

Turkey tries to build up strategic partnership with Azerbaijan

On 17 May, the Turkish prime minister Recep Erdogan paid a visit to Baku, where he met President Ilham Aliev. The visit's main aim was to build up his country's strategic partnership with Azerbaijan, which has been undermined by the Turkish/Armenian rapprochement which was forced through over the last year by Ankara.

Erdogan assured Azerbaijan of the strategic role which it plays in Ankara's policy (the creation of a Strategic Partnership Council was agreed upon), and he also guaranteed that the process of normalisation with Armenia would depend on progress in resolving the conflict over Nagorno Karabakh. Erdogan also exhorted the Minsk Group of OSCE to become more fully engaged in the Karabakh question. For his part, Aliev confirmed the achievement of an agreement concerning the transit of gas from Azerbaijan through Turkey's territory to Europe, which had been negotiated over a period of around two years; however, the signing of the document was postponed until Aliev's visit to Turkey at the beginning of June. The course of Erdogan's visit to Baku shows that after the tempest in relations between Ankara and Baku over the last year, Azerbaijan is to remain a key partner for Turkey in its policy in the South Caucasus. <ola>