

4/2018
December 2018

**THE RUSSIA-TURKEY RELATIONS: STRATEGIC
PARTNERSHIP OR STRATEGIC RIVALRY?**

Nadia Alexandrova-Arbatova



**CYPRUS CENTER FOR
EUROPEAN AND
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

UNIVERSITY *of* NICOSIA

1993-2018 TWENTY FIVE YEARS OF POLICY FORMULATION AND ANALYSIS

4/2018
December 2018

**THE RUSSIA-TURKEY RELATIONS: STRATEGIC
PARTNERSHIP OR STRATEGIC RIVALRY?**

Nadia Alexandrova-Arbatova

THE RUSSIA-TURKEY RELATIONS: STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP
OR STRATEGIC RIVALRY?

4/2018

Nicosia, December 2018

Copyright © Cyprus Center for European and International Affairs, University of
Nicosia, Nadia Alexandrova-Arbatova

Press: Cyprus Center for European and International Affairs, University of Nicosia

Nadia Alexandrova-Arbatova

Nadia Alexandrova-Arbatova (Nadezhda Arbatova) holds a PhD in Political Sciences and is currently Head of Department on European Political Studies at the Institute for World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Russian Academy of Sciences. She is also Director of the Discussion Forum "European Dialogues", Vice-President of the Russian Pugwash Committee, a Member of Council on Foreign and Defense Policy and author of numerous publications. Her professional interests include: international relations, European integration, the EU-Russia relations, European security, Russian foreign policy, conflict prevention.

**THE RUSSIA-TURKEY RELATIONS: STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP
OR STRATEGIC RIVALRY?**

ABSTRACT..... 6

INTRODUCTION 7

I. PAST AND PRESENT..... 8

II. NATURAL AND UNNATURAL ALLIANCES 12

**III. DIALECTICS OF ANTI-WESTERNISM IN THE
RUSSIA-TURKEY RELATIONS**..... 15

IV. PUTIN AND ERDOGAN: WHO IS STRONGER? 17

**V. ECONOMIC PRAGMATISM VERSUS POLITICAL
DETERMINISM**..... 19

**VI. TURKEY'S MEMBERSHIP IN NATO AND RUSSIA'S
INTERESTS** 21

VII. CONCLUSION..... 24

References..... 25

ABSTRACT

The Russia-Turkey relations are central for stability and security in the Black Sea-Mediterranean region. Everybody remembers too well how the incident with the downing of the Russian warplane near Syrian border in November 2015 brought Russian-Turkish relations not only to the rupture of their economic and trade ties, but to the point of direct collision. That incident between Russia and NATO's ally created a risk of a new conflict in the region already on fire of local wars. It took almost a year to repair the deep breach in the bilateral relations. As Huseyin Bagci, Professor at the Department of International Relations, Middle East Technical University in Ankara pointed out, "Turkey and Russia will create a new page in their history, they will be much more careful in the future not to disturb their relations because of these types of events and there will be more negotiation mechanisms" (Bagci, 2016). However the best intentions and goodwill recede into the background when the national interests of partners are involved. A deeper analysis of the Russian-Turkish relations suggests the existence of those serious problems and even paradoxes that do not have an easy solution or solution as a whole.

Keywords: Russia, Turkey, Cold war, European integration, European security, Black Sea region, CIS, Eastern Mediterranean, NATO's enlargement, Caucasus crisis, Ukraine conflict, Syria.

INTRODUCTION

In the Cold War time most of the Black Sea countries were the USSR allies with the only exception of Turkey which was an opponent of the Soviet Union, being NATO's member and hosting the US tactical nuclear weapons on its soil. Nowadays the situation is the opposite: most of the Black Sea littoral states are Russia's opponents and have very troubled relations with Moscow with the only exception of Turkey which is still a NATO member and is still hosting US TNW. This is only one and probably most obvious of the paradoxes in the bilateral relations between Russia and Turkey. There exist many definitions of the Russia-Turkey relations – economic and political dualism, competitive cooperation etc. – but they can be also defined as the hybrid relations that include both rivalry and selective cooperation. This is not surprising since at different levels of the multipolar international system and in different periods of time the same countries can be both rivals and partners. From this point of view the Russia-Turkey relationships are no exception.

At the same time although Russia and Turkey are presently portraying their relations as strategic partnership, in reality they are doomed to remain rivals or even opponents. This can be explained by the fact that their neighborhoods overlap, but their strategic interests, inspired to a large extent by their conflicting imperial past and current ambitions aimed at upgrading their international status, diverge. Turkey and Russia, when both are on a resurgent path, have overlapping spheres of influence in the Black Sea region, parts of the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia (Nemenov, 2016).

I. PAST AND PRESENT

Russia and Turkey are divided by their past, which is a history of the continued rivalry and confrontation. Beginning with the 1600s, Russia and Turkey were involved in rivalry and enjoyed very short periods of rapprochement. Russia's direct rivalry with the Ottoman empire began in the 17th century when Russia joined the Holy League alliance with Poland and the Habsburg Empire, taking some territory from the Ottomans – although importantly not Crimea. In the 18th century, the strengthened Russia under Catherine the Great scored several serious victories over Turkey, "taking control of the northern part of the Black Sea after the Russo-Turkish war in 1768-74". The 1774 Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca provided Russia direct access to the Black Sea region (via the Kerch and Azov ports). Crimea became independent from the Ottomans as a prelude to its eventual incorporation into the Russian empire in 1783 (Titov, 2016). As heirs of the Ottoman Empire, defeated many times by Russia, that resulted to the large extent in its disintegration, Turkey and its leaders have always been cautious about direct military confrontation with Russia.

