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**Research Report**

## Turkey and Russia: The logic of conflictual cooperation

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SWP Research Paper

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*Daria Isachenko*

# Turkey and Russia

The Logic of Conflictual Cooperation



Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik  
German Institute for  
International and Security Affairs

Centre for Applied Turkey Studies **CATS**

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- Relations between Turkey and Russia are a puzzle to many in the West. How sustainable is the relationship? What is it grounded on? And what can the West learn from it?
- Central to the relationship is its bilateral nature. Relations between Ankara and Moscow are based on the mutual recognition of security interests. The resulting dynamics have shaped Turkish-Russian cooperation since the 1990s and can be observed in the current partnership in Syria.
- Mutual regard for the other's security concerns is facilitated by the prospect of collaborative projects that promise greater advantages than continued conflict.
- Trust is of secondary importance, as is the quality of personal relations between the Turkish and Russian presidents. More important is the interdependence between Russia and Turkey.
- The potential for confrontation or cooperation between Ankara and Moscow in regional conflicts depends on current priorities rather than past rivalries. The form and extent of their collaboration are determined not by which side of the conflict they are on, but by their respective motives.

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*Daria Isachenko*

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## **Turkey and Russia: The Logic of Conflictual Cooperation**

Since 2016, Russia and Turkey have stepped up their cooperation in Syria; they have also reinforced their bilateral relations. Both these moves have fuelled debate about the nature of their partnership. In particular Turkey's 2017 purchase of the Russian air defence missile system S-400 raised doubts in NATO about Ankara's loyalty to the alliance. Did this move – unprecedented for a NATO member – signal a shift away from Ankara's traditional pro-Western policy? The highly personalised decision-making processes in Moscow and Ankara raise a further question: is the alliance a strategic one or is it a temporary tactical rapprochement largely underpinned by personal relations between the Russian president Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdoğan?

Within this debate the partnership between Ankara and Moscow tends to be presented as something of a mystery. Because of the long history of wars between the Ottoman and Russian empires and the Cold War rivalry between the Soviet Union and the West, the current cooperation is considered surprising and there are doubts about its sustainability. This view is problematic. To assume conflictual interaction between Turkey and Russia merely because of the historical tensions between the two countries is to rely on an oversimplified understanding of the relationship that sees conflict as the norm and cooperation as the exception. In fact, the five-century history of Turkish-Russian relations has plenty of evidence of both conflict and cooperation. The real question is, what has made Ankara and Moscow set aside their differences and work together in spite of their history of enmity?

Since the Cold War, analysts have come up with three models of explanation to account for the dynamics of the Turkish-Russian partnership: energy policy interests, disaffection from the West and, most recently, the personal chemistry between the presidents. When Moscow and Ankara initiated the Blue Stream pipeline project in the late 1990s, energy was assumed to be the main driving force behind the cooperation. In the mid-2000s, when Turkey was increasingly disillusioned by its Western partners'



attitude towards its security interests, it was thought that Turkey and Russia were united by their anxiety about the West — that it was their sense of being excluded by the West that had encouraged them to strengthen bilateral ties and cooperate on regional issues. The most recent model of explanation — and one that has gained traction in the context of the Russian-Turkish cooperation in Syria — sees the intensity of the partnership as a result of the personal relations between Putin and Erdoğan and their shared affinity for an authoritarian style of leadership.

All three models seem plausible, since all three touch on important features of Turkish-Russian relations. None of them, however, goes beyond specific aspects of the partnership to the real driving forces behind it, so that a number of questions are left unanswered. How, for example, was the energy cooperation — currently seen as one of the most important features of the partnership — possible in the first place? And why did the chemistry between Putin and Erdoğan not help to defuse the 2015 crisis in Syria?

The Syrian crisis clearly shows that the West's exclusion of Turkey and Russia is not the whole story either. Both countries' relations with the West were already in tatters at the outbreak of the crisis: Russia's relations had been fraught since 2014 because of the Crimean question and the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine and Turkey's had worsened as a result both of its policy in the Middle East and of domestic developments in Ankara. Such disaffection with the West did not, however, automatically lead to the closeness in Turkish-Russian relations that we can observe today.

The main basis for relations between Moscow and Ankara is in fact the mutual recognition of security interests; the resulting dynamics shape not only the current partnership in Syria, but also the collaboration that has been developing between the two countries since the mid-1990s. Mutual regard for the other's security concerns is facilitated by the prospect of collaborative projects that promise greater advantages than continued conflict. The quality of personal relations between the Turkish and Russian presidents is of secondary importance; more important is what the two countries stand to gain by cooperating. Two things are in play here. First, Russia and Turkey support one another in the pursuit of their immediate security interests. Secondly, by working together on common strategic projects, they are able to give greater international weight to their own policies.

# The Geostrategic Context of Turkish-Russian Relations

Playing Russia and the West off against each other is considered one of the main principles of Turkish foreign policy.<sup>1</sup> From a transatlantic perspective, Turkey's relations with the West appear natural, while its shifts towards Moscow seem temporary and above all contradictory.<sup>2</sup> It is true that Turkey's rapprochements with Russia have tended to coincide with worsening relations between Ankara and the West; in this sense Russia and Turkey could be seen as forming an "axis of the excluded" – a kind of tactical alliance founded on their shared resistance to the Western rules-based global order.<sup>3</sup>

The problem is that it is often assumed in Western debate that the rapprochement between Turkey and Russia follows the same logic as that between Turkey and the West. Turkey's customs union with the EU, for example, is compared with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), while NATO is compared with the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) or the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).<sup>4</sup> The

institutional framework – or lack of same – is also used as a benchmark to compare Turkish-Russian relations with Turkish-Western ones.<sup>5</sup>

## **Turkish-Russian relations cannot be measured by the same benchmark as Turkish-Western ones.**

Relations between Turkey and the West are, however, more complex than Turkish-Russian relations and cannot be measured by the same benchmark; the notion that Russia offers Turkey an alternative to the West should therefore be regarded critically. For the purposes of this study, I will focus on NATO when examining Turkey's relationship with the West. Ankara's relations with NATO are symbolic of the ambivalence of Turkey's Western orientation, for the West is regarded as both a source of protection and a cause for fear. This means that the significance of the West to Turkey goes beyond its immediate security interests – but it is precisely in matters of security that Turkey regards its relations with the West as non-exclusive.

## **NATO's Significance to Turkey**

When Turkey joined NATO in 1952, its immediate concern was to ensure transatlantic support against the perceived security threat from the Soviet Union. This was in line with the West's containment strategy against the Soviets, but there was no common vision

1 Siri Neset et al., *Turkey as a Regional Security Actor in the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Levant Region*, CMI Report R, 2021:2 (Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute [CMI], June 2021), <https://www.cmi.no/publications/7820-turkey-as-a-regional-security-actor-in-the-black-sea-the-mediterranean-and-the-levant-region> (accessed 12 July 2021).

2 Nathalie Tocci, *Peeling Turkey Away from Russia's Embrace: A Transatlantic Interest*, IAI Commentaries 20/93 (Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali [IAI], 14 December 2020), <https://www.iai.it/en/publicazioni/peeling-turkey-away-russias-embrace-transatlantic-interest> (accessed 2 May 2021).

3 Fiona Hill and Omar Taspinar, "Turkey and Russia: Axis of the Excluded?" *Survival* 48, no. 1 (2006): 81 – 92; Suat Kiniklioglu and Valeriy Morkva, "An Anatomy of Turkish-Russian Relations", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 7, no. 4 (2007): 533 – 53.

4 Mehmet Ögütçü and Dimitar B. Bechev, "Will Turkey and Russia Become 'Strategic Allies' or Sustain a 'Marriage of Convenience'?" *Hurriyet Daily News* (online), 16 February 2018, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/mehmet-ogutcu/will-turkey-and-russia-become-strategic-allies-or-sustain-a-marriage-of-convenience-127392> (accessed 2 May 2021).

5 Neset et al., *Turkey as a Regional Security Actor* (see note 1).

of values at the base of the collaboration.<sup>6</sup> Instead, Ankara's accession to NATO was a transaction based on Turkey's strategic importance and on common interests in the face of the Soviet threat. Turkey had to buy its way into NATO, taking an active part in the Korean war to demonstrate its importance to the alliance.<sup>7</sup>

From the Turkish perspective, there was also another dimension to the country's accession to NATO. This was Turkey's identification with the West or, to be more precise, the long-awaited confirmation of its affiliation with the West. Like Turkey's accession to the European Council three years previously, its NATO membership conveyed the impression that it was accepted as a Western country.<sup>8</sup>

The main reason for Turkey's efforts to be recognised as a part of the Western world was its sense of insecurity towards the West.<sup>9</sup> This insecurity can be traced back to the last years of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century; it is also to be observed at Kemal Atatürk's founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923.<sup>10</sup> The country's Western orientation was inextricably linked with the notion of state security, the hope of Turkey's political elite being that if the new republic was regarded as part of the West rather than as Europe's enemy, it would be able to avoid repeating the fate of the Ottoman Empire, namely massive territorial loss.<sup>11</sup> As Falih Rifki Atay, a close

associate of Atatürk, put it: "We were either going to become European or [...] the seven-fanged imperialist called *Düveli Muazzama* [great powers of Europe] was going to break us up and turn us into Asian hordes".<sup>12</sup>

### NATO membership gave Ankara dual protection – against the Soviet Union and against the West.

The relationship with the West that came with Turkey's NATO membership offered protection not only from the Soviet Union, but also from the West itself. For the West, on the other hand, the alliance with Turkey was largely the result of geostrategic considerations aimed at protecting NATO's southern flank, so that whenever Turkey's security interests diverged from those of their Western partners (for example in Cyprus in 1974,<sup>13</sup> in Iraq in 2003,<sup>14</sup> in Georgia in 2008<sup>15</sup> and more recently, especially since 2014, in Syria<sup>16</sup>), there were question marks either over Ankara's intention to remain a member or over Turkey's reliability as an ally and its commitment to NATO. Turkey's independent pursuit of its immediate security interests does not, however, necessarily signal its intention to leave NATO. After all, another advantage of Turkey's membership is that it allows Ankara to engage in an equal dialogue with Moscow.

6 Nick Danforth, "Getting Real about Turkey: Western Criticism in Historic Context", *Foreign Affairs*, 9 December 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2015-12-09/getting-real-about-turkey> (accessed 10 December 2020).

7 John M. Vander Lippe, "Forgotten Brigade of the Forgotten War: Turkey's Participation in the Korean War", *Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 1 (2000): 92–102; George C. McGhee, "Turkey Joins the West", *Foreign Affairs* 32, no. 4 (1954): 617–30.

8 Tanık Oğuzlu, "Turkey's Eroding Commitment to NATO: From Identity to Interests", *The Washington Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (July 2012): 153–64.

9 For Turkey's "insecurity complex" see Mustafa Aydın, "Securitization of History and Geography: Understanding of Security in Turkey", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 3, no. 2 (2003): 163–84.

10 Ali L. Karaosmanoğlu, "The Evolution of the National Security Culture and the Military in Turkey", *Journal of International Affairs* 54, no. 1 (2000): 199–216; Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876–1909* (London: Tauris, 1999).

11 Tanık Oğuzlu, "Turkey and the West: Geopolitical Shifts in the AK Party Era", in *Turkey's Pivot to Eurasia. Geopolitics and Foreign Policy in a Changing World Order: Rethinking Asia and*

*International Relations*, ed. Emre Erşen and Seçkin Köstem (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 15–30.

12 Quoted in Pınar Bilgin, "Securing Turkey through Western-oriented Foreign Policy", *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40 (2009): 103–23 (118).

13 "Verlassen die Türken die NATO?" *Der Spiegel* (online), 21 March 1977, <https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-40941772.html> (accessed 10 December 2020).

14 Soner Cagaptay and Mark Parris, *Turkey after the Iraq War: Still a U.S. Ally?* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 19 September 2003), <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/turkey-after-iraq-war-still-us-ally> (accessed 7 December 2020).

