

The Warming of Turkish-Russian Relations: Motives and Implications

JAMES W. WARHOLA AND WILLIAM A. MITCHELL

Abstract: Relations between Turkey and Russia have taken significant turns for the better in the past several years, culminating in the visit of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Moscow in December 2004 and followed by Russian President Vladimir Putin's reciprocal trip to Ankara in January 2005. How can we begin to account for this rather sudden warming of relations between Turkey and Russia, and what does this mean for the region? These questions can perhaps best be approached from the perspective of the larger regional landscape of issues whose substance and potential resolution are of particular importance to Turkey and Russia. These can be conveniently parsed into matters of (1) mutual economic and financial advantage, (2) regional security concerns, and (3) domestic political considerations. The present improvement of relations between Russia and Turkey has unfolded in the context of Turkey and Russia's simultaneously complex and somewhat conflicted orientations toward the Western world in general, and post-Soviet increase in U.S. global influence in particular. In any case, the improvement of Turkish-Russian relations will significantly alter the geopolitical landscape of Eurasia for the foreseeable future.

Key words: Chechnya, Eurasia, European Union, Recep Erdogan, Russia, terrorism, Turkey, Vladimir Putin

James W. Warhola is professor in and chairman of the Department of Political Science at the University of Maine. He is the author of numerous articles, book chapters, and occasional papers on Russian and post-Soviet domestic and foreign affairs. His research interests include political change in the post-Soviet region, ethno-political affairs, and the history of political thought. He holds a PhD in political science from The Ohio State University. William A. Mitchell is professor of political science and also serves as director and Jo Murphy Chair of the Center for International Education at Baylor University. He has published numerous articles on the political geography of Turkey and the Middle East. His research interests include natural disaster mitigation, ethno-political conflict, environmental security, Kurdish refugees, and Turkey as a regional power in the postwar and post-Soviet Union environments. He holds a PhD from the University of Illinois. Copyright © 2006 Heldref Publications.

Relations between Turkey and Russia have taken significant turns for the better in the past several years, culminating in the visit of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Moscow in December 2004, and followed by Russian President Vladimir Putin's reciprocal trip to Ankara in January 2005. This was the first time a Russian chief of state had paid an official visit to Turkey.¹ The latter meeting was timed, perhaps not coincidentally, to occur just before the European Union summit meeting in Brussels, which included the perennial matter of Turkish membership on its agenda. Although those visits are significant in their own right, they are emblematic of a larger significant shift in each country's disposition to the other, and in some respects are symptomatic of shifting political orientations in their domestic and international politics. As Shireen T. Hunter asserts, "Turkish and Russian officials increasingly refer to their respective countries as two great Eurasian powers, indicating that the Turkish and Russian versions of Eurasianism need not be competitive. Rather, they can be complementary."² This article explores the contours of this changing landscape with an eye toward identifying and critically analyzing alternative interpretations of the reasons for the emergence of a more cooperative set of relations between Turkey and Russia. It also does so from the perspective of the implications for democracy in each of these countries and the region more generally.

This remarkable turn toward greater cooperation between Russia and Turkey calls for commentary on several grounds, not least of which is the long history of suspicion, studied alienation, and overt military conflict between the two countries. As Lesser notes, "[d]espite the fact that Turkey no longer shares a border with Russia, Ankara still continues to view Russia with concern. A long tradition of Russo-Turkish competition contributes to Turkish unease, and reinforces more modern worries about Moscow as a geopolitical competitor and a source of regional risk."³ That unease, however, appears to be giving way to substantial change. Improved relations between these two significant powers will certainly shape the contours of domestic and foreign politics in Eurasia well beyond each country's current regime.⁴ This is already evident in terms of rapidly expanding trade (from an estimated \$4 billion in 2002 to approximately \$10 billion in 2004, and projections of \$25 billion by 2007),⁵ something akin to a military detente (if not rapprochement), an increasing measure of regional cooperation in attempted conflict resolution, and perhaps most demonstrably, diplomatic exchange. The last is perhaps most significant in that it may set the stage for expanded cooperation in economic and military domains as well as open doors in other aspects of bilateral and multilateral regional cooperation.

Historically, relations between the Ottoman Turkish and Russian empires were never particularly good or close, and were punctuated by armed conflict.⁶ Chronic conflict between the Ottoman Empire and a continually expanding Muscovy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was capped by Peter the Great's victory in capturing the fortress of Azov in 1696.

In 1715, Peter renamed Muscovy the Russian Empire, but with that redesignation came no change in long-term relations with the Ottoman neighbor to the

south. There were wars fought in 1710, 1736, 1768–74, 1787, 1806–12, 1828–29, 1854–56, and 1877–78. During World War I, Russian imperial forces occupied eastern portions of the crumbling Ottoman Empire. This, along with the postwar occupation of western Anatolia by Allied forces, led the founders of the modern Turkish Republic to dub the confusing mass of conflicts during and after World War I as Turkey's "War of Independence" (*Kurtuluş Savaşı*). Although the early Turkish regime of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk has been interpreted as having sought to base its principles on the ideals of both the American and Russian Bolshevik revolutions,⁷ Turkey took a decisively pro-Western and anti-Soviet orientation after World War II. Accordingly, it joined NATO in 1952 and began the process of seeking integration with Western Europe as early as 1959 with an application for associate membership in the European Economic Community. It received associate status with the EEC in September of 1963 with the signing of the Ankara Agreement.⁸ From the Soviet perspective, relations between the two countries were characterized as good, trustful, and mutually beneficial until the (to them) unfortunate turn toward the West by Turkey after World War II.⁹

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, however, and the opening up of an entirely new range of regional possibilities for Turkish foreign policy directions, it was perhaps inevitable that Turkish-Russian relations would undergo some degree of transformation.¹⁰ The collapse of the Soviet Union was followed by a rush of diplomatic activity between Turkey and Russia, culminating in the signing of the Treaty on the Principles of Relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation in late May 1992. This served as the legal basis for the countries' relations with each other, and sought to prepare the groundwork for continually improved relations. This generally positive disposition continued throughout the Yeltsin years. However, relations between the two have taken a strikingly close, cooperative path since late 2004 that distinguishes their respective foreign policies from those of the Yeltsin years, and most certainly from those of the Soviet era.