Only once, in 1833, when Russia saved Constantinople by request of Turkish Sultan Mahmud II from the troops of the rebellious Egyptian Pasha Mehmet Ali, they became allies. In early 1920's there was a short period of reconciliation between the Soviet Russia and the Kemalist Turkey based on the opposition of the both states to the dictate of the Entente. The state of the relations between Ankara and Moscow in 1936-1945 gradually deteriorated and fell in sharp contrast with the cordial atmosphere of the 1920s and 1930s. The underlying factor, guiding the Turkish state in its quest to remain neutral "was the revival of Russophobia amongst the ruling circles in Ankara. Turkey desired a German victory over Russia provided that this was followed by a British victory over Germany... In other words, Turks very much hoped to see another Brest-Litovsk status quo... (Isci, 2014)".

After the World War II the USSR-Turkey relations were strongly influenced by the bipolar confrontation and Turkey's geostrategic role as NATO's member in Eastern Mediterranean, first and foremost because of its control over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. Throughout the Cold War, there was an uneasy equilibrium in the Black Sea among Turkey, NATO, the United States, and the Soviet Union. From 1976 on, Turkey allowed Soviet aircraft carriers built in Ukraine (Kiev-class, then Kuznetsov-class) to pass through the straits (Toucas, 2017).

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Black Sea region became less geostrategically significant from a Western perspective, but it remained important for Russia's concept of its "near abroad" as well as attempts of the regional players to fill the vacuum in the post-Soviet space. With the collapse of the USSR, Ankara became obsessed with the loss of its strategic value for the NATO allies. Eastern Mediterranean became

intertwined with the Black Sea-Trans-Caucasus and the Trans-Caucasus-Caspian regions. After the demise of the USSR Ankara became interested in finding a new mission in the post-Soviet Moslem space including parts of the Russian Federation - the North Caucasus area and Tatarstan - and undercutting Russia's regional positions in the Black Sea-Balkan rim.

The necessity to find a new mission in the post-Soviet Islamic world was enhanced also by domestic developments in Turkey - the revival of Pan-Turkism ideology and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism that were threatening the secular foundation of the Atatürk model. The faded appeal of Pan-Turkism as an ideology was revived with the collapse of the Soviet Union when the Turkic speaking space in the FSU and in Russia was included in the new Ottoman sphere of influence (Hyman, 1996). Interestingly, Turkish liberal and moderate political forces looked at the new mission of their country from completely different angles. They hoped that apart from economic and political advantages Turkey's new mission in the post-Soviet Moslem space would decrease domestic tensions - between the Kemalist nomenclature and the forces of regression - and reorient the fundamentalist movement to the outside Islamic world. No doubt, Ankara's activism not only in the Turkic republics of Central Asia but also in Tatarstan and North Caucasus fueled Russia's concerns and fears about its territorial integrity.

The Munich speech of President Putin in 2007 can be viewed as a turning point in the Russia-West relations and in the Russia-Turkey rapprochement. Moscow sent a clear message to the West about its dissatisfaction with the existing world order and Russia's place in the post-bipolar security arrangements.¹ As a result of Russia's disappointment with the West, the predominant part of Russian political elite was thrown back in its political perceptions to the pre-October revolution time or even to the 19th century. Russian politicians were prone to regard the international system merely in terms of geopolitics, spheres of influences, buffer zones, and balance of power in its most traditional version. This does not mean that Russia has been alien to the modern concept of multilateralism. However, in the eyes of Russian political elite, this concept is not so much about multilateral cooperation but rather about Russia's equality to other great powers in the international affairs. Russia wants to be recognized as a great power in the ranks of the other great powers, and it wants this recognition to be not just in words but in deeds. Moscow demands respect for its legitimate interests and consideration for its views on the most important issues, even if they differ from those of the United States and its allies. Russia's core interests includes the revitalization of its status as a world power, obtaining a role of a leader of Anti-Western coalition.²

¹ The differences between Russia and the West stem from the profound misunderstanding of each other's views regarding acceptable foundations of European security and stakes across the post-Soviet space. In practice these differing views are often translated into the question "who has violated the post-bipolar order?"

² They have adjusted the Palmerston dictum of the 19th century to Russia of the 21st century claiming that "Russia doesn't have permanent friends or enemies but permanent interests".

Russia's dissatisfaction with the West coincided with Turkey's disappointment with European Union and the United States. Both Russia and Turkey were demonstrating the tendency toward more unilateral conduct. Russia lost any illusions about her integration with the Western institutions - European Union and NATO portraying itself as an independent Eurasian great power, while Turkey shifted its focus away from its role as a NATO member toward that of a regional power. The two countries were positioning themselves as pragmatic international players concerned about the US activism in the Black Sea region. They perceived the Black Sea as an "internal lake" and opposed efforts to make the Black Sea a NATO-controlled body of water (Torbakov, 2008). Put simply, the growing anti-Westernism whatever its roots has become a platform for the Russia-Turkey rapprochement.

