

Analyzing the Common Identity Factor in Turkey-Azerbaijan Strategic Relations Before and After the 2020 War

Nelli Minasyan * - Associate Professor, Research Fellow, Department of Strategic Research of the Countries Adjacent to Armenia and Near Abroad at the Institute for Armenian Studies of YSU, Yerevan, Armenia.

Narek Grigoryan – Associate Professor, The head of the RA National Security Research and Forecasting Group at the Institute for Armenian Studies of YSU, Yerevan, Armenia.

Received: 02/09/2025

Accepted: 21/11/2025

Abstract

This research analyzes the role of the common identity factor in shaping Turkey-Azerbaijan strategic relations, examined within the framework of the pre and post 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war context. The formation of this common identity factor is grounded and deeply rooted in ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and historical affinities shared by the two countries. The central argument is that the notion of a shared identity – embodied in the ideological and value-based formulation of “one nation, two states” – has significantly contributed to the evolution of bilateral alliance-building between the two countries. Both before and after the 2020 war, the factor of common identity has consistently served as one of the foundational pillars of strategic cooperation between Turkey and Azerbaijan, both prior to and following the 2020 conflict. Moreover, the study highlights how this identity narrative has been extended beyond bilateral ties to support broader Turkic integration initiatives involving both Turkish-Azerbaijani ties and relations with other Turkic-speaking states.

Keywords: Turkey (Türkiye), Azerbaijan, Strategic Alliance, one Nation, Two States, Identity, Turkic Integration.

* E-Mail: n.minasyan@ysu.am

1. Introduction

The initial phase in the history of Turkish-Azerbaijani relations dates back to 1918–1920 when the newly independent Azerbaijan People's Republic established political and military cooperation with the Ottoman Empire. Following the October Revolution in Russia in 1917, Ottoman troops achieved temporary success and advanced into the South Caucasus, reaching Baku by September 1918. However, these gains were short-lived; with the signing of the Armistice of Mudros on October 30, the Ottoman Empire acknowledged its defeat and withdrew its forces from the region. In 1920, Soviet Russia incorporated Azerbaijan into the Soviet Union, leading to a complete cessation of Azerbaijani-Turkish relations, thus effectively halting all bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey (Cornell, 2011). During the Soviet era, discourses related to Azerbaijan in Turkish political discourse were largely symbolic and ideological, with little to no practical engagement until the collapse of the USSR. In post-Cold War era, regional order underwent significant changes within the reshaped world system and regional powers began to integrate into new regional and global systems (Shafae, 2016). In this regard, Turkey activated its policy in the post-soviet regions, trying to establish its influence.

The collapse of the USSR created a strategic opening for Turkey to establish relations with the newly independent Turkic-speaking states. Among them, Azerbaijan received particular attention, with Turkey becoming the first country to recognize its independence and establish formal diplomatic ties. Turkish policy was primarily grounded in linguistic, ethnic, historical, and cultural commonalities with these states, with the broader aim of laying ideological foundations for long-term cooperation (Aydın, 2004).

The purpose of this research is to examine the foundations of strategic cooperation between Turkey and Azerbaijan, with a particular emphasis on the role of common identity. The core central argument of the study is that the concept of a shared identity – encapsulated in the ideological and value-based slogan of “one nation, two states” – has served as a significant and contributing factor in the formation of allied relations between the two countries. The idea of common identity played a pivotal role in shaping the strategic partnership prior to the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war and remains a key component not only in bilateral ties but also in the broader framework of Turkic integration initiatives, which have gained momentum in the post-war period.

2. Literature Review

Scholars have extensively explored the political, economic, cultural, and ideological dimensions of Turkey-Azerbaijan relations. Particular attention has been placed on the allied relationship between the two countries, with a strong focus on its military and geo-economic aspects — topics that have received considerable attention in academic literature. The evolution of Turkish-Azerbaijani relations has followed a trajectory from initial bilateral cooperation to the establishment of a full-fledged strategic alliance. This transformation resulted from the transition from emotionally driven perceptions to a pragmatic political course, underpinned by the development of a shared ideological framework.

Some scholars emphasize the role of energy resources and their transportation projects to Europe as key foundations for the development of strategic cooperation between Turkey and Azerbaijan. These factors have laid the groundwork for the formation of shared strategic interests between the two states (Mehdiyeva,2011; Ismayilov,2016; Ibrahimov,2015). Salehi and Reisinezhad (2024) argue that the Turkish-Azerbaijani strategic alliance is driven by geo-economic as well as geopolitical and geo-cultural factors, considering them at the international, regional, and domestic political levels. The advancement of trade, economic, and political cooperation also serves as a significant foundation for the establishment of strategic relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan. Proponents of this view argue that Turkish-Azerbaijani relations are not solely grounded in cultural, linguistic, or ethnic commonalities, nor in the fraternal ideals of Pan-Turkism, but rather have evolved on the basis of shared economic and strategic interests (Ismailzade, 2005; Abilov,2020; Yesevi and Tiftikcigli,2015). This pragmatic foundation has fostered a more institutionalized, interest-driven, and multidimensional form of bilateral cooperation.

