

**The Russian, Caucasian and Central Asian Aspects of Turkish Foreign Policy in
the Post Cold War Period**

Nasuh USLU*

Turkish people and statesmen felt disappointment in the 1990s in their relations with the USA and European states. There were also some serious changes in Turkish domestic politics in this period. Turkish people felt that Turkey reached nowhere, while Western oriented policies were pursued for years. The ordinary Turks began to find more answers to their problems in traditional values. The rightist and leftist parties in the centre could not meet demands of the public and were broken to pieces with their decreasing public support. On the other side, the anti-Western Islamists and the pro-Turkic nationalists increased their public support with their more dynamic and active stance.

The negative attitude of the Europeans on the accession of Turkey to the European Union and the occasional problems caused by the Americans led Turkish rulers to launch some initiatives in preventing the possible isolation of Turkey in the international arena. The former Soviet republics, the Balkans, the Black Sea region and the Middle East were new activity areas for Turkey in this regard. In the new atmosphere, some Turkish politicians questioned even the traditional policies of avoiding intervening in foreign countries and having a pro-Western standing. There were also some Turks who claimed that Turkey should not continue to wear the tight jacket of the state's traditional ideology. Turkey's special religious, historical, ethnic and cultural ties with the Central Asian and Middle Eastern countries could not escape from the attention of at least some sections of the Turkish political

system. The increase in the power of Turkish political groups, which were supporters of the close co-operation with those states, was another recent development. In the new atmosphere, the following question came to the minds of some strategists inevitably: Would Turkey move toward these regions by giving its relations with the West only secondary importance?

Whatever the real goals of Turkish rulers were, the new atmosphere was different from the old one. Turkey's foreign policy alternatives were discussed by public opinion, politicians and officials in the way, which could not be compared with the debates in the past. Turkey defended its national interests in the post-Cold War period much more assertively and acted more carefully in its relations with the Western countries including the United States not to harm its sovereignty and independence. The changes in Turkish domestic politics and the affinity of the Turkish nation to the people in the crisis regions put pressures on the Turkish administrations to pursue more active foreign policies. As a result, the horizon of Turkey's foreign and security policies was broadened both regionally and functionally. This article tries to analyse one of the most important connections of Turkish foreign policy in the new era.

The Russian Connection

Initial Turkish Perception of the Threat Posed by the Russian Federation

The collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in the removal of the main threat to Turkish security. For the first time in several centuries, Turkey's common borders with Russia were eliminated and Turkish rulers were saved from feeling the fear caused by direct exposure to the political and military power of their giant neighbour.¹ Prominent Turkish leaders such as Süleyman Demirel and Bülent Ecevit admitted that a big threat for Turkish security was eliminated. However, the region around Turkey still had great importance for both Russia and Turkey and it seemed that both sides would continue to engage in a stiff competition which would include a wide range of areas and which would require the use of various kinds

of means. Turkish rulers had many doubts. In Demirel's words, the Russian Federation claimed responsibility for the destiny of 30 million Russian living in other republics. Local conflicts could be use as pretexts for the reconstruction of the Russian Empire.²

There were other facts irritating Ankara. Russia signed agreements with Armenia (August 1992, allowing the establishment of Russian military bases on the Armenian territory), and Greece (1 November 1995; Agreement on Military and Technical Co-operation). It remained Syria's main military supplier and diplomatic ally and tried to improve its relationship with Iran to the extent that Iranian Foreign Minister Velayeti got the courage to say: "Iran and Russia can be strategic partners." The Russian attempt of selling sophisticated arms and missiles to Greek Cypriots seemed to target Turkish security directly. The establishment of Confederation of Kurdish Organisation of the CIS in Moscow on 1 November 1994 and the meeting of the third session of the Kurdish parliament-in-exile on 19 October 1995 in a building attached to the Russian Duma were designed to force Turkish leaders to act in accordance with Russia's interests. The Turkish denial of providing the Chechens with any official assistance and the Turkish reiteration of respect for Russia's territorial integrity could be seen as the result of these Russian actions.³

