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**The Russian Federation and Turkey between cooperation and conflict in the
Black Sea region**

SUMMARY

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SUMMARY

“...This is an almost closed sea which communicates with the Mediterranean only through the narrow exit of the Straits; however, because of the great rivers flowing into it from the depths of the steppe or from the ranges of Central Europe, thanks to the multiple network of the continental roads reaching its ports, it deserves, as much as other seas the name of the “turntable” of the great traffic and international exchanges. This character as a transition and a crossroads between Europe and Asia gives it to the people and States on its coastline. ...” (The Black Sea in Gheorghe I. Brătianu's vision).¹

The reference point of our presentation is represented by the quote of the Romanian historian and politician Gheorghe I. Brătianu, who highlighted with great critical spirit the importance of the Black Sea region, synthetically presenting its main characteristics, which are still relevant today. It is interesting that, despite the changing regional balance of power, the strategic importance of the Black Sea has remained constant throughout history. The new world order that followed the Cold War created a geopolitical context that accelerated regional dynamics, which brought to the fore the region's importance and global implications of developments in the Black Sea.

The Russian-Georgian war in August 2008, the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the militarization of the Black Sea basin by the Russian Federation have created major security risks for the riparian States, the EU and NATO. In the context of these developments, Turkey's regional role has become particularly important, given its membership of NATO and the fact that Ankara is the main trading partner of the Russian Federation in the region. The new security context post-2008 has created challenges and opportunities for Turkey in the Black Sea Region, with the way in which Ankara's political establishment is positioned toward regional geopolitical developments being relevant to both NATO and the Russian Federation.

¹ Gheorghe I. Brătianu, *Marea Neagră - De la origini până la cucerirea otomană*, Volumul I. București, Editura Meridiane, 1988, p. 87.

a. Rationale for choosing this topic

Considering the geopolitical developments in the Black Sea region after 2008, we believe that highlighting the co-ordinates of the bilateral relationship between the Russian Federation and Turkey is of particular importance for the current and future geopolitical context. The Russian Federation and Turkey are the countries with the most important military and economic power in the region, and their approach to developments in the Black Sea, either independently or in cooperation, has the potential to generate regional stability or volatility. At the same time, given that Turkey is the most relevant NATO Black Sea coastal state and a European Union (EU) candidate, its actions in the region may pose challenges to the Alliance and/or the EU.

The identification of the main foreign policy co-ordinates and Turkey's reporting on Russian actions in the Black Sea region is relevant for NATO and EU formulation of regional policies and strategies. Turkey is not important to NATO only in terms of its military capabilities and geostrategic position. Turkey's relevance is also given by the fact that, as a NATO Member state, it has the capacity to influence or block certain strategic decisions of the Alliance, targeting the Black Sea region. With decisions within NATO being made only with the consensus of all Member States, Turkey's position and influence can foster consensus or create institutional bottlenecks.

It is obvious that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, relations between Moscow and Ankara have intensified, which has created a framework for the development of strategic projects. Given the political and security importance of such initiatives, it is necessary to examine the implications they have on the formulation of foreign policy and regional strategies in the case of Moscow and Ankara. The ability of the Euro-Atlantic Community to anticipate potential regional-impact actions by Ankara and Moscow, both independently and jointly, has the potential to provide strategic advantages in relations with the two states.

b. Novelty and relevance of the subject

“The Black Sea region is of crucial significance for Europe, being a major crossroads and critical intersection of east-west and south-north corridors. Many experts believe that whoever controls or dominates the Black Sea can easily project power to the European

continent, mainly in the Balkans and Central Europe, but also in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as the South Caucasus and the northern Middle East". (Pavel Anastasov, NATO)².

Given Russia's revisionist actions in the Black Sea region, Turkey's growing activism and the 'thawing' of some 'frozen conflicts', the dynamics of the Russian-Turkish relationship have the potential to influence geopolitical developments in the region. A recent example of this is the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that flared up in 2020, where Moscow and Ankara were the main regional actors involved and had an interest in determining the outcome of the hostilities. Also, given Russia's actions in opposition to NATO's interests in the region, Ankara's policy decisions have the potential to strengthen Moscow's or the West's regional influence. Turkey's status as guardian of the Black Sea straits, granted by the 1936 Montreaux Convention, allows it to be a balancer between East and West, as it demonstrated during the Russo-Georgian War.

