

Energy in Turkey and Russia's Roller-Coaster Relationship

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ABSTRACT *Energy relations between Turkey and Russia provide an excellent example of how energy and politics interrelate in countries with a historically up-and-down relationship. Having started in the 1960s, the two countries' energy relations gained a new dimension after 1991 with the intensification of pipeline politics. In the 2000s, energy relations gained impetus owing to the leadership of Erdoğan and Putin, and reached an apex with the establishment of a cooperation council in 2010. Since 2011, Turkey's demands for gas price reduction and volume increase have dominated the agenda of the countries' energy talks. While Turkish-Russian relations have remained on shaky ground lately, the signing of the Turkish Stream agreement in 2016 might be perceived as a positive step for closer energy relations.*

Introduction

Energy relations between Turkey and Russia provide an excellent example of how energy and politics interrelate in countries with a historically up-and-down relationship. Located in a unique trans-continental geography, both Turkey and Russia have remained in between the East and West politically throughout their history. Even though they are not particularly defined as Western powers, both have tried to make reforms to adjust to western values. In the meantime, relations between Turkey and Russia have undeniably been bumpy. Historically, the two countries have fought at least 12 times; during the war of 1877-78, Russian troops managed to come as close as the capital of the Ottoman Empire prior to the signing of the Treaty of San Stefano. As history unfolded and Tsarist Russia became the Soviet Union, relations between the two countries started to recover from past hostilities. The closed-door diplomacy between Tsarist Russia, France and Britain was exposed to the public in *Izvestia* and *Pravda* on November 23, 1917 by the Bolsheviks, spoiling the Sykes-Picot Agreement - the secret Anglo-French pact that proposed the split-

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ting up of the Ottoman territories in the Middle East into zones of control. Moreover, Bolshevik Russia was the first to sign a friendship treaty on March 16, 1921 with the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, which had recently been established under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal.

The contributions of the Soviet Union at the peace treaty negotiations in Lausanne in 1923 and during the establishment of the Turkish Republic afterwards were also remarkable. Although the two countries followed two exact opposite paths for economic development in the following decades, they maintained economic relations at a decent level during the early stages of the Turkish Republic. A year after he became Turkey's Prime Minister for the sixth time in 1931, İsmet İnönü visited Moscow and secured credit from the Soviet Union for the establishment of Turkish textile factories, which was perceived as a vital step towards the development of the country.

The energy dimension of the two countries' economic relations started to gain impetus after the signing of the first economic and technological cooperation agreement in 1967. This agreement made possible the establishment of seven important industrial complexes, including the Seydişehir aluminum facilities and the Aliğa Petroleum Refinery, which were actually the first energy complexes in Turkey built completely by Russian labor, know-how, and technology. After the construction of the refinery was complete in 1972, Nikolai Podgorny, the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, visited İstanbul to evaluate developments, marking the very first time a Soviet leader visited Turkey. As a result of this successful visit, a second agreement on economic and technological cooperation was signed in 1975, which enabled the construction of lignite-fueled thermal power plants in Çan and Orhaneli. On the same date, an agreement for the construction of a hydroelectric power plant in Arpaçay, which was planned to flow on the border of the two countries, was ratified in the Turkish parliament.

In 1986, after the signing of the first natural gas agreements between the two countries, a new era began. Ever since then, Russian gas imports have been a very important component of Turkey's energy mix, bringing natural gas to the forefront of energy relations between the two countries.

East-West vs. North-South: Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Blue Stream

Energy relations between Russia and Turkey gained a completely new dimension after 1991. The new geopolitical setting that emerged in the region after the collapse of the Soviet Union intensified competition for the use and transportation of the Caspian's hydrocarbon resources. Energy resources in the Greater Caspian had previously been developed under the control of the So-

viet Union. After the Cold War, the newly-emergent hydrocarbon-rich states, namely Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, started to cooperate with the West in the development of their resources and their transportation to the world's markets. Turkey and Iran, which share ethnic and religious ties with these countries, were the two possible transit countries for the trans-

portation of the Caspian oil and gas to the West. After the United States passed the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996, Turkey remained the most likely transit country located on the route to the west.

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The first example of geopolitical competition for energy resources in the region could be observed in the rivalry between the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) crude oil pipeline and the Blue Stream natural gas pipeline. The BTC project was the first step towards the realization of the East-West Energy Corridor, sometimes referred to as the energy version of the Silk Road in the 21st Century.² Efforts to open such a corridor were mainly aimed at diversifying the European Union's (EU) energy sources by linking the hydrocarbon riches of the Caspian states to Europe. The corridor was intended to export the oil and gas of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan to Turkey and from there to the European markets.