Russia's refusal to reduce the military concentrations on its southern flank as required by the CFE Treaty of 1990 was particularly alarming for Turkish rulers.⁴ Moreover, the withdrawal of former Soviet forces from the central Europe to behind the Urals in accordance with the CFE Treaty and the improvement in the quality of the Russian forces in that region could put Turkey in an unfavourable position both within NATO and against Russia.⁵ Turkish rulers were concerned that Russia would not destroy the military equipment it withdrew from Europe and would stockpile them to the regions where they would constitute a threat to Turkey.⁶ In fact, Russia informed Western powers that the force ceilings established by the CFE Treaty fell short of meeting its security needs and it demonstrated its willingness

to violate these ceilings by taking initiatives in this direction. Western powers generally reiterated their insistence on the fulfilment of the CFE Treaty's requirements,⁷ but their attitude was far from carrying a full force. On the other hand, Turkey made it clear that it did not want to see the CFE Treaty changed in favour of Russia for the two reasons. Firstly it would give Russia the potential for intervention in the Middle East and secondly, it would cause a great imbalance in favour of Russian forces in the Caucasus and the Central Asia, resulting in the return to the Cold War conditions.⁸

Nevertheless, Ankara was not comfortable with the Western attitude in the issue. The West seemed inclined to make concessions to Russia on the CFE limits in the Caucasus and to give this state a relatively free hand in that region in exchange for the Russian consent to the enlargement of NATO and the membership of the Baltic and Eastern European countries in Western organisations.⁹ There was a ground for the Turkish fears that the United States might build a partnership with Russia's new imperial designs and some Turkish critics believed that the United States had already contributed to the consolidation of the Russian influence in the region by ignoring the new Russian imperialism.¹⁰ The US administration seemed to support the Russian leaders in spite of their bold actions in reinforcing their influence in the region because they feared that more hawkish leaders might come to power in Russia and that they might cause instabilities both at home and in the region.¹¹

One important development in the post-Cold War era was that NATO established the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program to integrate Russia into the Western security system. NATO also signed with Russia a Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Co-operation and Security and with Ukraine a Charter on a Distinctive Partnership. Turkey saw the PfP project and mutual relations among NATO, the Western European Union (WEU), the Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), Russia and Ukraine as the cornerstones of the European security structure.¹² Turkish officials

insisted that the enlargement of NATO should include the PfP and the establishment of special relations with Russia and Ukraine. In their view, an enhanced PfP was not a consolation prize, but it was a tool with which a sense of security and a sense of belonging would be projected to NATO's partners and which would facilitate the involvement of these partners in NATO's decision-making processes. Turkish officials further inserted that relations between NATO, Russia and Ukraine should be formalised in politically binding documents and that these partners should not have the right to veto the decisions of NATO.¹³

It seemed that Turkish rulers supported the PfP to keep their traditional enemy under the control of the multilateral Western security structures. Therefore, they did not hesitate to give a wide support to the PfP and even to show their sincerity in the issue by claiming that the project should be expanded through joint military exercises and training opportunities between Turkey and the Russian Federation.¹⁴ Moreover, Turkey established a PfP Training Centre in Ankara in June 1998 and finalised the project of establishing a multinational peace force in south-eastern Europe with the participation of all regional NATO and PfP nations.¹⁵ Ankara also welcomed the American suggestion of establishing new forms of co-operation with the partner countries, namely the Atlantic Partnership Council.¹⁶

The Present Turkish Approach to Russia

It is too early for Turkish policy-makers to say that Russia is no longer a potential threat for Turkey. There is even tendency to perceive that the Russian Federation has replaced its predecessor as a new threat to Turkish interests.¹⁷ Russia is the strongest force in the region and through its actions it gives the impression that it still pursues power politics to expand its spheres of influence. Russia's heavy-handed approach toward the future membership of the Eastern European countries in NATO, its direct interventions in conflicts and disagreements in the former Soviet republics and its coercive actions to establish spheres of influence in the region are bound to irritate Turkey as the country which will be influenced

by these developments in the most serious way. Russia launches initiatives to remind the regional countries that it is still a great power and this impairs to some extent Turkey's initiatives of establishing close links with the regional countries, with which it has historical, racial, cultural and religious ties.¹⁸

The United States, too, seems to share increasingly more concerns with Turkey on the assertion of the Russian influence in the Central Asia and the Caucasus. The American administration has also some doubts on the possibility of Russia's gaining control of the energy resources in the region and on Russia's co-operation with anti-Western states such as Iran.¹⁹ The agreement on Ukraine's vital importance for the European security and on maintaining Ukraine's independence to check the Russian expansionism is another example of the convergence of U.S. and Turkish interests. Turkey's position seems now more secure in the region. The United States gives increasingly more support to Turkish initiatives and the Russian influence is less effective. Russia's heavy-handed approach toward some former Soviet republics has led these states to try to balance the Russian force by expanding their ties with other countries including Turkey and the USA. Russia's economic crisis and ethnic problems, too, has reduced the Russian ability to control the region.²⁰