Interestingly, the Caucasus crisis³ and the Ukrainian conflict⁴ did not seriously affect the relationship between two countries although these conflicts revealed the differing goals of Russia and Turkey in the Black Sea region. Ankara was interested in maintaining status quo in the region by preserving its own positions, while Kremlin's understanding of the status quo meant Moscow's increasing role in the region of "its privileged interests" and preventing NATO's expansion to the region by all means. After the Georgia war, accommodating Russia's and Turkey's national interests in the Caucasus became a difficult task, although both states were not interested in accentuating their contradictions in the face of the West. However, in fact Ankara was concerned about Moscow's self-assertive stance in the region and tried to resolve this problem by advancing a regional security framework - the so-called Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Pact that would include the three South Caucasus countries - Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan - plus two regional heavyweights, Turkey and Russia. Although the Pact excluded USA and other Western states to Kremlin's pleasure, it was aimed at containing resurgent Russia. Turkey's would-be alliance with two GUAM members - Georgia and Azerbaijan, would leave Russia with only one ally - Armenia, which is why Russia was interested to counterbalance Turkey's domination with participation of Iran. Turkey's initiative was doomed to fail.

The idea of balance of power dates back to nineteenth century Europe, where Britain was the key to keep the balance between the European states through alliances.

³ NATO's enlargement to the CIS space, foremost to Ukraine and Georgia, is considered "a red line" for Russia; Kosovo's independence is seen as a direct violation of the international law; the US ABM plans in Europe are perceived as a threat to strategic stability. In the Caucasus crisis Russia has drawn a red line to NATO's policy in the CIS.

⁴ The Ukrainian crisis is viewed as the first direct conflict between differing regional strategies of Russia and the EU - Brussels' Eastern partnership and Moscow's Eurasia Union concept. Ukraine has been central to both strategies, and "the either/or" choice presented to Kiev ultimately made a conflict inevitable. However, the reason for this confrontation goes much deeper than the clash of two opposing regional strategies and rooted heavily in the 1990s.

In the Ukraine conflict Ankara has firmly supported territorial integrity of Ukraine. It confirmed also that it would be keeping a close eye on the situation of Turkic-speaking Crimean Tatars and thanked Ukraine for defending their rights. Paradoxically, this conflict (as well as the Caucasus crisis of 2008) has not had a major impact on the Russia-Turkey relations. This can be explained by Ankara's shift from the Black Sea / Balkan identity to a new mission in the Moslem world, and President Erdogan's tacit recognition of the post-Soviet Black Sea space as Russia's sphere of special interests. His statements about Georgia's and Ukraine's territorial integrity have been merely verbal and rhetorical, but Russia's involvement in the Syrian conflict, in Turkey's immediate neighborhood has triggered deeply hidden contradictions.

II. NATURAL AND UNNATURAL ALLIANCES

All ambitious actors need reliable allies or at least ad hoc partners. The common wisdom says: the friendlier immediate neighborhood of a state, the stronger its position.

Turkey's policy vis-à-vis its neighbours have been very contradictory. It knew both successes and failures. The latter is related to its neighbourhood strategy built in 2010 around two conceptual novelties – “zero problems with neighbors” and “neo-Ottomanism. This policy has met with mixed reactions and suspicions of a potential rise of neo-imperial and neo-Ottoman ambitions. “Zero problems with neighbors” is a great idea, but it's also a logical impossibility. Turkey can't embrace Hamas without angering Israel. It can move closer to Russia only at the potential expense of good relations with Georgia. Rapprochement with Armenia angers Azerbaijan; rapprochement with the Serbs angers the Balkan Moslems” (Feffer, 2010). “Neo-Ottomanism” has become the biggest disservice to Turkey's foreign policy having reversed its diplomatic successes – the beginning of rapprochement with Armenia and Serbia. The latter views “neo-Ottomanism” as Turkey's desire to islamicize the Balkans. But even the Moslem states are not ready to accept Turkey as a core of “the new sultanate and Erdoğan as the new Saladin” (Avineri, 2011).

The new Turkish foreign policy fueled by Islamic and neo-Ottoman impulses has destroyed the old security alliance with Israel and paved the road to the emergence of the Cypriot-Greek –Israeli axis that could be reinforced in future by Egypt.

Russia is no less controversial in its neighbourhood policies. It has been trying to maintain the balance of power between Turkey, its opponents and allies, which is a difficult endeavour. Most of Turkey's opponents in the South Caucasus – Mediterranean region are Russia's partners like Iran, Greece, Cyprus, Egypt and Israel or allies like Armenia. Interestingly, the latter is Russia's only formal ally in the region - the CSTO and EEU member. A key driver behind Yerevan's orientation toward Moscow is security concerns about a conflict with Azerbaijan backed by Turkey over the breakaway territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. However, Russia is upsetting its military ally by selling weapons to Azerbaijan in order to maintain the strategic parity between the sides of the conflict. This Kremlin's equidistance policy explains why Yerevan has been trying to maintain some elements of a “complementary” foreign policy, in its relations with the European Union, and NATO.

The emergence of the informal alliance between Russia, Iran and Turkey built in Syria around the Astana peace process has made many think that its importance goes far beyond the Syrian borders. What do the partners have in common? Definitely, it is the overlapping neighbourhoods of Russia, Iran and Turkey. But given their conflicting interests in these spaces this

fact not so much brings them together but rather divides them. Not only in the Caucasus where their interests clash but even in Syria they are pursuing different policies.

The goals of Russia are multifold. Russia's involvement in Syria is not about Bashar Assad himself but rather a matter of principle for Kremlin. Russia has drawn a red line to the Western policy of regime change. Russia's expanded presence in the region aims at status re-building and overcoming isolation of the West after the Ukraine conflict. Russia is interested in a friendly and strong regime in Syria, be it Assad or any other politician let alone Sunni or Shiite. Moscow also wants to destroy al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, which have presented a threat for Russia in the Caucasus. It also wouldn't mind deepening the gap between Ankara and NATO. And finally, Russia wants to show everyone that what the US breaks, Russia is able to fix.

