

# *Russia-Turkey Relations Confronts Syrian Strains*

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## **Abstract**

*Russia-Turkey relations are probably the best they have ever been. The two countries have developed extensive economic exchanges based on a robust energy trade and strong harmony in their security interests regarding Afghanistan, the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Black Sea regions. Turkey is one of Russia's largest economic partners with expanding reciprocal trade and investment based on an energy partnership that continues to grow. Russian analysts identify Turkey as a rising power with a dynamic economy and newly flexible foreign policy that shares with Russia the experience of being physically part of Europe but practically treated as a peripheral country not suitable for membership in core European clubs. Russia and Turkey are able to "compartmentalize" their differences over Syria in order to preserve the overall stability of their relationship. Notwithstanding the strain over Syria and Turkey's support for NATO's missile defense programs, Ankara recently agreed to allow construction of the South Stream pipeline. Moscow's support for Turkey becoming a formal dialogue partner of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization this summer reflects the Russian view that increasing Ankara's role in Central Asia could yield positive benefits in terms of helping stabilize the region as NATO military forces withdraw from Afghanistan.*

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Russia-Turkey relations are probably the best they have ever been. The two countries have developed extensive economic exchanges based on a robust energy trade, along with a strong harmony in security interests regarding Afghanistan, the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Black Sea regions. Russia and Turkey are able to “compartmentalize” their differences over Syria in order to preserve the overall stability of their relationship. Notwithstanding the strain over Syria and Turkey’s support for NATO’s missile defense programs, Ankara recently agreed to allow construction of the South Stream pipeline, which would enable Gazprom to bypass Ukraine via the Black Sea to deliver gas to Europe. Moscow’s support for Turkey becoming a formal dialogue partner of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization this summer reflects the Russian view that increasing Ankara’s role in Central Asia could yield positive benefits in terms of helping stabilize the region as NATO military forces withdraw from Afghanistan.

### Some History

The currently close ties between Turkey and Russia represent a major shift from their generally antagonistic history. During the Cold War, relations between Turkey and the Soviet Union were strained due to Ankara’s decision to ally itself firmly with the United States and its NATO allies. The pro-Western elite that

dominated the country’s foreign and defense policies viewed Turkey’s affiliation with NATO as defining and ensuring its status as a core member of the Western camp. NATO simultaneously defended Turkey against the Warsaw Pact and benefited from Ankara’s efforts to deter Soviet adventurism. Though confrontations occurred between Turkey and fellow alliance member Greece over Cyprus and other issues, these conflicts actually highlighted NATO’s additional value in moderating differences between Athens and Ankara.

Even during the first few years following the end of the Cold War and the demise of Soviet Union, Russian-Turkish ties remained troubled. The leaders of the new Russian Federation feared a strengthening of pan-Turkism among the Turkish peoples of Central Asia, with a corresponding decrease in Moscow’s influence in the region. From the Turkish perspective, the Russian government’s initial reluctance to label the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) as a terrorist organization, despite its attacks against civilian targets in Turkey, and Russia’s support for the Greek Cypriots in their conflict with the Turkish-dominated state of northern Cyprus, which still hosts Turkish troops, presented major stumbling blocks to better bilateral ties between Ankara and Moscow.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hasan Kanbolat, “Turkish-Russian Relations After Gul’s Moscow Visit,” *Journal of Turkish Weekly*, 15 February 2009, <http://www.turkishweekly.net/news/64590/turkish-russian-relations-after-gul-39-s-moscow-visit.html>.

Relations between Turkey and Russia began to improve toward the end of the decade. One of the consequences of the 1998 Russian economic collapse following the Asian financial crisis was to force a softening of Moscow's approach toward Ankara. By then, Russian leaders had recognized that Turkey lacked the resources to establish a sphere of influence in Central Asia or the Black Sea region or to take other measures that would weaken Russian primacy in the former Soviet space. As part of their economic recovery efforts, Russian officials sought to expand economic relations with Turkey. They adopted corresponding political and security policies to improve the prospects of Russian-Turkish reconciliation. For example, the Russian government refused to give rebel PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan asylum in Russia. In addition, Moscow redirected S-300 air defense missile systems planned for the Greek government of Cyprus, which confronted the Turkish-supported, "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus," to the Greek island of Crete instead.<sup>2</sup>

Within Turkey, newly empowered societal actors such as ethnic lobbies, business associations, influential politicians, and a resurgent religious establishment began to push for changes in long-established foreign

<sup>2</sup> Robert O. Freedman, "Russian Policy toward the Middle East under Putin: The Impact of 9/11 and the War in Iraq," *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Summer 2003), <http://www.alternativesjournal.net/volume2/number2/putin.htm>.

