



## Article

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# Is a Strategic Partnership Between Turkey and Russia Feasible at the Expense of Turkey's Relations with the EU and NATO?

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**Abstract:** The article mainly contends that since the real and expected benefits from the European Union (EU) and NATO were not delivered sufficiently from Turkey's perspective, Turkey looked for alternatives and collaborated with Russia more intensely in recent years. Turkey's cooperation with Russia was also facilitated by several global, political, economic, conjectural, security-related, and individual-level factors. Another argument of the study is that despite Turkey's intensive collaboration with Russia, it is not feasible for Turkey to build a strategic partnership with it in the short- and medium-term at the expense of its relations with NATO and the EU. The main reasons for this are, in addition to the institutional and social shortcomings, geostrategic divergences, Russia's inadequacy as an economic actor, the pitfalls of an asymmetric relationship with Russia, the security risks posed by Russia, NATO's continuing importance for Turkey's security needs, and the incompatibility of Russia's and Turkey's political systems.

**Keywords:** EU, NATO, Russia, strategic partnership, Turkish foreign policy

## Introduction

The arrival of the Russian S-400 air defence system in Turkey in July 2019 was welcomed enthusiastically by many in Turkey. This breakthrough event was even described by some in Turkey as the “country's liberation from the West” (Tol and Taşpınar 2019, 107). Almost a decade ago, the question started to be asked as to whether Turkey was drifting away from the West, especially since it had approached Iran and voted against sanctions on Iran over its nuclear programme in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as well as clashed with Israel over

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the *Mavi Marmara* incident in 2010. This time, however, this question is more pronounced and the likelihood of a strategic shift became more tangible with the arrival of a weapon system from a country that has been confronting the West recently. Given that Turkey's relations with the United States and the European Union (EU) have been at a nadir in recent years, many regarded the acquisition of the Russian weapon system as a precursor of Turkey's withdrawal from the North Atlantic Alliance (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, NATO) and the EU.

In addition to many other factors, Moscow's and Ankara's bitter relations with the West are a major reason why the two countries have closed ranks in recent years. A milestone for Moscow's relationship with the West was its annexation of Crimea in March 2014 while the coup plot against the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) government in Turkey in July 2016 marked a watershed in Ankara's relations with the West. Russia had to confront a series of economic sanctions from the West after 2014 while Turkey was deeply disappointed with its Western allies for their slow and reluctant condemnation of the coup attempt. Ankara has even aired doubts that the West might have been behind the coup attempt. These events have helped peak the two countries' deeply-ingrained sense of distrust towards the West. As one observer put, "Despite their obvious differences and even antagonisms, Russia and Turkey are united by one thing—the fact that they are two great powers connected historically, culturally, and geographically to a Europe that never fully accepted them as one of their own" (Lukyanov, *People with Big Ambitions*, *The Moscow Times*, 19 July 2016).

A major objective of this article is to unpack the puzzle of whether Russia could replace the EU and NATO as a strategic partner for Turkey. The article contends that in addition to some factors facilitating the Russo–Turkish rapprochement, Turkey searched for alternatives, collaborating with Russia owing to the decline in the real and expected benefits from the EU and NATO from the Turkish perspective. Another major contention of this article is that despite the close collaboration between Moscow and Ankara, in particular after the coup attempt against the Turkish Government in July 2016, it is hard for Turkey to forge a strategic partnership with Russia because of significant divergent geostrategic interests, Russia's inadequacy as an economic actor, the downsides of an asymmetric relationship with Russia, the security risks posed by Russia, the continuing importance of NATO for Turkey's security as well as the incompatibility of Turkey's and Russia's political systems. Moreover, the absence of a solid social basis and the lack of institutionalization in their relations further make it infeasible for Turkey to switch from the Transatlantic Alliance to Russia.

The study is divided into three sections. The first part concerns the motives that brought Moscow and Ankara together, including, first and foremost, their strained relationship with the West, economic interests, conjectural factors such as the Syrian conflict, transformation of the global governance system, and similarity of

their political culture based on security and personal harmony between the leaders. The second part draws attention to the limitations in the relationship, and the third part explains why a strategic partnership between Turkey and Ankara and at the expense of Turkey's partnership with the EU and NATO is not feasible in the foreseeable future. Finally, the conclusion wraps up the article.

## Factors Leading to Russo–Turkish Rapprochement

Russia was a major rival of the Ottoman Empire for many centuries. Throughout history, they fought at least 13 bloody wars. Since their relationship was dominated by wars, they have defined each other as the “other” and the “enemy”.<sup>1</sup> Despite the bloody heritage of the past, they managed to cultivate an amicable relationship after the First World War since they had a common rival, the West. The Soviet demands for the Kars and Ardahan provinces in Eastern Turkey and bases along the Turkish Straits in 1945 and the acceleration of the Cold War prompted Turkey to side with the Western camp, with Turkey becoming a NATO member in 1952.<sup>2</sup> Turkey approached the Soviet Union between 1964 and 1979 when its relations deteriorated with the West because of the Cyprus issue. Since the ending of the Cold War, they have developed a multi-dimensional relationship, pursuing a strategy of compartmentalization in that they have prevented their areas of disagreement from damaging their fields of cooperation.<sup>3</sup> Despite that, Russia imposed a series of sanctions on Turkey in retaliation to the downing of a Russian Sukhoi Su-24M, an all-weather attack aircraft, by a Turkish F-16 fighter jet close to the Turkey–Syria border on 24 November 2015 on the grounds that it violated Turkish airspace.<sup>4</sup> After a seven-month lull, relations resumed following Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's expression of his disappointment over the downing of the Russian fighter jet by Turkey (Turkey ‘Sorry for Downing Russian Jet’, *BBC*, 27 Jun 2016). President Putin's explicit support for the AKP government against the July 2016 coup attempt acted as a catalyst for the improvement in Ankara–Moscow relations given that the Western countries' reaction to the incident was relatively lukewarm. In the wake of this event, Turkish–Russian relations have been closer than ever.

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1 For an historical analysis of Turkish–Russian relations, see Gürsel (1968).

2 For an elaboration on the history of Turkey's relations with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, see Bilge (1992).

3 For a detailed evaluation of Turkish–Russian relations during the post-Cold War period, see Aktürk (2006) and Balta (2019).

