

## Turkish-Russian Relations During AK Parti Rule: Could Economic Partnership Transform into a Strategic Partnership? A Realistic Outlook

### AK Parti Döneminde Türkiye-Rusya İlişkileri: Ekonomik Müttefiklik Stratejik Müttefikliğe Dönüşebilir mi? Gerçekçi bir Bakış Açısı

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#### Öz

Soğuk Savaş dönemi sonrasında, Türkiye-Rusya ilişkileri, sürekli gelişim kaydedilen yeni bir sürece girmiştir. NATO ve ABD ile siyasi ve askeri bağlar devam etse de, özellikle enerji sektöründe ve genel olarak ekonomide Türk-Rus ilişkileri derinleşmiştir. Bu nedenle, iki ülke, 2010'lu yıllardan itibaren “ekonomik müttefik” olarak adlandırılmaya başlanmıştır. Ancak Ankara ile Moskova arasındaki çeşitli siyasi ve diplomatik anlaşmazlıklar bu dönemde de sürmüştür. Dahası, Suriye iç savaşının yarattığı gerginlikler nedeniyle, 2015-2016 döneminde Türk-Rus İlişkileri, “jet krizi” ve “Karlof suikasti” nedeniyle kısa bir türbülans dönemine girmiştir. Bu makale, Türkiye-Rusya ilişkilerinin geleceğini Realist bir perspektiften değerlendirmeyi ve “ekonomik müttefiklik” ilişki biçiminin “stratejik müttefiklik” ilişki biçimine dönüşüp dönüşmeyeceğini analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Türkiye-Rusya İlişkileri, Realizm, Ekonomik Müttefiklik, Stratejik Müttefiklik, AK Parti.

#### Abstract

Following the end of Cold War, Turkish-Russian relations entered into a new era of continuous progress. While Turkey's political and military ties with NATO and the United States persisted, Turkish-Russian cooperation quickly deepened in terms of energy sector and economy in general. Thus, in the early 2010s, two countries began to be labeled as “economic partners”. However, disagreements between Ankara and Moscow continued in various political and diplomatic issues. Moreover, due to tensions caused by the Syrian civil war, Turkish-Russian relations entered into a short turbulent period between 2015 and 2016 with the “jet crisis” and the “Karlof assassination”. This article aims to discuss the prospects of Turkish-Russian relations from a Realist perspective and to question whether developing “economic partnership” could actually transform into a “strategic partnership”.

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**Keywords:** Turkish-Russian Relations, Realism, Economic Partnership, Strategic Partnership, AK Parti.

## Introduction

Following the end of Cold War, Turkish-Russian relations entered into a new era of continuous progress. While Turkey's political and military ties with NATO and the United States persisted, Turkish-Russian cooperation quickly deepened in terms of energy sector and economy in general. Thus, in the early 2010s, two countries began to be labeled as "economic partners". However, disagreements between Ankara and Moscow continued in various political and diplomatic issues including Russian annexation of Crimea, Syrian civil war, Nagorno Karabakh Dispute, Turkey's Western orientation in foreign policy, and the PKK controversy. Moreover, due to tensions caused by the Syrian civil war, Turkish-Russian relations entered into a short turbulent period between 2015 and 2016 with the "jet crisis" and the "Karloff assassination". This article aims to discuss the prospects of Turkish-Russian relations from a Realist perspective and to question whether developing "economic partnership" could actually transform into a "strategic partnership".

In order to that, first of all, a short historical background of Turkish-Russian relations will be provided to readers who are unfamiliar with the subject at hand. Secondly, the development of Turkish-Russian relations during successive AK Parti governments (2002-2019) will be analyzed. Thirdly, concrete parameters of Turkish-Russian economic partnership will be revealed in order to understand the extent of cooperation between two countries. Accordingly, Mersin Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant, TurkStream (*Türk Akımı*) and earlier energy-based projects, S-400 air missile defense system deal and military cooperation, developing relations in tourism and construction industries as well as increasing number of Turkish-Russian families (marriages) will be explained. Fourthly, problematic issues that overshadow bilateral relations will be listed. Lastly, the author will make a strategic assessment from a Realist perspective about whether Turkish-Russian "economic partnership" could eventually turn into a "strategic partnership" in the near future.

## I. Turkish-Russian Relations: Historical Background

Historically, Turkish-Russian relations are built on the basis of political and military confrontation and competition. Diplomatic relations between the two countries began with the formal request by Czar Ivan the 3<sup>rd</sup> to send a diplomatic delegation to Istanbul in 1492 (*Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs/b*). Two countries represented the "enemy" to each other during the times of Ottoman Empire. During these ages, Tsarist Russian Empire identified itself as the inheritor of Byzantine Empire and saw Ottoman Empire as a barrier to realize its imperial aim of reaching the warm waters (Yılmaz & Yakşı, 2016, p. 11). In addition, while Istanbul was the religious center of Orthodox Christians during this era, the Russian Church was a metropolitan bishop of the Patriarchate in Istanbul (Yılmaz & Yakşı, 2016, p. 12). The first war between two countries took place in 1569 with the Astrahan Campaign of Ottomans. The wars intensified and multiplied in the coming ages and Russia began to use Christian minorities issue as a tool to have control over Ottoman domestic politics. With the Küçük Kaynarca Treaty in 1774, Russia began to dominate the Black Sea and became the protector of Ottoman Christians (Yılmaz & Yakşı, 2016, p. 15). Although there were temporary alliances between two countries as in 1798 against Napoleonic France, in general, Ottoman State had to be sided with major European powers including Britain and France such as in the Crimean War of 1853-1856 in order to survive against Russia. With the 1833 Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi, Russia also acquired additional powers over the Bosphorus. Two countries were on the other sides in the First

World War as well. While the war eventually led to the collapse of Ottoman Empire and the emergence of Turkey, Russian Empire was also replaced with the communist USSR after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. If we have to make an assessment of historical relations; it would not be wrong to conclude that two countries had an enmity perception due to their geopolitical clashes, political competition, and endless wars. In addition, Russians had a psychological domination against Turks due to their victories in almost all wars fought against Ottoman Empire.

