THE FUTURE OF TURKISH - RUSSIAN RELATIONS: A STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE

Analyzing multiple dimensions of the relationship, the author argues that contrary to some experts' predictions, a strategic partnership between Turkey and Russia is not likely to develop in the near future. The author concludes that: the key question will be how Russia will react to the reduction of its influence in the post-Soviet area. It is very likely to respond by continuing with the current aggressive stance (interference with internal affairs of post-Soviet countries and military and economic conflicts), which will inevitably collide with the interests of Turkey. In effect, Ankara will be forced to revise its previous relatively "soft" policy towards Moscow.

Adam Balcer*

* Adam Balcer is an analyst at DEMOS-EUROPA - Centre for European Strategy, the Polish private think-thank dealing with the EU affairs.

Relations between Turkey and Russia are better than ever. As a consequence, some experts have concluded that Moscow and Ankara could build a strategic partnership. In fact, relations between the two countries have been improving over the past few years, largely because of the tension in Ankara's contacts with Brussels and Washington. The way from such tactical cooperation to a strategic partnership is very long, however. Looking from the strategic point of view, it is clear that in the long-term perspective rivalry is much more likely than cooperation.

Russia and Turkey have different demographic, economic and military potentials. In 2008, GDP PPP[2] in Turkey reached 915 billion dollars,[2] while in Russia its value was 2,260 billion dollars. Turkey has a population of more than 70 million people, and Russia has nearly 140 million. The Turkish army, considering various factors (contracted and used arms, budget, combat experience, training level and mobilization possibilities) can be ranked as the world's eighth strongest force. In turn, Russia, which has 4,800 active nuclear warheads, is one of the world's greatest military powers. Russia, however, has a problem with a low level of development of its conventional forces in comparison with the armies of the western powers and Turkey (training and technological advancement of arms). This difference in potential between Turkey and Russia affects their bilateral relations, as well as their policies in the post-Soviet area, where their interaction is strongest.

Bilateral Relations

The main reason behind the recent warming in Russian-Turkish contacts is the general worsening of their relations with the West, which is especially clear in the case of Turkey. Its relations with the U.S. have worsened as a consequence of the Bush administration's unilateral policies, especially the 2003 invasion of Iraq, while relations with the EU have been affected by a slowdown in accession negotiations, owing to the reluctance of key EU members (France and Germany) to accept Turkey as a member state.

Another aspect which has contributed to the improvement of Turkish-Russian relations is the development of increasingly strong economic bonds. Turkish-Russian trade exchange has been growing at a very fast rate. In 2008, Russia became Turkey's most significant trade partner.[3] Turkey will soon become Russia's

[1] PPP – Purchasing Power Parity.
[2] Data based on the International Monetary Fund's information.
[3] In 2008, Russia had an 11 percent share in Turkey's trade exchange. Data from *Dış Ticaret Müsteşarlığı* (Secretariat of Foreign Trade)

fourth largest partner.[4] The trade balance between the two countries clearly favors Russia. Turkey has no such trade deficit with any other of its major partners.[5] Turkish building companies are very active in Russia, which is their most important market.[6] Between 1989 and 2008, the total value of building contracts awarded to Turkish firms in Russia reached nearly 25 billion dollars. Last year almost 3 million Russian tourists visited Turkey (more than 10 percent of all tourists; the second largest group after Germans).[7]

The energy sector is at the base of Russian-Turkish economic relations. Raw materials, the main products imported by Turkey from Russia, have a large share in the Turkish energy balance.[8] For Russia, Turkey is the second largest outlet for natural gas and one of the major outlets for oil.[9] Turkey has ordered too much Russian gas at a high price, which it is obliged to buy under a contract signed with the Russian supplier. Moscow has responded unwillingly to Ankara's attempts to change the situation. Russia is also strongly interested in building nuclear power plants in Turkey. The Turkish government is to decide on this issue in June 2009; legal problems may stand in the way, however. Such dependence in the energy sector is closely linked to bilateral political relations. In the case of a political conflict with Russia, Ankara would find itself in a difficult situation, though not a hopeless one: Turkey has tools to obtain raw material supplies from alternative sources (e.g. gas ports, pipelines supplying gas from Iran and Azerbaijan, and in the next few years also from Egypt, maybe Iraq and Turkmenistan as a consequence of infrastructure development). On the other hand, Turkey controls the Straits, part of a trade route that is very important for Russia.