On March 1-2, 1998, the Foreign Ministers of Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan gathered to discuss the production and transportation issues of the hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian basin. In their joint communique, they declared their support for the development of the East-West Energy Corridor.³ Apart from agreeing to conduct a feasibility study of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline project, the foreign ministers also expressed their views on the possibility for the transportation of Kazakh and Turkmen gas to international markets. Later, the Ankara Declaration was adopted on October 29, 1998 by the Presidents of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan, and the signing ceremony was witnessed by the United States Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson. An intergovernmental agreement was signed by Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey on November 18, 1999 in İstanbul, and the project gained momentum after the establishment of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline Company (BTC Co.) in August 2002. Construction began in April 2003 and the pipeline was inaugurated in July 2006.

The project was fully supported by the U.S. and the EU. The motivation behind their support was the belief that the establishment of alternative routes

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would strengthen these countries' and also Georgia's independence *vis-à-vis* Russia, and help them attract investment in other sectors too, thus boosting their economies.⁴ Not surprisingly, for the most part Russia opposed the pipeline as it would enable the transportation of Azerbaijan's hydrocarbon resources to world markets without Russia's involvement. Igor Ivanov, Russia's then-Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated that Russia was ready for cooperation but would not tolerate "attempts to crowd Russia out of regions in which we have historic interests."⁵

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline was an important part of the East-West Energy Corridor, but not the only part. The corridor was also planned to transport Turkmen gas first to Azerbaijan via a trans-Caspian pipeline, and then to bring Azeri and Turkmen gas to European markets through Turkey. Half of the 32

billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas would be used in Turkey, and the rest would be transported to Europe. Considering the tremendous dominance of Russia over regional natural gas production and transportation, the establishment of such a pipeline would threaten the interests of Russia much more than the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. Therefore, the Blue Stream pipeline proposed by Russia could be perceived as a rival of the East-West Energy Corridor. It should also be noted that the gas component of the corridor was more important than oil for the EU. Unlike the U.S., the EU became actively involved in the East-West Energy Corridor projects only when natural gas became a part of it, since it was perceived as a way to diversify the gas supply to European markets.⁶

Russia's efforts to promote its pipeline started with the signing of an agreement with Turkey in 1997 to construct a subsea pipeline between the two countries. This new pipeline would be established in the north-south direction and transport Russian gas to Samsun via the Black Sea. According to Gazprom, the main aim of this pipeline was to support the already existing gas route to Turkey (the West Route), which transits through Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, and Bulgaria. Through the planned pipeline, Russia could avoid transit costs while at the same time preventing any illegal siphoning of gas by the abovementioned transit states. In February 1999, Gazprom and ENI signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to build a pipeline (today known as the Blue Stream) to transport Russian gas to Turkey. In November 1999, Gazprom and ENI established the Blue Stream Pipeline Co. B.V., which started the construction of the pipeline in September 2001; gas flow started in February 2003.



During the Erdoğan-Putin meeting, the Turkish and Russian Ministers of Energy signed the agreement on the Turkish Stream.

AA PHOTO / METIN PALA

While the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline was criticized for not being economically feasible, the Blue Stream was criticized for being technically impossible, as it was the deepest subsea pipeline project ever attempted; it was thus called the “Blue Stream-Pipe Dream” by some critics. Other critics criticized the Blue Stream for not being an advantageous pipeline for Turkey as it increased the country’s already high dependence on Russian natural gas.⁷ Nevertheless, both pipelines were finally successfully built. Probably for the first time in history, an oil pipeline and a natural gas pipeline became rivals and entered into a fierce struggle. At the end of this unprecedented geopolitical struggle, Russia achieved a very important success, as the West had to sacrifice the natural gas component of the East-West Energy Corridor for the sake of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan project. Turkey, on the other hand, emerged as the country that benefitted the most as the target and transit country for both projects, giving it significant geopolitical leverage in the region.

