

To what extent does Turkey’s “fine balance” policy in the Russia-Ukraine conflict upgrade the country’s importance in global governance?

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Abstract

The position of Turkey in international relations is unique, as thanks to its special geographic location, the country can build many links with its neighbors. Moreover, the Russia-Ukraine conflict which began in February 2022 and still continues, is a subject that worries Turkey’s partners the most. At the same time, Turkey uses the situation to facilitate peace desired by all parties involved in the conflict. Ankara emerged as a key mediator between Russia and Ukraine and continues to stick to this position quite well. Furthermore, the Russia-Ukraine conflict is a chance for Turkey to upgrade its importance in global governance, as the conflict makes states, especially developing ones, vulnerable to economic shocks. The ways Turkey uses the current geopolitical situation, specifically its “fine balance” policy to boost its international prestige will be the subject of this article. The article will be divided into case studies of Africa, Asia, Europe and BRICS as a transcontinental organization. Then, policy recommendations for the Turkish government on how to upgrade the country’s importance in international relations will be given.

Keywords: Erdoğan, Turkey, balance, diplomacy, partnership, security, international, governance

I. Introduction

The military conflict in Ukraine put Russia and the West on opposite sides of the barricades. However, there is one country that despite being an EU candidate and NATO member, prefers to save economic and political connections with Russia and is actively willing to take on the role of a peacekeeper. The name of this country is Turkey.

Turkey has a balancing policy in the conflict and this is what makes the country stand out. Despite giving military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine, Turkey did not impose sanctions on Russia and even deepened economic trade with Russia. Turkey also has trust of both sides, which is a significant advantage. Moreover, an ability to conduct independent foreign policy gives Turkey many benefits. For example, this Eurasian country can be an effective

consultation hub for Russia and Ukraine. However, the world should not forget that the conflict would have an impact not only on Russia, Ukraine, and the Western world but also on some regions that are not involved in the conflict at all. For example, the humanitarian crisis is expected to worsen in Africa. Africa is a continent that heavily relies on imports of Russian and Ukrainian crops and oil. Food and fuel insecurity rose significantly because of the conflict. Millions of African people are in a vulnerable position. Nevertheless, thanks to the chosen balancing political position, Turkey apart from being a diplomatic harbor can also enjoy another advantage. The country can help the most vulnerable regions to relieve the humanitarian and economic consequences of the armed conflict in Eastern Europe. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan can embark on a humanitarian mission that can help his country to strengthen its international importance and even contest the domination of Western ideology in international relations. Turkey could even change perceptions about Muslim countries and force the West to reconsider the role of Muslim countries as mediators. Moreover, even though academicians write a lot about Turkey's position in the conflict, they dedicate too much attention to the impact of Turkish balancing policy on the West, Russia, and Ukraine and do not analyze a lot the impact of Erdoğan's policy on Turkey's place in global governance. The article would attempt to solve this issue in existing academic research and analyze how the Russia-

Ukraine conflict impacts Turkey's importance in global governance and later give policy recommendations for the Turkish government which could help the country to become a more authoritative and useful actor in international relations.

2. Humanitarianist approach to Africa

Africa is going through hard times now. While many African countries are still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, a regional European conflict emerged and now has a direct impact on Africa. Some of the economic challenges include trade disruption, food and fuel price spikes, macroeconomic instability, and security challenges¹. The price of grain skyrocketed because Russia and Ukraine were the main grain exporters to Africa. High inflation in turn can trigger social problems like hunger, which is already one of the greatest challenges for Africa. The continent is on the brink of the largest food crisis in recent history. Millions of people are pushed into extreme poverty and malnutrition. The conflict disrupted grain shipments and shut down Ukrainian ports².

At the same time, Turkey decided that it is time to step up and relieve the consequences of the military conflict for those who do not participate directly in the conflict and who are the most vulnerable to sudden economic and political changes. Turkish straits, Dardanelles and Bosphorus, are a critical international grain trade juncture, with $\frac{1}{5}$ of world wheat exports and $\frac{1}{6}$ of global maize

¹ Regional Bureau for Africa, The impact of the war in Ukraine on sustainable development in Africa, (UNDP, 2022)

² Faqin Lin et al., The impact of Russia-Ukraine conflict on global food security, (Global Food Security Journal, 2023)

shipments passing through them, much of which originates from the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan.³ The impact of any shipping disruption in this area is most directly felt by importers in the Near East and North Africa region. The reliance of countries located in North and East Africa on grains originating from the Russian Federation and Ukraine is also associated with the low shipping costs thanks to these countries' physical proximity to the Black Sea basin. Thus, Turkey would benefit by suggesting a humanitarian initiative. Firstly, Erdoğan would be unwilling to interrupt relations with African importers because these relations give an economic advantage to the country. Also, Turkey would reiterate its strategic role in the Black Sea and become more influential in Africa. Humanitarianism is a pillar of Turkish policy in Africa⁴, and this is why Africa leans more towards Turkey rather than the West. If the West for Africans is mostly associated with former slavery practices, colonialism, and brutality, then Turkey does not remind so much about its dark historic past. By increasing the sales of weapons and giving humanitarian aid to Africa, Turkey contests Western domination on this continent.