Turkey's sense of relief depends on the Russian behaviour and the future of Russia. The ultimate nature and direction of Russia's new order still remains unresolved and the future of the relationship between Russia and its ethnic nations is still uncertain. The relative stability and calmness of the Soviet era has been replaced by regional conflicts and tensions stemmed from ethnic national challenges to the integrity of the Russian Federation. Since it is certain that Russia will continue to respond to these uprisings with an unrestricted use of force, this constitutes a major risk to Turkey's security. Moreover, Russia is a historic rival of Turkey and it has numerous clashing interests with those of Turkey extending from the Central Asia to the eastern Mediterranean. Russia's vision clashes with Turkey's intention of

becoming the principal link between Asia and Europe because Russian leaders see Russia as the centre of the Euro-Asian landmass and want to control developments in this region.²¹

The story of Turkish-Russian relations in the post-Cold War period is a mixed one. The two countries are important economic and trade partners of each other whereas they also suspect of evil intentions of each other together with the mutual fear of the expansion of the other's influence. Particularly, Turkey feels anxiety about the possible renewal of the competition between the West and Russia. Ankara is highly suspicious that Moscow might prefer to initiate actions of influence in the southern parts of the Eurasian landmass rather than in Europe, creating a new cold war. Turkish rulers naturally fear that Turkey can be left alone by its Western allies in countering such threats, which may emerge in the wings.²² They also concern that Russia may use its conflict in Chechnya as a pretext to establish and expand its influence in the Caucasus and may gain the control of Azerbaijan and Georgia to a great extent. Of course, there will be serious repercussions of instabilities in the region, created by Russia, for Turkish interests. Such developments will exacerbate Turkish security fears, will close the important land corridor between Turkey and Central Asia and will threaten to prevent the construction of oil and gas pipelines, which will connect the Caspian region with Turkey and Europe.²³

There are other reasons for Turkish authorities to fear evil Russian designs. The Russian support for the separatist PKK and the Armenian occupation of the Azeri territory and the Russian initiative of selling S-300 missiles to the Greek Cypriot administration are still in their minds. They also suspiciously watch the Russian initiatives of violating the regional balance of power to the disadvantage of Turkey and Azerbaijan. Russia deployed a squadron of MiG 29 fighters to Armenia in December 1998 and began to station S-300 Zenith air defence systems in its base in Armenia, causing tensions in Turkish-Armenian relations.²⁴ The Russian actions against Georgia, including giving support to the Abkhazian rebels and

launching attacks against the Chechens inside the Georgian borders, are another sign of violating the regional balance. Turkish authorities admit that Russia and Turkey will always compete with each other and that Russia opposes Turkish interests regarding regional oil pipelines, but they want this competition kept within peaceful limits.²⁵

Turkey and the West need to form a common strategy toward Russia to deal with its expansionist actions and to improve economic and political relations with this state, as an important economic partner, which seems willing to make reforms and to offer co-operation to the West. Thus, establishing normal relations with Russia and containing this state to prevent its expansionist policies are two issues, in which Turkey seeks the help of the Western countries. It is an undeniable fact that Russia and Turkey are commercial partners as well as being political and economic rivals. There is a strong economic factor behind the Turkish desire of improving relations with Moscow. Russia is one of the most important trade partners of Turkey, coming second after Germany and the biggest gas provider of Turkey. Turkish business companies see Russia as a large and potentially lucrative market. In short, the mutual Turkish and Russian interests, concerns and perception of security are interwoven with each other with the possibility of clashes and confrontation. The two states need to manage these sensitive relations by being aware of mutual interests and fears.

The Place of Caucasus in Turkish Foreign Policy

There are a number of principles, on which Turkey's policies toward the Caucasus are based. Turkey stresses the importance of respecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the regional states, it supports Azerbaijan in the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh, it expresses its concerns on the possible dismemberment of Georgia and it avoids to intervene in Chechnya and other troubles in the North Caucasus. In the light of these principles, the main objective of Turkey in the region is to bolster the economic and political independence of the newly independent states in order to balance the power and influence of Russia. For this

purpose, Turkey tries to establish close contacts especially with Azerbaijan and Georgia in the military field and gets involved heavily in NATO's Partnership for Peace programmes with these two states. The Turkish military provides a substantial support with the Azeris and Georgians in forming their professional armies and training their officers, who will replace older native and ethnic Russian officers, inherited from the Soviet Union period.²⁶

