

July 2018

FEUTURE Online Paper No. 23

# EU-Turkey Relations: Security Drivers from the Eastern Neighbourhood

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## ABSTRACT

A number of developments in the Eastern Neighbourhood since 1999 have affected EU-Turkish security relations. In particular the rise of Russian influence in the region and Turkey's increasingly complex relations with both the EU and Russia will affect EU-Turkish relations. This paper provides background on the Eastern Neighbourhood's security context from 1999 and investigates the drivers that currently have the greatest effect on EU-Turkish security interests and threat perceptions in the region. The research suggests the EU-Turkish security relationship will be primarily conflictual, but with key points of cooperation particularly in fighting Russia's information warfare tactics.

## ÖZET

Doğu Komşuluk'ta 1999'dan beri bir dizi gelişme AB-Türkiye güvenlik ilişkilerini etkiledi. Özellikle bölgedeki Rus etkisinin yükselişi ve Türkiye'nin hem AB hem de Rusya ile giderek karmaşıklaşan ilişkileri AB-Türkiye ilişkilerini etkileyecektir. Bu makale, Doğu Komşuluk'unun güvenlik konusunu 1999'da gözden geçiriyor ve şu anda bölgedeki AB-Türk güvenlik çıkarları ve tehdit algıları üzerinde en büyük etkiye sahip olan sürücüleri araştırıyor. The research suggests the EU-Turkish security relationship will be primarily conflictual, but with key points of cooperation particularly in fighting Russia's information warfare tactics.



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## 1. Introduction

In the decades since the end of the Cold War, the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood has witnessed a resurgent Russia that has invaded parts of Georgia and Ukraine, exploited protracted regional conflicts to fuel instability, and altered the balance of power in the Black Sea against the interests of littoral EU members and Turkey through enhanced militarization. To exert influence over its perceived hinterland, Russia has leveraged its military, economic, energy, informational, cyber, and hybrid resources and capabilities. Since 1999, Russia's activity has fundamentally reshaped the post-Cold War architecture, presenting a major security challenge to EU member states and Turkey in Eastern Europe and the Baltics. Prolonged regional tensions with NATO have placed Russia at odds with the West and Turkey. However, recent developments in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, signal increasing cooperation between Turkey and Russia—a dynamic that will likely complicate EU-Turkish security relations in the Eastern Neighbourhood in the coming years.

This paper analyses a number of developments in the Eastern Neighbourhood since 1999 that have affected EU-Turkish security relations and the corresponding drivers that have shaped European and Turkish responses, highlighting the circumstances in which the two sides either converged, cooperated, or conflicted in the region. Following an assessment of developments, the paper summarizes key drivers that are likely to shape EU-Turkish security interests in the short to medium-term and offer a projection of whether the EU-Turkish security relationship will converge, cooperate, or conflict.

The analysis suggests the EU-Turkish security relationship will be primarily conflictual, but with key points of cooperation. The EU and Turkey will have a continued interest in **cooperating** to advance peace negotiations in the Caucasian territorial disputes and to work within the NATO security architecture to deter further Russian expansion in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Both the EU and Turkey maintain critical energy ties with Russia, and Ankara has added economic dependence on the Russian state. Therefore, the EU and Turkey share a continued interest in avoiding escalation with Moscow that might hinder or sever ties. Growing tensions between Turkey and the West, compounded by Turkey's increasing cooperation with Russia, make a full **convergence** scenario in the Eastern Neighbourhood highly unlikely.

In chapter one, this paper provides background on the Eastern Neighbourhood's security context from 1999 and identifies points in which EU-Turkish security relations converged, cooperated, or conflicted. Chapter two delineates drivers that currently have the greatest effect on EU-Turkish security interests and threat perceptions in the region. Overall, the paper argues that existing and emerging security challenges in the Eastern Neighbourhood are likely to drive conflict in the short to medium-term with a few key points of cooperation, particularly in response to Russia's information warfare tactics.

## 2. The Evolving Security Context and its Impact on the EU-Turkish Security Relationship

### 2.1 Russian Fears of Encirclement and Overthrow – 1999 to 2004

An analysis of developments in the Eastern Neighbourhood and their impact on EU-Turkish security relations in the region cannot be undertaken without considering Russia's perspective and its goals in its immediate neighbourhood. Russia's defensive posture towards the West, which has been a central driver of EU-Turkish security relations in the region, can largely be regarded as a response to Russia's perceived ill treatment in the years following the end of the Cold War, despite fleeting moments of cooperation.

Undergirding Russian distrust of the West and its institutions, primarily the EU and NATO, as well as Turkey, is a fear of encirclement: that Russia will share borders with the EU and NATO, and its enclave of Kaliningrad will be surrounded by member countries (Karaosmanoglu, 2000). Turkey's NATO alignment after the Second World War ignited fears in Moscow that the critical area in the Black Sea and the Caucasus, which it regarded as the 'soft underbelly' of the Russian homeland, would be engulfed by the West, providing Western powers with direct access to Russia and cutting off Russian access to key industrial areas and energy resources (Karaosmanoglu, 2000).

Similar concerns were voiced when NATO and the EU adopted a policy of enlargement with the goal of expanding both Alliances eastward, a move that Russia argued would bring Western forces even closer to the Russian border and perceptibly disrupt Russia's economic relations in its immediate neighbourhood. The first wave of NATO enlargement in 1999 that included Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary was rebuked by the Russians. The second wave in 2004, which granted NATO membership to Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia, was met by fervent Russian opposition as political forces in Russia emphasized that such expansion would lead to the diminution of Russia's global influence (Karabeshkin and Spechler 2007). Relatedly, while EU expansion beginning in 2004 extended membership offers to the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia, as well as Malta and Cyprus, it was deemed less of a hard security threat than NATO enlargement. Nonetheless, it stoked Russian fears of encirclement and disruption to its internal organization.

EU and NATO enlargement, in Moscow's eyes, proved first, that the security dimension had to remain the centre of Russian interests; second, the "special" role of Russia can only be accommodated in a multipolar world; and third, that the political and, above all, military domination of the US still prevails. This perception lent itself to Russian criticism of the EU's role in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture as a subordinate one, along with Russia's defence of the OSCE, in which Russia is a participating state, as a privileged forum for true multi-polarity. From Moscow's perspective, the maintenance of NATO and its enlargement are perceived as vestiges of the Cold War that cannot mean anything other than the continued perception of Russia as a potential enemy. Not even the signature in 1997 of the



Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security with NATO managed to effectively mitigate this perception.

Fears of Western interference in Russia’s perceived sphere of influence were exacerbated by the Colour Revolutions that swept post-Soviet regimes previously dominated by Russia. From the Kremlin’s perspective, the Colour Revolutions—which were Western-oriented in nature—could only be explained by the interference of Western powers. The Colour Revolutions produced mixed results. However, uprisings led to pro-Western governments and calls for democratic systems of governance. The new pro-Western orientation of states in Russia’s neighbourhood exacerbated fears in Moscow of Western interference in the Eurasian region and the West’s unwillingness to recognize Russia as a regional, hegemonic power in the post-Soviet space. Above all, the Kremlin is convinced that the West is implementing a strategy of regime change with geopolitical objectives that ultimately seek to subvert Russian power. This stance, catalysed by events in 2004, has led to the gradual inward and outward hardening of Putin’s regime.

