

Ontological Concerns, Historical Realities and Conjunctural Developments: Continuity and Change in Turkey's Relations with Russia *

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyse the reasons behind continuity and change in Turkey's relations with Russia and to question the limits of cooperation between the two nations by using historical and current developments as cases. The article proposes that it would be misleading to take into account certain recent cooperation points only, for instance in Syria, in order to reach for a better understanding about the nature of the relations. Instead, any attempt to understand the reasons for continuity and change in Turkey's relations with Russia necessitates a framework built on conceptual and historical materials, as well as an analysis of conjunctural developments. Indeed, the history of the relations with Russia goes back to the emergence of the Russians in Euro-Asian region, but the relationship cannot be analysed without first understanding the mutual ontological concerns that both nations have had for centuries. As the Turks played an important role as the other in the construction of a Russian national identity, the rise of a Russian state in Euro-Asia became possible, to a great extent, with the decline of the Turks in this same region. The manuscript concludes that this historical reality that created a deep ontological concern particularly in Turkey still has the potential for renewed conflicts, despite of some recent cooperation with Moscow.

Keywords

Turkey, Russia, foreign policy, ontological concerns, continuity, change, conflict and cooperation.

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Introduction

The relationship between Russia and Turkey spans over six hundred years. Although both share some common features such as strong state tradition and patrimonial leadership, their relationship has not generally been a friendly one, mainly due to the ontological concerns each held about the other. Despite a few historical events that created conditions for cooperation, they have often wrestled with each other since Russia's emergence as a distinct community after the sixteenth century. Against this background, Turkic peoples, otherwise referred to in Russia as *Turoks* or *Tatars*, played the role of the dominant other in the construction of the Russian national identity. On the other hand, the national memories of the Turks were essentially shaped by the image of *Moskof* as terrible enemy. Beyond a doubt, both nations have shared similar images and concerns about each other for centuries (Çelikpala 2019, Khodarkovsky 2004:1-5, Riasanovsky 2005: 59-61, Kamenskii 1967).

In order to understand the impacts of ontological concerns on their foreign policies, it is important to analyse the relations from a long historical perspective. Until the 16th century, many communities who would be later on connected to the Russians, in this or that way, were under the control of various Turkic communities, including the Huns, Avars, Pechenegs, Cumans, Tatars and the Ottomans in the Euro-Asian region. After the emergence of the Russian *knez* (prince), the Russians constantly expanded against the Turkic world, from Moscow to Vladivostok in the East, including most of the lands that once belonged to the Turkic peoples in Euro-Asia. The Russians also occupied a great part of the Ottoman territories as far as Yeřilköy in the west and Erzurum in the east. On the other hand, if the Turks had not been able to stop its enemies in the Dardanelles in 1915 and if the Soviet Revolution had not erupted in 1917, there is little doubt that the Russians would have occupied Istanbul and the most of Anatolia after WWI (Khodarkovsky 2004: 126-220).

The Russian claims for the leadership of the Orthodox and Slavic worlds, its tsarist expansionist policies in Euro-Asia, and the traditional Russian penchant of reaching out to control warm waters have always created difficulties for the Turks. Moreover, the rise of the Russians became possible only with the decline of the power of the Turkic communities

in Euro-Asia. This reverse correlation deeply affected not only their perceptions about each other, but also their strategical policies to assure their survival (Khodarkovsky 2004:76-125, Riasanovsky 2005: 33-73). The issue of survival is the main source of ontological concerns that deal with being and existence. Accordingly, ontological concerns in this article refer to the existential concerns of a nation as a political and social being that differentiates it from others, provides a distinct identity, and gives it meaning to live as an independent political unity in the world. These sorts of concerns are products of long-term experiences and their constructs, and are continually de/constructed, by national memories, consciousness and identities.

Relative to international politics, ontological concerns which arise especially at critical times and conditions do not necessarily refer to the debates concerning “ontological security studies”, despite of some points under the discussion share similar connotations as criticizing the centrality of states in security studies in particular (Rumelili and Adıřönmez 2020: 23-29, Rumelili and Karadađ 2017: 23-29, Kinnvall and Mitzen 2017: 3–11, Steele 2009: 2-7, Mitzen 2006: 341–370). However, in this article, ontological concerns are also used to include normative side of “concerns” which are not confined only to “national/state security and defence”, but related to social identity construction in essence. Note that social identity construction should not be seen as an extension of national/state identity only, but one that concerns several nations and states which share common history, cultures and religions without looking at space and time. In addition, ontological concerns serve not only to remind peoples of the past, but also to re-vitalise memories through narratives, myths and discourses which are constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed by generations. Subsequently, they determine the decisions taken by states regarding, for instance, foreign policy options (Mitzen and Larson 2017). However, these concerns are not necessarily related to any specific type of regime or any kind of state. Also, the type of international system did not fundamentally change the ontological concerns of nations, even though they could be oppressed for a while by a group which considered them to be old or anachronistic phobias.

Russia and Turkey both emerged from the ruins of empires with strong patrimonial state tradition (Kanadıkırık 2019: 125-154), experienced

different types of regimes, international systems, ideologies, and leaders and leadership styles. As such, they faithfully fit the above-outlined pattern of nations that always hold deep ontological concerns about each other. For this, conflict not cooperation has served as one of the most noticeable features defining the relations between the two nations for centuries. As the recent past has also demonstrated, the Cold War period did not ameliorate, but rather exacerbated this situation. During the Cold War, as Russians championed expansionism under the disguise of Communist ideals, Turkey became a staunch ally of the West, established strategic partnerships and then joined NATO in an effort to ensure its security and survival against the Soviet Union and the Russians.

As is known theoretically from Constructivist scholarship (Wendt 1999, Finnemore and Sikkink 2001, Hopf 2002), national interests cannot be separated from identities, and identities are much related to matters of national existence. Ideational reasons do not play a role in shaping foreign policy no less than material factors. This issue of survival for the Turks throughout history has definitely been connected with the Russian expansionist, if not imperialist, policies against Turkey, much more than any other reason. Therefore, this article attempts to contextualize national identities, interests and conflicts as matters which cannot be separated from ontological concerns in foreign policy making.

