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SİYASET BİLİMİ VE ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER ANABİLİM DALI**



**TURKISH RUSSIAN RELATIONS 1600-2024**

**An Analysis Based on Expert Opinions & Perceptions**

**Mohamad NASANI**

**YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ**

**GAZİANTEP - 2025**



## LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ KABUL VE ONAY FORMU

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**ÖZET**

Bu araştırma, Türk-Rus ilişkilerini 1600 ile 2024 yılları arasında etkileyen tarihî, jeopolitik, güvenlik, ideolojik, ekonomik ve çağdaş faktörler bağlamında uzman görüşlerine dayanarak eleştirel bir şekilde analiz etmektedir. Nicel bir araştırma yöntemi kapsamında, Türk-Rus ilişkileriyle doğrudan ya da dolaylı temas hâlinde olan medya mensupları, siyasi analistler ve uzmanlardan oluşan 88 katılımcıyla yapılandırılmış bir anket uygulanmıştır. Anket yoluyla toplanan veriler, politika oluşturma sürecini ve ikili ilişkileri etkileyen temel belirleyicileri ortaya koymak amacıyla kullanılmıştır. Elde edilen bulgular, ilişkilerin en önemli itici güçleri olarak jeopolitik ve ulusal güvenlik kaygılarının öne çıktığını; bunu ticaret ve enerji sektörlerindeki ekonomik karşılıklı bağımlılığın izlediğini göstermektedir. Tarihsel miraslar ile milliyetçilik ve din gibi ideolojik eğilimler ise orta düzeyde etkili faktörler olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Analiz ayrıca, algıların katılımcıların milliyeti, akademik geçmişi ve kültürel birikimi doğrultusunda şekillendiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Araştırma, bulgularını yerleştirirken realizm, liberalizm ve inşacılık gibi kuramsal paradigmaları referans alsa da, esas odak uzmanların algılarını haritalandırmak ve incelemek üzerinedir. Çalışma, gerçekçi diplomasi, ekonomik iş birliği ve stratejik denge yoluyla iş birliğini artırmaya yönelik uygulayıcılara yönelik öneriler sunarak bu karmaşık ve dinamik ikili ilişkiye dair anlayışı derinleştirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Son olarak, öneriler ve pratik sonuçlar arasında güven artırıcı önlemlerin geliştirilmesi, ekonomik iş birliğinin güçlendirilmesi ve kültürel ile akademik düzeyde karşılıklı değişimlerin teşvik edilmesi yer almaktadır. Bu öneriler, Türk-Rus ilişkilerinin daha sağlam temeller üzerinde ilerlemesine katkı sağlamayı hedeflemektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türk-Rus ilişkileri, uzman algıları, jeopolitik faktörler, ulusal güvenlik, ekonomik karşılıklı bağımlılık

**HASAN KALYONCU UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE EDUCATION INSTITUTE  
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL  
RELATIONS**

**TURKISH RUSSIAN RELATIONS 1600-2024  
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**Mohamad NASANI**

**MASTER THESIS**

**Advisor  
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**ABSTRACT**

The research critically analyzes Turkish-Russian relations between 1600 and 2024 on the basis of expert views regarding historical, geopolitical, security, ideological, economic, and contemporary factors influencing the bilateral relationship. A quantitative research method involved a structured survey of 88 respondents, including media professionals, political analysts, and specialists with either direct or indirect exposure to Turkish-Russian relations. The data collected through the survey were used to identify key determinants influencing policy formation and bilateral relations. The findings indicate that geopolitical and national security concerns are perceived as major drivers of the relationship, followed by economic interdependence in trade and energy sectors. Historical legacies, and also ideological trends such as nationalism and religion, are perceived to be moderate drivers. The analysis also reveals that the perceptions are shaped by respondents' nationality, academic background, and cultural exposure. Although the study references theoretical paradigms like realism, liberalism, and constructivism in placing the findings, the focus is primarily on mapping and examining perceptions from experts. The study ends by offering practitioner suggestions for enhancing cooperative endeavors through realistic diplomacy, economic engagement, and strategic balance, thereby furthering the understanding of this complex and dynamic bilateral relationship. The recommendations and practical implications include the development of confidence-building measures, strengthening cooperative economic activities, and promoting exchanges on the cultural and academic levels for strengthening bilateral relations.

**Keywords:** Turkish-Russian relations, expert perceptions, geopolitical factors, national security, economic interdependence

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>Bayraktar TB2</b>	Turkish Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicle
<b>BSEC</b>	Black Sea Economic Cooperation
<b>CAATSA</b>	Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act
<b>CSTO</b>	Collective Security Treaty Organization
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FSA</b>	Free Syrian Army
<b>F-35</b>	F-35 Fighter Jet
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GNA</b>	Government of National Accord (Libya)
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>LNG</b>	Liquefied Natural Gas
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
<b>PKK</b>	Kurdistan Workers’ Party
<b>S-400</b>	Russian S-400 Missile Defense System
<b>SDF</b>	Syrian Democratic Forces
<b>Su-24</b>	Russian Sukhoi Su-24 Attack Aircraft
<b>TANAP</b>	Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline
<b>TIKA</b>	Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>USSR</b>	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization
<b>YPG</b>	People's Protection Units (Kurdish Militia)

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Background

This complex, ever-evolving relationship between Turkey and Russia is the result of historical "geopolitical wars" between the Ottoman and Russian empires. As a matter of fact, these ties have deep roots in history because they reflect the long and complex centuries of political and territorial fights. This very legacy of competition is the background of all their interactions-usually periods of cooperation and conflicts that underline how complex Turkish-Russian relations really are (Hale, 2023).

Turkey holds a vital geopolitical location at the meeting point of Europe and Asia. Its land borders with eight nations-Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Greece, and Bulgaria-have historically been a source of contention and strife, which further complicates its foreign policy (Açar & Yalçınkaya, 2023). Indeed, with its natural resources, strategic geography, and regional influence, Turkey today is considered, by all means of the word, an influential regional and international interlocutor (Balta, 2019; Ersen & Köstem, 2020). Russia too has undertaken continuous efforts throughout the Empire era, the Soviet Union era, and finally that of the Russian Federation to establish its dominance and influence across Eurasia (Figes, 2010; Sakwa, 2017).

Traditionally, Turkish-Russian relations were shaped by strategic imperatives and historical challenges. Although there was a lot of cultural and commercial contact in the early years, political ties were few. The Soviet Union's collapse in 1991 significantly changed Turkey's future geopolitical plans and initiatives (Derman, 2021). Significant losses and a reassessment of policy followed Turkey's original exclusion of Russia from its strategy for Central Asia and the Caucasus. Thus, this acknowledgment marked the beginning of a shift toward a more cautious and well-rounded approach to Russia, particularly under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's direction. (Özbay, 2011; Keser, 2016).

Despite their greatest attempts at collaboration, their relationship is nonetheless shaped by past distrust. In order to preserve its strategic depth and avoid

overemphasizing issues, Turkey has carefully considered and balanced its relations with Russia. However, Russia is now a rising energy giant instead of a crumbling military force. Turkish-Russian ties are at the forefront of geopolitical tensions in areas such as the Middle East, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia due to this dynamic interplay between rivalry and cooperation (Köremezli, 2021).

The delicate balance between collaboration and conflict in Turkish-Russian ties is anchored by major flashpoints, including the current crisis in Ukraine, the Syrian Civil War, and energy politics. While regional issues have blown over into tensions, avenues of pragmatic collaboration within a framework of economic interdependence have also been found between the two nations. Such arenas include trade agreements and energy partnerships, illustrative of mutual benefits even as geopolitical disputes are sustained (Demir & Yılmaz, 2020).

Against the background of the evolution of this relationship, in the current research focus is shifted toward the views of professionals and analysts with direct or indirect experience dealing with Turkish-Russian relations. From what they make of key historic, geopolitical, security, ideological, economic, and current topics, this work attempts to demonstrate how professional witnesses interpret the inherent driving forces driving past, present, and future bilateral relations.

In an attempt to put the complex dynamics of the relationship between Turkey and Russia into perspective, the study examines how historical legacies, contemporary geopolitical concerns, and shared economic interests create the framework within which it has been framed. It also demonstrates that there have been significant efforts to redefine their connections by resolving long-standing grudges and turning divisive topics into chances for cooperation. The present study has tried to trace the development of the Turkish-Russian relationship through that lens to ascertain consequences for regional and global stability.

## **1.2. Problem Statement**

Turkey and Russia share a complex and long history that summarizes centuries of cooperation and conflict. Their relationship has continuously fluctuated between

pragmatic alliance and strategic rivalry, fueled by wars, treaties, and changing regional dynamics. Although research on these historical and current relations has been conducted, there is scant literature that brings the opinions of specialists together to examine how previous experiences, current conflicts, and economic interdependence all intersect to decide the bilateral relationship in the current and future (Çelikpala, 2019; Hale, 2023).

The enduring legacy of Ottoman-Russian confrontations and Cold War hostility continues to influence the expectations that both nations have regarding each other's purposes. In spite of effective diplomatic and economic engagement between Turkey and Russia, the alliance remains uneasy, often taut with outstanding tensions and alternative strategic interests. According to Hale (2023), the relationship continues to serve as a balancing act that remains warily weighted between underlying distrust and designed cooperation.

However, the application of the three main theories of international relations-constructivism, liberalism, and realism-to Turkish-Russian ties makes it even more complicated. Although they both provide insightful information, they fall short of capturing the complexity of the two-way connection. Constructivism explains the labor of historical identity and narrative; liberalism focuses on economic interdependence and institutional cooperation; and realism focuses on security and power politics (Köstem, 2015). However, no one theory can fully explain the reasons behind Turkish-Russian interaction; instead, a pluralistic approach based on all three is required.

Additionally, new geopolitical realities have added new dimensions to this complex relationship. How Turkey and Russia respond to war while retaining cooperation has become even more urgent in light of the Syrian Civil War, the changing nature of the conflict in Ukraine, and increasingly acrimonious disputes over regional security and military alliances. Traditional paradigms are being challenged by these recent occurrences, necessitating an investigation into the perspectives of the specialists seeing these events in real time.

This study accomplishes just that by combining theoretical analysis, historical reflection, and most importantly, expert perceptions. Through a methodical examination

of the six broad areas-historical legacies, geopolitical interests, national security, ideological currents, economic relations, and existing conflicts-this study gives a clearer and more nuanced perspective on how Turkish-Russian relations have evolved and where they are headed.

### 1.3. Research Questions

Main Research Question:

*“How do expert perceptions reflect the impact of historical legacies, geopolitical factors, national security concerns, ideological movements, contemporary conflicts, and economic interactions on Turkish-Russian relations between 1600 and 2024?”*

Sub-Questions:

- 1. How do expert perceptions reflect the impact of historical legacies, including major conflicts and treaties, on current Turkish-Russian diplomatic and strategic relations?**

This question examines how professionals interpret the continued significance of previous conflicts, Cold War politics, and Ottoman era treaties in setting present-day bilateral relations between Russia and Turkey.

- 2. What geopolitical and territorial factors impact expert perspectives on Turkish-Russian relations?**

The main geopolitical and territorial factors-such as geographic closeness, regional rivalry, and disputed borders-that experts feel are influencing the two nations' strategic relationship are listed in this sub-question.

- 3. What role do national security interests and military alliances play in shaping expert assessments of Turkish-Russian relations?**

This addresses the way in which defense cooperation, NATO membership, and regional security organizations are viewed by analysts as determinants of bilateral trust or suspicion.

**4. How do expert perceptions interpret the impact of ideological movements- such as nationalism and religious identity- on Turkish-Russian foreign policy behavior?**

This sub-question discusses the extent to which ideological worldviews drive diplomatic practice and bilateral discourse on the basis of experts' views.

**5. What are the perceived effects of contemporary geopolitical conflicts-such as the Syrian and Ukrainian wars-on Turkish-Russian relations?**

This question evaluates the way in which current regional crises are believed to be reshaping Russia-Turkey diplomatic, military, and strategic relations.

**6. How do expert views assess the impact of economic interactions, including trade, energy dependency, tourism, and infrastructure, on bilateral relations?**

This sub-question analyzes the liberalist dimension, assessing whether experts view economic cooperation as a buffer from political and military tensions.

#### **1.4. Aim of the Study**

This study endeavours to analyze critically how historical legacies, geopolitical alignment, national security concerns, ideational variables, prevailing conflicts, and economic dealings influenced Turkish-Russian relations from the year 1600 to the year 2024 in experts' perceptions. This study adopts the theoretical paradigms of realism, liberalism, and constructivism to conceptualise the dynamics of the multifaceted nature of this complex bilateral relationship changing over time.

The main objective is to discover how past treaties, wars, and historical contacts impact the way contemporary diplomatic and strategic decisions are made by experts today. Beyond history, the analysis also looks at how economic cooperations such as energy reliance, trade, and joint infrastructure works are considered factors of stabilizers or destabilizers in Turkish-Russian relations.

With the recent inclusion of geopolitical tensions, such as the Syrian and Ukrainian conflicts, this study contributes to shedding light on how those developments influenced foreign policy decision-making and intra-regional coordination. Furthermore, the study explores the ideational narratives, whether nationalist or religious, and the way such narratives are viewed as facilitative or a hindrance to cooperation among the two nations.

Using a systematic quantitative survey of experts, analysts, and professionals with direct experience, this study offers the voices of individuals directly or indirectly engaged with Turkish-Russian affairs. The goal is not just to map patterns of perception but also to offer practical suggestions for trust-building and long-term cooperation.

Lastly, this endeavor seeks to offer policymakers, researchers, and diplomats with evidence-based understandings of how thoughtful experts' perspectives can shape future strategic decisions and foster mutual understanding between Ankara and Moscow.

### **1.5. Research Objectives**

1. To explore the perceptions and views of experts and professionals with academic, policy, or personal connections to Turkish-Russian relations on six leading determinatives: history, geopolitics, security, ideology, modern conflicts, and economics.
2. In order to navigate the complexities and nuances of Turkish-Russian relations through a systematic quantitative analysis, based on information collected from a web-based survey.
3. To examine the information gathered, determine key trends and divergences by nationality, expertise, and cultural exposure, and provide constructive recommendations for enhancing mutual cooperation and addressing existing challenges in Turkish-Russian relations.

## **1.6. Research Hypothesis**

- Experts perceive that previous wars and treaties continue to influence Turkish-Russian economic and diplomatic relations, though in a different manner in accordance with national narratives and professional experience.
- Realism, constructivism, and liberalism are the three traditional theories of international relations are useful but in themselves inadequate explanations of the evolving and complex dynamics of Turkish-Russian relations.
- Contemporary geopolitical competitions, such as the Syrian and Ukrainian wars, are seen by analysts as having a fundamental influence on both countries' regional behavior and strategic interests.
- Economic interdependence, particularly in trade and energy, is viewed by respondents both as a foundation for cooperation and as a source of strategic leverage, depending on the situation.
- Building Turkish-Russian trust and collaboration requires closing unfinished historical disputes, managing contemporary geopolitical rivalries, and focusing on perceived zones of shared interest by academics and practitioners.

## **1.7. Significance of the Study**

This study is particularly worthwhile in managing to link long-term historical analysis and contemporary geopolitical reality, offering fresh perspective on how Turkish-Russian relations are perceived by specialists. While most of the literature is focused on specific time periods or individual events, this study encompasses a large time span-from the 17th century until 2024-while also drawing on specialist opinion on contemporary developments such as contemporary wars, energy interdependencies, and strategic alliances.

Why is this study particularly significant is the emphasis on professionals', academics', and those directly or indirectly involved in Turkish-Russian affairs perceiving how historical legacies, ideological currents, and national security issues are differently conceived based on background, nationality, and exposure. The result offers

a more practical and people-oriented picture of how bilateral relations are perceived in policy and scholarly communities.

The study also has policy relevance in the sense that it indicates where trust and cooperation can be enhanced. It suggests solutions such as reducing strategic risks, deepening energy cooperation, promoting regional dialogue, and building common infrastructure. These are not founded on theoretical reasoning, but are formulated from empirical responses grounded on real perceptions gathered from empirical research.

Additionally, this research adds to our knowledge at a wider level of how the bilateral relations between two leading regional powers-Turkey and Russia-can lead to regional as well as global stability. Both nations play significant roles on the Eurasian board and shape the processes from the Eastern Mediterranean to Central Asia. Understanding greater geopolitical trends, it is essential to know how their bilateral relations are perceived.

Finally, this study promotes theoretical pluralism as it uses realism, liberalism, and constructivism not as competing prisms but as complementary theories. This multilateralism strengthens the analysis and offers a template that other researchers can utilize in studying other complex international relationships. It demonstrates how many theoretical instruments might be combined to help separate the complex realities of international politics.

## **1.8. Organization of Thesis**

This thesis consists of five chapters representing a distinctive but coherent analysis of Turkish-Russian relations between 1600 and 2024. The structure allows for a cumulative flow from conceptual and historical context towards empirical facts, theoretical understanding, and policy recommendations.

1. Chapter 1: Introduction:

This chapter gives a general overview of the research that includes background, problem statement, research questions, aims and objectives, research hypotheses, significance, and general structure of the thesis.

2. Chapter 2: Literature Review & Historical Framework:

This chapter reviews current academic literature regarding Turkish-Russian relations. The theoretical paradigms of realism, constructivism, and liberalism are outlined, previous studies are highlighted, and gaps that the current research seeks to address are identified.

It also covers five general phases of Turkish-Russian relations: the Ottoman-Russian period, early Republican and Soviet relations, Cold War politics, post-Cold War realignments, and recent events between 2011–2024. In addition, it looks into the deeper drivers of the bilateral relation, with special reference to geography, national security interests, and ideational factors driving foreign policy.

Moreover, this chapter considers current geopolitical concerns like the war in Syria, war in Ukraine, politics of energy, Black Sea tensions, enlargement of NATO, and the problem of Cyprus. Furthermore, the chapter addresses economic cooperation in trade, energy dependence, tourism, and infrastructure projects, noting how economic interests sustain the relationship regardless of political tension.

The chapter, however, re-considers historical and modern patterns of conflict and cooperation, with specific reference to geopolitical alignments between 1600 and 1878 and the evolution of Turkish foreign policy towards Russia since 1920. It also outlines possible threats and deliberates diplomatic alternatives towards building peace and cooperation between the two nations. Focusing a light on some of the hotspots such as the Syrian Civil War, the 2015 jet crisis, the military provocation at Northern Syria, and the war in Ukraine, this chapter further deliberates on Turkey's strategic defense alternatives such as the S-400 system and F-16 purchases.

3. Chapter 3: Methodology:

The chapter delineates research design, population and sampling, data collection procedures, ethical concerns, and statistical analysis used in the study.

4. Chapter 4: Results & Discussion

This chapter presents the survey outcomes of expert analysis of historical, geopolitical, ideological, security, and economic forces in Turkish-Russian relations in the first part. In the second part, the chapter critically examines the results against the theoretical frameworks and literature. It has headings on significant determinants, perceptual differences, statistical predictors, study limitations, and further study directions.

5. Chapter 5: Conclusion

The final chapter summarizes the key findings and provides practical recommendations to enhance Turkish-Russian relations. It also discusses the implications of the findings and provides avenues for further academic research.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW & HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. Theoretical Frameworks**

Using a few different theories to describe how nations act on the international scene is helpful when examining the relationship between Russia and Turkey. Geopolitics, economics, history, and culture all contribute to these two nations' intricate connection. We have to employ a variety of international relations theories, each with its unique perspective, to truly understand their interconnections (Yanık, 2019).

Three theories- realism, constructivism and liberalism help us understand state behaviour in international politics. As Turkey and Russia try to balance responsibilities in regional or international affairs, each of them has a different perspective about the “Turkic World” that brings them together. Liberalism stresses the importance on cooperation and interdependence (Kara, 2017, p. 16); Constructivism focuses on identity and historical narratives (Ulusoy, 2023); and Realism focuses on power and security as motivations (Snyder, 2002). All of these viewpoints together shed light on different aspects of Russia-Turkey relations.

Russia and Turkey’s interaction may be understood well using these theories whether it is cooperation or competition. With the help of these frameworks, we can help analyse their diplomatic strategies, foreign policies and give a more thorough examination of how their actions affected the global scene.

According to Mearsheimer (2014), realism is a fundamental theory in international relations that underscores the concept that the global system is fundamentally anarchic, with no central authority to maintain order or enforce laws. Countries are therefore forced to prioritize their own security and survival. Because states prefer to behave in their own best interests in this autonomy setting, competition or even open antagonism are common outcomes. According to this theory, every state's primary objective is to increase its security and power, sometimes at the expense of other states, which inevitably results in a world characterized by rivalry and conflict (De Buck and Hosli, 2020).

Turkey and Russia relations are based on the notion that both countries see security and strategic goals as paramount. The Realism theory exposes the reason behind their competition for regional supremacy in areas of strife like Syria and Iraq. All the countries are trying to increase their influence in these unstable regions by focusing on measures that are in their own interest (Rüma & Çelikpala, 2019; Yükselen, 2020). As an example, the Assad-government gets backed by Russia while the rebel groups get backed by Turkey. This shows how every country works towards its own geopolitical aims (Ulusoy, 2021; Erşen, 2017). This suggests that governments might meddle with domestic matters of other countries to protect their geo-political interests and sustain a positive power balance.

To understand the manner in which Russia and Turkey manage their relations and alliances, the realist concept of “balance of power” is important. Turkey conjoining with NATO and the Western world could be a result of threats from Russia. But on this front, the aims of Russia to stay as a strong power against the West and regional competitors such as Turkey does reflect in efforts to enhance impact in several post-Soviet and Middle Eastern regions (Yüce & Amour, 2021)). The purchase of the Russian S-400 missile defense system by Turkey indicates this delicate balance of power. This also shows that Turkey is trying to balance its relationship between Russia and NATO (Kibaroğlu, 2019, p.159). Furthermore, it will strengthen its military.

The relationship between Russia and Turkey is a prime illustration of the military and strategic dominance that realism emphasizes. At the absolute least, the rivalry between Russia and Turkey in Syria will intensifies, as do their strategic alliances with other superpowers, particularly the US and EU (Ekşi, 2017). Even though they collaborate in commerce and energy, they do rival each other, especially with regard to their respective regions. In the end, both nations wish to maintain their positions as global and regional leaders.

All in all, it is realism that offers the most straightforward explanation for the often-tense relations between Russia and Turkey. It shows why the two countries think it is important to secure borders, preserve a good balance of power, and achieve their goals. As each state endeavours to increase its own strength and safety within a

complicated and uncertain surrounding environment, the theory can help explain their competitive and sometimes hostile behaviours (Gümüş, 2022).

On the other hand, Constructivism emphasizes that it is the identity, common ideas and social ideas-no matter what power states that do (Gökçekuyu, 2023). According to this theory, states' actions are determined by a number of variables. For instance, there are national identity, historical narrative, social norm, military power, economic power, etc. Constructionism may also be useful, especially in explaining Turkish-Russian relations that are largely related to the concepts of identity, past experiences and culture (Ulusoy, 2023).

Additionally, the lengthy and intricate history of the Ottoman Empire and Russia shapes the two nations' ties, characterised by a long history of wars, collaboration and tense relations. The shared happenings of both nations have helped to form the shared memories of the two countries and define their perception of each other's objectives, threats and positions in the region and beyond (Faroqhi, 2004). Turkey and Russia found themselves on opposing sides during the Cold War and then had to adjust to a new international order after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Aras & Fidan, 2009; Hale, 2023). This relationship went through further changes during and after the Soviet period. The identities of both countries are shaped by this historic link in modern day times, as are their foreign policies.

Let us consider the scenario in Syria, for example. Constructivism is useful because it accounts for how Russia and Turkey's actions there reflect their own national histories and ideologies rather than merely strategic objectives. Turkey and Russia back opposing groups in the Syrian civil war because they have distinct national identities and historical memories based on their different regional goals and understandings of sovereignty and governance (Ovalı & Özdikmenli, 2020). Constructivism posits that ideas and identity matter more than materiality (Gökçekuyu, 2023). This viewpoint highlights how identity and historical memory shape choices in foreign policy.

Constructivism also makes it clear how Russia and Turkey interpret and handle regional problems in ways that are in line with their past identities and experiences (Ulusoy, 2023). The divergent views on Syria and Ukraine serve as an excellent

illustration of how social factors, such as national identity, historical narratives, and self-perception, influence a state's actions. In keeping with this idea, Russia demonstrates its sphere of influence by annexing Crimea and acting as a protector in the Black Sea region. Turkey became involved in these conflicts because it viewed itself as a bridge connecting the East and the West (Rakhmatov, 2019).

In fact, the ongoing disputes concerning Crimea and the Black Sea present particularly revealing examples of how these historical stories still impact foreign policy today. Russia's identity as a major post-Soviet power has always rested on the existence of these territories. On the other hand, both Turkey's Ottoman heritage and its ambitions to become a regional power have an impact on its regional operations. (İnaç and Hadji, 2022).

The examples above illustrate, through a Constructivist lens, how social norms, collective memory, and identity can help us understand Turkish-Russian relations. This approach conveys how nations' common history and the stories each country tells about its place in the region can have such a powerful effect on their relations. Constructivism points to these influences on foreign policy. This lets us see how social and historical factors still influence Russian-Turkish international relations.

Liberalism, as defined by Keohane and Nye (2012), emphasizes the potential for state cooperation and collaboration despite competition unlike realism. According to liberalism, nations can cooperate with one another to maximise their joint gains through economic interdependence, international institutions and diplomatic involvement while realism sees international relations as essentially competitive and conflictual. This perspective is especially relevant when analyzing Turkish-Russian relations, as the two countries have nevertheless been able to collaborate in spite of, and due to, their often conflicting strategic rivalry.

In actuality, liberal theory provides a detailed explanation of Turkish-Russian ties in terms of trade, economic cooperation, and energy reliance. Despite their many military and political conflicts, Turkey and Russia have developed mutually beneficial business alliances. The TurkStream gas pipeline, which links Russia's natural gas supplies with Turkey and eventually Europe, is a prime example. When we make it

work, this endeavor demonstrates how crucial liberalism's emphasis on collaboration is. Because of the project, tensions between Turkey and Russia would be lessened by the stabilizing impact of their energy cooperation through TurkStream. Even if there are political issues between the two states, this still occurs. Their conflicts on Syria, for example, can be viewed as an obvious illustration indeed (Keohane & Nye, 2012).

In addition to energy, other industries are also affected by economic interconnection, which supports the liberal notion that cooperation and competition may coexist. Significant commerce between Turkey and Russia persists even during diplomatically tense times, demonstrating that interdependence has useful advantages that support relationship stability. Liberalism sheds light on these areas of collaboration and how they might serve as a deterrent to violence. Because both nations have a stake in maintaining commerce and investment, tensions are kept from rising higher.

Liberalism is also helpful in comprehending the political measures that Turkey and Russia have employed to resolve regional disputes. The Astana process on Syria is a prime illustration of this kind of collaboration. Through the Astana discussions, Iran, Russia, and Turkey have collaborated to identify points of disagreement over the Syrian situation. It occurs as a result of the Astana discussions' attempts to reach a political agreement. Although these measures have not completely settled the situation, the Astana process demonstrates how international collaboration, even among states with competing interests, may establish communication channels and help relieve tensions (Nabiev & Nafikov, 2021).

However, liberalism also shows how tough it is to work together when strong national interests are involved. Even with an acknowledgement of benefits, the theory recognizes that economic dependency and political collaboration do not always overcome hard divides. As stated before, Russia and Turkey have taken opposite positions in Syria and Ukraine. The Turkish government backs the opposition forces in Syria while Russia backs the regime. Turkey's backing of Ukraine's territorial integrity is contrary to Russia's annexation of Crimea and its role in the crisis in Ukraine. Differing viewpoints indicate that political and economic benefits can be overshadowed by strategic and national goals, according to Cheterian (2023).

Overall, liberalism offers a lens through which to see both the cooperative elements of Turkish-Russian relations and the difficulties that present themselves when collaboration and national interests conflict. The theory asserts that although economic ties and institutional cooperation may reduce conflict, competition cannot be eradicated by this evidence. The ongoing disputes between Russia and Turkey are an example of this tension indeed.

### **2.1.1. Previous Research on Turkish-Russian Relations**

A wide range of academic disciplines, including history, international relations, political science, and economics, have been studied in connection to Turkey and Russia. The vast corpus of information produced by this multidisciplinary approach depicts the intricacies of their interaction from several perspectives. This extensive collection of literature provides important insights into the historical, geopolitical, and economic elements that influence Turkey-Russia ties and illustrates how complicated their relationship is. From ancient wars and alliances to contemporary geopolitical scheming and business collaborations, scholars have studied a broad range of topics. When taken as a whole, these works offer a more comprehensive and advanced understanding of the evolution of Turkish-Russian ties across time.

Turkey and Russia have had a historically mixed relationship of cooperation and rivalry, due to their imperial pasts. Scholars of Ottoman-Russian rivalry include McCarthy (2015), İnalçık (1995), and Hale (2000) examine how territorial tussles, wars, and complex diplomacy shaped the foreign policy of both empires and the ensuing developments. According to McCarthy (2015), the Ottoman Empire collapse and the expansionist ambitions of Russia led to rivalries that have shaped contemporary attitudes and continue to accrue influence. İnalçık (1995, pp.221-223) discusses the Ottoman Empire's and Tsarist Russia's diplomatic communications. He argues that these events still shape the Turkish and Russian nations' identities and foreign policy ideas in the present.

After the republics released from the Soviet sphere of influence, Turkey and Russia tried to redefine their roles. The dynamics of the Caucasus and Central Asia were altered by the fall of the Soviet Union. As stated by Hill and Taşpınar (2006, p.