Turkish Prime Minister, and subsequently President, Süleyman Demirel’s efforts were highly significant for the realization of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. Demirel, together with U.S. President Bill Clinton, pushed for this pipeline project in the midst of tense debates on how the Caspian hydrocarbons should be transported to Western markets. Demirel’s visits to Georgia and Azerbaijan and close U.S.-Turkish cooperation “made the seemingly impossible pipeline possible.”⁸

Strengthening Ties: The Putin-Erdoğan Era

In the 2000s, energy played a pivotal role in Turkish-Russian relations. The political stability and economic prosperity of Putin's Russia and Erdoğan's Turkey, especially in the past decade or so, greatly contributed to the development of stronger bilateral links. In Putin's era, Russia started to overcome the difficulties stemming from its transition to capitalism while Turkey had substantially overcome the economic and political crises it experienced during the 1990s.⁹

The first face-to-face contact between Erdoğan and Putin took place on December 6, 2004. It was not a coincidence that Energy Minister Taner Yıldız was appointed as the host minister to meet Putin at the airport. Putin was the first Russian leader to officially visit Ankara in the 512 years of the countries' diplomatic history. During this historical visit, the main topics of discussion were energy and terrorism, and the two leaders laid the foundation of the new "Erdoğan-Putin" era. For Turkey, this visit was of high importance as the EU was expected to announce in about 10 days whether or not they would open accession negotiations with Turkey; thus Russia appeared as an alternative to the EU for Turkey at this critical time.

After the Brussels Summit on December 16-17, the Council announced that Turkey sufficiently fulfilled the political criteria and decided to open accession negotiations with the country in October 2005.¹⁰ Even though Turkey remained committed to joining the European Union in the following years, the country also continued its efforts to develop a strategic partnership with Russia. Erdoğan visited Moscow only one month after Putin's visit. The declared purpose of the Prime Minister's visit with hundreds of Turkish businessmen was the opening of the Turkish Trade Center, which was established in Moscow with the contribution of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB). Topics such as the Cyprus issue were also discussed at the bilateral meeting held on January 10, 2005, but the main agenda was economic and commercial relations, including energy.

After this visit, a series of phone calls took place and in July 2005, Erdoğan and Putin came together again in Sochi. At the press conference following the two leaders' meeting on July 18, both leaders stressed the fact that their meeting in Sochi was the fourth in seven months, which indicated the intensity of contacts and growing cooperation between the two countries. Putin stated that Russia intended to continue its energy dialogue with Turkey, and that they were considering "the possibility of also building a new gas pipeline ... [and] oil pipelines, pipelines that would follow a number of different routes."¹¹

The next meeting after Sochi was held on November 17, 2005 in Samsun for the official inauguration of the Blue Stream, which had been in operation since De-

ember 2002. The inauguration ceremony brought together Erdoğan, Putin, and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. During the ceremony, Putin said that “sceptics called it not ‘Blue Stream’ but ‘Blue Dreams’... Joining the resources and intellectual capital from Russia, Turkey, Italy and other countries proved successful.” He also stated that the pipeline makes Turkey “an energy bridge between east and west and gives Turkey a new role in the European energy space.”¹²

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The year 2005 marked the beginning of a decade of close cooperation between Turkey and Russia, mostly led by Erdoğan and Putin. Both pragmatic and strong leaders, they worked towards establishing a Russian-Turkish partnership not only in energy, but in all areas. Yet, after President Ahmet Necdet Sezer went to Moscow to meet with Putin in June 2006, relations came to a standstill.

Turkey's Double Game: Nabucco vs. South Stream

The main reason for the standstill of relations was the competition between the EU- and U.S.-backed Nabucco and the Russian South Stream natural gas pipeline projects, which were generally considered to be rivals. Abdullah Gül, who took over the presidency from Sezer in August 2007, went to Moscow to meet President Medvedev in February 2009. Even though the two presidents discussed Russian-Turkish energy relations, these talks were not as fruitful as those between Erdoğan and Putin had been. It could be said that during Gül's presidency, energy relations with Russia were mostly carried out by then Prime Minister Erdoğan while the presidency remained more focused on relations with the EU.

On July 13, 2009, the intergovernmental agreement for the establishment of the Nabucco pipeline project, which was designed to bring Azeri gas to European markets, was signed in Ankara. Even though both of the pipelines were thought to be needed in the future to meet the natural gas demand in the region and in the EU, it was certain that the pipeline that would be built first would have a comparative advantage over the other. As a matter of fact, on August 6, less than a month after the Nabucco agreement was signed, Putin came to Ankara with Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin, and Putin and

In 2011, the issue that preoccupied the Russian-Turkish energy talks the most was Turkey's demands for the reduction of the gas price to a reasonable level, and the extension of the West Route with a volume increase

Erdoğan signed the South Stream agreement. The South Stream was planned to transport natural gas from the Russian Federation through the Black Sea to Bulgaria and later to Europe.