There was no guarantee in 1991 that relations between these two regional powers would arrive at the levels of cooperation that are currently forming. It was widely thought that the collapse of the Soviet Union would open the door for much greater and closer cooperation between Turkey and the countries of the now-independent major Turkic peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia, namely Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.¹¹ After all, these and many numerically smaller Turkic peoples ranging across the entire span of Eurasia, such as the Karakalpaks, Karachai, Yakuts, or even the 7.6 million Uighurs (most whom are in China) are ethnically, culturally, and even religiously much closer to the Turkish people than to the officially idealized version of interethnic relations within the Soviet Union as a "New Historical Community of Peoples."¹² But no "pan-Turkic" political community emerged, nor even came close to materializing in the 1990s, except in rather ethereal academic discussions and cultural gatherings.¹³ Rather, the countries of Central Asia, and even Azerbaijan itself to some degree, have clearly gravitated much more toward the orbit of Moscow than toward Ankara since their independence from the Soviet Union. This trend appears

to be only deepening since the U.S.-led war on terrorism so dramatically foisted itself into the region in the autumn of 2001.¹⁴

How can we begin to account for this rather sudden warming of relations between Turkey and Russia, and what does this mean for the region? These questions can perhaps best be approached from the perspective of the larger regional landscape of issues whose substance, and potential resolution, is of particular importance to Turkey and Russia. These can be conveniently parsed into matters of mutual economic and financial advantage, regional security concerns, and domestic political considerations. This has all unfolded in the context of the simultaneously complex and somewhat conflicted orientations of Turkey and Russia toward the Western world in general, and the post-Soviet increase in United States global influence in particular.

It has been suggested that the vote in the Turkish parliament in March 2003 not to allow the United States to stage an invasion of Iraq from Turkish territory was a watershed in Turkey's relations with the United States (and the West more generally), and thus played a part in setting the stage for a shift in Turkish-Russian relations.¹⁵ It must be understood as a part, but only a part, of the complex larger picture of the suddenly improved Turkish-Russian relations. Other foreign and domestic factors doubtless played major parts, and these are explored later in this article. An important, but perhaps overlooked, key to understanding this puzzle is that both the Russian and Turkish economies were in a mode of strikingly robust growth from the period of 2001–2005. The nature of that growth has been problematic, particularly for Russia, because it derives largely from the export of commodities. But because much of the substance of improved Turkish-Russian relations has involved increased economic ties, it will be useful to begin by considering these.

Expanding Economic Ties

Perhaps the most critical area of economic relations between the two countries concerns fuel and energy resources, and specifically the increasing energy dependence of Turkey on Russia; Turkey currently receives roughly three-quarters of its fuel and energy resources from Russia.¹⁶ This involves a number of energy-related joint projects. Among these, perhaps the most significant is the Blue Stream Project, by which Turkey was to begin receiving two billion cubic meters of natural gas in 2003, reaching a projected peak of sixteen billion cubic meters by 2008. Domestic demand for gas is expected to reach fifty-five billion cubic meters in 2010 and eighty-two billion cubic meters in 2020.¹⁷ The widely heralded *Mavi Akim* (Blue Stream) Project involves pipelines stretching 1,250 kilometers beginning in the Black Sea coastal city of Dzhugba, Russia; going under the Black Sea; emerging in Samsun, Turkey; and proceeding to Ankara.¹⁸ For such a project to have been conceived and executed, stable political relations were necessary. For it to work over the long term, consistently good political relations are indispensable. Given that Turkey is so energy-resource dependent on Russia, stable diplomatic and economic relations are paramount.¹⁹ Support for the project was not universal, however. Pro-Islamic and nationalist groups opposed the project, and opposition parties and the National Action Party, a right-wing mem-

ber of the ruling government coalition, expressed reservations. The overall concern was the acquiescence of Turkish financial, legal, and property rights. Members of the influential military leadership establishment, as well as officials in the Foreign Ministry, also expressed their objections. Their unease stemmed from the basic question, how dependent would Turkey become on Russia for their energy needs?²⁰ Continued Turkish economic growth, which in May 2005 one representative of the International Monetary Fund called “excellent” in commending the country for “remarkable progress,” since the crisis of 2001, underscores the critical necessity of maintaining not only good, but continually improving relations with major energy suppliers, of which the Russian Federation has become the primary one.²¹

Also by cultivating closer ties with Turkey, the Russian Federation seeks to place itself in a more advantageous position regarding competing oil pipelines from the region to the world market. This means specifically seeking to offset the geostrategic advantages of increased Turkish-Western ties deriving from the Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline. As Bulent Aras commented in early 2005:

“Given that Turkey is so energy-resource dependent on Russia, stable diplomatic and economic relations are paramount.”¹⁹

[T]he mutual agenda is set around Russia’s energy geopolitics, its near abroad policies, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (B.T.C.) oil pipeline, ethnic secessionist movements in the Caucasus, the reduction of Russian military forces in the region in accordance with international agreements, and the problems emerging after the Iraq war. Russia dislikes the B.T.C. pipeline, which is expected to transit Azeri and Kazak oil to the West. Moscow regards this pipeline as a challenge to its status in the Caspian basin and an obstacle to its oil trade. Although the major conflict surrounding the B.T.C. pipeline was between Russia and a number of former Soviet states, it indirectly influenced Turkish-Russian relations.²²

In terms of retail trade and tourism, a similar if somewhat less dramatic pattern has emerged—considerable expansion, with more eagerly sought by both sides. The first nine months of 2003 (January 1–September 30) saw a 50 percent increase in Russian tourism to Turkey compared with the same time period during the previous year. To put this in perspective, the resort city of Antalya recorded a rise in numbers, from roughly 495,000 to 716,000 tourists. This raised the ratio of Russian tourists on holiday in Antalya to 19 percent of overall tourism, up from 9 percent the year before.²³ For this trend to continue, stable relations are necessary not only at the level of high diplomacy, but also throughout society. This can hardly happen when threats of terrorism, separatism, or other serious social or political unrest prevail.