It must be noted, however, that ontological concerns do not necessarily create a permanent hurdle against the establishment of cooperation between nations in some cases and at some periods. For instance, when the Kemalists and the Bolsheviks felt a need to come together at the beginning of 1920s, they did not refrain from establishing neighbourly relations. Later, the Soviet Union also assisted in the modernization and industrialization programs of Turkey in the 1930s, even during the Cold War. This has continued in a certain sense over the past few years, too. On the other hand, these examples did not alter the overall picture of the deep ontological concerns and strategic priorities held by both nations about each other.

With this framework in mind, the aim of this article is to analyse the logic behind continuity and change in the relations of Turkey with Russia within a historical and conceptual setting, while emphasizing specifically recent developments concerning the Syrian crisis.

The rise of the Russians and the decline of the Ottomans

The Russian nation originates from the Eastern Slavs. The word 'Rus' began appearing in history after the sixth century AD, following which the Russian-Varegs and the Kievan Rus were established as the first Russian principalities. Their acceptance of Orthodox Christianity and the Cyrillic alphabet in 988 played a decisive role in the development of a distinct Russian identity. Political unity also began under the Kievan Rus Principality, and, later, by the Muscovy Knez. However, the history of the Muscovits was heavily influenced by Turkic and Central Asian peoples who had invaded this region for a long time. Later on, the Tatars took control of the Knezes of Russia for a while. The transfer of the Orthodox Church from Kievan Rus to the city of Muscovy in the 14th century was a turning point in the history of Moscow, as the city would henceforth become the capital of the Russian states, including the Russian Federation today. In 1380, when the Moscow knez won a victory over the Tatars in the Battle of Kulikova, the Russians began to extend their territories towards Nizhniy-Novgorod and subsequently defeated the army of Kazan Khanate in 1487 (Yılmaz and Yakşı 2016: 9-57, Yılmaz 2019, Yılmaz 2020a, Kurat 1993: 91-109, Khodarkovsky 2004: 76-125, Riasanovsky 2005: 7-73).

Following the Battle of Kulikova, the Russians began to consider themselves as an independent and free nation. However, the Ottomans did not accept, nor recognize, the Russian existence as an independent state until the signature of the Karlowitz Agreement in 1699. Tsarist Russia continued to occupy the Volga and Caspian regions, and subsequently attacked the Azov castle. This war was terminated by the Istanbul Agreement of 1700. According to the agreement, Azov and Taganrog were left to Russia. In addition, the Ottomans granted permission for a Russian ambassador to be posted permanently in Istanbul. This period of peace was disrupted when Russians initiated another war in 1768. In this war, the Ottomans lost all their territories from Wallachia to Crimea, as per the agreements set forth in the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji of 1774 (Khodarkovsky 2004: 84-139, Meram 1969: 26-28, 127, Kurat 1993: 256-290).

As events have shown, Russia did not stop there and formed an alliance with Austria for a new war to implement the Greek Plan of Catherine II, which was initially drafted by the chief advisor of Tsar Peter I in 1736. Peter

I was in fact so obsessed with the destruction of the Ottomans until the last hour of his death. His aim was to conquer Constantinople in order “to chase the infidel Turks and Tatars out of Europe, and thus to re-establish the Greek monarchy” (Ragsdale 1993: 82-102). In the early 1780s, this plan was revitalized by Catharine II in order to re-establish the Byzantine Empire that would be headed by her grandson Constantine. On this matter she already had contacts with Voltaire, for instance, who “express the hope that one day she will advance to liberate Byzantium”, as Isabel de Madariaga puts it (Madariaga 2014: 221, Rebejkow 2018: 392–398). However, the sudden death in 1790 of Catherine’s ally Joseph II and “reel” politics in Europe about the future of Russian and the Ottoman empires put a halt to the plan, but the advances of the Russian army forced the Ottomans to accept the Jassy Agreement of 1792 with the loss of both Crimea and Ochakov (Meram 1969 :143-144, Kurat 1993: 291).

In a similar fashion, at the beginning of the 19th century, Russia continued annexing or occupying cities and lands once under the control of the Ottomans. The Ottomans attempted to fight back; however, after six years of war and another defeat, the only option was to accept the Treaty of Bucharest in 1812. This encouraged Russia to pursue even more aggressive policies towards the Balkans, Caucasus and even the inner regions of Anatolia. Furthermore, the Russians continued to support ethnic uprisings, particularly by the Greeks and Serbs. In 1827, the Russians destroyed an Ottoman fleet in Navarino and then marched towards Istanbul from the Balkans, all the while invading many towns and cities from the Caucasus all the way to Erzurum. Once again, the Ottomans were forced to grant independence to Greece and greater autonomy to Serbia (Riasanovsky 2005: 330, Meram 1969: 168-177).

As the decline of the Ottomans deepened, the Eastern Question had, in the meantime, become a pressing issue among the European powers. It was Tsar Nicholas who warned the Western powers that ‘Turkey seems to be falling to pieces ... We have a sick man on our hands, a man gravely ill, it will be a great misfortune if one of these days he slips through our hands, especially before the necessary arrangements are made’ (Temperly 1936: 272). European powers could not reach any consensus, which led to the start of the Crimean War in 1853, when Nicholas insisted on further

concessions from the Ottomans. Yet with the support of France and Britain, Turkey defeated and forced the Russians to accept a new status quo in the Black Sea, following the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1856 (Meram 1969: 189-190).