4 For an evaluation of the jet crisis between Turkey and Russia, see Özertem (2017).

The rapprochement between Moscow and Ankara did not occur in a vacuum. Many factors affected the emergence of this result. Both countries' troubled relations with the West acted as a major catalyst for the formation of this rapprochement. The transformation of the global governance system into a multi-polar order, growing economic cooperation, and the current state of affairs all helped hasten this relationship. Without doubt, the good chemistry between president Erdoğan and president Putin, their mutual inclination not to criticize the deficiencies in each other's political systems, and their anxieties regarding street movements as well as their security-based political culture played a significant role in the emergence of strong ties between Moscow and Ankara.

Needless to say, the most important driver that brought Russia and Turkey together was their growing disillusionment and resentment with the West. There was widely acknowledged perception in Moscow that during the 1990s the West neglected Russia in addressing international problems, particularly when NATO carried out military operations against the Serbian forces in Bosnia in 1994 and Kosovo in 1999. Furthermore, NATO expanded to include former Warsaw Pact members Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic in 1999. Russian foreign policy was guided by the so-called Atlanticism during the 1990s, characterized by a harmonious relationship with the United States, the EU, and international organisations. However, things started to change after Vladimir Putin took office as president in Russia in 2000. Thanks to soaring gas prices, Russian gross domestic product (GDP) increased almost six fold in a decade from 300 billion dollars in 1998 to almost 1.7 trillion dollars in 2008 in current prices (Rumer, *Russia and the Security of Europe*, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Jun 2016, 9). With Putin in power as well as rising gas prices, Russia consolidated its domestic stability, getting its voice heard in major global issues.

Russia's first frustration with the West during the 2000s was the US occupation of Iraq in March 2003 to overthrow Saddam Hussein by following a unilateral US decision and without UN authorization. Following the inclusion of the Baltic countries into NATO and the Eastern European and Baltic states into the EU in 2004, president Putin warned the Western countries at the Munich Security Conference in 2007 not to expand NATO further (Rumer 2018, 7). When the EU announced the Eastern Partnership in May 2008 aiming for the economic integration of six former Soviet Union countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) with the EU, the Russians' perception of encirclement deepened. These areas were regarded as a "sphere of privileged interests" by Russia. In response, Russia focused on Eurasian integration.

Western-backed "colour" revolutions, starting with the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, culminating in the overthrow of old regimes and their replacement with pro-western ones, further increased the threat perception on the part of

Russians. As a result, the 2013 foreign policy doctrine as well as subsequent military doctrines and foreign policy concepts designated Western policies as the most significant threat to Russia (Facon 2017).<sup>5</sup> Following the annexation of Crimea, Russia's pivot to Eurasia gained pace with the result that Russia started to cultivate more intensive ties with such non-Western countries as Turkey, India, and Iran.

As for Turkey, it has been going through a crisis in its relationship with the Western countries recently. Following the golden years between 1999 and 2005, Turkish–EU relations started to enter a vicious circle when the accession talks opened in 2005 in that the leaders of some EU countries came to question Turkey's credentials for EU membership. Not only this but the negotiating framework with Turkey opened the door to some kind of privileged partnership, a form of relationship short of full EU membership (Council of the European Union, 12 Oct 2005). A milestone in the relationship was that the Turkish–EU accession talks stalled due to the Cyprus dispute in 2006, leading to the suspension of accession talks on eight chapters. Then, following the suspension of some other chapters by Greece and France, Turkey–EU accession talks effectively ended. Another watershed event was the Gezi Park incidents in Istanbul in 2013, prompting EU capitals to criticize the harsh treatment of the protesters by security forces. This issue significantly worsened the relationship. Turkey's growing frustration with the EU led the then prime minister Erdoğan in November 2013 to talk openly about Turkey joining the Russia-China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as an alternative to the EU (Fed Up with EU, *Reuters*, 20 Nov 2016).

Nevertheless, the downward trend in the relationship between Ankara and Brussels peaked after the July 2016 coup plot. EU countries' support for the AKP government in the face of the coup attempt, if any, was perceived as “too little too late” by Ankara, leading to a crisis of confidence. The first visits to Turkey by EU officials were undertaken weeks after the coup attempt. Fethullah Gülen, the Sunni cleric living in self-imposed exile in the United States, was allegedly behind the coup attempt. Many of his followers took refuge in Europe following the coup attempt. That many EU countries are not willing to extradite them is another bone of contention between Brussels and Ankara.

EU-related developments such as the rise of populist anti-Turkish right-wing parties after the 2008–2009 financial/economic crisis, the increase in Islamophobia following attacks by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in many European countries, the rise in anti-migration sentiments owing to the Syrian migrant crisis, and Brussels's preoccupation with Brexit and a resurgent Russia were the other irritants in EU–Turkey relations. Last but not least, the failure to resolve the

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5 For an evaluation of Russian foreign and military doctrines, see Facon (2017).

visa issue for Turkish citizens, the row with some EU countries over the Turkish political campaign in Europe in 2017, the diplomatic crisis with Germany over the use of İncirlik military base as well as the arrest of some German citizens in 2017 have all widened the gap between the EU and Turkey.<sup>6</sup> The 2016 EU–Turkey refugee deal was not enough to save the relationship. With both of the parties mutually distancing from each other over time, the European Parliament finally decided with an overwhelming majority in a non-binding vote in 2019 for the suspension of the accession talks, citing the state of democracy in Turkey (European Parliament Votes to Suspend Turkey’s EU Membership Bid, *Deutsche Welle*, 13 Mar 2019).

Similarly, Turkish–American ties hit rock bottom after the coup attempt. Belated US endorsement of the AKP government in the face of the aborted coup, Ankara’s doubts that Washington might have been behind the coup plot, and the disagreement with the United States over the extradition of Fethullah Gülen, the alleged mastermind of the coup attempt, led to the parties taking mutually retaliatory steps. The detention of a US diplomatic official in Turkey because of his alleged links to Fethullah Gülen caused the suspension of the issuance of visas to Turkish citizens by the United States in 2017. The arrest of the American pastor Andrew Brunson in 2018 by the Turkish authorities prompted the United States to impose sanctions on two Turkish ministers and double tariffs on Turkish steel and aluminium imports. Moreover, the arrest of Hakan Atilla, the deputy director-general of Halkbank, by the US authorities in 2017, the crisis related to the Turkish decision to purchase the Russian S-400 surface to air defence system as well as the disagreement over the status of the Kurds in northern Syria have all contributed to the deterioration in Turkish–American relations.