Iran unlike Russia is interested in Assad and Shiite leadership personally. It does not want Syria to be strong and independent, which is why it favours "Lebanonization" of Syria. Iran's major concern in Syria is maintaining a buffer between itself and the very aggressive US, Israeli, and Saudi alliance. "What Tehran needs most of all is allies who will shield it from the enmity of the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia. In this regard, Turkey and Russia could be helpful (Hullinan, 2018)".

Turkey is trying to resolve in Syria the so-called Kurdish problem that has both domestic and external dimension. Its two military operations in northern Syria, Olive Branch and Euphrates Shield, aimed at driving the mainly Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) out of land that borders Turkey. For tactical reasons Ankara has found the way to cooperate with Moscow and Tehran, the protectors of Bashar Assad's regime as long as Kurds are excluded from the Astana peace process. "Russia and Turkey have embarked on a strategy of damage control using economic measures and tactical rapprochement in northern Syria – where trust is missing, but not required. Yet, the US operation against Raqqa, a potential collapse of the Astana platform, as well as the conditions of settling the crisis in Syria – primarily regarding the Kurds – could spark new tensions between them" (Delanoe, 2017). Aside from this, President Erdogan is manifesting his dissatisfaction with Trump's support of the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG by joining Russia and Iran. Syria, however, is an area where Russia and Turkey are unavoidably and diametrically opposed (Nemenov, 2016). Putin and Erdogan can express their desire for a peace settlement in Syria, but the two main parties to the negotiation – Turkish-backed Sunni rebels and Russian-backed Alawite-led government forces – are the most telling evidence to the fact that Moscow and Ankara are on the opposite sides of the barricade. Another factor - and probably the most important one - that unites all three is anti-Westernism/anti-Americanism. The fact that "the three countries have begun to work closely together to contain the Syrian civil war is more a function of their perceived perception

of American weakness than of any upsurge in mutual love” (Zakheim, 2017). However, whatever the claims of the partners to the West, anti-Westernism is too fragile a foundation for real partnership. The other side of anti-Westernism is a big powers’ nationalism, which is detrimental for international cooperation, which is why it is hardly likely that the trilateral alliance could be long-lived.

III. DIALECTICS OF ANTI-WESTERNISM IN THE RUSSIA-TURKEY RELATIONS

As it has been already mentioned dissatisfaction with the West in Russia and Turkey has resulted in explosion of anti-Western sentiments in these countries led by two popular presidents Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan. However it is exactly anti-Westernism in Russia and Turkey that could create new dividing lines between them. Drifting away from the West and Western values, Russia and Turkey revive traditionalism mixed with nationalism in their countries. But what is traditional in the Russia-Turkey relations? Three hundred years of turbulent relations. Aside from this nationalism always involves religion in its most traditional form.⁵ "To begin with, Russia considered itself (and still considers itself) the custodian of the true Eastern Orthodox Church after the fall of Byzantium to the Turks. The Ottomans regularly fought the czars, especially over Russian attempts to gain access to the Mediterranean Sea" (Zakheim, 2017). Turkish policy has had neo-Ottoman aspects, and Turkey is continuing in this direction, which is frequently troubling to Turkey's neighbors and even its allies.

Russia is a multinational state. Today Russian Orthodoxy is the country's largest religion, representing more than half of all adherents, while Muslims constitute Russia's second largest religious group. As Alexei Malashenko, the well-known Russian expert on Islam, has pointed out, "Despite formal "serenity" in state-Islam relations, the authorities have never learned to formulate clearly their attitude to Islam culture and religion. They view Islam as an ideology and a political movement that is threatening the stability and even integrity of the state and that is incompatible with the laws and the constitution. It is not admitted publicly but de facto the authorities regard Islam with suspicion and even fear" (Malashenko, 2014). Therefore Russian political elite is giving a new life to Orthodox tradition in order to consolidate the nation. The fact that the Muslim world is divided along the old Sunni-Shiite schism puts Moscow in a difficult position. The majority of Muslims in Russia adhere to the Sunni branch of Islam and only about 10% or more than two million are Shia Muslims. At the same time, unlike the West, Russia has been traditionally more comfortable with Shiites. This dichotomy of Russian authorities has both domestic and foreign policy projection. The American journalist James Brooke wrote in his article "Kremlin Crosses Russia's Sunni Muslims by Joining Syria's Shia Alliance, " From the point of view of many Russian Muslims, the Kremlin has placed itself on the wrong side of the Sunni-Shia divide" (Brooke, 2013). This gives

⁵ At the beginning of his political career in the mid-nineties he said, "Thank God Almighty, I am a servant of the Sharia." A decade later he said, "Democracy is like a streetcar. You ride it until you arrive at your destination and then you step off." In 2007, Erdogan said of the term "moderate Islam," "These descriptions are very ugly, it is offensive and an insult to our religion. There is no moderate or immoderate Islam. Islam is Islam and that's it." And last May, referring to democracy, freedom, and the rule of law, he proclaimed in a television address, "For us, these phrases have absolutely no value any longer (<https://www.frontpagemag.com/fpm/266442/erdogan-moves-closer-making-turkey-islamic-state-bruce-thornton>)

Turkey additional advantages in terms of religion, culture and identity in the post-Soviet Muslim space. It is all the more so since for most of the past 15 years, the North Caucasus has been an arena of incessant rebellions of separatists and Islamic radicals within Russian territory.

