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# 11. Russian–Turkish relations

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## I. Introduction: the historical development of Russian–Turkish relations

For several centuries Russian–Turkish relations were marked by military, political and diplomatic conflicts, the result not only of the expansionist ambitions of the leaders of the Ottoman Empire but also of the permanent attempts of the Russian Empire to secure its trade routes through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles (the Black Sea Straits), which was an essential condition of its developing its trade with the Mediterranean and southern Europe.

The relations of the two empires were at the same time a part of the foreign policy of other European states, and this had a great influence on their development. By the end of the 19th century a much weakened Ottoman Empire was considered by the leading European states not as a mighty opponent but as the ‘sick man of Europe’ whose final ruin was only a matter of time. At the same time the ambitions of its rulers were still fairly high. The Sultan still pretended to the leadership of all Muslims, and this created problems for Russia, which had significant Turkic-speaking Muslim populations in its vast area.

At the beginning of the 20th century Pan-Turkism became the most influential trend in the political life of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>1</sup> It was widespread in the public and political circles of the country and became the key ideology of the Young Turks who came to power in 1908.<sup>2</sup> According to its system of views, everything in this world should be considered in the light of the role of the ‘Turks’, meaning all Turkic nations. The history of civilization should be seen as the history of the Turks, the forefathers of human civilization; the science of language should recognize the primacy of the Turkish language as the parent language for the whole of mankind; geography should be studied from the point of view of the geopolitical concept of the habitation of the Turks; culture should be valued from the standpoint of the grandeur of Turkish culture and its guiding influence on all world culture. Pan-Turkism embraced practically every sphere of human activity and reflected larger than life.

Pan-Turkism was an important factor behind the Turkish leaders’ joining Germany and its allies in World War I in the hope that Germany would help the Ottoman Empire achieve the occupation of Russian Armenia<sup>3</sup> which was to be a

<sup>1</sup> Gasanova, E. Y., *Ideologiya Burzhuaznogo Natsionalizma v Turtsii pri Mladoturkakh* [Ideology of bourgeois nationalism in Turkey under the Young Turks, 1908–1914] (Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan: Baku, 1966), pp. 115–25.

<sup>2</sup> Gasanova (note 1), pp. 132–39.

<sup>3</sup> Gotlib, V. V., *Sekretnaya Diplomatiya vo Vreme Pervoy Mirovoy Voyny* [Secret diplomacy during the First World War] (Publishing House of Socio-economic Literature: Moscow, 1960), p. 60.

step towards the creation of the Great Turan, a Turkic state from the Adriatic to the Pacific. The defeat of Germany and its allies put an end to hopes for the implementation of this idea.

After the Kemalist revolution (1918–1923) the prevailing ideology in Turkey was Turkism and later nationalism (*milliyetçilik*). The new Turkish leader and founder of the Republic, Mustapha Kemal Atatürk, opposed the Pan-Turkist ideals of his predecessors:

This is how I understand Pan-Islamism . . . our nation and the government representing it naturally wish prosperity and happiness to all who believe in our God, wherever they live. We wish the communities set up in different countries by the believers in our God to live independently, on their own . . . But to rule and guide the whole of Muslim society from a single centre, as an empire, one big empire, is fantasy! This runs counter to science, knowledge, logic!<sup>4</sup>

This period of Russian–Turkish relations after the Russian Revolution was a time of shared hopes for the creation of a firm alliance of the two countries. The Russian Bolshevik leaders hoped to use Turkey as a bridge for the expansion of the ‘revolutionary process’ to the east in the attempt to promote world revolution. The Kemalists were seeking an outside ally in their struggle against the Allies who had occupied parts of Turkish territory after the defeat of the Central Powers in 1918. This period of honeymoon came to an end after the death of Atatürk in 1938.

