

Pragmatism in the Current Russian-Turkish Relations - Yulia S. Kudryashova

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Abstract

This paper argues that the instability in the Middle East has become a source of tension in relations between Russia and Turkey, despite the existence of joint political and economic projects. The purpose of the article is to identify opportunities for deepening the partnership between Russia and Turkey in a situation where there are significant regional contradictions between them. It provides an overview of the most relevant vectors of partnership between Russia and Turkey, such as joint settlement of conflicts in the Middle East, military,

energy and economic cooperation, and concludes that the pragmatic Russian-Turkish partnership is characterized by a lack of working institutions.

Keywords: Turkey, Syrian War, Kurdish Problem, the Middle East, Turkish Stream.

Introduction

The problems of cooperation between Russia and Turkey do not lose their relevance, and the purpose of this article is to identify opportunities for achieving a strategic partnership between them in a situation where there are significant regional contradictions. This study delves into the factors that contribute to the ensuring of a stable and long-term Russian-Turkish partnership and the level of rationality of active cooperation between Russia and Turkey which can create conditions for minimizing the conflicts in the Black Sea and Middle East regions.

While Russian authors note that the partnership established between Russia and Turkey is not perfect (Zvyagelskaya 2018), the Western authors highlight the Syrian issue, the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, agreements on oil and natural gas, relations with the Kurds as key issues of Moscow's fairly friendly relations with Ankara (Garcia 2018). While Turkey pursues a neo-Ottomanist foreign policy in the Middle East, especially in Syria (Hoffmann 2019), and Russia, as argued by Middle Eastern researchers, acts as its political and economic rival (Mansour-Ichrakieh & Zeaiter 2019). The main foreign policy task of Russia remains to help Turkey and Syria to establish more friendly relations according to Güner and Koç (2018) as the rapid rapprochement between Russia and Turkey in the Syrian conflict began due to the shift of the Turkish priority from the change of the Assad regime to the prevention of the creation of Kurdish autonomy and the threat of separatism (Rüma & Çelikpala 2019). With the changing conditions in the international system, accompanied by the belief of the Turkish elite that the West does not protect the interests of Turkey, and against the background of the relative improvement in relations with Russia, the Eurasian direction becomes more pro-Russian and even anti-Western component (Yanık 2019; Öniş 2019).

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of academic studies aimed at studying the role of Turkey in the energy geopolitics of Eurasia, especially in light of the increased competition between the EU and Russia for gas

pipeline projects (Erşen & Çelikpala, 2019). Russian-Turkish energy projects are studied from the point of view of economic and legal aspects, as well as their institutional structure (Dastan 2018; Khalova 2019). At the same time, conflicting geopolitical interests make it difficult to develop economic cooperation and cultural exchange (Balta 2019). A long-term alliance between Russia and Turkey depends on smoothing out their differences, which are deeply rooted in historical and geopolitical factors (Đidić & Kösebalaban 2019).

Complementing the existing research, this paper examines political, military, economic, and energy sectors, which are the main vectors of Russian-Turkish relations: The main dilemma of Russian-Turkish relations is the achievement of a strategic partnership in a situation of significant regional differences. As Ankara's reaction to the events in Crimea and the crisis over the downed Russian SU-24 has shown, the national interests of Russia and Turkey often diverge. This is especially true of the conflicts in the Black Sea region, the Caucasus and the Middle East. Further conclusions of this study will point to the expectation that instability will persist in Russian-Turkish relations due to the expected continuation of Russian activism in the Middle East which will impede Turkey's ambitions to become a regional leadership.

Points of Political Interaction

Bilateral relations between Moscow and Ankara have been tested by the Syrian crisis and Turkey's military actions in Syria, where Russia opposes Turkey's occupation of Northern Syria. The road to understanding each other's positions and finding a compromise has proved to be lengthy and difficult. In 2016, the process of normalization of relations after the "jet crisis" began, and an intensive political dialogue was established again. Russia and Turkey have become integral participants in the process of political settlement and post-conflict reconstruction in Syria. Second aspect of bilateral political relations is linked with the Black Sea-Cooperation.

