



POLICY PAPER

TURKEY'S FUTURE ROLE IN NATO

AN INDISPENSABLE AND DIFFICULT ALLY

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Cover page photo: At a constitutional referendum rally at the AKP stronghold, Kasımpaşa, Istanbul, 2017/ Hille Hanso, reproduced with kind permission.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Turkey is one of the key Allies in NATO. Turkey's relations with and attitude towards the West will have a significant impact on the future of the Alliance and its capabilities and influence in the Black Sea region, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. Turkey's regional power ambitions and interventionist policy, departure from democracy, unsettled disputes with NATO Allies and rapprochement with Russia and China create a very complex picture. The authors present the following recommendations from the perspective of reviving Turkey's Western orientation, as much as possible, and strengthening NATO:

- The West – meaning NATO Allies and the EU institutions and non-NATO member states – should adopt a double-track approach to Turkey by strengthening relations both personally, given Turkey's present governance and President Erdoğan's role/style, and institutionally, contemplating a long-term perspective.
- The relations between the West and Turkey do not need more irritants (disputes and conflicts of interest), but rather a problem-solving agenda, a positive atmosphere, and constructive contacts and communication.
- The above is easier said than done, but the main interests of, and critical issues that concern Western countries, NATO and the EU, and Turkey have been on the table for years, and should be solved one by one. None of these issues, from the refugees and Turkey's membership in the EU, to the Patriot versus S-400 systems, are unsolvable, or can be shelved indefinitely. All sides have made mistakes, but through good will reasonable compromises can be achieved for the common benefit. Western-Turkish relations need a success story/ a good news story soon.
- Western criticism of Turkey's current democracy deficiencies is legitimate, but it should not block the path to improving mutual relations. Turkey is a NATO ally, not an adversary of the Alliance. There is no reason to treat Turkey like Russia and differently, for example, from Poland or Hungary.
- Time cannot be turned back and the Turkish economic and democratisation "miracle" of the 2000s cannot be repeated in the same fashion under the current government, but the West has a duty and a vested interest in preventing Turkey from unbalancing its policies and strategic choices in favour of Russia (and China).
- Turkey's membership of the EU – that is full membership – depends on achieving consensus between member states. Turkey should be given clear answers regarding the accession negotiations that should be unfrozen in exchange for Ankara's pledge and tangible steps made towards improving its democracy record.
- The customs union agreement between the EU and Turkey could be complemented with clauses that allow Turkish exports of agricultural products to the EU, as a bonus for making steps that improve the state of democracy and freedoms before the elections in 2023.
- The EU should negotiate with Turkey a reasonable/acceptable way for visa liberalisation for Turkish citizens.
- A renewed peace process, aimed at resolving issues related to Kurdish organisations vis-à-vis fighting terrorism in Syria and elsewhere, could help pave the way to lasting security in Turkey and the region. The West could provide economic incentives to bring all counterparts, including relevant actors in the Kurdish political movements, to the negotiation table. Respect for human rights, territorial integrity and sovereignty of states, and of security arrangements are crucial ingredients of a peace process.

- Turkey has the ambition to develop its defence industry, but it also has military capability gaps that it is not likely to be able to fill by itself. Ideally, Turkey and also Greece should stop blocking cooperation and interaction between NATO and the EU for the benefit of all parties. Turkey could profit from participating in projects under the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), provided it meets conditions set by the EU for third countries.
- The US could clear the sale of Patriot systems to Turkey, as Ankara expressed its wish to purchase the equipment, in order to prevent Turkey from buying a second batch of S-400 systems from Russia. It is in the interest of all Allies that Turkey not continue to purchase Russian (and Chinese) military equipment. An acceptable and viable solution could be found regarding the S-400 systems already bought, but not yet activated by Turkey. The US could purchase them from Turkey.
- Turkey's primary goal is to get compensated by the US for the payments already made rather than seeking to return to the F-35 project. However, Turkey needs to replace (at least partially) its F-16 fleet in the foreseeable future. Turkey and other Allies, particularly the US, should find a solution as to how Turkey could acquire last generation multipurpose aircraft. This is key to the integrity of the Alliance, including NATO's integrated air defence.
- Ankara's claim for a larger Turkish maritime EEZ in the eastern Mediterranean cannot be solved unilaterally, or through the NATO-sponsored bilateral (Greek-Turkish) de-confliction mechanism established in October 2020. Turkey should address the issue to the International Court of Justice in The Hague.
- Turkey and the Baltic states, as well as Poland, should multiply their contacts, including at the highest level, and continue to strengthen their defence cooperation. The Baltic states should employ additional incentives for Turkey to become more active in defence and deterrence in the north-eastern flank, including contributions to NATO's enhanced Forward Presence and the enhanced Baltic Air Policing mission.
- The West should seek a working balance with Turkey between promoting (and not compromising) human rights and democratic values and advancing pragmatic and strategic interests.
- Last but not least, the COVID-19 pandemic limits physical contacts and interaction, but the Turkish culture requires direct contact, deliberations and practical cooperation. Mutual understanding between the West and Turkey could improve significantly through personal contacts at all levels, as well as official and unofficial ties between experts and specialised organisations.

The purpose of this policy paper is to examine the current dynamics and near future perspectives of Turkey's domestic situation and role in NATO, its only solid institutional link with the West, as well as relations with Allies and, on the other hand, Russia. It is directed foremost to the public and decision makers in the West, but also in Turkey, as an independent Estonian expert opinion.

Turkey's foreign and security policy altered further, dramatically, after the attempted coup in July 2016

The first section of this paper focuses on Turkey's domestic and foreign policies after July 2016, although it also outlines – for clarity – certain internal developments prior to the coup attempt that proved to be a watershed.

The second section examines Turkey's role and contribution to NATO, as well as its relations with Allies (particularly the US, France and Greece, but also Poland and the Baltic states), concentrating on contentious issues and opportunities for cooperation. Issues formally not related to the Alliance, such as those concerning the European Union and Turkey, are considered as well, as these have a serious impact on Turkey's attitude and position towards the West in general.

The third section discusses Turkey's relationship with Russia which is relevant in this context because Russia is the main challenge to NATO, and Russia seeks to attract Turkey to its side, away from the West. China's role vis-à-vis Turkey is also considered briefly.

Finally, the paper presents conclusions from the three sections and formulates policy recommendations to decision makers, opinion leaders and experts in NATO member states, including Estonia and Turkey, concerning ways and means of improving relations between Turkey and other Allies, as well as the EU, and thus strengthening the Alliance.

The authors acknowledge the limitations of this paper based on the observation that Turkey's defence and foreign policies are devised in small, closed circles of the governing elite and, therefore, the process is not fully transparent.

INTRODUCTION

This is the first research paper by the ICDS that is focused on Turkey, a capable and indispensable, but also a complex and difficult member of NATO. In Estonia, there is both interest and concern related to Turkey, as it is an important ally that could contribute more to deterrence and defence in NATO's north-eastern flank, but its Western orientation is changing and its relations with Russia continue to strengthen.

Turkey is an important ally that could contribute more to deterrence and defence in NATO's northeastern flank, but its Western orientation is changing and its relations with Russia continue to strengthen

Turkey's role in the Alliance and relations with the US, European Allies, the EU, Russia and other actors changed gradually after the end of the Cold War, due to significant geopolitical developments, including the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Arab uprisings and the wars in Syria and Libya, and the fight against ISIS. Turkey's domestic political scene, and consequently its foreign and security policy altered further, dramatically, after the attempted coup in July 2016.

The authors have used only materials available from open sources (with references) and notes made during meetings under the Chatham House rule. This paper expresses their expert opinions.

The authors acknowledge a variety of opposing views in Turkey regarding many of the topics discussed in this paper. Therefore, Turkey refers to the Turkish Government, unless otherwise specified.

1. TURKEY'S DOMESTIC SCENE

This section focuses on Turkey's domestic, foreign and security policy after the coup d'état attempt, on 15 July 2016, as it turned out to be a political watershed that changed Turkey profoundly. It also outlines – for clarity – certain internal developments prior to the coup attempt, and briefly examines Turkey's economy, including its defence industry.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan started to build an increasingly centralised and authoritarian presidential system, to promote a policy of an independent/autonomous regional power and to order pharaonic infrastructure projects to secure the executive presidency's continuity and strong legacy. Erdoğan began to impersonate Turkey's political establishment and gained virtually full authority, including in foreign relations. Former institutions were reformed and gradually started losing their importance in the decision-making processes.

Turkey firmly defends its revamped national interests

Turkey firmly defends its revamped national interests. The country's domestic development, and its pragmatic approach and ambitious goals in foreign policy have resulted, so far, in disagreements, conflicts of interest and worsening relations with NATO Allies and the EU, and, on the other hand, a rapid rapprochement with Russia. This section examines Turkey's policy drivers and considers the most likely perspective of Erdoğan's regime in the near

term, until the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections in 2023.

It must be understood from the outset that Turkey's foreign and security policy stems directly from its domestic political, economic,

Turkey's foreign and security policy stems directly from its domestic political, economic, social, religious and cultural life

social, religious and cultural life, as well as the role played by the armed forces and internal security structures. A number of interviewees share the opinion that Turkey's foreign policy is in fact a tool for upholding the present political regime rather than an instrument that advances the country's long-term national interests. Other interviewees refer to it as pragmatic governing.

Societally, the cult of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the laic Turkish Republic in 1923, remains strong. Turkish laicism is not under serious threat, and the multi-cultural and multi-religious, predominantly Muslim country could hardly turn itself into an Islamic state/republic, but significant changes towards political conservatism have nevertheless taken place in the past two decades.

1.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan established the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi or AKP) and became its leader in August 2001. The AKP, a conservative and populist party, argues that it is not Islamist, but it was founded on and attracted mainly supporters of conservative traditions of Turkey's Ottoman past and its Islamic identity. It worked originally together with Hizmet, the movement of the Islamic scholar Fethullah Gülen that the Turkish government labelled FETO (Fethullahist Terrorist Organisation) and criminalised in 2015.

In the 2000s, the AKP presented itself as a Western-oriented party that promoted a liberal market economy and sustained Turkey's bid for membership in the EU. The party's leader became Turkey's prime minister in

March 2003 and held the position in three successive cabinets until August 2014. Turkey was regarded then, in the West, as a model of Westernisation and liberalisation. The country's economy developed fast.

