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## RUSSIAN-TURKISH RELATIONS, STRATEGIES, SECURITY-RELATED PERCEPTIONS, CHALLENGES FACING GEORGIA

Kakha Putkaradze,<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Nikholoz Kachidze,<sup>2</sup>  
Lieutenant Colonel Ioseb Turashvili<sup>3</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

The study "Russian-Turkish relations, strategies, security-related perceptions, challenges facing Georgia" discusses the important aspects of the relationship between the two countries. The research focuses on the factors and circumstances that influence the relations between the two countries. The study highlights the economic, political, energy and security cooperation between the two countries. By using mutual cooperation on their common vision to increase the degree of political autonomy and lead a more effective foreign policy course. The research discusses Russian-Turkish geopolitical interests, as well as security-related challenges. Within the framework of the study, an important emphasis is placed on what specific factors determine the desire of the two countries to deepen the existing relations and how it will affect the security environment of Georgia. Within the framework of the study, the impact and consequences of the Russia-Ukraine war on the issues of the relationship between the two countries are also analyzed.

**Key words:** Energy security, geopolitics, strategy, economy, cooperation, war.

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<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor of Defence and Security Program, LEPL - David Aghmashenebeli National Defence Academy of Georgia, Doctor of Social Science, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9222-0673>

<sup>2</sup> head of the Baccalaureate, LEPL - David Aghmashenebeli National Defence Academy of Georgia, Caucasus International, University of social sciences Faculty of Sciences Political science doctoral education program, <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-3076-9678>

<sup>3</sup> Head of Management Program of Baccalaureate, LEPL - David Aghmashenebeli National Defence Academy of Georgia, Caucasus International University of social sciences Faculty of Sciences Political science doctoral education program, <https://ORCID:0009-0004-2891-7547>

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## INTRODUCTION

Russian-Turkish relations at the modern stage are characterized by a multi-vector direction. The two powerful countries of the region occupy an important place in the region and the world with their territorial, human, natural, economic, political, military, geographical resources. From this point of view, the issues of the relationship between the two countries are interesting, especially in the aspect when both states are geographically represented in one geopolitical space and both countries were historically the main competitors of each other for dominance in the region. Against the backdrop of Russia's military intervention in Ukraine, the sanctions imposed on Russia by the West, and the ongoing military, financial, logistical, and political support to Ukraine, Russian-Turkish cooperation deserves attention. This is interesting to the extent that, on the one hand, Turkey is a member of the North Atlantic Alliance, to which it has certain obligations and responsibilities, and on the other hand, it does not join the sanctions imposed against Russia, and continues and deepens cooperation with it in the political, economic, energy, and security fields. Turkey does not refuse to support Ukraine either.<sup>4</sup> In order to better explain the above-mentioned mutual understanding, it is appropriate to briefly review the historical and geopolitical excursion, which at the present stage has a significant impact on the issues of mutual cooperation and confrontation between these two countries.

## MAIN PART

### Historical aspects

1453 The capture of Constantinople by the Ottomans was followed by the destruction of the ancient Roman-Greek civilization in the eastern region, which laid the foundation for the geopolitical and geo-economics goals of the Ottomans and later the Turks in the region.<sup>5</sup> After the fall of Constantinople, Turkey expanded its political influence and territorial borders in the direction of Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East, Egypt and North Africa as a result of wars of conquest. In parallel with the military expansion of Turkey, a new state is being formed in the north, in the form of the Principality of Moscow. Moscow Russia emerged as a law-abiding state within Kievan Russia, embracing and preserving Eastern European and Byzantine culture. At the same time, it was influenced by Mongol management styles and imperial thinking. The formation of two dominant powers in the region naturally led to a confrontation between these two empires carrying elements of civilization, which was manifested in the Russian-Ottoman wars. Initially, the interests of these countries intersected in the issue of the Balkans and Poland, which in 1667 followed by the signing of the Andrusov

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<sup>4</sup> Z. Tziarras, "The Ukraine War and Turkey as a "Third Pole" in a New International Order." POLICY BRIEF. 2022 y.

<sup>5</sup> U. UZER, "IDENTITY AND TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY The Kemalist Influence in Cyprus and the Caucasus, New York, ." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17, 2011 y.

Treaty between Russia and Poland,<sup>6</sup> by which both countries undertook the inadmissibility of opening a separate second front for each other in case of war with Ottomans. In later years, Russian-Turkish geopolitical interests intersected in the Caucasus, the Black Sea, the Middle East, the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and at the modern stage, the issue of Central Asia was also added to this. Accordingly, the expansion of the influence of one state would automatically lead to the exit of another state from a specific geopolitical space, which, of course, did not happen without war. The result of this was and is that since the 16th century, the two countries have waged 14 full-scale wars against each other, where, with the exception of one exception (the Crimean War of 1853-1856), almost all cases ended with the victory of the Russians.<sup>7</sup> This fact has found an important reflection in the political and public mood of modern Turkey, which is expressed by the existence of some kind of fears and complexes with Russia.