We believe that the research we are undertaking will remain relevant for a long time to come, as the complexity of the strategic game in the Black Sea is increasing and the conflict dossiers are far from being resolved. In the context of increasing Russian aggression, including during international military exercises in the region with Ukraine, Turkey's reaction to these developments is being closely monitored by Moscow and the West. Another issue that will be of interest to Moscow is the intensification of military cooperation between Turkey and Ukraine.

Given the abovementioned developments, there is a high probability that tensions in the Black Sea will remain high or intensify. Against this background, we believe that the Russian-Turkish bilateral relationship will influence the regional strategic game in the long term. Beyond general strategic considerations, the Russian-Turkish relationship will continue to be particularly relevant in the context of the intensification of cooperation between the two countries in the field of strategic energy and military projects.

c. The study objectives

The first objective of the research is to highlight the main coordinates of the dichotomous cooperation-conflict relationship between the Russian Federation and Turkey since 2008. Establishing the limits of cooperation and conflict is relevant in the process of determining the characteristics of interdependence specific to the Russian-Turkish bilateral relationship. The

² Pavel Anastasov, *The Black Sea region: a critical intersection*, 25 mai 2018, [Online], Disponibil la: <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2018/05/25/the-black-sea-region-a-critical-intersection/index.html>, [Accesat la data de: 10.07.2021].

research we are conducting is aimed both at presenting the topics/areas that are fostering bilateral cooperation and those that are determining the manifestation of conflict. The comparative and integrated analysis of the two antagonistic dimensions allows us to isolate the factors that have the potential to change the coordinates of the Russian-Turkish bilateral relationship and to favour or not the manifestation of the Complex Interdependence between the two.

The second objective of the research is the dimension of Russian-Turkish cooperation in strategic areas and its implications for the two countries' foreign policy formulation. However, we have given priority to the way in which Turkish foreign policy is impacted by strategic cooperation with the Russian Federation. The main purpose of this approach is to highlight the potential for Russian-Turkish cooperation to determine the Turkish state to resort to actions contrary to the interests of Euro-Atlantic partners.

d. Research questions and hypothesis

Considering the above-mentioned developments, we have decided to outline the main changes that have marked Russian-Turkish bilateral relations since 2008 and to determine their regional and global implications. Accordingly, we aim to answer the following research questions: (1) Has the dichotomous cooperation-conflict relationship between the Russian Federation and Turkey fostered the manifestation of Complex Interdependence in the bilateral relationship between the two states? (2) Has the interdependence between the Russian Federation and Turkey influenced, in strategic areas, the foreign policy policies and strategies of the Turkish state, especially those concerning the relationship with Euro-Atlantic partners?

Based on the above mentioned research questions we intend to test the following hypothesis: “after 2008, the Russian-Turkish bilateral relationship, especially cooperation in the energy and military fields, has fostered the manifestation of a relationship of Complex Interdependence between the two states, as they are interested in maintaining the regional status quo and strengthening their partnership. This has created security challenges and/or risks for Euro-Atlantic partners”.

e. Methodology

Taking into account the high level of complexity of the Russian-Turkish bilateral relationship and the existence of a large number of issues, we used a mixed strategy in the

research approach, using quantitative and qualitative analysis, and the correlation of data was carried out using the interpretative method, specific to the field of foreign policy analysis. Quantitative analysis was used to determine numerically the level of interdependence between the Russian Federation and Turkey. As for the qualitative analysis, we used the historical and comparative methods.

The use of the historical method in the research we are undertaking has helped to highlight the behavioral patterns of the two states over a long period of time and their reaction to internal and external pressures. At the same time, given that in the case of nation states the historical past plays a crucial role in the formulation of foreign policy policies and strategies, we felt that the historical method lends itself very well to the research we are conducting. It is worth mentioning that we have used the historical method together with the comparative method, thus having the possibility to highlight issues that have not changed over time, but also to present novel insights and paradigm shifts.

