

EUROPEAN
COUNCIL
ON FOREIGN
RELATIONS

ecfr.eu

BRIEF
POLICY

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE: TURKEY, RUSSIA, AND THE END OF AN UNLIKELY ALLIANCE

Asli Aydintasbas

SUMMARY

- Turkey and Russia's burgeoning friendship came to an abrupt end when Turkey shot down a Russian fighter jet over Syria in November 2015.
- Since the rupture, Ankara has moved back towards the transatlantic security architecture, while Moscow has stepped up its links with the Kurds, fuelling suspicion in Turkey, while the two moved towards a proxy war in Syria.
- The EU cannot afford to watch from afar: Syria, the refugee crisis, and the Kurdish question are deeply intertwined. Turkey is a NATO member and a key part of planned Russian energy routes to Europe.
- The chance of a direct military confrontation between the two powers in Syria seem to have receded, as Turkish forces avoid Syrian airspace and Ankara has moderated its ambitions for regime change. Still, a return to normal will take a long time.
- A Turkey-Russia confrontation is not in anyone's interests, but nor would it help Europe for Turkey to adopt the Russian model of authoritarian crony capitalism. Europe should develop its own Kurdish policy, help dampen a Turkey-Russia proxy conflict in the Caucasus, and encourage Turkish energy diversification away from Russia.

Two resurgent powers with regional ambitions, powerful leaders, rising nationalism, and a deep suspicion of the West – there was every reason for Russia and Turkey to form a lasting alliance. Had the friendship between Russia's Vladimir Putin and Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan resulted in a more lasting alliance, they could have created a formidable counterbalance to the Western axis in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

But history rarely unfolds as expected. Turkey's downing of a Russian jet over Syria in November 2015 led to a sudden and traumatic rupture in the burgeoning relationship. Economic ties nearly collapsed; Russian animosity towards Ankara spilled over into Syria; harsh rhetoric from leaders was matched by public outrage.

This paper examines the rise and fall of the Turkey-Russia friendship during the Putin-Erdoğan era. Was it doomed to fail? Were the differences over Syria impossible to overcome? Are Turkey's regional aspirations as a Sunni power incompatible with Russia's new wish for a role in the Middle East? And, most importantly, is there a possibility of direct confrontation between Turkey and Russia?

These questions matter greatly to European decision makers for a number of reasons, the most pressing being the need to prevent a direct confrontation between two major powers on Europe's periphery. Despite its troubled relationship with the European Union, Turkey is still a candidate country and a NATO power. Its relationship with Russia affects Europe's energy policies, since Turkey sits at the crossroads of Eurasia and plays a prominent role in plans for new Russian energy supply routes to Europe.

More importantly, the conflict between Turkey and Russia has a significant impact on the evolution of the Syrian war, particularly in terms of Russian support for Kurdish forces in northern Syria and Turkey's reaction to this support. The EU cannot afford to simply watch from afar: the refugee crisis, the Syrian war, and the Kurdish question are all intertwined on a deep level. The liberation of territory from the Islamic State (ISIS) in northern Syria and the post-ISIS political transition in these zones are key components in making Syria a viable place to live for its citizens who are now seeking refuge in Europe. These are also necessary steps for curbing terrorism inside Europe.

There are already the beginnings of a Turkish-Russian proxy war in Syria. Europe has a strong interest in avoiding this, not least due to the impact of refugee flows from the region. EU institutions and member states should take an active role in preventing an escalation and facilitating dialogue between the two sides.

The downing of the fighter jet

On the morning of 24 November 2015, the Turkish Presidency announced that the air force had downed a Russian SU-24 that violated Turkish airspace – perhaps the most public clash between Russia and a NATO country in decades.

Initially, the response from Turkey's pro-government media and commentators was nationalistic to the point of giddy. But soon afterwards, when a video surfaced showing Syrian opposition forces killing one of the pilots as he was descending by parachute, the official tone became more defensive, talking about Russian violations and Turkey's "rules of engagement". In a letter to the United Nations Security Council, Ankara explained that the bomber had been warned for almost five minutes as it approached Turkish airspace, and then crossed into it for 17 seconds. NATO was also notified.

In the meantime, the downing of the jet and the brutal killing of the pilot unleashed a patriotic rage in Russia far beyond Ankara's imagination. Putin warned of "serious consequences" for what he described as "a stab in the back" by "terrorist accomplices". "It appears that Allah decided to punish Turkey's ruling clique by depriving them of wisdom and judgement", he commented.¹

The escalation in rhetoric was followed by a series of harsh economic measures against Turkish companies and exports. Relations unravelled at lightning speed. Over the next days, weeks, and months, the two countries effectively froze diplomatic ties; hostility prevailed in the public domain; and the absence of some 4 million Russian tourists dealt a significant blow to Turkey's tourism industry. Combined with the declining number of European tourists due to ISIS attacks, Turkish tourism suffered its worst period since the Iraq war. Media reports suggest that more than 400 hotels are for sale

in the Antalya area alone.² Loss of tourism revenues range anywhere from \$5-10 billion, according to news reports and various experts. Despite former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's prediction in February that Russian tourists "would not give up on Turkey", an official boycott on tours and charter flights to Turkey remains in place.

Overnight, Turkey turned from a friend to a foe in the Russian media, with stories appearing accusing it of support for jihadists and ties with ISIS. Turkey initially tried to de-escalate, and Erdoğan noted a few days after the incident: "We feel really saddened about this incident. We would not like such a thing to happen, but unfortunately it did."³

But the Russian propaganda campaign was now directed against Erdoğan and his family, with allegations that the president's son or son-in-law were profiting from the illegal sale of ISIS oil. Stories surfaced across Russian media about corruption allegations from 2014 against Erdoğan and his inner circle, Turkish prosecutions of journalists, and the deteriorating human rights conditions of Kurds. In December 2015, Putin made a distinction between Turkey and Erdoğan: "It is a good and hardworking nation. In Turkey, we have a lot of friends. They must understand that we do not put an 'equals' sign between them and supporters of terrorists."⁴

Seven months after the incident, Turkey and Russia are still locked in a bitter dispute, showing no signs of reconciliation or even effective dialogue.

Historic foes become business partners

To understand what the downing of the fighter jet means for Russia and Turkey, and what will come next, we need to examine the history of the two countries' relations. The first question is where to start the timeline. Should it go back to the Ottoman and Russian empires, which fought 17 wars from the fifteenth century onwards – all instigated and won by Russia?⁵ Or should it start from the Erdoğan-Putin era, which reversed decades of Cold War freeze and ushered in an era of economic cooperation, with Russia even at one point becoming Turkey's top trade partner?

Wherever the inquiry begins, historical baggage will always be a factor in Turkish-Russian relations. At times, the weight of the past has led Turkey to make critical choices, such as joining NATO in 1952 to counterbalance the Soviet Union.

Turkey and the Soviet Union were on the opposite sides of the Iron Curtain throughout the Cold War, and relations were slow to kick off in the post-Cold War era. For much

2 Norman Stone, "Turkey and Russia – friends for a while, now foes once again", *Financial Times*, 11 March 2016, available at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/70578676-e627-11e5-a09b-1f8b0d268c39.html>.

