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Turkish-Russian Relations During Erdogan’s Governance
Period

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Κόρινθος, Σεπτέμβριος 2017

Dedication

Dedicated to my beloved wife for her outstanding support in my authoring effort for this Dissertation. I also dedicate this work to my newborn, child that came on 13th July 2017 and gave another meaning to our lives.

By the Author,

Vasileios Broumidis

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Keywords: Erdogan, Putin, Kurdish issue, Syrian crisis, Turkish Stream, Turkish-Russian relations, Middle East.

Abstract

Bilateral relationship between Eurasia's two prominent and long-standing actors, Turkey and Russia, have shown a lot of shifts during the last decade. The relations of the two countries gain more significance due to the fact that are the most influential and powerful actors in Eurasia by all historical, political, economic and military accounts. The state of the relations between the two countries, its character of being conflictual or co-operational has region wide implications. My dissertation will investigate the last decades and especially during Erdogan's – Putin's respectively governance period, by focusing on the foreign policy shifts of the two states and the affection to the relations between the two countries, Turkey and Russia, in the fields of politics, economics and security. No matter how many years will pass, Russian-Turkish relations are undoubtedly an issue that will not stop to concern the international community.

AFFIDAVIT

With this Statement:

1. I expressly and unconditionally state that my dissertation is product of my own intellectual effort, does not violate the rights of third parties and follows internationally recognized standards of scientific writing, faithfully adhering to academic ethics.
2. The opinions expressed are the sole responsibility of the author; and the supervisor, the examiners, the Department and the University of Peloponnese do not necessarily follow the views expressed and bear no responsibility for any errors and omissions.

The Author

Broumidis Vasileios

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INTRODUCTION

Bilateral relationship between Eurasia's two prominent and long-standing actors, Turkey and Russia, have shown a lot of shifts during the last decades. The relations of the two countries gain more significance due to the fact that they are the most influential and powerful actors in Eurasia by all historical, political, economic and military accounts. As a result the state of the relation between these countries, its character of being conflictual or co-operational, has region wide implications, affecting the situation in the Black Sea, South Caucasus, Central Asia, Balkans, Eastern Mediterranean, and lately, increasingly, the Middle East. Moreover, it guides the foreign policy formulations of both regional states and apart from them are also affected the global powers that have interests and stakes in the region.

Traditionally, the history of Turkish–Russian relations has been long, complex and characterized by geopolitical rivalry. The bilateral relationship between Turkey and Russian Federation has been widening and deepening across areas ranging from political relations to the economic and cultural issues. Over the past of the four last centuries, the once two empires fought each other 13 times: the first was in the period between 1676 and 1681, the last in the years 1914 to 1918, during World War I. Thus, Turkish–Russian relations have been marked by a bloody and violent past.

My dissertation will investigate the last decades and especially during Erdogan's – Putin's respectively governance period, by focusing on the foreign policy shifts of the two states and the affection to the relations between the two countries, Turkey and Russia, in the fields of politics, economics and security. The findings of the analysis done will be used to establish a better understanding of foreign policy shifts happened, reflecting the different interests of the each country every time, underlying reasons, opinions, as well as motivations.

The preferred research method that has been used, is Qualitative Research that involves describing in details specific situations using research tools like interviews, surveys, data gathered by the bibliography provided and observations in order to examine the “why” and “how” of decision making that had impact on the relations of both countries, not just “what”, “where”, “when” or “who”. All the sources used to carry out the research and subsequently

produce the research report are secondary sources from published literature, journals and the internet.

My dissertation is consisted by three Chapters, where in each one is being analyzed different parameters of the foreign policy lines followed by each states and formulated the existing situation in the region. So, in the first part of the Chapter 1, is being outlined the political profile of the two leaders that have played the most important role in the formulation of the foreign policy of their countries during the last decade, being the head of their states as Prime Ministers or Presidents. Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Vladimir Putin are two men that have started their political life from the lower strata of their social society to climb to the highest title that can be achieved by a citizen, through all the intermediate levels, President and consequently head of the state. The second part of the chapter, is concentrated to the geostrategic role of the two countries, Turkey and Russia in the wider region of Eurasia as is has formulated the last years. Both countries through their foreign policy lines that have been following all these years, have managed to play important role either with their geostrategic position, either by the economic or military power they possess, either by the energy resources they manage, or finally by a combination of the above.

In Chapter 2, are being analyzed the relations of the two states and the cooperation that has achieved in the last years in the section of the energy. Turkey is the second largest gas market for Russian Gazprom, as it imports more than 50 % percent of its gas from Russia. Turkey imports the most of its needs in gas through a pipeline network that has been created between the two countries for these reasons. So, the dependency of Turkey to Russian energy market is very high and is expected to become even greater after the construction of the Turkish Stream pipeline. Also there is a reference to the huge capabilities that Russia has in the energy sector as a supplier and to the dependency of Turkey to this energy giant called Russia.

In next chapter, Chapter 3, in the first part are being analyzed the different interests of Turkey and Russia to some sensitive issues like the Kurdish matter, the Crisis in Syria, the expectations of each country to the Middle East and the relations with the traditional regional hegemonies. From the different interests of each country to every one of these sensitive issues, there is and a different strategy and consequently a different foreign policy from each country having as a result these issues to be either issues of competition either co-operation for the relations of the two countries. The main object of each country was and still is the title of the Regional Hegemony through their following policy. In the second part are being analyzed all

these facts that have happened during the last years, at the governance period of President Putin and Erdogan, that resulted to a shift to the relations between the two states. The announcement of the construction of the Turkish Stream pipeline, the terrorist act of execution of the Russian Ambassador in Ankara during a public event, as also the military coup of 15th July in Turkey are some of the facts that affected the relations of the two states, either more either less or even acted and reversely from what was expecting.

Finally, in the last part, Conclusions, I have reached to some conclusions after the examination of all the data gathered and through my Qualitative Research, concerning the relations of Turkey and Russia during the last decade of the Erdogan's governing period as also some possible future prospects between the two countries.

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CHAPTER 1

ERDOGAN AND PUTIN'S POLITICAL PROFILE AND THE GEOSTRATEGIC ROLE OF TURKEY AND RUSSIA IN REGION

1.1 Erdogan and Putin's Political Profile

1.1.1 Recep Tayyip Erdogan: the new Sultan?

On January 15, 2015, was held in Ankara, the official opening of the new, luxurious presidential house, for which too many scandalous articles have been written, and the new president of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who many have described as the new "Sultan", was officially settled, in his so called "Palace-Sarai". But who is the leader of today's Turkey, the politician who together with Ahmet Davutoglu, brought back the Ottoman visions as a perspective of New Turkey, the man who plays hard on the international stage, but also for many the fateful man who can lead Turkey into its dissolution?

The man who led Turkey to the twenty-first century is undoubtedly Tayyip Erdogan, an unknown football player until the early eighties. Born in the Kasimpasa quarter of Istanbul, Turkey, on February 26, 1954, to parents Ahmet and Tenzile Erdogan. Raised without much money, Erdogan sold lemonade and sesame buns on the streets as a teenager. A talented football player, he competed for many years and reportedly drew interest from top clubs, but was prevented from pursuing that path by his father¹. Recep Tayyip Erdogan became involved in politics while attending university.

Erdogan was considered to be one of the most charismatic political leaders and many of his followers had likened him to the former country president, Turgut Ozal. Ozal's common

¹ Biography.com Editors, 2016

element with Erdogan was that they both moved under the notion that the composition of Kemal's Nationalism movement, with Turkish Islamism would ensure the coherence and continuity of the existence for a complex country such as Turkey. At the same time, they are confident that this composition will bring Turkey to the front line of major world powers. But the main difference between them is that Ozal emerged with the support of the militants, as he was the one who assumed to politicize the coup d'état of the Turkish high rank officers in 1980, while exploiting the conflicts of that time and succeed in achieving the cooperation of Islam with the military to deal with the left-wing threat and the Kurdish issue. Unlike Ozal, Erdogan has been for many years the "red cloth" for the military, something that stopped to be true after his 2008 triumph, when the Political Islam prevailed.