The deterioration of both countries’ relations with the West and the transformation of the international political economy to the detriment of the West paved the way for the rise of emerging powers like Turkey and Russia. The high costs of the Afghan and Iraq conflicts for the Americans as well as the deep economic/financial crisis of 2008–2009 took their toll on the hegemonic role of the United States and the EU, making room for the rise of emerging powers such as Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS). Turkey’s multidimensional foreign policy, already in practice under the “strategic depth” doctrine designed by former Turkish prime minister Ahmet Davutoğlu (2009), was bolstered in the wake of the global economic crisis in 2008–2009.

Economic factors also facilitated the rapprochement between them. Turkey’s emergence as a “trading state” during the 2000s turned the economy into one of the main pillars of the two sides’ growing cooperation (Kirişçi 2009). Turkey is not

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<sup>6</sup> For more details about the factors contributing to the deterioration of Turkish–EU relations, see Bayraklı, Güngörmez, and Boyraz (2017).

only Russia's seventh-largest trading partner but it is also second only to Germany as Russia's gas market in Europe. Turkey provided an important economic lifeline to Russia after it was hit with heavy economic sanctions by the EU in 2014. Moreover, given the failure of Southern Stream, a gas pipeline project which would carry the Russian gas under the Black Sea and through the Balkans to the EU, due to the EU's bureaucratic hurdles, Turkey became important as a transit country for Russian gas. Southern Stream was renamed TurkStream and will transport the Russian gas arriving from under the Black Sea across Turkey to the Balkans and then to Europe. Half of 31.5 billion m<sup>3</sup>/a gas to be carried by TurkStream annually will be consumed by Turkey with the remaining half being sent on to the EU.<sup>7</sup> Turkey also provided a secure environment where Russian energy firms and banks could invest. Furthermore, in addition to Turkish contractors, many small- and medium-sized businesses operate in Russia. Russia is second only to Germany as Turkey's trading partner. Being the first destination for Russian tourists, Turkey received a record number of seven million Russian tourists in 2019 (Russian Tourist Influx, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 5 Oct 2020). Moreover, Russia's state company Rosatom is building Turkey's first nuclear power plant in Mersin-Akkuyu, at an estimated cost of 20 billion dollars (Dalton, Turkey: Construction of Akkuyu, *Nucnet*, 2 Jan 2020).

The international state of affairs also played a significant role in Turkey fostering closer ties with Russia. The collapse in 2015 of the so-called Kurdish "reconciliation process", which officially began in 2013, revived Turkey's sense of insecurity against Kurdish nationalism, as did the increase in the activities of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK)-affiliated Democratic Union Party (*Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat*, PYD)/People's Protection Units (*Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*, YPG) activities in northern Syria. The emergence of ISIS in Syria and Iraq was another part of the equation. Geostrategic changes in Syria and other parts of the Middle East affected Turkey's security perception negatively. These include the decline of Turkey's self-assigned role in Syria owing to Russian–Iranian activism, the withdrawal of the United States from the Middle East and its pivot to China and the Asia-Pacific region following the 2008 financial/economic crisis, the difficulty of stabilizing the region because of the dominant part played by sectarian dynamics, and the rivalry between Turkey and the Gulf countries and Egypt, which were alarmed at Turkish support for the Muslim Brotherhood (Aras 2017). Moreover, the EU was reluctant to get involved in the Syrian conflict. Under these circumstances, Turkey did not have many actors in the region apart from an influential Russia with which to cooperate in safeguarding itself against increasing security threats. Although initially their

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7 For an evaluation of TurkStream, see Furuncu (2020).

positions were opposed, Russia and Turkey have managed to work out a *modus vivendi* especially after the Astana Process began in 2017. It is thanks to Russia's opening of Syrian airspace to the Turkish Air Force and giving its green light that Turkey was able to carry out Operation Euphrates Shield in the summer of 2016, Operation Olive Branch in early 2018, and Operation Peace Spring in the autumn of 2019 with the aim of eliminating ISIS and pushing the YPG to the east of the Euphrates along the Syria–Turkey border. Moreover, both parties have partially cooperated in the fight against ISIS in Syria since they pursued their own interests in this issue.

The fact that both Russia and Turkey have a security-based foreign policy culture is an important similarity that helped prepare the ground for closer relations. Russia does not have natural barriers, especially along its western border, and this has exposed it to the attacks of major European powers throughout history. The porous nature of its western border has instilled a sense of geographical insecurity. By the same token, historically, Turkey has deep-rooted geographical insecurity as well, known as “the *Sèvres syndrome*”. According to “the *Sèvres syndrome*”, Turkey is surrounded by hostile countries that seek to exploit its weaknesses and dismantle it. Today, this enemy is the West for the Russian government while it is the West and its affiliates such as the Kurds in northern Syria for the Turkish government (Frappi 2018, 48–50).

Furthermore, some other factors have facilitated cooperation between them. The personal chemistry between Erdoğan and Putin, which developed over time, definitely played a positive role in forging a closer relationship. Besides, unlike the Western countries, Russia is not a critic of the state of human rights and democracy in Turkey, and vice versa. Moreover, both countries view street movements with suspicion. At the beginning of the Arab uprisings, Turkey supported these movements. However, following the Gezi Park events and the ouster of the AKP-supported Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt in 2013, the AKP government also adopted a negative line similar to Russia regarding these protests. They both believed that these protests were backed by Western governments and were aimed at subverting their governments.

## Limitations of the Rapprochement

Despite the existence of numerous commonalities and shared interests between Russia and Turkey, the divergences over geostrategic interests, the insufficiency of the societal dimension as well as the lack of an institutional aspect in their relations act as constraining factors between them.



