



# **EXPLORING THE PROSPECTS FOR RUSSIAN-TURKISH COOPERATION IN A TURBULENT NEIGHBORHOOD**

GRF-Carnegie Moscow Center Working Group  
Memduh Karakullukçu and Dmitri Trenin, Editors



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## Working Group on Russian-Turkish Cooperation

In 2013, Global Relations Forum in Istanbul and the Carnegie Moscow Center established a Working Group dedicated to exploring the potential for regional cooperation between Turkey and Russia. The Working Group was tasked with generating new thinking on how cooperation between the two countries could be practically advanced. It aims to facilitate a better understanding of the mutual interests in bilateral relations and to help build a more practical working relationship. The Working Group includes former senior government officials, diplomats, military officers, and leading experts from both countries. From the outset, members of the group have been working as one team. This paper is a product of their cooperation.

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## Summary

Even though tensions over Ukraine will inevitably cast a shadow over the bilateral relationship, Russia and Turkey—a NATO member—continue to share a range of important interests. Indeed, there are a number of areas in which the two can work together in their common neighborhood, which stretches from the South Caucasus and the Levant to Central Asia and Afghanistan. A high-level working group on Russian-Turkish regional cooperation has sketched a forward-looking approach for Russia and Turkey in tackling regional challenges.

### Key Issues

- Russia and Turkey's vast common neighborhood is a source of multiple threats, including terrorism, extremism, and drug trafficking, which can affect both countries.
- Both countries have compelling reasons to work together to promote geopolitical and social stability and economic prosperity in their overlapping neighborhoods, particularly in the South Caucasus and Central Asia.
- Moscow and Ankara have their differences on regional issues, rooted in their respective national interests, outlooks, and perceptions. Yet, they can manage those differences with a modicum of goodwill, shared respect for the tenets of international law and states' territorial integrity, regular and open dialogue between their political leaderships, and support from both countries' elites and societies.

### Next Steps for Russia and Turkey

- Russia and Turkey should work together to enhance stability in the South Caucasus, particularly on issues related to the conflicts over Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia.
- Moscow and Ankara should strive to find a political solution to the conflict in Syria. Such a solution would help lay the foundation for future stability in the region.
- Russia and Turkey need to work to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East and to help bring about an acceptable final agreement



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on Iran's nuclear program between Tehran and its international negotiating partners.

- In Afghanistan and Iraq, both Turkish and Russian interests demand that the two cooperate to combat extremism and help to create political stability.
- Central Asia would benefit from Russia and Turkey working together, rather than at cross-purposes, to enhance the economic well-being of countries in the region and prevent radicalism from undermining regional stability.

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## Prologue

The crisis over Ukraine, which entered an acute phase in February 2014, has greatly affected Russia's relations with the West. It effectively ended a quarter-century of generally cooperative relations and periodic attempts to integrate Russia into an expanded West. It also opened a new period of antagonistic rivalry and confrontation, particularly between Washington and Moscow. Although the future cannot be foreseen with any certainty, Russia is now likely to focus on itself; its relations with the former Soviet Republics; and its outreach to China and Asia. This has important implications for Russia's neighbors, including Turkey.

Committed to the principle of territorial integrity of states, Turkey has not recognized the Russian Federation's recent incorporation of Crimea, which has altered the geopolitics of the entire Black Sea region. Turkey has been particularly interested in the situation of Crimean Tatars, a sizable minority in the peninsula. Turkey also believes that the security and stability of Ukraine is critical to the region. Turkey has taken due note of the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia, to which Armenia and Kyrgyzstan are due to accede soon. Turkey is a U.S. ally, a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and a partner of the European Union (EU), negotiating full membership. The United States and these institutions are significantly hardening their positions vis-à-vis Russia.

Prior to the Ukraine crisis, bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia had gained significant momentum. The two countries had reaffirmed their desire to expand their bilateral trade to \$100 billion within a few years. Russian-Turkish energy cooperation had been proceeding, from the Blue Stream gas pipeline and the South Stream project to the nuclear power station. Economic cooperation in other areas, such as construction, has been moving forward, as is humanitarian, cultural, and intellectual contact. Political dialogue continues all the way up to the top level. Maintaining this momentum in the new environment is a challenge faced by authorities on both sides.

Turkish-Russian relations had thrived in the broad context of cooperative relations between Russia and the West. Reversion to such a cooperative context remains the first-best and thus aspirational scenario for the bilateral relationship. In the absence of that benign trajectory, the two countries will

need to reimagine and reshape their present positive relations within a new set of constraints.

Given the breadth of recent cooperation and the wide range of regional concerns shared by the two sides, the underlying dynamic of the bilateral relations is likely to force imaginative steps to sustain its effectiveness as a constructive influence in addressing the broader tensions. In the recent past, both countries have successfully shielded the issues of agreement from the issues of divergence; the coming years may require a skillful extension of that strategy.

