

Russian-Turkish Relations in the Black Sea Region and Caucasus under the Shades of Conflicts

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Abstract

This paper explains Russian-Turkish relations and historical perspectives of these relations in the context of Black Sea Region. There are several chronic issues in the region and bilateral relations of Russia and Turkey also effect regional problems, mostly in a positive way. Historical developments of Russian-Turkish relations are addressed and conflicts in the region have been tackled in this paper. The author first elaborates on the Abkhazian and Ossetian conflicts, and then looks at the Ukrainian crisis and its dynamics in the shade of Russian 'True Europe, False Europe' dichotomy. Finally, the power competition between Russia and Turkey regarding the historical ties of both is analysed.

Keywords: Black Sea Region, Russian-Turkish Relations, Caucasus, Conflicts.

Karadeniz Bölgesinde ve Kafkasya'da Çatışmaların Gölgesinde Rusya-Türkiye İlişkileri

Özet

Bu makalede Karadeniz Bölgesi bağlamında Rusya-Türkiye ilişkileri ve bu ilişkilerin tarihsel perspektifi incelenmektedir. Bölgede çok sayıda kronik problem bulunmaktadır ve Rusya ile Türkiye'nin ikili ilişkileri bölgesel sorunları çoğunlukla olumlu yönde etkilemektedir. Makalede Rusya-Türkiye ilişkilerinin tarihsel gelişimi ve Karadeniz Bölgesi'ndeki çatışmalar ele alınmıştır. İlk olarak Abhazya ve Kuzey Osetya anlaşmazlıkları ayrıntılı şekilde değerlendirilmiş; daha sonra ise Ukrayna krizi ve dinamikleri Rusya'nın "Gerçek Avrupa - Yanlış Avrupa" ikilemi ışığında açıklanmıştır. Ayrıca Rusya ile Türkiye arasındaki güç rekabeti ile hem Rusya hem de Türkiye'nin tarihsel bağları belirtilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Karadeniz Bölgesi, Rusya-Türkiye İlişkileri, Kafkasya, Çatışmalar.

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Introduction

Black Sea Region is a new field of interest for Europe, United States, Russia and Turkey which is a regional power, because of a great number of policy concerns related to regional conflicts, energy, migration and trade. However, before elaborating on the Russian-Turkish relations in the context of Black Sea region, first, we need to define where Black Sea Region is and which states are Black Sea states. There are different statements on the definition of Black Sea Region and commonly it can be defined as a land and a seascape from the Balkans to the Caucasus and from the Ukrainian and Russian steppe to Anatolia. There are six or more than six littoral states in the Black Sea Region depending on which perspective you are looking at: Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, Georgia, Romania, Bulgaria and also de-facto Republic of Abkhazia or disputed enclave Crimea.

From another view, Charles King claims that the Black Sea Region is within the field of view of European policymakers because of European Union and NATO border the Black Sea Region on the west and Turkey which is a European Union accession country bordering it in the south (King 1-19). Turkey is a member of NATO since 1952; Bulgaria and Romania have become members of NATO in 2004. Also, these two Balkan countries have become members of EU in 2007. This geographical situation of the region causes several incidents and also conflicts between the Black Sea countries with the interventions of great powers. Besides its geography, Black Sea Region also has the feature of a bridge and a crossroad of cultures, histories and religions.

From a different viewpoint, the region has been undergoing a change related to new global dynamics since the Soviet Union collapsed. Before the Cold War and the collapse of SSSR, there were relations or cooperation attempts between Turkey and Soviet Union in the Black Sea region. However, this changed and a community-building process started in the new multi-polar world. In 1992, a process of regional cooperation initiative was started by Turkey and 11 wider Black Sea area (WBSA) countries that gathered in Istanbul to sign the Declaration on the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). The BSEC was founded in 1998 as a symbolic, post-cold war cooperation and this organization at the present has 12 member states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia,

Turkey, Ukraine, Albania and Serbia. New political impacts created some opportunities for community building process in the wider Black Sea region. However, the regional cooperation has been a part of an integration process to Europe (Hajizada 529-548). This situation has caused tension between Russia and European Union and other countries in the Black Sea region edgeways.