The research includes primary sources, official documents, interviews, statements, papers, summaries, reports of international organizations, journals and articles, statistics published by public institutions in the Russian Federation and Turkey, studies and statistics by educational institutions in Turkey and the Russian Federation, papers published by organizations funded by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the two countries, etc.

Given that the research has a strong historical component, the starting point was the study of the Russian-Turkish bilateral relationship over a long period of time, during which we presented the main trends, the changes generated by the geopolitical context and the impact of external factors. To this end, we studied the main authors who have dealt with the subject of Russian-Turkish relations in the long term, which gave us an overview of the subject under investigation.

Subsequently, we used the official energy and security strategies and policies of the Russian Federation and Turkey as a basis for documentation, some of which can be consulted on the official websites of public institutions in the two countries. Given the relevance and implications of the Russian-Turkish relationship for the Black Sea region and the Euro-Atlantic community, the analysis we have undertaken includes reports, strategies, official documents from institutions such as NATO, EU, OSCE, BSEC, etc.

The scientific basis of the research is composed of a large number of papers and academic articles that have addressed the topic of Russian-Turkish relations, especially the cooperation-conflict dimension. It should be noted that we have categorized the consulted works according to the scientific background of the authors and their origin. The three categories are composed of Russian, Turkish and other geographical scholars who have studied the bilateral Russian-Turkish relationship. For each category we have presented the main approaches, highlighting their commonalities. At the same time, after reviewing the findings for each category of researchers, we have carried out a comparative analysis to highlight differences in approach and commonalities.

The access to the content of journals and scholarly articles in the field of international relations in the country and abroad was provided through electronic databases such as JSTOR, PROQUEST, EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, Academia.edu, Research Gate etc.

In the first chapter of the thesis (**LITERATURE REVIEW**) we reviewed the main academic works that have addressed the topic of the dihotimic cooperation-conflict relationship between the Russian Federation and Turkey. In order to have as clear and objective picture as possible of the topic, we have selected specialized works from several geographic areals. In the first section of this chapter we have included works by Russian researchers affiliated with institutions in the Russian Federation (universities, think tanks, organizations, etc.). Prior to the inclusion of these works in the study, we studied the scientific background of each individual researcher to ensure that the information disseminated by them promotes the Russian view on the Russian-Turkish bilateral relationship. In the second section of the chapter we have included research and studies by Turkish researchers (representatives of the political establishment in Ankara, members of organisations funded by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, professors of Turkish state universities, etc.). Similar to the section reserved for Russian researchers, the rationale for selecting researchers close to the political establishment in Ankara was to indirectly identify the Turkish state's policy towards the Russian Federation.

In the third section of the first chapter, we have included research and studies that are not ideologically contaminated by Russian and Turkish state approaches. Despite the fact that the authors of the third section include Turkish authors, we have taken into account that they are members of international think tanks, independent organisations, etc. At the end of each section we have presented the common ideas of the researchers, and at the end of the chapter we have

made a comparative analysis between the approaches of the three categories. The analysis identified a number of differences in the approaches of the three categories of researchers, but also identified points of convergence.

In the second chapter (**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**) we first present the way neoliberals have related to the cooperation-conflict relationship. At the same time, we provide data on the etymology of the concept of Complex Interdependence and the steps that led to its transformation into a theory of international relations. In this section we also highlight the main characteristics of Complex Interdependence and the main limitations of the theory.

Following the presentation of the theoretical framework, we presented the main researches that have addressed the bilateral relationship between the Russian Federation and Turkey from the perspective of the analysis grid proposed by the theory of Complex Interdependence. We have highlighted how the theory has been applied to the Russian-Turkish relationship, presenting both the strengths and weaknesses of previous studies. We have also presented the perspective from which we have chosen to apply the theory to the research we are undertaking, highlighting the main advantages of our approach and the elements of novelty it implies.