On August 16, 2001, was officially announced the establishment of the new Justice and Development party (AKP) by Erdogan. The new party, which is abbreviated as "AK Partisi", was first created by the members of the Islamist party "Fajilet", which was forbidden following a decision by the Turkish Supreme Constitutional Court. Apart from the Islamists, however, Erdogan had also attracted a great number of dissatisfied from other parties, and especially from the two right-wing parties, "Mother Country" and the "Right Way", and was aspiring to become the new focal center of the center-right wing, that would govern Turkey in the coming years.

Erdogan, however, from the beginning of his government has shown his intentions for changing the country's charter with a clear object of establishing more Islamic standards in governance by bringing him in a direct conflict with the military status quo. His main opponent, however, would be the Kemalic state itself, which began at first timidly and then resolutely steps, to replace it by a new Islamic status quo. Of course, this did not happen without frequent frictions, notably with the militants, which began to retreat abusively after 2008, when military conspiracies began to come to light and capture senior officers who resisted vigorously the pro-Islamic reforms.

Erdogan, served as mayor of Constantinople (1994-1998). During his tenure as mayor of Istanbul, the party who represented, the Welfare Party was declared unconstitutional by the Turkish Constitutional Court. In December 1997, in Siirt, Erdogan recited a poem by the Turkish nationalist poet of the 20th century Ziya Gokalp. The public reading of this poem, under the Turkish Law was regarded as an incitement to religious or racial hatred. Erdogan was forced to resign from the mayor's post in 1998 and was finally sentenced in 1999 to a ten-month imprisonment that also stipulated a political ban. From 2003 to 2014 and for three consecutive

terms, Erdogan served as prime minister of the country. A charismatic but contradictory political being that has been ruling for many consecutive years. A person who is worshiped by half the Turks and at the same time is characterized as the No1 enemy for the country from the rest. He is the "man of the people," portrayed by embracing babies, the loyal family man, the incorruptible, the protector of the weak and the defender of Turkey against internal and external enemies.

After winning the country's presidency with a slight majority in August 2014 (by direct election from the people and securing 52% of the votes), Erdogan's next goal seems to be the great leader of the Muslim world. The AKP has never hidden its goal of changing the Constitution and adopting the presidential system, a prospect that if implemented, will change Turkey and the entire region. Consequently, this debate is of strategic importance, as it will largely determine Turkey's future orientations and engagements. With this in mind, AKP's request for a new constitution and the introduction of the presidential or semi-presidential system, through the more general context of the party's establishment of power, as well as through its ideological continuity with the traditional Islamic Movement Milli Görüş Hareketi, is still not clear the final outcome. Both the change of the Constitution and the strengthening of the executive power in a presidential system appear to be long-standing demands of Turkish political Islam, which are being modernized and reproduced in a new context by the Erdogan party. Should he overcome Turkey's greatest political figure, Kemal Ataturk - whom he loves to hate or not?

1.1.2 Vladimir Putin: The strong man of Russia

After outlining the political trestle of Recep Tayyip Erdogan is also important to take a look to the opponent awe in Russia, President Vladimir Putin. Vladimir Putin is Russia's leader, who holds the post of President of the Russian Federation since May 7, 2012. He also held the same post between 2000 and 2008 and served as Prime Minister of the Russian Federation in the inter-period², from 8 May 2008 to May 7, 2012. During his 8-year, first and second presidential term, the Russian economy has re-emerged over a long period of time, cutting energy policy and high wealth into natural resources, oil, and gas. Also, Russia is now a member of the group of

² The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016

the eight richest states in the world (G8), due to the large GDP growth, which approached the equivalent of the USSR of the 1980s.

Putin was born in Leningrad, now St. Petersburg, on Oct. 7, 1952, and grew up, living in a communal apartment. His father, also named Vladimir, worked as a factory foreman. Putin received a degree from the law department at Leningrad State University in 1975, and that same year, he joined the KGB, beginning a long career as a Soviet intelligence officer³. In 1990 he retired from active KGB service with the rank of lieutenant colonel and returned to Russia. Soon, Putin became an adviser to Sobchak, the first democratically elected mayor of St. Petersburg. He quickly won Sobchak's confidence and became known for his ability to get things done and by 1994 he had risen to the post of first deputy mayor. In 1996 Putin moved to Moscow and very soon became known to President Boris Yeltsin that made him director of the Federal Security Service (the KGB's domestic successor), and shortly after he became secretary of the influential Security Council. In 1999, he was appointed prime minister by Yeltsin, who was searching for an heir to assume his mantle. On December 31, 1999, Yeltsin unexpectedly announced his resignation and named Putin acting president. With the promise to rebuild the weakened Russia, the austere and reserved Putin easily won the March 2000 elections with about 53 percent of the voters. As president, he sought to end corruption and create a strongly regulated market economy. On March 2008, soon after Medvedev won the presidential election by a landslide, Putin announced that he had accepted the position of chairman of the United Russia Party. Confirming widespread expectations, Medvedev nominated Putin as the country's prime minister within hours of taking office on May 7, 2008. Russia's parliament confirmed the appointment the following day and was still regarded as the main power within the Kremlin⁴.

Most Russians, view Putin as having staunched the bleeding of the Russian state, presided over the recovery of the economy (after a decade of depression), and defended Russian dignity in the councils of nations. Moreover, in the face of the world's worst economic crisis since the 1930s, Russians see that Putin kept their country afloat; in striking contrast to the economic collapse under Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin⁵.

On May 7, 2012, Putin was inaugurated as president for the third time. His third presidential term, which is still on going, is marked by intense relations with the United States

³ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Lynch, 2011

because of the different perceptions on the confrontation of the Syrian Civil War that broke up in August 2013. Also the Ukrainian matter; the annexation of Crimea that raised waves of protests against Russian policies and many economic sanctions by the U.S. and the EU are critical aspects of Putin's third presidential term. The follow on of these events was the improvement of the Russian-Turkish relations on December 2014, after Putin's visit to Ankara and the announcement of the new plans for the energy sector that would bring the relations of both nations to a new dimension.

1.1.3 Political Background of the Two Leaders and Common Points

With the rebellion of the New Turks, Kemal made reforms that were unusual at that time in an Islamic state. The overwhelming majorities of the people were deeply religious and could not understand the need to transform the society. Kemal Ataturk to an impressive extent for his time, succeeded in Europeanizing and civilizing his country. He abolished Islamic regular laws, the headscarves, the Islamic calendar, the Muslim religious battalions (as well as the Arabic alphabet), and replaced them with Latin. Despite the reforms and transformation of Turkey into a "Western state", the restoration of the Islamic state has always been a threat, especially in times of economic crisis.

So Turkey has an internal conflict between the two possible political backgrounds; the so-called Kemalists against Islamists. There are "gray" zones between them that however seek coexistence and attack whenever one side is led to the extreme. President Erdogan is considered to be a representative of the Islamists. Erdogan's powerful AK Party (AKP), stands for Justice and Development Party and is rooted in conservative Sunni Islam. Erdogan has denied wanting to impose Islamic values, saying he is committed to secularism, but on the other hand, he supports Turks' right to express their religion more openly. In October 2013, president Erdogan restored rules banning women from wearing headscarves in the country's state institutions with the exception of the judiciary, military, and police – ending a decades old restriction.

Russia, on the other side, according to the Constitution of the country, is a federation and semi-presidential republic, where the President is the head of state and the Prime Minister is the head of the government. President Putin, in one of his speeches, said: "I liked Communist and

Socialist ideas very much and I like them still.” Political-economically, he sounds like a typical economically left democratic socialist rather than Leninist due to his ideas on how to resolve the redistribution of wealth amongst citizens through ensuring good economic growth. According to the President, Russia had made its choice years ago towards democracy; meaning there is only one way to the future and that is through democratic ideas and values.

The ideological solution of Patriotism rooted in Christianity is what Putin has found to legitimize his authority and rebuild his country⁶. It does not mean that the president, a former KGB officer, has suddenly repented and become a Christian. It rather means that Putin proved to be a pragmatic politician, who re-discovered the potential and the power of the Russian "right faith," with relations to the national mythologies: the Orthodox mysticism and spiritualism, the idea of the Third Rome, the mystification of Russian geography, and the idea of the Eurasian civilization. It should be noted that in his politics, Putin did not adopt the humanistic philosophy of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, nor the core principles of Christianity. He was not and will not become a Christian Democrat. Putin, after the death of Yeltsin, rejected every known ideology as inappropriate for Russia and finally concluded that Orthodox Christianity was left as the most convenient and useful source for national, and political emancipation for Russians. He used this foundation to rebuild the country.