For the EU and Turkey, however, NATO and EU enlargement as well as the Colour Revolutions in the post-Soviet space were expressions of sovereign decision-making in the newly independent post-Soviet states. To the West, membership in the EU and NATO was granted to states that expressed interest in joining; that adopted formal policies of Western integration; and that undertook the necessary steps to meet membership criteria. Because the EU and NATO did not ‘solicit’ new members in the post-Soviet space, but rather ‘accepted’ sovereign states on the basis of expressed interest, Brussels largely dismissed Moscow’s objections. Thus, neither the EU nor NATO granted what Moscow was hoping for, and is now demanding: involvement in the *making of certain decisions* i.e. a veto with regard to third countries in what Russia regards as its ‘sphere of influence.’

## 2.2 Military Intervention in Georgia (2008)

Georgia’s Rose Revolution in 2003 launched a period of enhanced cooperation between Georgia, NATO, and the EU. The pro-Western government that came to power following the Revolution received a warm embrace from Brussels, as Euro-Atlantic integration emerged as a central policy objective in Tbilisi. Turkey and Georgia also enjoyed a history of amicable relations that were reinforced in the early 2000s through cooperative initiatives like the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. Thus, Turkey and the EU were mutually supportive of Georgia’s membership in the Alliance.

Georgia’s NATO ambitions, however, were met with warnings from Russia that integration efforts would be perceived as a direct threat to Moscow’s regional security interests. In 2007 and 2008, tensions mounted as President Putin drew clear red-lines in his speeches at the Munich Security Conference in Berlin (February 2007) and at the NATO summit in Bucharest (April 2008). In August 2008, just four months after the NATO Bucharest Summit, Russia intervened militarily in Georgia following Tbilisi’s attempt at retaking control of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, regions in Georgia that seceded post-1991 with Russian backing. The



military conflict, while just six days, had lasting implications not only for Georgia and Russia, but also for NATO and the EU.

For Russia and Georgia, the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have become *de facto* extensions of the Russian Federation. For the EU, the conflict hinted at divisions within the Union regarding Moscow’s objectives and European interests in Russia’s border states (Valasek). Some EU members responded by harshly condemning Russia and offering non-military aid to the Georgian Government, while other member-states accused President Saakashvili of unnecessarily provoking war (Valasek). Other countries did not attribute blame to either Tbilisi or Moscow. Despite internal divisions over who was at fault, from a security perspective, the EU was pressed to broker a cease-fire agreement that would end the conflict and prevent further Russian expansion. Thus, the EU adopted a policy of neutrality toward the conflict that allowed it to adopt a mediating role (Valasek).

Varying interpretations of Russian objectives in Georgia among EU member-states complicated the EU’s ability to form a coherent, unified policy toward Russia based on its shared security interests. Some states, like Germany and France, argued that Russia maintains greater disdain for US military presence along its borders than European influence in the region (Valasek). Other states, including Czechoslovakia and Poland, assert that the War was a signal of Russia’s inherently aggressive foreign policy strategy—one that ultimately seeks to control the political, economic, and security orientation of states in its perceived sphere of influence. To prevent future outbreak of conflict in the contested territories, the EU deployed an EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia with a mandate that aims to prevent a return to hostilities; facilitate the resumption of a safe and normal life for the local communities living in the Administrative Boundary Lines with Abkhazia and South Ossetia; build confidence among the conflicting parties; and inform EU policy in Georgia and the wider region.<sup>1</sup>

Turkey shared the EU’s immediate security interest of bringing the conflict to an end through diplomatic channels. In response to the war and desperate appeals for support from President Saakashvili, then Prime Minister Erdogan introduced a Caucasus Cooperation and Stability Pact that included Russia and Georgia, as well as Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey (Bulent, 2008) Turkey’s posture in the aftermath of the Russo-Georgian War was diplomatic: Ankara engaged the embattled Georgian government, supported post-war stabilization initiatives, and also continued dialogue with Moscow (Bulent, 2008).

Overall, the EU-Turkish security relationship was cooperative in response to the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, with both sides prioritizing swift diplomatic resolution and neutrality. However, some EU member-states, along with the US, expressed concern over Turkey’s willingness to continue with “business as usual” with the Russia following the war. In response to criticism, then Prime Minister Erdogan stated: “It would not be right for Turkey to be pushed toward any side. ... One of the sides is our closest ally, the United States. The

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<sup>1</sup> See *EUMM Georgia mandate*: [https://eumm.eu/en/about\\_eumm/mandate](https://eumm.eu/en/about_eumm/mandate)



other side is Russia, with which we have an important trade volume. We would act in line with what Turkey’s national interests require” (Bulent, 2008). Turkish economic ties to Russia present the most significant obstacle for Turkish cooperation in countering Russian influence in the Eastern neighbourhood.

Nevertheless, in the future, it is in both EU and Turkish interests to reduce Russian influence and the likelihood of further interventions in Georgia and the South Caucasus for a number of reasons. First, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which bypasses Russia’s share of the regional gas market, passes through Georgia. A Russian military incursion such as that of 2008 would threaten this supply. Second, both the EU and Turkey stand to gain if they can reduce Russian influence.

### **2.3 Russian expansion, the annexation of Crimea, and the ensuing conflict in Ukraine (2014)**

After 2004, the EU embarked on a path to extend its influence into the Eastern Neighborhood. After issuing a wave of membership bids to states in Eastern Europe in 2004, the EU established formalized partnerships through its 2009 Eastern Partnership initiative. In Moscow, the EU’s enlarged presence was regarded as an attempt to “carve out its own sphere of influence in the East” (Hisiki, 2015). As a retaliatory measure, the Russians, along with Belarus and Kazakhstan, formed the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU) in 2010, which later evolved into, the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), a fully-fledged economic union in 2015.

Crisis in Ukraine materialized largely in response to escalating tensions between the EU and Russia, and more specifically, to the EU’s anticipated signing of Association Agreements (AAs) including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTAs) with Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine at the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit in 2013 (Hisiki, 2015). Of greatest concern to Russia was the status of Ukraine. In an effort to pressure Ukraine to abandon its EU integration objectives, Russia threatened harsh economic consequences in tandem with incentives for cooperation such as discounted prices on natural gas and preferential loans (Hisiki, 2015). The Yanukovych regime initially buckled under Moscow’s coercive measures, but domestic upheaval in response resulted in Yanukovych’s overthrow (Hisiki, 2015). Following the collapse of Yanukovych’s regime, Russia invaded Crimea (Hisiki, 2015).

The EU responded to the invasion of Crimea, first, by seeking to preserve internal unity, and second, by devising a three-tier strategy of sanctions against Russia (Hisiki, 2015). After initially applying tier-two sanctions following Crimea’s annexation that were calculated to target those close to President Putin, the EU was pressured to assume a tougher stance following the downing of the Malaysian Airlines passenger flight in July 2014 (Hisiki, 2015). Consequently, the EU agreed to impose tier three sanctions against key sectors of the Russian economy through restricting Russia’s access to capital markets in the EU and prohibition of the buying or selling of bonds and equity as well as services (Hisiki, 2015). The EU expedited AA negotiations with the newly-elected Poroshenko government, which led



to the signing of the AA in September 2017. Sanctions levied by the EU and the US in the immediate aftermath of the annexation of Crimea marked an official break in relations between Moscow and Western powers.

The Kremlin has sustained the conflict in Ukraine by providing or permitting a constant supply of fighters, armaments, and ammunition. Since August 2014, OSCE monitors have recorded a transit of more than 33,000 people wearing military-style outfits crossing the border with Ukraine under the exclusive control of Moscow, but considering the size and the restrictions imposed on the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, the actual figure might be much higher. Furthermore, on at least two occasions, Russia has intervened devastatingly with its regular forces (the battles of Ilovaik in August 2014 and Devaltsevo in February 2015). In its current state, the war has reached a point of strategic deadlock as neither side is able to achieve its ultimate goals without incurring heavy costs.

