

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

Geopolitical Analysis of the Shusha Declaration: Constructing Theoretical Framework in the Regional Order Context*

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Abstract

Comprehensive relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, characterized by the “one nation, two states” discourse, have not only an emotional but also a rational dimension. The Shusha Declaration upgraded bilateral relations to the level of a political and military alliance on cemented rational basis. In addition to advancing of bilateral relations, the Shusha Declaration also contributed to building a new regional order in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the entire Turkic World, legally and politically. The article attempts to construct a theoretical framework to examine the contribution of the Shusha Declaration on the regional order-building process in the context of regional power dynamics, common identity and ideology, exigent internal and external threats, domestic political transformation, political leadership, and tangible regional cooperation initiatives such as Zangezur Corridor.

Keywords

The Shusha Declaration, Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations, regional order, Turkic World, Zangezur Corridor.

* Date of Arrival: 11 September 2023 – Date of Acceptance: 19 April 2024

You can refer to this article as follows:

Çelik, Metin, and Kenan Aslanlı. “Geopolitical Analysis of the Shusha Declaration: Constructing Theoretical Framework in the Regional Order Context.” *bilig*, no. 111, 2024, pp. 55-78, <https://doi.org/10.12995/bilig.11103>.

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Şuşa Deklarasyonu'nun Jeopolitik Analizi: Bölgesel Düzen Bağlamında Teorik Çerçeve Oluşturulması Girişimi*

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Öz

Türkiye ve Azerbaycan arasında “tek millet, iki devlet” söylemiyle karakterize edilen kapsamlı ilişkilerin sadece duygusal değil, aynı zamanda rasyonel boyutu da vardır. Şuşa Deklarasyonu, ikili ilişkileri sağlamlaştırılmış rasyonel temeller üzerinde siyasi ve askerî bir ittifak seviyesine yükseltmiştir. İkili ilişkilerin geliştirilmesinin yanı sıra Şuşa Deklarasyonu, Kafkasya, Orta Asya ve tüm Türk Dünyası'nda hukuki ve siyasi açıdan yeni bir bölgesel düzenin inşasına da katkıda bulunmuştur. Makale, Şuşa Deklarasyonu'nun bölgesel düzen inşası sürecine katkısını bölgesel güç dinamikleri, ortak kimlik ve ideoloji, ivedi iç ve dış tehditler, iç siyasi dönüşüm, siyasi liderlik ve Zengezur Koridoru gibi somut bölgesel iş birliği girişimleri bağlamında incelemek için teorik bir çerçeve oluşturmaya çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kavramlar

Şuşa Deklarasyonu, Türkiye-Azerbaycan İlişkileri, bölgesel düzen, Türk Dünyası, Zengezur Koridoru.

* Geliş Tarihi: 11 Eylül 2023 – Kabul Tarihi: 19 Nisan 2024

Bu makaleyi şu şekilde kaynak gösterebilirsiniz:

Çelik, Metin, ve Kenan Aslanlı. “Geopolitical Analysis of the Shusha Declaration: Constructing Theoretical Framework in the Regional Order Context.” *bilig*, no. 111, 2024, ss. 55-78, <https://doi.org/10.12995/bilig.11103>.

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Introduction

“The Shusha Declaration on Allied Relations between the Republic of Türkiye and the Republic of Azerbaijan” (The Shusha Declaration) was signed in the newly liberated Karabakh’s cultural and historical center, Shusha, on June 15, 2021, between the Presidents of Türkiye and Azerbaijan, as an international agreement based on mutual consent. The purpose of the Declaration is to consolidate and specify the political, legal, military, security, and economic mechanisms of establishing alliance relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, which was defined as friendship in 1994, and strategic partnership in 2010, based on the two countries’ state sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. The Shusha Declaration has not only an identity-based emotional basis but also a rational and pragmatic framework. These rational, pragmatic, and even normative foundations streamline the attempts of Türkiye and Azerbaijan to establish a regional order in the Caucasus and Central Asia regions.

Türkiye’s grand strategy goal toward getting geostrategic, geopolitical, geocultural and geoeconomic access to Central Asia’s Turkic Republics and Azerbaijan’s vital necessity to obtain a security guarantee from Türkiye against Russia and Iran formed the basis for the Shusha Declaration from a security standpoint that upgraded the bilateral cooperation to the strategic alliance level. The Second Karabakh War in 2020 was a consequential accelerator of the signing of the Shusha Declaration that significantly scratched out the existing and limited roughness in the mutual trust environment between Türkiye and Azerbaijan. The Shusha Declaration implicitly invites the other Turkic states to have identical deep cooperation between Türkiye and Azerbaijan. The convergence of bilateral relations at the level of the strategic alliance set an institutional and legal model for the Turkic World. In addition, The Shusha Declaration constructed a new historical, legal, and geopolitical reality for the region’s countries, including Russia, Iran, Armenia, and even Georgia.

