

An Analysis of Turkish Russian Rapprochement: Trends and Prospects

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Abstract: The history of tense bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia had changed dramatically in the last two decades. This paper will analyze reasons for this change and its implications. This project argues that first, expanding energy relations and increasing trade and tourism between the two countries have been the major driver of change in relations. Second, on the security front number of sources for conflict had been removed such as; the creation of NATO- Russian Council. Third, both countries found a common ground in number of issues in foreign policy. Fourth, both Turkey and Russia feel increasingly rejected by the EU, which adds up to the understanding that straining relations between Turkey and the EU will also negatively affect the relations between Russia and the EU. Fifth, with regard to the Black Sea both sides approach is to welcome an “entente cordiale” in which Turkey and Russia agrees to use more cooperation mechanisms. Finally, this paper argues that establishment of a strategic partnership between Turkey and Russia is unlikely in the future that both countries will remain economic and geopolitical competitors.

Keywords: Turkey, Russia, regional politics, cooperation, foreign policy.

Özet: Bu çalışma Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde Türkiye ve Rusya arasında olumlu değişen atmosferin neden etkilerini değerlendirir. İki ülke arasında, enerji, ticaret ve turizm alanlarında genişleyerek artan işbirliği bahsedilen olumlu atmosferin önemli nedenlerindedir. Aynı şekilde ülkeler arasında daha önceleri güvenlik alanındaki çatışmaların kaynağı kabul edilebilecek unsurlar ortadan kalmaya başlamıştır. Dış politikada da çıkar farklılıklarının yanında, ortak noktaların olduğu ve bazı konu ve bölgelerde işbirliğinin daha iyi sonuçlar doğurduğu izlenimi geçerlidir. Son yıllarda Türkiye ve Rusya Avrupa Birliği tarafından yalnız bırakılmakta ve bu ülkelerden bir tanesinin AB ile ilişkilerinin gerginleşmesi diğer ülke ile AB ilişkilerinin de kötüleşmesine de neden olduğu gözlemlenmektedir. Bu eğilimler çalışmanın ana temasını oluştursa da, Türkiye ve Rusya arasında uzun süreli işbirliği ve stratejik ortaklık öngörüsünün kısa süreli ve uluslararası ve bölgesel ortamın getirdiği bir dönem olduğu, iki ülkenin uzun vadede ekonomik ve jeopolitik rakip olarak kalacakları savunulur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye, Rusya, bölgesel politika, işbirliği, dış politika

1. Introduction

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The Black Sea basin, the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea basin have long been on the agenda of policymakers because the region surrounding it is home to multiple active conflicts as well as windows of opportunities for cooperation. For instance, the region is affiliated with a variety of military threats like Chechen separatism, Azerbaijan-Armenia conflicts, and Russia- Georgia War in 2008 (Kamalov, 2009; Çörten, 2009). At the same time, the region is a key transportation corridor to NATO's success in Afghanistan (Koçer, 2006). In terms of economic and energy security, the region is both a source and a transit point for present and future energy resources, which could boost diversity and security of supply. Aside from these, issues such as environmental pollution, human trafficking and drugs, other forms of organized crime, and terrorism act as both non-traditional security threats as well as focal points for cooperation in the region. Indeed, in few places in the world does wealth and prosperity exist in such proximity to poverty and instability. The region surrounding the Black Sea and the Caucasus is home to the aforementioned; but also a transit zone between these security threats and Europe – implying both challenges and opportunities.

During the Cold War, the region was seen as point of contact between two opposing political blocs: NATO and the Warsaw Pact. As a member of NATO, the Republic of Turkey at the time was seen as a border next to the hostile Soviet bloc. From the Turkish perspective the Soviet bloc prevented the development of the Black Sea coast and the Caucasus and thus undervalued Turkey's economy. At the same, Moscow viewed Turkey as a proxy for the United States (Hill and Taspınar, 2006: 83). However, the collapse of the Soviet Union made Turkey's close alignment of its interest in the region with Western strategy obsolete. In the 1990s and 2000s Turkey increasingly viewed the Black Sea as a shipping corridor that would open up alternative transportation and trade routes to Europe as well as the Caucasus and Central Asia. As a result of a changing political atmosphere, the Black Sea's six littoral states; Turkey, Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria have tentatively begun to construct a regional identity while foreign powers such as the European Union and the USA have started searching for footholds in the vicinity (Hill, 2003: 57).