In this context, it is encouraging to note that compartmentalization may also be taking place between Russia and the United States. Despite the severity of the U.S.-Russian conflict over Ukraine, a fair amount of Russian-American collaboration—in particular, as it relates to the geographical area close to Turkey—has so far survived this crisis. The P5+1 (the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, and France, plus Germany) nuclear talks with Iran continue with Moscow's position unchanged; the Syrian chemical disarmament is virtually complete, even if the United States and Russia stick to their positions as to the way forward for Syria; in Afghanistan, Americans and Russians support the constitutional process; and in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, Moscow agrees to Washington's role as a peace broker.

In this complex set of moving parts in an unsettled part of the world, we bring to the attention of interested audiences, in Turkey, Russia, and elsewhere, the joint report on the potential for Russo-Turkish cooperation in the region of Western Asia where Moscow and Ankara have a range of partially overlapping interests. Addressing those interests in the context of shared respect for the tenets of international law will remain the sine qua non for fulfilling that potential. We hope that such cooperation, in turn, will strengthen regional stability and enhance prosperity.

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## Introduction

Turkey and Russia share an extensive neighborhood, interacting with each other on a vast swath of geography stretching between the Black Sea and Central Asia, and between the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean. As two important players, they have the opportunity to positively shape the future of these regions by contributing to their peace, stability, and growing prosperity.

This opportunity comes at a time when the two countries have taken remarkable steps to reconcile their historical adversity. Having fought more than a dozen wars over five centuries, and despite having been in opposite camps during the Cold War, Russia and Turkey have been able to fundamentally transform their relations in the past twenty-five years. In doing so, they built on the elements of cooperation that existed in their shared history, including in the twentieth century.

Since the mid-1990s, Russo-Turkish political cooperation has been on the rise, driven by close interaction at the very top level. The establishment of the Turkey-Russia High Level Cooperation Council in May 2010 has been a major institutional development that can serve as the prime engine of wider collaboration outside of the strictly bilateral relationship.

This intense diplomacy rests on a solid foundation of extensive commercial and social exchanges between the two countries. The phenomenal growth in those exchanges has resulted from the fundamental changes initiated in the past two decades in each country's economy and society. With Turkey continuing to strive for a more balanced economic interdependence, Russia has become Turkey's second-largest trade partner. In 2013, bilateral trade reached \$32.8 billion. Reciprocal investments have reached \$10 billion. One-fifth of all Russians who vacation abroad—more than 3 million in 2013—go to Turkey. The visa-free travel regime introduced in 2010 has also led to a marked increase of Turkish visitors to Russia, although their number (about 100,000 in 2012) is still comparatively small.

Energy cooperation, going back to the mid-1980s, has served as the backbone for the intensified bilateral exchange. Russia remains Turkey's largest energy supplier, though the one-sided nature of the energy exchange—Russia sells gas and Turkey buys it—has caused some anxiety in Turkey, understandably resulting in attempts to reduce dependence on its principal supplier. In the meantime,

Russia has taken a leading role in the planned construction of Turkey's first nuclear power plant. If this undertaking succeeds in addressing Turkey's need for know-how and technology transfer, it has the potential to add another solid dimension to the Moscow-Ankara energy partnership.

The transformed bilateral relationship suggests that Turkey and Russia now have a basis to move to the next stage: regional cooperation with a view to improving security and advancing development in their shared neighborhood. This is a daunting task: the national interests of Russia and Turkey are obviously different, and in part competitive; their leaderships' worldviews do not coincide on some fundamental issues; and the rich memories of past rivalries weigh in palpably on Turkish and Russian decisionmaking when it comes to geopolitics. Despite all the welcome improvements of recent times, further trust between the two governments is needed.

Yet, the only way to enhance trust lies through practical cooperation. Turkey and Russia may sometimes hold different positions. But, given political will, it should be possible to narrow the gap between their perceptions. Furthermore, both countries share interests in a range of areas: preventing interstate wars and bringing civil conflicts to closure; avoiding nuclear proliferation; rehabilitating postwar societies; and ensuring political transitions without destabilizing violence. Moscow and Ankara both have to fight terrorism, extremism, and drug trafficking. If they manage to find a way to collaborate on the wide range of issues where their interests intersect, they can not only enhance their own security, but also ensure a more stable and livable neighborhood.

In 2013 Global Relations Forum in Istanbul and the Carnegie Moscow Center established a Working Group dedicated to exploring the potential for Turkish-Russian regional cooperation. The Working Group identified six themes touching on a set of issues in the neighborhood: the Arab Spring and the rise of regional instability, including terrorist activities; the Arab-Israeli conflict; Iran and nuclear nonproliferation; Afghanistan and regional stability; Central Asia and regional development; and conflict resolution in the South Caucasus. In-depth exchanges on these issues would help generate more practical steps through which Russia and Turkey can enhance their contribution to regional stability and prosperity.