The post-Soviet Area

After the collapse of the USSR, new actors (the EU, the U.S., China, Iran and Turkey) began to penetrate areas which had been under Moscow's control for centuries (Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern Europe). Although the position of

[4] Turkey's share in Russian trade reached almost 5 percent in 2008. Data from the *Federal Statistical Service*.
[5] According to Turkish data, imports from Russia account for 80 percent of the exchange between the two countries. Turkish export to Russia is frequently impeded by Russian administrative decisions (e.g. refusals to recognize documents).
[6] Turkey is the world's third largest provider of building services, after the U.S. and China.
[7] Profits generated by tourism accounted for more than 3 percent of Turkey's GDP in 2008.
[8] Turkey imports approximately 65 percent of its gas, almost 40 percent of its oil and a significant part of its coal from Russia. Gas, oil and coal each have a nearly 30 percent share in the energy balance of Turkey.
[9] In 2007, Russia exported 23.5 billion m3 of gas to Turkey (15 percent of total exports).

Russia has weakened, it remains one of the key players in this “great game”. Meanwhile, Turkey is an important but certainly not a leading player. The strong position of Russia in the post-Soviet area is based on:

• clear demographic and economic superiority[10];
• strong institutional and personal links which date back to the communist period (pro-Russian lobby);
• control of transit of a significant part of oil and gas exports from Central Asia;
• pro-Russian minorities (ethnic Russians and part of Russian-speaking population);
• frozen conflicts and control of parastates (Abkhazia, Transnistria, Southern Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh);
• military bases (Belarus, Armenia, Ukraine, Abkhazia, Southern Ossetia, Transnistria and Tajikistan);
• numerous expatriate workers from almost all of the region’s countries working in Russia[11]; their remittances playing an important role in the economy of these countries (especially in Armenia, Kyrgystan, Moldova, Tajikistan)[12];
• huge influence of Russia on most post-Soviet economies.[13] However, in the latter case the position of Russia has significantly weakened since 1991. For example, China's influence has strengthened over the past few years in Central Asia.

Turkey’s activity in the post-Soviet area has increased significantly in recent years. Nevertheless Turkey’s potential in this part of Eurasia is a result of its strategic geopolitical position. Turkey controls the Bosphorus and the Dardanelle Straits, the only maritime “entrance” to the Black Sea region. They are strategically important for the entire region because the countries located by the Black Sea carry out either most or a very big part of their trade via this maritime route. Turkey is also a “natural” bridge between Central Asia, the Caucasus and Europe.

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[10] GDP PPP of all post-Soviet countries is equivalent to less than 40 percent of Russia’s GDP PPP. Their total population number is also smaller than that of Russia.

[11] According to the estimates the total number of illegal and legal workers from the The Commonwealth of Independent States working in Russia is around 7 to 8 million (including 2-3 million Ukrainians, 1-1,5 million Azeri Turks, and around 800,000 Uzbeks).

[12] The share of remittances in the economies of these countries was in 2006 from almost 20 percent of their GDP to more than 35 percent of GDP.

[13] Russia is also a dominant trade partner for Belarus (nearly 50 percent of exchange) and a very important partner for Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (from 15 percent to almost 25 percent). Data for 2008. Russian investments in post-Soviet countries are not large and play a significant role only in small countries (e.g. Armenia and Moldova), where foreign investments are limited.

Turkey's influence is strongest in the Caucasus, although it is also quite strong in the Black Sea basin and Central Asia. Ankara's position is based on economic relations and the cultural and historical bonds with Muslim and Turkic nations, who often constitute significant minorities in the region's countries.[14] Through Turkic summits and a new initiative to establish a parliament of Turkic countries, Turkey fosters the development of institutional links between Turkic countries. The Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation was established as part of the Turkish policy of supporting regional cooperation. Turkey also grants scholarships to students from post-Soviet states, especially the Turkic republics.