15 Zeyno Baran, "Will Turkey Abandon NATO?", *The Wall Street Journal* (online), 29 August 2008, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB121997087258381935> (accessed 10 December 2020).

16 Bill Park, "Turkey's Isolated Stance: An Ally No More, or Just the Usual Turbulence?" *International Affairs* 91, no. 3 (2015): 581–600.

## Turkish Shifts towards Russia

Two periods in recent history are regarded as high points of Turkish-Russian relations: the “sincere friendship” under Lenin and Atatürk in the 1920s and the “golden decade of friendship” in the 2000s.<sup>17</sup>

Soviet Russia was the first country to recognise the Grand National Assembly of Turkey in 1921, “at a time,” as Atatürk said, “no one else had done”.<sup>18</sup> In the Friendship and Fraternity Treaty that was signed in March 1921, Moscow and Ankara affirmed their “solidarity in the struggle against Imperialism”.<sup>19</sup> The Soviet Union’s support for Ankara would prove crucial in the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1923). Moscow supplied ammunition and put up enough gold reserves to cover Ankara’s budget for a year.<sup>20</sup> In addition, the Soviet Union helped in the industrialisation of Turkey, drawing up a development plan and constructing textile factories in Turkey on condition that Ankara pay its share in exports.

The Turkish-Soviet friendship of the 1920s was founded on the premise that the age-old rivalry was entirely a result of the imperial ambitions of the Russian tsars and the Ottoman sultans.<sup>21</sup> There were thus several different images of Russia in Turkey in the first half of the twentieth century. Until 1919 it was seen as “Tsarist Russia, the rival”; between 1920 and 1945 it became the “USSR, the sincere friend” and after 1945 “the USSR, the Tsarist expansionist”.<sup>22</sup>

17 Ivan Starodubcev, *Rossiia–Turtsiya. 500 let bespokoïnogo soedstva* [Russia and Turkey: 500 years of uneasy proximity] (Moscow: Eksmo, 2017); Nataliya Ul’chenko and Pavel Shlykov, *Dinamika rossiïsko-turetskikh otnoshenii v usloviyakh narastaniya global’noi nestabil’nosti* [The dynamics of Russian-Turkish relations amid growing global instability] (Moscow: Institut vostokovedeniya RAN, 2014); Ziya Öniş and Şuhnaz Yılmaz, “Turkey and Russia in a Shifting Global Order: Cooperation, Conflict and Asymmetric Interdependence in a Turbulent Region”, *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2016): 71–95.

18 Quoted in Kivanç Coş and Pinar Bilgin, “Stalin’s Demands: Constructions of the ‘Soviet Other’ in Turkey’s Foreign Policy, 1919–1945”, *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6, no. 1 (2010): 43–60 (49).

19 Samuel J. Hirst and Onur Isci, “Smokestacks and Pipelines: Russian-Turkish Relations and the Persistence of Economic Development”, *Diplomatic History* 44, no. 5 (2020): 834–59.

20 Ibid.

21 Coş and Bilgin, “Stalin’s Demands” (see note 18).

22 Ibid.

## The use of the Turkish Straits was the main bone of contention in Soviet-Turkish relations from the 1920s.

The “sincere friendship” was undermined even before the outbreak of the Second World War; “Stalin’s demands” ended it once and for all.<sup>23</sup> In March 1945 the Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov informed the Turkish ambassador in Moscow that the Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression signed in 1925 would have to be renegotiated – in particular, the Montreux Convention regulating the control of the Turkish Straits needed reworking. The use of the Turkish Straits can be considered the main bone of contention in Soviet Russia’s relations with Turkey. Moscow made it a subject of debate on several occasions – in 1921, 1925, 1936 and 1939.<sup>24</sup>

In 1945, however, the requested revisions went beyond the question of the Turkish Straits. As Ankara saw it, Soviet conditions for the continuation of the contract were (1) that the provinces of Kars and Ardahan be returned to the Soviet Union; (2) that Soviet bases be established in the Turkish Straits of Istanbul and Çanakkale for purposes of “joint defence”; (3) that a bilateral agreement be negotiated concerning the future regime of the Straits and changes to the Montreux Convention, preferably allowing free passage to Soviet warships and denying access to non-Black Sea states.<sup>25</sup> Because of the territorial expansion connected with these conditions, they were seen in Ankara as “Tsarist policies” violating Turkey’s sovereignty.

In Turkish historiography “Stalin’s demands” are thus considered the main reason for Turkey’s shift towards the West after the Second World War. This widespread assumption should, however, be treated with caution for two reasons. First, the Soviet “demands” were not in fact demands at all, but suggestions made in response to Turkey’s offer of an alliance with the Soviet Union.<sup>26</sup> Secondly, the construction of a “Soviet threat” could be seen as Turkey’s way of enlisting Western help in escaping the international isolation that had afflicted Ankara since the

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid. and William M. Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy since 1774*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), 80.

26 Behlül Özkan, “The 1945 Turkish-Soviet Crisis: Devising a Foundational Myth for Turkish Foreign Policy”, *Russia in Global Affairs* 18, no. 2 (2020): 156–87.

Second World War and in quelling domestic opposition in Turkey.<sup>27</sup>

In spite of the Turkish government's strategic decision to side with the West during the Cold War, Turkish-Soviet relations were not completely broken off. Turkey was the only non-Soviet bloc country to send an official representative to Moscow for Stalin's funeral<sup>28</sup> and the Soviet Union supported Turkey into the sixties and seventies by building factories: a steel works, an aluminium factory, an oil refinery. The Soviet government was always keen to stress the care it took in fostering development in Turkey. In 1975 the Soviet prime minister Alexey Kosygin declared: "unlike the Americans with their Coca-Cola factories, we contribute to industrialization."<sup>29</sup>

Turkish-Russian energy relations also have their roots in the Cold War era. In 1984 Turkey and the Soviet Union signed their first agreement on gas imports to Turkey, for which Ankara paid in agricultural goods and a range of services, mainly in the construction industry.<sup>30</sup>

In the first decade after the Cold War, however, Turkish-Russian relations were clouded by two factors. First, the idea of pan-Turkism caused alarm to the Russian leadership. In the early 1990s Turkey attempted to fill the power vacuum that had emerged in the post-Soviet world by strengthening its ties to the Turkic states (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan).<sup>31</sup> Ankara's plans

included the creation of a common market, the establishment of a Turkish development and investment bank and the joint construction, together with Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, of an oil and gas pipeline to Europe.<sup>32</sup> Russia was concerned not only by Turkey's ambitions, but by the thought that it was acting at the behest of the West. A number of sources attribute the idea of a "Turkic world from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China" not, as is often supposed, to the Turkish leadership, but to US diplomat Henry Kissinger.<sup>33</sup> The pan-Turkist movement, however, would prove short-lived, partly because of Turkey's lack of capacity and partly because of the reluctance of the Turkic states.<sup>34</sup>

Secondly, Turkish-Russian relations were severely strained in the mid-1990s by separatist movements and mutual accusations of aiding and abetting these movements. The Russian side was outraged when Turkey supported Chechnya (mainly with weapons and soldiers). Turkey, meanwhile, was afraid that Russia would play the "Kurdish card" against Ankara. When, for example, Moscow was preparing to host the International Congress of Kurdish Organisations in 1996, Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the Kurdish workers' party PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê) spoke clearly of his hopes of Russian backing: "Just as Russia aided the creation of the Turkish state, let it now give the same support to the creation of an in-

27 Ibid.

28 McGhee, "Turkey Joins the West" (see note 7).

29 Quoted in Hirst and Isci, "Smokestacks and Pipelines" (see note 19), 834.

30 Lerna K. Yanik, "Allies or Partners? An Appraisal of Turkey's Ties to Russia, 1991–2007", *East European Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (2007): 349–70; H. Özdal et al., *Turkey–Russia Relations in the Post-Cold War Era: Current Dynamics, Future Prospects* (Ankara: International Strategic Research Organization [USAK], July 2013), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep02585.1> (accessed 10 December 2020).

31 Moscow was also alarmed by the pan-Turkist potential in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Chuvashia, Altai, Tuva, Khakassia, Yakutia and the republics of the Northern Caucasus; there were attempts to unite the various civil society organisations of the Turkic peoples. Tatarstan in particular sought close cooperation with Turkey, and was even prepared to recognise North Cyprus as a state. See Victor Nadein-Raevskiy, "Turtsiya i Rossiiskie Avtonomii" [Turkey and the Russian Autonomies], in *Rossiya i Turtsiya na poroge XXI veka: na puti v Evropu ili Evraziyu?* [Russia and Turkey at the threshold of the twenty-first century: on the road to Europe or

Eurasia?], ed. Irina Kobrinskaya (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 1997), 68–83.

32 Dietrich Jung and Wolfango Piccoli, *Pan-Turkist Dreams and Post-Soviet Realities: The Turkish Republic and the Turkic States in the 1990s* (Copenhagen: Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, 2000).

33 Güven Sak, "From the Adriatic Sea to the Great Wall of China", *Hurriyet Daily News* (online), 12 August 2017, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/guven-sak/from-the-adriatic-sea-to-the-great-wall-of-china-116644> (accessed 10 December 2020).

34 In the 1990s Ankara prioritised bilateral relations over multilateral cooperation with Turkic states (Jung and Piccoli, *Pan-Turkist Dreams* [see note 32]). In 2009, together with Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Turkey founded the Turkic Council following a suggestion put forward by the Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev in 2006. It was not least thanks to Russia's approval that this idea could be realised (conversation with a Turkey expert, Moscow, December 2019).

dependent Kurdish state.”<sup>35</sup> Eventually Turkey and Russia agreed to treat Chechnya and the Kurdish question as each other’s home affairs. As the then Russian ambassador in Ankara, Albert Chernyshev, put it: “Turkey and Russia are in the same boat. If the boat sinks, we both sink. It is necessary that we find the means for both of us to stay on the surface.”<sup>36</sup>

After settling their differences, Turkey and Russia were on track for the “golden decade of friendship”. In 2001 their respective foreign ministers, İsmail Cem and Igor Ivanov, signed a joint plan of action for cooperation in Eurasia. In December 2004 the Russian president Putin travelled to Ankara. As the first presidential visit since the 1970s, this was an event with a powerful message. It culminated in a joint declaration on strengthening the friendship and multidimensional partnership between the two countries.

In the 2000s the interests of Turkey and Russia converged on two central issues: their drive towards independent foreign policy and their dissatisfaction with the Western-dominated international order. Russia interpreted Turkey’s cautious stand on the 2003 Iraq War and the war in Georgia in 2008 as important signals that Ankara was acting autonomously.<sup>37</sup>

Until 2010 the only institutional link between Turkey and Russia was the Joint Economic Commission founded in 1992. Then, in 2010, the two countries set up the High-Level Cooperation Council, an executive-level bilateral coordination mechanism. They also established the Joint Strategic Planning Group and the Civic Forum.<sup>38</sup> Other highlights of the “golden decade of friendship” were the agreement on the construction of the Akkuyu nuclear power plant

in the Mersin province of Turkey and the mutual visa exemption.

Like the current Turkish-Russian partnership, the rapprochement in the late 1990s and mid-2000s was surprising to many. Given the “mutual fear, mistrust and suspicion”, it seemed “virtual” and “schizophrenic” – although it did spark a debate about the possibility of a strategic alliance.<sup>39</sup> The question of how to gauge Turkish-Russian relations often obscures the actual dynamics leading to their intensification. How did Turkey and Russia manage to meet the challenges of security policy in the mid-1990s and focus on a multidimensional partnership? Pyotr Stegny, a former Russian ambassador to Turkey, believes that there were two crucial forces at work: “the strategic agreement of 1997 to build the Blue Stream gas pipeline and growing contacts between Russian and Turkish entrepreneurs, who played a leading role in building a firm foundation for interstate cooperation.”<sup>40</sup> While there can be no doubt, then, that the new order of world politics and Turkey’s relations with the West have an important effect on relations between Turkey and Russia, the bilateral aspects of those relations should not be ignored.