The Hizmet became Erdoğan's political ally in 2003, when the latter took the course of empowering previously disenfranchised religious figures in civil life, a departure from laic Kemalism. Their alliance, however, has fractured since 2011, when corruption related investigations commenced against high-ranking AKP officials, coupled by the power party's accusations of illegal wiretapping by Gülen-linked investigators. There were also allegations that Gülen prepared to overthrow the government (AKP's rule), as well as suspicions about the possible role of US intelligence (Gülen has lived in self-exile in the US since 1999).

The AKP has won about two thirds of the seats in the three parliamentary elections since 2002, the presidency (Abdullah Gül elected indirectly in 2007, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan elected directly in 2014), and the majority in city councils in 2009 and 2014, but it failed to secure the absolute majority of parliamentary seats (66%) necessary to shift a "presidential" constitution, even in a second election in 2015.¹

1.2. THE 2016 COUP AND ITS IMPACT

A faction of Turkey's armed forces, led by an unidentified "Council for Peace at Home", organised a coup d'état that was suppressed quickly and effectively by the government on 15 July 2016. The military rebels' appeal on radio stated that their aim was to "reinstate constitutional order,

Turkey was deeply shaken by its bloodiest ever coup attempt

human rights and freedoms and the rule of law", in the spirit of Kemalism. The government quickly dismissed the rebels' claims and stated that their ideological motives stemmed from "terrorist" Gülenism.

¹ Philippe Perchoc, "Turkey since the failed July 2016 coup," European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2016.

Turkey was deeply shaken by its bloodiest ever coup attempt. The drama, during which 241 people were killed and more than 2,000 injured, the Parliament building was bombed from the air and the armed forces' chief kidnapped, lasted only hours before the government – with the help of loyal army units, the police and the population – took full control and declared victory.²

The Turkish government reacted swiftly and sharply by purging anyone suspected of having participated in the military coup attempt or sympathising with Gülenism. Hundreds of thousands of civil servants, employees of state-run institutions, security officials, judges and many others were dismissed and replaced with loyalists.

Turkey conducted a severe purge in its armed forces

Shortly after the coup attempt, Turkey conducted a severe purge in its armed forces, NATO's second largest, against those considered to be loyal to the Gülen movement. Subsequently, 99 loyal colonels were promoted to the rank of general or admiral and about 1,700 officers were discharged dishonourably over their alleged roles in the coup. About 40% of all generals and admirals in the military were dismissed.³

Today, Turkish Armed Forces are, once again, one of the country's most trusted public institutions

It was well known that the Turkish armed forces included segments with different political and religious orientations, including Gülenists. After the attempted coup, the armed forces temporarily lost their standing among Turkey's population, but also among Turkey's allies, including at the Pentagon. Today, Turkish Armed Forces are, once again, one of the country's most trusted public institutions.

² "Turkey's failed coup attempt: All you need to know," *Al Jazeera*, 15 July 2017.

³ Tulay Karadeniz and Humeyra Pamuk, "Turkey's Erdoğan slams West for failure to show solidarity over coup attempt," *Reuters*, 29 July 2016.

The media and academic organisations also experienced intensive repression by the government. There are increasingly fewer media outlets and journalists, or universities and scholars, who dare to speak out, instead of conforming to the government's position. Most act under self-censorship. The number of investigations and convictions for insulting the President, a criminal offence under law, have exploded since 2014 (with over 38,000 investigations and, for example, almost 10,000 lawsuits filed in 2020 alone).⁴ Ultimately, the question of whether Gülen's movement was behind the coup attempt or not, or how the events precisely unfolded, still lacks convincing evidence, but that hardly matters five years later.⁵

Upon his emergence to power as Prime Minister, Erdoğan made it his top priority to dismantle Turkey's "deep state" which he claimed to be penetrated by Kemalist (and later also Gülenist) networks, and to secure the loyalty of Turkey's armed forces and civil service to him and the AKP. The armed forces were then brought for the first time under (undemocratic) political control. The Turkish president began to create his own patronage system.

According to an interviewee, the country's parliament has been neutralised and has not fulfilled its functions since 2016. With the government largely paralysed, the President (or rather the president's palace) conducts Turkey's foreign and security policy and controls the decimated armed forces. As a consequence,

Other institutions of Turkey, such as ministries, have been sidelined

other institutions of Turkey, such as ministries, have been sidelined. The presidential system, according to several interviewees, has not proven to be effective and has not brought the desired positive results for the country and there is a need for political renewal in Turkey.

⁴ "Erdoğan sued 38,581 people for 'insulting the president' in six years," *BIA.net*, 27 August 2021.

⁵ Leela Jacinto, "Turkey's Post-Coup Purge and Erdoğan's Private Army," *Foreign Policy*, 13 July 2017.

1.3. FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

Some interviewees remarked that Allies regard Turkey's political scene as unpredictable and unstable. Turkey's foreign policy does not make clear-cut distinctions between allies and partners, or, on the other hand, competitors or even adversaries. Russia, for example, is both Turkey's partner and competitor in specific contexts, particularly in Syria.

Turkey's foreign policy does not make clear-cut distinctions between allies and partners

In addition to economic ties, Turkey's strongest bond with the Western world continues to be its membership of NATO. The Allies demonstrated solidarity and responded positively to Ankara's request (under Article 4 or the Washington Treaty) to deploy mid-range air defence missile systems to defend Turkey against possible threats from the south (Syria)

Turkey's strongest bond with the Western world continues to be its membership of NATO

in 2015. However, when the US, Germany and the Netherlands pulled out their Patriot batteries in 2016, leaving only the Spanish one in place, Turkey's government felt it was left alone to face Russia in Syria. In addition, most Allies refused to accept Turkey's request to label the Syrian Kurdish YPG a terrorist organisation, together with whom the US-led coalition fought against the Daesh/ISIS.

Turkey's accession negotiations with the EU have been frozen since 2018 and Turkey-EU relations are virtually de-institutionalised and conducted on a purely transactional basis. However, Turkey wants the 2016 Joint Action Plan for the support of Syrians under temporary protection and migration management renewed, as well as the customs union agreement, and to obtain visa-free travelling rights (visa "liberalisation") for Turkish citizens to the Schengen Area.

Turkey's intervention in the war in Libya and its quest to significantly enlarge its maritime Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the eastern Mediterranean unleashed political

confrontation with other Allies, particularly France and Greece that, in a critical moment, could degenerate into military conflict.

Ankara feels increasingly cornered in the eastern Mediterranean region by new cooperation formats that exclude Turkey, particularly concerning the EEZ issue⁶. Therefore, Turkey aims to conduct renewed dialogue with Egypt, the UAE and the new government of Israel. One interviewee claimed that the EEZ issue, as promoted by Turkey, is a (another) “hoax” of Erdoğan meant to strengthen his presidential system.

Turkey regards itself as one of the main players in the Palestinian issue and Turkish-Israeli relations suffered a severe blow after Israeli armed forces attacked a “Gaza Freedom Flotilla” in May 2010.⁷ Their relations have not yet recovered officially and publicly. However, interviewees stated that Turkey and Israel, despite being on opposing sides (for example, in the East Mediterranean EEZ issue), cooperate on practical issues, such as the transit of Turkish exports through Israeli ports (to the Gulf states) to avoid the Suez Canal.

In 2017, Turkey’s decision to purchase S-400 air defence missile systems from Russia provoked a crisis in its relations with the US that resulted in American sanctions and Turkey’s exclusion from the F-35 project.

Turkey’s rapprochement with Russia during the last five years has taken place against the background of an increasingly independent and interventionist foreign and security policy

After the coup attempt and the reconciliation of the two countries (leaders) in August 2016, Turkey made a sharp turn towards Russia. Turkey’s rapprochement with Russia during the last five years has taken place against the background of an increasingly independent and interventionist foreign and security policy, and worsening relations with NATO Allies and the EU.

⁶ Dimitrios Triantaphyllou, “[Interview: is the dream of Peace Pipelines coming to an end?](#)” interview by Hille Hanso, ICDC, 22 September 2020.

⁷ “[Turkey kicking out top Israeli diplomats over Gaza blockade](#),” *CNN*, 3 September 2011.

Iran and Iraq, Turkey’s neighbours to the east, play an important role in Ankara’s foreign and security policy. Turkey’s quest for a prominent position in the Middle East, and Iran’s ambition to dominate the Gulf region (and be a player in Syria and Lebanon), have deeply transformed the geopolitical picture from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Arabian Sea, particularly since the influence of Iraq, Egypt and other Arab countries has decreased.⁸ Although Turkey cooperates with Iran, for example, in the Astana Forum, it is also building a wall on the frontier between the two countries to prevent further massive immigration of Afghan refugees (through Iran to Turkey). Turkey has a military presence in Iraqi Kurdistan that pursues campaigns against Kurdish militias, as in Syria.⁹ Recently, Turkey extended the mandate of its force, likely because of the US’s decision to stop military/combat activities in Iraq and the inability of Iraq’s government to control the Kurdish inhabited region and provide security.

Ukraine is a delicate matter considering relations between Turkey and Russia

Ukraine is a delicate matter considering relations between Turkey and Russia. Ankara does not recognise the unlawful annexation of Crimea by Russia, and it also resents the mistreatment, once again, by Moscow of Crimean Tartars, a Turkic ethnic group. In fact, Turkey has repeatedly declared strong support for Ukraine’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, developed economic ties with and sold weapons of self-defence to Ukraine (Bayraktar TB2 drones that were used successfully against “separatist” military targets). Russia has reacted angrily to Turkey’s support for Ukraine.¹⁰ However, the Kremlin cannot take it for granted that its good relations with Erdoğan’s regime would induce Turkey to slow down or paralyse NATO’s reaction in case Russia were to engage in a new (decisive) offensive against Ukraine.

⁸ Itamar Rabinovich, “[How Iran’s regional ambitions have developed since 1979](#),” Brookings Institution, 24 January 2019.

⁹ “[Turkey Extends Syria, Iraq Missions by Two Years](#),” *The Defense Post*, 27 October 2021.

¹⁰ “[Russia warns Turkey over ties with Ukraine](#),” *Reuters*, 24 May 2021.