The signing of the South Stream agreement with a ceremony, where Berlusconi was also present, less than a month after the signing of the Nabucco agreement, caused re-

action in the West regarding whether Turkey was playing on both sides.¹³ In response to these claims, Ahmet Davutoğlu, then Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated that the South Stream and Nabucco were not rivals and that Turkey signed the agreement not for ideological reasons, but as a result of rational calculations.¹⁴

Although the construction of the South Stream pipeline started in December 2012, it could not be completed primarily due to the obstacles stemming from the EU's rules of network ownership unbundling and third party access (TPA). Due to the rules brought by the Third Energy Package, Gazprom could not be the owner at both the production and transmission levels. Thus in December 2013, the European Commission defined the intergovernmental agreements signed between Russia and the member states as a breach of EU law.¹⁵ These developments led to the suspension of the project by President Putin on December 1, 2014.¹⁶

The Nabucco project, on the other hand, was later modified and renamed Nabucco-West due to high costs and lack of sufficient supply. Unlike the original project, Nabucco-West would start at the Turkish-Bulgarian border and transport natural gas to Austria at a reduced volume of 16 bcm per year. However, Nabucco-West was officially cancelled in June 2013, after the Shah Deniz Consortium made a decision in favor of the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), which was planned to be the European connection of the newly-proposed Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP).

In the case of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan vs. Blue Stream competition, one project was an oil pipeline and the other was a natural gas pipeline and a balance could be maintained by realizing both projects. However, the competition between Nabucco and South Stream was a zero-sum game as both were natural gas pipeline projects. In the following years, the parties were not able to create a win-win situation and consequently both projects were canceled. In the first case, even though both Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Blue Stream were

established, the winner of this competition was likely Russia on the grounds that the plans of the West to establish the natural gas leg of the East-West Energy Corridor were interrupted. The second one, on the other hand, was a competition without winners and was rather characterized by a continuous struggle between the two sides to impede the other side's project from being realized. For Turkey, even though the competition could be seen as a loss since both projects were cancelled, the emergence of new natural gas projects in the following years has shown that the situation had the potential to be turned into an advantage.¹⁷

Establishment of the Turkish-Russian Council

After 2010, energy relations between Turkey and Russia were carried out through the Turkish-Russian High Level Cooperation Council (HLCC). Erdoğan visited Moscow in January 2010 to meet then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, followed by Medvedev's visit to Ankara on May 11. During Medvedev's visit, which coincided with the 90th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, the recently-established HLCC held its first meeting in Ankara. The most striking outcomes of the first meeting were the signing of agreements on cooperation for the construction and operation of a nuclear power plant at the Akkuyu site, and cooperation on the Samsun-Ceyhan crude oil pipeline project. These two agreements were signed on the principle of reciprocity: The former was a Russian project while the latter was a Turkish project run by Çalık Enerji, a private energy company in Turkey. The governments also signed an agreement on mutual visa exemptions, which was put into practice about one year later. One month after this meeting, Erdoğan and Putin met in İstanbul to evaluate recent developments in bilateral relations. In the following years, legal studies on the Akkuyu nuclear power plant were conducted by Russia, while it took Turkey's Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning many years to approve the environmental impact assessment report.

In 2011, the issue that preoccupied the Russian-Turkish energy talks the most was Turkey's demands for the reduction of the gas price to a reasonable level, and the extension of the West Route with a volume increase. Due to the decrease in natural gas consumption, Russia had recently revised its existing agreements with European countries, but had been avoiding a similar practice with Turkey. Furthermore, the gas contract signed between Russia and Turkey in 1986 was scheduled to expire at the end of 2011, and the 6 bcm of gas supplied through the West Route was not enough to meet current demand in Turkey. For Turkey, the second meeting of the HLCC was anticipated to provide a suitable platform to discuss these demands with Russia. However, the meeting did not provide Turkey with any tangible outcomes on these matters.



Erdoğan and Putin met for the first time after the Su-24 jet crisis in St. Petersburg on August 9, 2016 to normalize bilateral relations.

AFP PHOTO / ALEXANDER NEMENOV

After the meeting, the future of the West Route agreement remained unclear and no change was made to the price of gas.

Contacts between the countries' counterparts following the second meeting of the HLCC did not yield tangible results either. On October 1, 2011, then Energy Minister Taner Yıldız answered the questions of the press regarding the natural gas price increase at the Grand National Assembly. Yıldız told the press that Turkey had decided to cancel its gas purchase contract with Russia due to Russia's reluctance to make a discount. This decision was in fact in line with the Natural Gas Market Law No. 4646 of 2001, which provided for a step-by-step privatization of natural gas exports, and which had been constantly postponed by the government due to strategic concerns. As a matter of fact, the state-owned Petroleum Pipeline Corporation (BOTAŞ) had notified Gazprom that the contract would be terminated if their proposals were not accepted. Minister Yıldız, emphasizing the strong strategic cooperation with Russia, stated that the termination of the contract did not necessarily mean the end of gas trade between two countries.¹⁸