Apart from BSEC and its impact on Black Sea economy, Russia and Turkey's economic partnership in the Black Sea Region is a crucial juncture. In 2000s, Russia was one of Turkey's main trade partners and also Turkey became Russia's important trade partner. In this regard, BSEC could not supply free trade regimes or ties between the Black Sea countries. The most important economic effect of Russian-Turkish interaction on the region is the energy cooperation between two countries. Also, after the Ukrainian Crisis in 2014, Russia and Turkey declared that both countries will work on a joint energy project called "Turkish Stream".

On the other hand, two Black Sea countries, Russia and Turkey's relations have always been fluctuating and unstable since the new Russian Federation was founded. As Mitat Çelikpala expresses in the EDAM report in 2019; Russia and Turkey were not able to establish a political cooperation focused solely on their own interests. Their expectations were not independent of security and threat perceptions that dominate the regional-global relations (Çelikpala "Türkiye Rusya ilişkilerinin" 28). In this sense, Black Sea region has a significant role for both Russia and Turkey. Also; this paper will explore the Russian-Turkish relations in the context of Black Sea Region and the Caucasus which include Georgia, Abkhazia and Ukraine.

Before evaluating the Russian-Turkish relations in the Black Sea region, it could be beneficial to try to understand Russia's perspective towards Western countries due to Turkey's westernization process during its establishment and its close relations on trade. On his book, 'Russia and The Idea of Europe', Iver Neumann analyses Russian foreign policy discourse and he claims that Europe has stood between two different categories for Russian politicians and elites: 'True Europe and False Europe'. According to him 'True Europe and False Europe Dichotomy' can explain some historical periods of Russia. This dichotomy is not just related to Russia's perspective towards Europe,

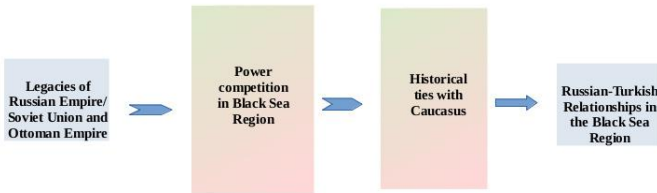
but also is related to where Russia locates itself in the region Russia's historical agnosticism never changed against Europe and this perspective of Russia has affected its approach to its relations with Turkey since the Ottoman Empire. From this point, this article will try to explain how Russian and Turkish legacies from Russian Empire/SSSR, and the Ottoman Empire affect today's Black Sea policies of these countries.

Methodology and the Theoretical Framework

In this paper, process tracing method is used to investigate the Russian-Turkish relations in the Black Sea region. There are three distinct types of process tracing method: theory-testing, theory-building and explaining-outcome (Beach and Pedersen). In this case, theory-testing (TT) process tracing has been used, as we think there is a causal link between Russia's and Turkey's policies towards the Black Sea region and their Soviet-Ottoman legacies, as well as their social structures.

Both Russia and Turkey have legacies from their former states, Russian Empire-Soviet Union and the Ottoman Empire. The legacy influences both countries' foreign policies, especially neighbourhood policies in the Black Sea region. The social structures of these countries are another dimension in their policies in the Black Sea area.

T.1: Russian-Turkish relationships in the Black Sea Region



In many cases, scholars try to evaluate the new global or regional security dynamics and develop some approaches related to state behavior and security problems in the context of geopolitics. There are also many studies on the Turkish-Russian interaction in the Black Sea Region and Caucasus in the context of realist or neo-realist approaches.