Before World War II the Turkish ruling circles once more put their stakes on alliance with Germany. Atatürk’s policy which, officially at least, rejected Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism was eventually renounced and Turkism, initially interpreted as a way towards the renaissance of the Turkish nation, started to acquire a Pan-Turkist hue. The members of the émigré Union of Turkestan Youth, which had been disbanded in 1937, and other ‘national groups’ became active again. The Pan-Turkists started to publish books and the Turkish press began printing articles of a Pan-Turkist orientation. Under the new Prime Minister, Sukru Saracoglu, the propaganda of Pan-Turkism intensified. Some Western studies note that after invading the USSR the German ruling circles ‘cleverly used Pan-Turk aspirations to form military units of Soviet war prisoners of Turkic descent’.<sup>5</sup> ‘Turkish emissaries drove about the German camps for the Soviet prisoners of war and tried to urge Turkic-speaking Soviet citizens to commit acts of treason against their homeland.’<sup>6</sup> In the autumn of 1942 Turkey concentrated large military forces near the border with the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup> In talks with the German Ambassador on 27 August 1942, Saracoglu said that,

<sup>4</sup> [About the rights and obligations of the Council of Commissars], speech on 1 Dec. 1921, Atatürk, K., *Izbrannye rechi i vystupleniya* [Selected speeches and presentations] (Progress: Moscow, 1966), p. 187. Pan-Islamism is the idea of the creation of the Islamic Empire.

<sup>5</sup> Landau, J. M., *Radical Politics in Modern Turkey* (E. J. Brill: Leiden, 1974), p. 193.

<sup>6</sup> Novichev, A. D., *Turtsiya: Kratkaya Istoriya* [Turkey: a short history] (Nauka: Moscow, 1965), p. 192.

<sup>7</sup> Miller, A. F., *Ocherki Noveyshey Istorii Turtsii* [Essays on the modern history of Turkey] (Academy of Sciences Publishing House: Moscow and Leningrad, 1948), p. 206.

being a Turk, he ardently desired the destruction of Russia. ‘The destruction of Russia is a feat of the Fuehrer, which can only be emulated once in a century; it is also a life-long dream of the Turkish people.’<sup>8</sup>

Russia prepared a punishment of its own for its former revolutionary ally and in 1946 demanded some territories in the north-east of Turkey. In 1952 Turkey became a member of NATO. Only in 1954 did the the Soviet Government declare that the USSR had no territorial claims. Relations had, however, already been spoiled.

Only in 1960 after the military coup in Turkey did relations became warmer. ‘Even during the cold war relations between the two countries were stable’, said the Ambassador of Turkey in Moscow, Ayhan Kamel, in 1993.<sup>9</sup> At the beginning of the 1990s both sides were sure that they had the basis for a strategic partnership in the Transcaucasus and Central Asia.<sup>10</sup> Reality, however, did not allow these plans to be implemented.

## II. The newly independent countries of Central Asia

After the break-up of the USSR at the end of 1991 Russia found itself in a new geopolitical situation. To its south and east it had borders that had not existed at the time of the USSR with the Asian Muslim outposts. What was previously part of ‘home’, almost ‘domesticated’, became the ‘soft under-belly’. This was not simply Muslim but Turkic–Muslim Asia, with customs and traditions incomprehensible to the majority of European-minded Russians and with its own perception of the outside world. It has been difficult for Russia to adapt to new realities, but the former Soviet republics have now emerged onto the international area and the ‘Islamic factor’, Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism, once regarded as something remote and alien, have now not only come very close but become part of the Russian reality.

Russians are not used to seeing the Turkic world as a whole. For the Turks the very notion of Turkophone peoples does not exist: when speaking about their kinsmen-in-language they refer to them as Azerbaijan Turks, Tatar Turks or Uzbek Turks.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union was met in Turkey with unanimous delight by both politicians and the public, apparently not only from relief at the disappearance of the ‘Soviet threat’ but as offering possibilities for the revival of the national ideal—the creation of the Great Turan. Inspired by the collapse of the old enemy to its north, Turkey started seeking to play a more active role in the newly formed geopolitical space. Conditions of uncertainty as to where geopolitical, regional and macroeconomic power now lay created unique historical conditions, making it possible to try to establish the Ottoman Turks’

<sup>8</sup> *Dokumenty Ministerstva Inostrannykh Del Germanii* [Documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany] (Gospolitizdat: Moscow, 1946), p. 98 (11th issue, document no. 27).