For its part, the Russian Federation has experienced consistently robust economic growth since 1999, averaging more than 6.5 percent per annum from 1999

through 2003, exceeding forecasts by the OECD each year. In a television question-and-answer session with the public on September 27, 2005, President Putin indicated that growth was now averaging more than 7 percent annually.²⁴ However, according to the U.S. Energy Information Agency:

[i]n 2004, Russia's real gross domestic product (GDP) grew by approximately 7.1%, surpassing average growth rates in all other G8 countries, and marking the country's sixth consecutive year of economic expansion. Russia's economic growth over the last five years has been fueled primarily by energy exports, particularly given the boom in Russian oil production and relatively high world oil prices during the period.

This type of growth has made the Russian economy dangerously dependent on oil and natural gas exports, and especially vulnerable to fluctuations in world oil prices.²⁵

Other observers have also noted the precarious nature of Russia's rapid economic growth. Allen Lynch, in particular, considers this growth a "fragile accomplishment" by an "enclave economy" that has yet to undergo necessary structural reforms that would produce balanced and stable long-term growth.

Energy-related revenues accounted for 38 percent of the central government's budget in 2002 and nearly half in 2004; that budget currently balances at \$21.50 per barrel of oil on the world market. Oil and gas together account for 56 percent of Russian export revenues whereas all raw materials and semifinished materials make up 80 percent of all export revenues, in contrast to 60 percent in the Soviet period. The Russian economy and thus the Russian government are more dependent on the energy and raw materials sector than ever before, a telling sign that structural reform has yet to take place.²⁶

Thus, the precariousness of Russia's export commodity-driven economy may make good and stable political relations with the purchasers of its energy resources nothing short of indispensable.

Russian Foreign Policy and Prospective Turkish Membership in the European Union

As is widely recognized, Turkey has persistently and vigorously pursued membership in the European Union and its predecessors virtually since the inauguration of European integration in the latter 1950s.²⁷ The Russian Federation under President Putin has encouraged Turkey in this process, probably with the belief that an economically and financially stronger Turkey makes for a better trade and diplomacy partner for Russia.²⁸ Yet, as of late 2005, Turkey's prospects for soon joining the EU as a full member were quite remote, with numerous obstacles in place, such as the status of northern Cyprus, Turkish domestic political and economic considerations, and other issues. Thus, perhaps a realistic assessment of this remote prospect by the Turkish leadership has played a role in its move toward closer relations with Russia. For its part, Russian interest in accommodating and cultivating closer relations with Turkey may be partly related to its own situation regarding desired-but-frustrated membership in the World Trade Organization. Russia's prospective membership in the WTO showed few signs of

moving toward full membership in late 2005, and Russian Foreign Trade Minister German Gref indicated that negotiations with the United States about key issues of Russian membership in the WTO were “not simple,” and that a “wide array of problems” (*bol'shoi krug voprosov*) remain unresolved.²⁹ Turkey has been a member of the WTO since its transformation from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1995.

But the question of the underlying forces and motives behind the rather precipitous warm-up of relations between Turkey and Russia seems hardly exhausted by these factors, some of which are speculative at best. As interpreted by Turkish journalist Mustafa Unal, Turkey seeks to improve relations with Russia not as an alternative to EU membership, but as a manifestation of an increasingly broad-ranging orientation on the part of the Erdogan regime to expand economic opportunities for Turkey. He states:

There is no doubt that Turkish-Russian relations are experiencing their brightest days. Turkish businessmen have huge investments in Russia, particularly in the construction sector. . . . Relations are reciprocal; Russia is also interested in privatization tenders in Turkey. Besides natural gas, Russia also wants production and distribution of electricity. . . . The rapprochement between two states has also resulted in different political evaluations; it is like an alternative to relations with the European Union (EU) or the United States. Interpreting the rapprochement in this context is not right. While Turkey is moving in the right direction with the EU on one side, it is also boosting its strategic partnership with the U.S. on the other side, and at the same time it can develop ties with Russia in every area at top level[s].³⁰

Further, the Turkish-based *Vestel* television production company, the first of its kind in Russia, invested fifteen million dollars into their Aleksandrova plant in 2003. The company hoped for further investment and, at full production, the creation of three hundred and fifty new jobs.³¹

To place this in perspective, Mustafa Unal states:

Putin also emphasized that Turkey's integration with the European Union would help boost relations with Russia even more and open up new horizons. The Russian leader perceiving Turkish-EU relations as *complementary* and *facilitative* rather than an *alternative* is significant.³² (emphasis added)

Thus, according to this interpretation, the questionable nature of Turkey's EU membership prospects are not the driving force behind improved relations with Russia. Instead, they are found in a broader move by the Erdogan regime to engage in a positive-sum game with major economic actors—and, in the case of Russia, to engage in a *sui generis* relationship with a major regional power on whom Turkey is dependent for continued economic vitality, and critically dependent on for energy resources. Nonetheless, the rather dim prospects of soon being accepted as a full member of the European Union must be viewed as a further impetus for cultivating closer, more cooperative, and longer-term ties with the Russian Federation. By mid- to late 2005, it was beginning to appear that those ties are intended to go well beyond any historical precedent in the countries' respective histories. Although this may be good for the grand-scale economic development of each, such ties shape the contours of foreign and domestic poli-

tics in the region. Thus, it is prudent to consider other factors that are doubtless involved and interconnected with the matter of mutual economic advantage of improved relations. Leading the list is the complex web of geostrategic security concerns. We now turn to consider these.