## The Arab Spring and the Rise of Regional Instability, Including Terrorist Activities

The largely unexpected movements for greater political opening in the Middle East and North Africa, known as the Arab Spring or the Arab Awakening, have had inevitable consequences for both Turkey and Russia.

For Turkey, the dramatic events leading to the rise of new regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya in 2011 coincided with the country's increasingly proactive foreign policy in its neighborhood. Boosted by a notable economic performance and a growing perception about Ankara's role as an increasingly important regional power, the Turkish leadership had become more open to engage with neighbors and more eager to resolve regional problems in the Middle East even before the onset of the Arab Spring. Deep historical ties, an intensified economic exchange with regional countries, and attempts to raise international support for the Palestinians had accorded Turkey with significant "soft power" among the Arab nations in the region.

Russia, by contrast, has de facto withdrawn from geopolitical competition in the Middle East since the early 1990s. Moscow did maintain close ties with several key countries as a Soviet legacy, including a naval resupply facility at Syria's port city of Tartus. Also, Russia had started to step up its political presence in the Middle East in the aftermath of the second Gulf War. However, it was not before the onset of turbulent movements in the Middle East and North Africa at the end of 2010 that Moscow reemerged as an active participant in regional politics. Unlike Turkey, which as an immediate neighbor to the conflicts has been significantly more involved in the developments in the Arab world from the early days, Russia has had to adjust to the new realities in the Middle East and North Africa region and has gradually intensified its involvement.

With the immense turbulence and growing uncertainty about the region's regimes, the Arab Spring has not surprisingly highlighted some differences between Ankara's regional approach and Moscow's. To some extent, these differences reflect the disparate worldviews prevalent in the two capitals about the nature and direction of the developments in the region.

For the Turkish leadership, demonstrations against decades-old authoritarian regimes represented an opportunity for the region to transition to democracy. Turkey was quick to respond to the upheaval in the region—Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was the first state leader to call for Hosni Mubarak's resignation in response to street protests in February 2011. Despite its initially somewhat more cautious approach in Libya and Syria, Turkey eventually became an active proponent for a solution for the crises, including through support for their respective opposition movements. In Syria, where Turkey has disproportionately felt the impact of the crisis in the form of a massive wave of refugees and multiple border incidents, Ankara has led intense diplomatic

efforts aimed at resolving the predicament. From the outset of the crisis, Turkey has consistently supported Syria's territorial and national integrity, while calling for measures toward encouraging a more inclusionary regime and ending the humanitarian crisis.

Russian leaders have approached the change in the Arab world with much more caution. From the very beginning, their view has been that the Arab Spring was an Islamist revolution, rather than an Eastern European-style democratic revolution. The collapse of Mubarak's regime was perceived in Moscow largely as a breakthrough for political Islam and raised the risk of further expansion into the neighboring regions. The ouster of Muammar Qaddafi plunged Libya into chaos, leading to proliferation of weapons and radical fighters. In the Syrian conflict, Russia has vehemently opposed external military intervention against the Bashar al-Assad regime, though its military assistance to the Syrian government has been at odds with the position of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members, including Turkey, and has been regarded in Ankara as a factor delaying resolution of the crisis. Overall, however, Moscow's stance on Syria has been in support of a world order based on the primacy of the United Nations Security Council in all matters related to international peace and security.

Yet, despite their differences, Moscow and Ankara have demonstrated an ability to maintain a regular and respectful dialogue. They avoided a war of words over Syria, and they kept the diplomatic channel open at all levels. They have largely managed to compartmentalize their relations by not allowing their differences on the Syria crisis to cause long-lasting damage to their bilateral relations. In the midst of the Syrian crisis, they convened the High Level Cooperation Council, attended by both countries' leaders.

Now it is time to step up Russo-Turkish cooperation on Syria. This can be achieved on the basis of shared interests in the future of the region. Both Moscow and Ankara are concerned that the spreading violence is destroying Syria, decimating its population, and destabilizing the neighborhood. Both Turkish and Russian leaders are concerned that the rise in extremism within Syria can pose a threat to their own countries.

At the Geneva conference on Syria, Russia and Turkey should work together to support Syria's sovereignty, national unity, and territorial integrity. Achieving a cease-fire in Syria and providing humanitarian relief to the Syrian people should be the immediate priorities of both Ankara and Moscow. Russia and Turkey should also promote participation in the Geneva conference of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and other key regional powers.

The Geneva process is likely to take much time. Acting in unison, and in cooperation with their allies and partners, Ankara and Moscow could seek out and empower those elements on all sides in Syria that are amenable to dialogue, leading to a sustainable political settlement based on power sharing and eventual national reconciliation and economic recovery. This pattern, if successful, could

be deployed in other situations in the Middle East and North Africa, should there be any destabilizing violence that threatens regional security.