Meanwhile, since 1991 relations between Ankara and Moscow have become much closer than ever before (Özbay, 2011: 51). This is best illustrated in the May 1992 Treaty on the Principles of Relations between the Republic of Turkey and Russian Federation, which established high level political relations and strong economic cooperation. Better trade links,

increasing economic activity of Turkish business in Russia, the unique ‘Blue Stream’ gas pipeline and consequently lifting visa regulation between countries signals this reverse trend in relations. What factors can explain this recent rapprochement between Turkey and Russia? What does this trend mean for the Black Sea and the Caucasus? Can we expect better relations in the future in the form of strategic partnership between two nations? Will the extent of this cooperation spill over to other areas and other nations in the region? What are the challenges that threaten this cooperation? The aim of this paper is to analyze the recent rapprochement between Turkey and Russia and consider the major reasons for this rapprochement, and to determine the constraints and opportunities surrounding their relationship.

To achieve this I will proceed with the following steps: First, this project will examine the expanding energy relations and increasing trade and tourism between the two countries as the major driver of change in relations. Second, I will look into the dynamics of security conditions in the region such as the conflicting interests of the main actors and stakeholders and the nature of threats. Third, I examine the growing convergence and complementarity of Turkish and Russian foreign policies. The final section examines the future of the relations between Turkey and Russia and speculates on the possibility for a long-term strategic partnership.

2. Energy, Trade and Tourism

The success or failure in delivering economic benefits in the form of higher income and better social services is one of the main criteria by which government is judged by the electorate. The ability of governments to deliver success in the economy also depends on success in foreign policy. In particular, governments need to increase the country’s export and service earnings and secure access to foreign capital. During the 1990s, in foreign policy that meant that Turkish government had to try to prevent conflict with important trading partners as well as to avoid isolationist policies (Hale, 2000: 266).

The end of the Cold War led to the opening of export markets in the former Soviet Union, which had previously been restricted by the state-controlled economic system. The approach advocated by the Turkish president at the time, Turgut Özal, was to increase regional economic links and dependencies by using Turkey’s growing economic power,

relative to most of its immediate neighbors, so that regional political stability would be secured. This was also reflected in his 'peace pipeline' project in the Middle East and in the sponsorship of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Zone (Winrow, 1997). As a result Turkey's economic interest in maintaining cooperative relations with Moscow continued to grow throughout the 1990s. For instance, in spite of the 1998 economic crisis in Russia, Turkey's exports to Russia in that year came to just over US \$3 billion or around 11 percent of its total exports. This made Russia Turkey's second largest overseas market, ahead of the United States, at 8.3 percent (Hale, 2000: 267).

Additionally, Turkish construction companies had won billions of US\$ worth of contracts in Russia, putting them in first place among foreign contractors working in the country. Therefore, some of Turkey's biggest companies were identified by the media as part of a pro-Russian business lobby in Turkey who were anxious to prevent political conflicts from undermining their position. On the import side, Turkey's trade with Russia was far lower, at US\$2.2 billion or 4.7 percent of total imports. However a large part of this was accounted for by natural gas, about 60 percent of Turkey's total supply through the pipeline via Bulgaria inaugurated in 1987. Without these imports, Turkey would have been left seriously short of a vital source of pollution-free energy (Hale, 2000: 267-269; Jonsson, Erxion, Laurelle, 2009: 12-37).

Economic development in the Black Sea region since the collapse of the Soviet Union can be divided into four phases (Aydn and Triantaphyllou, 2010: 31-34).¹ The first phase was a period of sharp economic decline. This saw the collapse of the old systems of production and distribution, weak or non-existent legal frameworks, dysfunctional financial sectors, inconsistent structural reforms and macroeconomic instability. The second phase, between 1995 and 1999, saw the stabilization and consolidation of regional economies with improved security and political stability, the strengthening of the first generation of market-oriented structural reforms and signs of macroeconomic stability. However, at the same time, the economies of the Black Sea countries had to contend with the increasing volatility of energy prices, the 1998 Russian financial crisis and the 1999 earthquake in Turkey. The third phase, from 2000 to the third quarter of 2008, was a period of high and sustained growth

¹ Economic indicators and categorizations in this part are taken from a report by the Commission on the Black Sea, which is developed and launched by The Bertelsmann Stiftung, Gütersloh; the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation (BST-GMFUS), Bucharest; the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV), Ankara, and the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS), Athens.

with real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increases for the region as a whole averaging 6 percent per annum, equal to a cumulative real expansion of 68 percent for the period. It saw rising living standards, increased trade and investment and the integration of Black Sea societies into the broader European and global economic context.

