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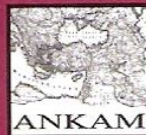
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Turkey's Special Relationship with Germany and Russia

Şener Aktürk*

Economic and social relations between Turkey, Germany, and Russia are having a deep, transformative influence on the place and role of Turkey in the post-Cold war era. From the U.S. point of view, this new context has to be taken into account in dealing with Turkey, and in explaining, or "predicting", Turkey's choices in many issues on which the United States is expecting Turkey's cooperation. Turkey's refusal of U.S. troop deployments in March 2003 would be less surprising, when seen against the background of staunch German and Russian resistance to the U.S. policy in the Middle East.

A quantitative and qualitative look at economic, socio-cultural and political relations

Germany and Russia have recently stabilized their positions as Turkey's two most important trading partners.¹ While Germany has been Turkey's most important trading partner for many decades, Russia's rise to the top among Turkey's trading partners since the end of the Cold War has been swift and has had far ranging consequences. Furthermore, in the case of Russia, official figures of bilateral trade with Turkey underestimate the real magnitude of the economic activity between the two countries because they fail to take into account the unofficial suitcase trade and the presence of sizable Turkish direct investments in Russia, two factors that do not exist to a comparable extent in Turkey's relations with other countries. Turkey's official goal is to increase the volume of Turkish-Russian trade, which is currently (2006) estimated around USD 15 billion, second only to Germany, to USD 25 billion in the next three years.² This goal, once attained, would make Russia Turkey's largest trading partner. Turkey also rose among the major trading partners of Russia, leaving behind countries like Japan, India, and South Korea.³

Likewise in the case of Germany, the economic impact on Turkey of millions of Turkish guest workers, a considerable proportion of which have become German citizens since 1998, and the billions of euros worth remittances they have sent back

(*) Şener Aktürk is a PhD candidate in political science at the University of California, Berkeley.

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home over decades, are not captured through official bilateral trade statistics. Germany and Russia are also the two countries sending the largest number of tourists to Turkey, which is another indispensable source of dynamism for the Turkish economy.⁴ As these examples show, the “people factor” occupies a tremendous role in Turkey’s relations with Germany and Russia. The existence of strong, vibrant, vocal, and growing Turkish communities in Germany and Russia, supported by extensive economic, cultural, and other social contacts between these countries and Turkey through trade, tourism, and investments, demonstrate the material basis upon which Turkish domestic politics and society are influenced and shaped by international factors in the 21st century. Studies of Turkish politics and society in the age of globalization must take into account, first and foremost, the inter-societal linkages between Turkey, Germany, and Russia.

The Turkish-German Connection in Historical Perspective

More than two million people living in Germany today are descendants of the so-called “guest workers” from Turkey.⁵ This is by far the largest number of expatriate Turks⁶ in the world. Their economic, social, and cultural influence in Germany already has a forty year old history. Guest workers’ impact on Turkey began to be felt with the substantial remittances they started sending to Turkey already in the 1960s and 1970s. Germany’s decision to declare a moratorium on foreign labor recruitment in 1973 had the opposite of its intended effect, and induced Turkish workers already in Germany to bring their families from Turkey through “family reunions.” As a result, Turkish population in Germany increased dramatically. A parallel augmentation of guest workers’ influence on Turkey followed their demographic explosion in Germany. Accelerating in the 1980s and 1990s, cultural and artistic production among the Turkish diaspora in Germany opened up new opportunity spaces and contributed to the reconfiguration of Turkish identity in Germany with echoes in Turkey. The presence of the guest workers challenged German democracy to live up to its liberal democratic ideals. Turks contributed to the deepening of democracy in Germany, by posing the challenge of multiculturalism and religious pluralism to a society that had limited and failed experiences with both, epitomized in the traumatic memory of the Holocaust.