The militarization of Crimea reflects the Kremlin’s desire to place the crisis with the EU and NATO in the military field, where, despite the risks, Moscow feels comfortable and has operational and political advantages—particularly over the EU states. Likewise, Crimea brought about a change in the military balance of the Black Sea area in favour of Russia with implications for the wider regional security complex. The transformation of Crimea into a military stronghold was accompanied by growth in the numbers and capabilities of the Russian Black Sea Fleet.

Crimea’s geographic position on the Black Sea peninsula and the fact that it houses millions of ethnically Crimean Tartars, ethnic kinsmen of Turkey, makes Crimea particularly salient in Turkish security relations. Yet despite its position and ethnic-connection to Crimea, the Turkish response to the outbreak of conflict in Ukraine and the invasion of Crimea was tempered by its dependence on Russia for key energy resources and economic channels (Cagaptay and Jeffrey, 2014). Notably, while Turkey condemned Russia’s annexation of Crimea, it did not impose sanctions against Russia. The Turkish foreign affairs minister Çavuşoğlu explained Ankara’s departing from western sanctions on the grounds that, “Turkey suffered from sanctions a lot in the past. Sanctions against our neighbors and partners caused grave damages on our economy. That’s why when we hear about sanctions we don’t rush into it. We are looking into whether we can find other ways to solve the problems” (Hurriyet Daily News, 2017). While a handful of EU member-states did not support sanctions against Russia, European states were far more explicit in condemning Russian aggression in Ukraine and Crimea than Turkey. Ankara’s response to the conflict has thus been largely muted.

Should the conflict in Ukraine escalate and the EU adopt an even more aggressive posture toward Russia, EU-Turkish security relations will likely conflict, as Turkey seems determined to abstain from participating in any measure that might threaten its economic and energy ties with Russia. Therefore, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the Russian occupation of Crimea will likely serve as a theatre for conflicting EU-Turkish security relations in the Eastern Neighbourhood in future years.



## 2.4 Militarization of the Black Sea

The Black Sea region has experienced growing militarization for the past decade. While most NATO member-states have cut military spending, Russian and Turkish military capabilities have expanded. Both Moscow and Ankara have plans to increase their naval capabilities in the next ten years, which stresses the increasing maritime dimension of militarization in the Black Sea. Still, the Black Sea can no longer be considered as anyone's "lake" (Toucas, 2017).

With the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, the Russian navy gained access to key harbours and naval bases such as Sevastopol. Around 90% of the tonnage of the Russian Black Sea fleet is located in Crimean ports of Sevastopol and Feodosia. By 2017, the Russian Black Sea Fleet consisted of 45 warships and 7 submarines stationed principally out of Sevastopol, and Novorossiysk. The fleet's warships constitute 21 percent of total Russian naval warships in service and 10 percent of the total submarine force (Schneider, 2017). The Russian Black Sea fleet plans to be reinforced and further modernized in the coming years with up to 18 warships and submarines to be commissioned by 2020 (Delanoe, 2016) in line with Russia's State Armaments Procurement Program for 2011-2020 (SAP-2020).

Russian military presence in the shared neighbourhood further intensifies the level of militarization in the Black Sea. There are almost 34,000 Russian servicemen stationed in the Eastern neighbourhood countries. It is estimated that there are 600 Russian troops in Belarus, 1,900 in the Transnistrian region of Moldova, 24,000 in the Crimean Peninsula, and 7,000 in the Donbass region of Ukraine (Dyner, 2016). Moreover, Russia's military facilities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are expanding, and Moscow has the highest capability of mobilization in the region with 2 million reserves at its disposal in its Southern Military District in the Black Sea (Delanoe, 2016). In addition to these, Russia is planning to create new divisions along its Ukrainian and Belarusian borders (Dyner, 2016).

Based on the Soviet military legacy of strategic deployment, the Russian troops stationed in the ex-Soviet space in the Black Sea region are highly alert and combat ready. Qualitatively, the Russian troops deployed to the shared neighbourhood countries are both better equipped and trained than local armed forces. In the last few years, especially following the annexation of Crimea, the region has witnessed a Russian military build-up. The Russian deployment of numerous coastal and air defence systems, alongside with the enlargement of the Black Sea Fleet and the Russian Air Force units make Russia appear to be the most prepared for a military confrontation in the region at this stage.

The 2007 wave of EU enlargement brought the EU to the shores of the Black Sea. Despite the significant challenges the Black Sea region harbours, the EU carries out just a handful of initiatives directed towards addressing developments in the region. According to the European Union Global Strategy published in 2016, state and societal resilience is the EU's strategic priority in the neighbourhood; however, several frozen conflicts, unrecognized states, and increasing militarization seriously undermine the EU's regional goals. Witnessing the unravelling of previously frozen conflicts into active ones along with the annexation of



disputed territories in the shared neighbourhood countries disposed towards Western integration, made the EU weary of the militarization of the Black Sea.

The Black Sea Synergy of the European Commission is not an independent strategy, but rather an EU initiative that complements the Union's other regional policies such as the pre-accession Strategy (for Turkey) and Strategic Partnership with Russia (Fischer, 2009: 342). Though none of the existing regional policies towards the Black Sea provide a decisive security umbrella. Thus, in the Black Sea's security realm, much falls on the capabilities of local states. With a reluctant Bulgaria, the EU leans on Turkey as its strategic ally capable of balancing out Russian militarization in the Black Sea region. Romania's role, however, has been upgraded in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture. Today, NATO maintains a presence in the Black Sea region through the Tailored Forward Presence (TFP) strategy, which encompasses strategic multinational land, air, and sea deployments in Romania. Importantly, Romania is also home to the Aegis Ashore ballistic missile defence site in Deveselu that was operationalized in August 2016.

Complementing EU and NATO efforts, the United States is also implementing the European Initiative for Restoring Confidence in bordering with Russia's NATO member-states, signalling an increasing presence of American forces in the region. One effect of military tensions in the region is that Turkish efforts for multilateral maritime cooperation in the Black Sea, such as the Black Sea Naval Force and wider cooperation initiatives such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, have been stalled. However, the NATO allies have designed joint regional multinational exercises such as the annual *Sea Breeze* to reinforce its credibility in the Black Sea.

Even though Turkey is the primary NATO military power in the Black Sea region, and the only actor strategically and financially capable of matching Russia's presence the area, Ankara has shown significant reluctance to stand up against Moscow. Even though there has been a decline in the Turkish defence spending over the last fifteen years, Turkey still maintains the standard NATO defence spending target of 2% of GDP, and is the only NATO member state in the region to hold up to the standard minimum for defence expenditure (Delanoë, 2016). Turkey even proposed to preside over NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (Spreadhead Force) in 2021. But the Middle East remains the key priority for Ankara, not the Black Sea. With the war in Syria, the ongoing fight against the Kurdistan's Workers Party (PKK) in the South-Eastern region of Turkey, and the concurrent migration crisis in the Mediterranean Sea, Turkey has concentrated its strategy and security priorities on the state's south and south-eastern flanks (Delanoë, 2016). Thus, Turkey has withdrawn from its Black Sea activism and has reached a common ground with Russia so as to maintain stability, despite Crimea and the conflict in Ukraine.

Turkey demonstrated its relative indifference to the growing Russian militarization of the Black Sea in 2014 when it sent its naval task force to the horn of Africa for training manoeuvres during the Russian annexation of Crimea. Moreover, the two sides have restored bilateral relations after the crisis caused by the shooting down of a Russian jet



fighter in Turkish airspace in November 2015. Notably, Russia's Black Sea Fleet and Turkey's navy held joint exercises in the Black Sea in April 2017, while Ankara's decision to buy the Russian-made missile defence system S-400 was widely criticized in Europe as it hinted at a strategic shift in Turkey's defence doctrine away from its traditional NATO allies. The head of NATO's military committee Gen. Petr Pavel stated: "Clearly, it will not be interoperable with NATO," and "... they're going to have to consider that if they go forward" (Woody, 2017).