In order to strengthen the independence of the countries in the Caucasus, Turkey also signs military assistance and co-operation agreements with them. One of such treaties is the one signed between Turkey and Georgia in March 1999. Georgian President Edward Shevardnadze presented the treaty as the last manifestation of Turkish-Georgian military co-operation, which he labelled as the strategic partnership. It was also stated that Turkish warplanes would use the Georgian military airfield in Marneuli, starting from March 2000. However, Shevardnadze also felt it necessary to declare after his visit to Turkey in March 1999 that the strategic partnership between Turkey and Georgia was not directed to any third country and that the establishment of Turkish military bases on the Georgian territory was out of question.²⁷ Turkey also announced in May 1997 a Declaration on Deepened Strategic Co-operation with Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan President Haydar Aliyev called for a strategic partnership in the winter of 2001. But it was clear that such a partnership would have to await the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia.²⁸

Turkish rulers attribute importance to supporting Azerbaijan, which is one of the most crucial states of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline project and which have close ethnic and cultural ties with Turkey, in international events, especially in its disputes with Armenia. The Turkish Foreign Ministry lobbies constantly in the UN and the Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to obtain statements and resolutions condemning the Armenian occupation of the Azerbaijani territory. However, Turkish efforts bear no substantial fruits because the Minsk Group, which was established to deal with the Azeri-Armenian dispute, is

under the control of American, Russian and French co-chairmen and Turkey has little opportunity to influence and direct the Group's activities. Establishing a blockade around Armenia does not seem to be an effective tool for Turkey to pressurise the Armenians for ending their occupation because its Western allies do not like such a Turkish action. The only choice available for Turkish authorities is to deny the Armenians to have full diplomatic relations with Turkey, indirectly creating problems for Armenia, until the Azeris and Armenians have made significant progress towards resolving their dispute.²⁹

Turkey also backs Azerbaijan in its problems with Iran, mainly in the dispute regarding the division of the Caspian resources among the littoral countries. When Iranian warships opened fire and drove back a joint Azeri-British Petroleum survey vessel in the waters, which was claimed by the Iranians as their territorial water, in the summer of 2001, Turkey extended its support to the Azeri government in the dispute. Ankara condemned the Iranian action and responded to it by conducting a military show of its jets in the skies over Baku and the vicinity.³⁰ It was natural from the Turkish point of view to take the side of their ethnic brothers against the main rival in the region with its anti-secularist and anti-Azeri policies, namely Iran. But the main concern of Turkish leaders was the future of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline project since some of the oil to feed the pipeline was to come from the Azerbaijan-claimed Araz-Alov-Shargh oil field.³¹

Although Turkey provides assistance to Azerbaijan and Georgia in the military field to strengthen their power in resisting internal and external threats, it does not want to be fully committed to their defence. The reason for this Turkish attitude is that such a commitment might cause an armed confrontation with Russia in the longer term. Particularly the Turkish military and the Turkish foreign ministry prefer to operate within the parameters of NATO's interests and concerns while co-operating militarily with the states in the South Caucasus. NATO, too, is sensitive to Russian security concerns in this region and tends to develop its

interests there cautiously and in an incremental manner. NATO's way of expanding its links with Azerbaijan and Georgia is to materialise it by expanding its Peace for Partnership programmes. Turkey tries to increase its influence in the region and to involve in military relations with these two states by using NATO channels. Nevertheless, Russia is still suspicious of the role of the United States and NATO in the Caucasus and this has a negative impact on Turkey's relations with Russia. On the other hand, there is a common belief that Russia will not risk a major conflict with the West by attempting to intervene in internal affairs of Georgia and Azerbaijan.³²

Turkey's cautious stance in not committing itself to the defence of the regional countries is also proved by its response to projects of the GUUAM group, established by the states in the region (the abbreviation represents the first letters of the member states). Within the framework of this group, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine considered forming a joint battalion of troops, whose primary mission would be to guard pipelines running across the South Caucasus. American strategist Brezinski proposed that GUUAM should be expanded to include Romania, Poland, Turkey and even Romania. But it seems that Turkey is unwilling to have formal links with the GUUAM grouping as a part of its policy of avoiding binding defence commitments in the Caucasus. Turkey is of the same opinion with its NATO allies in that polarising the Caucasus into opposing armed camps through such groupings will not be in their interests.³³

In spite of the fear of Russian influence or hegemony, Turkish authorities seem not willing to choose confrontation with Russia. They want to prevent the increase of Russian influence by working together with international organisations and by including Russia in initiatives of regional co-operation, which they have sponsored. One of such acts is the joint Turkish-Georgian initiative of establishing a South Caucasian Stability Pact with the possible participation of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey, Georgia, Russia, the United States, the

European Union and the OSCE. In addition to increasing Turkey's influence in the region and involving the West as an actor in regional affairs, one of the main motives of Turkish authorities in launching this initiative is to persuade the Russians to see the region as an area of international collaboration rather than its backyard.³⁴ Turkish officials also believe that international support for this proposal of pact will help to prevent the polarisation of the Caucasus.