Syria Conundrum

The Astana Strategic Dialogue, created as a diplomatic tool for solving political problems in Syria, aimed essentially to focus on the recent restructuring of the Middle East with the dramatically increasing interventionism of regional powers namely, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel) with a variety of interests and

goals. The regional powers have been ready to use political as well as military tools to implement the regional goals. The United Nations (UN) framework set the guidelines for Astana. With the help of Iran and Turkey talks are designed to address issues such as reducing the intensity and scale of hostilities, alleviating the humanitarian disaster, returning refugees to Syria, establishing a ceasefire, creating de-escalation zones, and launching a peace process (Zvyagelskaya 2018: 127).

Turkey has become a leading power broker in the Astana process. She effectively formed an alliance with Russia and Iran, despite their rival positions in the Syrian civil war. This cooperation gave NATO and allies a reason to talk about the Eurasian shift in Turkey's foreign policy (Hoffmann 2019: 303). Furthermore, the Astana platform allowed Russia and Turkey to neutralize their conflict of interests related with the Syrian question. Two regional power opted for flexibly coordinating their security policies in the region to avoid new tensions in relations.

For Turkey, the de facto territorial separation of Syria and the prospect of an independent Kurdish autonomy is a key impasse in the Syrian conflict. Therefore, the Russian-Turkish agreement on the territorial integrity of Syria has significantly strengthened friendly relations between Russia and Turkey. In order to ensure the security of the Turkish-Syrian border, the "Euphrates Shield" and "Olive Branch" cross-border military operations against ISIL and PKK/YPG were conducted by Turkey in the North-East of Syria in the context of a constant dialogue between Ankara and Moscow. The withdrawal of Russian troops from the Afrin region before the start of the Operation Olive Branch was interpreted by the Turkish side as a friendly step in the sense that Russia allowed Turkey to prevent the Kurds from establishing an autonomy in Syria through military actions (Güner & Koç 2018: 94).

Despite Russo-Turkish cooperation in the resolution of the Syrian crisis, both states continued to hold different official positions concerning the future of the Kurds in Syria. Ankara considers the PYD/YPG associated with the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) and does not allow them to participate in intra-Syrian negotiations. Turkey continues to consider the Syrian opposition as the only legitimate representative of Syria and supports anti-government associations, while Russia supports the government of Bashar al-Assad. On the other hand, Russia believes it is necessary to involve all influential players, including Kurdish

representatives, in the negotiations.

Besides the sharp policy divergences at the state-level in the USA and Turkey, the growing anti-American sentiments in public opinion has urged the Turkish government to look for alternative partnerships in the settlement of Syrian war. Despite the fact that Moscow has been providing a political support to the Assad government, which has laid foundations of stagnation in Russian-Turkish relations, complete divergence in Turkish-American foreign policy interests in Syria made Russia a more reasonable alternative partner to Ankara.

Cooperation with Russia on the basis of the Astana platform made it possible to prevent Turkey's isolation in the region by involving also Iran in the Syrian peace process. Tehran is a natural ally of Turkey on the Kurdish issue (due to shared interests over the Kurdish issue in the wider region). As a result, Turkey's regional rivals, Iran and Russia, despite their key role in preserving the Assad government, have become Ankara's new allies against the US-led coalition in Syria, though the Erdoğan government continues to periodically express its dissatisfaction with the Syrian regime (Rüma & Çelikpala 2019: 80).

In October 2019, Turkish Air Forces, despite the condemnation of the international community, launched the "Peace Spring" operation against the Kurdish formations in the North-East Syria. During the operation, Ankara negotiated with Moscow at the military and diplomatic levels as Turkey needed political cooperation with Moscow to avoid international isolation. Russia was sympathetic to Turkey's national security concerns and that fighting Kurdish separatism is a national security priority of Turkey. Nevertheless, Russia opposed the presence of foreign troops in Syria and insisted on compliance with key international norms that underpin the restoration of peace. Unlike Ankara, Moscow considers the Syrian President Assad as legitimate and could not support the offensive without the sanction of Damascus.