1.4. ECONOMIC ASPECTS

Since the 1970s, Turkey has transformed from a virtually agricultural into a mainly industrial country. It suffered a severe economic crisis in 2001, but recovered quickly, and its economy boomed, once again, due to efficient market-oriented reforms and privatisations, especially in the communications, transportation and banking sectors. The “Turkish miracle”, a decade of exceptional economic growth that tripled the country’s GDP per capita and almost doubled in size a genuine middle class, undoubtedly secured AKP’s and Erdoğan’s popularity.

The “Turkish miracle”, undoubtedly secured AKP’s and Erdoğan’s popularity

However, it is probably not accidental that corruption scandals and investigations emerged at the beginning of 2010s, when Turkey’s economy weakened, the flow of direct foreign investments slowed down and unemployment soared.

Turkey’s president continues to rely on the same recipe

The “miracle” was due partly to the booming construction sector that created millions of jobs. Turkey’s president continues to rely on the same recipe. The list of megaprojects that have been completed or are under construction includes the controversial Kanal Istanbul; the new Istanbul Airport, soon to be Europe’s largest air hub; the third bridge on the Bosphorus; The Çanakkale 1915 Bridge; giant dams; motorways; and nuclear power plants. The Istanbul Canal, that President Erdoğan is determined to construct at all political and financial costs (the estimated cost stands between the official price tag of 15 billion euros, and unofficial calculations of up to 60 billion euros), is highly controversial with disputes with Istanbul’s mayor and environmental movements, and overall low public support¹¹. The project is also virtually obscure in terms

¹¹ “İmamoğlu, anket sonucunu açıkladı: İşte Kanal İstanbul’a karşı olanların oranı! [İmamoğlu announced the result of the survey: Here is the number of those who are against Canal Istanbul!],” *Cumhuriyet*, 25 January 2020. According to the mayor of Istanbul, 57% of Istanbulites oppose the project.

of financing sources (members of the Qatar royal family have reportedly invested in real estate development around the canal, but China’s willingness to invest in the construction of the canal remains uncertain). Russia seems rather irritated by the canal project, as it could create a new door to the Black Sea for NATO naval vessels that could not be subject to the Montreux Convention of 1936.¹²

Turkey’s economy is currently in dire straits. The Turkish lira oscillates against the US dollar and has lost considerable value since 2020.¹³ At the same time, Turkey’s foreign debt has grown fast, from 36.4% in 2011 to 57.3% in 2019 and 62.8% of the country’s GDP in 2020.¹⁴ The external debt amounts to 450 billion USD in December 2020, with Turkey paying high interest rates on foreign loans (in US dollars) of up to 10%. Although the share of high tech in Turkey’s exports is rising, it was still only about 3% in 2020.¹⁵

1.5. DEFENCE INDUSTRY

The economic/industrial sector is very important in the context of the North Atlantic Alliance, as major producers of military equipment (most notably the US, the UK, France, Germany and Italy) are engaged both in competition and cooperation with each other. Acquisition and/or joint development of armaments and equipment creates strong and long-lasting ties, but also occasional rivalries between Allies.

Turkey has put much emphasis on the development of a diversified defence and aerospace industry

Turkey has put much emphasis on the development of a diversified defence and aerospace industry that achieved a

¹² Tuba Eldem, *Canal Istanbul: Turkey’s Controversial Megaproject*, SWP Comment no. 43 (Berlin: German Institute for International and Security Affairs, July 2021).

¹³ Ambar Warrick, “EMERGING MARKETS Turkish lira plummets to new low after central bank slashes rates,” *Reuters*, 21 October 2021.

¹⁴ “Turkey External Debt: % of GDP,” CEIC, accessed on 16 December 2021.

¹⁵ “Turkey’s high technology exports on rise, officials say,” *Hürriyet Daily News*, 11 October 2020.

turnover of almost USD 11 billion in 2019.¹⁶ The turnover, exports and orders received decreased significantly in 2020, but Turkey hopes the sector will recover, partly due to sales of platforms/equipment with capabilities demonstrated successfully in real combat, such as the Bayraktar TB2 medium-altitude long-endurance (MALE) surveillance and attack UAV.

As a Level III industrial participant of one of the most complex and expensive defence projects ever carried out by the US and other Allies and partners, Turkey planned to acquire 100 F-35A aircraft. But, due to Turkey's exclusion from the F-35 project, Turkish companies suffered an aggregated loss estimated at USD 10 billion. In addition, Turkey must consider and decide how to compensate potential/inevitable capability gaps resulting from an increase in operational load and the retirement of its F-16 fleet.¹⁷ For now, Turkey is contemplating the purchase of a new batch of F-16 jets and around 80 modernisation kits for its existing fighter aircrafts.

The US has declined Turkey's repeated request for a technology transfer for the purchase of Patriot air defence surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems. In December 2018, the US State Department ultimately cleared the purchase by Turkey of a package of Patriot systems (for about USD 3.5 billion), but the technology transfer issue remains unsettled.¹⁸

Moscow stands ready to sell to Turkey whatever it needs

Russia would surely be seeking to profit from Turkey's inability to purchase the newest generation multirole aircraft and mid-range air defence systems, as well as to acquire technology from and participate in joint armaments programs with other NATO Allies. Moscow stands ready to sell to Turkey whatever it needs (for example, a second batch of S-400 systems) and to develop bilateral

¹⁶ Melike Günaydin, "An overview of the Turkish Defence and Aerospace Industry 2020 Performance Report," *Defence Turk*, 1 July 2021.

¹⁷ Arda Mevlutoğlu, "Turkey's exclusion from the F-35 Project," The Topchubashov Center, 28 April 2021.

¹⁸ Aaron Mehta, "Turkey cleared by US for \$3.5 billion Patriot missile deal, despite S-400 row," *Defense News*, 19 December 2018.

cooperation in the defence and aerospace industry sector.

2. TURKEY, NATO AND THE EU

This section examines Turkey's attitudes, ambitions and interests, and relations and perspective vis-à-vis the West, i.e. NATO, the EU and their member states. First, it studies Turkey's role and contribution to the Alliance, thereafter it reflects on contentious issues and relations between Turkey and other Allies, and finally, it explores other Turkish-Western issues that are not formally linked to NATO's context.

2.1. TURKEY'S ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION TO NATO

Turkey's domestic and foreign policy debate has been unsettled since the coup in 2016. Nevertheless, its commitment to NATO, including the development of a new Strategic Concept of the Alliance, remains strong. Interviewees agreed on this point, referring to the communiqué of the Brussels summit, in June 2021, to which Turkey fully subscribed.

On the other hand, Turkey's so-called Eurasianists, as well as many Islamists, pose questions as to whether the country should stay in or leave NATO. These doubts are on the margins of Turkey's political landscape, but they do affect the domestic public debate and the results of opinion polls.

Security concerns, perceived threats and national interests determine Turkey's policy in relations to NATO. The main threats to Turkey's

The main threats to Turkey's security are regional instability and conflicts, as well as internal and cross-border terrorism

security are regional instability and conflicts (especially in Syria and Iraq, where Turkey has a sizeable military presence), as well as internal and cross-border terrorism. The Kurdistan

Workers Party (PKK) and its offshoot YPG¹⁹ are also perceived as a challenge to the country's security and territorial integrity. There is little discussion in Turkey, however, about possible military conflict scenarios (with Russia) in the Black Sea basin and/or the eastern Mediterranean, as opposed to the debates in the Nordic-Baltic region's context (and in Romania and Ukraine).

Turkey remains a staunch Ally and does not intend to leave NATO under any circumstances

Interviewees agreed unanimously that Turkey remains a staunch Ally and does not intend to leave NATO under any circumstances. However, the prevailing attitude is somewhat paradoxical – there is a broad mistrust of America stretching from ordinary citizens to intellectuals. For example, according to the Kadir Has University annual foreign policy research, the US is deemed “unreliable”, “hostile” and “imperialist” and only 8.6% of responders consider it a “friend and ally”. Yet, popular support for NATO membership in 2021 was 45.5% and it is generally believed that NATO would help Turkey in case of a military attack (52.7% of respondents). Many regard NATO as Turkey's main connection to the West (45.8%).²⁰

Turkey's position is sometimes misinterpreted as disrespect for joint interests

Most interviewees said that Turkey depends on NATO's security umbrella and values highly the collective defence and the prestige of belonging to the Alliance. However, they also stressed that Turkey needs to single-handedly address critical security threats (regional crises and terrorism). That is why Turkey's position is sometimes misinterpreted as disrespect for joint interests, including NATO's core task of collective defence. One interviewee stated that Turkey's “first reflex” – when it started to deal with the threats stemming from Syria – was to appeal to its NATO Allies, but the absence of

support compelled Turkey to develop its own capabilities and take independent action.

The picture is complex – Turkey does not only present problems, but also capabilities and valuable relationships. Another interviewee added that terrorism is one of the two main threats agreed in NATO's threat assessment, alongside Russia, but terrorism does not mean only al-Qaeda or ISIS, but also the PKK and the Syrian Kurdish YPG. Speaking of Allied unity of purpose and solidarity, especially in relation to NATO's 2030 perspective, these principles should apply equally in fighting against both recognised threats. The same interviewee added that the US's purpose was/is to support the Kurdish YPG, while Turkey fought “alone” against the Daesh/ISIS. Turkey made clear that it is not just a flank country, but also a regional power on its own, and that made the US and France become suspicious and worried.

Another interviewee argued that NATO is not only about deterring and defending against, but also about having a broader vision of Russia. The approach to Russia by the Alliance should therefore be more nuanced. There are different opinions, but neither of the two extremes would be helpful, whether playing along with Russia's power games or standing rigidly against the Kremlin. The interviewee added that Russia is “everywhere”, and it would be therefore impossible and unnecessary to isolate it. Hence, NATO's position should be calibrated.

Turkey's views on NATO's enlargement are officially in contradiction with Russia's position. Ankara supports the bids for NATO membership for both Ukraine and Georgia. Turkey also wants NATO to help more in Libya and display stronger commitment, upholding

Turkey's views on NATO's enlargement are officially in contradiction with Russia's position

the country's legitimate/ internationally recognised government in Tripoli, although NATO probably will not make any decisions to that end in the near future.

¹⁹ Güneş Murat Tezcür and Helin Yıldız, “[Kurdish politics in post-2011 Syria: From fragmentation to hegemony](#),” *Mediterranean Politics* 26, no. 1 (January 2021).