Turkey also avoids clashing with Russia on the Chechen dispute. Turkish authorities declare that they respect the territorial integrity of Russia and that they appreciate Moscow's security concerns in the North Caucasus though they have doubts about the danger of spillover or spread of the Chechen conflict to the south. Turkey has a considerable number of citizens, who have Chechen origin and who pressurise the government through various channels to give support to the Chechens of Russia, and Turkish nationalist and religious circles direct heavy criticism to the government on the Chechen issue. However, the Turkish government generally follows the international community and limits itself to issuing strongly worded statements condemning the use of violence against innocent civilians in Chechnya. It is ironic that Bülent Ecevit, the prime minister of the coalition government including the nationalists, signed a protocol on co-operation against terrorism during his visit to Moscow in November 1999 at the height of the conflict.³⁵

The Importance of Energy Issues for Turkish Foreign Policy

In the post-Cold War period, the security of energy resources, especially those in the Persian Gulf area, the Caucasus and Central Asia has paramount importance. The fact that the first armed conflict of this era was initiated for the sake of energy resources (the Gulf War) supports this conclusion. Energy politics have also a great place in Turkish foreign policy in the meaning that Turkish authorities have tied Turkey's future effective position in global politics to its role in the transportation of energy resources in critical regions. In this

issue, Turkey needs the support of the Western countries, especially the USA. On the other hand, the United States and the EU need to establish an effective alliance with Turkey for the purpose of ensuring the security of energy resources in the Persian Gulf area and the Caspian basin.

The rich energy resources of the Central Asia attracted the major powers to the region and caused the emergence of a stiff and comprehensive competition among them. At the beginning, Turkey wanted all pipelines carrying oil pass through its territories because only in this way it could become one of the most important countries of the world, on which the other states were dependent. However, with the intervention of the United States, Turkey accepted that oil could be transferred through multiple pipelines, meaning that some other states such as Russia, too, could get benefit from the transportation of oil.³⁶ In the eyes of Turkish rulers, “the project tabled by Turkey to transport oil from the vast reserves of the Caspian basin through a main pipeline from Baku to Ceyhan will have significant consequences for the prosperity of the entire region... Turkey offers a viable, reliable, rentable, technologically and environmentally most feasible and safe option.”³⁷ The transportation of oil through Russia meant that the tanker traffic in the Turkish Straits would increase greatly. Turkey could not accept the possibility of an environmental calamity in the Straits. If Russia insisted on transporting oil through the Turkish Straits, this might cause a serious rift in Russo-Turkish relations.

The most important thing which Turkish rulers stressed on the transportation of Central Asian oil was to make Turkey an important energy terminal.³⁸ If the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline was materialised, the West would be dependent on Turkey in getting oil and this would institutionalise Turkey’s importance for the West.³⁹ Turkey obtained the support of some regional states such as Azerbaijan for this project. However, the major powers of the world, including oil companies, had more voice in taking the final decision. Therefore,

Turkish rulers attributed great importance to the support of the United States in this matter. With the increase in activities of US oil companies in the region, the Americans showed more interest in the region. But they acted carefully and dwelled upon the transportation of oil through multiple pipelines not to alienate the Russians totally.⁴⁰ After Turkish rulers changed their approach in this direction, now the United States and Turkey agrees on that the Azeri oil should be saved from the monopoly of Russia.