Summing up, Turkey's radical islamization generates anxieties in Russia. If it continues and succeeds, Turkey's dramatic shift will be the most important change in the Middle East power balance since the 1979 Iranian revolution and will have equally devastating effects on Western interests and on Russian interests as well. There is the Shia alliance stretching from Iran, through Shia-influenced Iraq to Syria and to Lebanon's Hezbollah, on the Mediterranean. Despite all the smoke and mirrors in Moscow, Russia has now joined that alliance" (Brooke, 2013). Although there has emerged a trilateral alliance Russia-Iran-Turkey around the Astana peace process, the old Sunni-Shiite divide stays in this temporary union. The rise of political Islam in the Sunni Turkey objectively presents a challenge to Moscow both domestically and internationally. In other words, Turkey's new and assertive role fueled by its imperial past is seemingly designed to create a new order and balance of power in a Wider Moslem world including the post-Soviet Moslem space, Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean.

IV. PUTIN AND ERDOGAN: WHO IS STRONGER?

The leaders of Russia and Turkey - President Vladimir Putin and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan are portraying themselves as strong politicians called to upgrade the international status of their countries through new missions and more self assertive foreign policy. Since Vladimir Putin became President of Russia in 2000 status-rebuilding became the main foreign policy objective and the guiding principle in Russia's relations with the West. This goal has become kind of *idée fixe* for the Russian leadership. Russia's post-Soviet euphoria was replaced with a sense of loss of empire and status of world super power equal to the US. It is all the more so, that on many occasions the American politicians provoked Putin by slamming Russia as a "regional power" losing strength.⁶

In its turn, "Turkey is re-emerging as a significant regional power. In some sense, it is in the process of returning to its position prior to World War I when it was the seat of the Ottoman Empire. But while the Ottoman parallel has superficial value in understanding the situation, it fails to take into account changes in how the global system and the region work" (Friedman, 2012).

The fact is that Russia and Turkey have different weight categories in the international relations. Russia is a nuclear power with a permanent seat in the UN Security Council and global ambitions, while Turkey is a big country in the Black Sea/Mediterranean region with NATO's membership and ambitions of a regional superpower. Whatever the personal chemistry between two leaders, President Putin has never compared himself with President Erdogan. The downing of the Russian warplane near Syrian border in November 2015 reflects this psychological gap between two presidents. President Erdogan presented the downing of the Russian jet as an unintended incident, but it looks that he did what he intended to do. The underlying reason was that Erdogan was deeply dissatisfied with Putin. In the eyes of the Turkish president Vladimir Putin had violated the unwritten gentleman agreement and entered Syria, which was Turkey's near abroad and sphere of its special interests. By the downing of the Russian jet Erdogan wanted to send a signal to Moscow about Ankara's displeasure with

⁶ In 2000-2007 Vladimir Putin wanted to achieve the goal of status re-building through cooperation and integration with the West – EU and US/NATO. In practical terms this policy was aimed at upgrading Russia's legal status with European Union through negotiations on a new post-PCA strategic partnership. After 9/11 when Putin sided up with the US and NATO in the counter-terrorism operation in Afghanistan he tried to change Russia's relations with NATO having promised to reconsider Kremlin's position on NATO's enlargement, if this process was expanded to Russia. But unwillingness of the West to engage Russia on her own terms – controlled democracy at home, the growing self-assertiveness in the post-Soviet space and cooperation with the West - did away with Putin's illusions about re-instating Russia's international positions on equal-footing with the EU and NATO/US. When Vladimir Putin came back to Kremlin in 2012, he made a U turn and chose the Eurasian project as a means to save the existing system and rebuild Russia's great power status. He wanted Russia to remain a sovereign centre of power, with its area of primary influence based on the Eurasian Union.

Russian air attacks at Turkoman militia members operating in Syria and Turkic compatriots. No doubt, President Erdogan did not want a real conflict with Russia. He wanted only to send a message to his counterpart saying that Russia had entered Turkey's sphere of influence. However Vladimir Putin sincerely did not understand what was going wrong. He could not expect that hostile reaction of his friend to the "minor" violation of the Turkish border by the Russian jet. Nor did he have any idea about "a tacit gentlemen agreement" with Erdogan.

Given Russia's and Turkey's ambitions, it becomes clear that their unprecedented expansion strategies in Eastern Mediterranean let alone the post-Soviet space will inevitably lead them to a new crisis. Turkey has been silently projecting its military presence in the area to such an extent it has become a source of worry to the "moderate" Arab states and specifically to Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Russia is expanding its presence on unprecedented scale in Eastern Mediterranean. Both feel that they have no choice but to show their flags if they want to be heard or taken seriously.

V. ECONOMIC PRAGMATISM VERSUS POLITICAL DETERMINISM

The paradox of Russia-Turkey economic relations lies in the fact that while Moscow and Ankara have been engaged in an intense partnership, including in the energy sphere, they have been at the same time fiercely competing with one another in the same energy sphere. Russia's goal has been to increase Turkey's dependence on its natural gas supplies while preventing the construction of pipelines bypassing Russia. For its part, Ankara has been striving to diversify its energy sources and turn the country into a major transit hub, facilitating the transportation of Central Asian and Caspian hydrocarbons to Europe (Torbakov, 2008).