²⁰ Mustafa Aydın, [Public Perceptions on Turkish Foreign Policy](#) (Istanbul: Kadir Has University, Team of Turkish Studies, 15 June 2021).

In Afghanistan, Turkey played a major role in NATO's efforts. It was the only Ally present and one of the six countries invited (together with Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan and Qatar) to the inauguration of the Taliban-ruled government in Kabul, in a way representing both itself and the recently departed Alliance. Turkey was prepared to keep the Kabul Airport under control after the withdrawal of NATO troops, but there is no agreement with the new Taliban regime.

One interviewee argued that Turkey badly needs mid-range air defence (support). The S-400 systems, activated or not, are Erdoğan's "toys", according to one interviewee, deployed in Ankara to defend the capital city (and the presidential palace). However, they are by far not sufficient against threats from the south. Turkey is very grateful to Spain for continuing to deploy a Patriot battery in Adana, but that is not enough.

In 2021, Turkey took over from Germany the land component of the NATO Response Force (NRF), providing a Rapid Deployable Corps.²¹ In addition, France contributes the French Aero-Naval Rapid Reaction Force (FRAMARFOR) to the NRF's maritime component. The ACC Ramstein (Article 5 and Collective Defence) and Italy's JFAC (crisis response) make up the air component, and Command and Control (C2) and Special Forces from Denmark, Belgium, and the Netherlands contribute to the special operations components. Turkey contributes also routinely to NATO's maritime groups and operations in the Mediterranean (Standing NATO Maritime Group 1, Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group 1 and Operation Sea Guardian).

2.2. TURKEY'S RELATIONS WITH NATO ALLIES

The selection of Allies in this subsection includes the US, France and Greece, countries that play key roles in shaping Turkey's mind-set and aspirations regarding NATO and the West in general, as well as Poland and the Baltic states, given ICDS's perspective.

²¹ NATO, Joint Force Command Naples, "[NATO Response Force 2021](#)," Joint Force Command Naples, 16 December 2020.

2.2.1. TURKEY AND THE US

Turkey represented the West in its region after 9/11. It received support from the West and it supported the West until 2015. An interviewee claimed that Turkey was very keen to receive political and military support from the US and NATO in the early and mid-2010s, as it perceived itself endangered and being/becoming the main loser in the context of the so-called Arab Spring (millions of migrants, the Syrian conflict and YPG/PKK issues, Russian expansionism, economic decline and political uncertainty with AKP's popularity plummeting).

Many in Turkey blame the US for stepping back in Russia's favour in Syria

Another interviewee argued that Erdoğan is the most pro-American Turkish president ever, but he demands respect and would be inclined to solve pertinent issues, if they were addressed in a way (and language) that he understands best. However, many in Turkey blame the US for stepping back in Russia's favour in Syria, an implicit sign that America does not consider Russia's importance/status and (trouble making) potential to be equivalent to that of China. Some interviewees stated that Turkey feels alone versus Russia in Syria, despite its NATO membership and the continued, but drastically reduced, US presence in Kurdish held areas. In October 2019, US troops withdrew from positions in northern Syria, upon agreement by Presidents Trump and Erdoğan, for Turkey to create a buffer/safe zone along its southern border and conduct operations against Kurdish fighters. The interviewees expressed the opinion that the current US president, Joe Biden, would not have done such a deal with President Erdoğan.

Most Turkish observers blame the US for cooperating with "terrorists"

Most Turkish observers blame the US (and other Western Allies in the anti-ISIS coalition) for cooperating with "terrorists" (the Kurdish YPG in Syria) in a "secretive" and "ambiguous" manner. The Kurdish issue has become more critical in Turkish-American/NATO relations. The US offered Turkey the "safe zone" in Syria,

inhabited mostly by a Kurdish population, and it destroyed the embodiment of terrorism, the Daesh in Syria and Iraq, with the crucial support of Kurdish militias (the YPG in Syria), but that did not help to mend the US-Turkey relations or help to solve the Kurdish issue.

In addition, Turkey's president was outraged by the US administration's formal recognition of the Armenian genocide, following the almost unanimous adoption of resolutions on this matter by the US House of Representatives and Senate, respectively, in October and December 2019.²²

Turkey claims that it did not receive official reasons for the US's refusal to sell Patriot surface-to-air missile systems to Turkey during Barack Obama's administration. An interviewee argued that President Donald Trump was very pragmatic and transactional, and less effectively used sanctions against Turkey's defence industry sector, whereas President Joe Biden is focused more on democratic/Western values.

The US responded to Turkey's purchase of Russian S-400 missile systems by sanctioning Turkey and kicking it out of the F-35 project. At their meeting in Brussels, in June 2021, Presidents Biden and Erdoğan agreed to continue to work on these complex issues, and to detach them from other matters that are easier to solve. The meeting demonstrated smiles and gave indications that the US and Turkey still need one another. However, their history of direct contacts is rather short and characterised by animosity. In his election campaign, Biden called Erdoğan an autocrat. Erdoğan was also infuriated by Biden referring to Russia's President Putin as a killer.²³

President Erdoğan explained to the Turkish media that Turkey fulfilled its commitments regarding the F-35 project, including payments. He added that the US not only refused to sell Patriot systems to Turkey, hinting at the purchase of Russian S-400 systems, but also pulled out the Patriot systems deployed to Turkey in 2015. The media report also claims

that the US proposed, but Turkey refused, to move the S-400 systems to the Incirlik Airbase, near Adana, where the Spanish Patriot battery is deployed, to operate them there jointly. Turkish officials are quoted as saying, "Washington is trying to impose US control over the S-400s to make sure that they will never be activated." In an earlier statement, the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said, "We could remove the Russian element from this dispute (send the Russian technicians home), but we cannot hand over the control."²⁴ Nevertheless, Turkey may buy Patriot systems if allowed by the US Congress.²⁵

Presidents Erdoğan and Biden met in New York, in the margins of the UN General Assembly in September 2021, but they could not agree on any of the main issues. Thereafter, Erdoğan stated that Turkey intends to buy a second batch of Russian S-400 systems.

Despite uncertainty and prevailing problems, Turkey seeks to build a pragmatic relationship, and to find common ground and a positive agenda with the US

Despite uncertainty and prevailing problems, interviewees claimed that Turkey seeks to build a pragmatic relationship, and to find common ground and a positive agenda with the US. Domestic noise, when some problems occasionally become more acute, for example, talk about closing American bases in Turkey, should not be taken seriously. In fact, Turkey would like the US presence to be put to better use, in appropriate ways, for common purposes. For example, Russia's dominance in the Black Sea should be countered, although not by escalating and provoking conflict.

The US military presence (including nuclear) in Turkey remains solid, but some interviewees wondered whether Turkey could continue to rely on it, given America's obvious change of focus to the Indo-Pacific region and abandonment of Afghanistan (possibly also Iraq and Syria).

²² Thomas de Waal, "What Next After the U.S. Recognition of the Armenian Genocide?" Carnegie Europe, 30 April 2021.

²³ John Haltiwanger, "Biden and Erdoğan play nice at NATO summit, showing the US and Turkey still need each other despite tensions," *Business Insider*, 14 June 2021.

²⁴ Ragıp Soylu, "Turkey won't take new approach to resolve S-400 dispute, Erdoğan tells Biden," *Middle East Eye*, 17 June 2021.

²⁵ "Foreign minister: Turkey may buy Patriot missiles if allowed by US Congress," *BIA.net*, 8 September 2021.

The latest diplomatic clash occurred in the second half of October 2021, when President Erdoğan ordered the expulsion of 10 Western Ambassadors from Turkey (including those from the US, Germany, France and Canada) because they subscribed to a petition demanding the release of Osman Kavala who has been detained since October 2017 without charges. Erdoğan stepped back after the US Embassy announced on Twitter that it “maintains compliance” with the article of the Vienna Convention regarding respect for the laws of the host country and non-interference in internal affairs.²⁶ He made clear reference to Turkey’s “own stand” and to the “protection of its dignity”. Presidents Erdoğan and Biden had a good meeting thereafter in Rome, in the margins of the G20 Summit, but Biden warned Turkey against further “precipitous actions”.²⁷ These diplomatic rows demonstrate how unstable and unpredictable US-Turkey (and US-Western) relations can become from one week to the next.

The United States should certainly speak up and openly criticise Erdoğan’s deepening autocracy, but in the meantime, it should also face reality.

The US should keep pushing for constructive relations in Turkey at the institutional level, such as ministries and parliament

For all his faults, Erdoğan nevertheless leads an important country. He is, for now, the only person that the US can attempt to do business with and work with to solve major problems between the two countries.²⁸ Yet, the US should keep pushing for constructive relations in Turkey at the institutional level, such as ministries and parliament, to avoid accelerating the concentration of power to a very narrow group of people in Turkey.

Turkey can be a critical player in helping the US to handle Russia, Iran and many issues in the Middle East and the Mediterranean

Turkey can be a critical player in helping the US to handle Russia, Iran and many issues in the Middle East and the Mediterranean.

2.2.2. TURKEY AND FRANCE

Relations between Turkey and France have always been tense. An interviewee stated that France is the most challenging of Turkey’s allies. He claimed that France opposes Turkey in most important issues, including Syria (and the labelling of YPG as a terrorist organisation), Libya and the European Union-Turkey relations.

Turkey’s unilateral actions in Syria, in addition to former US president Trump’s policy, were likely the source of President Emmanuel Macron’s frustration, when he stated that NATO is “brain-dead”. In the context of Libya, France took a more ambiguous position, despite Ankara’s support for the legitimate government in Tripoli, standing for the enforcement of the UN’s arms embargo and against Turkey’s involvement in the war. An interviewee suggested that France’s support for the rebel field marshal Haftar is based on its assumption that he can be more helpful in countering terrorist threats from the Sahel, particularly from Mali and Chad.

France complained that Turkish naval vessels, suspected by France of smuggling small arms to Libya, repeatedly targeted a French frigate on a NATO-sanctioned mission in June 2020.²⁹ In addition, France sent Rafale fighter aircraft and a frigate to the eastern Mediterranean in August 2020, to support Greece against Turkish “expansionism” (the EEZ issue).³⁰ There was a risk of military incidents between Turkey and France (as well as Greece) in the Mediterranean Sea, until Greece and Turkey agreed to a military de-confliction mechanism at NATO’s HQ in Brussels, in October 2020, largely due to the efforts of NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg.³¹

An interviewee argued, nevertheless, that Turkey and France are “alike”.