Putin and Erdogan have a lot in common when comparing their political careers. Both stem from poor families and were raised in poverty. Also, their first political steps were forged in “Great Nation” ideas and vilifying the western lifestyle and political system. They both have governed their countries with violent force (authorizing police to suppress protestors against all democratic rights) for a long period, causing some political critics to characterize their reign as authoritarian administrators. The main difference between them however, can be found in the structure and culture of democracy within their respective country.

1.2 The Geostrategic role of Turkey and Russia in Region

⁶ T.S.Tsonchev, 2017

There is no doubt that Turkey occupies a unique position in the world, in both its geographic location and its political aspirations. Not many other countries so literally define the word “crossroads” as Turkey. This great nation lays both in Europe and Asia. Turkey presents itself as a Muslim country that aspires to be a part of the western world⁷.

During its past decade under the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), Turkey became a much more prominent global actor due to its dynamic diplomacy, strengthening economy, and the security vacuum in its turbulent neighborhood, which created a demand for the greater foreign policy activism Ankara was now able to provide⁸.

Turkey has presented both a challenge and an opportunity to NATO and the EU as they restructure their roles, missions, and capabilities to address Europe’s 21st-century security challenges. Turkey constitutes a NATO member, since 1951, but still is not a European Union member although it has been a candidate for full membership since December 1999. Due to serious failures of the State to address issues such as poor human rights records, restrictions on media freedoms, potential miscarriages of justice, constraints on Kurdish rights and non-recognition of the Republic of Cyprus, Turkish EU candidacy is still pending. As part of NATO, Turkey has benefitted from the Alliance’s support and has also contributed heavily to NATO’s effort to promote security in the Euro-Atlantic region and beyond. Turkey serves as the organization’s vital eastern anchor, controlling the straits between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea and sharing a border with Syria, Iraq, and Iran.

Moreover, Turkey is the only predominantly Muslim member of NATO and boasts one of the world’s most dynamic economies. The country’s rapid economic growth enabled the country to enhance its military forces through both foreign purchases and an improving domestic defense industry. The large population and the geographically broad perspective of the national security community, has transformed Turkey’s military into one of the largest and most readily deployable armies in Europe and the second largest in NATO⁹.

Russia’s great power status on the other hand, unlike other major powers as the US, the EU, and China, has been largely diminished from its superpower status in the second half of the twentieth century. As President Vladimir Putin stated at one of his speeches responding to

⁷ Carley P., 1995

⁸ Weitz R., 2014, p. 1

⁹ Ibid, p. 8

western criticisms on Russia's democratic credentials, "*the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century*". This statement is a clear reflection of Russian elite's traditional mindset utilizing geopolitics as the primary tool of (re) orienting Russia to changing international system¹⁰.

Consequently, it can be justified that Russia's ambition to regain great power status that is directly linked to its geographical positioning and physical characteristics of Russia as a security state, which should be powerful to avert prospective threats (i.e. military, separatist groups) that might endanger the integrity of its extensive territories in the Eurasian landmass. In this context, President Putin has the vision of transforming Russia into an indispensable great power through "economic modernization" (in the energy sector) and independent foreign policy. This brings the Kremlin's main objective into perspective that is to maintain Russia's territorial integrity by paying close attention to domestic concerns (i.e. economic modernization) in eastern regions. This prevents intra-state and facilitates economic cooperation - mainly in the energy sector - with all Eastern states (China), regardless of their ideological disparity¹¹.

With respect to foreign policies, Moscow has embarked on pursuing a more independent approach to dealing with the rest of the world. Along with Putin's leadership type and a broad elite consensus about the role that the state should play, an increase in Russia's relative international power - mainly due to incrementally increasing energy revenues and declining American hegemony - have shaped Russia's new foreign policy approach. Putin has foreseen that in today's era, economic factor and energy wealth are far more important than military power. Asserting the role as one of the major producer/exporter of oil and natural gas, Russia has made its economy to rely heavily on its energy exports.

Russia's credentials as a petro state have been remarkable. In 2013–2014, it was the world's second largest oil producer – accounting for 12.6% of total production – and also the second-largest exporter only behind Saudi Arabia in both domains. Russia was also the second-largest producer of natural gas, after the United States, and the leading natural gas exporter. It is also important to note that Europe is by far the most important consumer of Russia's energy

¹⁰ Işeri & Özdemir, 2017

¹¹ Ibid

exports; in 2014, more than 70% of Russia's crude oil exports and almost 90% of Russia's natural gas exports went to Europe¹².

Another significant sector of Russian Industry that will play an important role in the future is the defense-industrial complex. This has adopted a leading role in the Russian economy. The boom in the value of hydrocarbon exports laid the foundations for the return of the Russian defense-industrial sector¹³. In 2012, President Putin expressed the hope that this rearmament program would not only result in a more effective military machine but also that a defense-industrial renaissance would act as a “driver of modernization” across the wider Russian economy. This is not to suggest that Russia is anywhere close to the Soviet Union's level of militarization, where military expenditures accounted for anywhere between 15 and 20% of the nation's GDP in the 1980s, compared to the current 5.5% GDP figure as of 2015. Clearly, it is not. On the contrary, the role of Russia as a stability axis in the region is more acceptable, considering the unstable geopolitical environment in the periphery.

¹² Bradshaw & Connolly, 2016, p.157

¹³ Ibid, p. 160

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CHAPTER 2

TURKISH – RUSSIAN RELATIONS REGARDING ENERGY SECURITY IN REGION

2.1 Growing Needs for Energy Resources in Turkey

The limits of Turkey's domestic energy sources in light of its growing energy demand have resulted in high dependency on energy imports; primarily oil and gas. Currently, domestic resources meet only about 26% of the total energy demand, while a diversified portfolio of imports provides the rest¹⁴. Improving energy efficiency and energy security are high priorities for the Turkish Government. About 58% of its gas and 35% of its oil come from Russia, while the rest come from Iran. In February 2016 Gazprom arbitrarily increased the gas price by 10.25% regardless of contracts, and terminated supply when Turkish firms declined to pay the extra¹⁵. Projections in natural gas for 2020 cite domestic demand at 82.7 billion cubic meters. Such an acute need for energy necessitates an alteration in foreign policy, such as pragmatism, flexibility, and overcoming normative concerns. Imperatively, Turkey needs different energy resources and markets that would require a flexible foreign policy, thus allowing it to cooperate with different states¹⁶.

Turkey continues its efforts to increase the share of renewable energy sources and is also adding nuclear power to its energy mix for the purpose of reducing its energy import dependency. This expansion will maximize the use of domestic resources, and combat climate change. The addition of nuclear energy by Turkey is geared at decreasing negative environmental effects of energy production; meeting its ever-increasing energy demand as well as reducing its energy import dependency. To this end, the construction of two nuclear power plants (NPPs) in Akkuyu and Sinop are underway¹⁷.

¹⁴ Republic of Turkey, 2017

¹⁵ World Nuclear Association, 2017

¹⁶ Bacik, 2006, p. 294

¹⁷ Republic of Turkey, 2017

Turkey is geographically located in the midst of energy producing countries within its Region with more than 75% of the world's proven oil and gas reserves and the well-developed European energy consumer markets. This privileged natural bridge position provides Turkey with both opportunities and responsibilities in terms of energy security. Turkey remains convinced of the need to strengthen this unique role given by its geostrategic location. In this regard, while developing its energy strategy Turkey aims to strengthen its position between East-West and South-North Energy Corridors¹⁸.

Due to the economic and social development in Turkey in recent years, there has been a remarkable increase in energy and especially electricity demand. Despite a wide range of energy sources (coal, lignite, asphalt, oil, natural gas, hydro, geothermal, wood, animal and plant wastes, sun and wind¹⁹), the oil, natural gas, and coal used in electricity generation in the country cannot meet the increasing energy demands. To resolve this, it is necessary for Turkey to import most of its fossil-based energy consumption (the share of natural gas and coal in electricity generation is approximately 32.5% and 29% respectively²⁰). A very large portion of this gas and coal is imported. Comparatively, Turkey imports a significant portion of the fossil fuels used for heating and transportation. This strongly suggests why Turkey is significantly dependent on the energy field.