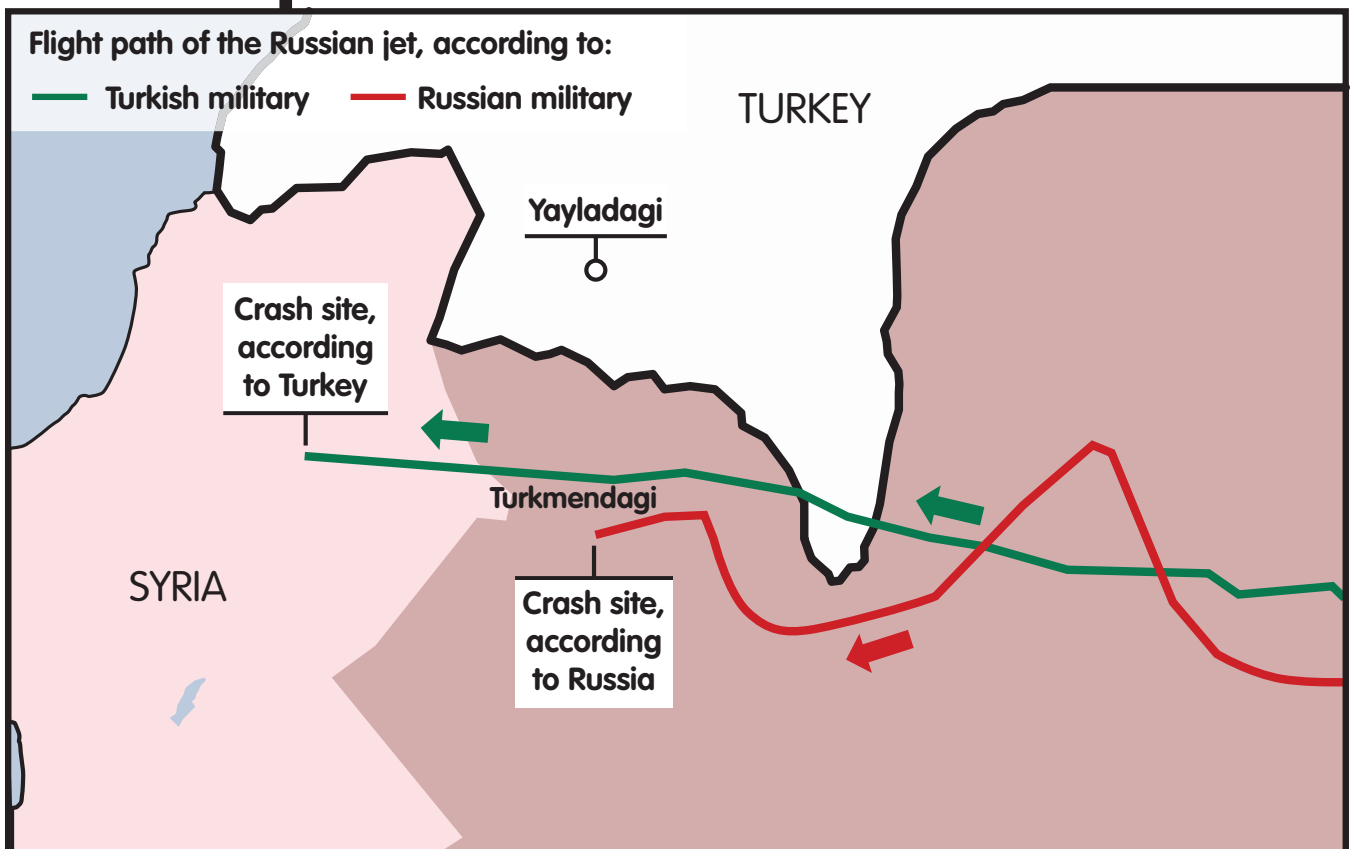
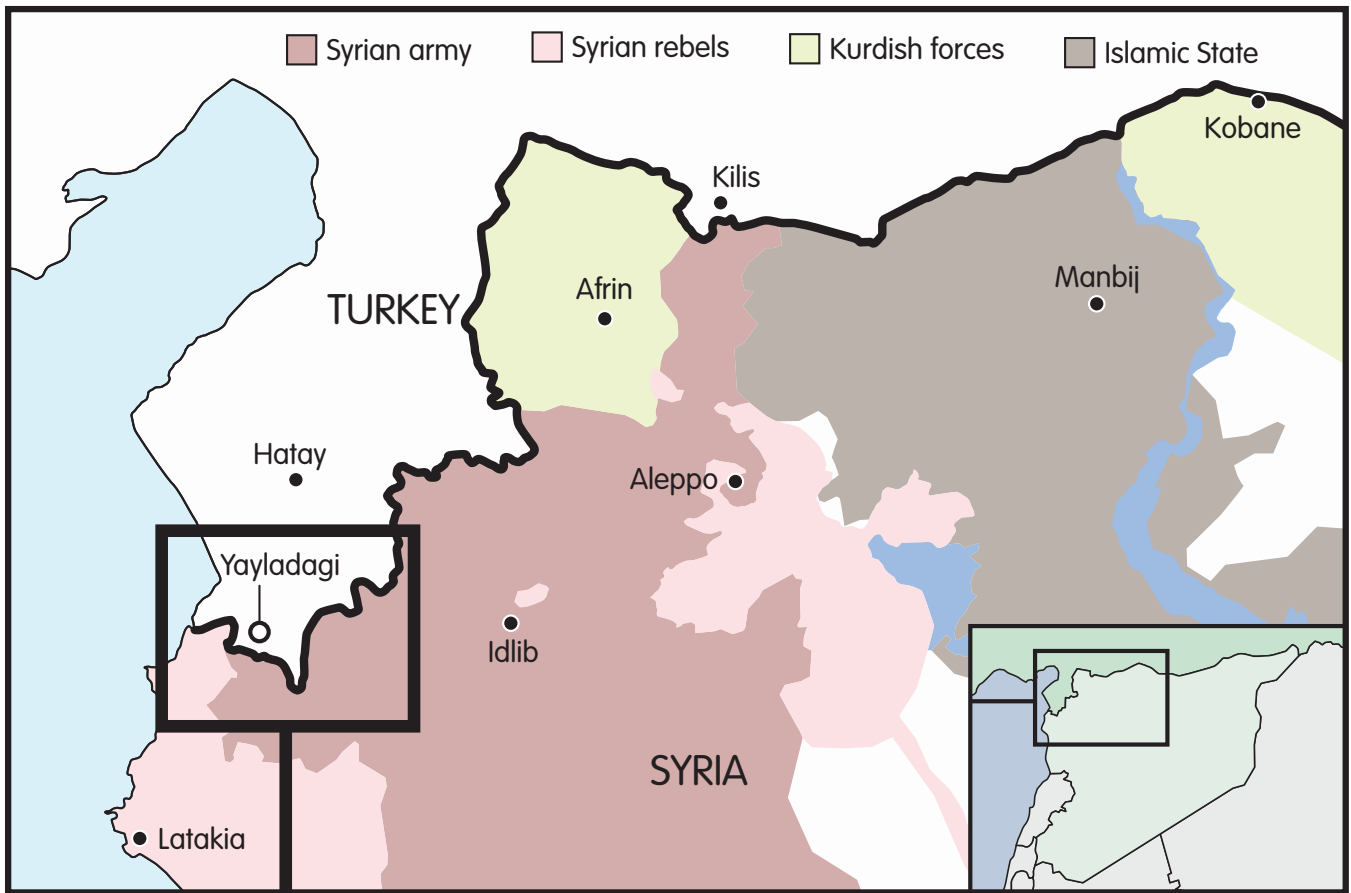
3 "Turkey 'saddened' about Russian jet's downing, Erdoğan says", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 28 November 2015, available at <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-saddened-about-russian-jets-downing-erdogan-says.aspx?PageID=238&NID=91807&NewsCatID=510>.

4 Vitalii Petrov, "Putin: U Rossii net i ne budet nenavisti k turetskomu narodu", *RG.ru*, 3 December 2015, available at <http://rg.ru/2015/12/03/narod-site.html>.