Although Turkey and Russia cooperate in the realization of certain energy projects, their energy strategies are very competitive and clearly rival to each other. It is all the more so, since these strategies involve the post-Soviet space. As Adam Balcer has pointed out, The post-Soviet area is also important for Turkey in the context of its energy security. It is both a major potential source of diversification (possible gas supplies from the Caspian Sea region) and a potential threat to Turkey's energy security (dependence on Russian gas). The post-Soviet space possesses also a substantial significance for Ankara in the context of its aspirations to play the role of an energy hub in Eurasia (Balcer, 2012). This is one of the main limitations of Turkey's cooperation with Russia in the Black Sea region. In fact, Turkey's energy strategy is based on the creation of an East-West energy corridor between the hydro-carbon producing countries in the Caspian Sea region and the energy consumers in Europe. This East-West energy corridor is labeled the 'Southern Energy Corridor' by the EU as a vital alternative to its dependence on the Russian-controlled project (Tanrisever, Oktan F.2012). The Turkish Stream pipeline was created as an alternative to South Stream, a pipeline deal between Gazprom and south European companies like Italy's Eni SpA to create another Russian gas route into Europe rather than through Ukraine.⁷

In 2008, Russia displaced Germany to become Turkey's largest trading partner with an annual trade volume totaling \$38 billion; both countries have expressed a desire to see that trade volume grow to \$100 billion (Markedonov, Sergey, Ulchenko, Natalya, 2011). In 2009, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin visited Ankara and concluded fifteen intergovernmental agreements and signed seven special protocols. During this visit, President Erdogan outlined the "strategic nature" of Russian-Turkish cooperation. In May 2010, during a visit to Turkey by Russian President Dmitri Medvedev, Ankara and Moscow agreed to allow visa-free travel for trips up to thirty days. The two leaders also reached an agreement

⁷ The project, with an estimated total cost of €11.4 billion (US\$12.7 billion), was announced in December 2014 during Putin's visit to Turkey as an alternative to the canceled South Stream route through Bulgaria. But after the downing of a Russian jet by the Turkish Air Force in November 2015, Russia suspended the project. It was revived only after Turkey publicly apologized for the incident this August

to build the first nuclear power plant in Turkey, at an estimated value of \$20 billion. Turkey imports 60% of its gas imports from Russia, and in December 2014 President Putin during his visit to Ankara underlined the importance of the energy issues in the bilateral relations. In June 2017, Russia's State Atomic Energy Corporation (ROSATOM) won final approval from Turkey to build the Akkuyu nuclear power plant for an estimated cost of \$20 billion (Ghoshal, 2017).

With all efforts to reinstate the pre-crisis level of economic cooperation between Russia and Turkey there exist more important considerations for Russia that have never been understood by Erdogan. The famous formula that politics is a concentrated expression of economy has nothing to do with the real state of affairs in Russia, where economy has always been a concentrated expression of politics. Put simply, there are no such economic sacrifices that Russia would be unwilling to make for the sake of its status of great power. Although Putin and Erdogan have reinstated their relations, the incident with the Russian jet has left unpleasant aftertaste in the Russia-Turkey relations. Geopolitical ambitions of two leaders create a background for a new conflict between Turkey and Russia, which cannot be prevented by personal chemistry of two leaders or economic considerations.

VI. TURKEY'S MEMBERSHIP IN NATO AND RUSSIA'S INTERESTS

Having troubled relations with NATO, Kremlin sees Turkey's pivot from the West as a positive sign. The Ukrainian divide has emerged as a key issue for recasting a new balance of power between Russia and the West –EU and in particular US/NATO. On the one hand, Moscow has been sidelined on the international arena and excluded from important international formats and forums.⁸ On the other hand, Moscow's exclusion from G-8 and the postponed Western summits with Russia encouraged Kremlin to use the so-called euroskeptics in Europe, China and the BRICS group at large, Central Asian regimes to mitigate isolation by the West. From this point of view, Turkey as NATO's member has a special value for Russia as a tool to blackmail the US and NATO. President Erdogan is teasing NATO by promises to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation with Russia and Iran as members; he has expelled German NATO troops from Turkish soil and threatened to do the same with British troops. In the clearest sign of his pivot toward Russia and away from NATO and the West, Erdogan announced on that Turkey had signed a deal to purchase a Russian surface-to-air missile system S-400.

There is no doubt that NATO is extremely important for President Erdogan's power game be it Russia or China. At the same time he never misses an opportunity to confirm his right to make sovereign decisions and please Moscow. But ironically, if Turkey seriously decided to withdraw from NATO, it would be at odds with Russia's security interests. There is little doubt that hypothetically Turkey could withdraw from NATO only if it were able to cross a nuclear threshold. Together with Saudi Arabia and Egypt, Turkey is one of the most probable proliferation candidates.

Russia is not the only country involved in Turkey's nascent nuclear power industry. Japan is currently another key partner. Ankara and Tokyo signed a nuclear cooperation agreement in 2013. Moreover, according to a \$20 billion deal reached in 2015, Atmea, a Japanese-French joint venture, has agreed to construct a nuclear power plant for Turkey at Sinop, near the Black Sea. This plant's four generation III pressurized water reactors (PWR) will produce 40 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity. China is hoping to be chosen to build Turkey's third nuclear plant, the final location of which has yet to be determined (Ghoshal, 2017).