In general, the Russia-Ukraine conflict turned out to be a good moment to achieve Erdoğan's goal of having a stronger influence on current affairs, especially in regions close to Turkey.

As a result of regular negotiations, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, and the UN brokered the Grain Deal on 22nd July 2022. The main goal of the Grain Deal is, of course, food security. Ships with Ukrainian grain are meant to go to developing countries after being checked by Turkey in the Black Sea. Certainly, Turkey played a very significant role in signing the agreement and ensuring the process ran smoothly. Thanks to Turkey's extensive diplomatic dialogue with Russian and Ukrainian representatives, it became possible to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe in developing countries and an economic meltdown. Even though not all grain went to the countries in need, the deal helped to stabilize the world market and contain food prices, to which developing countries are most vulnerable. The deal also progressed quite quickly: the first ship with Ukrainian grain reached East Africa in August. The process goes on smoothly thanks to the safe sea corridor that Turkey provides. Moreover, the deal benefited all parties involved in it. For example, Ukraine returned to pre-conflict levels of exports of 4 million tons. This fact directly benefits African countries, because Ukraine is one of the top exporters of not just grain, but also wheat, barley, corn, sunflower oil, and sunflower seed. In some countries of Northern Africa, about 80% of the grain that they have is exported from Ukraine⁵. Furthermore, in countries with extreme hunger like Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia, which are also war-ridden, the situation with food security can become better.

³ Information Note, THE IMPORTANCE OF UKRAINE AND THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION FOR GLOBAL AGRICULTURAL MARKETS AND THE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH THE WAR IN UKRAINE, (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2022)

⁴ Mira Demirdek & Hamid Talebian, Bolstering the Bromances: Turkey's and Iran's Tightening Ties with Africa, (GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, 2022)

⁵ Steve Inskeep, Ukrainian grain is arriving in East Africa for the first time since Russia invaded (NPR, 2022)

The US Special Envoy for Food Security Cary Fowler described the Grain Deal as “terribly important”⁶. Russia used the chance to show that it is open to dialogue, and the deal was a significant win for the United Nations as well. At the same time, the Grain Deal strengthened Turkey’s importance in global governance. Turkey gained more recognition, for example, from South Africa⁷, for trying to end the conflict and help those in need. The country highlighted its strategically important geographical position because it shares the Black Sea with Ukraine and is close to Africa, and became directly involved in the regulation of global food prices and thus alleviated consequences of rising inflation across continents. Furthermore, Turkey gained the trust of the opposing parties in the conflict and this achievement impacted the progress of the Grain Deal and full compliance with the terms of the agreement. For example, after some months Russia decided to leave the deal mainly because of alleged Ukrainian attacks on Russian infrastructure. However, a couple of days after Erdoğan decided to negotiate with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Russia returned to the Grain Deal. That means, Turkey as a diplomatic actor has a great influence on its foreign counterparts and in particular Russia. The ability to maintain a productive dialogue with Putin boosts the importance of Turkish participation in the peace-making process. Turkey, unlike the Western world, is willing and able to find “keys” to understanding the demands of Russia.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Hassan Isilow, South Africa lauds Turkish president’s efforts in Russia-Ukraine peace settlement, (Anadolu Agency, 2023)

Before the conflict, Erdoğan also worked on strengthening Turkish-Ukrainian relations, as he wanted to see Turkey as a regional power and use good relations with Ukraine to strengthen Turkish importance in the Black Sea. As a result, this diplomatic work pays off right now.

Turkey also increases its reputation in the migration crisis. The West is now often accused of having double standards because migrants from Ukraine are treated much better than those from Africa and the Middle East. However, Turkey is against these Western double standards and is in favor of equal treatment of all people regardless of their origins and race⁸. This leads to growing sympathy for Turkey in Africa. The West fully focused its attention on the Russia-Ukraine conflict and Ukrainian refugees and almost forgot about asylum seekers from other places where civil wars have been going on for years. It is interesting to note that despite growing anti-Western rhetoric in Africa because of discrimination against African migrants, Erdoğan is not accused of being pro-Russian (being anti-Western is often considered as being pro-Russian). Thanks to his mediation position in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, he can freely pursue his own interests in Africa and in other places too.