The term 'geopolitics' was coined by Rudolf Kjellen in the end of the 17th century. However, it is possible to say that 'classical' geopolitics

was founded by Alfred Mahan and Halford Mackinder. These theorists generally have an approach in their studies that Eurasia is the center of the world. There are many pre-Cold War theories that we can define as classical geopolitical theories. The Heartland Doctrine is the most known theory which belongs to Mackinder. According to this doctrine, while Eurasia refers to Heartland, England, America, Africa, Australia and Japan are defined as the outer crescent belt surrounding Eurasia (Dodds, Kuus, and Sharp 2-6; see also Mackinder).

Geopolitics was excluded from political discourse after the Second World War, but appeared again in the 20th century with the revival of the term by Henry Kissinger. However, geopolitics theories faced many different criticisms, for example, the Marxist approach claimed that geopolitics was a rationalization tool for American imperialism (Owens 61-62). From another perspective, in the political atmosphere of the period between late 40s and late 80s, the world was divided into geopolitical blocks. War visibly transformed into a new form of violence over geographies. With this new form, human insecurity moved beyond its traditional borders (Dalby 281).

With the end of the Cold War, several changes occurred in the geopolitical perception and the concept of 'critical geopolitics' has emerged. Critical geopolitical theory examines geographic assumptions and determinations for world politics (Agnew 2). It was grounded in parallel with the critical approaches that emerged in response to the neo-realism theory and its positivist methodology.

Critical Geopolitics is a theory based on Frankfurt school. Robert Cox, one of the prominent scholars of the Frankfurt School, criticizes the classical approaches of power and claims that realism cannot understand the changing structure of the world. With this anti-positivist approach of Cox and the critical theory, all knowledge and assumptions in world politics have been questioned again (Cox 1987). The critical geopolitical theory is intertwined with the critical theories of the international relations discipline.

Simon Dalby, John Agnew and Gearóid Ó Tuathail are among the pioneers of Critical Geopolitical Theory. Dalby, Agnew and Tuathail argue that world politics should be understood by interpreting, not by examining the relations between the naval and land forces. Tuathail states that critical geopolitics is not some form of "geopolitical"

thinking. According to him, geography, space and, most importantly, world politics can be conceptualized as an alternative to traditional geopolitics. Also, according to Tuathail, it is necessary to approach the scientific claim of geopolitics with suspicion. At the core of his critical geopolitical studies is the Foucauldian power/knowledge perspective. Tuathail's geo-power conceptualization is also parallel to the Foucauldian biopower perspective. As such, it is a critical geopolitical post-structuralist theoretical approach. For this reason, critical geopolitics is significant in terms of revealing the geographical formulation of global politics and showing the over-exaggerated meaning and hierarchical domination relationships of geopolitics according to Tuathail. (Dodds et al 6-10).

In light of all these issues, this article rejects a geopolitical approach to Turkish-Russian relations, conflicts in the Black Sea and Caucasus Regions. On the other hand, the regional approach of Russia and its interaction with Turkey are discussed in the article in the context of Russian Perspective towards the West. Iver Neumann, on 'Russia and The Idea of Europe', analyses Russian foreign policy discourse and he claims that Europe has stood between two different categories for Russian politicians and elites: 'True Europe and False Europe'. According to him 'True Europe and False Europe Dichotomy' can explain the same historical periods of Russia.

During the nineteenth century, the Russian state represented itself as 'True Europe'. There was a debate in the Russian discourse between Slavophiles and Westernizers. Slavophiles argued West had turned away from Christian values towards social rot in general. Modernity was a threat for Russia and modern Europe was a 'False Europe'. Also, during the twentieth century, Russia represented itself as 'True Europe' again in a situation where Europe had failed by not turning to socialism. (Neumann 194)

An Overview of Russian-Turkish Relations in the Black Sea Region

Russian-Turkish relations have a 500-year history dating back to the Moscow Principality and the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire dominated the Black Sea region in the 15th and 16th centuries but from the 17th century onwards the Russians reached the Black Sea and took control of the Caucasus (Çelikpala "Türkiye Rusya İlişkilerinin" 28).

