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*Armenia and Türkiye:
Bilateral relations with three actors*

Rusif Huseynov

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11 March 2026, Yerevan International Airport. A welcoming ceremony unfolds in front of a large aircraft painted in white and red. It marks the inaugural regular flight of Türkiye's flagship carrier, Turkish Airlines, to Armenia¹.

Celebrated as an aviation milestone this moment may be assessed as something bigger as it reflects shifting regional dynamics and the slow re-opening of channels that have remained largely frozen for decades between two neighboring states—Armenia and Türkiye. But how real and how fast is this thaw? And more importantly, where does Ankara stand in the broader regional transformation, particularly in the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace process?

What history tells

Though Türkiye was among the first countries to have recognized Armenia's independence in 1991², the trajectory of their relationship was shaped by historical disputes and most importantly, by the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over Karabakh. Having chosen a closer alignment with its kin state, Azerbaijan, Türkiye decided to seal its land border with Armenia and suspended efforts to establish diplomatic relations in 1993, following the occupation of Azerbaijani towns by the Armenian forces³.

This move effectively isolated Armenia from direct access to Turkish markets and regional infrastructure projects, which would connect Azerbaijan and Türkiye via Georgia.

The most significant previous attempt at normalization occurred in 2009 with the signing of the Zurich Protocols⁴. Facilitated by international actors, including Switzerland and the United States, the protocols envisaged the establishment of diplomatic relations and the opening of the border without preconditions. They also included the creation of a joint historical commission to address contentious historical issues.

Initially hailed as a breakthrough, the process quickly faltered. Domestic opposition in both countries was strong. In Armenia, critics argued that the protocols undermined genocide recognition efforts. In Türkiye, political pressure—particularly from Azerbaijan—led to renewed insistence on linking normalization to progress in the Karabakh conflict. Ultimately, neither country ratified the protocols, and the initiative collapsed, reinforcing skepticism about the feasibility of normalization⁵.

The 2020 war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, followed by the 2023 one-day operation in Khankendi, allowed Baku to regain control over the entirety of Karabakh and restore its territorial

¹ Armenpress. Turkish Airlines starts Istanbul–Yerevan flights. Armenpress.am, 11 March 2026. <https://armenpress.am/en/article/1244441>

² Tatul Hakobyan. Armenia-Turkey: 100 years of Diplomatic Relations. Civilnet, 5 July 2017. <https://civilnet.am/en/news/383603>

³ Onnik James Krikorian. Armenia and Turkey meet on closed border. Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa, 1 August 2024. https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/en/cp_article/armenia-and-turkey-meet-on-closed-border/

⁴ Roman Muzalevsky. THE ARMENIA-TURKEY PROTOCOLS: TACTICAL COOPERATION IN THE SHADOW OF EURASIAN STRATEGIC COMPETITION. CACI Analyst, 11 November 2009. <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/11942-analytical-articles-caci-analyst-2009-11-11-art-11942.html>

⁵ Erik Davtyan. Armenia Recalls the Zurich Protocols. Jamestown Foundation EDM, 3 April 2015. <https://jamestown.org/armenia-recalls-the-zurich-protocols/>

integrity, effectively ending a four-decade conflict. For Türkiye, the outcome strengthened its strategic position in the South Caucasus and deepened its alliance with Azerbaijan. For Armenia, the defeat triggered domestic political upheaval but also prompted a reassessment of foreign policy priorities, including the need to break regional isolation.

Importantly, the post-war environment altered the context for Armenia–Türkiye relations⁶. However paradoxical it may sound, the new geopolitical reality and the absence of the Karabakh agenda created a favorable ground for Armenia–Türkiye normalization.