As the Arab Spring progresses toward an uncertain future, Turkey and Russia must consult closely to develop common approaches based on their shared interest in containing the spread of terrorism and extremism, bolstering regional security, and enhancing economic cooperation as a means for fostering prosperity and stability. Despite their differences, an active dialogue on Syria's transition and postconflict order could make a valuable contribution to international efforts to bring peace. Furthermore, it will help to minimize mutual misunderstandings in the midst of rapidly evolving events.

## Engaging in the Middle East Peace Process

Historically, Ankara and Moscow have approached the Arab-Israeli conflict from different angles. By now, however, these differences have substantially narrowed. Russia is a member of the Middle East Quartet (other members being the United States, United Nations, and European Union), where it basically supports U.S. efforts to bring peace to the area. It also maintains cordial relations with the Palestinians and has built strong ties with Israel. Turkey's historically strong ties with the Jewish state have frayed in the wake of Israel's 2008 Gaza Strip offensive and its 2010 naval raid on a Gaza-bound flotilla, which killed several Turkish citizens. Ankara's engagement with the Palestinians has increased significantly.

Essentially, both Turkey and Russia support an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue leading to a lasting peace settlement. Both countries have maintained official channels of communication with the Hamas leadership. Russia also has contacts with the Hezbollah movement in Lebanon. This situation allows for Turkey and Russia to play a useful role in helping the Palestinian Arabs and the Israelis to come to terms with each other. Ankara and Moscow will benefit by regularly exchanging views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict specifically and the overall Middle East peace process in general.

However, Moscow and Ankara should be realistic about the prospect for an Israeli-Palestinian settlement; their relative influence and role vis-à-vis other players, such as the United States, which has been playing a central role in conflict resolution there, and the Middle East Quartet; and their leverage with either the Israeli government or the Palestinians, in particular the Hamas leadership in Gaza. With this caveat, Russia should promote ways for Turkey to cooperate within the Middle East peace process.

## Iran and Nuclear Nonproliferation

For both Turkey and Russia, relations with Iran have historically wavered between cooperation and competition. In the past few years, Iran has emerged



as particularly important in Turkish-Russian relations, amplifying differences between Ankara and Moscow on some occasions and bringing their positions closer on others. Now that the P5+1 group of world powers (the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, and France, plus Germany) have signed an interim accord with Tehran in November 2013 opening the way to resolving the Iranian nuclear issue, Russo-Turkish cooperation is particularly important in ensuring that this interim accord is followed by a final agreement.

For Iran, commercial relations with Russia and Turkey have been an important part of its attempt to break its international isolation in the face of ever more stringent economic sanctions. Turkey, while complying with international sanctions, has substantially expanded its economic ties with Iran, including in the area of gas imports. The volume of trade has grown remarkably, from \$1 billion in 2000 to \$22 billion in 2012, transforming Iran into one of Turkey's major economic partners. Additionally, Iran and Turkey are members of the Economic Cooperation Organization, which has provided a platform for deepening the economic exchange.

Russia, in the meantime, has also maintained substantial commercial ties with Iran, though their similar economic structure—energy exports are key for both countries—has somewhat limited the extent of their economic relations. Russia's importance has stemmed from its ability to supply military technology to Iran and assist the country in building its first nuclear power plant.

Both Ankara and Moscow have repeatedly expressed their reservations about further tightening sanctions on Iran, which until Hassan Rouhani's election as president in 2013 remained high on the international agenda. Both countries, but especially Turkey, are likely to benefit from a relaxation and eventual termination of the sanctions. Turkish leaders have repeatedly underlined the extent of losses due to over a decade of turbulence in neighboring Iraq and have been cautious about the impact of ongoing sanctions on Iran.

The main issue where Ankara and Moscow have demonstrated their common interest, and adopted a fairly consistent approach with each other, is on the need for Iran to commit to nuclear nonproliferation. Neither country wishes to see Iran acquire nuclear weapons. Likewise, neither of them would welcome a military solution in the form of a preemptive attack on Iran by Israel and/or the United States. Both Ankara and Moscow argue that when dealing with a country such as Iran, non-coercive measures have a greater chance to succeed.

For Turkey, a nuclear Iran could lead to a nuclear race in the region, dangerously undermining regional stability. Ankara has been particularly cognizant of a country's right to pursue peaceful nuclear technology—a right it is planning to exercise by developing its first nuclear power plant with Russian partnership.

This has prompted a proactive approach by Turkish diplomats to ensure that Iran addresses international concerns about its nuclear program, while preventing toughening of international sanctions. In 2010, Turkey and Brazil, both of them non-permanent members of the UN Security Council that year,

mediated an agreement with Iran for a nuclear fuel swap. But as progress failed to materialize, the two countries voted against the draft resolution of the Security Council to impose new sanctions. At the time, this proactive diplomatic maneuver by Turkey came at the cost of questioning its commitment to its alliance with Western powers. Ankara considered this reaction in the West to be unjustified, as the differences over Iran's nuclear program were largely over tactics for addressing a brewing conflict rather than strategic goals.

