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Security Promises of the East: Meeting the Expectations of Turkey in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) *

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Abstract

This paper argues that Turkey's full membership to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) would have a symbolic meaning in terms of showing its displeasure of the Western actions towards Ankara and whose message of not being alone in a world of realist thinking. Even if Turkey becomes a full member of the SCO, which is subject to its departure from NATO membership, it will still need to continue being in search of developing and deepening its strategic relations bilaterally with the strongest actors of Russia and China in the SCO. This paper, therefore, concludes that, in a world of quickly changing and unpredictable geopolitical settings, Turkey can be better off so long as it continues to maintain political, economic and security links with the West, and concurrently tries to find ways to develop and deepen strategic relations with the East. By performing the method of qualitative content analysis, this work tries to prove its argument by exploring first the gap in security interests within NATO, second Turkey's difficulties in getting support in the Alliance and third the scope of the SCO as a security provider and geopolitical partner for Turkey.

Key Words: Turkey, West, East, NATO, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

Doğu'nun Güvenlik Vaatleri: Şanghay İşbirliği Örgütü (ŞİÖ) ile Türkiye'nin Beklentilerini Cevaplamak

Öz

Çalışma, Türkiye'nin Şanghay İşbirliği Örgütüne (ŞİÖ) tam üyeliğinin, Batı'nın kendisine yönelik tutumları karşısındaki rahatsızlığını göstermeyi ve realist bir düşünce dünyasında yalnız olmadığı mesajını vermeyi içeren sembolik bir anlam taşıdığı iddiasında bulunmaktadır. ŞİÖ'ye tam üye olsa dahi- ki bu sonuç Ankara'nın NATO üyeliğinden ayrılmasına bağlıdır, hâla Türkiye Örgüt'ün en güçlü üyeleri olan Rusya ve Çin ile ikili stratejik ilişki geliştirme ve derinleştirme çabasını sürdürme ihtiyacı duyacaktır. Bu durum karşısında çalışma, hızlı değişen ve tahmin edilmesi güç bir jeopolitik dünya zemininde Türkiye'nin Batı ile siyasi, ekonomik ve güvenlik bağlantılarını sürdürmesi ve bununla eş zamanlı olarak, Doğu ile stratejik ilişkiler geliştirme ve derinleştirme yolları aramayı sürdürmesinin kendisi için faydalı olacağı sonucuna varmaktadır. İçerik analizine dayanan nitel araştırma yöntemini kullanan çalışma, ileri sürdüğü argümanını; ilk olarak NATO içindeki güvenlik açığını, ikinci olarak Türkiye'nin İttifak içinde destek elde etme konusunda deneyimlediği zorlukları ve üçüncü olarak

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ŞİÖ'nün Türkiye için güvenlik sağlayıcı ve jeopolitik bir partner olma imkanını inceleyerek ispatlamaya çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye, Batı, Doğu, NATO, Şanghay İşbirliği Örgütü

INTODUCTION

There are numerous military, political, economic and other kinds of international organisations in Eurasia, and Turkey is a member of many of them from full membership to dialog partnership levels. Turkish President, R.T. Erdogan, expressed in 2013 that “If we get into the Shanghai Five, we will say good-bye to the European Union...The Shanghai Five is better, much more powerful” (Hürriyet, 2013). Last year in November 2016 he said that “Turkey should, first of all, feel relaxed about the EU and not be fixated” about it...I think if Turkey were to join the Shanghai Five, it will enable us [Turkey] to act with much greater ease” (Sputnik Türkiye.2016). Erdogan has also often repeated that “the World is bigger than five” (Anadolu Ajansı, 2019) – a statement pointing Turkey’s displeasure on the composition of the permanent membership status of the US, Russia, China, France and the UK at the UN Security Council. Turkey’s increasing voice for asking a full membership to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) has not, in reality, come out of Turkey’s long delayed membership to the European Union (EU). As well as unfulfilling progress in the Turkish accession to the EU, the issue at point is much more linked to the changing geopolitical and security dynamics in entire Eurasia, driven by inability of the old alliances (NATO) and conflicting positions in the Middle East, especially in Syria. In addition to all these, Ankara has seen its Western allies as having left it in cold in bringing democracy in Syria, their support of Kurdish armed groups in Syrian conflict at the expense of Turkey’s national security and finally Western capitals’ tacit backing of the attempted coup on 15 July 2016.

The SCO seems to be a fruitful place for Turkey at first glance, so long as the common objectives of the organisation are concerned: promise of taking a common position against the three evils of “terrorism, separatism and extremism”. Yet, even this seemingly common stance of the SCO has not been reflected in their reactions to various terrorist, separatist and extremist conducts having occurred different parts of the world. Such common concerns to fight against collectively in the SCO seem to have been only relevant within the confined frontiers of Central Asian republics, a kind of landmass forming, among other things, a ‘buffer zone’ between Russia and China. In addition, proving the general view in the West that the SCO was against the Western and/or the US unipolar position is hard to establish and difficult to prove. It can only be said that main powers, Russia and China in the SCO, have been in conflicting positions with the US mainly on different issues in different settings such as Russia in Ukraine, Caucasus, Eastern Europe and China in South and East China Seas. Furthermore, China’s initiation of Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and long-term rise of China have become increasingly fearsome

for Russia. Continuation of this trend may not only separate the existing bond between Moscow and Beijing at the SCO, but also push them to reconsider to resolve their existing differences with the US separately (Demirtepe & Erdoğan, 2013: 90-93).

Potential to establish bilateral strategic relations between Turkey and Russia, and Turkey and China also have their own limits. Conflicting issues in many areas of interests and power discrepancies between Ankara and Moscow, and unpredictability of Russia have already constrained the two sides to define and prolong a long-term real strategic partnership, let alone a formal alliance. It does not mean such a strategic partnership can never be established between the two states. As seen in their history, this can happen only in times of emergency and difficulty that both sides had had to face from the same sort of urgent threat (s). Today, Russia has successfully met the exigencies directed against it by the West. On the other hand, China is geographically far away from Turkey and has not been willing to take a definite position on the issues that fall outside the Chinese vital national security interests. More than that, similar to what Ankara and Moscow have had conflicting positions in the Caucasus and now in Syria, Beijing and Ankara are not likely to be on the same side over the increasingly worsening East Turkestan issue. This means that membership to the SCO itself will not bring much difference in the accomplishment of having a common Turkish and Chinese position over the issue of separatism, the problem of East Turkestan.