Still, the impact that Russia's militarization of the Black Sea has on EU-Turkish relations is minimal when compared to other issues of concern between the two parties. For the EU, the militarization of the Black Sea is viewed not only as a regional problem, but as a development that will have a direct, consequential impact on the security of its member states. Furthermore, the EU believes Russia's militarized posture in the Black Sea indicates broader systemic challenges to the post-Cold War, norms-based, European security architecture (European Parliament, 2015: 5-6). To this end, Turkey supports a limited NATO reinforcement of the Black Sea region as long as it does not impact the Montreux Convention (1936). Nevertheless, as its priorities in the Black Sea do not necessarily coincide with those of the EU (as on energy transport), Turkey would not risk dismantling its relations with Russia in support of EU security interests. Given the evolving security climate, the role of reinforcing European and Euro-Atlantic interests in the Black Sea will increasingly fall on the shoulders of Bulgaria and Romania. Thus, for the EU and NATO, the combination of Russian-led military reinforcement in the Black Sea, Ankara's deviation from the traditional Euro-Atlantic security perceptions in the region, and the strengthened defence cooperation between Ankara and Moscow mark a historic shift in the strategic military balance in the Black Sea region.

## **2.5 Instability in the South Caucasus fuelled by protracted conflicts and radicalisation**

Given the strategic location of the South Caucasus, the security of this area is an issue of critical importance for both Turkey and the EU and may provide a future basis for the two parties to cooperate in order to maintain security in the region. Currently, potential instability stems from several trends in the region including weak states; the unresolved conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh; the lingering possibility of Russian intervention in the region, and the latent danger of radicalization. These trends will be analysed in detail, highlighting how each factor could drive Turkey and the EU into either convergence, cooperation or conflict.

For the purposes of this analysis, it is also important to note the existence of overlapping EU/Turkish interests. Major pipelines that run through the region deliver energy both to Turkey and the EU and help to reduce Gazprom's leverage over the latter. The EU also has a political interest in combatting the rise of pro-Russian/anti-Western sentiment in the Caucasus, while Turkey has a clear interest in restricting Russia's presence on the northern



shore of the Black Sea as it seeks to reshape itself as a regional power in the West and Central Asia. Thus, pragmatically countering a resurgent Russia is likely to be the greatest vehicle for EU/Turkish cooperation in the short to medium term.

The world is entering a geopolitical recession (Bremmer & Kupchan 2017: 2), whereby Europe is facing significant domestic challenges and is retreating from involvement in world affairs. This phenomenon of an inward-looking Europe has facilitated the emergence of a multipolar, rather than multilateral, geopolitical landscape. In this landscape, the foreign policies of Russia, and other regional powers like Iran and Turkey, have become bolder and self-serving. Rather than identifying common ground and working towards a compromise, regional powers now seek to advance their own interests, often at the expense of liberal, democratic values that are seen as “Western”. This may complicate EU-Turkish relations, as Turkey strengthens its own interests in the Caucasus at the expense of the interests of the EU – countering Russian incursions in the region and avoiding further “hot” conflicts in Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Nevertheless, it is in both EU and Turkish interests to look to curb Russian advances in the South Caucasus and work to resolve existing territorial conflicts.

State instability in the countries of the South Caucasus is a major underlying issue for the regional security situation. Among the major challenges to state stability in the region are economic circumstances that threaten to elevate widespread dissatisfaction into open discontent; the modest experience of democratic transition of power in Georgia and its absence in Armenia and Azerbaijan; and the very real danger of renewed hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh. In the short to medium term, EU-Turkish security interests coincide in curbing Russian advances in the South Caucasus and working to resolve existing territorial conflicts in the region.

### **Frozen conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia**

Georgia’s two breakaway regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, have become *de facto* extensions of the Russian Federation following the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. In March 2017, for instance, the Russian defence ministry signed an agreement with the South Ossetian *de facto* authorities permitting the Russia to employ soldiers from South Ossetia as contractors (Al Jazeera, 2017). This follows a treaty concluded in November 2014, which integrated the customs regimes of the two governments and allowed free movement across the common border. In the same month, the Russian government also signed an agreement with Abkhazia in 2014, partially integrating the two militaries (Financial Times, 2014). Russian soldiers continue to stoke tensions by arbitrarily changing the demarcation line between South Ossetia and Georgia, in what has been described as a “creeping occupation” by Tbilisi. The militarization of the two regions complicates any attempts for normalization of relations between Georgia and Russia. Successive governments have committed themselves to a deeper Euro-Atlantic partnership. Notable developments include the signing of an Association Agreement with the EU in June 2014, which led to the creation of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area and to Georgian citizens gaining visa-free access



to the Union in March 2017. While the EU has condemned Russian borderization in Georgia, the Union is hesitant to engage in measures that will inflame tensions with Russia. The EU intends to preserve its status as a mediator along the frozen conflict zones through the EU Monitoring Mission, while providing significant financial support for peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives. Thus, the EU's primary security priority is centred on preventing an outbreak of conflict in the contested territories, while deterring Russia from advancing any further into Georgia.

The primary obstacle to Turkish cooperation to counter Russian interventions in Georgia are its economic ties with Russia. Turkish construction companies have had a significant presence in Russia since the 1990s, with involvement in high profile projects such as the reconstruction of the State Duma. In November 2015, shortly after the downing of the Russian jet by the Turkish air force, it was estimated that as many as 87,000 Turks were working in the Russian construction sector (RT, 2015). In addition, Turkey has long been a popular Russian tourist destination, with two to four million visitors annually from 2007-2015 (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2017). This economic relation extends into the security sector, as Turkey is finalizing the details of a 2 billion USD purchase of an S-400 missile defence system from Russia Anadolu Agency, 2017). This economic interdependence and an alignment of security issues in Syria to counter the Kurds has helped to push Erdogan towards a reconciliation with Moscow in 2016 and may stall any future actions deemed hostile to Russian interests.

### Conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan

The Nagorno-Karabakh question remains a Damoclean sword for the South Caucasus, as the flare up in April 2016 demonstrated. Worryingly, it currently serves the interests of elites in both Armenia and Azerbaijan by fuelling nationalistic attitudes that crowd out other concerns. Nonetheless, a large-scale conflict here would be devastating for both sides, hence tit-for-tat responses are the most likely *modus operandi* for both sides.

A formal ceasefire has existed in Nagorno-Karabakh since 1994, yet, peace has remained elusive. Bilateral diplomacy has continued sporadically throughout the last two decades, largely on the sidelines of regional and international summits. Nevertheless, successive Armenian and Azerbaijani heads of state have proven willing to negotiate, usually through the OSCE Minsk Group: co-chaired by the U.S., Russia and France. Most recently, Presidents Sargsyan and Aliyev met at a summit held by the Group in Bern, Switzerland in December 2015, where they supported ongoing work to reduce violence and work towards a settlement following the Madrid Principles (OSCE, 2009). Unfortunately, a tenable solution for both sides has not been forthcoming, due to the necessity of one or the other to compromise. Partisans of the self-declared Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, for instance, have refused to entertain the idea of forming a common state with Azerbaijan whilst remaining autonomous. Similarly, Azerbaijan demands the return of the seven districts seized around the conflict zone, which include the vital Armenia-Karabakh land corridor of Lachin. Azerbaijan has deliberately hampered the peace process by vetoing the extension of the OSCE offices in Yerevan, having already forced the



closure of the Baku office, to the effect that the primary international peacebuilding organization lacks a regional presence (Commonspace.eu, 2017).