83) and Aydın (2002, pp. 39–48), in Turkish-Russian ties, the struggle for influence in these areas has become more significant. The fall of the Soviet Union gave Turkey the opportunity to establish itself in the Caucasus and Central Asia, with which it has cultural and historical ties (Aydın 2002, pp. 39–41), while Russia attempts to maintain its relation with these strategically important regions. Hill and Taşpınar (2006, p. 83) analyze the competition between both countries in these regions that emphasizes a wider tussle over dominance in the post-Soviet regions.

In the last years, studies examined the practical aspects of Turkish-Russian ties, such as energy interdependence and economic collaboration.. Researchers like Aras and Fidan (2019, p. 195) and Tsygankov (2018, p. 425) have studied how both the TurkStream gas pipeline Project as well as similar energy projects affect bilateral relations. According to Aras and Fidan (2016, p. 332), energy interdependence institutionalizes cooperation between Turkey and Russia despite geopolitical rivalry. Kalashnikov (2013, p. 101) further argues that energy cooperation, particularly through projects like the Blue Stream pipeline, is economically beneficial and serves as a stabilizing force that mitigates political disagreements between the two nations.

These two countries have also been an integral part of various tussle in the regions that cover Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Scholars like Balta (2019, pp. 69–86) and Kardaş (2018) examine how Turkey and Russia have taken sides in these region but are often on opposing sides in a number of wars, including the Syrian Civil War but still communicate. Balta (2019) remarks that even though both countries support different sides in the Syrian war, they collaborated by way of the Astana peace process. According to Kardaş (2018), Turkish-Russian relations are a prime example of dealing with geopolitical differences on a pragmatic basis as opposed to one of the contending rival counterparts in one region.

Studies indicate that reinforcement of relations between Turkey and Russia will yield mutual benefits in the energy sector. Experts like Erşen and Köstem (2020, p. 238) and Agha (2021, p. 440) opine that energy projects, like the TurkStream pipeline, aim not only to meet economic needs practically but also make dependence between states. According to Erşen and Köstem (2020), energy collaboration stabilizes the bilateral relationship by aligning economic interests even in the shadow of political

disagreements. Agha (2021) highlights the importance of energy interdependence in the broader strategic alliance between Russia and Turkey. This interdependence is very crucial to the partnership and reinforce its strength and continuity.

Moreover, research shows how Turkey's and Russia's domestic politics shape their foreign policy issues. According to Cagaptay (2019) and Sakwa (2017, p 95) that Presidents Erdoğan and Putin's leadership philosophies affect the foreign policy of their countries. According to Cagaptay (2019, p. 28), Turkey aims to restore its lost regional status by utilising an assertive foreign policy. As per Sakwa (2017, p. 95), Putin's emphasis on Russian nationalism is what causes Russia's interference in Syria and Ukraine. According to both authors, Turkey and Russia's relationship is constructive and that they built on each other through appropriate moves.

Overall, by looking at the Turkish-Russian relations, we have a rich experience of how the historical legacies, the geopolitics competition, the economic cooperation, and the domestic politics shape a relationship. Scholars articulate the nature of Turkish-Russian relations as being one of cooperation and rivalry, and also that it is dominated by pragmatic and not ideological considerations.

Even with all this body of literature, there have not been very many studies that have focused on the expert perceptions on multiple dimensions-historical narrative, geopolitical challenges, national security, ideological drivers, economic interdependence, and current crises. This study attempts to fill the gap by capturing systematically how experts and professionals perceive the evolving patterns of Turkish-Russian relations.

### **2.1.2. Gaps in the Literature**

Despite much written on Turkish-Russian relations, there still exists some gap in the literature to fully understand the evolving dynamics between the two regional powers. Scholars has talked about the past conflicts and major developments which shaped modern geopolitics but, more attention must be paid to contemporary events taking place at present in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and global power shift. There are those under studied areas that can provide opportunities to pursue new

investigations which can elaborate on the recent problems and future guarantees of Turkish-Russian relations. Furthermore, most of the literature lacks empirical data on how professionals, academics, and policy experts view the recent developments and implications.

Some of the most important gaps include lack of focus on new geopolitical developments, such as Turkey's rising military action in Northern Syria in 2024 and shifting trends of the war in Ukraine (Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies, 2024). What is happening in Ukraine and NATO has had an impact on Turkey's policy towards the two countries. While several studies have taken into account the overall trends of military competition and cooperation, few appear to study these cases keenly. For example, in the new energy politics developments and NATO enlargement, the Turkey-Russia relationship was rather more complex and impacted its diplomatic status around the world (Demir & Yılmaz, 2019). The military presence in Northern Syria, where Turkish forces were more engaged in 2024, has complicated the negotiations between Russia and Turkey. Not much has been written academically about the impact of these developments on bilateral relations, especially their diplomatic implications or changes in regional military collaboration.

There is also a significant lack in the research to study particular diplomatic and military incidents affecting Turkish-Russian relations-such as the killing of Turkish soldiers in Northern Syria. The incident that temporarily strained ties between the two countries attracts limited attention in strategic assessments. While existing studies conduct a literature review on phenomena like energy diplomacy or regional alliances, they tend to miss critical incidents relevant to Turkish-Russian talks. We can learn from both countries during the crises and how they maintain mutual interests with each after tensions from events like these (Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies, 2024). In addition, purchasing the Russian S-400 missile systems has had an effect on Turkey's bilateral ties with NATO and the United States (Kibaroglu , 2019). While a few studies concentrate on Turkey's military purchase decisions at a macro strategic level, little is still known about how these decisions affect the relationship between Russia and this country. Experts have yet to examine how these defence agreements may change the overall Turkish-Russian relationship; including Turkey's future strategic orientation and possibly its relationship with NATO.

Moreover, there are not enough studies conducted to know how the internal politics of Russia and Turkey are affecting their foreign policy choices and how they engage with one another. In recent times, public opinion, political leadership and economic challenges have become major determinants of foreign policy (Ersen & Köstem, 2020). But, existing literature predominantly spotlights external factors such as regional conflict, energy diplomacy and more, often overlooking as to how internal political pressures impact foreign policy decision making. In scholarly literature, there is not enough attention paid to how public opinion in Turkey affects its military actions in Syria and Iraq and how this does influence the way it deals with Russia. In Russia, domestic forces including economic sanctions, political opposition should also be investigated that might impact the behavior of Russia towards Turkey. To have a deeper comprehension of Turkish-Russian relations, these internal processes need to be understood. In time of war or economic crisis, decisions are often influenced by domestic factors (Yılmaz & Özdemir, 2017).

Furthermore, the literature on the impact of multinational organizations has significant gaps and multilateral frameworks on Turkish-Russian relations. Scholars often talk about NATO and the United Nations and how they tend to resolve or escalate the tensions between Turkey and Russia. However, there are no studies looking at how these organisations influence bilateral relations. One more thing that requires further investigation is the European Union's influence on Turkey's foreign policy towards Russia in terms of energy partnerships and geopolitical competition. Scholarly studies have not yet comprehensively examined how Turkey balances its European aspirations with strategic engagements with Russia given its deteriorating EU accession process and dependence on Russia for energy security.

Finally, we should address the unstudied effects of Turkey and Russia's Energy Interdependence in the Long-Term perspective. While projects like the TurkStream pipeline demonstrate their energy cooperation, not much studies have been done on what hazard this interdependence might create for both. For instance, how do Turkey's gas deals with Russia influence its position in global power struggles? How does Russia regard Turkey as a transit hub for energy exports that also fits into its overall European energy strategy? These questions are essential for the future of Turkish-Russian

relations because the global energy market is changing and including new actors like China and the Gulf states (Özkan, 2022).

In conclusion, this research explicitly fills these gaps through the provision of fresh empirical evidence based on expert perceptions gathered by a targeted quantitative survey. However, while the literature on Russia-Turkey relations is voluminous, It would not be an exaggeration to say that in light of recent changes in geopolitics, major events in diplomacy, the influence of domestic politics, and multilateral institutions, a number of key gaps persist. The more study the gaps are filled, the more knowledge on Turkish-Russian relations and insightful information about the involvement of the two nations in a dynamic and frequently conflicting partnership is expected to come up.

## **2.2. Historical Framework of Turkish-Russian Relations**

### **2.2.1. Ottoman-Russian Relations (1600-1878)**

The Ottoman and Russian Empires clashed continuously between 1600 and 1878 over the Caucasus region, Black Sea, and Eastern Europe. The two empires desired strategic land vital for military dominance and trade routes. This extended period of rivalry shaped the contentious and more often than not adversarial nature of the relationship between Russia and Turkey that endures today (Aksan, 2007; Badem, 2010; Fisher, 1987).

Because of what happened in the 1600s, the Ottomans were rising as a dominant force in both the Middle East and Europe. At their peak, they controlled much of the Balkans, North Africa, and large parts of the Middle East, including Arabia (İnalçık, 2000; Aksan, 2007). Meanwhile, the Romanov dynasty in Russia was pushing to expand its borders and grow its influence, especially in Eastern Europe (Fisher, 1987; Jelavich, 1983). They also desire access to the Black Sea and ports with pleasant temperatures. For both empires, the Black Sea functioned as a military base and an essential trade route (McCarthy, 1997; İnalçık, 2000).

These conflicting aims, however, led to the Russo-Turkish Wars, which stretched over two centuries. While the Ottoman Empire struggled to hold onto regions like Crimea, the Balkans, and the Caucasus, Russia was pushing southward (Fisher,

1987; Badem, 2010). These clashes weren't just local - they were part of a larger European power struggle. Major powers like Britain and France often got involved, seeing both the Ottomans and the Russians as key players in maintaining the balance of power in Europe (Seton-Watson, 1967; Figes, 2010). As the wars dragged on, treaties were signed and borders were redrawn, gradually stripping the Ottomans of control over much of their territory (Aksan, 2007).

One of the most significant turning points in Ottoman-Russian relations was the signing of the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774. The pact was signed following Russia's victory in the Russo-Turkish War (1768–1774), which altered the region's power dynamics. With this deal Russia gained substantial political and territorial benefits. Moreover, direct access to the Black Sea was granted to Russia under this deal. Additionally, it made it possible for Russia to build a navy that would challenge Ottoman dominance in the area. Moreover, Moscow was able to meddle in Ottoman politics under the guise of religious protection since Russia had the right to safeguard Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire (Aksan, 2007; Fisher, 1987). The Ottomans suffered a great defeat because of this treaty. Their power and geographical area over Eastern Europe and the Balkans got lessened by this treaty.

Consequently, the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca had far-reaching effects. In order to fulfill its long-term goal of acquiring warm-water ports-which are necessary for Russia's naval power and economic aspirations-it was imperative that it get access to the Black Sea (Fisher, 1987; Figes, 2010). Furthermore, the right to protect Orthodox Christians reinforced Russia's role as a defender of Slavic and Orthodox populations laying the groundwork for Russia's future engagement in the Balkans (Seton-Watson, 1967; Shaw, 1976). The treaty signaled the start of the Ottoman Empire's slow loss of geographical dominance, particularly in the Balkans where Russian-backed nationalist forces started to contest Ottoman rule (Shaw, 1976). Finally, the loss of Crimea dealt a major blow to Ottoman prestige, signaling that the empire's dominance in Eastern Europe was fading (Aksan, 2007).

As hostilities increased, the Ottoman and Russian empires' animosity peaked in the 19th century, leading to one of the largest conflicts, the Crimean War (1853–1856) (Aksan, 2007). A fierce dispute resulted from the disagreement about who would be in

control of the Christian holy sites in Jerusalem (Seton-Watson, 1967). The battle for dominance of the Eastern Mediterranean and the remaining Balkans swiftly grew out of this struggle (Jelavich, 1983). With the assistance of France and Britain, the Ottoman Empire tried to stop Russian growth in the region (Shaw, 1976). In the meanwhile, Russia aimed to diminish Ottoman authority by capturing the Black Sea area (Fisher, 1987). The conflict between Russia and the Ottoman Empire—England and France on one side—was a turning point in both Ottoman-Russian ties and the larger European backdrop (Figs, 2010; Badem, 2010).

The Russian advance was momentarily restrained by the 1856 Treaty of Paris, which ended the Crimean War (Badem, 2010). It significantly reduced Russia's naval presence and neutralized the Black Sea as a military zone (Figs, 2010). While the treaty was seen as a diplomatic victory for the Ottoman Empire and its Western allies, it failed to address the deeper geopolitical tensions between the empires. The war had already revealed serious structural weaknesses in both the Ottoman and Russian states, especially in terms of political stability and military capacity (Shaw, 1976). Although the Ottomans emerged as the nominal victors, the victory came at a high cost and did little to prevent the empire's eventual decline. On the Russian side, the defeat helped spur internal reforms—most notably the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 (McMeekin, 2010; Seton-Watson, 1967).

As the 19th century went on, tensions between the Ottoman and Russian empires increased. This was happening in the Balkans, as nationalist organizations demanding freedom from Ottoman rule were becoming more powerful (Ulusoy, 2023). Following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, the Berlin Conference of 1878 brought about a significant shift. As a result of the conference, the Ottoman Empire lost the control over the Balkans, while the frontiers of Eastern Europe were redrawn (Cheterian, 2023). It allowed Romania, Serbia and Montenegro to become independent. Bulgaria was established as an autonomous principality under Ottoman suzerainty (Yanık, 2019). As a consequence, Russia suffered both wins and defeats (Köstem, 2015).

The Berlin Conference initiated a new phase in Ottoman-Russian relations, which caused the Ottomans to lose more land and the Ottomans' influence in Europe to dramatically diminish. Russia viewed the meeting as a diplomatic balancing act. In

attempting to maintain its reputation as the guardian of Orthodox Christians in the Balkans, Russia had to juggle the clashing demands of other European nations. Nationalist movements in the Balkans, particularly the ones with Russian backing, brought disorder to the Ottoman Empire, resulting in the Empire's downfall (Keser, 2016; Jelavich, 1983). The outcomes of the Berlin Conference demonstrate Russia's increasing power in Eastern Europe and the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire's declining influence in Europe (Yanık, 2019; Köstem, 2015).

Basically, between 1600 and 1878, the Ottoman and Russian empires were engaged in warfare, rivalry, and a game of tricky diplomacy. Both were chasing big dreams of territorial expansion. Their rivalry often involved other European powers, creating a complicated relationship that continues to impact modern-day politics (Fisher, 1987; Nabiev & Nafikov, 2021). The treaties, wars, and alliances that took place at that time laid the groundwork for present-day Turkish-Russian relations; today's geopolitical situation is still impacted by these historical events (İnalçık, 2000; Kara, 2017). Understanding the history of these conflicts is necessary to understanding the current tensions-and sometimes cooperative efforts-of Turkey and Russia, as these long-standing struggles continue to affect both countries' foreign policy (Kıbaroğlu, 2019; Ovalı & Özdikmenli, 2020).

### **2.2.2. Early Republican Era and Soviet Relations (1920-1945)**

The Ottoman Empire collapsed in 1923 and Turkey became a republic; its foreign policy underwent a dramatic change-especially with Soviet Russia. Ottomans were rivals of Russia for centuries. But throughout the Republic's early years, things changed. The countries aligned due to common geopolitical interests, growing pressures from the West and mutual recognition of critical internal challenges related to the engine of war. Though not an easy or instinctive union, it was certainly a practical union. The new collaboration became the basis for the upcoming diplomatic and economic relations (Somel, 2016; Sakkas & Zhukova, 2013; Derman, 2021).

In 1921, the Treaty of Moscow altered the trajectory of events for both Turkey and Soviet Russia. In addition to drawing the two nations' borders, this signaled the start of a cooperative partnership. The agreement was made following Soviet Russia's

support of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and other Turkish nationalists during the Turkish War of Independence. To resist foreign pressure, particularly from Britain and France, which sought to annex major Turkish territories through treaties and a mandate, Turkey needed financial and military support (Şöhret, 2023).

Furthermore, the Treaty of Moscow was significant. It made it obvious to both countries that they had an interest in keeping the West in balance and preserving regional stability. Following World War I, which drove the two sides into war, the peace treaty put a stop to the fighting. Along with it came established borders and security agreements that shaped the two nations' commercial and diplomatic strategies. Turkey and the Soviet Union agreed on the Soviet borders of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. After a century of struggle between the Ottomans and Tsarists, both sides recognized each other's sovereignty, which contributes to the development of faith (Guçlü, n.d).

In subsequent years, Turkey and Soviet Russia established strong military and economic ties as both sought to modernize and stabilize their countries. In the early 1920s, both countries were recovering from wars and civil wars. Turkey focused on modernising its military and economy with support from the Soviet Union. In the interval between the two World Wars, the Soviet leadership-first led by Vladimir Lenin and then by Joseph Stalin-saw Turkey as a partner in the anti-fascist and anti-imperialist struggle. The common goal led to various compacts regarding trade, resulting from which these several agreements were signed (Hale, 2023; Sakkas & Zhukova, 2013).

During the interwar years, Turkey and the Soviet Union had a generally cautious relationship that was impacted by the threats each state faced from the outside. The Italian and German fronts saw the rise of fascist regimes in Europe, both of whom were victims of Western colonization. They were virtually compatible because of their similarities. In actuality, Turkey emerged as a forefront competitor throughout the Cold War. Turkey received arms and equipment that improved the readiness of its air force and army for conflict (Somel, 2016, pp. 224-234).

Turkey's location gave the Soviet Union a strategic advantage in return. With authority over the Dardanelles and Bosphorus Straits, Turkey held the key to Soviet

access to the Mediterranean. Both countries understood the importance of Turkey being neutral, or at the very least on the side of the Soviets so as to keep the USSR in control. Moreover, the Turkish-Soviet alliance prevented Western sway over Eastern Europe and the Middle East that both nations wished to protect from Western colonialists (Yücel, 2023, pp. 17–21).

Although their relationship during this period was overall stable, that did not mean it was without challenges. Turkey under Atatürk was secular and nationalist. However, it also had a Soviet-style communism which could cause tensions. Both countries were opposed to Western imperialism but had very different domestic political systems. Under Atatürk's leadership, Turkey adopted a policy of modernization and westernization which was secular and nationalistic in nature; this was contrary with the Soviet Union, which was based on communist principles (Karakuş, 2023).

Despite differing beliefs, the two nations were often able to continue cooperating because of the external troubles they faced. The rise of fascism across Europe, especially Mussolini's fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, made Turkey and the Soviet Union share a common objective. Both these countries became better off because of their collaboration on trade, military technology, and even intelligence sharing. Turkey thought the military backup from the Soviets was an opportunity to strengthen its defenses against nations in Europe. However, the Soviets considered it a chance to create regional stability through modernizing Turkey (Derman 2021).

Before the Second World War, relations of Turkey and USSR started changing. Turkey was neutral in the war, keeping a balance between the Allies and Axis forces. The USSR joined the allies following the 1941 Nazi invasion of the USSR, even though it partnered with Nazi Germany via the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939. Despite the Second World War, Turkey maintained its formal neutrality. Turkey's decision to be neutral caused many major problems with the Soviet Union. Despite the two nations still sending diplomats as well as troops to each other, their relations were relatively cautious and restrained due to both the globalisation of the conflict in addition to shifting alliances (Erşen & Köstem, 2020; Hale, 2023).

However, Turkey's relationship with the Soviet Union changed a lot by the time World War II ended. Towards the end of the war, Turkey's decision to side with the Allies and Soviet territorial requests in the Black Sea-Eastern Anatolia resulted in relationship strain that was mostly stable during the interwar period. The Yalta Conference held in 1945, which planned the post-war world, highlighted such tensions, because the Soviet Union started to exert pressure on Turkey to give Turkey the Straits and allow Soviet bases on Turkish territory – demands that Turkey firmly resisted. During this period, Turkish-Soviet relations entered a new phase marked by increased suspicion and eventually the Cold War (Çelikpala, 2019).

In conclusion, Turkey and Soviet Russia formed an alliance between 1920 and 1945 based on two shared goals. Over the years, the two nations have been cooperating militarily and commercially. Additionally, the Treaty of Moscow demonstrates that ideological disagreements did not impede progress (Derman, 2021). The Soviet Union and Turkey were initially friends. In hindsight, events outside the States' control caused the alliance that formed at the beginning of World War II to become cautious and eventually contentious. Understanding this era enables us to compare the following phase of Turkish-Russian diplomacy with the framework of the development of Turkish-Soviet ties.

### **2.2.3. Cold War Dynamics (1945-1991)**

The period of the Cold War lasted from 1945 until 1991 (Sakwa, 2017). It was also a fierce geopolitical conflict between the Western alliance, led by the United States and NATO, and the Eastern alliance, led by the Soviet Union (Perović & Krempin, 2014). Turkey, at the heart of this global conflict, has taken on particular relevance because of its role as a bridge linking Europe and the Middle East (Oğuzlu, 2013). Its strategic location-controlling the strategically significant Turkish Straits and sharing a border with the Soviet Union-made it significant throughout the Cold War (Hale, 2023; Yanık, 2019).

Following World War II, Turkey was under growing Soviet pressure and found itself in a challenging and uncertain situation. Turkish elites were greatly displeased with Joseph Stalin's demands for command of the Straits of Turkey and territory

concessions in Eastern Anatolia. At a pivotal moment in the post-war world, these demands were made due to the Soviet Union's growing influence throughout the Middle East and Eastern Europe. The Straits of Turkey, which link the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, were strategically and economically significant to both the Soviet Union and Turkey (Atmaca, 2014). In addition to opposing Soviet demands, Turkey worried about Soviet expansion. Turkey thus turned to the West for security assurances.

Turkey made an important decision regarding its foreign policy in 1952 when it joined NATO and completely supported the West (Oğuzlu, 2013). The action was motivated by the fear of Soviet expansion and the wish to protect their national independence via collective defense (Keser, 2016). One serious event in the Cold War event was the choice of Turkey to join NATO, which gave the Americans and their allies a powerful strategic advantage in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East (Perović & Krempin, 2014). Turkey claims that NATO membership offered protection from a possible Soviet invasion and access to financial and military support from Western partners (Baharçiçek, 2010). Turkey's situation among Asia, the Middle East, and Europe was a major advantage for NATO. Turkey was a key in constraining Soviet power projection and monitoring military movements in the region (Yanık, 2019).

Because of Turkey's significance to the Turkish Straits, the USSR exercised influence over it during the Cold War. Since the Straits were the only route connecting the Black Sea to the Mediterranean and beyond, the Soviet navy used them (Yücel, 2023). Turkey was important to the USSR as made evident by the Soviet's contention that they would need control or influence the passage through diplomatic channels or by a subtle threat (Keser & Meral, 2016). Shortly, the Soviet Union started to put pressure on Turkey once the Cold War started, but there were no repercussions (Karakuş, 2023).

Throughout the Cold War, however, Turkey and the USSR interspersed tensions with enmity. During the 1960s and the 1970s, tensions led to disagreements but there were successive reconciliations in the two states (Hale, 2023). From a practical standpoint, the Soviet Union was seen as essential to the state's stability and socioeconomic advancement (Derman, 2021). Having become a NATO member, having oriented foreign policy towards pro-Western vector, Turkey was striving for diversification of energy supplies and trade flows. Accordingly, the Soviets viewed their

economic relations with Turkey as providing the chance to underline their influence and establish connections to weaken Turkey's attitude toward the West (Şeker, 2023; Köstem, 2015).

A major portion of this economic cooperation was the development of joint industrial projects and energy agreements. During the 1960s and 1970s, Turkey and the Soviet Union started a number of major infrastructure and energy projects that reflected their mutual interest in leveraging economic ties for strategic purposes (Derman, 2021). For example, Soviet natural gas began flowing to Turkey in the 1980s, following the linking of pipelines between the two countries (Kalashnikov, 2013). This energy cooperation allowed Turkey to benefit from Soviet energy resources while simultaneously maintaining its security commitments to NATO (Perović & Krempin, 2014). Meanwhile, the Soviet Union saw these economic ties as a way to gain influence in Turkey's economy and possibly weaken its strong ties with the United States and other allies in the West (Köstem, 2015).

During the Cold War, Turkey and the Soviet Union maintained strategic and ideological differences despite their economic ties (Ulusoy, 2023). Turkey has been an active participant in NATO on many occasions and its association with Western Security configurations has restricted Soviet interest in expanding their influence either in the Middle East or in Eastern Europe (Keser, 2016). With crafty behaviour, as a dam to prevent the Soviet invasion into the Middle East and the Mediterranean, Turkey played a very useful and very important role in the southern flank of NATO. During the Cold War, from 1952 until 1973, Turkey also hosted NATO military installations such as the Incirlik Air Base. For NATO operations in the area, this specific military installation was essential. Additionally, it was crucial for keeping an eye on Soviet military operations in the Mediterranean and Black Sea (Armutlu, 2023; Oğuzlu, 2013).

Concurrently, the Soviet Union supported Turkey's regional enemies, especially nations and groups who were hostile to the West (Cheterian, 2023). The Soviet Union's backing for Syria, Iraq, and other Middle Eastern players presented Turkey's foreign policy with even more difficulties because these nations frequently fought Turkey in regional alliances and wars (Yılmaz & Özdemir, 2017). Furthermore, despite their shared desire to reach a consensus on pragmatic economic matters, deeper political

collaboration proved challenging due to the ideological gap between the Turkish secular-nationalist leaders and the Soviet system (Ovalı & Özdikmenli, 2020).

Turkish-Soviet ties in the ensuing years were further complicated by the Cyprus issue in the 1970s. Despite supporting the Greek Cypriot side, the Soviet Union took cautious to avoid upsetting Turkey, a crucial member of the NATO alliance. An intriguing balancing act was displayed by Moscow's diplomatic actions during the Cyprus conflict. The Soviets were supporting left-wing organizations in the area, on the one hand. However, they were continuing to have strategic and commercial relations with Turkey. The heightened tensions during this period were a reflection of the complexity of Cold War geopolitics, where ideological alignments did not always fit cleanly into military or economic relationships (Sakkas & Zhukova, 2013).

By the late 1980s, the Cold War began to shift as Mikhail Gorbachev introduced reforms in the Soviet Union-glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring)-to reduce tensions with the West and integrate the Soviet economy into the global system (Aras, 2009). For Turkey, these changes offered new opportunities to strengthen economic and diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union. However, despite these openings, the broader geopolitical rivalry between NATO and the Eastern bloc continued to shape much of their relationship (Oğuzlu, 2021). Turkey's strategic importance remained a central factor in NATO's containment strategy, however, a new chapter in Turkish-Russian relations might emerge with the end of the Cold War, one that would be characterized by post-Cold War realities rather than ideological conflicts. (Oğuzlu, 2013).

In conclusion, due to the Cold War, there was immense competition and hostility between the two countries because the Soviet Union controlled the Eastern bloc and Turkey was a Western bloc ally (Sakwa, 2017). The position, control over the Turkish Straits, and NATO membership of Turkey had given much help to the West in containing Soviet expansion in the Black Sea and Mediterranean (Hale, 2023; Oğuzlu, 2013). Relations between Turkey and the Soviet Union have been characterized by periods of strategic rivalry and fierce ideological confrontation during the Cold War, but there were also moments of economic collaboration in the sphere of industrial growth and energy (Şöhret, 2023; Derman, 2021). By looking closely at these factors, we might

understand how the geopolitics of the Cold War affected both the future of Turkish-Russian ties and Turkish-Soviet relations.

#### **2.2.4. Post-Cold War Era and New Realignment (1991-2010)**

Following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, both nations began to adjust to a new international system (Hale, 2023). As a result, Turkish-Russian relations also began to shift. Strategy and relationships changed when the Soviet Union collapsed (Ulusoy, 2023). The Russian Federation and Turkey developed a complex relationship. Initially, the United States and Canada worked together. However, as time passed, the relationship evolved into one of rivalry (Cheterian, 2023).

In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet Union's dissolution, Russia found itself in the midst of a profound economic and political crisis (Faroqhi, 2004). Russia's transition from a planned economy to a market-based one was difficult and resulted in significant economic suffering, political unrest, and a reduction in its influence internationally (Sakwa, 2017). In contrast, Turkey had a more solid political and economic base going into this time. Especially in the former Soviet areas such as the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Balkans, Turkey began to establish itself on a global scale. As a result, the post-Cold War era ushered in a new phase of competition between the two nations, particularly in these strategically important regions (Ekinci, 2010, pp. 441–465).

Since the end of Soviet Union, Turkish politics have aimed to establish closer ties with the Turkic republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus. The nations seemed ideal for Turkey to strengthen its power following the fall of the Soviet Union as they provide rich natural resources and consist of multiple ethnic groups sharing linguistic and cultural links with Turkey and a Turkish national (Aras & Fidan, 2019). Turkey served as a regional power and as a bridge between Europe and the Middle East and Central Asian governments, which access to political, economic and technological assistance (İnaç & Hadji, 2022). But this expansion put Russia in direct competition with Turkey, which viewed the former Soviet republics as part of its traditional sphere of influence and wanted to maintain dominance in the region (Çelikpala, 2019).

Moreover, the geopolitical rivalry between Turkey and Russia made the South Caucasus a key theater of operation almost right away. Whereas Turkey has very close relations with Azerbaijan and took the latter's side in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Russia supports Armenia as its key ally in the region (Arıkan Açar & Yalçınkaya, 2023). This competition developed not only via military and diplomatic assistance but also through energy diplomacy, with Russia and Turkey fighting for control of the flow of gas and oil from the Caspian Sea to Europe. Most importantly, Turkey's role in the construction of the BTC pipeline that bypassed Russian territory was a clear example of efforts to reduce Russian dominance over energy exports from the region, while simultaneously positioning itself as the key transit hub for Europe's energy needs (Çelikpala, 2019; Kalashnikov, 2013).