35 Quoted in Robert Olson, “Turkish and Russian Foreign Policies, 1991 – 1997: The Kurdish and Chechnya Questions”, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18, no. 2 (1998): 209 – 27 (218).

36 Quoted in *ibid.*, 214.

37 Pavel V. Shlykov, “Kharakter dvustoronnikh otnosheniĭ v 2000-e gg.: Rossiya i Turtsiya v global’noĭ politike” [The nature of bilateral relations in the 2000s: Russia and Turkey in global politics], in *Dinamika rossiĭsko-turetskikh otnosheniĭ v usloviyakh narastaniya global’noĭ nestabil’nosti*, ed. Ul’chenko and Shlykov (see note 17), 4 – 15.

38 Members of the Joint Strategic Planning Group include the Turkish and Russian energy ministers and foreign ministers and the heads of foreign affairs committees. The Civic Forum is a platform for social dialogue. Özdal et al., *Turkey-Russia Relations in the Post-Cold War Era* (see note 30), 45 – 47.

39 Duygu B. Sezer, “Turkish-Russian Relations: The Challenges of Reconciling Geopolitical Competition with Economic Partnership”, *Turkish Studies* 1, no. 1 (2000): 59 – 82; Dmitri Trenin, “Russia and Turkey: A Cure for Schizophrenia”, *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 2, no. 2 (July and August 1997): 57 – 65; Yanik, “Allies or Partners?” (see note 30).

40 Pyotr Stegny, “Two in the ‘Heartland’”, *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 1 (2015), <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/two-in-the-heartland/> (accessed 22 January 2021).

# The Bilateral Dimension of Turkish-Russian Relations

The economic side of the bilateral relationship deserves particular attention. There are three reasons for this. First, economic ties, especially in the energy sector, are often seen as a crucial factor in holding together Turkey and Russia.<sup>41</sup> They may not “provide a solid enough foundation for preventing escalations of high-level political quarrels”,<sup>42</sup> but they do seem to give Russia a comparative advantage over the US. James Jeffrey, a former US ambassador to Turkey and onetime US special representative for Syria, compares Turkish-Russian relations with the interaction between Turkey and the US and arrives at the following conclusion: “We’re not Putin. We can’t send a million tourists to Turkey... We cannot decide we’re going to buy all of our tomatoes from Turkey... That’s the problem.”<sup>43</sup>

## Turkish-Russian relations cannot be measured in numbers.

Secondly, Turkish-Russian trade relations are asymmetrical.<sup>44</sup> There is an inequality in trading volumes which, as the 2015 Syrian crisis has revealed, creates a number of problems, particularly for Turkey which is dependent on Russian gas, Russian tourists and the

Russian tomato market.<sup>45</sup> But Turkish-Russian relations cannot be measured in numbers alone; when it comes to energy, Russia and Turkey are dependent on one another, as is demonstrated by the case of the gas pipeline TurkStream to which I will return below.

Thirdly, the 2015 Syrian crisis throws into question the notion of compartmentalisation – a concept often used when discussing Turkish-Russian relations. Given that relations between the two countries were for a time completely undermined by the Syrian crisis, this concept clearly needs rethinking. Ultimately, compartmentalisation – understood as the cultivation of economic relations despite geopolitical incompatibilities – can only work when both parties agree on fundamental issues.

## Trade Relations

Over the past five years, Germany and the UK have been Turkey’s most important trading partners for export. Russia has ranked first among Turkey’s trading partners for import since 2006, only briefly outstripped by China and Germany between 2015 and 2017, but as Turkey’s trading partner for export, it is much lower down the table – tenth place in 2019.<sup>46</sup> Turkish-Russian trade relations are thus dominated by Russian exports – approximately US\$23 billion worth in 2019, compared with only about US\$2.7 bil-

41 Rémi Bourgeot, *Russia-Turkey: A Relationship Shaped by Energy* (Paris: Institut Français des Relations Internationales [IFRI], March 2013), <https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ifriremibourgeotrussiaturkeyengmarch2013.pdf> (accessed 22 January 2021).

42 Pavel Baev, “Turkey’s Ambiguous Strategic Rapprochement with Russia”, in *Turkey’s Pivot to Eurasia*, ed. Emre and Köstem (see note 11), 48 – 63.

43 “The Biden Administration and Turkey: Transition in Bilateral Relations?” (Atlantic Council, 15 January 2021), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVu2dj\\_IaDw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVu2dj_IaDw) (accessed 22 January 2021).

44 Öniş and Yılmaz, “Turkey and Russia in a Shifting Global Order” (see note 17).

45 Senem Aydın-Düzgüt et al., *Turkey, Russia and the West: Reassessing Persistent Volatility, Asymmetric Interdependence, and the Syria Conflict* (Istanbul: Istanbul Policy Center, April 2020), <https://ipc.sabanciuniv.edu/Content/Images/Document/reasses-sing-persistent-volatility-asymmetric-interdependence-and-the-syria-conflict-93d479/reassessing-persistent-volatility-asymmetric-interdependence-and-the-syria-conflict-93d479.pdf> (accessed 22 January 2021).

46 International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Direction of Trade Statistics*, <https://data.imf.org/regular.aspx?key=61013712> (accessed 25 January 2021).

Table 1

**Natural Gas Market in Turkey (2010 and 2020)**

Source	2010 (in bcm)	2010 (in %)	2020 (in bcm)	2020 (in %)
Russia	17,576	46.2%	16,178	33%
Iran	7,765	20.4%	5,321	11%
Azerbaijan	4,521	11.9%	11,548	24%
LNG (Algeria, Nigeria, Spot)	8,174	21.5%	15,078	32%
Total	38,036	100%	48,126	100%

bcm = billion cubic metres

Source: Petroleum and Natural Gas Platform Association (Petform), “Natural Gas Market in Turkey”,

<https://www.petform.org.tr/en/dogal-gaz-piyasasi/turkiye-dogal-gaz-piyasasi/> (accessed 21 September 2021).

lion worth of Turkish exports to Russia.<sup>47</sup> Russia’s main exports to Turkey are mineral fuels and refined products (58.7 per cent of exports) and metals and metal products (25 per cent). Turkey’s exports to Russia include machinery, equipment and vehicles (28.3 per cent), food (31.3 per cent) and textiles and shoes (18.1 per cent).<sup>48</sup>

Turkey’s dependence on Russia’s gas supplies and the resulting imbalance of trade is one of the main problems of the bilateral relationship from a Turkish perspective. Between 1987 and 1994 Russia was Turkey’s only gas supplier. In 1994 the Russian monopoly of about five billion cubic metres was broken by Algeria, which achieved a share of 418 million cubic metres on the Turkish gas market.<sup>49</sup> With the help of Azerbaijan and Iran, and thanks to the increased share of liquefied natural gas (LNG), Turkey has managed to diversify its gas supply over the past ten years, reducing Russia’s share to 33 per cent in 2020 (see table 1).

The diversification of gas supplies has not eliminated the trade imbalance, but from a Russian perspective Ankara’s concerns about the disparity are mitigated by revenue that is not necessarily visible in

the annual reports on trading volume, such as profits from the suitcase trade,<sup>50</sup> tourism, or the activities of Turkish businesses in Russia.<sup>51</sup> Suitcase trade between Turkey and other post-Soviet states was particularly prevalent in the early 1990s, reaching an annual volume of about US\$10 billion in 1995.<sup>52</sup> In the mid-1990s it began to decline; between 1996 and 2006 it sank to a total volume of approximately US\$40 billion.<sup>53</sup> Tourism was boosted by the agreement on visa liberalisation that came into force in 2011. In 2012 the number of Russian tourists in Turkey reached 3.5 million; in 2019 it hit a record high of 7 million – 16 per cent of the total.<sup>54</sup>

The most commonly overlooked aspect of Turkish-Russian economic relations – and one that is similarly unrecorded in the balance of trade – is the work of Turkish construction companies in Russia. Thanks

<sup>50</sup> Suitcase traders (known as *chelnoki* in Russian and *bavul ticareti* in Turkish) were small-time traders from Russia and other former Soviet Republics who bought goods such as textiles and shoes in Turkey for resale in their home countries. They are sometimes referred to as “shuttle traders”.

<sup>51</sup> Yanik, “Allies or Partners?” (see note 30).

<sup>52</sup> M. Eder et al., “Suitcase Trade between Turkey and Russia: Microeconomics and Institutional Structure”, in *Sotsiologiya rýnkov* [Sociology of markets] (2003), 3.

<sup>53</sup> Yanik, “Allies or Partners?” (see note 30), 361.

<sup>54</sup> “Turpotok iz Rossii v Turtsiyu v pervýe v istorii prevýsil 7 millionov” [Tourist traffic from Russia to Turkey exceeds 7 million for the first time in history], *Interfax* (online), 31 January 2020, <https://tourism.interfax.ru/ru/news/articles/66142/> (accessed 25 January 2021).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> “Ékonomicheskie svyazi Rossii i Turtsii” [Economic ties between Russia and Turkey], *Kommersant* (online), 4 March 2020, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4276836> (accessed 25 January 2021).

<sup>49</sup> Fatma A. Kelkitli, *Turkish-Russian Relations. Competition and Cooperation in Eurasia* (London: Routledge, 2017), 111.



to the Natural Gas Agreement of 1984, such companies gained access to Soviet Russia and other Soviet Republics. A few projects stand out from the vast number of shopping centres, hotels and high-rise estates. The Turkish company Enka, for example, rebuilt the White House in Moscow that had been damaged during the constitutional crisis of 1993; it was also involved in the restoration of the Russian State Duma. The largest Turkish construction company in Russia is Rönesans Holding, responsible for two of Europe's tallest buildings, the Lakhta Center in Saint Petersburg and Federation Tower in Moscow.<sup>55</sup> Between 1989 and 2005 Turkish construction projects in Russia totalled US\$14.7 billion.<sup>56</sup> There were also presidential-level discussions about the involvement of Turkish companies in the preparations for the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.<sup>57</sup> In 2018 the total volume of Turkish construction projects in Russia since Turkish companies had first entered the market was estimated at US\$71.8 billion, making Russia the leading foreign market for Turkish construction businesses, with a share of 19.6 per cent, followed by Turkmenistan (12.9 per cent) and Libya (7.9 per cent).<sup>58</sup>

## Energy Projects

The structure of economic relations between Turkey and Russia suggests an asymmetrical interdependence to the disadvantage of Turkey. In the energy sector, however, Russia seems to be more dependent on Turkey; we can observe this in two recent strategic projects, the gas pipeline TurkStream and the Akkuyu nuclear power plant. Between the start of Russia's intervention in Syria in September 2015 and the shooting down of a Russian fighter jet by the Turkish air force in November 2015, the Turkish leadership threatened to cease cooperation with Russia on both these projects.<sup>59</sup>

55 Hirst and Isci, "Smokestacks and Pipelines" (see note 19), 24.

56 Yanik, "Allies or Partners?" (see note 30), 362.

57 İkbâl Dürre, *Rossiisko-turetskie otnosheniya s 2008 po 2018 gg.* [Russian-Turkish relations from 2008 to 2018] (Moscow and Berlin: DirektMEDIA, 2019).

58 Dilara Zengin and Hicran İsmaylova, "Turetskie stroiteli realizuyut proektı po vsemu miru" [Turkish builders carry out projects all over the world], *Anadolu Agency* (online), 14 July 2018, <https://bit.ly/3ktjZYp> (accessed 25 January 2021).