The article begins with the determination of the integral theoretical framework of the Shusha Declaration based on the existing literature on regionalization. After that, the possible effects of the Shusha Declaration on (a) bilateral alliance relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, (b) perennial stability in the Caucasus region, (c) cooperation and integration attempts

in the Turkic World, and finally, (d) the realization of regional strategic connectivity initiatives such as the Zangezur Corridor were thoroughly discussed in the article. The article considers the Shusha Declaration as a legal and institutional mechanism that characterizes the new regional order through joint decision-making devices and *omnibus* integration endeavors in a recent environment of geopolitical fragmentation and disorder in Eurasia.

Theoretical Framework for the Shusha Declaration

The Shusha Declaration was signed on June 15, 2021, and entered into force after being approved in accordance with the domestic law of both states. On February 1, 2022, the Azerbaijani National Assembly (Millî Meclis) approved the Shusha Declaration on the alliance relations between the Republic of Türkiye and the Republic of Azerbaijan in the general assembly (E-qanun.az. No. 478-VIQ), and the Shusha Declaration entered into force according to the Azerbaijani legal system. In the Turkish constitutional system, for an international agreement to become binding, it must first be approved by the Turkish Grand National Assembly (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi) with a law and then approved by the decision of the President. The Shusha Declaration was approved by Law No. 7355, which was accepted by the majority vote in the Turkish Grand National Assembly on February 3, 2022, and entered into force by being published in the Official Gazette dated February 14, 2022 (*Resmî Gazete* No. 31750). Therefore, the Declaration has become a binding document for both countries.

With the Shusha Declaration, Türkiye and Azerbaijan are forming a political, economic, and military alliance, which serves the two countries' national interests and security, stability, and prosperity in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. The Declaration addresses military, security, defense industry, diplomacy, economy, trade, energy, transport, counter-terrorism, cybercrime, culture, and humanitarian issues from a multidimensional perspective, and it states that the relationship between the parties should be deepened and integrated into a multidimensional and multi-layered manner. The Declaration also *greening seed* for the broader regional conformity and convergence among Turkic Republics. Çelik and Aslanlı emphasized that the Shusha Declaration presented a road map of cooperation and integration in the Turkic World to determine the geopolitical architecture of the region (38).

The main reason for the process that led Türkiye and Azerbaijan to sign the Shusha Declaration was to guarantee the success and gains achieved by Azerbaijan after the Second Karabakh War in 2020, which ended with Azerbaijan's victory. However, from a broader perspective, the crisis of the global system in the last decade, the challenge to the neo-liberal order, the insecurity caused by non-state actors, the increase in conventional conflicts at the regional level, and the nuclear threat, which became more closely with the war in Ukraine, have led two states to more optional and effective regional cooperation structures and alliances (Çelik and Aslanlı 38). Therefore, the Shusha Declaration is more than a diplomatic document aimed at raising Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations to the level of an alliance; it is the founding document of the two countries' attempt to create a regional order.

There are rational and normative foundations for Türkiye's and Azerbaijan's attempts to create a regional order. The order has been analyzed differently in the mainstream theories of international relations. Liberals argue that order is achieved through interdependence, international organizations, and global governance. On the other hand, constructivists have emphasized ideas, norms, and ideologies and believe that order is attained through legitimate shared ideas on a global scale. According to realists, order is achieved through the balance of power based on political, military, and economic capacities. In *World Order*, Kissinger argues that regional orders, like global orders, can be built on mutual power sharing and fair practices (Kissinger, *World* 9). Kissinger also emphasizes that the quest for regional order within regionalism, regional subsystems, and reciprocity is more suited to regional dynamics and more effective in resolving regional crises. There is a similar dynamic in the alliance relationship that the Shusha Declaration seeks to establish.

The structure of the international system has shaped the search for regional order. During the Cold War, Karl Deutsch's concept of the *security community* came to the fore in the search for a security-based order. According to Deutsch, mutual communication and interaction would build trust between states and create a sense of *togetherness*. Acting with this awareness and wishing to establish a regional order, states would voluntarily choose to form either an amalgamated security community or a pluralistic security community. Deutsch argued that to create a security community,

whether amalgamated or pluralistic, it is essential that there would be harmony between the parties in terms of trade and transportation, constant communication, a perception of common interests and security, and a sense of unshakable loyalty (Deutsch et al. 154-159).

