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Turkey's Rise as a Reluctant Ally Faced with the Russian Threat

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While actively contributing to NATO exercises and operations that confirm Turkey's commitment to the Alliance, Ankara has also actively avoided cooperating with the Western political and economic efforts to curb Russian aggression in Ukraine. Turkey's low-level involvement, shaped by security concerns, economic needs, yet at the same time its consolidating dependence on Moscow, and its optimistic opportunism, increasingly raise concerns about possible prospects of a Turkish pivot away from the Euro-Atlantic community. But even while distancing itself from NATO, it may be in Turkey's interests to rebalance its policy by supporting the stability of Ukraine and closer cooperation with the EU.

Turkey was one of the first countries to recognise the new government in Kyiv, and the Turkish leaders repeatedly affirmed their commitment to Ukraine's territorial integrity, political union and sovereignty, including the Crimean peninsula. On several occasions, Turkish leaders have been vocal to their Russian counterparts on their support for Ukraine's territorial integrity, as well as on the protection of the rights of the Crimean Tatars. However, at the beginning of Russian–Ukrainian conflict Turkey did not try to use its diplomatic or economic capacities to influence the outcome of the crisis, nor to improve the conditions of the Crimean Tatar community.

Turkey, which represents a significant asset for NATO, thanks to its strategic location, having the second largest army in the Alliance, and its significant level of military spending (\$13.2 billion in 2014, 1.7% of GDP) also demonstrated that it is ready to distance itself from NATO during the crisis. Ankara's controversial diplomatic and economic initiatives, such as its potential anti-missile deal with China, a nuclear power plant deal with Moscow, its reluctance to contribute to the campaign against the Islamic State, raised questions among the Allies about Turkish commitment to Alliance.

In a recent months, Turkey has demonstrated that it is trying to rebalance its policy. Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, offered a \$50 million loan and \$10 million in humanitarian assistance to help Ukraine cover its budget deficit, during his visit to Kyiv on 20 March. The offer represents a change in Turkey's position since last year, when it claimed it would give no financial aid to Ukraine. Since December 2014, Ankara also has taken a visible role in NATO's practical support to Ukraine through the trust funds, an initiative to support Ukraine's defence and security sector reforms. In March, Turkey participated in NATO naval drills in the Black Sea, in addition to its earlier contributions to NATO missions, such as its support for NATO AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System) reconnaissance flights over Poland and Romania, and it also plays a patrolling role in the Black Sea. Turkey might in addition further increase its presence in the Multinational Corps Northeast in Poland, while at the same time it also makes a significant contribution to NATO missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Lastly, Turkey also sent a strong

message of its NATO commitment during the NATO foreign ministers meeting in Antalya as it offered to assume responsibility as a framework nation in the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force for 2021.

Security Concerns within a Fragmented Alliance

Despite recent moves, Turkey's low profile on the Ukraine crisis, its resistance to apply sanctions against Russia, and moreover its ambitious moves to deepen economic and energy ties with Moscow (as a result of which Turkey's dependence on Russia can become more consolidated), create concerns on Turkey's strategic direction. Indeed, the reorientation of Turkey's foreign policy, despite its interests that are deeply aligned with the Euro-Atlantic community, is shaped by three factors. First, Turkey's security concerns mean that it avoids becoming a frontline state in a "new Cold War" scenario, due to a number of factors such as security threats from the south, the general tendency for decreasing tensions in the region, a lack of confidence in transatlantic solidarity, and not least its disappointment in not being able to engage its allies for a larger campaign in Syria. Second, the economic ambitions of an emergent power, and therefore the wider expected economic benefits of maintaining ties with Russia, persuade Turkish leaders to stay on good terms with Moscow. Finally, Turkey is also in a political pivot away from the Euro-Atlantic community. With prospects of political integration with the EU already fading, it perceives little interest in contributing to the Western foreign policy aims.

As a frontline country neighbouring Russia and holding key access points in the Black Sea, Turkey has had a general tendency for restraint. It hoped to maintain the stability and balance of power of the region, and to prevent pressure on the Turkish straits that are regulated by the Montreux agreement, and which require Turkey to limit the access to non-littoral states' vessels. Moreover, Turkey is also reluctant to make moves that might be perceived as a result of being "cornered" by Moscow and cause a counter-reaction. It has been opposed to a permanent change in the NATO presence on the Alliance's eastern flank, and has therefore had doubts about the recent consideration of permanent bases in Central Europe.

