

THE RELATIONS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND TURKEY IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL EVENTS*

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Достављен: 09. 02. 2022.

Језик рада: Енглески

Кориговано: 22. 02. и 03. 03. 2022.

Тип рада: Прегледни рад

Прихваћен: 23. 03. 2022.

DOI број: 10.5937/vojdela2201077D

In the context of international events, the relations between Russia and Turkey remain complex, although they are based on mutual recognition of security and other interests and cooperation that is mutually beneficial. The strained relations between Turkey and the United States, caused by disagreements in Syria and Turkish purchase of the S-400 missile system, have shown Turkey's growing commitment to a more independent foreign policy. Russia is under sanctions due to the annexation of Crimea and is an actor in the crisis over Ukraine due to the NATO threat of expansion to the Russian western borders, which escalated after the Russian recognition of the independence of the People's Republic of Donetsk and Lugansk (Donbas) and launching a "special military operation" in Donbas. In the foreign policy of Russia and Turkey and acting towards the third parties, their conflicting interests and providing direct or indirect support to parties to the conflict, without a direct conflict, are often present, which shapes their specific "competitive cooperation". The engagement of Turkey and Russia in Syria has proven to be effective, both in military operations and in mediating negotiations, which has reduced the influence of the

* The paper is the result of work on the scientific research project "Physiognomy of Modern Armed Conflicts", which is conducted on the basis of the Plan of Scientific Research Activities in the Ministry of Defence and the Serbian Armed Forces for 2022.

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United States and NATO in this area. The crisis management model implemented in Syria has not been successful in the Libyan crisis due to the Russian more passive attitude and greater influence of the Western powers and the UN mission. The common engagement in energy and military projects and technology transfer is an indicator of cooperation focused on the industries of strategic importance. The Russian interests in the NATO non-expansion and Turkey in entering the European Union markets can also have a positive effect on the current economic, political and security position of Serbia and the countries of the region.

Key words: Russia, Turkey, competitive cooperation, Serbia, Ukrainian crisis, military-technical cooperation, energy cooperation

Introduction

In the centre of international events in recent months, in addition to the problem with the COVID-19 pandemic, energy crisis and unrest in Kazakhstan, there are the current tensions in Eastern Europe between the United States and allies, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other hand, due to the events related to Ukraine. The unresolved relations between Russia and NATO, primarily the United States, and the possibility of expanding this Alliance to the East by the Ukrainian accession, do not contribute to achieving peace. The deployment of the Russian Forces and military equipment on the border with Ukraine, and also the NATO Forces and equipment near the border with Russia, along with arming the Ukrainian Forces, has contributed to the already tense situation. At the end of February 2022, the crisis escalated with the Russian recognition of the independence of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and the Lugansk People's Republic (LPR), which are located in the Ukrainian territory, and then launching a "special military operation" by the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine with the aim of "demilitarization and denazification" of this state.

In addition to global powers such as Russia, some regional powers, such as Turkey, have a significant influence on relations and events in international community. In the context of international events, the relations between Russia and Turkey remain a complex issue, although they are based on mutual recognition of security interests and a number of bilateral agreements. Their relations are characterized by the increased economic cooperation and exchange and intensification of military-technical cooperation, and also the support of mutually conflicting forces in the conflict areas of North Africa, Central Asia and the Middle East, where Turkey and Russia are not in a direct conflict. The totality of the relations between Russia and Turkey can be described as "competitive cooperation", whose theoretical foundations were laid in the 1950s. Competitive cooperation theory is a set of principles and contents of decision-making and undertaking actions by participants in a conflict, based on their goals and expected effects, where the effects of undertaken actions

depend on the choice of cooperative or competitive commitment of participants in defining the course and outcome of the current process. This theory has two bases: a) the interdependence of goals and b) the character of undertaken actions. The correlation of goals and actions results in the achieved effects, their positive or negative outcome for parties to the conflict, etc.¹ This type of the relations between Turkey and Russia arose as a result of the expressed interests in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, which they managed to adjust to each other in most of these regions and find models of economic and political cooperation suitable for fulfilling their individual interests.

