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## Erdoğan talks about a new order in Transcaucasia



On his return from Iraq, on the eve of the 109th anniversary of the Armenian genocide, Turkish President Recep Erdoğan announced the establishment of a “new order” in Transcaucasia. The essence of his thesis seems to be addressed to Armenia, which, as Nöbetçi Gazete notes, is being advised by the Turkish leader to discard unfounded memories and act on the basis of the [realities of the present](#).

In other words, Erdoğan not only considers the accusation that the Ottoman Empire and the Young Turk government in particular were involved in the organisation of the Armenian genocide to be “unfounded”, but also the demands made by Armenia:

- a) deny these false claims;
- b) recognise its subordinate position in the region after the defeat in Karabakh and the loss of control over another Armenian ethnic territory in favour of Ankara's ally Azerbaijan
- c) recognise its dependence on Turkey's regional leadership, which became a "new reality" after the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers from Karabakh.

In the Caucasus region, according to Erdoğan, a new order is now being established, and this is being realised by Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan, who

- a) is no longer so active in using the term genocide;
- b) refers to the tragedy of the Armenian people in 1915-1923 as a great catastrophe (or great massacre);
- c) further questions the appropriateness of the image of the biblical Ararat on the coat of arms of the Republic of Armenia, since the sacred Mount Ararat became part of Turkey under the terms of the Moscow-Kars Treaty of 1921.

In other words, Nikol Pashinyan is pursuing a policy of rejecting the projection of historical Armenia onto the reality of the Third Republic of Armenia, and in an interview with a group of British journalists on 22 April this year he stated that Armenia will not start a new war over Nagorno-Karabakh and that in the current situation he sees no real chances for the return of deported Armenians to Karabakh. The Armenian leader frames all his concessions on the world agenda under the dictates of his new masters in the West, where he recognised the disputed territory as part of Azerbaijan at a meeting in Prague after the September Karabakh tragedy and continues to capitulate with the diversification of the security system away from Russia in favour of the US, France and Turkey.

Why did Erdoğan announce his thesis of a "new order" in Transcaucasia not on 23 September 2023, when Aliyev established control over the remaining Armenian part of Nagorno-Karabakh at the cost of another military operation, but on 23 April 2024? Tell me, was this the Turkish leader's message on the 24th of April, the anniversary of the Armenians? But the order in the region does not change one day before the Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day.

Or maybe Erdoğan said this because he was inspired by the positive results of his visit to Iraq after a 12-year hiatus? In particular, in Baghdad Turkey signed an important transit agreement with Iraq, Qatar and the UAE – a memorandum of understanding on the project of the overland transport corridor Development Route from the Persian Gulf to Europe. This 1200 km long corridor is to connect the Gulf countries with the EU through the transport communications of Iraq and Turkey along the route: the largest Iraqi seaport Fao with 90

berths and then the road and railway Iraqi highways Najaf, Karbala, Baghdad and Mosul to Turkey and Europe. The cost of the project is estimated at \$17bn and involves the reconstruction and construction of new roads.

“The Path of Development project”, notes Turkish Transport Minister Abdulkadir Uraloğlu, is being implemented on the basis of the developing and growing volume of trade in the world and Turkey’s strategic position. We will now ensure uninterrupted transport to every country in Europe by road and rail from the port of Fao to London.

Some experts (for example, Grigory Lukyanov, a researcher at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences) believe that the Turkish-Arab land corridor project is quite relevant in the situation of blocked maritime trade routes in the Red Sea due to the attacks of the Houthis and the conflict in the Gaza Strip. At the same time, it increases Turkey’s transit importance in the Middle East and reduces the level of contradictions with the UAE. Will Moscow eventually get access to the “Development Path” with its 7,200-kilometre multimodal north-south road project linking Russia to India via Azerbaijan and Iran?

In principle, Moscow is interested in diversifying its trade links towards the countries of the global South in the wake of Western sanctions. Accordingly, Russia could benefit from building infrastructure hubs in the Middle East as it turns towards southern markets. Although, of course, systemic contradictions remain in the region between Iran and Iraq, Syria and Turkey, and so on. What is clear is that Turkey’s transit role in the Middle East is strengthening and its access to Europe is becoming a key position in the struggle for transport corridors.

Meanwhile, although the Middle East borders on the South Caucasus, the promising Iraqi “Development Path” project, which is to be completed by 2050, cannot change the situation in the Transcaucasus so quickly and establish a “new order”.

It turns out that one week after the early withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers from Nagorno-Karabakh began on 17 April and ahead of his important visit to Washington on 9 May to meet with President Biden, Erdoğan was not just reminding Armenia of his admonitions to re-educate, his ideas about the beginning of a new era in the region and his advice to choose the path of co-creating new beginnings for a better tomorrow.

Turkey hastens to believe that its military success together with Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 and 2023 has created new realities – the necessary conditions for a new peacekeeping force in Nagorno-Karabakh. has created new realities – the necessary conditions for changing the balance of power in the South Caucasus, opened the way for a

new transit of political and economic neopanturanism to Central Asia, made Ankara a new Eurasian pole, predetermined the collapse of Russian-Armenian strategic alliance relations, destroyed the Armenian buffer on the Turks way to Turan, and finally forced Russia to leave Nagorno-Karabakh.