Unlike the Ottoman period, during Turkey's Independence War (1919-1922) and the single-party era (1923-1945), Turkish-Russian relations were constantly improved. Soviet help to Turkish National Struggle and Atatürk-Lenin friendship were key factors during this period. Soviet help was also a decisive factor about Turkish victory in the war due to arms support and financial aid provided by Moscow to Ankara (Yılmaz & Yakşi, 2016, pp. 19-20). Anti-imperialist political stances of two countries and their leaders also helped two states during this period to establish friendly relations. In addition, Nonaggression and Friendship Treaty of 1925 was a milestone for adding an institutional framework to developing relations (Metin, 2012). Russia also supported Turkish control over the Bosphorus during this era with the Montreux Convention in 1936 (Topsakal, 2016, p. 46). In addition, Russia procured a credit to Turkish government in 1931 in order to help Ankara to establish a textile factory (Kakışım, 2019, p. 69). Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Tevfik Rüştü Aras was a key figure in terms of Turkish-Soviet alliance during this period.

Friendly relations between two countries changed rapidly after the Second World War upon threatening demands coming from Stalin. The crisis was caused by Russia; after winning the Second World War, Moscow declared that it would not renew the 1925 Nonaggression and Friendship Treaty since Turkey stayed neutral until the very last days of the war against Nazi Germany. Later, in order to renew the Treaty, Soviet Russia asked some territories (Kars and Ardahan), reconsideration of the Montreux Treaty, and a military base at the Bosphorus as required conditions (Yılmaz & Yakşi, 2016, p. 27). Consequently, Turkey had to change its foreign policy direction and began to look for new and more reliable partners. Accordingly, Turkey began to get closer with the United States and eventually became a member of NATO and the Council of Europe in the 1950s.

During the Cold War (1945-1991), Turkish-Russian relation was characterized by enmity perception and suspicion once again. However, both countries were somehow kept their bilateral relations and contact channels even during this period. For instance, in 1953, Moscow officially declared that it gave up from Stalin's territorial demands (Yılmaz & Yakşi, 2016, p. 31). Moreover, when Turkey began to have problems with Washington and NATO due to Cyprus Dispute, in the 1960s and 1970s, two countries even established some important economic projects together in Turkey. The most important among them were Aliğa Oil Refinery and İskenderun Iron and Steel CO. In addition, during this period, Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel (1967) and President of the Republic Cevdet Sunay (1969) made official visits to Russia (Topsakal, 2016, p. 47). However, classical Cold War paradigm was restored after the 1980 military coup and the prevailing Turkish-American alliance and ideological differences prevented Turkish-Russian relations to improve further.

With the end of Cold War, the main pattern and paradigm changed in terms of Turkish-Russian relations. Most importantly, as the communist bloc collapsed, two countries were not sided against each other anymore. This helped Turkish and Russian statesmen and companies to improve their relations without political reservations. Furthermore, people from both countries engaged in commercial activities apart from their states. A new type of trade called "suitcase trading" (*bavul ticareti* in Turkish) started in Istanbul (especially in Laleli district) due to huge number of Russian tourists coming to Turkey for buying different types of commercial goods, which constituted the half of Turkey's total export volume at those years (Yılmaz & Yakşi, 2016, p. 33). In the meantime,

starting from these years, Turkey began to develop its ties with the Turkic states in Caucasia and Central Asia as the “Iron Curtain” was lifted. This trend was strengthened with Turkey’s new liberal-minded Prime Minister Turgut Özal’s globalization vision. At the same time, Turkey’s strategic need for regular energy suppliers forced Ankara to reconsider its historical perception of Moscow and to actively support developing Turkish-Russian relations. This trend continued after Özal as well; although Turkish-American relations continued to dominate the political/military scene, in economy and especially in terms of energy politics, Russia has begun to transform into a close partner. Accordingly, with the 1992 agreement (Treaty on the Principles of Relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation), signed by then-Turkish Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel, two countries identified each other as “friendly state” for the first time in their history (Yılmaz & Yakşı, 2016, p. 33). According to Kelkitli (2017, p. 20), this agreement was “the first blueprint that determined the basic contours of Turkish-Russian relations in the post-Cold War era”. Yılmaz and Yakşı (2016, p. 33) described this period (the 1990s) as “restrained proximity” (*ölçülü yakınlık*) due to ongoing suspicion on both sides even though the Cold War was over and competing interests in Caucasia and Central Asia. This was caused by two countries’ divergent positions in terms of Nagorno-Karabakh Dispute and Armenia-Azerbaijan relations as well as Chechen and Kurdish Questions. In addition, during this period, Russian S-300 air missile defense system sale to South Cypriot government caused anger in Ankara (Yılmaz & Yakşı, 2016, p. 35).<sup>2</sup> Rubin and Kirişçi (2001, p. 155) on the other hand identified this period as “virtual rapprochement” due to “managed geopolitical rivalry” and “unique economic cooperation verging on interdependence”. In addition, Özbay (2001, p. 38) described the 1990s as “lost years” due to missed opportunities. However, with Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit’s Moscow visit in 1999, during which Ecevit said that “Chechnya problem is a domestic political affair of Russia”, relations became ready for a take-over in the coming years (Özbay, 2001, p. 38).

## II. Turkish-Russian Relations During AK Parti Governments

The most important progress in the history of Turkish-Russian relations took place in the 2000s and 2010s during the reign of Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. While both leaders are often criticized for their authoritarian tendencies and anti-Western attitude in some issues, so far they managed to get over political crises and improve their countries’ relations. In fact, two countries decided to enhance their relations in 2001, before AK Parti and Erdoğan came to power, with the “Joint Action Plan to Develop Cooperation between the Russian Federation and Turkey” (Yılmaz & Yakşı, 2016, p. 36). The document emphasized that the fundamental changes in the world of historic magnitude opened a new stage in interaction between Turkey and Russia, characterized by opportunities of developing fruitful bilateral and regional cooperation in every field in the spirit of friendship and mutual trust and thus, the two countries are determined to carry their relations to the level of enhanced constructive partnership (*Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs/b*). According to Arafat and Alnuaimy (2011, p. 109), this document was of crucial importance for its call for close relations in regional and international issues especially in Eurasia. During then-Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül’s visit to Russia on 23-26 February 2004, a new document, “2004-2005 Consultations Programme between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation” was signed and bilateral consultation process was formalized (*Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs/b*). In addition, during the same year, Vladimir Putin became the first Russian President to visit Turkey on 5-6 December 2004 (*China Daily*, 2004). “Joint Declaration on the Intensification of Friendship and Multidimensional

<sup>2</sup> Upon Turkish pressure, Cypriot government later sold this air missile defense system to Greece.