59 Reuters Staff, "Erdoğan prigrizil Rossii nañti drugikh éksporтеров gaza i stroitelei AÉS" [Erdoğan threatened

TurkStream in particular made Ankara an indispensable partner to Moscow. In December 2014 Putin announced his intention to halt the construction of the South Stream gas pipeline and instead lay a new line across Turkey to bring Russian gas to south and south-east Europe. The decision was unexpected. The plans for South Stream went back to 2007; with four pipelines and annual supplies of 63 billion cubic metres it was to be the biggest gas transport project in Europe. Gazprom had already invested US\$4.7 billion in the construction work;<sup>60</sup> many thought at first that the proposed change to Russia's energy strategy was merely a "geopolitical bluff".<sup>61</sup> But there were a number of significant reasons for the new pipeline via Turkey. The main motive was the wish to bypass Ukraine. Another reason was that South Stream was thwarted by tensions between Russia and the EU: first, the EU's third energy package with its rules for a competitive energy market was a problem to Gazprom, because it demanded that other providers have access to the pipeline – and secondly, the 2014 Ukraine crisis prevented further negotiations on gas supply between the EU and Russia.<sup>62</sup>

It can be no coincidence that Putin announced the replacement of South Stream during a visit to Turkey. Cooperating with Turkey over the construction of the new pipeline made it possible to circumvent the EU rules on competition,<sup>63</sup> and Erdoğan's anti-Western

Russia to find other gas exporters and nuclear power plant builders], *Reuters* (online), 8 October 2015,

<https://www.reuters.com/article/orutp-crisis-turkey-russia-idRUKCN0S216P20151008> (accessed 25 January 2021).

60 Jonathan Stern et al., *Does the Cancellation of South Stream Signal a Fundamental Reorientation of Russian Gas Export Policy?* (Oxford: The Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, January 2015), <https://www.oxfordenergy.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Does-cancellation-of-South-Stream-signal-a-fundamental-reorientation-of-Russian-gas-export-policy-GPC-5.pdf> (accessed 25 January 2021).

61 Irina Mironova, *Turkish Stream: Another Geopolitical Bluff from the Kremlin?* (Russia Direct, 4 February 2015), <https://russia-direct.org/opinion/turkish-stream-another-geopolitical-bluffing-kremlin> (accessed 25 January 2021).

62 Stern et al., *Does the Cancellation of South Stream Signal a Fundamental Reorientation of Russian Gas Export Policy?* (see note 60), 5.

63 Seyit A. Dastan, "Negotiation of a Cross-border Natural Gas Pipeline: An Analytical Contribution to the Discussions on Turkish Stream", *Energy Policy* 120 (2018): 749 – 60 (754).

sentiment made Turkey an ideal partner anyway, as far as Russia was concerned.<sup>64</sup>

The new gas pipeline proved attractive to Turkey both financially and geopolitically, benefiting from discounts on gas supplies as well as from transit fees. At the same time, the pipeline is a “perceptual asset” to the nationalist discourse in Turkey because it can be regarded as a means of “strengthening Turkey’s national power”.<sup>65</sup> Ankara’s involvement in the project, in particular since the resolution of the crisis with Russia in 2016 and the completion of TurkStream in early 2020, has been seen as proof of its ability to assert itself against the West.<sup>66</sup>

When the gas pipeline was opened in January 2020, Erdoğan described TurkStream as “historic” and said that the project was exemplary of a “win-win cooperation” and provided a “basis for future projects”.<sup>67</sup> With TurkStream, Russia not only consolidated its relations with Turkey, but also came closer to its goal of cutting off Ukraine as a transit country for gas supplies to Europe. TurkStream’s capacity, however, is lower than that of the cancelled South Stream pipeline. TurkStream has two lines of 15.75 billion cubic metres each, so a total volume of 31.5 billion cubic metres. One line supplies Turkey; the other is earmarked for south and south-east Europe.

Volumes of trade, then, can only inadequately express the character and quality of the bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia. From an economic point of view, Turkey is primarily dependent on trade and tourism from Russia. Unilateral dependence can act either as a carrot or as a stick. In fact, however, projects like TurkStream would seem to suggest a degree of interdependence between the countries.

## The Myth of Compartmentalisation

It is often assumed that a central feature of Turkish-Russian relations is the ability of both states to compartmentalise those relations.<sup>68</sup> The idea behind this assumption is that flourishing economic relations are kept separate from geopolitical incompatibility – in other words, Turkish and Russian leadership agree to ignore any issues on which their views diverge, while striving to foster economic cooperation. This was the prevailing view of the Turkish-Russian partnership until the 2015 jet crisis in Syria mentioned above. The shooting down of the Russian fighter jet and Moscow’s reaction to the incident made clear that it was not quite that straightforward. But a look at Turkish-Russian relations before the 2015 crisis shows that there was no compartmentalisation even then.

Instead, the sustainability of Turkish-Russian relations relies on two closely connected aspects. First – a necessary condition – the recognition that certain topics may be sensitive to the other. And secondly, the prospect of a cooperation that has advantages for both sides. What Robert Axelrod calls the “shadow of the future” allows for a collaboration for which trust is not a necessary requirement. More important are the repeated interactions and the mutual rewards hoped for from future cooperation.<sup>69</sup> In the mid-1990s, for example, the prospect of a profitable collaboration in the energy sector (Blue Stream) helped Russia and Turkey to reconcile their security interests regarding the PKK and Chechnya.

64 Vladimir Kara-Murza, “Pochemu issyak ‘Yuzhnyĭ potok?’ [Why did South Stream dry up?], *Radio Svoboda* (online), 2 December 2014, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/26721432.html> (accessed 25 January 2021).

65 Dastan, “Negotiation of a Cross-border Natural Gas Pipeline” (see note 63), 755.

66 Gloria S. Özdemir, “Russia-Turkey-US Energy Triangle: Success of TurkStream”, *Daily Sabah* (online), 13 January 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/russia-turkey-us-energy-triangle-success-of-turkstream> (accessed 25 January 2021).

67 Zeynep Bilginsoy, “Erdoğan, Putin Launch New Gas Line, Vow Mideast Diplomacy”, *AP News* (online), 8 January 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/a9b4a8502521be3b3acc7be302913ab> (accessed 25 January 2021).

68 Habibe Özdal, “Turkey-Russia Relations: Complex Cooperation”, in *Threats to Euro-Atlantic Security. Views from the Younger Generation Leaders Network*, Springer eBooks Political Science and International Studies, ed. Andrew Futter (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 99 – 114; Robert E. Hamilton and Anna Mikulska, *Cooperation, Competition, and Compartmentalization: Russian-Turkish Relations and Their Implications for the West* (Philadelphia, PA: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 8 April 2021), <https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/russian-turkish-relations-bssp.pdf> (accessed 10 April 2021); and Öniş and Yılmaz, “Turkey and Russia in a Shifting Global Order” (see note 17).

69 Robert M. Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

**A common vision for the future is important for the mutual recognition of interests.**

It is crucial to the interplay between a recognition of interests and a common vision for the future that both sides regard the anticipated collaboration as advantageous. If one side sees no benefit, it will be hard, if not impossible, to reconcile diverging interests. This became apparent in the wake of the Arab Spring, an event that would eventually lead to conflict between Moscow and Ankara over Syria in 2015. Until the gradual normalisation that followed the jet crisis, not only had Turkey and Russia's interests diverged significantly, but the "shadow of the future" had not been enough to persuade the two countries to settle their differences. The main reason for this was that Turkey did not regard future prospects as advantageous to both sides. In other words, more was at stake in Syria for Ankara than for Moscow, and this outweighed the advantages of the cooperation in Turk-Stream proposed by Moscow in 2014/15. In the wake of the Arab Spring, then, Turkish-Russian relations were undermined less by an inability to compartmentalise than by a lack of shared belief in the mutual benefits of future cooperation.

# Syria: What's New in Turkish-Russian Relations under Putin and Erdoğan?

On 25 November 2015, the day after the Russian fighter jet was shot down by the Turkish air force at the border between Syria and Turkey, Putin criticised the “targeted support of Islamisation” practised for years by Turkey’s leadership. Because further incidents could not be ruled out, Russian citizens in Turkey could, he said, find themselves in “considerable danger”. With this argument, Putin justified the travel restrictions imposed by the Russian foreign ministry “in connection with the terrorist threat”.<sup>70</sup>

Since then, the Russian president has become more restrained when it comes to criticising domestic developments in Turkey. Instead he praises the independent foreign policy pursued by Ankara despite pressure from the West. On 22 October 2020, for example, at the international discussion club Valdai, Putin described Erdoğan as a flexible partner.<sup>71</sup> He particularly praised Turkey’s autonomous action in the construction of TurkStream and in the purchase of the Russian S-400 missile defence system. On 17 December 2020 Putin delivered another panegyric to the Turkish president at his annual press conference. Despite some differences of opinion, he seemed satisfied with their cooperation: “He [Erdoğan] keeps his word like a real man. He does not wag his tail. If

he thinks something is good for his country, he goes for it. This is about predictability.”<sup>72</sup>

The Syrian civil war has without a doubt become the most significant factor in Turkish-Russian relations. Given this, it is important to explain why Russia and Turkey are on opposing sides of the conflict and yet still capable of maintaining a close relationship. Another issue is the form of that relationship – is the focus on the two states or on their presidents?

## Moscow's Interests in Syria

Russia’s intervention in Syria in 2015 allowed the Kremlin to return to the Middle East as a geopolitical power. Moscow’s commitment to Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and his regime was largely motivated by three factors. First, it was of immediate concern to Moscow to stop the “Islamic State” (IS) from gaining ground in order to prevent the radicalisation of those regions of Russia with a predominantly Muslim population, such as Northern Caucasus. The fight against Islamist groups abroad was also important in preventing the destabilisation of the neighbouring regions of Central Asia. All these regions had spawned IS recruits and their anticipated homecoming posed a considerable security risk to Russia.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> “Putin: rukovodstvo Turtsii provodit tselenapravlenuyu podderzhku islamizatsii svoei strany” [Putin: Turkey’s leadership is deliberately supporting the Islamisation of its country], TASS, 25 November 2015, <https://tass.ru/politika/2469800> (accessed 18 December 2020).

<sup>71</sup> President of Russia, “Meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club”, press release, Novo-Ogaryovo, Moscow, 22 October 2020, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64261> (accessed 18 December 2020).

<sup>72</sup> Idem, “Vladimir Putin’s Annual News Conference”, press release, Novo-Ogaryovo, Moscow, 17 December 2020, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/64671> (accessed 18 December 2020).

<sup>73</sup> Dmitri Trenin, *Putin’s Syria Gambit Aims at Something Bigger Than Syria* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 13 October 2015), <https://carnegie.ru/2015/10/13/putin-s-syria-gambit-aims-at-something-bigger-than-syria-pub-61611> (accessed 21 December 2020).

Secondly, the war in Syria gave the Kremlin the opportunity to demonstrate Russia's parity with the Western powers, and in particular the US.<sup>74</sup> The pursuit of recognition has long marked Moscow's relations with the West.<sup>75</sup> In the case of Syria, this meant that the Kremlin asserted Russia's right to help create and shape international norms, and defended established principles such as national sovereignty and non-intervention in internal affairs.<sup>76</sup>

Thirdly, therefore, the Russian leadership was keen to prevent a change of regime in Syria. From Moscow's perspective, the Arab Spring was merely a sequel to the colour revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan.<sup>77</sup> Concerns that similar revolutionary street protests, supported by Western NGOs, might eventually reach Russia received fresh impetus when protests were held in Moscow in the winter of 2011/12.<sup>78</sup>

For Russia's leadership under Putin, a change of regime would be dangerous for two reasons. First, Putin is convinced that street protests bring nothing but chaos and destabilisation. At the UN General Assembly on 28 September 2015 he criticised "the export of 'democratic' revolutions" to the Middle East and North Africa. "Instead of bringing about reforms, aggressive intervention rashly destroyed government institutions and the local way of life. Instead of democracy and progress, there is now violence, poverty, social disasters and total disregard for human rights, including even the right to life."<sup>79</sup> What is more, the "power vacuum in some countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa obviously resulted in the emergence of areas of anarchy, which were quickly filled with extremists and terrorists."<sup>80</sup>

Secondly, the Kremlin associates regime change with the downfall of its own state. As early as 2005,

74 Ibid.

75 Andrei Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

76 Moritz Pieper, "'Rising Power' Status and the Evolution of International Order: Conceptualising Russia's Syria Policies", *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 3 (2019): 365–87.