Of course, it is very difficult to present clear evidence for the existence of Erdogan's nuclear weapons program. The official explanation to Turkey's active efforts to pursue nuclear energy is the need to address predicted

⁸ The G7 leaders decided on March 24 in The Hague to hold their own Summit in Brussels instead of Sochi without Russia for the first time since 1998. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe voted to suspend the Russian delegation's voting rights as well as the rights to be represented in the Bureau of the Assembly, the PACE Presidential Committee, the PACE Standing Committee, and the rights to participate in election-observation missions, after the Assembly condemned the [2014 Russian military intervention in Ukraine](#). This list can be developed further.

energy shortfalls. However, a thorough expert analysis of the contracts reveals that these projects are not just about improving Turkey's energy supply. According to some analysts, Turkey has also consciously opened the door to a military nuclear option. Proposals for constructing a light-water reactor usually consist not just of a commitment to build the plant according to agreed specifications and timelines, but also commitments to run the project for sixty years, to provide the required low enriched uranium and to take back the spent fuel rods. Such offers were put forward by both Rosatom and the Japanese-French consortium. Interestingly, in both cases, Turkey insisted that the deal would neither include the provision of uranium nor the return of the spent fuel rods. Ankara wanted to deal with this matter separately at a later stage ([Rühle, 2015](#)).

Turkey has never explained this decision. However, for the experts involved in the nuclear sphere, Erdogan's intention behind this unusual behaviour is easy to understand. Turkey wants to maintain the option to run the reactors with its own low enriched uranium and to reprocess the spent fuel rods itself. This, in turn, means that Turkey intends to enrich uranium, at least to a low level. It allows for only one conclusion: Turkey is bent on producing plutonium for making weapons. In January 2011, Energy Ministry Undersecretary Metin Kilci asserted, "We want a minimum 20 reactors in operation by 2030. This may not be our formalized plan, but it is our target" ([Reuters, 2011](#)). The path that Turkey wants to take is clear: to follow Iran's model. Given Erdogan's vision of Turkey as a self-confident, assertive and potentially independent regional leader in the Middle East, and given the existence of an established (Israel) and an emerging nuclear power (Iran), Turkey has no real alternative but to acquire nuclear arms as well. If Turkey does not opt for nuclear weapons, it will remain second class—a position that Erdogan cannot and will not accept ([Rühle, 2015](#)).

Another concern of the international community with regard to Ankara's nuclear ambitions has been the connection between Turkey and Pakistan. The latter is a nuclear state possessing the capabilities to enrich uranium, develop warheads and attach them to missiles. "According to 2012 a report on the "Hürriyet Daily News" website, Professor Yücel Altınbaak, then head of the Turkish technological institute TÜBİTAK, stated that Erdogan had ordered, back in 2011, the development of a program involving missiles to a medium range of about 2.500 km. In one of his public appearances, Erdogan stated that he aspired even to an intercontinental range of 10.000 km" ([Dombe, 2015](#)).

The second consequence of Turkey's hypothetical withdrawal from NATO would be its rapid and radical re-islamisation as a driver for construction of a new national identity and expansionist plans. The latter could include Russia's Moslem neighborhood and its Moslem-populated autonomies. To become attractive to the Moslem world Turkey should look more traditional and move in a more religious direction, which could take it to other foreign policy destinations than the modern world. "In many ways, Turkey is both

the most prosperous and most militarily powerful of any Muslim country. The idea that the AKP agenda is radically Islamist and that Turkey is moving toward radical Islamism generates anxieties and hostilities in the international system", G. Friedman states (Freidman, 2011). In its column on March 27, the editor of Tayyip Erdogan-supporting daily Yeni Safak (New Dawn), wrote that Turkey should withdraw from attacking the enemies of the West, thought to mean Islamic State (Davies, 2017). So, it is no exaggeration to say that Turkey's drift from the modern world, NATO included, could be detrimental to global and regional stability and security.

VII. CONCLUSION

Both Russia and Turkey have emerged on the international and regional stage as strong powers, relying on their own geo-political and economic strength and reconsidering their regional strategies on the basis of big-power nationalisms. There are striking similarities in their post-bipolar experience - post-imperial syndromes, security concerns and negative experience of cooperation with the West. However the Russia-Turkey reinstated friendship rests on a shaky foundation, because anti-Westernism is too fragile a basis for real strategic partnership if there are no more sound reasons for cooperation. It is all the more so, since anti-Western rhetoric in Russia is fueling neo-Imperial motives in part of the Russian political elite, which looks scary not only for Russia's EU neighbours but also for Moscow's allies in the CSTO and Eurasia Economic Union (EEU). As for Turkey, despite Erdoğan's political pragmatism, his anti-Western, conspiracy-driven policy may lead the country to a point of no return or better to say to the marginalization of Turkey who once was a symbol of modernization in the Islamic world.

Russia and Turkey are divided not only by their past history but first and foremost by the competing goals in their overlapping neighborhoods, which means that they can be only situational partners but not natural allies. Despite the complexity and multidimensionality of the security landscape in Wider Europe including Eastern Mediterranean, the main challenge to the regional security is the deep divide in the relations between Russia and the West, since neither Russia, nor the West can stabilize the region without each other. Russia's expansion in the region is widely perceived in the West as a threat to the global and regional stability. However it is not Russia's expansion but rather her isolation that presents a threat to the regional and global security. The same can be said about Turkey. Its accommodation and inclusion in multilateral international cooperation remains high in the international security agenda, since to lose Turkey would be a geopolitical failure for the modern world.