<sup>9</sup> Mehtiyev, A., ‘Rossiya i Turtsiya—garanti stabilnosti v regione’ [Russia and Turkey are the guarantors of stability in the region], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 16 June 1993, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Mehtiyev (note 9), p. 3.

long-desired pre-eminence in the Turkic–Muslim regions which for many ages had been under the influence of Russia. The passive policy of Russia, which was toiling over a serious economic crisis, still unable to comprehend its primary national interests or their long-term prospects and not cognizant of its geopolitical role, also contributed to Turkish economic, political and cultural expansionism.

A policy of rapprochement with Turkey and of seeking its support has become an essential attribute of the foreign policy of all the Turkic-speaking Central Asian republics of the former USSR—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. From the point of view of the former communist *nomenklatura*, this rapprochement is preferable to descending to Islamic fundamentalism of the Iranian type, the more so because rivalry between Turkey and Iran for influence in the Muslim regions of the former USSR has become a political reality.

The Russian ‘big brother’ who had educated, fed and financed them (even though this is now being denied) is himself on the verge of bankruptcy. Turkey, which was developing dynamically at the beginning of the 1990s and which over the past decade has made such a powerful economic breakthrough that the world has seriously started to speak about the ‘Turkish miracle’ and the ‘Turkish model’,<sup>11</sup> was considered a rather attractive protector. On the face of it the ‘Turkish miracle’ is striking in its dynamism and organization. The Turks have managed to set foot in every corner of the Near East as mediators. Their construction firms are numerous and effective. They have been able to establish contacts between Western companies and Muslim states and to find a common language both with modern Western businessmen and with representatives of the Arab Emirates, not without substantial profit for themselves. This provided a fertile soil for the Turkish economy. There has, however, been a certain check to Turkey’s further expansion in the Near East, resulting from the fall in oil prices, which makes it necessary for Turkey to seek new ways. The former Soviet republics therefore at first glance seem to be a natural direction for further expansion.

While the republics are attracted by the secular path of development in Turkey, the Turks themselves base their hopes on identity of language and culture. The West has expressed its readiness to back the new Turkish economic expansion with loans in the hope that Turkey will act as a kind of barrier to the spread of the Islamic fundamentalism of Iran. The free market economy successfully developed in Turkey in the 1990s, the abandonment of central planning and Turkey’s success in the agricultural sector were also very attractive to Turkic Muslims in the early 1990s.

Turgut Ozal, late President of Turkey, characterized the country’s intentions in the Turkic–Muslim republics as follows: ‘The main hopes of the Central Asian republics of the former USSR are connected with the possibility of following Turkey’s example where state structure is concerned. Naturally, the

<sup>11</sup> ‘Retsepty stabilnosti’ [Recipes for stability], *Izvestiya*, 9 Mar. 1991, p. 5.

Turkish model cannot be employed by all states. It will be necessary to make some changes in it. The new states will have to tackle these problems by themselves. However we can also offer help in building systems of state administration on the Turkish model'.<sup>12</sup> Official visits to Ankara at the end of 1991 and the beginning of 1992 by the presidents of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and a trip by Ozal to the Turkic–Muslim republics confirmed the interest of the newly independent states in cooperation with Turkey. In a two-month period Ozal signed economic and cultural agreements with all the Turkic–Muslim states of Central Asia. He received all possible compliments from his negotiators and could be sure that the 'Turkish model' was held in high regard. 'I announce to the world that my country will go forward by the Turkish route', said the President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov.<sup>13</sup> The same idea was expressed by Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan: 'We want to implement a free market and the only model we have is Turkey'.<sup>14</sup> The honours with which Ozal and his party were met had not been paid even to the highest Soviet leaders of the past.