Although both the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan have called for peace, their efforts to compromise have been challenged by domestic critique. The intensity of popular feeling regarding the conflict should not be underestimated: the memory of ethnic cleansing is recent enough that as many as 900,000 displaced Azerbaijanis bear a very real claim, and personal connection, to property in the region (EPRS, 2016). The current Armenian government has held power since the break-up of the Soviet Union, highlighting their military victory over Azerbaijan to stoke nationalist support. Both sides have spilt enough blood that a disadvantageous compromise by politicians now would lead to severe domestic recrimination. Biased media on both sides have also played a role in fanning the flames of conflict, by increasing national sentiments and demonizing the opposing side. Impetus to the conflict has been added by the fact that the 2016 episode marked the first time that Azerbaijan gained territory since the 1994 ceasefire. Thus, on the Azerbaijani side there have been calls to resume the conflict and build on the military success of 2016. In Armenia there have been calls for a counterattack designed to shatter Azerbaijan's newfound confidence and bring its government back to the negotiating table.

Complicating matters are international ties that threaten to draw in outside forces. Turkey itself is closely involved in the conflict, with then Prime Minister Erdogan having reportedly said that Turkey "will support Azerbaijan to the end" following the signing of the Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support with Azerbaijan in 2010 (Soguel, 2016).. This is in addition to maintaining a longstanding trade embargo on Armenia (Soguel, 2016). Similarly, Russia is a *de facto* security guarantor of Armenia, with two bases in the country and joint membership of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). CSTO follows the principle that an attack on one member is an attack on all members. The CSTO's position here is unclear, however, with a stated declaration in 2008 pledging to resolve frozen conflicts (such as Nagorno-Karabakh) by peaceful means (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008). Nonetheless, in a January 2017 press Q&A session, Sergei Lavrov refused to distance Russia from the conflict, stating that Nagorno-Karabakh was no longer solely an internal Azerbaijani affair (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). Russia's role in the conflict is made more complicated by its sale of arms to Azerbaijan. Since the ceasefire of 1994, 59% of Azerbaijani military purchases have come from Russia; while the latter has also supplied 89% of Armenia's (SIPRI, 2017). This has led to allegations that Russia is deliberately promoting instability in order to preserve its influence in the region. One of the few things the two combatants actually agree on is a refusal to permit Russian peacekeepers from having a role in the conflict.

For now, the conflict seems set to continue in the long term without a serious peace deal. On the Armenian side, the longer they hold out, the greater the opportunity for the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic to continue developing its own institutions and cultural identity in an effort to gain international recognition as a state. For the Azerbaijanis, their claim on the region grows weaker with every passing year as seized land passes to a new generation of "beneficial" Nagorno-Karabakh owners uninvolved in the original expulsions. Thus, it is in Azerbaijan's



interest to continue testing the Line of Control in the hope of further territorial gains while their oil revenues allow them to do so.

EU and Turkish interests converge regarding the conflict, as both parties desire a stable security situation in the region. The EU continues to call for peace, supporting the OSCE and Minsk Group, but has little leverage outside these avenues. The EU Foreign Affairs Spokeswoman Maja Kocijancic stressed that the 2016 flare-up is "a stark reminder that the status quo is unsustainable" and given Armenia and Azerbaijan have both committed to peace, "the EU expects de-escalation and restraint in deeds as well as in words" (EEAS, 2016). Turkey, is also directly involved in conflict resolution, working with Russia in an upgraded format of the Minsk Group. As such, working to resolve the conflict peacefully is the most likely way EU-Turkish policy convergence will manifest. Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlut Cavusoglu also stressed the need for peaceful resolution, noting that "Turkey will [continue to] support a diplomatic and peaceful solution to this matter within the internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan and its territorial integrity" and that "the normalization of our relations with Russia will definitely help in this regard" (Anadolu Agency, 2016).

Russian involvement is necessary, given its influence in Armenia. Turkey will participate because Ankara does not wish for hostilities to re-emerge, as these will challenge Turkey to act and thus set them up for conflict with the Kremlin. Turkey's security apparatus is currently bogged down handling the aftermath of the attempted coup, the intensification of the PKK conflict, and securing its southeastern border. Moreover, Turkey has only recently achieved a hard-won rapprochement with Russia over the downing of its jet in Syria and the assassination of the Russian ambassador to Turkey. For this reason, the Turkish side has to handle security issues with caution until other pressures have receded, which will not happen in the short term. Meanwhile, although remaining a largely passive observer to the conflict, the EU has no desire to see fighting add fuel to the refugee crisis or affect the insulation Azerbaijan provides from Russian gas leverage (Cornell, 2017: 149). Therefore, in the likely event that fresh conflict erupts around Nagorno-Karabakh, the EU and Turkey will cooperate to achieve de-escalation.

### **Radicalization in the South Caucasus**

Islamic radicalization in the South Caucasus is a real and present danger for Georgia and Azerbaijan in the long term. Simultaneously, the region might serve as a transit route for foreign fighters joining the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. Radicalization is happening in the region, and there are several factors that may exacerbate it. Economic hardship and poor governance may fuel dissatisfaction and push citizens, and in particular youth, towards extremism.

This issue is made potentially dangerous by the turmoil in the Middle East where destabilization has produced ISIS, which recruits adherents from many countries, including those of the South Caucasus. Various extremist groups might be interested in increasing the tensions in the region, as the establishment of a Chechen ISIS affiliate shows (VOA News, 2016).



In Georgia, potential hazards include the proximity of Chechnya and radical elements from the region, and growing disillusionment with the market economy and democracy (Cornell, 2005: 52). The Pankisi Gorge Kists, a Georgian ethnic group related to Chechens, does have members participating in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq (Scharbrodt et al (eds.) 2016: 247). A recent approximation of the number of Pankisi Kists fighting in Iraq and Syria was around 50-70. However, it was noted by local residents that there has been a decrease in the number of recruits from this region joining the militants (Scharbrodt et al. (eds.) 2016: 255). In August 2015, the Defence Minister of Georgia said that the country did not have issues with radicalization, though she stressed the need to mitigate the risk of future recruitment (Khidasheli 2015).

Just like in Georgia, in Azerbaijan the "modest but noticeable" rise in Islamic radicalism has been associated with disillusionment with socio-economic conditions in the country, with government officials contending that over 900 citizens have travelled to fight in Syria and Iraq (Barrett, 2017). Even before the conflict in Syria and Iraq, the growth of Wahhabist elements has been witnessed in the capital and the North, which borders the "hot" North Caucasus of Russia; while the increase of Shias was observed in the country's South, which borders Iran (Cornell, 2005: 52). Additionally, there is a Salafist influence stemming from Dagestan in Russia (Stratfor, 2012).

However, the Azerbaijani regime is strongly opposed to the spread of Islamism in the country. The government response to Islamic organizations has been harsh. For example, in 2015 the government ordered a large-scale security operation in Baku, detaining at least a dozen people suspected of radical activities (RarioFreeEurope, 2015). Following this, the leader of an Islamic group called Muslim Unity Movement (MUN) along with seventeen others were arrested on charges of terrorism and homicide in 2016 (Mamedov, 2016). This suggests that, for the time being, the government appears to be in control of the situation.

Turkey's security concerns in the South Caucasus are greater due to its proximity to the Caucasus and its role as a transit country for violent extremists traveling from Russia and the Caucasus to Syria and Iraq. Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan are increasingly worried about radicalized returning foreign fighters, facing complex challenges to de-radicalise and reintegrate those who have come back from Syria and Iraq. Highlighting this challenge is the case of Akhmed Chatayev, a high profile known extremist who is considered to be the mastermind behind the 2016 Istanbul airport attack. Chatayev was able to cross the border between Turkey and Georgia before being killed by Georgian Security Services in Tbilisi on 22 November 2017 and an investigation into how he crossed the border has been launched (Security Services Georgia, 2018).