77 Dmitri Trenin, *What Is Russia up to in the Middle East?* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2018).

78 Ibid.

79 President of Russia, "70th Session of the UN General Assembly", press release, New York, 28 September 2015, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50385> (accessed 28 December 2020).

80 Ibid.

Putin described the collapse of the Soviet Union as "a major geopolitical disaster of the century".<sup>81</sup> He was not expressing a desire to see the geographical boundaries of the Soviet Union reinstated, but regret at the loss of Russia's geopolitical role as a great power.<sup>82</sup> Restoring Russia's status as a great power is a top priority for Putin;<sup>83</sup> the constitutional amendments initiated in Russia in 2020 are the result of what Russia expert Alexander Baunov has called the "fear of a second perestroika".<sup>84</sup> Since perestroika is widely acknowledged to have led to the fall of the Soviet Union, any change of regime is now associated with the fear of losing Russia. As Putin sees it, forfeiting power is tantamount to Russia's collapse as a state.<sup>85</sup>

## Ankara's Interests in Syria

While the outbreak of the Arab Spring in late 2010 was seen in Moscow as a challenge in foreign policy with considerable repercussions on domestic policy, the protests appeared to Ankara — at least at first — as a unique opportunity for expanding its influence in the Middle East. Where others saw chaos and destabilisation, the Turkish leadership saw the emergence of a new regional order that Ankara was determined to do its bit to establish. In the words of the then Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, Ankara saw itself as an "order instituting actor".<sup>86</sup>

81 Putin was referring to the Russian people, but in the Western media his words were interpreted as an allusion to his geopolitical ambitions. For a critical analysis see Gerard Toal, *Near Abroad: Putin, the West and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

82 Alexander Baunov, *Strakh perestroiki-2. Pochemu Putin otverg slozhnyye skhemy transfera vlasti* [Fear of perestroika-2. Why Putin rejected complex power transfer schemes] (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 29 April 2020), <https://carnegie.ru/2020/04/29/ru-pub-81670> (accessed 28 December 2020).

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid.

86 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy and Regional Political Structuring*, Turkey Policy Brief Series 3 (Türkiye Ekonomi Politikaları Araştırma Vakfı/Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey [TEPAV], 2012), [www.tepav.org.tr/upload/files/1336135395-4.Principles\\_of\\_Turkish\\_Foreign\\_Policy\\_and\\_Regional\\_Political\\_Structuring\\_by\\_Ahmet\\_Davutoglu.pdf](http://www.tepav.org.tr/upload/files/1336135395-4.Principles_of_Turkish_Foreign_Policy_and_Regional_Political_Structuring_by_Ahmet_Davutoglu.pdf) (accessed 28 December 2020).

Davutoğlu also stressed that “Turkey would be both the pioneer and speaker of this order of peace.”<sup>87</sup>

There were reasons for such confidence. Both in the West and in other countries of the region, Turkey was seen as a “model”.<sup>88</sup> For the Arab world, Turkey’s economic developments, visa liberalisation, plans for economic regional integration and position on Palestine were attractive prospects.<sup>89</sup> The toppling of the Tunisian regime and, more important, the Muslim Brotherhood’s rise to power in Egypt in June 2012 further fuelled Ankara’s ambitions to take the lead in pushing ahead the Arab transformation. When Mohamed Morsi’s Muslim Brotherhood government was overthrown in a coup in July 2013, Erdoğan’s spokesperson, Ibrahim Kalin, responded to criticism that Turkey had isolated itself through its Middle Eastern policy by declaring its loneliness “precious”.<sup>90</sup>

In Syria, too, the situation did not develop as the Turkish leadership had expected. At first, Erdoğan hoped to convince the Syrian president Bashar al-Assad of the necessity of political reforms. Then, from the autumn of 2011 onwards, Ankara pursued the objective of a regime change in Syria. But this position proved more and more difficult to maintain. There were several reasons for this. First, it emerged that the question of whether Assad remained in power was not as important to the US as to Turkey.<sup>91</sup>

**87** Quoted in Gencer Özcan, “If the Crisis Is What We Make of It: Turkey and the Uprisings in Syria”, in *Analyzing Foreign Policy Crises in Turkey: Conceptual Theoretical and Practical Discussions*, ed. Fuat Aksu and Helin Sarı Ertem (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 178–98 (184).

**88** Günter Seufert, *Die Türkei als Modell für die arabischen Staaten?* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 16 November 2011), <https://www.bpb.de/internationales/afrika/arabischer-fruehling/52427/die-rolle-der-tuerkei?p=all> (accessed 28 December 2020).

**89** Kemal Kirişçi, *The Rise and Fall of Turkey as a Model for the Arab World* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 15 August 2013), <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/the-rise-and-fall-of-turkey-as-a-model-for-the-arab-world/> (accessed 28 December 2020).

**90** Quoted in Murat Yetkin, “The End of Turkey’s ‘Precious Loneliness?’”, *Hurriyet Daily News* (online), 18 June 2016, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/murat-yetkin/the-end-of-turkeys-precious-loneliness-100622> (accessed 28 December 2020).

**91** Galip Dalay, *Turkish-Russian Relations in the Light of Recent Conflicts: Syria, Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh*, SWP Research Paper 5/2021 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, August 2021), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/turkish-russian-relations-in-light-of-recent-conflicts>.

This became particularly clear to Ankara in 2013 when the US abstained from intervention despite the Assad regime’s use of chemical weapons — a “red line” according to then US president Barack Obama.<sup>92</sup> Secondly, the growing power of the IS meant that the Western states focused on fighting the IS rather than the Assad regime, as Turkey would have preferred.<sup>93</sup> Thirdly, Washington formed a partnership with the Syrian-Kurdish People’s Defence Units (YPG) in the context of the battle for the city of Kobane between September 2014 and February 2015.<sup>94</sup>

The course taken by the 2014–2016 civil war in Syria ended up leading to a “siege mentality” within the Turkish political elite.<sup>95</sup> The main problem was that a Kurdish enclave was threatening to form at the Turkish border, arousing fears reminiscent of the “Sèvres syndrome”.<sup>96</sup> The Treaty of Sèvres, signed in August 1920, sealed the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire following its defeat in the First World War; in Turkey it remains an important point of reference for territorial disintegration and the widespread view that the Western powers are still out to fragment Turkey.<sup>97</sup> The transformation of the Syrian conflict meant that Ankara’s main objective was no longer regime change in Syria, but preventing Syrian Kurds from consolidating territory.

The Syrian conflict had three serious consequences for Turkey. First, it took on a critical domestic dimension as a result of the Kurdish question. Secondly, Turkish policy in Syria led to worsening relations with the West. The US had already aired doubts about Turkey’s reliability as a NATO partner in the autumn of 2014 when Ankara refused to join the Washington-

**92** Christopher Phillips, *The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020).

**93** Dalay, *Turkish-Russian Relations in the Light of Recent Conflicts* (see note 91).

**94** The YPG are the military units of the Syrian-Kurdish Party of Democratic Union (PYD) which Turkey regards as affiliated with the Workers’ Party of Kurdistan (PKK).

**95** Dalay, *Turkish-Russian Relations in the Light of Recent Conflicts* (see note 91).

**96** *Ibid.*

**97** Fatma M. Göçek, *The Transformation of Turkey: Redefining State and Society from the Ottoman Empire to the Modern Era*, Library of Modern Middle East Studies, vol. 103 (London: Tauris, 2011); Emre Erdoğan, *The Unbearable Heaviness of Being a Turkish Citizen* (The German Marshall Fund of the United States), <https://www.gmfus.org/publications/unbearable-heaviness-being-turkish-citizen> (accessed 15 January 2021).

led anti-IS coalition. Even then there was severe criticism of Ankara's "transactional" attitude to the transatlantic alliance.<sup>98</sup> Thirdly, in November 2015, Turkey's relations with Russia were also thrown into crisis — a crisis that would continue for seven months.

### The Roots of the 2015 Turkish-Russian Crisis

On 24 November 2015 in the Turkish-Syrian border region, the Turkish air force shot down a Russian fighter jet which, according to Ankara, had violated Turkish airspace. Two Russian pilots were killed in the incident and the subsequent evacuation operation. Russia responded with economic sanctions on the import of certain Turkish products, the suspension of visa exemption for Turkish nationals and a ban on charter holidays for Russian nationals to Turkey.<sup>99</sup> All the sanctions imposed hit the Turkish economy hard, while Russia's interests, such as the construction of the Akkuyu nuclear power plant, remained unaffected.<sup>100</sup> Putin announced that Turkey was "not going to get away with tomato bans". In February 2016 a representative office for Syrian Kurds was opened in Moscow.<sup>101</sup>

**98** Bill Park, "Turkey's Isolated Stance: An Ally No More, or Just the Usual Turbulence?" *International Affairs* 91, no. 3 (2015): 581–600.

**99** A full list of Russia's sanctions on Turkey can be seen in the "Ukaz o merakh po obespecheniyu natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossii i zashchite grazhdan Rossii ot prestupnykh i in'kh protivopravnykh deistvii i o primenenii spetsial'nykh ekonomicheskikh mer v otnoshenii Turtsii" [Decree on measures to ensure Russia's national security and protect Russian citizens from criminal and other unlawful acts and on the application of special economic measures against Turkey], press release, 28 November 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50805> (accessed 21 December 2020).

**100** On the subject of Akkuyu, for example, Putin said, "This is a strictly commercial issue, and we will not take a single step that would harm our economic interests." President of Russia, "Vladimir Putin's Annual News Conference", press release, Moscow, 17 December 2015, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50971> (accessed 21 December 2020).

**101** Michael A. Reynolds, *Vladimir Putin, Godfather of Kurdistan?* (Philadelphia, PA: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 1 March 2016), <https://www.fpri.org/article/2016/03/vladimir-putin-godfather-of-kurdistan/> (accessed 21 December 2020).

### Crisis management is crucial to Russian-Turkish relations.

According to Moscow, it was Turkey's botched crisis management that was primarily to blame for Russia's severe response to the shooting down of the aircraft on 24 November 2015 — Putin famously referred to the incident as a "stab in the back". A more important reason, however, was presumably Erdoğan's decision to turn to NATO rather than Putin following the shooting down, although Moscow had allegedly been willing to cooperate with Ankara on "the issues that [were] sensitive to Turkey", even though they did "not fit into the context of international law".<sup>102</sup>

Bilateral relations between Russia and Turkey were already strained by this point, which is likely to have affected the way in which the incident was dealt with. The gas pipeline TurkStream announced in December 2014 was not making the progress hoped for by Moscow, although this did not stop Putin from saying at a meeting with Erdoğan in September 2015, "We are extremely satisfied with the development of our intergovernmental relations."<sup>103</sup> Erdoğan, meanwhile, spoke only of "a very good basic level" of relations.<sup>104</sup> The main reason for his coolness was that the two sides had been unable to reconcile their opposing positions on the Syrian conflict.

Between 2011 and 2015, Moscow and Ankara engaged in dialogue, but their priorities were very different. Russia wanted to keep the focus of their bilateral relations on questions of economy and energy,<sup>105</sup> while Turkey preferred to concentrate on the Syrian question. Eventually, in the autumn of 2015, the Turkish leadership was prompted to call into question publicly its energy cooperation with Russia.<sup>106</sup> Syria had strategic significance for both

**102** President of Russia, "Vladimir Putin's Annual News Conference" (see note 100).

**103** Idem, "Vstrecha s Prezidentom Turtsii Redzhepom Taïpom Êrdoganom" [Meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan], press release, Moscow, 23 September 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50354> (accessed 21 December 2020).