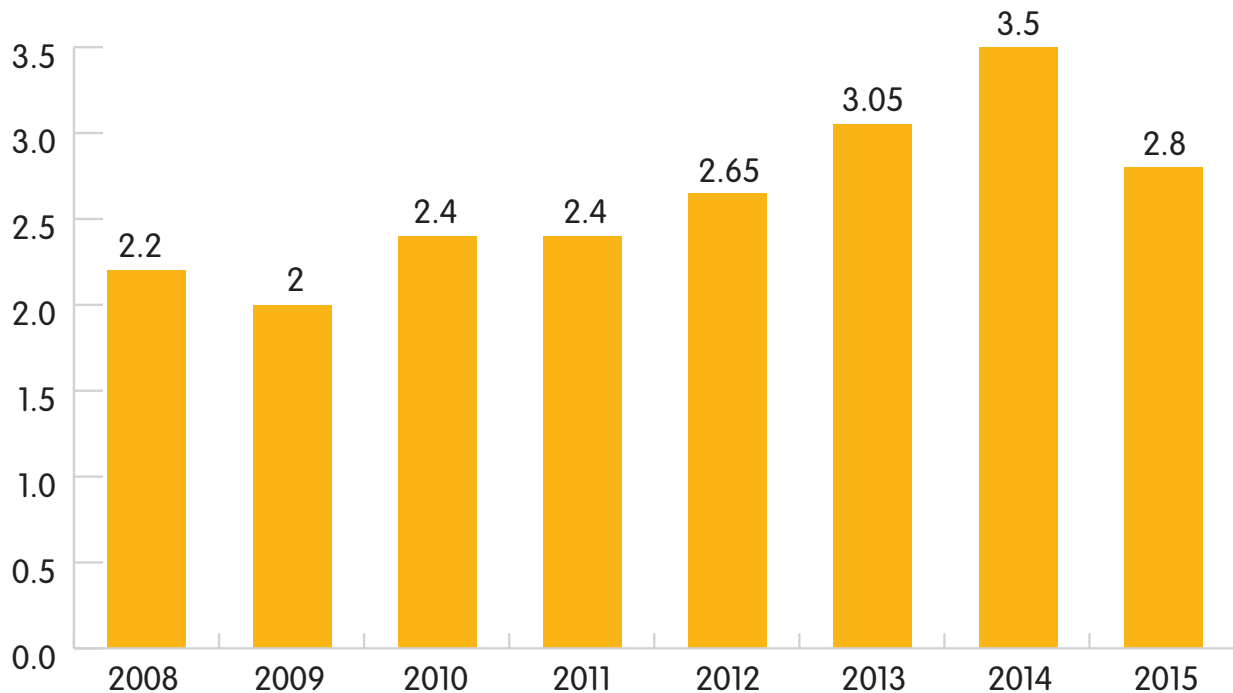
5 Soner Cagaptay and James Jeffrey, "How Will the Turkey-Russia Crisis Affect Ankara's NATO Ties?" PolicyWatch 2530, Washington Institute for Near East Studies, 9 December 2015, available at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/how-will-the-turkey-russia-crisis-affect-ankaras-nato-ties>.

1 "Putin – Allah reshil nakazat' pravayashchuyu kliky v Tyrtsii, lishiv ee razuma i rassudka", *NTV.ru*, 3 December 2015, available at <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1579747>.

Power balance at Turkey-Syria border (October 2015)



Russian tourists visiting Turkey (millions)



of the 1990s, Turkey had a keen interest in expanding its sphere of political and economic influence in the newly independent Central Asian states, often at Russia's expense. It was an explicit Turkish policy to anchor Central Asian republics, especially the Turkic-speaking ones, to the international community – and away from the Russian sphere. During this period, as Russia was stepping back from its superpower role, Turkey was positioning itself as an indispensable ally to the winners of the Cold War, and as a bridge between the Muslim world and the West.

When Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002, it maintained the pro-Europe direction of foreign policy, and much of its early years were exclusively focused on accession negotiations with the EU.

These were also the early years of Putin, before the Russian leader's assertive foreign policy and contentious relationship with the West had fully emerged.

In December 2004, Putin became the first Russian head of state to visit Turkey since the Russian and Ottoman empires established relations in the fifteenth century. This was followed by Erdoğan's visit to Moscow in January 2005 and another short visit several months later.

Starting in 2005, Turkish-Russian relations took on a new importance, in the form of energy. While trade had increased incrementally since the end of the Cold War, the real boost came with the growth in Russian natural gas exports to Turkey. The value of the countries' trade increased from

\$6.8 billion in 2003 up to \$9.4 billion in the first 11 months of the following year, and then to \$38 billion by 2008, largely due to Russian exports. (It has since fallen slightly due to the decline in oil prices and Turkey's efforts to diversify its energy supply.) This was the beginning of a long economic rally for both countries.

Over the next decade, the frequency of bilateral visits and the volume of trade increased steadily. By 2015, Russia was Turkey's top energy supplier, providing 55 percent of Turkish domestic consumption of natural gas and crude oil at a combined price of roughly \$15 billion.⁶ This made Turkey Russia's second-largest gas export market after Germany.⁷ Throughout these years, the trade imbalance remained in favour of Russia by almost \$20 billion, due to gas and crude oil exports.⁸ Even so, Turkish companies also managed to sell up to \$6 billion worth of food, chemicals, textiles, and other goods to Russia.

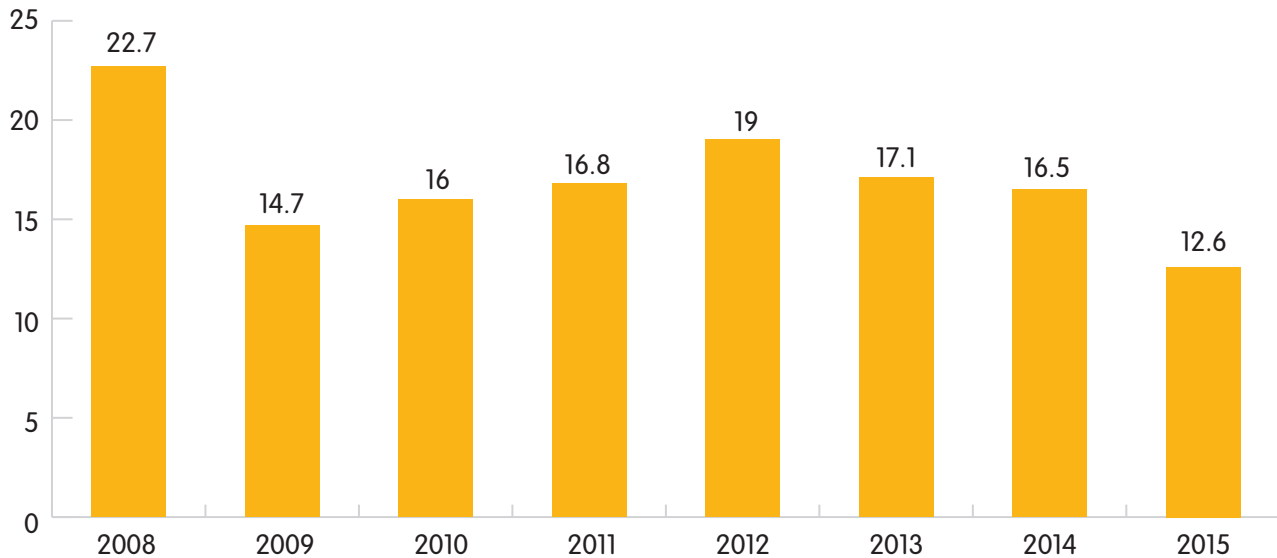
There were other high-value strategic projects on the table. In line with Turkey's decision in the 1990s to become an east-west energy hub, the 1,213km Blue Stream pipeline connected mainland Russia with Turkey across the Black Sea and delivered up to 16 billion cubic metres of gas to the Turkish market, with the cooperation of Russian energy giant Gazprom. Inaugurated in 2005, by 2015 the pipeline

⁶ Mitat Çelikpala, "Rusya Gazı Keser mi? Son Gelişmeler Işığında Türkiye-Rusya Enerji İlişkilerine Bakmak", *iletisim*, forthcoming autumn 2016, p. 4.

⁷ "Factbox: Turkey-Russian Trade Relations", *Reuters*, 24 November 2015, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-russia-turkey-ties-factbox/idUSKBN0TD26K20151124>.

⁸ Soli Ozel, "Voices from Turkey: The Crisis in Turkish-Russian Relations", Center for American Progress, 10 May 2016, available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/report/2016/05/10/137131/the-crisis-in-turkish-russian-relations/> (hereafter, Ozel, "The Crisis in Turkish-Russian Relations").

Turkey-Russia annual trade (\$billions)



delivered almost half of Turkey's natural gas imports, despite long-running controversies about pricing and about Turkey's dependence on Russia for energy.⁹

Turkey welcomed growing numbers of Russian tourists from the early 2000s, and its Mediterranean resorts became popular destinations for Russians. By 2015, with almost 3.5 million visitors, Russians were the second-largest group of tourists in Turkey, after Germans.¹⁰

While Russia's policy towards Turkey during this period aimed at increasing Ankara's energy dependence, Ankara saw economic ties as leading to greater interdependence between these two powers, according to Oktay Tanrısever, one of Turkey's leading experts on Russia.¹¹

Whether it was dependence or interdependence, the highly personalised decision-making of Erdoğan and Putin brought Turkey and Russia even closer. The connection between the two leaders was the linchpin for the burgeoning new alliance. In 2010, the two countries signed a multi-billion dollar agreement to build, own, and operate Turkey's first nuclear power plant. Financing was largely provided by the Russian side, through the state atomic energy company Rosatom.

