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Shusha Declaration and the Türkiye–Azerbaijan Alliance: An Analysis from the Perspective of Turkology

Şuşa Beyannamesi ve Türkiye–Azerbaycan İttifakı: Türklük Bilimi Perspektifinde Bir Analiz

Abstract

The Shusha Declaration, signed by Türkiye and Azerbaijan on 15 June 2021, represents a significant milestone in the contemporary evolution of bilateral relations between the two states. Although the Declaration has frequently been examined within the frameworks of security cooperation, regional geopolitics, and post-conflict dynamics in the South Caucasus, its cultural and identity-based dimensions have received comparatively limited scholarly attention. This study approaches the Shusha Declaration from the perspective of Turkology and examines its significance within the historical continuum of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of shared historical memory, common linguistic heritage, cultural affinity, and collective identity in shaping interstate cooperation. Employing qualitative document analysis, the article evaluates the extent to which the Declaration reflects and institutionalizes long-standing historical and cultural ties between the two countries. The study argues that the document should be understood not only as a framework for institutionalized allied relations but also as an important expression of a shared Turkic identity articulated through contemporary political and institutional mechanisms. By linking Turkology with the study of interstate relations, the article contributes to a broader understanding of alliance formation, identity construction, and the evolving role of the Turkic World in regional affairs.

Keywords: Shusha Declaration; Türkiye–Azerbaijan Relations; Turkology; Turkic Identity; Collective Memory; Turkic World

Öz

15 Haziran 2021 tarihinde Türkiye ile Azerbaycan arasında imzalanan Şuşa Beyannamesi, iki ülke arasındaki ilişkilerin çağdaş gelişim sürecinde önemli bir dönüm noktasını temsil etmektedir. Beyanname, çoğunlukla güvenlik iş birliği, bölgesel jeopolitik ve Güney Kafkasya'daki çatışma sonrası dinamikler çerçevesinde ele alınmış olmakla birlikte, kültürel ve kimlik temelli boyutları literatürde nispeten sınırlı düzeyde incelenmiştir. Bu çalışma, Şuşa Beyannamesi'ni Türklük Bilimi perspektifinden ele almakta ve belgenin Türkiye–Azerbaycan ilişkilerinin tarihsel sürekliliği içerisindeki yerini incelemektedir.

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Çalışmada ortak tarihsel hafıza, müşterek dil mirası, kültürel yakınlık ve kolektif kimliğin devletler arası iş birliğinin şekillenmesindeki rolü üzerinde durulmaktadır. Nitel doküman analizi yönteminin kullanıldığı çalışmada, Beyanname'nin iki ülke arasındaki köklü tarihsel ve kültürel bağları ne ölçüde yansıttığı ve kurumsallaştırdığı değerlendirilmektedir. Çalışma, Şuşa Beyanname'si'nin yalnızca stratejik ve güvenlik odaklı bir iş birliği belgesi olarak değil, aynı zamanda çağdaş siyasal ve kurumsal mekanizmalar aracılığıyla ifade edilen ortak Türk kimliğinin önemli bir tezahürü olarak değerlendirilmesi gerektiğini ileri sürmektedir. Türklük Bilimi ile devletler arası ilişkiler literatürünü bir araya getiren bu çalışma, ittifak oluşumu, kimlik inşası ve Türk Dünyası'nın bölgesel siyasette değişen rolünün anlaşılmasına katkı sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Şuşa Beyanname'si; Türkiye–Azerbaycan İlişkileri; Türklük Bilimi; Türk Kimliği; Kolektif Hafıza; Türk Dünyası*

Introduction

The relationship between Türkiye and Azerbaijan constitutes one of the most distinctive examples of interstate cooperation in the contemporary Turkic World. Beyond conventional diplomatic interaction, the ties between the two countries have been shaped by a shared linguistic heritage, common historical experiences, cultural proximity, and a collective memory that has reinforced mutual perceptions of solidarity over time. These historical and cultural foundations have contributed to the development of a relationship whose significance extends beyond strategic interests and geopolitical considerations. Consequently, Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations provide a valuable framework for examining the interaction between identity, history, and political cooperation within the broader context of Turkic World studies.

The political landscape of the South Caucasus underwent a significant transformation following the Second Karabakh War. Among the most important outcomes of this process was the signing of the Shusha Declaration on 15 June 2021. The Declaration introduced a comprehensive framework for cooperation encompassing security, defense, foreign policy, transportation, economic relations, culture, education, and communication. While the document has generally been interpreted as a milestone in the strategic partnership between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, its significance cannot be reduced solely to geopolitical or security-related considerations. The language, symbolism, and objectives embedded within the Declaration also reflect deeper historical and cultural connections that have shaped bilateral relations for decades.