This paper argues that a full membership to the SCO would only have a symbolic meaning in terms of showing Ankara's displeasure of the Western actions towards Turkey and whose message of not being alone in a world of realist state thinking. Even if Turkey becomes a full member of the SCO, which is subject to its departure from NATO membership, it will still need to continue being in search of developing and deepening its strategic relations bilaterally with the strongest actors of Russia and China in the SCO. This paper, therefore, concludes that, in a world of quickly changing and unpredictable geopolitical settings, Turkey can be better off so long as it continues to maintain political, economic and security links with the West, and concurrently tries to find ways to develop and deepen strategic relations with the East. The more options a regional power has to talk, the more room it can play for realising its objectives.

The work, which adopts the approach of qualitative content analysis, tries to prove its argument first by exploring the gap in security interests in NATO. Aim of this section is to show that Western security bloc, NATO, on its own right, has become a more disunified actor independent from what Turkey thinks and is for the Alliance. Second, it delves into the topic of Turkey's difficulties in getting support in NATO. The logic to examine this is the fact that disagreements between Turkey and West on how to define and handle urgent international and domestic security issues in the vicinity of NATO are the major reasons why Turkey seem to have been in search of alternative centres to develop close relations, the SCO. Third, the scope of the SCO as a geopolitical partner for Turkey is to be explored. By doing this, the question of to what extent the SCO can offer Turkey to bridge the security and geopolitical gap left by the West, NATO, in the hands of Ankara, is

attempted to be answered. Finally, conclusion evaluates the findings.

1. EXPLORING THE GAP IN SECURITY INTERESTS IN THE NATO

Turkey has been part of the western security system, NATO, since 1952, and there has been colossal changes by then in international system and the preferences of many members of the organization. NATO has all the time, especially since the end of the Cold War in 1991, tried to adopt itself in line with the ways the member states interpreted the security requirements of the new international order/disorder and security needs of influential parties. These all in the absence of a common enemy shook the unity within NATO that has continued as of today.

In order to prolong reason d'état of the Organisation, NATO first developed the concept of Out of Area (Partnership for Peace-PfP) in 1994, which developed cooperative relations with Russia and rest of the former Eastern bloc countries including number of newly independent states born out of Soviet ashes. NATO intervention, even if led by the US, in Bosnia in 1995 and Kosovo in 1999 allowed to think of still necessity and importance of the military Alliance. The US leadership on the other hand implied one important fact that Western European partners of the alliance were unable to contribute enough to new endeavours of the organisation in the post-Cold war era, even if Western European states declared the start of EU in 1992 with the Maastricht Treaty in place of European Community. In parallel to the declaration of the EU with which formation of EU's Defence and Foreign Policy was initiated, NATO began admitting full membership of former Eastern bloc countries of Check Republic, Hungary and Poland in 1999, and Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia in 2004. For the EU, which has always found it difficult to develop a fully functioning Common Defence and Foreign Policy, expansion of NATO to the East covering Eastern European states was of great value as it, not the EU, would provide security guaranties, required due to the threat still felt from Russia, to those new members of the military Alliance and the EU. Nevertheless, NATO's Eastern march produced fruits under the condition in which Russia was either weak or pacified (Gjana, 2015).

It was and still is Russia, which has always been against the full admission of the former Eastern bloc countries, let alone former Soviet republics, to NATO. Russia's aggregated opposition to the NATO expansion to the East came into force with a solid military reaction after the Alliance declared a strong signal to Georgia and Ukraine to be full member to the organisation at its April 2008 Bucharest Summit (NATO, 2008). Soon after it came the Russian military invasion of the part of Georgia in August 2008 and later on in 2014 its support for Russian speaking Ukrainians against government in Kiev in Eastern Ukraine and finally the annexation of Crimea in the same year (Özkan, 2017: 311-314). How far NATO could expand territories by admitting new members has remained, to a changing degree, a hot dividing topic between old (France and Germany) and new Europe (Eastern

European members alongside the US). While the old Europe hesitated to admit Ukraine and Georgia, the two former Soviet republics, to NATO in the fear of transgressing Russia and its interests, the new Europe, especially Poland, with the US behind, saw a strong response to Moscow and the enlargement of the Alliance to ease security threat felt from Russia (Dempsey, 2014).

The division within NATO is not, of course, limited only to the Eastern expansion and possible Russian reaction to this move. War in Afghanistan was the first to test how successful the Out of Area policy of NATO would work. Again, in this theatre was the US, which had to shoulder the great percentage of the burden of military personnel and financial costs. French, German, British and any other member of the coalition supported the US in Afghanistan, but their contribution had remained far shorter than those of the efforts of the US government. Although limited, unifying result of the joint war effort in Afghanistan seems to have disappeared when the US invaded Iraq in 2003 with only support of British and Spanish governments of the time. The division in NATO over the Iraqi invasion was so tense that governments in France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg even suggested accelerating the efforts to establish an alternative security and defence structure to NATO for the EU's need (Heisbourg, 2004: 61-62).

Even though French and German leaderships now in the wake of the US invasion of Iraq strongly uttered the creation of EU's own defence and security structure, this objective has, to a great extent, remained as words not as deeds. For instance, France and Britain tried to develop two initiatives, among other things, to make the EU an important military actor. Jack Chirac of France and Tony Blair of Britain signed Saint-Malo initiative in 1998 aiming to structure a joint EU military force that would allow the Union to use in future military interventions (British-French Summit, 1998: 8-9). The Saint-Malo initiative failed under the impact of NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999 and lack of political will at the EU level. Another failed attempt was in 2010 between France and Britain, the so-called Lancaster House Agreements envisaged furthering defence cooperation between London and Paris (The Guardian, 2010). Though France and Britain managed to show some cooperation in the area of nuclear issue, they could not succeed in a satisfactory collaboration in other defence and military matters.