Post-2020 rapprochement

The normalization process between Armenia and Türkiye after the 2020 Karabakh war represents one of the most significant geopolitical shifts in the South Caucasus in decades. Unlike previous attempts—particularly the failed Zurich Protocols of 2009—the current process is incremental, pragmatic, and deeply embedded in broader regional power politics, especially the relationship between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The end of the 2020 war fundamentally altered the regional balance of power. Türkiye emerged from the conflict as a decisive regional actor after strongly supporting Azerbaijan politically and militarily. In the aftermath of the war, Ankara signaled its willingness to normalize relations with Armenia, and in 2021 the two countries officially launched a new normalization process⁷. This was not a sudden reconciliation or diplomatic breakthrough, but rather a calculated geopolitical adjustment shaped by new realities in the South Caucasus.

Both countries appointed special envoys to manage the process—Ruben Rubinyan for Armenia and Serdar Kılıç for Türkiye⁸—and since early 2022 they have held multiple rounds of negotiations in Moscow, Vienna, and other locations, including at the border⁹. Importantly, these talks did not initially focus on historical disputes or immediate diplomatic recognition. Instead, they concentrated on practical confidence-building measures. This represents a major departure from previous normalization attempts, which tried to resolve political and historical issues first and ultimately collapsed under political pressure.

High-level political contacts also resumed after decades of frozen relations. Meetings at the level of the foreign ministers and higher leaders took place several times. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan attended Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s inauguration in Ankara in 2023¹⁰ and made a historic

⁶ Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, Richard Giragosian. Acts of normality: The potential for Turkey-Armenia rapprochement. ECFR, 15 March 2022. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/acts-of-normality-the-potential-for-turkey-armenia-rapprochement/>

⁷ Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, Richard Giragosian. Acts of normality: The potential for Turkey-Armenia rapprochement. ECFR, 15 March 2022. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/acts-of-normality-the-potential-for-turkey-armenia-rapprochement/>

⁸ Ani Mejlumyan. Turkey, Armenia to appoint envoys to normalize relations. Eurasianet, 14 December 2021. <https://eurasianet.org/turkey-armenia-to-appoint-envoys-to-normalize-relations>

⁹ Jamnews. Special representatives of Armenia and Turkey met at the border: what was agreed upon. Jamnews, 30 July 2024. <https://jam-news.net/rubinyan-kilic-border-meeting/>

¹⁰ Asbarez Staff. Pashinyan Attends Erdogan’s Inauguration. Asbarez, 3 June 2023. <https://asbarez.com/pashinyan-arrives-in-turkey/>

visit to Istanbul to meet Turkish President again in 2025¹¹. The 2023 earthquake diplomacy¹², during which Armenia dispatched humanitarian aid and a rescue team¹³ to Türkiye to help mitigate the disaster's impact, further advanced the normalization process and even opened the long-closed Armenia-Turkish border¹⁴, albeit temporarily. These contacts did not immediately lead to diplomatic normalization, but they signaled the restoration of political communication and mutual sympathy at the highest level.

The current normalization process prioritizes technical and economic steps rather than grand political agreements. The two sides [agreed](#) to open the land border for third-country citizens and diplomats¹⁵ and resume direct cargo flights¹⁶. These steps may appear modest, but they are strategically significant: they gradually create economic interdependence and normalize cross-border contact without forcing immediate political concessions.

Economic and regional connectivity considerations are in fact among the main drivers of normalization. Opening the Armenia–Türkiye border could reshape trade routes across the South Caucasus and potentially contribute to new transport corridors connecting Central Asia to Europe. For Türkiye, normalization offers expanded regional influence and new economic opportunities. For Armenia, it could mean ending decades of economic isolation¹⁷ and gaining direct access to Turkish and European markets.

Western actors—particularly the United States and the European Union—have actively supported, and at times even encouraged, the normalization process. From their perspective, it forms part of a broader strategy to stabilize the South Caucasus, enhance regional connectivity, and gradually reduce Armenia’s reliance on Russia. However, Nigar Göksel, Crisis Group's Project Director, who has been dealing with the regional conflicts for years, cautions that “pressure from Western capitals on Ankara can backfire and prove counter-productive,” as it risks irritating Turkish authorities and complicating the delicate diplomatic balance.