**104** Ibid.

**105** Dürre, *Rossiïsko-turetskie otnosheniya s 2008 po 2018 gg.* (see note 57).

**106** Kerim Has, *Love-Hate Relationship: The Cooling of Russia-Turkey Relations* (Russian International Affairs Council, 16 October 2015), <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytiks-and-comments/analytiks/i-ne-drug-i-ne-vrag-a-tak-okhlazhdenie->

countries, but they were unable to reconcile their interests. “Moscow and Ankara,” said Russian foreign policy expert Fyodor Lukyanov, “considered cooperation in all other areas so important and successful that they eventually believed that the Syrian impact could be evaded or simply set aside. Mutual irritation and misunderstanding were piling up behind warm smiles and finally exploded, throwing relations far back.”<sup>107</sup>

In this way, the shooting down of the fighter jet would seem not to have caused the crisis, but to have made evident an existing crisis in the bilateral relations between Russia and Turkey.<sup>108</sup> This hypothesis is supported by the fact that, unlike Moscow and Washington, Moscow and Ankara did not negotiate an agreement on air safety when Russia launched air strikes on Syria on 30 September 2015.<sup>109</sup>

## Advantages of Normalisation

On 27 June 2016 President Putin received a letter from his Turkish counterpart: “Mr Erdoğan expressed his deep regret for what happened and said that he is ready to do all possible to restore the traditionally friendly ties between Turkey and Russia and also to work together to respond to crisis situations in the region and fight terrorism.”<sup>110</sup> This turnaround was due in part to the situation in Syria; Turkey wanted to crack down not only on the IS, but also on the YPG and its political wing, the Party of the Democratic

Union (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat, PYD).<sup>111</sup> The economic situation was also an important deciding factor. The Russian sanctions mainly affected tourism, the construction industry and the retail sector.<sup>112</sup> The reconciliation that Erdoğan had been seeking since April 2016 was led by Turkish entrepreneur Cavit Çağlar, Hulusi Akar – now Turkey’s defence minister – and Nursultan Nazarbayev, the then president of Kazakhstan.<sup>113</sup>

Another factor that helped forge an agreement between Putin and Erdoğan was undoubtedly Putin’s support of Erdoğan after the attempted coup in Turkey on 15 July 2016 – especially compared with the tepid responses of Ankara’s Western partners. Erdoğan’s first foreign trip after the coup was to Russia. After a meeting with Putin in Saint Petersburg on 9 August 2016, relations between Turkey and Russia began to pick up again, both bilaterally and in Syria.

Particularly important from a bilateral perspective was the normalisation of trade relations. The gas pipeline project TurkStream was also resumed. On 10 October 2016 Putin and Erdoğan met again, this time at the World Energy Congress in Istanbul. They signed a deal on TurkStream and agreed on terms for reduced gas prices. Putin further announced an interest in working together with Turkey in other areas, such as space, and declared Russia willing to contribute to the construction of Turkish communication satellites. Military-technical cooperation was also to be expanded – with the aim, as Putin put it, of “continuing this interaction and filling it with serious projects of mutual interest”.<sup>114</sup> In November 2016 there were first media reports that Ankara was

rossiysko-turetskikh-/?sphrase\_id=30523863 (accessed 28 December 2020).

**107** Quoted in Hasan S. Özertem, “Turkey and Russia: A Fragile Partnership”, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, (Winter 2017): 121 – 34 (125).

**108** Ibid.

**109** Kerim Has, *Post Mortem by the Turkish Side: Relations between Moscow and Ankara Worsen* (Russian International Affairs Council, 30 November 2015), <https://en.russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/razbor-poletov-po-turetski-obostrenie-otnosheniy-moskvyy-i-an/> (accessed 28 December 2020).

**110** President of Russia, “Vladimir Putin Received a Letter from President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan”, press release, Moscow, 27 June 2016, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52282> (accessed 28 December 2020).

**111** Emre Erşen, *The Turkish-Russian Dialogue in Syria: Prospects and Challenges* (Al Sharq Strategic Research, 5 January 2017), <https://research.sharqforum.org/2017/01/05/the-turkish-russian-dialogue-in-syria-prospects-and-challenges/> (accessed 28 December 2020).

**112** Murat Yetkin, “Story of Secret Diplomacy that Ended Russia-Turkey Jet Crisis”, *Hurriyet Daily News* (online), 9 August 2016, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/murat-yetkin/story-of-secret-diplomacy-that-ended-russia-turkey-jet-crisis-102629> (accessed 28 December 2020).

**113** Ibid.

**114** President of Russia, “Vstrecha s Prezidentom Turtsii Redzhepom Taiipom Érdoganom” [Meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan], press release, Istanbul, 10 October 2016, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53065> (accessed 28 December 2020).



interested in purchasing the Russian missile defence system S-400.<sup>115</sup>

### The Turkish-Russian cooperation is not based on trust.

In order to improve communication and coordination on Syria, an interministerial consulting platform was set up, involving the foreign ministries, secret services and general staffs of Russia and Turkey.<sup>116</sup> Perhaps, however, the most important factor was Russia's attitude towards Turkey. Moscow respected Turkey's security interests; red lines were drawn and possible future cooperation was discussed.<sup>117</sup> Such an approach to Turkish-Russian relations, based on the recognition of security interests and the prospect of mutually beneficial cooperation, was not new; it had been typical of relations between the two countries even in the mid-1990s. Once again it became clear what part the "shadow of the future" played in those relations. The Turkish-Russian cooperation has never required trust. More important are the mutual benefits gained from repeated interaction.

The resumed dialogue with Russia soon paid off for Turkey, and on 24 August 2016 it launched "Euphrates Shield", its first operation in Syria. Its second military operation, "Olive Branch", launched on 20 January 2018, was similarly dependent on the close relations between the two countries.<sup>118</sup> Politically, too, Turkey profited from the normalisation of its relations with Russia. On 20 December 2016 a meeting was held in Moscow with the foreign ministers of Russia, Iran and Turkey, which would eventually lead to the Astana Process for Syria. Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov described the three-way talks as "the most effective format for solving the conflict in Syria".<sup>119</sup>

If, thanks to Russia, Turkey was now able to combat the Kurdish push for autonomy in Syria which had become its most serious security problem, the great advantage for Russia in cooperating with Turkey was the establishment of the Astana Process. Turkey's involvement was important to Russia because Ankara was able to legitimise the new negotiation format through its connections to oppositional forces in Syria. A great deal is at stake for Russia in the Astana Process — not least its image and credibility as a regional conflict manager.<sup>120</sup> If the partnership with Turkey over Syria were to fail, the greatest risk for Moscow would not be direct confrontation with Ankara, but the collapse of Astana.<sup>121</sup>

The toughest test for the Turkish-Russian partnership came in late February 2020 during a military escalation in the Syrian city of Idlib. As a result of allegedly Russian-linked air strikes, at least thirty-four Turkish soldiers were killed.<sup>122</sup> Unlike the shooting down of the fighting jet in 2015, however, the military escalation of February 2020 did not lead to a crisis in Turkish-Russian relations, but to a ceasefire deal reached during a meeting between the Turkish and Russian presidents on 5 March 2020. It is important to stress that personal relations between Putin and Erdoğan almost certainly helped them to reach an agreement. But at the same time, a great deal is at stake where state interests are concerned. Not for nothing did Putin say at a press conference in March 2020, "We are not always of one mind with our Turkish partners on events in Syria, but at critical moments, thanks to the high level of our bilateral relations, we have so far always managed to find

115 Erşen, *The Turkish-Russian Dialogue in Syria* (see note 111).

116 Ibid.

117 Maxim Suchkov, "Russia Has 3 Messages for Turkey over Operation in Syria", *Al-Monitor* (online), 9 October 2019, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/10/russia-turkey-operation-syria-us-kurds.html> (accessed 28 December 2020).

118 "Erdoğan Aide: Olive Branch and Euphrates Shield Impossible without Russia", *Sputnik* (online), 1 April 2018, <https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/201804011063109618-erdogan-aide-operations-impossible-russia/> (accessed 28 December 2020).

119 "Lavrov: tol'ko Rossiya, Turtsiya i Iran mogut pomoch' Sirii" [Lavrov: Only Russia, Turkey and Iran can help Syria],

BBC (online), 20 December 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-38379974> (accessed 28 December 2020).

120 Alexey Khlebnikov, *Russia Needs Astana to Succeed* (Washington, D.C.: Middle East Institute, 9 May 2017), <https://www.mei.edu/publications/russia-needs-astana-succeed> (accessed 28 December 2020).

121 Marianna Belenkaya, *Idlibskaya frendzona. Smogut li Rossiya i Turtsiya opyat' dogovorit'sya* [Idlib Friendzone. Can Russia and Turkey agree again] (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2 March 2020), <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/81183> (accessed 28 December 2020).

122 Metin Gurcan, "Deciphering Turkey's Darkest Night in Syria", *Al-Monitor* (online), 28 February 2020, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/02/turkey-syria-russia-deciphering-attack-on-turkish-troops.html> (accessed 28 December 2020).

common ground in controversial issues and to come up with acceptable solutions.”<sup>123</sup>

**Rather than becoming an endurance test for the Russian-Turkish partnership, the Syrian conflict has become the glue holding it together.**

The model of cooperation that has existed between Moscow and Ankara since 2016 is thus closely tied up with the interdependence of their interests in Syria – which in turn strengthens their bilateral relations. Thanks to Turkey, Russia can continue to pursue its dual goal of preventing a regime change and maintaining the Astana talks. Moscow also needs Ankara in order to gain access to Syria over the Turkish Straits.<sup>124</sup> And with Russia’s support, Turkey is able to tackle what has become its main security problem: Kurdish separatism. Rather than becoming an endurance test for the Russian-Turkish partnership, the Syrian conflict has become the glue holding it together.

As it turns out, what matters is not what side of the conflict Ankara and Moscow are on, but what their interests are. Even if they support different sides, their interests won’t necessarily clash – especially as both the course of the Syrian conflict and the fight for Nagorno-Karabakh show that these age-old rivals are quite capable of changing their priorities.<sup>125</sup>

**123** “Press-konferentsiya po itogam vstrechi Putina i Erdoğan” [Press conference following Putin and Erdoğan’s meeting], *RIA Novosti*, 5 March 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rp83U9u1qFw> (accessed 28 December 2020).

**124** Just as Turkey’s dependence on Russian gas supplies is a sensitive topic for Ankara, Russia’s dependence on Turkey’s control of the straits is a sensitive topic for Moscow. Traffic between the states is regulated by the 1936 Montreux Convention, but during the crisis with Turkey in 2015/16 there were nevertheless fears among Russian experts that Turkey might hinder Russian oil transportation across the Black Sea. (Starodubcev, *Rossiia-Turtsiya* [see note 17]).

**125** Patterns of cooperation can also be observed in the conflict in Libya, although Russia and Turkey support opposing sides. See, for example, Dalay, *Turkish-Russian Relations in the Light of Recent Conflicts* (see note 91); Güney Yildiz, *Turkish-Russian Adversarial Collaboration in Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh*, SWP Comment 22/2021 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, March 2021), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/turkish-russian-adversarial-collaboration-in-syria-libya-and-nagorno-karabakh>; Wolfram Lacher, *The Great Carve-Up. Libya’s Internationalised Conflicts after Tripoli*, SWP Comment 25/2020 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik,

In the autumn of 2020, the long smouldering conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan escalated into a military confrontation and Turkey positioned itself forthrightly on the Azerbaijani side. Russia, which could have been expected to take the side of its traditional ally Armenia, surprised many observers by holding back. Moscow’s position towards Ankara was particularly remarkable when compared with the position it had adopted in the first Karabakh war. When Turkey tried to intervene in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in the early 1990s, the Soviet defence minister Yevgeni Shaposhnikov went so far as to warn of a Third World War. Since then, Russia’s attitude towards its “zone of privileged interests” has significantly changed; according to the Russian political analyst Vladimir Frolov, “post-Soviet dominance is more of a luxury” for Moscow.<sup>126</sup> Prominent expert in Russian foreign policy Dmitri Trenin also points to the reappraisal of Russian politics in the post-Soviet world; the Kremlin, he says, is primarily interested in itself – its policy is “Russia first”.<sup>127</sup> In the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, therefore, Moscow wanted to avoid confrontation between the Armenian and Azerbaijani diasporas in Russia and did not want to jeopardise relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey.<sup>128</sup> Another important factor was that Russia’s relations with Armenia had been damaged since at least 2018.<sup>129</sup>

**The outcome of the war in the Southern Caucasus benefits Moscow and Ankara alike.**

The outcome of the war in the Southern Caucasus benefits Moscow and Ankara alike. By sharing its

June 2020), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/the-great-carve-up>.