EU's failure to develop its own defence and security policy pushed France to draw itself up alongside NATO and the US. NATO now allows its members to form *ad hoc* coalitions, coalition of willing, inside the alliance, and such new way of looking appears to have been fit best for the security interest of France. Such military actions France involved as in Mali and Libya managed to receive the US and/or NATO supports in the forms of either by direct backing and 'leading from behind' policy of Washington or "coalition of willing" in NATO with Britain (Starosta, 2013; Cohen, 2011). British perspective towards EU's security and defence structure, and NATO, is not much different from that of France. Although Britain appeared to have spent efforts in building a common European defence and security structure, which was also advised by the US to the British governments, London has, in reality, maintained a strong suspicion for the EU having a successful European army.

After all, a unified security and defence of Europe could provide no guaranties that it would not turn against Britain in the future. Therefore, a Britain, now left the EU after Brexit, acts to use NATO for its own security needs in the shape of the formations of “coalition of willing” in NATO and of maintaining bilateral ‘special relationship’ with the US to get its support as much as possible.

Germany’s position in the formation of EU’s defence and security structure and towards NATO has reflected complex messages and conflicted views. When the US announced its policy of Asia pivot, it has continuously asked the other NATO allies to take more responsibility and share more burden to fight against the global challenges of extremism, illegal migration, piracy at sea and so on. Some German politicians and ministers such as Joschka Fischer, Ursula von der Leyen ve Frank-Walter Steinmeier, were reported to have had a similar view that time of Germany to take more responsibility in defence and security burdens and matters in both the EU and NATO had come (Dempsey, 2014). Nevertheless, Chancellor of Germany, Angele Merkel, is said to have not been so much willing to put Germany in a forefront position in both security and defence matters of NATO and the EU. It is believed that Merkel has been of more concerned with the interests of German business community in Russia than those of the security of Ukraine and security worries of Eastern European countries (Ibid.). Thus, Germany has not wanted to deploy German military forces to Baltic states and Poland in cooperation with the US and/or within the framework of NATO to send a strong message to Russia. Germany has joined the embargoes applied by the West against Russia after its annexation of Crimea and Moscow’s meddling of instability in Ukraine, but not been willing to go further to endanger bilateral economic/trade relations with Russia and transgress Moscow’s concerns in Ukraine. To put it simply, Germany has tried to maintain a balance for its economic, political and security interests between NATO, EU’s defence policy and relations with the US on one side and Russia on the other. This means that the more Russia goes further to threaten European security beyond Ukraine, the more Germany values defence and security benefits NATO and the EU offer (Ibid.).

The US demand for more responsibility and burden sharing from the NATO members, and formation of EU’s own security structure ideally go well with the US global security interests. Yet, strong European NATO members are not willing to be an American ‘foot soldier’ globally, and still want to keep the Alliance in its original area of security and defence concentration, Euro-Atlantic area. A less committed US in Europe does not make NATO in Europe stronger against the new and old types of challenges. Neither does this lead the EU to building its own unified and strong defence structure. Indeed, due to a new Europe and/or the EU with 27 members having differing degree of economic, security and geopolitical interests in their engagements and commitments with NATO and the US, Poland and Baltic States increase their defence budgets and seek to find ways to keep the US militarily on their own side in the face of threat they have felt from Russia (Ibid.).

2. TURKEY'S DIFFICULTIES IN GETTING SUPPORT IN THE NATO

Similar to the differentiation of interests among Western members in the way to utilise their NATO membership, number of specific cases since the end of the Cold War have shown Turkey's challenges in the use of the very same military organisation. Indeed, there have been unanimous repeat of the solid existence and defence value of the Alliance at each high-level summit, as well as many examples of cooperation in the forms of conducting military exercises and joint operations that Turkey took part. However, Turkey has increasingly found it difficult to coordinate the changing demands of its security/geopolitical interests with those of the disunited Western partners from the very beginning of the early 1990s.

Apart from the Cold War era, Turkey's first experience of observing the changed attitude of some members towards Ankara in NATO came just before the end of the Cold War when Saddam Hussein of Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990. Turkey's demand for the deployment of Patriot early warning missile systems from NATO to protect its territory in the case of Iraqi attack against Turkish territory had been challenged by Germany and Belgium in the Alliance. Germany and Belgium thought that, unlike Turkey's worries, Iraq did not pose threat to Turkish security, and the crisis was resolved with the US efforts. A similar opposition from the same countries plus France in NATO towards Turkey came out when the US invaded Iraq in 2003. France, Germany and Belgium again were unwilling to deploy Patriot missile systems on Turkish soil within the framework of NATO on the basis that such an effort would harm the diplomatic efforts to resolve the problem peacefully (Voice of America, 2003). Though this crisis was also overcome with the efforts of the US and some other members of the Alliance, another setback occurred in the Turkey's relations with NATO during the Arab Spring, this time on the issue of the crisis in Libya.

From the beginning of the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Turkey has always defended peaceful transition of the authoritarian states to democratic ones. When external interferences to these countries were on the horizon, they had already been, though changing degree, turned into bloody civil war between pro-democracy groups and regime forces. To involve these conflicts, Turkey always sought international legitimacy, first and foremost from the United Nations Security Council. In the absence of a clear international mandate, Turkey was opposed to the deployment of NATO ground forces to Libya to help opposition in the process of ousting M. Qaddafi. Turkey's main concern was the fact that such a clear Turkish support and/or involvement in the NATO operation in Libya would damage Turkey's image, as the only Muslim member in the Alliance, that Ankara had been trying to improve in the eyes of Middle Eastern Arab communities and governments via expressing its Strategic Depth Concept (Oguzlu, 2013: 19). In the final analysis, Turkey joined the NATO effort of deposing M. Qaddafi from power after it felt that it had the international consent when such Arab/Muslim international organisations and bodies as the Arab League, the Organisation of Islamic Conference and Contact Group agreed on an outcome that M. Qaddafi should be ousted from power by force (Ibid.).