Turkey's commitment to the stability of the region has, however, not prevented Russian expansionism, and Ankara now faces a security dilemma. On the one hand, Moscow has gained considerable capacity by invading the Crimean peninsula, and now has the possibility to control the Black Sea and project its power to the Mediterranean. Although Turkey has remained on good terms with Moscow, it still has not had any positive influence on the situation of the Crimean Tatars since the annexation of the peninsula. On the other hand, the lack of confidence in the solidarity and capability of the Euro-Atlantic community, and existing security threats in its southern neighbourhood, weaken Turkey's resolve to deal with challenges posed by Russia.

Turkey has historically grounded concerns. It has twice been the subject of arms embargoes imposed by its allies, and NATO Allies agreed to deploy air defence missile systems to protect the country during the 1991 Gulf War only after long discussions. The debates on NATO's transformation have affected Turkey's position. The gradual disengagement of the U.S. from the region, accompanied by the reduced manpower capacity of the European NATO members, their austerity measures in defence spending, and the EU's earlier initiatives for building a European Security and Defence Policy by excluding Turkey from decision making procedures, have all introduced a new era in Turkey's perception of its security environment.

At the same time, Ankara has perceived its own security concerns as being underplayed by Allies. Indeed, NATO has demonstrated its solidarity with Turkey by reacting swiftly and deploying Patriot air defence missile systems to protect Turkey's southern border. Turkey also enjoys a highly influential place in NATO and has been able to mobilise the community three times through invoking Article 4. Nevertheless, the diverging views on NATO's threat perception, the rise of the "coalition of the willing" (such as in NATO's engagement in a military campaign in Libya), and Ankara's frustration at not being able to mobilise its allies for a larger military campaign in Syria, were among factors that either decreased confidence in or reduced the perceived relevance of Turkey's Euro-Atlantic links.

However, with its deepening economic and political relationship with Moscow, Turkey's low level involvement increasingly appears to signify neutrality towards Russian expansionism and the changing balance of power in its neighbourhood. This only adds to the existing Western concerns about Turkey's potential pivot away from the transatlantic community. In addition indeed, Turkey's declarations on the

possible procurement of a Chinese air defence missile system, whether this is simply a tool to negotiate a better price and a greater share of know-how with the United States, or to counter Armenian lobbying efforts in Washington, is not compatible with NATO systems and does not contribute to strengthening the defence of the south-eastern flank.

An Economic Pivot to Eurasia

Despite divergences on many issues on foreign policy, Ankara has opted to compartmentalise its relations with Moscow. Above all, Turkey has high energy vulnerability, as its Russian gas imports account for 57% of its needs. This is a critical dependency, as nearly 45% of Turkey's electricity generation relies on natural gas. In addition, Russia is Turkey's second largest trade partner (\$33 billion), and leaders in both countries have declared their goal to reach \$100 billion by 2020. Turkish investments in Russia are currently estimated at \$12 billion, with around 100 Turkish construction companies active there, whereas Russian investments in Turkey total more than \$9 billion. In addition, 4.5 million Russian tourists visited Turkey in 2014 (second only to tourists from Germany), and Turkish and Russian citizens enjoy visa free travel between the two countries. Following the fall in the Russian ruble, which caused bilateral trade to shrink by 4%, and Russia's announcement of a delay in its construction of the \$20 billion Akkuyu nuclear power plant, another \$10 billion project, the Turkish Stream gas pipeline, may also be cancelled. In turn, various solutions are being considered, such as Russia and Turkey replacing the dollar as common currency for these projects with their own currencies, establishing new investment funds, or lending and subsidies to air carriers to maintain tourism.

Turkey avoids following the West in imposing sanctions on Russia, as well as pragmatically negotiating a better price for its gas imports, to protect its own energy and economic needs, not least to gain a bigger share in the Russian market. Diversification of economic relations initially made Turkey want to limit the effects at home of economic crises in the EU, Turkey's biggest trade partner and foreign direct investor (70%), yet it gained a wider importance with Ankara's growing global economic ambitions. The Turkish construction and contracting industries have a critical place in the national economy and rank among the largest in the world. In addition, good relations with Moscow also help Turkey's business interests in countries that have close ties with Moscow.

In addition, Moscow represents a further strategic dimension for Turkey, which might also offer prospects of a higher level of cooperation in the future. Turkey expects to create an indigenous nuclear industry from the Rosatom's Akkuyu nuclear power plant project, whereby it would be able to gain the capacity to trade goods, services and even technology. Joint ventures in third countries are also possible. Rosatom stated, on December 2014, that Turkey may participate in Rosatom's foreign construction projects.