Existing scholarship has largely approached the Shusha Declaration through the perspectives of regional security, military cooperation, energy politics, and the changing geopolitical dynamics of the South Caucasus. These studies have substantially contributed to understanding the strategic dimensions of the document. However, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to the historical, cultural, and identity-based foundations that inform the Declaration and give meaning to its institutional framework. In particular, the relationship between the Declaration and the broader processes of Turkic identity formation, collective memory, and cultural continuity remains insufficiently explored. This gap is noteworthy because the political significance of the Declaration is closely connected to the historical narratives and cultural references that underpin Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations.

From the perspective of Turkology, the relationship between Türkiye and Azerbaijan represents a historical continuum shaped by shared language, cultural interaction, common traditions, and a collective understanding of belonging. Accordingly, the study of contemporary political developments requires attention not only to strategic calculations but also to the historical and cultural structures that influence interstate cooperation. Within this context, the Shusha Declaration offers an important opportunity to examine how historically rooted cultural affinities are translated into institutional mechanisms and political practices in the twenty-first century. Such an approach broadens the analytical scope of existing studies and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between identity and alliance formation.

This article argues that the Shusha Declaration should be understood not merely as a strategic partnership document but also as an institutional expression of historically embedded cultural and identity-based ties between Türkiye and Azerbaijan. By analyzing the Declaration through the perspective of Turkology, the study seeks to demonstrate how shared historical memory, cultural heritage, and collective identity contribute to the consolidation of interstate cooperation. In doing so, it explores the ways in which historical continuity and contemporary political objectives intersect within the framework of the Türkiye–Azerbaijan alliance.

The primary objective of this study is to examine the Shusha Declaration from the perspective of Turkology and to evaluate its role in the institutionalization of the Türkiye–Azerbaijan alliance. Particular attention is devoted to the interaction between collective memory, cultural affinity, shared identity, and political cooperation. Through a qualitative analysis of the Declaration and its historical context, the article aims to contribute to the literature on Turkic identity, alliance formation, and contemporary Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations.

The article is structured as follows. The first section reviews the relevant literature and establishes the theoretical foundations of the study. The second section examines the historical and cultural background of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations within the framework of the Turkic World. The third section analyzes the Shusha Declaration with particular emphasis on its institutional and identity-related dimensions. Finally, the conclusion evaluates the broader implications of the findings for the future of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations and for contemporary discussions concerning the Turkic World.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on document analysis and interpretive textual analysis. The primary objective of the research is to examine the Shusha Declaration from the perspective of Turkology and to evaluate its significance in the institutionalization of the Türkiye–Azerbaijan alliance. Accordingly, the Declaration is approached not merely as a diplomatic

or legal document, but also as a political and cultural text through which historical memory, collective identity, and interstate cooperation are articulated and institutionalized.

The principal source of the study is the official text of the Shusha Declaration signed by Türkiye and Azerbaijan on 15 June 2021. The document is analyzed with particular attention to the concepts, themes, and discursive elements that define the nature of bilateral relations. Special emphasis is placed on references to historical continuity, cultural affinity, strategic cooperation, mutual solidarity, and the broader idea of the Turkic World. In this regard, the study combines qualitative document analysis with conceptual perspectives derived from Turkology, identity studies, and historical institutionalism.

The analytical framework is structured around three interrelated dimensions. The first dimension examines the historical and cultural foundations of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations, including shared linguistic heritage, collective memory, common historical experiences, and cultural interconnectedness. The second dimension focuses on the institutionalization of cooperation through the Shusha Declaration, particularly in the fields of security, diplomacy, education, culture, communication, transportation, and economic collaboration. The third dimension evaluates the Declaration as a symbolic and political expression of shared Turkic identity and explores how historically embedded ties are reflected in contemporary forms of interstate cooperation.

The study employs purposive document selection. The Shusha Declaration is chosen as the central object of analysis because it constitutes one of the most comprehensive and symbolically significant documents in the contemporary history of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations. In addition to the primary document, the study draws upon relevant academic literature concerning Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations, Turkology, collective memory, identity construction, alliance formation, and the Turkic World. Only verifiable scholarly publications, official documents, and academically reliable sources are included in the analysis. Sources with uncertain bibliographic status, non-academic commentary, and unverified materials are excluded.

A central feature of the study is its interdisciplinary orientation. Existing analyses of the Shusha Declaration have predominantly emphasized geopolitical, security-related, and regional dimensions. While these approaches have provided valuable insights, they have devoted comparatively less attention to the historical and cultural foundations underlying the document. By integrating perspectives from Turkology, identity studies, and institutional analysis, this research seeks to provide a broader understanding of how cultural memory, historical continuity, and shared identity contribute to the consolidation of interstate cooperation.

The analysis proceeds through thematic interpretation. Key themes are identified according to their relevance to the research questions, including historical continuity, collective identity, cultural heritage, institutional cooperation, strategic partnership, Turkic solidarity, and regional

vision. These themes are subsequently interpreted within the broader historical context of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations and the conceptual framework of Turkology. Rather than measuring causal relationships quantitatively, the study aims to offer an interpretive and analytically grounded explanation of how the Shusha Declaration articulates the relationship between identity, history, and alliance formation.