Several researchers have explored the establishment of the military alliance between Turkey and Azerbaijan, highlighting the evolving dynamics of military cooperation and its broader significance within bilateral relations (Hovsepyan and Tonoyan,2024; Gurbanov,2018). The ethnic, linguistic, and cultural affinities between Turkey and Azerbaijan, reflected in the formation and evolution of the motto “one nation, two states” along with Turkey’s policy of Turkification and the construction of a Turkic identity in Azerbaijan, have also attracted scholarly attention (Kanca,2012; Mikail and Çora,2024).

Following the 2020 war, scholarly attention has increasingly turned to the geopolitical dimensions of the strategic alliance between Turkey and Azerbaijan, focusing on the Shushi Declaration and the emerging strategic alliance (Çelik and Aslanlı,2024; Hajizade,2024), the perceived “splicing” nature of relations of the two states in the context of Turko centric space (Avatkov,2023), as well as on the expanding processes of Turkic integration and Azerbaijan’s evolving role within these dynamics (Shafiyev,2023).

To date, despite the extensive academic focus on Turkey-Azerbaijan relations, the specific role of identity in shaping their strategic has not been comprehensively addressed by scholars. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the concept of a shared identity and its influence on the formation and consolidation of allied relations. This dimension has become particularly salient in the post-2020 war context, when Turkey actively promoted the idea of Turkic integration and sought to extend the Turkish-Azerbaijani identity model to other Turkic-speaking states.

3. Theoretical Framework

Multiple theoretical approaches have been developed to explain the formation and evolution of alliances between states. These frameworks address the foundational principles upon which alliances are built, the dynamics of their operation, and the factors that drive their emergence and transformation. Key prerequisites for alliance formation typically include shared strategic interests, the perception of common threats, economic interdependence, and ideological or cultural affinities. This study adopts a constructivist perspective to analyze Turkish-Azerbaijani allied relations.

Constructivist theory emphasizes the central role of identity, norms, values, and social structures in the formation of alliances. Constructivists argue that shared identities and norms can foster alliances, as states are more inclined to establish cooperative relations with actors that share similar cultural, ideological, and value-based characteristics. In contrast to realist or liberal perspectives, which prioritize material interests and power balances, constructivism highlights the primacy of ideational factors in shaping state behavior. From this perspective, alliances are not merely formed to gain strategic or economic advantages but also to express and reinforce a shared socio-political identity and a collective sense of purpose, constructed through mutual perception and interaction within the international system. The formation of the Turkey-Azerbaijan alliance was shaped by a combination of material interests and shared ethnic, cultural, and linguistic

affinities, which were prominently reflected in Turkey's broader efforts to promote a common Turkic identity. This dual foundation highlights how strategic cooperation was not only driven by geopolitical and economic considerations but also by efforts to promote a common Turkic identity, reinforcing a deeper ideological and cultural bond between the two states.

A key proponent of constructivist theory, Alexander Wendt, emphasizes the significance of identity, ethnicity, and culture in elaborating on international relations. However, these elements alone are insufficient to fully account for interstate relations, as states also pursue distinct national and strategic interests. According to Wendt, each identity is associated with objective interests and actors (Wendt, 1999). Furthermore, identity and culture influence the beliefs and perceptions of political elites, which, in turn, shape the formulation of state and national interests. In the case of Turkish-Azerbaijani alliance, the concept of identity played a significant role in the process of establishing the Turkish-Azerbaijani strategic alliance, which received its ideological formulation in the slogan "one nation, two states."

Wendt further asserts that international relations are constructed through mental frameworks rooted in socially shared perceptions and interactions. This view suggests that the structure of anarchy in international relations is shaped not only by material factors but also by values, identities, and cultural perceptions. This should be examined within the context of Turkish-Azerbaijani integration processes, where efforts are being made to promote the idea of Turkic integration based on shared ethnic and identity markers, in a geopolitical environment shaped by regional fragmentation and global anarchy.

Another influential constructivist scholar, Peter Katzenstein (1996), emphasizes that norms and identity shape alliance behavior. Alliances are often formed based on shared collective memories, consciousness, and sentiments as he suggests. In this regard, the convergence of Turkey and Azerbaijan's behavior is evident: on the one hand, efforts are made to construct collective memory and shared self-awareness; on the other, steps are being taken to develop a common cultural and historical heritage. These processes influence their political conduct, contributing to the formation of common political programs as well as visions. However, this does not imply that states abandon their national interests in favor of common norms or approaches. Rather, these elements are integrated with national interests,

particularly those rooted in spiritual, cultural, and symbolic affinities, which continue to shape national policy orientations.