The account deficit of the Turkish economy was 60 billion US dollars (USD) by the end of 2014. Approximately 55 billion USD were also imported into energy simultaneously²¹. Consequently, to ensure fiscal equilibrium, it is absolutely necessary to reduce energy imports (which make up a large part of the current account deficit), and maximize the exploitation of other energy resources. The implementation of renewable energy resources with the highest efficiency and ensuring energetic resource diversification, and adding nuclear energy to its portfolio is an effective solution.

The transition to electricity generation using nuclear power plants is a vital factor to reduce Turkey's dependency on natural gas to Russia and Iran. There have been many futile attempts to establish and use nuclear power plants. In May 2004, technical reviews resumed under the supervision of the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources. The plan is to build two

¹⁸ Republic of Turkey, 2017

¹⁹ Kok & Benli, 2017, p. 871

²⁰ Ibid p. 876

²¹ Ibid

power plants; one on the north coast of Turkey near the city of Sinop and the other on the south coast of Turkey near the city of Akkuyu. The Sinop nuclear project is designed to have a capacity of 4800 MWe, and a 60-year lifetime for the reactor with a cost range of 22 - 25 billion USD. In comparison, the investment cost of the Akkuyu nuclear project is expected to be 20 billion USD. The Akkuyu plant will also have 4800 MWe capacities, with a similar lifetime reactor²². The idea of a third unit is still under discussion and will be further considered after the progress that will be made from the initial two. The third unit is projected to be built north of Istanbul, in the coastal city of Igneada (Fig. 2.1). A Russian consortium for Akkuyu has chosen to build the first four reactors on a build-own operate model, while discussions for the next four reactors haven't been completed yet.

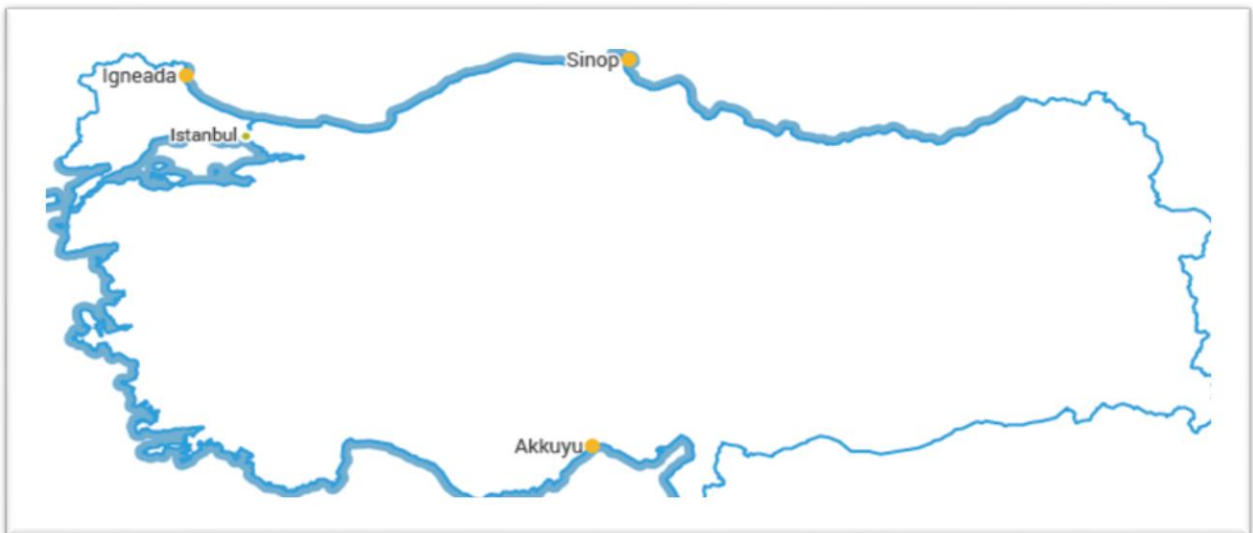


Fig. 2.1 Planned Nuclear Power Plants in Turkey

Source: World Nuclear Association

2.2 The Russian Energy Giant

²² Kok & Benli, 2017, p.871

The main pillars of Russian exports are the Natural resources that contribute greatly towards domestic tax revenues and GDP. In this aspect, Russia remains as dependent on natural resources as the Soviet Union used to be, with its economic and geopolitical fortunes heavily influenced by changes in global natural resource prices. Oil and oil products account for the largest share of export revenues, while natural gas is the second most important source of export revenue. Revenues have plateaued since the global recession of 2009, which was caused by a fall in demands from Russia's principal gas customers in the European Union (EU). Coal is also an important component of Russian natural resource exports, accounting for 2.7% of the total exports²³.

The idea of a large-scale export of Russian gas to Western Europe stemmed after the Second World War when the focus on gas production moved from Urals, North Caucasus, and Ukraine to Siberia. The latter created numerous transportation issues for the produced gas. Over the years, the discovery of new sources and the rise in demands has resulted to the construction of a dense network of pipelines across Europe originating from Russia to the demanding countries. This pipeline network, today represents the basic structure of Russian gas export to Europe and is basically structured on two key axes: the Brotherhood Pipeline and the Northern Lights Pipeline. (Fig.2.2)

Fig.2.2 Key Russian gas export pipelines to Europe: Brotherhood and Northern Lights



²³ Kuhrt & Feklyunina, 2017

Source: Oxford Institute for Energy Studies.

On another scale of exports in the Black Sea, there is the Blue Stream pipeline that carries natural gas to Turkey from Russia. According to Gazprom, this pipeline was built in order to diversify Russian gas delivery routes to Turkey and avoid third countries and also circumvent the ecologically risky Turkish Straits of Bosphorus. In 2007, Russia launched the “South Stream” gas pipeline project, which was to start from Russia's Black Sea coasts, running through Bulgaria, and then onwards to Serbia, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Austria, and Italy, carrying 63 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas. South Stream had represented the key element of the discussions concerning the EU security of gas supply and the overall EU-Russia relations that period. South Stream represented a crucial element of the Russian gas export strategy for two reasons; the diversification of transit routes, and the limitation of potential competition originating from Central Asia and the Caspian basin to Europe via Turkey.

The 2013 civil war in Ukraine opened a new page in relations between Russia and the Western world. Russia’s annexation of Crimea in March of 2014 and continuous support of insurgents in eastern Ukraine, initiated Cold War tensions in the European continent. The United States of America (USA) and the European Union (EU) responded immediately by implementing sanctions against Russia²⁴.

The reaction of the Russian President Vladimir Putin, after the imposed trade barriers against Russia, was direct. He visited Ankara in December 2014 and announced new plans; the cancellation of the South Stream Project, which was planned to carry Russian gas to Europe under the Black Sea, and the beginning of works “Turkish Stream” for a new pipeline in replacement. The Turkish Stream was perceived as a mark of trust between the Russians and the Turkish. The Southern Stream’s new path to Europe via Turkey will be the dawn of a new era in Turkey-EU relations as well as Turkey-Russia relations, by virtue of energy-politics²⁵.

Despite the important role that natural resources play in Russia’s economy, Russia is a price taker, not a price maker, on global natural resource markets. Russia’s share of global export markets for most natural resources, while significant, is not so high as to confer exceptional market power to Russian companies²⁶. This disparity between Russia’s dependence on natural resource exports and its relatively small degree of market power reveals the crucial paradox of

²⁴ Karagol & Kizilkaya, Spring 2015, p.57

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Kuhrt & Feklyunina, 2017

Russian economic power: Russia relies critically on the extraction and sales of a range of resources over which it exerts very little influence in the price. In this aspect, Russia's real economic sovereignty is severely constrained.