Partnership” was signed during this visit. This was followed by then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s visits to Russia in 10-12 January 2005 and 17-18 July 2005. Intensifying relations developed further with President Putin’s working visit in November 2005 and Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer’s official visit in June 2006 (*Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs/b*). Moreover, in 2007, Russian Cultural Year activities were organized in Turkey and reciprocally the year 2008 was celebrated as the Turkish Cultural Year in Russia. In May 2010, High-Level Cooperation Council (*Rusya-Türkiye Üst Düzey İşbirliği Konseyi*), “a mechanism that would act as the guiding body in setting the strategy and main directions for developing Russian-Turkish relations, was established in the course of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev’s visit to Turkey” (Kelkitli, 2017, p. 22). According to Kısacık, harmony between two countries’ leaders (Erdoğan and Putin) as well as their “win-win” approach also strengthened this trend and Turkey and Russia began to consider each other as partners during this new and ongoing “Golden Age” (Örmeci & Kısacık, p. 474).

Fatih Özbay (2011, p. 38) analyzes Turkish-Russian relations during AK Parti period in two different categories: “2000-2008” period and “2008 onwards” period. In the first period, which Özbay (2011, pp. 38-39) calls as “searching years”, economic relations began to develop rapidly with Turkish government’s full initiative. However, since Turkey’s main foreign policy goal and ideal during this era was to become a full member of European Union, relations with Russia were not seen as the most important political issue. The second period, “2008 onwards” era on the other hand witnessed an improvement in terms of political relations too, in addition to economic relations. During this period, bilateral political relations began to develop, mutual trust was established and big economic projects were realized. However, this period was overshadowed and ended by 2014 Ukraine events and 2015 Russian intervention into Syria when two countries defended and actively supported opposing sides and began to perceive each other as “rival” once again. This hostile perception was strengthened with the “jet crisis” and “Karlov assassination” that followed these crises soon afterwards in 2015 and 2016. However, starting from 2016, with President Erdoğan’s efforts<sup>3</sup> and both countries’ strategic necessities, bilateral relations quickly recovered and economic relations even trespassed on the military zone (with the S-400 deal) for the first time in history. Thus, starting from 2016, it would not be wrong to assume that Turkish-Russian relations entered into a new (third) phase; during which Russia has gradually become the most important economic and political actor for Turkey due to ongoing Syrian crisis, new energy projects, and military cooperation.

Although economic, diplomatic, and cultural relations constantly improved between two countries during successive AK Parti governments, several crises also took place. Crises were often caused by two countries’ different reactions’ to some regional political conflicts. Russian Federation, with Vladimir Putin’s coming to power, adopted the “near abroad” doctrine in order to reclaim Russian influence in the post-Soviet neighboring countries by using the energy card and frozen conflicts (Derman, 2018/a, p. 158). Another instrument implemented by Putin was to use the ethnic Russian population as a diplomatic leverage in order to influence former Soviet countries’ domestic affairs via threatening their territorial integrity (Çomak & Şeker, p. 232). Turkey on the other hand, adopted “zero problems with neighbors” (*komşularla sıfır sorun*) strategy during AK Parti era with the influence of Erdoğan’s foreign policy advisor and later Turkey’s Foreign Minister (2009-2014) and Prime Minister (2014-2016) Professor Ahmet Davutoğlu. With this policy (*Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs/a*), Turkey aimed to expand the scope of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s “Peace at home, peace in the world” principle and to establish friendly relations with all countries around

<sup>3</sup> According to Turkish newspapers, Turkish businessman Cavit Çağlar was a key figure in opening dialogue channels between Putin and Erdoğan after the crisis (*Haberler.com*, 2019). Some others (Yetkin, 2016) claim that it was former Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev and then-Turkey’s Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar helped two leaders to get over this crisis.

itself. Thus, Russian strategy of reclaiming power in the “near abroad” and Turkish aim to develop relations with neighbors overlapped in the 2000s. However, Turkey’s Western orientation and close ties with United States and NATO as well conflicting interests in some regional political developments limited the level of cooperation between two countries.

The first crisis between two countries took place in 2008 with the Russian intervention into Georgia. Eventually, Russia transformed South Ossetia and Abkhazia into two pro-Russian satellite states (Çomak & Şeker, p. 233). Russia defended this intervention by using the presence of Russian citizens in these regions as a result of Russian policy of “passportization” in the early 2000s (Güneylioğlu & Savaş, p. 289). Moscow also argued that civil casualties in the region after the Georgian intervention was an effort of “genocide” by making reference to newly developing concept of “Responsibility to Protect-R2P” (Güneylioğlu & Savaş, pp. 290-291). Turkey on the other hand defended the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia in 2008 and afterwards. Moreover, Ankara developed many energy and transportation projects such as Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline (BTC), Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline (BTE), and Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway (BTK) with Azerbaijan and Georgia in the 2000s and the 2010s (Kelkitli, 2017, p. 50).

Another problem emerged between Ankara and Moscow in 2014 with the Russian interference into Ukraine, which eventually led to the annexation of Crimea by Russia. Turkey opposed to Russian interference into Ukraine on the basis of Ukrainian territorial integrity and did not recognize Russian annexation of Crimea (Özçelik, 2018, p. 1216). This position was clarified with President Erdoğan’s visit to Ukraine in 2015, during which Turkish President met with Crimean Tatar and Meskhetian/Ahiska Turks representatives (Derman, 2018/b, p. 1233). Moreover, in 2017, during Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu’s visit into Ukraine, Ankara and Kiev signed a free trade agreement and Ankara promised to donate 3 million US dollars for 5 years to Ukrainian Armed Forces (Derman, 2018/b, p. 1234). During this period, by following a Realist and pragmatic foreign policy, Turkey tried to criticize Russian foreign policy towards Ukraine and Crimea and help Ukrainian government and Crimean Tatars without completely spoiling relations with Moscow (Özçelik, 2018, p. 1216). However, upon Russian President Vladimir Putin’s participation into 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary activities for 1915 events in Yerevan and deepening confrontation with Russia in Syria, Turkey began to follow a more active foreign policy for supporting Crimean Tatars via organizing the World Congress of Crimean Tatars in 2015 (Özçelik, 2018, p. 1217).

In addition, after the Russian military intervention into Syria in 2015, which changed the course of events in Syria and allowed -Turkey’s main target- Bashar al Assad to stay in power, Ankara and Moscow had their third and most important regional conflict. During the civil war, Turkey clearly supported the Sunni opposition (Free Syrian Army) and blamed Syrian state for organizing chemical attacks<sup>4</sup> towards civilians, whereas Russia stood firm by supporting the Assad government and blamed Turkey for supporting outlaws. Russia identified opposition forces in Syria as “terrorists” with its declared new foreign policy vision in 2016 (Örmeci & Kısacık, 2018, pp. 258-259). Syrian crisis even led to the shooting of a Russian jet that violated Turkish airspace in 2015. Thus, Syrian crisis could be identified as the worst crisis during AK Parti era in terms of Turkish-Russian relations.