Within the framework of constructivism, scholars offer diverse interpretations of the causal mechanisms underlying the formation and consolidation of alliances. Nicholas Onuf (2013) contends that norms and values are not static entities or mere behavioral patterns; rather, they are shaped through the lived experience of active cooperation and the identity perceptions of international actors. Adler and Faubert (2022) emphasize the importance of shared values and collective perceptions, which manifest through multi-sectoral interstate interactions and foster mutual trust. Jutta Weldes (1999), in turn, underlines the role of political elites in constructing national interests, arguing that these interests are often grounded in historical narratives and cultural commonalities intentionally promoted by those elites.

In the context of Turkey-Azerbaijan relations, the allied partnership has been significantly influenced by the efforts of the political elites of both countries, who simultaneously established the legal and political foundations of cooperation while cultivating its ideological and identity-based dimensions. The construction of shared values and a common identity, spanning political, ideological, and cultural spheres, has been a continuous and dynamic process. This identity-building effort is not only sustained but also amplified by current Turkic integration initiatives.

4. Research Design and Methodology

The formation and evolution of the Turkey-Azerbaijan strategic alliance have been shaped by a combination of internal and external factors. While pragmatic drivers — such as military cooperation, energy projects, economic interdependence, and political alignment — played a crucial role, these elements were closely intertwined with the discourse of shared identity, encapsulated in the widely invoked motto “one nation, two states.” The trajectory of Turkish-Azerbaijani alliance-building demonstrates how the notion of a common identity has influenced not only symbolic narratives but also the practical dynamics of bilateral cooperation. To explore this process, the research addresses two key questions:

1. To what extent did the ideas of a common identity — articulated through the conceptual framework of “one nation, two states”— serve as a foundational element in the formation of the Turkey-Azerbaijan strategic alliance?

2. What role does the common identity narrative play in the post-2020 geopolitical context, particularly in shaping and advancing broader Turkic integration initiatives?

To address these research questions, the following two hypotheses are proposed and evaluated:

Hypothesis 1:

The concept of a common identity has functioned as one of the fundamental pillars in the formation and consolidation of the Turkey-Azerbaijan strategic alliance, playing a role that is both significant and enduring.

Hypothesis 2:

In the integration process initiated in the new realities after the war in 2020, the notion of a common identity is considered from the foundations of a strategic alliance and is increasingly functioning as a unifying factor in the case of both Turkey-Azerbaijan and Turkic-speaking states.

The research adopts a qualitative methodology grounded in content analysis, discourse analysis, and case study methods. Content analysis was used to examine official documents, particularly the bilateral agreements signed between Turkey and Azerbaijan. Using this method, the study traces the stages and foundational principles underlying the development of the strategic cooperation between two states. Discourse analysis was applied to study media coverage and official statements to uncover dominant narratives related to identity and alliance-building. Finally, the case study method was employed to analyze the specific role of the common identity factor in shaping bilateral and regional dynamics.

5. The Foundations of Strategic Cooperation

The foundations of strategic cooperation between Turkey and Azerbaijan should be analyzed through a multidimensional lens, incorporating geopolitical, political, military, economic, energy-related, and ideological factors. The strategic partnership between Turkey and Azerbaijan emerged in the aftermath of major geopolitical shifts, most notably the collapse of the Soviet Union and the shifting dynamics in the South Caucasus. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, provided Turkey with an opportunity to expand its influence in the post-Soviet South Caucasus and Central Asia, with Azerbaijan occupying a central position in this regional strategy. Azerbaijan not only became the cornerstone of Turkey's South Caucasus policy but also served as a strategic bridge to the Turkic-speaking republics

of Central Asia, facilitating Ankara's broader geopolitical and cultural outreach in the region (Erşen,2016).

The geopolitical developments of the 1990s in the South Caucasus significantly contributed to the deepening of Turkish-Azerbaijani relations. Key factors included Azerbaijan's defeat in the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, the resurgence of Russian influence in the region, and the increasing interest of the West, especially in Azerbaijan's rich energy resources. According to Saltanov (2019:22), the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, particularly Azerbaijan's defeat in the First War and Turkey's supportive stance, played a crucial role in shaping not only strategic cooperation but also the ideological foundations of the bilateral relationship.