In contrast to Turkey, the European Union lacks an immediate border with the region, which makes spill over from potential problems less acute. To counter potential issues with radicalisation and returnee fighters in the South Caucasus, Turkey and the EU will work together to prevent the aggravation of instability and will cooperate to contain extremism in the region.



### 3. Analysis of Key Drivers and the Status of EU-Turkish Security Relations in the Region

The above sections delineate pivotal developments that have coloured the complexion of the EU-Turkish security relationship in the Eastern Neighbourhood. A series of drivers undergirding EU-Turkish responses to the evolving security context have inspired both conflicting and cooperative approaches.

#### 3.1 Driver 1: Strategic distrust towards Russia's objectives

Strategic distrust towards Russia's objectives aggravated by Russia's invasion of Crimea, military involvement in the protracted war in Ukraine, exploitation of frozen conflicts in the Caucasus, and militarization of the Black Sea has had significant ramifications for EU and Turkish security calculations and strategies individually, as well as for their combined security relationship. At this stage, Russia has identified two chief objectives: first, to be acknowledged among the great powers who set the rules and the agenda in international politics; and second, a recognition, implicit or explicit, of what Russia considers its "sphere of influence," which means controlling the strategic orientation of countries in its periphery. What is less clear, however, is how far Russia is willing to go to achieve their goals. Thus, it is the inability to determine the extent of the *means* Russia is willing to employ to achieve their objectives that will complicate the EU-Turkish security relationship.

Russia's actions in the Neighbourhood are received differently by EU member-states. Members like France and Germany, while harshly condemning Russian aggression, are hesitant to pursue a zero-sum approach to Russia, fearing that it would invite negative consequences in the energy sector. Many leading EU member-states also maintain that Russia's aggressive posture is chiefly a response to American involvement in the region rather than EU objectives. Therefore, the threat Russia poses is (evidently) not exclusive to EU member-states and is diffused, with slightly greater animosity aimed at the United States.

On the other hand, member-states along the Eastern Flank whose threat perceptions of Russia emanate from their geopolitical proximity, advocate for a hard-line security approach to Moscow, calling for more muscular measures in the fields of defence and security to respond to and protect against Russian aggression. Internal divisions with regard to the handling of Russia have, at times, hampered the EU's ability to devise and execute a coherent, unified Russia policy.

Nevertheless, the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy adopted in June 2016 is not particularly hawkish or focused on Russia, but acknowledges that "managing the relationship with Russia represents a key strategic challenge" (European Union, 2016). Brussels has expressed its willingness to "strengthen the EU, enhance the resilience of [its] eastern neighbours, and uphold their right to determine freely their approach towards the EU." The Strategy also highlights the deep divisions among European



member states about Russia and interdependence with Moscow, stating that Brussels "will engage Russia to discuss disagreements and cooperate if and when [their] interests overlap"(European Union, 2016). Thus, the EU is committed to a dual approach that intends to consolidate a strong position (*deterrence*) with open channels for meaningful dialogue (*diplomacy*). This *Global Strategy* is coherent and continuous with the approach made through the five guiding principles for EU-Russia relations agreed by the US foreign ministers with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini in March 2016 (European Union, 2016).<sup>2</sup>

Turkey faces similar uncertainty regarding Russia's objectives in the Eastern Neighbourhood, but has undertaken an approach that differs slightly from its European counterparts. Turkey has opened and sustained diplomatic channels with Moscow to preserve its economic ties and energy interests in Central Asia and the South Caucasus. Despite perceived Russian aggression and participation in conflicts where Turkey is also involved, Ankara is unwilling to pursue direct, confrontational security measures that might place at odds with Moscow. At the same time, however, Turkey seeks to secure its role as a regional hegemon, countering the expanding influence of Russia and Iran.

Thus, Turkey and the EU have been similarly cautious in their handling of Russia, acknowledging that Moscow plays a significant role in energy, security, and—to a lesser extent—economic relations in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Yet, Turkey's enhanced cooperation with Russia in economic, energy, and — as of November 2017 with Turkey's procurement of Russian air and missile defence systems (S-400 missile system) — security domains have laid the foundation for divergent EU-Turkish security relations (Toucas, 2018).

### 3.2 Driver 2: Shifting projections of power in the Eastern Neighbourhood and Russia's contest for influence

Shifting projections of power in the Eastern Neighbourhood and Russia's contest for influence have caused the EU and Turkey's security agenda to overlap, particularly in terms of preventing further Russian expansion and ensuring the economic and political stability of countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood. As Russia assumes an increasingly aggressive regional posture, one that is unlikely to change in the near future, the EU will be pressed to decide whether its balanced policy of diplomacy and deterrence effectively meets its immediate security interests.

Similarly, if Russian hostility continues through militarizing key strategic regions such as the Black Sea, Turkey will likely be pressured by its NATO counterparts as well as EU member-states to adopt a stronger stance against Moscow, either through encouraging Turkish

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<sup>2</sup> The five principles go as follows: full implementation of the Minsk agreements to settle the war in Eastern Ukraine; closer ties with Russia's former Soviet neighbors; strengthening EU resilience to Russian threats; selective engagement with Russia on certain issues such as counter-terrorism; and support for people-to-people contacts. See [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/5490/remarks-high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-press-conference-following-foreign\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/5490/remarks-high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-press-conference-following-foreign_en)



participation in levying sanctions against Russia or easing Ankara’s strict adherence to the Montreux Convention to permit NATO member countries greater access to expand maritime security operations in the Black Sea. Turkey’s perceived ambivalence towards Russia’s reinforced military positioning in the region will pose a challenge for EU-Turkish security relations in the future. Ankara is faced with two potential responses in the Black Sea: cooperate with NATO and Western powers to augment NATO’s military presence in the Black Sea to counteract Russia, or continue to downplay the role of Russian militarization of Crimea and permit Russia to bolster its military presence in the region—a move that would exacerbate already fraught ties with NATO partners and could potentially trigger Turkey’s official pivot towards Russia.

It is imperative to note, however, that Turkey’s ‘red line’ in the Black Sea is any violation of the Montreux Convention—a line that affects NATO forces and Russia equally. The Montreux Convention is paramount to Turkish regional security and influence, and holds tremendous historic significance. Having demonstrated unwavering commitment to strictly uphold the Convention, any activity on the side of NATO or Russia that violates the agreement would undoubtedly provoke an aggressive response from Turkey.

With these developments in mind, the Black Sea will thus likely serve as an arena of conflicting EU-Turkish security interests in the short to medium-term.

### **3.3 Driver 3: Protracted conflicts and general instability in the Eastern Neighbourhood fuelled by Russian intervention**

Protracted conflicts and general instability in the Eastern Neighbourhood fuelled by Russian intervention have generated both cooperative and conflictual responses from the EU and Turkey. In the Caucasus, Turkey’s direct involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute on the side opposite of Russia may drive Turkey closer to the EU, encouraging a multilateral approach to resolving the conflict. If Turkey continues to act alone or with Russia solely on a bilateral basis in Nagorno-Karabakh, it places the Turks at a structural disadvantage in its conflict resolution efforts (Onis and Yilnaz, 2015). Similarly, the EU-Turkish security relationship did not diverge significantly in response to Russia’s occupation of Georgia and Moscow’s support for secessionist movements in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Turkey, weary of its own Kurdish separatist movement, rejects South Ossetian and Abkhazian claims of sovereignty and condemns Russia for supporting the two breakaway regions. Yet, the trend holds that Turkey remains unwilling to undertake measures that would seriously disrupt its economic and energy ties with Moscow. Similarly, the EU, intent on maintaining a mediatory role in the conflict in Georgia, has not approached the situation in zero-sum terms, instead extending aid to help Georgia achieve its economic and democratic reforms while encouraging channels for dialogue with the Russians to resolve the territorial dispute. Thus, in the event of renewed conflict in the South Caucasus, the EU-Turkish security relationship is more likely to be cooperative, with both parties opposing Russia but seeking to avoid military escalation.