2.3 Turkey's Dependence on Russia and Cooperation Projects Between the Two Countries in the Last Decade

The dependence of Turkey on Russia can be simply described in a sentence retrieved from the Turkish media, commenting on the 2005 gas crisis between Russia and Ukraine; "*Turkey is Russia's fat gas customer*"²⁷. In this effect, the energy dimension constitutes the most significant aspect of the Turkish–Russian relationship. Turkey portrays itself as an energy transit country and an energy hub for Europe. Conscious of these Turkish aspirations, Russia confirms Ankara's ambitions. Despite the growing and worrying level of dependency on Russian gas, some pro-Russian analysts do not hide their enthusiasm about more energy cooperation with Russia. It is important to acknowledge that Turkish energy imports from Russia have increased exponentially, especially after the completion of the Blue Stream pipeline. The Blue Stream natural gas pipeline project, which tunnels under the Black Sea, is the pillar of the energy relationship²⁸ between the two countries. In 2000, a year before the completion of Blue Stream, Turkey imported 10.000 million cm³ of Natural Gas from Russia, while on 2006, three years after the construction of the pipeline, the imports nearly doubled (19.500 million cm³ of Natural Gas).

President Putin's declarations *«We are ready to build another pipeline system to meet the growing needs of the Turkish economy and, if deemed viable, to create an additional gas hub for the consumers in Southern Europe on the territory of Turkey on the border with Greece»*²⁹ proposes a new way forward.

After this declaration, Gazprom specified Russia's plan to construct a new pipeline under the Black Sea to Turkey with the same capacity of South Stream (63 bcm per year), to supply 14

²⁷ Kiniklioğlu & Morkva, 2007, p.540

²⁸ Ibid, p.541

²⁹ Sputnik News, 2015

bcm per year to Turkey and the rest to be used for a gas hub on the border with Greece. Commutatively, a part of 15 billion cubic meters will be stored in Turkey and another one of 48 billion cubic meters in Greece. Currently, Russia delivers a total of 16 billion cubic meters of gas to Turkey via the Blue Stream pipeline. Therefore, this will bring the project to a critical point of energy demand security for Russia, Turkey, and the EU countries³⁰.

Finally, after discussions that lasted two months between the Russian and Turkish counterparts for the potential routes of the new pipeline, Gazprom CEO and Turkish Minister for Energy and Natural Resources, presented on February 7, 2015, the updated route of Turkish Stream. (Fig. 2.3)

The dependence of Turkey over Russia is taken for granted and is also indisputable. As President Putin stated on the opening of the sixth meeting of the High-Level Russian-Turkish Cooperation Council (HLCC) that took place in Moscow in March 2017, *“it is gratifying that we have been able to establish strategic cooperation in the energy sector. Turkey is Russia’s second largest natural gas importer. Last month, the intergovernmental agreement on the major project to build the Turkish Stream gas pipeline network came into force. This project will help increase natural gas supplies to Turkey and develop its transit potential”*. The president also made a reference to the Akkuyu nuclear power plant, which will be designed from the Russian Rosatom and will be the first nuclear power facility in Turkey.

After the construction of the Turkish Stream, Russia will remain Turkey’s main gas supplier, and the latter will become further reliant on Russia with the completion of the Mersin-Akkuyu nuclear power plant. Being dependent on Russian gas at a level of more than 50 percent is a matter of energy security, and after the completion of the ongoing projects, this may hardly change in the years to come.

In the energy sphere, there are promising outcomes for both parties, as there are fragilities. Mersin-Akkuyu and the Turkish Stream are two high expensive projects, for which Russia faces financial constraints due to low oil prices and Western sanctions. Obviously developing financial solutions in the future is a necessity before these aspirations turn into impediments and these projects can be constructed. Additionally, it is hard to ignore political fragilities; the possibility of a further deterioration of relations between the West and Russia

³⁰ Hafner & Tagliapietra., 2015

might negatively impact the future of the Turkish Stream. Here, political dialogue between Russia and Turkey may help hinder such problems up to a certain extent; however, economic constraints would need further creative and feasible solutions to be developed³¹.

Fig.2.3 Possible Transit Route of the Turkish Stream Project



Source: Gazprom (official map based on the Russian view of Ukraine's boundaries).

³¹ Özertem, Winter 2017

CHAPTER 3

GREAT ISSUES OF COMPETITION AND COOPERATION

3.1 The Kurdish Issue and How the Two Countries Are Involved

3.1.1 The Kurdish issue and the Turkish Perspective

The Kurdish issue plays a decisive role in the Russian-Turkish relations due to its complexity that surpasses the struggle for independence. Kurds are the largest stateless minority in the world, with an estimated population of 25 to 35 million Kurds in a geographic area encompassing territories in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Armenia (Fig. 3.1). They make up the fourth-largest ethnic group in the Middle East, but they have never obtained a permanent national state despite comprising 15-20 % of the population in Turkey and Iraq. A largely Sunni Muslim people with their own language and culture, most Kurds live in the generally contiguous areas of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Armenia, and Syria — a mountainous region of southwest Asia generally known as Kurdistan (Land of the Kurds)³².

The 1920 Treaty of Sevres that created the modern states of Iraq, Syria, and Kuwait, was supposed to include the possibility of a Kurdish state in the region, however, it was never implemented. In recent decades, Kurds have increasingly influenced regional developments, fighting for autonomy in Turkey and playing prominent roles in the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, where they have resisted the advance of the so-called Islamic State (IS) jihadist group. Today, they form a distinctive community even though they have no standard dialect, united through race, culture, and language. They also adhere to a number of different religions and creeds, although the majority are Sunni Muslims.

³² BBC News, 2016

Fig. 3.1 Kurdish Inhabited Area



Source: BBC News

There is deep-seated hostility between the Turkish state and the country's Kurds. Kurds have received harsh treatment at the hands of the Turkish authorities for generations. In response to uprisings in the 1920s and 1930s, many Kurds resettled, Kurdish names and costumes were banned, and the use of the Kurdish language was restricted and even the existence of a Kurdish ethnic identity was denied, with people designated as "Mountain Turks". In 1978, Abdullah Ocalan established the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which called for an independent state within Turkey. Six years later, the group began an armed struggle and ever since then, more than 40,000 people have been killed and hundreds of thousands displaced³³.

In the 90s the PKK rolled back on its demand for independence, calling instead for a greater cultural and political autonomy, but continued to fight. In 2012, the government and PKK began peace talks and the following year a ceasefire was agreed, although clashes continued. The ceasefire collapsed in July 2015, days after a suicide bombing blamed on IS killed 33 young Kurdish activists in the town of Suruc, near the Syrian border³⁴. The PKK responded by attacking Turkish soldiers and police. The Turkish government launched what it called a

³³ BBC News, 2016

³⁴ Ibid

"synchronized war on terror" against the PKK and IS. Since then, hundreds of people have been killed in clashes in southeastern Turkey, and in air strikes on PKK camps in northern Iraq.

According to the Turkish government, the Popular Protection Units (YPG) (the armed wing of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Unity Party (PYD)) and the PYD are affiliates of the PKK, and share the same goal for secession (through armed struggle), and are all terrorist organizations. The independence of a Kurdish State relies on one giant obstacle; Turkey, which for a long time has opposed the creation of a Kurdish state. Turkey, in any case, does not want the creation of an independent Kurdish state at its border with the fear of partitioning and secession of its territories.

3.1.2 United States Role in the Kurdish Issue

Since the end of World War II, the onset of the Cold War, and the dawn of the present geopolitical era, one fact remains consistent: the United States needs strong regional allies to monitor its enemies and ensure their influence in order to safeguard its interests. After Israel's independence and the Suez Crisis, the enemy was Egypt; the ally was Iraq. After the Persian Gulf War, the enemy was Iraq; the allies were literally everyone else. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the enemy was Iran; the ally was Saudi Arabia. Since the fall of Ba'athism in Iraq in 2003, Iran remains the sole state that has any real power opposing US foreign policy in the Middle East. Though the war against ISIS that began in 2014 has led to some level of uneasy Iran-American cooperation, Iran still remains a major destabilizer of American backed states in the Persian Gulf region and beyond.

The United States in recent decades has entrusted its stalwart regional partners such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar to act as the main bastions against Iranian destabilization, however these allies have been working on countering Iran for years. What is needed is a fresh, dedicated nation-state that is not only willing to tackle the threat of Tehran but is even right at its border. An independent Kurdistan would be appropriate. Having an automatic distrust for the Iranian regime which has controlled a piece of greater Kurdistan for centuries, and actively opposed any kind of Kurdish independence, a Kurdish state would surely use everything in its political and military power to ensure corrosive Iranian influence goes no further than Iran's own borders.