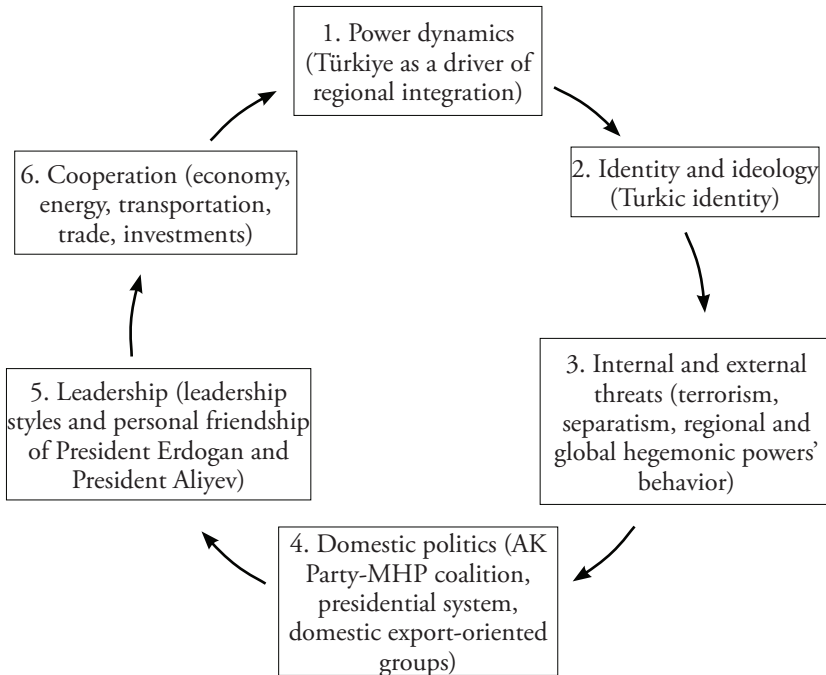
During the *détente* of the Cold War, Barry Buzan conceptualized the *regional security complex*. According to Buzan, states' national security concerns cannot be considered apart from their adjacent regional security complexes (Buzan, *People* 105-106). The arrangements of the states and the differentiation amongst them, the patterns of amity and enmity, and the distribution of power among the states shape the content of the regional security complex (Buzan, "Regional security" 143). With the changes in the post-Cold War global system, Buzan, together with Waever, updated the regional security complex approach with social constructivism, arguing that the mutually indistinguishable level of national and regional securitization, desecuritization and both processes internalized by states, rather than concrete threat perceptions, would be the primary motive (Buzan and Waever 44).

Amitav Acharya has developed a more recent approach to establishing order in the last decade's global disorder era, power transition process and the neoliberal system crisis. Continuing Buzan and Waever's social constructivist approach to regionalism, Acharya analyses regions as socially and politically constructed environments rather than territorial boundaries (Acharya, *Constructing* 80). According to Acharya, regional cooperation encourages states to create a platform to address common challenges, achieve common goals, and express a common identity. The regional cooperation and organizations thus created play an essential role in solving regional challenges, managing conflicts and crises, and enhancing cooperation. He notes that regional cooperation built on these foundations will build the global order in the *multiplex world* through their participation in global governance (Acharya, *The End* 82).

In addition, Karns and Mingst specify five political factors that drive regionalism (148-152): Power dynamics, identity and ideology, internal and external threats, domestic politics, and leadership. As a result of these approaches, which have evolved in response to changes and transformations in international politics, it is also possible to create a new theoretical

framework by considering bilateral relations and regional and global dynamics in defining the alliance that the Shusha Declaration seeks to establish.

In the theoretical framework part of this article, the aim is not to explain the Shusha Declaration with one single regionalization theory solitarily. None of the existing theories can explain this phenomenon on its own. While making the political analysis of the Shusha Declaration, the solution proposals presented by the current theoretical discussions and debates were combined in a *melting pot*. This article combined the known parameters of theoretical discussions on regionalization trends and emerged with a 6-parameter theoretical framework (Scheme 1).



Scheme 1. Six dimensions of regional integration in the Turkic World from the lens of the Shusha Declaration (The general framework of the scheme was modified from Karns and Mingst 148-152)

(a) *Power dynamics.* Theoretically, power dynamics can be realized by regional power centers or larger sides on economic, political, diplomatic, and military weight in asymmetrical regional arrangements. If we approach the Shusha Declaration as a forefoot for the greater regionalism in the Turkic World stretching from the Balkans and Central Europe (e.g., Hungary) to Central Asia via Anatolia and the South Caucasus, then we could emphasize that Türkiye drives regional integration in this geopolitical axis. Paradigmatic changes materialized in Turkish foreign policy toward proactivity and initiative in the regional geopolitical order and global affairs with revisionist challengers of the emerging global order system such as Russia and China. Asia Anew Initiative was proclaimed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye as an indication of the new era in the relations with emerging Asian powers. These principal changes intensified Türkiye's strategic communication and long-term alliance-building efforts with Azerbaijan and other Turkic Republics. All these developments take place sensitively in some problematic domains and realms between Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and other Turkic Republics arising from historical identity and current political reasons.

(b) *Identity and ideology.* Karns and Mingst (148-152) define regional identity from the constructive perspective as a shared perception of being part of a definable region. Domestic constituents such as culture and religion or external determinants such as joint security or economic menaces could form shared perceptions and common identities. Grevi underlines that region-level identities and historical values shape regional orders in heterogeneous global systems (30-38). Regional and bilateral economic cooperation and communications can contribute to the shared identity. Acharya points out that regional identities can be reinterpreted from the social construction standpoint, changing the regional position of various countries (Acharya, "The Emerging" 650-651). Potentially, ideologies that can upgrade bilateral relations to regional integration scope could be cooperation-based neo-liberal ideologies, anticolonial attitudes of post-Soviet area's Turkic states against post-imperial Russia, and growing interest toward ethnic identity in the region.

