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# Turkey and Russia: From Shared History to Today's Cooperation

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Turkey and Russia are two countries that share a long past and an extensive common neighborhood. Turkish-Russian relations have experienced times of competition and cooperation over the course of history, like the relationships of many neighboring countries. In the aftermath of the Cold War, new opportunities and prospects for cooperation have arisen. Particularly in the last 15 years, intensive Turkish-Russian bilateral contacts have led to today's frank dialogue and interaction in many fields, both bilaterally and at the international level.

The establishment of the High Level Cooperation Council in 2010 was a watershed in this regard. The Council and its sub-mechanisms, namely the Joint Strategic Planning Group, the Joint Economic Committee and the Civic Forum have laid the necessary groundwork for furthering relations. Solid high-level political will and the

new institutionalized character of cooperation have paid dividends:

- Russia is Turkey's third major trade partner with a \$22.2 billion trade volume in 2017, with vast potential for growth and improvement.
- Russia has been the number one market for Turkish constructors abroad for a long time.
- Reciprocal investments stand at 10 billion dollars each, not including the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant project.
- Turkey and Russia are key tourism partners. Last year, Turkey hosted 4.7 million Russian tourists, setting a new record.

Energy is yet another important aspect of bilateral relations. Turkey is the second largest importer of Russian gas, getting more than half of its natural gas and 10% of its oil from Russia. Turkey and Russia are diversifying their strategic energy cooperation with the construction of the Akkuyu Nuclear

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Power Plant and the TurkStream natural gas pipeline projects.

Turkey and Russia have well-developed cultural and person-to-person ties as well. This is not unexpected, since Russia is home to more than 10 million people of Turkic origin and over 20 million Muslims, and each year millions of Russians visit Turkey. Moreover, thousands of mixed Turkish-Russian families demonstrate how strongly and closely the two countries are connected. Russia and Turkey have designated 2019 as “The Reciprocal Year of Culture and Tourism”, creating a significant opportunity for strengthening social and cultural ties.

Being at the center of Eurasia, it is incumbent upon Turkey and Russia to contribute to peace and stability in their common neighborhood. Indeed, recent hectic developments in the region impel the two countries to closely coordinate their efforts. It is not a secret that Russia and Turkey diverge in their opinions on several issues. This renders Turkish-Russian regional and international cooperation based on uninterrupted dialogue, openness and sincerity even more crucial.

There are many heroes behind the scenes who play indispensable roles in supporting Turkish-Russian relations. The late Ambassador Andrey Karlov, who served in Turkey during a delicate period, was one of them. He lost his

life in a heinous attack which was a deliberate act of provocation targeting Turkish-Russian friendship, on 19 December 2016.

When I served as a Counsellor at the Turkish Embassy in Moscow, I witnessed firsthand how eagerly Ambassador Karlov made every effort to ensure the conclusion of the visa exemption agreement as Director General of the Consular Affairs Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry. We would sometimes encounter each other during official visits as well. As Turkish Consul General in Kazan, I accompanied Rustam Minnikhanov, President of the Republic of Tatarstan, during his visit to Ankara. After the meeting between Minnikhanov and Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, I missed the motorcade and stood on the road waiting desperately for someone to pick me up to catch the next step of the visit. At that moment, Ambassador Karlov was passing by and he was more than kind to invite me into his vehicle. During our chat I once again realized how devoted he was in his work to promote Turkish-Russian relations. We will always remember him, and make sure this painful loss will turn into a token of everlasting friendship and cooperation between our countries.

In conclusion, the wide spectrum of Turkish-Russian interaction is

continuing to deepen based on mutual understanding, respect and interdependence. Both sides adopt the gist of the Russian proverb: “A close neighbor is better than a distant relative” (Бликий сосед лучше

дальней родни). Turkey and Russia are and will remain valuable neighbors and partners, and Turkish-Russian relations will further develop on this basis in the future.