In the context of the events of the 1990s, Turkish-Azerbaijani relations began to be characterized as "brotherly" and "friendly." While President Abulfaz Elchibey emphasized emotional and cultural proximity, his successor Heydar Aliyev placed the relationship on a more pragmatic and institutionalized footing. He not only deepened political and economic cooperation with Turkey but also provided an ideological formulation for bilateral relations. During an official visit to Turkey on February 8–11, 1994, in a speech delivered at the Turkish Grand National Assembly, he introduced the motto "one nation, two states" as a conceptual expression of their strategic and cultural unity and the essence of their partnership (Işık, 2025). Over time, the phrase evolved from a rhetorical expression into a core ideological motto that underpinned bilateral cooperation. This trajectory was further consolidated with the signing of the Declaration of Strategic Cooperation in 1997, which marked a turning point in the institutionalization of bilateral relations, outlining frameworks for collaboration across various domains, including politics, economics, defense, technology, and other strategic fields.

The geopolitical developments in the South Caucasus during the 2000s significantly contributed to the deepening of Turkish-Azerbaijani strategic cooperation. Energy projects occupied a leading role in Turkey's foreign policy, a priority that accelerated following the August 2008 Russo-Georgian war, which reshaped the regional security landscape. In response to these shifts, Turkey intensified its engagement in the South Caucasus, while Azerbaijan adopted an increasingly pro-Turkish orientation. A major milestone in the evolution of this partnership was the signing of the Treaty on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance in 2010, which established

the legal and political foundation for a formal bilateral military alliance (Resmi Gazete,2010).

Given the geopolitical realities of the 1990s, Azerbaijan prioritized security concerns and regarded its cooperation with Turkey primarily through a defense-oriented lens. Military cooperation between Turkey and Azerbaijan initially focused on military education and technical assistance. This collaboration began with an agreement signed in 1992 and structured around two key objectives: first, Turkey launched training programs for Azerbaijani military personnel; second, it facilitated the education of a new officer corps in Turkish military institutions. Additionally, efforts were made to establish a Turkish military school in Azerbaijan to further institutionalize defense ties. With Turkey's support, Azerbaijan undertook a comprehensive modernization of its armed forces, becoming the first post-Soviet state to align its military structure and training systems with NATO standards (Ateş and Kılıç,2025:35-39).

One of the key indicators of deepening military cooperation between Turkey and Azerbaijan is the increasing frequency and institutionalization of joint military exercises, particularly throughout the 2010s. While these exercises carried clear military and strategic importance, particularly amid evolving regional dynamics, it is equally important to emphasize that they served as vehicles for ideological messaging. In this regard, the series of exercises conducted under the name "Indestructible Brotherhood" are especially noteworthy, reflecting not only operational coordination but also a deepening of the shared political and ideological narratives within the Turkish-Azerbaijani alliance. Three such military exercises took place in 2019, 2020, 2021, each conducted under the slogan "one nation, two states," symbolizing the strategic and ideological unity of the two countries in the military sphere (Rahimov,2021).

Among the joint military exercises conducted by Turkey and Azerbaijan, special attention should be paid to the "Mustafa Kemal Atatürk" and "TurAz Eagle" (TurAz Kartalı) exercises. The first, held in 2021 and 2023, aimed at strengthening bilateral military cooperation and enhancing the operational and strategic capabilities of the command-level staff. Meanwhile, the "TurAz Eagle" exercises — conducted in 2015, 2017, 2020, and 2022—involved the air forces of both countries and focused on improving operational coordination and tactical aviation capabilities. These military

activities carry not only operational significance but also reflect a shared Turkish-Azerbaijani vision of regional dynamics and strategic alignment.

Military-technical cooperation between Turkey and Azerbaijan has manifested in two primary dimensions: first, through the procurement of weapons, ammunition, and military equipment from Turkey; and second, through joint military-industrial initiatives aimed at localizing production and fostering long-term defense cooperation. Nearly two dozen Turkish companies, including ASELSAN, Koza, and TISAS, are actively involved in Azerbaijan's military-industrial sector (Gurbanov,2018:258-259). Of particular significance is the establishment of a new branch of the Baykar company in Azerbaijan and the launch of local production of Akıncı drones, marking a milestone in the deepening of bilateral military-industrial cooperation. Azerbaijan has become one of the largest purchasers of Turkish defense industry products, including armored vehicles, missile systems, and, especially, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). According to multiple researchers, Turkish-manufactured drones, particularly the Bayraktar TB2 and Akıncı models, played a decisive role during the 44-day war (Kınık and Çelik,2021).

Energy resources have also played a key role in establishing strategic cooperation between Turkey and Azerbaijan. For the Turkish authorities, energy resources were important not only for meeting domestic demand but also for ensuring their transit to European markets (Frappi,2017). For Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi- AKP), one of the key objectives of its foreign policy was to position itself as an energy bridge, implementing the transit of Caspian energy resources to Europe. In addition, since the early 2000s, Turkey has emerged as one of the largest consumers of Azerbaijani energy resources (Mehdiyeva,2011:185). For Azerbaijan, the priority was to establish alternative export routes for its energy resources and reduce dependence on Russia and reliance on Russian-controlled pipelines. This alignment of interests laid the foundation for the development of pragmatic and mutually beneficial energy partnership between the two countries. Three major infrastructure projects have formed the backbone of Turkish-Azerbaijani energy cooperation: the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) gas pipeline, and the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) (Balci,2014).

