridor” emphasize the importance of the South Caucasus as a transit zone, as well as the importance of creating alternative routes in the current geopolitical environment. This is done primarily to attract international investment, since this east-west route has a competitor in the form of the North-South route: *“Considering the sanctions over Russia, the shift of trade routes to the Middle Corridor through Azerbaijan and Türkiye is more likely to occur because it is the only viable alternative route connecting the West and East in current situation. Additionally, the implementation of the Zangezur Corridor will enhance the potential of energy and trade routes which pass through Azerbaijan and Türkiye. Obviously, the concept of Zangezur Corridor creates opportunities not only for the opening of the railway routes between Europe and Asia, but also for the operation of energy, roads, trade routes, airlines, electricity and etc. along this transport artery”* (Museyibov 2022).

“Growing disruption of the Northern Corridor leads to a new discussion

about potential *alternative routes between China and the EU, particularly in the context of the Middle Corridor*. For instance, due to the instability in the Northern Corridor, *Gebrüder Weiss, one of the world's oldest logistics companies, has decided to expand its presence in Türkiye, and a new agreement between Finnish logistics company Nurminen Logistics and Kazakhstan Railways for commercializing the Middle Corridor shows that there is growing interest in the corridor* (Sharifli 2022).

VI. Conclusion

The emergence of new global players and new centers of power entails new large-scale and ambitious projects. We can clearly see its contours in the South Caucasus, where the “*new Great Game*” is unfolding (Kamrava 2017). The Third Artsakh War and the subsequent change of the status quo were a prelude to this large-scale change. We see how Turkey, by engaging in the Third Artsakh War and consolidating its post-war achievements together with Azerbaijan, brought its voice to the region.

This research is an attempt to investigate the basic theses underlying the so-called Armenian-Turkish reconciliation, i.e. the Artsakh issue and “Zangezur corridor”, in parallel, the so-called “peace process”. And in order to understand how these agenda points are constructed and presented to the both domestic and foreign audience, we chose the Turkish English-language press (“Anadolu Agency”, “Daily Sabah”, “Hürriyet Daily News”).

The rhetoric of the Turkish press regarding Artsakh proves once again the fact that for decades, at least after the First Artsakh War, Turkey has always taken a pro-Azerbaijani stance and has not separated the Artsakh issue from the Armenian-Turkish conflict. The fact of Turkey’s indirect involvement in the Third Artsakh War is very clearly indicated by the use of “*Turkey was a*

key backer of Azerbaijan”, “*Turkey will continue to support and contribute to Azerbaijan*” and other phrases like this. An integral part of Turkish-Azerbaijani discourse around Artsakh are also phrases like “internally displaced persons”, “illegal Armenian forces/separatists”, “East Zangezur”, etc. The last one is used to legitimize Azerbaijani territorial claims against Armenia based on so-called historical rights to this territory.

A spectacular picture is emerging around the Zangezur Corridor and regional cooperation. Turkey’s English language media keeps mentioning that due to new realities after the Azerbaijani side “*liberated Karabakh region from Armenian occupation*” “*peace and tranquility*” will come to the region. The opening of the communications, and particularly “Zangezur Corridor”, which was impossible before the war, will bring “*lasting peace and development in the region*”. But what is most important, the corridor will “*strengthen Azerbaijan’s ties with Turkey*”, become a “*link between Turkey and Azerbaijan*” and “*strengthen relations between Turkic nations*”. Besides this, “Zangezur corridor” is considered as a “*political achievement*” by both Turkish and Azerbaijani sides.

To analyze Turkey’s English-language press allowed us to notice how identical are the phrases and verbal units used in these theses and around which the entire Turkish narrative is built. Interestingly, there is no difference between Turkey’s English-language and Turkish-language press in this respect. Thus, this article provides an insight into Turkey’s political agenda, through which one can get an idea of Turkey’s foreign policy priorities. And the main purpose of this research is to highlight Turkey’s foreign policy objectives against the background of the so-called settlement of Armenian-Turkish relations unfolding on the ground, its integration in the context of the Armenian-Turkish conflict, identification and assessment of the risks associated with it.

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아르메니아-터키 관계에서 터키 언론의 역할

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최근 유라시아 지역에서 아르메니아-튀르키예 관계는 지역의 경계를 넘어 국제적 영향을 갖는 일련의 사건들로 인해 더욱 부각되고 있다. 본 연구는 기존 문헌에서 다루지 않은 'the Third Artsakh War' 과 이후 진행되고 있는 화해 과정을 중심으로 튀르키예 언론이 공공 인식에 영향을 미치는 내러티브와 외교 정책 목표를 전달하는 방식을 분석한다. 특히 튀르키예의 영어 언론에서 아르메니아-튀르키예 갈등을 둘러싼 담론을 집중적으로 분석한다. 'the Artsakh problem'와 'Zangezur corridor'와 같은 특정 담론에 특별한 주의를 기울이며 언론 내용을 세심하게 살펴본다. 이러한 분석은 튀르키예 언론이 분쟁과 갈등을 어떻게 묘사하고 형성하는지에 대한 중요한 통찰을 제공하는 것으로 기대한다. 따라서 본 연구는 언론의 담론이 공공 정책과 인식을 형성하는 데 어떤 역할을 하는지에 대한 이해를 제공하며, 이는 지역의 외교 및 지정학적 지형에 영향을 미칠 수 있음을 밝혀내고자 한다. 또한 본 연구는 언론 대표성, 외교 정책 목표 및 전쟁 후 화해 노력의 복잡한 상호 작용 과정을 이해하는데 기여할 것으로 기대한다.

[주제어: 터키-아르메니아 관계, 미디어 담론 분석, Artsakh 문제, Zangezur corridor]

논문접수일: 2023년 11월 24일

논문수정일: 2023년 12월 1일

게재확정일: 2023년 12월 22일

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