3. Becoming an influential power in Asia

The Grain Deal did not leave some Asian countries without food as well. For example, ships with Ukrainian grain

⁸ Mira Demirdek & Hamid Talebian, Bolstering the Bromances: Turkey’s and Iran’s Tightening Ties with Africa, (GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, 2022)

reached Yemen, where there is persistent hunger and strong reliance on wheat flour. The country is in the state of civil war and survives thanks to international aid. Almost 50% of Yemen's wheat imports came from Russia and Ukraine in 2021⁹. Other Asian countries that received grain are Egypt, Iran, India, Bangladesh and Lebanon¹⁰. The situation is particularly acute in Lebanon, where, according to local bakery owner Elias Fares, "most people survive on just bread these days"¹¹. There were serious fears of bread queues in this Arab country, especially when Russia wanted to leave the deal. However, thanks to Turkish diplomatic efforts, it was possible to pull Russia back in the agreement and thus to avoid the worst economic and humanitarian consequences not only in Lebanon, but also in poorer Asian countries. Therefore, this humanitarian initiative effectively controlled by Turkey can help to improve its image in those countries, as ordinary people would be thankful for saving them from a humanitarian and economic catastrophe.

Turkey's diplomatic efforts could also increase the importance of Muslim countries as mediators. For example, it was possible to exchange 215 prisoners of war between Russia and Ukraine. It is also known that some foreign nationals who fought on the side of Ukraine were sentenced

to death penalty in the Russia-backed People's Republic of Donetsk. If the punishment would be realized, this could lead to a further diplomatic crisis between Russia and the West and finding a diplomatic way to reconciliation would be much more difficult. The role of diplomacy could lose importance, as the West would accuse Russia of violation of human rights and Russia would accuse the West of supporting combatants who threaten the security of Russia. Again, Turkey prevented this escalation. Five of the war prisoners arrived in Turkey and will stay there until the end of conflict under guarantees of protection provided by President Erdoğan. Moreover, another Muslim country in joint efforts with Turkey played a significant role in mediation between Russia and Ukraine. It was Saudi Arabia. This country prefers to follow an example of Turkey by being neutral and using a balanced approach in the situation. This stance became useful. A group of foreign combatants who were among those 215 prisoners of war were sent to Er-Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, and from there they were about to return to their countries of origin¹². The role of Saudi Arabia was praised in Washington and a number of European countries. Thus, together with the grain deal, the prisoner swap is an example of success of diplomatic efforts made by non-Western countries. Thanks to these achievements, the West might

⁹ News release, WFP vessel leaves Ukraine with grain for humanitarian response in Yemen (World Food Programme, 2022)

¹⁰ UN News, The Black Sea Grain Initiative: What it is, and why it's important for the world (United Nations, 2022)

¹¹ Raya Jalabi & Emiko Terazono, Ukraine grain deal collapse revives fears of bread queues and hunger, (Financial Times, 2022)

¹² Nerea Belmonte, Ukraine and Russia exchange 215 prisoners of war, (Atalayar.com, 2022).

start to look more positively at the role of Muslim countries in solving international conflicts, despite many disagreements on topics of human rights and mutual accusations. Russia-Ukraine conflict is a good chance for Turkey to upgrade its importance in solving major issues and get world recognition for its diplomatic goodwill. For Saudi Arabia, the conflict is a chance to improve its international branding. As the conflict goes on, it becomes clear that an ideal mediator would be a non-European country which has good relations with Russia and Ukraine. Seeing how Turkey accomplishes its diplomatic goals, the trend can continue as Saudi Arabia and similar countries might step in and offer a space for dialogue. While African and Latin American countries prefer to stay away from the conflict, Muslim countries that are in the same region as Turkey can step in. Inspired by the example of Turkey, they can prove right now that in the 21st century diplomacy is the only acceptable way to end the conflict and that not only Western states are capable of doing this. Furthermore, the Russia-Ukraine conflict is the chance for Turkey to help improve strained relations between the West and Muslim world. Relations can become more trusting and the West might have to recognize the rising influence of Turkey in current affairs and might have to recognize the country as an equal player on the international arena. Thus, Turkey can contribute to the inclusion of non-Western and non-Christian states into global governance, which is now clearly dominated by the West. Recently, Russians and

Ukrainians met in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to discuss further prisoner swap in exchange for Russian ammonia exports¹³. This is a good chance for the UAE to secure a diplomatic win like Saudi Arabia did, while the West deliberately does not look for diplomatic dialogue with Russia.

Turkey is also increasing its influence in Central Asia, and the policy of “fine balance” in the Russia-Ukraine conflict favors this course of events. While Vladimir Putin is thinking of what to do in Ukraine, Erdoğan seeks to have closer contact with Putin’s partners in Turkic countries in Central Asia. Bruce Pannier from Eurasianet believes that the leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan noticed that the use of Turkish drones in Ukraine “lifted Turkey’s image”¹⁴. As a result, those drones are now highly demanded by those countries, Turkmenistan being the leading buyer of Turkish arms. Erdoğan enjoys two important benefits here: not only he builds stronger political ties with leaders ethnically close to him, but he also manages to boost the prestige of Turkish weapons. Moreover, when conflict started, Putin’s prestige dropped slightly, as Central Asian leaders were not enthusiastic about his actions. These countries are also at risk of being under secondary sanctions for operating with the Russian payment system “Mir”, for example. Economic and political cooperation with Russia does not seem viable in the long run, because they do not want to spoil relations