Reunification of Germany and the incorporation of sixteen million East Germans along with over a million ethnic Germans (*volksdeutsche*) from the former Soviet Union (mostly Russia and Kazakhstan) created a new wave of anti-Turkish sentiments and xenophobia.⁷ The fatal arson attacks on Turkish houses in Mölln and Solingen alerted Turks and Germans alike to a resurgence of Neo-Nazi and other anti-immigrant activism.⁸ Chancellor Kohl’s Christian Democratic leadership was explicitly opposed to the idea of a multicultural Germany as a destination for immigration.⁹ Christian Democrats encouraged Turks to return to Turkey, and even offered DM 10,500 compensa-

tion for those who would choose to do so.¹⁰ Such policies not only failed to “solve the Turkish problem” in Germany, but they made Turks feel even more unwelcome in Germany and contributed to the formation of parallel societies in ghettos, where Islamist and nationalist ideas found fertile ground. Even in the former German Democratic Republic, where only several dozen Turkish communists lived, Turks were ranked as the least desirable neighbors, along with the Gypsies, by the German population, showing the detachment from real experience and culturally embedded nature of deeply held prejudices against the Turks.¹¹

Kohl's leadership conceived of the Turkish population as a potential threat to Germany. “securitization” of the Turkish diaspora by the state in Germany was joined by the securitization of the guest workers from the point of view of the Turkish state. The activities of the infamous “Khomeini from Cologne”, Cemalettin Kaplan, and similar Islamic fundamentalist organizations, sent shock waves to Turkey.¹² Germany was seen as the financial base and the recruitment ground of both Islamic fundamentalist and ethnic separatist movements against Turkey. In this period of double-isolation (from Germany and from Turkey), Turks in Germany could not use their potential to serve as a channel of democratization in Turkey or in Germany. Turkey's suspension of its relations with the European Union after the Luxemburg summit in 1997 further undermined the role of Turks in Germany as a bridge between Turkey and Europe.

Several major political events, in Turkey, in Germany, and at the EU level, transformed this situation and provided for an opening. In Turkey, the ousting Prime Minister Erbakan in 1996 and the coming to power of a three party coalition government with majority support in the 1999 elections, and the capture of Kurdish separatist leader Abdullah Öcalan, created perceptions of a decline in the Islamic fundamentalist and the ethnic separatist threats compared to the mid-1990s. This environment of relative security allowed Turkey to make strides towards democratization while de-securitizing the interaction with the Turks in Germany. Secondly, the victory of Social Democratic Party (SPD) in Germany brought to power a Red-Green coalition headed by Gerhard Schroeder. SPD and the Greens were much more welcoming towards the Turks. They campaigned on the promise of extending citizenship to the Turkish and other guest workers who have been living in Germany for generations. Turks voted overwhelming (over 80 percent) for SPD and the Greens. These two parties included Turkish-Germans among their ranks. Among these, Cem Özdemir of the Greens and Ozan Ceyhun of SPD were two of the most prominent ethnically Turkish German politicians.¹³ Schroeder included among his supporters the prominent Turkish-German businessman Vural Öger. A new, social democratic and progressive German-Turkish political and intellectual elite came to the fore, who would contribute to the democratization debates in Turkey. Thirdly, EU granted candidate status to Turkey in the Helsinki Summit in 1999, allowing for a re-opening of the frozen Turkish-EU relations, hence providing an opportunity for Turks in Germany to serve as natural emissaries of Europe who would facilitate Turkey's integration with the European Union.

The Schroeder era in Germany has witnessed both a florescence of German-Turkish activism, cultural production, and increased representation in political bodies, but also a visible improvement in and intensification of Germany's relations with Turkey.

Germany, along with Britain, was the most important country pushing for Turkey's membership in the European Union, against criticisms from other EU member states, making possible the beginning of accession talks by October 2005. The long awaited change of German citizenship law, which was promulgated in 1913, qualifies—potentially—over a million Turkish residents of Germany for citizenship. In the first elections after the change in citizenship laws, the SPD and the Greens won by a razor sharp majority, thanks to the overwhelming (over 80 percent) support of the Turkish guest workers, among other factors.