Despite the geopolitical conflict and struggle for spheres of influence, these countries share many common civilizational elements. Scientists working in Russia are dominated by the opinion about the dualistic identity of Russia. In particular, the civilizational identity of Russia is determined by the belonging of its ethno-cultural part to the eastern branch of the European Christian civilization. At the same time, the geopolitical identity of Russia is determined by its location in the Eurasian geographical space on the cultural-political union of peoples of Slavic, Finnish, Hungarian and Turkish origin, that is, from the point of view of civilization, Russia is Europe, and from the geopolitical point of view - Eurasia.<sup>8</sup> It is also worth noting the fact that Russia historically achieved the greatest success when these two elements were harmoniously combined. The loss of any element is harmful for Russia, because without the European cultural tradition, Russia will not be attractive for its inner East, and without the Eurasian geopolitical potential, it will be uninteresting for Europe”. „Therefore, historically, Russia has always tried to establish the status of a European state from a civilizational point of view, whose interests would be mainly directed towards the East, where it would spread European ideas, and in relations with the West, from a geopolitical point of view, Russia should be a Eurasian state, the special type of statehood of which was determined by the specific nature of its geopolitical tasks”.<sup>9</sup>

After the end of the Cold War, geopolitical ideologies developed in Russia, on which, according to the assessment of the political and scientific elites, the modern Russian state structure should be based, according to which Russian political directions should be formed.

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<sup>6</sup> Editor S. Kapanadze, Chief scientific editor of the Turkish publication. *Turkish foreign policy 1990-2008 years*, . 38: Tbilisi State University. 2013 y.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. S. Editor Kapanadze, 2013. .

<sup>8</sup> E. Urushadze, *Russian foreign policy thinking in the post-Soviet period*, BTCC - Policy Research Group, Tbilisi: BTCC - Policy Research Group, 2006 y.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. E.Urushadze, 2006 y.

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## Russia's Case

Proponents of Western ideologies talked about uniting and merging Russia with Western structures. Since Russia was historically considered to be a state carrying Western culture and thought.

At the same time, they rejected the ideas about the special messianic mission of Russia. The famous Russian scientist and political scientist Igor Maksimevich shares the same opinion. According to his assessment, in the modern world, where the processes of interstate integration and economic rapprochement are strengthened, it is important for Russia to define its civilizational space, which historically was a constituent part of the common European civilization. For the second group, common Slavic ethnos is the pillar of Russian policy formation. The main idea of this idea lies in the creation of a new Russia, a new Russian civilization, which will unite the peoples of the Slavic ethnos. One of the representatives of the Russian State Council, Sergey Baburin, noted that the collapse of the USSR contributed to the division of the Slavic ethnos in the allied republics. Russia is the heir of Eastern-Byzantine and Hellenistic civilization, and in order for Russia to preserve its national identity, it is necessary to combine the best features of the USSR and the Russian Empire in the new Russia. First of all, the countries inhabited by the Slavic ethnic groups, such as Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Northern Kazakhstan, should join this union.<sup>10</sup> Defenders of the Eurasian idea emphasize the geographical location of Russia. The Eurasian idea is based on the British scientist Sir Halford Mackinder's theory. The scientist talks about the world's "Heartland", the "Axis of History/Earth", the island of the world. According to the supporters of the Eurasian idea, Russia is the heart/axis of the world. Controlling this area allows Russia to dictate its own agenda to the rest of the world. This ideological line has many supporters in the Russian political and national security structures. Alexander Dugin, a representative of the radical wing of the Eurasian idea, focuses on the need to restore Russia's strength, the expediency of merging Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova with Russia, the leading role of Russia in Latin America and the weakening of US influence there, and the liberation of the European Union from US influence.<sup>11</sup> According to some scientists, the modern Russian government is partly a political group carrying centrist ideology. In some cases, it combines the moods of the Eurasian vision. The carriers of this idea emphasize the leading role of Russia in the post-Soviet space and the importance of non-confrontational relations with the West. According to their assessment, Russian policy should be balanced with the West, but at the same time attention should also be focused on the need to strengthen Russian positions in the Eastern space.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> J., Mankoff. *Russian Foreign Policy, The Return of Great Power Politics, A Council on Foreign Relations Book*, . Lanham • Boulder • New York • Toronto • Plymouth, UK: ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS, INC, 2009 y.

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According to them, Russia's productive relations with the West are necessary for Russia's economic future, but at the same time, taking into account its territorial location, Moscow cannot ignore its own leading role in this region. Russia should never find itself in the position of having to choose between its neighbors in the West, the East and the South.<sup>12</sup>