These crises prove that although great progress achieved in Turkish-Russian relations during AK Parti era in terms of breaking prejudices and building trust, two countries’ regional geopolitical considerations are not coherent and relations are still prone to political crises in times of escalation. Ankara aims to keep good relations with Moscow although it does not have any sympathy towards Russian foreign policy towards Ukraine and Syria. One can claim that Moscow also shows its good

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<sup>4</sup> UN also asserts that Syrian government conducted chemical attacks towards civilians during the civil war (UN News, 2018).

will to help Turkey to become a regional power by establishing Turkey's first ever nuclear power plant and selling to Ankara -Turkey's one and only air missile defense system- S-400s while Americans rejected the sale of Patriot system. Thus, except for the turbulent 2015-2016 period, it would be a fair judgment to conclude that Turkish-Russian relations entered into a "Golden Era" during AK Parti government.

### III. Turkish-Russian Economic Partnership

Turkish-Russian economic relations in terms bilateral trade is around 26 billion US dollars as of early 2019 (*Daily Sabah*, 2019). According to TÜİK-Turkish Statistical Institute (*TÜİK*), Russia is Turkey's second biggest trade partner after Germany. Two countries' leaders have a declared goal of reaching 100 billion US dollars in bilateral trade in the coming years (*Daily Sabah*, 2019). During the 8<sup>th</sup> High-Level Cooperation Council meeting held in Moscow on April 8, 2019, Russian President Vladimir Putin underlined that the volume of Turkish-Russian investments has reached 20 billion US dollars; while Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan emphasized that almost 6 million Russian tourists (5.96 million) visited Turkey in 2018 (*Daily Sabah*, 2019). The positive trend in developing economic relations continued in 2018 (*Sputnik Türkiye*, 2018/b) although both countries' economic growth slowed down in recent years.

According to Özbay (2011, p. 39), Turkish-Russian economic partnership is beneficial since two countries have complementary economies. Looking at Turkish-Russian economic relations closely, this is not a false claim since Russia fulfills Turkey's energy (mainly natural gas and oil) needs and Turkey is a perfect destination for Russian people's holiday plans as well as a good market for acquiring commercial goods. As Köstem (2018, p. 11) concludes, natural resources dominate Turkey's imports from Russia, while Russia in return imports mostly machinery and equipment, textiles, and food products from Turkey. However, it is a fact that economic relations are in favor of Russia since Turkey has a large trade deficit against Russia and it has become dependent on Russian natural gas. By 2018, Russian exports to Turkey are around 21.3 billion US dollars, whereas Turkish exports to Russia are only around 4.2 billion US dollars (*Sputnik Türkiye*, 2018/a).

In order to better understand the extent of Turkish-Russian economic cooperation, one should look at concrete economic projects and make industry-based analyses.

***Mersin Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant:*** Russian Federation is establishing Turkey's first ever nuclear power plant in Akkuyu/Mersin with a budget of 25 billion US dollars (*AA*, 2016). Rosatom Assistant General Manager Kirill Komarov announced that seismic studies for the nuclear plant is over and the nuclear plant will officially start producing electricity in 2023 (Akkuyu Nükleer). With the opening of the nuclear plant, Turkey's natural gas imports will be reduced considerably and there will be an economic gain of 3.6 billion US dollars for Ankara (Örmeci & Kısacık, p. 457). In addition, thanks to this project, 300 Turkish students are trained in Russia in the field of nuclear energy and many of them will work in Mersin/Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant after finishing their education (Örmeci & Kısacık, p. 458).

***TurkStream and energy-based relations:*** Turkish-Russian energy cooperation has become quickly the most important determinant of bilateral relations in the last few decades. Economic relations in the field of energy between two countries started with Russia-Turkey Natural Gas Pipeline (West Line) project in 1984. After the earlier studies and planning phase, a 25-year Natural Gas Purchase-Sale Agreement was signed between BOTAŞ and SoyuzGazExport on 14 February 1986. Within the scope of this agreement, natural gas imports from Russia to Turkey started in 1987 and reached to the maximum amount of 6 billion m<sup>3</sup> per year in 1993 (*Republic of Turkey Ministry of Energy and*

*Natural Resources*). West Line project included Ukraine and Bulgaria as well in addition to Turkey and Russia.

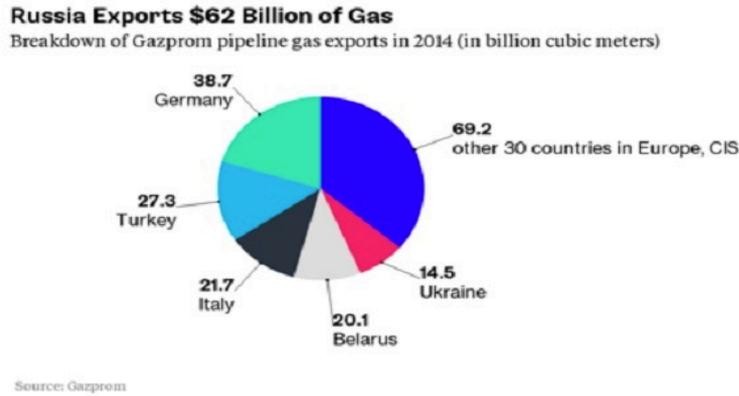
The second important project was Blue Stream (*Mavi Akım*). Within the scope of the 25-year Natural Gas Purchase-Sale Agreement signed between BOTAŞ and Gazexport on December 15, 1997, natural gas is transported from the Russian Federation through a transit line under the Black Sea to Turkey. According to the agreement, 16 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year is supplied to Turkey (*Republic of Turkey Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources*). The pipeline was taken into operation on February 20, 2003 and the official opening ceremony was held on November 17, 2005.



**Map I:** Natural gas pipelines and projects passing from *Turkey*

(*Republic of Turkey Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources*)

The TurkStream (*Türk Akımı*) project is the last important energy project agreed between Moscow and Ankara. The project consists of a new gas pipeline system with a maximum capacity of 31.5 billion m<sup>3</sup> per annum for two lines, each having 15.75 billion m<sup>3</sup> per annum, which run from Russian Federation through Black Sea to the receiving terminal on the Black Sea coast of our country and further across the territory of Turkey up to the borders with its neighboring states (*Republic of Turkey Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources*). The project was initiated with a state protocol on October 10, 2016 with the presence of two countries' Presidents and is expected to be in operation at the end of 2019. The TurkStream project includes Greece, Albania, and Italy as well.