Turkey is the most important trade partner for Georgia (accounting for more than 15 percent of the country's trade exchange in 2008), a significant partner for Azerbaijan[15] and a very important investor (8 percent of investments in Georgia and 15 percent in Azerbaijan).[16] The number of citizens of post-Soviet countries visiting Turkey has significantly increased over the past few years. Some of them come in search of employment[17]. Turkey is also a rather important trade partner for Armenia, Ukraine, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan (having a share of between almost 4 percent to more than 7 percent of their respective trade)[18]. Trade between Turkey and some of those countries increased by as much as 160-180 percent in 2008. The development of transport infrastructure connecting Turkey with the Caucasus and Central Asia (the Transcaucasian railroad) will contribute to the enhancement of economic relations. Turkish firms hold a large share in the building sectors of most post-Soviet countries, and the number of building contracts has significantly increased over the past few years.[19]

[14] Crimean Tartars in Ukraine, the Gagauz in Moldova and Adjarians and Azeris in Georgia.
[15] Turkey certainly plays a very important part in Azeri imports (second place after Russia, with a share of almost 12 percent). In turn, data provided by the Azeri statistical office on exports and the shares of individual countries in Azerbaijan's exports are very imprecise because they radically differ depending on the definition. In 2007, Turkey was the main destination of Azeri exports (17 percent). This share was reduced more than 13 times in 2008, when the total Azeri exports increased more than eight times,
[16] Data on investments as per end of 2007.
[17] For example, in 2008 Turkey was visited by 830,000 Georgians (nearly 20 percent of the country's population), 460,000 Azeris (almost 6 percent) and 140,000 Moldovans (more than 4 percent).
[18] Trade with Turkey via Georgia is not taken into consideration in official Armenian sources. For this reason it is difficult to determine Turkey's real share in Armenia's trade balance. Its estimated level is at least several percent.
[19] Between 2003 and 2008, the value of building contracts implemented by Turkish firms in CIS countries, Russia excluded, reached nearly 20 billion dollars. The largest contracts were implemented in Turkmenistan (worth 8.2 billion dollars), Kazakhstan (5.7 billion dollars), Azerbaijan (2.4 billion dollars) and Ukraine (1.6 billion dollars). Data from: Yurtdışı Müteahhitlik ve Teknik Müşavirlik Hizmetleri (Engineering and Foreign Technical Consulting Service)

A potential Russian-Turkish alliance, according to some experts, could be based on the identical self-perception of Moscow and Ankara as Eurasian countries by definition: situated between the East and the West, taking a traditional view of international politics (zones of influence, sovereignty, significance of the armed forces, etc.), having an ambivalent attitude towards western values (especially democracy) and similar historical heritage (imperial tradition).[20] However, firstly, such countries have a significant conflict potential. Secondly, there are serious differences in the foreign policies of Russia and Turkey, which are especially evident in the post-Soviet area, where the two countries have intensified their activities over the past few years. Each of them uses different political measures. While Russia has to be classified as a hard power, Turkey has been trying to act primarily as a soft power.

Since the collapse of communism, Russia has been treating post-Soviet countries as its own zone of influence (the well-known concept of the "near abroad" devised by Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev). Two major goals of the Russian policy towards the post-Soviet area are to maintain influence by impeding the development of the area's relations with the West (NATO and the EU) and to retain control over the transit of energy and raw materials from Central Asia. The latter issue has a strong impact on Moscow's political position in those countries and on the Russian share in the EU's energy balance. However, until the beginning of the 21st century, Russia's ability to implement its goals was limited due to its poor economic condition. The country's potential clearly grew in the first decade of the 21st century as a consequence of the radical increase in oil and gas prices. In this context the new team led by Vladimir Putin, its roots in the state security sector, significantly raised defense spending and adopted a hard stance on post-Soviet countries, interfering in their internal affairs (elections in Ukraine in 2004), waging trade wars (gas disputes with Ukraine in 2006 and 2009, the embargo on sale of Moldavian wine and the withholding of gas transit from Turkmenistan in 2009) and carrying out the military invasion of Georgia in 2008. In effect, Russia's relations with many countries in this region (e.g. Georgia, Ukraine and Turkmenistan) significantly worsened, which only strengthened Moscow's conviction about the need to stick to its hard stance in foreign policy.