During the following decades, particularly in the 1990s and 2000s, economic relations of the two states came closer, particularly in the oil sector (Gümüş, 2022). Turkey turned into Russia's principal natural gas supplier throughout the early 1990s crisis and post-stabilization period, and also emerged as one of Russia's main energy markets (Yanık, 2019). The Blue Stream pipeline, opened in 2005, transported natural gas from Russia to Turkey across the Black Sea. The two governments' aspiration to control the international energy market more was expressed through the Blue Stream project. The research also demonstrated the increasing economic interdependence of the nations (Kalashnikov, 2013).

Apart from gas, Turkey and Russia also developed an energy partnership in other fields. Turkey and Russia's relationship has expanded to nuclear energy and construction beyond natural gas. Additionally, Russia enterprises became noteworthy players in Turkey's construction sector after also being responsible for the construction of airports, shopping centers, and power plants (Aras, 2009). Also, at the same time, Turkish companies made large investments in Russia; Turkish construction companies fitted well into Moscow and other important cities (Cheterian, 2023). This economic interdependence helped to create a relationship that was relatively stable and realistic despite the presence of geopolitical tensions (Kardaş, 2018).

The years following the Cold War were not without challenges, though. When Russia and Turkey attempted to expand their influence in areas that overlapped,

tensions frequently resulted. While Turkey sought to forge closer political and economic ties with the recently independent nations, Russia sought to preserve its long-standing sphere of influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia (İnaç & Hadji, 2022). Turkish and Russian interests often clashed in the Balkans as well, especially when Yugoslavia broke up and both countries tried to make their mark in the new post-conflict order (Arıkan Açar & Yalçınkaya, 2023). Their relationship was further complicated by Turkey's attempts to align itself with Western-led initiatives, such as NATO's intervention in Kosovo, which frequently clashed with Russia's hostility to Western military participation in the area (Derman, 2021; Çelikpala, 2019).

However, both nations demonstrated a remarkable ability to set aside their differences and work together when their interests aligned, despite these geopolitical challenges. In the energy industry, this was especially clear, as both countries understood the strategic importance of stable and profitable trading relationships. By allowing both countries to capitalize on their complementary roles as energy providers and consumers, the Blue Stream pipeline and other collaborative energy projects solidified the bilateral relationship (Kalashnikov, 2013; Gümüş, 2022).

After seizing power in 1999, Vladimir Putin moved swiftly to solidify his government and calm the public. Russian foreign policy underwent a radical change by the 2000s. Restoring Russia's standing abroad, particularly in its immediate area, has been one of Putin's administration's main goals (Sakwa, 2017). Russia became much more active against Turkey, particularly in the Caucasus and Central Asia. At the same time, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Turkey was trying to expand its foreign policy in order to have a more autonomous role in the world. Turkey is taking a more active role in the globe, which is shown in its relationships with both non-Western countries like Russia and the West (Aras, 2009; Hale, 2023).

Competition and cooperation intertwined in the balance between Turkish-Russian relations within the 2000s, when both states would compete for influence in overlapping regions, yet the rapidly growing economic ties provided ample opportunities for dialogue and cooperation (Derman, 2021). Such dynamics, when rivalry and partnership are combined, marked much of their post-Cold War relationship

and gave way to changing relations in the decades that followed (Cheterian, 2023; Köremezli, 2021).

The period between 1991 and 2010 thus represents a critical period of change and adjustment in Turkish-Russian relations. The collapse of the Soviet Union ushered in a new phase of cooperation and competition in Turkish-Russian relations (İnaç & Hadji, 2022). Projects such as the Blue Stream pipeline made energy a key element of cooperation, developing the economic component of the Turkey-Russia relationship (Kalashnikov, 2013). Such competition is, however, belied by the two states' constant rivalry in hegemonic regions such as Central Asia and the Caucasus (Arıkan Açar & Yalçınkaya, 2023). This period of time did establish the sophisticated balance of cooperation and competition that distinguishes Turkish-Russian relations in the twenty-first century and transformed the relationship between Ankara and Moscow (Köremezli, 2021).

#### **2.2.5. Recent Geopolitical Developments (2011-2024)**

Starting from 2011, a number of big geopolitical events set the Turkish-Russian relations moving in another direction. The Civil War in Syria, the annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014, and the change in Turkey's security strategy have all made the relations between Ankara and Moscow complicated, often unexpected. Since both have negotiated an increasingly complicated regional environment with close economic ties intact, relations in the period have combined rivalry with cooperation. They are the two pivotal powers in Eurasia, with their way of responding to the changes marking wider processes entailed in shaping the region and providing some suggestions how their relations will shape up over the following years (Derman, 2021; Çelikpala, 2019).

The outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011 marked an important inflection point in the Turkish-Russian relations. At the very beginning of the Syrian war, they had very different stakes in the conflict, reflecting the overall geopolitical rivalry between them. For Turkey, which shares a border with Syria in the north, the conflict was a matter of regional security, and its main concern was the Kurdish groups in northern Syria, especially the YPG (People's Protection Units), which it considers an offshoot of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), a group that has been waging an

insurgency against Turkey for decades. The Turkish involvement in Syria was further driven by long-time resistance against the Bashar al-Assad regime, and support for the Syrian opposition-primarily to check the formation of a Kurdish autonomous zone along its border (Demir & Yılmaz, 2020; Khaki, 2023).

In turn, Russia thought the question was political and historical for Syria, standing as one of the closest allies for Russia in the Middle East from the time of the Cold War onward, a very pivotal regime-where Russia held its crucial pillar of influence-powerful in the Eastern Mediterranean area. The Assad regime has to stay in power for Moscow to maintain its sway over the area and get access to its naval base in Tartus. Thus, the Russian military intervention in Syria in 2015, decisively changing the course of events in Assad's favor, has been pursued in defense of its strategic interests in the region to undermine Western influence and establish itself as a dominant player in the Middle East (Çelikpala 2019; Demir & Yılmaz 2020).

A Russian Su-24 fighter was shot down by Turkish forces in November 2015 for allegedly violating Turkish airspace near the Syrian border, thus turning what had been growing tension between Turkish and Russian interests in Syria into major international difficulties. After the incident, Russia slapped economic sanctions on Turkey and briefly cut diplomatic and military ties with Ankara, thus provoking a serious diplomatic crisis. The crisis also illustrated the intrinsic fragility of the Turkish-Russian partnership when geopolitical interests come sharply into conflict, especially around conflict zones like Syria (Agha 2021).

Nevertheless, both Russia and Turkey quickly took steps to mend their differences in spite of this significant diplomatic breakdown. Due in large part to economic pragmatism and the realization that putting aside disagreements was best for the interests of the larger area, the Turkish-Russian relationship was essentially restored in 2016. When Turkey joined the Astana peace process in 2017 to negotiate cease-fires and create de-escalation zones in Syria alongside Russia and Iran, it was the pinnacle of this pragmatic rapprochement. Although Russia and Turkey continued to be on opposing sides of the crisis, the Astana talks were a major attempt by both nations to diplomatically resolve their disagreements and prevent the dispute from degenerating into a wider regional conflict (Nabiev & Nafikov, 2021).

Since 2014, the war in Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea by Russia have come to be highly interlinked with events regarding Turkey-Russia relations. The Crimean Tatars are a Turkic Muslim minority that is culturally and historically very close to Turkey (Köremezli, 2021), and they are very upset by Russia's seizure of Crimea (Yüce & Amour, 2021). Considering the importance of Crimean Tatars in Ukraine, Turkey has condemned the annexation of Crimea by Russia, reaffirmed its commitment to the territorial integrity of Ukraine, and emphasized the sufferings of the majority of Tatars under Russia's current rule (Hale, 2023; Çelikpala, 2019).

However, Turkey never fully backed the sanctions system launched by the West against Russia, despite opposing the invasion of Crimea. The reasoning behind this decision shows how Turkey balances its responsibility as a member of NATO with the practical engagement of Russia, which remains an extremely important trading and energy cooperation partner. Crimea is strategically important to Russia and Turkey alike, making the situation of Turkey more complicated as it is located in the Black Sea region (Hale, 2023). While Turkey loves its obligations in NATO, it has been continuously trying to avoid activities that would immediately put at risk its strategic and economic ties with Russia, especially on the energy sector (Çelikpala, 2019).

Due to Turkey's reliance on Russian natural gas, energy has become a major topic in Turkish-Russian ties. The TurkStream pipeline, which began supplying gas in 2020, is the most obvious example of how intense this collaboration is. Even when there is political friction between them, these energy linkages serve as the stabilizing element that keeps the partnership functional and stable despite their conflicting strategic goals (Derman, 2021; Erşen & Köstem, 2020).

Meanwhile, the development of military and defense cooperation has strained Russia-Turkey relations. In 2017, Turkey dramatically turned around from its long reliance on military systems connected with NATO when it decided to purchase the S-400 missile defense system from Russia. The purchase of the S-400 has been criticized by Turkey's Western partners, particularly the United States, since it is incompatible with NATO's defensive architecture. In turn, the US slapped a ban on Turkey from the F-35 Fighter Jet Programme. That marked and deepened a fracture in the relationship

between Turkey and NATO due to concerns that the S-400 system may compromise NATO's defence capabilities (Kibaroglu 2019; Derman 2021).

Turkey went ahead with the S-400 deal despite the objections. It is part of Ankara's broader effort to assert its strategic autonomy and broaden its defence procurement. Turkey's S-400 deal has strengthened defence ties with Russia and further complicates ties between Turkey, NATO and the EU. But, this move also demonstrates Turkey's increasingly multi-vector foreign policy that seeks to balance traditional Western alliances with pragmatic non-Western partners, including Russia (Kibaroglu 2019; Gümüş 2022).

In addition to Syria and Ukraine, Russia and Turkey are at conflict in other regional wars (Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh). While Russia supports Khalifa Haftar in Libya, Turkey supports the internationally recognized GNA administration in Libya. Russia has backed its important ally Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh, while Turkey has backed Azerbaijan. Moscow and Ankara prioritized resolving their differences above concentrating on their fight for regional hegemony, therefore even when they have clashed, they have generally been able to pursue diplomacy (Kardaş, 2018; Balta, 2019).

In conclusion, Turkish-Russian ties have been affected by a number of geopolitical issues and changes since 2011 (Cheterian, 2023). The stability of their bilateral ties has been put to the test by the Syrian Civil War, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and Turkey's procurement of the S-400 missile system (Demir & Yılmaz, 2020; Köremezli, 2021). But due to their strategic and economic adaptability, Russia and Turkey have always been able to work together despite their disagreements (Gümüş, 2022). The development in which President Putin's party representatives met with Turkey's foreign minister will undoubtedly impact Turkish-Russian ties as well as other global developments in the near future. As Russia seeks to increase its influence in important areas and Turkey balances its strategic goals with NATO obligations, their engagement will play a significant role in shaping the future of Eurasian geopolitics (Ulusoy, 2023).

### **2.3. Key Factors Influencing Turkish-Russian Relations**

This section addresses the root causes underlying Turkish-Russian relations, focusing particularly on three interrelated issues of geopolitical realities, national security interests, and ideological tendencies. They are argued to be core drivers of the long-term patterns of competition, cooperation, and strategic engagement between the two nations. Grounding itself in the available literature and theoretical paradigms, these sections identify how geography, defense concerns, and ideological narratives form the structural basis of bilateral relations, setting the broader context prior to an eventual presentation of empirical facts later in the thesis.

#### **2.3.1. Geographical Location**

Due to a few factors, Turkey is situated in the center of regional and global geopolitics. As a bridge between Europe and Asia, Turkey is located between the two continents (Yanık, 2019). Its strategic location allows it to control the Bosphorus and the Dardenelles, which link the Mediterranean and Black Seas (Yücel, 2023). Turkey's geographic advantage has made it a major role in both military strategy and maritime trade (Oğuzlu, 2013). Furthermore, because the Black Sea is an essential route for trade and energy, Turkish sovereignty over these straits has become a topic of discussion and contention on a global scale. (Hale, 2023).

Because of its unique strategic location, Turkey's geographic location has always been vital (Yanık, 2019). Russia has been searching for warm-water ports for a long time. The desire of Russia to get access to the Indian, Black, and Aegean oceans is one of the main causes of its competition with Turkey (Sakwa, 2017). In order to achieve this goal, Russia began waging thirteen wars against the Ottoman Empire beginning in 1677. The goal was to seize territory and control military and commercial channels (Aksan, 2007). In light of the disputes, Turkey's function as Russia's gatekeeper is emphasized (Hale, 2023).

In addition to its maritime predominance, the strategic importance of Turkey is further heightened by its position as a passage to the Caspian Sea basin. The Caspian region is of great significance to energy geopolitics, given the occurrence of enormous

deposits of oil and gas (Kalashnikov, 2013). The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline is one example of an energy pipeline that Turkey may serve as a transit center for, showing how important it is in linking energy-rich regions to international markets (Aras & Fidan, 2019). The ability of Turkey to transport energy not only enhances its geopolitical power but also places it at the forefront of regional rivalry with Russia, which seeks to maintain its hegemony in energy exports (Şenol & Üçışık Erbilien, 2022).

Furthermore, Turkey's close ties to each of its eight neighbors-Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Greece, and Bulgaria-confirm its strategic significance (Hale, 2023). Turkey is still at the center of the conflict since the area has already experienced warfare over these disputed borders. The dispute over territorial sovereignty, minority rights, water resources, and other issues has made Turkey's relationship with its neighbors a mix of toughness and diplomacy (Arıkan Açar & Yalçinkaya, 2023). This is made more complicated by Turkey's participation in many international organizations, such as NATO, which keeps Turkey firmly in the western camp but occasionally opposing its neighbors and Russia (Oğuzlu, 2013).

But being at this very location significantly affects both external and internal dynamics. While it acts as a bridge between Europe and Asia by serving to mediate cultural and economic differences (Yanık, 2019), unstable migration, cross-border terrorism, and economic dependence may be some vulnerabilities Turkey faces by being at that site (Arıkan Açar & Yalçinkaya, 2023). At the same time, it was compelled to perform the balancing act among superpowers in the US, the EU, and Russia (Ulusoy, 2023). It needs, indeed, a multi-dimensional approach to foreign policy in Turkey.

In addition, Turkey's dominance over vital waterways has sometimes turned it into a place of rivalry rather than collaboration. Similar to the 1936 Montreux Convention, which gave Turkey authority over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits (Yücel, 2023), Turkey has faced diplomatic pressure, particularly during periods of significant international war (Hale, 2023). Turkish naval access to the Black Sea is strengthened by its control of the strait. This is an issue that is still extremely important today, such as the conflict in Ukraine (Cheterian, 2023). This geographic reality still

remains a central component in expert evaluations of Turkish-Russian relations, as both countries consider the region central to their spheres of influence and security strategies.

Considering geopolitics in the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea, and Central Asian supply routes, Turkey is indeed an important player. However, due to this privileged position, Turkey equally faces several difficulties: juggling conflicting interests, regional conflicts, and the aspirations of strong neighbors like Russia. Turkey is a regional critical player in shaping the balance of power in its region. Thus, all the above points act as the basis for any problem faced by Turkey.

### **2.3.2. National Security Interests**

The national security interests of both Turkey and Russia have more often than not run in opposite directions, given their different alliances and strategic objectives. Membership in NATO since 1952 has placed Turkey as a very important ally of the West, especially during the Cold War, when it acted as a buffer state against Soviet expansionism (Oğuzlu, 2013). This strategic role was not only a reflection of Turkey's geographic location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia but also a reflection of its alignment with the West to counterbalance Soviet influence in the region (Aras, 2009). The country's role in NATO's missile defense systems and strategic military bases has further secured its position of importance within the Western alliance, but it has also added to tensions with Russia (Keser, 2016).

On the other hand, Russia has pursued a different trajectory in its security partnerships, largely due to its leading role in the Collective Security Treaty Organization or CSTO. The CSTO is a military alliance of various post-Soviet states, which aims to guarantee Russia's predominance in the region and counterbalance the influence of NATO (Köremezli, 2021). Setting up rival alliances catalyzed the distrust between Russia and Turkey, as both believed the other nation's military tactic was to create regional imbalance.

However, the relationship between Russia and Turkey has changed in the post-Cold War era to include aspects of collaboration despite these underlying concerns. Opportunities for collaboration have been created by bilateral participation in energy

commerce, regional stability measures, and counterterrorism campaigns (Derman, 2021). For instance, while supporting opposite forces in the Syrian Civil War, Russia and Turkey have collaborated on the Astana process (Cheterian, 2023). These exchanges demonstrate how pragmatic their partnership is, with shared interests frequently triumphing over ideological disagreements (Köstem, 2015).

One of the most significant and contentious examples of this strategic partnership is the purchase of the S-400 missile defense system by Russia. Turkey announced its change of security strategy in 2017 and completed it in 2019. With this decision, Turkey showed how much it had the intention of distancing itself from its NATO ally, although it might raise resentment with its western allies, especially the United States that applied penalties subsequent to the decision (Kibaroglu, 2019). The agreement between the two is a good example of how both collaboration and competition shape the ties between Turkish and Russian countries. It is not an easy thing for both Russia and Turkey to balance their bilateral relationship.

Furthermore, despite staying loyal to NATO, Turkish foreign policy under current President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has had to balance its regional security strategy between independence and alignment with Russia on a few issues (Köstem, 2015; Derman, 2021). In energy infrastructure projects like the TurkStream pipeline, Turkish-Russian collaboration has prioritized commercial objectives above military relations characterized by rivalry and mistrust (Kardaş, 2018; Kibaroglu, 2019).

This section thematically opens the national security theme, one of the six priority areas surveyed in the expert perception survey. It sets the stage for further empirical analysis by putting the historical and strategic importance of national security in bilateral relations.

Actually, their attitude to regional crises demonstrates the dual nature of Turkish-Russian security ties. While both nations have occasionally coordinated their efforts, as seen by their handling of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (İnaç and Hadji 2022), they frequently back competing factions in a number of other wars, including the Libyan war (Derman 2021) and the Syrian war (Nabiev and Nafikov 2021). The

delicate balance that exists between them is constantly brought to light by these dynamics, one that is readily thrown off balance by internal or external forces.

To conclude, Russia's and Turkey's national security objectives show practicality as well as hostility. While their NATO and CSTO ties testify to their differing approaches (Sakwa, 2017; Köremezli, 2021), their cooperation in energy, counter-terrorism and regional security shows how they can work together (Cheterian, 2023). Turkish-Russian relations show that international security matters cannot be solved with mere military approaches (Ulusoy, 2023).

### **2.3.3. Ideological Movements**

Ever since, Russia and Turkey have a long history of ideological rivalry and conflict at war. Russia was regarded as the protector of the Slavic and Orthodox minority in eastern Europe and the Balkans long ago. Their strategies were closely related, and that was frequently used as a reason for involvement against the Ottomans (Cheterian, 2023). In the 19th century, Russia helped the Orthodox Christians living in the Balkans and tried to weaken the Ottoman Empire. Through closer relations with Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece's nationalists, the group established itself as the enemy of the Ottoman Empire but also religious and cultural unifier (Fisher, 1987; Cheterian, 2023).

This ideological narrative grasped Russia in addition to the Balkans. Russia's desire to safeguard Orthodox Christians was tied to its geopolitical objectives, particularly its desire for warm-water ports and access to strategically significant areas (Fisher, 1987). The Ottoman Empire often launched military campaigns. They wanted more than simply growth, though. Such initiatives were launched by Russia solely to protect Orthodox people (Shaw, 1976). The long-lasting animosity engendered by these campaigns led to future competition and mistrust between the two countries (Aksan, 2007).

On the Turkish side, nationalism and Islamic identity have played an equally critical role in foreign policy. Towards the end of the Ottoman period, as losses began to be suffered and with the Russians considered a threat, nationalist movements started

emerging. These movements emphasized the maintenance of territorial sovereignty and resistance to foreign interference, blaming Russia as a main enemy (Hale, 2023) This idea continues into the early Republican period of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk when secularism and Turkish nationalism were accepted as the new state's ideas. Atatürk's priorities referred to national sovereignty and independence in general but especially in the face of Soviet designs in the Caucasus and the Black Sea (Derman, 2021; Köremezli, 2021).

However, Turkey has undergone a series of ideological shifts in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Turkish foreign policy began to include aspects of Islamic identity and neo-Ottomanism under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's leadership (Yılmaz & Özdemir, 2017; Ulusoy, 2023). Increased political, cultural and economic relations have emerged with Central Asia's Turkic and Islamic states, following this shift. Turkey used common religious and cultural links to expand its influence in the region that had been historically disputed with Russia. Although this led to some collaboration among the two nations, it made them more contending, especially in the post-Soviet region (İnaç & Hadji, 2022).

The fall of the USSR in 1991 marked the beginning of a new era of ideological conflict. As newly established Turkic republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus claimed that their languages and histories were interchangeable, Turkey's demand for economic and cultural cooperation was strengthened (Aras & Fidan, 2019; Köstem, 2015). Using its economic, political, and military might, Russia attempted to exert control over these regions. Other rivals in the area profited from Russia's security measures and Turkey's deployment of soft power. For instance, Turkey backed Azerbaijan, while Russia was too busy mediating and stifling anti-Russian attitudes to stop the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Cheterian, 2023).

Despite their opposing ideologies, Turkey and Russia have at times had common interest in their collaborative effort to address regional problems and mutual economic relations. Russia and Turkey were able to put aside their differences and agree on enormous and intricate strategic objectives. However, the two states' continuous ideological rivalry is not eliminated; they clash throughout the Middle East, Caucasus, and Central Asia.

In sum, nationalism and religion have played important roles in Turkish-Russian relations throughout history. The two regimes' diverse ideologies support the pursuit of broader interests and identities. They thus generate state relations that are some of the most complex and multidimensional in the contemporary world.

## **2.4. Contemporary Issues In Turkish-Russian Relations**

### **2.4.1. The Syrian Conflict**

Contemporary Turkey-Russian relations, characterized by both the potential for cooperation and the struggle of interests, have been defined by the Syrian Civil War (Cheterian, 2023). The two nations have distinct Middle East goals. The Syrian conflict in 2011 has widened the gulf between the two nations. Notwithstanding their respective stakes in the area, Russia and Turkey's conflicts over Syria are a reflection of their geopolitical aspirations and security challenges in a larger sense (Demir & Yılmaz, 2020). While these confrontations frequently resulted in significant conflicts, they also brought about reality when needed (Khaki, 2023).

Both internal and regional factors have driven the involvement of Turkey in the Syrian conflict. As the latter started to unfold, so did Turkey emerge as a staunch supporter of various opposition forces that sought to overthrow the Assad regime. At the same time, it is based on several strategic concerns, including preventing an autonomous Kurdish region right along the southern border of Turkey, perceived as a direct threat to its national security. The concern has been that Kurdish groups, specifically the People's Protection Units (YPG), may end up taking over northern Syria's territories, which are closely linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and have long been involved in an insurgency against the Turkish state (Demir & Yılmaz, 2019).

In addition to handling the Kurdish issue, Turkey has attempted to lessen the influence of Iran as part of their ongoing engagement in Syria. With the help of pro-Assad forces and other Shiite militias, Iran, an Assad ally, increased its power throughout the Levant (Cheterian, 2023). Turkey views the rise of Shiite influence as a

challenge to its position as the dominant Sunni state in the area. Turkey has attempted to fortify Syria's opposition parties in an effort to thwart the Iranian-backed Assad regime's consolidation. (Gümüş, 2022; Çelikpala, 2019)

Actually, Russian's intervention in the Syrian conflict has, on the contrary, been inspired by Moscow's goal of standing with its long-time ally, the Assad regime, and to sustain its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this regard, Syria is of particular importance to Russia because it offers an important foothold in the region, especially in terms of access to the naval base at Tartus-the only Russian military facility outside the former Soviet Union (Hill & Taşpınar, 2006). By supporting the Assad regime, Russia sought to exert its influence in the Middle East, counter Western intervention, and project power in a region important for military and energy interests (Erşen & Köstem, 2019). That military intervention, comprising airstrikes and the deployment of ground troops in 2015, marked a turning point in the war in Assad's favor and underlined Russia's determination to keep its ally in power.

Conflicting interests between Turkey and Russia reached a peak in November 2015 when the Turkish military downed a Russian Su-24 fighter near the border of the two countries, which Ankara declared a violation of its airspace. Moscow, however, denied invading Turkish airspace. Beyond causing a grave deterioration in bilateral relations, the incident triggered an immediate diplomatic crisis. In response, Russia imposed economic sanctions on Turkey, banning Turkish imports, suspending tourism flows, and freezing several joint economic projects (Aras & Fidan, 2019). This diplomatic standoff demonstrated the volatility of Turkey-Russia relations, particularly when their interests collided in a conflict zone, underlining the fragile nature of their interactions (Kardaş, 2018).

Yet, despite this serious setback, both Turkey and Russia soon realized the imperative for restoration of cooperation impelled by larger strategic interests. The realization that neither of them could resolve the Syrian conflict unilaterally brought about the restoration of diplomatic channels. In early 2017, Turkey and Russia, together with Iran, co-initiated the Astana Process, a diplomatic process of managing the Syrian conflict through negotiated ceasefires and the establishment of de-escalation zones (Nabiev & Nafikov, 2021). The Astana talks, even though not fully resolving the

conflict, did show the capacity of both Turkey and Russia to iron out their differences through pragmatic diplomacy (Cheterian, 2023). Accordingly, both countries realized that further confrontation would damage their general interests in the region and limited cooperation was a necessity in order to prevent further escalation (Çelikpala, 2019).

The Astana Process allowed Turkey and Russia to embark on joint military and diplomatic efforts in Syria despite their fundamental disagreements over the future of the Assad regime. For Turkey, the process has provided a platform to pursue its goal of preventing a Kurdish autonomous region along its border, while for Russia, it has offered an opportunity to consolidate Assad's position and protect its strategic assets in the region (Demir & Yılmaz, 2019). Mutual interests have compelled the cooperation between Turkey and Russia on ways to handle specific areas of the Syrian Conflict: avoiding a humanitarian crisis and retaining regional stability. This cooperation is fragile and most often eclipsed by broader tensions, which have shaped their involvement in Syria (Çelikpala 2019; Yüce & Amour, 2021).

Among the most contentious features of their Syria policy is the situation in Idlib, one of the largest strongholds of opposition forces. The deployment of troops by Turkey in northern Syria aims at establishing a buffer zone and thus preventing a refugee crisis; at the same time, Turkey tries to shield from an all-out assault by Syrian government forces, backed by Russia, opposition-held areas in Idlib (Demir & Yılmaz, 2020). Moscow, in turn, has supported Assad's efforts to retake Idlib because the defeat of the opposition is important for the reconsolidation of Syrian territory. The result has been repeated clashes between Turkish-backed opposition forces and Syrian government troops, with Russia providing air support for Assad's offensives (Hale, 2023; Sakwa, 2017).

The tensions in Idlib reveal a fragile cooperation between Turkey and Russia on Syria. Necessary pragmatism has pushed both to work out conflict-management approaches, but their respective core objectives remain in diametric opposition to each other. For Turkey, this involves preventing a Kurdish enclave and averting a humanitarian tragedy on its border, while for Russia, it centers on restoring Assad's rule over the entire Syrian territory (Cheterian, 2023). Despite these differences, both sides have demonstrated that where their interests converge-particularly on managing

ceasefires and coordinating military activities to prevent direct confrontation-cooperation is possible (Sakwa, 2017; Çelikpala, 2019).

In conclusion, the conflict between Russia and Turkey in Syria influenced the two countries' current relationship. The conflict has demonstrated how differently the two nations view their objectives, particularly, how they perceive security and regional predominance inside their own domains (Erşen & Köstem, 2020). However, there was a great deal of strategic and diplomatic interaction due to the necessity of controlling the situation (Cheterian, 2023). The Astana Process and the Idlib discussions demonstrate the complexity of the Turkish-Russian relationship in Syria. It doesn't imply that they concur, instead, it implies that the two nations must work together in spite of their differences (Ulusoy, 2023).

#### **2.4.2. The Ukraine War**

Due to the war in Ukraine, Turkish-Russian relations have become more complicated since Turkey's foreign policy is not only multifaceted but often contradictory. Although Turkey has made it official that it condemned Russia's annexation of Crimea way back in 2014 and has offered strong support to Ukraine, it has strategically avoided a direct confrontation with Moscow (Yüce & Amour, 2021). Instead, Ankara plays a mediatory role seeking a balance between the West and Russia. As a result, Turkey was able to preserve its economic and geopolitical interest. Turkey's dual strategy allows it to balance NATO interests and may assist Moscow, as it strengthens Turkey's bargaining position with Europe and the US by showing its prominence as an indispensable player (Hale, 2023; Gümüş, 2022; Rakhmatov, 2019).

However, Turkey's response to the Ukraine war is influenced by several factors. Turkey's energy dependence of heavy Russian influence of most important factors affecting its position. Turkey's sources believe Russia will not cut off gas supplies, offering the country more room than other recommended alternatives such as liquefied natural gas (LNG). Ankara's dependence on Moscow for energy makes it hard for Turkey to take a more aggressive stance toward Russia, as doing so would hurt both and economic relations (Köstem, 2015). Turkey considers energy security to be vital, and steady energy supplies from Russia are crucial for Turkey's economy. It seeks to

alleviate energy vulnerabilities where it can but still may rely on external suppliers (Kardaş, 2018; Aras, 2009).