Geostrategic and Regional Security Factors

Although not contiguous, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey share borders on a region that is problematical for each of them in terms of political and economic stability and security. Bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia in no small measure derive from success and stability in multilateral relations with regional countries, particularly Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia.³³ Given the tangled and often conflicted nature of political relations both among and within these countries since the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, the balancing act of finding common ground between Turkey and Russia has been particularly difficult to navigate, but not impossible. In February 1996, the Russian government announced figures for arms sales to Turkey. In 1994, arms exports totaled \$25.7 million; \$70 million in 1995; and \$121 million between January and February 2006. The Turkish government used these weapons in its battle against the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party).³⁴ Indeed, the overall picture suggests a greater likelihood of perennially strained relations between Russia and Turkey than the kind of warm cooperation that had emerged by 2004 and 2005. How can this be accounted for? Painting the picture in broad bushstrokes, one observer states the following:

Turkey's main ally in the Caucasus region is Azerbaijan, whereas Russia's ally is its rival, Armenia, which continues to insist that Turkey committed "genocide" against its people during World War One. "We are all aware about the historical problems between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Russia will contribute to the peace process," Putin said. "We do not want negative relations with any of our neighbours, including Armenia," Erdogan responded.³⁵

It bears asking, to what degree is the warming pattern a function of the particular leadership orientations and styles of the Putin and Erdogan regimes? Tempting as it might be to conclude that this is the major factor, it is important to bear in mind the great military potential of Russia and Turkey, regardless of which particular leader, party, or group is in power. Turkey and Russia both possess formidable military capabilities. Shortly after Putin came to power as president ad interim in the Russian Federation in 2000, one Turkish scholar noted:

Relations between neighboring countries are generally expected to alternate between conflict and cooperation. But the salience of Turkish-Russian relations flows from the fact that the two states are major regional powers—Russia, after all, was a superpower until the late 1980s and still boasts a massive nuclear arsenal—situated at the crossroads of two formerly adversarial continental systems, the Trans-Atlantic and the Eurasian.³⁶

With a population of roughly seventy million people and a military establishment that is the largest in the region with approximately 625,000 active duty military personnel, Turkey is a formidable military actor even without considering its critical-

ly important ties to NATO. Russia presents a more enigmatic case, wherein immense military potential exists against a backdrop of generally declining military capabilities, certainly including even the capability to project military power into troubled areas of the post-Soviet space. But with Russia's robust economic growth since 1999, and President Putin's determination to both rebuild the Russian military and to reassert Russian influence in the post-Soviet space, it is not difficult to understand the potential that existed for heightened tensions with Turkey.³⁷ Indeed, some voices from within Turkish scholarship remained particularly wary of Russian long-term intentions in the region. Some observers suspected that it was only a matter of time before deeply entrenched patterns of hegemonic intent resurfaced in Russian foreign policy in a manner that would work at cross-purposes with Turkish regional interests, if not threatening Turkey directly. For example, noted scholar on Turkish foreign policy Nasuh Uslu offered:

It is too early for Turkish policy-makers to say that Russia is no longer a potential threat for Turkey. There is even a tendency to perceive that the Russian Federation has replaced its predecessor as a new threat to Turkish interests. Russia is the strongest force in the region and through its actions it gives the impression that it still pursues power politics to expand its spheres of influence. Russia's heavy-handed approach toward the future membership of Eastern European countries in NATO, its direct interventions in conflicts and disagreements in the former Soviet republics and its coercive actions to establish spheres of influence in the region are bound to irritate Turkey as the country which will be influenced by these developments in the most serious way.³⁸

But again, quite the opposite has happened, suggesting that a partial motive by Moscow in cultivating warmer and closer relations with Ankara would be to create a political and economic framework within which reassertion of Russian regional hegemony in the post-Soviet territories could proceed. In any case, the generally warming climate between Russia and Turkey may make the presence of Russian military bases in Georgia and Armenia more palatable to Ankara. As recently noted by K. Singh, former Indian ambassador to Turkey and Azerbaijan:

Turkey remains wary of Russian military bases in Georgia and Armenia as a potential threat. Ankara would also like CIS peacekeeping forces in the South Caucasus to be replaced by international forces, since these peacekeeping troops are mostly Russian. At the same time Russia is also unhappy with Turkish military and security officials' cooperation with their counterparts in Georgia and Azerbaijan. In January 2002 in Ankara, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey concluded a tripartite agreement on regional security. Moscow is especially unhappy with Turkish assistance in modernizing the Marneuli airbase near Tbilisi. In October 2002, a Turkish military delegation attended the formal opening of the United Military Academy in Tbilisi, set up and co-staffed by the Turkish armed forces. Speaking at the opening ceremony, Georgian Defense Minister Lieutenant General David Tevzadze stressed that instructions would comply with NATO standards.³⁹

A growing weariness of continued heavy American influence in the Caucasus region (particularly Georgia) on Turkey's part can be attributed to the ongoing war on terror. Although Ankara cannot begin to rival the amount of soldiers, equipment, and money that the United States is pumping into the area, it has begun to offer its

own independent military training and financing, and is increasingly looking to Russia to act as a counter presence in the region.⁴⁰ In any case, however, an attitude of studied and deliberate concentration on issues of common Turkish and Russian concern has come to characterize relations between the two, with complex, difficult, and long-standing regional problems—such as the historiography of the slaughters of Armenians in the 1910s, the status of ethnoterritorial units within neighboring states (for example, Abkhazia or Nakichevia)—simply not being allowed to obstruct, let alone derail, continually deepening cooperation. There is also evidence beginning to appear that Turkish politicians and intellectuals are warming to the prospect of continually improving relations with Russia because of

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the de facto dampening of Turkish-American relations surrounding the U.S.-led war in Iraq, and particularly the idea (justifiable or not) that the United States is doing too little to stop “Kurdish terrorists” from operating out of northern Iraq.⁴¹ Finally, the matter of Chechnya represents a gnawing problem in its own right, and calls for particular consideration.