Turkey and Russia also agreed in principle to build the Turkish Stream natural gas pipeline across the Black Sea, as announced during Putin's visit to Ankara in 2014. Had it gone into effect, the new pipeline would have bypassed Ukraine as a transit corridor into Europe and provided gas at a discount to Turkey.

9 "Russia's Gazprom declines Turkey's request for 3 bcm of gas via Blue Stream pipeline: CEO", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 9 October 2015, available at <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/russias-gazprom-declines-turkeys-request-for-3-bcm-of-gas-via-blue-stream-pipeline-ceo.aspx?pageID=238&nID=89624&NewsCatID=348>.

10 Alan Makovsky, "Turkey's Growing Energy Ties with Moscow", Center for American Progress, 6 May 2015, available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/report/2015/05/06/112511/turkeys-growing-energy-ties-with-moscow/>.

11 Oktay Tanrısever, "Turkey and Russia in the Black Sea Region: Dynamics of Cooperation and Conflict", Black Sea Discussion Paper Series, EDAM, 2012, p. 2 (hereafter, Tanrısever, "Turkey and Russia").

A co-dependency hard to cure

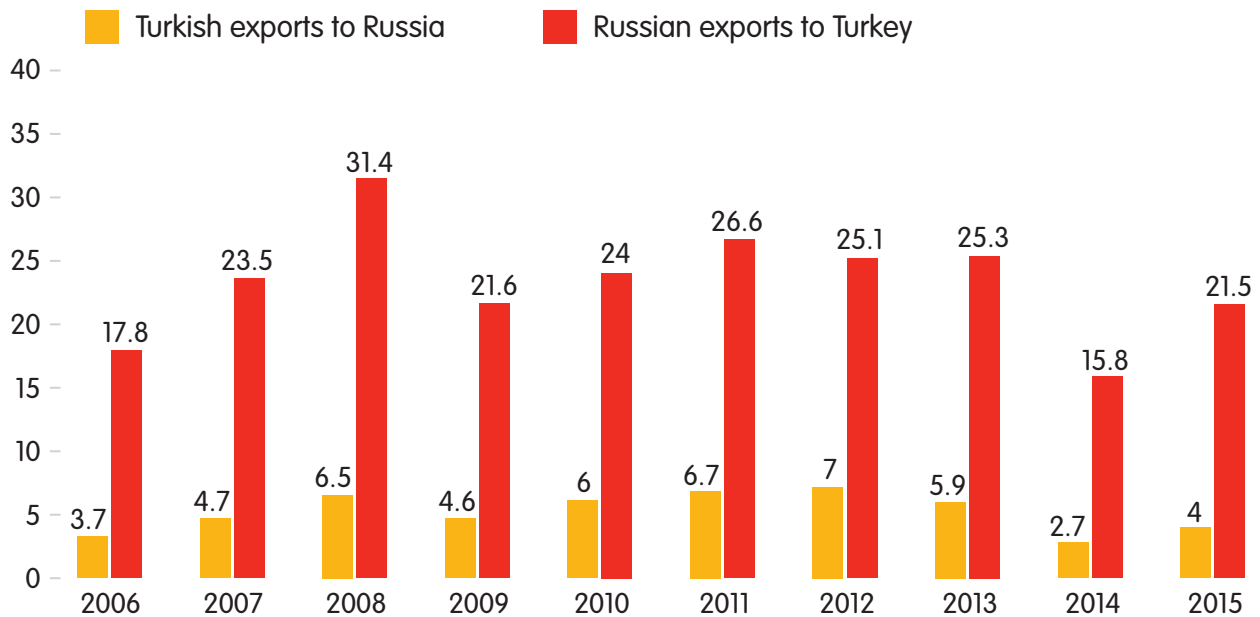
All of this created co-dependency between the Turkish and Russian economies. Despite the political fallout from the downing of the Russian plane over Syria in November 2015, a significant amount of unadvertised economic activity remains between the two countries – particularly in terms of Russian energy exports.

While Russia has enforced a harsh embargo on Turkish exports and curtailed tourism – activities that largely affect the Turkish side of bilateral trade – Moscow continues to be Turkey's biggest supplier of natural gas. Turkey remains Russia's second-largest gas customer. Russia is the main contractor for two lucrative nuclear power plant projects in Turkey. Russian direct investment in key Turkish markets – including by Gazprom, Lukoil, and Sberbank – has effectively anchored Russia in the Turkish market and created a level of mutual dependence that may not in itself be enough to avert a political crisis, but could limit its destructive impact.

The economic co-dependency provides the main rationale for those who argue that relations will improve in due course. Turkish officials cite it as the reason for their optimism. Most Turkish experts interviewed for this study also had a rosier outlook on the prospects of reconciliation than their Russian counterparts – often citing Russia's financial needs and the countries' mutual economic dependency.¹² Turkey's economy has performed reasonably well in early 2016, while Russia's is suffering from low oil prices and the effects of international sanctions. To decision makers in Ankara, this is a safeguard against further escalation and direct confrontation with Russia.

12 Hakan Aksay, "Rusya ile ilişkiler düzeliyor, ancak Rusya'nın bundan haberi yok", *T24*, 13 April 2016, available at <http://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/hakan-aksay/rusya-ile-iliskiler-duzeliyor-ancak-rusyanin-bundan-haberi-yok.14319>.

Turkey-Russia annual trade (\$billions)



Ideological affinity and neo-imperial worldview

Trade may have oiled the wheels, but it was not the only reason that Turkey and Russia found themselves in an unlikely alliance over the past decade. There were ideological and strategic reasons as well. As former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu stated in his influential book, *Strategic Depth*, AKP's ruling elite long believed that Turkey would be stronger if it complemented its ties to the West with other alliances, particularly in the Middle East and Asia.¹³

In the early days of the AKP, a Russian leader with neo-imperial aspirations and deep suspicions about the West would not have been an obvious choice of strategic partner. A long-term NATO member with aspirations to join the EU, Turkey had supported the “colour revolutions” in the former Soviet republics, was cautious of Russian intentions in the Black Sea, and was an advocate of the NATO missile defence system – which the Russians did not favour. A tacit agreement developed between Russia and Turkey meant that the countries refrained from supporting Kurdish and Chechen causes, respectively, in the late 1990s. However, the AKP's Islamist base and ruling cadres still regarded Russia with deep suspicion, particularly when it came to the predicament of Muslims in the former Soviet domain.

But alongside the growing number of trade deals, most decided at the senior level, came greater trust between the Turkish and Russian leaders. What Tanrısever calls “the predictability of political leadership” – the fact that both Erdoğan and Putin enjoyed uncontested supremacy in their

governments – helped boost ties and facilitated critical strategic agreements, such as the nuclear and natural gas deals.¹⁴

On top of this, Putin and Erdoğan share many traits, including a highly personalised and authoritarian style of governance. In both countries, beginning in the late 2000s, a personality cult – with sprinkles of machismo and nationalism – was woven around the leaders. In 2013, columnist-turned-Erdoğan-advisor Yiğit Bulut famously stated, “There is a leadership problem in the world. I say this everywhere. There are only 2.5 leaders around the world today. Mr Erdoğan, Mr Putin, and the half is Obama.”¹⁵

To all that was added a kinship based on loosely defined themes of re-establishing lost empires. With the Arab Uprisings, Ankara increasingly started viewing Sunni leadership in the Middle East as an inevitable historic destiny, ushering in a period of popular preoccupation with the Ottoman Empire. From talk shows to sitcoms and political commentary, the pro-AKP media was full of neo-Ottoman yearnings.

And while these sentiments were being openly expressed at the highest levels of government in Turkey, Russians were enjoying their country's rebirth as a hegemon. A more assertive posture in the Baltics was followed by the 2008 war with Georgia and culminated in Russian military presence in Ukraine and the 2014 annexation of Crimea. These episodes were accompanied by media hype about Russia's glory and military might.

Moscow started to see Turkey “not as a challenge to its territorial integrity but as a political asset that might contribute to

¹⁴ Tanrısever, “Turkey and Russia”, p. 9.

¹⁵ “Yiğit Bulut Dünyada 2,5 lider var!”, Kanal 24, 28 August 2013, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gGLG-UJTJoY>.