Apart from energy, another significant component of Turkey's economic ties with Russia is Russian tourism. Turkey's yearly tourism income is mostly derived from Russian visitors, especially in areas like Antalya and the Turkish Riviera. Since tourism is of essence to Turkey's economy, there have been calls for the country to strike a balance in its foreign policy towards Russia because any strained relations will mean fewer tourists coming in and thus a general economic implication. Turkey has chosen to cooperate diplomatically rather than directly confront Russia over the crisis in Ukraine, which is explained by its reliance on Russian tourist and energy ties (Aras & Fidan, 2019; Gümüş, 2022; Yılmaz & Özdemir, 2017)

While trying to keep its economic relationship with Russia, Turkey has tried to strengthen its defence ties with Ukraine simultaneously. Turkey is supporting Ukraine with military aid in the form of Bayraktar TB2 drones against Russia. Drones manufactured by Turkey's defense industry have been used for military operations in Ukraine, especially against Russian armored vehicles and infrastructure (Derman, 2021). Turkey is selling military equipment to Ukraine, but it demonstrates the willingness of Ankara to maintain sovereignty and territorial integrity for Ukraine. Meanwhile, it demonstrates how Ankara has been careful to balance the bilateral relations it shares with Russia by supplying it with military equipment in increasing volume (Yanık, 2019). Sale of drones by Turkey to Ukraine also refers to the country's intention to strengthen its defense industry and assert influence as a regional power in matters beyond its borders (Ersen & Köstem, 2020).

However, this military support provided by Turkey for Ukraine does not reflect a comprehensive pivot away from its strategic engagements with Russia. Rather, it exemplifies Turkey's dual strategy for diplomatic flexibility: supporting Ukraine's resistance against the aggression of Russia, while also carefully managing its interactions with Moscow to avoid a complete breakdown in relations (Ulusoy, 2023). This delicate balance is indicative of Turkey's broader foreign policy, which has striven to strike a balance between the demands placed upon it by its Western allies and those that come from its economic and security relationships with non-Western states, notably

Russia. This has enabled Ankara to become a kind of mediator in the conflict, supporting negotiations such as the grain deal, which attempted to solve international food security concerns by opening Ukrainian grain exports from the Black Sea (Aras & Fidan, 2019; Köremezli, 2021).

The most recent example of such a positive role of Turkey for Ukraine has been the agreement over grain that Turkey brokered in 2022. Because of its geopolitics, Turkey can be positive for Ukraine: as a Black Sea power, it could impact trade routes, and with that, its strength forced communication between Russia and Ukraine (Yücel, 2023). The agreement has mitigated the consequences of the war for the world's food supply and allowed Ukraine to return to agricultural exports so crucial to the nation's economy. In terms of implications, for Turkey-a mediator and key player for any settlement in the crisis-it has meant a promise of open channels of communication with both Kyiv and Moscow. Turkey's role as a mediator through the conflict has enhanced its international standing and aided in its ability to handle such intricate matters diplomatically (Çelikpala, 2019; Gökçekuyu, 2023).

As a matter of fact, Turkey has also raised concerns regarding its long-term strategic alignment with NATO membership. The strong position it held within the alliance complicated efforts by NATO to unite as one force in opposing Russia. The country has not fully aligned itself with the sanctions implemented by the United States and the European Union against Russia. While Turkey has condemned the annexation of Crimea and voiced support for Ukraine, its ongoing economic and defense ties with Russia create tensions within the alliance, complicating NATO's strategy in the region (Kibaroğlu, 2019; Oğuzlu, 2021).

This has also fanned renewed controversies over NATO's role in the Black Sea area and Turkey's place within that alliance. Regarding regional security dynamics, Turkey holds an important position due to its double status of Asia and Europe, where its military has increased its presence, especially in the Black Sea area, since the annexation of Crimea. The approach of Turkey is complicated by the delicate balance between preserving ties with Russia and helping Ukraine while NATO looks to strengthen its collective defense posture in the area. This will depend on its capacity to

maintain this delicate balance in Turkey's participation in NATO and larger geopolitical goals (Yılmaz & Özdemir, 2017; Sakkas & Zhukova, 2013).

The future of Turkish-Russian relations will, no doubt, be shaped in the coming period by how both states navigate the increasingly changing geopolitical contours of the War in Ukraine. In this war, Turkey finds a source of challenges and opportunities (Kardaş, 2018). On the one hand, Turkey has to balance its economic dependency on Russia, mainly in the fields of energy and tourism, without alienating its NATO allies. On the other hand, this war offers an opportunity for Turkey's defense industry-for its support to Ukraine-and projects itself as a regional mediator with much potential to have its say in what happens in that conflict (Cheterian, 2023). The degree to which Turkey is able to balance commitments to NATO against economic and security interests in Russia will be a great determinant of how Turkish-Russian relations unfold in the next few years.

#### **2.4.3. Energy Politics and Black Sea Tensions**

The Black Sea also forms a very important strategic region for both Turkey and Russia, at the junction of energy transportation and geopolitics. This section analyzes the complex interplay between energy politics and tensions in the Black Sea, which have shaped Turkish-Russian relations through competition and cooperation (Yücel, 2023; Aras & Fidan, 2019).

As the Black Sea is a very important energy corridor, the relationship of Turkey with Russia comes to be so significant. Major pipelines like TurkStream, the Blue Stream, transferring Russian natural gas to Turkey and Europe, have been able to show the economic interdependence between the two states. For instance, the TurkStream tightens the screws more and grows the geopolitical rivalry. The duality of energy cooperation, in promoting economic cooperation on one side and reinforcing asymmetry of power on the other, underlines the very intricacies of Turkish-Russian relations. Dependence on Russian energy sources makes up a significant part of its overall energy consumption and forces it to balance that dependence by positioning itself as an essential transit country for Europe's energy supplies (Kardaş 2018; Kalashnikov 2013).

However, the strategic importance of the Black Sea is not limited to energy transportation. The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 has dramatically changed the security dynamics in the region, solidifying Russian dominance and limiting Turkish influence (Cheterian, 2023). This militarization of the Black Sea has raised tensions, especially with the increasing presence of NATO in the region. This balance is precarious, given the presence of Russian naval forces and the strategic alliance that Turkey has forged with NATO; energy politics are thus deeply intertwined with broader security concerns (Sakkas & Zhukova, 2013; Aras, 2009).

The interplay between energy projects such as TurkStream and security tensions in the Black Sea underlines the complexity of economic cooperation and geopolitical rivalry. Being a NATO member and aligning increasingly with Western allies, Turkey is in tension with its high dependence on Russian energy, hence the need for a careful balancing act. Energy politics and Black Sea tensions represent a bridge and a barrier in Turkish-Russian relations at the same time. While encouraging regional cooperation through mutual economic interests, they also strengthen regional security concerns and great power competition. It is these paradoxes which have to be comprehended for handling the complexities involved in the relationship between Turkey and Russia (Kalashnikov, 2013; Çelikpala, 2019).

#### **2.4.4. NATO Expansion and Cyprus Issue**

NATO expansion and the Cyprus issue are considered two of the main factors that form the Turkish-Russian relationship. Very often, NATO membership puts Turkey in opposition to Russia's geopolitical interests (Oğuzlu, 2021), while the Cyprus conflict brings in another layer with historical grievances and regional alignments (Sakkas & Zhukova, 2013).

Turkey has been a NATO member since 1952. NATO membership provided Turkey with security guarantees while placing it on the same side as Western powers. The problem, however, is that this often goes against the strategic interests of Russia, especially with NATO's eastward expansion. NATO's presence on Russia's border is viewed by Russia as a direct threat (Sakwa, 2017). Turkey uses its NATO membership as a tool to counterbalance the influence of Russia. This dynamic is very pronounced,

particularly in the Black Sea region, where increased activity by NATO exacerbates tensions (Oğuzlu, 2013; Armutlu, 2023).

The Cyprus dispute further complicates the Turkish-Russian relationship because of the extreme difference between Turkey's staunch stance in view of recognition of the TRNC and Russia's traditional support for Greek Cypriot interests, underlining larger geopolitical conflicts between them, with the issue often used by Russia to weaken the unity of NATO (Sakkas & Zhukova, 2013). The Cyprus problem affects Turkish-Russian relations though, admittedly, not as much as issues involving energy or security. Despite that reality, the issue is still a sensitive challenge to Turkish foreign policy and Turkish relations with Russia, and allies in the West (Şeker, 2023; Hill & Taşpınar, 2006).

In conclusion and in terms of energy and security, the above dynamics provide a great example of how Turkey needs to balance its obligations to Russia and NATO. A further source of complexity and a contributing factor to the confrontation with Russia is the Cyprus issue and NATO membership (Sakkas & Zhukova, 2013). Thus, the NATO expansion and the Cyprus issue have contributed to the complex character of Turkish-Russian relations. While membership in NATO strengthens the security framework of Turkey, it brings much friction with Russia (Armutlu, 2023). Equally, wider geopolitical rivalries have constantly reflected the dispute in Cyprus. Of course, strategic balance and sophisticated diplomacy have the requirement of not leaving behind such problems while managing these regional and international relationships. A policy analyst of such a nature would fathom how these complex nuances wove together an intricate web that will define the course of future Turkish-Russian relations.

## **2.5. Economic Interactions and Trade Relations**

Economic relations between Turkey and Russia have followed a complex dance of cooperation and competition for centuries. From Ottoman-Russian treaties in the 17th century to modern agreements today, trade forms the bedrock of this bilateral relationship (Faroqhi, 2004). Those economic interactions-influenced through mutual

dependencies, geopolitical constraints-shape significant changes on the impulse from historical events, regional development, and changing world dynamics (Sakwa, 2017).

Among the very first formal agreements of trade was the 1774 Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, marking an end to the Russo-Turkish War, allowing the way for access to the Ottoman ports for the merchants from Russia, setting precedence for economic involvement between the empires. (Inalcik 2000). In the 19th century, the trade ties continued to expand, with the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829, which allowed for more significant commercial exchanges as the Ottoman Empire was trying to find a way out of its economic instability due to internal challenges (Fisher, 1987). By the early 20th century, despite the political antagonism, the Treaty of Moscow of 1921 between the then-newly formed Soviet Union and Turkey established a groundwork for economic cooperation during their time of mutual geopolitical isolation (Somel, 2016).

The dynamics in the aftermath of World War II ushered in a new phase in Turkish-Russian economic relations. The Cold War minimized the possibilities of direct economic interaction on account of the ideological divide between the two powers; however, indirect trade continued, especially in primary products (Sakkas & Zhukova 2013; Seton-Watson, 1967). Further avenues for economic cooperation emerged with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The signing of the 1997 Black Sea Economic Cooperation Pact and discussions on the 2004 Free Trade Agreement demonstrated the mutual will for closer economic ties despite political issues still remaining (Cheterian, 2023).

In the 21st century, the trade between Turkey and Russia has grown exponentially. Complementary economic structures are at the core of such massive growth. Supplies of natural resources such as natural gas, metals, and agricultural products are exported by Russia, while machinery, textiles, and food products are supplied by Turkey (Aras, 2009). The notable agreements include the 2007 intergovernmental agreement on natural gas supplies and the establishment of TurkStream in 2019, reflecting the strategic importance of their energy trade. These all emphasize the pragmatic approach both countries have adopted in the development of their economic relations, despite geopolitical disputes.

Critically, Turkey and Russia's trade agreements are also vulnerable to exogenous shocks. The geopolitical crises like the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and the subsequent sanctions by the West have reshaped trade dynamics and forced Turkey to balance its economic interests with its responsibilities as a NATO member. Seasonal tariffs, sector-specific restrictions, and occasional embargoes further put the resilience of their economic ties to a test (Kalashnikov, 2013).

In brief, trade agreements, energy dependencies, and joint ventures are the dimensions that critically establish the economic relations between Turkey and Russia, yet at the same time complicate their bilateral relations. An integrated analysis, while incorporating historical evolution in the realms of trade relations and also critically reviewing the present dynamics, is indicative of the fact that economic cooperation acts as a building block for the two, hence creating problems in bigger geopolitical strategies.

### **2.5.1. Trade Agreements**

Trade agreements between Turkey and Russia represent a pragmatic approach toward developing economic relations, which in turn are a function of historical necessity and geopolitical strategy. The agreements have changed from limited and region-based agreements to comprehensive frameworks covering a wide range of economic sectors over many centuries (İnalçık, 2000). At times of war and rivalry, trade has always been a force of stability in the relations between Turks and Russians, with the complementary nature of their economic structures driving this forward (Aras, 2009).

Traditionally, Russia has been a very important supplier to Turkey, offering such raw materials as metals, wheat, and energy resources, and continues to remain pivotal in the two countries' trade. On its part, Turkey is a serious exporter of textiles, machinery, and agricultural produce. This kind of exchange serves as the economic foundation between the two states and engenders mutual interests for continued trade, regardless of the more general political climate between them (Kalashnikov, 2013).

In fact, it was economic cooperation that came first and set the historical path for trade agreement. One of the early agreements granting Russian merchants a right of entrance to the ports was the Küçük Kaynarca Treaty dating 1774; it indeed introduced a turning in the balance in the regional setting and a fertile ground for a forthcoming economic cooperation (İnalçık, 2000). Likewise, the Treaty of Adrianople (1829) increased trade, demonstrating the Ottoman Empire's emerging necessity for economic stabilization in the face of its internal and external pressures (Fisher, 1987).

In the 20th century, the Treaty of Moscow between the Soviet Union and Turkey was established in 1921-a landmark treaty where political tension would be overcome with economic cooperation. It provided access to the very much-needed resources for Turkey while it provided a strategic partner for the Soviet Union within this region (Somel, 2016). The post-World War II dynamics, while restricted by ideological divisions of the Cold War era, did involve indirect trade mechanisms that continued to support economic interaction (Sakkas & Zhukova, 2013).

However, trade relations started again with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The most crucial one is the 1992 BSEC agreement, which aimed at establishing regional economic integration, mainly to develop trade and infrastructure. An intergovernmental agreement was made in 2007 on the delivery of natural gas, and more recently in 2019, regarding the "TurkStream" project (Armutlu, 2023). While these agreements mark the positive features of trade, they also reveal the geopolitical risks of such a partnership management (Çelikpala, 2019).

Despite their economic significance, trade agreements between Russia and Turkey are vulnerable to geopolitical upheavals. Sanctions have been indirectly affecting Turkey's economic strategy, especially those imposed by the West on Russia following its annexation of Crimea in 2014. Ankara frequently has to balance its obligations to its NATO membership with its economic objectives. Their fragile interdependency status is highlighted by the imposition of sectoral limits and seasonal tariffs, which further complicates the relationship (Ersen & Köstem, 2020).

Efforts at diversification by Turkey also dramatize how overdependence on the Russian markets is a challenge. During recent decades, Ankara has pursued the

expansion of trade ties with the European Union, China, and other Asian economies to reduce its economic vulnerability. This approach has not shrunk the important position of Russian markets, especially in energy and agriculture, in which sectors Turkey remains highly dependent (Hale 2023; Kibaroglu 2019).

Trade agreements are very often as much a political signaling tool as they are economic ones. From a strategic perspective, the alliance is an asset for Moscow because it was willing to talk business with Turkey even when tensions between them were higher than usual. On the other hand, Turkey's pragmatic foreign policy approach is underlined by the fact that it keeps ties with NATO allies warm while continuing to work with Russia on economic issues (Köremezli, 2021).

In essence, the dual nature of the trade agreements both as a geopolitical tool and as an instrument of economic cooperation obviously illustrates the more complex nature of Turkish-Russian relations. Both countries have been capable of using trade as a political and strategic tool in order to show the importance of these agreements in setting the course for their bilateral relations.

### **2.5.2. Energy Dependencies**

Energy interdependence is one critical axis that forms Turkish-Russian economic relations and influences the dynamics at both a bilateral and regional level. Being one of the biggest energy-producing countries in the world, and with Turkey being an energy-dependent country, interdependence in their relationship is very complex. Natural gas remains predominant in this respect, given the fact that Russia covers nearly half of the annual gas consumption of Turkey. This reliance underscores the asymmetry in their economic engagement and highlights the strategic importance of energy agreements in their bilateral ties (Kibaroglu, 2019).

The strategic energy infrastructure has played an important role in the definition of energy relations between Turkey and Russia. TurkStream and Blue Stream were examples of that depth, on one side, but vulnerabilities innate to such dependencies are also being shown. The Blue Stream pipeline, operational since 2003, marked an important step in sealing energy ties as it was specifically designed to transport Russian

gas directly to Turkey beneath the Black Sea (Aras, 2009). TurkStream, launched in 2020, had extended that partnership by including in its grid Russian gas destined for southeastern Europe besides Turkey alone (Sakwa, 2017).

Moreover, the two pipelines are part of Moscow's larger strategy to sidetrack traditional transit routes through Ukraine and minimize its geopolitical exposure, yet maintain a firm grip on the European energy markets. For Turkey, they symbolize the possibility to become a decisive energy transit player that would bring the country much greater geopolitical heft in both regional and global energy politics. However, by tightly linking Ankara's energy security to Russian infrastructure and supplies, this position also increases Ankara's vulnerability (Ersen & Köstem, 2020; Kalashnikov, 2013).

Additionally, mutual benefit created in economic aspects and stability from the collaboration in regard to energy projects means the opening of vast risks for Turkey. The predominant role of Russia as a supplier already implies not only economic dependence but also some sort of geopolitical lever of Moscow's influence in bilateral relations. For instance, instability in the price of gas, broken supplies, or political crises might directly affect the energy security of Turkey. This dynamic has historically constrained Ankara's ability to adopt independent policies during periods of tension with Moscow (Kardaş, 2018).

Besides natural gas, energy interdependence also includes nuclear energy cooperation. The Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant project, led by Russia's Rosatom, gives the clearest example of long-term dependence. While this investment promises the modernization of the energy infrastructure in Turkey, embedding Russian technological and operational control within Turkey's domestic energy landscape has a dark side to sovereignty and resilience (Ovalı & Özdikmenli, 2020).

In light of these dangers, the diversification strategy has been actively promoted as a risk-reduction strategy in recent years. Investing in renewable energy sources like solar and wind fits into a larger plan to increase Turkey's energy security. In an attempt to reduce its reliance on Russian gas, the nation has also concentrated on diversification with alternative sources, such as the collaboration with Azerbaijan through TANAP and Qatar by importing LNG (Armutlu, 2023; Yılmaz & Özdemir, 2017).

However, diversification remains a very cumbersome and slow process. Geopolitical constraints, financial limitations, and the scale of infrastructure required to support alternative energy sources have restricted Ankara's ability to make considerable changes in its energy portfolio. Such a fragile balancing act exemplifies the intricacy of Turkey's energy strategy-that must consider the economic needs, geopolitical pressures, and domestic energy demand (Ekinici, 2010).

Finally, the interaction between energy cooperation and geopolitical rivalry in Turkish-Russian relations underlines the duality in their interdependence. While energy projects like TurkStream are a symbol of mutual trust and cooperation, they also reflect the latent tensions and vulnerabilities that complicate the broader relationship. Because Turkey is both a consumer of Russian energy and a transit country for European markets, its role sits at the junction of different regional and global interests (Perović & Krempin, 2014; Ovalı & Özdikmenli, 2020).

This duality reflects wider challenges in the Turkish-Russian relationship, where economic interdependence serves both as a source of stability and of conflict. The strategic depth, therefore, can only be gauged together with the inherent risks of energy dependencies through understanding the bilateral relationship in its entirety.

### **2.5.3. Tourism and Infrastructure Projects**

Tourism and infrastructural projects are highly relevant to the Turkish-Russian relations, showing mutual economic interests, but this influence goes to wider political dynamics. Russia is one of the most continuous and significant countries for incoming tourism in Turkey over the years: in 2019, more than 7 million Russian tourists came into the country and made up approximately 16% of total international arrivals to the country (Balta, 2019). This also brings billions of dollars into the economy of Turkey and deepens the interdependence of the two countries. Cities like Antalya and Istanbul have become symbols of Turkish-Russian connectivity, where cultural exchanges complement economic ties so well (Cheterian, 2023; Yüce & Amour, 2021).

However, the sensitivity of the tourism sector to geopolitical tensions makes it both a factor that could stabilize and a source of vulnerability in bilateral relations. For

instance, the downing of a Russian jet by Turkish forces in 2015 precipitated a diplomatic crisis that saw Russian tourist arrivals in Turkey drop almost 90% in 2016. A ban imposed by Russia on charter flights, among other sanctions, underlined its leverage over Turkey economically (Balta, 2019). Despite that, the remarkable recovery of tourism flows following the normalization of relations in mid-2016 shows how the economic pragmatism in their relationship can be resilient (Cheterian, 2023). This incident underlines a fact that tourism may be used as a barometer of the Turkish-Russian relationship; its ups and downs reflect the political situation between the two countries (Kara, 2017).

Beyond tourism, joint infrastructure projects have become a hallmark of economic and strategic interaction between Turkey and Russia. By far, the most prominent example of deepening economic relations between the two countries is the US \$20 billion Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant, which is led by Russia's Rosatom. When completed, this project is supposed to provide 10% of Turkey's electricity needs, thus constituting a very important stake for both economies and their geopolitical influence. Such projects solidify Russian influence over a key NATO member due to long-term embedded economic dependencies (Köstem, 2015). The project fits well with the plans for modernizing Turkish energy but does awaken anxieties related to dependence on Russian technology and expertise, particularly at times when bilateral relations may have worsened (Ovalı & Özdikmenli, 2020).

Actually, these infrastructure projects' strategic implications go way beyond economic cooperation. The Akkuyu project is a good example of how Russia buys political influence through its economic heavyweight, silently but effectively, as an indispensable partner in Turkey's developmental journey. However, the mere fact that it is prepared to take part in such massive projects shows how pragmatic it is in striking a balance between its collaboration with Moscow and its Western allegiances. On the other hand, such initiatives put Turkey at risk of geopolitical difficulties that might obfuscate their execution or viability (Perović & Krempin, 2014).

More importantly, the interaction between tourism and infrastructure is symbolic of the greater complexity of Turkish-Russian relations. Whereas tourism is generally a stabilizing factor that nurtures people-to-people contacts and provides mutual economic

benefit, it can nevertheless shift ground almost overnight due to political developments. Infrastructure projects, on the other hand, are a more rigid kind of interdependence, forging long-term links that are more difficult to cut off even in conditions of a diplomatic crisis. For instance, despite the tensions over Syria and NATO-related disagreements, economic cooperation in these sectors has been persistent, underscoring pragmatic prioritization of shared interests over ideological or strategic conflicts (Armutlu, 2023; Köstem, 2015).

In the end, the infrastructure and tourism initiatives reflect the paradox at the heart of Turkish-Russian relations: a bridge of cooperation, a front for a wall that strengthens dependence. Both countries are doing an extremely challenging balancing act between their economic and geopolitical interdependencies. Turkey and Russia are continuously altering their bilateral relationship through these types of economic exchanges, underscoring the notion that political strategy and economic stability are interwoven.

## **2.6. Conflict and Cooperation Between Turkey & Russia**

### **2.6.1. Geopolitical Conflicts and Alliances (1600-1878)**

A crucial juncture in Turkish-Russian relations, the years 1600–1878 were characterized by a complex interaction of territorial aspirations, religious beliefs, and military conflicts. The persistent dynamics of rivalry and interdependence that still define their relationship today were established during this period, which was characterized by a cyclical pattern of conflict and practical collaboration (Faroqhi, 2004; Badem, 2010; Jelavich, 1983).

The first contacts between the Ottoman and the Russian Empires were conditioned by the common interest of both empires in the expansion of the corresponding control and sphere of influence. While the Ottoman Empire was seeking the consolidation of its predominance over the Black Sea and Eastern Europe, the Russian Empire, under the Romanov dynasty, sought the warm-water ports with the ultimate goal of posing itself as the protector of the Orthodox Christians within the

Ottoman borders. In effect, his difference in objectives, or rather aspirations, ultimately led to the first full-scale conflict, the Russo-Turkish War (1686–1700). In addition to reflecting their conflicting goals, this conflict also described the part that the Danube and Crimea should play in such a competition (Fisher, 1987).

These wars culminated in the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774, which became a watershed in Ottoman-Russian relations. Most significantly, this treaty allowed Russia to protect Orthodox Christians inside the Ottoman Empire and gave it access to the Black Sea. Both of these provisions considerably changed the regional balance of power and mirrored the deteriorating standing of the Ottoman Empire. These conflicts finally reached their hotbed with the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774, marking a turn in Ottoman-Russian relations. Most notably, this treaty gave Russia access to the Black Sea and provided it with the right to protect Orthodox Christians within the Ottoman Empire. These provisions drastically shifted the regional balance of power in accordance with the fast-deteriorating position of the Ottoman Empire. Even more so, annexation by Russia in 1783 made Russia supreme in the Black Sea and further repressed the role of the Ottomans into subsidiary ones, setting the precedent for further expansion by the Russians. Hence, the late 18th century was one phase in which ascendancy of the Russians became very apparent (Fisher, 1987; Shaw, 1976; Aksan, 2007).

Despite these hostile developments, there were moments in time when both empires found the need to cooperate. During the Napoleonic Wars, for example, both the Ottoman Empire and Russia saw French expansion as a threat and for some time coordinated their efforts. The cooperation, however, was extremely short-lived because the latent rivalry over territory and religious influence once again started to resurface. This dynamic was underlined by the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829, which concluded another Russo-Turkish War, with Russia receiving wide-ranging territorial and economic concessions, while at the same time highlighting the Ottoman Empire's increasing inability to counterbalance Russian advances, especially in the Balkans. (Badem 2010; Hale 2023).

This trend in the Ottoman decline and the Russian ascendancy was to be sealed more firmly by the Crimean War of 1853-1856. Unlike before, this war engaged the

Western European powers of Britain and France, which intervened to block Russian expansionism. The intervention momentarily stayed the Russian preeminence in the Black Sea and gave the ailing Ottoman Empire the support it needed. Yet, the war equally demonstrated how much the Ottomans depended on European powers with respect to keeping their territorial integrity intact. The dependence became characteristic of their fading influence in the second half of the 19th century onward (Figes, 2010; Hale, 2023).

The apex of this phase was the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878, after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, in which substantial territorial gains were accorded to Russia and its Balkan allies at the further weakening of Ottoman control in Southeastern Europe. Although this treaty was revised in due course of things at the Congress of Berlin with a view to pressuring other European powers, this accord underscored both the strategic decline of the Ottoman Empire and Russia's ascendancy within the region. This close of the era would see the balance of geopolitical power between these two empires change substantially and decisively to reflect that one, namely Russia, had indisputably become the main regional player (Badem, 2010; Fisher 1987).

More broadly speaking, the geopolitical conflicts and alliances of the time expose a fascinatingly minute play between military power, religion, and diplomacy as modulators of Turkish-Russian relations. Religion thus assumed two aspects: first, it became an element of discord when Russia appealed to Orthodox Christianity to justify its intervention, and then as an active unifying element when during moments of rapprochement-as, for example, against Napoleonic France-religious issues created one solid block of cohesion. Similarly, the repeated wars and treaties redrew not only territorial boundaries but also ingrained patterns of mistrust and competition that would persist well into the modern era (Hale, 2023; Derman, 2021).

In addition to that, the strategic importance of the Black Sea, the Caucasus, and the Balkans turned out to be one more distinctive sign of their rivalries. Such a resource-rich and geopolitically important territory would continue facing the hotbed of their confrontation. This also created an impact on both the Ottoman Empire, as control of these territories ensured territorial integrity for them, while influence expanded into these spheres, forming the grounds of aspiration by Russia for its goals to be viewed as

a power; thus it made both the Black Sea and its rim crucial centers in the locus of their competition during these centuries (Aksan, 2007; Fisher, 1987).

In brief, the period from 1600 to 1878 embraces the development whereby Ottoman-Russian relations changed from a rivalry of near equals to one dominated by ascendancy from the Russian side. While the conflicts during this period underlined their competitive aspirations, occasional alliances were a pragmatic recognition of mutual interests (Jelavich, 1983; Badem, 2010). While these historical dynamics traced out a geopolitical contour for that time, they also set the understanding of the continuity of Turkish-Russian relations in subsequent centuries. The strategic and ideological patterns established during this period are remarkably relevant today, lending critical insights into the enduring complexities of their relationship (Faroqhi, 2004).

#### **2.6.2. Evolution of Turkish Foreign Policy Toward Russia (1920-2024)**

Turkish foreign policy toward Russia between 1920 and 2024 is a story of pragmatism and adaptability. What began as enemies gradually evolved into a sensitive game of cooperation and competition over the years (Hale, 2023). The pursuit of strategic independence by Turkey, its interaction with international powers, and its approach toward regional issues have helped it sail through these turbulences (Aras, 2009; Derman, 2021).

Where there is need, pragmatic collaboration was the main focus at the beginning of the period, this means that during the early Republican period; the Treaty of Moscow in 1921 was a time when the Soviet Union and the recently established Turkish Republic closely matched. These were two countries on the opposite shores of the continent, looking into ways to make their borders much stronger and who acted hostile against Western imperial pretension following their individual revolutions. Financial and military assistance from the Soviets during the Turkish War of Independence provided Ankara with the wherewithal to establish its sovereignty (Şöhret, 2023). Still, that cooperation did not imply friendship: ideological confrontation between Soviet Communism and Turkey's secular nationalism made this implicit tension the driving point in their relations for the decades to follow. Despite

these differences, this first phase of cooperation highlighted their common capability to put mutual interests first against external threats (Somel, 2016; Hale, 2023).

The Cold War ushered in a period of great divergence with the shift in global geopolitics. Full membership in NATO in 1952 aligned Turkey with the Western bloc, positioning it as a very strategic frontline state against Soviet expansionism. This alignment had to raise tensions with the Soviet Union, especially considering that at different critical moments, such as during the Cuban Missile Crisis, Turkey was housing U.S. military bases and nuclear weapons on its territory (Balta, 2019). Despite such ideological differences, small areas of cooperation did continue. Examples include Soviet aid for the industrial development of Turkey during the 1960s, which really showed the pragmatism underlying their relations. Such interactions point out that even at the height of rivalry, both countries valued functional engagement in non-political areas (Oğuzlu, 2013; Hale, 2023).