¹³ Aziz el Yaakoubi, Pavel Polityuk, Jonathan Saul, Exclusive: Russians, Ukrainians met in UAE to discuss prisoner swap, ammonia, sources say, (Reuters, 2022)

¹⁴ Bruce Pannier, Perspectives | Turkey and Central Asia: Ukraine war will strengthen ties, (Eurasianet, 2022)

with Ukraine, fall under secondary sanctions and face reputational risks. Therefore, they desperately need to diversify their partners. Turkey successfully fills in the vacuum gap which emerged after economic weakening of Russia. Turkey slowly takes over Russian influence in the region, but the Russian government would not oppose this because first economic partnership with Turkey is essential for the country's economy in such difficult times, and second, Putin is thankful for Erdoğan's diplomatic efforts.

So far, Erdoğan is working hard to establish stronger positions in Central Asia and develop the idea of cooperation inside the Turkic world. Last year, Erdoğan and President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev signed more than a dozen agreements in spheres such as trade, education and culture. Moreover, although Turkey appreciates good relations with Russia that emerge from its balancing policy, the country wants to diversify economic partners and use Russia's partners to assert itself as an important connecting link between Europe and Asia. For instance, Turkey and Kazakhstan are working on developing a transport route to bypass Russia via the Trans-Caspian international transport route, also called the Middle Corridor which goes from China and reaches Europe through Turkey¹⁵. That means Turkey wants to control major Eurasian connection routes and pull the great economic benefit out of its geographical position. Moreover, Nikola Miković, a policy analyst based in Serbia, assumes that if Russia would be defeated in the Ukrainian

conflict, then Kazakhstan would seek security assurances elsewhere, and Turkey would be eager to step in in order to mark its influence in the region¹⁶. It is highly likely that Turkey would be chosen as a security guarantor for Kazakhstan, as thanks to Erdoğan's balancing policy in the Ukrainian conflict Turkey would not help Russia militarily and also would not recognize territories that joined Russia in September 2022, while being open to further contacts with Russia. Thus, the trust in Turkish actions would be quite high, as Ankara did not actively participate in activities which did not find enthusiasm in the Kazakh government.

Turkey also wants to upgrade its international importance while also securing its interests in the energetic sector. Erdoğan knows that Central Asian countries, and in particular Turkmenistan, are full of gas reserves. Despite buying a lot of gas from Russia thanks to continuing dialog with Putin, Erdoğan wants to diversify gas providers while also promoting its influence through pan-Turkic agenda. Moreover, the possibility of being criticized for buying Russian gas is not totally excluded. Thus, Erdoğan needs to find more partners to keep Turkish reputation cleaner and maintain its credibility in the eyes of the West. Turkey also wants to upgrade its importance as a regional gas hub. Turkey could redirect the gas it receives to Europe and be intermediary in gas sales. Gas supplies and construction of gas routes is a global issue, because in today's world states depend on each other economically and also because gas

¹⁵ Nikola Miković, As Russia stumbles in war, Turkey and Kazakhstan sense opportunity, (The Arab Weekly, 2022)

¹⁶ Ibid.

prices have a global effect on the economy, standards of living and political stability in some states. If Turkey becomes a host of a transcontinental gas hub, its importance in global governance will significantly increase. Therefore, Erdoğan built close ties with Turkmenistan in order to turn it into a regional gas hub¹⁷. Although this idea received some criticism in Moscow, it is likely that Putin would not oppose the idea too much because of constructive relations with Erdoğan. Also, he lost his previous political weight and he would not be able to dictate other countries what to do. It is also important to remember that Turkey, thanks to its balancing diplomacy, gives the chance for Russian sanctioned companies to survive. Erdoğan in his turn will not give up his interests, knowing that Central Asian states would be likely to distance themselves from Russia in order to avoid secondary sanctions.

4. Keeping ties with Europe

Erdoğan wants to keep relations with Europe and remain in the Western camp, because he wants to participate in key decision making processes in global governance, which are led by the West. Turkey uses its “fine balance” policy very well to protect its own interests and gain political recognition at the same time. Simultaneously, while Turkey gives aid to Ukraine and also Bayraktar drones, it also makes stronger economic connections with Russia, buys Russian gas and stimulates bilateral trade. Ukraine does not mind

too much about Turkey’s economic partnership with Russia, as long as aid and Bayraktar drones keep flowing. The provision of drones to Ukraine finds positive reaction in the West as well. Economic relations with Russia indeed benefit Turkey, but at the same time Erdoğan needs and wants to show his NATO partners that he is a credible NATO member.