For Russia, which sees itself as a guardian of global strategic stability, a nuclear-armed Iran is also unacceptable. Moscow has been an active participant in the P5+1 talks with Iran on its nuclear program. Like Turkey, it has sought, and also failed, to mediate between Tehran and the West. Yet, Russia managed to play a positive role in encouraging direct U.S.-Iranian contacts that led to the interim agreement. An additional factor in Russia's diplomacy has been its role in building Iran's first nuclear power plant. Moscow, while helping Iran in its endeavor, has insisted that all spent fuel be transferred back to Russia in an effort to decrease proliferation concerns.

The Syrian crisis, however, has created some discord between Ankara and Tehran, while helping to solidify Russia's ties with the Iranian leadership. Iran is the staunchest supporter of Assad's regime, while Turkey has been outspoken in its backing for the opposition forces. When Ankara decided in September 2011 to host a radar system with its NATO allies to track missiles, Tehran perceived the move as directed at Iran. Iraq, in the meantime, has also become an arena for growing competition between Ankara and Tehran.

However, with the new leadership in Iran, the interim accord between Tehran and the international community, and signs of hope for a rapprochement with the United States, Turkey and Russia should be actively seeking a final resolution to the Iranian nuclear issue that would allow Iran to develop a peaceful nuclear program while ensuring that it does not become a nuclear weapon state. Should such a solution be reached, Turkey and Russia would be important for Iran's future reintegration into the global economy and for creating a stable strategic environment around it.

The chances for a positive and long-lasting contribution by Turkey and Russia will be greater if they channel their efforts for the establishment of a reliable nonproliferation regime in the Middle East as a whole. In conjunction with governments in the region, UN Security Council members, and international stakeholders, Ankara and Moscow should spearhead the process of developing a comprehensive set of measures for peaceful development of national nuclear programs. This should include clear-cut proposals for monitoring nuclear programs, in conjunction with confidence-building mechanisms throughout the Middle East and North Africa region that would curb any potential incentives for countries to make a transition toward developing nuclear programs for military purposes.

## Afghanistan and Regional Stability

The withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force from Afghanistan, scheduled to take place by the end of 2014, subjects regional security to another serious trial. Coming as it does during a period of high uncertainty in Afghanistan, the stability of the government in Kabul and the nature of the future Afghan regime are in question.

To steer the situation within and around Afghanistan away from more dangerous scenarios and to help Afghanistan achieve stability through peace and prosperity, it is imperative that the countries in the region work jointly toward a common cause. At stake is not only a decade of efforts aimed at building a regime that could withstand attacks from Taliban forces and al-Qaeda. An Afghanistan that plunges into instability similar to the 1990s would have inevitable repercussions for security in the wider region, stretching from Central Asia to Pakistan to India.

Although Turkey and Russia are not among Afghanistan's direct neighbors, they are near enough to feel the impact of developments there. In this region, their interests are very much aligned and lack any significant potential sources for discord. Both countries have a stake, as well as potential capability, in helping Afghanistan on its way to recovery.

Historically, Turkey has been a model for Afghanistan as a Muslim country that is successfully modernizing. This soft power potential continues to this day. Recently, in its role as a NATO member, Turkey has maintained an active role in Afghanistan's security, twice leading the International Security Assistance Force. It has helped train members of the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police. Turkey has also been involved in rebuilding war-torn infrastructure in Afghanistan. From 2004 to 2012, the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency fulfilled more than 800 projects, helping Afghanistan to develop health, education, and economic infrastructure. Overall, Turkey maintains a high degree of credibility and respect in Afghanistan and has the potential to help rebuild the country and its institutions.

Additionally, Turkey has had a positive role in the region in facilitating a dialogue between Pakistan and Afghanistan, thanks to its close ties with the two nations. The leadership in Ankara enjoys a relatively high degree of credibility in both countries, which has helped it to host numerous trilateral meetings and summits. Finally, Turkey has close relations with Afghanistan's northern neighbors in Central Asia.

Russia has rich historical experience with Afghanistan, having learned a number of useful, if painful, lessons during its war there in the 1980s. In more recent times, Russia played a key role in assuring the success of the U.S. operation to defeat al-Qaeda and its Taliban hosts in Afghanistan in 2001. Since then, it has been a crucial element of the Northern Distribution Network

to ensure safe transit of material being shipped into Afghanistan by the United States and NATO.

With respect to Afghanistan's future, Russia is most concerned about two things: the potential spillover of terrorist activities and religious extremism into Central Asia, and increased drug trafficking to Russia. Moscow has been maintaining regular contacts with the government in Kabul, both bilaterally and in multinational platforms, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the so-called Quad countries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia, and Tajikistan.

Russia has been giving Afghanistan security assistance by providing military hardware (through the United States) and officer training. Moscow has declared its intention to expand its economic involvement in Afghanistan. Any economic assistance and investment in various infrastructure projects could enhance Russia's positive role in Afghanistan and the region.