²⁶ Andrew Wilks, “[Turkey’s Erdoğan lifts threat to expel Western ambassadors](#),” *AP News*, 25 October 2021.

²⁷ Jeff Mason, “[Biden to warn Turkey’s Erdoğan against ‘precipitous’ actions](#),” *Reuters*, 31 October 2021.

²⁸ Michael E. O’Hanlon and Ömer Taşpınar, “[Repairing the rift with Turkey](#),” *Brooking Institution*, 18 November 2020.

²⁹ Orhan Coskun, “[Turkish military official denies French claim that warship was harassed](#),” *Reuters*, 17 June 2020.

³⁰ “[France sends jets and ships to tense east Mediterranean](#),” *BBC*, 13 August 2020.

³¹ NATO, “[Military de-confliction mechanism between Greece and Turkey established at NATO](#),” NATO, 1 October 2020.

They both believe in the Alliance, but would not hesitate to “shake it”, if necessary, and to give examples of leadership and promote their own interests. However, it is unlikely, even if not impossible, that Turkey would follow the example of Charles de Gaulle’s France and quit – for an unpredictable period – the military structures of the Alliance.

Turkey and France believe in the Alliance, but would not hesitate to “shake it”

2.2.3. TURKEY AND GREECE

According to an interviewee, the harshness of the US arms embargo from 1975–1978, after the occupation by Turkey of the northern part of Cyprus, is still remembered in Turkey. It was a bitter pill in US-Turkey relations that was clearly meant to escalate in order to deescalate tensions between Greece and Turkey, but the embargo had also a future oriented positive side effect – it prompted Turkey to start developing its own defence industry.³²

One interviewee argued that for decades since the early 1970s, Cyprus was a top priority national matter for Turkey, but in recent years it has become a bargaining chip. Turkey is increasingly supporting a two-state solution advanced by the North Cypriot nationalist leaders. The issue, however, remains in a stalemate after the UN sponsored talks in Geneva in April 2021 did not break the deadlock.

The Cyprus issue is officially considered vital for Turkey. It has also of paramount importance in solving the maritime EEZ dispute initiated by Turkey that is related – to a large extent – to extracting hydrocarbons from undersea fields.³³ Athens backs Cyprus, but Ankara stresses there will be no solution unless the rights and security of Turkish Cypriots are guaranteed. Ankara adds, in the context of the maritime EEZ, that there is a need for a fair and equitable share for Turkey, as well.

³² Mahmut Durmaz, “[The U.S. arms embargo of 1975-1978 and its effects on the development of the Turkish defense industry](#)” (Master’s Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, September 2014).

³³ “[Drilling for Victory – Turkey/Cyprus EEZ dispute](#),” *LGC News*, accessed on 16 December 2021.

The flow of migrants, mostly Syrian refugees, from mainland Turkey to the Greek islands (as well as over the frontier on the Evros River) is yet another critical problem between the two Allies, and also between Turkey and the EU. In February 2016, NATO deployed its Standing Maritime Group 2 to the Aegean Sea to support Greece, Turkey and the EU’s border agency Frontex to deal with the migrant situation.³⁴

Tensions deescalated, but Turkey remained unsatisfied with the EU’s (financial) support. President Erdoğan declared in July 2019: “We have made invaluable contributions to the security of the entire European continent, particularly to the Balkan countries. However, we did not see the support and humanitarian attitude that we expect from our European friends during this difficult time.”³⁵ He added that the EU provided support in the amount of 3 billion euros to Greece to deal with 100,000 refugees, while it “did not keep its responsibility” (paying the agreed 6 billion euros) to Turkey to deal with 4 million refugees.

The US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken called Greece a “pillar of stability the region”, as Athens and Washington agreed to the US gaining greater access to Greek military bases in October 2021.³⁶ The agreement is indefinite and allows US forces to train and operate more broadly in Greece. This means the US has significant military assets deployed in both Turkey and Greece that surely would play a key

The US has significant military assets deployed in both Turkey and Greece that surely would play a key role in preventing conflict between the two Allies and historic rivals

role in preventing conflict between the two Allies and historic rivals. This agreement may signal to Ankara that it is time to solve disputes with Greece for the sake of strengthening the Alliance, and that solutions could be found by

³⁴ NATO, “[NATO’s Deployment in the Aegean Sea](#),” NATO, October 2016.

³⁵ “[EU-Turkey refugee deal: Five years on](#),” *TRT World*, 18 March 2021.

³⁶ John Vandiver, “[Americans to broaden footprint in Greece under revised defense agreement](#),” *Stars and Stripes*, 14 October 2021.

negotiations and/or international mechanisms/bodies (for example, the International Court of Justice, in the case of the maritime EEZ) rather than unilateral actions.

2.2.4. TURKEY AND POLAND AND THE BALTIC STATES

Mention of the Baltic states is almost non-existent in the Turkish media and public opinion, and opinions regarding Poland appear to be moderate. Turkish experts in the field of diplomacy and security have the opinion that Poland and the Baltic states always comply with US decisions and demands, and do not criticise or publicly resent even steps made by America that hurt or contradict their interests.

Turkish experts in the field of diplomacy and security have the opinion that Poland and the Baltic states always comply with US decisions and demands

A new defence plan for Poland and the Baltic states was approved by NATO, in June 2020, only after Turkey lifted its veto.³⁷ An interviewee claimed that Turkey did not intend to take the four countries hostage, but instead sought to achieve consensus in the Alliance on labelling the Syrian Kurdish YPG a terrorist organisation. Diplomatic/political bargaining between Allies at NATO's HQ rarely spills out to the public, even in the most contentious cases, but the defence plan issue did come out and rang bells particularly in the Baltics states and Poland. The issue soon disappeared from the media, but left behind some important lessons. Turkey's behaviour is not excusable, but the Allies need to define/agree on common threats, as clearly as possible, and strengthen solidarity, to avoid hampering NATO's core task of collective defence.

Poland is the first NATO member state to purchase a batch of 24 Bayraktar UAVs

The rise of Polish and Baltic interest in Turkey, and also in the opposite direction, became evident after Presidents Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

³⁷ "Turkey drops objections to NATO defence plan for Poland and the Baltics," *NATO Watch*, 3 July 2020.

and Andrzej Duda signed an agreement for the purchase by Poland of Bayraktar TB2 drones at the presidential complex in Ankara, in May 2021.³⁸ The agreement signed by the Turkish and Polish ministers of defence and worth USD 270 million, made Poland the first NATO member state to purchase a batch of 24 Bayraktar UAVs, with the first drones due to be delivered in 2022.³⁹ For now, it is hard to say whether this is a new trend or an isolated arms deal. Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Qatar and Libya have purchased similar models of the Bayraktar TB2 drones with a range of 150 kilometres and readiness to be armed with anti-tank missiles.

Latvia's defence minister Artis Pabriks and Lithuania's foreign minister Gabrielius Landsbergis visited Turkey in June and July 2021, respectively. Turkey is interested in selling variants of the Bayraktar TB2 to these Allies, as well. It is possible that Latvia and Lithuania, in addition to Poland and Ukraine, could purchase and start to operate the combat proven and capable Turkish drones, a development that would certainly enhance deterrence and defence in the region.

In early July 2021, Turkey deployed four F-16s and an 80-strong detachment from its 6th Main Jet Base at Bandırma to the Malbork Air Base in Poland, to support the enhanced Baltic Air Policing (BAP) Mission⁴⁰. This was the second contribution by Turkey to upholding NATO's north-eastern flank, after a single rotation in the BAP from April to July 2006 (in Šiauliai, Lithuania). The deployment of Turkey's F-16s to Poland demonstrated the power of political dialogue, and also of defence procurements between Allies. Interestingly, three Allies from the south – Spain, Italy and Turkey – contributed together to the BAP mission in Lithuania, Estonia and Poland, an excellent example of Allied solidarity. However, Turkey has not yet contributed troops to NATO's enhanced Forward Presence.

³⁸ Enes Kaplan and Faruk Zorlu, "Polish president to visit Turkey on Monday," *Anadolu Agency*, 23 May 2021.

³⁹ Maria Wilczek, "Polish president visits Turkey to seal military deals with 'strongest ally' in region," *Notes from Poland*, 25 May 2021.

⁴⁰ NATO, Allied Air Command, "Turkish Air Force Joins NATO Enhanced Air Policing in Poland," Allied Air Command, 6 July 2021.

Last but not least, Poland and the Baltic states have expressed support for continuing accession negotiations between Turkey and the European Union.

2.3. TURKEY AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

With the exception of the cosmopolitan megacity of Istanbul and a few other European-styled touristic/historic towns, Turkey could be viewed as the Orient's West and the West's Orient. It is still the most liberal Muslim country and it has an extremely rich culture. As a newly established Republic, Turkey started westernising in 1923 and has been loyal to the West since the early 1950s. It became a NATO member together with Greece in 1952, before West Germany (1955), and has sought EEC/EU associate membership since 1959, and full membership since 1987. This section briefly examines Turkey's and the West's mutual interactions and expectations, and the interests of both sides, outside the context of NATO.

Turkey's disillusionment with the EEC/EU became apparent after the end of the Cold War

Turkey's disillusionment with the EEC/EU became apparent after the end of the Cold War. The EU was joined by neutral/non-aligned Austria, Finland and Sweden in 1995, countries that were perfectly qualified for membership. However, successive waves of enlargement of NATO, and also the EU (in 1999, 2004, 2007 and 2013) included virtually all previously Soviet dominated/occupied countries and states that emerged from former Yugoslavia, after only a few years of negotiations and preparations in each case. The sentiment became stronger in Turkey that it had been rejected by Europe (or at least by some European countries, notably France and obviously Greece and Cyprus) because it is Muslim, and too big to digest (it has a large population, therefore it would gain a sizable number of seats in the European Parliament and its relatively low economic development would necessitate a huge level of financial support). This, coupled with traditional widespread anti-Americanism, fused into scepticism towards the West in general.