3.1.3 How Russia Sees Kurdish Struggle for Autonomy

While Russia and the United States in the pursuit for a golden section that would bring a ceasefire in Syria, each one for the safeguard of their own interests, Moscow insists that Kurds should be included in the Geneva peace talks. The moderate Syrian opposition and Washington share this idea, while Ankara understandably opposes to it³⁵.

Russia's position on the Kurds is more complicated than it may seem. In their relations with Kurds, Russian decision-makers face two major narratives that create a dilemma. Firstly, some Russian analysts and diplomats believe that the size of the Kurdish population and the military power exercised by the Kurds in Syria and Iraq, at some point would give birth to some kind of Kurdish statehood in the region. For them, Middle East is undergoing a massive transformation and the Kurds have played a significant role in vital battles against the Islamic State (IS) and other extremist groups, and they might use their victories to legitimize their claim to statehood.

Secondly, there are the conservative observers (including some in the government) who understand that a drastic fragmentation of the region would inevitably trigger profound and unpredictable consequences and could backfire on those who sponsor it. Without a doubt, such a development also would deteriorate relations with affected countries namely - Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran. Proponents of this idea urge the Kremlin to stick to its advocacy for strong states as guarantors of regional stability³⁶. They are positive that Russia would support more delicate arrangements, such as autonomy. That, in their view, would represent an adequate compromise between central governments and the minority groups demanding independence.

Russia has a lot of interests in the region. One of them includes Moscow's intent to build ties with the Kurds. The geopolitical game is growing more than ever since Russia is trying to undermine US sovereignty in the Middle East, with the approach of the Kurds to change their correlations to the crisis. From the Russian perspective, Moscow and Washington are not entirely rivals in their military support for the Kurds. Instead, there's a "division of responsibilities" —

³⁵ Suchkov, 2016

³⁶ Ibid

the Kremlin anticipates a potential political struggle for influence in the future. Thus, having an early edge in its political relations with Kurdish groups was a strategic calculation.

Moreover, the outcome for the Kurds will inevitably affect Russian – Turkish relations. Moscow assessed that Ankara perceived the creation of a Syrian Kurdish autonomy as a dangerous precedent for Kurdish autonomous regions elsewhere, which eventually could unite into a state resulting in the loss of their Eastern lands (where Kurds live) (Fig.3.1). The autonomy would bury Ankara's intent to take control of northern Syria in order to create a buffer zone between Kurdish enclaves in Syria and in Turkey. Powerful Kurdish groups from both countries have lobbied Moscow about the idea of a Kurdish State. Though Moscow has expressed a genuine interest in Kurdish issues, so far it has been cautious in offering actual support. This is driven partly by the Kurds' history of internal conflicts and varying approaches to achieving their goals.

Russia is supporting Kurdish people and still does not recognize the PKK as a terrorist organization. Kurds are very crucial for Middle East's future and Russia knows that. While economic and political relations are evolving, Turkey and Russia have different opinions in the regional affairs. Therefore, relations between these two countries are always going to be under the threat of breaking up. Nevertheless, there's no question that Moscow's vision for the future of the Middle East includes greater representation for the Kurds. Thus, the Geneva process is just the first step in embracing them, with future political engagement to follow, whatever form that might take.

3.2 The Syrian Crisis Affecting the Relations of Two Countries

Turkey's interests in Syria are tied to the Kurdish influence in the region. Therefore, any Turkish interference in the conflict is driven by Ankara's aim to reduce the influence of the Kurds³⁷. The extent to which the Kurds are involved in the Syrian conflict reveals efforts towards the establishment of Kurdistan, or at least, a stronger sense of a Kurdish national identity. However, for Turkey, this is inextricably linked with what is perceived as a direct threat to Turkish stability and its efforts to curtail any possibility of a new Kurdish State. Another

³⁷ Shahnavaaz, 2017

primary goal for Turkey in Syria since 2011 was the fall of President Assad and his regime. While Assad was losing control in the country, Turkey was becoming a safe haven for refugees escaping from the civil war. As the humanitarian situation worsened, Turkey blamed the Assad regime of human rights violations and took a position against the leadership. The fact that Turkey has been able to accommodate over 3 million Syrian refugees at its borders with Syria³⁸, has been a leverage and justification for the Turkish government to send Turkish Armed Forces into Syria to create a safe zone for refugees inside Syria.

Russia's involvement in Syria on the other hand is to undermine US sovereignty in the Middle East and show its role as a global power, to fight ISIS and save the Assad regime, which is a very close ally. The ties between the two countries (the once USSR and Syria), dates back to 1950 when Syria turned to USSR to sign an armament agreement. The resulting arms agreement that authorized purchases by the USSR created the conditions for Syria to depend on the USSR at the military-economic level. This agreement also created the need for the USSR to support Syria diplomatically. Moreover, the USSR undertook the development of Syrian potential for oil extraction, power generation, irrigation systems, and infrastructure. So far, Russia has invested over 1.6 billion USD in energy contracts in Syria³⁹. A potential change in regime in Syria could lead to loss of the invested capital. Also, Russia's Naval Base in Tartus, Syria is the only base outside the former USSR territory. Although Russia is not involved in a war for a fleet base, it has no reason to easily abandon this unique base in the Mediterranean.

Russia decided to take an active role in the Syrian conflict in the fall of 2015. Up until then, Russia was supporting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and the Baath regime indirectly economically and militarily⁴⁰. In political terms, Moscow was vocal against any intervention in Syria like in the case of Libya and has become active on the United Nations Security Council in blocking any resolution that goes against Damascus' interests.

The shooting down of the Russian Su-24 bomber by a Turkish F-16 fighter jet on 24 November 2015 resulted in a rip in the long-standing fragile relations between Turkey and Russia. Despite the fact that bilateral relations had been gaining substantial momentum since 2000, the crisis swiftly escalated. Even existing mechanisms that regularly brought the heads of

³⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2017

³⁹ Ellyatt, 2015

⁴⁰ Shahnavaaz, 2017

states of Turkey and Russia together (such as the High-Level Cooperation Council (HLCC)), could not prevent this relations from hitting rock bottom in political and economic terms⁴¹.

The Russian Su-24 bomber incident sent shock waves through the Kremlin and President Vladimir Putin simply said, *“They [Turks] stabbed us in the back.”*⁴² From the other side, Ankara declared that due to the existing rules of engagement, the Russian aircraft had been justifiably shot down since according to radar records, it violated Turkish airspace. Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, defended Turkey’s actions, by stating: *“Turkey took the necessary measures to protect its sovereignty on its territory in line with the rules of engagement.”*

The shooting down of the Su-24 bomber was a result rather than a cause of the deterioration of relations⁴³. Turkey’s goals changed somewhat in 2014, when American aerial support of Syrian Kurdish forces led by the PYD, held off a determined Islamic State assault on the town of Kobani. The PYD and its armed militia, YPG, are affiliates of the PKK, which has been fighting the Turkish for so long. Turkey, therefore, considers their consolidation of power in northern Syria, where they have set up a de facto government, to be a major security threat. In response, Turkey changed its Syrian policy. Ankara now had two targets in Syria: the Assad regime and PYD⁴⁴. To secure both goals, Turkey intensified cooperation with Saudi Arabia and jointly supplied more weapons and money to Arab and Turkmen opposition groups while refusing to cooperate with anti-Islamic State coalition activities in support of the Syrian Kurds. When Russia stepped up its intervention in Syria at the end of September 2015 to rescue the Assad regime, its first target was not the Islamic State but the Turkish and Saudi backed opposition groups that were advancing rapidly into regime-held territory in northern Syria.

The Russian intervention was devastating to Turkey’s policy in Syria, and in that light, Moscow provoked the downing of the Russian plane (Su-24 Bomber). Russia had already increased its presence in the eastern Mediterranean with the sole intention of defending its military base in Tartus, Syria. The deployment of Russian fighter planes to Syria at the end of September sparked several incidents that foreshadowed the trouble ahead between Russian and Turkish forces. On October 3, a Russian fighter jet entered Turkish airspace and was escorted out

⁴¹ Özertem, Winter 2017, p.122

⁴² Özertem, Winter 2017, p.124

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Özel, 2016

by Turkish jets. The Russian ambassador claimed that this was a navigation error. The next day, a Russian MiG-29 approached Turkish airspace from Syria and locked its radar onto two Turkish jets cruising the Turkish side of the border. On October 5, the show repeated, with a Russian plane locking its radar on eight Turkish jets, again cruising within Turkish territory⁴⁵.