On the issue of NATO expansion has always Turkey's overall view been reflecting much of a concern. Turkey, indeed, supported cooperation between NATO and any other states around the world, but only on the assumption that such partnerships should be on the issues of soft power relations such as support of democracy and improvement of security forces with modern technics, and be pursued on the basis of international legitimacy. That is why Turkey was in favour of participation of many post-Soviet States into the PfP Programme of NATO as this included Russia as well. When it came to the decision to take Georgia and Ukraine into NATO as full members, Turkey displayed a more subtle approach to the issue, concerning that such a move without Russian consent would transgress geopolitical interests of Moscow (Oguzlu, Tarık, 2012: 112-113).

Turkey, indeed, was right with its concern as the examples of Russian invasion of Georgia in August 2008, annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and Russia's meddling of Russian speaking people against pro-Western government in Ukraine, all of which were, primarily, Moscow's responses to the Eastern expansion of NATO, prove it. It is this prediction of Turkey that Ankara has always been opposed to the increase of NATO military forces in Black Sea. Turkey did not support the expansion of Operation Active Endeavour of NATO to Black Sea, and any other efforts of the Alliance to oversee maritime traffic in the same sea area after 9/11 terror attack to the US (Ibid.). Instead, Turkey has insisted that Black Sea Harmony, a cooperative body formed between Turkey and Russia, was there to help provide maritime peace and security in Black Sea. To be clearer, Turkey does not want NATO to engage long term and large military activities in Black Sea for the fear that this would harm the Montreux Convention, and push Ankara to find itself into an undesirable military confrontation next to its territory between the US and Russia (Ibid.).

Turkey-NATO relations have, also, been hampered by the question of how to coordinate NATO and Common Defence and Security Policy of the EU. For Turkey, NATO-EU institutional relations should be coordinated in line with the Berlin Plus Accord of 2002. This Accord mainly explains the extent to which the use of NATO facilities by the EU in two separate capabilities of the Alliance. Specifically saying, EU would use non-strategic facilities of the Alliance automatically while employment of strategic ones requires a consensus decision of all NATO members (Ibid.: 115-116). Among other disagreements regarding the Berlin Plus Accord, for Turkey, Cyprus issue is the key point of disagreement. It is because, while the EU defends the participation of Greek Cypriot side to all EU-NATO meetings falling outside of Berlin Plus, Turkey does not want Nicosia to join any official meetings of the two organisation as it was left out of the Berlin Plus Accords (Ibid.: 116). Due to this reason, Turkey vetoes the institutional relations between NATO and the EU, and believes that Brussels has not lived up to the obligations imprinted in the Berlin Plus Accords (Ibid.). Turkey asks the EU to sign a security Agreement between Ankara and Brussels, and wants to join into the European Defence Agency, both of which are encumbered by the Greek Cypriot side in the EU (Ibid.).

Turkey-NATO relations are not of course limited to the abovementioned developments. There may be given many other disagreements between the two sides and/or individual

NATO members, such as the Iranian Nuclear deal in May 2010 brokered by the joint efforts of Turkey and Brazil. Turkey's efforts to end the Iranian Nuclear crisis was taken lightly by the US and many capitals in Western Europe, and the deal reached at the end with the intensive diplomatic efforts of Ankara was quickly thrown into the dustbin (Parsi, Trita, 2010). Nevertheless, neither of the points of departure, uttered by now between Turkey and NATO/West, seems to have more worsened the same relationship than dramatic overturns having witnessed in the Syrian Crisis, and attempted military coup in Turkey.

It is the Syrian conflict that, despite apparent steps of some military cooperation and joint steps in the Alliance, conjoining security interests of Turkey and Western partners in NATO have gradually drifted farther away. From Turkey's point of view, the US and many other NATO members gave up their previous preferences of democracy over authoritarianism in the Middle East. They have now preferred security and authoritarianism to democracy and freedom in the same region. For instance, the US and other partners in the Alliance have only supported the removal of Assad regime in Syria in words, but not in deeds. For Turkey, fighting against Daesh (The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) is Western partners' priority for the sake of providing security to themselves. In Turkey's view, they even use the armed Kurdish groups of PYD (Democratic Union Party) and YPG (People's Protection Unit) in Syria, which Ankara sees as the affiliates of the separatist and terrorist group of the PKK in Turkey, at the expense of Turkish security. Even Turkish government's intensive diplomatic efforts in the Western capitals to fight against Daesh together, a NATO ally, rather than that of with a terrorist group, appear to have gone to deaf ears (Özer, 2016; Haberturk, 2017). Neither has Turkey found it easy to convince its Western partners that attempted military coup was made by a terrorist formation led by a so-called Muslim cleric, Fetullah Gulen, resided in the US. From Turkey's viewpoint, let alone lack of interests of Western capitals to condemn the attempted military coup and absence of their strong solidarity to defend democracy and freedom in Turkey, many of the perpetrators of the attempted military coup have been provided safe haven by them (Hürriyet, 2016b; Milliyet, 2016). Amid diversified positions in the Syrian conflict, especially regarding the PYD and YPG in Syria, Western tacit support of the attempted military coup in Turkey has become the last nail in the coffin. Therefore, Turkish government and many Turkish people ask the question of what value of the NATO and strategic bilateral and multilateral relations that Turkey has had with Western capitals for a long time, contributes to the Turkish interests, especially to the removal of imminent domestic and international security threats that Turkey is fighting against. Such a question, therefore, appears to force the Turkish government to find answers by searching new alternatives to get allied with, the SCO.