During the following days, little was accomplished regarding the demands of the Turkish side. On December 27, 2011, Gazprom Chairman Alexey Miller came to Ankara with a delegation and had a meeting with the BOTAŞ delegation, headed by Yıldız. Finally, in the night of December 27, Minister Yıldız suddenly flew to Moscow in a special plane belonging to the Prime Minister. On the following day, both sides agreed to extend the long-term contracts for the delivery of Russian gas to Turkey, one until 2021 and the other one until 2025. In return, Yıldız granted Gazprom the authorization to build the South Stream gas pipeline system on the Black Sea bed in Turkey's exclusive eco-

After the U.S. pulled out of Iraq in December 2011, the importance of Russia and Iran in the Middle East started to rise. The U.S. and its European allies actually began supporting the growing presence of Russia in the region as a counter-balance to Iran

conomic zone. At the signing ceremony, Putin emphasized the importance of the dialogue they had started with then Prime Minister Erdoğan and stated that Russia was “convinced once again that Turkey is a reliable partner.”¹⁹

However, the discount rate for the gas price was much less than what Turkey expected, and relations between Turkey and Russia have remained strained due to Russia's reluctance to decrease gas prices for Turkey. Furthermore, the two countries fell out due to their completely opposite views on the future of Syria. Additionally, after the U.S. pulled out of Iraq in December 2011, the importance of Russia and Iran in the Middle East started to rise. The U.S. and its European allies actually began supporting the growing presence of Russia in the region as a counter-balance to Iran.

Reluctant Cooperation in Hard Times

On June 22, 2012, it finally became clear that Russia's policy against Turkey in the new period would cause tension between the two countries, when a Turkish F-4 Phantom reconnaissance jet was shot down on the Syrian border. Although Russia did not claim it, open support by Russians for the Syrian regime caused controversial arguments regarding whether Russia was behind the action. The two leaders had actually come together in Mexico for a G-20 meeting on June 19, just a few days before the incident, and had prominently discussed the Syrian issue. After the incident, the two leaders came together in Moscow on July 18 and exchanged ideas regarding the attacks by pro-Assad demonstrators on the U.S. and French embassies on July 12 in Damascus.²⁰ Following this contact, Russo-Turkish energy relations also started to be carried out in a tense environment.

Despite a noteworthy deterioration in relations, the two countries managed to continue their cooperation by signing a number of agreements on the economy, trade, and nuclear energy, as well as education, science and culture. The most important among these agreements were those on energy. In December, the cooperation agreement on the establishment of a joint venture in ener-

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gy marketing and distribution was signed between Çalık Holding and Rosneft, accompanied by the signing of a joint declaration on the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant project by Turkey's Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources and the State Nuclear Power Company of the Russian Federation.²¹

At that time, Turkey's energy relations started to deteriorate not only with Russia, but with other countries in the region as well. As a matter of fact, then Minister Yıldız's flight to Erbil for a conference was blocked by Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki on December 2. Despite this incident, Minister Yıldız attended the ceremony of the South Stream's Russkaya compressor in Anapa on December 7.

There was no significant improvement in the days following Putin's visit to Ankara on November 4, 2012. The two leaders could only come together on November 22, 2013 in St. Petersburg for the fourth meeting of the HLCC. In the meeting, five different cooperation agreements were signed on energy, customs and information. The most important aspect of this meeting, however, was Erdoğan's words after the meeting. At the joint conference, after Putin sarcastically said "Turkey has great experience in EU talks," Erdoğan said "You are right. Fifty years of experience is not easy. Allow us into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and save us from this trouble," which once again fueled debates on whether Turkey was shifting axis and moving away from the West.²²

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, commonly known as the Shanghai Five, had actually begun to be presented in the Turkish media as an alternative to the EU, especially after December 2006, when the EU froze eight chapters of Turkey's accession negotiations because of the Cyprus issue. Turkey's requests to participate in the Shanghai Five's meetings as a guest country in 2007, 2009 and 2010 were also not accepted. Turkey officially applied for the status of "Dialogue Partnership" in the Shanghai Five in March 2011; this application was accepted with the agreement signed in April 2013 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Turkey remains the sole NATO-member dialogue partner in the organization.