As it is known, after the beginning of the withdrawal of the Russian peacekeeping contingent from Karabakh, Ankara announced the suspension of the activities of the joint (Russian and Turkish) monitoring centre in Aghdam. However, the Russians are leaving Karabakh and Azerbaijan, while there is no information about the withdrawal of Turkish troops from this Transcaucasian republic. In addition, Turkish military advisers and some special forces units continue to be stationed in the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic, and NATO member Turkey and its ally Azerbaijan regularly conduct various types of joint military exercises in the region and train troops according to the programmes and standards of the North Atlantic Alliance.

The Turks are staying and the Russians are leaving. In this way, Ankara believes that, thanks to its intervention, the Russian peacekeeping contingent has not become another Russian military base in the South Caucasus (as Russian experts so often and unfoundedly talked about in 2020-2022). And this reality, according to Erdoğan, offers the same Armenia a “window of opportunity”, which, however, “will not be open forever and it is necessary to use the moment effectively”.

Ankara does not rule out the possibility that the subsequent distancing of Armenia from Russia and the CSTO will eventually raise the issue of withdrawal of Russia’s 102nd military base and border guards from the Republic, and this security vacuum will be filled by NATO forces under the operational control of geographically close Turkey. It is with these thoughts in mind that Erdoğan plans a visit to the U.S. to report on his contribution to weakening Russia’s position in the Transcaucasia (i.e. mission accomplished), his readiness to take responsibility for regional security (including Armenia’s own) and to create new roadmaps on a realistic basis.

After Armenia recognised Azerbaijan’s 1991 border with Azerbaijan, the geo-political reality in the Transcaucasus certainly changed. Baku established control over Karabakh and deported the Karabakh Armenians, Yerevan gave up its dispute over the province, and Moscow had no subject to retain its peacekeepers in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijani expert Timur Shafir claims that after Recep Erdoğan’s departure from the historical stage, a power struggle will begin in Turkey itself, and the main puppeteers in Ankara will continue to be Western countries – the United States, Britain, France and the EU

(i.e. an indication of a power shift from nationalists to Westerners). Therefore, Sharif believes that with Russia's withdrawal, Turkey will not be a dominant force in the Transcaucasus, as it will be replaced by an ambitious and resourceful Azerbaijan, which signed an agreement on allied relations with Moscow on 22 February 2022.

In other words, Baku's representative is assuring his Russian colleagues that the leadership of independent Azerbaijan, not NATO Turkey, will replace Russia in the region. But what is the basis for the independence of the "new regional leader", if not the military power of NATO-Turkey, the Shusha Declaration on the Baku-Ankara strategic alliance of 15 July 2021, or the "Turkish transit" of Azerbaijani oil and gas resources to the EU? If Erdoğan leaves politics at the end of his current presidential term in 2028 (which is natural, since nothing is eternal), Turkey will remain. Moreover, natural changes on the political horizon will occur over time, not only in Turkey, but there is no guarantee of similar processes in Azerbaijan itself and in other countries interested in the region. Who guarantees Baku's regional leadership?

And the West should not be so easily dismissed, as the likely changes in Turkey are linked to a resumption of Turkish-American relations. It is no coincidence that before Erdoğan's visit to the United States, the World Bank decided to more than double its lending to Turkey from \$17 billion to \$35 billion, and the IMF has given a positive assessment of the Turkish government's economic reforms under the leadership of Finance and Treasury Minister Mehmet Şimşek. The deterioration of relations with the West and Iran, while ignoring Turkey's leadership, is unlikely to help strengthen Azerbaijan's leading position in the Transcaucasus.

Russia has ruled out getting involved in a military conflict in Transcaucasia not because it is afraid of the power of the Azerbaijani army, but because it does not want to get into a direct conflict with NATO member Turkey and invoke Article 5 of the NATO Charter. And this has nothing to do with the name of the Turkish leader. However, Russia is unlikely to agree to lower its bar of being a major geopolitical centre to the status of the Republic of Azerbaijan. In the history of the twentieth century. Russia has twice withdrawn from Transcaucasia and returned with renewed vigour. There is no reason to rule out another analogy in the first quarter of the 21st century.

Meanwhile, conflicting versions are circulating in the Turkish media as to whether or not President Erdoğan's announced visit to the United States in May will take place. Following Erdoğan's official reception of Hamas politburo leader Ismail Haniyeh, Israel and influential Jewish forces in Washington have taken a negative view of such a challenge by the Turkish president. Moreover, Biden himself is not particularly interested in losing votes in the

upcoming presidential elections, given the discrediting of his personality by receiving the pro-Hamas R. Erdoğan.

So Erdoğan's business is not so clear-cut that he can dictate new rules in the South Caucasus without looking to the West and the North. Azerbaijan, which hopes to become a regional leader, is probably better off keeping what it has gained with external help, concentrating on building its north-south road link, possibly contributing to the reconstruction of the Baikal-Amur Mainline project, which Heydar Aliyev himself once helped to create, and not deepening the contradictions in the east (Turkmenistan), south (Iran) and west (Armenia).

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