At the same time, Turkey has significantly improved its relations with all its neighbors in an unprecedented way. This is an effect of Ankara's new foreign policy, which is clearly different from the Russian one, based as it is on the concepts –devised by Ahmet Davutoğlu, the present Foreign Minister– of "strategic

[20] Ömer Taşpınar, Fionna Hill, "Turkey and Russia: Axis of the Excluded?", *Survival* Vol. 48 No. 1, Spring 2006, pp. 81-92·

depth" (stratejik derinlik) and "zero problems with neighbors".[21] According to these concepts, Turkey should gain the status of a regional power and stakeholder in surrounding regions including the Black Sea basin and Central Asia. Its political position will be based on strong economic relations (trade, investments and building contracts) and good political relations with all regional players. Thanks to this, Turkey will be able to play role of mediator in the regional conflicts. Davutoğlu's concept is based on support for evolutional improvement of the situation in the region and skeptical approach to radical revolutionary changes (stability before democratization). Turkey has much in common with Russia in this context. However, Ankara, unlike Moscow, does not oppose the establishment of close relations between the post-Soviet area and the West per se; it just would like to participate in the process as an EU member whose exceptional role in the region would be accepted by Brussels and Washington. Ankara's stance, regardless of its relations with the U.S. and the EU, must cause tension between Turkey and the West. However, the current tension is first of all an effect of the general worsening of Ankara's relations with the U.S. and the EU. According to the "strategic depth" concept, the most significant effect of building a stronger position of Turkey in the post-Soviet area should be convincing the Union to accept Turkey as a member state (presenting it as an asset and not a burden). In the longer term, accession would be used by Ankara to enhance Turkey's influence in those regions. This concept also provides that in case of worsening relations with the West (no EU accession and tension in relations with the U.S.), the reinforcement of Turkey's position in the neighborhood, including the post-Soviet area will be aimed at building its own zone of influence and a search for alternative partners, including Russia.

Ankara is very unlikely to adopt an anti-Western policy, considering the differences in potential between Turkey and the West, as well as the strong economic and political links existing between them. In case of serious crisis, the West would make a concerted effort to maintain ties with Turkey. For example, the new U.S. administration led by President Barack Obama has quickly improved relations with Ankara by accepting its position as an important regional player. However, the worse Turkey's relations with the West and the EU, the more readily will Ankara cooperate with Moscow which will mean pushing the West, especially the EU, out of the Black Sea region, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

The development of tactical cooperation between Moscow and Ankara in the post-Soviet area over the past few years shows the possible consequences of worsening relations between Turkey and the West. It is important to notice, however, that Ankara has been promoting its own interests as part of this coopera-

[21] Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik,* Ankara, 2001.

tion and that there are still clear differences between Turkey and Russia. Turkey, like Russia, has opposed large-scale U.S. presence in the Black Sea region.[22] Ankara, in its desire to maintain correct relations with Russia, has never eagerly supported the aspirations of Georgia and Ukraine to join NATO. Ankara moderately criticized the Russian intervention in Georgia and Moscow's recognition of Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia as independent states. After the war in Georgia, Ankara came up with a proposal of creating the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform, addressed to the region's countries and Russia, without consulting the U.S. and the EU. The main goals of the Platform are the resolution of the conflicts in the Caucasus through Turkish-Russian mediation and the establishment of normal relations between Turkey and Armenia. The initiative has been supported by Russia. The Platform is an example of the implementation of the "strategic depth" policy. By building the Platform, Ankara has accepted the new geopolitical situation in the region (clear weakening of western influence and reinforcement of Russia) and at the same time chosen to use it to expand its own influence in the Southern Caucasus. The lack of diplomatic relations and the closed border with Armenia is the most serious flaw in Turkey's political position in the post-Soviet area. Ankara wants to normalize relations with Yerevan and at the same time to maintain good relations with Azerbaijan. While the Azeri-Armenian conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh remains unresolved, it is extremely difficult to achieve the two goals simultaneously. Turkey in coordination with Russia has contributed to the intensification of peace talks between Azerbaijan and Armenia. A positive outcome of the talks depends on the stance of Moscow, which has tools to block them. However, it seems that Moscow will not be interested in the normalization of the situation in the Caucasus, as it would not like Ankara's position to become too strong.