Thus, the foundations of strategic cooperation between Turkey and Azerbaijan are anchored in political, energy, and military spheres. Parallel to

the development of cooperation in these domains, ideological and value-based pillars have also been established, symbolized by the motto “one nation, two states.” These dual processes reflect the dynamics of Turkish-Azerbaijani relations, in which material interests intersect shared values and identity-based perceptions.

6. The Common Identity Factor

Identity is a component of state strategies and power politics, which is also important for those actors who are trying to occupy a new position in the regional political order (Mossalanejed,2025:5). In its relations with Azerbaijan and other post-Soviet Turkic-speaking states, Turkey has placed significant emphasis on the promotion of a shared Turkic identity. From this perspective, ideological, educational, and cultural initiatives have become integral components of Turkey’s foreign policy in the region. At the same time, discussions on the foundations and principles of national identity formation have gained momentum within post-Soviet Turkic-speaking countries themselves (Akbari,2023). In Azerbaijan, the process of national identity formation has been complex and multi-layered and influenced by a number of factors, such as historical perspectives, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the role of religion, etc. (Altstadt,1992; Broers,2019; Ergun and Çitak,2020).

In the context of nation-building and the construction of national identity in Azerbaijan, two main ideological discourses have emerged: Azerbaijanism (Azerbaycançılıq) and Turkism (Türkçülük) (Ergun,2022). Notably, in the early 1990s, the Popular Front of Azerbaijan, under the leadership of Abulfaz Elchibey, strongly promoted the idea of Turkism (Suvari and Kanca,2012). Elchibey was particularly known for his Pan-Turkic views and frequently expressed critical views toward both Iran and Russia, strongly advocating for greater unity among Turkic peoples. During Heydar Aliyev’s presidency, the emphasis was placed on the concept of Azerbaijanism, which aimed to reduce ethnic tensions in the country. While Aliyev did not completely reject Turkism, his administration adopted a more cautious and balanced approach toward Turkism, integrating it within a broader framework of inclusive national identity.

Nevertheless, selective elements of Turkism began to be incorporated into Azerbaijani society and political discourse during Heydar Aliyev’s presidency. Under Ilham Aliyev’s leadership, the focus shifted further toward promoting a national and citizenship identity (Ergun,2022:423-424).

At the same time, the principles of Turkism continued to gain traction, and following the 2020 war, Azerbaijani national identity increasingly reflected a synthesis of Azerbaijanism and Turkism. This evolving identity is encapsulated in the widely used motto “one nation, two states,” which has been consistently invoked by the presidents and political elites of both Turkey and Azerbaijan to describe the uniqueness of their bilateral relationship. A key factor in the effectiveness of this discourse is the motto’s resonance with both Turkish and Azerbaijani societies, where it finds broad public and political acceptance (Valiyev,2020).

Discourses centered on a “common origin” and “common language” have played a significant role in shaping a shared Turkic identity. Turkish national identity plays a significant role in contemporary identity politics and has shaped emotional perceptions across various segments of Azerbaijani society (Mikail and Çora,2024:3094). Since gaining independence, Azerbaijan’s ruling elites have actively pursued political mobilization aimed at constructing a common Turkic identity. This initiative has been integrated into both state-building and nation-building processes, most visibly reflected in national symbols and official discourse. This policy acquires particular significance in the context of multiethnic Azerbaijan. Within this framework, considerable emphasis is placed on narratives of shared origins, specifically the portrayal of Azerbaijanis as part of the broader Turkish ethnocultural continuum (Suvari and Kanca,2012). These narratives are institutionalized through state-directed educational and cultural policies, which serve to embed the idea of a common Turkic identity into public consciousness and national discourse. Turkey, emphasizing linguistic and cultural affinities with Turkic-speaking post-Soviet states, advocated for the adoption of the Turkish-based Latin alphabet as a replacement for the Cyrillic script. This initiative was part of a broader effort to foster closer cultural and ideological ties. However, due to decades of Russian influence, the Russian language had become deeply embedded in the national identities of these countries.