For strategic reasons, Turkey, the EU and the USA need to make efforts for the realisation of the Baku-Tibilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline project, which will carry the Caspian basin oil to the Turkish port in the coast of the Mediterranean through Azerbaijan and Georgia. They should remove the attractiveness of the other projects, which are economically, not strategically, less costly. The co-operation in this issue can be the first step in the finalisation of the content of Turkey-the USA-the EU, alliance established in practice for the security of energy resources. It is an undeniable fact that Turkey is an important actor having influence in issues involving energy security and that the Western countries cannot ignore Turkey and its surrounding region, crucially important for their strategic interests. Turkey has an ideal position to play a role in guaranteeing the security of energy resources in the Persian Gulf and the Caspian basin. The United States, which plays the leading role in energy security as proved by the Gulf War, will inevitably request from the EU countries and Turkey, which are more dependent on oil and natural gas of the region, to share the burden.⁴¹

The construction of the BTC pipeline and associated gas route will create alternatives to Middle Eastern energy sources and will help Azerbaijan and Georgia to strengthen their power in resisting foreign and extremist exploitation.⁴² It will also boost the economies of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, will reduce the economic and political dependence of these states on Russia and will provide great help in meeting Turkey's energy needs. Turkish authorities hope that Turkey, which will be an energy terminal for the

processing and transportation of oil and gas to world markets, will be a pivotal state or a leading geo-strategic player. Its stature will be enhanced in the region and will become a world-class state situated on strategic crossroads.⁴³ It is also expected that the Western countries will become influential in such a strategic region with the help of Turkey. This will also boost the Western hegemony in the world by breaking the Western dependence on the Middle Eastern oil and gas.

Although the strategic importance of the BTC project is obvious, it has met serious difficulties and menaces such as the opposition of business corporations and the reluctance of the Western states in realising it. Nevertheless, the package agreements stipulating to give a start to projects was signed by the related states with the participation of the US representative on 18 November 1999 during the OSCE summit in Istanbul. As the next step, the sides completed the legal infrastructure of the BTC project by signing the treaty of forming the sponsor group, which would undertake financial responsibilities of the project, on 3 October 2000.⁴⁴

In Finn's words, "the most important development on the political-economic front resulting from the September 11 attacks is a renewed effort toward the implementation of plans to actualise the Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline."⁴⁵ The United States, which has come to considering the terrorism, especially the one stemmed from religious fundamentalism, as the most important threat, attributes more importance to its strategic projects regarding critical regions, boosting terrorism. One of these vital projects is the construction of the BTC pipeline. This change in American priorities also affected Russian rulers and led them to announce that their largest oil company (Lukoil) would like to participate in the construction of the BTC pipeline project. It will be useful to quote the analysis of Olson in this context:

Moscow perceived America's war on terrorism as an opportune time to be more co-operative on the construction of the BTC and on a variety of policies that the pipeline affects with regard to Russia-Israel, Russia-Turkey, Turkey-Israel and Turkey's relations with the American Jewish community. In the wake of

September 11, if the United States and the West chooses to lessen their dependency on the oil resources of Saudi Arabia and increase supplies from the Caspian basin..., this will strengthen US relations with Turkey... and impel Russia to be more co-operative, Moscow's participation in the construction of the BTC will be an indication of its co-operation and its understanding of potential strategic shifts in the wake of September 11.⁴⁶

The recent developments such as the completion of feasibility works on the Turkish territory through which the pipeline will pass and laying the first foundation stone of the project (with the participation of the presidents of Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan on 18 September 2002) are encouraging for the BTC project.

Another issue concerning Turkey's energy security and its foreign policy vision together with its relations with Western countries is the construction of pipelines, which will carry the Russian, Kazakh, Turkmen and Azeri gas to Turkey. In this issue, the Blue Stream project, which will transport the Russian gas to Turkey, the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline (TCP) from Turkmenistan and a new line from Azerbaijan compete with each other to get to the Turkish market first. With the interesting similarities to the great game of the early 20th century in the region, this competition has become a part of the strategic great game over the future of the region.⁴⁷ In this competition, from the start, the United States supported the Turkmenistan-Turkey pipeline (TCP) project because it would bypass Russia and Iran, potential rivals and enemies of the American interests in the region. The American administration was opposed to Turkey importing gas along a pipeline from Iran and encouraged the Turkish government to give priority to the TCP project. The problem was that Turkish authorities did not always pursue a consistent policy toward this issue and their intentions and activities were not always discernible.