The post-Cold War period opened new opportunities and challenges for the relationship between Turkey and Russia. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the dramatic change in regional power dynamics made it possible for Turkey to expand its influence in traditionally contested regions like the Caucasus and Central Asia (Ekinici, 2010). This newly instigated competition coincided with greater economic interdependence, especially in the field of energy. A case in point is the Blue Stream pipeline, which has been operational since 2003, symbolizing their ability to foster economic cooperation despite lingering geopolitical tensions. Meanwhile, the country's foreign policy behavior at the same time expressed Turkey's wider diversification scheme—a balance between the country's rapport proper with Russia on one hand, with commitments with NATO on the other and accession hopes into the European Union. Such balancing actually signaled increasing confidence for pursuing a multidirectional foreign policy (Aras & Fidan, 2019).

However, the 21st century deepened the intricacies of Turkish-Russian relations, particularly in the light of regional conflicts. The Syrian Civil War, beginning in 2011, had sharply contrasting aims: Russia for the Assad regime to retain its influence in the Middle East, and Turkey in support of opposition forces for regime change. Despite these, both countries had goals that were in conflict with each other, and so the Astana

Process was born-a platform to de-escalate the conflict by diplomatic means. This pragmatic approach underlined the ways through which they could compartmentalize their differences to address broader security concerns. Yet, the Syrian conflict also highlighted the fragility of their cooperation insofar as clashes over regional dominance frequently undermined efforts to stabilize the region (Demir & Yılmaz, 2020; Nabiev & Nafikov, 2021).

Similarly, the Ukrainian crisis has put Turkish-Russian relations to great test. The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and its invasion of Ukraine in 2022 made things very difficult for Turkey. In face of such circumstances, Turkey was under extreme pressure since its NATO membership demanded solidarity in imposing sanctions on Russia. At the same time, however, Ankara chose a different strategy: it condemned the Russian aggression but still maintained economic and diplomatic relations with Moscow. One such dual approach could be seen in how Turkey mediated the deal on Black Sea grain to keep the agricultural export flow from Ukraine operational amidst hostilities. This act of balance actually points to an interesting consequence: how Ankara manages complex geopolitical pressures and fervently pursues a regional power role while not losing sight of its national security interests (Çelikpala 2019; Cagaptay 2019).

Furthermore, strategic autonomy also featured in the evolution of Turkish foreign policy relating to Russia, particularly in the domain of defense. The acquisition of the S-400 missile defense system from Russia in 2019 was a significant break from NATO norms and underlined the extent to which Turkey was willing to go in prioritizing its national security objectives over alliance cohesion. This move cooled Ankara's relationship with the US and other NATO members but at the same time illustrated a greater urge for Turkey to expand its defensive alliances. The current case once again represents the sophisticated balancing policy, which forms one of the significant features of Turkish foreign policy in seeking to cooperate with Russia on key issues while maintaining good relations with the West (Kibaroglu, 2019).

Geopolitical realities in the Black Sea region further underpin the complexity of the Turkish-Russian relationship. The militarization of the Black Sea, especially after Russia's annexation of Crimea, has increased tension in this area of strategic

importance. With its position as a member of NATO but with a strong economic alliance with Russia, Turkey is placed uniquely in the regional security landscape. While Ankara supported the increased NATO presence in the Black Sea, it concurrently called for dialogue with Moscow as a means of preventing further destabilization. The duality underlines the more general challenges involved in balancing security commitments with economic interdependence, a recurring theme in Turkish-Russian relations (Hale 2023; Köremezli 2021).

On the larger scale, the period from 1920 until 2024 does reveal in a greater degree of details that Turkish-Russian relations develop their cooperation-to-competition-to-conflict model: oscillations that, no doubt, characterized moments of shared purpose, say over the Astana Process, energy projects, and so forth, with those related to security concerns or the quest for regional leadership. This duality is symbolic of the larger foreign policy in which Turkey tries to insist on its geopolitical importance and negotiate the complexities of a multipolar world (Nabiev & Nafikov, 2021; Şeker, 2023).

In brief, the change in Turkish foreign policy toward Russia has become a significant structural balancing act between regional interests, global realignment, and historical legacies (Aras & Fidan, 2019; Hale, 2023). It has been stressful thus far, stuck between pragmatism and strategic flexibility. In the complex interplay of interdependence and divergences that characterized its relationship with Russia, Turkey has reached out to both partners and competitors (Çelikpala, 2019). Together, these create a landscape that can further elaborate some of the more central dynamics entailed within those higher themes of cooperation versus competition constitutive of greater Turkish-Russian relations.

## **2.7. Risks & Peace Possibilities In Turkish-Russian Relations**

The Russian-Turkish bilateral relationship represents a complex interaction of constant conflict alongside common interests. Throughout the centuries, interactions have demonstrated the dual nature of their relations between conflict and cooperation (Hale, 2023; Balta, 2019). The analysis thus discusses various threats to their

cooperation-such as regional rivalries, asymmetrical economies, and geopolitical rivalry-along with possibilities for peace impelled by diplomatic engagement, economic interdependence, and cooperative mechanisms (Aras & Fidan, 2019). The interplay of these factors reveals the dynamic nature of Turkish-Russian relations and their fragile stability.

### **2.7.1. Threats to the Relationship**

Multiple structural and persistent challenges come associated with the bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia. In terms of geopolitics, mismatched regional approaches, and susceptibilities due to economic interdependency, the dangers arise (Cheterian, 2023; Yüce & Amour, 2021). An analysis of main risk dimensions is undertaken further herein (Derman, 2021).

Among the most salient of these threats is geopolitical rivalry in strategically important regions, above all the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and the South Caucasus. A striking example of such rivalry is the Syrian Civil War. Turkey, which backs the opposition forces, has tried to establish a no-fly zone along its southern border, while the military intervention of Russia serves for saving the Assad regime. These have become the diverging aims that have driven military clashes, such as in 2015 when Turkish forces downed a Russian jet and severely strained relations. While efforts to reconcile via the Astana Process and other platforms, the fundamental differences in Syria have remained unresolved and thus continue to create tension between the two nations (Demir & Yılmaz, 2020; Nabiev & Nafikov, 2021).

Another parallel challenge is the one in Eastern Europe, where Turkey and Russia have different views on the conflict in Ukraine. Turkey has condemned Russia's annexation of Crimea and expressed support for the sovereignty of Ukraine, mirroring the position of NATO; this stance, however, has been modulated by its reluctance to enforce Western sanctions against Russia. This balancing role, though pragmatic, certainly creates mistrust on both sides, even while Turkey continues to supply Ukraine with military equipment, including Bayraktar drones, which have been very useful in containing Russian aggression (Cagaptay, 2019; Çelikpala, 2019).

Turkey, in the South Caucasus, by actively taking its part in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, had increased tensions with Russia, who traditionally viewed that region as within their sphere of influence. The active military and political support of Azerbaijan by Turkey in the 2020 conflict seriously challenged the position of Russia and thus called for some recalibration in their interactions. This competition only heightens the fragility in the partnership that their partnership enters where strategic interests may collide (Aras & Fidan, 2019).

This further complicates the picture of economic vulnerabilities. Historical energy trade served as a key stabilizer for the two states but created great asymmetries nevertheless. Specifically, Turkey relies so much on natural gas supplies by Russia-almost 45% of its overall consumption-that during politically tense periods, such dependence allows significant leverage for Russia. At the same time, however, the efforts of Turkey towards the diversification of energy sources-for instance, increasing liquefied natural gas imports from Qatar or the United States, or pursuing projects like TANAP with Azerbaijan-threaten Russian dominance in the country's energy market. These shifts therefore underscore the precariousness of their energy interdependence and the likely spillover of economic grievances to overall geopolitical conflict (Kibaroglu, 2019; Ersen & Köstem, 2020).

And last but not least, domestic factors also pose risks to the relationship. For example, in Turkey, foreign policy decisions are highly vulnerable to domestic variables like public opinion and the need to demonstrate national strength. Likewise, Russian foreign policy is determined to a great extent by its desire to counter the reach of NATO and to maintain its status as a great power. Such drivers at home may lead to unpredictable policy changes that dampen bilateral relations if there is political turbulence in either country (Hale, 2023; Köremezli, 2021).

### **2.7.2. Possibilities of Peace**

So far, against the background of these challenges, several factors provide opportunities for stability and collaboration: shared economic interests, regional cooperation mechanisms, and the unique geopolitical position of Turkey as a mediator.

The economy still remains the backbone of interdependence in their relations. In 2022, the trade volume between Turkey and Russia was \$33 billion, reflecting a deep level of economic engagement between them. Long-term cooperation in projects such as TurkStream and the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant exemplify this. Whereas for Turkey these projects reinforce its status as a regional energy hub, for Russia they provide assured markets and routes for its exported energy (Kardaş, 2018; Çelikpala, 2019).

Another possible field of peace between them is the regional cooperation platforms. For instance, the Astana Process in Syria is a suitable example of how Turkey and Russia might cooperate on regional conflicts. Even though their goals are often different, these platforms allow for dialogue and negotiation at least, which minimizes the risk of an escalation. The organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) acts similarly to provide a forum where members discuss mutual economic and environmental challenges as part of a shared responsibility (Demir & Yılmaz, 2020; Nabiev & Nafikov, 2021).

It is in respect to the fact that this geography, which puts Turkey as a bridge between the East and the West, escalates its role in conflict mediation involving Russia, into a facilitator of dialogue between opposing blocs. In return, alignment with NATO is matched with Eurasian partners. A very recent example of how Turkey can act as a regional mediator is represented by the Black Sea grain deal mediated in 2022. Allowing agricultural exports by Ukraine in the context of continued hostilities, Turkey showed one's potential to become a contributor to regional stability while sustaining diplomatic credibility both for Russia and the West. (Cagaptay, 2019).

The peace also goes hand in hand with cultural and societal relations. Tourism has been very active in building goodwill between these two nations. More than 7 million Russian tourists visited Turkey in 2019, bringing billions into its economy. Though geopolitical tensions periodically disrupted tourism flows, the resilience of the sector underlines its potential as a stabilizing factor. This, in addition, could enhance mutual understanding and reduce the chances of societal conflict through increasing cultural exchanges and people-to-people relationships (Cheterian, 2023; Yüce & Amour, 2021).

Lastly, the global transition to multipolarity provides a sweet opportunity for Turkey and Russia to come together with a common cause of reshaping the new world order. Both countries are ambitious to be leading actors in this emerging geopolitical atmosphere and thus hold great potential for consensus on various multilateral platforms. Both Turkey and Russia can come out of their historical rivalries to work together in overcoming many challenges that are being faced globally, including climate change, terrorism, and economic inequality (Aras & Fidan, 2019).

In essence, the Turkish-Russian relationship is an act of balance between risks and opportunities. Geopolitical competition, economic vulnerabilities, and domestic political dynamics are presenting severe tests to their partnership (Derman, 2021; Köremezli, 2021), whereas mutual economic interests, regional mechanisms of cooperation, and Turkey as a mediator-avenues toward stability and cooperation-are apparently what hold them together (Aras & Fidan, 2019). Given the priority of pragmatic engagement, playing on each other's mutual dependencies, Turkey and Russia can make this complex relationship work with a view to regional and global stability (Çelikpala, 2019).

## **2.8. Recent Conflicts & Their Impact on Turkish-Russian Relations**

A number of confrontations that reflect their changing geopolitical strategies, mutual interdependence, and the ongoing complexity of their relationships have greatly influenced the current phase of Turkish-Russian relations. These conflicts-which involve Syria and Ukraine as well as the consequences they have on military procurement show how complex their relationship is (Çelikpala, 2019; Demir & Yılmaz, 2020). Turkish-Russian relations are marked by practical collaboration in certain areas, such as diplomatic endeavors and economic interdependence, but they also show underlying tensions stemming from structural imbalances and conflicting geopolitical agendas (Aras & Fidan, 2019; Köremezli, 2021). Insights into the wider ramifications of these recent wars for bilateral ties and the regional and global power dynamics they impact are provided by this section.

### **2.8.1. The Syrian Civil War and Shifting Dynamics**

Since its outbreak, the Syrian Civil War has been the driving factor in the modern relationship between Turkey and Russia, shaping both cooperation and confrontation. For Turkey, the conflict entails a national security imperative with the Kurdish militias, particularly the threat deriving from the YPG, which Ankara perceives as nothing more than an extension of the PKK. Moreover, humanitarian, economic, and political challenges presented by the influx of millions of refugees into Turkey support the need to increase stability and security within this border region more (Ahmad, 2015). At the same time, the involvement in Syria reflects larger geopolitical ambitions to re-establish Russia as a key player in the Middle East. Supporting the Assad regime is an attempt by Moscow to maintain the strategic role within the region that it enjoyed hitherto, with military assets at the naval base of Tartus and the airbase of Hmeimim being regional presence linchpins (Ulusoy, 2021)

The Astana Process has lain at the very core of interaction between Turkey and Russia in Syria since it was launched in 2017-a trilateral initiative that included Turkey, Russia, and Iran. It was a process aimed at de-escalation and the establishment of deconfliction zones, offering a platform for dialogue amidst the complex dynamics of the war. While the Astana Process has had partial success in decreasing large-scale hostilities, it has often failed to tackle the very causes of the conflict or even a pathway toward lasting peace. One consistent complication is the divergence in what Turkey and Russia want: for Ankara, countering Kurdish forces and preventing refugee flows is key, while Moscow is attached to the preservation of the Assad regime's territorial integrity. These competing agendas have frequently brought the two powers into direct conflict, exposing the limits of their cooperation (Yükselen, 2020).

Such efforts of Turkey within northern Syria in the form of Operation Euphrates Shield of 2016, Operation Olive Branch of 2018, and Operation Peace Spring of 2019 illustrate the determination toward creating a security belt at its southern frontiers. Those were meant for neutralizing Kurdish militia threats along with those of the Islamic State, giving room for appropriate conditions for refugees' return to Syria. Still, such behavior frequently went in direct conflict with Russia's objective. For instance, Moscow's support for the Assad regime and its military efforts to take back areas from

the opposition have time and again run afoul of Turkey's efforts to solidify areas under its control. Fragile agreements, such as the Sochi Memorandum of Understanding in 2019, reflect how cooperation between both states stands on a tightrope where deconfliction mechanisms have been repeatedly put to test through events on the ground (SETA Foundation, 2020).

The Idlib province represents the last significant stronghold of the opposition forces and has emerged as a focal point of Turkish-Russian tensions. With the government seeking to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe by maintaining the military presence and rebel groups, Russian airstrikes in support of the Assad regime have become more aggressive. This was evident in the killing of Turkish soldiers by Russian-backed forces in 2020, indicating that their confrontation has been rather volatile (van Veen, 2021). Such incidents strain not only diplomatic relations but also reveal larger asymmetries in their relations, where Turkey has more often than not been seen reacting to strategic moves made by Russia.

However, the Syrian conflict, from a geopolitical perspective, represents the greater problem of balancing national interests with international realities. The Turkish ambitions to establish regional leadership and project power in the Middle East are highly constrained by Russia's superior military capability and influence over key actors in the conflict (Yüce & Amour, 2021). Yet, at the same time, the fact that Russia has to count on Turkey in handling some war-related issues, such as the flow of refugees and counterterrorism, makes Ankara indispensable in the region. This produces a paradoxical dynamic of interdependence whereby both countries have to work out their rivalries in order to maintain functional ties.

Economically, the Syrian conflict makes the Turkish-Russian relations even more complex. The reconstruction of Syria opens huge opportunities for both countries, with Russian companies eyeing lucrative contracts and Turkey seeking to exploit its logistical and construction expertise. However, without a political resolution to the conflict and in the face of ongoing instability in the region, they cannot capitalize on these opportunities (Kortunov & Erşen, 2018). The different visions of the future of Syria further complicate the economic cooperation prospects in the post-war period.

In summary, the Syrian Civil War has simultaneously been a field of clashing interests and a platform for reluctant cooperation between Turkey and Russia. While the interactions of Turkey and Russia over Syria do show that pragmatic cooperation is possible, the continuous clashes and structural asymmetries underlying their interactions signal how fragile this relationship is (Demir & Yılmaz, 2020). This is a good example of wider patterns in Turkish-Russian engagement, where mutual dependencies and deep geopolitical rivalries go hand in glove (Sakwa, 2017).

### **2.8.2. The Downing of the Russian Jet**

The shooting down of the Russian Su-24 fighter jet by Turkish forces on November 24, 2015, constitutes a landmark crisis in modern Turkish-Russian relations. The incident near the Turkish-Syrian border reflected the risks from overlapping military operations and the fragility of Turkish-Russian relations in regional conflict situations. While the incident put the strength of the bilateral relationship to test, it was also a reflection of broader geopolitical dynamics shaping their involvement in Syria (Erşen, 2017).

The immediate background to this incident included Turkey's concerns that Russian planes operating in Syria violated airspace. After Ankara argued that the Su-24 fighter had breached Turkish airspace despite numerous warnings, Turkish soldiers acted with force against it. The action is thought of by Turkey as a defense of territorial sovereignty—a notion ingrained in its foreign policy theory (Henry, 2016). But for Russia, it was an aggression, as Moscow categorically stated that the jet had been attacked within Syrian airspace when the incident happened.

The fallout was thus immediate and acutely felt. Russia introduced the economic sanctions against Turkey in such vital sectors as agriculture, construction, and tourism. Such sanctions were to put maximum pressure on Ankara to make it clear how much Moscow had been influential in their relationship (Rakhmatov, 201). Russia simultaneously began a vigorous propaganda campaign accusing Ankara of aiding terrorist organizations in Syria and characterizing Turkey's actions as a betrayal. In addition to escalating tensions between the two countries, this story also made Turkey's diplomatic relationship with its Western allies more difficult (Rüma & Çelikpala, 2019).

But even at the height of the crisis, the downing of the jet eventually showcased the pragmatism that underpins Turkish-Russian relations. Both countries valued the benefits from their economic and strategic partnership with one another, as both moved toward rapprochement. In June 2016, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan apologized to his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin for the incident and expressed his desire to restore the two countries' bilateral relationship. This was the first sign of a gradual normalization process, which also included the resumption of economic cooperation and restoration of diplomatic channels (Köremezli, 2021).

The incident, from an analytical perspective, reflects the schizophrenic nature of Turkish-Russian relations: every incident of confrontation finds its positive denouement in pragmatic attempts at rebuilding relations. The Su-24 incident made starkly clear the dangers of their involvement in a conflict zone such as Syria, where the overlap of military operations and divergence in strategic objectives carry the risk of miscalculation. But it also showed that they have a common goal in preserving functional ties, which is motivated by regional stability and economic interdependence (Demir & Yılmaz, 2020; Çelikipala, 2019; Keser & Meral, 2016).

The crisis also brought into sharp relief the difficulties of managing Turkey's foreign policy in a complex web of alliances and rivalries. Being a member of NATO, every action that Turkey made was closely watched by its Western allies. In light of increasingly independent foreign policy decisions taken by Turkey, NATO has shown cautiousness not to escalate tensions with Russia further, while showing unity with Turkey on airspace protection (Oğuzlu, 2013).

Economically, the sanctions imposed by Russia revealed the vulnerability of the economic relationship between Turkey and its northern neighbor: it significantly slashed tourist arrivals, as Russian visitors comprised a significant portion of the annual tourist arrivals in Turkey, and disrupted important trade flows in agricultural goods, which obligated Turkey to seek other markets. These economic repercussions underlined the cost of diplomatic crises in relationships characterized by interdependence (Aras & Fidan, 2019; Kalashnikov, 2013).

In strategic terms, the incident underlined the importance of deconfliction mechanisms as a means to avoid such crises in the future. Following the jet downing, Turkey and Russia established military coordination channels to prevent further incidents in Syrian airspace. While such measures were necessary, they also underlined the broader challenge of managing their competing interests in the region. The main issues of dispute—the support of the Assad regime by Russia and the support given to the opposition forces by Turkey—point to the continuous possibility of clashes (Demir & Yılmaz, 2020; Nabiev & Nafikov, 2021).

In actuality, the downing of the Russian Su-24 symbolized the intricate dialectics of their interaction and signaled a sea change in Turkey-Russian ties. The crisis demonstrated the brittleness of their relationship while also highlighting their capacity for practical healing. In many respects, this incident serves as a case study of how conflict and cooperation interact in their relationship, especially when it comes to striking a balance between the demands of regional stability and national security. Their interactions are still based on the lessons learned from this incident, particularly in war zones where their interests are beginning to diverge and intersect more.

### **2.8.3. Northern Syria and the Killing of Turkish Soldiers**

The conflict in Northern Syria is a prime example of a highly explosive and volatile situation. It is not only the result of wildly divergent strategic goals and a complex web of overlapping claims to spheres of influence, but it is also put in a bloody exclamation point by endangering the lives of Turkish soldiers in the area, which may hinder the development of productive relationships. Such occurrences provide light on a wider range of intricacies surrounding the Turkish-Russian relationship and the geopolitical calculation that underpins their contact, in addition to the immediate humanitarian consequences.

The Turkish military engagement with Northern Syria has a single drive in the interests of the national security objectives, particularly when dealing with the YPG as an affiliate to the PKK. A series of Turkish military actions in the area, including Operation Euphrates Shield (2016), Operation Olive Branch (2018), and Operation Peace Spring (2019), demonstrated Turkey's determination to prevent cross-border

militancy and establish a buffer zone along its southern border against Kurdish forces (Demir & Yılmaz, 2020). While these activities are vital to address immediate security threats, they often dragged Turkey into a competing regional conflict with Russia, which still sees its interest in Syria inseparable from that of the Assad regime (Hale, 2023; Keser & Ulusoy, 2021).

Moreover, the killing of Turkish soldiers during clashes in Northern Syria was how fragile deconfliction could be through the Sochi Memorandum of Understanding in 2019, with commitments very much at variance from the operational reality on the ground despite having well-marked lines that were demarcated for keeping the Turkish and Russian forces from facing a direct conflict (Keser & Ulusoy, 2021). The constant support for the Assad regime, together with Russia's resistance to Turkey's unilateral military action, has brought on more direct clashes-something which was likely to be the case as long ago as 2023. Such incidents are a trial not only of the limits of the Turkish-Russian cooperation but also the greater structural tensions implicit in that relationship (Cheterian, 2023).

It is for this reason that conflict in Northern Syria has come geopolitically to reveal the contradictions of Turkish-Russian relations: the fact that a number of such initiatives as the Astana Process had de-escalation emerge through pragmatism within its will to cooperate, while conversely, with Russia's continuous support for the Assad regime and military operations targeting areas close to Turkish forces, suspicion did deepen. At the same time, Moscow seemed to be challenging its regional policy when Turkey established military bases and insisted on controlling the border area (Nabiev & Nafikov, 2021).

This geopolitical rivalry has a huge human cost, strongly reverberating in the domestic political sphere of Turkey. It is not uncommon that the killing of Turkish soldiers becomes an item of public outcry, as government leaders like to present such sacrifices as given for the sake of the sovereignty and security of the nation. But such instances underlined Turkey's vulnerabilities, too, as it needed fragile agreements with Russia just to contain such a dangerous battlefield. While they are discrete incidents, they represent a broader set of conflict management challenges due to the pursuit of

conflicting objectives by the Assad regime, Kurdish troops, and other rebel factions (Hale, 2023).

Economically, the Northern Syrian conflict complicates the wider Turkish-Russian relationship. Though the two nations enjoy a substantial economic interdependence in the energy, tourism, and trade domains, the objective divide over Syria injects extra risks. The killing of Turkish soldiers has at times exacerbated diplomatic tensions, as Ankara has to recalibrate its position and demand from Moscow accountability over the incident. This is the dynamic in the precarious balance between economic interdependence and geopolitical rivalry (Ersen & Köstem, 2020).

Analytically, Northern Syria has been a miniature of the general trends that have come to define Turkish-Russian relations: the cooperative frameworks established in diplomatic settings are often contradicted by the divergence of strategic objectives on the ground. While Turkey seeks to secure its borders and counter Kurdish forces, Russia remains focused on consolidating Assad's position and extending its influence in the Middle East. It thus mirrors the broader challenges associated with managing a relationship that has put both competition and collaboration in force (Demir & Yılmaz, 2020).

In short, the killing of Turkish soldiers in Northern Syria embodies all the complexities of the Turkish-Russian relationship in a conflict environment: pragmatic cooperation such as the Astana Process denotes the interests of both parties in regional stability, yet periodic clashes and human losses from battles demonstrate how fragile the engagement is (Nabiev & Nafikov, 2021). It is for these dynamics that structural tensions in their relationship underpin the relevance of continued dealing, as it has done with respect to the interactions between Ankara and Moscow regarding Syria (Çelikpala, 2019). When incidents of this kind are analyzed, it does allow a better understanding of the fragile balance between competition and cooperation that is characterizing the modern era's Turkish-Russian relations.

#### **2.8.4. Competing Interests in the Ukrainian Conflict**

The Ukrainian crisis will be a touchstone for the relations between Ankara and Moscow in light of the emerging existential character of the Middle East and beyond. This conflict compelled both states to reassess their policies in light of the complexity, fragility and depth of their interdependence (Rakhmatov, 2019; Yüce & Amour, 2021). Though the intricate position of Turkey has been besieged in this crisis due to multiple roles, which range from cooperation to competition with Russia, it is at the same time struggling to draft its strategic autonomy (Gümüş, 2022).

One of the most fateful developments of the war has been Turkey's decision to supply Bayraktar TB2 drones to Ukraine. Produced by the rapidly developing Turkish defense industry, these have been at the heart of Ukrainian resistance against invading Russian troops, especially when it comes to targeting armored troop carriers and military infrastructure. This military support means that Turkey has become more determined to counterbalance Russia's aggressive foreign policy and put itself in a camp with NATO and European interests. Yet, this very decision is about ambition, with the wish to reinforce its regional influence, making it a leading state regarding modern defense technologies (Çelikpala, 2019; Gümüş, 2022; Keser & Meral, 2016). Not only did the deployment of Turkish drones reinforce Ukraine's defense capacity, but it also firmly placed Turkey as a serious player in global arms markets.

While there is such a military alignment with Ukraine, Turkey has been realistic in the larger approach to the conflict at hand. Precisely, Ankara has declined to join the Western-led sanctions against Russia, standing in the way of complete alignment with the policy posture of NATO in this conflict. Russia remains a crucial trading partner of Turkey, especially in energy, agriculture, and tourism; economic disengagement would therefore be quite costly. In so doing, Turkey has sought to protect its economic stability without provoking its Western allies. Such a balancing game dramatically reflects two pulls on Turkey, as both a NATO member and a country deeply inserted into the Russian economy (Ersen & Köstem, 2020; Cheterian, 2023).

Furthermore, the mediation effort by Turkey has underlined its strategic positioning. Such a deal on the export of Ukrainian agricultural produce via the Black

Sea during the war, among others, underlined its status as a regional mediator. Negotiating agreements between Ukraine and Russia, Ankara managed to place itself at the very front of addressing global food security concerns and managing regional tensions. The latter qualifies within the general context of the influence that Turkey is trying to assume in certain high-level international negotiations. On the other hand, such duality reflects the complexity of the Turkish foreign policy in an effort to balance the demands from the NATO allies on one side with its bilateral commitments towards Russia (Hale, 2023; Yüce & Amour, 2021).

The Ukrainian crisis underlines the strategic ambiguities in the relationship between Turkey and Russia. While their economic relations and diplomatic interactions reflect mutual interdependence, the crisis has brought to light the geopolitical rivalries that underpin their interactions. To Russia, NATO's expansion and Western military aid to Ukraine have become an existential threat, to which Turkey also contributes by providing military aid to Ukraine. These tensions, in word, make it rather difficult for Turkey to show some independence in international relations, considering its obligations towards NATO (Aras & Fidan, 2019; Gümüş, 2022).

From a regional perspective, the Ukrainian conflict multiplies its implications for Black Sea security. In fact, Turkey's strategic position as a Black Sea power places it at the center of managing regional stability. What happened in Ukraine heightened the Black Sea's militarization with NATO increasing its presence to counter Russia's attempts to solidify its dominance over its littoral. Turkey may mediate and interact with both sides due to its unique position, but this dualism also raises the possibility of being involved in larger geopolitical conflicts (Ekinçi, 2010; Nabiev & Nafikov, 2021).

Economically, the Ukrainian crisis challenges Turkish trade and energy security. The leadership of Russia as a supplier of natural gas and the dependence of Turkey on Russian pipelines of energy make the liabilities in their economic interdependence very conspicuous. In the same breadth, however, the conflict has spurred Turkey to diversify its sources of energy, including increased collaboration with Azerbaijan, and investments in renewable energies. These efforts reflect Turkey's recognition of the risks associated with overreliance on Russian resources, particularly during periods of geopolitical tension (Kardaş, 2018; Ersen & Köstem, 2020).

The Ukrainian crisis has wide repercussions, on the other hand, for the nature of Ankara-Moscow relations: "Deep divisions over everything that has occurred require the continuous and candid communication of the two states." The art of handling such conflicts, in the furtherance of these objectives, therefore assumes prime significance in maintaining regional stability. But this war has also demonstrated how a fast-evolving geopolitical environment makes managing divergent alliances and interests very difficult to deal with (Hale, 2023; Çelikpala, 2019).

In conclusion, the Ukrainian conflict thus represents both a challenge and an opportunity for Turkish-Russian relations. It crystallizes the dilemmas of their engagement, with mutual dependencies going hand in hand with profound geopolitical rivalries. The role that Turkey plays towards this conflict-as mediator, as NATO ally, and as independent player-reflects the broader tensions and contradictions in its foreign policy. The result of such a balancing game is going to have far-reaching implications for regional stability and the future trajectory of Turkish-Russian relations.