From the 18th century to the 20th century onwards, the Black Sea region has been an area of savage and continuous rivalry between the Ottomans and Russians. In the 18th century, they had a strife for dominance in the Black Sea region and both had a desire to control the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles Straits. After the foundation of the Republic of Turkey and the USSR, the First World War erupted and after this war, Montreux Convention was signed in 1936 between the two countries. This convention put an end to the long-term competition and commenced an era of peace and stability in the Black Sea region (Kelkitli 65). Also, Turkey took full control over the straits with the Montreux Convention.

It is accepted that the modern Russian-Turkish relations started in 1920s and 1930s. In 1925, Turkish-Soviet Treaty of Neutrality and Non-aggression was signed between the parties and remained in force until 1945. Turkey's NATO membership led to re-tension in the Russian-Turkish relations. The energy cooperation agreements signed in the 80s brought the two countries closer again. In short, Russian-Turkish relations always displayed a fluctuating momentum.

For a brief history of Russian-Turkish relations in the Black Sea region, we need to look at the Cold War period which effected the relations between the Russians and the Turks. At that time, all the Black Sea region was influenced by the bipolar world system. When Turkey joined the NATO in 1952, Soviet Union already had more power in the Black Sea region due to the inclusion of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, along with the present-day semi-recognized Republic of Abkhazia. Also, at that time the nuclear parity of superpowers achieved a strategic stability in 1960s and this caused a positive resonance in the Black Sea Region (Shlykov 93-116). On the other hand, Turkey's membership of NATO changed its perspective towards USSR and increased anti-communism in Turkey's domestic and foreign policies. Containment, which is a geopolitical strategic foreign policy pursued by the United States against Soviet Russia was adopted by Turkey (Çelikpala "Türkiye Rusya İlişkilerinin" 5).

When we look from the Soviet side, there was a similar situation towards Turkey on USSR's foreign policy. Soviet Russia pursued a policy against Turkey like its foreign policy towards European countries and United States. Samokhvalov explains the 'False and True Europe'

perspective of Russian foreign policy as not being a new representation for Russia's neighbourhood perspective on his book "*Russian-European relations in the Balkans and Black Sea region: Great power identity and the idea of Europe*" (Samokhvalov 62). Iver Neumann, analyzing the Russian foreign policy discourse, claims that Europe stood between two different categories for Russian politicians and elites: 'True Europe and False Europe'. During the nineteenth century, the Russian state represented itself as 'True Europe'. That means, Russia located itself in Europe, hence, there was another Europe in its perspective. At that time the existing debate in the Russian discourse between Slavophiles and Westernizers perceived Europe as having a degenerate nature. Modernity was a threat for Russia and modern Europe was a 'False Europe'. Also, during the twentieth century, Russia represented itself as the 'True Europe', again, in a situation where Europe had failed by not turning to socialism (Neumann 194). After Turkey's NATO participation, Turkey also has been a Western enemy like Europe and United States for Soviet regime. In this sense, elaborating Soviet Union's Turkey policy with this perspective is the right way to understand Russian-Turkish relation during the Cold War.

In addition to the Slavophile Debate, Eurasians seen as the Slavophiles' continuation, also have a similar Western-Slavic argument (Laruenne 2, Senderov 25, Vahitov). It is necessary to examine the Westernizer-Slavophile debate in 19th century to understand Eurasianism. However, differing from Slavophiles, Eurasianists claim that non-Slavs may also live among the Slavic people. Eurasianism also has a close relation with the geopolitical theories that shape the Russian Federation's security policies since the Soviet times. Starting from the early 2000's an approach called neo-Eurasianism came into view (Senderov). Some studies claim that neo-Eurasianism is a determinant factor of the contemporary Russian foreign policy, although this approach is unfounded.

On the other hand, contrary to the claims of some Eurasiansist approaches, Putin adopted a centrist course of pragmatic realism which looks to preserve Russia's territorial integrity due to the limits of Primakov's Eurasianist foreign policy. Also, Putin aims to enhance Russia's commanding presence within the post-Soviet region with his new policy (Morozova, Karaganov, Tsygankov 70).