The final phase, which covers post 2008 until present, is a period of lower levels of trade volume compared to the third phase mainly due to the global financial crises and the full customs regulations at the Russian border crossings. (See, Selçuk, 2005; Kolobov et. al. 2006). For instance between July 2008 and August 2009 trade volume between two countries dropped 23 billion US Dollars compared to 38 billion US Dollars of the previous period (See table 1). Nevertheless, beginning of 2010 was a period normalization and the trade volume increased to 26.1 billion US Dollars by the end of that year. Overall Russian Federation lost its 2008 number one trade partner status of Turkey to Germany in 2009 and 2010.

Table 1. Trade indicators with Russian Federation (in billion US Dollars)

	Exports	Imports	Balance	Volume
2007	4.7	23.5	-18.7	28.2
2008	6.4	31.3	-24.8	37.7
2009	3.2	19.7	-16.5	22.9
2010	4.6	21.5	-16.8	26.1

Source: Turkish Statistics Institute (www.turkstat.gov.tr)

The most critical area of economic relations between the two countries concerns fuel and energy resources (petroleum 37.6%, natural gas 32.4%), and specifically the increasing energy dependence of Turkey on Russia. Turkish export to Russia mainly includes food products (25%), textile (20%), chemicals (9.6%) and automotive (7%). Turkey currently receives roughly three-quarters of its fuel and energy resources from Russia. This involves a number of energy-related joint projects (Yüce, 2006). Among these, perhaps the most significant is the Blue Stream Project (Mavi Akim), involving pipelines stretching 1,250 kilometers beginning in the Black Sea coastal city of Dzhugba, Russia, going under the Black Sea, emerging in Samsun, Turkey, and proceeding to Ankara (Khalilzad, Lesser and Larrabee, 2000: xi-xi; Bacik, 2001: 85-93). For such a project to work over the long term, consistently

good political relations are indispensable. Given that Turkey is so energy-resource dependent on Russia, stable diplomatic and economic relations are paramount (Ruseckas, 2000).¹

In terms of retail trade and tourism, a similar if somewhat less dramatic pattern has emerged - considerable expansion, with more eagerly sought by both sides (Warhola and Mitchell, 2006: 130). For example, in the first nine months of 2003 (January 1–September 30) saw a 50 percent increase in Russian tourism to Turkey compared with the same time period during the previous year. To put this in perspective, the resort city of Antalya recorded a rise in numbers, from roughly 495,000 to 716,000 tourists. This raised the ratio of Russian tourists on holiday in Antalya to 19 percent of overall tourism, up from 9 percent the year before.² Over the years the number of Russian tourist visiting Turkey continued to grow. Speaking at the Turkey- Russia 11th Joint Economic Commission, Ozgur Ozarslan, Deputy Undersecretary of Turkish Tourism Ministry said Turkish Tourism Ministry was planning to increase the Russian tourist number to four millions in the 2011. Meanwhile, the number of Turkish visitors who visits Moscow increased 35% in 2010.³ For this trend to continue, stable relations are necessary not only at the level of high diplomacy, but also throughout society. This can hardly happen when threats of terrorism, separatism, or other serious social or political unrest prevail.

Challenges that may prevent furthering cooperation in economy sphere include long term demographic trends and the threat they pose for the quantity and quality of the workforce, pension systems, the business environment and the sustainability of social security programs (Warola and Mitchell, 2006: 132;). While the implications of shrinking populations in most of the region's countries are wide ranging, reforms in the areas of competitiveness and productivity are key to minimizing their impact. Dealing with the current global financial crisis is a priority as it has affected the region collectively and countries individually. Each state's prescriptions vary, the need for cooperation and coordination through regional institutions such as BSEC is paramount (Hanson, 2011; Aras, 2009).

Good relations with key actors, including the US, the EU, China and Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries, are important from an economic perspective. In this context, the

¹ See also the U.S. Department of Energy's Web site outlining the political and economic situation regarding energy resources in the region at http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Region_ni.html.

² "Relations with Russia," Turkishpress.com, <http://www.turkishpress.com/specials/2003/yir/Russia.asp>

³ <http://www.eturbonews.com/21543/turkey-wants-4-millions-russian-visitors-2011> (last accessed September 9, 2011).

most significant parameter is the future evolution of relations with the EU, whose decisions have direct impacts on the regional economy (Mathews, 2002). The EU is a critical market both for Turkey and Russia and it is a principal source of financing, lending, investment and official assistance. It is hence the most powerful influence on regional cooperation, with EU measures sometimes dividing countries according to whether or not they are members, while at other times they facilitate increased cooperation under EU sponsored frameworks (Bükülmez and Küpeli, 2007: 204-205). A prolonged economic downturn in the EU will negatively affect growth prospects for the entire region, while a rapid recovery will be critical for economic development.