¹³ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001).

the consolidation of control over the predominantly Muslim republics of the Russian Federation”, as Tanrisever puts it.¹⁶

Both countries, led by controversial yet popular figures, were also increasingly concerned about street movements that challenged centralised state power through mass protests. The AKP government’s enthusiasm for the Arab Spring turned sour in 2013 after the Gezi protests across Turkey and the second Tahrir Square rebellion that collapsed Egypt’s AKP-backed Muslim Brotherhood government.

Pro-AKP media in Turkey took an unsympathetic tone towards the mass protests that brought down Ukraine’s government in February 2014. On paper, Turkey supported the new government and the pro-European orientation of Ukraine and was wary of Russian expansionism. But in the pro-government media, themes such as “outside influence”, “foreign intervention”, “using democracy as a disguise”, and “Western interests” were used interchangeably for Gezi and the Ukrainian uprisings. Ankara did not join in with Western sanctions on Russia following the annexation of Crimea, and was diplomatic in dealing with the plight of Crimean Tatars, a minority with close ties to Turkey, urging the group to reach a compromise with the Russian government.

In this climate, it was no surprise that when Erdoğan unveiled his controversial new presidential palace in 2014 – built at a cost of over \$600 million and in defiance of a court ruling – Putin was the first head of state to visit, apart from Pope Francis. Coming right after Gezi and during a turbulent period in Turkish politics, Putin’s short Ankara visit carried a highly symbolic meaning, both deepening Russia’s ties with and highlighting the all-powerful leadership style of Turkey’s emerging Erdoğan-centric regime.

This was also a period when Turkey was suffering from a deep sense of isolation in the international scene. Since Gezi, criticism of Erdoğan’s treatment of domestic dissent as well as Turkey’s unwillingness to commit to the United States-led fight against Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria had driven a wedge between Ankara and Washington. Relations with Europe had cooled to a mere formality. And the landscape in the Middle East had changed dramatically since the early days of the Arab Spring, surrounding Turkey with unfriendly governments. There was a sense in domestic discussions that Turkey was on the losing side in Syria. Tweeting in August 2013, İbrahim Kalın, Erdoğan’s senior foreign policy advisor, described Turkey’s regional standing as a “precious loneliness”, on the grounds that its isolation stemmed from its moral choices.

Syria: A glitch

Disenchanted, isolated, mistrustful – there was much bringing Turkey and Russia together by 2014. Putin’s visit to Erdoğan’s new palace – which Western leaders refused to visit for another year due to the controversy around its construction – marked the will on both sides for an even closer economic partnership. An agreement was reached for

¹⁶ Tanrisever, “Turkey and Russia”, p. 11.

a direct Russian-Turkish pipeline crossing the Black Sea – dubbed the Turkish Stream.

But Syria was a thorn in the side of this new alliance from the beginning. Despite being unable to garner US support for toppling the regime of Bashar al-Assad, Ankara remained wedded to the idea of regime change in Damascus and continued to support Sunni opposition groups on its borders. Russia, on the other hand, was determined from the beginning not to let Syria become “another Libya”, where multi-lateral action led to a regime change that was a step into the unknown, and remained unwavering in its support for the Assad regime.

Between 2012 and 2015, high-level discussions between Turkey and Russia on a mutually acceptable solution to the war in Syria led nowhere.¹⁷ Officials from both countries paid lip service to seeking a secular, non-sectarian solution to the Syrian crisis that maintained the country’s territorial integrity. But in reality, Turkey sided with Saudi Arabia on supporting anti-Assad rebels in Idlib, and Russia sided with Iran on propping up the regime forces.

However, this difference did not seem to matter all that much to Ankara at the time. Though Russia and Turkey were on opposite sides of the Syrian equation, they had mutually beneficial economic ties and a strong rapport on the leadership level. Their solution was to “compartmentalise” their economic alliance from their differences over Syria.

Russia enters the war

As long as the military balance inside Syria was deadlocked, with neither side in a position to defeat the other, Turkish-Russian efforts to bypass the issue in their bilateral dealings worked perfectly well. For much of 2015, economic ties continued to prosper.

But all that changed with Russia’s direct military involvement in Syria in October 2015, tipping the balance of power in favour of the Assad regime.

It was a year of major changes in the Syrian war. From the beginning of the conflict in 2011, Turkish policy in Syria had revolved around the removal of President Assad, once a close ally of Erdoğan, and along the way, Ankara had supported a coterie of Sunni opposition groups, ranging from remnants of the Free Syrian Army to the more radical Ahrar al-Sham. But by 2015, it was evident that Assad was not giving up power any time soon, stirring resentment in Ankara towards allies in the Obama administration for their failure to actively support the removal of the regime.

At the same time, Turkey’s priorities in Syria were shifting towards something else: preventing the takeover of its nearly 900km southern border by the Kurdish militia (YPG), who were steamrolling through ISIS territory with the support

¹⁷ Personal conversation with senior Turkish officials in 2014-2015 on Russia’s position in Syria following various high-level dialogue with Russian counterparts. Also a briefing by a senior Turkish official to reporters describing a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

of US airpower. Since their remarkable resistance against ISIS in the town of Kobani in October–November 2014, Syrian Kurds had been receiving US military support in their struggle against ISIS and slowly expanding their territory, much to Ankara’s chagrin. In June 2015, Kurdish militia groups took the Syrian border town of Tal Abyad, creating a unified Kurdish zone all the way from the eastern border to the ISIS-held town of Jarablus on the Turkish border. In Ankara, panic set in.

The Kurdish capture of Tal Abyad was more alarming for Ankara than anything else that had happened in the five-year conflict. Turkey closed down its border crossing with the Syrian Kurdish areas and hardened its position towards the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the political arm of the Syrian Kurds. The PYD has links to the Kurdish militant group, the PKK, which has been fighting a long-running insurgency against the Turkish state. That summer, in the middle of an election campaign, Erdoğan declared that the PYD was “more dangerous than ISIS”. Following a summit of Turkey’s National Security Council (MGK), Ankara declared that it would consider further Kurdish expansion on its borders – creating a contiguous Kurdish zone from Afrin in the west to the Kurdish region of Rojava in the east – as a “red line”.¹⁸ Turkey made it known to its allies that if the Kurds crossed the Euphrates, it could spark Turkish military action across the border.

Turkey’s relations with the Kurds were also breaking down on the domestic front. In June 2015, the pro-Kurdish People’s Democratic Party (HDP) had won an unprecedented 13 percent in the general elections, denying the ruling AKP the right to form a single-party government for the first time in 13 years. In July 2015, the ceasefire between the government and the PKK ended, with each side blaming the other, and the PKK embarked upon an urban guerrilla campaign for greater self-rule in the south-east. In July, Turkey finally gave the US the right to use Turkish bases to stage attacks against ISIS inside Syria, but also embarked upon a military campaign against PKK targets in Turkey and in Iraq.

By the time the Russians arrived on the Syrian scene in October 2015, Turkey had already entered a period of national hysteria. It was caught up in a divisive early election campaign; fighting a two-pronged war against ISIS and the PKK; and increasingly consumed by a dangerous new discourse within AKP circles about a new “war of liberation” against internal and external enemies. One pro-government daily called for a national “resistance” to “the occupation of Anatolia”, comparing it to the Crusades and to the aftermath of World War I.¹⁹ Similar sentiments were expressed by pro-AKP journalists and government officials, presenting the flare-up in PKK violence as the continuation of a global conspiracy to weaken Turkey.

¹⁸ News reports on the National Security Council meeting are widely available. See, for example, “Firat’ın batısı kırmızı çizgi”, *Milliyet.com.tr*, 1 July 2015, available at <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/firat-in-batisi-kirmizi-cizgi/siyaset/detay/2081424/default.htm>.

¹⁹ İbrahim Karagül, “Entelektüel terör, acımasız direniş..”, 24 August 2015, available at <http://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ibrahimkaragul/entelektuel-teror-acimasiz-direnis-2019854>.

In November, Russia focused its air campaign in Syria against Turkish- and Saudi-backed opposition groups in Idlib and north of the regime stronghold in Latakia, in particular the Jabal Turkman region (Türkmen Dağı or Turkmen Mountain). Although the ethnic Turks in Syria had received very little coverage, suddenly the position of Turkmen opposition forces became a major topic in Turkish media. Many Syrian Turkmens had already fled to the refugee camps in Turkey since the beginning of the conflict, and another 10,000–15,000 Turkmen refugees arrived once the Russian campaign began.