Energy Infrastructure and Diversification of Supplies to the EU

Turkey is important for Russia in the context of the latter's ambition to maintain its position as a major supplier of oil and gas to the EU. Russia also controls transit of the raw materials from Central Asia.[23] Anatolia is a bridge connecting the European Union with the Middle East and Central Asia, areas where the world's largest oil and gas fields are located. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, which have been built owing to U.S. support, are responsible for a moderate gap in Russian control of supplies

[21] It should be noted that the Montreux Convention (1936), which sets the rules of ship traffic through the Turkish Straits, is treated as one of the pillars of Turkey's sovereignty.
[23] Russian gas currently accounts for 25 percent of gas consumption in the EU. Gas from Central Asia, the transit of which is controlled by Russia, adds several percent to this share. The Russian control of gas transit from Central Asia plays an important part in the context of Russia's problems with ensuring supplies to Europe from its own resources and its desire to keep Central Asia within its own zone of influence.

from Central Asia. The pipelines are used to transport raw materials from Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan to Turkey. The most serious attempt to diversify supplies to the EU is the Nabucco gas pipeline project, which has been supported by the U.S., the EU and Turkey. It provides for construction and development of infrastructure in Turkey and in the Balkans to transport gas from the Caspian Sea region or possibly from Iraq and Egypt to Central Europe. Turkmenistan is the key to success of the Nabucco project.[24] If this project is completed, relations between Turkey as a transit country and Central Asian and Caucasian countries would certainly strengthen. However, joint EU-Turkish projects will be much more difficult to implement, if Turkey remains outside the EU. In such a case Ankara would be a much more demanding and less predictable partner for Brussels.

Russia strongly opposes the Nabucco project. The Russian military intervention in Georgia in 2008 has to be seen in this context. The stability of Southern Caucasus is essential for the project's success. Moscow has also been trying to impede the implementation of the Nabucco pipeline by promoting its own project, the South Stream gas pipeline, which runs through the Black Sea and the Balkans. However, very high costs and necessity to obtain the approval of Ukraine or Turkey to build it through their exclusive economic zones are a serious challenge.

Turkey would like to have as many oil and gas pipelines running through its territory as possible, including those from Russia. It expects that the increasing demand for natural gas in Europe will reduce the tension between the currently competing projects. Ankara's maximum goal, only part of which is achievable, is to make Turkey an energy hub country. As part of this policy, Turkey presented several cooperation offers to Russia, all of which were rejected by Moscow. In effect, Turkey found itself in a clear conflict of interests with Russia in the context of building energy infrastructure. Turkey supported the construction of the Blue Stream II gas pipeline, which would have run through the Black Sea and Turkey, carrying Russian gas to Europe. Blue Stream II was promoted by Turkey as a parallel project to Nabucco. However, were it to have been implemented before Nabucco, the construction of the latter would have been significantly postponed. Russia thus could also have gained major additional leverage over Ukraine. In turn, Russian dependence on Turkey as a transit country would

[24] The disputable status of the Caspian Sea would not affect the issue of gas transport from Turkmenistan to Europe through it. Turkmen gas fields on the bottom of the sea are connected with the Azeri fields. It is also possible to transport Turkmen gas across the Caspian by barges to Azerbaijan.

have increased. In the end, however, Russia presented the South Stream project. Ankara also made several invitations for Russia to join Nabucco, all of which were rejected by Moscow.[25] Ankara invited Russia to participate in the construction of the Samsun-Ceyhan pipeline, designed to carry oil bypassing the Turkish Straits. However, Russia supports its own project of a pipeline going around Turkey (Burgas-Alexandropolis).

The possible growth of the Russian gas share in the energy balance of the EU could be ultimately stopped if the Persian Pipeline, which would transport gas from Iran (second largest gas reserves in the world after Russia), is built or if Tehran joins Nabucco.[26] Turkey has been cooperating on this issue with Iran for two years. The greatest impediment is the strong opposition of the U.S., which is seriously concerned about the Iranian nuclear program. However, a political breakthrough in Iranian-Western relations -which cannot be ruled out in the medium term- would cause energy cooperation between the EU and Iran to intensify.[27]

The Strategic Perspective

A durable strategic alliance between Russia and Turkey is rather unlikely due to serious differences in the two countries' stances on certain major issues (e.g. Cyprus, Kosovo and energy policy), different approaches to foreign policy (soft vs. hard power) and, what is crucial, a perspective of strong improvement in Ankara's position in the balance of powers between Turkey and Russia. According to UN forecasts, the population of Turkey by 2050 (medium-prognosis) will increase from the present number of over 70 million to almost 100 million. In return, the population of Russia will decrease from 140 million to 115 million. At the same time, the share of Muslims in the Russian population, which now reaches almost 15 percent, will increase to a level close to 30 percent because of the higher birth-rate in Muslim communities. This increase in the share of Muslims will pose a serious challenge for Russia's security in the Northern Caucasus, where ethnic relations are tense. Considering that a great majority of Russian Muslims are representatives of Turkic peoples or those who have strong cultural and historical links with Turks, it is quite fair to assume that this change of ethnic and religious structure will strengthen Turkish influence inside Russia. Large scale immigration will be a necessary means for improving Russia's