Nevertheless, major obstacles remain. The Armenia–Azerbaijan peace process is still incomplete, while some critical voices may be heard in Armenia’s domestic politics.

In any case, the post-2020 normalization process is fundamentally different from previous attempts, especially the 2009 Zurich Protocols. It may seem slower, but is more pragmatic, and deeply embedded in regional geopolitics rather than driven purely by bilateral reconciliation. This

¹¹ Al Jazeera. Armenian PM visits Türkiye for ‘historic’ trip aimed at normalising ties. Al Jazeera, 20 June 2025. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/6/20/armenian-pm-in-turkiye-for-historic-visit-aimed-at-normalising-ties>

¹² Civilnet. ‘Earthquake diplomacy’ heightens momentum for Armenia-Turkey normalization. Civilnet, 13 February 2023. <https://civilnet.am/en/video/691806>

¹³ Bilal Kahyaoglu. Armenian team continues to search for survivors in quake-stricken Türkiye. Anadolu Agency, 13 February 2023. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/armenian-team-continues-to-search-for-survivors-in-quake-stricken-turkiye/2817443>

¹⁴ Joshua Kucera. Caucasus earthquake diplomacy tied up in regional politics. Eurasianet, 8 February 2023. <https://eurasianet.org/caucasus-earthquake-diplomacy-tied-up-in-regional-politics>

¹⁵ Al Jazeera. Armenia, Turkey agree to open borders for third-country nationals. Al Jazeera, 1 July 2025. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/7/1/armenia-turkey-agree-to-open-border-for-third-country-nationals>

¹⁶ Al Arabiya. Turkey, Armenia agree to start direct cargo trade at earliest date: Ankara. Al Arabiya English, 1 July 2022. <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/world/2022/07/01/Turkey-Armenia-agree-to-start-direct-cargo-trade-at-earliest-date-Ankara>

¹⁷ Asli Aydıntaşbaş, Richard Giragosian. Acts of normality: The potential for Turkey-Armenia rapprochement. ECFR, 15 March 2022. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/acts-of-normality-the-potential-for-turkey-armenia-rapprochement/>

time, the two sides are attempting to build economic ties, technical cooperation, and political communication that may, over time, make full normalization not only possible, but inevitable.

The primacy of Azerbaijan in Türkiye's Armenia policy

At the core of Türkiye's South Caucasus policy lies its enduring strategic partnership with Azerbaijan. What is often described rhetorically as "one nation, two states"¹⁸ has, over the past decade, evolved far beyond cultural affinity into a deeply institutionalized alliance encompassing military cooperation, energy interdependence, investment flows, and close political coordination. The outcome of the 2020 Karabakh war further strengthened this alignment, elevating Türkiye's role from a supportive partner to a decisive geopolitical actor in the South Caucasus.

This strategic partnership was formally consolidated in the Shusha Declaration of 2021¹⁹, which effectively established a mutual defense pact between the two countries and elevated their relationship to the level of an alliance. In reality, the declaration institutionalized a partnership that had already been deepening for years. Military cooperation, joint exercises, and defense coordination had been intensifying well before the document was signed, while energy and infrastructure projects had long strengthened economic interdependence. Notably, Azerbaijan's foreign direct investment in Türkiye at some point exceeded Turkish investment in Azerbaijan²⁰, highlighting an asymmetric but mutually beneficial economic relationship.

Personal ties of the two leaders – Ilham Aliyev and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan²¹ – have also played an important role in strengthening the Azerbaijani-Turkish political coordination. Erdoğan's visits to the territories liberated²² by Azerbaijan after the 2020 war and his role as the main guest at Azerbaijan's Victory Day parades²³ since 2020 have become powerful symbols of this alliance. Turkish companies have also received a lion's share of reconstruction contracts in Karabakh²⁴, further reinforcing the economic dimension of the partnership.