One of Turkey’s key objectives in the post-Soviet space was to diminish Russian linguistic and cultural dominance in the Turkic republics and assert its own cultural influence. Following independence, one of the Azerbaijani government’s early priorities was the transition to a new alphabet – a decision closely tied to the broader processes of nation-building and national identity formation. In 1993, Azerbaijan officially adopted the Latin alphabet

and adapted it to the Azerbaijani language characteristics (Hatcher, 2008). This move was framed as part of a modernization agenda, aimed at aligning Azerbaijan more closely with Turkey and the West, while distancing it from the legacy of Russian and Soviet cultural influence. Another symbolic measure was the modification of family names, where the Russified patronymic endings *ov* and *ova* were gradually replaced with more Azerbaijani, effectively Turkish-style, alternatives, such as *oğlu*, *kızı*, *zade* or *li* (Goltz,1998). The 2020 war significantly influenced the ongoing processes of linguistic and national identity development in Azerbaijan, particularly in the context of Turkey's active support (Kazimzade,2024: 201). This support not only reinforced political and military ties but also strengthened the symbolic and cultural dimensions of the Turkish-Azerbaijani relationship, further integrating Turkic identity elements into Azerbaijan's national discourse.

Turkey places significant emphasis on educational, cultural, and religious instruments in the process of constructing a shared identity. In the 1990s, the Gülen movement became particularly active in Azerbaijan, establishing a network of schools, gymnasiums, and a university (Qafqaz University). This network played a considerable role in the spread of Turkish educational and ideological influence in Azerbaijan (Balci,2013). However, following the failed coup attempt in Turkey in 2016, and in the context of the Erdoğan-Gülen controversy, the Azerbaijani authorities closed all institutions affiliated with the Gülen movement. In their place, Turkey expanded its official educational outreach through the establishment of state-sponsored institutions such as the Turkish Maarif Foundation and the Yunus Emre Institute. Turkey also places considerable emphasis on the religious dimension as part of its identity-building efforts in Azerbaijan, particularly aiming to promote a form of Turkish Islam in a Shiite society (Bedford, 2016:134-136). Turkish religious influence in Azerbaijan has been advanced in two ways: governmental (the Directorate of Religious Affairs – Diyanet) and non-governmental (the Gülen movement) (Mayilyan,2023:63). Diyanet became increasingly active in Azerbaijan by providing religious literature, training clergy, renovating mosques, and supporting institutional cooperation, notably through its involvement with the Department of Religion at Baku State University.

Within the framework of Turkish-Azerbaijani allied relations, the notion of a “common enemy” plays a significant role – primarily referring to Armenia

but also extending to Russia and Iran. Azerbaijan began portraying Armenia as an “enemy” in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, while for Turkey, Armenia was considered a historical enemy. This shared perception of an adversarial state actor emerged in public and political discourses, influencing bilateral policy orientations and becoming a cornerstone of state policy in both countries. The military successes of Armenian forces in Nagorno-Karabakh in 1992-1993 reinforced these hostile narratives (Kulumbegova,2020). In response, Turkey closed its border with Armenia in 1993, following the Armenian forces captured Karvachar/Kelbajar. Nowadays, Turkey connects the normalization of relations with Armenia to the Azerbaijani factor.

Both before and after the 2020 War, the Presidents of Turkey and Azerbaijan, R.T. Erdoğan and I. Aliyev, have consistently used vocabulary emphasizing common identity. The expressions and terms employed by both leaders are rooted in shared ideological and value systems. To explore this, we analyzed two speeches delivered by each president before and after the 2020 War. Particular attention should be given to the phrase "one nation, two states," which characterizes their common perceptions and interests before the war (Iletisim.gov.tr,2019; Azertac,2006) and the strategic nature of their post-war relations. Both leaders frequently emphasize concepts such as friendship, fraternity and unity situating them within the framework of practical and institutional cooperation (President.az,2015). The terms of brotherhood and mutual assistance are clearly reflected in the speeches of both presidents (Apa,2025). Following the 2020 War, Erdoğan and Aliyev increasingly emphasized the ideas of Turkic unity and the Turkic world, seeking to institutionalize the ideas of common origin and shared ethnicity, as well as to promote the principles of Pan-Turkism within this framework (44days.info,2020).

Despite the close ties between Turkey and Azerbaijan, their relationship has also experienced periods of disagreements. One notable episode occurred in 2008–2009, when Turkey launched a process of normalizing relations with Armenia, known as “football diplomacy.” This initiative was met with strong opposition in Azerbaijan, both from the public and the state elite, who viewed it as a betrayal of the Azerbaijani national cause. In 2009, tensions escalated into what became known as the “flag crisis” between the two countries. In both Turkey and Azerbaijan, Armenia was classified as an enemy and perceived as the underlying cause of this crisis (Kanca,2012:

202). The failure of Turkey's "zero problems with neighbors" policy, particularly in the South Caucasus, contributed to the resurgence of the "one nation, two states" rhetoric and the reaffirmation of the Turkish-Azerbaijani brotherhood narrative.

