

Russian-Turkish Relations and their Impact on NATO and the EU

Eugene Kogan

President Erdogan's Turkey might increasingly come under President Putin's control until the parliamentary and presidential elections in Turkey in November 2019.

The Black Sea region is one of the regions in which Turkey has lost its influence to Russia. NATO and the EU have no influence on relations between Russia and Turkey, as the Presidents of both countries either ignore the EU's efforts or, as in the case of Erdogan, despise their at-

tempts to appease him. In addition, NATO has no mechanism for excluding Turkey as a member state. Although the EU has implicitly suspended negotiations on Turkey's possible EU membership, it is not prepared to make a clear statement that Turkey will not join the Union in the fore-

seeable future. The leaders of both organizations continue to hope that Erdogan will change the authoritarian course of the country and return to a European way and reconsider the comfortable relations with Putin. Erdogan has other plans, and as a result the leaders of NATO and the EU are likely to wait in vain.

It must be emphasised that Erdogan was and is not an equal partner in the Turkish–Russian relationship, although both President Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan have a similarly authoritarian style of government. Erdogan called Putin "my dear friend Vladimir" at a press conference in St. Petersburg on 9 August 2016, shortly after the restoration of bilateral relations, which were damaged by a Turkish F-16 fighter plane on 24 November 2015 after the launch of a Russian Su-24 bomber. But Putin did not call Erdogan "my dear friend" Tayyip. There is a saying that Russia has no friends. As the Russian Tsar Alexander III previously said: has only two allies – the army and the navy." And in the 21st century, Russia also has nuclear deterrence and the right of veto in the UN Security Council. It can therefore be said that Putin does not regard Erdogan as a friend, but as an unequal counterpart.

In addition, Murat Bilhan, former head of the Turkish Foreign Ministry's Strategic Research Centre, said: "Behind Putin's smile, Russia remains a great state and can show its talons whenever it suits him. Turkey could never compete with Russia. Russia is a superpower, while Turkey is a regional power." Turkey should not be under any illusions about its role in relations, namely that of the second fiddle.

While Erdogan's authoritarian rule has alienated allies in Europe and the United States, it has strengthened Putin's control over Turkey and embarrassed Erdogan. Putin's economic sanctions against Turkey in November 2015 caused serious damage to the Turkish economy when Russian tourists stayed away from Turkey. Putin can impose these economic sanctions and travel

Photo: Kremlin.ru



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad met with representatives of the Russian Defence Ministry to discuss Russian "counter-terrorism operations" in Syria.

Photo: Kremlin.ru



On 13 November 2017, Vladimir Putin met with President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Sochi to discuss bilateral relations and current issues on the international agenda.

restrictions on Turkey if he feels that Erdogan is not listening to him. In addition, Putin can impose sanctions at any time and without warning, which he can promise. Therefore, the relationship is one of senior and junior partners, even though Erdogan does not see this reality. But as Atilla Yesilada of Global Source Partners, a consultancy firm based in Istanbul, said in January 2017: "The Turkish government has completely decoupled itself from reality. This is not the case with Putin, who is playing a tough, well-calculated and manipulative game against Erdogan and at the same time knows how to deal with the volatile Erdogan correctly, compared to the rather timid attitude of Turkey's Western allies."

There is no doubt that Turkey did not only push itself into Russian orbit in 2015, but already in 2008, because Turkey was already dependent on 60 percent of gas supplies from Russia at that time. Today, the figure is 55 percent. Turkey has no choice but to rely on Russia's good will, and Turkey pays in hard currency. The idea that Turkey must diversify its gas imports away from Russia and become a gas hub has remained an idea. In 2014, according to Turkey's foreign trade statistics, exports to Russia amounted to US\$5.9Bn, while imports from Russia amounted to US\$25.2Bn. The first six months of 2016 were Turkey's worst export result since 2004, and the most striking aspect of trade with Russia is that it has been in favour of Russia from the outset. Russia sells more to Turkey than Turkey sells to Russia. Turkey's dependence on Russian gas and oil (10 percent of oil comes from Russia) is a major factor in this imbalance. The current situation is unlikely to change, as Turkey's energy requirements will double in the next decade. Another factor in this imbalance is the increasing number of Russian tourists in Turkey.