Since the dissolution of the USSR, Russia and Turkey have been countries on the coasts of the Black Sea and not land neighbours, but the rich heritage of historical relations and many current ties creates specific interconnectedness and more common points than in the past. The presentation of friendly relations between the two presidents who “do not trust” the West, conceals the complexity of the relations between these two countries, which strive to have a significant influence in international community, in accordance with their national interests. The sustainability of the Turkish-Russian relations relies on two related aspects: the respect for topics that are sensitive to the other partner and the cooperation that achieves mutual benefits.²

In the domain of “hard power”, Turkey is a member of NATO with the Armed Forces that are the second largest in the Alliance, but with occasional deviations from the attitudes and policies of the United States. In the last two decades, the Turkish foreign policy has undergone a great transformation, from Eurasianism, through neo-Ottomanism to the return to Eurasian integration and anti-Western and pro-Russian rhetoric, making it more visible in foreign policy practice.^{3, 4} The turnaround in the Turkish foreign policy was expressed after the failed coup attempt of a part of the Turkish Armed Forces in July 2016 and the Turkish doubts about the role of some US governmental agencies in these events, when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, owing to a timely warning from Russia, managed to leave the residence and Ankara before the coup. On the other hand, Russia is a leading state in the *Collective Security Treaty Organization* (CSTO), which is based on military-security cooperation between the states that were established after the dissolution of the USSR, has a great influence in the *Shanghai Cooperation Organization* and has a respectable military force and nuclear arsenal. In security sector, it is facing the US efforts to limit its influence on international events, prevent the control of nuclear weapons in Europe by the US withdrawal from the agreement on medium-range nuclear forces, and the NATO growing claims to expand the Alliance with Ukraine and Georgia.

¹ Morton Deutsch, „Cooperation and Competition”, in: Morton Deutsch, Peter Coleman and Eric Marcus (eds.), *Conflict, interdependence, and justice*, Springer, New York, 2011, p. 25.

² Daria Isachenko, „Turkey and Russia: the logic of conflictual cooperation”, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin, SWP Research Paper 7, October 2021, p. 15.

³ Srđan M. Perišić, „Geopolitičko ponašanje savremene Turske”. *Vojno delo*, Vol. 70, br.7 2018, pp. 53-64.

⁴ Ayşe Ömür Atmaca and Zerrin Torun, „Geopolitical Visions in Turkish Foreign Policy”, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2022, p. 114.

Turkey has greater resources of “soft power” because millions of the Russian tourists go to Turkey for summer vacation, a great number of the Russian students attend the Turkish universities, and the ties of the diaspora, especially the North Caucasus with relatives in Turkey, are noticeable.⁵ For Turkey, however, in addition to energy dependence and significant import of natural gas from Russia, the Russian market is also important, especially due to export of agricultural products, broad engagement in the construction sector of the Russian economy, and new joint engagement in the import of arms and military technology transfer in Turkey. Russia is the greatest market for the Turkish construction companies, which have become famous for their road construction technology, as well as civil engineering facilities in Moscow and Sochi, and the Russian companies are accepted in Turkey due to high-quality construction of large infrastructure facilities such as factories, dams, canals or nuclear power plants.⁶ In the first nine months of 2021, the trade of these countries increased by more than 50% compared to the previous year.⁷ In the Western Balkans (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania), the influence of Russia, China and Turkey has been growing in recent years, with the constant presence and influence of the European Union and the United States. It is expected that the interests of Russia and Turkey will encourage cooperation in this area, which is important for the countries of the region in economic and security sense.

The relations between Turkey and Russia in Syria and the South Caucasus

Syria. Since 2015, in Syria, and later in Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh, Moscow and Ankara have been actively supporting the opposing warring parties. In Syria, Russia and Iran are the key governmental allies, while the opposition forces have been supported by the United States, the Western powers (Great Britain, France), Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.⁸ The Russian interests in Syria are to prevent regime change and preserve military bases and military presence, while the Turkish interests are based on opposing the Kurdish separatism. In addition to the relations characterized by their confrontation, especially after shooting down the Russian Su-

⁵ Pavel Baev, “Russia and Turkey. Strategic partners and rivals”, *Russie.Nei.Reports/French Institute of International Relations*, No. 35, 2021, pp. 10-11.

⁶ Timor Akhimov, „It is Time to Revise Russia-Turkey Relations for a Stable Future”, *Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC)*, <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/it-is-time-to-revise-russia-turkey-relations-for-a-more-stable-future/>, 31/01/2022.

