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The Turkish elections could cost Azerbaijan a friend

Azerbaijan views Turkey as its most valuable ally. But is this closeness only based on common interests or rather on a genuine sense of belonging?

Everyone in the region eagerly awaits the upcoming Turkish elections on 14 May. Their results will certainly influence all countries in the South Caucasus — not least Azerbaijan, which views Turkey as its most valuable ally.

Over the past few years, Ankara was consistently there for Baku, providing material and moral support to Azerbaijan during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.

As a result, what we see now is the peak of Azerbaijani-Turkish relations, but is this closeness based on the mutual interests of both Ankara and Baku or is it a sincere sense of belonging stemming from the populations of both countries?

Ankara and Baku have not always been close; during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, Azerbaijan's President, Abulfaz Elchibey, claimed to have asked Turkey for several helicopters to transport civilians – but was refused.

The people of Turkey and Azerbaijan do not know each other very well, nor do they share the same identity.

Today, Turkish companies are actively involved in the reconstruction work of territories that came under Azerbaijani control after the 44-Day War. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has several times visited the newly opened airports in Fuzuli (Varanda) and Zangilan (Kovsakan), and his government has also been pressuring Armenia to allow the establishment of the so-called Zangezur corridor.

The Azerbaijan-proposed corridor would connect the country with its

western exclave Nakhchivan through Armenian territory. Turkey would benefit from this by achieving easier access to Azerbaijani gas.

The two countries are also conducting joint military drills in light of the ongoing tensions between Azerbaijan and Iran.

But will Azerbaijan and Turkey still maintain this degree of friendliness should Erdogan lose the elections?

I don't think so.

Different identities

As a journalist who has lived and worked in Turkey for several years, I can say that the people of Turkey and Azerbaijan do not know each other very well, nor do they share the same identity.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkish TV channels began to be broadcast in Azerbaijan. After 70 years of Soviet rule, Azerbaijanis began to receive programmes and information in the Turkish language, the closest language to them. Through television, they witness the changes Turkey went through in the last two decades.

They felt a natural responsibility to express their 'fraternal' opinion on Turkey's social and political developments. After all, they do speak a language that is very similar to ours.

Azerbaijanis from all walks of life – citizens, statesmen or intellectuals – express their position and think that they have the right to comment on Turkey's internal issues.

But now, faced with a chance of losing a good friend in Ankara, President Ilham Aliyev will need to change in accordance with the results of the elections. If elected, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, will almost certainly not share Aliyev's feelings about Armenia and we will likely see his Turkey drift away from Azerbaijan.

As we say in Azerbaijan: 'as long as there are apricots in the garden, we will continue to greet each other every day. Once the apricot tree dies, however, the greetings will end with it.'

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