¹⁸ Azerbaijani President. Press statements by President Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Official website of President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, 15 September 2010. <https://president.az/en/articles/view/736>

¹⁹ Javidan Ahmadkhanli. 15 June Shusha declaration. Topchubashov Center, 15 June 2021. <https://www.top-center.org/en/expert-opinion/3157/15-june-shusha-declaration>

²⁰ MFA Türkiye. Economic Relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan. Official website of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye. Accessed 10 April 2026. <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/economic-relations-between-turkey-and-azerbaijan.en.mfa>

²¹ Azertac. President of Azerbaijan: Our personal friendship with President Erdogan is a really important factor of regional development and regional stability. Azertac, 21 July 2023. <https://azertag.az/en/xeber/president-of-azerbaijan-our-personal-friendship-with-president-erdogan-is-a-really-important-factor-of-regional-development-and-regional-stability-2702878>

²² Nur Özkan Erbay. Erdoğan visits Azerbaijan's liberated Shusha. Daily Sabah, 15 June 2021. <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/erdogan-visits-azerbajians-liberated-shusha>

²³ MoD Azerbaijan. A Victory parade dedicated to Victory in the Patriotic war was held at Azadlig Square, Baku. Official website of Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 10 December 2020. <https://mod.gov.az/en/news/a-victory-parade-dedicated-to-victory-in-the-patriotic-war-was-held-at-azadlig-square-baku-34045.html>

²⁴ APA. Turkish companies implement 560 projects in Azerbaijan - Trade Minister. APA, 23 December 2025. <https://en.apa.az/finance/turkish-companies-implement-560-projects-in-azerbaijan-trade-minister-487170>

“Ankara may want to move faster in its normalization with Yerevan,” says Göksel. Yet this engagement is carefully managed so as not to diverge from Azerbaijani preferences as Turkish officials have openly and repeatedly emphasized that Türkiye coordinates its normalization policy with Azerbaijan. This means that Armenia–Türkiye normalization is not purely bilateral; it is triangular, involving Ankara, Baku, and Yerevan. This triangular dynamic will continue to define the pace and limits of rapprochement.

Against this background, it is highly unlikely that Türkiye would risk its strategic partnership with Azerbaijan for uncertain and politically sensitive gains from normalization with Armenia. As explained above, Azerbaijan represents not only a cultural relative but also a strategic partner that provides Ankara with tangible geopolitical, economic, and energy dividends. Armenia, by contrast, offers far more limited immediate strategic benefits. This asymmetry explains why Türkiye has consistently linked normalization with Armenia to progress in the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace process. Such a situation does not satisfy the Armenian experts, one of who, Benyamin Poghosyan, refers to Armenia–Türkiye normalization as “a hostage of Azerbaijan’s policy”, while Alexander Iskandaryan repeatedly stated that “Armenia is not neighboring Ankara and Baku, but is surrounded by two Bakus.”²⁵

What may come next?

The future of normalization between Armenia and Türkiye may largely depend on the pace of the Azerbaijani–Armenia peace process. Yet, several other factors such as the Pashinyan government in Yerevan with its peace agenda and the broader regional environment also present a momentum for all three actors. Dr. Mitat Çelikpala, Professor from Kadir Has University, with rich expertise on Türkiye’s Caucasus policy, questions whether this momentum will survive Armenia’s upcoming June elections and whether the normalization process would continue if Pashinyan were to lose power. According to the expert, the environment for normalization has never been as constructive since the 1990s, as both “Armenian and Turkish policymakers and scholars are approaching the issue with a more pragmatic perspective than in the past.” The current situation presents even more fertile ground than during the Zurich Protocols period, when as “the Armenian side appeared more hesitant and less engaged,” Çelikpala thinks.

Indeed, the upcoming elections may become a watershed moment in Armenia’s contemporary political trajectory. The reelection of Pashinyan’s government would not only represent a domestic political outcome but could also determine whether Yerevan continues its peace process with Azerbaijan and its rapprochement with Türkiye. For Armenia’s Prime Minister who has invested significant political capital on these two normalization tracks any tangible or visible progress along either of them may bring extra pre-election scores. At the same time, however, overly dramatic or rapid steps by either Azerbaijan or Türkiye could backfire, as segments of Armenian society might perceive such developments as external support aimed at securing Pashinyan’s political victory, warns Çelikpala.