Within the realm of regional security considerations in Russian-Turkish relations, the issue of Chechnya presents a major threat to continued progress and improvement. At one level, Ankara views the conflict in Chechnya as a more-or-less purely internal Russian affair. However, the Chechen conflict has raised the possibility of seriously derailing improved relations between Turkey and Russia. During Vladimir Putin’s December 4, 2004, visit to Ankara, for example, several thousand Turkish protesters publicly and vigorously objected to his presence, and specifically Russian operations in Chechnya. No serious incidents followed, and Turkey’s contingent of three thousand police assigned as security for his visit evidently did their job well.⁴² In any case, Professor Bulent Aras interprets the larger question of Chechnya in Russian-Turkish relations thus:

According to the official Turkish policy line, the Chechen question is a Russian internal problem. Turkish officials frequently declare that Russian security measures should not violate human rights in Chechnya. However, a large Chechen diaspora in Turkey follows a different line and tries its best to assist Chechen guerrillas, creating significant tensions between the Turkish and Russian governments. In return, Turkish officials have expressed discontent about the Kurdistan Workers Party’s—a separatist Kurdish armed movement—activities in Russian territories. For the time being, both sides extend considerable vigor in order not to sever their relations on account of trans-boundary ethnic problems.⁴³

As late as 2002, diplomatic tensions between the two countries significantly escalated over the issue of terrorism. Although each country has unfortunately experienced numerous acts of terrorism within this generation, the ongoing conflict in Chechnya raised the possibility of driving a lasting wedge between Turkey and

the Putin regime.⁴⁴ In the particularly tense but revealing episode in 2002 of the Nord-Ost theater hostage seizure crisis,⁴⁵ well after the post–September 11, 2001–induced war on terrorism of the Bush administration was underway, one analyst has suggested that it was Turkey’s diplomatic equanimity that prevented relations from taking a substantial turn for the worse. His insights bear citing at length:

[R]elations between the two countries have sunk to their lowest point in several years. Russia’s Chechen policy has prompted anger on both sides that could prove hard to dispel. . . . On October 28, the Islamist-leaning *Yeni Safak*, a prominent Istanbul daily, published a commentary that denounced Russia’s “brutal” theater operation, while more liberal and mainstream press quoted Turkish experts deeming the operation a “disaster.” Two days later, Russian Ambassador Alexander Lebedev dispatched a blistering five-page diplomatic note to the Turkish Foreign Ministry. *The note accused Turkey of revealing deep-seated anti-Russian bias in its coverage of the siege—and of hypocrisy in the global “war on terror.” Such vitriol, rare in diplomatic conduct, hints at how Russia’s campaign to eradicate Chechen insurgency may rekindle tensions between Moscow and Ankara. . . .* Russia has branded Turkey as “soft” on Chechen terrorism since 1996, when armed Chechens hijacked a ferry on the Black Sea. Though the episode ended peacefully and Turkish authorities arrested and jailed the hijackers, all later escaped. In April 2001, the same rebels besieged a Swissotel in Istanbul for 12 hours, much to the embarrassment of the Turkish government. Russia has tended to contrast this history with Turkey’s tough stand against its domestic separatists, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party or PKK.⁴⁶ (emphasis added)

Notwithstanding the potential for these episodes to further antagonize relations between Turkey and Russia, restraint prevailed:

Despite the escalating rhetoric, Turkish officials have tried to play down any idea of a rift. The Turkish foreign ministry responded calmly to the ambassador’s letter, reiterating Turkey’s anti-terrorism stance and calling on the Turkish press to report “responsibly” events such as the theater siege. “In Turkish-Russian relations, both sides generally try to keep things cordial,” Professor Iltar Turan of Bilgi University’s International Relations Department told *EurasiaNet*. “Turkey has nothing to gain from exploiting the problems Russia has with its internal unity.”⁴⁷

Perhaps Moscow was experiencing unease at the time about the prospect that the rapidly approaching Turkish parliamentary elections of November 3, 2002, would produce an Islamist-oriented regime that would make Russia’s continued conflict in Chechnya increasingly difficult to execute. As it turns out, the mildly Islamic AK party ended up forming the government (having won 363 of 550 seats from only 34 percent of the party list-based popular vote due to the 10 percent threshold, which precluded nine parties from gaining representation).⁴⁸ The party’s program, presented at the fifty-ninth session of the parliament on March 18, 2003, specifically mentioned the importance of working on regional issues within the framework of “good neighborly relations” with the Russian Federation.⁴⁹ Nor was this view entirely novel, as Turkish president Ahmet Necdet Sezer offered the following relevant comment at the NATO-Russia Summit in Rome during May 2002: “Among the priority goals of the Turkish foreign policy is to strengthen the bilateral cooperation with our friend and neighbor Russia and to elevate it to an

advanced level of partnership to our mutual benefit.”⁵⁰ This was seen as particularly important, given the highly complex ethnoterritorial neighborhood of the Caucasus region, serving as the border area between Turkey and Russia. Russia, for its part, seems to have arrived at a similar conclusion, based on considerations of economic cooperation, matters of common regional security interests, and perhaps the basis of domestic political concerns within each country.