3. SCOPE OF SCO AS A GEOPOLITICAL ALLY FOR TURKEY

How much a possible SCO membership of Turkey could meet Turkish security needs left

by NATO/the West is a question that requires one to look answers through overseeing what the SCO really is in terms of a military or larger geopolitical alliance and security provider for its own members. In this search, conventional wisdom tells that had there been parallel views and practices to resolve certain international security problems for both Turkey and the SCO, then it could be safe to say that there is a prospect for cooperation, even alliance, between Ankara and the SCO.

3.1. World Order Debate

Beginning with a broader world order issue, Turkey, through the words of R.T. Erdogan, often expresses that “world is bigger than five” criticising one sided and self-interested actions of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council in the resolutions of international security issues. R.T. Erdogan complains not only about selfish and unjust behaviours of the Western members of the UN Security Council that they are all allies of Turkey in NATO, but also about the other two permanent members, Russia and China, the two leading powers in the SCO. On this matter, Turkey therefore has two options in its search for membership to the SCO: either lessening its demand on a new world order claim or having Russia and China defend the SCO as an organisation seeking a just world order. Second option is highly unlikely as one of the main purposes of the two great power members of the SCO is considered. As being realist in their foreign and security behaviours, Russia and China in 1997, just the year after they established the Shanghai Five, openly and clearly, together announced a Russia-China Joint Declaration that they would “strive to promote the multipolarization of the world and the establishment of a new international order” (United Nations, 1997). Although Russian and Chinese Joint Declaration was a bilateral effort to challenge, what they called, unilateral and unjust actions and world dominance of the US and/or the West, it was not necessarily reflecting a just world order that Turkey has asked for.

General view is that the SCO is for many things, but not for creating a new just world order to make all humanity safe, secure and ‘happy’. For some, the SCO is to tackle serious problems in Central Asia that concern both Russia and China (Russia Today, 2016b). For some others, it is for rising and active China, rather than as a united single body of some kind that would even take NATO as a balancing actor (Roney, 2013). Even for Angele Stent from Transatlantic Academy, nature of the demand of a multipolar world order of Russia and China differs from each other in that “while the Kremlin seeks to overturn the U.S.-led global order and promotes a tripolar world order, Beijing prefers to reform the existing order to suit China’s economic and geostrategic interests and regards the United States as its only true global counterpart” (Stent, 2016).

It is indeed safe to say that, let alone being a defender of a just world order, the SCO is not a security bloc in the sense either NATO or Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) led by Russia represents. The SCO is, in fact, a cooperative body in Asia that has been coordinating and advancing common areas of the interests of its members whether on the issues of regional and international security, economics, trade and social matters. How

much this nature of the SCO then would be willing and able to respond positively to the security gap that Turkey is said to be feeling in its relations with the West is the question one needs to look for in order to make a sense in Turkey's search for a full membership to the very same organisation. Close examination of the responses of the SCO, and whose big power members, to such topics as Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism; democracy and regime change; and the Syrian Crisis may shed more light in this context.

3.2. Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism

Much of the concentration areas, and perhaps the only, but limited success, as it claims, of the SCO is to fight against international terrorism. In this and broader context, the SCO has, indeed, developed a uniting idea for all members and called it as to fight against "three evils" of "terrorism, separatism and extremism". Members of the SCO formed a Regional Anti-terrorist Structure (RATS) in 2004 and managed to conduct number of military exercises to fight against these "three evils" in bilateral and multilateral formats. In this context, the RATS in the SCO is said to have prevented over 1000 terrorist attacks and helped arrest of 650 terrorists until 2014 (The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2014a; European Parliament, 2015: 8). There is no available information about the mentioned prevented terrorist attacks by the RATS regarding what kind of possible terrorist attacks they were, where and how they were about to happen.

As it is in the Western media and other circles, when it is talked about terrorism and extremism in the territories covered by the SCO, they are first associated with the people who are Muslims. Biggest concerns of SCO members are said to have been the 'Islamic radicalism and extremism' thought to be located and spread as terrorism from as mainly far away territories as Afghanistan, Chechnya, Central Asian countries, East Turkistan to the Middle East. Even if there were actual preparation and conducted terrorist attacks in the numbers the RATS, many of them would perfectly fall into the category of the efforts of the member governments of the SCO to eliminate political opposition figures. Central Asian governments have long used 'Islamic extremism' as a pretext to suppress opposition for their own regime survival (International Crisis Group, 2003). As one of the main complain of the Turkish government towards the Western allies is the latter's biased approach to almost all terror cases and terrorism as the acts of Muslims. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that Turkey as a full member of the SCO will be able to change approaches of the SCO members towards their own Muslim people and Muslims around the world. Indeed, Russia from after the downing a Russian SU-Fighter Jet in November 2015 by the Turkish F16s to reconciliation in May 2016 had continually, and concurrently with many media outlets in the West, propagated the false opinion to international community that the Turkish government had supported international terrorism, Daesh (Russia Today, 2016a; Gordts, 2014; Williams, 2014).

As for separatism, Russia and China have, so far, failed to evoke the SCO to provide a unified and satisfactory response to the separatist conflicts having occurred in Eurasia. For instance, the SCO refrained from recognising Russian backed independence of the

breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Although the Organisation praised “Russia’s active role in promoting peace and cooperation in the region”, it remained short to give full support to Moscow as it, in the SCO Dushanbe Declaration, urged the all parties involved to resolve the problem through talks and negotiation (The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2008; RFE/RL, 2008). A similar posture has been taken by the SCO towards the crises and conflicts in Ukraine. The Dushanbe Declaration of the SCO in 2014 supported efforts of Ukrainian and Russian presidents to end the crisis peacefully through their joint initiatives that produced a Peace Plan under the auspices of Trilateral Contact Group made up of representatives from Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE (The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2014b). Some Russian experts even interpreted this “a new step” meaning as a support given by the SCO to Russia on the issues in Ukraine (Russian International Affairs Council, 2015). For them, though it may seem so in the context of the SCO, it can be stressed that the way China and Kazakhstan see the issue in Ukraine is different.