Leonardo Mazzucco, a researcher at the Strategic Studies Department at TRENDS Research and Advisory, believes that Erdoğan chose the role of mediator because he, like a typical mediator, has reasonable expectations that by guiding the negotiation process, it can craft a post-conflict environment more in tune with strategic interests¹⁸. Erdoğan clearly wants to boost the global stance of his country and increase reputation in circles of the EU and NATO, which are the most authoritative players in international affairs. Mediation is also beneficial for Turkey because of the economic crisis. Turkey wants stability. An open confrontation between the collective West and Russia, which are Ankara’s two critical economic partners, does not bode well for the country’s economic recovery and stability. Keeping links between two sides is crucial for Erdoğan. Domestic economic stress forces Turkey to offer diplomatic solutions to conflicting sides.

Turkey’s Middle Corridor initiative, which was already mentioned, deserves greater attention, as it might force Europe to accept Turkey’s growing role in the governance

¹⁷ Nikola Miković, Turkey’s pipeline politics in Central Asia, (The Arab Weekly, 2022)

¹⁸ Leonardo Mazzucco, Turkey’s delicate balancing act: Mediating between the West, Russia, and Ukraine, (TRENDS Research & Advisory, 2022)

of global trade routes. The idea of this corridor is not new, but it might be helpful in making EU-Turkey relations more positive. The Middle Corridor would serve as a useful addition to the North Corridor, which goes through heavily sanctioned Russia and Belarus, and thus provide a more reliable way for shipments to go from China to the EU.



Fig. 1. The Middle Corridor. © 2022 Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 2022.

The Middle Corridor would connect Europe to China through Turkey and a Central Asian country, most likely Kazakhstan. For Ankara, this route is a very attractive one, because not only would it make Turkey an important player in governance of major trade connections, but also it would help Turkey to boost its image in the eyes of European leaders who are desperately looking for ways to relieve the economic crisis that anti-Russian sanctions cause. Turkey wants to be useful for Europe and wants to remain in the Western camp, because Erdoğan understands that European countries together with the US are dominant in global governance. Turkey also wants to capture 30% of flows coming from the Northern Corridor by diverting them into the Middle Corridor, thus taking significant advantage of its geographic position. For Europe, a trans-

Caspian alternative seems like a good idea as the continent aims to get rid of dependence on Russia. Even before the conflict in Ukraine, European investors have shown significant interest in the route. A number of companies from Finland, Denmark, Netherlands and Germany, including Austrian Federal Railways (ÖBB) have begun using the Middle Corridor. From January to March 2022, the cargo transported through this route increased up to 120% in comparison to 2021¹⁹. Now, Turkish balancing stance but with pro-Ukrainian actions finds support in the West. In 2022 the EU and Kazakhstan in their joint declaration highlighted that current geopolitical situation calls to find alternative routes that connect Europe with Asia. These events might accelerate the rapprochement between Europe and Turkey, as well as make Turkic states more important players in global trade, as the EU turns its attention on them. Inclusion of non-European states into global governance is a relevant trend, because they have a lot of resources which they can offer to the most developed countries.

Despite certain discontent among European countries about increased trade between Russia and Turkey, it is important for them to realize that they need the help of Turkey to overcome gas insecurity, especially after imposition of sanctions against Russian gas. Western states accuse Turkey of being a war profiteer and a “black knight” (a nation that helps in the evasion of international

¹⁹ Tuba Eldem, *Russia’s War on Ukraine and the Rise of the Middle Corridor as a Third Vector of Eurasian Connectivity*, (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2022)

embargoes for its own benefit)²⁰. Nevertheless, Europeans tend to forget that Ankara already plays an important role in helping Europe to alleviate the energy crisis as Turkey transmits Azerbaijani gas through the Tanap pipeline²¹. Thus, Turkey directly influences the future of Europe's energy. Moreover, in October 2022 Putin suggested Erdoğan create a gas hub. Erdoğan accepted this idea, as he wants Turkey to be the place where gas is traded and sold by private entities and not only as a gas transmitter. The idea received criticism from the West because Russian gas might be secretly transmitted to Europe through Turkey. However, since in today's geopolitical reality Ankara has more influence on Moscow rather than vice versa, Erdoğan has an option to pursue only his own interests in the energy sphere and invite gas suppliers other than Russia (e.g. Turkmenistan), to transmit gas to Europe through a potential hub. It looks like it is already happening: Russian officials were not invited for the gas hub summit in February 2023. Moreover, Turkey does not want to accept the Electronic Sales Platform (ESP) offered by Russian gas company Gazprom because it will keep European buyers away because of political reasons²². Thus, Erdoğan caught Putin's idea thanks to his balancing policy in the Ukrainian conflict, but at the same time he uses it to pursue only Turkish geopolitical and energetic interests.