The study is limited to the analysis of the Shusha Declaration and the relevant scholarly literature associated with its historical, cultural, and political context. It does not seek to measure the empirical outcomes of policies derived from the Declaration. Instead, its primary purpose is to examine how identity-based narratives, historical memory, and cultural affinity are embedded within an institutional framework of interstate cooperation.

Through this methodological approach, the article seeks to maintain a balance between historical-cultural interpretation and contemporary political analysis. The aim is not to reproduce normative narratives concerning bilateral relations, but to investigate how such narratives are represented, institutionalized, and mobilized within an official political document. Consequently, the methodology provides a systematic framework for understanding the Shusha Declaration as both a diplomatic instrument and a significant text within contemporary Turkic World studies.

Historical Memory, Turkic Identity, and the Foundations of the Türkiye–Azerbaijan Alliance

The alliance between Türkiye and Azerbaijan occupies a distinctive position within contemporary international relations. While interstate alliances are generally explained through considerations of security, power balancing, and strategic interests, the relationship between Türkiye and Azerbaijan exhibits characteristics that extend beyond conventional geopolitical calculations. The continuity, resilience, and institutional depth of bilateral relations derive not only from contemporary political cooperation but also from a historically rooted sense of cultural affinity and collective belonging. Consequently, the foundations of the Türkiye–Azerbaijan alliance must be examined through a multidimensional framework that incorporates historical memory, identity formation, and shared cultural heritage alongside strategic considerations.

The historical interaction between Anatolian and Azerbaijani Turks has produced a common cultural sphere characterized by linguistic proximity, similar social traditions, and interconnected historical experiences. These long-term interactions contributed to the formation of a collective consciousness that transcended changing political structures and geographical boundaries. Within the intellectual framework of Turkology, such continuity is regarded as one of the defining characteristics of the broader Turkic world. Rather than representing separate and isolated national experiences, Türkiye and Azerbaijan emerged from a historical environment shaped by common cultural codes, collective memories, and overlapping historical narratives. The frequently employed

expression “One Nation, Two States” therefore reflects more than diplomatic rhetoric; it symbolizes the political manifestation of a historically accumulated sense of shared identity.

The significance of historical memory in the construction of collective identities has been emphasized by numerous scholars. Halbwachs (1992) argues that collective memory is socially produced and maintained through institutions, cultural practices, and shared narratives. Similarly, Assmann (2011) highlights the role of cultural memory in preserving continuity between past and present, allowing societies to reproduce common values and collective identities across generations. In the context of Türkiye and Azerbaijan, collective memory functions as an important mechanism through which historical experiences are transformed into contemporary political meanings. Memories of shared cultural heritage, common linguistic traditions, and historical solidarity have contributed to the persistence of mutual perceptions of proximity and partnership.

The relationship between memory and identity is further clarified through the works of Anderson (2006) and Smith (1991). Anderson’s concept of imagined communities demonstrates how collective identities are sustained through shared narratives and symbolic references that create a sense of belonging among individuals who may never directly interact. Smith, meanwhile, emphasizes the importance of myths, memories, symbols, and historical traditions in the formation and preservation of national identities. These approaches are particularly relevant for understanding Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations, where common historical references and cultural symbols continue to play an important role in political discourse and interstate cooperation.

From the perspective of Turkology, the intellectual foundations of this shared identity can be traced to the historical development of Turkic civilization. Gökalp’s understanding of cultural unity emphasized language, historical consciousness, and common values as essential elements of collective existence. Likewise, Kafesoğlu’s studies on Turkish cultural history and Rásonyi’s analyses of Turkic historical continuity underlined the existence of a broad civilizational space connecting various Turkic communities across Eurasia. These intellectual contributions suggest that the cultural relationship between Türkiye and Azerbaijan should be interpreted within a wider historical framework that predates the establishment of modern nation-states. Accordingly, contemporary political cooperation is not the origin of bilateral solidarity; rather, it represents its modern institutional expression.

As emphasized by Huseynova, Talishinsky, Yılmaz, Babayeva-Shukurova, Ismayilov, and Ishbilir (2025), the philosophical heritage of the Turkic world developed through a unique historical trajectory shaped by oral traditions, folklore, cultural memory, and spiritual movements. The authors argue that Turkic philosophical thought should be considered an integral component of world intellectual history, reflecting a shared cultural identity that transcends political boundaries and historical periods. This common philosophical legacy has contributed to the preservation of

collective consciousness and cultural continuity among Turkic peoples, providing an important foundation for contemporary forms of cooperation and solidarity within the Turkic World (Huseynova, M., Talishinsky, E., Yilmaz, B. A., Babayeva-Shukurova, F., Ismayilov, S., & Ishbilir, C. 2025).

Constructivist approaches to international relations provide an additional analytical perspective for explaining how shared identities influence interstate behavior. Wendt (1999) argues that state interests are shaped by socially constructed identities and intersubjective understandings rather than solely by material factors. Within this framework, the strategic partnership between Türkiye and Azerbaijan can be interpreted as the outcome of a mutually constituted identity structure that influences perceptions of common interests and shared responsibilities. The persistence of bilateral cooperation across changing regional and international conditions demonstrates the significance of ideational factors alongside geopolitical considerations.

