**Türkiye in Russia's near abroad: rival or partner?**

***Osman Tekin***

*Aspirant*

*MGIMO University*

*Institute of International Research, Moscow, Russia*

*E-mail: osmantkn.13@gmail.com*

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Turkey stands out as a NATO member, a historical rival, and rising regional power in Russia’s near abroad. It was among the countries with the potential to pursue proactive and ambitious policies in post-Soviet geography following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This process was seen as a historical opportunity for Turkey, which has historical and cultural ties in the Black Sea and Caucasus regions and Central Asia, considered the "ancestral homeland," as having the possibility of ethnic and cultural interaction with Turkic states.

After the Cold War, Turkey embarked on a quest to define a new strategy for itself and to delineate its spheres of influence. The country possessed significant historical, cultural, and political potential. It could expand its sphere of influence to the extent of its capacity from the Black Sea to Central Asia in Russia’s near abroad. Being a Western, secular, and Muslim country, it was partly supported by Europe and the US as a role model for new independent states in the post-Soviet region. In this context, Turkey's efforts to increase its influence in Russia's near abroad and to achieve new gains after the Cold War can be observed in three interconnected regions: the Black Sea, South Caucasus, and Central Asia.

Turkey's efforts to enhance its influence in these regions, its relations with regional countries and societies, and the gains it has achieved have led to Turkey being perceived by Russia as both a threat and a partner. On the other hand, one of the unwritten rules of Turkish foreign policy post-Cold War is to avoid activities that would provoke Russia in its regional policies and to maintain a balance between the West and Russia. While Turkish foreign policy is often thought by Russia and regional powers to harbor ideological and ethnic desires such as “Neo-Ottomanism” "Pan-Turk” "Pan-Turkism," or "Turanism," Turkey's policies towards Russia's near abroad primarily aim at pragmatic gains. The development of bilateral relations between Russia and Turkey, which brought the two countries to the level of strategic partnership in 2014, lies in the mutual adoption of this pragmatic Turkish foreign policy approach. Today, bilateral trade reached almost 70 billion dollar and their desires to carry it to 100 billion dollar is in possible process.

However, although Turkey's policies towards the relevant regions generally harbor pragmatic desires, there are differences regarding the conjuncture that emerged immediately after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Turkey's limited capacity, as well as the foreign policy approach and actions adopted in the 1990s and 21st century. In this context, Turkey's policies towards Russia's near abroad can be examined in two separate periods: the 1990s and post-2000s and 3 regions: Black Sea, South Caucasia and Central Asia.

**Foreign Policy of Turkey towards Russia’s Near Abroad in 1990s**

The desire of states to expand their spheres of influence may lead to discrepancies with their capacities, resulting in serious disappointments and failures in their foreign policies. Turkey's inability to achieve desired gains in Russia’s near abroad in the 1990s after the Cold War had two main reasons: Discrepancy between desired gains and state capacity, Turkey's lack of understanding of regional dynamics and the desires of newly independent states.

**Foreign Policy of Turkey in Russia’s Near Abroad in 21st Century**

In the 1990s, Turkey left behind a period of internal political turmoil and the parallel economic crises that emerged, following the Justice and Development Party's (JDP) rise to sole power in the 2002 elections. The new government under Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan also embraced an active foreign policy approach that prioritized economic gains. A pragmatic foreign policy approach based on win-win cooperation with all parties, including countries like Armenia, Greece, and Syria, which were on the brink of war in the 1990s, was adopted in 2000s. Later coined as the "Zero Problems with Neighbors"(citation) doctrine, this approach reflected Turkey's pragmatic and proactive foreign policy stance towards the Black Sea, the Greater Caucasus, and Central Asia. However, securitization of foreign policy towards 2010s with critical changes of Turkey’s near abroad have brought about hard power politics in Turkish foreign policy. On the other hand, except jet crisis period since end of the 2015 to middle of the 2016, Turkish politics towards Russia’s near abroad has contained quest for cooperations with Russia and other regional states. Lastly, despite of dramatic economic crises inside, Turkish pro-active foreign policy has provided new gains for Turkey in Russia’s near abroad especially after 2020 Karabakh War and the beginning of Russian Special Military Operation in Ukraine.

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