The Russian air campaign was an effort to prop up the Assad regime and support the Syrian ground offensive against Sunni opposition forces in the strategic enclave north of Latakia (and south of the Turkish town of Antakya). With easy access to supply routes, the groups operating here ranged from Turkish-backed outfits such as the Sultan Murad and Sultan Abdulhamid Brigades – trained and equipped by Turkey – to the more radical Ahrar al-Sham and Nusra Front.

While most Turks had never heard of these groups, as Russian forces intensified their bombardment the issue morphed in the popular imagination into “Russians attacking Turkmens”, especially in the Islamist media. Both Prime Minister Davutoğlu and President Erdoğan made passionate pleas about the plight of the Turkmens and the bombardment of civilians, publicly calling on Russia to halt its campaign. Russia’s ambassador, Andrei Karlov, was summoned to the Turkish Foreign Ministry on 19 November and warned of “consequences”, while Ankara tried to enlist NATO support over repeated Russian violations of its airspace. On 20 November, Zekeriya Abdullah, the commander of the Turkey-backed “Sultan Abdulhamid Brigades”, died in combat close to the Turkish border.

Meanwhile, aid campaigns and protests by nationalist groups were organised across Turkey. While Russian media was enjoying the spectacle of a resurgent military fighting “terrorists” and “jihadists” in Syria, the Turkish public was polarised: pro-government newspapers focused on the plight of the Turkmens and complained of Russian-Kurdish connections, while anti-government commentators relished the collapse of Turkey’s Syria policy. Ankara decided to take its case about the bombardment of Turkmen civilians to the UN.

But events on the ground were moving faster than policies. The Russian/Syrian advances were successful in repelling opposition forces. In a front-page headline on 21 November, Islamist newspaper *Yeni Şafak*, which has close ties to the Turkish government, reported: “Turkmen mountain falls!”

Within days, the fighter jet had been shot down, and relations spiralled to a new low.

The ghost of Stalin

One immediate impact of the meltdown in Turkish-Russian relations was to bring Turkey closer to the Transatlantic alliance once again. This mirrors the period after World War II, when fear of Stalinist Russia and its territorial claims over the Bosphorus and possible support for the expansion of Armenia was the single biggest factor pushing Turkey towards NATO. Escalating tensions with Russia and the vast zone of instability to its south created a need for strategic allies.

Immediately after the fighter jet incident, Turkey sought NATO's protection from Russian reprisals. Although it was unable to persuade NATO to evoke Article 5 on collective defence, the Alliance did express support for Turkey's territorial integrity. Within the Turkish establishment, NATO membership was noticeably more valued than in recent years. Ankara felt the need to return to the Western security architecture – rather than “going it alone”, as was the idea during the height of the Arab Spring and much of 2014.

Still, NATO alone did not seem sufficient to provide the security and political backing that Turkey needs in a tumultuous region, particularly given Turkish differences with key allies on the Kurdish issue. A few months after the Russia incident, Ankara announced a renewed effort to “normalise” relations with Israel, as well as plans for a military alliance with Saudi Arabia.

Still, in the period after the shooting down of the Russian plane, Turkey felt more vulnerable than ever. It was effectively frozen out of the Syrian theatre, it was unable to halt US support for the Kurds, and it had troubled relations with regional powers such as Iran and Iraq.

In response to the shooting, Russia began to embrace the Kurds in Syria. Within a month of the incident, the Russian media were talking of the Kurdish question and the plight of the group inside Turkey and in Syria, discarding the tacit agreement between Ankara and Moscow to stay clear of the Kurdish and Chechen issues. In January, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova publicly supported a petition signed by Turkish academics condemning human rights abuses in the fight against the PKK.²⁰

In a surprise move, Russia extended a warm welcome to the Turkish pro-Kurdish party HDP, and invited its leader, Selahattin Demirtas, to meet with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Moscow in December.²¹ Lavrov told Demirtas, “We know that there are Iraqi and Syrian Kurds among those who on the ground resist the threat from Islamic State and other extremist groups with weapons in their hands.” The meeting marked the beginning of a series of contacts between Moscow and Kurdish groups, and Syrian Kurds have been invited to open offices in Moscow and Yerevan.

²⁰ “Rossiya prizyvaet Turtsiyu prekratit’ politiku istrebleniya kudrov”, *RIA Novosti*, 21 January 2016, available at <http://ria.ru/world/20160121/1362850418.html>.

²¹ Dmitry Solovyov, “Russia hosts pro-Kurdish Turkish politician who condemns Ankara”, *Reuters*, 23 December 2015, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-russia-turkey-idUSKBN0U60P220151223>.

Both the US and Russia continued to support Kurdish forces in Syria, while the Turkish military was unable to fly its planes there for fear of an altercation with the Russian air force. In addition, the Kurds continued to gain territory and, by the beginning of 2016, were on their way to becoming a key US ally in Syria, possibly taking the lead in an offensive against the ISIS stronghold of Raqqa.

In a last-ditch attempt, and partly out of desperation, Ankara decided to take the fight to Syria, shelling Kurdish forces advancing towards the Turkish border at Azaz in early February. In the wake of Geneva talks, Washington was alarmed enough to ask its Kurdish allies to drop plans for a contiguous Kurdish zone – but also asked Turkey to end the shelling. A senior Western official described the awkward position in Syria as follows: “We are telling Kurds to stay put and the Russians are telling them go!”²²

Ankara inches closer to Washington

The result of this now combined Syrian/Kurdish/Russian front was an attempt by Ankara to revive its relationship with the US. Before Kurdish advances in Syria, Turkish policy on ISIS had been non-committal and cautious. As a senior Turkish official put it in early 2015, “Why should we fight them? They will be there for quite some time. The United States could come from thousands of miles away, bomb, and leave. We are stuck here. So we need to develop a *modus vivendi* with them.”²³

But with US and Russian support for the Kurds increasing, coupled with public criticism of Turkey's unwillingness to combat ISIS, Ankara felt the need to recalibrate. In July 2015, following tough negotiations, it granted US warplanes permission to use its Incirlik base to bomb ISIS. By early 2016, Turkey itself was again in talks with Washington to “enter the war” against ISIS. Without the fear of Kurdish expansion in Syria, and US and Russian support for the Kurds, it is unlikely that Turkey would ever have taken on ISIS militarily.

A breakthrough came during Erdoğan's visit to Washington in March, when he and Obama agreed that Turkish-backed opposition groups would embark on a major military operation to seal off the 98km ISIS-held pocket on the Turkish border. The US provided airpower and the Turkish military provided training, equipment, and artillery as the Sunni forces tried to capture towns and villages from ISIS.

However, even with a more active Turkish participation in countering ISIS, both the US and Russia continue to support Kurdish forces in Syria. Ankara's bet that its participation would make the Kurdish YPG forces redundant seems to be a major miscalculation. The Kurds are still the most viable anti-ISIS fighting force in Syria and are the backbone of the coalition's operations to reclaim the key towns of Munbic and Raqqa.

²² Private briefing, February 2016.

²³ Private conversation, early 2015.

Futile attempts to reconcile

Meanwhile, a reconciliation between Turkey and Russia does not seem likely in the short term, despite various attempts by Turkish leaders. Both sides have de-escalated the conflict, but their relationship is a long way from returning to normal.

Since November, numerous rounds of public and private diplomacy – most instigated by Ankara and rebuffed by Moscow – have aimed to ease the tensions between the two countries. Erdoğan himself has admitted in interviews that Putin does not take his calls. On 31 March, Zakharova said that Moscow's position towards Turkey had not changed, dampening Ankara's hopes for a gradual reconciliation, although the spokesperson took a noticeably softer tone than before: "The crisis is temporary and I believe that our peoples will overcome it. But there is no reconciliation with what has been done, there is no justification for what continues to be said, and there never will be. And Turkish officials do not have to rearrange the words of Russian politicians to hear what they want."²⁴ In December, Putin revealed that Erdoğan had sent private messages underlining that the order to shoot down the plane was issued by his prime minister and not himself. In April, reports surfaced that Hakan Fidan, Turkey's chief intelligence official and a close confidant of Erdoğan, had travelled to Moscow.²⁵

Soon afterwards, Turkish authorities detained and arrested Alparslan Çelik – a Turkish nationalist who fought alongside the Syrian Turkmen opposition and admitted to killing the Russian pilot – ostensibly for illegal possession of arms.²⁶ While many saw this as an overture to Russia, whatever back-channel diplomacy took place did not seem to work: Çelik was released a month later.