⁷ Putin na sastanku sa Erdoganom: Rusija i Turska naučile da pronalaze kompromise, *Sputnik Srbija*, September 29, 2021, <https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/20210929/odnosi-rusije-i-turske-se-pozitivno-razvijaju-poceo-sastanak-putina-i-erdogana-u-sociju-1130261209.html>, 25/01/2022.

⁸ Due to the direct support of the parties to the conflict, which are also the mediators of great powers, the armed conflict in Syria has all the essential features of “proxy warfare”.

24 aircraft on the Syrian-Turkish border by the Turkish Air Force in November 2015, Russia and Turkey strengthened their bilateral relations and cooperation in Syria in 2016 (after the failed coup in Turkey).⁹

The direct confrontation between the Russian and Turkish Forces, intentional or accidental, has been a threat throughout the Syrian crisis, especially in northwestern Syria in the area of the city of Idlib, which is a stronghold of rebel forces and a refuge for a great number of refugees, and is under siege by the Syrian Army. The tensions in Idlib were intensified by the offensive of the Turkish Forces against the Syrian Army and the intensified strikes of the Russian Air Force against rebel forces. The area of Idlib is still the scene of sporadic clashes, although the 2020 agreement between Russia and Turkey declared it a de-escalation zone in which the Turkish and Russian Forces jointly conduct control along the buffer zone between the conflicting forces. It can be said that the situation in Syria has stabilized since then and that governmental forces keep all major cities under control, although the truce in Idlib seeks to prevent their further penetration and enable the return of a great number of displaced persons from this area. For now, there are no major changes in the peace process because the UN-sponsored negotiations in Geneva were unsuccessful, and later negotiations were opened in Astana (Nur-sultan, Kazakhstan) between the Syrian government and opposition forces, with the participation of Russia, Iran and Turkey. The seventeenth meeting in the negotiations, at the end of 2021, in addition to analyzing the current situation, was based on further establishment of mutual trust, work on a new Syrian constitution, exchange of prisoners, delivery of humanitarian aid and fight against terrorism expressed by the actions of the Islamic State groups and other terrorist organizations.

The cooperation between Moscow and Ankara in Syria is a good basis for both countries to test their political trust and learn to listen to the concerns of the other side, which have so far been largely ignored or pushed off the agenda.¹⁰ The Syrian crisis was a test of the Russian-Turkish partnership, from the pronounced antagonism after shooting down the Russian plane in 2015, to highly cooperative relations in the preparation and implementation of peace processes in Astana, but they cannot be viewed separately from the development of other forms of economic and military relations.¹¹

Nagorno-Karabakh. The situation in the South Caucasus region and the simmering conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan also affect the complexity of the relations between Russia and Turkey. After the six-week war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020, around the Nagorno-Karabakh region in the territory of Azerbaijan, an unstable truce was reached with the mediation of Russia, which was mo-

⁹ Güney Yıldız, „Turkish-Russian Adversarial Collaboration in Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh“, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin, No. 22, March 2021, p. 2.

¹⁰ Timor Akhimov, „It is Time to Revise Russia-Turkey Relations for a Stable Future“, gen. quote.

¹¹ The efforts by Russia and Turkey to implement “the Syrian model” of reconciliation in Libya have so far been unsuccessful, as the UN-initiated reconciliation process has received the support of most stakeholders in the country, as well as the United States, France and Italy.

nitored by the Russian and Turkish peacekeeping forces. In that war, Turkey helped Azerbaijan militarily, while Russia, apart from mediating for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, did not actively support Armenia, even though it is a member of the CSTO. The reasons for the Russian partly passive attitude can be found in the pro-Western orientation of the Armenian government, the fact that the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region is located in Azerbaijan, that Armenia has not officially recognized the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (the Republic of Artsakh) and that there was no formal basis for the Russian involvement in the armed conflict, but also in an effort not to provoke interethnic conflicts between Armenians and Azari living in Russia. New conflicts of low intensity during 2021 ended with an agreement mediated by Russia, and at the same time the process of demarcation of these two countries began. The other important event for the region is the Russian mediation in establishing bilateral ties between Turkey and Armenia, which have not had diplomatic relations for three decades. The talks between the Turkish and Armenian delegations began in Moscow in January 2022, and are related to the development of a reconciliation plan and the creation of a favourable climate for establishing diplomatic, social and economic ties, as well as the opening of borders between the two countries. In return, Turkey will mediate and coordinate Azerbaijan's views on Armenia. These acts indicate peace in the South Caucasus region, which suits all parties involved in the conflict, and Russia has regained its influence in the region.