Shared Turkic identity was outstandingly strengthened among Turkic Republics, including Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and Central Asian Republics after

1991, by the growing social interactions, economic cooperation, official and non-official communications, and common threats such as terrorism, separatism, and global powers' expansionist and sometimes destructive behavior. Turkic identity evolved from the people-level distinguishing element to the founding ideology of the nation-building and state-building process. Identity-based bilateral and regional integration efforts caused the emergence of a variety of interstate legal documents, including the Shusha Declaration and regional organizations, such as the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) and its affiliated institutions and initiatives.

(c) *Internal and external threats.* Actual external-internal threats or valid menace perceptions could trigger a regional integration process based on a bilateral intense cooperative relationship through the constructivist joint identity-building process or realist balance-of-power strategy. Not only direct military threats, ethnic conflicts, civil wars, and terrorism but also economic difficulties, migration inflows, environmental challenges, natural disasters, pandemics, and noxious humanitarian catastrophes could precipitate regional integration that is rooted in bilateral affairs and shared interests. Internal and external threats and relevant security perceptions played a crucial role in the appearance of the Shusha Declaration and the intensification of the Turkic World's rapprochement. The long-lasting Karabakh issue and Armenia's direct military occupation of Azerbaijan's internationally recognized territories created immense regional security risks and common threats to the joint economic, energy, transport, and infrastructure projects of Türkiye and Azerbaijan (See also. Şen). Also, the aggressive position of Iran toward Azerbaijan and Russia's covert support to the illegal Armenian armed forces in the region after the Second Karabakh War intensified the emergence of the comprehensive military-alliance agreement in the example of the Shusha Declaration in 2021 between Türkiye and Azerbaijan.

(d) *Domestic politics.* Karns and Mingst emphasize the importance of similar state structures and regime types in the subjects of the regional integration process (148-152). Türkiye's transformation from a parliamentary to a presidential system in 2017 (*Resmî Gazete* No. 29976) adducted the state to the deep-seated state structure of Azerbaijan and other Turkic Republics where the presidency institute is very powerful. The structure of regional

political, military, and economic order is influenced by the characteristics of domestic political alliances and their approaches toward other states in the region. Conservative and nationalist domestic political alliance or coalition between the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) that emerged after the July 15 coup attempt in 2016 led to more attention to the Turkic World dimension in Turkish foreign policy.

The actors of the Azerbaijani political system and the political parties in the parliament have consistently taken a stand in favor of deepening cooperation with Türkiye. In particular, the Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance and Joint Declaration on the Establishment of a High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council between Azerbaijan and Türkiye signed in 2010, right after overcoming the “flag crisis” between the two countries in 2009 (“Eurasianet”), scaled up bilateral relations to the next level. The social support in Azerbaijani society for the partnership with Türkiye has traditionally been above 90% (“Caucasus Barometer”).

(e) *Leadership*. Purposeful policy preferences and strong characteristic features of political leaders and heads of state advance regional integration based on the developed bilateral ties. Kissinger (*Leadership*) highlighted the importance of transformational and strategic leadership for the crises and transition periods of the states, regions, and even international order. Leadership is one of the main driving factors of contemporary national, regional, and global politics. The political leadership styles of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and President Ilham Aliyev, their long-lasting personal friendship relations, and their all-encompassing awareness of regional and global developments intensified bilateral ties and the emergence of new regional order settings in the Caucasus.

(f) *Cooperation*. Despite the overemphasis on the role of nation-states, comprehensive cooperation, and integration were perceived as the cornerstone for any regionalization tendency (Börzel 41-63). The cooperation dimension of regional integration covers regionalism’s economic and political economy drivers, such as interdependence, the need for foreign trade and investment, and economic globalization. Regional cooperation and interdependence can potentially avert deeper fragmentation and instability in the polycentric global order (Grevi 30-38). In addition to stability and security factors

based on common external threats and conjunctural conditions, economic cooperation is also the founding principle of any regionalism. Export-oriented economic sectors in Türkiye and their political influence on official policy-making and decision-making processes contributed to the growing cooperation and integration with Azerbaijan and Central Asia. The need to raise the ongoing economic cooperation to a new level, especially in terms of transport corridors, including the Zangezur Corridor and joint energy infrastructure projects, necessitated the elimination of the Karabakh conflict as a common security threat and blocking barrier. In this sense, the security dimension of bilateral affairs has been a factor that deeply triggered comprehensive economic cooperation. The Shusha Declaration expressed its determination to improve bilateral and regional economic, energy, transportation, and social cooperation.

The Shusha Declaration envisaged the establishment of mechanisms for realizing the free movement of goods and diversification of exports in June 2021. In April 2023, Türkiye and Azerbaijan signed the protocol to expand the scope of the Preferential Trade Agreement (*Resmî Gazete* No. 31369), signed in February 2020 after long and compelling negotiations, to reach the 15-billion-dollar trade volume target set by the presidents of both states (Ministry of Trade). So, a *spiral-shaped pattern* exists between the Shusha Declaration and the economic cooperation disposition between Türkiye and Azerbaijan. Also, the Shusha Declaration proposes joint and effective decision-making mechanisms for the economy and security realm. Finally, the Shusha Declaration is an attempt to bring order to the regional disorder.