**126** Vladimir Frolov, “Tschüss, Russki Mir?!” *Dekoder* (online), 29 October 2020, <https://www.dekoder.org/de/article/frolov-aussenpolitik-wende-bergkarabach> (accessed 17 May 2021).

**127** Dmitri Trenin, *Moscow’s New Rules* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 12 November 2020), <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/83208> (accessed 17 May 2021).

**128** *Ibid.*

**129** Daria Isachenko, *Turkey-Russia Partnership in the War over Nagorno-Karabakh: Militarised Peacebuilding with Implications for Conflict Transformation*, SWP Comment 53/2020 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, November 2020), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/turkey-russia-partnership-in-the-war-over-nagorno-karabakh> (accessed 27 October 2021).

sphere of influence with Turkey, Russia has achieved its objective of posting peacekeeping soldiers in Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>130</sup> As a result, Moscow now has a military presence throughout the Southern Caucasus – in Armenia, Azerbaijan and de facto in Georgia. At the start of the escalation, Turkey set a maximum target of applying the Astana format in the Southern Caucasus.<sup>131</sup> This target was not reached, but Ankara made important achievements nevertheless, including the prospect of the Zangezur Corridor, an undertaking that Ankara and Baku had had on their agendas since 1999/2000.<sup>132</sup> The corridor is to connect Turkey with Azerbaijan via the Azerbaijani exclave Nakhichevan in Armenia, giving Ankara access to the Caspian region and Central Asia.

Another central objective of both Turkey and Russia was to hold off extra-regional and Western powers. This was no new objective, but one that was already in place in 2008 after the war in Georgia.<sup>133</sup> When Ankara sought to set up a kind of stability platform in the Southern Caucasus at that time, preliminary talks were held exclusively with Russia. The notion of regional ownership had the express approval of Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov: “The Turkish idea that the countries of the region should get together to think about a platform for stability and cooperation in the Caucasus reflects the experience of Turkish diplomacy.”<sup>134</sup>

**130** Thomas de Waal argues that the ceasefire deal signed in Moscow on 10 November 2020 closely resembles the “Lavrov Plan” originally proposed by Russia. This plan, named after the Russian foreign minister, envisaged the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the seven occupied Azerbaijani territories and the dispatch of a Russian peacekeeping contingent to Karabakh. Thomas de Waal, *A Precarious Peace for Karabakh* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 11 November 2020), <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/83202> (accessed 17 May 2021).

**131** Maxim Suchkov, “Khoteli kak v Sirii. Poïdët li Rossiya na sdelku po Karabakhu s Turtsiei?” [Like in Syria. Will Russia agree to a Karabakh deal with Turkey?], *Russia in Global Affairs*, (October 2020), <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/hoteli-kak-v-sirii/> (accessed 17 May 2021).

**132** Waal, *A Precarious Peace for Karabakh* (see note 130).

**133** Tigran Torosjan, “Vozvrashchenie Turtsii” [Turkey’s return], *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 4 (July and August 2009), <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/vozvrashchenie-turczii/> (accessed 17 May 2021).

**134** Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Interv’yu Ministra inostrannykh del Rossii S.V.Lavrova, opublikovannoe v ‘Rossiïskoï gazete’ 7 oktyabrya 2008 goda” [Interview by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, pub-

lished in Rossiyskaya Gazeta on 7 October 2008], press release, Moscow, 7 October 2008, [https://www.mid.ru/press\\_service/minister\\_speeches/-/asset\\_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/322070](https://www.mid.ru/press_service/minister_speeches/-/asset_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/322070) (accessed 17 May 2021).

# The Case of the S-400

The most important outcome of Turkish-Russian cooperation in Syria for Turkish foreign policy was without a doubt Turkey's purchase of a Russian S-400. For the Turkish leadership, this purchase was an act of sovereignty. The case of the S-400 shows more forcibly than anything else how differently Turkey and the West regard the relations between them. For the West — and, indeed, for Russia — Turkey's NATO membership is of crucial importance and a clear signal of Ankara's allegiance to the West. For the Turkish leadership, however, the value of its membership does not lie in its relations with the West as such, but depends on the extent to which those relations serve Ankara's interests. From the point of view of Ankara, allegiance to the West is not an end in itself, but a means to an end, a strategy to guarantee its own security.

In December 2017 it was officially announced that Turkey would buy two batteries of the S-400 Russian air defence system for approximately US\$2.5 billion — a purchase that would be 55 per cent financed by loans.<sup>135</sup> Representatives of the Turkish defence industry were keen to stress particulars of the deal, such as Turkey's full control over the management and use of the systems, potential technology transfer and opportunities for joint production.<sup>136</sup> The first delivery, originally planned for spring 2020, was brought forward to July 2019 at Turkey's request and arrived in Ankara on the anniversary of the attempted coup. Erdoğan referred to the S-400 deal as the “the most important deal in our history right now,” but said it had not been dictated by “market logic”.<sup>137</sup>

<sup>135</sup> According to the Russian side, four batteries were purchased. The Turkish side confirmed only two. Tuvan Gumrukcu and Ece Toksabay, “Turkey, Russia Sign Deal on Supply of S-400 Missiles”, *Reuters* (online), 29 December 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-turkey-missiles-idUSKBN1EN0T5> (accessed 28 December 2020).

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> “Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Tarihimizin şu anda en önemli anlaşması, S-400 anlaşmasıdır”, *Haberler* (online), 14 July 2019, [https://www.haberler.com/son-dakika-](https://www.haberler.com/son-dakika-cumhurbaskani-erdogan-tarihimizin-su-12244102-haber/)

The US, on the other hand, saw the purchase as a stumbling block in their relations with Turkey. Washington responded to the delivery by excluding Turkey from the F-35 programme for the production and use of fighter jets. Sanctions followed in December 2020 — not unexpectedly given the CAATSA law (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) that had been passed in 2017. According to the terms of that act, the US president must impose sanctions on any third party engaging in “significant transactions” with the Russian defence industry.

The effects of the sanctions on the Turkish defence industry have yet to be seen. On the one hand, the mood in Ankara appears optimistic, especially after its experience with the US arms embargo following Turkey's 1974 military intervention in Cyprus, when Turkey was eventually motivated to develop a defence sector of its own.<sup>138</sup> On the other hand, there is a very real fear of constraints — for one thing because the Turkish arms industry relies on US export licences and deliveries of prefabricated parts.<sup>139</sup>

To this day there is speculation over why Erdoğan chose to buy a Russian air defence system. Some Turkey experts are convinced that his purchase of the S-400 was the result of personal motives.<sup>140</sup> Others point out that Turkey had been looking to purchase a

[cumhurbaskani-erdogan-tarihimizin-su-12244102-haber/](https://www.cumhurbaskani-erdogan-tarihimizin-su-12244102-haber/) (accessed 28 December 2020).

<sup>138</sup> Murat Yetkin, *Sanctions: The Bitter Pill in Turkish Foreign Policy*, Yetkin Report, 15 December 2020, <https://yetkinreport.com/en/2020/12/15/sanctions-the-bitter-pill-in-turkish-foreign-policy/> (accessed 28 December 2020).

<sup>139</sup> Yörük Işık, *CAATSA Sanctions Are Hurting Turkey's Military Readiness at a Time When NATO Can't Afford It* (Washington, D.C.: Middle East Institute, 6 May 2021), <https://www.mei.edu/publications/caatsa-sanctions-are-hurting-turkeys-military-readiness-time-when-nato-cant-afford-it> (accessed 18 May 2021).

<sup>140</sup> Soner Cagaptay, *Erdogan Will Play Biden, But Stick to Putin* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute of Near East Policy, 9 December 2020), <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/erdogan-will-play-biden-stick-putin> (accessed 28 December 2020).

missile defence system ever since the Gulf War in the early 1990s.<sup>141</sup> In 1991 and again in 2003 Ankara asked NATO to deploy early warning systems and Patriot missiles in Turkey. The hesitancy of some NATO members led to the perception in Turkey that Turkish security interests were not shared by other NATO members. US security experts Jim Townsend and Rachel Ellehus explain it like this: “Long suspicious that NATO did not appreciate Turkey’s vulnerability in such a dangerous neighborhood, Ankara came to view its missile defense requests as a litmus test for how much NATO really cared about Turkey.”<sup>142</sup> When, from Ankara’s perspective, adequate support from NATO failed to materialise, Turkey’s desire to buy an air defence system of its own began to take shape.

The decision to buy from Russia seems to have been influenced by the question of technology transfer. This was one reason for the failure of Turkey’s negotiations with the US on the purchase of a Patriot system; the US couldn’t satisfy Ankara’s demands.<sup>143</sup> The details of the technology transfer that was agreed on in the negotiation process between Turkey and Russia are not known. According to Sergey Chemezov, head of the Russian arms company Rostec, “an option for technological cooperation, for localising the production of components used in the S-400” is provided for in the second deal with Turkey.<sup>144</sup> Moscow seems to have no security qualms about entering into technological cooperation with a NATO member.

**141** David Stefanovic, *Turkey’s Perennial Strategic Importance and the S-400 Saga*, AIES FOKUS 10/2019 (Vienna: Austria Institut für Europa- und Sicherheitspolitik [AIES], 8 October 2019), <https://www.aies.at/publikationen/2019/fokus-19-10.php> (accessed 28 December 2020); Jim Townsend and Rachel Ellehus, “The Tale of Turkey and the Patriots”, *War on the Rocks*, 22 July 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/07/the-tale-of-turkey-and-the-patriots/> (accessed 28 December 2020).

**142** Townsend and Ellehus, “The Tale of Turkey and the Patriots” (see note 141).

**143** Aaron Stein, *The Crete Mirage: Why Rapprochement with Turkey May Be a Long Way Off* (Philadelphia, PA: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 10 February 2021), <https://www.fpri.org/article/2021/02/the-crete-mirage-why-rapprochement-with-turkey-may-be-a-long-way-off/> (accessed 15 February 2021).

**144** RT-Interview, “Sergej Chemezov: na pokupatelej rossijskogo oruzhiya okaz’vaetsya sil’noe davlenie” [Sergej Chemezov: Buyers of Russian arms are under strong pressure], *Russia Today* (RT, online), 23 February 2021, <https://doc.rt.com/filmy/sergej-chemezov-na-pokupatelej-rossijskogo/> (accessed 25 February 2021).

“As far as joint production goes,” Putin said at a press conference in April 2018, “the transfer of technology is not a matter of trust or political interaction. It is a purely commercial issue that is decided between economic entities. There are no military or political considerations or limitations in this sphere.”<sup>145</sup>

### **The purchase of the S-400 must be considered in the broader context of Turkish-US relations.**

But what seems even more important for the purchase of the S-400 than the question of technology transfer is the broader context of Turkish-US relations. First, the relationship between the two nations was overshadowed by the attempted coup in July 2016. The assumption that the US was behind the coup extended far beyond government circles.<sup>146</sup> Secondly, Ankara’s S-400 deal with Russia can be seen as a response to US cooperation with the Kurdish militia YPG in Syria. Washington’s partnership with the YPG led to a loss of trust on the part of Ankara; policy advisor Sinan Ülgen even spoke of “total alienation”.<sup>147</sup> From the Turkish perspective, then, the purchase of the S-400 was not a cause, but a result of worsening relations with the US. In the long list of points of dispute between Ankara and Washington, the YPG issue and the S-400 issue are seen (by Turkey and the US respectively) as the problems that weigh most heavily on US-Turkish relations.<sup>148</sup>

**145** President of Russia, “Joint News Conference of Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan”, press release, Ankara, 3 April 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57192> (accessed 28 December 2020).