From the Turkish perspective, after the end of the Cold War, Turkey attached importance to neighbourhood policies in the Mediterranean area but also the Black Sea region. In the Black Sea region, Russia and Turkey regarded as each other as rivals – not enemies- in the 1990s; but in the 2000s, Turkish foreign policy has been changed towards the importance of cooperation with Russia in order to become a more effective regional actor. Actually, Turkey was surprised by the collapse of the USSR and also incapable to adapt to the new international system which was multipolar. Besides, Turkey was caught up in the security threats of the region and in the end of the 1990s, Turkey started understand the importance of good neighbour relations (Piet and Simao 68). In 1992 Turkey commenced the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) process which includes Russia as a member state. In this regional organization Azerbaijan, Albania, Armenia, Bulgaria, Greece, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Romania, Serbia, Ukraine and Turkey are there and it is possible to claim that Turkey gained the opportunity in the region due to BSEC initiative. Russia and Turkey have been started to compete for regional influence in Black Sea region but also in the Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean. Partnership for Peace (PfP) program of NATO was another initiative related to the region and post-Soviet countries. This program aimed at building a stronger security cooperation and also included European ex-members of the communist bloc countries in the Black Sea region (Slykov 93-116).

In 2004 Romania and Bulgaria joined NATO and in 2007 they became members of European Union. Not just NATO, also EU has become a significant actor in the Black Sea region and post-communist countries in the region after the Soviet Union collapsed. The Russian-Georgian War in 2008 and the political crisis in Ukraine in 2014, brought it back to the military-strategic map of Russian-Turkish relations. Although the newly emerging Russian and Turkish interests in the Black Sea was not purely military and geopolitical in nature (Shlykov 93-116). In this sense, except Crimea and Russian-Georgian War, there are also some crucial conflicts and problems which lays on the Black Sea region. Next part of the paper will try to explain these dimensions.

Conflicts in the region and Russian-Turkish impacts

Caucasus is a significant area in the wider Black Sea region due to the clashes of Russian-Turkish and European interests. Also, it is possible to say the South Caucasus region and the conflicts in this area play a significant role in Black Sea area's stability and prosperity. Caspian Energy and pipeline politics of Russia and Turkey, Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts, infrastructure, security and defence issues are standing in front of the Black Sea region in the future. Turkey's historical antagonism with Armenia and close relations with Azerbaijan separates it from Russian Federation on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In other respects, Turkey has a different relationship with Abkhazia related to Caucasus diaspora in Turkey while Ankara is trying to be in good relations with Georgia (Çelikpala "Immigrants to Diaspora" 423-446).

Also, during the 1990s, European Union was not much interested in Black Sea region due to the farness and complex reality there. Quite the contrary, Black Sea area was too close and important for Russia and also for Turkey. There weren't any European Union policies towards the conflicts in the region in the 1990s (Triantaphyllou and Tsantoulis). As a result, the conflicts of the Black Sea have remained between Russia's and Turkey's power competitions.

Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts are important events in the wider Black Sea Region which are related to Georgia's close relations with European Union and the Russian-Georgian War in 2008. These conflicts are also critical when considering Russian-European-Turkish trilateral relations and post-Soviet legacy of the Black Sea Region. Even Russia is a part of the region, European Union has initiatives which annoys Russia and effect Russia's relations with Turkey and other countries in the Black Sea area. It is also possible to claim that the reason of Russian recognition of Abkhazia's independence after the Russian-Georgian War in 2008 was to give a response to the West due to EU's desire to play an effective role in the Black Sea region without the consent of Russia. Moscow is trying to demonstrate that Russia can be the alternative to the Europe as a centre of gravity, offering fighters for self-determination what is necessary – political, economic or military support, and promoting their interests in the regions (Bagdasaryan and Petrova).