In the face of the extreme deterioration of relations with the U.S., Turkey was forced to coordinate its actions with Russia. The statement of the former US President Trump about readiness to wage war against Turkey during the Peace Springs Operation pushed the Turkish authorities to reconcile with Russia. Turkey, which did not succumb to Washington's blackmail, turned even more towards Russia, agreeing to a compromise with Moscow despite pressure from the U.S.

The adoption of the Memorandum of Understanding between Turkey and Russia on Northern Syria by Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Erdoğan on October 22, 2019 was a significant success for Russian diplomacy and an important indicator of a rapprochement between Turkey and Russia. As agreed upon in the memorandum: Russia and Turkey would pledge to jointly fight against terrorism and any manifestations of separatism in the region; to ensure the territorial integrity of Syria and to implement joint patrols in Northern Syria. What is more, Russia would thus act as a real de facto partner for Turkey in the Middle East more reliable and open for cooperation than the NATO allies. By creating conditions for the cessation of the military operation and the withdrawal of Turkish troops from Syria, Russia allowed Turkey to avoid international isolation and maintain its political authority. At the same time, Russia has demonstrated that it will not allow the Kurds to be removed as one of the players from the Syrian arena.

Following the clashes between the Turkish and Syrian armies in Idlib, which led to the death of dozens of Turkish soldiers, on March 5, 2020, President Putin and President Erdoğan signed another agreement in Moscow to create a six-kilometers security corridor across the north and south of the M4 highway, which crosses Idlib in the middle connecting Latakia with Aleppo. Also, joint Russian-Turkish patrols were foreseen to open the highway to traffic and to ensure its safety. The highway is largely controlled by radical jihadist groups, primarily the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). According to the above-mentioned agreement, the Turkish side pledged to take measures in the near future to neutralize radical extremist groups that hinder the movement of convoys of the joint patrol of the M4 highway in the security corridor. They would have two options regarding Idlib question: to ensure the withdrawal and disarmament of the jihadist groups, as they pledged in the Moscow agreement, or to move together with these groups towards a new conflict with the Syrian army and Russia.

Although strategic Russian-Turkish partnership cannot yet be built, both countries cannot allow relations to break and are forced to develop cooperation. In the short term, Russian-Turkish relations will be strongly influenced by the course of negotiations on the Syrian conflict. Syrian settlement will be difficult to achieve without Turkey's participation, but Ankara lacks a clear, consistent position on the future of Syria. It is in the interests of both countries to make joint efforts to overcome the humanitarian crisis and restore the socio-economic

infrastructure of Syria. Russia and Turkey already have experience in humanitarian cooperation in Syria within the framework of de-escalation zones and have the opportunity to develop cooperation both with each other and with international organizations to provide assistance to those in need. The experience of de-escalation zones can also be used to create humanitarian zones designed to provide assistance to the population. Using the accumulated experience and relying on common tactical and strategic interests, at least in the medium term, Russia and Turkey can significantly increase the effectiveness of the fight against terrorism both on a bilateral basis and with the involvement of other countries in the region, including Iran and Iraq.

Cooperation in the Black Sea

Russia and Turkey also have extensive interests in the Black Sea region, ranging from economic and energy cooperation to security and cultural cooperation, although partnership in the region is complicated by Turkey's political, military-technical and economic cooperation with Ukraine, and Ankara's criticism of the situation of the Crimean Tatars. Ankara is also strengthening its strategic ties with Georgia and supporting Tbilisi's rapprochement with NATO. The current situation is complicated by unresolved ethnic and separatist conflicts in Donbas, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria. The Russian-Turkish differences over Crimea and Nagorno-Karabakh are particularly far from being resolved. Thus, Russian-Turkish cooperation in the Black Sea region is determined by common foreign policy priorities, and not by a common approach to regional problems. Joint ways should be sought to overcome the alienation created by regional conflicts.