3. Security

The security dynamics of the Black Sea region is complex and wide in scope. It is vitally important since the changes in security structure determine the state of regional cooperation, economic development and good governance. Security structure in the region could be studied from two perspectives: geography and natural resources (Aydın and Triantaphyllou, 2010: 28). Black Sea's Eurasian location and its possession of major strategic transport and trade arteries form the geographic dimension of the security. Natural resources perspective is based on energy resources such as gas and oil and involves the changing nature of threats and actors, whether of conventional or non-conventional types.

The security context in the region is firstly related to the bipolar model of the Cold War era up until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Later during the 1990s the region has witnessed the unleashing and evolution of several ethnic, national and territorial conflicts and their suppression. Russia during this period withdrew from its global political and military role and had to reformulate and adapt new perspectives in its relations with the US, the Europe and its immediate neighbors. Finally in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Towers both countries had to adapt themselves to the multi-polar structure of the global security environment. Overall, the security context in the region has been shaped by series of post-Cold War trends such as globalization and greater international cooperation, the blurring of boundaries between soft and hard security threats (Aras, 2010).

Aydın and Triantaphyllou (2010: 28- 30) summarizes the main security challenges and concerns in two broad categories. First, the conflicting interests of the main actors and

stakeholders make the security environment difficult to manage. The large number of regional and extra-regional actors implies clashing interests that pull security policy options in different directions. For Russia, the main concern is the restoration and consolidation of its power in its “near abroad” while restricting the presence of other actors in the region. The increased activity of NATO, either through its enlargement policy, the Partnership for Peace program (PfP) or Membership Action Plans (MAPs). According to Aydın and Triantaphyllou (2010: 28) Russia’s fear of encirclement was obvious in its government’s statements made prior to and during the August 2008 war with Georgia.

Among the area’s states, Turkey, however, seems to offer a comprehensive vision for the area (Cornell et al, 2006: 15). It has also supported or initiated a number of regional cooperation schemes including BSEC, BlackSeaFor, Black Sea Harmony and the Caucasian Stability and Cooperation Platform (Koçer, 2007: 196). Turkey’s overriding aim with these is the creation of a region where, as they and the Russians say, “extra-regional powers” would not be needed in the security sphere (Aydın and Triantaphyllou, 2010: 30). Assisting regional transition, creating opportunities for political and economic cooperation and supporting the Black Sea area’s integration into the global economy are also Turkish goals. Finally, ensuring that maritime security remains the exclusive concern of Turkey and Russia and preserving the current legal regime of the Straits, based on the Montreux Convention, are Turkey’s security priorities (Bükülmez and Küpeli, 2007; Aydın and Triantaphyllou, 2010: 30).

Second the dynamic nature of threats and actors competing in the region culminates in the complexity of the security atmosphere of the Black Sea region. The size and complexity of security threats, both potential and actual, contribute to a general perception of the region as insecure and unstable (Koçer, 2007: 196-197). Some of these include the contested notions of “neighborhood” in which key stakeholders have started to develop their own “neighborhoods” and thus create further divisions rather than cooperation (Hill, 2003: 60). Further security threats include persisting ethnic, religious and other differences and the ramifications of Russia’s recognition of the independence of the Georgian breakaways, Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Vasiliev, 2010: 4).

In this context, the future of the breakaways and the other ongoing conflicts remains unclear (Stribis, 2003: 132). They continue to hinder the progress of the states concerned as well as regional cooperation, security and stability as a whole. The weak, unaccountable and disorganized nature of some of the entities in question, point to the risk that they may acquire

the features of failed states in the future. This entails the danger of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (Dunlop and Menon, 2006: 97- 114). It also implies vastly increased opportunities for the trafficking of drugs, arms and people, and organized crime in general.

The issue of energy security is also a major concern to both Turkey and Russia (Zubkov, 2006). The issue for Turkey is that they need to diversify their energy supplies and reduce the risks of being too dependent on Russia. At the same time Turkey needs to find alternative routes and sources of gas and oil from other countries to deliver to the European markets. The capacity of Russia to meet Europe's natural gas demand is intimately connected with its ability to deliver without making major investments in technology and infrastructure. All this makes the Black Sea and the Caucasus region a potential energy transit hub while, at the same time, a zone of rivalry.