#### **2.8.5. Turkey's Defense Realignments and Strategic Military Choices**

The military procurement decisions of Turkey are a shining reflection of how the need for security, foreign policy objectives, and geopolitical calculations interrelate in a complex fashion. The 2019 acquisition of S-400 missile systems from Russia, despite strong opposition from NATO allies, was a significant shift from Turkey's traditionally Western-oriented defense strategy. This was not simply a tactical decision but rather a strategic signal emphasizing Turkey's growing pursuit of strategic autonomy in its foreign policy (Kıbaroğlu, 2019; Köremezli, 2021).

The S-400 agreement generated several first-order consequences. Turkey's insistence on not violating NATO traditions in solo defense acquisitions-despite evident political and economic costs-invited US sanctions under the CAATSA legislation and Turkey's removal from the F-35 fighter aircraft program. These consequences strained Turkey's ties with Western allies, generating concerns about the prospects of Turkish membership in NATO and its balancing act between Russia and the West (Ersen & Köstem, 2020).

On the other hand, talks with the United States to buy F-16 fighter aircraft indicate Turkey's ongoing dependence on Western defense technology. Although the S-400 buy was a diversification, Turkey's effort to modernize its air force using U.S. technology indicates the degree of its defense policy constraints. This balancing act of procurement choices demonstrates a calculated game, positioning Turkey at the middle of worldwide defense markets and utilizing competitor powers to enhance its strategic flexibility (Gümüş, 2022; Yücel, 2023).

More profoundly, the S-400 deal symbolizes a duality at the heart of Turkish foreign policy. Reaching out to Russia consolidates its air defense capabilities, strengthens its hand with NATO, and emphasizes its capability to work with non-Western powers. This is not without great risk: the resulting tension with NATO puts into stark focus the possible cost of pursuing strategic autonomy in such a deeply interconnected security environment (Yüce & Amour, 2021; Nabiev & Nafikov).

Aside from military ramifications, such acquisition choices also demonstrate Turkey's changing status in the international arms trade. By getting military equipment from Russia and America, Turkey is not simply building up its defense portfolio but also aiding its aspirations of being a rising regional power that is capable of managing intricate geopolitical rivalries. Nevertheless, the contradictions in this approach present Turkey's military strategy and alliances with long-term dilemmas (Ekinci, 2010; Köremezli, 2021).

Lastly, Turkey's defense procurement policy is a paragon of pragmatism and strategic maneuvering. For all that this flexibility maximizes Turkey's options, though, it also underscores the structural constraints within which Turkey is operating. This delicate balance between military cooperation and competition is a characteristic of the broader Turkish-Russian relationship and its ramifications for regional and global security (Çıplak & Keser, 2016).

#### **2.8.6. The S-400 Air Defense System**

At the heart of Turkey's defense reorientation has been its acquisition of the Russian S-400 missile defense system. The move was controversial not just because of

technical incompatibility with NATO systems, but also because of geopolitical fallout that rewrote Turkey's alliances and strategic calculus (Kibaroglu, 2019).

From a military perspective, the S-400 system is one of the most modern high-altitude intercept and long-range radar air defense systems in the world. The fact that it was not compatible with NATO defense systems, though, raised fears of possible intelligence leaks to China about F-35 stealth fighter jet technology. This was part of the distrust between Turkey and the US and resulted in sanctions that directly affected the defense modernization of Turkey (Kibaroglu, 2019).

Geopolitically, the S-400 acquisition underscored Turkey's balancing between Russia and the West. It was Ankara's readiness to defy U.S. monopoly over military acquisitions, thus showing its insistence on strategic autonomy. The acquisition also put Turkey under greater pressure from within NATO because the member states perceived it as a geopolitical lean towards Russia instead of an arms purchase (Ulusoy, 2023).

In addition, the economic and strategic implications of the S-400 acquisition cannot be overlooked. The sale further boosted Russian-Turkish military relations, solidifying Moscow's status as a key Turkish military supplier. However, it also topped Turkey's access to Western defense systems, making defense procurement talks with the U.S. in the future more complex. What remains to be seen is whether Turkey will operationalize the S-400 system to its full capacity or keep it unused to appease NATO (Ovalı & Özdikmenli, 2020).

In total, the S-400 acquisition ranks as one of the most dramatic Turkish defense policy shifts, indicating Turkey's broader strategic rebalancing in the face of great power competition (Kardaş, 2018; Ersen & Köstem, 2020). Whether the move ultimately serves Turkish security or increases strategic vulnerabilities remains a defining question for the future of Turkish-Russian relations (Ulusoy, 2023).

### 2.8.7. Turkey's F-16 Procurement from the United States

While it has bolstered cooperation on defense with Russia, Turkey has continued negotiating with the U.S. on acquiring F-16 fighter jets, demonstrating reliance on Western hardware to upgrade the air force (Gümüő, 2022; Ođuzlu, 2021).

The F-16 procurement agreement, encompassing new acquisitions as well as overhauling the existing fleets, reflects Turkey's two-pronged defense approach. It attempts to maintain meaningful military cooperation with NATO but also diversifies defense alliances by buying Russian weapons (Köstem, 2015).

This balancing is inspired by a range of strategic drivers:

- NATO commitment: The Turkish possession of Western fighter aircraft assures interoperability with NATO and US allies (Ođuzlu, 2021).
- Deter CAATSA sanctions: Through targeting US aircraft, Ankara demonstrates that it is determined to mend strained relations with Washington (Gümüő, 2022).
- Operational requirements: Turkey requires modern fighter jets so that it may maintain its air dominance, especially in regional conflicts (Ersen & Köstem, 2020).

However, the sale of the F-16 to Turkey has been politicized, with US politicians insisting on guarantees that Turkey will not operationally use the S-400 system as a condition of sale. All this is part of the larger controversy over Turkey's defense alignment, with Washington suspicious at Ankara's simultaneous entanglement of Russia and NATO (Yüce, 2023).

Finally, Turkey's F-16 negotiations are the larger challenge of its military rebalancings, walking the line of restraint and pragmatism in balancing its Western and Russian defense relationships (Ersen & Köstem, 2020)..

### **2.8.8. Strategic Perspectives on Recent Conflicts**

The conflicts discussed in these sections provide a penetrating glance into Turkish-Russian relations as motivated by strategic competition, economic interdependence, and regional ambitions (Balta, 2019; Çelikpala, 2019). Even though cooperation remains pragmatic, the structural problems in their relations are still in place (Köremezli, 2021).

One of the most vivid trends in their relationship is the power imbalance. As Turkey pursues regional leadership and strategic autonomy, Russia's superior military and economic capabilities often dictate the agenda for interaction, particularly in Syria and Ukraine (Köremezli, 2021; Ersen & Köstem, 2020).

At the same time, the Astana Process and Black Sea grain deal platforms demonstrate that Turkish-Russian collaboration continues despite geopolitical disagreements. Economic-military interdependence remains a source of stability wherein common interests on both sides have a tendency to outweigh ideological disputes (Ovalı & Özdikmenli, 2020; Yükselen, 2020).

However, recent conflicts reveal vulnerabilities of this balance. The war in Ukraine heightened Turkey's dilemma between its loyalty to NATO and economic relations with Russia (Cheterian, 2023). At the same time, the Gaza War illustrates differences in the ideology of their regional policy in the Middle East (Gökçekuyu, 2023).

On balance, Turkish-Russian relations are moving through a stage of pragmatic engagement and chronic strain. The following years will signal whether Ankara can continue to have its cake in the more multipolar international system (Keser, 2016).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Study Design

This study was designed as a cross-sectional survey involving an open, web-based survey in order to examine Turkish-Russian relations during the period from 1600 to 2024. A quantitative, structured methodology was employed in order to explore expert opinions in terms of historical, geopolitical, national security, ideological, contemporary, and economic determinants of bilateral relations.

#### 3.2. Study Population and Sampling

The target population was academicians, politicians, policy analysts, researchers, and professionals in international relations, political science, economics, and history. Postgraduate students, experts, journalists, and individuals with direct or indirect expertise in Turkish-Russian relations were also targeted for a balanced dataset.

Purposive sampling was used in order to recruit the participants, and the individuals who were selected possessed sufficient experience and knowledge regarding the field. The questionnaire was also filled in online, thus providing extensive representation and access to numerous respondents that are well-informed related to the Turkish-Russian relations.

88 valid responses were collected, and respondents were of diverse nationalities, professionals, and fields of study. The sample coverage included:

- **Academic qualifications:** Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD.
- **Areas of study:** International Relations, Political Science, Economics, History, and Military Affairs.
- **Professionals:** Academics, researchers, policymakers, political analysts, and journalists.
- **Geographical spread:** Turkish and non-Turkish respondents from a number of regions.

This diverse group of participants ensured a deep understanding of Turkish-Russian relations from all sides.

#### ❖ **Sample Size Calculation**

The sample size was determined using OpenEpi (Open-Source Epidemiologic Statistics for Public Health, Version 3.01, Emory University, Atlanta, GA, USA). We used 50% for the anticipated frequency, as is recommended for unknown frequencies, with 10% absolute precision and 90% confidence level. The minimum sample size needed was at least 68.

### **3.3. Data Collection Instrument**

The primary tool of data collection for this research was a structured, self-completed questionnaire, developed to assess the expert opinions in regard to various aspects of Turkish-Russian relations. The questionnaire was developed based on a thorough literature review and presented in seven parts, each covering a unique thematic aspect of the research:

#### **1. Participant Information**

Gathered demographic data, level of education, occupation, and relationship of participants to Turkish-Russian affairs.

#### **2. Perceptions Regarding Historical Events**

Rated opinion of respondents' perception of the impact of dominant periods in history, such as the Ottoman, Cold War, post-Cold War realignment, and more contemporary conflicts.

#### **3. Geopolitical Factors**

Assessed the perceived impact of border conflicts and geographical considerations on the bilateral relationship.

#### **4. National Security Interests**

Examined the role seen by defense agreements, national security interests, and military alliances in affecting cooperation and trust between Russia and Turkey.

#### **5. Ideological Movements**

Examined the perceived effect of religious factors, political ideologies, and nationalism on Turkish-Russian foreign policy decisions.

#### **6. Contemporary Issues**

Evaluated the perceived function of ongoing geopolitics tensions like the Syrian war, Ukrainian conflict, energy politics, Black Sea tensions, and NATO expansion.

#### **7. Economic Interactions**

Analyzed the perceived trade relations, energy dependencies, tourism, and infrastructure projects as major economic determinants of bilateral relations.

Participants were requested to respond to questionnaire items by indicating their level of agreement with the presented statement on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5), for quantifying and uniformly measuring participant responses.

A cover page came before the questionnaire, detailing its purpose, objectives, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Participants had to consent before proceeding. The first draft of the questionnaire was piloted among a group of five academics to examine visibility and validity of the content. A feedback was obtained and the questionnaire was revised according to the obtained remarks before launching the final survey.

### 3.4. Data Collection Procedure

The survey was created on Google Forms and distributed online through social media platforms, professional networks, Messenger, WhatsApp, Telegram, and email to reach the targeted population.

Participants completed the study voluntarily and were requested to pass the survey to their professional networks, which led to a wider dissemination among experts and specialists. The on-line nature of the survey allowed participants from different geographical locations to contribute their input.

To ensure data integrity and prevent repeat responses, questionnaire settings did not allow multiple responses by one respondent.

### 3.5. Ethical Considerations

The protocol of the study and related survey were reviewed and approved by the Department of Political Sciences and International relations and Ethical approval for this research was granted by Hasan Kalyoncu University's Scientific Research Committee, ensuring compliance with ethical standards for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before they proceeded with the questionnaire.

This study followed stringent ethical practices, which were as follows:

- **Informed Consent:** The intent, voluntary status, and confidentiality procedures of the study were well explained to the participants. And invited subjects provided their consent to take part in the study and complete the questionnaire
- **Anonymity and Confidentiality:** No identifiable personal information was gathered, and the respondents were kept anonymous.

- **Security of Data:** All data gathered were safely stored and employed only for educational purposes.
- **Non-Coercion:** Respondents were free to leave the survey at any time without any justification, as there was no coercion.

### 3.6. Statistical Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 22.0 (IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY, USA). Descriptive statistics were used to present the demographic characteristics of the participants and their responses to the survey questions. Average scores for each theme were calculated by averaging the responses to the questions within that theme. Based on the average score for each theme, the overall perceived impact of that theme was classified. Participants were categorized as perceiving a major impact if their score was 60% or greater in the Strongly Agree/Agree (SA/A) categories, a moderate impact if their score was between 50% and 59%, and a weak impact if their score was less than 50% (based on Bloom's hierarchical levels of understanding).

The Chi-square test was performed to assess potential associations between participants' perceptions of the impact of various factors on Turkish-Russian relations and their nationality, field of study or expertise, and nature of connection to Turkish-Russian bilateral relations. The independent samples t-test was used to investigate differences in overall mean perception scores for each theme presented in the survey between Turkish and non-Turkish participants; specialists in International Relations and Political Science and specialists in Economics, History, and other specialities; and between those connected to Turkish-Russian relations on academic and professional grounds and those connected on personal and other grounds. For all comparisons, a two-sided threshold was used to detect any significant differences, regardless of direction. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

A multivariate binary logistic model was utilized with "Strongly Agree/Agree" on the impact of historical events, geopolitical interests, concerns of national security ,

ideological forces, contemporary issues, and economic transactions as the dependent variable. Predictor variables included nationality, field of study or expertise, connection to Turkish-Russian relations, experience living in or studying Turkish culture, and experience living in or studying Russian culture. Odds ratios (ORs) and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were calculated to identify significant predictors of the perceived impact of the examined themes. A p-value of  $<0.05$  was considered statistically significant.



## 4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The start of this chapter presents the most significant findings and outcomes achieved with the quantitative survey, analyzing the impact of past events, geopolitical factors, economic relations, ideological trends, current issues and security dynamics on Turkish-Russian relations. The data are analyzed systematically to identify the important trends, correlations, and theoretical implications. With the unification of statistical evidence, this section presents an advanced image of evolving dynamics of Turkish-Russian relationships with focuses on perceived sources of collaboration and points of tension in the bilateral relationship.

### 4.1. Results

Eighty-eight participants agreed to take part in the survey and completed it. Most of them (53.4%) were under 40 years of age, and 58% of them were males. Russian, Syrian, Bosnian, Cypriot, British, American, German, Palestinian, Uzbek, Indian, Lebanese, and Egyptian nationalities accounted for 67% of the respondents, while 33% of them were Turkish.

Educationally, 33% had a PhD, 22.7% had a Master's degree, and 31.8% had a Bachelor's degree. Their areas of study or specialization were international relations (22.7%), political science (22.7%), economics (5.7%), history (2.3%), and other fields (46.6%). Professionally, 57.9% were academics, 5.7% were politicians, and 11.4% were journalists or media professionals.

Most participants had less than five years of work experience (43.2%), while 39.8% had more than ten years of experience. Their connection to Turkish-Russian relations varied: 38.6% had an academic connection, 9.1% had a professional connection, and 30.7% had a personal connection. Additionally, 60.2% had lived in or

studied Turkish culture, whereas only 18.2% had lived in or studied Russian culture.

The characteristics and demographics of the participants are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Characteristics of participants (n=88).**

<b>Demographics</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Age</b>		
• ≤40 years	47	53.4%
• >40 years	32	36.4%
• Missing	9	10.2%
<b>Gender</b>		
• Male	51	58.0%
• Female	37	42.0%
<b>Nationality</b>		
• Turkish	29	33.0%
• Non-Turkish	59	67.0%
<b>Highest Academic Qualification</b>		
• Bachelor's Degree	28	31.8%
• Master's Degree	20	22.7%
• PhD	29	33.0%
• Other	11	12.5%
<b>Field of Study or Expertise</b>		
• International Relations	20	22.7%
• Political Science	20	22.7%
• Economics	5	5.7%
• History	2	2.3%
• Other	41	46.6%
<b>Current Occupation/Role</b>		
• Academic	51	57.9%
• Politician	0	5.7%
• Journalist/Media Practitioner	10	11.4%
• Other	22	25.0%
<b>Work Experience</b>		
<5 years	38	43.2%
5-10 years	15	17.0%
>10 years	35	39.8%
<b>Connection to Turkish-Russian Relations</b>		
• Academic	34	38.6%
• Professional	8	9.1%
• Personal	27	30.7%
• Other	19	21.6%
<b>Have you lived in or studied Turkish culture?</b>		
• Yes	53	60.2%
• No	35	39.8%
<b>Have you lived in or studied Russian culture?</b>		
• Yes	16	18.2%
• No	72	81.8%

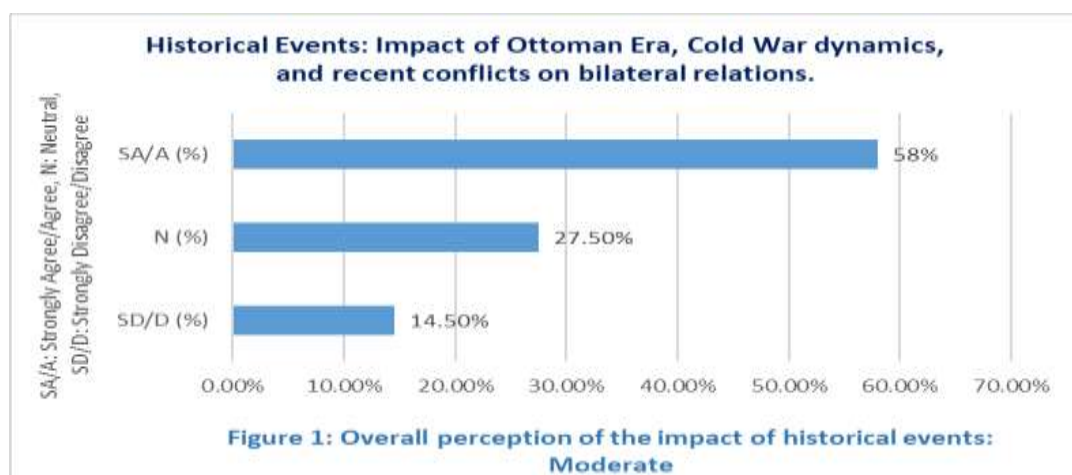
Table 2 and Figure 1 show the perception of the participants on the impact of the historical events on Turkish-Russian relations. The average perception score of the participants was 58%, which is a moderate perceived impact. Participants believed that Post-Cold War Adjustments (61.4% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed) and Key Historical Events (e.g., wars and treaties) impacted the most, as 59.1% of them strongly agreed or agreed with their impact. In contrast, however, the Ottoman Era Treaties were perceived as having a moderate impact, as 54.5% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed with their influence.

**Table 2. Participants' Perceptions of the Impact of Historical Events on Turkish-Russian Relations**

Theme	Participant Responses (n=88)		
	SA/A (%)	N (%)	SD/D (%)
<b>Historical Events: Impact of Ottoman Era, Cold War dynamics, and recent conflicts on bilateral relations.</b>			
1. Key historical events, such as treaties and wars, have significantly influenced Turkish-Russian relations.	59.1%	27.3%	13.6%
2. Specific historical periods are critical in shaping the bilateral relationship between Turkey and Russia:			
a. Ottoman Era Treaties	54.5%	31.8%	13.6%
b. Cold War Period	56.8%	29.5%	13.6%
c. Post-Cold War Adjustments	61.4%	23.9%	14.8%
d. Recent Conflicts	58.0%	25.0%	17.0%
<b>Average score</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>27.5%</b>	<b>14.5%</b>
<b>Overall perception of the impact of historical events: Moderate</b>			

SA/A: Strongly Agree/Agree, N: Neutral, SD/D: Strongly Disagree/Disagree

Participants were classified as perceiving a major impact if they scored  $\geq 60\%$  in Strongly Agree/Agree (SA/A), a moderate impact if the score was between 50% and 59%, and a weak impact if the score was  $< 50\%$  (based on Bloom's hierarchical levels of understanding).



**Figure 1. Overall perception of the impact of historical events**

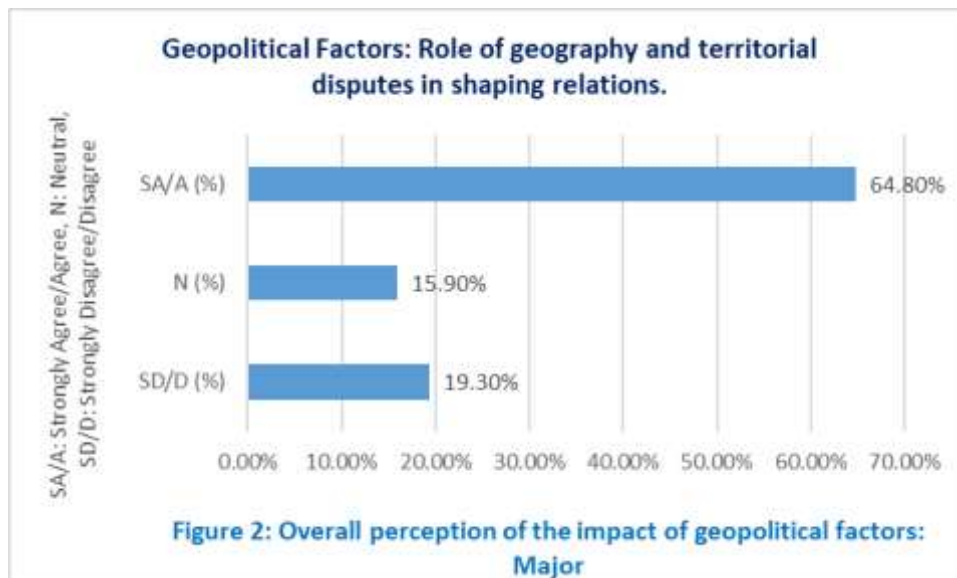
With regard to geopolitical factors, the perceived impact was “major”, with an overall perception score of 64.8%, as shown in Table 3 and Figure 2. Specifically, 65.9% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that “Territorial boundaries” influence the strategic interests of both Turkey and Russia. Additionally, 63.6% strongly agreed or agreed that “Geographical factors” play a crucial role in shaping Turkish-Russian relations.

**Table 3. Participants' Perceptions of the Impact of Geopolitical Factors on Turkish-Russian Relations**

Theme	Participant Responses (n=88)		
	SA/A (%)	N (%)	SD/D (%)
<b>Geopolitical Factors: Role of geography and territorial disputes in shaping relations.</b>			
1. Geographical factors play a significant role in influencing Turkish-Russian relations.	63.6%	15.9%	20.5%
2. Territorial boundaries are crucial for the strategic interests of both Turkey and Russia.	65.9%	15.9%	18.2%
<b>Average score</b>	<b>64.8%</b>	<b>15.9%</b>	<b>19.3%</b>
<b>Overall perception of the impact of geopolitical factors: Major</b>			

SA/A: Strongly Agree/Agree, N: Neutral, SD/D: Strongly Disagree/Disagree

Participants were classified as perceiving a major impact if they scored  $\geq 60\%$  in Strongly Agree/Agree (SA/A), a moderate impact if the score was between 50% and 59%, and a weak impact if the score was  $< 50\%$  (based on Bloom’s hierarchical levels of understanding).



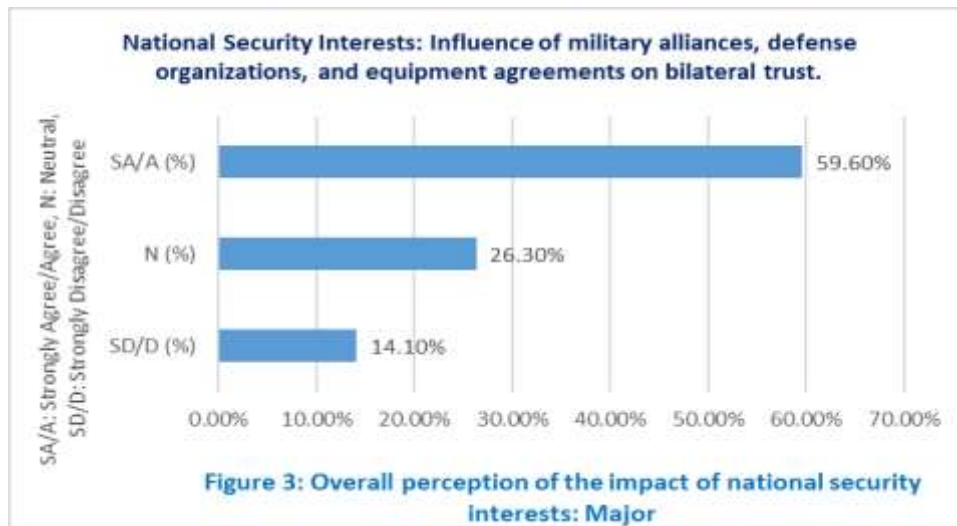
**Figure 2. Overall perception of the impact of geopolitical factors**

Likewise, national security interests in Turkish-Russian relations were assessed "major" by around 60% of respondents who strongly agreed or agreed to this factor. Military alliances, military equipment pact and collaboration, and national security issues were ranked as the most significant factors in this regard, and 61.4% of them strongly agreed or agreed in terms of their salience. Nevertheless, just 55.7% of the participants concurred with the function of regional organizations, such as the Turkic Federation, in molding Turkey-Russia relations. The findings above are presented in Table 4 and Figure 3.

**Table 4. Participants' Perceptions of the Impact of National Security Interests on Turkish-Russian Relations**

Theme	Participant Responses (n=88)		
	SA/A (%)	N (%)	SD/D (%)
<b>National Security Interests: Influence of military alliances, defense organizations, and equipment agreements on bilateral trust.</b>			
Military alliances have a significant impact on the bilateral relationship between Turkey and Russia.	61.4%	25.0%	13.6%
National security issues play an important role in shaping Turkish-Russian relations.	61.4%	22.7%	15.9%
Military defense organizations, such as NATO and CSTO, significantly influence Turkish-Russian relations.	58.0%	29.5%	12.5%
Regional organizations, including the Turkic Federation, play a pivotal role in shaping relations between Turkey and Russia.	55.7%	28.4%	15.9%
Military equipment agreements and collaborations influence trust and cooperation between Turkey and Russia.	61.4%	26.1%	12.5%
<b>Average score</b>	<b>59.6%</b>	<b>26.3%</b>	<b>14.1%</b>
<b>Overall perception of the impact of national security interests: Major</b>			

SA/A: Strongly Agree/Agree, N: Neutral, SD/D: Strongly Disagree/Disagree  
Participants were classified as perceiving a major impact if they scored  $\geq 60\%$  in Strongly Agree/Agree (SA/A), a moderate impact if the score was between 50% and 59%, and a weak impact if the score was  $< 50\%$  (based on Bloom's hierarchical levels of understanding).



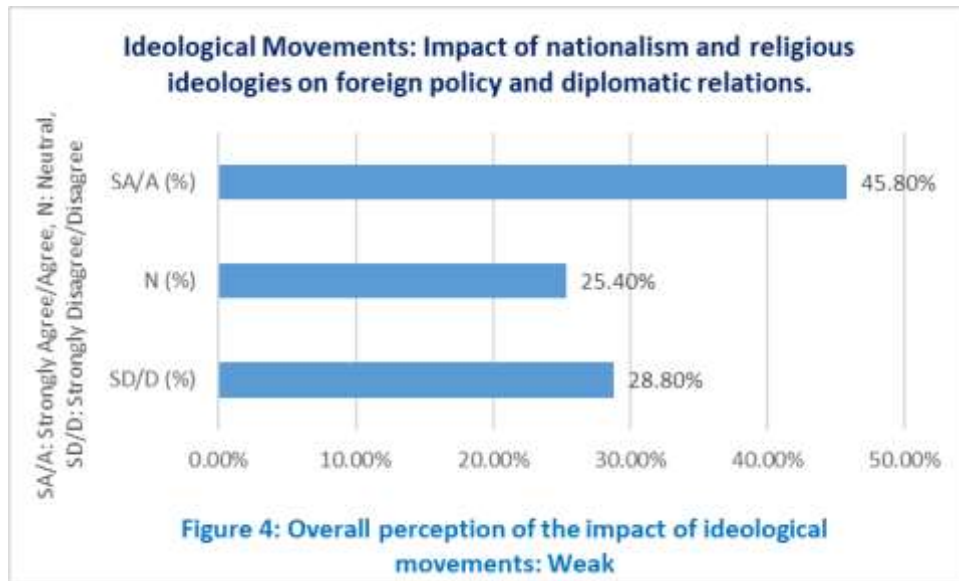
**Figure 3. Overall perception of the impact of national security interests**

The perceived impact of ideological movements on Turkish-Russian relations was considered “weak”, with an overall impact score of 45.8%. Notably, only 46.6% of participants endorsed the influence of ideological movements and nationalism on the foreign policies of Turkey and Russia, while 44.3% agreed on the impact of “religious influence”. The findings are presented in Table 5 and Figure 4.

**Table 5. Participants' Perceptions of the Impact of Ideological Movements on Turkish-Russian Relations**

Theme	Participant Responses (n=88)		
	SA/A (%)	N (%)	SD/D (%)
<b>Ideological Movements: Impact of nationalism and religious ideologies on foreign policy and diplomatic relations.</b>			
Ideological movements (e.g., political ideologies, religious influences) significantly influence the foreign policies of Turkey and Russia.	46.6%	22.7%	30.7%
The following ideological factors are influential in shaping Turkish-Russian relations:			
a. Nationalism	46.6%	29.5%	23.9%
b. Religious Influence	44.3%	23.9%	31.8%
<b>Average score</b>	<b>45.8%</b>	<b>25.4%</b>	<b>28.8%</b>
<b>Overall perception of the impact of ideological movements: Weak</b>			

SA/A: Strongly Agree/Agree, N: Neutral, SD/D: Strongly Disagree/Disagree  
 Participants were classified as perceiving a major impact if they scored  $\geq 60\%$  in Strongly Agree/Agree (SA/A), a moderate impact if the score was between 50% and 59%, and a weak impact if the score was  $< 50\%$  (based on Bloom’s hierarchical levels of understanding).