In the third chapter (**THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE BLACK SEA AND THE HISTORY OF BILATERAL RUSSIAN-TURKISH RELATIONS**), we summarise the characteristics of the region and how they favour certain behaviours of its constituent states. At the same time, in this chapter we highlight the main stages that have marked the history of Russian-Turkish bilateral relations from the establishment of diplomatic relations to the Putin-Erdoğan era. Observing the Russian-Turkish bilateral relationship over a long period of time allows us to highlight how the two powers have disputed their regional supremacy and how they relate to the bilateral relationship. At the same time, in this chapter we present the fluctuations inherent in the bilateral relationship and the mechanisms that fostered cooperation and conflict between the two powers, the role played by the West and the relevance of regional and global alliances.

In the fourth chapter of the thesis (**RUSSIAN-TURKISH COOPERATION IN THE ENERGY AND MILITARY FIELDS**) we analyse the coordinates of Russian-Turkish cooperation in the field of strategic energy projects and in the military field. The main objective is to highlight the role that these two sectors play in increasing the level of interdependence

between Moscow and Ankara. In the first section of this chapter we analyse the energy strategies of the Russian and Turkish states and the strategic implications of the energy projects jointly developed by the two states. As for the energy strategies of the two states, we investigate their importance both internally and externally, highlighting the implications for the Black Sea region.

In the case of Turkey, we highlight the role played by imports of energy resources in the strategy to secure domestic energy needs. We also present the main regional implications of the Ankara political establishment's strategy to turn Turkey into a regional energy hub. In the case of the Russian Federation, the analysis focuses in particular on highlighting the role played by the external energy strategy and its strategic implications. We believe that investigating the main energy coordinates of the two countries' strategies and highlighting convergent elements is essential for understanding the springs that foster energy cooperation between Moscow and Ankara. Given the importance attached by the Russian Federation and Turkey to energy cooperation, we present how the two countries deal with the issue and the regional implications of the strategic energy projects they develop.

In the first section of this chapter, we investigate the role played by the TurkStream 2 pipeline and the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant in strengthening the bilateral Russian-Turkish energy relationship and their implications for the relationship between Ankara and its Euro-Atlantic partners. In the case of the TurkStream pipeline, we present the economic and strategic implications of the project, highlighting the regional connections of its development. We pay particular attention to how Western countries have reacted to the operationalisation of this project. In the case of the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant, we investigate the reasons why Turkey chose to award the project to a Russian company and the implications of the project on the Russian-Turkish bilateral relationship.

In the second section of this chapter we present the main coordinates of military cooperation between the two countries. We highlighted the main projects developed jointly by Moscow and Ankara after the dissolution of the USSR, but we gave priority to the subject of Turkey's acquisition of the S-400 Triumph air defence system. Given that Turkey is a NATO member state and the Russian Federation the main security threat to the Alliance, in this section we have outlined the implications of this contract for the relationship between NATO and Turkey. In particular, we have highlighted the allies' reaction to Turkey's decision to purchase

the Russian system, as well as how the Turkish state is repositioning itself in relation to the actions of its Euro-Atlantic partners.

In the fifth chapter of the thesis (**COMPETITION-COOPERATION AMBIVALENCE IN THE BILATERAL RUSSIAN-TURKISH RELATIONSHIP**), we presented the main problematic dossiers of the Russian-Turkish relationship in the Black Sea and how the foreign policy decisions of the two states influence each other. In the first section of this chapter, we have analysed the security dynamics in the Caucasus region, the interests of the Russian Federation and Turkey in this area, and the way in which the two states adjust their actions to regional developments. In the second section of this chapter, we examined the consequences for bilateral relations of the Russian Federation's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. At the same time, we have presented the main coordinates of the bilateral relationship between Turkey and Ukraine and the importance of this topic for the Russian-Turkish bilateral relationship. In the last section of this chapter, we have highlighted the main strategic interests of the Russian Federation and Turkey in the conflict in Syria. We also presented the main coordinates of cooperation and conflict between Moscow and Ankara, highlighting the approach by which the two states have kept under control the tensions that have erupted in Syria.