It is notable that the SPD came very close to such a razor sharp victory in the 2005 elections as well. In the 2005 elections, five parliamentarians with Turkish origins (Lale Akgün-SPD, Ekin Deligöz-Greens, Hüseyin Aydın-Linke, Sevim Dağdelen-Linke, Hakkı Keskin-Linke) entered the Bundestag, all from left wing parties, close to one percent of all Bundestag members. This percentage corresponds to the proportion of German citizens of Turkish origin in German population (around 600,000 in 79 million) but not yet to the proportion of all Turkish residents in Germany (more than 2 million). As more Turks acquire German citizenship in the next few years, the number of Turkish parliamentarians in Germany is also likely to increase. Unlike the political landscape in Turkey, where 70-75 percent of the electorate recently voted for right wing parties, the Turks in Germany have manifestly different political attitudes, and might exert a transformative influence on their brethren in Turkey. Historically, in the international marriages involving Turkish nationals, German citizens ranked at the top as Turks' partners in life. Germans maintain a substantial lead over all others even today, except for Russians, who were catapulted to the top by the phenomenal outbreak of Turkish-Russian marriages since the end of the Cold War. Much more recently, a substantial number of Germans began to take up residence in Turkey, especially in Turkey's Mediterranean coast, further contributing to the already intense societal interaction between people from Turkey and Germany. In 2004 alone, 2,125 Germans immigrated to Turkey to seek a new and better life.¹⁴ There are over twenty thousand Germans residing in the town of Alanya by Turkey's Mediterranean coast alone, which some journalists wistfully dubbed "Al(m)anya" ("Germany" in Turkish), and where a local German weekly is published.¹⁵

Economic, social, cultural and political aspects of Turkey's relations with Russia

The single most radical improvement in Turkey's diplomatic relations in the post-Cold War era has been her relations with the Russian Federation. We are undoubtedly witnessing the highest levels of cooperation between the two countries in the 500 year-long history of Turkish-Russian relations. The level of cooperation in the post-Cold War period far supersedes even that of the 1920s, the only other period in the 20th century when the two countries had cooperative and friendly relations.¹⁶ Turkish-Soviet trade rose to about USD 600 million in the late 1980s, thanks to the new trade treaties spurred by the joint initiative of presidents Gorbachev and Özal. Once the Soviet

Union collapsed, the bilateral trade volume shot up to around USD 3 billion in 2000, and reached a phenomenal USD 13.5 billion in 2005. In a 20 year period (1985-2005), Turkish-Russian trade has increased twenty-fold. The goal on the part of the Turkish government is to reach USD 25 billion in the next three years, which could make Russia Turkey's number one trading partner.¹⁷

There are not as many Turkish workers living in Russia as in Germany, and Moscow does not (yet) have a "Kreuzberg".¹⁸ The formation of Turkish-Russian communities is in the making throughout Russia, especially in urban centers such as Moscow and St. Petersburg. Furthermore, although Moscow does not have Turkish neighborhoods yet, both Trabzon and Istanbul already have Russian neighborhoods in their midst. The number of Turkish-Russian marriages is comparable only to Turkish-German marriages in their significance in transforming Turkish identity today. In 2005 alone, 50,000 Turkish-Russian marriages took place in Turkey, which at this pace could create a Turkish-Russian population of over a million people in a total population of 70 million within a decade in a country which is considered the most religiously homogenous (99.8 percent Muslim) of any country in the world except for Somalia. Beyond the presence of a growing population of Turks in Russia, the many Turkic speaking Muslim communities in Russia already perform a function that is somewhat similar to the function fulfilled by the Turkish diaspora in Germany: serving as a site of cultural and ideational production and reconfiguration. Tatars, Bashkirs, Chechens, and Dagestanis are the most numerous and influential among the approximately 20 million Muslim citizens of Russia today.¹⁹ These peoples have large diasporic communities in Turkey. For example, around seven million people in Turkey are said to have Caucasian origins. Schools established in Russia by Turkish entrepreneurs and philanthropists are primarily serving these communities by educating a new generation of Turkic speaking Muslim elites who forge strong personal connections with Turkey throughout their education. These communities, along with the growing number of Turkish-Russian families inhabiting the cultural and linguistic border zone between Turkey and Russia, serve as a crucial site of communication and reconfiguration of national identities. Unlike between Turkey and Germany, there has not been a "simultaneous democratization" between Russia and Turkey where the diaspora communities played a significant role. The increasingly repressive policies of the Russian state so far inhibited such a process from taking place. Russia has been suffering from a deteriorating democratic record since the beginning of President Putin's administration.²⁰