As happened in the past, Russia continued to encourage separatist uprisings until the start of 1877-78 war, otherwise referred to by Turks as *93 Harbi* (The 93 War). Just before the war, Russia and Serbia began to support rebellions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Then, Russia declared war on the Ottomans in 1877 and occupied Bulgaria, capturing Plevna, Edirne and then Yeřilköy. At the same time, the Russian army attacked eastern Turkey and captured the entire region up to the Aziziye Bastion in Erzurum. For the Ottomans, they had to accept the defeat and signed the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878, recognizing the independence of Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, and providing autonomy to Bulgaria and Bosnia. In the east, Kars, Ardahan and Batumi were ceded to the Russians. In addition, this agreement confirmed Russia's success in pan-Slavist policies, particularly in the Balkans, and offered opportunities to redesign the eastern part of Turkey as well. Obviously, the defeat also re-confirmed the 'sick man' image of Turkey (Meram 1969: 196-200, Karal 2007: 28-34, 64-67, Riasanovsky 2005: 386-387).

Documenting Russian public opinion during the Crimean and the 93 wars, Acar informs us concerning both the image of the Turks in Russian popular culture and how this culture played a role in re/constructing Russian national identity (Acar 2019: 113-136, Acar 2007: 260-290, 69-91). Russian propaganda machines, for instance *Lubok* cartoons, pictures and books, in addition to newspapers, represented the Turks as the number one enemy of not only the Russians, but of all the Orthodox world. This propaganda portrayed the Russians as the saviour of the Christian brothers in the region, the Serbians in particular. Quite simply, the Turks were depicted as 'barbarians' among other epithets. The same mood of 'the joy of hatred' also definitely prevailed during the wars in the Caucasus. On the other hand, Russia's relentless attacks on the Turks which ended with humiliating defeats, occupations, loss of territory, countries and dignities also created deep ontological concerns and the subsequent Russian phobia of the Turks. In addition, studies on the history education textbooks of the

Russians, including the Soviet and Russian Federation periods, demonstrated that they reproduced the image of terrible Turks again and again without making a substantial difference between the Ottomans and the Turks. The Ottomans who were perceived as indispensable part of Turkish history were always accepted as a people brutal and repressive. Russian narratives for instance concerning Balkans, Istanbul and the Straits were constructed on the same rhetoric of saving them from the invasion of the Turks. No doubts all the Turks in the textbooks are represented as the other of Russian identity (Şimşek and Cengiz 2015: 225-258, Cengiz and Şimşek 2017: 37-66).

Bolsheviks and Kemalists: Anti-imperialist collaboration

Note that this understanding confirms the stereotyped images of the Turks held by the Russians since the tsars continued to follow anti-Turkish policies up to the very last hour of their power in Moscow. At the start of WWI in 1914, Russia perceived the war as another opportunity to finish off the Ottomans. However, the Turks defended the Straits, which weakened the tsarist regime. Then, Bolsheviks succeeded in dethroning the tsars and declaring the Soviet Revolution in October 1917. Soon after, Russia withdrew from the war (Riasanovsky 2005: 475) and signed the Brest-Litovsk Agreement in 1918. By this agreement, the Bolsheviks also agreed to remove Russian troops in Ardahan, Kars and Batumi.

One more note at this point that the tsarist period ended in 1917, but the image of the Turks as the other has remained unchanged in Russia, as we have noted above. However, the success of the Bolsheviks, which coincided with the start of the National Liberation War by the Kemalists in Turkey, forced both of the side to coming together against western powers. On the one hand, the West was suspicious of Mustafa Kemal and his movements. He was regarded either as a Bolshevik and an Islamist-nationalist. In a similar vein, the West also rejected the Bolsheviks as Communists from the very inception of their movement. The Kemalists and Bolsheviks appeared to be alone and helpless in international politics. Therefore, they desperately needed for each other. It is certain that historical circumstances pushed both of the sides into direct contacts (Gökay 2000: 14-35).

After Mustafa Kemal Pasha landed in Samsun on 19 May 1919, he began to organize the National Liberation War on the one hand. On the other,

he started attempts to get the help and support of the Bolsheviks since he regarded the Bolsheviks as the only possible and most important ally that could help his struggle in Anatolia. It was certain that anti-imperialism was the common point for both of the sides. As a result, he started diplomatic initiatives first by sending Halil Pasha to Moscow as an envoy soon after the Sivas Congress, which was convened in September 1919. The mission of the pasha was to establish relations with the Soviets, and to ask their helps for weapons, ammunition and finance. The first contact was successful because it prepared the ground for both sides to make cooperation possible (Benhür 2008: 278-280, Topal 2018: 316-317).

Another diplomatic initiative which was started in April 1920, following the opening of the Parliament was Atatürk's famous letter to Lenin. The letter was indeed one of the first foreign policy actions of the government of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. Mustafa Kemal Pasha wrote this letter as the President of the Assembly and sent it to Moscow by an envoy. In his letter to Lenin, Kemal Pasha proposed political and military solidarity against the imperialist forces that threatened their countries, and requested from the Soviets to send 5 million gold, weapons, ammunition and supplies in order to fight against imperialism (Yerasimos 2000: 223). When the Soviet Russian Foreign Affairs Commissioner George Vassilievitch Chicherin replied it in June 1920, it meant that diplomatic relations between the two countries had officially began. Chicherin also noted that an embassy delegation to Ankara was sent by the Soviets (Yerasimos 2000: 228-229). Similarly, the first foreign policy action of the first Assembly government which was formed in May 1920 was to send another but high-level diplomatic delegation to Moscow under the chairmanship of Foreign Minister Bekir Sami. They arrived in Moscow in July 1920, and held talks to sign a friendship agreement with the Soviets. In August, both of the sides agreed on a draft agreement, including a certain amount of assistance to Ankara. However, there were many more problems that needed to be discussed in Ankara, concerning issues related to Turkey's borders and relations with Caucasian states and peoples in particular. Making matters worse was the Soviet territorial claims. On the last days of the Moscow talks, in August 1920, Chicherin did not refrain himself from demanding territory in favour of Armenians from Turkey. His demands were really shocking and unexpected but taken seriously by the Turkish delegation who was in fact