China, for instance, neither supported nor rejected a UN General Assembly resolution condemning annexation of Crimea by Russia. China abstained in the resolutions of both on the issues of Crimea at the UN General Assembly and downing Malaysian airline, MH17 in 2014, over Donbas in Ukraine at the UN Security Council (Stent, 2016). Kazakhstan, as well as Uzbekistan, has also concerns about the way Russia choses to resolve international security issues it involved, and Moscow’s desires and practices to dominate the former Soviet countries. Even Kazakhstan felt more alarming and showed its concerns when Russia annexed Crimea due to its fear that Moscow would want to seize the northern part of the country populated mostly by ethnic Russian people (The Guardian, 2015).

Annexing Crimea based on majority ethnic Russians living there, meddling further ethnic strife in Ukraine and backing them militarily are all at odds with the Charter of the SCO regarding separatism. The SCO in its The Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism signed 2001 openly defines separatism as “any act intended to violate territorial integrity of a State including by annexation of any part of its territory or disintegrate a State in a violent manner, as well as planning and preparing, aiding and abetting such act, and subject to criminal prosecuting in accordance with the national laws of the Parties” (The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2001a). Russia’s actions in both cases of Georgia and Ukraine go well beyond what the SCO defines Russia’s role in these conflicts as a significant contributor in the establishment of peace and security in the regions.

Indeed, it can be observed that what the SCO and some of its members, China and Kazakhstan, could not produce against Russia’s actions in the conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine, have come from the West in the forms of embargoes against Moscow and strengthening military positions of some of the NATO members in the Baltic countries and Eastern Europe. Poland and some other Eastern European countries did not find the level of embargo and deployment of the US soldiers and military equipment by NATO into their soils enough against the threat that they have felt from Russia. However, it

would be right to say that they, unlike the rest of the members of the SCO saw fit, did not see bandwagoning with Moscow as the right solution to repel or appease Russia's actions in their next doors.

Turkey did not join the Western embargo against Russia, but just like them, it did not recognise Russian annexation of Crimea. Neither did Turkey recognise independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia backed by Russia but has continued economic relations with these breakaway republics. Turkey has, indeed, adopted a policy towards Russia in the conflicts in Ukraine and Georgia that it is more similar to that of the SCO and less similar to that of the West and NATO. Turkey's attempt to appease, and desire not to harm its economic and political relations with, Russia did not stop Moscow to change the balance of strategic power in the Black Sea in its favour and support the Kurdish groups and Assad regime in Syria, at the expense of vital security interests of Turkey. Therefore, being an SCO member did not and will not provide to any member with guaranties that it would convince Russia to obey the rules it accepted on separatism.

3.3. Democracy and Regime Change

Another would-be problematic area between Turkey and the SCO is the way of understanding democracy and regime change. Both establishing document in 2001 and Charter of the SCO in 2002 mention 'democracy' only once, and it is written down in an adjective form, 'democratic' (The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2001b; The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2002). The Charter under the Article 1 points out that "the main goals and tasks of SCO are: to strengthen mutual trust, friendship and goodneighborliness between the member States; to consolidate multidisciplinary cooperation in the maintenance and strengthening of peace, security and stability in the region and promotion of a new democratic, fair and rational political and economic international order" (Ibid.). The "democratic" here is not a kind of democracy that is related to a political form determining and regulating state-society relations within the boundaries of a given country. Neither is it related to the liberal democracy that Turkey and the West understand. The SCO sees and accepts democracy only in the context of Westphalian international order of sovereignty, equality and non-interference of internal affairs of states. This is, indeed, another call of the SCO to establish a multipolar world order in order to challenge Western world dominance and whose practices of regime change on the basis of international terrorism and human rights abuses.

Turkey has always been different from the SCO and individual views of Russia, China and Central Asian states in that it has encouraged, promoted and, when it saw fit, supported domestic liberal democratic efforts and transformations in entire post- Soviet space and the Middle East. Instead of helping change the authoritarian regimes by violence, Turkey has always encouraged peaceful political transition of Central Asian states to liberal democracies. One of the main reasons for tense relationship between Turkey and Uzbekistan during the period of Islam Karimov before 2016 was the criticisms that Ankara displayed towards Tashkent government, which applied an indiscriminate use of

force against anti Karimov protestors killing hundreds of people in Andijan in 2005 on the pretext of 'Islamic terrorism' (Human Rights Watch, 2005). While Turkey and the West had, to a changing degree, uttered their displeasure towards the Uzbek government, all the SCO members either remained idle or defended regime stability over democratic demands and human right claims of Uzbek people. Indeed, it was protective cover of the SCO and Russia's intensive efforts, both of which have killed any positive prospect of Coloured Revolutions demanded liberal democracy in the former Soviet territories from 2003 onwards.

Especially the concept of 'Sovereign democracy', developed by Russian President V. Putin after Coloured Revolutions to denounce liberal democracy and accept the concept of a democracy based only on the equality of states in international area, and also adopted by the SCO, played a key role not only to rebuke the democratic aspirations in Central Asia, but also to put Syria into a chaos. Russia, which took lessons from the examples of the Coloured Revolutions in the post-Soviet states, applied its Sovereign democracy in the Arab Spring. Russia did not support democratic transformations of Arab states in the course of Arab spring; instead, it has remained an ardent and most influential material and political supporter of Arabic autocratic regimes. For instance, Russia recognised General Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, who deposed democratically elected Mohammed Morsi with a military coup in Egypt in 2013. Moscow even tried to go further and to take advantage of the rift occurred between Military Government in Egypt and the US when Washington suspended arms sale to Egypt just after the military coup (Aljazeera, 2014). By meeting the new Military regime in Moscow, which also included the discussion of Russian arms sale to Egypt, Russia obviously demonstrated the continuation of its support for authoritarian governments, no matter whether they are in military or civilian forms, and of taking advantage of the situation that would best serve Russian political, geopolitical and material interests.