Apart from rapidly growing economic, societal, and cultural interaction between the two countries, there has also been substantial political cooperation between Turkey and Russia. In 1992, Turkey took the initiative by established the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) organization to facilitate economic, social, cultural, academic, and environmental cooperation between the littoral states of the Black Sea, including Russia and Turkey among its members.²¹ BSEC developed branches such as the BSEC Business

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Council, Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB), International Center for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS), and the Parliamentary Assembly (PABSEC).²² Although BSEC officers expressed their hope to use oil and gas among other natural resources to cement a regional integration frame similar to the European Coal and Steel Union,²³ BSEC should not be seen as a substitute for EU but as a peripheral and sympathetic response intended to facilitate the participation of Black Sea states in EU integration.²⁴ In April 2001, Turkey and Russia, along with Ukraine, Rumania, Bulgaria, and Georgia, formed a joint naval task force called the Black Sea Force.²⁵ This task force holds annual maneuvers in the Black Sea. This is the first time Turkey and Russia participated in joint military exercises in the 500 year history of Turkish-Russian relations.

Economic, social, cultural, and political interaction had some ideational repercussions for the production of knowledge as well. Turkish-Russian epistemic communities flourished on both sides of the Black Sea. Some Turkish newspaper columnists write their daily columns from Russia.²⁶ Likewise, some Russian journalists and scholars, such as Igor Torbakov, are based in Istanbul.²⁷ These scholars and journalists constitute an "epistemic community", the members of which have an interest in facilitating and deepening Turkish-Russian cooperation. Such epistemic communities are a major intellectual and human resource in fostering regional cooperation. In a different vein, the post-Cold War decade witnessed the emergence of "Turkish Eurasianism" as an alternative conception of Turkish national identity that incorporates Russia as an indispensable partner in a vision of a common future.²⁸ This anti-Western intellectual movement has rapidly grown in the last decade and gathered a critical following. Though marginal and somewhat extremist overall, the existence of this movement demonstrates that even anti-systemic protest movements are now utilizing the opportunity spaces created by the increasing interactions between Turkey and Russia. Turkish-Russian cooperation facilitated liberal visions of a common future, which constitute the dominant paradigm, as well as authoritarian and extremist ones, which are marginal.

Turkey's foreign policy behavior may be influenced by German and Russian preferences

Throughout this paper, I have argued that Turkey's relations with the outside world evolved in certain directions since the end of the Cold War. In particular, Turkey's relations with Germany and Russia include economic, societal, cultural, and political dimensions, which are intertwined in such ways that many fields that were previously considered Turkish domestic politics should now be studied from an international vantage point. Turkish politics have been internationalized through trade and also through the influence of the Turkish diaspora. For example, I noted processes of mutual development and democratization, whereby Turks in Germany contribute to the deepening of democracy both in Germany and in Turkey.

In planning for the future, U.S. foreign policy will have to take into account the new geopolitical context brought about by Turkey's flourishing special relationship with Germany and Russia. German and Russian preferences in the Middle East, Caucasus,