In the economic sphere Turkey is endeavouring to use to the full the opportunities which have presented themselves. At the beginning of the 1990s the main sphere of its interest in Central Asia was light industry, textiles and tourism. In the first place Turkey had in mind the 'Silk Road' project, which involves in various degrees all the Central Asian republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)<sup>15</sup> and will require the development of a modern infrastructure of tourism. Turkish firms planned to take part in the construction of hotels in Tashkent, Samarkand and Bokhara and of an International Trade Centre in Tashkent, to be oriented to the Central Asian republics. Also under discussion were plans for the construction of factories, the setting up of a spinning and weaving complex, joint ventures in the clothing industry in Uzbekistan, and numerous other projects. Such cooperation can help the Central Asian republics overcome the current grave economic crisis. The Turkish authorities were taking this cooperation seriously. A special ministry was even set up in to deal with questions of economic cooperation with Turkey's northern neighbours.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time Central Asia is of vital importance from the viewpoint of the strategic interests of Russia. Kazakhstan and Central Asia are still an important market for Russian industrial output, the more so because Russian goods cannot compete successfully with the exports of the developed countries. Millions of Russians live in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries whom Russia is unable to accept at present.<sup>17</sup> A significant proportion of the local residents are oriented towards general European values which came to the

<sup>12</sup> 'Interbizness' [International business], *Delovye Lyudi*, no. 4 (22) (Apr. 1992), p. 40.

<sup>13</sup> Sullivan, S. and Kohen, S., 'The Turkish model is on display', *Newsweek*, 2 Feb. 1992, p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> See note 13.

<sup>15</sup> The Silk Road was an ancient trade route from China through Central Asia to Europe.

<sup>16</sup> See note 12.

<sup>17</sup> Zhirinovskiy, V., *Proshloye, Nastoyashcheye i Budushcheye Russkoy Natsii* [Past, present and future of the Russian nation] (Liberal Democratic Party of Russia: Moscow, 1998), p. 70.

Islamic world through Russian culture. Pre-revolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union created many problems there which cannot be dealt with without Russian participation, including the problems of inter-republican borders and industries oriented to close integration with Russia.

Moreover, Russia is interested in strengthening its new southern frontiers. On this depends its internal stability, the reliability of capital investments from the viewpoint of foreign investors, and many other aspects of the national interests of any independent state.

A number of other factors also keep alive the interest of the Central Asian republics in keeping close ties with Russia and could therefore serve as a basis for developing relations. First and foremost there are the long-established economic, political and cultural connections which had a significant influence on the formation of the local nations. It was in fact from Russian hands that the Central Asian republics received their statehood at the beginning of the 1920s. Even if that statehood was originally purely decorative, and despite its more negative ideological aspects, the development of industry in the republics, the gradual improvement in educational levels, and the development of science and culture were conducive to national consolidation and to the development of a distinctive national self-awareness.

Russia reacted quietly to the Turkish moves to establish closer relations with the Turkophone newly independent states. It seemed that the basis for a strategic partnership between Russia and Turkey was now in place. However, real economic interests have prevented far-reaching political constructions. The success of the Islamist Refah (National Salvation) Party in the Turkish parliamentary elections of December 1995 also changed the balance of political forces inside Turkey.<sup>18</sup> These factors have affected the international policy of Turkey and resulted in a cooling of Russian–Turkish relations.

### III. The oil pipeline routes

The main point of difference between Russia and Turkey is the question of the transport of oil from the Caspian Sea area to Western markets. Russia and Turkey have offered variant routes. Turkey has insisted on a route through Azerbaijan and Georgia to the port of Poty, from there by tanker to the Turkish coast, then by pipeline through Turkey to the port of Ceyhan and further again by tanker to the ultimate consumers (see figure 5.1). Russia has offered the ‘northern route’ through Russian territory (including Chechnya) up to the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk and on by sea through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles.

In reply to this Turkey has tried to stop any transport of oil through the Black Sea Straits, referring to the ecological dangers which this route would inevitably involve.<sup>19</sup> To ensure the safety of navigation the Russian side has offered

<sup>18</sup> Burham, J., ‘A slim chance to stop the drift’, *Financial Times Survey*, 3 June 1996, p. II.