To start with, geostrategically speaking, Turkey and Russia are in the opposite camps in the South Caucasus. While Turkey is allied with Azerbaijan and Georgia, Russia is in the same camp as Armenia and Iran. Turkey signed a strategic cooperation agreement with Azerbaijan in 2010 and signed a memorandum establishing a trilateral defence partnership with Azerbaijan and Georgia in 2018. These three countries regularly conduct military exercises. Meanwhile, Russia is an ally of Armenia through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Moreover, Turkey has not recognized the Russian protectorates of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which were separated from Georgia proper by a five-day war between Russia and Georgia in 2008.

When it comes to the Cyprus dispute, given that Russia has enjoyed close political and economic ties with the Greek Cypriots since the Cold War era, Moscow backs their stance, which favors federalism against the Turkish position, which calls for partition or confederation. The Russians are also concerned that a change in the status quo in Cyprus might weaken their traditional influence over Nicosia (Balta 2019, 81). As a corollary to Moscow's traditional pro-Greek Cypriot policy, Russia supports the Greek Cypriot posture in the gas dispute in the eastern Mediterranean too (Socor 2012).

Although Moscow and Ankara have worked out some kind of reconciliation in the Syrian crisis within the framework of the Astana Process, they still diverge on some significant points: the role of the Turkey-supported opposition, the Syrian Kurds, and the role of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad in the future of Syria (Demir 2016). Regarding the future status of al-Assad, Russia insists that he should remain in power after the civil war in Syria ends whereas Turkey is averse to al-Assad having any political role in the future. Furthermore, Russia is overly sensitive toward Islamic movements and considers some of the Syrian opposition groups backed by Turkey to be radical Islamists. Moreover, while Putin backed Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the secular head of the Egyptian military, who came to power through a coup, Erdoğan supported Mohamed Morsi, the head of the overthrown, moderately Islamist government (Baev and Kirişçi 2017). In the Libyan crisis too, they are at loggerheads. While Turkey supports the internationally recognized Government of National Accord in Tripoli, Russia, on the other hand, backs Tobruk-based House of Representatives headed by Abdullah al-Thini and its armed forces, the self-styled Libyan National Army led by Khalifah Haftar (Hilton, Russia and Turkey's Strained Relations, *Al Arabiya*, 7 Feb 2020).

The status of the Syrian Kurds is another bone of contention between Moscow and Ankara. Historically speaking, Russia has always had a special relationship with the Kurds. Over time, Russian rulers have come to see the Kurds as leverage against their enemies. Starting in the 1980s, the Soviet Union and then Russia supported the PKK and used it as a trump card against Turkey. Unlike Washington,

Moscow has never declared the PKK to be a terrorist organization. As a corollary of Russians' traditional position towards the Kurds, Putin tries to maintain Russia's influence over the Kurds in northern Syria, including the PYD/YPG. For Turkey, on the other hand, there is no difference between the outlawed Kurdish terrorist organization PKK in Turkey and the PYD/YPG in Syria. Putin is in favour of granting some kind of autonomy to the Kurds in the new Syrian state as well. Following the green light from Russia, the PYD opened a representative office in Moscow in February 2016 (Tol, Why is Turkey Silent on Russia's Cooperation with the Kurds? *War on the Rocks*, 19 Dec 2017).

Furthermore, Moscow and Ankara do not see eye to eye in terms of the direction of energy pipelines in the Caspian Basin. Russia and Turkey compete for the direction of the routes of the Caspian energy with both countries promoting the pipelines' passage through their territories. In the past, Russia objected, albeit with partial success, to the realization of both Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) and Nabucco, two pipeline projects planned to cross Turkish territory. Turkey's objective is to be an energy hub, a major part of which is the East-West Energy Corridor, shipping Caspian energy through Turkey to Europe. One leg of this corridor is the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC), which consists of the Southern Caucasus Pipeline, the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), and the Trans Anatolian Gas Pipeline (TANAP).<sup>8</sup> When it becomes fully operational, the SGC will carry 10 billion m<sup>3</sup>/a gas through Italy to the EU with Turkey receiving 6 billion m<sup>3</sup>/a gas. Since it will transport non-Russian gas (currently only Azeri gas) over non-Russian territory, the EU backs this pipeline project because it will contribute to the reduction of EU countries' energy dependency on Russia. Russia, on the other hand, aims to monopolize the transportation of Caspian gas to the world market, seeking to carry it through Russian territory. Furthermore, the Kremlin and Ankara are at odds over the deployment of the radar system for the NATO missile shield in Malatya–Kür-eçik, in 2012, something Russia has vehemently objected to.

Another problematic issue between Russia and Turkey is that despite the intense relationship between political and economic actors, the societal dimension of the bond between them seems to be superficial. The number of Russian–Turkish mixed marriages has surpassed 100,000, with many of them living in Turkish cities along the southern coast (Karakus, Rus Gelin Sayısı 105 Bini Geçti, *Milliyet*, 14 Mar 2017). In addition, there are many retired Russians who spend the rest of their lives in Turkey's coastal provinces. There have been also many Turkish contractors, workers, and small- and medium-sized entrepreneurs in Russia for decades. As a result, the visibility of the societies has mutually increased. However, despite this positive phenomenon, the lack of NGOs and insufficient interaction between those

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<sup>8</sup> For more information on the SGC, see Koranvi (2014).

that exist constitute a significant impediment to the establishment of a strong bond between the communities (Balta 2019, 85). Furthermore, despite the unprecedented level of contacts in the post-Cold War era, mutually deep-rooted historical memories of rivalry and hostility continue among the people to a certain extent: “Because of their opposing historical memories, imperial legacies, and antagonistic ethnic-religious kinships, Turkish–Russian relations remain prone to crises and disagreements” (Balcer 2014, 7).

Another significant problem standing in the way of a stronger bond between Moscow and Ankara is the fact their relationship lacks an institutional basis. The most advanced institutional structure, through which they foster their ties, is the High-Level Cooperation Council (*Üst Düzey İşbirliği Konseyi*, ÜDİK), which convenes with the participation of relevant ministers each year. This is a mechanism that Turkey has established with many countries in its neighbourhood. Yet, this mechanism of cooperation cannot be compared to the EU or NATO, through which Turkey has established a multi-dimensional institutional relationship with its Western partners.