In 2014, Turkey was busy with its domestic affairs as local elections were held on March 30 and presidential elections on August 10. Russia, on the other hand, was struggling with the crisis in Ukraine. After the annexation of Crimea by Russia on March 16, 2014, the EU imposed the first travel bans and asset freezes against those involved in the destabilizing actions in Ukraine. The EU

later imposed economic sanctions in July 2014, which were further reinforced in September 2014.²³ After the first set of measures, Putin on April 10 wrote a letter to EU leaders and also included Turkey as a recipient of the letter. He emphasized in the letter that Russia had supported “Ukraine’s existence as an independent state” and the stability of its economy “by supplying it with natural gas at cut-rate prices” from the very beginning.²⁴ Relations between Russia and Turkey, therefore, entered a period of stagnation. One of the first signs of this slow-down was the postponement of the completion of the first unit of the Akkuyu nuclear power plant from 2019 to 2020. Taner Yıldız warned Russia in a statement to accelerate the process to avoid any further delays.

Last Surprise: Turkish Stream Replacing South Stream

Taner Yıldız said on October 15, 2014 that his office had once again delivered Turkey’s demand for natural gas price reduction. Russia’s Aleksey Pushkov, the head of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the State Duma, on the other hand, claimed on November 16 that ISIS oil was being pumped to world markets through Turkey and Jordan and said that no one, including the U.S., was considering imposing sanctions on these countries.²⁵ Prior to Putin’s critical visit to Turkey on December 1, Taner Yıldız had visited Moscow for the meeting of the Turkish-Russian Joint Economic Commission on November 26. In the meeting, he responded to Pushkov’s claims by saying that Turkey demanded proof from those who put forward such claims, but even though one and a half months had passed, no one was able to prove that Turkey had been buying oil from ISIS.²⁶

On December 1, 2014, Putin came to Ankara, along with 10 ministers, in his private plane. He stayed for only 8 hours. After visiting Atatürk’s mausoleum in Anıtkabir, he met Erdoğan in the new presidential palace and the 5th meeting of the HLCC was held, followed by a dinner held in Putin’s honor. In the press conference following their meeting, Putin emphasized the importance of trade relations between Russia and Turkey, and thanked Turkey for giving “all the permits necessary” to build the South Stream pipeline through the country’s exclusive economic zone even though the country did not directly benefit from it. However, he continued, Russia had decided to cancel the South Stream project after “taking into account the European Commission’s position, which is not conducive to implementing this project,” and the fact that they could not continue with the project unless they had Bulgaria’s permission. He said they would soon increase supplies through the Blue Stream pipeline by another 3 bcm and would be giving Turkey a 6 percent natural gas price discount for the period after January 1, 2015. He also announced that Russia would be establishing a new pipeline to transport Russian natural gas directly to Turkey via the Black Sea.²⁷ On the same day, Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller announced that

the company had signed a MOU with BOTAŞ to build a new pipeline with an annual capacity of 63 bcm, 14 bcm of which would be bought by Turkey.

No name could have been more fitting than “Turkish Stream” to define this new pipeline, following the traditional trend of Blue Stream, Nord Stream, and South Stream. The Turkish Stream was estimated to cost 40 billion dollars and was planned to bring 63 bcm of Russian gas to the Turkish-Greek border through the Black Sea. Since the new pipeline was meant to stop at Turkey’s Greek border, which is not bound by the EU’s Third Energy Package rules as a non-member state, Russia would not face the problems it had experienced in the case of the South Stream pipeline. In this way, the pipeline would both abide by EU regulations and avoid Ukraine as a transit country.²⁸

The Turkish Stream, in this sense, replaced the South Stream as the rival project to TANAP, which had been progressing rather quietly for last three years. It was first announced during the Black Sea Energy and Economic Forum in İstanbul on November 17, 2011, followed by the signing of a MOU between Azerbaijan and Turkey to establish a consortium consisting of TPAO and SOCAR. Finally, the intergovernmental agreement was signed on June 26, 2012 after the Shah Deniz Consortium decided to supply 10 bcm of Azerbaijani gas to be made available for European markets to TAP, resulting in the official cancellation of the U.S. and EU-backed Nabucco-West. With these developments, TAP and TANAP became the main gas export pipeline projects of the East-West Energy Corridor.