Europe might have to agree with Turkish plans. Europe wants to get completely rid of Russian gas in only three years, but because of the energy situation in countries like Hungary and Slovakia it is not easy. Turkey on the other hand can provide an alternative, even by mixing Russian gas with gas coming from other countries. Turkey already helps vulnerable states like Bulgaria by supplying gas through liquefied natural gas terminals. State-owned terminals Botas' Marmara Ereğlisi LNG and Gulf of Saros FSRU, which are about to be finished, will supply additional gas to Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine and other Eastern European states²³. It is interesting to notice that most of the East and South-East European states where Turkey supplies gas were once under control of the Ottoman Empire, which was the predecessor of modern Turkey, for a few centuries.

Former member of Turkish parliament and a member of an ECFR Council Suat Kınıklıoğlu describes EU-Turkish relations as a necessary friendship. He argues that Western capitals will have to work closer with Ankara irrespective of what they think about Erdoğan²⁴. Indeed, Turkey directly participates in the life of the European economy and uses its balancing political stance to offer friendship to Europe when the latter needs help. Europe will have to cooperate with Turkey also because of the Syrian migration crisis and cooperation in the framework of NATO in fighting

²⁰ Barbara Moens, Sarah Anne Aarup, Paola Tamma, Erdoğan walks a fine line as the Ukraine war's double agent (Politico, 2022)

²¹ Emin Emrah Danis, Energy crisis: How Turkey can play a major role in solutions for Europe (Middle East Eye, 2022)

²² Staff Reports, Russia Faces Challenges Over Turkey Hub, (Energy Intelligence, 2023)

²³ Emin Emrah Danis, Energy crisis: How Turkey can play a major role in solutions for Europe (Middle East Eye, 2022)

²⁴ Suat Kınıklıoğlu, Necessary friends: Turkey's improving relationship with the West, (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2022)

terrorism. Erdoğan's balancing policy allows him to repair relations with Europe and in particular NATO, as he handles the Ukrainian conflict quite well. Thus, he is able to maintain an influential role in Turkey in the governance of global security, because if something will break out in Europe, it will affect other continents due to the nature of economic and political links between states. Less developed countries would not feel secure about their economic and political future, because their development strongly depends on links with developed countries. It can even be said that Erdoğan by his balancing policy prevents NATO from taking a more radical action against Putin, as his successful balancing policy convinces his European partners that it is better to use diplomacy rather than force. As Kınıkloğlu points out, there are signs that Europe shows solidarity with Ankara²⁵. Turkey proved this point in practice as the country closed Dardanelles Straits and Bosphorus for Russian warships in line with the 1936 Montreux Convention. This document is a strong source of power in Erdoğan's hands, as it gives him considerably strong power in the Black Sea. This move found support in the West, as it could prevent potential military escalation. Moreover, it looks like Europe started to appreciate Turkey as a platform for discussion of consequences of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. For example, the EU hosted the "Istanbul Summit" this year. Ukrainian and Turkish representatives were present and discussed the implications of conflict²⁶.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ World News, EU will organise 'Istanbul summit' for Ukraine-Russia war, (MEMO Middle East Monitor, 2023)

Despite the fact that Turkish-European relations look like swings, keeping ties is beneficial for both parties.

5. Turkey and BRICS

The influence of Turkey in different continents is already covered. Now, it would be interesting to look at Turkish influence on a transcontinental organization, which can potentially counterbalance a typical transatlantic alliance that usually includes European countries, USA and Canada. The case of BRICS would be the best to study.

BRICS is an acronym of five leading emerging economies (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa). It is an economic and geopolitical bloc that aims to foster economic cooperation between member states. Recently, the organization attracted the interest of other non-European states, such as Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. If these countries become members of BRICS, then the role of this union in global governance would be significantly stronger. Moreover, in the case of Turkey, accession to BRICS would be useful in the context of Ankara's geopolitical interests. Erdoğan calls to make global governance more inclusive and thus he serves as a representative of the Turkic world in international affairs. Moreover, Turkey as a Turkic country will add more diversity to BRICS and get access to the rapidly growing Chinese economy. It is also important to remember that BRICS comprises 5 states with half of the world's population²⁷. Thus, if more countries join BRICS, the

²⁷ Ismail Numan Telci, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey's Joining BRICS Can Be a Game Changer, (Politics Today, 2022)

significance of it in global governance would increase. The organization would be able to rival the monoethnic European G7 group. Another benefit for Turkey would be that Ankara will be much closer to its goal of being the gateway for the EU as an energy hub. Murray Hunter, an entrepreneur and researcher, believes that if Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia join BRICS, then a gas network will connect Egypt, Greece and Azerbaijan and make Turkey the largest energy hub in the European region²⁸. This may be the reason why Turkey is now actively preparing for membership in BRICS. Turkey would also benefit from BRICS because it is not a poor or rich country. Therefore, by joining this organization, Ankara can offer its resources and at the same time create domestic business opportunities by creating more trade links thanks to BRICS. Moreover, thanks to the balancing policy in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Turkey would maximize profit from creating several identities: the first one as a NATO member and European partner, second one as a leader of Turkic world and third as a member of a transcontinental organization, which celebrates ethnic diversity and inclusion. Ankara wants to position itself as a friend for most of the world, except those with whom Turkey has strong political issues. By creating a large network of friends and alliances, Erdoğan creates for Turkey an image of “friend of all”, thus increasing the country’s role in global governance. Other states, knowing that Turkey serves as a successful

