
Introduction: Deepening Turkey-Russia Relations

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On 16 December 2016, the Center for Strategic Research (SAM) and the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) jointly organized a one-day conference in Ankara titled “Deepening Turkey-Russia Relations.” Leading experts from Turkey and Russia discussed the political, economic and social dimensions of relations between the two countries. The opening speech of the conference was delivered by His Excellency Andrey G. Karlov, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Turkey, who highlighted the long diplomatic history and potential fields of cooperation between Turkey and Russia.

Only a few days after this event, a horrendous act of violence in Ankara

caused the death of Ambassador Karlov, which came as a painful shock to both the Turkish and Russian public. At the time, some argued that the assassination would lead to a new crisis in Turkish-Russian relations. On the contrary, however, the incident drew the two countries even closer to each other. Turkish and Russian authorities worked together to investigate the heinous terrorist attack, and political and economic relations between Ankara and Moscow have continued to improve in a very remarkable way in the 2017-2018 period.

Only one day after the assassination of Ambassador Karlov, the foreign ministers of Turkey, Russia and Iran came together in Moscow and confirmed their determination to launch a new peace process to resolve the Syrian crisis. To this day, this trilateral strategic dialogue has been the most effective instrument to deal with the difficult and extremely complicated challenges posed by the chaos in Syria. In fact, Turkey’s two

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cross-border military operations in Syria- Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch- were both conducted successfully as a result of the close dialogue between Ankara, Moscow and Tehran.

In addition to their strategic partnership in Syria, Turkey and Russia have also developed ties in the field of economic cooperation. Their two ongoing mega energy projects- the Akkuyu nuclear power plant and Turkish Stream natural gas pipeline- are clear indications of the deepening economic relations between the two countries. The bilateral trade volume and number of Russian tourists visiting Turkey also continue to rise steadily.

Most recently, Turkey has decided to purchase the Russian S-400 missile defense system. When the deal is finalized, Turkey will become the first NATO country to host such an advanced Russian military system on its territories. Although there are still a number of issues that need to be resolved between the two countries, the strategic rapprochement between Ankara and Moscow is expected to continue in the near future.

The goal of this issue, which is dedicated to the memory of Ambassador Karlov, is to explore the various aspects of the present, ongoing rapprochement process between Turkey and Russia. Considering that the main dilemma

of Turkish-Russian relations in the last quarter century has been to achieve a genuine strategic partnership in the presence of significant regional disagreements, it is important to discuss the prospects and challenges lying ahead of this relationship.

To this end, articles in this issue discuss the dynamics of cooperation and competition in four significant areas of Turkish-Russian relations: i) bilateral economic ties, ii) strategic challenges in the Middle East, iii) regional issues in the Black Sea and Caucasus, iv) the development of transport corridors in Eurasia.

In their articles, Seçkin Köstem and Nigyar R. Masumova elaborate on the economic ties between Turkey and Russia. Köstem argues that there is an asymmetric interdependence which currently favors Russia over Turkey; he uses foreign direct investment data to analyze the evolution of Turkish-Russian economic ties over the past decade. Masumova, on the other hand, focuses on the various areas of economic cooperation between the two countries such as trade, tourism, construction and energy, and concludes that Turkey and Russia are natural partners and should develop their economic cooperation further despite a number of difficulties.

Regarding the issues in the Middle East, Ruslan Mamedov and Grigory V. Lukyanov, elaborate on the four main

issues that shape the Turkish-Russian relations in the region, namely: 1) domestic and international terrorism, 2) nuclear weapons and nuclear energy, 3) the Syrian crisis, and 4) regional security architecture; and analyze how these challenges influence the evolution of Turkish-Russian strategic relations in the region.

The goal of Mitat Çelikpala and Emre Erşen in their article is to understand the development of the new security environment in the Black Sea, as well as its implications for the future of regional dialogue between Turkey and Russia. The authors particularly focus on the radically altered strategic balance in the region after Russia's conflicts with Georgia and Ukraine. Pavel Shlykov also highlights the general patterns of cooperation and competition between Ankara and Moscow in the Black Sea region, including the Caucasus, but further analyzes how the contending geopolitical interests of the two countries can be turned into a well-grounded cooperation in this region.

The articles of Altay Atlı and Egor Pak both elaborate on the implications of the regional transport systems in

Eurasia. Atlı believes that Turkey is well poised to become a Eurasian transport hub connecting Europe with Asia, and advocates closer cooperation with Russia in order to strengthen the Turkish position in the network of Eurasian connectivity. Pak particularly focuses on the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and argues that Russia needs to consider the interests of other EAEU countries like Kazakhstan when dealing with Turkey on this issue. Both authors highlight the rising significance of other transport initiatives in the region such as the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

In conclusion, as guest editors, we hope this special issue will be a valuable contribution to the thriving academic literature on Turkish-Russian relations, and provide a new channel for discussion on the multidimensional nature of the ongoing strategic rapprochement between the two countries. We would also like to take this opportunity to remember the valuable personal efforts of Ambassador Andrey Karlov in the development of Turkish-Russian relations and offer our condolences to his family.