The inevitable consequently occurred on 24 November 2015. Turkish Armed Forces, initial declaration on its website, suggested that an unidentified aircraft was shot down in Turkish airspace but later identified the aircraft as a Russian Su-24 bomber.

The fall of 2015 was a critical turning point because it coincided with Russia's direct military intervention into the Syrian crisis, which increased the fragility of the bilateral relations. This is primarily because, over the last decade, the parties compartmentalized their relations, rather than following a comprehensive approach in their dialogue. Moscow and Ankara managed to pursue their mutual economic interests on a bilateral level but failed to establish a cooperative *modus vivendi* on political issues, such as in the case of the Syrian crisis. Rather, they chose to coordinate their positions at the lowest common denominator.

Judging from the outcome, it seems that Moscow was ready for such an incident weighing on the measures the Russians immediately took. Aside from political consequences, relations in the economic sphere hit rock bottom shortly after the downing of the Russian jet. The Russian government imposed economic sanctions that hit the Turkish trade, construction and tourism sectors. These trade agreements had chiefly benefited Turkey immensely. Additionally, Moscow unilaterally lifted the visa-free regime, which was one of the concrete products of the HLCC meetings aimed to stimulate mobility between the two nations. Militarily, Russia announced that it would deploy its more advanced S-400 surface-to-air missiles in Syria and continued to pound the positions of the Turkmen brigades that Turkey organized, trained, and supported with arms and money. The total cost of these sanctions for Turkey in 2016 was estimated to exceed \$8 billion USD⁴⁶.

⁴⁵ Özel, 2016

⁴⁶ Ibid

3.3 Important Facts That Affected Turkish-Russian Relations

3.3.1 The Turkish Stream

In 2013 broke up in Ukraine a civil war, which opened a new page in relations between Russia and the Western world. After Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and continued backing for insurgents in eastern Ukraine Cold War tensions returned to the European continent as a result of the suctions against Russia. The cancellation of the South Stream Project was inevitable to happen, as it was planned to carry Russian gas to Europe under the Black Sea, under the current circumstances. The creation of a new alternative pipeline of South Stream was also considered very normal, which main goal would be to add a new dimension to Turkey-Russia relations, as it happened.

The Turkish Stream project, because of the existing tension taken from the act of war by the Turkish side, to take down the Russian fighting Jet on November 2015, had been on ice. After nearly one year of cold relations between the two countries, things started changing when President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, expressed Turkey's willingness to restore ties with Russia⁴⁷ on June 2016. The two countries signed an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) in October 2016 in order to launch works on the first part of the pipeline.

Russia with the Turkish Stream, aims to strengthen its control over the growing Turkish market⁴⁸. Actually, is expected to add, to the already existing ones (Blue Stream, Tans-Balkan Pipeline) a new route and link them to new points in Turkey. Also, by bringing Ankara closer in geopolitically terms, that strengthens its influence in the region. Nonetheless, arm-twisting Turkey will be much harder than arm-twisting Ukraine in case of disputes over gas transit, or with respect to other political issues. Russia, as for sure isn't expected to influence Turkey in the same way it has been Ukraine, and consequently there isn't enough room for Moscow to politicize Turkish Stream. Apart from that, EU's increasing options for diversification, economic sanctions etc., are serious challenges to Russian gas exports. The withdrawal of sanctions on

⁴⁷ Reuters News, 2016

⁴⁸ Koch, 2015

Iranian oil and gas exports should also be taken seriously because may result on losing its significance for Turkish Stream regarding Europe as a client of Russia.

Moreover, Russia uses energy as a tool for foreign policy and oppression and wants to preserve its monopoly position, opposes projects that will increase resource diversity and exclude itself. Russia develops projects as counter-moves for Turkish moves in the region.

For Turkey, the reflation of the bilateral relations between the two countries, become a one way, especially after the consistent denial of Turkish access to the Syrian war theater due to Russian blockage. To that effect Turkey has seen a change of government, whereby the pro-Western Davutoglu government was replaced by the relatively “Eurasianist” Yildirim government, which has assured the reconciliation process between Ankara and Moscow⁴⁹. From the other hand, relations between the United States and Turkey have been worsen during the Syrian Civil War and especially over the handling over the Kurdish issue. The American forces in the Syrian Civil War are openly allied with the Kurdish YPG fighters and support them militarily while for Turkey the YPG fighters are considered as “terrorists”. The result is that Turkey saw its self being isolated in an international level, so the reflation of relations with Russia was considered to be the least worsen case for Turkey with the positive results for both countries. As a matter of fact, the result of reconciliation for Turkey, was that it became increasingly dependent on Russian gas, while Turkey provides Russia with a reliable and expanding market for its gas.

3.3.2 Assassination of Ambassador of Russia in Ankara

On December 19, 2016, a gunman at an art gallery exhibition opening in Ankara killed Russian Ambassador to Turkey Andrey Karlov. The assassination of Russian Ambassador in Ankara was immediately paralleled the murder of Archduke Francesco Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914. For the history, that fact had given rise to the outbreak of World War I. In our case, after the assassination of the Russian ambassador by the Turkish police officer, some feared that it would the spark for regional turbulence to be triggered. The world was shocked by the

⁴⁹ Shahnavaaz, 2017

assassination and tested Russian-Turkish relations, but the ties did not break. Turkey and Russia's leaders put on a show of unity and both Erdogan and Putin condemned the attack as a "provocation" designed to undermine relations between the two countries.

The Russian ambassador to Ankara, was from the old school as a Cold War warrior and who even served in North Korea. In the worst times of the Turkish-Russian crisis after Turkey downed the Russian plane on the Syrian border, Karlov did not lose his calm. His last words before being shot by Turkish police officer in the back were "*it is always easy to destroy, but difficult to construct*"⁵⁰, very meaningful words for the future relations of the two countries.

President Vladimir Putin summoned for consultations the same day of the murder, his Foreign Minister, as well as the heads of Russia's security and intelligence services. Fatih Öke, the press attache of Turkey's embassy in Washington, DC, after the incident widely posted in the social media: "*The bullet to Ambassador Karlov is not only aims him. It aims also Turkish Russian relation.*"⁵¹ This statement indicates that there are a number of third parties interested in alienating Ankara and Moscow, but this incident didn't cause damage to the bilateral relations.

Seeking deeper, the timing of the murder is crucial. The shots were fired just days before Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu was scheduled to hold talks in Moscow with his Russian and Iranian counterparts, Sergei Lavrov and Mohammad Javad Zarif. The agenda of these negotiations was focused on how the retaking of Aleppo by Syrian government forces changes the situation on the ground in Syria. Moscow had hoped that the meeting could bring about a plan for ending Syria's civil war. Lavrov was optimistic about the meeting even though Turkey's representatives were more measured. The death of Russia's top diplomat in Turkey would invariably had an impact on the emerging cooperation between Russia, Turkey and Iran, but instead of derailing it, the murder is likely to have energize it instead. Turkey and Russia rapprochement accelerated, while neither Moscow nor Ankara had political incentive to turn the murder into a precursor of wider crisis, rejecting the parallelism with the beginnings of the First World War, becoming a level of rapprochement between the two countries.

⁵⁰ Yetkin, 2016

⁵¹ Mikheev, 2016

3.3.3 15th July Coup d'état in Turkey

On July 15th, a military coup was attempted in Turkey. It wasn't the first time for a military coup to happen in Turkey. In most of the biggest cities, rebels tried to take control of them, while in Capital City Ankara, rebels seized helicopters and carried out several strikes against government buildings, as also in Istanbul, the plotters closed off the bridges across the Bosphorus and broke into the offices of leading Turkish media organizations in a try to control the media and the information reaching to citizens⁵². As a result of the coup, over 160 people were killed and hundreds injured. The attempt to seize power was organized by a group of officers from the army and the air force. In the aftermath of the coup, more than 2600 people were arrested with the categories of involvement or assistance in dismantling the regime. Persecutions continue to take place even today, one year after the failed attempt.