**Graphic I:** Russian gas exports by 2014 according to Gazprom (*Global Research*, 2015)

While these projects strengthen bilateral ties and force two countries to work on their political problems by overriding their historical enmities, Turkey's heavy dependence on Russian energy especially in the field of natural gas is often criticized in Turkey and in the Western countries. According to official 2017 statistics, Turkey imports 53 % of its total natural gas from Russian Federation (Kakışım, 2019, p. 76).<sup>5</sup> This can be considered as a political fragility against Russia since Moscow used natural gas as a diplomatic weapon against Ukraine many times (in 2006, in 2009, and most recently in 2014) in the recent past. Looking from a positive perspective on the other hand, since Turkey is Russia's second biggest gas market after Germany, the energy-based cooperation of two countries can be categorized as "mutual dependency" (Kakışım, 2019, p. 86).

**S-400 deal and military cooperation:** Turkey decided to buy its first ever air missile defense system from Russia albeit heavy criticism coming from Washington. This is of historical importance since first time a NATO member country bought Russian made S-400 system although Russian made S-300 systems are already implanted in many NATO countries including Greece, Bulgaria, and Slovakia (RT, 2019). The delivery of the system started in July 2019. Although technically S-400 system is a perfect choice, due to Turkey's NATO membership, there are political risks. Many military experts claim that Turkey might not even integrate this system into its general defense architecture due to its NATO ties. Moreover, Turkey was excluded from the F-35 stealth jet program after S-400 deliveries from Russia (*The Defense Post*, 2019).

Turkish-Russian military cooperation in recent years is not limited to S-400 deal. It should not be forgotten that, in the early 2000s, Turkish General Tuncer Kılınç (then-Secretary of the National Security Council) even advocated a radical shift from the classical Cold War foreign policy paradigm and offered a new Eurasian vision for Turkey, which proposes an alliance with Russia and Iran instead of Western countries (Baytok, 2002). Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces of both countries paid visits reciprocally in 2002 followed by several visits of high ranking Commanders. Moreover, Russian Armed Forces and Turkish Armed Forces already conducted a joint naval operation in December 2006 (Operation Black Sea Harmony) (*Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs/b*). Although Turkey politically did not approve Russian interventions in Georgia (2008) and in Ukraine (2014), due to its own problems with Washington related to Kurdish Question and Israel-Palestine conflict, Ankara did not position itself in the anti-Russia camp and kept its military ties with Moscow since then. Moreover, after the cancellation of F-35 program, Turkey might decide to buy its new generation jets from Russia instead of United States. Rostec President Sergei Chemezov already offered Turkey to buy Russian made SU-35 jets after the crisis between Washington and Ankara (*Takvim*, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Telli (2017, p. 163) claims that Turkey's natural gas dependence on Russia is around 52 %, while Derman (2018/a, p. 159) claims that it is around 60%. Köstem (2018, p. 13) on the other hand asserts that it is around 55%.

**Tourism:** The positive effect of tourism in bilateral relations became apparent right after the Cold War. The first step was the emergence of “suitcase trading”. The next step was the discovery of Turkey’s Mediterranean shores by Russian tourists. Turkey’s former ambassador to Moscow Nabi Şensoy claimed that, tourism not only positively affects Turkish economy, but also offers a chance to improve social relations between two nations (Yılmaz & Yakşı, 2016, p. 34). According to official statistics provided by Turkey (*Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs/c*), in 2014, a total of 4.5 million Russian tourists visited Turkey. Due to “jet crisis” and “Karlov assassination” this number decreased in 2015 and 2016; but in 2017 it rose to 4.7 million. In 2018, the number of Russian tourists visiting Turkey reached almost 6 million (5.96 million), which constituted 15.1 % of total visitors coming to Turkey (*Daily Sabah*, 2019). Turkish city Antalya (especially Kemer region) has become the center of Turkish-Russian touristic ties and is now called as “little Moscow” by many (Uzun, 2018).

**Construction sector:** According to statistics provided by *BBC* (2010-2013 period), for Turkish construction companies, Russia is the second biggest market after Turkmenistan (Şenerdem, 2015). The cooperation between Moscow and Ankara in the construction industry started with ENKA’s restoration of Petrovsky Passage in Red Square in 1988 and increased regularly until the turbulent period of 2015 and 2016. According to Turkish-Russian Businessmen Association, at its peak in 2013, the volume of economic activities of Turkish construction companies in Russia reached 5.8 billion US dollars (Rus Türk İşadamları Birliği, 2019, p. 9). After the huge shrinking in 2016 and 2017, a growth started once again in 2018 and trade volume in the construction industry reached 3.9 billion US dollars in 2018 (Rus Türk İşadamları Birliği, 2019, p. 9).

**Turkish-Russian families:** The number of Turkish-Russian families is constantly rising in recent years. According to estimations, there are now almost 105,000 Russian brides who married Turkish men (Karakuş, 2017). Moreover, the number of Turkish citizens living in Russian capital (Moscow) is now around 40,000 (Karakuş, 2017). Russia looks at intermarriages from a strategic point of view since the Cold War. According to many analysts, “intermarriages” was a key factor in Russian help to Bashar Assad regime in Syria as well (*Milliyet*, 2012). Turkey’s former Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu also said in 2012 that “Russian brides” is a positive development for Turkish-Russian relations (*Hürriyet*, 2012).

#### IV. Problematic Issues

**Russian annexation of Crimea:** As stated earlier, two countries defended opposing sides after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. Turkey defends the territorial integrity of Ukraine and the rights of Crimean Tatars, whereas Russia claims that NATO expansion should be stopped and Ukraine should not be a member of NATO and European Union. Turkish position in Ukraine is caused by international law as well as recent weapon sales to Ukraine (*Sputnik Türkiye*, 2017). In Russian perspective on the other hand, Ukraine is part of “*Russkiy mir*” (Russian world) and it should never be allowed to be a part of the Western bloc. In official Russian National Security documents, NATO’s eastern enlargement is stressed as one of the most important geopolitical risks (Akdeniz, 2018, p. 250). Accordingly, Russian interventions in 2008 (Georgia) and in 2014 (Ukraine) aimed at punishing pro-American and pro-NATO forces in Moscow’s “near abroad”. However, Turkey is a member of NATO and it does not have any opposition against NATO’s further enlargement unless it causes a major regional crisis. Furthermore, Ukraine has become a new market for the Turkish defense industry in recent years. Thus, two countries’ divergent positions in Ukraine are not caused only by their different approach to international law, but also from conflicting national interests. However, it should be noted that Ukraine Crisis is not the most vital issue for Turkish-Russian relations. Against expectations of

the Western countries, Turkey's refusal to bandwagon with Western powers to implement economic sanctions towards Russia is a clear proof of this (Önsoy, 2014, pp. 251-252).