not happy with the developments in Moscow from the time they arrived at the train station and their reception there by a low-profile Russian diplomat after waiting for a while. When the delegation returned back to Turkey, all the issues but the subject of territorial demands in particular were brought to a secret session of the parliament and discussed in details on 16 and 17 October 1920. As far as is understood from the discussions, the territorial demands certainly caused the revived Turkish ontological concerns, feelings of doubt and distrust about the Soviet intentions. Speaking after Yusuf Kemal's statement concerning their visit and talks in Moscow, a member of parliament, Hasan Fehmi Bey, stated that "domestic policy has changed in Russia, but foreign policy has remained unchanged. Whatever yesterday's tsarist Russia thinks, today's Soviet Russia is also thinking of something close to it in foreign relations". For instance, in addition to Chicherin's territorial claims, as Hasan Fehmi puts it, the Soviets still rejected the advancement of the Turkish army towards the Caucasus and accused Turkey of violating the conditions set out by the Brest-Litovsk Agreement. All of other members condemned and rejected the Soviet approach to Turkey (TBMM 1999: 158-187, Yerasimos 2000: 101-311).

On the other hand, Ankara's rapprochement with Moscow did not go without notice by the western powers, too. Britain in particular attempted to hamper it through playing with different cards such as supporting pan-Islamist and pan-Turkist movements in Central Asia (Gökay 2000: 30-32). Although none of the British plots prevented the development of relations with Moscow, Ankara became alerted and sceptical more about Soviet connections with communist activities in Istanbul and Anatolia. Not surprisingly, at the beginning of 1921, the Ankara government took strict measures against communist activities, such as closures of associations, investigations and trials of people associated to them, while increasing security, especially on the Eastern border of Turkey (Aslan 2002: 14-17, Benhür 2008: 277-287, Topal 2018: 316-322).

Nevertheless, all the adverse developments did not cause a major diplomatic rupture between the Kemalists and Bolsheviks since Ankara and Moscow signed the Treaty of Friendship and Brotherhood in March 1921 in Moscow. For Ankara, in addition to establish a legal base for its relations with Moscow, this agreement also had a very symbolic meaning since it

rendered the Treaty of Sevres obsolete. In addition, the Mudanya Armistice in October 1922 which declared the Turkish victory in Anatolia, was welcomed by the Soviets (Akarslan 1995: 467-499, Benhür 2008: 277-313, Topal 2012: 317-330, Yerasimos 2000: 313-468).

On the other hand, it is surprising that the Soviet Union held reservations about signing the Lausanne Treaty in July 1923, since the Soviet demands for the Straits in particular were not taken into account. For the Kemalists, the Lausanne Treaty was of paramount importance because it documented, first and foremost, the recognition of Turkey as a new and independent state by international community. According to the Bolsheviks, as 'petit bourgeois leaders', the Kemalists aimed to change the country, but did not accomplish much for the cause of socialism. Fortunately, Soviet diplomats in Turkey offset the growing tension by suggesting that Moscow accept 'the 'New Turkey' as it was for collaboration (Somel 2018: 13, Yerasimos 469-611). Also, the Mosul question, which was mishandled by the League of Nations, played a crucial role in improving the relations. As a reaction to the Mosul decision, Turkey withdrew its delegation from the League and on the next day signed the Turkish-Soviet Treaty of Friendship in December 1925 (Kinross 2012: 477, Yüceer 2010: 85-86, Korhan 2012: 95). On the other hand, among the reasons that pushed the Soviets to get closer to Turkey were also their own domestic problems concerning economy, society and security. The leaders of the revolution had to work so much hard in order to bring all the Tsarist lands and people together as creating a new soviet society (Sadıgov 2020, Carr 1979, Bullock 2008, Chamberlin 1987).

Deteriorating relations with Stalinist Russia and the Cold War

However, the Montreux negotiations in 1936 triggered a major setback between Ankara and Moscow. The international climate of that time enabled Turkey to conclude the Montreux Treaty with the participation of relevant states, including Russia. Yet the Soviets had different ideas about the regime of the Straits, favouring a policy of control in order to keep the Black Sea closed to any other power. As far as can be understood from related documents, Turkey's contacts with Britain during the conference had further annoyed Moscow, but international circumstances were about the change for the worse with the start of the WWII (Gökay 2000: 36-47, Çalıř 2017:17-23).

At the beginning of the war, the treaty of friendship between Moscow and Berlin in August 1939 alerted the Turks once again since they suspected the two countries of making a deal to partition Turkey, to seize control of the Straits, to change the Montreux Treaty and to invade certain regions of Anatolia. Then, the Turks had to follow the war with growing anxiety and the enduring concerns uncovered the Russian phobia among decision makers. It was certain that Turkey refused to enter the war since they did not want to be 'occupied by Germany and then to be saved by the Red Army'. Nonetheless, in order to appease the Soviets in particular, Turkey gradually tilted its neutral stance in favour of the Allies, too. Finally, Ankara declared war on Germany and Japan on February 23, 1945 (Deringil 1989:154-157, Oran 2001: 396-397).

However, Stalin kept pushing Turkey into a corner as he voiced his concern about the control of the Straits. In June 1945, Molotov disclosed details concerning the Soviet intentions. He stated that Turkish borders needed to be changed in favour of the Soviets, that the Soviets needed bases in Turkey, and that the Montreux Treaty must be redesigned to meet Russian interests. Following this, the Soviet media revamped an anti-Turkish campaign accusing Turkey of being opportunist, failing to declare war when needed most and by helping Germany (Kuniholm 1980: 40-42, Weisband 1973: 197-198). The Truman Doctrine in 1947 and the start of the Cold War represented another turning point for Turkey as well. During the Cold War, Turkey joined all Western organizations, including NATO. Then, Turkey became the staunchest ally of the USA, continually defended Western interests in all organizations, such as the Bandung conference, and took a leading role in the establishments of Balkan and the Baghdad pacts against the Soviets in particular. For Moscow, Turkey's NATO membership in particular confirmed only 'an aspiration on the part of the imperialist states to utilize Turkish territory... for aggressive purposes' (Çalıř 2017: 107-108, Kurban 2014: 258).