Jet Crisis: Deterioration and Re-Normalization of Relations

The meeting between Putin and Erdoğan at the G-20 Summit in Antalya on November 15, 2015 was the last meeting between the two leaders before the crisis following the downing of the Russian aircraft. On November 24, 2015, a Russian Su-24 aircraft was shot down by a Turkish F-16 fighter jet for violating Turkish airspace for 17 seconds, according to Turkey. While Turkey claimed that the Russian jet was warned multiple times for five minutes²⁹ and was shot down in accordance with the rules of engagement, Russia denied the allegations and officially claimed that the Russian aircraft had never entered Turkish airspace.³⁰ After the jet was shot down, one of the pilots was rescued and brought to Latakia while the other pilot was found dead by Turkmen rebels in the region. After the incident, Russia sent two Mi-8 helicopters to the area but one of them was damaged by the Syrian Turkmen Brigade, causing the death of a naval infantryman.³¹

The downing of the Russian Su-24 jet sparked a deep crisis in Russian-Turkish relations. Following the shooting-down of the Su-24, on the same day, Pu-

tin described the loss as “a stab in the back delivered by terrorists’ accomplices” and claimed that they had “long been recording the movement of a large amount of oil and petroleum to Turkey from ISIS-occupied territories,” which explained “the significant funding the terrorists are receiving.” He also stated that the event would have significant consequences for Russian-Turkish relations,³² a comment which signaled the steps Russia would take in the following weeks.

The event was followed by the introduction of harsh sanctions on Turkey by Russia. On November 26, 2015, the HLCC meeting that was planned to be held on December 15 in St. Petersburg was canceled. The Russian Foreign Ministry warned Russian citizens not to go to Turkey and urged their citizens in Turkey to return home. On the same day, 39 Turkish businessmen who had gone to Krasnodar for an agricultural fair were detained.³³ One of Russia’s most important acts, however, was to introduce a series of restrictions on trade with Turkey. On November 28, Putin signed a decree outlining the details of the sanctions; according to the decree, Russia would implement restrictions on the import of some Turkish goods as well as a ban on charter flights between the two countries.³⁴ Even though there were no disruptions in the ongoing energy trade between Russia and Turkey, talks with Turkey on the Turkish Stream pipeline project were suspended on December 3,³⁵ and the 10.25 percent natural gas price discount for Turkish companies was cancelled on January 29, 2016.³⁶

The crisis between Russia and Turkey continued for more than seven months. On June 27, 2016, Erdoğan sent a letter to his Russian counterpart and expressed his condolences for the death of the pilot who was killed when the Su-24 jet was downed. In the letter, he stated that Turkey “never had a desire or a deliberate intention to down an aircraft belonging to Russia.” Calling Russia a friend and strategic partner, he emphasized Turkey was “ready for any initiatives to relieve the pain and severity of the damage done.”³⁷

After Erdoğan’s rapprochement with Putin, Gazprom spokesman Sergey Kupriyanov stated that the company was open to talks on revitalizing the Turkish Stream.³⁸ Russian-Turkish relations started to improve even more after the coup attempt against Erdoğan by Turkey’s military on July 15, 2016. The most important step toward the normalization of Turkish-Russian relations was taken when Erdoğan and Putin met for the first time after the Su-24 jet



The most important step toward the normalization of Turkish-Russian relations was taken when Erdoğan and Putin met for the first time after the Su-24 jet crisis. The two leaders came together in St. Petersburg on August 9, 2016



Leaders and high representatives of the states participated in the 23rd World Energy Congress in Istanbul, October 10, 2016.

AA PHOTO / KAYHAN ÖZER

crisis. The two leaders came together in St. Petersburg on August 9, 2016. This was the first overseas trip by Erdoğan after the coup attempt. At the joint press conference, Erdoğan said that Putin had called him the day after the coup attempt and that this act was “a very strong psychological factor” for the restoration of the “axis of friendship between Moscow and Ankara.” Putin emphasized the importance of Erdoğan’s visit despite the ongoing situation in Turkish domestic politics, and stated that Russia would “step by step” lift the sanctions imposed on Turkey, while cautioning that it would be “painstaking work” to reach the previous trade levels the countries had enjoyed before the crisis.³⁹

Ceasefire: Turkish Stream and Rapprochement on the Syrian Conflict

The two leaders’ meeting on October 10, 2016 for the World Energy Congress held in İstanbul was perceived to be successful by both sides. This meeting was also crucial politically, considering the ongoing tensions between Russia and the U.S. primarily on the Syrian issue, as well as the tensions between the U.S. and Turkey that had followed the coup attempt. The U.S. criticized the Turkish government due to the claim that the crackdown following the coup attempt resulted in the purge not only of the coup plotters and their backers, but also of other critics. Putin, on the other hand, had shown robust support for the Turkish government since the coup and does not define the acts of the government as authoritarian, in contrast to the West.