As developments in Afghanistan become more uncertain, Turkey and Russia should consult each other more closely and more often. In particular, they need to explore the potential for counterterrorism and counternarcotics cooperation among themselves and Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and Central Asia, with a view toward establishing a regional framework for stemming drug trafficking.

Turkey and Russia should also cooperate in rebuilding the Afghan economy, strengthening its institutions, and fostering stability. Their assistance projects thus far have lacked coordination. To enhance the impact of their efforts, developing joint projects, such as those related to training of personnel or infrastructure development, should become a priority.

As Central Asian countries also feel the impact of developments in Afghanistan, Turkey and Russia should consider incorporating them into their dialogue on Afghanistan, and possibly bring them, along with Iran, into joint projects, such as counternarcotics, that span the whole region.

Given Turkey's interest in expanding its involvement in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Russia should help upgrade Turkey's participation in the organization from dialogue partner to observer.

## Central Asia and Regional Development

For several years after the breakup of the Soviet Union, competition dominated Turkish-Russian relations with respect to Central Asia. At the very outset, Turkey hoped to emerge as a possible model for development in Central Asia. Remarkably, all of the countries in Central Asia, except for Tajikistan, are Turkic-speaking. Ankara pioneered in establishing diplomatic relations with them right after their independence. Economic and cultural ties expanded rapidly with Turkish companies gaining a significant role in construction, light manufacturing, retail, and other key sectors. For Moscow, this constituted

a source of concern as the extent of the appeal of the Turkish model was not immediately clear to Russian officials.

Over time, however, Russian leaders have largely overcome their concerns about growing Turkish involvement in Central Asia. They soon realized that a pan-Turkic ideology lacked sufficient appeal both in Central Asia and in Turkey. Also, some setbacks in Turkey's policy in the region eased Russia's anxiety. Ankara's relations with Uzbekistan suffered corrosion, for example, while its economic activism did not transform into gaining a major foothold in the most strategic sectors of Central Asia—oil and gas. Notably, Turkey's increasingly proactive foreign policy with its neighbors in the past few years has not coincided with a growing activism in Central Asia.

Stability in Central Asia is at risk as several developments occur simultaneously. First, the political stability of the post-Soviet republics in the region is under challenge as the old generation of leaders continues to pass the scene. Particularly, Kazakhstan, Central Asia's biggest country, and Uzbekistan, its most populous nation, are facing likely departures of their founding presidents, who acceded to power a quarter century ago. Second, stability and security in Central Asia may be challenged by what happens in Afghanistan after the International Security Assistance Force is withdrawn. Third, the impact of political Islam on the domestic political transitions in the region remains unclear.

Now that Russian concerns about Turkey's role in the region have faded, an opportunity exists to collaborate in enhancing the region's law-based political stability. Both countries share interest in opposing terrorism and extremism in the region, and both have denounced drug trafficking. The two countries should also consider expanding joint projects for promoting the region's development. Since both Ankara and Moscow are already donors in various capacities in the Central Asian states, coordinating their efforts could help achieve more effective results. Likewise, they should attempt to jointly mediate to help Central Asian republics resolve the long-standing problem of water supply.

In the meantime, both Turkey and Russia need to acknowledge that the foreign policy of Central Asian countries is becoming increasingly dynamic, resulting in more contacts with external players. Thus, Central Asian countries have diversified their foreign political, economic, and security relations. China has become a very significant player in the region, especially in the energy and raw materials sectors, but also in trade and infrastructure. The United States is represented by its major oil companies and—for the time being—the Pentagon-rented facilities. Iran, India, Europe, and Japan are also showing interest. The place is becoming more crowded.

Among all players, Russia could probably be expected to maintain some advantages, providing it with continued soft power. This includes substantial labor migration to Russia, Russian-speaking elites, and the presence of Russian minorities in the region. Also, Russia has special ties with many of the region's republics through the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Customs Union/

Eurasian Union initiative. Yet, Moscow should ensure that its regional initiatives are based on equal footing among their members and do not come fundamentally at the expense of other stakeholders in the region.

## Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus

In the nineteenth century, the South Caucasus was historically one of the main battlefields between Turkey and Russia (the other one being the Balkans). In the early 1990s, this remained the region where tensions between Ankara and Moscow persisted for some time.

Today, Turkey and Russia maintain significant differences in the South Caucasus, though they have learned to live with them without causing a major dent to bilateral relations. One area where interests have diverged has been in energy development, over rival pipelines to feed Europe's energy demand. Turkey's extensive trade and intensified energy relations with Russia, however, has helped to partly soften Moscow's approach toward Ankara.

The main differences have been the product of several protracted territorial conflicts: over Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. While dormant now, these conflicts are not close to being resolved.

In particular, the Azeri-Armenian conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh threatens to disrupt peace in the entire region and draw in both Russia and Turkey. For more than twenty years, the conflict has been "frozen," while Nagorno-Karabakh and a large swath of Azerbaijani lands outside it remain in Armenian hands. Despite all the attempts by international mediators from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Minsk Group, where Russia is a co-chair, progress toward peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan remains stalled.