The role of Russia and Turkey in the Ukrainian crisis

After the unrest in Ukraine in 2014 and the overthrow of the pro-Russian authorities, the autonomous province of Crimea declared its accession to Russia, which Turkey condemned, but did not join the European Union's sanctions against Russia. In the same year, the regions around the cities of Lugansk and Donetsk in eastern Ukraine simultaneously refused to further recognize the Ukrainian government and declared independent People's Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk or the Donetsk Basin (Donbas). Peace processes began in Minsk in 2014, but the agreements have not been implemented in practice and sporadic conflicts have not stopped including intensive actions in cyberspace.¹²

In recent months, Ukraine has become a neuralgic point between Russia and NATO, primarily the United States, due to the Western accusations that Russia is preparing an invasion of Ukraine and the Russian demands to limit the expansion of the Alliance. At the beginning of 2022, some NATO members (US, Great Britain, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) delivered weapons and military equipment to Ukraine, weighing over a thousand tons and worth about a billion and five hundred million dollars and sent military instructors and a contingent of two thousand US soldiers to

¹² Nenad Putnik i Branislav Milosavljević, "Ruske informacione operacije u ukrajinskom oružanom sukobu", *Bezbednost*, Vol. 63, No. 1, 2021, p. 75.

Poland. On the other hand, Russia explained the deployment of military forces near the border with Ukraine and the transfer to Belarus as exercising and performing manoeuvres. At the end of February 2022, Russian President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin made a decision that Russia recognizes the independence of the DPR and LPR and concludes agreements on friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance. The Western countries, reacting to the decision and agreements, imposed strict sanctions on the DPR, LPR and Russia and continued to arm Ukraine.

In the midst of the Ukrainian crisis, Turkey, due to the good political and economic relations with Russia and Ukraine and its affirmation during that process, wanted to be actively involved in mediation that would lead to a peaceful solution to the crisis, but so far these attempts have failed (as well as the efforts of some leading Western politicians). It should be said that Turkey cultivates strong historical and ethnic ties with the Crimean Tatars and has close relations and developed economic and military cooperation with Ukraine, so it is likely that the armed conflict in Ukraine will have negative consequences for the Turkish economy. Turkey has recently sold the Bayraktar TB2 unmanned combat aerial vehicles to Ukraine and the Ukrainian Armed Forces have already used some of them in Donbas against pro-Russian targets, which the Russian diplomacy has strongly condemned, although this act has not significantly disrupted their relations globally.

The President of Turkey has characterized the recognition of the independence of the DPR and LPR by Russia as “unacceptable”, with criticism of the actions of the Western countries in this crisis, appealing to all interested parties to respect international law.¹³ In the event of an escalation of the crisis and conflict between Russia and NATO, Turkey will certainly want to avoid any military conflict with Russia, but it is also expected to join the NATO partners in condemning the Russian invasion, but not potential sanctions.

Russia and Turkey and the riots in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is a country that for almost 30 years, in comparison to the former Soviet Republics, has stood out for the efficiency of its political and security system. However, in several cities, at the beginning of 2022, mass protests and riots broke out in which 225 people died. The official reason for the unrest was the increase in the price of fuel, while the reaction to the crisis of the regime and government and the attempt of coup d'état and change of government can be recognized as the reason. President Kassym - Jomart Tokayev declared a state of emergency in the entire territory and called the CSTO peacekeeping forces to help protect strategic facilities. After a week-long intervention by the CSTO forces with more than two thousand troops, protests ended on January 13 and peacekeepers began withdrawing from Kazakhstan. With this action, the CSTO peacekeeping forces have shown that they

¹³ “Turska odbacila poteze Rusije u Ukrajini”, Al Jazeera Balkan, February 22, 2022, <https://balkans.aljazeera.net/news/world/2022/2/22/turska-odbacila-poteze-rusije-u-ukrajini>, 23/02/2022.

can respond to any threat in the region without conflict and interference in internal affairs of states and that Russia is a guarantee for eliminating security threats in the post-Soviet area. The speed of reaction, and also the departure of peacekeeping forces after the successful operation, have further strengthened the reputation of the CSTO forces and the Russian influence in the region.