**Figure 4. Overall perception of the impact of ideological movements**

The perceived impact of existing issues varied from topic to topic. Black Sea conflicts were awarded the most impact by respondents (64.8% strongly agreed or agreed), followed by the Syrian crisis (61.4%), energy politics (60.2%), NATO expansion (58%), the Ukrainian war (44.3%), and finally the Cyprus issue, with only 29.5% seeing its impact on Turkish-Russian relations. Although the general perceived effect of current issues on Turkish-Russian relations was high (64.8% strongly agreed or agreed), the total impact score showed a moderate effect, which is due to the wide and varied nature of issues included. These results are illustrated in Table 6 and Figure 5.

**Table 6. Participants' Perceptions of the Impact of Contemporary Issues on Turkish-Russian Relations**

Theme	Participant Responses (n=88)		
	SA/A (%)	N (%)	SD/D (%)
<b>Contemporary Issues: Significance of Syrian Conflict, Ukrainian War, energy politics, and other current events.</b>			
Contemporary issues (e.g., the Syrian conflict, the Ukrainian war) have a significant impact on Turkish-Russian relations.	64.8%	27.3%	8.0%
The following contemporary issues have the greatest influence on Turkish-Russian relations:			
a. Syrian Conflict	61.4%	26.1%	12.5%
b. Ukrainian War	44.3%	43.2%	12.5%
c. Energy Politics	60.2%	27.3%	12.5%
d. Black Sea Tensions	64.8%	22.7%	12.5%
e. NATO Expansion	58.0%	31.8%	10.2%

f. Cyprus Issue	29.5%	36.4%	34.1%
<b>Average score</b>	<b>54.7%</b>	<b>30.7%</b>	<b>14.6%</b>
<b>Overall perception of the impact of contemporary issues: Moderate</b>			

SA/A: Strongly Agree/Agree, N: Neutral, SD/D: Strongly Disagree/Disagree

Participants were classified as perceiving a major impact if they scored  $\geq 60\%$  in Strongly Agree/Agree (SA/A), a moderate impact if the score was between 50% and 59%, and a weak impact if the score was  $< 50\%$  (based on Bloom's hierarchical levels of understanding).

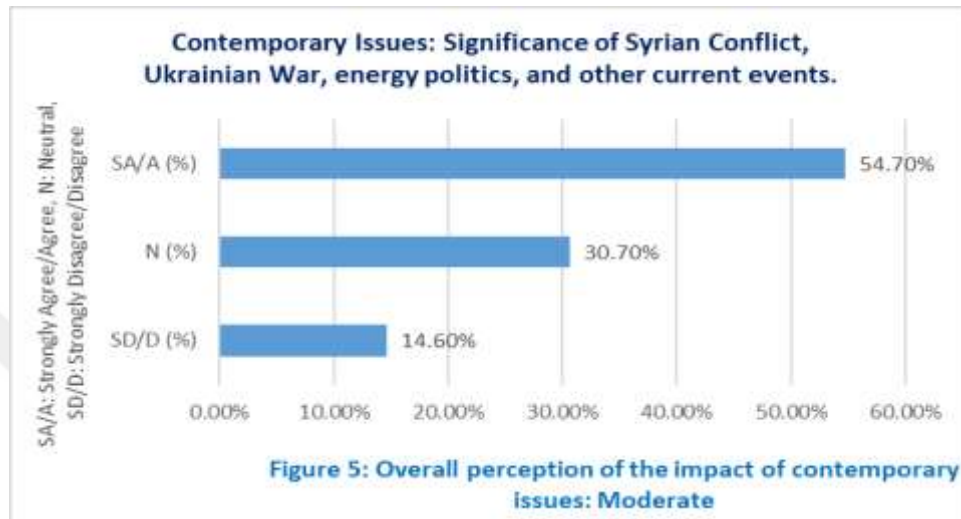


Figure 5. Overall perception of the impact of contemporary issues

As can be seen from Figure 6 and Table 7, economic relations also proved to have a significant impact on Turkish-Russian bilateral relations, with an average of around 60%. Economic interdependencies within the energy sector proved to bear the most significance, as 67% of the respondents agreed to its impact. 62.5% also agreed to the influence of trade agreements, 56.8% to tourism, while infrastructure projects registered the least with 47.7%.

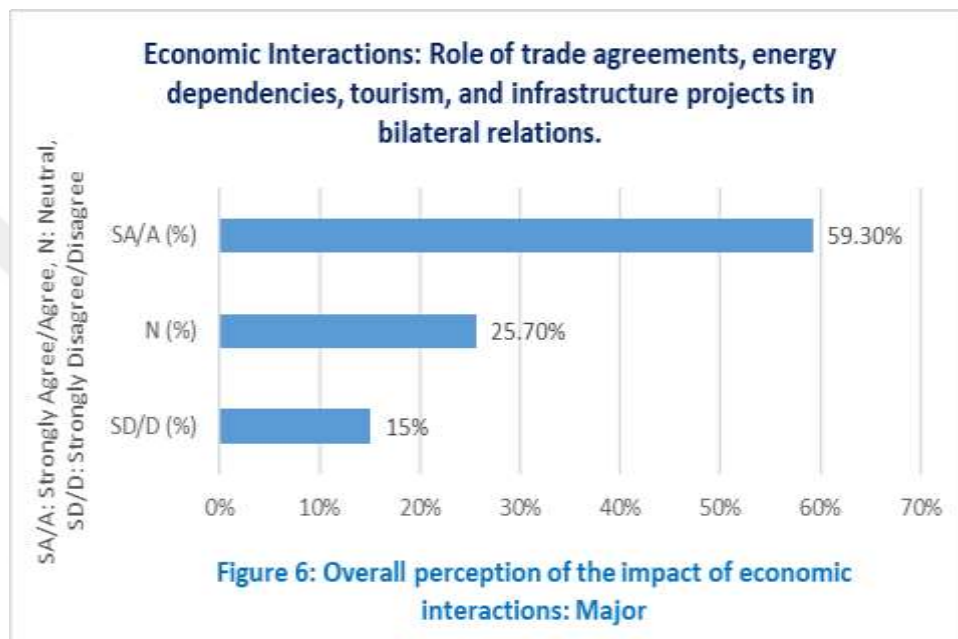
Table 7. Participants' Perceptions of the Impact of Economic Interactions on Turkish-Russian Relations

Theme	Participant Responses (n=88)		
	SA/A (%)	N (%)	SD/D (%)
<b>Economic Interactions: Role of trade agreements, energy dependencies, tourism, and infrastructure projects in bilateral relations.</b>			
Economic interactions (e.g., trade relations, energy dependencies) play a significant role in Turkish-Russian relations.	62.5%	23.9%	13.6%
The following areas of economic interaction are most significant in shaping Turkish-Russian relations:			
a. Trade Agreements	62.5%	19.3%	18.2%

b. Energy Dependencies	67.0%	21.6%	11.4%
c. Tourism	56.8%	26.1%	17.0%
d. Infrastructure Projects	47.7%	37.5%	14.8%
<b>Average score</b>	<b>59.3%</b>	<b>25.7%</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Overall perception of the impact of economic interactions: Major</b>			

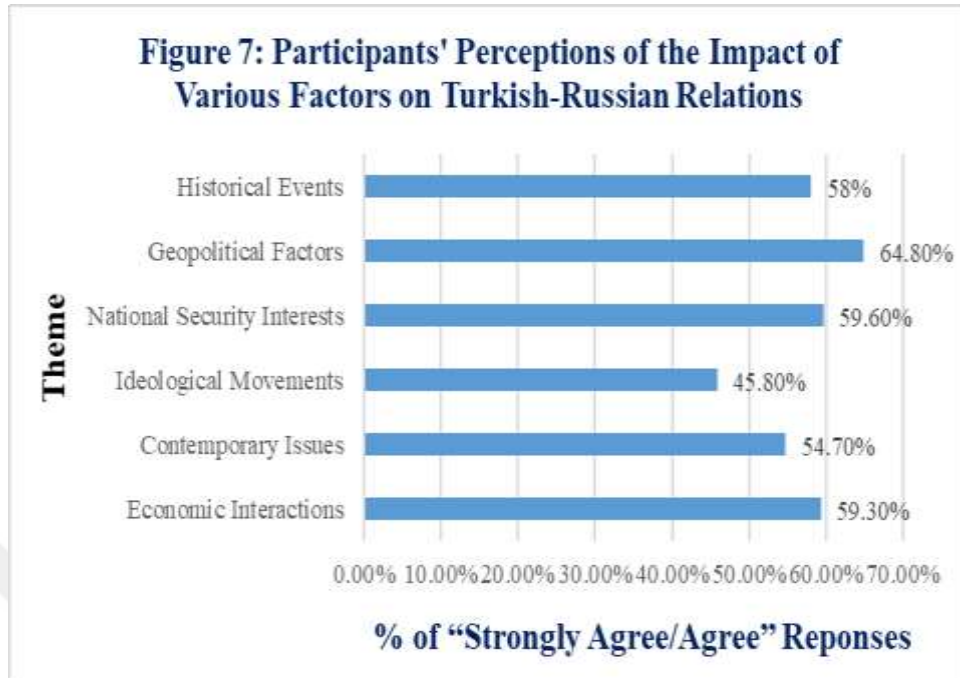
SA/A: Strongly Agree/Agree, N: Neutral, SD/D: Strongly Disagree/Disagree

Participants were classified as perceiving a major impact if they scored  $\geq 60\%$  in Strongly Agree/Agree (SA/A), a moderate impact if the score was between 50% and 59%, and a weak impact if the score was  $< 50\%$  (based on Bloom's hierarchical levels of understanding).



**Figure 6. Overall perception of the impact of economic interactions**

Figure 7 shows the attitude of respondents on the influence of factors on Turkish-Russian bilateral relations. It is clear that geopolitical interests, national security issues, and economic relations were believed to have a "major" influence on the relations, with 64.8%, 59.6%, and 59.3% of respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing, respectively. In contrast, historical issues and contemporary issues were believed to exert a moderate influence (58% and 54.7%, respectively). Ideological movements had the least agreement (45.8%), since it was rated to have a weak impact on the relations.



**Figure 7. Participants' Perceptions of the Impact of Various Factors on Turkish-Russian Relations**

Table 8 shows the findings of statistical analysis in order to study the relationship between the nationality of the participant and the perceived effect of different factors on Turkish-Russian political relations. It can be seen that the nationality of participants has been linked with geopolitical, national security interests, and economic factors since Turkish participants have rated significantly higher the effect of these factors on Turkish-Russian relations compared to non-Turkish participants ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Furthermore, Turkish participants perceived a significantly greater impact of post-cold war adjustments, recent conflicts, religious influence, Black Sea tensions, and tourism on the bilateral Turkish-Russian relations than their non-Turkish counterparts ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 8. Participants' Perceptions of the Impact of Various Factors on Turkish-Russian Relations, Categorized by Nationality**

Theme	% of "SA/A" Reponses based on nationality			
	Sample n=88	Turkish n=29	Non-Turkish n=59	p-value
<b>Historical Events: Impact of Ottoman Era, Cold War dynamics, and recent conflicts on bilateral relations.</b>				
1. Key historical events, such as treaties and wars, have significantly influenced Turkish-Russian relations.	59.1%	72.4%	52.5%	0.180
2. Specific historical periods are critical in shaping the bilateral relationship between Turkey and Russia:				
e. Ottoman Era Treaties	54.5%	65.5%	49.2%	0.267
f. Cold War Period	56.8%	65.5%	52.5%	0.422
g. Post-Cold War Adjustments	61.4%	79.3%	52.5%	<b>0.023*</b>
h. Recent Conflicts	58.0%	75.9%	49.2%	<b>0.041*</b>
<b>Mean score (SD)</b>	3.71 (0.92)	3.98 (0.95)	3.57 (0.88)	0.050
<b>Geopolitical Factors: Role of geography and territorial disputes in shaping relations.</b>				
1. Geographical factors play a significant role in influencing Turkish-Russian relations.	63.6%	82.8%	54.2%	<b>0.022*</b>
2. Territorial boundaries are crucial for the strategic interests of both Turkey and Russia.	65.9%	82.8%	57.6%	0.057
<b>Mean score (SD)</b>	3.80 (1.24)	4.24 (0.94)	3.58 (1.31)	<b>0.008**</b>
<b>National Security Interests: Influence of military alliances, defense organizations, and equipment agreements on bilateral trust.</b>				
Military alliances have a significant impact on the bilateral relationship between Turkey and Russia.	61.4%	65.5%	59.3%	0.787
National security issues play an important role in shaping Turkish-Russian relations.	61.4%	82.8%	50.8%	<b>0.005*</b>
Military defense organizations, such as NATO and CSTO, significantly influence Turkish-Russian relations.	58.0%	65.5%	54.2%	0.602
Regional organizations, including the Turkic Federation, play a pivotal role in shaping relations between Turkey and Russia.	55.7%	69.0%	49.2%	0.210
Military equipment agreements and collaborations influence trust and cooperation between Turkey and Russia.	61.4%	72.4%	55.9%	0.296
<b>Mean score (SD)</b>	3.74 (0.93)	3.99 (0.68)	3.62 (1.01)	<b>0.045**</b>
<b>Ideological Movements: Impact of nationalism and religious ideologies on foreign policy and diplomatic relations.</b>				
Ideological movements (e.g., political ideologies, religious influences) significantly influence the foreign policies of Turkey and Russia.	46.6%	44.8%	47.5%	0.511
The following ideological factors are influential in shaping Turkish-Russian relations:				
c. Nationalism	46.6%	44.8%	47.5%	0.845
d. Religious Influence	44.3%	51.7%	40.7%	<b>0.006*</b>
<b>Mean score (SD)</b>	3.32 (1.07)	3.18 (1.11)	3.38 (1.06)	0.413

<b>Contemporary Issues: Significance of Syrian Conflict, Ukrainian War, energy politics, and other current events.</b>				
Contemporary issues (e.g., the Syrian conflict, the Ukrainian war) have a significant impact on Turkish-Russian relations.	64.8%	69.0%	62.7%	0.542
The following contemporary issues have the greatest influence on Turkish-Russian relations:				
g. Syrian Conflict	61.4%	65.5%	59.3%	0.537
h. Ukrainian War	44.3%	51.7%	40.7%	0.509
i. Energy Politics	60.2%	75.9%	52.5%	0.109
j. Black Sea Tensions	64.8%	82.8%	55.9%	<b>0.029*</b>
k. NATO Expansion	58.0%	69.0%	52.5%	0.213
l. Cyprus Issue	29.5%	37.9%	25.4%	0.447
<b>Mean score (SD)</b>	3.65 (0.83)	3.84 (0.74)	3.56 (0.86)	0.135
<b>Economic Interactions: Role of trade agreements, energy dependencies, tourism, and infrastructure projects in bilateral relations.</b>				
Economic interactions (e.g., trade relations, energy dependencies) play a significant role in Turkish-Russian relations.	62.5%	79.3%	54.2%	<b>0.018*</b>
The following areas of economic interaction are most significant in shaping Turkish-Russian relations:				
e. Trade Agreements	62.5%	75.9%	55.9%	0.113
f. Energy Dependencies	67.0%	82.8%	59.3%	0.074
g. Tourism	56.8%	75.9%	47.5%	<b>0.019*</b>
h. Infrastructure Projects	47.7%	62.1%	40.7%	0.125
<b>Mean score (SD)</b>	3.73 (0.88)	4.07 (0.59)	3.56 (0.95)	<b>0.003**</b>

SA/A: Strongly Agree/Agree, SD: Standard Deviation

\* Denotes a significant difference at  $p < 0.05$  as indicated by chi-square statistics

\*\* Denotes a significant difference at  $p < 0.05$  as indicated by t-test for independent samples

Three main factors have been significantly associated with the field of study or expertise ( $p < 0.05$ ). These include national security interests, contemporary issues, and economic interactions. Participants specializing in international relations or political science perceived these factors as having a higher impact on Turkish-Russian relations than those with different fields of study or expertise, as shown in Table 9 ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Moreover, the perceived impact of recent conflicts, energy politics, Black Sea tensions, NATO expansion, and infrastructure projects was significantly greater among those whose field of study or expertise was international relations or political science ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 9. Participants' Perceptions of the Impact of Various Factors on Turkish-Russian Relations, Categorized by Field of Study or Expertise**

Theme	% of “SA/A” Reponses based on Field of Study or Expertise			
	Sample n=88	IRPS n=40	EHO n=48	p-value
<b>Historical Events: Impact of Ottoman Era, Cold War dynamics, and recent conflicts on bilateral relations.</b>				
1. Key historical events, such as treaties and wars, have significantly influenced Turkish-Russian relations.	59.1%	67.5%	52.1%	0.170
2. Specific historical periods are critical in shaping the bilateral relationship between Turkey and Russia:				
i. Ottoman Era Treaties	54.5%	60.0%	50.0%	0.552
j. Cold War Period	56.8%	65.0%	50.0%	0.352
k. Post-Cold War Adjustments	61.4%	72.5%	52.1%	0.065
l. Recent Conflicts	58.0%	65.0%	52.1%	<b>0.039*</b>
<b>Mean score (SD)</b>	3.71 (0.92)	3.88 (1.02)	3.56 (0.80)	0.104
<b>Geopolitical Factors: Role of geography and territorial disputes in shaping relations.</b>				
1. Geographical factors play a significant role in influencing Turkish-Russian relations.	63.6%	65.0%	62.5%	0.305
2. Territorial boundaries are crucial for the strategic interests of both Turkey and Russia.	65.9%	75.0%	58.3%	0.123
<b>Mean score (SD)</b>	3.80 (1.24)	3.98 (1.26)	3.65 (1.22)	0.216
<b>National Security Interests: Influence of military alliances, defense organizations, and equipment agreements on bilateral trust.</b>				
Military alliances have a significant impact on the bilateral relationship between Turkey and Russia.	61.4%	67.5%	56.3%	0.535
National security issues play an important role in shaping Turkish-Russian relations.	61.4%	72.5%	52.1%	0.139
Military defense organizations, such as NATO and CSTO, significantly influence Turkish-Russian relations.	58.0%	70.0%	47.9%	0.066
Regional organizations, including the Turkic Federation, play a pivotal role in shaping relations between Turkey and Russia.	55.7%	67.5%	45.8%	0.114
Military equipment agreements and collaborations influence trust and cooperation between Turkey and Russia.	61.4%	72.5%	52.1%	0.135
<b>Mean score (SD)</b>	3.74 (0.93)	4.01 (0.89)	3.53 (0.92)	<b>0.015**</b>
<b>Ideological Movements: Impact of nationalism and religious ideologies on foreign policy and diplomatic relations.</b>				
Ideological movements (e.g., political ideologies, religious influences) significantly influence the foreign policies of Turkey and Russia.	46.6%	50.0%	43.8%	0.808
The following ideological factors are influential in shaping Turkish-Russian relations:				
e. Nationalism	46.6%	50.0%	43.8%	0.440
f. Religious Influence	44.3%	50.0%	39.6%	0.409
<b>Mean score (SD)</b>	3.32 (1.07)	3.46 (1.02)	3.20 (1.11)	0.265

<b>Contemporary Issues: Significance of Syrian Conflict, Ukrainian War, energy politics, and other current events.</b>				
Contemporary issues (e.g., the Syrian conflict, the Ukrainian war) have a significant impact on Turkish-Russian relations.	64.8%	65.0%	64.6%	0.769
The following contemporary issues have the greatest influence on Turkish-Russian relations:				
m. Syrian Conflict	61.4%	57.5%	64.6%	0.431
n. Ukrainian War	44.3%	45.0%	43.8%	0.992
o. Energy Politics	60.2%	80.0%	43.8%	<b>0.002*</b>
p. Black Sea Tensions	64.8%	82.5%	50.0%	<b>0.006*</b>
q. NATO Expansion	58.0%	72.5%	45.8%	<b>0.040*</b>
r. Cyprus Issue	29.5%	32.5%	27.1%	0.740
<b>Mean score (SD)</b>	3.65 (0.83)	3.85 (0.74)	3.49 (0.86)	<b>0.046**</b>
<b>Economic Interactions: Role of trade agreements, energy dependencies, tourism, and infrastructure projects in bilateral relations.</b>				
Economic interactions (e.g., trade relations, energy dependencies) play a significant role in Turkish-Russian relations.	62.5%	77.5%	50.0%	<b>0.026*</b>
The following areas of economic interaction are most significant in shaping Turkish-Russian relations:				
i. Trade Agreements	62.5%	72.5%	54.2%	0.188
j. Energy Dependencies	67.0%	72.5%	62.5%	0.602
k. Tourism	56.8%	70.0%	45.8%	0.066
l. Infrastructure Projects	47.7%	62.5%	35.4%	<b>0.029*</b>
<b>Mean score (SD)</b>	3.73 (0.88)	4.02 (0.92)	3.49 (0.77)	<b>0.005**</b>

SA/A: Strongly Agree/Agree, SD: Standard Deviation

IRPS = International Relations & Political Science; EHO = Economics, History, & Other

\* Denotes a significant difference at  $p < 0.05$  as indicated by chi-square statistics

\*\* Denotes a significant difference at  $p < 0.05$  as indicated by t-test for independent samples

An evaluation of how the nature of participants' connection to Turkish-Russian relations influences individuals' perceptions of the bilateral political relations identified three principal factors. Perceptions of ideological movements had a significantly greater impact among participants with academic or professional connections to Turkish-Russian relations compared to those with personal or other types of connections ( $p < 0.05$ ). Similarly, contemporary issues and economic relations were perceived as having a greater impact by those with academic or professional connections ( $p < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, factors such as the Cold War period, military defense organizations, regional organizations, energy politics, Black Sea tensions, NATO expansion, tourism, and infrastructure projects were all perceived as having a greater impact by participants

with academic or professional connections ( $p < 0.05$ ). These findings are presented in Table 10.

**Table 10. Participants' Perceptions of the Impact of Various Factors on Turkish-Russian Relations, Categorized by Connection to Turkish-Russian Relations**

Theme	% of "SA/A" Reponses based on Connection to Turkish-Russian Relations			
	Sample n=88	AP n=42	PO n=46	p-value
<b>Historical Events: Impact of Ottoman Era, Cold War dynamics, and recent conflicts on bilateral relations.</b>				
1. Key historical events, such as treaties and wars, have significantly influenced Turkish-Russian relations.	59.1%	64.3%	54.3%	0.234
2. Specific historical periods are critical in shaping the bilateral relationship between Turkey and Russia:				
m. Ottoman Era Treaties	54.5%	61.9%	47.8%	0.295
n. Cold War Period	56.8%	64.3%	50.0%	<b>0.030*</b>
o. Post-Cold War Adjustments	61.4%	64.3%	58.7%	0.850
p. Recent Conflicts	58.0%	64.3%	52.2%	0.427
<b>Mean score (SD)</b>	3.71 (0.92)	3.85 (1.01)	3.58 (0.81)	0.170
<b>Geopolitical Factors: Role of geography and territorial disputes in shaping relations.</b>				
1. Geographical factors play a significant role in influencing Turkish-Russian relations.	63.6%	64.3%	63.0%	0.533
2. Territorial boundaries are crucial for the strategic interests of both Turkey and Russia.	65.9%	66.7%	65.2%	0.527
<b>Mean score (SD)</b>	3.80 (1.24)	3.83 (1.36)	3.76 (1.12)	0.786
<b>National Security Interests: Influence of military alliances, defense organizations, and equipment agreements on bilateral trust.</b>				
Military alliances have a significant impact on the bilateral relationship between Turkey and Russia.	61.4%	66.7%	56.5%	0.465
National security issues play an important role in shaping Turkish-Russian relations.	61.4%	71.4%	52.2%	0.137
Military defense organizations, such as NATO and CSTO, significantly influence Turkish-Russian relations.	58.0%	71.4%	45.7%	<b>0.002*</b>
Regional organizations, including the Turkic Federation, play a pivotal role in shaping relations between Turkey and Russia.	55.7%	69.0%	43.5%	<b>0.016*</b>
Military equipment agreements and collaborations influence trust and cooperation between Turkey and Russia.	61.4%	66.7%	56.5%	0.585
<b>Mean score (SD)</b>	3.74 (0.93)	3.92 (0.92)	3.58 (0.92)	0.090
<b>Ideological Movements: Impact of nationalism and religious ideologies on foreign policy and diplomatic relations.</b>				
Ideological movements (e.g., political	46.6%	59.5%	34.8%	0.061

ideologies, religious influences) significantly influence the foreign policies of Turkey and Russia.				
The following ideological factors are influential in shaping Turkish-Russian relations:				
g. Nationalism	46.6%	54.8%	39.1%	0.230
h. Religious Influence	44.3%	54.8%	34.8%	0.150
<b>Mean score (SD)</b>	3.32 (1.07)	3.60 (1.04)	3.06 (1.04)	<b>0.016**</b>
<b>Contemporary Issues: Significance of Syrian Conflict, Ukrainian War, energy politics, and other current events.</b>				
Contemporary issues (e.g., the Syrian conflict, the Ukrainian war) have a significant impact on Turkish-Russian relations.	64.8%	71.4%	58.7%	0.248
The following contemporary issues have the greatest influence on Turkish-Russian relations:				
s. Syrian Conflict	61.4%	66.7%	56.5%	0.347
t. Ukrainian War	44.3%	47.6%	41.3%	0.837
u. Energy Politics	60.2%	73.8%	47.8%	<b>0.043*</b>
v. Black Sea Tensions	64.8%	76.2%	54.3%	<b>0.018*</b>
w. NATO Expansion	58.0%	71.4%	45.7%	<b>0.014*</b>
x. Cyprus Issue	29.5%	33.3%	26.1%	0.729
<b>Mean score (SD)</b>	3.65 (0.83)	3.86 (0.81)	3.47 (0.81)	<b>0.027**</b>
<b>Economic Interactions: Role of trade agreements, energy dependencies, tourism, and infrastructure projects in bilateral relations.</b>				
Economic interactions (e.g., trade relations, energy dependencies) play a significant role in Turkish-Russian relations.	62.5%	73.8%	52.2%	0.086
The following areas of economic interaction are most significant in shaping Turkish-Russian relations:				
m. Trade Agreements	62.5%	66.7%	58.7%	0.735
n. Energy Dependencies	67.0%	66.7%	67.4%	0.655
o. Tourism	56.8%	71.4%	43.5%	<b>0.027*</b>
p. Infrastructure Projects	47.7%	61.9%	34.8%	<b>0.024*</b>
<b>Mean score (SD)</b>	3.73 (0.88)	3.93 (0.97)	3.54 (0.75)	<b>0.037**</b>

SA/A: Strongly Agree/Agree, SD: Standard Deviation

AP = Academic and Professional; PO = Personal and Other.

\* Denotes a significant difference at  $p < 0.05$  as indicated by chi-square statistics

\*\* Denotes a significant difference at  $p < 0.05$  as indicated by t-test for independent samples

Furthermore, the regression analysis presented in Table 11 revealed that significant predictors of "Strongly Agree/Agree" on the impact of geopolitical factors on bilateral Turkish-Russian relations were being a Turkish national (Odds Ratio [OR], 4.81; 95% CI, 1.46–15.80) and having lived in or studied Russian culture (OR, 7.39; 95% CI, 1.70–32.22).

**Table 11. Predictors and Associated Factors of the Perceived Impact of Historical Events, Geopolitical Factors, and National Security Interests.**

Predictors	Outcomes		
	Strongly Agree/Agree on the Impact of the Theme, OR (95% CI)		
	Historical Events	Geopolitical Factors	National Security Interests
<b>Nationality</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-Turkish</li> <li>• Turkish</li> </ul>	[Reference] 1.81 (0.60–5.50)	[Reference] <b>4.81 (1.46–15.80)*</b>	[Reference] 1.45 (0.47–4.48)
<b>Field of Study or Expertise</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economics, History, &amp; Other</li> <li>• International Relations &amp; Political Science</li> </ul>	[Reference] 1.26 (0.42–3.74)	[Reference] 0.72 (0.22–2.31)	[Reference] 2.30 (0.77–6.89)
<b>Connection to Turkish-Russian Relations</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal and Other</li> <li>• Academic and Professional</li> </ul>	[Reference] 2.14 (0.75–6.08)	[Reference] 0.82 (0.28–2.44)	[Reference] 1.35 (0.47–3.89)
<b>Have you lived in or studied Turkish culture?</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No</li> <li>• Yes</li> </ul>	[Reference] 2.27 (0.81–6.33)	[Reference] 1.54 (0.55–4.31)	[Reference] 1.62 (0.57–4.61)
<b>Have you lived in or studied Russian culture?</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No</li> <li>• Yes</li> </ul>	[Reference] 1.78 (0.50–6.27)	[Reference] <b>7.39 (1.70–32.22)*</b>	[Reference] 3.56 (0.97–13.04)

Abbreviation: OR, odds ratio, CI, confidence interval

Odds ratio and 95% confidence interval were calculated by a multivariate binary logistic model.

\*Denotes significant difference at  $p < 0.05$ .

Lastly, in Table 12, the regression model results indicated that having lived in or studied Turkish culture was a significant predictor of 'Strongly Agree/Agree' regarding the impact of contemporary issues and economic interactions on bilateral Turkish-Russian relations (Odds Ratio [OR] = 3.21; 95% CI, 1.08–9.57) and (OR = 4.58; 95% CI, 1.53–13.75), respectively.