The sixth chapter of the thesis (Turkey's relationship with NATO and Russian subversive operations aimed at jeopardizing the Turkey-NATO relationship) is composed of two sections. In the first section we analyse the evolution of the relationship between Turkey and NATO after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. With the disappearance of the main security threat to the Turkish state - the USSR - officials in Ankara took steps to increase regional influence and strategic independence. To achieve the latter, Turkey put its national interests first, which often opposed with NATO's regional policies. These include the Ankara political establishment's efforts to maintain the status quo in the Black Sea basin. With this in mind, in the first section of the chapter we analyse the coordinates of Turkey's relationship with NATO, presenting the factors that have led Turkish officials to formulate policies opposed to NATO's interests.

Although this topic has marginal implications for Russian-Turkish relations, it is important to highlight Turkey's relationship with NATO in order to identify the tools used by the Russian Federation to drive a wedge between Ankara and NATO. In the second section of this chapter, we examine how the Kremlin has exploited and heightened tensions between Turkey and NATO in order to promote its own political agenda and hijack Turkey's Euro-Atlantic path.

f. Research limitations

Given the complexity of the topic under investigation and the diversity of issues involved, one of the main limitations is the lack of comprehensive coverage of the subject. As a consequence, the research is limited to events, ideas and attitudes that subscribe to the argument. Another limitation is generated by the vast period we cover in our research - 2008-present, not having the capacity and tools to go through all the materials that have addressed the topic of Russian-Turkish bilateral relations. It should also be noted that, due to the lack of knowledge of some of the languages spoken in the selected area, such as Russian and Turkish, access to official data and information and direct sources is limited. At the same time, it should be noted that material from the Arab and Asian areas has a relatively small share, again due to linguistic limitations.

For official documents and information available in Turkish and Russian, including online, we used translation applications and software such as Reverso and Translator.eu. However, the accuracy of the translations made using the above-mentioned tools did not meet our expectations, which is why we only considered information that we were able to access and verify in languages such as English or French.

We believe that it is also worth mentioning that some of the issues on the agenda of bilateral Russian-Turkish relations have not been resolved, and for some of them there is no near horizon of resolution. Given this state of affairs and the unpredictability of the Russian-Turkish relationship, there is a possibility of rapid and hard-to-anticipate changes in the regional geopolitical context, which would invalidate some of the value judgments we have put forward in this research.

We draw attention to the fact that the listing of limitations is not intended to justify the qualitative level of the argument, but is a warning made for ethical reasons regarding possible omissions in the identification and presentation of some elements of the argument.

In the **FINAL CONCLUSIONS** section, we formulate the answers to the research questions and highlight the results obtained from testing the research hypothesis. At the same time, in this section we highlight the main implications of the results of the research we have undertaken and the contribution it has made to the field. This section also includes the main limitations of the research and questions that need to be addressed to future research that will deal with the topic of Russian-Turkish bilateral relations.

Quid pro quo in international relations? The Black Sea region is an area of particular economic and security importance for the Russian Federation and Turkey, as well as an area of convergence of the strategic interests of the two countries. While until 1991 the Soviet Union was the main security threat to Turkey, the post-Cold War world order has changed the balance of power between Moscow and Ankara. The new context has favoured increased cooperation, despite the continuing high level of competition between the two states. The decline of the Kremlin's influence in the near neighbourhood has prompted Ankara to resort to strategies aimed at increasing its influence in the Black Sea region.

In parallel with this approach, Turkey has taken steps to increase its strategic autonomy, which has led to strained relations with Western partners. As regards the Black Sea region, the strategy of the political establishment in Ankara has been to maintain influence and limit Western involvement in the region. Keeping the West out of the Black Sea region was an approach that suited the Kremlin. For this reason, the Russian side aimed to avoid escalating tensions with Turkey, despite the many conflict dossiers on the bilateral agenda.

The Russian intervention in Georgia and the annexation of the Crimean peninsula have prompted the political establishment in Ankara to reconsider its strategy towards the Black Sea region. However, Turkish officials have continued to limit actions aimed at strengthening the Western presence in the Black Sea, believing that such developments would lead to regional instability. This approach has favoured Russian interests in the region, with the Kremlin resorting to a marked strengthening of military capabilities in the Black Sea basin since 2014.