The tense situation in Kazakhstan, which coincided with the Ukrainian crisis, caused concern of the Russian leadership over the potential violent change of the government in Kazakhstan and the possibility of the “spillover” of political instability in its territory. Besides preserving stability in the region, the Russian interest in Kazakhstan is also the protection of the Baikonur closed city and Cosmodrome, which will be under the Russian administration until 2050. At the level of foreign ministers, Russia and Turkey, at the beginning of January 2022, supported the efforts of the leadership of Kazakhstan to restore the constitutional order, where the activities of the CSTO peacekeeping forces were presented, which Turkey did not dispute. The Organization of Turkic States (Turkey, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan and potential members Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) have also expressed readiness to provide the necessary support to the administration and people of Kazakhstan in overcoming the crisis and in operations against terrorists, radicals and extremists aimed at disrupting the country’s constitutional order.

Energy and military-technical cooperation between Russia and Turkey

The energy crisis in Europe, which occurred at the end of 2021, has reflected on the deterioration of the Russian economic and political relations with the Western European countries. Namely, the West accused Russia of using gas supplies for political purpose, even though it is under sanctions. The Turkish economy is also heavily dependent on the Russian natural gas. Thus, during 2020, it imported 33.6 billion of the total of 48.1 billion cubic metres of consumed gas from Russia. The sensitivity of the Turkish industry to the import of energy was shown during January 2022, when due to a technical malfunction on gas pipeline, the supply from Iran was interrupted, which caused the interruption of the production of a part of the industry.¹⁴ Due to the increase in gas supplies and the importance of the Turkish hubs in gas network, the TurkStream Gas Pipeline was built from Russia to Turkey at the bottom of the Black Sea, and was officially put into operation in January 2020. The pipeline has two branches, one supplies Turkey, and the other passes through Bulgaria, Serbia and Hungary (*the Balkan Stream*) and further through Slovakia to Austria. From 2020, the hubs in Greece and North Macedonia have been connected to the gas pipeline, and from October 2021 in Croatia, as well. While cooperating on the pipeline, the Turkish

¹⁴ Gulsen Solaker, „Erdoğan kao posrednik između Rusije i Ukrajine”, Deutsche welle Serbian, February 3, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/sr/erdogan-kao-posrednik-izme%C4%91u-rusije-i-ukrajine/a-60641535>, 04/02/2022.

leadership is working to diversify its energy sources in order to reduce its dependence on Russia. Turkey is trying to provide a part of its energy by a programme of nuclear power plants, so that the Russian nuclear conglomerate “Rosatom” is building the first Turkish nuclear power plant “Akkuyu” in southern Turkey, which is expected to start operating with a reactor in 2023, and at full capacity in 2026.

In addition to energy cooperation, Russia and Turkey are intensifying cooperation in the field of defence. The contracting and delivery of the Russian S-400 missile systems to Turkey have influenced loyalty review and the collapse of the Turkish position in NATO. After 2017 and contracting the purchase of the S-400 missile system from Russia, Turkey was exposed to strong pressures and threats of the US sanctions, demanding to give up the purchase and equip it with the Patriot system or some similar system from the Alliance’s arsenal. However, the Russian system was delivered in 2019. The Turkish defence industry representatives believe that the mentioned agreement is favourable, not only because of the lower purchase price and the corresponding performance of the Russian system, but also because of obtaining permits for full control over the management and use of the system, potential technology transfer and possibility of joint production.

Due to the US assessments that the S-400 system is not compatible with the NATO equipment and endangers its security, and also due to the strained US sanctions imposed on Russia after the annexation of Crimea, Turkey was denied the already agreed and partially paid delivery of 100 US multi-role fifth generation fighter jets F-35 (stealth technology) and was excluded from the complete programme of their production, contracted in 2007. At the end of 2020, sanctions were imposed on the Turkish military industry, which caused a slowdown in its development due to the impossibility of procuring components and using technology from the NATO countries. In October 2021, Turkey asked the United States to reimburse \$1.4 billion invested in the F-35 programme by the delivery of 40 F-16 planes and 80 kits for the modernization of the existing aircraft of the same type. Such Turkish request has little chance of success, having in mind new negotiations on the purchase of a modernized series of the S-400 system from Russia. The purchase of the S-400 system can be considered a consequence of the long-standing refusal of the United States to meet the Turkish requests for anti-aircraft missile systems in previous periods, as well as the strained relations between the two countries after the coup attempt in July 2016 by a part of the Turkish Armed Forces and the Turkish suspicions that the US governmental agencies played a role in these events. Moreover, the relations between Turkey and the US have been influenced by the US cooperation with the Kurdish militia in Syria, namely an opponent of the Turkish Forces. Turkey has celebrated the first delivery of the S-400 system as the “liberation from the West” and the confirmation of its sovereignty and independent decision-making on its security. Therefore some analysts and state officials believe that the Turkish procurement of the S-400 system has been exclusively politically motivated and used as a tool of foreign policy.¹⁵