Domestic Political Considerations

For better or for worse, relations between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey have been largely devoid of complications arising over questions of regime type, allegations of human rights abuses, or moral-political posturing by either side vis-à-vis the other. There can be little question that relations between the United States and Russia, at least from the perspective of Moscow, have been periodically strained by what is perceived as simply inappropriate diplomatic moralizing, preaching, and unhelpful invoking of sanctions or threatening sanctions on the basis of objections to the degree of democratization or lack thereof. This is not to say that Turkey and Russia (in Imperial, Soviet, or present Federation form) have not periodically experienced strained relations that involved what amounted to sanctions. But certainly in the post-Soviet era, the possibility of relations between the two countries being strained or broken altogether on the basis of the kind of considerations that motivated, for example, the Jackson-Vanik amendment in U.S. foreign policy toward the Soviet Union during the 1970s, appear very low. The fact that both countries have domestic political regimes that are considered by Freedom House as less than free and democratic, and thus with less likelihood of engaging in moral censure of the other’s political system, perhaps ironically places them in a much more maneuverable position vis-à-vis the other to more effectively focus on issues of mutual advantage.⁵¹ It is doubtful, for instance, that the Blue Stream project would have gone forward if the Turkish regime had elevated the issue of Chechnya to the same level and tenor of objection as had, for example, the European Union. The same could be said of the Turkish side, if Russia, for example, had insisted on Turkey reworking its position on Cyprus, or worse, adopted a more conciliatory or solicitous disposition to the matter of Kurdish separatism. Just as it has been demonstrated that the so-called democratic peace thesis is questionable because it is not so much liberal democracies that forbear warring with one another but rather that similar regimes do so, so also it is perhaps the case that certain points of similarity between the Turkish and Russian regimes may be having a similar effect of serving as a basis for increased mutual trust, cooperation, and commitment.⁵² What are those similarities, and how might they have the effect of serving as platform for the possibility of improved relations? Serious questions have been raised about the claim that democracies rarely if ever go to war. Mansfield and Snyder, for example, presented a serious case more than a decade ago that regimes in transition can be particularly prone to beligerence.⁵³ Be that as it may, however, there are again certain curious similarities in regime type between Russia under the Putin regime and Turkey in the

early twenty-first century, and understanding these will deepen our understanding of why the two countries began experiencing such a warming of relations since 2005.

First, both regimes have moved in the direction of single-party dominance, particularly with a number of the political changes made by Russian President Putin.⁵⁴ The Turkish parliament's threshold (*baraj*) of 10 percent of the party list-based popular vote for a party to win seats in the parliament is the highest in the world and has the utterly predictable and intended effect of allowing very few parties into the parliament. This figure was established as part of the restitution of civilian rule in 1983, following the military takeover of 1980, justified in part by the extreme fragmentation and polarization of the country along partisan and other lines.⁵⁵ This vague similarity of regime type is such that political and economic relations between the two are not likely to be spoiled or even threatened by condescending moralization about questionably democratic domestic politics. Further, in terms of regional maneuvering for power, the semiauthoritarian character of both Turkey and Russia may make for a certain congruence with the prevailing form of regime type in the region. As recently noted by Igor Torbakov:

Similarly, in Central Asia, Turkey and Russia seek to maintain the geopolitical status quo. According to Kinikliloglu, both the Turks and the Russians would prefer to deal with the likes of Uzbek President Islam Karimov and other autocratic regional leaders than face the uncertainty of revolutionary turmoil. A number of Turkish foreign policy experts suggest that Ankara's strategic perspective on Central Asia is much closer to the Russian position than to that of the United States. "Neither Moscow nor Ankara is happy to see U.S. forces in the region," wrote analyst Semih Idiz in the mass circulation *Milliyet* daily.⁵⁶

Second, both Turkey and Russia entered the twenty-first century with a long history of empire and acclimation, with each of them seeing itself as having a particularly significant historical role in human affairs. The underlying political culture of each country lends itself to expectations by political elites (and in no small measure by the general public) that the country will have a major role in regional, if not global, affairs. Turkey rightly sees itself as having a decisive and critical role as the crossroads of power between Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Russia likewise has entered the twenty-first century with the Putin administration clearly emphasizing the need to reestablish the Russian Federation as a major actor in global affairs.

In his 2005 New Year's speech, Prime Minister Erdogan noted: "We know that our responsibilities are not just internal anymore but in the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Caucasus and throughout the world."⁵⁷ Ruben Safrastian maintains that this is a reference to the Turkish desire for increased influence in countries once held under Ottoman sway. He further notes the dissatisfaction felt by both Russia and Turkey on their roles as regional superpowers, and their continued search for a more definite influence.⁵⁸

For each of these respective visions to materialize in any meaningful sense, relations between them cannot fail to have special significance, either toward greater cooperation or toward tension and conflict. Neutral passivity hardly seems

a possibility given their respective economic, diplomatic, geostrategic, and military statures in the region. This reality, combined with the logic of improved economic relations, pushes each country in the direction of greater mutual cooperation, notwithstanding conflicting stances on any particular Caucasus-region conflict.

Third, as noted earlier, each of the two countries has experienced robust economic growth in the early twenty-first century. This inevitably generates popular expectations that can only be met if increasingly productive political and economic relations continue to be cultivated. In this respect, the logic of the imperative for continued economic growth may well translate into increased pressures to pursue conciliatory and increasingly cooperative relations with each other. Coincidentally, the decline in public opinion in Turkey concerning the role of the United States in the region since the Iraq war may well have contributed to this in some measure.⁵⁹ In any case, it is turning into a fortunate logic for the respective populations of Russia, Turkey, and the region. In doing so, however, there can be little question that the geopolitical landscape of Eurasia will look substantially different well into the twenty-first century than it did even at the century's turn.

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NOTES

1. Harrouitun Khachatrian, "The Russia-Turkish Rapprochement Could Benefit Armenia," *EurasiaNet*, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/article.print?id=5215> (accessed February 3, 2005).

2. Shireen T. Hunter, *Islam in Russia: The Politics of Identity and Security* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2004), 370.

3. Ian O. Lesser, qtd. in Gokhan Bacik, "The Blue Stream Project, Energy Co-operation and Conflicting Interests," *Turkish Studies* 2, no. 2 (2001): 85.

4. Although not the conclusion of this present article, see Hunter, *Islam in Russia*, 361, for arguments pertaining to the "ambiguous" character of the "dual aspect[s]" of Turkish-Russian relations.

5. Cf. Khachatrian, "The Russia-Turkish Rapprochement."

6. Zalmay Khalilzad, Ian O. Lesser, and F. Stephen Larrabee, *The Future of Turkish-Western Relations: Toward a Strategic Plan* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2000), ix–xi.