The institutional dimension of this process may also be examined through the concept of security communities developed by Deutsch et al. (1957) and further elaborated by Adler and Barnett (1998). Security communities emerge when political actors develop mutual trust, shared expectations, and a collective commitment to peaceful cooperation. The evolution of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations from cultural affinity to strategic partnership and eventually to formal alliance exhibits several characteristics associated with such communities. Shared historical experiences and common identity narratives have facilitated the development of political trust, thereby creating favorable conditions for deeper institutional cooperation.

Therefore, the contemporary Türkiye–Azerbaijan alliance should not be interpreted exclusively through the lens of regional geopolitics. Its foundations rest upon a complex interaction between historical memory, cultural continuity, collective identity, and strategic interests. The importance of this historical and intellectual background becomes particularly evident in the context of the Shusha Declaration, which transformed an already existing partnership into a formally institutionalized alliance. Consequently, understanding the historical memory and shared identity underlying bilateral relations is essential for explaining both the emergence and the durability of the Türkiye–Azerbaijan alliance in the twenty-first century.

Historical Foundations of Türkiye–Azerbaijan Relations: From Shared Heritage to Strategic Partnership

The contemporary alliance between Türkiye and Azerbaijan is the product of a long historical process that extends beyond recent geopolitical developments and strategic calculations. Although bilateral relations acquired a more institutionalized character following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the foundations of cooperation were established through centuries of shared cultural experiences, linguistic proximity, and collective historical memory. Therefore, the origins of the

Türkiye–Azerbaijan partnership should be understood within a broader historical framework reflecting the continuity of Turkic cultural interactions and civilizational heritage (Gökalp, 2018; Kafesoğlu, 1998; Rásonyi, 1971).

The historical relationship between Anatolian and Azerbaijani Turks emerged within a common cultural sphere shaped by the historical movement and interaction of Turkic communities across Eurasia. Despite the existence of different political entities throughout various historical periods, linguistic affinity, cultural traditions, and shared social values contributed to the preservation of a collective sense of belonging. The continuity of cultural practices, literary traditions, and historical narratives facilitated the transmission of collective memory across generations and reinforced perceptions of cultural proximity between the two societies (Kafesoğlu, 1998; Rásonyi, 1971). In this respect, contemporary interstate cooperation rests upon a historical foundation that predates the emergence of modern nation-states.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries constituted a critical phase in the development of modern Turkish and Azerbaijani political consciousness. Intellectual debates concerning modernization, language, education, and national identity encouraged closer interaction among Turkic intellectual circles. The growing emphasis on common historical heritage and cultural solidarity strengthened intellectual links between Anatolia and Azerbaijan and contributed to the emergence of a broader awareness of Turkic identity. Although these developments occurred within different political environments, they generated a shared ideological framework that later facilitated political cooperation between the two societies (Gökalp, 2018).

A decisive milestone in the historical relations between the two nations occurred during the final phase of the First World War. In September 1918, the Caucasus Islamic Army under the command of Nuri Pasha entered Baku and played a decisive role in the liberation of the city. This event occupies a prominent place in Azerbaijani historical memory and continues to be regarded as one of the earliest and most significant manifestations of Turkish–Azerbaijani solidarity. Beyond its military significance, the liberation of Baku became a symbolic reference point that reinforced narratives of mutual assistance and historical fraternity in both countries (Özsoy, 2023).

The establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918 further strengthened political ties between the two societies. Although the republic existed only until 1920, it became a lasting symbol of Azerbaijani sovereignty and national self-determination. As the first parliamentary republic in the Muslim world, it occupies an important position in Azerbaijani national memory. The subsequent incorporation of Azerbaijan into the Soviet Union interrupted independent state development but did not eliminate cultural and emotional connections with Türkiye. Throughout the Soviet period, shared linguistic and cultural bonds preserved a sense of historical continuity despite geopolitical separation and limited political interaction (Cornell, 2011).

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked the beginning of a new era in bilateral relations. Türkiye became one of the first states to recognize the independence of Azerbaijan and actively supported its integration into international political and economic structures. The restoration of Azerbaijani sovereignty enabled cooperation in diplomacy, economy, education, culture, and security. During this period, relations gradually evolved from symbolic fraternity into a structured strategic partnership supported by growing institutional cooperation (Cornell, 2011; Erarslan & Özdemir, 2021).

One of the most influential concepts shaping post-Soviet relations was the expression “One Nation, Two States,” articulated by Heydar Aliyev. The phrase emphasized the existence of a common historical, linguistic, and cultural heritage while simultaneously affirming the sovereignty of two independent states. Beyond its symbolic significance, the concept provided a normative framework that guided bilateral relations and encouraged the expansion of cooperation across political, economic, military, and cultural domains. Over time, it became one of the defining principles of official discourse in both countries and an important element in the institutionalization of bilateral relations (Babiş, 2018; Karayel, 2024).