One may draw a conclusion that Russia's embrace of Sisi of Egypt suggests that if the attempted military coup in Turkey had been successful, Moscow would have recognised, and worked with, it in a perfect term. In such a scenario, so long as the coup makes had not adopted a hostile position towards Russia and refrained from harming Russian vital interest, Moscow would even have supported it actively. Even if a possible military regime in Turkey had been falling into the interests of the US under current geopolitical and political atmosphere, such a authoritarian regime with a friendly position towards the Russian interests would have been most welcome by Moscow. As seen in the example of Egypt, it would be difficult to determine if the military government of Sisi in Egypt is fully pro-American, pro-Western or pro-Russian. The Military regime in Cairo has been in good terms with both the West and Russia in order to maintain its survival and prolong its power and international legitimacy.

Indeed, in contrast to Turkey's criticism and demand for return to democracy in Egypt, Russia, China, the US, the SCO and the EU have all been in good terms with the military regime in Cairo. Turkey, alone in its endeavour for democracy and freedom in Egypt,

has used all diplomatic and bilateral opportunities for freeing the Egyptian President Morsi from prison, especially in contacts with its allies in the West. It appears that the overwhelming conviction of security first and democracy second of the West with the Arab Spring, which is based on a largely accepted Western idea that a democratic and free Arab world would produce terrorism and insecurity, has long been already produced and reproduced by Russia and China individually and collectively in the SCO. Therefore, it is likely that Turkey, which was unable to mobilise even existing pro-democracy circles in the West for a democratic Arab world, could not be successful to turn the SCO into an organisation and ally advocating universally understood democracy, freedom and human rights for all states and their societies. Then, it seems that, if or when Turkey becomes full member of the SCO, its only option there in the promotion of democracy in Arab world and elsewhere would be only bandwagoning to authoritarian political positions of Russia and China.

3.4. The Syrian Crisis

The example of the crisis in Syria can even more shed light on the issue of Turkey's strive for security by the SCO membership. The SCO did comment on the Syrian conflict in number of its Summit Meetings in recent years. What is common in all these statements of the SCO was the repetition of respecting sovereignty of Syria, unacceptability of external interference, backing political and diplomatic methods, such as Astana Process and Geneva Talks, to resolve the problem peacefully (The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 2012; The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 2013; The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 2014b; The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 2016; The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 2017; The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 2018; The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 2019). Instead of the SCO platform, which is a difficult combination of states to make geopolitical and regional security interests of all members parallel, each big members has continued to display their own positions individually and bilaterally. Russia and China used their veto right at the UN Security Council to protect Assad regime in Syria. They vetoed all proposals at the UN Security Council, that was brought forward by other Western members of the Council supported by Turkey to impose sanctions on, and punish, Assad regime (The Guardian, 2017). Unlike Russia and China, on the fate of the Assad regime have Turkey and the West, though now to a lesser extent, still been on the same side, removal of him from the power. How much important and urgent the removal of Assad regime from power differ between Turkey and the West. While Turkey has, at least in words especially before the Astana Process, seen the removal of Daesh and Assad regime equally important, and required fight against both fronts with an equal seriousness, the West gives more priority to deal with Daesh than on the issue of who would run Syria.

What makes now Turkey on one side and the US and Russia on the other in the opposite sides in the Syrian crisis is the issue of YPG and PYD, the affiliations of the PKK. Like the US, Russia has wanted to use the Syrian Kurds on the ground, and supplied weapons to them, to which Turkey has strongly opposed (Milliyet, 2017; Karar, 2015). When one

thinks of Turkey's long and heavy fight against the PKK and some American and Russian weapons, captured during the operations of Turkish security forces against PKK in Turkey (Vatan, 2016; Hürriyet, 2016a; Vatan, 2017). Turkish national security regarding its territorial integrity seems to have been put at a serious risk by overall developments in Syria, and by especially the pro- Kurdish policies of Russia and the US. This risk has, indeed, further, increased after the Kurdish Authority in Northern Iraq announced on June 7, 2017 that they were going to held independence referendum on 25 September 2017 (Aljazeera; 2017). Apart from the US position towards the Syrian Kurds, which has already caused huge damage in the relationship between Turkey and the US, and started discussions about the value of NATO for Turkey, the improved Ankara-Moscow relations after both side overcome on the downed fighter jet crisis in 2015, has not helped on the very same issue for Turkey's favour. While Russia has continued its political and military material support to Syrian Kurds, it is, at the same time, trying to take advantage of the tense relations between Ankara and Washington by selling S-400 Air Defence Systems to Turkey. Also, important to note that Moscow and Beijing have sought to expand their military cooperation by conducting naval military exercises as far sea areas as in Mediterranean and South China Seas. In this framework, Russia and China, not the SCO, conducted military drills in the Mediterranean Sea in May 2015, sending perhaps positive messages to their 'friends', Assad regime, and negative signals to their 'enemies', NATO and opposite sides to Moscow and Beijing in the Syrian conflict (Gady, 2015). It can be, thus, said that, for Turkey, the SCO cannot be much beneficial entity willing to support for the current security and geopolitical interests of Ankara in Syria.

CONCLUSION

Turkey has been a dialogue partner of the SCO since 2012, but one cannot make a lot out of such level of cooperation. It is perhaps because of this lower level of contact that Turkey has asked for a full membership to SCO since 2013. The purpose of Turkey to become a full member to the SCO was stressed out by R.T. Erdogan with his key words saying that "the SCO Five is better, much powerful", and "it will enable us [Turkey] to act with much greater ease". The latter part of his reasoning to join the SCO was the main topic that this work tried to test, while the former part of the argument, the SCO being better and much powerful, was left out as it can only be determined by a subjective judgement. Regarding the argument that Turkey would ease itself to act with a greater freedom, it may be true that Turkey could free itself from hesitations and disagreements in NATO and unending, long and tiring accession process to the EU. Yet, how much Turkey would have a greater freedom to act in the SCO in the resolution of its urgent security and greater geopolitical needs is open to debate. It is because security and geopolitics of Turkey are not isolated subjects; they are, one way or another, within the top subjects and policy targets of the EU, the US, NATO, Russia, China and so on. That is why this work took security issue, NATO in this regard, as a subject to test the security and geopolitical utility of the SCO for Turkey.