7. See, for example, Emil Çeçen, *Kemalizm* (Istanbul: Cumhuriyet Kitapları, 1999), 99–118.

8. For the official European Union timeline of significant events regarding relations with Turkey, including prospective membership, see "Key Events in Turkey-EU Relations," http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/turkey/key_events.htm. For more detailed information, see "EU-Turkey: Historical Review: Historical Background and Recent Developments," <http://www.deltur.cec.eu.int/english/historical.html>.

9. See, for example, "Sovyetso-Turetskiye Otnosheniya—Spravka," *Tsentral'nii Komitet KPCC* (April 11, 1964), qtd. in Erel Tellal, *Uluslararası ve Bölgesel Gelişmeler Cercevisinde: SSCB-Türkiye İlişkileri 1953–1964* (Ankara: Mülkiyeliler Birliği Vakfı Yayınları, 2000), 279.

10. Cf. Gokhan Bacik, "The Blue-Stream Project, Energy Co-operation, and Conflicting Interests," *Turkish Studies* 2, no. 2 (2001): 85.

11. See <http://titus.fkidg1.uni-frankfurt.de/didact/karten/turk/turklm.htm> for maps and related commentary depicting the location, range, and basic descriptions of the various Turkic peoples.

12. The official Soviet literature on this matter is vast, both at the level of CPSU propaganda and at the level of scholarly discourse, at least to the extent that the latter was genuinely possible under conditions of Soviet "scholarship" on such extraordinarily sensitive issues as national identity, cultural affinity, and ethnopolitical identity. For a more or less typically official Soviet version of the concept of the Soviet people (including, of course, those of Turkic ethnological orientation, such as the Uzbeks, Azeris, Karakalpaks, etc.), see P. N. Fedoseyev, *Leninizm I Natsional'nii Vopros V Sovremennich Uslovyach* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977).

13. For a recent example, see Marat Yermukanov, "Kazakhstan: Between Pan-Turkism and Globalization," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 1, no. 56 (2004), http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=401&issue_id=3022&article_id=2368277. For background up to the ultimately forlorn efforts of Turkey to establish itself as a major political, economic, and cultural influence among the various Turkic Eurasian peoples outside of Turkey itself, see Igor Torbakov, "Ankara's Post-Soviet Efforts in the Caucasus and Central Asia: The Failure of the 'Turkic World' Model," *EurasiaNet*, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav122602.shtml> (accessed December 26, 2002).

14. See, for example, the numerous writings of Igor Torbakov, who has closely chronicled the path of Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet space for EurasiaNet. For example, see Igor Torbakov, "Russia Seeks to Restore Its Influence in Central Asia," <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav120502a.shtml> (accessed December 5, 2002).

15. K. Gajendra Singh, "Putin's Visit to Ankara: Russian-Turkish Relations in Perspective," *South Asia Analysis Group*, <http://www.saag.org/papers12/paper1101.html>. Singh is the former Indian ambassador to Turkey and Azerbaijan and chairman of the Foundation for Indo-Turkic Studies.

16. Approximately 70 percent of gas comes from Russian sources. See Bacik, "The Blue-Stream Project," 89. See also Zalmay Khalilzad et al., *The Future of Turkish-Western Relations*, x.

17. Cf. Bacik, "The Blue-Stream Project," 87.

18. According to *Pravda*, "a protocol on putting the pipeline in operation was signed on December 30, 2002; its official launch is scheduled for February 3, 2003. Industrial gas supplies are most likely to start on this day, too. It is planned to supply two billion cubic meters of gas to Turkey in 2003. The pipeline is to reach its planned capacity of sixteen billion cubic meters per year in 2008. It is worth mentioning that the Russian part of the Blue Stream system includes 370 kilometers of overland pipeline and 396 kilometers of seabottom pipeline." See <http://english.pravda.ru/comp/2003/01/27/42606.html/>. For the official Gazprom view of the entire project, see <http://www.gazprom.com/eng/articles/article8895.shtml/>. Also, for an overview, cf. Bacik, "The Blue-Stream Project," 85-93.

19. See Laurent Ruseckas, "Turkey and Eurasia: Opportunities and Risks in the Caspian Pipeline Derby," *Journal of International Affairs* 54, no. 1 (2000). See also the U.S. Department of Energy's Web site outlining the political and economic situation regarding energy resources in the region at http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Region_ni.html.

20. Cf. Bacik, "The Blue-Stream Project," 89.

21. See a speech given at the Istanbul Forum, May 5, 2005, by First Deputy Managing Director Krueger. Anne O. Krueger, "Turkey's Economy: A Future Full of Promise," <http://www.imf.org/external/np/speeches/2005/050505.htm> (accessed May 5, 2005).

22. Bulent Aras, "Turkish-Russian Relations: Implications for Eurasia's Geopolitics," *Power and Interest News Report*, http://www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view_printable&report_id=265&language_id=1 (accessed February 9, 2005).

23. "Relations with Russia," *Turkishpress.com*, <http://www.turkishpress.com/specials/2003/yir/Russia.asp> (accessed September 19, 2005).

24. "OECD Economic Survey of the Russian Federation 2004: The Sources of Russian Economic Growth," *Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development*, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/56/0/32389025.pdf>. For President Putin's address and comments, see <http://www.kremlin.ru/sdocs/appears.shtml>.

25. Cited from U.S. Energy Information Agency, Department of Energy, "Country Analysis Briefs: Russia," <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/russia.html>.

26. Allen C. Lynch, *How Russia Is Not Ruled: Reflections on Russian Political Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 245–46.

27. Hunter notes that "The Turkish military's doubts about the wisdom of Turkey's attempts to join the EU, which would require significant changes in Turkey's policy towards ethnic minorities and a strengthening of civilian control over the military. . . . Therefore some Turkish generals have talked about closer cooperation with Russia" (*Islam in Russia*, 370).