Along with the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the communist camp and the USSR led to the decline of Russia's military-political and economic power. In the 1990s, Russia was engulfed by an economic crisis, which led to the spread of the political and economic interests of Western countries in the former allied republics and Eastern European states. The mentioned situation created a mood in the political circles of Russia, according to which the West embraced an undesirable economic policy on Russia. "Wrong economic programs led to a sharp decline of the Russian economy and an increase in mass poverty. From a political point of view, the West took advantage of Russia's temporary weakness and extended its political influence to those geographical areas, which were considered by the Russian ruling elites to be the sphere of special, privileged interests.<sup>13</sup> After Putin came to power, a geopolitical vision was formed, according to which Russia is the carrier of Eurasian civilization. Its confrontation with the West stems from this "special identity" and geopolitical location. This does not exclude issues of Russia's cooperation with Western countries, moreover, in the early 2000s, emphasis was placed on strengthening partnership, equal, non-confrontational relations with the West, where Russia would be represented as an equal partner and its political, economic and security interests in the region would be recognized.<sup>14</sup>

***The geopolitical interests of modern Russia are based on the following issues:***

1) Formation of a multipolar world system, where Russia will be represented as one of the world's global powers, and in the region it will be a geopolitical and geo-economic center; 2) Diversification of spheres of energy and economic influence, which will give the Russian economy the opportunity for development and assimilation of new technologies; 3) The spread and strengthening of Russia's dominance in the post-Soviet space, which will be represented by the existence of a unified position in common economic, political, and security issues; 4) Gaining control over energy resources and transit routes. Along with the improvement of the economic situation, the increase in the dependence of Western and other regional countries on Russian energy resources will be an important factor in the expansion of Russian political influence; 5) Ensuring the suspension of Western influence in the East; 6) Inciting anti-

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<sup>12</sup> Luke March, "Nationalism,." In *ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY*, by Edited by Andrei P. Tsygankov, New York: Taylor and Francis group, Routledge 80-98, 2018 y.

<sup>13</sup> John Berryman, "Geopolitics and Russian foreign policy." In *HANDBOOK OF RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY*, by Edited by Andrei P. Tsygankov, New York.: Taylor and Francis group, ROUTLEDGE, 60-79, 2018 y .

<sup>14</sup> Kakha Putkaradze, The role of special services and military elites in the formation process of Russian politics (theoretical and practical analysis 2022y .

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American sentiments in EU and NATO member states. The entry of the USA into Iraq (2003), the revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan (2003, 2004 and 2005), the accession of Eastern European countries to NATO, the processes developed in Yugoslavia and a number of other issues contributed to the formation of attitudes among the Russian political elite about the deliberate weakening of the state by the West.. This reflects the spread of Western political influence in "privileged zones" while neglecting Russian security interests." According to Moscow, the West does not need a strong Russia, but a Russia that guides their political course, which at the same time will be an exporter of ready-made natural resources and a state dependent on Western products. Considering the above, high-ranking military officials supported the introduction of the so-called "red lines" by Russia with the West. This was reflected in the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the subsequent processes. Under the leadership of the former Deputy Chairman of the Security Council, Yuriy Baluevsky, the military proposed a military doctrine focusing on conventional military threats from the West and other state actors. In the view of the Russian political elites, Russia's insecurity was historically caused by its geopolitical situation, which was manifested by the insecurity of the state border and the constant influence of the West on Russia's peripheries.<sup>15</sup>

In the context of Russian foreign policy, the issues of Russian-Turkish cooperation are noteworthy. Against the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine war, Russia's geopolitical goals in relation to Turkey are interesting when Turkey is expanding its economic, political and military ties with both opposing sides. In the context of the war, Russia's interests are characterized by a complex multi-sectoral strategy. It aims to create conditions that will allow Moscow to continue the war until the enemy is completely exhausted. Moscow realized that the military plan in February-May could not suppress the will of Ukraine and bring a pro-Russian government to Ukraine. Therefore, the political tactics have also changed, the main goal of which is not to achieve a quick victory over Ukraine, but to stimulate favorable attitudes of Russia in Europe by prolonging the war. It will contribute to the exhaustion of Western society, political and financial elites due to the expected economic damage. In order for Russia to convince the West to engage in negotiations, it must show that it is not losing the war in Ukraine and can drag out the war process for years. Russia is trying to find alternative sources, markets in the world in order to somehow balance the geopolitical and geoeconomic challenges facing it. Against the backdrop of international sanctions, Turkey is an important opportunity for Russia. In cooperation with Turkey, in the near term, Russia wants to mitigate the damage caused by economic sanctions imposed by the West, diversify its export products and balance the consequences of the loss of Western technologies by tapping alternative markets. This means that Russia will have to find strategic partners who will agree to establish