## Weighing Turkish–Russian Relations Against Turkey’s Relations with the EU and NATO

Apart from Russia’s and Turkey’s divergent geostrategic stances explained in the first section, the continuation of the EU as Turkey’s main economic partner, the declining importance of Russia as an economic partner, the security risks posed by Russia to Turkey, Turkey’s continuing reliance on NATO as a protective security umbrella, its asymmetric relationship with Russia, and the incompatibility of the Turkish and Russian regimes make it difficult for Turkey and Russia to forge a strategic partnership.

It could be maintained that since the expected and real benefits of NATO and the EU have declined over the years from Turkey’s perspective, Turkey has increasingly embraced a transactional approach to these institutions that were once thought to be the main pillars of its external defence and political-economic relations. Furthermore, it has striven to search for alternatives to make up for the benefits that the EU and NATO did not deliver. It is in this setting that Turkey has moved to upgrade its multidimensional ties with Russia, ties that it began cultivating in the 1990s.

With respect to Turkey’s relations with NATO, Turkey’s perspective of the Alliance has gradually changed following the end of the Cold War. Turkey’s change of view about NATO accelerated after the AKP came to power in 2002.

During the Cold War period, Turkey's commitment to NATO was, to an important extent, based on the factor of identity. Apart from its function of reassuring Turkey's security, NATO was an important symbol affirming Turkey's Western character. With the Cold War over, concerning Turkey's commitment to NATO, an interest-driven approach has begun to replace the identity-driven approach. The threats originating from the Middle Eastern theatre to Turkey's security have proliferated in the post-Cold War era. However, much to Turkey's displeasure, the European members of the Alliance were unwilling to come to the help of Turkey in the context of the solidarity article (Article V) of the Alliance (Oğuzlu 2012, 155). These cases include the first and second Gulf wars in 1991 and 2003 respectively, the Turkish calls for protection against al-Assad's missiles in 2012, and protection against Russia after the downing of a Russian jet by Turkey along the Turkey–Syria border in 2015.

After the AKP came to power in 2002, Turkey started to question the usefulness of the Alliance for its security more vocally. With an Islamist pedigree, the AKP has, unlike the Kemalists (proponents of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's ideals), no identity-driven commitment to Western institutions and views its relationship with these institutions more through pragmatic lenses. When the AKP government decided that NATO did not provide the expected protection against the security challenges in its neighborhood, it became willing to search for alternative security systems. Turkey's acquisition of the Russian S-400 air defence system as well as its growing cooperation with Russia in Syria and the broader Middle Eastern region in the context of the Arab uprisings are the by-product of this consideration.

It is also a fact that the multipolar world order replacing the bipolar international system in the Cold War period has enabled Turkey to pursue a multi-dimensional foreign policy, reducing the significance of its alliance with the West. In addition, the fact that former US president Donald Trump considered NATO as "obsolete" (Master, Trump Tells German Paper: NATO is 'Obsolete', *The Hill*, 15 Jan 2017) and preferred to act unilaterally on the international stage weakened the transatlantic ties, thus further undermining the real and expected security benefits of this organization for Turkey.

Moreover, Turkey's increasing military capabilities in the last two decades have enhanced its strategic autonomy, reducing its dependence on NATO as a protective umbrella. This was another development reducing the expected and real benefits from NATO for Turkey's security. Thanks to the sustained economic growth during the 2000s, the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) have acquired sophisticated military capabilities, increasing self-sufficiency in arms supply as well as enhanced operational ability to field troops in different international theatres simultaneously. Turkey's economic growth has boosted its defence industry too, transforming Turkey into an increasingly self-reliant state in the production of

arms and military equipment. While the Turkish defence industry's overall turnover reached 3067 billion dollars in 2009 (Savunma ve Havacılık Sanayi Performans Raporu 2013), it increased in a decade by more than 300%, totalling 10,884 billion dollars in 2019 (Performans Raporu 2019). Likewise, the Turkish defence industry's volume of exports more than tripled from 853 million dollars in 2010 (Savunma ve Havacılık Sanayi Performans Raporu 2013) to 3068 billion dollars in 2019 (Performans Raporu 2019), indicating the Turkish defence industry's global competitive power and quality of its products. Owing to the advances in the Turkish arms industry, as of 2019, 70% of the arms and military equipment used by the TSK was indigenous (Gurini, Turkey's Uncompromising Defense Industry, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 9 Oct 2020). As a result, increasing strategic autonomy has reduced Turkey's reliance on NATO for its security needs and provided it with room for manoeuvre to engage with such actors as Russia if need be.

An important milestone in Turkey's perceived tilt towards Russia was its decision to purchase the Russian S-400 air defence system. The S-400 saga started during the Barack Obama presidency when Turkey's request to acquire the Patriot missile defence system was rejected by the United States. Following the jet downing on 24 November 2015, NATO sent an air defence system to Turkey for protection against Russia upon Turkey's request. Nevertheless, to Turkey's displeasure, the United States, Germany, and the Netherlands deployed the Patriots temporarily and pulled them out when their missions terminated. In turn, Turkey searched for alternatives to protect the Eastern provinces, which are vulnerable to shorter-range aerial threats from the Middle East. The solution was the acquisition of the Russian S-400 air defence system with surface-to-air missiles against airborne threats, which was at the same time more affordable in comparison to the US Patriot air defence system and included the possibility of technology transfer. However, the Turkish plan faced objections in particular on the grounds of the S-400 air defence system's interoperability with NATO data exchange network, its inability to provide defence against ballistic missiles, its inability to utilize NATO's air defence ground environment and satellite detection capabilities, its contradiction with NATO's friend or foe policy, and operational concerns (Tol and Goren 2017).

In retaliation, following the acquisition of the Russian S-400 air defence system in July 2019, Turkey was removed from the F-35 programme by the United States, ending Ankara's plan to purchase more than 100 stealth fighter jets. In addition, the United States threatened further economic sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). In response, Turkey implied that it would retaliate by expelling the United States from the İncirlik and Kürecik airbases if new sanctions were imposed (Gotev, Turkey Warns

It Could Kick Out US, *Euractiv*, 11 Dec 2019). Given Turkey's firm stance on the issue, in a last-ditch effort, the United States took a softer line, proposing to sell Turkey its Patriot air defence system if Turkey agreed not to operate the Russian S-400 air defence system (US Offering Patriot System If Russian S-400s Not Operated, *Aljazeera*, 10 Mar 2020). In October 2020, Turkey test-fired the Russian S-400 air defence system, to Washington's condemnation. The United States threatened Turkey with further sanctions if the latter activated the system (US Warns Turkey over Reported Test of Russian S-400 Missile System, *Deutsche Welle*, 17 Oct 2020). Unlike the US ruling elite, NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg was, on the other hand, more understanding of Turkey's acquisition of the S-400, underlining the importance of Turkey for the Alliance (Stefanovic 2019).