¹⁵ Nobuhide M. Matsumoto, „Overcoming Systematic Punishments: A Neoclassical Realist Approach to the US-Turkey Relations After the S-400 Crisis”, *Journal of Rising Powers and Global Governance*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2021, p. 8.

The Turkish striving for autonomy, despite disagreements with the European Union and the United States, has not led to its complete institutional separation from the Western-led international order, as it remains the NATO member and has the customs alliance with the European Union.¹⁶ The imposed US sanctions open the need for Turkey to intensify military-technical cooperation with other countries, and also to rely on its weapons production. If an agreement is not reached with the United States on the purchase and modernization of F-16 planes, and bearing in mind the inadequate technical condition of the Turkish Air Force, Turkey will probably consider the possibility of buying the Russian Su-34, Su-35 and Su-57 aircraft.¹⁷ In addition, and given the enviable level of the development of the military industry, Turkey is trying to build its fifth generation fighter called TAI TF-X, which will be a twin-engine stealth fighter and thus replace obsolete aircraft. Although it is far from the finished product, according to President Erdogan, it is expected that the fighter will be shown in 2023, and that it will be put into operational use in 2029. Russia, through its "Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation", has expressed readiness to join this project, and interstate negotiations are being carried out between Turkey and Russia, whose successful epilogue would probably contribute to the Turkish further distance from NATO.

The Russian and Turkish influences on Serbia and the countries of the region

The geopolitical situation in the Western Balkans in recent years has been marked by strengthening of the influence of Russia, China and Turkey, with the constant influence of the United States, despite the commitment of the countries of this region to join the European Union. The Turkish political goals in the Balkans are related to the areas inhabited by Bosniaks and Albanians, who see their prosperity in strengthening the Turkish regional power and influence. In economic sense, the Turkish investment expansion has been present in the Balkans in recent years, primarily in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro (especially after the NATO accession in 2017 and strained relations with Russia). Turkey has significant investment in infrastructure, tourism, banking, media, industry and energy industry in the Balkans. In addition to the increase in economic exchange with the Balkan countries, the Turkish interest is also to create opportunities to enter the European Union market through the Balkan countries.

Russia has economic interests in the Balkans, and also an interest in NATO not expanding to non-member countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia), which is a new Russian interest and foreign policy framework for the presence in Southeast

¹⁶ Mustafa Kutlay and Ziya Öniş. „Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order: strategic autonomy or new forms of dependence?“ *International Affairs*, Vol. 97, No. 4, 2021, p. 1103.

¹⁷ Aaron Stein, „Turkey's response to the Russia-Ukraine crisis“, Foreign Policy Research Institute, Eurasia program, Philadelphia, January 2022, p. 15.

Europe.¹⁸ After the European Union imposed sanctions on Russia (due to the annexation of Crimea), Serbia has increased the export of agricultural products to Russia, but not to the expected extent. The military-technical cooperation of Russia with the Balkan countries is small, except with Serbia, with which it has been improved through equipping the Serbian Armed Forces with combat systems and joint exercises of the military units of Serbia, Russia and Belarus.¹⁹

Russia and Turkey have supported the Serbian “Open Balkan” initiative, coordinated by Serbia, North Macedonia and Albania, with an open invitation to Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the interim institutions in Priština. The initiative refers to the facilitated movement of people, goods, capital and services among the signatory countries. Furthermore, Russia and Turkey support the military neutrality of Serbia, which is present in the CSTO as an observer (its membership is impossible due to the accession to the European Union) and cooperates with NATO through membership in the “Partnership for Peace” programme. The military neutrality of Serbia enables military and technical cooperation and equipping the Armed Forces with weapons and military equipment from the NATO and CSTO member states, as well as from the third countries.