The most institutionalized structure in the region is the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). The problem with the organization is that it actually exists only in a declared form. But it can become a platform for joint investment and trade in the region, as well as liberalization of the visa regime for business trips. On the basis of the BSEC, Russia and Turkey can deepen regional economic cooperation in such areas as tourism, energy, transport, agriculture, banking and financial sectors. It is also possible to implement transnational projects such as the Black Sea Ring Highway.

For Turkey, the visa problem remains acute. In February 2019, the visa regime for entering Russia was abolished for certain categories of Turkish citizens. Visa-

free entry to Russia is possible only for professional drivers engaged in international road transport, and in the case of short-term business trips of holders of official passports, which hinders the development of bilateral economic ties.

The changes in the international arena are accompanied by the growing belief of the Turkish political elite that the West does not protect Turkey's interests. In addition, against the background of the relative improvement in relations with Russia, the Eurasian direction of Turkish foreign policy forms not only a pro-Russian, but also an anti-Western position. However, the question arises about the seriousness of this direction, whether it is not a threat of Turkey to the West by "turning to the East". Given the deterioration of Turkey's relations with neighboring countries of the Middle East, the Eurasian vector becomes an alternative to the West, and not an attack against the West (Yanık 2019: 49-50).

Development of Military Cooperation

The second aspect of Turkish-Russian cooperation relates to an eventually increasing collaboration in military sector. Political disagreements between Russia and Turkey regarding the war in Syria and the Ukrainian conflict do not significantly affect economic cooperation. Moreover, the rapprochement of the two countries in the military sphere has begun. The Turkish government signed a 2.5 billion USD agreement to purchase four battalions of the S-400 Triumph missile system from *Rosoboronexport* as a part of national policy to create national missile defense system (Kibaroglu 2019:159-160). The S-400 deal between Russia and Turkey has sparked a fierce debate in the international arena. Turkey's growing rapprochement with Russia has caused serious source of criticism in the U.S. and at the NATO and thus would tense the relations of long-standing alliance.

Representatives of the NATO military committee have expressed concerns about the fact that the Russian personnel would operate the S-400 in Turkey and thus obtain confidential information about the alliance's weapons technologies. Over time, Russian experts would be able to collect a huge amount of information about the unique technology of the F-35 from different viewing angles and in different operating conditions (*Strategic Comments* 2019: 4-7). In addition, the Russian S-400 system is incompatible with the technical means of NATO. Nevertheless, the first batch of anti-aircraft missile systems was delivered with a

partial transfer of production technology, and technical operators were trained in Turkey. Ankara, on the other hand, responded to these allegations insisting that the S-400 would be operated only by the Turkish military personnel, and yet the Russian instructors and technical specialists would inevitably be in Turkey for purposes of training, maintenance and operational support. The radar stations could allow Russia to receive recorded high-precision measurements of the F-35 flying in stealth mode.

The missile and nuclear capabilities of a number of neighboring countries pose a threat to Turkey. In addition, the Turkish territory is located in close proximity to the most explosive regions of the world. Therefore, the deployment of an advanced air defense system is an urgent need for Ankara in order to neutralize these threats. The Stinger, Rapier, and Hawk air defense systems located on the territory of Turkey not only have a limited range, but are also subject to rapid technological obsolescence. Turkey needs the S-400, because, unlike the American Stella air defense, it perceives aviation as a hostile target. The S-400s are capable of protecting Turkey from American allies in the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia, to which the U.S. supplies missiles and F-35 fighter jets.

Besides these concerns raised by the allies of Turkey, military cooperation at the industrial level is not a problem free one between the two countries. Russian-Turkish military and intelligence cooperation is limited to and gradually focused on Syria. There is still a high degree of mutual distrust, and we should not forget that the military of the two countries often found themselves on different sides of the barricades in the Syrian conflict.

Deepening Partnership in the Energy Sector

Despite the increasing divergence in Turkey-US relations and the replacement with increased strategic cooperation with Russia, Turkey, with the U.S. support, implemented with Georgia and Azerbaijan various regional energy and transport projects, namely the pipelines Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC), Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE), and TRANS-Anatolian (TANAP), and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway. These projects ultimately aimed at reducing Turkey's dependence on Russian energy resources by diversifying its energy resources. Turkey has thus managed to alternate Russian monopoly on the export routes of Caspian energy resources and giving Baku a direct access to international energy markets, bypassing Russia.