Türkiye-Azerbaijan Bilateral Relations and The Shusha Declaration

Except for a few crises, relations between the two countries have generally progressed in close cooperation in line with the *one nation, two states* discourse during the last three decades. It is not enough to explain bilateral relations only with moral values. Türkiye and Azerbaijan are rational actors seeking maximum benefit in their national and mutual interests. Rational factors such as the territorial integrity of the countries, the common attitude towards the powers in the region such as Iran and Russia, energy and transportation transit lines in the East-West axis, the stability and security in the South Caucasus, and the cooperation and integration in the Turkic World guide the bilateral relations. Structural changes in the international

system and Türkiye's active and entrepreneurial foreign policy in the last two decades are effective in this disposition. Today, Türkiye and Azerbaijan act together in regional and global politics within the strategic partnership framework in diplomatic, military, and economic relations.

The Shusha Declaration aims to raise the relations to the level of *alliance*, which was defined as *friendship* in 1994 (*Resmî Gazete* No. 22059), *strategic cooperation* in 1997 (E-qanun.az. No. 368-IQ) and *strategic partnership* in 2010 (*Resmî Gazete* No. 27889). The Shusha Declaration (*Resmî Gazete* No. 31787) aims to deepen the cooperation between two countries in various domains, such as politics, economy, defence, security, culture, humanitarian issues, health, education, social, youth, and sports (par. 5 and 45)¹; diversification of exports, evaluation of joint production opportunities (par. 28); operation of the East-West/Central international transport corridor (par. 30); a partnership in diaspora activities (par. 35 and 36); communication (par. 38); a partnership in the protection of historical and cultural heritage (par. 40); mutual convenience in matters of travel and residence (par. 44).

Although the Shusha Declaration aims to deepen cooperation in all areas, the security, defence, and military fields stand out. Paragraph 20 of the Declaration clearly emphasizes the will for an alliance like Articles 4 and 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty (NATO):

If, in the opinion of one of the parties, there is a threat or an act of aggression from a third state or states against their independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, the inviolability or security of their internationally recognized borders, *the parties will hold joint consultations* [such as “consultation among members” in Article 4 of NATO] and, in order to eliminate this threat or acts of aggression, *carry out initiatives* [such as “collective defence” in Article 5 of NATO] in accordance with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and provide each other with the necessary assistance in accordance with the UN Charter. After determining through urgent discussions, the volume and form of such possible assistance, a decision will be made to secure defence needs for the *adoption of joint measures, and coordinated activities* will be organized of power-wielding and administrative agencies of the Armed Forces.

The Declaration also stipulates the modernization of the armed forces of the two countries (par. 22), exchange of military personnel, coordination of defence industry institutions (par. 24); joint projects in the fields of sea, air, and space and cooperation in the defence industry (par. 25); and joint work in the field of cyber security (par. 27). Additionally, Paragraph 21 of the Declaration is important in terms of showing the depth of the strategic and allied dimension of the relationship between the two countries: “Regular joint meetings of the Security Councils of the Parties on national security issues shall be organized, during which national interests and regional and international security issues affecting the Parties’ interests shall be discussed”.

The security councils in this paragraph are the National Security Council of Türkiye and the Service of the Secretary of the Security Council of Azerbaijan. *Holding regular joint meetings and consultation on regional and global developments* between the two states’ Security Councils indicates a significant deepening in security and defence policies.

The Shusha Declaration’s Regional Implications and Stability Assurance in the Caucasus

The Shusha Declaration has a solid regional dimension, especially considering the Caucasus region. In 2020-2021, Türkiye needed to make new moves to deepen the strategic dimension of its relations with Azerbaijan and gain permanent geopolitical status in the region by taking advantage of the historical momentum gained with Russia in the Caucasus (Çelik and Aslanlı 38). The Shusha Declaration emphasized that Türkiye and Azerbaijan “will continue their efforts to consolidate stability and security in the Caucasus region, restore all ties in the field of economy and transportation, as well as normalize relations between the states of the region and ensure long-term peace” (par. 14). The liberation of the Karabakh region from Armenian occupation by Azerbaijan with the comprehensive support of Türkiye was seen and presented in the Declaration as a step to ensure regional stability and security in the Caucasus. In his speech at the Azerbaijan National Assembly on June 16, 2021, President Erdoğan stated, “We must make the best use of the opportunities that come before us so that no one can put a chain of captivity on the Caucasus again” (“Kafkaslardaki barış ve huzur”). It means Türkiye’s vision encompasses the entire Caucasus region, including the North Caucasus which is part of Russia.