This picture began changing after the emergence of the Cyprus crisis at the end of the 1950s, but not in substance. Under the stress of the crisis, Turkey decided to follow a multidimensional foreign policy which included closer relations with the Soviets as well. Subsequently, the Menderes government signed a trade agreement with Russia and Poland and announced the

possibility of an official visit to Moscow. However, the military coup in May 1960 and ensuing events, such as the Cuban missile crisis, prevented any high-level visit until 1967, at which time Demirel visited Moscow (Armaoğlu 2002: 735). Then, Turkey built iron and steel plants in İskenderun, an aluminium factory in Seydişehir, an oil refinery in Aliğa and a sulphur acid factory in Bandırma with the aid of Soviet investments. Despite certain issues, including the Soviet support of the Greek Cypriots, this cooperation continued after Bülent Ecevit came to power in 1978 (Tellal 2000: 332-343, Gençalp 2014: 327-341).

However, the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 by the Soviets caused another tension and stirred up painful national memories in Turkey relative to the Russians. Many millions in Turkey protested the invasion and shouted slogans in support of the *mujahideen* fighting against the Soviets. On the other hand, Turkey experienced one of the worst economic and political crises and the Turkish army seized power in September 1980. The anti-Socialist and anti-leftist policies of the military did not help but worsened relations until Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985 (Çalış 2017-192-193, Oran 2001: 158-161). Then, Turgut Özal visited Moscow in July 1986 and signed several agreements including to finance hydroelectric plants in Turkey. In March 1991, they signed another agreement, the Treaty of Friendship, but it was never implemented due to the collapse of the Soviets. On 25 December 1991, Gorbachev resigned from his post, and all the Soviet Republics declared their independence shortly thereafter (Oran 2001: 161-166, Çalış 2017: 192-193, Tuncer 2016: 51-52).

Enduring conflicts with the new Russia

Following the collapse of the Soviets, Ankara adapted to emerging circumstances and recognized the independence of new states, including the Russian Federation (RF), as soon as possible. Since then, despite progress in many fields, several chronic problems continue to hinder relations. Of them, the first one is related to the rise of pan-Turkist and Islamist movements after the emergence of new Turkic states in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Turkey always denied any official connection with these movements but felt a responsibility to support the new Republics and integrate them into the new world order (Kramer 1996, Hyman 1997: 339-351, Walke 2003, Collins 2007, Koncak 2012: 209-226, Haidar 2015, Goble 2015,

Balcer 2017:151-162). On the other hand, the Russian presidents, including Putin, always followed what was happening in the region, and, as a reaction to Turkey, they supported anti-Turkish movements such as the PKK and then YPG. Moscow has never accepted the PKK as a terrorist organization and supported the YPG activities in Russia, despite Turkey's many attempts in this direction (Çelikpala 2007: 274, Çelikpala 2019, Coskun and Toksabay 2016, Jones 2019, Çetinkaya and Yılmaz 2020). To counter Turkey's influence in the region, in addition to other reasons such as providing an answer to the growing influences of the western powers, Putin applied more aggressive economic and political policies towards Central Asia and Caucasus. In 2003, for instance, the RF opened a military base in Kyrgyzstan, while taking a leading role in establishing the Euro-Asian Economic Union (EAEU) in 2015. Putin also used public diplomacy and succeeded in gaining substantial respect among the peoples and leaders of the region. This made the Turkic countries too cautious not to irritate the RF when establishing any relations with Turkey.

In addition, some *neo-Eurasian* intellectuals who have connections with the Russian establishment, for instance Aleksandr Dugin, harshly criticized Turkey's connections with the Turkic communities in the RF after the end of the Cold War (Laruelle 2008: 4). Note that his opinions have changed a lot in favour of closer relations with Turkey in order to create a common anti-Western block in the region (Yılmaz 2020a). On the other hand, some Russian politicians such as Zhirinovskiy demonstrate the meaning of the ontological concern that some Russians still have towards the Turks. The credibility of Zhirinovskiy could be debated; however, he illustrates an interesting example among the Russian people, who 'has a Turcophobia which is virtually obsessive'. As Service puts it, "his diatribes against foreign countries are weak in comparison with the intensity of his detestation of the Ottoman Empire and twentieth-century Turkey. The Turkish impact on Russian history, he maintains, has been unrelievedly malign. He raises an alarm about the resurgence of 'Pan-Turkism' in Russia. He also warns about the continuing danger posed by the Turkish government' (Service 1998: 184-185).

Another contentious issue that has affected Turkey's relations with Russia, dating from the Ottoman Empire, is related to the Armenian question.

However, the problem at this point in time is related essentially to the Armenians of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which was attached to Azerbaijan by the Soviets. In 1987, the Karabakh Armenians decided to separate from Azerbaijan and to unite with the Republic of Armenia. This unilateral declaration initiated a war between the Azeris and the Armenians (Kamel 2014: 193). In response to the conflict, Ankara rejected the decision of union diplomatically and criticized the involvement of Russia, which supported the separatists (Oran, III, 2013:552-559). However, no progress has been made on this issue until very recently, and Turkey has been in favour of the Azeris, whereas the RF still continues to side with the Armenians.

The military intervention of the RF in Chechnya was another issue affecting relations after the Cold War. When Chechnya declared independence in 1991, many Turks embraced it and demonstrated in support of the Chechnyan warriors. Despite Turkey's official non-involvement policy in this war, the Russians harshly criticized Ankara for allowing 'terrorists' to live in Turkey, because of the warriors who escaped to Turkey. Making matters worse was the RF's brutal massive military operation against the Chechnyans. When additional problems related to the peoples of the region, such as Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Georgia, were added to these conflicts, the RF officially became more critical of Turkey's regional policies (Kanbolat 2001: 167-169, Kamel 2014: 183-197).