Nevertheless, despite the expansion of the competitive energy environment, the Russian-Turkish partnership deepened also in the energy sector. Energy is a strategic aspect of bilateral relations, and energy cooperation is based on a strong foundation. Turkey is the second largest importer of Russian gas after Germany. In 2018, Russia exported to Turkey 24 billion cubic meters of gas. Turkey imported 56% of its natural gas and 10% of its oil from Russia (Dilmaç 2018: 4). Until 2020, Russia supplied gas to Turkey through two pipelines: The Trans-Balkan Pipeline and the Blue Stream Pipeline. In addition, Russian exports of oil and petroleum products to world markets are carried out through the Turkish Straits, which increases the geopolitical importance of Turkey for Russia. Every year, about 150 million tons of Russian oil passes through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles.

Russia has become also the implementer of various energy projects in Turkey, such as the Turkish Stream gas pipeline and the construction of the Akkuyu nuclear power plant. In October 2016, Russia and Turkey signed an intergovernmental agreement on the Turkish Stream Pipeline Project in Istanbul. The agreement obliges the parties to build two pipelines with a capacity of 15.75 billion cubic meters of gas each. One branch will supply gas to the Turkish market, and the other to Europe via Turkish territory. It is expected that after the construction is completed, the Turkish Stream will replace 14 billion cubic meters of natural gas imported annually via the Ukraine-Moldova-Romania [route](#). Currently, more than 20% of Russian gas is exported to Europe through the Ukrainian gas transportation [system](#).

The Turkish Stream project was warmly welcomed by Ankara, as it is intended to replace the western route pipeline passing through Ukraine and guarantee uninterrupted supplies of Russian natural gas to the Turkish market, regardless of geopolitical tensions between Moscow and Kiev. Although the approved decision, at first glance, contradicted Ankara's obligations to the EU's Southern Gas Corridor project, Turkish officials have repeatedly stated that they were considering the SGC and the Turkish Stream as complementary elements that met Turkey's desire to become an energy hub of Eurasia. Moreover, the Turkish authorities do not consider these two projects as competing, since the growing demand for natural gas from the EU requires the construction of both the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream at the same time (Erşen & Çelikpala 2019: 588).

What are bilateral motivations to tighten the energy collaboration? Turkey, first of all, seeks to obtain financial benefits from the Turkish Stream project. A significant benefit is the fee that Ankara will charge for gas transit through Turkish territory. In addition, Russia and Turkey agreed on a discount of 10.25% of the gas price. A 10% reduction in the actual prices of all imported gas from Russia would result in Turkey saving approximately \$ 1 billion. As for Russia, the ten percent discount will reduce Gazprom's export revenues by 1-2%, since the Turkish market's share in Gazprom's total exports was about 15% (Dastan 2018: 754).

The Turkish Stream will allow Gazprom to continue selling natural gas to Europe, economically isolating Ukraine. The project's prospects depend on the EU's position on Russian plans to bypass Ukraine. The problem of increasing cost of the project in the process of Gazprom's construction of land and underwater infrastructure is complicated by uncertainty about the future of the EU-leading branch line and because of the gas discount that the Russian side was forced to provide to the Turkish state-owned company Botaş. Moscow's desire to bypass Ukraine and thereby reduce its dependence on Ukrainian transit for natural gas exports to Europe has strengthened Turkey's position in energy cooperation with Russia.

Russian technology and construction companies may be involved in the modernization of Turkey's energy infrastructure. Taking into account the considerable experience of Russian companies, their high competence and strong engineering and technological base, they could provide significant support and increase the efficiency of implementing infrastructure projects in the Turkish gas industry. In addition, Ankara faces non-fulfillment of obligations for supplies from Iran and Azerbaijan, and the Gazprom compensates for these shortfalls. Gazprom is also able to cover the peak demand growth in Turkey, which is associated with periodically observed cold temperatures. Thus, further expansion of export capacities from Russia to Turkey is desirable for both sides (Khalova 2019: 237-242).