Between Turkey and Azerbaijan certain disagreements have persisted concerning the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) (Saltanov,2019:41-42). One of the key points of divergence remains Azerbaijan's continued non-recognition of the TRNC, despite Turkey's efforts to garner broader international support for its recognition. In Azerbaijan, this position was linked to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

A further area of divergence lies in the two countries' respective foreign policy approaches toward Israel. While Turkish-Israeli relations have been marked by recurring tensions and periodic crises (Alibabalu and Sarkhonov, 2023), Azerbaijan maintains strategic and multifaceted relations with Israel, particularly in the security and energy sectors. Despite Ankara's periodic expressions of dissatisfaction, it exerts limited actual influence over Baku's foreign policy decisions in this field. In the light of the ongoing crises in Gaza and Syria, which have further strained Turkish-Israeli ties, Azerbaijan has attempted to position itself as a potential mediator.

Thus, the process of forming a common identity between Turkey and Azerbaijan was grounded in shared ethnic, linguistic, religious, and historical elements. This identity was reinforced through Turkey's linguistic, educational, and religious policies, actively supported by the political elites of both countries. As a result, the factor of common identity became the foundation for strategic cooperation, representing the ideological value concept.

7. Common Identity Factor after the 2020 War

The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war led to the emergence of new geopolitical realities in the South Caucasus, prompting renewed discourse on the nature and trajectory of Turkey-Azerbaijan relations. During the conflict, Turkey provided Azerbaijan with not only military and diplomatic support but also substantial moral and psychological encouragement. In a visit to Baku in November 2020, Turkish former Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu declared, "We will continue to be one nation, one spirit with our Azeri brothers," reaffirming the depth of bilateral solidarity (Daily Sabah,2020). President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's participation in the December 2020

military parade in Baku carried considerable political symbolism. In his address, he emphasized the enduring strategic and ideological bond between the two nations, reiterating the motto “two states, one nation” to reinforce the shared identity narrative and unity of purpose between Turkey and Azerbaijan (TCCB,2020).

The outcome of the 2020 war culminated in the signing of the Shushi Declaration on June 15, 2021, which elevated Turkish-Azerbaijani relations to a qualitatively new level of strategic partnership. The declaration reaffirmed “the bonds of friendship and brotherhood” between the two peoples (Şuşa Beyannamesi,2021). It outlined a range of provisions focused on the protection of mutual interests, infrastructure development, economic and military integration, and other strategic priorities. The ideological foundations of the Declaration are rooted in the maxims of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, “Azerbaijan’s joy is our joy, its sorrow is our sorrow”, and Heydar Aliyev’s well-known expression, “one nation, two states” (Şuşa Beyannamesi,2021). The content analysis of the declaration reveals the repeated use of phrases such as “two friendly and brotherly countries” and “two brotherly countries,” each appearing twice. These formulations underscore not only the ideological and emotional dimensions of the bilateral relationship but also the high level of mutual satisfaction with the existing strategic cooperation between Turkey and Azerbaijan.

In the context of the new geopolitical realities that emerged in 2020, Turkey initiated a renewed drive for Turkic integration. This effort culminated in the Turkic Council summit held in Istanbul in November 2021, during which the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) was officially established. At the summit, the strategic document “Turkic World Vision-2040” was adopted, outlining the core principles, long-term objectives, and key directions for cooperation among the Turkic-speaking states. This integration initiative is grounded in shared ethnic, linguistic, and cultural commonalities, with one of Turkey’s primary objectives being the creation of a common ethnolinguistic space. Within this framework, Azerbaijan occupies a pivotal role for two primary reasons First, Ankara regards the Turkish-Azerbaijani strategic partnership as a model for the Turkic-speaking states of Central Asia, aiming to replicate this partnership with those countries as part of its broader regional strategy. Second, Azerbaijan’s geographic position as a bridge between Turkey and Central Asia enhances its strategic relevance, making it an important link in efforts to promote transregional connectivity

and cooperation. In recent years, Azerbaijan has taken an increasingly active role in Turkic integration initiatives (Shafiyev,2023). President Aliyev has consistently emphasized the importance of unity and cooperation among Turkic-speaking states, underscoring shared cultural, ethnic, and historical ties as the foundation for such collaboration. He reiterated these ideas during the informal summit of the OTS held in July 2024, where he highlighted the strategic imperative of deepening ties among member states (Rehimov, 2024).