Notwithstanding the turmoil that broke out over the Turkish acquisition of the S-400, in terms of security, Turkey still needs NATO's protective umbrella against Russia. It is important to note that Turkey hosts the NATO missile defence system's radar station, which is aimed at Russia, in Malatya–Kürecik. Given the status of relations with Russia, Turkey perceives a security threat from this country, and since Turkey's geostrategic interests do not overlap with those of Russia in many areas, Turkey should tread a fine line to avoid a clash with this country. For instance, when Turkey shot down a Russian jet on 24 November 2015, Ankara turned to NATO for protection. Although Turkey was not able to extract from NATO the decision to put into practice Article 5 regarding collective defence, the Alliance declared its solidarity with Turkey and sent an air defence package to shore up the country's air and naval defence. The package included AWACS surveillance planes and a bolstered naval presence including maritime patrol aircraft (Emmott, Exclusive: NATO Agrees to Turkey's Air Defense Package, *Reuters*, 18 Dec 2015).

Moreover, Turkey's threat perception of Russia increased in the Black Sea region after the Crimea event in March 2014. This is because the balance of power in the Black Sea changed to the detriment of Turkey in the wake of the Russian annexation of Crimea. In May 2016 president Erdoğan told Stoltenberg that "the Black Sea has almost become a Russian lake. If we don't act now, history will not forgive us" (International Crisis Group 2018, 14). Indeed, after 2014, the length of Russia's coastline increased from 475 km to 1200 km. Russia launched a massive expansion plan of its navy in the Black Sea with a cost of 2.4 billion dollars by 2020 (LaGrone, Russia to Expand Naval Presence in Black Sea, *USNI News*, 6 May 2014). With this plan, Russia planned to add 30 warships of various sizes to its Black Sea fleet. Turkey, on the other hand, supported NATO's plans to increase its presence in the Black Sea. After the jet downing incident in November 2015, Turkey supported the Romanian proposal in February 2016 to form a permanent naval task force comprising Romania, Turkey, and Bulgaria (International Crisis Group 2018). However, the initiative foundered following the Bulgarian rejection in early 2017.

In brief, Russia's military build-up in the Black Sea renders the NATO alliance increasingly significant for Turkey's security in the region despite Ankara's growing accord with the Kremlin.

Furthermore, to counterbalance Russia in the Black Sea, Turkey fosters close ties with Ukraine in the defence industry. This country has been in conflict with Russia since the latter annexed Crimea in 2014. Cooperation in the defence industry is expected to be followed by military exercises in the Black Sea. Turkey is Ukraine's second most important trading partner and it cooperates with this country in the fields of defence, economy, and tourism. Turkey describes its relationship with Ukraine as strategic because of its geopolitical implications in the Black Sea region as well as for the Turkish defence industry (Miller, In Kyiv, Erdogan Said All the Right Things, *RFERL*, 5 Feb 2020). Ukraine is the main partner for Turkey in some key military technologies, including avionics, drones, turboprop, and diesel engines, anti-ship and cruise missiles, space and satellite technologies, radar and surveillance systems, active and passive armor protection systems, robotic systems, guidance systems, and rocket engines. It is estimated that firms from the two sides have been working on about 50 joint defence projects as of November 2020 (Gürcan, Turkey on Couse to Strategic Partnership with Ukraine, *Al Monitor*, 22 Oct 2020). Moreover, despite its collaboration with Russia, Turkey respects Ukraine's territorial integrity, has never recognized the Russian annexation of Crimea, and has been a traditional protector of the rights of Crimean Tatars.

All in all, exiting NATO could be costly for Turkey's security. Furthermore, since Turkey lives in a volatile neighbourhood, NATO provides deterrence against possible adversaries in the region. Moreover, NATO helps Turkey geostrategically counterbalance Greece, Turkey's neighbour and traditional rival. Otherwise, Turkey would have to confront Greece backed by the North Atlantic Alliance. Furthermore, NATO provides a channel of communication for Turkey vis-à-vis Greece and to Western partners. NATO also provides protection for Turkey against nuclear threats such as those from Iran and Russia (Yegin 2019). In short, although NATO failed to deliver the expected security benefits in the eyes of Turkey, NATO is too important for Turkey to seriously contemplate a split. The benefits of remaining in NATO outweigh the costs for Turkey. Turkey, too, provides security benefits to NATO since Turkey plays a significant role in enhancing European security in many respects. These contributions include, among others, the provision of military bases to NATO in a volatile neighbourhood, its participation in almost all collective defence-related missions and crisis management operations and missions such as ISAF, establishing cooperative relations with non-NATO member partners in its neighborhood, supporting the Alliance against emerging security threats such as terrorism, and deploying a NATO missile defence radar system against Russia. These kinds of mutually indispensable security benefits create an

“alliance dependency” at a structural level (DIIS 2020, 5), holding NATO and Turkey together.

When it comes to Turkey’s economic relations, Russia is no match for the EU. However, the Turkish national income increased from \$240 billion in 2002 to \$761 billion in 2019 (World Bank 2021a). During the same interval, per capita income jumped from \$3687 in 2002 to \$9126 in 2019 (World Bank 2021b). Furthermore, while the share of the EU in Turkey’s overall trade was 56% in 1999, it declined to 42% in 2018.<sup>9</sup> It is obvious that the relative decline in the EU’s importance for Turkey in external trade plus the growth of the Turkish economy have undermined the real and expected benefits from the EU. Yet, EU countries are still Turkey’s most important source of short-term finance, foreign direct investment (FDI), technology, and tourism revenue. Turkey conducts more than 40% of its trade with the EU, making the EU Turkey’s largest trading partner. At its peak, Turkey’s exports to Russia reached 7 billion dollars in 2013 while Turkey’s exports to the EU amounted to almost 70 billion dollars in 2019 (TÜİK, *Database*). Russia’s share in Turkey’s exports reached only 2.1% with \$3.4 billion in 2018, making Russia just the twelfth largest market for Turkish exports (Turkey Exports by Country, *Trading Economics*). About half of Turkey’s exports to Russia are made up of low-technology and low value-added goods such as food and textiles (RIAC 2016). The Russian demand for such kind of products is also hard to increase in the short- and medium-term because of their low price elasticity. Besides, the Russian economy has been in crisis since 2014 owing to the sanctions imposed by the EU and low gas prices. Therefore, any growth in Turkish exports to the Russian market cannot be expected in the short- and medium-term.