The strategic dimension of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations became increasingly visible during the first decades of the twenty-first century. Major energy projects, particularly the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline and the Southern Gas Corridor, strengthened economic interdependence while enhancing the geopolitical significance of cooperation. Simultaneously, military agreements, joint exercises, and expanding defence-industrial collaboration deepened security cooperation and contributed to the transformation of bilateral relations into a multidimensional strategic partnership (Özsoy, 2023). An important institutional milestone was reached with the signing of the Treaty on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance in 2010. The treaty elevated bilateral relations to a new level by introducing formal commitments concerning political consultation, security cooperation, and mutual assistance. Through this agreement, strategic solidarity acquired a stronger legal and institutional foundation, reducing dependence on symbolic affinity alone and strengthening the durability of cooperation between the two countries (Treaty on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance, 2010). The Second Karabakh War in 2020 represented another turning point in the evolution of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations. Throughout the conflict, Türkiye provided consistent political and diplomatic support to Azerbaijan, reinforcing perceptions of trust, solidarity, and strategic alignment. The outcome of the war significantly altered regional dynamics while simultaneously strengthening bilateral cooperation in security, reconstruction, transportation, and regional connectivity. Furthermore, the conflict revitalized historical narratives of solidarity that had long influenced mutual perceptions in both societies and contributed to the emergence of a more institutionalized alliance framework (Erarslan & Özdemir, 2021; Özdemir, 2021).

The historical evolution of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations demonstrates a gradual transformation from cultural affinity to institutionalized strategic cooperation. Shared historical memory, common identity, and cultural continuity provided the social foundations of the relationship, while political, economic, and security cooperation transformed these foundations into durable institutional structures. This historical trajectory ultimately culminated in the signing of the Shusha Declaration in 2021. Rather than representing the beginning of bilateral solidarity, the declaration constituted the formal codification of a partnership whose roots had been shaped by centuries of cultural interaction and decades of strategic cooperation. Accordingly, the Shusha Declaration should be understood as the most advanced stage of a long historical process linking shared heritage, collective identity, and alliance formation within the contemporary Turkic world (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021).

The Historical and Political Context of the Shusha Declaration

The Shusha Declaration emerged within a distinctive historical and geopolitical environment shaped by the outcome of the Second Karabakh War and the subsequent transformation of regional dynamics in the South Caucasus. Signed on 15 June 2021 in the city of Shusha by the Presidents of the Republic of Türkiye and the Republic of Azerbaijan, the declaration represented a significant milestone in the evolution of bilateral relations. Although the document was concluded in the post-war period, its foundations were rooted in a much longer process of political cooperation, strategic coordination, and shared historical experience between the two states (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021).

The choice of Shusha as the location for the signing of the declaration carried both political and symbolic significance. Shusha occupies a prominent place in Azerbaijani historical memory, cultural heritage, and national identity. Following the restoration of Azerbaijani control over the city during the Second Karabakh War, Shusha acquired renewed importance as a symbol of sovereignty and national revival. Consequently, the signing of the declaration in this city linked contemporary interstate cooperation with broader narratives of historical continuity and collective memory. As Özdemir and Kantar (2023) note, the declaration should be understood not only as a diplomatic document but also as an important political development reflecting the changing regional environment after the war.

The declaration did not emerge in isolation. Since Azerbaijan regained its independence in 1991, relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan have steadily expanded across political, economic, military, educational, and cultural spheres. Throughout this period, bilateral cooperation was guided by the principle commonly expressed as “One Nation, Two States,” a formulation emphasizing shared historical, linguistic, and cultural ties while simultaneously recognizing the sovereignty of two independent states (Babiş, 2018; Karayel, 2024). This conceptual framework provided an

important normative basis for the gradual expansion of cooperation and contributed to the development of mutual trust between the two countries.

An important stage in this process was the signing of the Treaty on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance in 2010. The treaty established a formal framework for political consultation, security cooperation, and mutual support, thereby strengthening the institutional foundations of bilateral relations. The existence of this earlier agreement demonstrates that the alliance-oriented trajectory of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations began prior to the signing of the Shusha Declaration. Accordingly, the declaration should be interpreted as a continuation and expansion of an already existing process of institutional development rather than as the beginning of bilateral cooperation (Treaty on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance, 2010). The text of the declaration itself confirms this continuity. The document explicitly refers to the historical friendship and strategic partnership between the two countries while emphasizing the intention to elevate bilateral relations to a qualitatively new level. Furthermore, the declaration highlights cooperation in political, military, security, economic, transportation, energy, educational, and cultural fields, reflecting a multidimensional understanding of interstate partnership (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ile Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti Arasında Müttelik İlişkileri Hakkında Şuşa Beyannamesi, 2022).