In Turkey's clearest gesture towards repairing ties since the downing of the plane, Erdoğan sent a letter to Putin in June, congratulating him on Russia's national day and expressing a wish for better relations. But Russia remains adamant that Turkey must fulfil its three conditions before there can be a dialogue: issuing a public apology, punishing those responsible for killing the pilot, and paying compensation.²⁷ A further, unwritten, condition is the reversal of Turkey's Syria policy and an acceptance of the Assad regime, according to most analysts.

It is important to note that economic activity between Turkey and Russia continues – to the advantage of Russian exporters. While the ambitious Turkish Stream project seems to have been shelved for now, Russia still intends to build Turkey's first nuclear power plant. Turks believe that the two economies are interdependent, and therefore that hostilities will not last forever.

²⁴ "Zakharova: Pozitsiya Moskvyy v otnoshenii Turtsii ostaetsya neismennoi", *Vzglyad*, 31 March 2016, available at <http://www.vz.ru/news/2016/3/31/802829.html>.

²⁵ See Amberin Zaman, "MIT Müsteşarı Hakan Fidan'ın gizemli Moskova seferi", *Diken*, 13 April 2016, available at <http://www.diken.com.tr/hakan-fidanin-gizemli-moskova-seferi>.

²⁶ Alparslan Çelik tutuklandı!", *Milliyet.com.tr*, 3 April 2016, available at <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/alparslan-celik-tutuklandi-gundem-2220675>.

²⁷ "Rusya'nın 3 şartı", *Hürriyet*, 14 December 2015, available at <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/rusyanin-3-sarti-40026646>.

With both countries run by unpredictable leaders, it is hard to know whether this is true – though both continue to pay a high strategic and economic cost for the current state of relations. The cost of Russian sanctions against Turkey is estimated at around \$8 billion in 2016.²⁸ In a highly charged conflict and with an intensely personalised decision-making process, there is no indication that Putin will "forgive" Turkey any time soon – or that Erdoğan will keep trying forever. The toxic media environment in Russia and Turkey counts against a quick easing of the current state of affairs.²⁹

The probability of a direct confrontation seem to have reduced – but at the cost of Turkey's military staying out of Syria. As long as Turkish land or air forces remain in their own territory, direct Russian retaliation is not possible. Turkey's military is cautious about its activities in the border regions with Syria.

For Europe, NATO, and the US, it is important to limit the physical space where a direct physical confrontation could occur. When a team of Turkish Special Forces slipped in and out of Syria recently to provide pointers for targeting ISIS, Russia was warned ahead of time by the US to prevent it from launching an attack.³⁰ This type of de-conflicting is necessary to avoid a Russian attack on Turkish forces or their proxies – particularly on the Turkish border, in Aleppo, or in Kurdish-controlled Afrin, where Russian influence remains strong.

The Kurdish card

In the absence of a direct confrontation, the Kurds will likely be the key battleground in the Turkish-Russian war of attrition, at least in the short term. The indications are that Moscow will continue to support Ankara's enemies in Syria, specifically the Assad regime and the Syrian Kurds.

The Kurds in Syria are also backed by Washington, causing a good deal of turbulence in Turkey's relationship with its key ally. Nearly 200 US special forces are embedded with YPG units in Kobani, Raqqa, and Munbic, providing military training and assistance in the fight against ISIS.

But for Ankara, there is a difference between US and Russian support for Kurds – although both are unwelcome. A long-time ally in NATO, Washington has been keeping Ankara informed about the exact nature and scope of its military engagement with Syrian Kurds. It has also been supportive of Turkey's "red lines" in Syria, urging the Kurds not to go "west of the Euphrates" and overrun the entire Turkish border. Though unable to stop PKK attacks inside Turkey, the US has prevented military coordination and weapons transfers between YPG forces in Syria and PKK-affiliated groups fighting in Turkey.

²⁸ Ozel, "The Crisis in Turkish-Russian Relations".

²⁹ By the end of February, 65 percent of Turks said they saw Russia as "the biggest threat to Turkey" in a 26-city survey conducted by Kadir Has University.

³⁰ Dion Nissenbaum, "Turkey's Elite Force Stages Raid Against Islamic State Fighters in Syria", *Wall Street Journal*, 10 May 2016, available at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/turkeys-elite-force-stages-raid-against-islamic-state-fighters-in-syria-1462868840>.

With Russia, no such negotiation is possible. Moscow's support for Syrian Kurds and the PKK remains opaque to Ankara.

Almost all Turkish officials interviewed for this paper believed that the Russian regime not only provided support and arms to the Syrian Kurdish forces but played a key role in the PKK's decision to start fighting again inside Turkey. This is despite the fact that the resumption of Turkish-PKK hostilities preceded the downing of the fighter jet. Ankara regards the current escalation in the "Kurdish issue" at home, in part, as a reprisal from Russia. The PKK's downing of a Turkish chopper in the Iraqi-Turkish border area in early May using a Russian-made surface-to-air missile (9K38 Iгла) was seen as further proof of Russian support for the group. Although the PKK used surface-to-air missiles several times in the 1990s, the group's recent use of them – and their release of a video showing it – was seen as an escalation.³¹

Having reverted to an increasingly nationalist discourse, AKP leaders today describe Turkey as a nation locked in an existential battle against foreign enemies that use the PKK to weaken Turkey and halt its progress. This vague description leaves the identities of the enemies open to the imagination, and depending on the international saga of the week, it could be any of Turkey's allies or the world powers. But Russia is always in the mix.

It is no surprise that Turkey and Russia were so ready to fall back on historical cultural stereotypes. Both regimes rely upon the rhetoric of global conspiracy to galvanise popular support. Both accuse each other of having "imperial" ambitions, and they have little cultural affinity to count on in a time of crisis. Trade and gas were good – but even in the heyday of the relationship, there was never a real strategic friendship involving institutional dialogue and policy coordination between Turkey and Russia.

In many ways, Turks and Russians have found the "perfect enemy" in one another, providing an excuse for their overseas adventures. For Russians, Turkey is once again "the sick man of Europe" – a term coined for the Ottomans by the Tsar Nicholas I before the Crimean War of 1853 – that needs to be reminded of its limitations. For Turks, Russia provides a convenient excuse not to own up to its mistakes on the Kurdish issue and its failing Syrian policy.

Short-term reconciliation is unlikely, barring a public "mea culpa" by Erdoğan and a major reversal in Turkey's Syria policy, dropping plans for regime change or the creation of opposition-controlled zones. Efforts to de-escalate are now evident in both Ankara and Moscow – but the Syrian situation remains a quicksand that could engulf both powers. No one can guarantee that Russia would not shoot down a Turkish fighter jet tomorrow if one were to fly into Syrian territory. But a more likely scenario is avoidance, a gradual

31 For further discussion of PKK's use of man-pads, see Kadri Gürsel, "Savaşta kritik soru... 'Cobra'savar füze kaç tane?", *Cumhuriyet*, 17 May 2016, available at http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/koseyazisi/534827/Savastaki_kritik_soru..._Cobra_savar_fuze_kac_tane_.html.

return to economic activity, and over the next few years, begrudging acceptance of one another.

What Europe can do

The Turkey-Russia relationship matters to Europe for a number of reasons, not least because an escalation of their proxy war in Syria is still a possibility – albeit a more distant one than it was a few months ago.

Europe and European institutions have a vested interest in Turkey's economic well-being, stability, and political model, since it is a significant NATO ally and a candidate for EU membership. Turkey's burgeoning alliance with Putin's Russia over the past few years was in fact an unrecognised problem for Europe because it meant the rise of a consciously illiberal axis that positioned itself as an alternative to the European model of liberal democracy. However, Turkey's falling out with Russia has not resulted in Ankara's immediate return to European values.

There is a lot that Europe can do about the Turkish-Russian dynamic to protect its interests, to help push Turkey in the right direction in this moment of soul-searching, and to develop a more strategic vision about the volatile neighbourhood outside its borders.

Facilitate Russia-Turkey dialogue

Europe's relationship with Turkey is hostage to a fragile accession process, limiting its ability to mediate between Turkey and Russia. At the level of civil society, however, European think tanks should begin to build the foundations of a Turkish-European dialogue on Russia, inviting both Turkish official and civil society actors to discussions and dialogue mechanisms with Russia. In the long term, this will help Europeans to understand and defuse future Turkish-Russian tensions, as well as building a shared EU-Turkish perspective on Russia.