President Erdoğan does not contemplate Turkey's membership in the European Union, but he pretends to be interested in solving the main issues between the two sides. He reacts painfully to Europe's criticism of Turkey's human rights and democracy record, and expects respect, i.e. acquiescence of Turkey's presidential regime as a fait accompli that Europe cannot influence or change. Turkey's leader, while seeming indifferent to the freezing of accession negotiations by the EU in 2018, seeks to avoid doing business with (companies

President Erdoğan does not contemplate Turkey's membership in the European Union, but he pretends to be interested in solving the main issues between the two sides

from) EU member states on the basis of EU's regulations. This is most notably about large public tenders, because of requirements concerning transparency and accountability. An interviewee said that the Turkish government has changed legal requirements before major tenders, to make them more suitable for favoured partners.

Nevertheless, the EU remains, if not politically, at least economically tremendously important for Turkey.

The EU's share in foreign direct investments made in Turkey is above 60%, and it is Turkey's main trade partner, accounting for 33.4% of Turkey's imports and 41.3% of its exports in 2020.⁴¹ It is also noteworthy that 59.3% of the Turkish public supported Turkey's full membership in the European Union in 2021. However, only 55.3% of the responders believe that Turkey could join the EU. They agree that religious and identity differences, but also the weakness of Turkish democracy, rule of law and human rights are major hindrances.⁴²

The main problem between Turkey and the EU is perhaps the gradual de-institutionalisation of their relations that is largely due to the personalised approach of president Erdoğan. Some interviewees argued that the EU needs to develop and implement a solid and forward-looking strategy for Turkey, and to seek to

⁴¹ European Union, European Commission, "Turkey," 7 July 2021.

⁴² Aydın, *Public Perceptions*, 4551.

re-institutionalise relations before the Turkish general election in 2023 (contemplating political changes in Turkey).

The main problem between Turkey and the EU is perhaps the gradual de-institutionalisation of their relations

Another important aspect is the population of Turkish origin in many European Union countries. Apart from historic Turkish diasporas living in the Balkans since Ottoman rule (particularly in Bulgaria), since the 1950s millions of Turks have been residing mainly in Germany, as well as Austria and Benelux and Scandinavian countries. President Erdoğan's attempt to rally European Turks – those who also retain Turkish citizenship and the right to vote in Turkey's elections – behind his candidature, during a tour in Europe, led to political tensions between Turkey and particularly Germany and the Netherlands in 2017.⁴³ This is undoubtedly a very touchy issue, as generations of partly integrated Turks in European countries are encouraged to support Turkey's present regime that is in conflict with Western liberalism.

The EU's main political interest is related to the migration issue

2.3.1. MAJOR ISSUES BETWEEN TURKEY AND THE EU

The EU's main political interest is related to the migration issue. Turkey hosts almost 4 million refugees, including 3.6 million Syrians who do not have refugee status, just "temporary protection" (until they return home or leave for Europe). An estimated 300,000 Afghans had also arrived in Turkey, due to the instability in their country, even before the Taliban rose to power. One must recognise that Turkey, due to its geography, is actually Europe's first line of defence against irregular migration, and also terrorism originating from a vast region stretching from Syria to the Horn of Africa and Afghanistan. An interviewee expressed a popular argument in Turkey that the EU

wants to make Turkey its "refugee camp", and to "outsource" the (mainly Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan) migrant issue to Turkey, and also Iran and Pakistan.

In March 2016, the EU and Turkey signed an agreement to stop the refugee flow in return for speeding up accession negotiations.⁴⁴ Turkey demanded, and the EU promised to consider, visa-free travel (visa liberalisation) for its citizens to the Schengen Area. The issue of resettling tens of thousands of Syrians without refugee status from Europe to Turkey was also on the table. Finally, the sums allocated by the EU for compensating Turkey's expenses related to refugees in its territory also became a contentious issue, including the management of the funds, as Turkey preferred the funds to be transferred to its government institutions, instead of the NGOs dealing directly with refugees.

By the end of June 2016, the EU and Turkey reached an agreement over lifting the visa requirements for Turkish citizens in regard to entrance into the Schengen Area provided that Turkey "takes all the necessary steps to fulfil the remaining requirements" on the visa liberalisation roadmap. However, the visa liberalisation process stalled, partly because of deficiencies in Turkey's democracy. Some interviewees argued that the EU also imposed "bureaucratic obstacles", such as biometric passports.

The third main issue between Turkey and the EU is the customs union that entered into force at the end of 1995. Turkey wants to renew the customs agreement to include agricultural

During the last 30 years, Turkey has been technically in the EU trading zone but does not have a say

products, a still significant category of Turkey's exports. After the downing of the Su-24 in November 2015, Russia's punitive measures, in addition to tourism and other sectors, targeted Turkey's exports of agricultural products which

⁴³ Jenny Hill, "Turkish-German ties fray as Erdoğan chases diaspora vote," *BBC*, 9 March 2017.

⁴⁴ Andrea Rönnsberg, "EU-Turkey migrant deal done," *Deutsche Welle*, 18 March 2016.

was felt very painfully by Turkish producers. During the last 30 years, Turkey has been technically in the EU trading zone but does not have a say. Yet, it wants to take advantage of the system of trade with the EU.

However, consultations have been slow. The EU is open for dialogue but is tying it to Turkey's "provocations" in the Eastern Mediterranean.⁴⁵ The interviewees were pessimistic about the renewal of the EU-Turkey customs union agreement (as well as of the migration deal).

3. TURKEY, RUSSIA AND CHINA

This section analyses Turkey's relations with Russia and includes a brief overview of Ankara's relationship with Beijing. Russia's influence over Turkey's foreign and security policy is still far more prominent than that of China, mainly due to geography and history, but they both play major roles in shaping Turkey's position towards the West.

3.1. RUSSIA

An interviewee remarked that for Turkey the Cold War lasted, in terms of not warming up relations with Russia, until the mid-2000s. Competition between Turkey and Russia took new forms in the former Soviet empire,

Turkey's relations with Russia influence directly and significantly, although not (yet) decisively its ties with the West

particularly in the Caucasus and in Central Asia, but also provided new opportunities for cooperation,⁴⁶ starting with the opening of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline in May 2006. This happened when Russia started to turn,

⁴⁵ Asli Aydintaşbaş, "Low expectations: A year of renewal for the EU-Turkey relationship," European Council on Foreign Relations, 27 January 2021.

⁴⁶ Güneş Murat Tezcür, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Turkish Politics* (Oxford University Press, published online July 2020); Evren Balta and Mitat Çelikpala, "Turkey and Russia: Historical Patterns and Contemporary Trends in Bilateral Relations" in *The Oxford Handbook of Turkish Politics*, ed. Güneş Murat Tezcür (Oxford University Press, published online July 2020).

first rhetorically and later in practice, against the West.

Turkey's relations with Russia influence directly and significantly, although not (yet) decisively its ties with the West, i.e. with other members of NATO, as well as the European Union. Russia seeks to gain political and economic profit, as much as possible, from cooperation with Turkey, setting it as an example for Western countries, and attempting to demonstrate that doing business bilaterally, especially at the top leaders' level, can be successful and non-confrontational (as opposed to EU's policy of sanctions and NATO's virtually frozen relations with Russia, depicted by the Kremlin as detrimental dead-ends). Moscow likely considers that Turkey offers an excellent opportunity to crack solidarity and cohesion between NATO Allies and encourages Ankara to strengthen defence (industry) cooperation with Russia that further antagonises the US and other Allies.

Russia is ruled by an autocratic regime and Turkey follows the same direction

Turkey has regional ambitions, but Russia has also global aspirations. Russia is ruled by an autocratic regime and Turkey follows the same direction. They promote similar traditional nationalistic and Eurasian ideologies with their own religious blends, respectively Islamic and Christian Orthodox. Turkey and Russia feel alienated, offended, even humiliated, that they are not taken seriously and treated with respect by the West. They are irritated by Western criticism, and especially by punitive measures (sanctions) adopted because of their poor record of human rights, democratic freedoms and the rule of law.

The Kremlin labels Western criticism as "Russophobia" but does not apply the term to Western or other countries that conduct friendly relations with Putin's regime. In the same vein, Turkey's president uses the term "Islamophobia" and compared it (and xenophobia) to a "virus that is more destructive, more lethal and more insidious than Covid-19" in his speech to the UN General Assembly on 23

September 2021.⁴⁷ Erdoğan desires to become the leader of the Muslim world, just as Putin would like to be seen as the main figure in the Orthodox/East and South Slavic nations.

The Kremlin's propaganda narratives and disinformation find rather fertile ground in Turkey

The Kremlin's propaganda narratives and disinformation find rather fertile ground in Turkey due to widespread anti-American and anti-Western feelings, and historic belief in various conspiracy theories (for example, that the US is to blame for virtually all wrongs, and even for plotting a regime change in Turkey by supporting Gülenists in Turkey and the Kurds in Syria). Major Russian Kremlin-backed media outlets (RT, Sputnik) operate in Turkey and often hire well-known and reputable journalists.

Not only are Turkey and Russia inspired by the values of their former empires, but they also seek to attain (occasionally shared) influence over former subjects and establish security buffers along their borders. The two countries are undoubtedly competitors, as they have been throughout many centuries, but they have nevertheless acquired a critical amount of pragmatism and willingness to cooperate and deal together with international crises, with or without the West's participation.

Political and economic relations between Turkey and Russia are developing very fast

Current governments in Turkey and Russia have much in common, since 2015. This explains why Turkey's rapprochement with Russia took place so quickly and smoothly, in spite of strained relations from November 2015 to August 2016, because of the downing of a Russian Su-24 by a Turkish F-16.

Political and economic relations between Turkey and Russia are developing very fast, but Russia may also succeed in attracting Turkey into extensive bilateral defence/military cooperation, particularly in the defence industry sector.

⁴⁷ Cengiz Candar, "In New York, Erdoğan plays to domestic audience," *Al-Monitor*, 23 September 2021.

Russia's main arsenal for building strong and stable relations with suitable partners (undemocratic regimes) is well known: political, economic and if necessary/possible military support (regular forces, military "advisors" and/or Wagner-type mercenaries); gas and/or oil sales/transit; building nuclear power plants; offering loans and bribes (corruption); and arms sales. Russia is successfully employing this entire spectrum towards Turkey.