At the same time, due to the decline in world natural gas prices and the development of alternative energy sources in Turkey, the Russian share in Turkish gas imports in 2019 was only 33%. Azerbaijan became the largest gas supplier to Turkey. Moreover, Botaş increased its imports of spot LNG from Qatar and Algeria. Unlike contracts with Gazprom, in which gas pricing is linked to the

cost of oil, in LNG agreements, pricing is formed on the basis of the hub. In the first half of 2020, Turkey cut Russian gas imports by almost seven times, as a result, the share of gas from Russia [decreased to 9%](#). Due to the decline in demand, gas pipelines remain unfilled. In May 2020, the Blue Stream pipeline was closed for repairs. At the same time, in August 2020, natural gas reserves were discovered in the territorial waters of Turkey.

Akkuyu, which is being built by the Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation (*Rosatom*), will be Turkey's first nuclear power plant. The plant is located in the southern province Mersin on the Mediterranean coast and will consist of four units, each of which will generate 1,200 MW of electricity with a service life of 60 years (Masumova 2018: 42). Rosatom acts as the general contractor for the construction, and upon its completion, it will maintain and operate the facility despite the controversies at the mass public level in Turkey. Akkuyu nuclear power plant caused a mixed reaction from the Turkish public. Critics of the project note that the nuclear power plant will allow Russia to control a significant part of Turkey's electricity production. Apparently both sides enjoy greater opportunities than risks so their collaboration in the energy sector is likely to expand.

Implementation of Economic Projects

Economic cooperation has been the most dynamic, long-lasting, yet not a problem-free one between the two countries. An increased economic interdependence has long contributed to the improvement of bilateral relations cutting across trade, tourism, construction industry, transport and agriculture sectors

Turkey is a reliable trading partner and a stable source of income for the Russian economy. Russia is Turkey's third-largest trading partner. In its trade with Turkey, Russia has a positive balance due to the large volumes of Turkish energy imports. There have been numerous agreements and protocols that establish preferential treatment in mutual trade. Among the Russia's exports to Turkey, raw materials: oil, petroleum products, natural gas, coal and metals come first. Turkey, on the other hand, exports to Russia primarily fruits, fish and nuts, clothing and shoes, household appliances, vehicles, equipment, weapons, watches, and construction services (Petrov 2018: 38-45). Despite the [stated goal of increasing](#) the volume of bilateral trade to \$100 billion, it amounted only to \$26

billion in 2018, which is 15% more than in 2017. The main reasons for the decline in the volume of bilateral trade were the global financial crisis, Western sanctions against Russia and the “jet” crisis. Ankara emphasizes that it is necessary to facilitate customs procedures for the export of Turkish agricultural products. Turkey is deeply integrated into the global economy, so it does not benefit from the political instability in its region. The negative impact of the sanctions shows that Turkey’s export potential largely depends on the economic well-being of its trading partners.

Russian firms have increased their presence in Turkish economy, which has narrowed the gap in direct investment between the two countries in favor of Russia. Mutual investments between the two countries have reached to \$20 billion since 1984 till 2018 including the fields of energy, metallurgy, automotive industry, banking, and [tourism](#). While a number of joint investment projects have been implemented, Russian investments in Turkey have a higher strategic significance and added value compared to Turkish investments in Russia. The Russian Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Works, for instance, has built the largest metal steel plant in Iskenderun, Turkey, with its own port and access to the EU market. Russia’s largest foreign acquisition is Sberbank’s purchase of Deniz Bank. Lukoil is one of the largest petroleum product distributors in Turkey, having expanded following the purchase of the Turkish fuel distributor Akpet. Lukoil’s investments in Turkey exceed a billion dollars. The Russian manufacturer of commercial vehicles “GAZ Group” produces the brand “Gazelle Next” in Sakarya. Tech giant Yandex has launched its web portal and search engine in Turkey. The Turkish financial crises affect the economic stability in Russia, this is due to the fact that Turkey attracts a significant amount of Russian direct investment. All in all, Russia ranks fifth among investors in the Turkish economy after the UK, the Netherlands, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the U.S. (Mansour-Ichrakieh & Zeaiter 2019: 9).