Military alliance or pact between Türkiye and Azerbaijan that was reinforced and further consolidated by the Shusha Declaration seeks to secure the South Caucasus region from possible external intervention, probably from Iran, Russia, or ambitious Western powers such as France. Therefore, the Shusha Declaration presents Türkiye's strategic partnership and shields against possible and viable Russian and Iranian interventions in Azerbaijan. While discussing the effects of the Shusha Declaration on the Caucasus region and wider Eurasia, it should be underlined that this document reflects the strategic and regional rivalry of Türkiye with Iran and Russia. Iranian officials insistently stated they would not be willing to *change the borders* in the South Caucasus after the Second Karabakh War, deploying military units on the state border and threatening Azerbaijan ("Iran does not accept").

Türkiye and Azerbaijan had the opportunity to give clear political messages to all regional actors, including Russia, Iran, and even global actors such as the USA and France on the Karabakh through a new strategic alliance document. That message was about the new regional security architecture and changing regional power dynamics. The document laid the groundwork for expanding the bilateral alliance to potential new members from the Turkic World and other countries such as Georgia that also needed trustworthy security guarantees. This new regional order that was designed around the Türkiye-Azerbaijan strategic military and political alliance started to unblock and unlock the potential of regional cooperation between South Caucasus republics (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia), regional powers (Türkiye, Russia, Iran, and even Pakistan) and global powers (the USA, China, the EU, and even India).

The Karabakh conflict blocked regional economic cooperation in the Caucasus. It increased the vulnerability of the strategic energy and transportation infrastructure projects. The Shusha Declaration accentuates the strategic stature of the Southern Gas Corridor that supplies the natural gas of Azerbaijan to Europe through Türkiye, ensuring route diversification for energy supply. The Declaration also promises that Türkiye and Azerbaijan will continue contributing to regional and international energy security by exporting electricity (par. 29).

The Shusha Declaration underlines the political will of Türkiye and Azerbaijan to carry on with mutual efforts and cooperation to ensure smooth operations and functionality of the East-West (Middle) Transport Corridor through the Zangezur Corridor. It means the regional dimension of the Shusha Declaration covers not only the Caucasus but also the welfare and unity of Central Asia, the Caspian Sea basin, and the entire Turkic World. After signing the Shusha Declaration, the Presidents of Türkiye and Azerbaijan made a joint press statement about the 3+3 regional economic cooperation and stability platform covering the South Caucasus states and the three regional powers - Russia, Türkiye, and Iran (“Azərbaycan və Türkiyə prezidentləri mətbuatı”). The Shusha Declaration, which has the nature of an international treaty and takes the relations between the two states to a new level in all policy domains, also has a wider regional dimension in Eurasia.

The Shusha Declaration’s Repercussions on the Turkic World and Deepening the Cooperation

The Shusha Declaration states that activities for the development of the Turkic World need to be supported (par. 9) and that national and international efforts need to be increased for this purpose (par. 41). The Declaration also addresses the promotion of the Turkish cultural heritage in the international arena (par. 42), strengthening solidarity in the Turkic World (par. 43). In order to strengthen solidarity in the Turkic World, it is suggested to employ regional organizations such as the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (now OTS), the Turkic Academy, the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation, TURKSOY, and the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking States more actively.

The Shusha Declaration can become an institutional framework for Turkic states to cooperate politically, economically, and culturally. The fact that the areas of cooperation addressed in the Declaration are realizable, that the areas of cooperation are issues that occupy the agenda of each country and await a solution, and that the alliance relationship to be realized respects the sovereignty rights of the parties is quite effective in this. For the Turkic republics, which closely feel the political pressure of regional and global powers such as Russia, China, and India, mechanisms such as the Shusha Declaration, which provides sovereign equal relations, are desirable. While

the Shusha Declaration aims to raise Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations to the alliance level, it has content that protects the national interests and sovereign rights of both states (par. 18). The Shusha Declaration envisages that Türkiye and Azerbaijan can conduct an independent foreign policy to protect their national interests. The Declaration postulates that their positions on regional and international issues cannot fully overlap. Therefore, the alliance relationship sought to be established by the Shusha Declaration envisages an intergovernmental rather than a supra-governmental mechanism. As in the case of the Shusha Declaration, the Turkic States will increase the possibility of rapprochement with each other in different fields within the framework of the principles of independent foreign policy, sovereignty, sovereign equality, non-interference in the internal affairs of states, and non-hierarchical cooperation (Çelik and Aslanlı 59).

There are also examples where the Shusha Declaration directly impacted cooperation in the Turkic World. The Shusha Declaration significantly impacted the OTS as the institutional representative of cooperation in the Turkic World (Purtaş 23-25). Only five months after the signing of the Shusha Declaration, the Eighth Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States was held in Istanbul on November 12, 2021, and the name of the institutional structure was changed to the OTS. This name change is crucial in deepening cooperation in the Turkic World. Moreover, Turkmenistan attended the Summit at the presidential level and became an observer member. Thus, all Turkic republics gathered under an umbrella. The Summit Declaration bears the traces of the Shusha Declaration.