President Putin ignored this year's UNGA, but he hosted president Erdoğan in Sochi on the 29 September. Erdoğan called Putin "dear friend" and thanked Russia for the support given to Turkey in the fight against forest fires, in which fire fighters from both countries perished. He was also thankful for Putin's support in the tourism sector and satisfied that the first block of the Russian/Rosatom built nuclear power plant in Akkuyu (in southern Turkey, facing Cyprus on the Mediterranean coast – a megaproject employing 10,000 Turkish and 3,000 Russian workers) would become operational in 2022. President Erdoğan noted that the two countries are taking steps in defence industry cooperation, and that peace in Syria (and the region) depends on Turkish-Russian relations.

President Putin, as usual, brought out figures, this time to illustrate Turkey's economic dependence on Russia: the number of Russian tourists visiting Turkey is again on the rise (6.8 million in 2019, 1.5 million in 2020, and 2.5 million in the first nine months of 2021); the aggregate sum of mutual direct investments is growing (USD 1.5 billion in Russia and USD 6.5 billion in Turkey); and the trade volume is expanding (55% in the first nine months of 2021, after a decrease of 20% in 2020). He thanked Erdoğan for the completion of the gas pipeline system, Turkish Stream, and noted that Turkey could "feel safe" in the "turbulent times" that affect Europe's natural gas/energy market. Putin added that Russia and Turkey "cooperate reasonably successfully" and "coordinate positions" not only in Syria, but also in Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh (a Turkish-Russian joint centre for ceasefire control on the Azeri-Armenian state border which is, according to Putin, a "serious guarantee for stability" in the area).⁴⁸

⁴⁸ "Meeting with President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan," The Kremlin, 29 September 2021.

3.2. THE CONTEXT OF SYRIA, LIBYA AND NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Turkey and Russia certainly compete over influence in Syria, Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh, even if they do it in a more or less cooperative manner, due to a strategy of compartmentalising issues. Officially, Turkey does not regard Russia

Turkey and Russia certainly compete over influence in Syria, Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh, even if they do it in a more or less cooperative manner

as its adversary (in contrast to the case of the US, in subsequent National Security Strategies, and of NATO, in various summit meetings' communiqués and other documents), and not surprisingly, the public perception in Turkey of Russia is not adversarial. About 50.2% of the population evaluates Turkey-Russia relations as some form of cooperation.⁴⁹

Syria is the main arena of interaction between Turkey and Russia

Syria is the main arena of interaction between Turkey and Russia. Russia's military build up in Syria began in July 2015, and the State Duma approved the use of force (bombing raids by deployed Russian Aerospace Forces' aircraft) on 30 September 2015. Intensive and indiscriminate Russian bombing with cluster munitions of cities and villages in northern Syria in October 2015, including in the Aleppo region close to Turkey, produced havoc and massive waves of refugees headed to Turkey.⁵⁰ An increasingly aggressive bombing campaign and violations of Turkey's air space by Russia ultimately resulted in the shooting down of a Russian Su-24 attack aircraft by a Turkish F-16 fighter.⁵¹

Russia retaliated vigorously against Turkey.⁵² The flows of Russian tourists to Turkey and of agricultural imports from Turkey were shut down, and Turkish companies and workers,

especially in the construction sector, were virtually prevented from working in Russia. The Kremlin even ordered air strikes against Turkish humanitarian aid convoys entering Syria.

A reconciliation took place at the meeting between Presidents Erdoğan and Putin in Saint Petersburg, on 9 August 2016. The coup attempt in Turkey, less than a month earlier, to which Presidents Putin and Rouhani (of Iran) reacted very quickly by expressing support to Erdoğan, probably offered the opportunity to renew the bilateral partnership.

The Astana process that involved Russia, Turkey and Iran as peacemakers in Syria, but left out the West including the US, was launched in January 2017.⁵³ An interviewee stated rhetorically that Turkey could and would have done business with the West in Syria, but there was no West there to be found (except for a minimal US military presence). Another interviewee claimed that the Russian Su-24 was shot down as an act of desperation to mobilise NATO and the entire West behind Turkey. However, from Turkey's viewpoint, the West reacted with suspicion and/or indifference, as it did after the coup attempt.

In November 2016, Turkey had started "discussing" with Russia the purchase of S-400 systems likely in connection with a reconciliation agreement made in Saint Petersburg.⁵⁴ Turkey needs mid-range air defence towards the south (against Syria), but the US and other NATO nations, except Spain, pulled out their Patriot batteries. The purchase and deployment of Russian S-400 systems to Turkey (that are tested, but not yet activated), coupled with subsequent US sanctions against Turkey and the forced removal of Turkey from the F-35 project, is a major political victory for Russia and a serious problem for NATO.

Turkey and Russia have divergent views on Bashar al-Assad's regime. Whereas Turkey would like to work with Russia on the next regime in Syria, the (claimed) legitimacy of Russia's military presence and operations in the country

⁴⁹ Aydın, *Public Perceptions*, 104.

⁵⁰ "Evidence mounts of Russian cluster-bomb use in Syria," *Al Jazeera*, 12 October 2015.

⁵¹ "Turkey shoots down Russian warplane on Syria border," *BBC*, 24 November 2015.

⁵² Lin Jenkins, "Vladimir Putin announces Russian sanctions against Turkey," *The Guardian*, 28 November 2015.

⁵³ "Syria: the Astana peace process," *France 24*, 5 September 2018.

⁵⁴ "Turkey is discussing purchase of S-400 systems from Russia – minister," *Russia Beyond*, 18 November 2016.

depends on Assad's regime. An interviewee argued that Russia is not an indispensable actor in Syria, but this opinion is not (yet) supported by real facts or Turkey's policy.

Turkey would like to work with Russia on the next regime in Syria

The war in **Libya** started during NATO's bombing campaign and continued after dictator Muammar Gaddafi was killed in October 2011. It goes on with Turkey and Russia supporting opposing forces, the internationally recognised government in the country's capital Tripoli, and the rebel Libyan National Army under the command of Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar. Since December 2019, Turkish drones have destroyed Russian equipment given to Haftar or operated by Russian mercenaries (so-called Wagners). Ankara's main interests in Libya are to achieve support and an agreement for the extension of Turkey's EEZ in the eastern Mediterranean, and likely to sell arms to the Libyan government. However, Russia is also interested in selling military equipment to Libya, as it was one of its main clients under Gaddafi – alongside neighbouring Algeria – in the African continent.

In late 2020, Azerbaijan waged a successful blitzkrieg against Armenian forces and regained control over all areas around **Nagorno-Karabakh** that it lost in 2004. Ankara's military support to Baku was crucial. Russia did not interfere on behalf of its ally Armenia, as it was interested in getting a foothold in Azerbaijan (Russian Spetsnaz "peacekeepers" were deployed in the corridor between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia). Moscow was also interested in cementing the role of guarantors of peace to Russia and Turkey, effectively leaving the West (the US and France, as members of the Minsk Group) out of the political process. With Nagorno-Karabakh out of the way, there is good chance for a Turkey-Armenia rapprochement that Russia would not oppose. It would certainly serve as an excellent example by Moscow and Ankara of their joint ability to solve major crises and make peace.

In summary, Turkey's political and economic relations with Russia are presently more friendly, solid and free of disputes than

Turkey's relations with its Western allies. The interests of both Russia and Turkey are fulfilled. Turkey is following a foreign and security policy trajectory laid out by Erdoğan and Putin that is bringing it closer to Russia. This trajectory's evolution will therefore depend on the duration and legacy of the stay in power of the two autocratic presidents. The West can do little to influence Turkey's relations with Russia, particularly at the top/personal level. A renewed perspective of EU membership and other bonuses (visa-free travel for Turkish citizens in the Schengen Area,

Turkey's political and economic relations with Russia are presently more friendly, solid and free of disputes than Turkey's relations with its Western allies

re-negotiated customs union, a new migration deal) would certainly improve relations between Turkey and the EU, but probably would not have a decisive effect in turning Turkey (under Erdoğan) towards the West. A relevant example to keep in mind is Hungary, a NATO and EU member ruled by an increasingly undemocratic government (of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán) that quarrels with Brussels and shares mutual sympathy and conducts friendly relations with Putin's regime and seeks close relations with the Turkish ruling elite.

Turkey would like to balance its relations with Russia, but Russia would likely never accept and allow anything close to equal partnership

Turkey would like to balance its relations with Russia, especially the bilateral trade, but Russia would likely never accept and allow anything close to equal partnership. In addition, history has repeatedly proven that mutually beneficial and friendly relations between autocratic leaders/dictators may quickly deteriorate and become adversarial. Turkey would also like to balance its relations with the US/NATO and Russia, but that is an equally difficult task, because Russia will always attempt to make Turkey choose between Moscow and the West.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ "Turkey seeking to balance relations with U.S., NATO, and Russia – former Turkish FM," *Ahval*, 7 June 2021.

3.3. CHINA

China is, of course, a superpower on its own. But, regardless of the bilateral Memorandum of Understanding on the Belt and Road Initiative's (BRI) Middle Corridor, as yet China has rather limited influence on Turkey, in comparison to Russia. An interviewee suggested that China is cautious about making big investments (apart

As yet China has rather limited influence on Turkey, in comparison to Russia

from, for example, the Hunutlu Thermal Power Plant in the Adana region and the Kumkapi Port in Istanbul), in spite of Turkey's open support of China's BRI megaproject. Another interviewee claimed, in connection with the Kanal Istanbul projects, that China could be hesitant because of possible political change in Turkey, and therefore prefers to wait for the results of the election in 2023.

China is interested in Turkey

Official figures provide a slightly different picture, showing that China is interested in Turkey. According to pre-COVID-19 data from Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China was Turkey's second major source of imports. Chinese investments in Turkey amounted USD 2 billion, and more than 400,000 Chinese tourists visited Turkey in 2019. Almost every third mobile device in Turkey is made by Huawei or other Chinese producers, and the Chinese enterprise Alibaba became the main owner of Trendyol, one of Turkey's largest e-commerce companies. These figures could rise and compete with Russia's in the coming years. Russia alone cannot help Turkey out of its economic difficulties, and neither would Turkey wish for such a scenario.