When the failed attempt was happened, Russian leader Vladimir Putin and Russia stand with the elected government and declared "*Russia will be with the legal governance*". However, most of the Western Countries waited for the ending of the attempt to declare this. Therefore, in that stage, Turkey and Russia rapprochement accelerated. After the failed coup, president Erdogan visited Russia to meet Putin in 9th August 2016. The result of the visit in St Petersburg was positive for the side of Turkey, while President Putin announced that would gradually phase out sanctions against Ankara, that had been imposed after the Turks shot down a Russian fighter jet near the Syrian border nine months ago, and that bringing ties to their pre-crisis level was the priority. From Erdogan side, their talks had been "*comprehensive and beneficial*"⁵³.

The reboot with Russia comes at a time when Turkey's relationship with its NATO allies in the West is under strain, amid criticism of Ankara's post-coup crackdown and tough negotiations with the EU over a deal on migration. President Erdogan has taken umbrage at the response by Western allies to 15th July coup attempt, accusing them of failing to condemn those behind the coup, and being overly critical of the sweeping crackdown he launched in its wake. For Erdogan the brain of the coup is Cleric Gulen, who lives in USA the last years. The denial of US for the extradition of Gulen to Turkey, in relation with the constant support from US side to the Kurds have resulted for Turkey and USA tense relationships, that have also an impact to

⁵² Chulkovskaya, 2016

⁵³ Express, 2016

relations with NATO. However, the U.S. government demanded that Turkey first produce evidence that he was connected with the coup attempt, evidence that never provided. Under these circumstances, Turkey turned to Russia for further more cooperation, establishing an alliance initially with Russia and then with Iran, a traditional rival for US interests in Middle East. Easily can be concluded that Erdogan used to his favor the failed coup in order to promote his interests.

3.4 Middle East: Interests for the Future

The Middle East is a complex region, consisting of a number of countries. For centuries, it has been a region of conflict for people and ambivalent interests. Different countries with a heterogeneous population, with different customs, culture, and religion, compose the broader region of Middle East.

Turkey's relations with the Middle East – as with the rest of the world – will be determined by its success in handling two critical domestic problems: the Kurdish issue and a dire economic crisis. Failure to solve either problem will soon threaten the country's political stability. Their effective resolution, on the other hand, could allow Turkey to become a significant force in the Middle East. The fact that the Kurdish insurrection has rapidly escalated in intensity in recent months, in relevance with the fact that Turkish society is becoming increasingly polarized between Turks and Kurds, substantially raises the risk of a broader civil war.

It can be deduced that the Turkish foreign policy toward the Middle East for the future is focused on one point; it's leading presence in the region in all areas by gaining the title of the "Regional Power". For Turkey, this practically will be achieved by maintaining its current borders and status quo, and by consolidating its relations with other neighboring states with proven power and influence. Moreover, achieving its goals in the field of energy as an energy hub is crucial. The Turkish government has recognized that improving their bilateral relations with Iran and Israel increases their potential towards achieving their long-term goals.

On the other side, for Moscow, the Middle East is the region where Russia wants to show the world that it isn't just a Regional Power but a World one. Russian interests cannot be left

without protection, and if threatened, the response will be inevitable. This is the case with the port of Tartus. Although it certainly does not have the value of Sebastopol, it is a valuable lever of penetration towards the “warm seas” in Mediterranean. In addition, there are significant gas discoveries in the eastern Mediterranean (Israel, Lebanon, and Cyprus), which bear the potential of weakening Moscow’s position as a key player in this new energy realm. It should be emphasized that among the countries that are critical of the western position and even that of the Arab League on Syria, some are old allies of Russia, such as Qatar or Saudi Arabia, with whom a number of projects have been put in place or envisaged⁵⁴. Vladimir Putin thus played a very tight game, which he didn’t fully master, and where he had as much to gain as to lose, even if confronted with the stall that can be observed today in Syria (because recent successes of the Syrian regime resemble victories of Pyrrhus).

Russia has made a strong comeback in recent years in the Middle East and has even become a key player in various crises in the Arab world since the beginning of the revolts that affected it in 2011. Russia up to now supports the Syrian regime and this unavoidable position is as much an asset as a formidable challenge. If its ally is finally ousted, then the country will sink into chaos and it will reproach its imperium and will lose some of its credit beyond the Arab world. On the contrary, if it maintains itself or contributes to an exit from the crisis, then it will have proven that nothing can be done without Russia in the region⁵⁵.

The future will predict the outcome for both countries. However, the interests of Ankara and Moscow seem to be rather complementary than conflicting, as Turkey wants to take the present position of Russia in the region and Russia intends to achieve an even greater position to world status as the adversary of the United States.

⁵⁴ Berthelot, 2017, p. 174

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 179

CONCLUSION

Russia and Turkey are two of the largest countries in the wider Eurasian region. Their relationship is an excellent study of political realism and endless transnational power competition. The geographical locations, as well as the historical circumstances (both of which have been great empires), have often brought the two countries to opposing sides. Although the number of wars often framed them, there have been periods of cooperation and mutual reliance as well. The shift in relations between the two countries could be scientifically described as a periodical phenomenon.

Facts and changes in the international system are a key factor in shaping a high-level strategy for each state, which must be adapted to the prevailing circumstances. Thus, the 1990s and 2000s marked a major change in Russian-Turkish relations. Particularly, Russia was in a process of restructuring and redefinition after the collapse of the Soviet Union, while Turkey had begun trying to gain a leading role in the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East regions. In context of the general instability due to the abolition of the bipolar system, relations between the two countries entered a new phase - that of cooperation with focus on economy and energy.

Noteworthy, since 2000, the two countries have stepped up their political and diplomatic relations. In this context, economic and commercial Russian-Turkish cooperation has flourished, with the energy sector being at the top of the agenda. Today, Turkey imports a large proportion of natural gas from Russia. Nevertheless, since 2010, a series of regional and international issues have brought Russian-Turkish relations to stumbling, as conflicting interests have left no room for cooperation. The biggest change in the balance of power – not only regional but also internationally – has been achieved by the Syrian civil war, which this year has reached six years. But the downing of the Russian fighter aircraft by Turkey in November 2015 was the decisive point that brought the relationship between the two states in deep tension. After a period of cold relations between the two countries with sanctions from the Russia side, it was not until recently that Russia and Turkey took steps to reflate their relations.

The change of the President of United States to Donald J. Trump has caused great constraint internationally due to the unpredictable policies he had announced during the pre-election campaign. One of these is related to the Syrian civil war, where he made it clear that the

overthrow of Assad will no longer be a priority for America. On the other hand, Turkey is in one of the unstable periods of its modern history (as the referendum did not bring the desired result for Erdogan), and Turkey's relation with the EU is undergoing a major crisis. Also, in the case of Syria, Turkish forces have recently focused on fighting Kurds in Syria and Iraq while both the US and Russia are in direct opposition with Turkey because of the Kurdish issue, as both consider the Kurds of Syria as one of the most effective means in the fight against terrorism. To Ankara's greatest frustration, the US decided early this May, to arm the Kurdish organization YPG, which fights for the occupation of the "capital" of the Islamic State, Raqqa.

President Erdogan in order to achieve his objectives, has shown that he is not afraid to bring relations with Russia under severe tension or even more reflate them to the higher point. From the other side, President Putin isn't the type of man that will let anyone to take advantage of his policy without having something to gain for the good of his country. Both exhaust all possibilities to reach at least a win-win situation if not a unilateral win situation, as they did in case of Syria. The two strong men of Turkey and Russia, are undoubtedly important personalities that lead their countries in different ways than their predecessors. They are the kind of Leaders that historians will deal with them in the near future.

Russian-Turkish relations are undoubtedly an issue that will not cease to affect the international community. The geopolitical, historical and cultural ties of these two major Eurasian countries are constantly being adapted to the political and economic environment. This births unpredictability in their relationship over the years. What is certain is that both are important for maintaining their regional stability. Vladimir Putin's appearance on the Russian political scene, as well as the rise of Erdogan's party to power, signaled a substantial change in the conflicting relations of the two countries. By observing the actions of both, it becomes clear that their ultimate goal is to maximize their power by whatever means that can be achieved – either through conflict or through cooperation. Nowadays the international power balance system is extremely unstable. The Russian-Turkish relations are expected to have a major impact on international security and stability.

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