Moscow and Ankara take considerably different views on the Azeri-Armenian dispute. Moscow is a formal ally of Yerevan and maintains a military base in Armenia's territory, though Russia also sells arms and military equipment to Azerbaijan. In 2013, Yerevan opted to join the Moscow-led Customs Union. Ankara maintains a strategic relationship with Baku. Turkey, for its part, launched an effort several years ago for a rapprochement with Yerevan, though the initiative soon stalled. While the effort enjoyed Russia's official support, some in Ankara felt that Moscow failed to use its leverage with Yerevan as effectively as it could have.

The stalemate in the rapprochement between Ankara and Yerevan has raised the possibility of new tensions. The gap in the economic and military capability of Azerbaijan and Armenia keeps growing. In the meantime, the leadership both in Baku and Yerevan continues to resort to rhetoric calling for a military solution.

Russia and Turkey need to pool their diplomatic efforts in promoting peace and prosperity in this region. Russia maintains significant leverage over Armenia,

and Turkey has significant leverage over Azerbaijan. If this is not enough to establish peace in the area, it should at least be sufficient to prevent a new outbreak of hostilities. In the near term, both Moscow and Ankara need to work together to prevent a military confrontation.

Georgia's territorial integrity has been another area where Moscow and Ankara are divided by significant differences. In 2008, Russia recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states. Turkey, while expanding economic ties with Abkhazia, supports Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, preferring that conflicts be resolved through peaceful means within internationally recognized borders. Likewise, Ankara, at odds with Moscow, supports the European Union's Eastern Partnership policy, whose objective is to foster economic and social integration between the EU and the South Caucasus republics.

Yet, on another note, Turkey's approach in the South Caucasus has been well received in Moscow. Thus, in the aftermath of the Russo-Georgian war of 2008, Ankara called for resolving regional issues with less intervention from external players. Also, the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform, initiated by the Turkish leadership in 2008, can be revived and updated to foster dialogue in the region. It could even be transformed into a joint Turkish-Russian initiative.

As the region's neighbors—the South Caucasus physically links Russia and Turkey—Moscow and Ankara bear a special responsibility for conflict prevention and resolution there, as well as for promoting economic cooperation that helps build understanding and, eventually, trust. Ankara and Moscow would both benefit from a more stable and prosperous South Caucasus region and should develop joint initiatives promoting that goal. These initiatives may include joint energy and transportation projects, infrastructure development, and cultural exchanges and other human contacts.

Moscow and Ankara should also consider cooperation in the South Caucasus as part of their shared interest to ensure stability, peace, and prosperity in the region. For more than two decades, the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, which includes the three South Caucasus republics among others, has provided a multilateral platform for deepening cooperation. As an organization established to foster regional cooperation, it could potentially play a unique role in bringing the region's countries together in setting and realizing their shared objectives for the new century. In that respect, Turkey and Russia, as the two leading members of the organization, should work on fulfilling its promise. Developing joint projects for the South Caucasus countries would be a good start in revitalizing this institution's place in the international arena.

It is time that Turkey and Russia developed a joint plan to bolster stability and enhance cooperation in the South Caucasus. Such an initiative could help mitigate the hardships felt by the people of the region as a result of the protracted conflicts; restore economic links, build transportation corridors connecting Europe and Asia along both east-west and north-south axes, and spur growth; promote

informal dialogue; create stakeholders for conflict resolution; and isolate extremists and weaken radicals across the region.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Having transformed their relations in the past two decades, Turkey and Russia now have the opportunity to further enhance their dialogue. At the same time, they could start contributing to prosperity and peace in their shared geography.

With the Cold War's ideological divide gone and some of the misperceptions of the early 1990s largely buried in the past, Ankara and Moscow could strive to build further trust in their relations and to explore pathways for a more functional future.

The regular political dialogue that has been established between Moscow and Ankara could be enhanced by deepening its intellectual foundations. Bilateral relations could gain further momentum through growing input from civil society institutions, universities, and interparliamentary and cultural exchanges. This would contribute to overcoming the burden of history, while cultivating new thinking, and even a new language in this process of a growing exchange between the two societies. Deepening such interactions will also help to generate a more robust and vibrant rationale for political cooperation. More empathy is needed at the formal level, as well as at the level of cultural and people-to-people exchanges between the two nations.

Fundamentally, Russia and Turkey have some significant commonality of interests that provide a setting conducive to further strengthening their dialogue and cooperation. They have common interests in enhancing economic revival and political stability in their shared geography. Both have reservations about foreign intervention, especially a military one, on this geography. Furthermore, it would not be an overstatement to say that they also hold common fears and even historical traumas. Opposing the spread of terrorism and extremism as a potential threat to their own stability and integrity is an essential part of their foreign engagements. For their neighboring regions, ensuring a secular future based on international rule of law remains crucial.