The post-war regional environment played a decisive role in accelerating this process of institutionalization. The outcome of the Second Karabakh War altered the political landscape of the South Caucasus and created new opportunities for regional connectivity, economic cooperation, and strategic coordination. In this context, the declaration represented an effort to establish a more comprehensive framework capable of responding to emerging regional realities while simultaneously strengthening bilateral cooperation. According to Özdemir and Kantar (2023), the declaration constitutes a significant turning point in Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations and possesses implications extending beyond bilateral affairs, particularly with regard to regional stability and future cooperation within the Turkic world.

From a theoretical perspective, the declaration may be interpreted as an example of alliance institutionalization. Constructivist approaches emphasize that durable interstate cooperation often develops through the interaction of shared identities, common interests, and repeated political engagement (Wendt, 1999). Similarly, the security community approach highlights the importance of mutual trust, common expectations, and institutionalized cooperation in the formation of stable partnerships (Deutsch et al., 1957; Adler & Barnett, 1998). The historical evolution of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations reflects many of these characteristics. Shared cultural identity and historical memory provided the social foundations of cooperation, while converging strategic interests encouraged the development of formal institutional mechanisms.

Therefore, the historical and political context of the Shusha Declaration demonstrates that the document was neither an isolated diplomatic initiative nor merely a response to immediate post-war circumstances. Rather, it represented the culmination of a long process through which historical solidarity, cultural affinity, strategic partnership, and political coordination were transformed into a more comprehensive framework of allied relations. Understanding this context is essential for analyzing the specific provisions of the declaration and evaluating its role in the further institutionalization of the Türkiye–Azerbaijan alliance.

Allied Relations and Security Cooperation in the Declaration

One of the most significant dimensions of the Shusha Declaration is its emphasis on allied relations and security cooperation. Although Türkiye and Azerbaijan had previously developed extensive political, military, and strategic cooperation through bilateral agreements and institutional mechanisms, the declaration provided a more comprehensive framework through which these relations were formally articulated at the level of allied partnership. In this respect, the document represents an important stage in the institutional development of bilateral relations and reflects the gradual evolution of cooperation from strategic partnership to allied relations (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ile Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti Arasında Müttelik İlişkileri Hakkında Şuşa Beyannamesi, 2022).

The declaration places particular emphasis on the protection of independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the inviolability of internationally recognized borders. These principles constitute fundamental elements of the contemporary international system and occupy a central place in the foreign policy priorities of both Türkiye and Azerbaijan. Their explicit inclusion in the declaration demonstrates the existence of a shared normative framework that underpins bilateral security cooperation and reinforces common perceptions regarding regional stability and state security (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ile Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti Arasında Müttelik İlişkileri Hakkında Şuşa Beyannamesi, 2022).

Another important aspect of the declaration is the emphasis placed on political consultation and coordination. The document envisages close cooperation between the parties on issues affecting national interests and regional security. Such provisions contribute to the institutionalization of bilateral communication and facilitate the development of regular mechanisms of consultation. Consequently, cooperation is not limited to ad hoc political interaction but is supported by an increasingly structured framework of coordination (Özdemir & Kantar, 2023).

The declaration also highlights the importance of cooperation in defence and security-related fields. Military cooperation between Türkiye and Azerbaijan had already expanded considerably before 2021 through joint exercises, defence-industrial collaboration, and security agreements. The

declaration did not initiate these processes; rather, it reaffirmed their importance within a broader framework of allied relations and political coordination (Karayel, 2024; Özsoy, 2023).

From an institutional perspective, these provisions may be interpreted as mechanisms designed to strengthen the predictability and continuity of bilateral relations. Alliance relationships require not only converging interests but also stable channels of communication, consultation, and coordination. The declaration contributes to this process by formalizing expectations regarding cooperation and by reinforcing the political foundations of mutual support. In this sense, the document represents an important step in the institutionalization of bilateral security relations (Deutsch et al., 1957; Adler & Barnett, 1998).

The security dimension of the declaration extends beyond conventional military concerns. The text reflects a broader understanding of security that incorporates political cooperation, regional stability, and strategic coordination. This multidimensional approach corresponds to contemporary understandings of security, in which political, economic, and strategic factors are increasingly interconnected. Accordingly, the declaration situates defence cooperation within a wider framework of interstate collaboration rather than treating it as an isolated policy domain (Çelik & Aslanlı, 2024).

Constructivist approaches provide an additional perspective for understanding the significance of these provisions. According to Wendt (1999), durable patterns of cooperation emerge not only from material interests but also from shared identities and common understandings. The security cooperation reflected in the declaration illustrates this interaction between strategic interests and identity-based solidarity. Historical experience, cultural proximity, and mutual perceptions have contributed to the development of a relationship in which security cooperation is supported by both political calculations and a broader sense of partnership.

The declaration must also be understood within the context of the “One Nation, Two States” principle that has long shaped official discourse in Türkiye and Azerbaijan. This principle emphasizes common historical and cultural bonds while recognizing the sovereignty of two independent states. The declaration reflects the continued relevance of this framework and demonstrates how shared identity can support the development of institutionalized cooperation in the political and security spheres (Babiş, 2018; Karayel, 2024).