28. See Mikhael Meyer, "Russia-Turkey-EU: Partnership Inevitable," *Turkish Weekly*, <http://www.turkishweekly.net/articles.php?id=30> (accessed November 16, 2004).

29. *Rossiia i Mirovoya Torgovaya Organizatsiya*, "German Gref Nazyvayet Nyeprostoi Situatsiyu Na Peregovorach s SSHA o vstuplenii v VTO," http://www.wto.ru/ru/news.asp?msg_id=13773.

30. Mustafa Unal, "Brightest Period in Turkish-Russian Relations," *Zaman Daily News*, <http://www.zaman.com/?bl=columnists&trh=20050914&hn=15612> (accessed January 12, 2005).

31. Cf. "Relations with Russia," *Turkishpress.com*.

32. Unal, *op. cit.*

33. Cf. Bacik, "The Blue-Stream Project," 87. See also Khalilzad et al., *The Future of Turkish-Western Relations*, xi.

34. Hunter, *Islam in Russia*, 367.

35. <http://www.euractiv.com/Article?tmuri=tcm:29-134083-16&type=LinksDossier>.

36. Duygu Bazoğlu Sezer, "Turkish-Russian Relations: The Challenges of Reconciling Geopolitical Competition with Economic Partnership," *Turkish Studies* 1, no. 1 (2000): 59.

37. Significantly, the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, adopted by Putin in June 2000, only several months after his election to the presidency, establishes Russian influence in the post-Soviet regions as a priority. "A priority area in Russia's foreign policy is ensuring conformity of multilateral and bilateral cooperation with the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to national security tasks of the country. The emphasis will be made on the development of good neighborly relations and strategic partnership with all CIS member states. We attach a priority importance to joint efforts toward settling conflicts in CIS member states, and to the development of cooperation in the military-political area and in the sphere of security, particularly in combating international terrorism and extremism" ("The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm>).

38. Nasuh Uslu, "The Russian, Caucasian, and Central Asian Aspects of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post Cold War Period," *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations* 2, no. 3–4 (2003): 168–69.

39. Singh, "Putin's Visit to Ankara." See also Idil Tuncer, "The Security Policies of the Russian Federation: The 'Near Abroad' and Turkey," *Turkish Studies* 1, no. 2 (2000): 95–112.

40. Cf. Khachatryan, "The Russia-Turkish Rapprochement."

41. These sentiments were conveyed to one of the authors by sources who wish to remain anonymous. See also Steve Fainaru, "Kurds Claiming Prized Territory in Northern Iraq," *Washington Post*, October 30, 2005, A01.

42. "Turkish Demonstrators Denounce Putin," *Chechnya Weekly* 5, no. 45 (December 8, 2004): 1.

43. Bulent Aras, "Turkish-Russian Relations."

44. This was forecast in 2000 to become and persist as a major point of tension between Turkey and Russia; see Sezer, "Turkish-Russian Relations," 59–82.

45. "Chechen Gunmen Seize Moscow Theater," *CNN.com*, <http://archives.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/europe/10/23/russia.siege> (accessed October 24, 2002).

46. Jon Gorvett, "Chechen Question Harms Turkish-Russian Relations," *Eurasia Insight*, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav110702a.shtml> (accessed November 7, 2002). See also Fotios Moustakis and Ella Ackerman, "September 11: A Dynamic for Russo-Turkish Cooperation or Conflict?" *Central Asia Survey* 21, no. 4 (2002): 423–34. *Yeni Safak* (New Dawn) is a moderately Islamist publication.

47. *Ibid.*

48. For a breakdown of the election results, see "Elections Around the World: Elections in Turkey," <http://www.electionworld.org/turkey.htm>.

49. "Başbakan Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Tarafından TBMM'ne Sunulan 59'uncu Hükümet Programı" (Governmental Program of the AK Party, address to the Turkish Grand National Assembly), March 18, 2003, <http://www.akparti.org.tr/hukümetprg.doc>. İyi komşuluk ilişkileri içinde Rusya Federasyonu ile, kültürel yakınlığımız çerçevesinde Orta-Asya ve Kafkasya ülkelerinde tarafların çıkarlarını zedelemeyen, işbirliğine dayalı ilişkiler sürdürülecektir. Hükümetimiz, Rusya Federasyonu ile ilişkilerini azamileştirmeyi öncelleyen Avrasya perspektifini titizlikle geliştirecektir.

50. Hunter, *Islam in Russia*, 369–70.

51. For Freedom House's report on Turkey (which it considers "partly free"), see <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2005/Spain-Zimbabwe.pdf>. For Russia (which it considers "unfree"), see <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2005/Paraguay-SouthKorea.pdf>.

52. Brian Lai and Dan Reiter, "Democracy, Political Similarity, and International Alliances 1816–1992," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44, no. 2 (2000): 203–27.

53. Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, "Democratization and War," *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 3 (1995): 79–97. See also their more recent and expansive work, *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

54. For an excellent summary of the changes in the political party system in Russia that are only strengthening the grip on power of Putin's Unified Russia party (*Yedinaya Rossiya*, which some translate as United Russia), see "Duma: How the Duma Electoral System Works," <http://www.russiavotes.org/>.

55. Mehmet Ali Birand and Hikmet Bila-Ridvan Akar, *12 Eylül: Türkiye'nin Miladi* (Istanbul: Doğan Kitapçılık, 1999).

56. Igor Torbakov, "Turkey and Russia Forge New Ties on Security, Trade," *EurasiaNet* <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav080805.shtml> (accessed August 8, 2005).

57. Cf. Khachatryan, "The Russia-Turkish Rapprochement."

58. Cf. Khachatryan, "The Russia-Turkish Rapprochement."

59. For an assessment of Turkish public opinion on this matter, see Nasuh Uslu, Metin Toprak, Ibrahim Dalmis, and Ertan Aydın, "Turkish Public Opinion toward the United States in the Context of the Iraq Question," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 9, no. 2 (2005): 75–80.