The annexation of Crimea by the RF in 2014 is another point of conflict. For the security of the Black Sea, an autonomous Crimea attached to Ukraine created a new status quo that also favoured Turkey after the Cold War. Therefore, the RF's decision has been perceived by Ankara as the destruction of a strategic equilibrium and another attempt of Russia for hegemony in the region. When Turkish public in general began demonstrations against Russia, Ankara had but no choice other than protesting Moscow. Nothing has changed so far, but the Crimean problem still carries significant potential for conflicts in the region and runs the risk of further jeopardizing relations (Aktürk 2016: 2).

The Syrian Crisis and the Limits of Cooperation

As demonstrated in the discussions above, most of the problems with the new Russia that have historical roots remain as they are, despite the

fact that Putin and Erdoğan have been in power since 2000 and 2003 respectively. In this respect, the Syrian crisis must be taken as yet another cluster of events demonstrating the limits of cooperation since Russia's direct involvement in it in 2015. No doubt that the crisis has become a vital issue for Turkey's national security and even for its survival. First of all, it would be an absurd point to question Turkey's involvement in this crisis, simply because it shares common borders with Syria for more than 900 kilometres. Secondly, no doubt that any further destabilization of Syria would cost much more to Ankara mainly due to Kurdish separatist activities under the control of PKK/YPG terrorist organizations in northern Syria. As declared by Ankara, Turkey will not allow the establishment of any type of terrorist state, independent or autonomous, on the other side of its borders. A third issue is related to the Syrian refugees in Turkey, whose numbers exceed more than 3.5 million. Ankara relentlessly declares that it cannot afford to host any more of them within its borders. Therefore, it urges to establish a safe zone within Syria in order to avoid any further humanitarian tragedies in the region. The final issue that concerns Turkey is the political and social structure of Syria after the war ends. Turkey insists on including all opposition groups in the negotiations for the building of a new Syria and does not believe that any political solution can be achieved with the Assad regime. However, Russia shares none of Turkey's concerns and proposals.

In order to understand the role of this crisis in depth, a short historical account would be helpful. When Bashar Assad succeeded his father, Hafez, in 2000, he attempted to improve relations with Turkey. However, the start of uprisings for democracy in 2011 and ruthless responses by the government to the subsequent street demonstrations created a rift between Ankara and Damascus, causing Assad to once again shift Syria's allegiance towards Russia. As it was during his father's days, Bashar's Damascus and Moscow became close allies in the region in 2015 when Putin began to support Assad unconditionally, and to reject any solution without Assad. No doubt, Putin attempts to re-establish Russia as a powerful actor, not only in Syria, but also in the region, as demonstrated by his interventions in Iraq, Yemen and Libya. Nevertheless, these interventions did not prevent Turkey from joining the RF in negotiations seeking to find a solution for Syria since 2016, first in Astana and then many times in Sochi and Moscow (Yılmaz 2020a, 2020b).

However, evil is hidden in the details, as certain major incidents related to the Syrian crisis after Russia's direct interventions have demonstrated the limits of cooperation. The first incident started with the destruction of the Turkish Air Force F-4 in June 2012. After that, Turkey's air space was violated over and over again by the Syrian and Russian forces, who claimed that it was necessary for fighting against the terrorist groups of the ISIS. However, they did not refrain from attacking Turcoman civilians living in the area adjacent to the Turkish borders. Besides, despite warnings from Turkey, the Russian and Syrian forces have ignored the Turkish 'new rules of engagement' resulting in increased tension with Moscow after a Russian aircraft was shot down by Turkey in November 2015. Soon after, Putin called the incident a 'stab in the back' and responded promptly by issuing huge sanctions against Turkey, including imports, building contracts, chartered flights, holiday packages, and visa-free travel. Other retaliatory measures consisted of intensified bombings of Turcoman groups in Syria by Russian aircraft, the introduction of a pro-Armenian bill against Turkey's denial of the 1915 events as a genocide, the provision of more support for pro-PKK organizations, such as the YPG in Syria, the deployment of additional S-300F missiles positioned off Latakia and the severing of all military communications and contact with the Turkish side. Russia has even accused Turkey of trading oil with ISIS (Özdemir 2018).

Following this, a second major incident occurred in Ankara in December 2016. The assassination of Andrey Karlov, the Russian Ambassador to Turkey, created much tension with Moscow (Bromwich 2016). The assassination occurred at a time when Turkey was protesting the brutal attacks on civilians by the Russian-supported Syrian forces, as well as the retaking of control of Aleppo. However, neither Erdoğan nor Putin allowed it to create another conflict, since they realized that both the shooting of Russian aircraft and the Karlov assassination were plots by terrorist FETÖ that essentially targeted to test, and even more to destroy the normalization process of Ankara's relations with Moscow (Alhas and Morrow 2019).

The third major incident is related to the bombings on Turkish troops in the Idlib region within Syrian borders towards the end of February 2020. It is certain that the bombings were jointly organized by Syrian and Russian jets, despite the fact that Turkey had shared information with the Russian