A number of state ministries and agencies, private domestic and foreign business groups and the administrations of some other states were involved in decision-making in determining main gas pipelines and it seemed that a harsh rivalry was going on within and among certain state institutions and bodies. For example, the gas institution of the state,

BOTAŞ, was opposed to making Turkey highly dependent on Russia for its gas needs. It was estimated that over the next decade Russian gas would comprise 70-75 percent of Turkey's domestic consumption with the completion of the Blue Stream project. The Turkish Foreign Ministry and the Turkish military, too, favoured in the US-supported TCP project for political and strategic reasons.⁴⁸

The argument in favour of the Blue Stream was that Russia and Turkey were two giant neighbours who would gain from co-operation rather than regional rivalry. "The existence of a 'Russian party' composed of oil and gas executives, construction conglomerates and tradesmen, purported to include high-ranking politicians like Mesut Yılmaz [the leader of the Motherland Party]"⁴⁹ was the most important chance of the Blue Stream. The Russian lobby, the Turkish Energy Ministry and leading members of the Motherland Party were in favour of the Blue Stream for various commercial and economic reasons. Meanwhile, Moscow's hand was powerful because of its control over Turkmenistan's northern gas pipeline passing through Russia. At the end, with Turkey giving priority to the Blue Stream, the TCP project had almost lost its viability by the end of 2000, causing tension in Turkish-Turkmenistan relations. With the removal of the possibility of selling gas to Turkey in large amounts, Turkmenistan was compelled to sign a treaty with Russia on selling gas to this country as a certification of its further dependence on the Russian power.⁵⁰

While the Blue Stream has progressed rapidly and the TCP have faced uncertainties, American policy priorities have seemed to be "shifting from Turkmen gas to Azeri gas in order to keep the gas portion of the Eurasian energy corridor alive".⁵¹ The Turkish Foreign Ministry and the Turkish military, too, have begun to hope that significant amount of Azerbaijani gas will soon reach the Turkish market in order to avoid excessive dependence on Russia. American President George Bush's statement, issued on the inauguration of the CPC project, which will carry oil from the Kazakhstan and Caspian oil fields via pipelines to

various locations in Russia including port on the Black Sea, shows the American flexibility on the issue and stresses the importance of the Turkish routes as well. He said: “the prospect of the consortium [CPC] promotes the realisation of a new national energy strategy elaborated by this administration, which stipulated the diversification of oil deliveries to the USA and the construction of a network of Caspian oil pipelines along the routes as Baku-Tibilisi-Ceyhan, a Turkish port on the coast of the Iskenderun Strait of the Mediterranean, Baku-Georgia, Georgian port of Supsa on the Black Sea, Baku-Novrossiysk, as well as a gas pipeline, Baku-Tibilisi-Erzurum in eastern Turkey.”⁵²

Turkey’s Role in Central Asia

The importance which Turkish rulers attribute to having close relations with the Central Asian countries can be understood clearly from the fact that Turkey was the first country which recognised the independence of these states. Pointing to this fact, Turkish leaders state that Turkey can share its experiences in democracy and economic development with the Central Asian states and might constitute a perfect democratic, secular and free enterprise model for them.⁵³ As Prime Minister Demirel did in 1992, some Turkish politicians spoke of a large unified Turkic world, covering the area extending from the Chinese Wall to the Adriatic. Turkish nationalists thought that a political and economic unity could be established among Turkic states under the leadership of Turkey even if a tight political organisation could not be formed. Under pressures coming from different sides, it was expected that Turkey might pursue brave multi-dimensional economic, political, cultural and security policies in the Central Asia, departing from its traditional line. The victory of pro-Turkey Elçi Bey in Azerbaijan was one of the most important successes of Turkish diplomacy in the region in those years.⁵⁴

However, it became clear in a short time that Turkey would face many problems in the Central Asian context. Turkish efforts of inserting their models in the region implied a big

brother attitude, which was hurting for the regional states. Turkish rulers realised soon that the Central Asian states were unstable and demanded much more military and economic aid than that Turkey could provide. Although they seemed very close to Ankara, they could turn to Moscow easily in vital economic, political and security issues. The idea of establishing a strong Turkic union was not a viable alternative because Turkey had not enough resources to play the central role in bringing the Central Asian states together.⁵⁵ Moreover, these states did not want to become a second-class member of a union established under the leadership of Turkey. But what they preferred was to form a loose grouping, which would hold summit meetings occasionally.