**Syrian crisis:** The most serious challenge to Turkish-Russian relations is caused by the ongoing Syrian civil war since 2011. While Turkey supported the Sunni opposition and rebel forces during the civil war -together with the Western countries-, Russia strongly supported Bashar al Assad government and actively engaged in Syria by a military intervention in 2015. Russian support to Ba'ath regime is originated from the Cold War cooperation between Moscow and Damascus and it has intensified after the Cold War due to new military agreements between two countries and Syrian government's purchases of Russian arms. According to estimations, Russia alone provides 44 % of Syria's arsenal (Kelkitli, 2017, p. 92). Moscow has a military naval base in Tartus and a listening facility in Latakia (Kelkitli, 2017, p. 92). Thus, Russia does not want to allow the replacement of Assad regime with a moderate or radical Islamist regime that might be closer to Turkey and the United States and harm Russian interests in Syria. Turkey on the other hand normalized its relations with the Syrian regime with the Adana Protocol in 1998 and developed its economic and political relations with Damascus until 2011; but due to severe human rights violations (chemical attacks towards civilians) made by the Syrian Army and the inability of the regime to control its territories, together with Western powers, Ankara decided to support rebel forces during the Arab Spring. However, both Moscow and Ankara have been working together in the last few years in order to find a solution to Syrian Crisis since the United States decided to remove its troops from Syria and two countries are part of Astana and Geneva processes. Although two countries' national interests' are not same in Syria; they can still work together to keep Syrian territorial integrity and prevent terrorist movements such as ISIS and Al Qaeda-affiliated groups. However, here Moscow's approach to Kurdish groups PYD/YPG is different and more tolerant (Russia does not consider PYD/YPG as terrorist groups) compared to Ankara, which aims to eradicate these PKK-affiliated groups. Although Syrian Crisis has been the most important problem in Turkish-Russian relations, this could turn into an area of cooperation between two countries due to American removal and a general consensus in both countries about Syria's territorial integrity.

**Nagorno Karabakh dispute:** One of the most important issues that spoils positive attitude towards Moscow in Turkey is the Nagorno Karabakh Dispute. While Turkey supports the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan -a friendly country that Turkish people support most according to a research conducted by Kadir Has University in 2019 (Kadir Has University Center for Turkish Studies, 2019)- in accordance with the international law and United Nations resolutions, Russia has been supporting separatist movement in Nagorno Karabakh with the fear of energy-rich Azerbaijan might distance itself from Moscow and get closer with Western powers in the future (Kelkitli, 2017, p. 39). Russia also continuously supplies arms to Yerevan (*The Moscow Times*, 2018). For Moscow, Nagorno Karabakh Dispute is a key issue for preventing Azerbaijan to get closer with Turkey and NATO as in the case of Ukraine. According to Kelkitli, Armenia on the other hand is under the control of Russia both in military and economic terms (Kelkitli, 2017, p. 40). Kelkitli also asserts that it is not only ethnic and religious ties, but also Azerbaijan's rich energy resources that direct Turkey to pursue a pro-Azerbaijani foreign policy in the South Caucasus (Kelkitli, 2017, p. 41). Turkey and Azerbaijan successfully completed energy projects recently including Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline and Trans Anatolian pipeline (TANAP). Moreover, Turkey is an important supplier of arms to Azerbaijan. As Kasapoğlu (2017) underlines, the defense cooperation between Ankara and Baku is now considered as "military partnership" and "strategic partnership" due to new agreements made. Thus, Turkish and Russian positions are irreconcilable in terms of Nagorno Karabakh Dispute and it is not only caused of ethnic or religious ties between Baku and Ankara or Yerevan and Moscow, but rather of conflicting national interests. So, it would not be wrong to conclude that Nagorno Karabakh

Dispute will be the most important challenge to Turkish-Russian relations and will decrease support for Russia in Turkey in the future unless Russia changes its pro-Armenian stance.

**Turkey's NATO membership and Western orientation:** Although Turkey has serious problems with the United States and some other NATO members in recent years<sup>6</sup>, so far none of the Turkish governments seriously proposed an exit from NATO. NATO provides a security guarantee to Ankara against nuclear Russia thanks to its "article 5", which provides "collective defense" understanding and "spirit of solidarity". According to Hüseyin Bağcı, Turkey's exit from NATO is "technically impossible" (K24, 2019). On the other hand, Alexandr Dugin, a well-known Eurasianist thinker and an advisor to President Putin, claims that Turkey is ready for leaving NATO and President Erdoğan openly said this to him (*Independent Türkçe*, 2019). Although without NATO membership Turkey will be open to new Russian threats, losing Turkey, who is positioned in a strategic geography between three continents -Europe, Middle East (Asia) and North Africa- is a major risk for NATO as well. Retired US Navy admiral James Stavridis (2019) for instance claims that although the purchase of a Russian missile defense by Turkey is a severe blow to the alliance, kicking Turkey out of NATO would be a big mistake and a gift to Putin. Bayraktar (2019) on the other hand thinks that, unlike the Cold War days, Russia now wants Turkey to stay in NATO in order to deepen splits and cleavages within the alliance.