Another noteworthy aspect of the declaration is its regional significance. By strengthening cooperation between two important actors in the South Caucasus, the document contributes to the development of a more structured framework for political dialogue, security coordination, and regional engagement. As Özdemir and Kantar (2023) argue, the declaration possesses implications extending beyond bilateral relations and should be evaluated within the broader context of regional cooperation and stability.

Ultimately, the security provisions of the Shusha Declaration demonstrate that the document represents more than a symbolic statement of friendship. Through its emphasis on consultation, coordination, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security cooperation, the declaration formalized principles that had gradually developed throughout the history of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations. Consequently, the document constitutes one of the most important milestones in the institutionalization of allied relations between the two states and provides a significant framework for understanding the contemporary strategic partnership between Türkiye and Azerbaijan.

The Shusha Declaration from a Turkological Perspective: Identity, Institutionalization, and the Future of Turkic Cooperation

The Shusha Declaration occupies a distinctive place in the evolution of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations because it brings together three interrelated dimensions: historical identity, institutionalized alliance, and the future of Turkic cooperation. Although the document is formally a bilateral declaration between two sovereign states, its meaning extends beyond the conventional boundaries of interstate diplomacy. From a Turkological perspective, the declaration may be interpreted as the institutional expression of a relationship shaped by shared language, cultural proximity, historical memory, and a long-standing consciousness of belonging within the wider Turkic world.

The main argument of this study is that the Türkiye–Azerbaijan alliance cannot be sufficiently explained through geopolitical interests alone. Security concerns, energy routes, regional balances, and post-war strategic conditions are undoubtedly important. However, these factors operate within a deeper historical and cultural framework. The durability of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations derives from the interaction between material interests and identity-based solidarity. In this regard, collective memory and cultural continuity are essential analytical concepts. Halbwachs (1992) conceptualizes collective memory as a socially reproduced structure through which communities preserve shared understandings of the past, while Assmann (2011) emphasizes the role of cultural memory in transmitting identity across generations. These approaches help explain why Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations have maintained a high degree of symbolic and political continuity despite changing regional and international conditions.

Within the tradition of Turkology, language, culture, and historical consciousness constitute central elements of collective identity. Gökalp's emphasis on cultural unity, Kafesoğlu's interpretation of Turkish cultural history, and Rásonyi's historical analysis of Turkic continuity provide a conceptual basis for situating Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations within a broader Turkic civilizational context (Gökalp, 2018; Kafesoğlu, 1998; Rásonyi, 1971). From this standpoint, the Shusha Declaration is not merely a post-war diplomatic document. It is also a contemporary

political text that reflects the transformation of historically rooted cultural affinity into an institutional form of cooperation.

The declaration is especially significant because it converts symbolic solidarity into structured political cooperation. The principle of “One Nation, Two States” has long served as a central discursive framework in Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations. Yet symbolic narratives alone are not sufficient to sustain durable interstate cooperation. Long-term alliances require institutional mechanisms, predictable consultation channels, coordinated policy practices, and legally or politically recognized frameworks of cooperation. The Shusha Declaration contributes to this process by placing historical solidarity within a multidimensional framework that includes political coordination, security cooperation, economic interaction, energy policy, transportation connectivity, cultural relations, and educational collaboration (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ile Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti Arasında Müttelik İlişkileri Hakkında Şuşa Beyannamesi, 2022).

This transformation can also be explained through constructivist international relations theory. Wendt (1999) argues that state interests are shaped not only by material capabilities but also by socially constructed identities and shared meanings. The Türkiye–Azerbaijan case illustrates this interaction clearly. Historical memory and cultural proximity created a favorable social environment for cooperation, while institutional agreements such as the 2010 Treaty on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance and the 2021 Shusha Declaration provided formal mechanisms for sustaining and deepening this cooperation. Therefore, the alliance between Türkiye and Azerbaijan should be interpreted as a product of both strategic convergence and identity-based institutionalization.

The Shusha Declaration also has significance for the wider Turkic world. The document’s emphasis on cultural cooperation, educational interaction, transportation links, regional connectivity, and coordination among Turkic institutions corresponds with broader efforts to strengthen cooperation among Turkic states. In this respect, the declaration is compatible with the institutional vision represented by the Organization of Turkic States and the Turkic World Vision 2040 framework (Organization of Turkic States, 2021; Musabay Baki, 2022). Özdemir and Kantar (2023) similarly argue that the declaration is not limited to bilateral relations but also offers a model with implications for regional cooperation and the development of collaboration within the Turkic world.

From a Turkological perspective, the most important aspect of the declaration is its ability to connect historical consciousness with contemporary institutional practice. Many communities share cultural memory and symbolic affinity, but not all are able to transform these elements into durable political cooperation. The Türkiye–Azerbaijan relationship demonstrates a different trajectory. In this case, shared identity does not replace institutional development; rather, it

supports and legitimizes it. The Shusha Declaration shows how cultural proximity, historical memory, and strategic cooperation can reinforce one another within a formal alliance framework.