diplomatic actor in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, would trust it more rather than a state which takes only one side of the conflict. Furthermore, Tarik Oğuzlu, professor at Antalya International University, suggested that Ankara’s institutional relations with the West do not automatically mean that blindly following Western policies always serves Turkey’s interest²⁹. Turkey has a right to build its global presence in non-Western organizations, simply because of its geographical position. As it was previously mentioned, Turkey can enjoy having several identities.

6. Policy recommendations

Despite all efforts that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan puts into finishing the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, it looks like his diplomatic work needs improvement, as the conflict continues and becomes lingering. Military activities are far from being finished. They have significant humanitarian consequences on standards of living of those who live in the epicenter of the conflict. Therefore, this is how Turkey can make its mediator role better and thus demonstrate readiness to be a significant power in international relations. Although these measures will not create a ceasefire, they can help ordinary citizens who have to suffer from this political conflict.

6.1 Improve the Grain Deal and help expand Ukrainian exports other than grain for developing countries

²⁸ Murray Hunter, BRICS Is Becoming The Big Kid On The Block: Implications For Australia – Analysis, (EurasiaReview, News & Analysis, 2022)

²⁹ Tarik Oğuzlu, Middle Easternization of Turkey’s Foreign Policy: Does Turkey Dissociate from the West? (Turkish Studies, 2008)

The main problem with the Grain Deal was that most of the grain actually went to Europe and not to developing countries. Turkey in order to build stronger influence in Africa and poorer parts of Asia needs to monitor more carefully where ships go and make sure that at least 40% of grain goes to the countries in need. By doing this, Erdogan will prove to developing countries that his country is ready to be their friend and that they can rely on it when needed. This would lead to more trustworthy relationships and therefore increase more bilateral and multilateral links.

Moreover, Turkey can suggest another initiative to Ukraine, Russia and the UN, which would consist of creating a corridor for ships with Ukrainian sunflower oil, vegetable oil, raw materials and metals. In this kind of situation, Turkey would serve as an even more important bridge between developing countries and Ukraine, thus minimizing negative effects of the conflict on those who are not even remotely part of it. Also, it would be easier for Turkey to maintain constructive relations with Russia, as the latter would see that Turkey aims to relieve humanitarian and economic consequences of the conflict. Russia also has good relations with developing countries, and therefore would be willing to help them too.

6.2 Invite other states to take part in mediation process

This recommendation may not be ideal because Turkey would not want competition and would prefer to stand out as a sole effective mediator. However, inviting states from non-European, specifically Muslim and Turkic world, can help make the mediation process more effective. It is pretty

difficult to do this alone. Some examples shown earlier in the article prove that non-European countries are able to make Russia and Ukraine collaborate on at least something. Countries from other continents would gain higher trust from Russia and Ukraine. Moreover, Turkey can set up a working group to resolve the Russia-Ukraine conflict and thus get credit and greater political recognition for putting greater effort into conflict resolution. Moreover, Turkey can invite any of the BRICS countries (obviously apart from Russia), or those who want to be part of the organization (e.g. Argentina, Iran, Egypt) to be a mediator. If this process turns out successfully, then it would accelerate the accession of Turkey to BRICS, as member states would already know what kind of partner they will be dealing with. Moreover, participation in mediation would strengthen the authority of BRICS, because unlike the West, the organization would do at least something to promote a diplomatic solution. Again, credit would be given to Turkey if it starts the initiative.

6.3 Offer mediation to Russia, Ukraine and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in matters of ensuring the safety of the Zaporozhye nuclear power plant (NPP)

For a long period of time, roughly from February to October 2022, Zaporozhye NPP was regularly under attack. As a result, its activity was significantly limited because of regular power cuts which became the consequence of military activities. Now, shelling has decreased, however, the power plant is still not safe. An action is urgently needed to protect energy security, health and safety of peaceful citizens. Moreover, if the NPP explodes, then there will be catastrophic consequences

for Ukraine, Russian regions bordering Ukraine and neighbors of fighting countries. An evacuation of people living nearby will have to be evacuated because a radioactive cloud would spread out. An explosion could cause illnesses such as radiation poisoning and also poisoning of nature that surrounds the NPP. Another factor of concern is that if the system that cools down reactors would be damaged by shelling, then, there would be an uncontrolled heat buildup, a meltdown and a fire that could release and spread radiation from the containment structures. Radiation release is unpredictable and can get any European area contaminated³⁰.