The unresolved status of the southern Serbian province of Kosovo and Metohija has a negative impact on the regional security. The relations between Turkey and Russia have not changed on this issue - from the non-recognition of “the Republic of Kosovo” by Russia, to the earlier recognition by Turkey, and also somewhat reduced lobbying for new recognition in the world. The political and security situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is unstable, but armed conflicts between entities are unlikely. The adoption of the law against the denial of genocide in Srebrenica by the UN High Representative, using his discretionary rights (Bonn powers), as well as the transfer of certain rights from the jurisdiction of the Republika Srpska to the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, has led to the confrontation of the Republika Srpska’s representatives with state authorities and their withdrawal from the state power. Thus, the work of the state bodies of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been blocked and a crisis that endangers the fundamental principles of the Dayton Accords has been provoked. Russia has denied the Western decision to appoint Christian Schmidt as High Representative, although the UN Security Council has not confirmed his mandate. Russia and Turkey support the integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina and have confirmed their mutual commitment to the resumption of internal political dialogue on a firm basis of the Dayton principles and in the interest of all entities, with an agreement to continue the constructive cooperation on these issues.

The interests of Russia and Turkey in the Western Balkans were expressed during the construction of the Balkan gas stream that connects Russia and Turkey across the Black Sea and continues through Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary and Croatia, with the goal of providing gas to the Central and Eastern European countries, bypassing Ukraine.

¹⁸ Ekaterina Entina and Alexander Pivovarenko, „Russia’s Foreign Policy Evolution in the New Balkan Landscape”, *Croatian Political Science Review*, Vol. 56, No. 3-4, 2019, p. 181.

¹⁹ Константин К. Худолей и Евгений А. Колосков, „Политика России на Балканах: современное состояние и перспективы”, *Мировая экономика и международные отношения*, Том 65, число 1, 2021. <https://www.imemo.ru/en/publications/periodical/meimo/archive/2021/1-t-65>. p. 92.

The expansion of the gas pipeline to the Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is also planned. This project has avoided the disputes of the European Commission, which were relevant for giving up the previously planned *South Stream* in 2014, when damage was done to the Balkan states. Within the infrastructure development in the Western Balkans, the construction of the Belgrade-Bijeljina-Sarajevo and the Belgrade-Užice-Sarajevo highway is planned. Funds have been provided for the financing of the mentioned projects in Serbia, and the financing of the construction in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina has not been completely resolved, with the expected assistance from both Turkey and Russia.

The development of the good relations between Serbia and Russia was confirmed by the visit of the President of Serbia to Russia, at the end of November 2021, when assistance was provided to Serbia to avoid the energy crisis present in the European countries. The good bilateral relations with Turkey were confirmed with the opening of Consulate General of Turkey in Novi Pazar in September 2021, and the meeting of the Presidents of Turkey and Serbia in January 2022, when several documents on improving bilateral cooperation were signed at governmental level.

Conclusion

In recent years, the relations between Turkey and Russia have been improved, so that Turkey has become closer in some fields to its traditional and long-standing adversary than its Western allies (the United States, European Union and NATO). This turnaround in the Turkish foreign policy followed the failed coup in 2016 and is a reflection of the aspiration for more independent foreign policy and the accomplishment of its interests. The strained relations between Turkey and the United States have been deepened due to the disrespect of the Turkish national interests by traditional allies, manifested in the Syrian crisis through the US support to separatist Kurdish Forces and refusal to sell it any effective missile system. Although Turkey is still a member of NATO, its changed relations with the United States mean that Turkey is also the Russian defence shield against the Alliance.

The “competitive cooperation” between Russia and Turkey, which has proved successful in establishing and controlling the ceasefire and starting the negotiation process in Syria even after the Armenian-Azerbaijani war, has so far not proved effective in Libya, where most influential military commanders have supported the UN-led negotiation process. The failure of the mission and the mutual accusations of Turkey and Russia over the military presence have not significantly affected the resolution of other strategic issues, which has confirmed the thesis of mutual respect for security issues of the other side and avoiding a direct conflict, while finding the most useful joint engagement. The improvement of the relations between Turkey and Russia includes the development of economic and trade relations, the construction of infrastructure facilities, such as the *TurkStream* gas pipeline and the first nuclear power plant in Turkey, all the way to the purchase of the S-400 defence system. Thus, the cooperation is focused on strategic industries and long-term interdependencies.