However one can observe a conflicting trend in the region's security structure. On the one hand Western powers attempt to promote norms and values based on representative democracy, the rule of law and human rights in the hope of contributing to peace building in the region. On the other hand authoritarianism, militarization and power politics are on the rise. Therefore formulating a common strategy capable of addressing and overcoming deadlocks, differences and regional security threats have been a major challenge. In addition, one could observe diminishing role of inclusive international organizations such as the OSCE and the increasing relevance of the EU with its selective membership. Finally, as Aydin and Triantaphyllou (2010: 41) argues, conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms have been unsuccessful in the Black Sea region and there is a clear need for new and creative ideas with regard to conflict resolution.

4. Foreign Policy

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a considerable shift in the dynamic of both Turkish and Russian foreign policies. Russia lost its superpower status as well as a global military presence, which in turn required adjustment and focus on the transformation and development of its relations with the US, the EU and its neighboring countries. Turkey also needed to tackle new foreign policy problems such as expanding its focus beyond strategic alliance with the US, management of relations with Greece and its EU membership bid. The

two countries found a better atmosphere for cooperation especially after the 2002 May-June summits and the Russia-US summit, which consolidated the steady progress made in relations, the Russia- NATO summit, which established a new Russia-NATO Council and the Russia- EU summit, which gave the first acknowledgement of Russia' status as an open market economy (Hill, 2003: 58).

At a geopolitical level, the number of issues opposing the two countries has clearly diminished. Today, Moscow is supportive of Turkey's position concerning the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and its membership bid for the EU, while Ankara, for its part, approves of Moscow's growing role in the Middle East and acquiesces to its dominance in the South Caucasus. With regard to their immediate regions Turkey and Russia seem to have more common interest than conflicts. For instance, Ankara and Moscow share apprehension of U.S. policy toward Iran and Iraq. As for Syria, even though Turkey and Russia obviously have differences in terms of their approach to that country's uprising, both countries also similar need and interest in preventing the chaos. Also as a result of their geographic locations and energy and trade interests in the Middle East, both countries have tried to maintain relatively independent policies in that region in spite of the US pressure. According to Kınıklıoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoglu's vision is in tandem with Russia's emphasis on stability and appeals to the AKP's Muslim-sensitive outlook toward Turkey's immediate neighborhood. It also appeals to the growing Turkish urge to act independently in the region (Kınıklıoğlu, 2006: 3).

In addition, Turkish and Russian foreign policy objectives overlap on four prominent geopolitical issues. First, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; second, the need to preserve the territorial integrity and political unity of Iraq; third, maintaining stability in the Caucasus; and fourth, Black Sea security with the littoral states.

Overall on all previously mentioned issues Turkish-Russian views are somewhat opposed to U.S. policy (Hill and Taspınar, 2006: 9-11), which is a sign that the two sides established a sort of common foreign and security policy that is based on regular political consultations among their leadership. This is quite obvious when we consider the Syria case. As mentioned earlier both countries have a common goal to prevent chaos in Syria. But Turkey and Russia have very different visions for the future of that country. Turkish leadership maintained their goal as leadership change in Syria and provided safe havens for the rebel Free Syrian Army in the refugee camps near the border in addition to permitting

Syrian opposition groups to organize in Turkey (Jackson, 2012). Russia, a long time ally of Esad regime, on the other hand, resisted pressures to change Esad leadership and blocked UN Security Council resolutions on Syria in addition to continue arms sales. Despite such diverging approaches on Syria, both countries maintained their relationship.

The new Russo-Turkish partnership remains a relatively precarious affair since both countries are as likely to become competitors as they are partners. However, the Turkish ruling elite's growing discontent with the EU and NATO membership could create an opening for further rapprochement with Moscow. Therefore, it is possible to argue that an entente cordiale between Turkey and Russia signified by the end of centuries old conflicts and the formalization of a peaceful co-existence that started by the turn of the twenty first century.

5. Towards a Strategic Partnership?

Black Sea and Caucasus region is geopolitically significant because it connects cultures, international trade, ideas and influences. Oil and gas from Central Asia and the Middle East move along pipelines in Caucasus and Black Sea shipping lanes to Europe. Same shipping lanes are used for traffic in narcotics, terrorists and weapons. The Black Sea region is an important platform for stabilization efforts in the Caucasus, the Central Asia, and Afghanistan as well as for the protection of energy shipping lanes between the Caspian Sea and the European markets. Therefore it is not surprising to see foreign powers and outside searching for a foothold in the vicinity.