Thus, Turkey can use its mediation to bring Russia and Ukraine together to discuss the safety of the NPP. Turkey can arrange a series of quadripartite meetings with Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and the IAEA and which would be about creating security guarantees for the power plant. Ankara has the trust of Russia and Ukraine. In September 2022, Erdogan said that Turkey is ready to mediate in this situation, however, no real progress has been made. Now, when shelling has decreased, it is time to discuss how to stop attacks completely. Turkey can also try to convince Russia to create a demilitarized zone around the power plant. This idea is backed by Ukraine and IAEA but Russia is skeptical about it. The progress in talks might be slowed down because Russia controls the NPP. However, Turkish representatives should remind sides participating in talks that they are responsible for safety of one of the largest

NPPs in Europe, and if something happens to it, the consequences would be only bad. Turkey should lean on this humanitarian narrative to convince Russia and at the same time take into consideration Russian demands. Organization of negotiations would build up Ankara's prestige and receive support from neutral countries and the West as well, because the safety of the NPP which is located geographically in Europe is desired by Europeans. Moreover, nuclear safety is an issue of global importance because of the unpredictable consequences of accidents at an NPP. Thus, Turkey would participate in resolving a very important issue which might impact peaceful citizens.

6.4 Support the initiative of Karpowership to send floating power plants to Ukraine

Another humanitarian activity which would upgrade Turkey's prestige in international affairs would be to support the project of Turkish company Karadeniz Powership (Karpowership), which announced its plans to send 500 MW of electricity to Ukraine and use floating power plants to achieve this objective. 500 MW is enough to power over 1 million households³¹. Turkey's balancing policy in the conflict can allow the country to help peaceful Ukrainians go through a power crisis. Therefore, the Turkish government can support the project financially and also help to solve documentation problems like provision of insurance for vessels that will go to Ukraine.

³⁰ World News, WHAT HAPPENS IF UKRAINE'S ZAPORIZHZHIA NUCLEAR PLANT EXPLODES?, (Business Media Georgia, 2022)

³¹ Nuran Erkul Kaya, Karpowership, Ukraine sign pact to fast-track 500 MW powerships to ease power crisis, (Anadolu Agency, 2023)

The efforts attempting to solve the humanitarian crisis because of power cuts would be welcomed by other countries. Turkey would prove itself as a good partner and Turkish companies that deal with energy infrastructure might increase their reputation thanks to their humanitarian contribution. Russia is likely not to be against the initiative of Karpowership, because firstly Turkey strengthened its energy ties with Russia and secondly being unwilling to help peaceful citizens would be against common sense. Turkey might also be able to consolidate its influence in Africa and poorer parts of Asia, because these locations strongly need electricity and therefore they would be interested in building partnerships with Turkish companies.

7. Conclusion

On 14 April 2010, in the interview with Marc Grossman, then Minister of International affairs of Turkey Ahmet Davutoğlu said: “Turkey is a European country, an Asian country, a Middle Eastern country, Balkan country, Caucasian country, neighbor to Africa, Black Sea country, Caspian Sea, all these”³². Not only did he perfectly describe Turkey’s unique geographic position, but he also hinted that Turkey’s interest is only about being a Western ally.

In current geopolitical circumstances, Turkey’s status in global governance certainly upgraded to a certain extent. The country actively uses the current situation to gain political ground by getting involved into conflicts of

concern and demands consultations through Ankara on issues of global governance, such as conflict resolution, trade and transcontinental transport links. Turkey is making the most out of its multi-vector foreign policy and specifically the “fair balance” policy, which manages to bring conflict sides to cooperate in solving humanitarian issues. In Africa and poorer parts of Asia, Erdoğan builds relationships based on humanitarian approach. In Asia, he gains advantage of the fact that Putin is concentrated on Ukraine. Erdogan looks for business opportunities and promotes the idea of pan-Turkism, which is received well by leaders of Central Asian states. Moreover, he shows a good mediation example to countries that are yet to take a more active role in conflict resolution. In relations with Europe, Turkey uses the gas crisis and impact of anti-Russian sanctions on the European economy to gain more influence and serve as a Eurasian gas hub and transit point for shipments going from China to Europe. Ankara is also looking at how to fulfill commitments as a NATO member, but also to avoid damaging an already fragile economy because of deterioration of relations between Russia and NATO. Moreover, Turkey is looking forward to joining BRICS to make the most out of economic relations with both European and non-European camps. So far, although Turkey’s mediation efforts do give some positive results, some improvements need to be made in order to alleviate humanitarian consequences of the conflict. Recommended measures include sending Ukrainian exports other than

³² Marc Grossman, A Conversation with Ahmet Davutoglu, (Council on Foreign Relations, 2010)

grain to developing countries, inviting other non-European states to participate in mediation process, offer mediation in the issue of security of Zaporozhye NPP and supporting the initiative of Karpowership on the state level to help peaceful Ukrainians to go through power crisis. Turkey already has a great potential of becoming an influential power in global governance, and now it is time to prove it.

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