The declaration also helps explain the changing meaning of Turkic cooperation in the twenty-first century. Earlier forms of Turkic solidarity were often expressed through cultural, linguistic, and intellectual references. In the contemporary period, however, these references increasingly intersect with transportation corridors, energy security, defence cooperation, regional diplomacy, and institutional coordination. The Shusha Declaration reflects this transformation. It demonstrates that Turkic cooperation is no longer limited to symbolic or cultural discourse but is increasingly connected to concrete mechanisms of interstate coordination and regional policy.

Consequently, the Shusha Declaration should be understood as both a product of historical continuity and an instrument of future-oriented cooperation. It draws legitimacy from shared memory, cultural affinity, and the historical depth of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations, while simultaneously creating a framework for strategic coordination and institutional development. Its significance therefore lies not only in what it declares but also in what it represents: the institutional consolidation of a historically rooted alliance and the projection of this alliance into the wider context of Turkic cooperation.

In this sense, the declaration constitutes one of the most important contemporary documents for interpreting the relationship between Turkology and international relations. It shows that identity, memory, culture, and strategic interests are not separate analytical categories but mutually reinforcing dimensions of political cooperation. For this reason, the Shusha Declaration stands as a key text for understanding how Türkiye and Azerbaijan have transformed shared historical consciousness into an institutionalized alliance framework with implications for the future of the Turkic world.

Conclusion

This study examined the Shusha Declaration within the broader historical and intellectual framework of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations and evaluated its significance through the perspective of Turkology. Moving beyond approaches that interpret the declaration primarily through geopolitical competition, regional security, or post-war strategic calculations, the study argued that the declaration should also be understood as the institutional expression of a historically constructed relationship grounded in shared identity, collective memory, cultural continuity, and political cooperation.

The findings demonstrate that the foundations of the contemporary Türkiye–Azerbaijan alliance were established long before the signing of the Shusha Declaration. Shared linguistic heritage, common historical experiences, cultural interaction, and enduring social ties created a durable framework of solidarity that survived changing political circumstances. Consequently, the

development of bilateral relations cannot be explained solely through material interests or strategic necessities. Rather, the persistence and depth of cooperation reflect the interaction between historical identity and political pragmatism.

The analysis further revealed that the Shusha Declaration represents the most advanced stage in the institutional evolution of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations. The document did not create a new partnership; instead, it formalized and consolidated patterns of cooperation that had gradually developed over decades. By strengthening mechanisms of political consultation, security coordination, economic cooperation, transportation connectivity, cultural interaction, and educational collaboration, the declaration transformed an existing strategic partnership into a more comprehensive framework of allied relations. In this sense, the declaration constitutes a process of institutional consolidation rather than a sudden political transformation.

From a theoretical perspective, the study demonstrated that identity-based approaches and institutional explanations are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the Türkiye–Azerbaijan case illustrates how shared identity can facilitate the development of durable institutional structures. Historical memory, cultural affinity, and political cooperation have functioned as mutually reinforcing elements, creating favorable conditions for the institutionalization of bilateral relations. The Shusha Declaration emerged from this interaction and represents the formal codification of a partnership whose social foundations had been established long before its legal and political articulation.

The study also highlighted the broader implications of the declaration for the Turkic world. The document reflects a vision of cooperation that extends beyond bilateral relations and corresponds with contemporary efforts to strengthen interaction among Turkic states. Its emphasis on connectivity, cultural cooperation, educational exchange, and coordinated political engagement demonstrates that contemporary Turkic cooperation increasingly relies on institutional mechanisms rather than solely on symbolic expressions of solidarity. In this respect, the declaration contributes not only to the development of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations but also to the broader institutionalization of cooperation within the Turkic world.

One of the principal contributions of this study is its argument that the Shusha Declaration should be interpreted as both a strategic and a civilizational document. Unlike studies that evaluate the declaration primarily through security-oriented or geopolitical perspectives, this research has demonstrated that the document also reflects the institutional manifestation of a historically constructed Turkic identity. From a Turkological perspective, the declaration embodies the interaction of memory, culture, identity, and political strategy, thereby illustrating how historical consciousness continues to influence contemporary interstate relations.

Ultimately, the Shusha Declaration represents more than a bilateral diplomatic agreement. It constitutes the institutional consolidation of a historically rooted partnership, the formalization of a shared political vision, and the continuation of a long process linking identity, memory, culture, and strategy. As such, it occupies a distinctive place in the contemporary history of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations and stands as one of the most significant examples of alliance institutionalization in the Turkic world during the twenty-first century. The declaration therefore demonstrates that historical affinity and cultural continuity remain influential factors in the construction of sustainable political partnerships when supported by effective institutional frameworks.

Author Contributions

Shahismayil Ismayilov solely contributed to the conception and design of the study, data collection and analysis, interpretation of the findings, drafting of the manuscript, and revision of the final text. The author read and approved the final version of the manuscript prior to publication.

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