In addition to Turkey's dependence on Russian gas and Russian tourists, the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008 sent a clear message to Ankara, namely that Ankara can only increase its influence in its immediate neighbourhood, namely in the Black Sea region, by coordinating with Moscow and not with its NATO allies. And that is exactly what has happened since then. Turkey's failed coup d'état on 15 July 2016 has further consolidated relations between Russia and Turkey. In a telephone call with Erdogan on 17 July 2016, Putin stressed the "categorical inadmissibility of anti-constitutional acts and violence in state life" and reaffirmed his intention to meet Erdogan in Russia. Putin's reaction was in stark contrast to that of the Western allies. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on 25 July 2016: "Unlike other countries, we



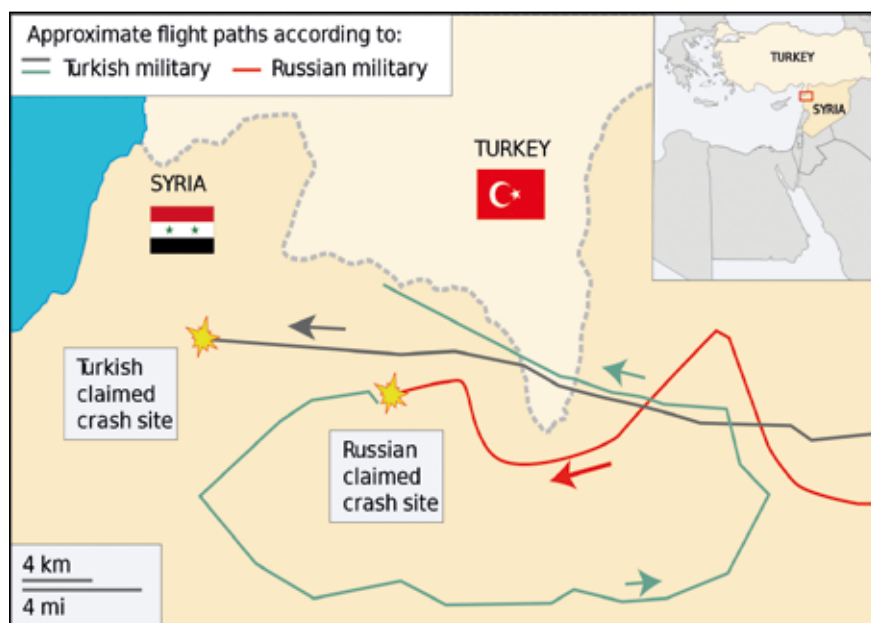
Photo: Vitaly Kuzmin, Wikipedia CC

A Russian S-400 Air Defence System on a BAZ trailer chassis

have received unconditional support from Russia. The cost of unconditional support from Russia remains high and has a long-term impact. In addition, the renewed cooperation between Ankara and Moscow is to take place on Russian terms, and Turkey reluctantly accepts this reality."

The never-ending story of Erdogan's decision to buy the S-400 air defence system from Russia is an example of Putin's view of Moscow's support for Turkey. Turkey buys a system that is not compatible with NATO standards and cannot be integrated into NATO's air defence system. That is why

Turkey must confine itself to its own architecture. Even if Russia is ready to carry out maintenance work, maintenance is carried out by Russian and not by Turkish workers. At the same time, Russia is not prepared to supply software codes, IFF systems, joint production with Turkey and certainly no technology transfer to Turkey. And this despite the Turkish side's persistence to gain access to the software codes and the IFF system. In addition, the system cannot be delivered to Turkey before 2020. This is a high price paid by Turkey for unconditional support from Russia. The statement by Ca-



Graphics: Donor Furfur, Wikipedia CC

On 24 November 2015, a Turkish F-16 fighter aircraft shot down a Russian Su-24 aircraft near the Syrian-Turkish border. The Turkish Air Force claimed that the Russian aircraft violated Turkish airspace. The Russian pilot Capt. Konstantin Murakhtin said on Russian TV there was "no way" the jet could have violated Turkish airspace. Turkey says the pilots were warned 10 times before the plane was shot down. Capt. Murakhtin was rescued from rebel-held territory in Syria in a 12-hour operation involving Russian Special Forces. The incident strained Russian-Turkish relations.