REFERENCES

- Avineri, Shlomo. 2011. *Hard Turkey*. Newspaper Project Syndicate, October, 21. Available at:
<http://cceia.unic.ac.cy/wp-content/uploads/article03-S.Avineri-8-5.pdf>
- Bagci, Huseyin. 2016. *A New Page in Russian-Turkish Relations?* 11 August, Available at
<http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/book/A-New-Page-in-Russian-Turkish-Relations-18312>
- Balcer, Adam. 2012. *An Audit of Power: Turkey's Leverage in the Post Soviet Space*.
- Black Sea Discussion Paper Series - 2012/3. Available at:
<http://edam.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/bsd5.pdf>
- Brooke, James.2013. *Kremlin Crosses Russia's Sunni Muslims by Joining Syria's Shia Alliance*. June, 19th. Available at:
<https://blogs.voanews.com/russia-watch/2013/06/19/kremlin-crosses-russias-sunni-muslims-by-joining-syrias-shia-alliance/>
- Davies, Gareth.2017. *Pro-Erdogan Turkish daily calls on the country to obtain nuclear weapons and hints that it should stop fighting ISIS*. Mailonline, 29 March/ Available at:
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4357782/Pro-Erdogan-Turkish-daily-calls-Turkey-nuclear.html>
- Delanoe, Igor.2017. *Russia and Turkey: Competitive partners*. Turkish policy Quaterly, April 5, Available at:
<http://turkishpolicy.com/blog/19/russia-and-turkey-competitive-partners>
- Dombe, Rojkes Ami. 2015 *Turkey's Nuclear Aspirations*. Israel Defense. Available at:
<http://www.israeldefense.co.il/en/content/turkeys-nuclear-aspirations>
- Feffer, John. 2010. *Stealth Superpower. How Turkey Is Chasing China to Become the Next Big Thin*. Available at: www.tomdispatch.com/
- Friedman, George. 2011. *Turkey's Realignment and What it Means for the World*. STRATFOR (Strategic Forecasting Inc.), 14 June 2011, The Cutting Edge News, Archive for June 2011.
- Friedman, George.2012. *Turkey's Strategy*. Geopolitical Weekly, April, 17. Stratfor. Available at:
<https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/turkeys-strategy>

- Ghoshal, Debalina. 2017. *Russia, Japan, China to Help Turkey Fulfill Its Nuclear Power Ambitions*. Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 14 Issue: 146. Available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-japan-china-help-turkey-fulfill-nuclear-power-ambitions/>
- Hyman, Anthony.1996. *The Legacy of Enver Pasha: Pan-Turkism Today*, Dialogue, September.
- Hullinan, Conn. 2018. *An Emerging Russia-Turkey-Iran Alliance Could Reshape the Middle East*. Foreign Policy In Focus, April. Available at: <https://fpif.org/an-emerging-russia-turkey-iran-alliance-could-reshape-the-middle-east/>
- Isci, Onur. 2014, *RUSSOPHOBIC NEUTRALITY: TURKISH DIPLOMACY, 1936-1945*. Available at: https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/709778/Isci_georgetown_0076D_12634.pdf?sequence=1
- Malashenko, Alexei.2014. *Islam in Russia*. Russia in Global Affairs № 3. Available at: <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Islam-in-Russia-17002>
- Markedonov, Sergey, Ulchenko, Natalya. 2011.*Turkey and Russia: An Evolving Relationship*. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2011/08/19/turkey-and-russia-evolving-relationship-pub-45383>
- Nemenov, Alexander.2016. *Russia keeps Its Friends Close and Turkey Closer*. Stratfor, August 9. Available at: https://www.stratfor.com/geopolitical-diary/russia-keeps-its-friends-close-and-turkey-closer?utm_campaign=LL_Content_Digest&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=32807796&hsenc=p2ANqtz-9iNFn-lij6OL9e-xp9Qy-W_i4EDhZYvon67ltYdBWMx927INVm-dm1JIN1-YlxTgLdHKG5cDTAX-mW6XqID8UF7zxK7w&hsmi=32805443
- Reuters, 2011."*Turkey Targets 20 Nuclear Reactors by 2030-official*," 31 January
- Rühle, Hans.2015. *Is Turkey Secretly Working on Nuclear Weapons?* National Interest September, 22. Available at: <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/turkey-secretly-working-nuclear-weapons-13898?page=3>
- Tanrisever, Oktan F.2012. *Turkey and Russia in the Black Sea Region: Dynamics of Cooperation and Conflict*. Available at: <http://edam.org.tr/en/turkey-and-russia-in-the-black-sea-region-dynamics-of-cooperation-and-conflict/>

Titov, Alexander, 2016 *Russia and Turkey: a long history of turbulent relations*. Available at: <http://theconversation.com/russia-and-turkey-a-long-history-of-turbulent-relations-51424>

Torbakov, Igor. 2008. *The Georgia Crisis and Russia-Turkey Relations*. Available at <http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/GeorgiaCrisisTorbakov.pdf>

Toucas, Boris. 2017. *The Geostrategic Importance of the Black Sea Region: A Brief History* .CSIS, February 2. Available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/geostrategic-importance-black-sea-region-brief-history>

Zakheim, Dov.2017. *Iran, Turkey, and Russia Aren't Natural Friends. It's Up to the US to Keep It That Way*. Available at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/09/04/iran-turkey-and-russia-arent-natural-friends-its-up-to-the-u-s-to-keep-it-that-way/>



**CYPRUS CENTER FOR
EUROPEAN AND
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

UNIVERSITY *of* NICOSIA

1993-2018 TWENTY FIVE YEARS OF POLICY FORMULATION AND ANALYSIS