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and defense policies. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) that has been in charge of the Turkish government since 2002, has pursued better Russian-Turkish relations while still seeking to cultivate new partnerships in the Middle East and sustain good ties with Turkey's traditional NATO allies and the former Soviet republics of Central Asia. Despite some unease in Turkey with Moscow's repressive counterinsurgency policies in the South Caucasus, Russian security ties with Armenia, and growing Russian military power in regions near Turkey, many Turkish leaders no longer perceive an imminent military threat from Russia.

Meanwhile, Turkey's ties with various Western countries have deteriorated since the Cold War. Disputes with European countries over a number of issues and a general lack of enthusiasm among Europeans for Turkish membership of the EU have caused Turkish leaders to lose hope that Ankara will soon enter the EU as a full member, despite the enormous changes Turkish governments have made to realign Turkish policies with those of the EU. Meanwhile, Turkey-U.S. relations have

only recently recovered from a decade of strained ties. The 2003-2011 U.S. war in Iraq resulted in a precipitous collapse in Turks' previously favorable opinion of the United States.

In contrast, Ankara's ties with Moscow have noticeably strengthened in recent years. Since Vladimir Putin became Russian President at the end of 1999, Russian leaders have cultivated relations with Turkey, exploiting its alienation from the West.<sup>3</sup> The foreign ministers of Russia and Turkey signed the Action Plan for Cooperation in Eurasia on November 16, 2001. Determined to carry their relations to a level of enhanced constructive partnership, the plan estab-

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lished a Russian-Turkish High-Level Joint Working Group and a Caucasus Task Force to bring together senior officials from the Russian and Turkish foreign ministries.<sup>4</sup> When Putin visited Ankara in December 2004, he and Turkish President Ahmet Necdet

3 Ömer Taspinar and Fiona Hill, "Turkey and Russia: Axis of the Excluded?," *Survival*, Vol. 48 No. 1 (Spring 2006), pp. 81-92.

4 Dr. Burcu Gültekin Punsmann, "Thinking about the Caucasus as a Land Bridge between Turkey and Russia," *Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey, Ankara, January 2009*, p. 3.

Sezer signed six cooperation agreements in the areas of energy, finance, and security. The two governments also signed a "Joint Declaration on

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the Intensification of Friendship and Multidimensional Partnership," which established a formal framework that recognized past and contributed to the subsequent expansion of bilateral relations.<sup>5</sup>

In subsequent years, the leaders of both countries have exchanged frequent visits. These reciprocal exchanges culminated in February 2009, with the first state visit by a Turkish president to Russia. In Moscow, President Abdullah Gül and his entourage met with Russian political and business leaders. Former Russian president, Dmitry Medvedev, characterized ties between Russia and Turkey as "multifaceted cooperation and multidimensional partnership."<sup>6</sup> Gül then became the first modern Turkish president to visit Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, the largest of the Russian

5 "Russia, Turkey Declare New Era with 'Strategic' Document," *Today's Zaman*, 15 February 2009, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=166883>.

6 "Press Statements Following the Russian-Turkish Talks," *Kremlin website*, 13 February, 2009, [http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2009/02/13/2131\\_type82914type82915\\_212893.shtml](http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2009/02/13/2131_type82914type82915_212893.shtml).

Federation's autonomous republics and home to many of Russia's Tatar Turk population. While Gül used the opportunity to promote business ties between Tatarstan and Turkey, the visit was more important as a symbol that Moscow is no longer worried about ties between Russian Muslims and Turkey.<sup>7</sup>

### Economics and Energy

Turkey is one of Russia's largest economic partners with expanding reciprocal trade and investment based on an energy partnership that continues to grow. Russia provides nearly two-thirds of Turkey's gas supplies and will build Turkey's first nuclear power plant. Russia became Turkey's largest trading partner in 2008 and Turkey is now Russia's fifth-largest trading partner.<sup>8</sup> Thanks to Turkey's growing consumption of imported Russian energy, mutual trade between two countries almost reached \$32 billion in 2011.<sup>9</sup> That year, Russia's gas supplies sales to Turkey reached 26 billion cubic meters, making Turkey the second largest purchaser of Rus-