The intensification of energy cooperation has been a contributing factor to the growing economic ties between Ankara and Moscow. This has facilitated an increase in the number of formal, non-governmental channels of contact between the two countries. Given these developments, we can say that the post-2008 Russian-Turkish bilateral relationship is in line with the first feature of Complex Interdependence theory - *societies are connected through multiple channels*. However, it should be mentioned that in terms of importance, governmental channels have been much more relevant in the economics of the bilateral relationship than non-governmental ones (e.g. Russian and Turkish business community). The personal relationship between Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan continues to play an increased role in the conduct of Russian-Turkish bilateral relations. At the same time, the lack of an institutional framework to facilitate cooperation between the two countries is felt when conflicts break out. In

such situations, it is obvious that the role played by political leaders in resolving disputes is much more important than that of the institutional framework.

As for the second characteristic of the Complex Interdependence theory, *the lack of hierarchy of the issues on the bilateral agenda*, the developments in the period under study reveal that the increased level of complexity of the issues jointly managed by Moscow and Ankara makes it impossible to prioritize them. In terms of cooperation, the energy sector has been for a considerable period of time the most important topic on the agenda of bilateral Russian-Turkish relations. However, the increasing complexity of Russian-Turkish bilateral relations has led to the parallel existence of several priority topics. For example, with Turkey's acquisition of the Russian S-400 system, cooperation in the economic field has been joined by cooperation in the military field, thus creating several areas of strategic cooperation.

In terms of conflict, until the outbreak of the Arab Spring, the main issue on the agenda of Russian-Turkish relations was the management of the situation in the Caucasus. However, with the outbreak of the war in Syria and the subsequent involvement of the two countries in the Libyan conflict, the agenda of bilateral relations has no longer been dominated by a single issue. In view of these developments, we can say that the level of complexity of the Russian-Turkish bilateral relationship is high, with a large number of cooperation and conflict dossiers that the two states have to manage. At the same time, given the high regional dynamics and the volatile nature of the Russian-Turkish relationship, the relevance of one dossier on the agenda of the Russian-Turkish bilateral relationship can be overtaken within a few days by another. Thus, it can be concluded that the relations between the Russian Federation and Turkey imply the existence of several dossiers/issues, which are not organised in a hierarchical order.

As for the third feature of the Complex Interdependence Theory, *states no longer use military capabilities against other regional actors*, we can say that this is also applicable to the Russian-Turkish bilateral relationship, but with a few caveats. Despite the fact that during the period under study there was an increase in bilateral cooperation, favoured by energy projects, there were times when, albeit temporarily, Turkey and the Russian Federation used military power against each other. A prime relevant example is the incident in November 2015, when Ankara shot down the Russian Suhoi Su-24 fighter jet, which had accessed Turkish airspace without authorisation. Also, during the conflict in Syria, Moscow and Ankara used military

power against each other by proxy. Relevant in this respect is also the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, where Russian forces were in opposition to Turkish forces.

Given these developments, we can say that the bilateral Russian-Turkish relationship is only partly in line with the third characteristic of Complex Interdependence. Consequently, the conclusion that emerges from the analysis of the Russian-Turkish bilateral relationship using the analytical grid proposed by Keohane and Nye is that the conditions for the existence of Complex Interdependence are not met. However, on specific moments and issues between the Russian Federation and Turkey there is a high level of interdependence, which has the potential to turn into Complex Interdependence. In order to achieve this goal, it would be necessary for the way the two states report on jointly managed conflict dossiers to be different from the current one.

In other words, the way Moscow and Ankara manage the conflict dossiers should lead to a state of balance that does not allow the outbreak of major conflicts, or in the event of their outbreak, they should not impact overwhelmingly the bilateral relationship. At the same time, transforming the interdependence relationship into Complex Interdependence would require the two countries to identify mechanisms for multiplying the channels of contact and creating an institutional framework to facilitate cooperation. As long as the personal relationship between leaders is of major importance in the conduct of bilateral relations, to the detriment of the institutional framework, the relationship between the two states remains fragile and volatile.