<sup>19</sup> Under the 1936 Montreux Convention Turkey may supervise traffic on the Bosphorus only in wartime. In peacetime it must allow merchant shipping ‘complete freedom of transit and navigation with any kind of cargo, without any formalities’. ‘Danger in the straits’, *Financial Times Survey*, 3 June 1996, p. 5.

to instal navigating equipment, especially in the Bosphorus, which is very narrow. This the Turkish side has refused: it solves the question of safe transport of oil from the technological point of view, making it more difficult to insist on the 'southern route', and does not correspond to the interests of Turkey. The ecological argument is not without foundation: the danger of pollution in the straits in the event of a tanker disaster is real. However, the problem is soluble. A pipeline from the Bulgarian port of Burgas to the Greek port of Alexandropolis would take the oil round the straits and remove ecological fears.

One of the arguments against the northern route was the question of the security of the pipeline. The old oil pipeline passes through Chechnya. The question of its security was partly settled after the Chechen war was stopped and the Khasaviurt agreement was signed on 31 August 1996. However, the southern route from Supsa to Ceyhan is also not safe for the transport of oil because a considerable stretch of it would pass through areas of Kurdish population.<sup>20</sup> The official position of the illegal but active Kurdish organizations concerning the oil transport projects is already decided. Their leaders threaten to damage future oil pipelines passing through Turkish Kurdistan, demand to be consulted and want payment for transit through their territory.<sup>21</sup> The Turkish authorities refuse to recognize the existence of a Kurdish nation and are categorically against any negotiation with Kurdish 'terrorists', denying that there is a problem.<sup>22</sup>

Just as Turkey recalls the Chechen danger when the pipeline through Russian territory is on the agenda, Moscow may rise similar questions concerning the Turkish variant. There are in fact security problems with both routes.

The problem of the pipeline routes is becoming more and more acute. One of the countries paying special interest to the problem is Kazakhstan, whose rich Tenghiz oil deposit was explored in 1979.<sup>23</sup> In 1997 Kazakhstan produced 26 million tonnes of oil but it has no big export pipelines.<sup>24</sup> By 2000 it plans to produce 120–160 million tonnes of oil per year.<sup>25</sup> With the intention of diversifying pipeline routes, it plans not only to use Russian pipelines to deliver oil to Europe but to build several new lines to China, through Afghanistan and Pakistan and across the bottom of the Caspian Sea through Azerbaijan and Georgia to Turkey. Turkmenistan also plans to use this route for the transport of

<sup>20</sup> In Turkey the Kurds for many years were officially called 'mountain Turks' because according to Clause 66 of the Turkish Constitution 'all the citizens of Turkish Republic . . . are Turks'. Tasan, S., 'Dis politikamizi etkileyen yeni unsurlar', *Dis Politika 20 Yil Ozel Sayisi* (Ankara, Dec. 1994, p. 63 (in Turkish). They are deprived of their civil rights and have no schools, newspapers, radio or television. Only for a short period of time, during the 1991 Persian Gulf War, did Turkish President Suleyman Demirel recognize the existence of the Kurds, but only with reference to Iraq and the refugees—Iraqi Kurds.

<sup>21</sup> *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 4 Dec. 1998, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 22 Jan. 1998, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Perrodon, A., *Istoriya Krupnykh Otkritii Nefti i Gaza* [History of large deposits of oil and gas] (Mir-Elf Akiten: Moscow, 1994), p. 92.

<sup>24</sup> Ardayev, B., 'Kazakhstan namechayet truboprovodnye marshruti' [Kazakhstan plans pipeline routes], *Finansovye Izvestiya*, 14 Apr. 1998, p. V.

<sup>25</sup> See note 24.

gas and oil. The political and diplomatic struggle around the problem of transport of the Caspian oil and gas is thus becoming more and more intense.