In parallel with the deepening allied relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan, integration processes — particularly in the military domain — have become increasingly evident. In this regard, the practical foundations of military integration were laid during the 44-day war, when Turkey provided direct military support to Azerbaijan, notably through the reported involvement of approximately 600 Turkish military personnel (Osce.mfa.am,2020). In a further institutional step Turkish Army Major General Bakhtiyar Ersay was appointed as an advisor to the Azerbaijani Minister of Defense in 2022 — a move widely interpreted as having influenced the organization and coordination of Azerbaijan’s military operations (Caucasus Watch,2022). Joint military exercises and military-technical cooperation between the two countries have continued steadily. Between 2021 and 2025, five major military exercises were conducted with the primary goal of enhancing interoperability between the armed forces of Turkey and Azerbaijan. Notably, within the context of these joint operations, a new slogan — “one nation, two states, one army” — gained visibility, symbolizing not only the deepening of strategic and military ties but also the ideological and symbolic unity underpinning their bilateral relations (Aydınlık,2021).

Integration processes between Turkey and Azerbaijan are increasingly evident in the field of foreign policy. The Shushi Declaration explicitly reflects this trend, stating that “the parties emphasize the importance of coordination and regular bilateral political consultations in the field of foreign policy” (Şuşa Beyannamesi,2021). In the light of ongoing developments in the South Caucasus, coordinated efforts have become more visible aimed at forming a common agenda. One of the most prominent examples is the joint promotion of the so-called “Zangezur Corridor” initiative, which both countries frame within the broader context of the “Middle Corridor” project. Beyond its economic relevance, the initiative

carries substantial strategic and geopolitical significance, especially as it aligns with the overarching objective of advancing Turkic integration. The so-called "Zangezur Corridor" (or Turan Corridor) has the potential to alter the geopolitics of the region in favor of Turkey and Azerbaijan (Afrasiyab, 2025:61). Geopolitically, Ankara aims to position itself as a key Eurasian transit hub, seeking to limit the strategic leverage of Russia and Iran in the region. This initiative will allow Turkey to establish a direct land connection with the Turkic-speaking countries of Central Asia. It will also strengthen Azerbaijan's role both in regional geopolitics and as a transit country. This development has created a unique opportunity for Turkey to deepen its strategic partnerships with Azerbaijan and the Turkic-speaking countries of Central Asia, while simultaneously advancing efforts to institutionalize the Organization of Turkic States across Eurasia. Furthermore, the emerging common agenda between the Turkey and Azerbaijan extends to their policies toward Armenia, particularly in the context of normalization efforts. Turkey continues to condition the normalization of its relations with Armenia—and the potential reopening of its border—on progress in the Armenian-Azerbaijani normalization process.

Thus, following the 2020 war, the factor of common identity continues to serve as the ideological cornerstone of Turkish-Azerbaijani relations. As in the pre-war period, identity construction remains a central policy focus—now framed around the narrative of the war as a defining national achievement. At the same time, post-war developments suggest ongoing efforts to reinterpret and rearticulate the notion of shared identity, reflecting its dynamic and evolving role in shaping the bilateral relationship.

8. Conclusion

Turkey-Azerbaijan strategic cooperation encompasses the political, military, and energy domains and is grounded by a distinct ideological framework. Drawing on shared historical, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural ties, Turkey initiated the construction of a common identity, encapsulated in the widely adopted motto "one nation, two states." This expression has evolved from a political discourse and a rhetorical slogan into a defining concept of Turkish-Azerbaijani relations. The process of constructing this common identity has extended into the linguistic, educational, cultural, and religious spheres, actively supported by the political elites of both countries. As a result, the notion of a shared identity has become the ideological foundation of their strategic partnership. On the one hand, this factor has contributed to

the deepening of bilateral cooperation; on the other, it has served a unifying function by aligning national interests with shared ideological values.

Following the 2020 war, the application of the common identity factor has proceeded in two primary directions. The first pertains to bilateral relations, in which the notion of a shared identity continues to serve as a key foundation for the strategic alliance and ongoing integration processes between Turkey and Azerbaijan. The second direction relates to Turkey's broader Turkic integration agenda, where the common identity factor functions as a unifying element aimed at fostering a cohesive Turkic ethnolinguistic space. Within this context, the Turkish-Azerbaijani relations are increasingly portrayed as a model for regional cooperation and unity.

9. Acknowledgement

The authors express their sincere gratitude to the Institute for Armenian Studies of Yerevan State University for providing institutional and research support throughout the development of this study. Special thanks are also extended to the Department of Strategic Research of the Countries Adjacent to Armenia and Near Abroad, as well as the RA National Security Research and Forecasting Group, for their invaluable input and access to strategic data resources. Additionally, the authors would like to thank the editorial team of *Geopolitics Quarterly* for their professional guidance and support throughout the publication process.

10. Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest and that all ethical principles in research have been fully observed, including avoidance of plagiarism, duplicate publication or multiple submission of the manuscript, unauthorized replication of others' research, data fabrication or falsification, citation manipulation and reference fabrication, conducting research without informed consent of participants, research misconduct, and other unethical practices.

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