As this study tried to explain, geopolitical problems of Turkey especially regarding its search for security are not just specific to itself. The end of the old-world order, the Cold War, gave birth to a new world order in which there are more freedom for states to act as well as more dangers and security risks to deal with. Turkey is not alone in a new world full of risks and opportunities. As seen in this work, security and geopolitical interests have diversified in NATO and in the EU. It is because of this fact that the EU has never been able to complete a unified and strong defence and foreign policy. Germany has seen its interests in the reliance largely on the utility of NATO instead of having led to the creation of a European foreign and defence structure. Similar policy diversifications have also been seen in the capitals of other great powers in the EU. France and Britain tried to cooperate on security interests in the name of the EU, but their national interests and other challenges did not allow them to go further. The Baltic and Eastern European states in both the EU and NATO have had different agendas with a greater unease regarding their security and geopolitical requirements. While many in the Western Europe do not see Russia as threat- instead they see it as an opportunity for business trade, Poland, Romania, the Baltic states and so on have had to live with alarm due to the security threat they have felt from Moscow. The US as the strongest power in the world has tried to shape the old security structures, NATO, in line with the demands of its interests in everywhere around the world under the new conditions of the new world order/disorder.

Turkey, having been a regional power and a partner and ally of the Western security and geopolitical interests since the end of the Second World War, could not have escaped from the changes that have continued to evolve since 1991 in the form of interest diversifications and new security and geopolitical dynamics. Since 1991, Turkey has found hard to take its NATO allies to defend its security to which they are all committed under the Article 5 of the Alliance. The 9/11 terror attacks to the US have made the definition of, and responses to, the security challenges much more complicated for many states. Turkey is one of such states that it has been badly affected. PKK, as a separatist and terrorist group, has been allowed to flourish and used as a geopolitical tool by the very allies of Turkey in the West for the sake of either further derailing Turkish prospect to accede to the EU or promoting their own security interests. It can be easily seen that active role of the YPG and PYD in the fight against Daesh in Syria seems to be just one deliberate policy choice of the US and some Western European countries to keep Turkey outside the Middle East and the EU as well as to maintain the Middle East as much a torn region as possible. As seen in the work, Turkey appears to have been in need of continuing to give solid responses to multiple security challenges rooted from international and domestic developments, respectively from Syrian crisis and attempted military coup. In order to boost its efforts of repelling these international and domestic challenges, Turkey points out of its desire to become a full member to the SCO.

As this study tried to show, the challenges that Turkey and the Western states have been disagreed on are also on the table of the SCO. The SCO as an international organisation, and Russia and China as its strongest great powers, does not have much different view on the issues of world order debate; terrorism, separatism and extremism; democracy and

regime change; the Syrian crisis from those of the US and the EU. Russia and China, not the SCO as a united body, ask a new world order in which the US and the West should not be supreme. Both have seen their permanent seats at the UN Security Council as advantages for their own individual authoritarian political systems and security, economic and geopolitical interests, but not for the good of entire international community. Similar points were also found in the way they define and see the problem of terrorism, separatism and extremism. The SCO in its reactions to the developments related with these topics has always been ineffective, unclear and submissive to the balanced interests of Russia and China. Outside the SCO, both Russia and China have reflected their own self-interested policy behaviours. Russia's actions in Georgia and Ukraine are not confirmative at all to the definition of, and the opposition to, separatism in the SCO. Indeed, being well aware of all these, it is why R. T. Erdogan has often uttered the words that "the World is bigger than five."

On the issue of democracy and regime change has the SCO had its own perspective that it is completely different from that of Turkey and the Western world. The SCO is not composed of states which are democratic and against authoritarian regimes. Indeed, one can draw a conclusion from this and hitherto deliberations of the SCO that it has continuously tried to spend efforts to protect authoritarian characters of its own members and support the prolongation of authoritarian regimes around the world, like Assad government in Syria. Russia and China, not the SCO as a whole, have protected the Assad regime at the UN Security Council. Turkey and the West tried to get rid of Assad regime with an international legitimacy given by the UN. Especially, Russia has remained the main protector of the regime in Syria by deploying its own military force to this country. It is also Russia that it has allied with the YPG and PYD in the fight against Daesh in Syria and been concerned less about Turkey's complains on the link between the armed Syrian Kurds and the PKK. Despite the fact that positive and strong appeal of Ankara and Moscow towards each other after overcoming the downing of Russian fighter jet by the Turkish air force in late 2015, and then Turkey's military operations (Euphrates Shield in August 2016, Olive Branch in January 2018, Peace Spring in October 2019 and Spring Shield in March 2020) in the southern neighbour along eastern and western Euphrates, they have still had many differences on the issue of YPG and PYD in Syria, and now in Libya. .

Under the lights of the findings in this work, it can be said that, despite all setbacks having been experienced with NATO and Western capitals, Turkey should still be in favour of maintaining and further developing strategic relations with the West in all possible bilateral and multilateral levels. It is because an unpredictable geopolitical order and multi-faceted security threats, which are equally prevalent from very existence and influence of Russia in Syria, Cyprus, Black Sea, Caucasus and now in the Mediterranean Sea including Libya require Turkey to continue valuing its long-term strategic partnership with NATO and Western capitals. It is, indeed, exactly what Turkey has been trying to do in its relations with the Western capitals and NATO in the unfolding security challenges in the outskirts of Sirte and al-Jufra in Libya. Having considered the US, and Western in general, support

for the affiliates of PKK in Syria, Turkey has no option but to continue to improve and intensify its strategic relations with both Russia and China. If the SCO gives Turkey the opportunity to wipe out its domestic and international security and geopolitical problems that the Western states and Russia have caused, then it is very reasonable to think that Turkey must seek to join it as a full member. However, such an outcome is a highly unlikely for Turkey under the current regional and international security and geopolitical circumstances.

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