The image of China and Russia in Turkish language media channels is almost immaculate

The authors were told that the image of China and Russia in Turkish language media channels is almost immaculate. There is no criticism directed at the policies promoted by Moscow or Beijing. In addition, Turkey is conveniently silent about China's abuses against Uighurs, a

Turkic and Muslim indigenous people in the Xinjiang province. When President Erdoğan attended the Belt and Road Initiative Forum in Beijing in 2017, China and Turkey signed an extradition accord (for persons wanted on charges of criminal activity). Subsequently, tens of thousands of Uighurs who have found refuge in Turkey since 1950s (the largest Uighur community outside China) now feel threatened by the possibility of being handed over to China, where they could even face the death penalty.⁵⁶

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The dynamic and trajectory of Turkey's domestic policy, and consequently its foreign and security policy, as set out after the coup attempt in July 2016, will continue up to the parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled for 2023. It could last considerably longer because a possible transition of power becomes increasingly difficult.

Ahead of the elections, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the power party, the AKP, will likely seek to strengthen the autocratic executive presidential system. Moreover, the domestic political opposition and popular dissent will likely be further suppressed, and the Turkish media kept continuously under firm control/self-censorship.

The country's leader and his party will seek to regain, as much as possible, the popularity they enjoyed thanks to Turkey's economic boom, achieved in cooperation with the West and due to a Western-like policy until the early 2010s. However, it is questionable, under present economic difficulties and trends, whether Turkey's economic "miracle" can be repeated by relying mainly on Erdoğan's pharaonic projects, Russian gas, nuclear energy and tourism, and Chinese and Qatari investments in infrastructure.

⁵⁶ Asim Kashgarian and Ezel Sahinkaya, "Analysts: Extradition Treaty Between Turkey, China Endangers Uighur Refugees," *Voice of America*, 7 January 2021.

Turkey's policy and decision-making have become personalised and centralised at the presidential palace, at the expense of the parliament, government and judiciary. The armed forces have been decimated since 2016, and have been brought effectively under (undemocratic) civilian control. Yet, the popularity of the AKP is continuously diminishing. At the same time, the voice of the opposition and public freedoms are increasingly suppressed in the unstable situation.

Ankara conducts an independent/autonomous and interventionist foreign policy. It will continue to play an active role, including militarily, in Syria, Iraq and Libya, and to seek to establish a much larger maritime Exclusive Economic Zone under Turkey's control. There is little ground to expect the start of peace negotiations between Turkey and the Syrian Kurdish YPG, or negotiations aimed at solving the Kurdish issue in Turkey.

Turkey does not make clear-cut distinctions between allies, partners and adversaries. It defends by all means its interests, including countering the most serious perceived threats (regional crises/instability, and domestic and cross-border terrorism). Therefore, cooperation and friendly relations, but also competition with Russia and, on the other hand, contributions to NATO and conflicts of interest/tense relations with other Allies, are rational from Turkey's perspective.

Indisputably, Turkey is and remains a valuable asset and a key member of NATO, but also a complex and potentially increasingly difficult ally. The West, meaning the US and the EU, is tempted to punish Turkey for its president's autocratic striving, its harsh reprisal against Syrian Kurdish YPG, its purchase of S-400 systems from Russia, its intervention in Libya and its quest to extend its maritime EEZ in the eastern Mediterranean. Turkey's accession negotiations with the EU have been frozen, and the US has imposed sanctions on Turkey's defence industry and kicked it out of the F-35 project.

The executive presidency and the policies promoted by Erdoğan resemble in many ways Vladimir Putin's autocratic regime in Russia. Nevertheless, the West should recognise that Turkey carries the heaviest burden of any of the NATO Allies in terms of active crises on its

periphery and the wider region (the Caucasus and the Middle East and North Africa) and faces drastic consequences from those crises (particularly migration).

Turkey's democratisation, peace building and conflict resolution regarding different Kurdish political factions are undoubtedly complex topics. There are no quick solutions. Lessons learned from failures of past mediation attempts should be addressed comprehensively and openly between Western countries and Turkey, as well as other countries concerned, together with Kurdish representatives.

The period before the elections in 2023 could be a window of opportunity, because Erdoğan's tone and mood are usually more conciliatory in pre-election times when AKP's popularity is low. Although his meetings with US President Biden, French President Macron and Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis in Brussels, in June 2021, did not result in breakthroughs, the general atmosphere was reportedly good, and could be followed up.

In addition, the EU can play a decisive role in shaping Turkey's attitude and aspirations vis-à-vis the West. It needs a clear, proactive and long-term strategy of cooperation with Turkey, but foremost to address and find solutions to the most pressing issues: Turkey's accession negotiations, migration issues, the customs union agreement and visa liberalisation. Long-term solid cooperation between the EU and Turkey requires institutionalised rather than personalised relations.

Standing by ready to fill every gap (by providing political support and economic advantages, but also by selling military equipment), Russia will use, in its own interest, every dispute between Turkey and the West. Moscow would enjoy Ankara's continuous conflicts with and alienation from NATO Allies and the EU. The bottom line, particularly from NATO's perspective, would be Turkey's further rapprochement with Russia (and China) in the defence/military field. However, one should not disregard the fact that Turkey would be willing, for example, to be reinstated (most probably not unconditionally by the US) in the F-35 project and to purchase Patriot systems (and F-16 jets) from the US. The bridges have not yet been burned.

Poland and the Baltic states are Turkey's relatively recent "discoveries". The model applied in the Turkey-Poland case, that is, developing the highest-level contacts followed by acquisitions of military equipment from Turkey and contribution by Turkey to NATO's enhanced Baltic Air Policing, is transactional, but it works and is beneficial to both sides. Based on common history between the two world wars and a similar geographic position on the periphery of Europe with a large and unpredictable neighbour, common issues for dialogue are easy to find. Every ally (and member of the EU) has a role to play with respect to Turkey.

The authors propose, on the basis of these conclusions, the following recommendations:

- The West – meaning NATO Allies and the EU institutions and non-NATO member states – should adopt a double-track approach to Turkey by strengthening relations both personally, given Turkey's present governance and President Erdoğan's role/style, and institutionally, contemplating a long-term perspective.
- The relations between the West and Turkey do not need more irritants (disputes and conflicts of interest), but rather a problem-solving agenda, a positive atmosphere, and constructive contacts and communication.
- The above is easier said than done, but the main interests of, and critical issues that concern Western countries, NATO and the EU, and Turkey have been on the table for years, and should be solved one by one. None of these issues, from the refugees and Turkey's membership in the EU, to the Patriot versus S-400 systems, are unsolvable, or can be shelved indefinitely. All sides have made mistakes, but through good will they can achieve reasonable compromises for the common benefit. Western-Turkish relations need a success story/ a good news story soon.
- Western criticism of Turkey's current democracy deficiencies is legitimate, but this should not block the path to improving mutual relations. Turkey is a NATO ally, not an adversary of the Alliance. There is no reason to treat Turkey like Russia and differently, for example, from Poland or Hungary.
- Time cannot be turned back, and the Turkish economic and democratisation "miracle" of the 2000s cannot be repeated in the same fashion under the current government, but the West has the duty and a vested interest in preventing Turkey from unbalancing its policy and strategic choices in favour of Russia (and China).
- Turkey's membership of the EU – that is full membership – depends on achieving consensus between member states. Turkey should be given clear answers regarding the accession negotiations that should be unfrozen in exchange for Ankara's pledge and tangible steps made towards improving its democracy record.
- The customs union agreement between the EU and Turkey could be complemented with clauses that allow Turkish exports of agricultural products to the EU, as a bonus for making steps that improve the state of democracy and freedoms before the elections in 2023.
- The EU should negotiate with Turkey a reasonable/acceptable way for visa liberalisation for Turkish citizens.
- A renewed peace process, aimed at resolving issues related to Kurdish organisations vis-à-vis fighting terrorism in Syria and elsewhere, could help pave the way to lasting security in Turkey and the region. The West could provide economic incentives to bring all counterparts, including relevant actors in the Kurdish political movements, to the negotiation table. Respect for human rights, territorial integrity and sovereignty of states, and of security arrangements are crucial ingredients of a peace process.
- Turkey has the ambition to develop its defence industry, but it has also military capability gaps that it would not be likely to be able to fill by itself. Ideally, Turkey and also Greece should stop blocking cooperation and interaction between NATO and the EU for the benefit of all parties. Turkey could profit from participating in projects under

- the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), provided it meets conditions set by the EU for third countries.⁵⁷
- The US could clear the sale of Patriot systems to Turkey, as Ankara expressed its wish to purchase the equipment, to prevent Turkey from buying a second batch of S-400 systems from Russia. It is in the interest of all Allies that Turkey not continue to purchase Russian (and Chinese) military equipment. An acceptable and viable solution could be found regarding the S-400 systems already bought, but not yet activated by Turkey. The US could purchase them from Turkey.
 - Turkey's primary goal is to get compensated by the US for the payments already made rather than seeking to return to the F-35 project.⁵⁸ However, Turkey needs to replace (at least partially) its F-16 fleet in the foreseeable future. Turkey and other Allies, particularly the US, should find a solution as to how Turkey could acquire last generation multipurpose aircraft. This is key to the integrity of the Alliance, including NATO's integrated air defence.
 - Ankara's claim for a larger Turkish maritime EEZ in the eastern Mediterranean cannot be solved unilaterally, or through the NATO-sponsored bilateral (Greek-Turkish) de-confliction mechanism established in October 2020.⁵⁹ Turkey should address the issue to the International Court of Justice in The Hague.
 - Turkey and the Baltic states, as well as Poland, should multiply their contacts, including at the highest level, and continue to strengthen their defence cooperation. The Baltic states should employ additional incentives for Turkey to become more active in defence and deterrence in the north-eastern flank, including contributions to NATO's enhanced Forward Presence and the enhanced Baltic Air Policing mission.
 - Last but not least, the COVID-19 pandemic limits physical contacts and interaction, but the Turkish culture requires direct contact, deliberations and practical cooperation. Mutual understanding between the West and Turkey could improve significantly through personal contacts at all levels, as well as official and unofficial ties between experts and specialised organisations.
 - The West should seek a working balance with Turkey between promoting (and not compromising) human rights and democratic values and advancing pragmatic and strategic interests.

⁵⁷ Senem Aydın-Düzgüt and Alessandro Marrone, [PESCO and Security Cooperation Between the EU and Turkey](#) (Rome: Istanbul Policy Center and Sabanci University, September 2018).

⁵⁸ "Turkey not necessarily seeking return to F-35 project: defence industry chief," *Reuters*, 3 March 2021.

⁵⁹ NATO, "Military de-confliction."

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