**PKK controversy:** Kurdish secessionist PKK was established in the late 1970s and began its terrorist activities in 1984 as a Marxist-Leninist and Kurdish nationalist organization (Tol, 2017). During the Cold War, USSR actively supported pro-Kurdish movements including PKK. Soviet ally Syria also provided a comfortable ground for PKK terrorists during the time of Hafez al Assad. After the end of Cold War, Russian support to PKK did not end. According to Tol (2017), throughout the 1990s, Russia entertained the possibility of establishing a Kurdish parliament-in-exile in Moscow and in 1995 and 1996 held several international conferences featuring organizations close the PKK. During these years, Turkish media even circulated reports that the PKK set up a camp in Moscow where the militants were receiving military training (Tol, 2017). It should not be forgotten that, imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan was in Russia after he deported from Syria and before he moved to Italy and Kenya in 1998 (Bayraktar, 2019). As a response to Russia's pro-Kurdish policy, during the 1990s, Turkey actively supported Chechen groups. When Turkey decided not to support Chechen groups, Russia's support for pro-Kurdish terrorist groups also became a less-spoken issue. However, Moscow never designated PKK or PKK-affiliated PYD/YPG as terrorist groups until now (*World Bulletin*, 2017). Russia even allowed the opening of an office of Syrian Kurdish groups whom Turkey labels as terrorists in Moscow in 2016 (Sharkov, 2016). According to Bayraktar (2019), Moscow aims to use Kurdish card as leverage against Ankara especially in Syria. That is why; Tol questions why Ankara is so silent against Moscow although it constantly criticizes Washington for supporting PYD/YPG groups in Syria (Tol, 2017). Thus, together with the Nagorno Karabakh Dispute, PKK controversy and Russian support for pro-Kurdish movements will be the most important problem in Turkish-Russian relations in the future.

**Jet crisis and Karlov assassination:** As a result of ongoing disagreements over Syria, on November 24, 2015, a Turkish F-16 jet shot down a Russian SU24 near the Syrian-Turkish border (Coşkun, 2019, p. 36). Turkish officials stated that the jet was shot down as a result of its violation of Turkish airspace for 17 seconds despite warnings, while Moscow insisted that the plane remained within the Syrian airspace (Coşkun, 2019, p. 41). Russian President Putin accused Turkish government for the shooting

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<sup>6</sup> Con Coughlin for instance wrote that S-400 deal was a final blow and Turkey should be kicked out of NATO (Coughlin, 2019). Max Hoffman from Center for American Progress also claims that Turkey's credibility within the NATO is shaken after the S-400 deal (*Amerika'nın Sesi*, 2019).

down of their plane (Coşkun, 2019, p. 42). Russia began to cancel deals and implement sanctions to Turkey following this event (Reuters, 2015). In November 2015, Russian government announced a package of economic sanctions on Turkey including the abolishment of the visa-free regime which had been in effect since 2011, restrictions on Turkish investments and labor in Russia, restrictions on Turkish goods exported to the Russian market, and the abolishment of charter flights to Turkey. However, upon the letter written by Turkish President Erdoğan to Vladimir Putin and expressing Turkish apology for the “jet crisis” in 2016 (CNNTürk, 2016), economic sanctions started to be gradually lifted by Moscow and bilateral relation began to normalize. Relations continued to improve after the failed coup attempt in July 15, 2016. Russian President Putin was the first leader to support the civilian government against the coup attempt and this was welcomed by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and Turkish President Erdoğan (Coşkun, 2019, p. 43).

On December 19, 2016, another shocking event took place in Ankara. Russian ambassador to Turkey, Mr. Andrey Karlov was shot dead in Ankara by a young Turkish police officer. The assassination was largely seen by the Turkish public as an effort to sabotage Turkish-Russian rapprochement following the “jet crisis”. Moreover, Turkish State and especially Turkish police agency were intimidated by not being able to protect a foreign diplomat. Thus, interestingly, the event accelerated Turkish-Russian rapprochement. Turkish officials immediately blamed FETÖ, an Islamic group who had supported the AK Parti government between 2002 and 2012. The assassination was perceived on both sides as an effort to sabotage Turkish-Russian relations and encouraged Moscow and Ankara to develop their relations (The Moscow Times, 2016). Eventually, all sanctions except the visa-free regime imposed after the “jet crisis” removed by Moscow.

## V. Could Economic Partnership Turn into Strategic Partnership?

### *The nature of Turkish-Russian economic partnership from a realist perspective*

Realism is the oldest and most important school of thought in International Relations. It basically suggests that: (1) states are the principal actors in diplomacy, (2) states are unitary actors, (3) states are rational actors, and (4) national security is the most important issue in foreign policy (Viotti & Kauppi, pp. 6-7, 55). In addition, Realism relies upon three key concepts: (1) Groupism (Humans face one another mainly as members of groups. To survive at anything above subsistence level, people need the cohesion provided by group solidarity, yet that very same in-group cohesion generates the potential for conflict with other groups), (2) Egoism (Political actions are driven by self-interests and egoism is rooted in human nature), and (3) Power-centrism (Power is the key feature of politics and it is associated mostly with physical-military power and control over resources) (Smith & Hadfield & Dunne, pp. 36-37).

In economic relations, Realists consider “trade deficit”, “self-sufficiency” and “political autonomy” as key concepts. Accordingly, looking from a statist, unitary, rational, and national security-oriented perspective, Realists do not consider economic interdependence necessarily as a good thing. Realists suggest that in a power-based anarchic world, economic interdependence would favor the dominant party and would increase the vulnerability of the weaker side. To reduce vulnerability upon other states, Realists suggest it is better for a state to be independent (self-sufficient) or -at least- to minimize dependency on other states (Viotti & Kauppi, 2013, pp. 76-77). By criticizing Realists, Liberals on the other hand argue that economic integration and interdependence will decrease chances of political conflicts since states at one point recognize that they could not jeopardize their economic benefits (Smith & Hadfield & Dunne, 2011, p. 220). However, in Liberal approach, economic interdependence is presumed to be a two-way street and the effects of economic interdependence

strongly favoring one side is not mentioned. Thus, Liberal approach does not contradict with Realism if the economic interdependence creates necessities only for one side.

Applying Realist principles to Turkish-Russian relations formulated during the AK Parti period (2002-), it would not be wrong to claim that Turkey's energy dependency and trade deficit to Russia as well as strategic advantages of Moscow (more developed military capabilities, possession of nuclear weapons, huge geography, rich energy resources, and self-sufficient economy) should be a great concern for Ankara for the future. Especially energy dependency and almost 17 billion US dollars trade deficit against Moscow should be assessed from a strategic perspective. As stated by Köstem (2018, pp. 12-13), although developing economic relations in recent years create mutual interdependence, which makes the break-up of relations costly for both sides, Russia clearly has a comparative advantage against Turkey due to "asymmetric interdependence" caused by the nature of bilateral trade in two countries. That is because Turkish exports to Russia are less critical and more replaceable, whereas almost Russian exports and investments (natural gas, oil, nuclear plant etc.) are strategic in nature (Köstem, 2018, p. 12). To say it more openly, Russia does have the luxury to live comfortably without Turkish exports, while Turkish governments could not afford to oppose Russia from now on unless they replace Russian gas imports.