In a rapidly changing world with new emerging sources of threats and tensions, Turkey and Russia should put forth a major contribution to stability, peace, and prosperity in a wide geography spanning between the Balkans and Central Asia and Afghanistan and between North Africa and the Middle East and the South Caucasus. This vast geography is still embroiled in regional conflicts, upheavals, wars, revolutions, and political and economic turmoil.

What further necessitates the cooperation of Russia and Turkey is that they are two of the leading powers in this shared geography with significant resources. Both possess historical, cultural, and economic ties with parts of this geography. Both should make use of their comparative advantages in the pursuit of resolving key issues in their neighborhood.



Importantly, through bilateral and multilateral efforts, Turkey and Russia have the capacity and the opportunity to contribute to multilateral initiatives to manage conflicts, bring peace, and enhance prosperity in a broad geography. As two regional powers, their joint efforts could be pivotal for addressing twenty-first century shocks, based on enhancing shared norms and values embodied by the UN Charter.

Joint efforts to contribute to regional prosperity could help minimize mutual misconceptions, establish realistic expectations, and build trust between the two nations. It could also enhance the resilience of bilateral relations to tackle future shocks both in the neighboring regions and internationally. Admittedly, this will not be a quick and easy process. It will require continuing the current political dialogue, while also deepening it to address new potential issues in the future.

This Working Group proposes the following set of policies and actions for Turkey and Russia to further their constructive role in their neighboring geography. Broken down by region, Turkey and Russia need to:

*The Middle East (to include the Arab Spring, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and Iran)*

- Continue to insulate their bilateral relations with respect to emerging tensions by not allowing their differences on, for example, Syria or Egypt, to damage their wider relationship.
- Resolutely oppose extremism and radicalism and seek to empower moderate forces interested in political modernization rather than conservation of the status quo.
- Recognize the urgent need to mitigate the humanitarian crisis in Syria, secure a cease-fire agreement, and provide relief services to all affected parties.
- Provide continued support for the sovereignty, national unity, and territorial integrity of Syria as the Geneva process unfolds, while encouraging the parties amenable to a political settlement through power sharing.
- Start developing practical proposals for international collaboration in the reconstruction of postconflict Syria.
- Coordinate their efforts aimed at countering the spread of terrorism and extremism through regular consultations, intelligence sharing, and economic means, cultivating secular development and prosperity in the region.
- Engage third parties in preventive diplomacy and conflict management in the region. Such initiatives could be developed for a range of issues, namely Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- Engage each other more regularly in individual and multilateral efforts aimed at facilitating the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Russia should promote Turkey's inclusion in the activities of the Middle East Quartet.

- Continue their pursuit of a final resolution on Iran's nuclear issue whereby Iran maintains its right to develop a peaceful nuclear program but does not become a nuclear weapon state.
- Lead international efforts to establish a reliable nonproliferation regime in the Middle East beyond Iran and come up with comprehensive proposals for the peaceful development of nuclear energy programs in the region.
- Be prepared to play a constructive role in the reintegration of Iran into the world economy, should the nuclear stalemate be finally overcome.
- Find a way to collaborate in Iraq. They also need to consider holding consultations on the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East.

#### *Afghanistan and Central Asia*

- Cooperate in rebuilding Afghanistan by providing assistance in strengthening its institutions, personnel training, and joint infrastructure projects to ensure its future stability.
- Use their leverage in a constructive manner for the prosperity and stability of the countries in Central Asia and Afghanistan, as the long-term interests of both Turkey and Russia will benefit from the growing integration of the region with the rest of the world (including their increasingly diversified relations with external powers).

Consult more regularly and enhance their cooperation in the region through multilateral and well-coordinated efforts with Afghanistan, Iran, and the Central Asian republics to counter extremism, terrorist threats, and drug trafficking in the region.

#### *The South Caucasus*

- Utilize their leverage over Azerbaijan and Armenia to ensure that a new outbreak of hostilities does not occur.
- Recognize that maintaining the status quo over Nagorno-Karabakh with regard to the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict has a detrimental impact for building a prosperous and stable region.
- Coordinate their efforts to move Baku and Yerevan toward reciprocal and gradual steps leading to reducing their deep mistrust and offering a path to eventual conflict resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh.
- Use their influence to help maintain regular top-level contacts between Armenia and Azerbaijan and increase their productiveness.
- Initiate steps toward multilateral security and stability dialogue across the entire South Caucasus region, including through existing initiatives that appear promising, such as the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform.
- Translate their economic power into joint projects in areas such as railways, roads, and other infrastructure development of adjoining countries

in the South Caucasus to build a more prosperous and stable region, and link Russia and Turkey via that region.

- Play leading roles in reenergizing the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, which remains a potentially useful platform for multilateral cooperation. As two major economic, political, and security players in the area, Russia and Turkey can do a lot to enhance stability, prosperity, and security in the region where, historically, they used to be rivals.

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