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

alternative transport routes. This will replace the export oriented to the West, and promote the development of the country's industrial and military technologies. Russia's goal is to strengthen new energy and economic platforms to promote Russia's involvement in new regional and international formats. In other words, Russia should create a kind of anti-Western center that will help Moscow compensate for the losses arising from Western sanctions and minimize the sanctions-related risks in the country's economy. Accordingly, Russia aims to deepen relations with countries that show the desire to pursue an independent foreign policy course and see the possibility of increasing the role of their countries in the post-war multipolar world order. Russian-Turkish cooperation in the economic, energy, and security sectors is likely to be explained by the desire to stir up anti-American and anti-Western sentiments in Turkey and bring down disagreements among NATO member states. By offering Turkey regional cooperation platforms, Russia is trying to stimulate the formation of the mood of the Turkish political elite regarding the growth of Turkey's role in the post-war world order. Within the framework of relations with Turkey, Russia is trying to ensure the expulsion of the West from the region and strengthening its dominant position. On the other hand, Russia actively cooperates with Iran in order to balance Turkish influence and actively discusses the issue of Iran's involvement in the proposed platforms. With Russia's separate concessions to Turkey, growing ties in the energy, economic, and security spheres, Russia is forming a soft power tool that will give it the opportunity to influence Turkey at the right time. Russia will try to oppose Turkish and Western geopolitical interests more. Turkey's goal of becoming an energy hub is categorically unacceptable for Russia. Russia is trying not to allow, bypassing it, the supply of natural resources in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea basin to Europe. As a result of Russia's efforts, the Nabucco strategic project also failed. Russia is interested in Turkey being represented as a transit state, and any format of cooperation where regional countries will be represented must necessarily involve Russia as the main decision-making state.<sup>16</sup>

Russian and Turkish interests align due to a shared sense of insecurity. Russia does not have the kind of natural barriers that exposed its vulnerability in the First and Second World Wars - to military operations conducted by European powers along Russia's borders. Similarly, due to its geographical insecurity, Turkey was formed by the so-called "Sevres syndrome", according to which Turkey is surrounded by hostile countries. They are trying to use Turkey's weaknesses and break this country. If the West is the enemy for Russia, the Kurds supported by Western policies in northern Syria and Iraq are the enemy for the Turks.

Turkey is an important economic market and alternative transit corridor for Russia. Turkey has become a necessary component of the Russian gas transit network. The Southern,

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<sup>16</sup> Sinem Adar, *Perceptions in Turkey about the War in Ukraine. Implications for the Future of EU-Turkey Relations*. SWP Comment, German Institute for international and security affairs, 2022 y.

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aka Turkish Stream, is a highlight of mutual cooperation between the two countries in the energy sector. It aimed to export natural resources through Turkey to the Balkans and then to Europe, which would further increase the country's dependence on Russia. Of the 31.5 billion cubic meters/year of gas exported annually by Turkish Stream, half was to be consumed by Turkey and half to be sent to the EU. The project of the Russian state company Rosatom, regarding the construction of the first nuclear power plant in Turkey, is also important.

Parallel to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Russian-Turkish presidential meetings clearly showed certain changes in Russia's foreign policy tactics. Moscow views Turkey as an important transit partner. In the process of confrontation with the West, according to Moscow, Turkey can significantly contribute to strengthening its position in the region. Ankara, in exchange for proper support for Russia, received some kind of concessions (eg the issue of Karabakh). The issue of the South Caucasus is also important for Russia. It is the subject of geopolitical conflict between Russia, Turkey and the USA. According to the Russian view, Washington's interest in this region is based on the idea of energy pluralism, that is, finding alternative ways to supply oil and gas to Europe. It will help to prevent the growth of influence of Tehran and Moscow in the region. From this point of view, Turkey's individual actions in the Caucasus are perceived by Russia as part of the West's attempt to expand its regional influence. The US and the European Union support trilateral cooperation between Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia. According to some scientists, the US is focused on "promoting pluralist geopolitics and ensuring the supply of Caspian oil and gas to Europe." According to Russian elites, this is aimed at weakening Russia's military and political positions in the region. Accordingly, Russian-Turkish cooperation, from the Russian perspective, is aimed at preventing the further deepening of Turkish-Western relations and expelling the West from the region.<sup>17</sup> As a counterweight to this, Russia is trying to create certain platforms with the involvement of regional countries (for example, the 3+3 cooperation format in the Caucasus) - based on principles based on common profit. Russia's offer of Russia as an alternative to the West for Turkey is largely due to the goals of preventing the expansion of Western influence.

Considering the above-mentioned factors, we can formulate the long-term goals of Russia in the format of cooperation with Turkey as follows:

- 1) based on the economic and energy interests of Russia - diversify existing markets and support Russian exports;
- 2) to increase Turkey's dependence on Russia by strengthening energy and economic ties;
- 3) to create a tool of soft power by deepening economic and energy ties;
- 4) to introduce discord and cause a crack in Turkish-Western relations;
- 5) distance the West from the region and expel it if possible;
- 6) preventing the implementation of alternative energy projects bypassing Russia by offering regional platforms in the Caucasus;
- 7)

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<sup>17</sup> D. Pipinashvili, *South Caucasus conflicts and regional stability problems*, . Tbilisi, 2009 y.



inadmissibility of the presence of the US and Western military components in the region; 8) preventing the expansion of the influence of Western states in the Black Sea Basin; 9) mitigation of economic and technological risks arising from sanctions imposed by the West; 10) search for alternative markets; 11) Formation of geopolitical centers of anti-Western gravity.