On the contrary, Turkish investments in Russia are concentrated more in the construction sector, as well as in low - and medium-tech sectors, such as the production of alcoholic beverages, chemicals and glass. Turkish contractors in Russia have implemented 1961 projects worth \$73 billion. For many years, All in all twenty percent of Turkish foreign contracting projects have been implemented in Russia including the leading Turkish investors such as Anadolu Efes (alcoholic beverages), Enka and Renaissance (construction), Şişecam and Trakya Cam

(glass), Eczacıbaşı (tiles and ceramic tableware), Hayat (wood products), Koç (household appliances and banking), Zorlu (household appliances and energy) (Köstem 2018:20) To expand rapprochement, 2019 was mutually declared to be “the year of culture and tourism”. In 2018, 5.9 million tourists from Russia [visited Turkey](#) and 15% of foreign tourists arrive in Turkey from Russia. Economic stability, investor confidence, closer contact at the societal level and the deepening of political cooperation contribute positively to the construction of mutual understanding at the societal level. According to the results of the [Turkey Trends Survey](#) (2018), Russia is considered a friendly country by 35% of the Turks.

Besides closed bilateral economic collaboration both states contribute to the development of markets in the neighboring regions. For Russian and Turkish public and private companies, the Middle East and North Africa are extremely promising markets in the long term. In addition to supply of Russian grain and Turkish food, Russia and Turkey can make joint strategic investments in transport and energy infrastructure as well as in the mining and processing industries. Russia and Turkey also have huge potential to help Arab countries with water shortages in the region.

Conclusion

As this study points out, Russian-Turkish partnership is a multi-sectoral one, driven with pragmatic interests, driven mostly with national priorities. At the same time, the concept of pragmatism assumes that the partner countries limit their political agenda to a number of mutual obligations. Although today Ankara does not consider Moscow’s actions as a threat to its security, cooperation between Russia and Turkey does not yet have a developed institutional framework, on which to build strategic trust. Since political relations determine the economic agenda, it is necessary to strengthen bilateral political ties through various mechanisms, primarily through the High-Level Cooperation Council. The Council created in 2010 includes the Joint Strategic Planning Group, the Joint Economic Committee and the Civil Society Forum, which laid the institutional foundation for the development of relations.

However, despite that pragmatism serves a constructive role, bilateral relations time-to-time suffer from sharp differences over regional tensions. Crimea and Syria have demonstrated that the strategy of delineating political and economic

issues is no longer a guarantee of the stability of Russian-Turkish relations. This model of cooperation was vulnerable due to the lack of trust of the political elites of both countries. Growing threats to regional security can cause serious damage to bilateral relations.

Today, despite the continuing differences in the approaches of Russia and Turkey to regional and world politics, they are outweighed by common economic interests. However, the political situation in the Middle East is destabilized, and economic projects with the Turkish side may be complicated, first of all, by this factor. Even if there is no reason to use military force against each other, a change in Turkey's political course may pose a threat to Russia's energy security. Despite the implementation of a number of joint energy projects, Turkey remains a strategic competitor of Russia. Ankara is seeking to create an energy corridor connecting Caspian energy producers with European consumers. However, Russia needs Turkey as a reliable energy partner at a time of deteriorating relations with the West and Ukraine. On the other hand, due to the fact that Turkey exports manufacturing and food products to Russia, and imports natural gas and petroleum products, it risks significant economic losses in the event of political disagreements with Russia on strategic issues.

The strategic rapprochement between Russia and Turkey has become possible under certain geopolitical conditions. At the same time, it is obvious that the Russian-Turkish partnership is tactical and depends on the current political benefits. Tactical partnerships are subject to the risk of conflicts if the parties have mutually exclusive interests. The further development of relations will be determined by periodic changes in the interests of the parties under the influence of unequal ideological, political and economic factors.

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