[25] However, pumping Russian gas through Nabucco on large scale would have an adverse effect on the idea of diversification of gas supplies to the EU.
[26] According to the World Energy Council, Russian gas reserves account for 27 percent of global reserves, while Iranian reserves have a 15 percent share.
[27] A liberalization of the political system and, in effect, adopting a softer policy towards the West, may happen as a consequence of a serious economic crisis in Iran and pressure from Iranian society, whose views are more moderate than those represented by the conservative elite.

demographic situation. However, this would meet with serious internal resistance due to very strong xenophobia in Russia. Such negative demographic trends will probably have a significant adverse effect on the development of the Russian economy (shrinking workforce). Another serious challenge the Russian economy will have to face is the need to undergo modernization and diversification. At present, the economy strongly relies on production of raw materials, whose value is prone to fluctuations in world markets. Moreover, the countries which buy those materials from Russia will develop other sources of energy, while Russia's easily accessible gas will gradually be exhausted. Commencing production in new fields will require not only enormous financial outlays but also many years of work. In effect, Russia may soon have serious problems meeting its obligations as a supplier. Such strategic economic challenges seem to be too big to handle for the extremely corrupt, authoritarian and bureaucratized Russian political elite.

As a result, Turkey may be expected to be developing faster than Russia in the long term. According to The World in 2050 report published by PriceWaterHouse & Coopers in 2008, Turkey's GDP PPP will grow at the average annual rate of 4.1 percent until 2050, while Russia's will grow only 2.5 per year. The Turkish economy, which (in terms of GDP PPP) is now equivalent to 40 percent of the Russian economy, would be worth 80 percent of the Russian economy by 2050. The rise of Turkey would also be felt globally. At present, Turkey is the world's 15th largest economy. By 2050, it is expected to become the 10th or 12th. The extent to which Turkey meets its potential in the 21st century will strongly depend on its internal situation. The biggest challenge is the Kurdish issue.[28] The share of Kurds in the Turkish population will significantly grow in the next few decades because of higher population growth rates in this group as compared to ethnic Turks. Their integration will require a change in the present state ideology, according to which Turkish national identity is a synonym of Turkish citizenship. This idea is strongly cherished by the Kemalist elite (army and bureaucracy); the process will not be easy. However, relatively good Turkish-Kurdish relations at the social level could enable the successful integration of Kurds in Turkey. The strong readiness in major political parties in Turkey to implement reforms offering more rights to Kurds may also be a positive factor. This has been proven by changes happening over the past few years (for example, a 24-hour public TV channel broadcasting in Kurdish, available across the entire country).

[28] A resolution to the Kurdish issue in Iraq, the stabilization of Iraq and the gradual broadening of Turkish Kurds' rights offer a chance for cooperation between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan, which will be based on serious common interests. In this case, the marginalization of radicals will become a more likely scenario. Henri Barkey, *Preventing Conflict Over Kurdistan*, Carnegie Report, February 2009, http://www.carnegieendowment.org /files/preventing_conflict_kurdistan.pdf

EU membership would certainly significantly strengthen Turkey's position in the post-Soviet area. It cannot be ruled out that the balance of power in military terms between Russia and Turkey will change to the benefit of the latter. Many experts believe that if Iran gains access to nuclear weapons, an arms race will begin in the Middle East, as a consequence of which several countries, including Turkey, will become nuclear powers.

It has to be expected that China will increase its influence in Central Asia and the EU in Eastern Europe in the first half of the 21st century in the post-Soviet area. Some countries from the region (especially Kazakhstan) will build stronger position. Thus the key question will be how Russia will react to the reduction of its influence in the post-Soviet area. It is very likely to respond by continuing with the current aggressive stance (interference with internal affairs of post-Soviet countries and military and economic conflicts), which will inevitably collide with the interests of Turkey. In effect, Ankara will be forced to revise its previous relatively "soft" policy towards Moscow.