Although these relations do not represent the alliance of two countries, their rapprochement is noticeable, despite different visions, which are even contradictory, and sometimes conflicting. The escalation of the Ukrainian crisis and the Russian military intervention have been condemned by the Turkish leadership, but Turkey, as expected, has not joined the sanctions of the Western states against Russia.

As in other regions, the interests of Russia and Turkey in the Western Balkans are not harmonized because Turkey, due to its NATO membership, has wider space for economic investment and economic exchange with the European Union, while for Russia such space is narrow. The Russian interest is to limit the NATO space to an extent through the neutrality of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, using economic, political and military-technical cooperation with Serbia. It should be expected that the interests of Russia and Turkey in the Western Balkans, and based on experiences and achieved cooperation in conditions of different interests in other regions, will have a positive impact on the political, security and economic situation in this region, as well.

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Summary

In international events in recent months, in addition to the problem with the COVID-19 pandemic, energy crisis and unrest in Kazakhstan, there are the current tensions due to the events related to Ukraine and the NATO expansion to the East, as well as the simmering conflicts in Syria and Libya. In the context of these events, the relations between Russia and Turkey remain complex, although based on mutual recognition of security and other interests and cooperation for mutual benefit, with efforts to accomplish a significant influence in international community in accordance with their national interests. Their relations are characterized as “the competitive cooperation” of participants in the conflict, in accordance with their overall interests and goals, which they use to undertake concrete actions to achieve the expected effects. The strained relations between Turkey and the United States, as a result of the failed coup in Turkey, the disagreement in Syria and the US refusal to provide Turkey with missile systems, have culminated in the Turkish purchase of the Russian S-400 missile system. In return, the United States has imposed sanctions on the Turkish military industry and terminated the agreement on cooperation in the programme of the production of the F-35 fighters. In this way, Turkey has shown a growing commitment to a more independent foreign policy and faster development of its military industry, as well as the openness to the transfer of the Russian military technology. Russia is under sanctions due to the annexation of Crimea and is an actor in the crisis over Ukraine due to the NATO threat of expansion to the Russian western borders, which escalated after the Russian recognition of the independence of the People’s Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk (Donbas) and launching a “special military operation” in the territory of Donbas.

January riots in Kazakhstan, assessed as an attempt to forcibly change the government, were stopped by the intervention and one-week action of the CSTO peace-keeping forces, which have shown that they can respond to any threat in the region without interfering in internal affairs and that Russia is a guarantee of eliminating security threats in the post-Soviet space. Turkey and other member states of the Organization of Turkic States have supported the current state administration and the people of Kazakhstan and have not disputed the mission of the CSTO forces.

In the foreign policy of Russia and Turkey and acting towards the third parties, their conflicting interests and providing direct or indirect support to parties to the conflict, without a direct conflict, are often present, which shapes their specific “competitive cooperation”. The success of Russia and Turkey in the negotiations on the demarcation of Armenia and Azerbaijan is important, as well as the consolidation of the decades-long strained relations between Turkey and Armenia. The engagement of Turkey and Russia in Syria has proven to be effective, both in military operations and in mediating negotiations, which has reduced the influence of the United States and NATO in this area. The crisis management model implemented in Syria has not been successful in the Libyan crisis due to the Russian more passive attitude and greater influence of the Western powers and the UN mission. The failure of the mission and mutual accusations about the military presence in Libya have not significantly affected the resolution of their other strategic issues. The common engagement in energy and military projects and technology transfer is an indicator of cooperation focused on the industries of strategic importance. Although these relations do not represent the alliance of the two countries, their rapprochement is noticeable, despite different views on international relations.

The geopolitical situation in the Western Balkans in recent years has been marked by strengthening of the influence of Russia, China and Turkey, with the constant influence of the United States, despite the commitment of the countries of this region to join the European Union. Russia and Turkey support the military neutrality of Serbia and the “Open Balkan” initiative. The Russian interests aimed at preventing the NATO expansion into Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Turkish efforts to enter the European Union markets through the Balkan states and their political and economic engagement have a positive effect on the current economic, political and security position of Serbia and the regional countries.

Key words: Russia, Turkey, competitive cooperation, Serbia, Ukrainian crisis, military-technical cooperation, energy cooperation

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