### **Turkey's Case**

The collapse of the USSR created a new geopolitical reality and a different security architecture in the world. It gave important opportunities to Turkey, which was modestly represented in the region before. This was reflected in the geographical areas on which Turkey historically had certain claims. The ideological, political, economic and security vacuum created in the former communist camp as a result of the end of the Cold War gave Turkey a chance to intervene with a new force in the ongoing political and economic processes in the post-Soviet countries. From the same period, the strengthening of Turkey's ties with the former allied republics and countries of the post-Soviet camp began. It was expressed by strengthening joint economic, energy, political, military and cultural contacts.<sup>18</sup> The collapse of the USSR removed the existential threat posed by Soviet Russia during the Cold War to Turkey. At the time, this factor also influenced the decision on Turkey's accession to NATO. Turkey's alleged involvement in the Russo-Chechen wars, which was manifested in the training of Chechen fighters, logistical, financial assistance and sharing of intelligence information, significantly strained the relations between the two countries. The facts of the participation of the Turkish ultra-right radical organization - "Grey Wolves" in the Karabakh war and their attempt at a military political coup in Azerbaijan, stirring up Turanian and neo-Ottoman sentiments in a certain part of the military and political circles, strengthened the negative sentiments towards Turkey among the Russian political elite. In response, a large Kurdish political congress was held in Moscow in April 1996 with the support of Russia, in which the political leader of the Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party, Abdullah Öcalan, participated. Finally, the agreement reached on Turkey's side to end support for Chechen separatism and Russia's support for Kurdish separatism laid the foundation for a new stage of relations between these two countries. This was expressed in the 2004 speech of the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin. A visit to Turkey. In the format of bilateral relations, the possibility of convergence of the interests of the two countries in the economic, energy, political, and security sectors was highlighted. Nevertheless, there were and will be a number of issues between the two countries where they have different positions. The affairs of Syria, Libya, the South Caucasus, Egypt, Cyprus, and Ukraine are a clear confirmation of this. 2016 After the

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<sup>18</sup> K. Putkaradze, Preventing of religious conflict in the new democratic countries (Case study of Georgian Muslims), 2021 y.

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failed military coup, Turkey, through President Erdogan and his administration, set a new political course and orientation. It meant the formation of an independent foreign policy course corresponding to national interests. Despite the different positions, the existing relations between these countries were significantly strengthened, which was manifested in cooperation in energy and economic projects.

Russia's military intervention in Ukraine (February 24, 2022) set Turkey two important tasks: a) *maintaining global and regional positions, which Turkey managed to consolidate and strengthen after 2016, and b) strengthening influence and consolidating earlier achievements - to ensure further expansion.*

The war in Ukraine has threatened Turkey's pragmatic multipolar approach that underpins its foreign policy. Turkey, as a member of NATO, has certain political obligations towards the organization and its member states. Despite this, he does not want to participate in the sanctions against Russia. It is partially explained by economic reasons. Russia is an important trade partner for Turkey. As of 2021, the trade turnover between the two countries amounted to 32.5 billion dollars. After the war, Russian investments in Turkey increased. The percentage of Russian citizens in Turkey's tourism industry is significant. As of 2019, the number of visitors from Russia to Turkey reached 7 million people, which is almost 17% of Turkey's tourism potential.<sup>19</sup> Russia is also an important energy partner for Turkey. In the Turkish industry, the volume of Russian natural gas occupies the first place in the country. The mentioned factors significantly led to an increase in Turkey's dependence on Russia in the energy and economic spheres, which, if appropriate, creates an opportunity for Russia to use soft power. The war in Ukraine is a kind of opportunity for Turkey. It allows Turkish interest groups to occupy the places vacated by Western companies in Russia and attract more investments to their country. With the Russo-Ukrainian war, Turkey sees an opportunity to become the region's energy hub and Europe's main transit hub. Despite the sanctions imposed on Russia, some Western countries continue to purchase Russian gas through Turkey. Turkey offers Europe its transit and logistics capabilities and puts on the agenda the possibility of realizing the long-discussed underwater gas pipeline between Israel and Turkey (the impact of the current Israeli-Hamas military conflict on this issue is a subject of separate analysis). Amid the Turkish-Western standoff, Ankara sees the war as an opportunity for the West to lift sanctions on its defense industrial complexes and accept Turkey as an equal partner. This was confirmed by the differing positions of the Turkish side on the process of NATO expansion, Sweden and Finland, and NATO membership.

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<sup>19</sup> S. Akgundogdu, Trissel Collin, "Turkey's Growing Ukrainian and Russian Communities." The Washington institute for Near east Policy, 2023 y.

Despite bilateral cooperation, the existing relations between Moscow and Ankara cannot be considered as strategic and long-term cooperation, which is determined by the fundamentally different interests and historical experience between these two countries. The relations between the two countries actually reflect an example of classical situational cooperation. Despite cooperation with Russia, Ankara does not cut military ties with Ukraine, which is explained by the following circumstances:

*A) Turkey, as a member of NATO and a state willing to integrate into Western structures, cannot stand aside in the Ukraine conflict; B) Ukraine, on the northern flank of Turkey, has always represented a buffer state between it and Russia. If the borders are broken, a strengthened Russian state will approach from the north, which is not part of Turkey's long-term strategic plans; C) Ukraine is an important economic market for Turkey, where, in case of its dominance, it will significantly contribute to the expansion of the export of Turkish products; D) Russia's increased presence in Ukraine, especially along the southern coastline, further strengthens Turkey's strategic vulnerability on the Black Sea and activates Cold War-era threat perceptions.*

Along with supporting Ukraine, Ankara is trying not to openly confront Russia, as an open confrontation with the Kremlin could lead to retaliatory actions in Syria. Moscow could stimulate a new wave of migration from Idlib. He also sought to facilitate the activation of pro-Kurdish movements, which represent an existential threat to Turkey.