From the perspective of the Central Asian states, the friendship with Turkey had more importance in strengthening their ties with the West. In other words, Turkey could serve as an agent helping these states in obtaining the capital, technology and friendship of the West. Having the same ethnic origin could not be the base of regional policies. Joint declarations, which were full of promises, were issued at the end of the summit meetings of the Turkic states, but these summits did not prove to be effective in establishing a complete co-operation in all areas. Turkey could be used as a channel to reach Western capital and principles, but if Turkey acted as a big brother, it could have alienated them in the most dramatic way.⁵⁶

Turkey's active policies at the beginning also worried some states, interested in the region. Russia's extending its nuclear umbrella to some states of the region could be interpreted as a veiled warning to Turkey, trying to dissuade it from involving itself in the region.⁵⁷ As Turkey increased its initiatives in the region, Russia and Iran became more formidable rivals for Turkey and they began to take measures against Turkish efforts. Russia made special arrangements with the regional states and even resorted to military intervention when it felt necessary. Turkish rulers were quick to realise that they should act carefully not to clash with Russian interests. Therefore, they avoided giving support to Muslim and Turkic

groups inside Russia and they declared frequently that they respected Russia's territorial integrity.⁵⁸

As Turkey now shows its interest in the Central Asian states by taking the lead in the summit meetings of the Turkic states, it also hopes to tighten its ties with the regional states in the long-term by joining economic projects and encouraging its private companies' activities in these countries. It will be a rationalist policy for Turkey to help the Central Asian states in various ways to reduce their dependence on Russia.⁵⁹ The Turkish actions of deepening its economic relations with the Central Asian republics and launching large-scale investments in these countries will contribute to their efforts of standing on their own foot. Moreover, if Turkey plays an active role in the initiatives of regional co-operation, especially in those, which are related to Turkish interests, this will strengthen the regional solidarity and will serve the Turkish interests ultimately. Besides, Turkey's cultural and educational initiatives directed to the regional states might contribute to the improvement of multilateral relations. Turkey recently gives the impression that it has lost its interest in arranging summit meetings between the Turkic states. This might be a result of that Turkey has focused its attention on relations with the United States and the Western Europe, but it is clear that this kind of attitude deprives Turkey of an important foreign policy tool. On the other hand, Turkey's leading role in helping the regional states to participate to the Partnership for Peace project of NATO increases Turkey's prestige in their eyes and serves the regional peace.⁶⁰

From the Turkish perspective, having close relations with the Central Asian states is valuable not only because it will enable Turkey to pursue more independent and dynamic foreign policy, but more importantly because it will increase Turkey's strategic importance in the eyes of the Americans and the Europeans. In order to ensure the Western interest in Turkey, Turkish authorities emphasise that they can help the Western initiatives in this region, which will affect the future of the world. They also point out that Turkey can undertake the

leadership role in tying the Central Asia to the West through technical, economic and financial aids.⁶¹ In this way, they want to stress the fact that Turkey is an indispensable ally of the West, constituting a strategic bridge between the East and the West. In this sense, Turkey's relations with the Central Asian countries are not alternatives to Turkey's ties with the West, but they could be seen as the means for strengthening these ties.⁶²

Conclusion

Turkey faces a world whose rules and functioning are more uncertain in the post-Cold War period. The economic losses which are endured for the sake of the partnership with the USA and the restrictions imposed on Turkish foreign policy by this alliance demonstrate that the close relations with this state is not sufficient for the protection of Turkish interests. In addition, Turkey's relations with the European Union have always become problematic and the prospect of Turkey's full membership in the EU is still not bright. Turkey has to diversify its foreign policy partners in a world, in which relations among the states have become more complicated and interdependent. While it preserves its traditional ties with the West, it does not have to undertake the heavy burden of being dependent on only one state or camp. Turkey's position at the edge of the Western world, with some cultural and political differences, requires it to maintain a separate identity with a definable role in Central Asia and the Middle East. Playing a determining role at the heart of Eurasia is one of the basic goals of Turkish foreign policy.

It is clear that having problem-free relations with the Eurasian countries is not so simple. Apart from the difficulties which stem from the domestic structures of the regional states, Turkey experience problems with the countries, with which it competes in various issues concerning the region. The abundance of the factors related to the region and the number of actors, which have interest in the region, complicates the matters. The failure of Turkey's bold initiatives at the beginning and the disappointment felt by the Turkish

authorities on the consequences of their actions underline this difficulty. The important thing is to formulate realist long-term policies by evaluating the realities of the region correctly and by taking into consideration the demands, needs and sensitivities of the regional states. It is also a necessity to keep the relations with the rival states, which are influential in the region, in normal channels. Turkey gives sometimes the impression that it ignores Russia, Caucasus and the Central Asia while it is busy with other foreign policy issues and domestic problems. Such an attitude will not be advantageous for Turkey. As a country, which is close to the region and which has historical and cultural ties with the regional states and people, Turkey has to struggle to become one of the most influential powers in the region.

* Lecturer, The University of Kırıkkale, Department of International Relations, The Faculty of Political and Administrative Sciences

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