7th Edition

International Exhibition & Conference for Defense,
Homeland Security, Cyber Security, Safety & Security and Aerospace



MAY 16 - 18, 2018
ROMAERO, BUCHAREST



Event organized with the
official support of the Romanian
Ministry of National Defense

Media
Partners



Official Partner and Location:



Organiser:



@bsdaromania



OPEN BUSINESS & VISITING HOURS:

Wednesday, May 16, 2018 12:00 - 17:00
Thursday, May 17, 2018 10:00 - 17:00
Friday, May 18, 2018 10:00 - 15:00

Free visitor registration at:
www.bsda.ro

vusoglu that "Ankara can refuse to buy the S-400 if Moscow refuses to stop joint production in Turkey on 9 October 2017" should be taken with a grain of salt. Cavusoglu is not the one who decided to buy the S-400. Cavusoglu's attempt to put the Russians under pressure is not taken seriously by Moscow and the Russians laugh behind Cavusoglu's back. After all, the Turkish cash deposit of around US\$100M for the purchase of the S-400 will not be repaid.

Finally, General Petr Pavel, Chairman of the Military Committee, said on 25 October 2017: "Although the principle of sovereignty obviously consists in the procurement of defence equipment, as the nations are sovereign in decision-making, they are also sovereign in coping with the consequences of this decision." It remains to be seen whether Pavel's statement can be interpreted as an explicit warning to Erdogan, but it is obvious that NATO is not satisfied with Erdogan's decision to buy the S-400.

The unequal bilateral relations are a major headache for NATO and the EU, as relations between Turkey and its Western allies have deteriorated since the failed coup d'état in Turkey. Let us recall the state of bilateral relations between Germany and Turkey, and in particular the USA and Turkey, as well as the bitter relations between Austria and The Netherlands and Turkey. It is obvious that relations between Turkey and its Western allies will not change as long as Erdogan remains president. Although Turkey remains an ally of NATO, Turkey has become a difficult ally. Erdogan is fully aware of this fact and will not change his behaviour, making the NATO and EU response difficult. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg's polite statement that Turkish officials told him that "Ankara remains a strong NATO ally" is without substance. Erdogan is acting in bad faith, knowing that Western allies cannot punish Turkey in the present circumstances. On the other hand, Putin behaves like a spectator and enjoys the confusion without moving a finger.

As long as NATO does not succeed in including an article on the right of expulsion and penalties for misconduct of a member of NATO in the North Atlantic Treaty, Erdogan will continue to behave boldly. As long as the EU heads of state and government disagree on the fate of Turkey's possible membership and therefore do not take a unanimous decision, Erdogan will treat these heads of state and government with contempt. It is an opportunity for Putin to bind the Turkish Gulliver to the land of the Lilliputians, to continue his policy of changing the military balance in the Black Sea region (with intensive militarisation of the Crimean peninsula) in his favour and to scorn the NATO alliance.

NATO and the EU are in an unprofitable position because of consensus and compromise, while Putin and Erdogan continue to behave with impunity, knowing the internal weaknesses of the EU, which is unable to make a final decision on Turkey's EU membership. As long as NATO's language remains vague and ambiguous, Erdogan will not do anything to shake NATO's boat, but will enjoy the protection of NATO and Russia's embrace. Whether the Turkish formula of NATO protection and Russian embrace can also apply to other NATO member states goes beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, it can be said that other NATO members are carefully evaluating the Turkish experience.

Putin will continue to draw Turkey into its sphere of influence by offering smaller trade, energy and tourism concessions and with the unresolved conflict in Syria, as Erdogan is also in an unprofitable position. The author can only repeat what Bilhan said above: "Behind Putin's smile Russia remains a great state and can show its claws whenever it suits it." And this is something that Erdogan and his government should remember well. ■