There is also room for non-governmental third-parties – such as former European leaders or the European Parliament – to help cool the conflict, not as mediators but as facilitators. Temperamental as he may seem, Erdoğan is a pragmatic politician. Recently, he has indicated that he is interested in improving relations with Russia, and European actors should support this.

Increase Europe's role in Syria talks

Europe has a deep interest in the Syrian conflict, especially given the impact of the refugee crisis. This is particularly the case in northern Syria, where the Turkish-Russian rivalry is playing out and the US is focusing its efforts against ISIS. However, Europeans are largely absent from the international debate on Syria. Europe should start thinking about bringing stability to the country, not just counting the number of refugees.

This would require a more focused strategic discussion with Ankara, including on de-conflicting Turkish and Russian actions in Syria. It is in everyone's interest to avoid a Turkish-Russian confrontation – directly or via proxies. Both the anti-ISIS coalition and individual European member states that have troops and advisors on the ground in Iraq or Syria could be useful in monitoring the Aleppo and Idlib provinces, which are potential flashpoints for an escalation.

Develop a stronger Kurdish policy

Europe should have its own “Kurdish policy” in Syria, and take part in discussions that currently involve only Russia and the US military. Kurds were consistently the geopolitical losers of the last century, but seem to be a rising force in the new one, courted by both Russia and the US. These powers have each been playing the “Kurdish card” in their own ways in Syria over the past year. For Washington, a welcome but unexpected result of its alliance with Kurdish forces in Syria was Turkey's new willingness to commit to the fight against ISIS. Russia has similarly tried to use assistance to Syrian Kurds as leverage against Turkey. But Europe is not part of this game.

A European Kurdish policy should involve direct dialogue with various factions of Syrian Kurds and their representatives. As with the US's actions, Turkey will not welcome this development, but will eventually accept it. It has now become impossible to solve Turkey's domestic conflict with Kurdish forces without attention to the Syrian component, and vice versa. Europe should therefore facilitate talks between Turkish and Syrian Kurdish forces, to help reduce tensions within Turkey. Europe is well-placed to do this because of its understanding of the Turkey-Kurdish issue – the European Parliament and European Court of Human Rights have traditionally been important actors on this.

Support the Minsk process

The EU should increase its support for the Minsk process to end the frozen conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh. The Caucasus is an area of traditional Russian-Turkish rivalry and has the potential to once again serve as a convenient battleground for proxy conflict between the two powers.

A flare-up of violence in the long-dormant dispute in late March raised eyebrows. Turkey is Azerbaijan's closest ally and the Baku regime is extremely influential in Turkish domestic politics. The Russians have long supported Armenia in the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian-majority region over which the two countries went to war in the early 1990s. At the same time, the Russian policy has long been to keep the dispute quiet and use it as a tool to maintain influence over both sides.

This new round of violence provoked speculation in the Turkish media of Russian meddling, while several Russian officials hinted at that Turkey instigated the violence.

Amid a tide of rising nationalism, Ankara sees a de facto alliance between its traditional “enemies”, namely the Kurds, the Russians, and the Armenians. The EU, and particularly France as co-chair of the OSCE's Minsk Group, has an important role to play. The EU and France need to work to defuse this potential flashpoint, making the case to the parties that they are in danger of being used by great powers for their own purposes.

Encourage Turkish energy diversification

Future Turkish-Russian energy projects are very important for Europe's energy supply routes, because they could provide new routes for Russian gas to enter Europe – in particular via the planned Turkish Stream pipeline. There is evidence that Russia is prepared to move ahead with its Turkish energy deals and pipeline projects even while diplomatic relations remain cool. For example, in a recent meeting with Israel's Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, Putin mentioned the Turkish Stream as one of Russia's future energy routes.

However, Europe should encourage Turkey to diversify its energy sources and decrease its reliance on Russia. Since the clash with Moscow, Ankara has revised its energy policies and is trying to find alternative resources such as liquefied natural gas, new agreements with Baghdad and the Iraqi Kurds, and oil and gas from the eastern Mediterranean. European member states should encourage this.

Draw Turkey back to the European sphere

It would not be in Europe's interest for the “Russian model” of authoritarian crony capitalism to take root in Turkey. Already, the country is showing worrying signs of establishing an illiberal order. But there still is a chance for Europe to convince Turkish leaders of the merits of continuing on a reform path towards a European model of liberal democracy. The refugee deal with Brussels and Turkey's relative isolation in its neighbourhood provides the ground, and visa liberalisation could be the catalyst for such an opening.

Europe should act fast, preferably before autumn 2016, to lobby Turkey's leaders to re-orient the country towards the EU. The task is made harder by Erdoğan's need to survive in a polarised and antagonistic domestic environment, as well as his personal disregard for European norms. But it is still worth the effort, since the prize of winning Turkey back into the European sphere would be enormous, and the cost of losing it would be high.

About the author

Asli Aydintasbas is a senior policy fellow at ECFR and an expert on Turkish domestic and foreign policy. She is also a renowned Turkish journalist whose career included regular columns in publications such as *Cumhuriyet* and *Milliyet*, a talk show on Turkish politics on CNN Turk, and frequent contributions to publications such as *Politico*, the *New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. Much of her work focuses on the interplay between Turkey's internal and external dynamics, and she has been a supporter of Turkey's reform and democratisation process.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all those within ECFR that have given me encouragement, at times a nudge, and discussed the ideas covered in this policy brief, in particular Fredrik Wesslau, Jeremy Shapiro, Nikoleta Gabrovska, and Sophia Pugsley. Special thanks are due to Turkish experts Soli Özel, Sinan Ulgen, Mitat Çelikpala and Oktay Tanrıseven for the counsel they have provided. Researchers Anatoly Dmitriev and Ridvan Bari de Urcosta have helped me understand Russian media and provided invaluable research on Russian responses to the crises.

And finally, a special thanks goes to Hannah Stone for her diligent editing and excellent direction in shaping the final product, and to Gareth Davies for his contribution to the editing and design.

ABOUT ECFR

The **European Council on Foreign Relations** (ECFR) is the first pan-European think-tank. Launched in 2007, its objective is to conduct cutting-edge research, build coalitions for change, and promote informed debate on the development of coherent, effective and values-based European foreign policy.

ECFR has developed a strategy with three distinctive elements that define its activities:

- **A pan-European Council.** ECFR has brought together a distinguished Council of over 250 members – politicians, decision makers, thinkers and business people from the EU's member states and candidate countries – which meets once a year. Through regular geographical and thematic task forces, members provide ECFR staff with advice and feedback on policy ideas and help with ECFR's activities in their own countries. The Council is chaired by Carl Bildt, Emma Bonino and Mabel van Oranje.
- **A physical presence in the main EU member states.** Uniquely among European think-tanks, ECFR has offices in Berlin, London, Madrid, Paris, Rome, Sofia and Warsaw, allowing the organisation to channel the opinions and perspectives of a wide range of EU member states. Our pan-European presence puts us at the centre of policy debates in European capitals, and provides a platform for research, debate, advocacy and communications.
- **Developing contagious ideas that get people talking.** ECFR has brought together a team of distinguished researchers and practitioners from all over Europe to carry out innovative research and policy development projects with a pan-European focus. ECFR produces original research; publishes policy reports; hosts private meetings, public debates, and "friends of ECFR" gatherings in EU capitals; and reaches out to strategic media outlets.

ECFR is a registered charity funded by charitable foundations, national governments, companies and private individuals. These donors allow us to publish our ideas and advocate for a values-based EU foreign policy. ECFR works in partnership with other think-tanks and organisations but does not make grants to individuals or institutions.

www.ecfr.eu

The European Council on Foreign Relations does not take collective positions. This paper, like all publications of the European Council on Foreign Relations, represents only the views of its authors.

Copyright of this publication is held by the European Council on Foreign Relations. You may not copy, reproduce, republish or circulate in any way the content from this publication except for your own personal and non-commercial use. Any other use requires the prior written permission of the European Council on Foreign Relations

© ECFR June 2016

ISBN: 978-1-910118-78-8

Published by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR),
7th Floor, Kings Buildings,
16 Smith Square, London,
SW1P 3HQ, United Kingdom

london@ecfr.eu