One of the underlying conditions for Turkey to expand its exports to the Russian market is for Russia to overhaul its economic system, rendering it more competitive in the global market and generating sustainable growth, something that is unlikely to be achieved in a short time. Currently, the Russian economic model relies on the exports of raw materials. Regarding the FDI, the rate of the Russian FDI in Turkey totalled only 4.1% whereas that of the United States and the EU combined was 54% between 2003 and 2018 (Investment Office of the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey). The leaders of Russia and Turkey often exaggeratedly declare 100 billion dollars as their goal of annual trade. However, this is no more than a good source of motivation to increase the volume of trade since it is not realistic to reach this target, at least in the short- and medium-term, because of the reasons cited above as well as the decline in Turkey’s energy trade with Russia, as is explained in the next paragraph.

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<sup>9</sup> Compiled by the author from the Turkish Ministry of Trade database (<https://www.trade.gov.tr/>) and the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) database (<https://www.tuik.gov.tr/>).



Russia's importance in Turkey's energy imports, the mainstay of Turkish–Russian trade relations, will continue decreasing in the years ahead except for the nuclear power plant under construction in Mersin-Akkuyu, and this will further diminish the importance of economic relations, thereby undermining the prospects for a strategic partnership between Turkey and Russia. Turkey imports 75% of its energy, 28% of which is gas (Kraemer, Diversify and Expand, *Middle East Institute*, 16 Apr 2020). Russia's share in Turkey's gas imports saw a significant decline from 52% in 2017 to 33% in 2019 (Temizer, Russian Share of Turkish Gas Imports Falls, *Anadolu Agency*, 5 Jun 2020). This trend will continue in the years ahead thanks to Ankara's energy supply diversification efforts, including an increasing reliance on Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), the introduction of TANAP shipping non-Russian gas to Turkey, the growing importance of renewable energy, the increasing use of coal in energy production, and the newly discovered gas resources in the Black Sea as well as the introduction of the national energy efficiency plan.

Thanks to cheap prices, the share of LNG in Turkey's gas import jumped from 15.8% in 2015 to 28.3% in 2019 (Özdil, How Turkey Benefits from Global Gas Glut, *Atlantic Council*, 7 May 2020). The gas resources discovered in the Black Sea in August 2020, worth approximately \$80 billion, will further help curtail the gas imports from Russia. In addition, the Azeri gas brought to Turkey by TANAP, which became operational in 2019, contributes to the reduction of Turkey's dependence on Russian gas. Even though the oil imported from Russia to Turkey increased fourfold from 2018 to 2019 because of the US sanctions on Iran, Turkey's main oil supplier, this could change with the change of US president from Donald Trump to Joe Biden. Joe Biden is not as strict on Iran as his predecessor and is willing to return to the negotiating table on the nuclear issue with Iran (Biden – Iran Nuclear Deal, *Aljazeera*, 2 Dec 2020). As a result of the successful negotiations, US sanctions on the export of Iranian oil might ease and Iran's share in Turkey's oil import might increase again. Azerbaijan's state oil company SOCAR's refinery STAR, which opened in İzmir in 2018, will further cut down on Turkey's dependence on processed oil products imported from Russia. Turkey also plans to increase the share of renewable energy in the country's electricity production to two-thirds by 2023 (Turkey Looks to Raise Share of Renewables to Two-thirds by 2023, *Daily Sabah*, 17 Jun 2019). The share of coal imported from Russia, Turkey's second-largest coal supplier, has also fallen in the past few years owing to more competitive coal prices from Colombia and the United States (Turkey Takes Less Russian Coal, *Argustmedia*, 25 Feb 2019). An important implication for Turkish–EU relations of Russia's declining importance as Turkey's main energy supplier is that as a result of the decline in Russia's importance for Turkey as an economic actor, the EU will enhance its role as Turkey's most important economic partner.

Furthermore, the fact that Turkey enjoys an asymmetric relationship with Russia calls into question the sustainability of a possible strategic partnership. This is because in such a form of relationship, the stronger partner, Russia, will impose its will on the weaker partner, Turkey. This is all the more valid for an authoritarian country like Russia. A case in point is the jet downing crisis in November 2015. Immediately after the incident, Russia put into practice an extensive list of embargoes against Turkey, damaging the Turkish economy significantly in 2016. Later, Russia phased out the restrictions piece by piece, squeezing out concessions from Turkey in return for the amelioration of relations. As one expert aptly put it: “Russia has applied a ‘salami tactic’, relaxing restrictions step-by-step, in the interest of domestic vested interests but also to preserve diplomatic leverage over Turkey” (Bechev 2017, 6). By the same token, the asymmetric form of relationship can be observed in the field of economy. Given that Turkey is not the leading supplier of Russia’s imports from Turkey all of the time, it is not difficult for Russia to switch to other suppliers. Apart from that, although Turkey has been gradually reducing its energy dependence on Russia, there is an obvious imbalance in favour of Russia when it comes to the FDI. Turkey’s investment in Russia is heavily concentrated in non-strategic sectors such as construction whereas Russia’s investment in Turkey is mostly in such strategic sectors as banking and energy (Aydın-Düzgüt, Balta, and O’Donohue 2020, 9). Therefore, Turkey turning the current collaboration with Russia into a strategic partnership would further deepen the power asymmetry between them. As noted by Özel (2018), in such a case, “Ankara may inadvertently turn itself into a sidekick of Moscow and find out that in this unequal relation it cannot adequately protect even its core national interests.”