**Table 12. Predictors and Associated Factors of the Perceived Impact of Ideological Movements, Contemporary Issues, and Economic Interactions.**

Predictors	Outcomes		
	Strongly Agree/Agree on the Impact of the Theme, OR (95% CI)		
	Ideological Movements	Contemporary Issues	Economic Interactions
<b>Nationality</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-Turkish</li> <li>• Turkish</li> </ul>	[Reference] 0.96 (0.30–3.04)	[Reference] 0.96 (0.30–3.10)	[Reference] 1.37 (0.43–4.38)
<b>Field of Study or Expertise</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economics, History, &amp; Other</li> <li>• International Relations &amp; Political Science</li> </ul>	[Reference] 0.46 (0.14–1.52)	[Reference] 1.18 (0.38–3.64)	[Reference] 1.21 (0.39–3.78)

<b>Connection to Turkish-Russian Relations</b>			
• Personal and Other	<b>[Reference]</b> 2.97 (0.99–8.92)	<b>[Reference]</b> 2.83 (0.97–8.26)	<b>[Reference]</b> 2.50 (0.83–7.47)
• Academic and Professional			
<b>Have you lived in or studied Turkish culture?</b>			
• No	<b>[Reference]</b> 1.14 (0.40–3.19)	<b>[Reference]</b> <b>3.21 (1.08–9.57)*</b>	<b>[Reference]</b> <b>4.58 (1.53–13.75)*</b>
• Yes			
<b>Have you lived in or studied Russian culture?</b>			
• No	<b>[Reference]</b> 1.47 (0.42–5.12)	<b>[Reference]</b> 2.28 (0.62–8.41)	<b>[Reference]</b> 2.24 (0.58–8.57)
• Yes			

Abbreviation: OR, odds ratio, CI, confidence interval

Odds ratio and 95% confidence interval were calculated by a multivariate binary logistic model.

\*Denotes significant difference at  $p < 0.05$ .

## 4.2. Discussion

This part critically analyzes the perceptions of the target audience on six general themes: historical legacies, geopolitical considerations, national security interests, contemporary conflicts, ideological forces, and economic interdependencies.

Geopolitical and national security concerns are the most prominent perceived drivers of Turkish-Russian relations, and economic interdependence has been perceived to be a stabilizing factor in the face of political tensions, based on the findings of the survey. Historical legacies and ideological trends were rated as weak to moderate factors, shaping narratives but having little direct impact on policy decisions. In contrast, recent geopolitical crises such as the Syrian crisis and Black Sea tensions were perceived dramatic upsets that necessitated strategic adaptability in bilateral relations.

The subsequent sections present a systematic discussion of the study sample and the six broad themes framing the Turkish Russian relations, siting the findings within relevant theoretical frameworks and available literature to more clearly shed light on their meaning for Turkish-Russian relations. Also the limitation of the study and recommendations for future research will be presented.

### 4.2.1. Study Poulation

The population under study in this survey comprised a heterogeneous population of individuals who have information on Turkish-Russian relations. The respondents are

demographically heterogeneous regarding demographics, age, and generations, both male and female, and belong to 13 different nationalities, among which Turkish and non-Turkish respondents were engaged. Their educational levels also vary as nearly one-third of them have a PhD while nearly a quarter of them have a master's. Also, nearly the vast majority of the respondents are professionals in international relations or political science (45.4%). In addition, nearly three-quarters of the research population hold an academic degree or are politicians, journalists, or practitioners of the mass media, hence increasing the heterogeneity of the sample. The participants' professional experience is also varied, with nearly 40% having more than 10 years of professional experience and 17% having 5-10 professional experience. Interestingly, nearly half the sample of the study has a professional or academic connection to Turkish-Russian relations, giving strength to the study. Additionally, about 60% have lived in or learned about Turkish culture, and nearly 18% have done the same with Russian culture, which contributes to diversity of the sample.

In all, the study's population is a wide and composite group of people who are either directly engaged with or related to Turkish-Russian relationships. The diversity gives strength to the study findings through the addition of people from varying backgrounds and skill sets, which consequently aids in broadening the study implications.

## **4.2.2. Key Determinants of Turkish-Russian Relations**

### **4.2.2.1. The Role of Historical Legacies in Turkish-Russian Relations**

#### **❖ Moderate Perceived Impact**

Historical legacies were perceived as moderately influential in Turkish-Russian relations, with shaping historical events, Cold War dynamics, and Ottoman-era treaties continuing to inform diplomatic exchanges. The analysis demonstrates, nonetheless, that historic grievances do not motivate contemporary foreign policy decisions.

Notably, Turkish respondents also rated historical influences more highly than their non-Turkish counterparts, suggesting that national identity and historical memory continue to shape perceptions. This would validate constructivist arguments, which draw attention to the role of history and identity in shaping diplomatic action (Yanık, 2019).

However, realist theory better explains why Turkey and Russia have been able to engage pragmatically despite historical differences (Keohane & Nye, 2012). This can be seen in defense and economic cooperations, such as the S-400 missile deal, that transcend historical grievances in favor of strategic interests.

#### **4.2.2.2. The Influence of Geopolitical Factors**

##### **❖ Major Perceived Impact**

The survey results indicate that geopolitical considerations have been instrumental in the evolution of Turkish-Russian relations, especially concerning territorial borders and regional positioning. Geography was seen by respondents as strategically important to the evolution of bilateral engagement, especially territorial conflicts and regional presence. Results in this context highlight the geopolitical outlines of Turkish-Russian engagement in terms of proximity, control of strategic areas, and regional competition.

This conforms to realist theory, that states prefer territory control and influence in a region as the chief motivations of foreign policy (Snyder, 2002; Mearsheimer, 2002). The evidence also accords with the theory that Turkish-Russian relations were motivated by geopolitics competition and strategic alignment and not by temporary political change (Hale, 2023).

Furthermore, such results are in line with earlier studies showing territorial disputes and regional alignment remain at the center of Turkish-Russian geopolitical relations. This means that geopolitical decisions are largely determined by regional dominance and territorial aspiration, as representative of long-term strategic interests.

#### **4.2.2.3. The Role of National Security Interests**

##### **❖ Major Perceived Impact**

The survey findings indicate that national security interests are the top concern that governs Turkish-Russian relations. All respondents, invariably, placed military alliances, defense bodies (NATO and CSTO, among others), and military equipment agreements as determinative factors of bilateral interactions. In addition, national security issues, defense agreements, and arms sales were also all agreed to be determinative drivers of foreign policy decisions.

Notably, Turkish respondents were 4.81 times more likely than non-Turkish respondents to consider national security as a primary driver of Turkish-Russian relations. This corresponds with realist theory, which contends that states are primarily concerned with security and military alliances as the foundation pillars of foreign policy (Mearsheimer, 2002). The results also support earlier studies that highlight the central role of military cooperation and defense agreements in bilateral relations (Kibaroglu, 2019; Ersen & Köstem, 2020).

Furthermore, while defense and military alliances were universally regarded as being most crucial, the role of regional organizations such as the Turkic Federation was perceived as being slightly less pivotal, with only 55.7% of those polled in accord with their role. This reflects that bilateral formal defense and security agreements are more pivotal in Turkish-Russian security interactions than general regional efforts.

#### **4.2.2.4. The Influence of Contemporary Issues**

##### **❖ Moderate Perceived Impact**

The results of the survey were that contemporary issues affect Turkish-Russian relations moderately, although some were perceived to be considerably more significant than others. Black Sea tensions, the Syrian war, and energy politics were identified as the most powerful contemporary issues, while the Ukrainian war and Cyprus issue were perceived as having less impact.

Black Sea tensions were rated the highest in terms of perceived impact, highlighting its role as a contested area where both nations project influence. The Syrian war was also rated as a top driver, highlighting ongoing engagement between Turkey and Russia on regional stability. Energy politics was also a top concern, highlighting the role of economic dependencies on bilateral engagement.

On the other hand, the Ukrainian war was scored as having a lesser impact, indicating that while relevant, it does not loom over Turkish-Russian relations as much as some other regional disputes. The lowest impact score was awarded to the Cyprus dispute, lowering the overall score of contemporary issues considerably. Were it not for the Cyprus dispute, the overall impact score of contemporary issues might have been rated as major rather than moderate, further indicating the part of recent crises in Turkish-Russian relations.

These findings are in line with realist expectations, which hold that state actions are determined by responses to evolving regional challenges (Keohane & Nye, 2012). The findings also corroborate with literature, which points out that Turkey and Russia's approach to addressing contemporary crises is guided by situational requirements and regional forces (Cheterian, 2023; İleri, 2024).

Moreover, neoclassical realism brings illumination by demonstrating the role of internal and external factors in determining the actions of the state to responding to the present regional challenges (Rose, 1998). The variation in perceived influence between other present issues suggests that the bilateral relationship between Russia and Turkey is responsive to proximate pressures and regional events.

#### **4.2.2.5. The Influence of Ideological and Nationalist Factors**

##### **❖ Weak Perceived Impact**

The results of the survey also indicate that ideological and nationalist factors have had the least perceived impact on Turkish-Russian relations. While religion and nationalism were acknowledged as factors of public debate, they were not regarded as leading drivers of bilateral relations.

However, the perceptions of respondents varied with their field of specialization. Political science and international relations experts viewed greater importance to nationalist and ideologically motivated actors than respondents of other academic fields. Religious influence, specifically, was placed higher by Turkish respondents, as well as respondents with an academic specialty in Turkish-Russian relations.

These findings counter robust constructivist claims that ideological congruence exercises a determinative effect on foreign policy (Gökçekuyu, 2023). Instead, they are consistent with the perception that ideological factors are largely secondary to pragmatic factors in decision-making. However, the findings do reveal that ideological forces do remain active in shaping perceptions within specific academic and national communities, if not necessarily decisively determining policy outcomes.

#### **4.2.2.6. The Role of Economic Interactions**

##### **❖ Major Perceived Impact**

The economic relations were seen as a foremost factor influencing Turkish-Russian relations, and energy dependences, trade agreements, and tourism were viewed to be the most applicable economic drivers. Dependence on energy was particularly ranked as the strongest economic driver, which arose from the tremendous economic interdependence between the two nations. Trade agreements were also considered a primary factor of the bilateral economic relations, which added economic interdependence.

Although tourism was listed as a priority area in the contribution to Turkish-Russian relations, its ranking was moderately lower in terms of impact perception. Infrastructure projects received the lowest perception score among the economic variables, indicating that while economic engagement has a stabilizing influence, its significance varies across sectors.

These findings corroborate liberal institutionalist perspectives that argue economic interdependence influences bilateral relations by engendering cooperation and

establishing mutual economic interests (Keohane & Nye, 2012). These findings also conform to realist perspectives that identify economic cooperation as a tool of larger political calculation rather than a discrete determinant of relations (Waltz, 1979).

Also, the respondents who had educational and experiential familiarity with Turkish-Russian relations tended to emphasize economic factors as a salient motivating factor. This is in consonance with theory on complex interdependence, where it is hypothesized that economic relationships cut across and intersect political and security issues in shaping international alliances (Keohane & Nye, 2012).

The findings of this research indicate that Turkish-Russian relations among the study respondents are driven primarily by national security, geopolitical alignment, and economic interdependence. Among these, the geopolitical considerations and national security interests were the most compelling determinants, indicating realist theoretical approaches where power, security, and strategic calculation dominate foreign policy (Mearsheimer, 2002).

While, on the one hand, economic relations were seen as a stabilizing factor in Turkish-Russian relations, primarily via energy interdependencies, trade partnerships, and tourism. This economic cooperation was not, however, considered to be strong enough to overpower geopolitics, confirming the perception that economic interdependence makes strategic competition mellower, but does not eliminate it.

Historical legacies and ideological considerations were, on the other hand, viewed as having a less immediate impact on policy-making. Although there was a recognition of the influence of ideological trends and historical events on popular narratives, these were not regarded as the most important drivers of Turkish-Russian relations. What these results suggest is that pragmatically oriented strategic interests take precedence over historical and ideological considerations in shaping foreign policy engagement.

However, Turkish-Russian relations were understood differently by respondents based on their nationality and discipline. Turkish respondents were more likely to give greater weight to geopolitical, security, and economic factors in shaping bilateral

relations, whereas non-Turkish respondents gave lower weight to these factors. Similarly, respondents from international relations or political science disciplines were more likely to emphasize the role of security and economic factors, whereas respondents from other disciplines perceived these influences differently.

In addition, exposure to Turkish and Russian cultural experiences appeared to bear on the perception of economic and security cooperation. Those with direct experience of participation in Turkish-Russian relations-whether academic, professional, or cultural-demonstrated greater susceptibility to perceiving economic interdependence as a stabilizer of bilateral relations.

Lastly, the study concludes that perceptions of Turkish-Russian relations are based on a complex blend of security interests, regional geopolitics, and economic pragmatism. The study provides pragmatic suggestions for policymakers in the context that although strategic coordination of interests is possible where there are corresponding security and economic interests involved, geopolitical and security-driven forces deeper shape the direction of bilateral relations than ideological or historical considerations.

Besides, national and educational differences in perception mean that policy solutions must be accommodative of divergent perceptions when formulating diplomatic measures. Policymakers and diplomats can utilize the above insights in enhancing cooperation through policy harmonization with existing security and economic challenges while being sensitive to the complex role of history, ideology, and ongoing crises.

### **4.3. Key Findings**

This section highlights the research's principal findings, where determinants of specialist views of Turkish-Russian relations are explored. The results are based on statistical and regression models which had tested the impact of nationality, academic field, and exposure to culture on the opinions of respondents.

#### 4.3.1. Factors Influencing Perceptions of Turkish-Russian Relations

The findings indicate that there are three prominent factors that determine expert opinions about Turkish-Russian relations:

- ❖ **Nationality:** The Turkish participants cared more about security matters, tensions in the region, and economic cooperation compared to their peers from other countries. They also perceived geopolitical matters and history as being more vital in the shaping of the relationship.
- ❖ **Academic Specialization:** International relations and political science specialists viewed security concerns most notably, geopolitically oriented conflict, as well as recent regional tensions, consistent with realistic perceptions regarding world matters. Other than this, international relations and political science specialists most likely considered economic interdependence playing a role in forming foreign diplomatic relationships.
- ❖ **Exposure to Turkish or Russian Culture:** Participants who had lived in or studied Turkish culture were more inclined to view contemporary political tensions and economic dependencies as the most significant forces in shaping bilateral relations. Conversely, those with direct exposure to Russian culture emphasized geopolitical and security concerns.

These findings are consistent with theoretical expectations, as far as realist theories of security and power relations are mainstream among political scientists, while liberal interdependence theory is more typical for researchers of trade and economic relations (Keohane & Nye, 2012).

#### 4.3.2. Predictors of Perceived Impact

Regression analysis revealed that there were three significant predictors framing expert opinions of Turkish-Russian relations

- **Turkish Nationality & Russian Cultural Exposure:** Strong predictors of increased perceived geopolitical factor influence, national identity and in-direct cultural exposure posit that a nation's cultural contact shapes an individual's explanation of security and foreign policy mechanisms.
- **Turkish Cultural Exposure:** It was a strong predictor of greater perceived influence of contemporary concerns and economic engagement, inferring that cultural exposure to Turkey's geographical position aids in creating more political and economic interdependence focus.
- **Academic Background in Political Science & International Relations:** This significantly increased the likelihood of interpreting geopolitical tensions and security issues as being central drivers of Turkish-Russian relations.

These results underscore the role of professional experience and personal backgrounds in shaping expert perceptions of security priorities, economic interdependencies, and ideological currents. Larger and more representative samples in subsequent studies could provide an even clearer picture of how expert communities evaluate Turkish-Russian relations and their overall influence on policymaking.

#### **4.4. Limitations of the Study and Future Research Directions**

While this study gives empirical evidence regarding the determinants of Turkish-Russian relations, some methodological limitations are to be mentioned for future more accurate studies.

##### **4.4.1. Limitations of the Study**

###### **1. Quantitative Approach**

- The study employed a survey-based quantitative method, which was helpful for the identification of trends and correlation. However, it cannot thoroughly comment on the nuanced thinking that goes into expert judgments.

- Qualitative methods (like in-depth interviews of diplomats, security analysts, and policymakers) should be incorporated in future research to permit more context to these perceptions.

## **2. Sample Size and Composition**

- The study was conducted among 88 participants from largely academic, media, and foreign affairs specialists' backgrounds.
- Government officials, business executives, and security professionals were underrepresented. The sample must be bigger and more diverse stakeholders in future studies to have improved, more complete insights.

## **3. Evolving Geopolitical Context**

- Turkish-Russian relations continue to evolve and are prone to unexpected geopolitical undercurrents.
- Comparative studies of Turkish foreign relations with other strategic partners (e.g., EU, China, and Iran) could give us additional information on how Turkey balances rival global interests.

While this research provided empirical data to the research question, further qualitative research, for instance, interviews of policymakers, security agents, and economic players, would offer more contextual information to the perceptions at hand. Further studies may also elicit opinion among the masses versus what the experts believe for a broader scope of analysis.

### **4.4.2. Implications for Turkish-Russian Relations in a Changing World**

The findings of the study have important policy implications for Western actors, NATO, Russia, and Turkey.

#### **❖ Implications for Turkish Policymakers**

- The study emphasizes strategic autonomy of Turkey and asserts that in the case of Russia and NATO, balancing is not a short-term policy but a core component of foreign policy.

- Russian cooperation in the energy sector is the pillar of the relationship, and thus it is not likely that diplomatic tensions will cut economic ties completely.
- The Turkish procurement of defense equipment, such as the S-400 and the F-16 talks, displays its security-strategic flexibility for the purposes of eliciting concessions from its chief nemesis great powers.

#### ❖ **Implications for Russian Policymakers**

- Turkey is also a central regional player whose independent foreign policy needs to be handled carefully.
- Use economic interdependence to sustain cooperation amid political and security tensions.
- Turkish membership in NATO provides Moscow with an indirect diplomatic opening to Western alliances, affirming the worth of cooperation despite occasional competitions.

#### ❖ **Implications for Western Policymakers**

- The study asserts that it is unrealistic to push Turkey toward full NATO coordination with Russia.
- More critically, there must be a more adult policy style that values Turkey's geopolitical limits and strategic maneuvering space.
- Sanctions or isolation policies will never put an end to Turkish-Russian relations but targeted diplomatic efforts need to be employed to render Western interests effective.

Overall, the findings validate the contention that Turkish-Russian relations are driven by strategic pragmatism rather than ideological commonality. The collaboration will likely continue to define bilateral relations in a growing multipolar world.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study has taken into account the perceived influence of historical legacies, geopolitical interests, national security interests, recent conflicts, ideological factors, and economic interdependencies on Turkish-Russian relations since 1600 until 2024. From an analysis of experts' perception, academics' views, and professionals with direct or indirect involvement with Turkish-Russian relations, this study has been able to provide meaningful insight into how the factors mentioned above shape the bilateral relationship. The findings indicate that of the six thematic areas under study, geopolitical interests, security issues pertaining to national security, and economic interdependence are considered the most significant determinants of Turkish-Russian relations, whereas historical legacies, ideological dispositions, and some of the contemporary concerns are rated as weak or moderate forces. The findings are consistent with realist notions of international relations, which privileged the dimension of power relations, strategic considerations, and economic interests over ideological or historical explanations in determining state action.

Statistical analysis confirms that the perception of geopolitical interests is the most accurate predictor of Turkish-Russian relations since 64.8% of the respondents answered strongly or agreed with its stance. That is, positioning in the region, territorial conflict, and strategic calculation are being considered at the center of deciding interaction between the two countries. National security matters like defence agencies, defence pacts, and defence equipment deals were also considered highly influential with a mean consensus score of 59.6%. It is evidence for the supposition that Turkish-Russian relations are marked by pragmatist security considerations rather than ideology or historical ties. Economic interdependence, such as energy cooperation, trade treaties, and tourism, was yet another top-rated determinant with 60% of the respondents seeing economic exchanges as a stabilizer. This fits with the point that despite political and military tensions, economic interests create a cause for ongoing cooperation.

Historical legacies, while identified as being among the drivers in diplomatic rhetoric, were rated to have a moderate impact, with an average perception rating of 58%. Although milestone historical events such as Ottoman treaties and Cold War tensions create political narratives, they do not appear to significantly influence

policymaking in contemporary times. This is evident in the way in which current-day political and economic interests would usually replace traditional grievances, a development that is revealing of pragmatic interplay between Russia and Turkey. Concurrently, ideological factors, i.e., nationalism and religion, were rated the least effective predictor, and 45.8% of respondents to the questionnaire strongly agreed or agreed with their influence. The finding contradicts constructivist theory, which concentrates on identity- and ideology-determination of international relations and otherwise suggests Turkish-Russian relations as pragmatic and interest-based.

The study also indicates that the perceptions regarding Turkish-Russian relations vary according to nationality, academic background, and familiarity with the relationship via personal or professional exposure. Geopolitical, security, and economic concerns were ranked as significantly more significant by Turkish respondents compared to non-Turkish respondents, which means that issues of national security and regional geopolitics are considered more pressing in Turkey. International relations and political science specialised participants gave higher priority to national security and geopolitical concerns than those in other fields, confirming the idea that disciplinary background affects foreign relations interpretation. Additionally, individuals with direct experience of Turkish or Russian culture were more likely to view economic interdependence as a source of stability, indicating that direct experience of bilateral interaction promotes a nuanced appreciation of cooperation in the presence of strategic tensions.

The findings have important policy implications. For Turkish policymakers, the perceived primacy of geopolitical and security issues suggests the necessity of maintaining a balanced foreign policy that balances relations with both Russia and Western allies. While economic relations with Russia possess crucial benefits, these are not necessarily transferable to political alignment, suggesting the strategic necessity of diversification. For Russian policymakers, it is demonstrated here that Turkey is not a powerless regional player but a shrewd one balancing its security and economic interests. Founding economic cooperation on while keeping strategic competition at bay will be key to sustaining diplomatic engagement. To Western policymakers, the study reminds that attempting to push Turkey into a hard decision between NATO and Russia could be futile because Ankara's foreign policy is defined by a complex mix of security

calculations, regional interests, as well as economic dependencies. A more mature one that respects Turkey's strategic autonomy but also promotes cooperation in fields of mutual interest would yield more productive diplomatic outcomes.

Though valuable, there are limitations to this study. Application of survey-based quantitative methods, though as beneficial for the determination of trends, does not capture the fullness of expert thinking behind their intuition. Future studies should incorporate qualitative methods, such as intensive interviews with security analysts, policymakers, and economic analysts, to better understand drivers of Turkish-Russian relations. In addition, the study sample, though diverse, was predominantly composed of professionals and academics, with limited government officials, business leaders, and military strategists. Expanding the pool of respondents to these stakeholders would make future studies more inclusive. In addition, as the nature of geopolitical dynamics is rapidly evolving, a longitudinal design tracking shifts in perceptions over time would be revealing regarding the stability and change in Turkish-Russian relations.

The findings of this research uncover the complexities of Turkish-Russian relations, demonstrating how security and geopolitical interests are perceived as the guiding factors while economic interdependence is an important aspect in facilitating cooperation despite tensions at the political level. Historical and ideational factors, even though important in the creation of narrative structures, are not important drivers in molding today's policy decisions. The country-specific differences of perception, the academic interest, and exposure to culture indicate that consideration of more than one view is essential for bilateral relations to be understood. As the geopolitics continue to change, the direction of Turkish-Russian engagement over the next several years will rest on the relative balance of priorities each country sets, resolves issues of regional tension, and maintains economic collaboration. Follow-up research must operate from such assumptions in an effort to provide more targeted discourses of policy-driven approaches toward stability and cooperation in an ever more complex world.

Expanding on the current research's findings, more comprehensive and wider scope studies by including an extensive variety of themes in discussion with multiple fields as potential avenues for improvement are presented to upcoming work. Potential avenues of investigation include reinforcing this very first study effort's steps by

increasing sample size and implementing a greater level of participation encompassing individuals in the political society and with first-hand interaction with functioning Turkish-Russian diplomacy. Such an extension would provide for a more comprehensive and representative realization of the opinions of specialists. Also, the integration of qualitative techniques-e.g., interviews of policymakers, analysts, and diplomats-would provide for a better, more detailed realization of the forces involved in bilateral decision-making.

In addition to methodology enrichment, thematic expansion is also needed. For instance, studies of the impact of energy politics on foreign policy beyond the Turkish-Russian pair-i.e., Turkey's energy cooperation with Iran, Azerbaijan, and the EU-would be complemented in a broader geopolitical setup. Likewise, examining the impact of sanctions by the West on Russia on Turkey's strategic choices and economic alliances could unveil Ankara's diplomatic flexibility under pressure from abroad.

Equally important, in a similar vein, is the need to examine public perceptions among the broader public. Expanding research from expert realms to larger demographic segments might determine whether or not public perception aligns with elite perception, or whether divergence exists to be noted in foreign policy discourse. Both of these subject areas for future research will deepen the explanatory value of Turkish-Russian relations analysis and allow more realistic, evidence-informed policy suggestions for policymakers.

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## APPENDIXES

### Quantitative Turkish Russian Questionnaire

#### Turkish-Russian Relations 1600-2024 AD

**Dear Participant,**

Thank you for participating in this study. This quantitative questionnaire aims to examine Turkish-Russian relations from 1600 to 2024 through the theoretical perspectives of constructivism, liberalism, and realism. Your responses will provide valuable data to understand the dynamics of their historical and contemporary relations. Please answer the questions as accurately as possible. Your responses will remain confidential and used solely for academic purposes.

Please note that this research is part of a Master's degree in Political Sciences and International Relations at Hasan Kalyoncu University, Gaziantep, Turkey.

**By proceeding with this questionnaire, you confirm your consent to participate in this study.**

#### Section 1: Participant Information

Please provide the following details about yourself:

**1. Affiliation:**

**2. Age:**

**3. Gender:**

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

**4. Nationality:**

**5. Highest Academic Qualification:**

- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- PhD
- Other (Please specify):

**6. Field of Study or Expertise:**

- International Relations
- Economics
- History
- Political Science
- Military professional
- Other (Please specify):

**7. Current Occupation/Role:**

- Academic
- Journalist
- Scholar
- Political Science Analyst
- Politician
- Policy Maker
- Media Practitioner
- Post Graduate Student in Political Science
- Post Graduate Student in International Relations
- Other (Please specify):

**8. Years of Work Experience in Your Field:**

- Less than 5 years
- 5-10 years
- More than 10 years

**9. Connection to Turkish-Russian Relations:**

- Academic
- Professional
- Personal
- Other (Please specify):

**10. Have you lived in or studied Turkish culture?**

- Yes
- No
- If Yes, please specify details:

**11. Have you lived in or studied Russian culture?**

- Yes
- No
- If Yes, please specify details:

**Section 2: Perceptions of Historical Events**

**1. Key historical events, such as treaties and wars, have significantly influenced Turkish-Russian relations.**

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

2. Specific historical periods are critical in shaping the bilateral relationship between Turkey and Russia:

a. Ottoman Era Treaties

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

b. Cold War Period

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

c. Post-Cold War Adjustments

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

d. Recent Conflicts

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

### Section 3: Geopolitical Factors

1. Geographical factors play a significant role in influencing Turkish-Russian relations.

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

2. Territorial boundaries are crucial for the strategic interests of both Turkey and Russia.

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

#### Section 4: National Security Interests

1. Military alliances have a significant impact on the bilateral relationship between Turkey and Russia.

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

2. National security issues play an important role in shaping Turkish-Russian relations.

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

3. Military defense organizations, such as NATO and CSTO, significantly influence Turkish-Russian relations.

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

4. Regional organizations, including the Turkic Federation, play a pivotal role in shaping relations between Turkey and Russia.

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

5. Military equipment agreements and collaborations influence trust and cooperation between Turkey and Russia.

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

#### Section 5: Ideological Movements

1. Ideological movements (e.g., political ideologies, religious influences) significantly influence the foreign policies of Turkey and Russia.

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

2. The following ideological factors are influential in shaping Turkish-Russian relations:

##### A. Nationalism

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

**B. Religious Influence**

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

**Section 6: Contemporary Issues**

1. Contemporary issues (e.g., the Syrian conflict, the Ukrainian war) have a significant impact on Turkish-Russian relations.

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

2. The following contemporary issues have the greatest influence on Turkish-Russian relations:

**a. Syrian Conflict**

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

**b. Ukrainian War**

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

**c. Energy Politics**

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

**d. Black Sea Tensions**

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

**e. NATO Expansion**

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

**f. Cyprus Issue**

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

**Section 7: Economic Interactions**

**1. Economic interactions (e.g., trade relations, energy dependencies) play a significant role in Turkish-Russian relations.**

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

**2. The following areas of economic interaction are most significant in shaping Turkish-Russian relations:**

**a. Trade Agreements**

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

**b. Energy Dependencies**

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

**c. Tourism**

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

**d. Infrastructure Projects**

1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly Agree)

Thank you for your participation in this study. Your responses are highly appreciated and will contribute significantly to understanding Turkish-Russian relations.

If you have any questions or require further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

MOHAMAD NASANI

## ÖZGEÇMİŞ

### KİŞİSEL BİLGİLER

**Adı Soyadı** : MOHAMAD NASANI  
**Uyruğu** : Suriye

### EĞİTİM

Derece	Adı	Bitirme Yılı
Üniversite	: Halep Üniversitesi	2002
Yüksek Lisans	: Asya Metropolitan Üniversitesi	2017
Doktora	: Al İmam El Uzaie Üniversitesi	2022

### İŞ DENEYİMLERİ

Yıl	Kurum	Görevi
2002	Kral Suud Üniversitesi	Öğretim görevlisi
2014	El Farabi Tıp Fakülteleri	Öğretim görevlisi
2023	Unitar Üniversitesi	Akademik Koordinatör
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- Uluslararası eğitim projelerinde danışmanlık deneyimi
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### YAYINLAR

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