The Eighth Summit Declaration emphasized the need for close cooperation and common policies in the Turkic World in foreign policy, security, economy, education, culture, humanitarian issues, transport, energy, tourism, and many other fields. The decision to ensure the connection of the Zangezur Corridor within the scope of the International East-West (Central) Corridor and to support Azerbaijan in this regard which was envisaged in Article 40 of the Declaration has strategic importance. It demonstrates that the issues highlighted in the Shusha Declaration are on the agenda not only between the two countries but also by the member states and observers of the OTS.

The most concrete output of the Summit is the approval of the 2040 Vision Document of the Turkic World. The 2040 Vision Document includes the

medium-term goals of the Turkic World for 2040 and details the objectives in the Shusha Declaration under four main headings: political and security cooperation, economic and sectoral cooperation, international cooperation, and cooperation with third parties (“Türk Dünyası 2040 Vizyonu”).

Lastly, according to the Shusha Declaration, the Security Councils of Türkiye and Azerbaijan were to hold joint meetings on national security issues (par. 21). Thereupon, the two countries’ security councils signed a memorandum of cooperation in May 2022 (MGK Genel Sekreterliği). Only one month after this bilateral memorandum, on June 29 – July 1, 2022, the secretaries of the National Security Councils of the members of the OTS held a consultative meeting in Türkiye. As can be seen, some of the mechanisms established by the Shusha Declaration were also accepted and implemented by the OTS. In this respect, the Shusha Declaration is the first and most concrete attempt to show that the Turkic states can move from a strategic partnership to a level of alliance.

The Shusha Declaration as a Trigger of Regional Initiatives: Zangezur Corridor

The Trilateral Statement signed in November 2020 ended the Second Karabakh War with the active mediation of Russia and the consent of Türkiye. Article No. 9 of the Trilateral Statement contemplated *the restoration of all economic and transport links in the region* (“İlham Əliyev xalqa müraciət”). Armenia guaranteed the safety of transport links between the western regions of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (NAR) to organize the unobstructed movement of citizens, vehicles, and cargo in both directions. The construction of new transport communications and transport links (which will be controlled by Russia) connecting the NAR and the western regions of Azerbaijan was ensured with the agreement. Azerbaijan (West) – Armenia – NAR (Azerbaijan) – Türkiye regional transport lines, which the 9th article of the tripartite declaration envisaged being opened, were later introduced to the public as the Zangezur Corridor.

At the informal summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (now OTS) in March 2021, President Aliyev stated that *transportation, communication, and infrastructure projects passing via Zangezur will connect the entire Turkic World and will also create additional opportunities for other*

countries, including Armenia (“Türkdilli Dövlətlərin Əməkdaşlıq Şurasının videokonfrans”). In April 2021, President Aliyev stated that the Zangezur Corridor cannot be opened without the consent and participation of Türkiye (“İlham Əliyev ADA Universitetində”). In November 2022, in Samarkand Declaration of the 9th Summit of the Council of Heads of State and Government of the OTS, member states were committed to supporting the opening of the Zengezur Corridor as soon as possible, as a component of the Trans-Caspian East-West Middle Corridor (“Devlet ve Hükümet Başkanları Konseyi”).

The Shusha Declaration considered that *the opening of the Zangezur Corridor between the western regions of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan, which connects Türkiye and Azerbaijan, and the construction of the Nakhchivan-Kars railway as a continuation of that Corridor will make an important contribution to the intensification of transport and communication relations between the two countries* (par. 31). After the signing of the Shusha Declaration, Presidents of Türkiye and Azerbaijan made joint statements to the press where both leaders underlined the strategic importance of the Zangezur Corridor for both countries and the entire region (“Azərbaycan və Türkiyə prezidentləri mətbuatı”). On October 26, 2021, the presidents of Türkiye and Azerbaijan laid the foundation of the Horadiz-Jabrayil-Zengilan-Aghband local highway net that will be an integral part or contributing element of the Zangezur Corridor (“Azərbaycan və Türkiyə prezidentləri Horadiz”). Although the Shusha Declaration emphasizes the 40-kilometer length Zangezur Corridor as a bilateral communication route, it also has a regional dimension.

The Zangezur Corridor, as the new transportation artery of Eurasia, meets the interests of the EU, Russia, Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, as well as Eurasian powers such as China.

In the Turkic World 2040 Vision Document approved by the OTS, the “joint promotion of the Zangezur Corridor in various international economic platforms” was emphasized (Aslanlı). The Shusha Declaration cemented guarantees the realization of the Zangezur Corridor initiative against security risks and external threats stemming from Iran and non-regional actors.

From the Russian angle, the Zangezur Corridor is an international route that could potentially connect Russia and Türkiye with an uninterrupted land connection that consists of two branches – the railway and the highway. Iran does not want to lose its feature of being a transit country connecting other regions of Azerbaijan to NAR with the Zangezur Corridor. At the same time, Türkiye’s direct land connection with the Central Asian states through the Zangezur Corridor and expanding its economic cooperation with the region contradicts Iran’s national interests (“İran Zengezur Koridoruna”). In order to mitigate the Iranian harsh position on the Zangezur Corridor, Azerbaijan proposed an alternative route via Iran. In March 2022, a memorandum was signed between the governments of Azerbaijan and Iran on the new communication ties.