On the other hand, Noutcheva has a similar perspective on her article which analyses European Union actorness on Kosovo, Abkhazia and Western Sahara. She asserts that Russia has a perspective about post-Soviet space which is related to West's recognition of Kosovo's independence. With this perspective, it was free to apply the same logic to other territorial conflicts in the region and Abkhazia was a prime candidate. Russian perception that the European Union applies double standards to conflicts when has a consensual view on Georgia's so-called territorial integrity in 2000s (Noutcheva 15).

Within that period, Turkey had 3 main points about Abkhazian question that related its domestic and foreign policies. At first, Turkish authorities worried that an ethnic conflict between Abkhazians and Georgians in Turkey could fever due to the Turkish government's attitudes towards Abkhazian issue. The second interrogation point was coupled with the territorial integrity of Turkey. Due to the Kurdish minority and their requests for interdependence, Turkey did not lean towards Abkhazia's situation. But this approach was consumed by Diaspora because the political situation of Abkhazia was similar between the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

Turkey was afraid about its territorial integrity and did not react on the side of Abkhazia. However, the Caucasian Diaspora in Turkey did not agree with Turkey's official approach. They tried to compel Turkish authorities to be more active and decisive on the Abkhazian issue. In 1992 Caucasian Diaspora founded the Caucasus-Abkhazia Solidarity Committee in Istanbul with the participation of a representative from 43 Caucasian Cultural Associations. This organization played a significant role in mold the Turkish and global public opinion about the Abkhazian War. Also, the Committee purposed to supply humanitarian and economic aid to Abkhazia. Demonstrations was organized in big cities and close relationships with all levels of the state including the President was established by the Committee and its members. Therefore, Suleyman Demirel who was the Prime Minister of Turkey decided to receive a delegation of Caucasians and this shows that diaspora was highly effective on Turkish Politics. As a result of Committee's attitudes and concerns, a parliamentary debate was held in the Turkish Grand National Assembly on 13 October 1992. Mass media handled by diaspora about Abkhazia

and the support from the public has gained. Turkish MP's that were members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the European Commission were invited for group meetings. Also, reports and assessments related to Abkhazia and Georgian's attack to Abkhazia were submitted to international organizations like UN and the OSCE (Çelikpala 432-433). Some of the members of Caucasian Diaspora in Turkey went to Abkhazia to fight against Georgians.

Due to the Caucasian diaspora, Turkey's approach to the Abkhazian-Georgian conflict was complicated. As a result of intense activities of Caucasians, Turkish public opinion has supported the Abkhaz side. The demonstrations also changed the government's attitude against Abkhazia. At that time President of Turkey Ahmet Necdet Sezer declared that Turkey would not abandon Abkhazia and would do whatever falls on its part for justice and permanent peace (Çelikpala 435). Turkey has not interested a conflict in Abkhazia but officially supporting the territorial integrity of Georgia. At the same time, Turkey would prefer to see a peaceful resolution to the Abkhazian problem. Turkey's main interest in the region is not to endanger projects like the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline which is crucially important for its economy. Turkey needs to avoid destabilization in within the country itself, which hosts both a significant and quite active Abkhazian and North Caucasian Diasporas, supporting Abkhazia, as well as a Georgian Muslim community (Chirikba 344).

The pro-Western leader of Georgia in the period of 2008 – 2013, Mikhail Saakashvili, was also one of the leaders of Georgian Rose Revolution. Before the Russian-Georgian War in 2008, he was making no secret of his desire to moving away from bilateral relations with Russia (Asmus 54). Moscow was apprehensive about Saakashvili's policy towards Russia. In the end, Russian-Georgian relations have become worse and tensions increased in 2008. Russia could not stand a Pro-Western country on its south borderline due to its security concerns. A pro-Western or a pro-European Georgia means that to be a neighbour with United State in other words.