authorities concerning the position of its troops in the region. The bombings resulted in the deaths of more than 50 Turkish soldiers in addition to many casualties. Several hundred more civilian lives were lost within the following few weeks. Russia has not as of yet accepted their direct involvement in these bombings, but rather, has preferred to accuse Turkey of violating the Sochi Understanding of 2018. Even more confounding is the fact that both the governments in Moscow and Ankara have not directly blamed each other but have employed other means, such as media and politicians. For instance, Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of the Nationalist Movement Party, which supports Erdoğan, not only condemned the regime's attacks, but also urged the government to review its relations with Russia, 'the regime's main ally'. According to Bahçeli, 'Moscow is just as responsible for the recently martyred Turkish troops' and 'Russia is achieving its goals step by step in Syria through crisis and chaos'. On the other hand, the state-owned Russian television declared that Turkish troops and 'terrorist groups' supported by Turkey fired rockets at Russian and Syrian aircrafts, forcing them to take 'counter measures' to stop the assaults of these terrorist groups (Yetkin 2020). Nevertheless, the presidents came together once again in Moscow on 5 March 2020 and reached a new understanding to maintain the current ceasefire without violating the status quo of the region in accordance with the Sochi Understanding of 2018. In reality, both sides did not change their positions and Ankara gained nothing in terms of its 'red lines' in Syrian policies concerning border security, control of terrorist activities by the PK/YPG groups and resolution of the refugee issue. In Moscow, it became very clear that both countries and their leaders appear to have lost a considerable amount of confidence in each other, since they continued to speak about the same issues using different verbiage with altered meanings in mind. For instance, when Putin talked about terrorists, he categorically meant all opposition groups fighting against the regime, whereas Erdoğan's view of the terrorists essentially referred to the PKK/YPG members. Secondly, while the Turks complained about the current problems created by the Assad regime, the Russians preferred to send historical messages in the 5th March meeting in Moscow by using subliminal symbols, such as the portrait on the wall of Aleksandr Suvorov, a general who won many battles against the Ottomans. This spurred debates in Turkish media which argued, 'the appearance of the portrait was for the purpose of humiliating the Turkish

delegation, though it had actually been hanging on the walls of the room for quite some time'. For instance, a journalist argued that the real issue could lie with the reporter directing viewers toward the portrait, noting that the coverage was broadcast on the state channel Rossiya, which is under strict control of the Kremlin' (DuvarEnglish, 10.03.2020).

Before the Moscow meeting, the presidents of both countries had played a substantial role in reaching agreements in many conflicts. For instance, the case of the shooting down of Russian aircraft in 2015 was closed directly by President Erdoğan with a diplomatic letter to President Putin in June 2016, expressing sympathy and 'deep condolences' to the Russian families of the victims. Understanding Turkey's position in Syria, Putin also took a positive role in attempting to restore relations. However, developments concerning Idlib at the beginning of 2020 demonstrated that the diplomacy of leadership has certain limits.

The question at this stage is why Turkey still appears eager to maintain relations with Russia, despite ontological concerns and strategical differences concerning both regional policies in general and Syria in particular. The answer to this question lies in two essential factors: Firstly, Erdoğan's ever-growing doubts about the West since the failed coup attempt by the terrorist FETÖ on 15 July 2016 led him to find alternatives in international politics. It is possible to read, for instance the case of the purchase of S-400 Long Range Air Defence Missiles from the Russian Federation, as part of Erdoğan's reactions to the West, as he intensified efforts to buy Russian S-400 anti-aircraft missile systems amid critics of Western media about him. On the other hand, Erdoğan also asserts that Turkey certainly needed a long-range air defence and explained it to western allies on several occasions, and, moreover, applied to the US to purchase Patriot system missiles. However, Turkey never received a positive reply.

The second reason for Erdoğan's preferences emerges from Turkey's dependency on Russia in foreign trade; in particular in the energy and tourism sectors. Since the establishment of the RF in 1992, the trade between the two countries has increased from 1.5 billion dollars to more than 26 billion in 2019. Last year, Turkey's exports to Russia were about 4 billion, and its imports reached to 22.4 billion. The reason behind the trade deficit stems from Turkey's need for energy, which is mostly dependent on

Russian natural gas. The consumption of gas, which was only 3 billion m³ in 1990, exceeded more than 52 billion m³ in 2017.

In addition, Turkish companies in Russia are investing more than 10 billion dollars as of 2019. Turkish contracting firms have also completed 1,946 projects worth approximately 68 billion. Also, the numbers of Russian tourists who visited Turkey increased from 477 thousand in 2000 to more than 7 million in 2019. After the 2015 aircraft incident, the numbers of Russian tourists plummeted drastically in 2015 and 2016, from 5 million to less than one million, due to the sanctions against Turkey put in place by the Putin government. Realizing the dramatic effects of the sanctions for the Turkish economy, for instance, Erdoğan then saw no harm in apologizing to the families of the Russian aircraft pilots in a letter to Putin in 2016, as noted above. Only after this gesture did Moscow gradually lift sanctions, and Russian tourists began packing Turkish seashores in record numbers once again (Semercioglu 2020: 176-212).

Conclusions

No doubt, economy, security and who leads a country are all important matters, but they have limits when ontological concerns begin dominating the psychological environment in which foreign policy decisions are made. Perhaps the leaderships of Erdoğan and Putin from the beginning of 2000's have much helped in solving some critical issues in a similar manner as we have seen in the cases of Mustafa Kemal and Lenin, but their case also demonstrates that despite of interim cooperation periods, both of the countries continued conflicts and began following different ways as rivals in international relations after a while, mainly due to developments that alerted ontological concerns. Certainly, conflicts do not always mean wars and the absent of relations between nations.

Relations between Russia and Turkey date back to the rise of the Russians as an ethnic community. When the Russians began appearing in history, the Turkic peoples had already dominated the Euro-Asian steppes. On the other hand, many territories now occupied by the Russians once belonged to the Turks or to Turkic communities, from Vladivostok to Moscow. The first and most important reason which deeply affects relations emerges from this history which is dominated by wars, insecurity and not trusting each other.

This point is vital, not only due to geopolitical reasons, but to the ontological concerns which were created and constantly fostered by insecurity, wars and conflicts rather than trust, friendship and cooperation enduring for centuries. Another reason affecting relations arises from their ethnic, social and religious affinities, which provided strong, yet opposite bases in the construction of the national identities of both nations. Secondly, the Turks in its broadest sense are one of the most important community who created barriers in the path of the Russians in their expansion towards the south in order to reach warm waters, for their plans to revive Byzantium, and for their goal to craft a stronger unity among Slavic peoples. Lastly, Russia was one of the prime powers behind the destabilization and dissolution of the Ottoman Empire up until the Bolshevik revolution in 1917.