Turkey and Russia swing back and forth between East and West, pulled in different directions by history, religion and national interest. Current rapprochement between Turkey and Russia should be seen as part of this back and forth pattern. Both countries have been displaying improved relations and cooperation mostly because of their concern about the West's destabilizing influence rather than actual common interests. As the two major players of the region, their cooperation is based on the goal of minimization of any outside influence, be it U.S., EU or NATO, that may rival theirs. Hill and Taspınar argues that the U.S.' Greater Middle East Project to spread democracy and freedom in the region is considered by Turkey and Russia as an "expansionist policy that will further damage their interests by encouraging even more chaos on their southern tiers" (Hill and Taspınar, 2006: 87).

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, multiple power centers have emerged to fulfill the sphere of influence which was once dominated by Moscow. Two of these power centers, Turkey and Russia are capable of balancing and restraining each other and other actors. In this case of mutual containment, Ankara and Moscow have so far been able to establish better relationship by balancing their national interests. However, this mutual containment will unlikely to evolve into a strategic partnership.

First of all, a common regional identity, which could be considered as a shared feeling in the minds of people who share a common geography that they belong to a single territorial unit, does not exist between Turkey and Russia. Even though Turks and Russians shared same geography for a long time, cultural commonality, which could be defined as common values and a particular philosophy, has still to be built. NATO's success for instance could be explained as a result of shared values and a particular philosophy in the absence of geographic proximity.

Second, creation of a strategic partnership or a security complex between Turkey and Russia is unlikely because a unified and integrated center of power between Turkey and Russia would contradict the interests of major actors; states, transnational corporations and global financial institutions of the international system. For instance NATO and the EU have been active players in the Balkans since the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the U.S. and the NATO consolidated their position in the Caucasus and Central Asia and in the post-September 11 era, the U.S. has a direct outlet to Black Sea basin through its bases in Bulgaria and Romania. Under the current international conditions, due to Europe's desire to find alternatives to Russian energy sources, growing significance of energy in geopolitics and ongoing war on international terrorism, the U.S., NATO and the EU will continue to conduct active policy in the region.

Third the region is in itself being stretched by alliances and coalitions, which makes it unlikely for Turkey and Russia to form a solid bloc. For example partnership between Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia, close cooperation between Turkey and Ukraine, formal partnership between Russia and Ukraine, and Russian and Armenian alliance, which is duplicated in their membership to Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) could all be considered as axes of interaction and confrontation in the region. In the economic sphere, a similar confrontation could also be observed between U.S. sponsored GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova) and Russian led EURASEC (the Eurasian Economic Community).

This analysis concludes that the recent warming relations between Turkey and Russia suggest a profitable period of economic cooperation. However beyond their shared economic and security interests, their shared goal is limited to minimization of influence of outside powers and thus unlikely to lead to a long term strategic partnership between two nations. It is more likely to see these two nations compete and display adherence to other foreign policy alliances and priorities; such as Turkey to the U.S. and the EU or Russia to its own goal of greater Russian influence in the Caucasus and the Central Asia, in the future.

6. Conclusion

In the post-Cold War era, an alternative vision and pathway to stabilization and sustainable development involved creation of a strategic partnership between Turkey and Russia. Since 1991, this vision was vitalized and illustrated by series of common projects and treaties between two countries. However the relationship between Ankara and Moscow is unlikely to evolve into a sophisticated system of bilateral interactions between neighboring states due to intrinsic; lack of common identity and conflicting interests and extrinsic; interference by outsider powers and multiple axes of alliances active in the region, factors. Instead the relationship between Turkey and Russia would be best characterized as a loose and flexible alliance where actors position themselves pragmatically as to their long term interest.

Despite the obvious importance of such foreign policy issues as the EU, Iraq, Israel, and Iran, Turkey should not concentrate on these concerns and exclude all others. Establishing alliances and improving relations with states in strategic areas, such as the wider Black Sea is important in developing future geopolitical arrangements. Given the current state of Turkey's relationship with Russia, the best way for Turkey to maintain and strengthen its control in the Black Sea is to develop cooperation across a broad spectrum of issues of common interest and mutual concern. Turkey needs to thread Russia softly offering support and cooperation where possible and backing off where necessary. Maintaining such a balance with Russia will also be instrumental for Turkey to establish a more formidable presence in other strategic areas such as Central Asia.

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