In August 2008, the inevitable conflict erupted on the region. Several civilian died after the Georgian bombardment in Tskhinvali, a South Ossetian city, when the fierce military conflict between Russia

and Georgia began in 7 August 2008. Before this attack, the relations between two sides were falling into decay because of the Georgia's Pro-Western policies and all these dimensions caused to Russian-Georgian War which has been occurred between 8 August and 16 August of 2008 (Wertsch and Karumidze 378). The Georgian aggression against South Ossetia is believed to have been actualized with the supports of European Union and U.S. by Russian Federation authorities. This view has explained by Dimitri Medvedev, President of Russia, as 'Americans must be feeling sad that their virtual project Free Georgia had failed' (Digol 113).

On the other hand, the other conflict zone in the region, Abkhazia has become a part of this war and after the war, the Russian Federation has recognized the independence of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia on 26 August. Also, Russia has installed military units in both regions (George 182). As a result, this war resulted in defeat for Georgia and had regional repercussions in terms of intensifying the security dilemma and also in terms of the importance of Russia's re-emergence in global affairs (Manoli). Black Sea countries also effected this security concerns and Russia's increasing impact in the region.

In 2014, Maidan Revolution anti-government protests in Ukraine were a crucial development in the Black Sea Region. The demonstrations against the decision of Ukrainian government on not signing of an association agreement with the European Union began on Euromaidan on 21 November 2013. The protesters claimed closer ties between European Union instead of the Russian Federation and complained about the corruption of government, abuse of power and human rights violations in Ukraine. After these protests, the mailed fists that supported Russian troops and Russian military equipment induced conflict in Ukraine. Pro-Euromaidan and Crimean Tatars fought against pro-Russian militias. Russia's annexation of Crimea pursued the protests and revolution on the excuse that the referendum on whether to join Russia. Far from these militaristic incidents, on 16 March 2014, a referendum was held in Crimea and %96.77 of voters were agreed on annexation of Crimea to the Russian Federation. Public support for the annexation among the local Russian population in Crimea was strong. But annexation of Crimea by

the Russian Federation caught the U.S. and European Union by surprise (Larrabee et al. 6-8).

These incidents were testing Russian-Turkish relations once again. On the other hand, due to Russia's Syria intervention Turkey has disappointments and leaned more clearly toward Ukraine. Also, Ukraine and Turkey have security cooperation and Crimean Tatars who Turkey supports is another significant factor for the relations between Ukraine and Turkey, also between Russia and Turkey. Another dimension is about Russia's perspective towards West or clearly towards Europe and United States. Russian President Vladimir Putin refers the Balkan example, as Lavrov referred for Abkhazian and Ossetian cases, and he is suggesting that his interest in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine derives from humanitarian concern to protect Russian speakers. His claim is that there is nothing more than what NATO did for Kosovo (Serwer 116). Russia used Kosovo card for the Crimea and Ukraine crisis again.

This policy of Russia affirms many researchers who share three conclusions over the past 20 years in the studies of Russian-Western interaction in the Black Sea Region and the Balkans. First conclusion of these researchers is the Kosovo issue which was a constant irritant in Russian-European relations since 1999. Second one is Russia's concerns about the Balkan settlement was not conditioned simply by strategic considerations or interests. The third is the Russian security policy in the Black Sea region was built in part on Moscow's experience of dealing with the West in the Balkans (Samokhalov 4-5).

Conclusion

Several numbers of geopolitical and economic issues have caused the Black Sea region to be a theatre of war for power. At this juncture, we need to say that Russia and Turkey are the key actors in the region and both states have a desire to gain status-quo in the Black Sea. Also, Russian-Turkish cooperation and good bilateral relations could bring stability and help to cease conflicts in the Black Sea region. Because of these positive effects, bilateral relations of Russia and Turkey have an important role for the Black Sea Region's prosperity, stability and peace.