No doubt, the October Revolution that was coincided with the start of the National Liberation War in Turkey pushed Lenin and Mustafa Kemal to come together against imperialist powers. This collaboration set up relatively peaceful relations between the two countries until the second half of the 1930s. Afterwards, relations substantially deteriorated and Stalinist policies reawakened the Russian phobia in Turkey. The Cold War did not help but exacerbated worsening relations. Certainly, Turkey's close interest in the newly-independent Turkic states after the Cold War created more concerns in Russia in return. The rise of Putin meant the return of powerful Russia in the region. Initially Putin disdained developing peaceful relations with Turkey, but the factor of Erdoğan who preferred to improve relations for political and economic reasons opened new horizons in their relations.

After this point, the leadership diplomacy and direct interventions of the presidents as happened in many recent crises, appear to be solving some problems, but many strategic issues that foster ontological concerns still remain unresolved. Turkey still supports the case of Azeris, has never accepted the annexation of Crimea by Russia and has always preferred to keep distance towards any Russian movement in the Black Sea region, the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia. In Syria, Turkey continues to support opposition groups, including the Syrian National Army, does not favour any solution with the Assad regime, and rejects talks with any pro-PKK Kurdish groups, about all of which Russia has different opinions. Similarly, Turkey still allies with the legal government in Libya as the Russians

provide supports to Hafter's forces (Mackinnon 2020, Wintour 2020). In sum, all of the cases do not provide exceptions, but rather demonstrate that ontological concerns have the potential to suddenly emerge and force to review relations.

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Ontolojik Kaygılar, Tarihsel Gerçekler ve Konjonktürel Gelişmeler: Türkiye'nin Rusya İle İlişkilerinde Süreklilik ve Değişim*

Şaban Halis Çalış**

Öz

Bu makalenin amacı, tarihsel ve güncel gelişmeleri dikkate alarak Türkiye ile Rusya arasındaki bir yandan devamlılık ve değişim öte yandan da işbirliği ve çatışmayı analiz etmektir. Makalede, iki ülke arasındaki ilişkilerin niteliği konusunda bir sonuca varmak için sadece son dönemde gelişen bazı işbirliği noktalarını dikkate almanın yanıltıcı olacağı öne sürülmektedir. Kaldı ki makalede de örnek olarak daha geniş bir şekilde ele alındığı üzere, son dönem Suriye üzerinde iki ülkenin politikalarında işbirliğinin belli bir sınırı olduğu da açıktır. Bu yüzden, Türkiye'nin Rusya ile ilişkilerini analize yönelik her tür girişim, konjonktürel gelişmeler yanında tarihini ele almak zorundadır. Çünkü her iki ulusun da hafızalarına kazınmış ontolojik kaygılar yaratan bu ilişkilerin tarihi, Rusların Avrasya'da bir etnik grup olarak ortaya çıkmasına kadar uzanır. Bu yüzden, oldukça uzun bir tarihin doğurduğu ve her iki ülkenin yüzyıllardır sahip olduğu karşılıklı ontolojik kaygılar göz ardı edilerek bu ilişkiler analiz edilemez. Avrasya'da bir Rus kimlik ve devletinin kuruluşu ve yükselişi, aynı bölgedeki Türklerin ya da Türki toplulukların gerilemesiyle ancak mümkün hale gelmiştir. Avrasya'da hegemonyanın esas olarak bu iki topluluk arasında el değiştirdiği de bilinmektedir. Bu sürecin bir uzantısı olarak, her iki toplumun ulusal kimlik inşasında değişen oranlarda biri diğerinin ötekisi olarak ciddi bir rol oynamış; ancak Rusların genel olarak büyük Türk coğrafyasında özel olarak da Osmanlı coğrafyasında Türkler aleyhine toprak kazanımı üzerine kurulu yayılmacı politikalarının bir ürünü olan yüzyıllarca süren çatışma ve savaşlar bugünün Türkiye'sinde de varlığını sürdüren derin ontolojik kaygılar yaratmıştır. Bu ontolojik kaygılar Rusya ve Türkiye arasında işbirliğini zorlaştıran ve çatışma potansiyelini barındıran birer faktör olarak ilişkilerin analizinde tarihsel arkaplan ile birlikte mutlaka dikkate alınması gereken önemli bir fenomen, tartışılması gereken ciddi bir konudur.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Türkiye, Rusya, dış politika, ontolojik kaygılar, süreklilik, değişim, çatışma, işbirliği.

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Онтологические проблемы, исторические реальности и конъюнктурные события: преемственность и изменение в отношениях Турции с Россией*

Шабан Халис Чалыш**

Аннотация

Цель данной статьи - проанализировать причины преемственности и изменений в отношениях Турции с Россией и рассмотреть пределы сотрудничества между двумя странами, используя исторические и текущие события в качестве примеров. Автор полагает, что было бы неправильным принимать во внимание только некоторые недавние моменты сотрудничества, например, в Сирии, чтобы лучше понять характер отношений. Напротив, любая попытка понять причины преемственности и изменений в отношениях Турции с Россией требует рамок, построенных на концептуальных и исторических материалах, а также анализа конъюнктурных событий. Действительно, история отношений с Россией восходит к появлению русских в евроазиатском регионе, но эти отношения невозможно проанализировать без предварительного понимания взаимных онтологических проблем, которые обе нации испытывали на протяжении веков. Насколько тюрки играли важную роль в построении русской национальной идентичности, так и подъем русского государства в Евразии стал возможным в значительной степени с ослаблением тюрков в этом же регионе. В статье делается вывод о том, что эта историческая реальность, которая вызвала глубокую онтологическую озабоченность, особенно в Турции, все еще имеет потенциал для возобновления конфликтов, несмотря на некоторое сотрудничество с Москвой в последнее время.

Ключевые слова

Турция, Россия, внешняя политика, онтологические проблемы, преемственность, изменения, конфликты и сотрудничество.

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