The fact that Moscow and Ankara have different regime types constitutes another obstacle for Turkey to disengage further from the EU and NATO and towards Russia. Russia is one of the prominent examples of “competitive authoritarianism”, in which on the outside, the political system is democratic given the existence of multi-party elections.<sup>10</sup> Yet, in essence, it is an authoritarian political system due to a multitude of violations of democratic politics. Turkey, on the other hand, has 70 years of experience in multi-party democracy, the recent criticism regarding a decline in democracy notwithstanding. Therefore, this normative difference among the countries renders it difficult for them to establish a much closer partnership. In this sense, Turkey’s inclusion in the SCO, consisting of authoritarian regimes in Asia, instead of maintaining its ties with the EU and NATO is not a realistic option. After all, despite some setbacks, Turkey

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**10** For an in-depth analysis regarding competitive authoritarianism, see Levitsky and Way (2010).

has achieved a wide range of democratic gains throughout its political history and in the past two decades, and the EU has played a significant part in this.

Finally, despite uneasy relations with the West, the EU and NATO enjoy a considerable degree of support among the Turkish public. According to a public opinion poll conducted in April 2020, 53% of the respondents supported Turkey's aspiration to EU membership and 55.2% believed that Turkey's NATO membership should continue (Türk Dış Politikası Kamuoyu Algıları Araştırması 2020 Sonuçları Açıklandı, *Kadir Has University*). In short, from the perspective of public opinion, the likelihood of building a strategic partnership with Russia replacing NATO and the EU does not seem to be high in the short- and medium-term either.

After having burnt the bridges with Brussels after the coup attempt in 2016, Turkey made an effort to mend fences with the EU in early 2021, indicating the importance of the European dimension of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey's increasing isolation in the region because of its assertive foreign policy, the election of Joe Biden as US president, who committed to revive the transatlantic partnership and the US global role that was neglected by the outgoing president Donald Trump, as well as the need to boost the Turkish economy that was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic were the main drivers behind the Turkish government's move to thaw its relationship with the EU. However, the resumption of Turkish–EU dialogue is not expected to make a fundamental shift in the relations between them in the short- and medium-term for reasons related both to the EU as well as Turkey. The AKP government's alliance with the Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP), the EU's fundamental criticism of the presidential system with few checks and balances not to mention the questions regarding the independence of the judiciary, and criticism regarding the democratic backslide and the growing role of the conservatives in the AKP all constrain the AKP government's overture towards the EU.

On the European front, the enlargement fatigue persists, being exacerbated by both internal and external challenges recently. For these reasons, smooth progress in the accession talks should not be expected. In other words, the EU–Turkish relationship will be transactional and its progress will be dependent upon the fulfillment of mutual demands. Thus, Turkish–European relations will not improve fundamentally in the short- and medium-term, and since it will not be possible to anchor Turkey to the EU as a full member, the decline in expected interests from Turkey's perspective will continue, a process that began after 2006 when the accession talks effectively stalled. However, owing to the aforesaid problems regarding Turkish–Russian relations, it will not be possible to turn the Russian–Turkish relationship into a strategic

partnership either. Therefore, Turkey will continue using Russia and the EU against each other as a bargaining chip.

## Conclusion

This article argues that in addition to many factors facilitating the Russo–Turkish rapprochement, due to the diminishment of the real and expected benefits from the EU and NATO in Turkish eyes, Turkey was compelled to look for new options, cultivating closer ties with Russia. The study also maintains that despite the close partnership between Ankara and the Kremlin, which has accelerated after the July 2016 coup attempt, it is not possible for Turkey to forge a strategic partnership with Russia at the expense of its relations with the EU and NATO due to significant divergences over geostrategic issues, Russia’s inadequate status as an economic actor, the pitfalls of an asymmetric partnership with Russia, the security risks posed by Russia, the continuing status of NATO as a protective umbrella for Turkey’s security, and their incompatible political systems. Furthermore, the flaws in the social and institutional aspects of their relationship make a Turkish shift from the Transatlantic Alliance to Russia improbable.

To start with, in terms of Turkey’s economic relations, Russia cannot be compared to the EU given that there is a wide disparity between Turkey’s economic relations with the EU and its economic relations with Russia to the detriment of the latter and the fact that the potential of developing Turkey’s economic relationship with Russia further is not very bright mainly due to the nature of Turkey’s trade with Russia based on low value-added products such as textiles and food, the low growth potential of the Russian economy, which relies on the export of raw materials, and Turkey’s declining energy import from Russia.

Secondly, Turkey is vulnerable to security risks posed by Russia given the fluctuations in its relationship with this country. Since Turkey and Russia pursue opposing geostrategic interests in the areas surrounding Turkey, notably in Syria, Libya, the Black Sea region, Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and Cyprus, Turkey feels threatened by Russia whenever their interests overly differentiate from each other. Moreover, Turkey still relies on NATO for its protection against the Russian threat as well as other possible nuclear and conventional threats in its neighborhood. After all, whenever Turkey got into trouble with Russia following the November 2015 jet downing incident, it turned to NATO to counterbalance the Russian threat.

Thirdly, a possible strategic partnership with Russia has some pitfalls since the current Turkish–Russian relationship is asymmetric in terms of economy, politics, security, and arms supply in favour of the latter. Transforming the present

relationship into a strategic one would further expand this asymmetry, making Turkey increasingly dependent on Russia and thus damaging Turkey's national interests.

Fourthly, given the lack of common political norms considering that Turkey and Russia represent different regime examples, the Turkish–Russian bond is prone to being transactional rather than strategic. Even if Turkey has some deficiencies in its political system and has been criticized recently on the grounds of democratic backsliding, it is a functioning democracy with the experience of seven decades. Russia, on the other hand, is a leading example of “competitive authoritarianism”, in which the authoritarian character of the regime dominates over its democratic aspects.

Moreover, aside from their divergent geo-strategic viewpoints in many regions and issues, flaws in the institutional and societal aspects of their relations render a possible strategic partnership between Turkey and Russia unfeasible. The societal dimension of the relationship is weak despite the growing interaction among the two peoples in the post-Cold War era. The institutional aspect of Russo–Turkish ties is flawed, something that stands in stark contrast to Turkey's multi-dimensional institutional relationship with the EU and NATO. In short, a strategic partnership between Turkey and Russia seems improbable in the short- and medium-term due to geostrategic, political, economic, societal, institutional, and normative reasons even if Turkish–Western relations have been at a nadir in recent years.

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