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sian gas after Germany.<sup>10</sup> According to TurkStat, Turkey's Statistics authority, Russia exported \$19.5 billion worth of goods while importing \$4.9 billion in first six months of 2012.<sup>11</sup> The two governments have set the target of raising bilateral trade to \$100 billion during the next five years.<sup>12</sup> One way they hope to do so is by using one another's national currencies in bilateral commercial transactions rather than relying on U.S. dollars or other foreign currencies.<sup>13</sup> A significant amount of gas supplies has been conveyed through the "Blue Stream" pipeline that compliments the gas delivery line running from Russia to Turkey via Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, and Bulgaria. This will soon be supplemented by the "South Stream" gas pipeline.<sup>14</sup> In return, Russia is

7 F. William Engdahl, "Turkey Hops Aboard Russia's Ride," *Asia Times Online*, 4 March, 2009, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/KC04Ak02.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/KC04Ak02.html)

8 "Турция – в пятерке крупнейших торговых партнеров России" ["Turkey is in the Top Five of Russia's Largest Trade Partners"], 11 November 2012, <http://www.delovayaturisia.ru/Content/Details/2053-Турция+-в+пятерке+крупнейших+торговых+партнеров+России>

9 "Россия и Турция: экономическое партнёрство и политическое недоверие" ["Russia and Turkey: Economic Partnership and Political Mistrust"] *Flot XXI Vek [21st Century Fleet]*, 29 September 2012,

[http://blackseafleet-21.com/news/27-09-2012\\_rossija-i-turtsija-ekonomicheskoe-partnjorstvo-i-politicheskoe-nedoverie](http://blackseafleet-21.com/news/27-09-2012_rossija-i-turtsija-ekonomicheskoe-partnjorstvo-i-politicheskoe-nedoverie).

10 "Gazprom Export," 2012, [www.gazpromexport.ru/content/file/brochure/ge\\_en\\_2011.pdf](http://www.gazpromexport.ru/content/file/brochure/ge_en_2011.pdf), p. 6.

11 Ministry of customs and trade website, Turkey, Foreign trade statistics, October 31, 2012 <http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=10926>.

12 "Заявления для прессы и ответы на вопросы журналистов по итогам встречи с Премьер-министром Турции Реджепом Тайипом Эрдоганом" ["Statement for the Press and Answers to Journalists' Questions Regarding the Results of the Meeting with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan"], Kremlin website, 18 June 2012, <http://news.kremlin.ru/transcripts/16014/print>.

13 "Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan Address a News Conference on the Outcome of their Negotiations," Kremlin website, 13 January 2010, <http://www.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/8965/>.

14 "Путин проведет встречу с премьером Турции" ["Putin Conducts Meeting with the Turkish Premier"] *Vzglyad*, 18 July

supporting the Turkish-backed Sam-sun-Ceyhan pipeline.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to Russia's role as Turkey's dominant energy supplier, bilateral commerce and investment have also grown considerably in recent years due to the millions of Russian tourists who visit Turkey, and the extensive role of Turkish contractors in several sectors of the Russian economy, especially construction. According Turkish newspaper "Milliyet," about 3,000 Turkish companies operate in Russia, of which some 500 have capital of more than \$5 million.<sup>16</sup> RIA Novosti commentator Andrei Fedyashin estimates that Russia accounts for one-quarter of all Turkish-built projects in foreign countries.<sup>17</sup> According to Aydin Sezgin, Turkey's ambassador to Russia, mutual investment now reaches some \$10 billion.<sup>18</sup> In 2011 alone Russian businesses invested more than \$1 billion in the Turkish economy.<sup>19</sup>

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2012, <http://vz.ru/news/2012/7/18/589015.html>.

15 A Barysheva and P. Chernitza, "Экономика с акцентом на энергетику" [*Economics with an Energy Emphasis*] *Voice of Russia*, 18 July 2012, [http://rus.ruvr.ru/2012\\_07\\_18/81936995/](http://rus.ruvr.ru/2012_07_18/81936995/).

16 "Бизнесмены не дадут поспориться России и Турции" [*Businessmen with not Incite a Russia-Turkey Quarrel*] *InoTV*, 29 October 2012, <http://inotv.rt.com/2012-10-29/Biznesmeni-ne-dadut-possoritsya-Rossii>

17 Andrei Fedyashin, "Russia-Turkey: Blue Stream is not Enough," *RIA Novosti*, 7 January 2008, <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20080701/112739778.html>.

18 "Айдын Аднан Сезгин: "Сближение Турции и России особенно полезно для регион," [*Turkey-Russia Reconciliation Especially Useful for the Region*] *Vestnikavkaza*, 13 November 2012, <http://www.vestnikavkaza.ru/interview/Ayдын-Adnan-Sezgin-Sblizhenie-Turtsii-i-Rossii-osoblenno-polezno-dlya-regiona.html>.