Overall, Ankara now sees the opportunity to raise its international profile by shifting towards Asia in general. The intensity of relations with China, by accommodating the new Silk Road project, and being a shareholder in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, therefore receive more positive attention. However, optimism about Turkey's potential to become a global power has brought about considerably improvident initiatives. The partnership with Russia unwittingly risks enabling Russian expansionism and Moscow's capacity to exert influence. In addition, along with the procedural, security and economic controversies of the Russian nuclear power plant, the deal simply consolidates Turkey's dependence on Moscow, with the potential to affect Turkey's future strategic direction.

The Political Pivot of a Centralised Power

Security concerns and economic ambitions are not the only reasons for Turkey's quasi-neutral stance in the deepening crisis between Russia and the West. Turkey's low-level involvement in the Ukraine crisis was initially motivated by its stance on similar pro-democracy protests at home and abroad. Moreover, Turkey has not been a contributor to the democratisation policy in its eastern neighbourhood. Yet Ankara's divergence from the West has gradually increased with its own illiberal turn in domestic politics, with echoes in its foreign policy. Turkish leaders and pro-government media simply repeat Moscow's anti-Western rhetoric. The pro-democracy protests at home and abroad are often pictured as Western-orchestrated movements. The Euromaidan protests are continuously compared to those at Gezi Park and

in Cairo, which at the same time have helped as justification for the violent repression of protests at home and to consolidate the government's support. It is no surprise, therefore, that the current crisis is reduced to a crisis between Russia and the West, excluding Turkey from the community.

Admittedly, Turkey's Western aspirations are not over. The Turkish parliament continues adapting national law to EU regulations, and a full EU membership bid is still publicised. Yet Turkey has not only distanced itself from contributing to the EU's foreign policy ambitions, perhaps in a bid to gain an upper hand in the EU accession negotiations. Ankara appears to want the best of both worlds, as Turkey is a dialogue partner with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and Turkish leaders have repeatedly voiced their interests in joining the Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union, which is indeed at odds with Turkey's membership of the EU Customs Union, still crucial to Turkey's business interests.

Recommendation: Facilitate Turkish–Ukrainian Links

The Ukrainian–Russian crisis magnifies the risks of Turkey becoming increasingly distant and no longer constrained by its traditional allies. On the one hand, Turkey's main security interests still lie in the Euro-Atlantic community, and Ankara continues its commitment to NATO. On the other hand, Turkey has distanced itself from the ambitions of the Euro-Atlantic community, for a mixture of strategic and tactical reasons. However, its foreign policy pivot exposes Turkey to Moscow and undermines efforts to counter Russia's destabilisation of the region. Turkish leaders' optimistic opportunism therefore risks contradicting the nation's own security interests. After all, NATO remains strategically the principal security provider for Turkey, and further weakening its existing cohesion simply undermines Turkish security. With the deepening rift between Russia and the West, Turkey's quasi-neutral position is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. It may therefore need to balance it by greater engagement in bringing stability to Ukraine.

Turkey's divergences cannot be easily mended but they can at least be addressed, by engaging Ankara further in European economic support to Ukraine. This might be an opportunity for the EU to engage Turkey as a player crucial for regional stability. The Turkish and Ukrainian economies are complementary, and Turkish companies are already active in the Ukrainian market. The EU can facilitate a Free Trade Agreement between Turkey and Ukraine, during the implementation period of the DCFTA, which will in turn also increase the expected effects. In addition, common initiatives in support of Ukraine, such as financial aid, institutional support, and joint EU-Ukrainian ventures in Ukraine, such as the transportation and energy efficiency projects, can be opened to Turkish companies, which may offer a price advantage while at the same time engaging the Turkish business community's interest in cooperating with the EU in foreign policy. The EU should also build civil society mechanisms to increase contacts between the Ukrainian and Turkish academia, experts and media.

Deepening Turkey's economic ties with the transatlantic community is a necessity for re-invigorating cooperation on foreign policy with Turkey. Excluding Turkey from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership entails a risk of decreasing Turkey's interest in contributing to the foreign policy aims of the Alliance, and thus building the future "economic-NATO" without Turkey. A specific provision should therefore be added, for the future enlargement of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, while the EU should proceed with upgrading the EU-Turkey Customs Union to include services, tackling non-tariff barriers to Turkish investments and trade in the EU, and dealing with the side effects of the EU's FTA agreements with third countries. At the same time, Ankara sees the relevance of foreign policy cooperation with the EU as reduced, due to its stalled membership prospects. A new momentum for reinvigorating relations with Turkey can come after the general election there in June 2015, an opportunity that should not be missed.