Russian-Georgian War in 2008, Euromaidan Revolution and Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 were crucial conflicts in the region. Security issues also effect Russia and Turkey relations, also trade and economy in the Black Sea. As Tsantoulis states, when we look at the Black Sea Security logics, there are also security assets and security burden factors. The remarkable point of these in security burdens are frozen conflicts; danger of spill-over, tension with Russia (Tsantoulis). Russian aggression on the region has always been one of the security issues in the Black Sea. Despite, Russia always being an aggressive actor and a great power in the Black Sea, Turkey also has a voice as a stakeholder country.

According to Buzan, individuals are irreducible base unit for security issues, and they could not be the referent object for the analysis of international security (Smith 72-101). Constructivist approaches adopt a social ontology and argue that individuals and states cannot be considered separate from the normative environment which surrounds them. They exist not because of their material existence but because of the meaning and value attributed to them. The social construction of reality claims that states are social entities and international relations is a social area (Wendt 139). That means we cannot ignore normative environmental factors when we analyse Russian-Turkish impact on the region.

For example, Turkey pursued three main policies about Abkhazian and South Ossetian issues that relates to its domestic and foreign policies. Firstly, Turkey was worried about an ethnic conflict between the Abkhazians and the Georgians or other Circassians and Georgians in Turkey, which could have been ignited due to the Turkish government's attitudes towards Abkhaz and South Ossetian issues. The other disorienting point was coupled with the territorial integrity of Turkey. Due to the Kurdish problem and their requests for interdependence, Turkey did not incline towards Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's situations (Çelikipala "Immigrants to Diaspora" 423-446). But this approach was denied by the Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey with the argument that the political situation of Abkhazia was similar to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Abkhazian and the Circassian Diaspora in Turkey have had a crucial role because of historical ties with Turkey.

On the other hand, due to the historical background of Russia-Caucasus relations, Russia's Abkhazia policy has differences about Abkhazian-Georgian conflict from other Black Sea Region conflicts such as Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia (De Waal 148). Also, there is a common perception in the West that Abkhazia is strongly pro-Russian or even a Russian puppet while Georgians are the enemies of Russia. This Western sense about Abkhazia is not true and in the nineteenth century the situation was the other way around. There is a historical hostility between Russia and Abkhazia and Thomas De Wall expresses this on his book 'Caucasus': "Abkhazia was made a principality inside the Russian Empire in 1810, but resistance to Russian rule, aided by the Ottomans, continued for much of the nineteenth century, while many Georgians were adapting well to Russian rule. The Abkhaz supported their ethnic cousins, the Circassian tribes to the north and east, in their war against tsarist armies" (De Waal 149). This dimension of the region has never been taken into consideration when Russia's policies in the Black Sea are elaborated. However, this factor has an important role for the regional dimensions.

The other important social dimension related to Russian approach in the Black Sea region is related to its 'return to civilization' wish after the Soviet Union collapsed. However, according to Neumann, today, Russian nationalists think that Europe is just a degenerate cesspool that can only be rescued by following Russia. There are still Slavophiles and Westernizers in the country and Westernizers are represented by the liberal position (Neumann 198). Today Russian Slavophiles' debate has two models that challenge the Western ones and these models are ill-defined. First model is Romantic nationalist model which promotes a tightly disciplined, militaristic society and the other model is an idealised version of the pre-Petrine Russian pastoral. Besides, Neumann claims that there exists a variant of Romantic nationalism which shares with the liberals a moral assessment of Europe as an equal of Russia (Neumann 205-209). This nationalists and Slavophiles include the Russian elites and they shape Russia's foreign policy towards Europe. These policies have some similarities with Russia's foreign policy towards Turkey.

On the other hand, Turkey's point of view of Europe is totally different from the Russian approach. However, in 2014, after the crisis

in Ukraine and rising tensions between Russia and the West, Turkey once again demonstrated that its economic interests are priorities over ideological solidarity with its NATO allies. In this sense, it is possible to claim that Russian-Turkish relations are not just related to economic or politic dimensions, but also social and historical dimensions. This means the social and historical dimensions of Russian-Turkish relations also affect their Black Sea policies.

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