Work to implement these projects has been given a definite organizational framework. On 29 October 1998 in Ankara the presidents of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan and the US Energy Secretary discussed economic issues and predominantly the pipeline routes, and it was reported that the main issue was finally solved. The pipeline for transport of the 'main oil' will be laid from Azerbaijan through Georgia to Ceyhan.<sup>26</sup> The resulting Ankara Declaration has a political character and is aimed at strengthening the basic achievements for a 'successful start towards a constructive future'.<sup>27</sup> Many Russian observers have seen this meeting as anti-Russian and an attempt to create a certain alliance that is not only economic but also political, stressing that some US politicians were backing the project as a geopolitical one aimed to strengthen US interests in the Transcaucasus.<sup>28</sup>

This approach of course leaves out Russia, which was not invited to the meeting, underlining once more that it is finally being deprived of an exit to the Mediterranean. In July 1994 Turkey imposed new rules which restrict the passage of tankers with Russian oil through the Bosphorus. Its unfriendly position towards Russia has become immutable fact.

Russian–Turkish relations are also aggravated by other problems. One was Turkey's support for the Chechen insurgents. Officially Turkey was always neutral and never hinted at any possibility of backing the Chechen separatist movement, but Russian sources often stressed that Turkish volunteers with 'connections with the Turkish secret services' were penetrating Chechnya from Azerbaijan.<sup>29</sup> The Turkish Government was also blamed for backing the separatists through the private Caucasus–Chechen Solidarity Foundation.<sup>30</sup> There were solid reasons for criticism of the Russian position from the Turkish side, such as the sale of SA-10/S-300PMU-1 air defence systems to Cyprus, which seemed still to be irritating for Turkey even after Greece in December 1998 agreed to deploy the rockets on its own territory.<sup>31</sup>

#### IV. Conclusions

Despite the unfavourable situation for Russia in its relations with the Turkic–Muslim states and factors that favour the positions of other countries (including Turkey), a number of political elements do nevertheless support the political

<sup>26</sup> Tesemnikova, E. and Broladze, N., 'Ankarskaya deklaratsiya prinyata' [Ankara Declaration adopted], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 30 Oct. 1998, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> See note 26.

<sup>28</sup> See note 26; and Tarasov, S., 'Zakavkazskiy taim-aut' [Transcaucasus time-out], *Vek* (Moscow), no. 43, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Agayev, O., 'Kuda Heidar Aliyev vedet Azerbaidzhan?' [Where is Heidar Aliyev leading Azerbaijan?], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 8 Apr. 1998, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Safronov, A., 'Terrorizm v kavkazskom regione' [Terrorism in the Caucasian region], *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye*, no. 1 (1998), p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Antonov, E. and Bausin, A., 'Visit k Minotavru' [A visit to the Minotaur], *Vremya-MN* (Moscow), 29 Dec. 1998, p. 6.



and economic interest of these states in strengthening their links with Russia. None of the newly independent states of Central Asia has an exit to the open sea, which limits their access to cheap transport routes for their exports and imports. Their 'external' boundaries adjoin states which are a potential threat to their existence and their interest in future integration with Russia has not yet disappeared, although year by year it diminishes and they find new partners.

It is not in the interests of Russia to delay the process of integration within or in the framework of the CIS, as the implantation of Turkey into the Turkic–Muslim regions has already complicated the situation to the south. Moreover, open dictatorial behaviour from the Turkish side, militant threats to Russia in connection with the sale to Cyprus of the SA-10 air defence systems and Turkey's support for the Chechen separatists do not testify to any desire in the present ruling circles in Turkey to strengthen relations with Russia.

However, some problems can be solved by joint efforts of the two countries. The problems of Afghanistan and stability in Central Asia and many others urgently need these efforts. The Russian market is also fairly important for Turkey. Russian 'shuttle' traders have already become the most important buyers of Turkish consumer goods. Turkey is tending to become one of the largest consumers of Russian gas<sup>32</sup> and the question of the construction of the new pipelines for enlarging this segment of Russia's gas exports will arise in the near future. For these reasons the positive development of Russian–Turkish relations in future should be welcomed.

<sup>32</sup> Gankin, L., 'Turetskiy marsh na gazovoy trube' [The Turkish march on the gas pipeline], *Kommersant Daily*, 16 Dec. 1997, p. 5.