As for the degree of dependence in the bilateral relationship, despite the fact that Nye and Keohane argue that interdependence does not imply perfect equilibrium in all situations, in the case of the Russian-Turkish relationship Moscow has a large number of levers of control in the relationship with Turkey, while the reciprocal is not valid. Given Turkey's dependence on energy resources imported from the Russian Federation and the Russian Federation's favourable trade balance, Ankara's room for maneuver is relatively limited. This was visible during the Russian-Turkish Cold War of 2015-2016, when sanctions imposed by the Russian Federation significantly affected Turkey's economy. Despite the fact that the Russian Federation has continued to violate Turkish airspace and strike positions in Syria of Turkish-backed forces, Ankara officials have made moves to resume bilateral relations, particularly in the economic sphere.

Given the specifics of the Russian-Turkish bilateral relationship and the level of interdependence currently existing between the two countries, the outbreak of crises such as the

one in 2015-2016 generates losses for both actors. However, the Russian Federation is at an advantage as it is less dependent on Turkey than vice versa, with the possibility to adapt quickly to sanctions imposed by the Turkish state. As for Turkey, as officials in Ankara have repeatedly stated, its dependence on energy resources provided by the Russian state limits its leverage in the bilateral relationship. However, given that Turkey is taking steps to reduce the share of Russian hydrocarbon imports, in the long term Turkey will be able to reduce its dependence on the Russian Federation.

Regarding the level of interdependence between the two states, we can conclude that Turkey is much more sensitive and vulnerable in its relations with the Russian Federation than vice versa. In terms of sensitivity, it is worth noting that Russian actions aimed at undermining Turkish status quickly achieve their goal, causing Turkey to moderate its actions against the Russian Federation. At the same time, in terms of vulnerability, Turkey is currently vulnerable to hostile actions by the Russian Federation, both economically and strategically. If the Russian Federation were to halt energy exports, this would lead to a major crisis for the Turkish state, given that approximately 50% of the country's energy consumption is of Russian origin. As for the strategic dimension, Turkey is vulnerable to hostile actions by the Russian Federation in theatres of operations such as Syria, as Ankara does not have the capacity to respond proportionately to Moscow's aggression. The structural asymmetry of economic and strategic relations between the Russian Federation and Turkey limits Ankara's ability to negotiate with Moscow.

As for testing the research hypothesis³, we can say that the intensification of energy cooperation between the Russian Federation and Turkey has led to the improvement and strengthening of bilateral relations. The high level of interdependence in the energy field has boosted cooperation between the two countries in other areas as well, including the military. Despite the deepening and increasing complexity of the Russian-Turkish bilateral relationship, the large number of conflict dossiers on the agenda of bilateral relations and the lack of leverage on the part of Turkey has not allowed the manifestation of Complex Interdependence between the two states. However, Russian-Turkish cooperation in the energy and military fields has

³ “Since 2008, the Russian-Turkish bilateral relationship, in particular cooperation in the energy and military fields, has fostered a relationship of Complex Interdependence between the two countries, as they are interested in maintaining the regional *status quo* and strengthening their partnership. This has created security challenges and/or risks for Euro-Atlantic partners”.

created a number of challenges for NATO member states. The most relevant examples are the TurkStream 2 gas pipeline and the S-400 Triumph deal.

Regarding the TurkStream 2 gas pipeline, through Turkey's participation in the operationalization of the energy project, Ankara has made a considerable contribution to promoting the Kremlin's strategic interests. First of all, the quantities of gas delivered through the pipeline provide the Russian Federation with significant financial resources with which the Kremlin is able to support its national economy (targeted by Western sanctions), strengthen its military capabilities, including in the Black Sea region. Secondly, as TurkStream 2 bypasses Ukraine, the Kremlin has the possibility to stop gas exports through the Ukrainian transport network. At the same time, the Russian side has the opportunity to exert more pressure on the Ukrainian state, including by stopping gas exports, as it did in 2006 and 2009. The context also allows the Russian Federation to continue to support hostile actions in eastern Ukraine, thus maintaining a high level of instability near NATO and EU borders.