After the failed coup of 2016, Turkey is trying to pursue an independent foreign policy, which was facilitated by two important circumstances: a) the lack of solidarity from the West during the coup attempt of 2016 and the suspicions of the US about their alleged involvement in the military coup attempt; b) US partnership, financial, military and logistical support to the Kurdish Democratic Union Workers' Party.<sup>20</sup>

The conflict in Ukraine allows Turkey to increase the country's geopolitical importance and strengthen its existing political power. A situation is created when Turkey has the opportunity to put pressure on the West by dealing with certain conflict issues. This also applies to issues in the fields of defense and security. Turkey has said it is time to lift sanctions on its defense industry. Speaking to the press after an emergency meeting of NATO defense ministers in mid-March, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar also noted that Turkey had become a NATO member, was fully committed to NATO, and expected that NATO allies would also be committed to Turkey and its efforts to counter "terrorist organizations such as "PKK/YPG, ISIS and FETO".

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<sup>20</sup> Myles B Caggins, "Peshmerga Reforms: Navigating Challenges, Forging Unity," Foreign Policy Research Institute, October 31. Accessed November, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/10/peshmerga-reforms-navigating-challenges-forging-unity/>. 2023 y.

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Since the beginning of March, pro-Western sentiments have become noticeable in Ankara's narrative. At a press conference held with the President of Kosovo, Erdogan expressed his support for the expansion of NATO and the European Union and expressed his readiness to support Ukraine. Ultimately, Ankara views this situation as an opportunity to support Turkey's EU accession process. It is no coincidence that at the same press conference, Erdogan asked the EU to show "the same sensitivity" to Turkey's membership status.

Turkey's adaptation of the role of conciliator and mediator in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, systematic invitations of Turkish leaders to Western capitals, are perceived as evidence of Turkey's growing influence. It became possible to achieve this by pursuing an autonomous foreign policy course. Pro-government experts focus on Turkey's growing importance in global processes, namely: a) *"Ankara has succeeded in diplomacy." It is confirmed by the bilateral visits of Israel, Greece, the USA and Germany to Turkey, holding a diplomatic forum in Antalya, with the participation of Western and non-Western leaders. Turkey emerged as the only mediating country between Ukraine and Russia;* b) *Erdogan's criticism of the West. It was connected with the lack of a unified position of the West regarding the annexation of Crimea by Russia;* c) *Structural weaknesses of post-World War II institutions as evidence. The merit of Erdogan's call is to start public discussions on reforming the UN system.*

The goal of Turkey's ruling elites in the Ukraine war and cooperation with Russia is: a) to support economic activity; b) strengthening cooperation with the US and the European Union and influencing them to reach individual concessions; c) strengthening of close political, economic, diplomatic and security ties with the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia; d) the final solution of the Kurdish question; e) expansion of influence in the Middle East; f) turning into an energy hub and a regional country; g) strengthening cooperation with the countries of the region; h) pursuing an independent foreign and security policy tailored to national interests; i) strengthening the country's energy, economic and political resources by strengthening ties with Russia, deepening relations with Russia - in exchange for certain concessions from Russia; j) Strengthening the influence of Turkey in the new geopolitical space created after the war in Ukraine.

Considering the above-mentioned factors, we can assume that Russian-Turkish cooperation is conditioned by mutual interests, namely: 1. *Cooperation in the energy field;* 2. *The desire of the two countries to adopt an independent foreign policy course and to contribute to the distancing of the West in the current events in the region;* 3. *The personal relations between Putin and Erdogan and the authoritarian style of state management;* 4. *Recognizing each other's security interests, taking them into account and implementing a security policy tailored to national interests;* 5) *skeptical attitudes towards the West;* 6)

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*Cooperation in the economic sector.* The cooperation between the two countries reflects the situation when, due to the situation, a partial alignment of interests in political and security matters became possible. From an economic point of view, there is complementarianism, which implies the deepening of economic relations despite geopolitical conflicts. The ruling elites of Russia and Turkey are of the opinion that it is possible to establish red lines between the two countries on the basis of mutual cooperation, to respect the security interests of both sides, and to deepen future cooperation. A similar approach, based on the recognition of security interests and the perspective of mutually beneficial cooperation, was acceptable to both countries.