The Shusha Declaration and the interlinked Zangezur Corridor initiative are manifestations of the determined personal leadership in turbulent regional circumstances. The Zangezur Corridor initiative would serve as a key mission that would, in a way, remove the blockade of the entire Caucasus region and relieve the region in terms of transportation. Türkiye and Azerbaijan attempt to strengthen the position of the transit logistics hub of the region with multidimensional transportation systems and cooperative models. Zangezur Corridor will connect countries by railway and highway, which concerns the entire Eurasia region as an indicator of the regional dimension of the Shusha Declaration.

Conclusion

The Shusha Declaration is the first document that defines the relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan as an alliance, defined as friendship in 1994, strategic cooperation in 1997, and strategic partnership in 2010. The Declaration is also an attempt by Türkiye and Azerbaijan to establish a regional order in the nexus of cooperation and security. There are rational and normative foundations of this attempt. In this article, we have tried to draw a theoretical framework for the regional order that the Shusha Declaration will establish. We have designed a six-parameter approach to define the backdrop of the regional order devised by the Shusha Declaration.

This six-parameter theoretical framework included changing power dynamics envisaging Türkiye as a strenuous driver of regional integration;

growing Turkic identity and related political ideologies in Turkic Republics in the post-Cold War epoch; internal and external threats such as separatism, terrorism, and global hegemonic powers' behavior in the entire Eurasian region; domestic political dynamics and factors in Türkiye such as the AK Party-MHP coalition after 2015-2016, the transformation from a parliamentary to a presidential system in 2017, the increasing influence of domestic export-oriented groups on foreign policy, and in Azerbaijan such as generational changes and growing pro-Türkiye attitudes in political and social groups; result-oriented leadership styles and mutual trust of President Erdogan and President Aliyev; growing bilateral cooperation between Türkiye and Azerbaijan in transportation, investments, energy, trade, agriculture, and other economic realms.

In this article, we make a geopolitical analysis of the Shusha Declaration through bilateral relations, stability in the South Caucasus, cooperation and integration in the Turkic World, and the Zangezur Corridor.

The Shusha Declaration raised bilateral affairs from the level of strategic partners to the level of the political-military alliance. The Shusha Declaration includes many issues, including military, security, defense industry, counterterrorism, cybercrime, economy, investment, trade, energy, transport, culture, and humanitarian issues. It states that the Türkiye-Azerbaijan relationship should be deepened and integrated into a multidimensional and multi-layered manner.

The Shusha Declaration determined the political and military alliance, policy-level coordination, and action-level synchronization between Türkiye and Azerbaijan as a nucleus of the new regional order in the Caucasus that can be expanded to Central Asia. Political and military pressures on Azerbaijan from regional countries and outside of the region were balanced by Türkiye in 2020-2023. The anti-terror operations carried out by the Azerbaijani Army in Karabakh on September 19-20, 2023, and the restoration of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan have made the Shusha Declaration a fully functional document in terms of military and political alliance between Türkiye and Azerbaijan. Türkiye and Azerbaijan established a regional order in the Caucasus with a broader regional perspective and repercussions.

The geopolitical and geo-economic power struggle between regional and global actors in the Caucasus and Central Asia region has coerced the Turkic World to approximate and affiliate with Türkiye regarding military, security, political, and economic cooperation. The Shusha Declaration was a pilot practice or model in the context of cooperation and integration of the Turkic World in the regional environment related to the circumstances and consequences of the Second Karabakh War.

Furthermore, the Shusha Declaration is essential in establishing a bilateral alliance between the Turkic Republics, which embodies the foundations of wider regional cohesion and rapprochement. The Declaration presented a road map of cooperation and integration in the Turkic World to determine the geopolitical architecture of the region. In future research, the reflections of the Shusha Declaration in the Central Asian Turkic Republics can be examined regarding foreign policy perceptions of the region's nation-states. The odds of the Shusha Declaration transforming from a Türkiye-Azerbaijan bilateral military-security deal into a regional security pact, including the Central Asian Turkic Republics, may be the subject of future research.

The geopolitics, geoculture, geoeconomics, and sustainable stability of the South Caucasus directly affect regional transport corridors. The Shusha Declaration's potent emphasis on the Zangezur Corridor as an integral part of the Middle Corridor demonstrated the document's strategic vision and regional scope, predicting the growing geopolitical significance of transportation corridors and critical checkpoints around the globe after 2021. The period after the signing of the Shusha Declaration manifested the intensification of the global debates and conflicts on the transportation corridors and energy chokepoints in the nexus of security and connectivity agenda (e.g., India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, Northern Sea Route, International North-South Transport Corridor, Red Sea, Suez Canal).

Contribution Rate Statement

The authors' contribution rates in this study are equal.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study. There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

Notes

1 The Shusha Declaration consists of 46 paragraphs, but the provisions in the Declaration are not numbered as articles or paragraphs. The paragraph numbers cited in this section show their order in the Declaration.

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