Thirdly, TurkStream 2 allows the Russian Federation to increase the quantities of natural gas exported to European countries, in contradiction with the EU Energy Security Strategy, which aims to decrease the share of Russian gas imports. At the same time, TurkStream 2 is an instrument through which the Kremlin can maintain/consolidate its influence in European countries and gain leverage over decision-makers in these countries. Given these circumstances, we can conclude that, by Turkey's participation in the TurkStream 2 project, Ankara has contributed to increasing the Russian Federation's regional influence, to the detriment of NATO and EU interests.

As for Russian-Turkish military cooperation and the main topic on the agenda of bilateral relations - the S-400 Triumph project - we can say that it has generated tensions within NATO and fears of new security risks to member states. The expansion of the Russian-Turkish partnership from the energy to the military sphere has underlined the strategic nature of the Russian-Turkish bilateral relationship. Regardless of Turkey's actual decisions to purchase the Russian S-400 Triumph air defence system, the issue has generated tensions within the Alliance and led to the strengthening of Russia's image as a great power. Although NATO member states, especially the US, have contested the agreement with the Russian side, officials in Ankara have ignored the opposition expressed by allies. The situation has damaged the organisation's image by calling into question the Alliance's unity and Turkey's loyalty to NATO.

Moreover, amid Turkey's refusal to give up the S-400 Triumph system, the US has triggered several sanctions mechanisms on Turkey, which has been repeatedly warned about the security risks that the Russian system may generate against NATO's military infrastructure. Based on the presented issues, we formulated the following answer to the first research question⁴: the dichotomous cooperation-conflict relationship between the Russian Federation and Turkey in the Black Sea Region after 2008 facilitated the increase of the degree of economic and strategic co-dependence between the two states, but the bilateral relationship between the two states does not meet the conditions for the manifestation of Complex Interdependence.

As for the second research question⁵, the answer is complex and nuanced and needs to be contextualized. Clearly, the intensification of cooperation between the Russian Federation and Turkey has had an impact on Turkey's relationship with its Euro-Atlantic partners. The most important example of this is the S-400 Triumph contract, which Turkey has not given up on, despite vehement opposition from allies and the security risks they claim. At the same time, Ankara's continued interest in maintaining the status quo in the Black Sea creates security risks for the Allies, as it allows the Russian Federation to consolidate its regional power and influence.

However, the process of deteriorating relations between Ankara and the West cannot be attributed to the intensification of cooperation between Moscow and Ankara, although these dynamics have made a significant contribution. More specifically, the deterioration in relations between Ankara and the West has been driven by a series of Turkish decisions that have fostered the emergence of fault lines in relations with Euro-Atlantic partners. These include the anti-Western rhetoric of the Erdoğan regime and its party, Turkey's activism in the Eastern Mediterranean, the conflictual relationship with Greece and Cyprus, etc.

The bilateral relationship between the Russian Federation and Turkey is dependent on the relationship between the two countries and the West. Thus, in the context of deteriorating relations with the West, the two states tend to enhance each other's strategic interests and take an aggressive approach against the West. However, we should bear in mind that the recent history of Russian-Turkish relations reveals the high level of unpredictability of bilateral relations. Against this background, there is a possibility that at any moment we could witness

⁴ Has the dichotomous cooperation-conflict relationship between the Russian Federation and Turkey favoured the manifestation of Complex Interdependence in the bilateral relationship between the two countries?

⁵ Has the interdependence between the Russian Federation and Turkey influenced, in strategic areas, the foreign policy policies and strategies of the Turkish state, especially those concerning the relationship with Euro-Atlantic partners?

developments that could enhance the conflict dimension of the dichotomous cooperation-conflict relationship between Moscow and Ankara.

The main limitation of the research we conducted is that, despite the reported trends of increasing levels of interdependence between the Russian Federation and Turkey, it is not possible to establish an exact causal relationship between these developments and the foreign policy decisions of the Turkish state that run counter to the interests of the Euro-Atlantic partners.

We believe that a relevant question for future research on the dynamics of interdependence between Moscow and Ankara could be: to what extent will Turkey tolerate Russian actions in the Black Sea region in the context of the operationalization of the Istanbul Canal project and the identification of alternative sources of energy supply?

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