The attitudes of the political elites of these states are also important, according to which "Washington equally threatens the interests of Turkey and Russia". The relationship between the two countries is perceived as a kind of opportunity to balance the American influence in the region. According to Turkey, Washington is not interested in Turkey's support for Kurdish separatism, on the other hand, it helps Kurdish paramilitary groups "Peshmerga" and others with military, logistical, political and financial resources.<sup>21</sup> The political elites of the two countries believe that Washington is interested in replacing the political regime in these countries, which will further pursue pro-American interests. Another important issue where the political elites of the two countries consider Washington's positions dangerous is the unilateral actions of America in the region. Turkey believes that America is not interested in establishing Turkey as a strong regional state.

From Turkey's perspective, the real dimension of the country's accession to NATO and the expediency of its accession to the European Union at the current stage are interesting. Turkey's attempt to be recognized by Western countries as part of the Western world is due to its sense of historical insecurity. It was associated with threats from the Soviet Union as well as fears about the West. The feeling of insecurity has deep roots dating back to the nineteenth century. That is why, during the founding of the Republic of Turkey by Kemal Atatürk in 1923, the real reason for the unconditional support of the country's western orientation policy was related to the concept of state security. Turkey's political elite believed that if the new republic was considered part of the West, it would be able to avoid repeating the fate of the Ottoman Empire. In particular, it would have avoided the massive territorial losses suffered by the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As Atatürk's associate Falih Rifqi Atay said: "We were either going to become Europeans or imperialists, otherwise Europe was going to disintegrate us and turn us into Asian hordes." Relations with the West, whose goal is to integrate Turkey into the European Union at the modern stage, are determined, in

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<sup>21</sup> J. Anotti, T. Clayton, "Turkey (Türkiye): Background and U.S. Relations In Brief .," Breaif, 2023 y.

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addition to economic factors, by the possible threats that may threaten Turkey if it is not a full member of the Western structures.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the disagreements on a number of issues, Turkey and Russia managed to maintain a situational partnership. It became possible thanks to the pragmatic and personalized foreign policy of the two states. The above-mentioned cooperation is a confirmation of the implementation of the independent foreign policy course of the two countries. Turkey's main national interests in the context of the war in Ukraine are focused on maintaining and expanding Ankara's regional and international influence through political, diplomatic and economic intervention in the conflict. Ankara sees the current crisis as a harbinger of global change that will contribute to the establishment of a multipolar world order, which will give Turkey a more active and dignified role in regional and international relations. For Russia, the war in Ukraine is an opportunity to stop the growing influence of the West and to recognize the Russian privileged and security interests on the part of the Western states. In Russia's long-term plans, relations with Turkey (in exchange for a separate compromise) are considered an opportunity to completely distance the West from the region. If it is possible to align common interests with Turkey, the gap between Turkey and the West will increase, and the real chance of a crack in the united position of the West will increase. By instigating the deterioration of Turkish-Western relations, Moscow will try to strengthen its influence in the Caucasus and the Middle East, to gain control over energy and transit resources, as well as to strengthen the military component in the region.

It is difficult to predict how long Russian and Turkish "friendship" will last after the war in Ukraine. Much will depend on what tangible concessions the two countries are willing to make and whether they will be able to reach an agreement on regional issues where there is serious conflict.

Despite bilateral cooperation between Russia and Turkey, there are a number of issues where the interests of these countries differ. For example, the main threat to Moscow in Syria was the strengthening of radical jihadist groups and the disruption of the central government. It would facilitate the export of radical/political Islam and terrorism to Russia and former allied republics. At the same time, the region would lose its last strategic ally. Ankara, for its part, seeks to strengthen both regional interests in the Middle East, as well as deter any attempt at Kurdish self-determination. In 2014, disagreements over the Crimea issue were added to the above-mentioned differences. Although Ankara did not join its Western partners in imposing sanctions against Russia, it did not hesitate to take a clear position on the issue.

There are several fundamental factors behind Turkey's interest in the Caucasus. First, its strong ties to Azerbaijan as a Turkic-speaking country. On December 9, 1991, Ankara

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<sup>22</sup> Hale, William, *Turkish Foreign Policy since 1774, 3rd edition*, London and New York: Routledge, 2013 y.

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recognized Azerbaijan as an independent state. Turkey provided decisive assistance to Karabakh in the second war and in the complete restoration of its territorial integrity. Azerbaijan and Turkey are involved in energy (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan; Baku-Tbilisi-Erzrum; Trans-Anatolian and Trans-Adriatic projects) and infrastructure projects, including the Baku-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Kars railway. Strategic projects are aimed at creating alternative routes for the supply of oil and gas to EU countries and establishing Turkey as a regional power.

The presence of the Caucasian diaspora in Turkey is also a factor to consider. About 10 percent of Turkey's current population is ethnically related to the North and South Caucasus. 3-5 million people of North Caucasian origin live in Turkey, about 3-3 million people are from Azerbaijan and Georgia. Important Caucasian non-governmental organizations are "Kafkas Derne"; "Kafkas Vakf" and "Birle,ik Kafkas Dernekleri Federasyonu". There is also a Chechen organization "Çeçen Dayan, ma Grubu". The Azerbaijani and Georgian diaspora is represented by the Azerbaijani "Dostluk Derne" and "Gürcistan" organizations<sup>23</sup>.