The most important outcome of the meeting, where Putin could be observed to have a less reserved posture compared to their meeting in August,⁴⁰ was the signing of an intergovernmental agreement on the construction of the Turkish Stream pipeline. The agreement envisioned the construction of two pipeline branches, each with a capacity of 15.75 bcm, one of which would

supply gas to Turkey while the other one would deliver gas to the European market through Turkey. As part of the project, and the Russian-Turkish cooperation, Putin announced that they had agreed on a mechanism to provide a discount on gas for Turkey, and, had reached an agreement to increase the construction pace of the Akkuyu nuclear power plant. Putin said that in this way, they were “moving towards realizing the plans of the Turkish President to create a major energy hub in the country.”⁴¹ Turkey and Russia also started to work toward resolving the Syrian problem by trying to reconcile their different perspectives on the issue. They had long had diverging views; while Erdoğan had insisted on the ousting of Assad, Russia had supported the Assad regime since the beginning of the crisis.

It should be noted that in this new period of rapprochement, the dimensions of their relations go far beyond mere bilateral relations, having regional and global implications

In light of these positive steps toward rapprochement, it came as a shock when Andrei Karlov, Russian ambassador to Turkey, was assassinated on December 19 at the opening of an art exhibition in Ankara by an off-duty Turkish police officer, who shouted “Don’t forget Aleppo. Don’t forget Syria” right after the assassination. It was striking that the assassination happened on the day before Russian, Turkish, and Iranian Foreign Affairs and Defense Ministers were scheduled to meet in Moscow to discuss a peaceful resolution to the Syrian crisis.

Immediately after the assassination, Erdoğan had a phone conversation with Putin, where the two leaders agreed on further strengthening their cooperation in the international fight against terror. The first public statement came from Maria Zakharova, the Director of Russia’s Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who defined the assassination as a terrorist act. Following her statement, Putin called the act “a provocation aimed at disrupting the normalization of Russian-Turkish relations and disrupting the peace process in Syria that is being actively advanced by Russia, Turkey, and Iran.”⁴²

On the next day, the Foreign Affairs and Defense Ministers of Turkey, Russia, and Iran met in Moscow as scheduled. During the meeting, the three countries

agreed on the Moscow Declaration, which was drawn up by Russian experts as a roadmap for resolving the crisis in Syria. According to the declaration, the three countries would take the role of guarantors for preserving the territorial integrity of Syria. This declaration constitutes a major milestone not only for the future of Syria, but also for the future of Russian-Turkish relations on the grounds that by agreeing to the declaration, Turkey officially abandoned its long-lasting insistence on the ousting of the Assad regime, which had long been the major obstacle in the dialogue between Russia and Turkey.

Conclusion

Energy relations between Turkey and Russia gained a remarkable impetus owing to the pragmatic and strong leadership of Erdoğan and Putin from 2004 to 2010. The establishment of the HLCC in 2010 and its first meeting in May can be accepted as the apex of their efforts to date to establish an institutional ground for their relations. However, it did not turn into a long-lasting strategic partnership and the HLCC could unfortunately meet only five times. One of the major impediments to Russia-Turkey relations were the countries' ongoing disagreements in the political sphere, particularly, on the future of the Middle East and the crisis in Syria.

Relations between Turkey and Russia remained on shaky ground up until 2016, when a new period of normalization began, thanks to Erdoğan's expression of condolences for the death of the Russian pilot in the jet crash in June, and Putin's call to Erdoğan after the coup attempt in Turkey in July. The signing of the agreement on the Turkish Stream pipeline project in October and the Moscow Declaration on the future of Syria in December might be perceived as positive steps for closer Turkish-Russian relations. However, it should be noted that in this new period of rapprochement, the dimensions of their relations go far beyond mere bilateral relations, having regional and global implications. At such a time when gray tones are being reduced, sharpening the black and whites in global politics, the two countries are more likely to be forced to make tougher choices.

As argued previously by the first author of this article, Turkey should not consider its energy relations with Russia as a single package and each energy project should be dealt with separately because of their differences in technical and commercial characteristics.⁴³ Even though joint projects have the potential to benefit both sides, in some projects Turkey is the decision-maker whereas in others the implementation of the projects is largely in the hands of the Russian side, as in the construction of the nuclear power plant, and Turkey's demands for gas volume increase and price reduction, respectively. Another important consideration should be the unequal trade relationship between the

two countries. The asymmetrical interdependence between the two countries may limit Turkey's bargaining power, "which might also challenge the logic of the 'strategic partnership' forged between the two states."⁴⁴ One last factor to consider is that Turkey, as both a consumer and a transit country, should make a distinction between its two different characteristics in its negotiations with Russia. Even though Turkish-Russian relations have always been difficult and complicated, working together toward turning crises into opportunities would greatly benefit both countries. ■

Endnotes

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