Where the EU and Turkish security relationship primarily conflicts is in their handling of the protracted conflict in Ukraine. The EU has adopted a far tougher response to developments in Ukraine, while the Turkish reaction has been tempered by its relative dependence on Russia. Turkey, chiefly focused on advancing its own regional ambitions, has not signalled a willingness to levy sanctions against the Russians and has offered tepid support for strengthening the Alliance's Eastern flank. However, in line with Western powers, Ankara explicitly reaffirms the importance of maintaining Ukraine's territorial integrity. If divisions between EU and Turkish security responses to the crisis in Ukraine become more evident, it is probable that the Russians will leverage such divisions to their own advantage, seeking to undermine unified NATO responses to the conflict.

A factor that has not yet galvanized Turkish participation in the conflict, but one that could potentially trigger a more robust Turkish response in the face of internal pressure, is the 300,000 Crimean Tartars that comprise 12 percent of the population in the Crimean Peninsula (Conant, 2014). Turkish leadership has a history of defending Crimean Tartars, with whom Turkey shares ethnic ties. As a home to over five million citizens of Crimean Tartar descent, Turkey may be inclined to intervene on behalf of its ethnic kinsmen should their security on the Crimean Peninsula be seriously threatened as a result of the Russian occupation and military campaign (Adilgizi, 2014).

Nonetheless, we contend that protracted conflicts and ongoing instability in the Eastern Neighbourhood will nudge the EU-Turkish security relationship towards conflict in the short to medium-term, with scattered points of cooperation primarily in the South Caucasus.

### 3.4 Explaining Turkey's Divergent Approach

Despite similar threat perceptions, Turkey's approach towards Russia has been characteristically less confrontational than the EU, resulting in points of cooperation between Moscow and Ankara in geopolitical, energy and economic spheres. Through the 'Astana format' launched in 2017, Turkey, Russia and Iran are working to negotiate an end to the Syrian conflict. While Turkey's demands in Syria are in many ways incongruent with those of Russia and Iran, all countries stand to gain from bringing an end to the fighting, stabilizing the country, and facilitating post-war reconstruction.

Moreover, Turkey continues to rely extensively on Russia to meet its energy needs due to severely limited domestic resources. After plans to launch the Turkish Stream pipeline were frozen following the downing of the Russian fighter jet in 2015, President Erdogan issued a tepid apology to President Putin for the crisis, which he accepted the following year. In October 2016 the two countries signed agreements reviving plans to carry out the Turkish Stream project, which is projected to deliver 15.75 billion cubic meters of gas to Turkey and southeastern Europe by 2020 (Kirisici and Baev, 2017). The pipeline will transform Turkey into a powerful gas hub and lessen Russia's dependency on Ukraine as an energy transit partner. Further cooperation between Moscow and Ankara in energy and infrastructural development is demonstrated by an agreement granting Russia's State Energy Corporation



(Rosatom) the rights to build a 20 billion dollar nuclear power plant in southern Turkey (Kirisci and Baev, 2017).

Economically, ties between Turkey and Russia are robust, though not enough to render the EU-Turkish economic relationship insignificant. Russo-Turkish bilateral trade increased fivefold between 2002 and 2013 while foreign direct investment (FDI) between the two countries has also risen steadily (Kirisci and Baev, 2017). In 2015, Turkish FDI into Russia reached \$420 million, an increase that stems primarily from the growing presence of Turkish construction companies in the Russian market (Kirisci and Baev, 2017). In 2014, 14.8 percent of global projects carried out by Turkish construction companies took place in Russia (Simsek, Simsek and Zhanaltav, 2017). Tourism is another key area facilitating closer economic bilateral relations between the two states. Turkey has become a popular destination for Russian tourists: more than 4 million Russian tourists visited Turkey in 2014 (against 950,000 in 2002), contributing close to \$3.5 billion to the Turkish economy (Kirisci and Baev, 2017).

Yet amidst increasing cooperation between Turkey and Russia, the EU's central role in the Turkish economy cannot be understated or, as of now, replaced. The EU remains Turkey's largest trade partner and source of foreign direct investment (Kirisci and Baev, 2017). There is no indication that Russia will surpass the EU in this regard in the near future. Turkey and the EU also engage in bilateral cooperation in the energy sector: namely in the fields of gas and electricity, renewable and efficient energy, and nuclear energy and carbon markets (Zachmann and Tagliapietra, 2017). Therefore, Turkey's divergent approach toward Russia cannot be explained exclusively by energy, economic, or geopolitical dimensions as it remains largely reliant on the EU on all three fronts.

The more likely explanation for Turkey's handling of Russia rests in the shifting political character of the Turkish state under the leadership of President Erdogan. President Erdogan, much like President Putin, has grown alienated with the West in recent years. Frustration with the EU and United States come in the midst of efforts by President Erdogan to expand and consolidate his domestic authority, pushing Turkey closer to an autocracy than a democracy. Both leaders in Russia and Turkey view Western democracy promotion as a threat to regime security, thus lending itself to deep mistrust between Turkey and its Western partners. For the United States, relations with Turkey deteriorated following the failed 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, which President Erdogan believes was orchestrated by the US. President Erdogan's frustration with the EU stems from the glacial pace of EU accession negotiations—a matter that was only aggravated when European leaders condemned violations of democratic freedoms and human rights in Turkey. While Turkey continues to rely extensively on the EU for economic stability and NATO for security protections, Erdogan's explicit scepticism of the liberal world order and Western hegemony as well as his own authoritarian leanings make him an attractive target for the Kremlin (Kirisci and Baev, 2017). Thus, the shifting internal character of Turkey's political regime, rather than tangible developments in economic, energy, and geopolitical realms, is a more



likely explanation for Turkey's divergent approach towards Russia. Moving forward, it will be important to consider the impact of personal leadership on the future of EU-Turkish security relations.

### 3.5 Key Future Driver: information warfare

In the coming years, one key driver will likely have a significant effect on the EU-Turkish security relationship: Russia's information warfare tactics. Russian activity in this realm threatens to severely destabilize the security landscape in both the EU and Turkey, creating a security context in which EU and Turkish interests will likely coincide.

Russia's expanding information warfare tactics include computer network operations, electronic warfare, psychological operations, and information operations (Connell and Vogler, 2017). Such tactics have demonstrated alarming global reach, permeating the systems and minds of individuals in both developed and transitioning democratic states. Cyberwarfare, a sub-component of Russia's information warfare framework, is likely to play a central role in the Kremlin's offensive and defensive measures in the coming years—diversifying the nature of Russia's ongoing military operations and adding to its deterrence structure (Connell and Vogler, 2017).