The West supports pluralism in geopolitics and energy, but Turkish elites believe the West is not interested in a stronger Turkey or its Eurasian ambitions. Back in July 2006, the US House of Representatives passed a decision largely due to the support of the Armenian lobby, which was later confirmed by the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by Congress.

### **Georgia's Case**

The issues of Russian-Turkish cooperation are the subject of critical study in Georgia as well. On the one hand, there is Russia, which has temporarily occupied 20% of Georgia's territory, and on the other hand, Turkey - the number one economic and trade partner of Georgia, a strategic ally and a supporter of Georgia's accession to NATO. Accordingly, it is worth noting how the formats of cooperation between these two powerful regional countries will affect the national security environment of Georgia. It is worth noting the fact that both regional powers are trying to strengthen their political power in order to spread their dominance in the South Caucasus. Nevertheless, this does not exclude the issues of bargaining and cooperation between these regional powers. A clear confirmation of this is the second Karabakh war and the offer of the Caucasus 3+3 regional cooperation platform after this war. There are other examples of mutual agreement between Russia and Turkey. Among them are issues related to Syria and the Kurds, energy and economic relations. The common position of these two states regarding the purposeful weakening of Western positions in the region is particularly noteworthy for Georgia. Considering common economic, political and energy

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<sup>23</sup> GÖNÜL TOL,. "Why Is Turkey Silent on Russia's Cooperation with the Kurds? ." War on the Rocks, . Dec 19 . Accessed 2023. <https://warontherocks.com/2017/12/why-is-turkey-silent-on-russias-cooperation-with-the-syrian-kurds/>. 2017 y.

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goals, it is important for Georgia not to sacrifice Georgian interests in Russian-Turkish relations in exchange for certain concessions.

*The efforts of the two countries to weaken the positions of the West will have a negative impact on the West's support for Georgia. Accordingly, Georgia will remain without a strong political supporter*

- Along with the weakening of Western positions, Georgia will have to face Russia one-on-one, and on the other hand, be alone with the Turkey-Azerbaijan alliance, which will put the country in a losing position;
- Convergence of Russian-Turkish interests will reduce Georgia's ability to diversify the economic and energy sectors and improve the country's economic situation;
- Depending on the economic conditions, it will be difficult for the country to pursue an export-oriented economic policy;
- The convergence of the interests of the two countries in the Caucasus will create a geopolitical situation for Georgia, where Georgia will be in the arc of the interests of the Russian, Turkish-Azerbaijani and Iranian states;
- Russian-Turkish cooperation does not exclude the implementation of new energy projects bypassing Georgia, with the probable involvement of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Iran, which in the long run will lead to the loss of Georgia's geostrategic importance;
- The issues of convergence of interests between the two countries do not exclude the weakening of Georgia's transit capabilities, the reduction of the cargo turnover of Batumi and Poti sea ports;
- The convergence of Russian-Turkish interests will increase Georgia's economic, political and energy dependence on these countries;
- Reaching an agreement between the two countries will strengthen the possibility of using hybrid or hard force against Georgia;
- The convergence of Russian-Turkish interests activates the military threats facing the country;
- Convergence of Russian-Turkish interests may lead to a change in Turkey's supporting positions towards Georgia in NATO;
- The weakening of the West's position in the Black Sea basin will lead to a decrease in Georgia's access to the existing marine resources, will worsen the security of the maritime space of Georgia, will put regional challenges related to the Black Sea basin on the agenda;
- Taking into account the historical experience, in the recent history of Georgia there are many facts, when the convergence of interests between these two countries led to mass migration of Georgians, the loss of a significant part of the territories of Georgia, and the convergence of interests of a number of states resulted in the loss of Georgia's independence.



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## CONCLUSION

Russian-Turkish relations have always been full of contradictions and geopolitical confrontations throughout the history of the relationship between the two states. The different geopolitical and civilizational differences of the two countries caused and still causes the disagreements between them. It excludes the strategic partnership and cooperation of the two states in the long term. Despite different geopolitical interests, there are also examples of separate cooperation in a number of issues, namely: economic and energy issues, joint energy strategic projects, dissatisfaction of the two countries towards the West, the delay of Turkey's accession to the European Union, the goal of pursuing an independent foreign policy course, the common interests of the two countries regarding the Black Sea Basin Vision - countries that are not part of the Black Sea basin were not represented in the region, precedents for creating buffer zones, discussion of Kurdish-Turkish issues in the Astana format. At the current stage, regional and global processes have contributed to the rapprochement of the two countries, which is largely due to the views of the ruling political elite of the two states in relation to the West. Nevertheless, the mutual cooperation between them resembles situational cooperation. Different civilizational, geopolitical and geoeconomic visions and the correspondingly changing geopolitical and security field increase the possibility of new conflicts between them. At the current stage, the convergence of the interests of the two states with certain regions, including the Caucasus and the Black Sea basin, increases the vulnerability of the countries of the South Caucasus. It can become an important factor contributing to the emergence of new types of risks and challenges.

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