1973-1974 OPEC oil crisis is a perfect example for a Realist that should alarm Ankara in reducing its over 50 % dependency on Russia in terms of natural gas. First of all, in case there is volatility in the natural gas market, Turkish economy could be devastated and the stability of government could be at risk since the economy and the heating of ordinary people depend heavily on gas imports. Secondly, in case of a political crisis with Moscow, it would be impossible for Ankara to replace more than half of its needs from other suppliers in the short or even in the medium-run. Although Moscow did not use gas exports as a weapon against Ankara after the "jet crisis", Russian foreign policy towards Ukraine in the recent past proves that Moscow can use natural gas as a diplomatic leverage. Thus, looking from a Realist perspective, Turkish-Russian relations in the last decades strongly favor Moscow and put Ankara into great risk. Here, a counter argument could be Russia's efforts to establish Turkey's first nuclear plant and allow technology transfer in the field of nuclear energy. Thus, in the long run, Turkey might use nuclear energy by establishing its own nuclear plants in order to decrease the level of dependency on Russian and Iranian natural gas.

### *Strategic partnership?*

Strategic partnership or strategic alliance is a concept that is used in International Relations theory both by Realists and Liberals. Strategic alliance is based on the cooperation between the subjects that share the same goals (Czechowska, 2013, p. 42). The concept was first used systematically in the field by the Realist thinker George Liska in his book *Nations in Alliance: The Limits of the Interdependence* (1962). Liska further improved his theories with *Imperial America* (1967), and *Career of Empire* (1978) books (Kratochvil, 2007, p. 101). Liska's basic principles (1962) for a strategic alliance are (Kireyev, 2004, pp. 4-5):

1. Weaker states align themselves with core powers for the sake of protecting themselves from a potential adversary, achieving status, and stability.
2. Defensive alliance formation (e.g. NATO) is often rationalized through the function of common ideology.
3. The efficacy of alliances lies in their capability to always deter the common threat.
4. Key reasons for alliance dissolution lie in unequal distribution of costs and benefits (gains and responsibilities), as well as the disappearance of the common threat.

The key element in strategic alliance is the maintenance of institutional flexibility and long-term close relation between partners. Realists underline that it is not institutional framework, but rather a troubling issue (e.g. common threats to security) that lays the foundation of a strategic partnership (Kireyev, 2004, pp. 4-5). In other words, states will only engage in strategic partnership relationship in case they are convinced that they will reach their national interests best by engaging in alliance. Motives for states in engaging strategic partnership are also different. As Dwivedi (2012, p. 224) notes, small or weak states enter into alliance when they need protection against strong states, whereas strong states enter into alliances to counter other strong states in order to maintain balance of power. Accordingly, when small states group together against a strong state together with another strong state, it is called “bandwagoning”, whereas when strong states enter into alliances to counter other strong states, it is called “external balancing” or “balancing” (Dwivedi, 2012, p. 226).

If we apply basic views of Realism and George Liska into Turkish-Russian relations, strategic partnership in the near future seems unrealistic. First of all, Turkey is a NATO member and has close ties with the Western world. Due to NATO’s collective security understanding, Turkey is sided with the Western powers against Russia in many disputes such as the Ukraine Crisis. Moreover, in many security issues (e.g. PKK controversy), Russia’s position is still harsher compared to Turkey’s Western allies. Thus, only if threats caused by the West would be more dangerous for Ankara and Turkey would be out of NATO, we can talk about a real strategic partnership between Moscow and Ankara.

Secondly, Moscow and Ankara do not share a common ideology that will boost their motivation for a strategic partnership. Turkey aims to become a part of the Western world and a member of the European Union, whereas Russia wants to reclaim its power in Eurasia through a strongman regime (Putinism). In addition, on many issues (NATO enlargement, Nagorno Karabakh Dispute, Syrian Crisis), Moscow and Ankara have different goals unlike Turkish-American strategic partnership in the Cold War during which two countries defended similar values. Turkey supports NATO’s enlargement and opposes to Moscow’s policies that violate international law. However, due to its own problems with the United States as well as its need for Russian help in the solution of Syrian Crisis, Turkey has been acting less critical towards Russia in recent years.

Thirdly, common threat perception is missing in Turkish-Russian relations; while Moscow identifies Western powers and NATO enlargement as main threat to Russian national security, Turkey puts Kurdish secessionist terrorist movements on the top of the list. Moreover, Turkey’s close partners in the region such as Azerbaijan and Georgia are critical of Russian foreign policy; but they could not dare to bandwagon with the US and NATO due to Russia’s leverages (in the case of Georgia it is Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in the case of Azerbaijan it is Nagorno Karabakh). To put it shortly, Turkey does not have an adversary like Stalin’s Russia in the 1950s, which would force itself to be sided with Russia.

Fourthly, Turkey’s growing energy dependency and trade deficit against Russia might become a national security concern in the near future. Since the key issue for alliance dissolution lies in unequal distribution of costs and benefits, Turkey might be willing to reconsider its comparative disadvantage in relations with Russia. Moreover, Turkish-Russian rapprochement is a relatively new phenomenon and building confidence-based strategic partnership requires a long term dialogue and relationship. Thus, Moscow and Ankara have to develop their relations and solve their problems in order to become strategic partners.

For all these reasons, Turkish-Russian economic partnership will not necessarily lead to strategic partnership unless a fundamental change would take place and create a common threat perception and force two countries to align. However, this should not mean that two countries will give up from the

benefits of economic partnership. Rather, Turkey will be more skeptical about economic relations with Russia and will try to diversify its economy in order to decrease dependency (especially in the field of energy) on Moscow. It should be also added that, if the current balance in Turkish-Russian relations continue, bilateral relations might gradually become similar to relations between Ukraine and Russia; which means either Russia will be the dominant partner and will dictate its own will or there will be constant crises that will negatively affect Turkey's political and economic stability.

## Conclusion

This article aimed to analyze Turkish-Russian relations from a Realist perspective and to question whether developing economic relations could eventually turn into strategic partnership. The article tried to prove that the nature of Turkish-Russian economic partnership model established during the AK Parti favors Russia and makes Turkey dependent on Russia. This is caused by Turkey's heavy dependency on Russian natural gas, Ankara's large trade deficit against Moscow as well as Russia's strategic investments in Turkey. In addition, the article tried to make it concrete that, Turkey's relationship with Russia could not turn into a strategic partnership unless a major change takes place.

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