and the Black Sea region, may exert a certain influence on Turkey's foreign policy behavior in these regions as well. Turkey's rejection of U.S. troop deployments in the run-up to the Iraq War is only the most glaring of such influences. Turkey was encouraged and supported by the staunch Russian and German opposition to the war, as the intense traffic and high level agreement between Ankara and Moscow and Berlin on this issue during that period testifies. When the United States applied for observer status in the Turkish-Russian dominated BSEC, Russia voted against the U.S. application while Turkey abstained from the vote.²⁹ Turkey has also been consistently opposed to letting NATO enter the Black Sea, which it prefers to manage jointly with Russia and the other littoral states.³⁰ German pressure also had a role in softening Turkey's position in Cyprus, which was manifest in Turkey's support for the United Nations plan (so-called "Annan plan"), which the Turkish side opposed for many years. As significantly, German politicians of all stripes had a major role, through their interactions with the Turkish state and society over the last decade, in the lifting of the ban against Kurdish, and allowing for Kurdish publications, broadcasting, and education in Turkey. Examples are too many to recount here. In short, the future of Turkish-U.S. relations, in good part, depends on the nature of Turkey's relations with Germany and Russia as alternative partners. By implication, Turkey's relations with the United States will also be influenced by the nature of U.S. relations with Russia and Germany.

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Endnotes:

- (*) Dann Naseemullah and Mujeeb R. Khan read and commented on previous drafts of this paper.
1. T.C. Başbakanlık Dış Ticaret Müsteşarlığı (Undersecretary of Foreign Trade, Office of the Prime Minister, Republic of Turkey), <<http://www.dtm.gov.tr/ead/ekolar1/Drgos.htm>>. Officially documented total bilateral trade volume between Germany and Turkey has been USD 20,669 million in 2005. The corresponding total with Russia has been USD 13,577 million, occupying the second position. Germany and Russia are followed by Italy (USD 11,792 m.), Britain (USD 9,549 m.), United States (USD 9,266 m.), France (USD 8,787 m.), China (USD 6,547m.), Spain (USD 5,877 m.).
 2. The statement of the Turkish State Minister for Trade in the meeting of Russian Federation and Turkey Business and Friendship Association, available online at <<http://www.rusya.ru/haberler/981>>
 3. Interview with German Gref, the Russian Minister of Economic Development and Trade, available online at <<http://www.rtibnet.com/contents.php?cid=129>>
 4. Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Statistics (in Turkish), available online at: <<http://www.kultur.gov.tr/TR/BelgeGoster.aspx?F6E10F8892433CFF670AAAC19264C5A89312FEB68290DD11>>
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13. For brief information on Cem Özdemir <<http://www.oezdemir.de/>>, and for Ozan Ceyhun <<http://www.ceyhun.de/>>.
14. "Almanlar, Türkiye'ye göç ediyor", ("Germans are immigrating to Turkey"), *Hürriyet*, July 8, 2006, available online at <<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/4717528.asp?m=1&gid=69&srld=3051&oid=3>>
15. "Al(m)anya", *Vatan*, April 21, 2004, available online at <<http://www.vatanim.com.tr/root.vatan?exec=haberdetay&Newsid=26470&Categoryid=7>>
16. For a discussion of the "spring time of Turkish-Soviet Russian relations" in the 1920s and 1930s, refer to Jeannette Pond, *The relations between the Soviet Union and the Turkish Republic (1918-1939)*, unpublished M.A. thesis in Joseph Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago; call number: DK999; also Saime Yüceer, *Milli Mücadele Yıllarında Ankara-Moskova İlişkileri*, Bursa: Ekin Kitabevi, 1997.
17. The full interview with the Russian Minister of Economic Development and Trade, German Gref, is available at the Russian-Turkish Businessmen Association's website <<http://www.rtibnet.com/contents.php?cid=129>>
18. The Turkish neighborhood in Berlin.
19. Shireen T. Hunter, *Islam in Russia: The Politics of Identity and Security*, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004; also see my critical review of this work, Şener Aktürk and Kate Graney, review of Shireen Hunter's *Islam in Russia*, *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 46, no.4, June 2005, pp.319-325.
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25. April 3, 2001, "A New Organization is Born", *Turkish Daily News*.
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27. For a short biography of Torbakov, <http://www.jamestown.org/authors_details.php?author_id=137>. For a representative sample of his publications, refer to www.eurasianet.org
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