In 2007, the first large-scale Russian cyber-attack aimed at achieving a strategic outcome in a neighbouring state was launched in Estonia. The attack forced a majority of Estonia's internet websites to either shut down or sever international connections, which prevented much of the country from communicating or sharing information with the outside world. The attack was carried out in waves. During the first, Estonian government sites, websites of political parties, Estonian banks, and news and telecommunications outlets were targeted (Connell and Vogler, 2017). The second wave marked a series of more sophisticated attacks that culminated in Estonia's largest bank, Hansabank, being forced to shut down its online operations (Lander, 2007). The third wave followed shortly as hackers infiltrated individual websites, defacing them and posting their own messages (Davis, 2007). The Russian cyber-attack in Estonia was pivotal for a number of reasons. First, Estonia's NATO membership did not deter the Russians from carrying out the attack. This raised the question of whether Article V of NATO's charter extended to include cyber-attacks in member states. Secondly, it highlighted NATO and Western partners' lack of capacity to respond to a non-kinetic attack. Finally, it illustrated how Russia was capable of evading responsibility for the attack through its use of online hackers—a method that continues to prevent the international community from holding Russia directly accountable for its cyber actions today.

The 2008 War in Georgia marked an important turning point for Russian cyber operations when it leveraged its cyber capabilities to support its conventional forces. Days before Russian forces began air strikes in South Ossetia, hackers launched a coordinated cyber-attack aimed at shutting down government sites and communication channels. Furthermore, the Russians have engaged in covert cyber activity throughout the ongoing



conflict in Ukraine, which has posed unforeseen, complex challenges for the Ukrainian government and its Western allies.

Since 2013, Russian cyber activity has targeted key infrastructure systems, influenced political and economic outcomes, and threatened crucial security structures. Perhaps most importantly, Moscow has embraced an information warfare toolkit to be used in both times of war *and* peace and to perpetuate asymmetries in information and military tactics. General Valery Gerasimov echoed this sentiment in 2013 when he stated, “The role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and in many cases they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness” (Branford, 2017).

Russian-linked cyber-attacks in 2015 targeted a number of European entities including: France’s TV5Monde broadcaster, shutting it down and nearly destroying its systems; deputies in Germany’s lower house of parliament, causing the loss of 16 gigabytes of crucial data; and a Ukrainian power plant, leading to days of blackout (Branford, 2017). Russian cyber activities also aimed to sow political discord and generate public support for opposition parties in elections in France, Germany, Austria in tandem with a comprehensive election-meddling campaign executed in the United States. Countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood with explicit European and Euro-Atlantic integration ambitions have fallen prey to sustained Russian propaganda and disinformation campaigns through Russian-funded NGOs, television, radio, and social media. In 2015, Turkey also faced its first major confrontation with Russian cyber warfare tactics when 400,000 websites, including those of government institutions, were brought down (Murgia, 2015). Since 2015, Russian-linked cyber-attacks have targeted Turkey’s financial sector and government institutions, which caused major leaks of official emails and had significant destabilizing effects. Russian information, and, more specifically cyber, warfare capabilities have a demonstrated capacity to target systems, people, and highly sensitive networks.

To date, the EU has been targeted by Russian information warfare tactics to a greater extent than Turkey. To respond to the growing risk, the European Parliament issued a directive in 2016 on the security of network and information systems, which aims to improve cybersecurity measures to safeguard essential services including online marketplaces, search engines, and cloud computing services vital to businesses, governments and citizens (Chernenko, Lukyanov and Demidov, 2018). However, the evolving cyber threat warrants multilateral cooperation and action—both the EU and Turkey are exposed.

Two possible scenarios arise for EU-Turkish relations in the face of the information warfare threat. The first, and most likely, scenario would be one of convergence, wherein the EU and Turkey cooperate to develop robust defensive cyber security capabilities to limit large-scale cyberattacks in the EU, Turkey, and around the world. Given Turkey’s NATO membership, initial talks could be structured in a bilateral format between the EU and NATO. Working together, EU and NATO partners could take the lead in developing a blueprint for an international code of cyber conduct (Chernenko, Lukyanov and Demidov, 2018). Upon establishing a foundation for rules and principles regulating cyber conduct, the



EU and NATO could launch multilateral talks with key powers including China and Russia. While concrete evidence links the Russian government to information warfare campaigns, the Russian state has also been the target of cybercrime and cyberattacks. Thus, all states stand to gain from an international code regulating cyber activity and from frameworks that would prevent terrorist organizations and non-state actors from weaponizing cyber capabilities (Chernenko, Lukyanov and Demidov, 2018). Furthermore, the EU and NATO could work together to mandate state reporting on cyber vulnerabilities, which would help identify existing weaknesses and protect against future attacks to critical systems and infrastructure (Chernenko, Lukyanov and Demidov, 2018). Finally, the EU and Turkey could cooperate in launching discussions on a global cybercrime convention, bringing together all major powers to agree on terms and conditions regarding cyber activity and conduct (Chernenko, Lukyanov and Demidov, 2018).

The second possible scenario for the EU-Turkish relationship in response to the information warfare threat in the Eastern Neighbourhood is that the EU and Turkey continue to develop their defensive cyber capabilities and frameworks independent of one another. In this scenario, given its extensive resources and recent advancements in the cyber realm, the EU would likely outpace Turkey in developing robust cybersecurity measures, leaving Turkey more exposed to future threats. If Turkey signalled its willingness to cooperate with the EU on the cybersecurity front, not only would Turkey benefit from enhanced protection, but it could potentially assume a more prominent position in negotiations to develop international frameworks for cybersecurity cooperation. The EU is thus an attractive partner for Turkish security cooperation in this regard.

#### 4. Conclusion

Security developments in the Eastern Neighbourhood since 1999 have, more often than not, generated conflicting responses from the EU and Turkey. Russia’s aggressive posture in the region lies at the core of EU-Turkish security challenges. While both parties maintain high levels of distrust towards Russia’s strategic objectives, Turkey has slowly been inching towards Russian cooperation while the EU maintains a much more strained relationship—a dynamic that will likely complicate the future EU-Turkish security relationship. Furthermore, the militarization of the Black Sea, protracted regional conflicts, and general instability fuelled by Russian intervention will continue to hinder EU-Turkish security cooperation. Neither the EU nor Turkey have an interest in allowing tensions with Russia escalate into full-scale conflict, nor do they wish to sever their critical energy ties with Moscow. However, the EU, given its robust economic and political apparatus, may be more strategically positioned to institute tougher measures against Russian aggression in the future. It is unlikely that such an approach would be shared by Turkey, bringing the EU-Turkey security relationship into conflict over matters such as the conflict in Ukraine or Russian and NATO military build-up along the Black Sea. Nonetheless, a handful of areas for EU-Turkish security



cooperation are scattered along the conflictual backdrop. These areas include curbing radicalization in the Caucasus, resolving frozen conflicts in the South Caucasus and Ukraine, and in enhancing cyber security measures to defend against Russian information warfare tactics. The future of the EU-Turkish security relationship is inextricably linked to the manner and extent to which each actor engages, and is willing to engage, with Russia. A significant imbalance in the way the EU and Turkey handle Russia will serve as the greatest potential strain on their security relationship.



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# ABOUT FEUTURE

FEUTURE sets out to explore fully different options for further EU-Turkey cooperation in the next decade, including analysis of the challenges and opportunities connected with further integration of Turkey with the EU.

To do so, FEUTURE applies a comprehensive research approach with the following three main objectives:

1. Mapping the dynamics of the EU-Turkey relationship in terms of their underlying historical narratives and thematic key drivers.
2. Testing and substantiating the most likely scenario(s) for the future and assessing the implications (challenges and opportunities) these may have on the EU and Turkey, as well as the neighbourhood and the global scene.
3. Drawing policy recommendations for the EU and Turkey on the basis of a strong evidence-based foundation in the future trajectory of EU-Turkey relations.

FEUTURE is coordinated by Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Wessels, Director of the Centre for Turkey and European Union Studies at the University of Cologne and Dr. Nathalie Tocci, Director of Istituto Affari Internazionali, Rome.

The FEUTURE consortium consists of 15 renowned universities and think tanks from the EU, Turkey and the neighbourhood.

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