**146** Tim Arango and Ceylan Yeginsu, “Turks Can Agree on One Thing: U.S. Was behind Failed Coup”, *The New York Times* (online), 2 August 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/03/world/europe/turkey-coup-erdogan-fethullah-gulen-united-states.html> (accessed 22 February 2021).

**147** Sinan Ülgen, “It’s Not Too Late to Stop Turkey from Realigning with Russia”, *Foreign Policy* (online), 11 April 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/04/11/its-not-too-late-to-stop-turkey-from-realigning-with-russia-s400-patriot-missile-putin-erdogan-trump/> (accessed 28 December 2020).

**148** Amanda Sloat, “How to Save the U.S.-Turkey Relationship”, *Foreign Affairs*, (July 2018), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2018-07-30/how-save-us-turkey-relationship> (accessed 22 January 2021); Alan Makovsky, *Problematic Prospects for US-Turkish Ties in the Biden Era*, SWP Comment 60/2020 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, December 2020), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2020C60/>; Max Hoffman, *Flashpoints in U.S.-Turkey*

Ankara's purchase of a Russian air defence system also sent a signal that it was not only concerned with its own security interests. The acquisition of the S-400 was seen as a matter of sovereignty and for Turkey it has become a symbol of sovereign state action. Erdoğan supporters and opposition factions alike celebrated the first delivery in July 2019 as "the country's liberation from the West".<sup>149</sup> Erdoğan and the opposition were also united in their vehement criticism of the CAATSA sanctions imposed in December 2020. Ünal Çeviköz, an MP for the Republican People's Party (CHP), the largest opposition, saw the purchase of the air defence system as "Turkey's sovereign decision. Therefore, by no means do we accept the sanctions."<sup>150</sup> As Turkey expert Galip Dalay explained: "Turkey didn't buy a missile system; it bought a new vision of its place in the international system."<sup>151</sup> For the US, the central problem of the S-400 is that it cannot be operationally integrated into NATO's systems, but Ankara increasingly regards this technological argument "as a fig leaf to disguise Washington's political agenda", the main aim of this agenda being "to keep Turkey under the US thumb".<sup>152</sup>

*Relations in 2021* (Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress, 19 January 2021), <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2021/01/19/494738/flashpoints-u-s-turkey-relations-2021/#Ca=3#Or=1#Pr=28#IA=R> (accessed 22 January 2021); Matthew Bryza, *How to End the US-Turkey Dialogue of the Deaf* (Atlantic Council, 18 March 2021), <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/turkeysource/how-to-end-the-us-turkey-dialogue-of-the-deaf> (accessed 19 March 2021).

**149** Gönül Tol and Ömer Taşpınar, "Turkey's Russian Roulette", in *The MENA Region: A Great Power Competition*, ed. Karim Mezran and Arturo Varvelli (Milan: Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale [ISPI] and Atlantic Council, 2019), 107–25 (107).

**150** "US Sanctions Turkey's Presidency of Defense Industries over S-400 Purchase", *Daily Sabah* (online), 14 December 2020, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/us-sanctions-turkeys-presidency-of-defense-industries-over-s-400-purchase> (accessed 28 December 2020).

**151** In conversation with the author, 3 December 2020.

**152** Hamilton and Mikulska *Cooperation, Competition, and Compartmentalization* (see note 68), 64.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

In the Western debate about Turkish-Russian relations, there are two striking misunderstandings. First, too much is expected of the partnership between Ankara and Moscow; phases of rapprochement are seen as evidence that the two countries are developing a strategic alliance. Secondly, mutual trust is thought to be essential to their cooperation, when in fact the dynamics of Turkish-Russian relations show that this need not be the case.

Ankara and Moscow have come to terms with the dynamics of their relations. Turkey cooperates with Russia in order to protect its immediate security interests, but this does not preclude relations with the West. Turkey's NATO membership is its most important institutionalised connection in the field of security. After all, that membership is very much bound up with its Western identity; from Ankara's point of view it fulfils the important purpose of acting as a protective shield against the West. Turkey also remains in NATO, however, because its membership gives it important room for manoeuvre in its dealings with Russia. Moscow, meanwhile, regards Ankara not as a "strategic ally", but, to quote Russian foreign minister Lavrov, as a "very close partner".<sup>153</sup> The divergence of interests between the Turkish government and its Western allies is crucial to Russia; that is why Moscow is always quick to praise Ankara for its autonomy. But although Turkey and Russia are consolidating mutual relations, it is unlikely that a strategic alliance will develop between them in the foreseeable future.

The cooperation between the two countries appears paradoxical only if their relationship is viewed against the backdrop of their past rivalry, and trust is

<sup>153</sup> "Rossiya nikogda ne nazývala Turtsiyu strategicheskim soyuznikom, zayavil Lavrov" [Russia has never called Turkey a strategic ally, Lavrov said], *RIA Novosti* (online), 14 October 2020, <https://ria.ru/20201014/soyuznik-1579720492.html> (accessed 21 January 2021).

thought necessary to sustainable relations. Turkey and Russia's ability to cooperate without a relationship of trust suggests that the trust factor is overestimated. According to Russian foreign policy expert Timofei Bordachev, Moscow's military superiority enables it to regard Ankara as something like a "good enemy".<sup>154</sup> Nevertheless, both sides also have other good reasons to persist in ignoring their history of animosity.

Since relations were normalised in 2016, too much has been at stake for either side to jeopardise the cooperation. In Syria, Moscow and Ankara are dependent on each other for preserving vital interests: in Russia's case, preventing regime change and in Turkey's, containing the Kurdish push for autonomy. On a bilateral level their mutual dependence is maintained through strategic projects like Akkuyu, Turk-Stream and S-400. An important aspect of Turkish-Russian relations since the 2016 normalisation is thus their expansion into areas with structural components. "No longer do construction, tourism, textiles, and fruit or vegetables define Turkish-Russian economic ties," says Galip Dalay. "Instead, cooperation has shifted to strategic industries that create long-lasting mutual dependencies".<sup>155</sup>

When examining Turkish-Russian relations, then, we should focus not on the form, but on the substance of their interdependence. This has two implications for the West. First, personal relations between the Turkish and Russian presidents should not be overestimated. Western political circles should be

<sup>154</sup> Timofei Bordachev, "Khoroshiĭ vrag Turtsiya" [A good enemy Turkey], *Russia in Global Affairs*, 28 October 2020, <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/horoshij-vrag-turcziya/> (accessed 21 January 2021).

<sup>155</sup> Galip Dalay, *After the S-400 Purchase: Where Are Turkish-Russian Relations Heading?* SWP Point of View (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 3 September 2021), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/after-the-s-400-purchase-where-are-turkish-russian-relations-heading/>.

prepared for the possibility of continuity in the respective foreign policies of Ankara and Moscow beyond the incumbent presidents' terms of office. A change of leadership need not mean a change in foreign policy, either in Turkey or in Russia.<sup>156</sup>

Secondly, the nature of the current Turkish-Russian partnership should not be underestimated. The relationship is often dismissed as purely transactional, but in fact it is precisely this transactional aspect that must be taken seriously: the transactional dynamics of the partnership, defined as an interested negotiation process aimed at mutually beneficial interaction, allow Turkey and Russia not only to upgrade their bilateral relations, but to enter into a regional cooperation that is unparalleled in the history of the countries' relationship.

Although a major component of Turkish-Russian interaction, the Astana format alone does not make the partnership in Syria unique. The most important aspect of Turkish-Russian cooperation in Syria is the strong bond resulting from their mutual involvement; it allows both Ankara and Moscow to combat what they perceive as existential threats to their countries. In this way, the potential for confrontation or cooperation inherent in the Syrian conflicts has nothing to do with the countries' past rivalry, and everything to do with their current priorities. Similarly, it doesn't matter what side of the conflict Russia and Turkey are on; what counts are their motives.

This extraordinary interdependence, meanwhile, increases the likelihood that Ankara and Moscow will go on to cooperate in other regional conflicts in which they are on opposing sides. If we compare the level of Turkish-Russian cooperation before and after the Syrian conflict, we find that not only have bilateral relations considerably improved, but there is a significant difference in the "export" of their regional interaction. Turkey and Russia recently expanded their regional agenda for the next two years. It now reaches well beyond Nagorno-Karabakh, Syria and Libya to take in the Balkans, the eastern Mediterranean including Cyprus, and the Black Sea including Ukraine.<sup>157</sup> This new expanded agenda contrasts

starkly with the pre-crisis agenda of 2015 when there was a much lower level of cooperation. In 2010, for example, Moscow offered Turkey the chance to cooperate with Russia in the Middle East. At that time the Turkish leadership's shared regional agenda was limited to the Caucasus and the Balkans, because it believed it could operate better in the Middle East without Russia.<sup>158</sup> These regional dynamics in Turkish-Russian relations show once again that first, the relationship between Ankara and Moscow is not shaped by ancient rivalry, but by the question how and to what extent they respect each other's interests. And secondly, there is a reciprocal effect between the level of their bilateral relations and their ability and readiness to consult on regional challenges.

When it comes to the present crisis in relations between Turkey and the West, the lesson to be learnt from the Turkish-Russian partnership is that the most important aspect of bilateral relations is their capacity to look to the future. It was the prospect of mutually beneficial cooperation that persuaded Russia and Turkey to overcome their differences — perhaps the present crisis in Turkey's relations with the West also stems from the lack of a shared and mutually beneficial vision for the future.

press-konferentsii po itogam peregovorov s Ministrom inostrannykh del Turtsii M. Chavushoglu v ramkakh vos'mogo zasedaniya Sovmestnoi grupp'y strategicheskogo planirovaniya, Sochi, 29 dekabrya 2020 goda" [Speech and answers to media questions by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov, during a joint press conference following talks with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, M. Çavuşoğlu, on the margins of the eighth meeting of the Joint Strategic Planning Group, Sochi, 29 December 2020], press release, 29 December 2020, [https://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/tr/-/asset\\_publisher/Fn23K1b76LY2/content/id/4515679](https://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/tr/-/asset_publisher/Fn23K1b76LY2/content/id/4515679) (accessed 21 January 2021).

<sup>158</sup> Dürre, *Rossiysko-tureckie otnoeheniya s 2008 po 2018 gg.* (see note 57), 50.

<sup>156</sup> Idem, *Turkish-Russian Relations in the Light of Recent Conflicts* (see note 91); Alexander Baunov, *Ot lichnogo k obshchestvennomu* [From the personal to the public] (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 6 February 2020), <https://carnegie.ru/2020/02/06/ru-pub-80959> (accessed 21 January 2021).

<sup>157</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Výstuplenie i otvety na voprosy SMI Ministra inostrannykh del Rossiiskoi Federatsii S.V.Lavrova v khode sovmestnoi



## Abbreviations

AIES	Austria Institut für Europa- und Sicherheitspolitik (Vienna)
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CAATSA	Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act
CHP	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party)
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EU	European Union
IFRI	Institut Français des Relations Internationales (Paris)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IS	"Islamic State"
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
PYD	Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (Party of Democratic Union)
RT	Russia Today
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
YPG	Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (People's Defence Units)

## Further Reading

*Galip Dalay*

### **Turkish-Russian Relations in the Light of Recent Conflicts: Syria, Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh**

SWP Research Paper 5/2021

(Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, August 2021)

<https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/turkish-russian-relations-in-light-of-recent-conflicts>

*Güney Yıldız*

### **Turkish-Russian Adversarial Collaboration in Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh**

SWP Comment 22/2021

(Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, March 2021)

<https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/turkish-russian-adversarial-collaboration-in-syria-libya-and-nagorno-karabakh>



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