Some analysts such as Poghosyan also warn that the current window of opportunity for normalization may not remain open indefinitely. In their view, the favorable regional environment

²⁵ Rusarm info. Мы имеем два Баку–с запада и востока: политолог. Rusarm info, 27 January 2022. <https://youtu.be/ygT4GetDAbc?si=Vxxse6GVexj1jO7h>

is partly the result of geopolitical circumstances—particularly the fact that Russia, traditionally the dominant power in the South Caucasus, is heavily preoccupied with the war in Ukraine and therefore less able to actively shape regional developments.

One of the most visible and practical dimensions of normalization concerns borders and connectivity. Although the two sides agreed to open the border for third-country citizens and diplomats, implementation has been slow. Technical preparations for reopening the Margara–Alican crossing have largely been completed, and a partial reopening is expected, but full implementation has yet to materialize. Even a limited opening would be symbolically and economically significant, marking the first real physical connection between the two countries in decades.

Connectivity, however, is not only about borders but about Armenia’s broader regional role. For many years, Armenia positioned itself—intentionally or structurally—as an obstacle in Azerbaijan–Türkiye connectivity projects linking the Caspian basin to Anatolia and further to Europe. The emerging regional environment is, however, forcing a strategic rethink in Yerevan. The key question for Armenia is no longer how to block regional connectivity projects, including Azerbaijan–Türkiye connectivity but how to find its own role within emerging regional transport and trade networks, including “broader Turkic integrationist projects and connectivity corridors stretching from Central Asia to Europe,” as an anonymous Armenian foreign policy expert said in a private conversation.

A plausible sequence of next steps could unfold as follows: Armenia and Türkiye first prioritize the partial opening of the border for third-country nationals, followed by a full reopening contingent on progress in the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace process. This phased opening would likely coincide with—or further enhance—connectivity among Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Türkiye. Subsequently, the two sides could move toward establishing formal diplomatic relations between Ankara and Yerevan.

Looking further ahead, in the medium and long term, an even more interesting geopolitical scenario may emerge. As Armenia gradually attempts to reduce its dependence on Russia and move closer to Western political and economic structures, some analysts such as Wojciech Górecki, Polish expert on the Caucasus, speculate that Türkiye could eventually be seen—not immediately, but strategically—as a potential security umbrella for Armenia²⁶. Such a scenario would have been almost unimaginable a decade ago, but the geopolitical transformations after the 2020 war, Russia’s weakening position in the region, and Armenia’s gradual foreign policy reorientation are reshaping strategic thinking across the South Caucasus.

Conclusion

Armenia–Türkiye normalization is therefore not merely about reopening a border or restoring diplomatic relations. It is about the emergence of a new regional order in the South Caucasus—one in which bilateral relations are increasingly shaped not by history alone, but by geopolitics, connectivity, and the shifting balance of power in the wider region. In this new reality, Armenia–

²⁶ Civilnet. Гарантировать безопасность Армении может только Турция – Войцех Гурецкий. Civilnet, 21 March 2024. <https://youtu.be/SX4c3tirlo?si=jj2By8THtUihCcnr>

Türkiye relations may formally remain bilateral, but in practice they will continue to be shaped by three actors: Ankara, Yerevan, and Baku.

Rusif Huseynov is the Director of the Topchubashov Center, a Baku-based think tank. His work focuses on socio-political developments, frozen conflicts, and ethnic minorities in post-Soviet countries, with particular attention to Eastern Europe, the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Mr. Huseynov holds a bachelor's degree from Baku State University and a master's degree from the University of Tartu. He has been a ReThink.CEE fellow (2021) at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, a Local Focal Point within the EU4Dialogue project, and a Think Visegrad fellow (2025). He regularly publishes commentary and provides interviews for various international media outlets.