19 "Путин проведет встречу с премьером Турции" [*Putin*

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Turkey's overwhelming reliance on Russian oil and gas concerns many Turkish officials. Currently, Russia's state energy giant Gazprom supplies 48 million cubic meters of gas per day.<sup>20</sup> Diversification of energy partners would make Turkey less vulnerable to disruptions in Russian energy deliveries. Turkey has been trying to import gas from alternative suppliers to prevent Gazprom from demanding excessively high prices for its gas shipments. Turkey is also planning to develop its civilian nuclear power sector. Recently Russia and Turkey have reached an agreement on the construction of Turkey's first nuclear power plant "Akkuyu". It will bring Russia \$4 billion in annual profits.<sup>21</sup>

## **Regional Security Issue**

The same mixture of overt friendship but subtle competition that characterizes Russia-Turkey energy relations is also present in their regional security relationship. Russia and Turkey see one another as both a potential

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*Conducts a Meeting with the Turkish Premire*"], *Vzglyad*, 18 July 2012, <http://vz.ru/news/2012/7/18/589015.html>.

20 Pauline Stroganoff and Christina Justus, "Турция в полтора раза увеличила импорт российского газа" [*Turkey Has Increased the Importation of Russia Gas By One and a Half Times*"], *RBK Daily*, 22 October 2012, <http://www.rbcdaily.ru/2012/10/22/tek/562949984975737>.

21 "Газ и атом скрепят союз России и Турции" [*Gas and Atom Strengthen Russia-Turkish Union*], *Pravda*, 7 September 2012, [http://www.pravda.ru/world/asia/middleeast/07-09-2012/1127423-russia\\_turkey-0/](http://www.pravda.ru/world/asia/middleeast/07-09-2012/1127423-russia_turkey-0/)

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threat and a hoped-for contributor to achieving mutual regional security objectives. The positions of Russia and Turkey regarding many security issues—such as Afghanistan, the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Black Sea regions—has become more harmonious in recent years. Turkey and Russia have adopted similar formal positions regarding Iran’s nuclear program. Neither government wants the Islamic Republic to obtain nuclear weapons, but neither Ankara nor Moscow objects to Iran’s pursuit of limited nuclear activities under appropriate international monitoring. In addition, Turkey and Russia want to prevent other countries from employing force against Iran to attack its nuclear facilities. Turkish diplomats have expressed increasing disappointment that Russia has refused to reduce its support for the Syrian government of Bashar Assad. They continue to encourage the Russian government to reduce its support for Assad in the Security Council and elsewhere, but are unwilling to break with Moscow over the issue.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the tensions over Iraq, and other mutual security concerns in their overlapping neigh-

borhoods of Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Balkans, and the Middle East during the past decade have driven Ankara and Moscow to collaborate in order to address these problems. Policy makers in both countries share the belief that other NATO countries, particularly the United States, have paid insufficient attention to their concerns in these regions, which are

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critical to national security. In Central Asia, Turkish and Russian interests since the mid-2000s have converged more than they have differed. Both countries have sought to reduce terrorism (especially by sharing intelligence), increase oil and gas production, and curb human and narcotics trafficking. Unlike some more distant governments, Turkey and Russia also desire to limit disruptive political upheavals in Central Asia and neighboring regions given the risks of such chaos spilling across their borders. The independent policies Ankara pursued towards regional security issues presumably lessened Moscow’s concerns about Turkey serving as an anti-Russian stalking-horse for Western interests in the region.

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in particular. Preserving this pluralism involves strengthening the political sovereignty of these countries, countering the growth of Russian influence in the Caucasus (though in a covert rather than overt way), and promoting closer ties between these countries and Euro-Atlantic organizations such as NATO.<sup>22</sup> Russia’s decision to use overwhelming force to defeat Georgia in its August 2008 war, and the resulting disintegration in East-West relations, resulted in a major change in Turkey’s regional policies. Moscow’s decisive response shocked Turkish policy makers into realizing that their margin for maneuver in Russia’s backyard might be smaller than anticipated due to Moscow’s new assertiveness.<sup>23</sup> To prevent further regional disorders, Ankara sought to advance a multilateral regional security framework that would both constrain Russia’s assertive impulses as well as revitalize efforts to solve the regional conflicts that might lead to new flare-ups and further destabilization.<sup>24</sup>

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22 Igor Torbakov, “The Georgia Crisis and Russia-Turkey Relations,” Jamestown Foundation, Washington DC: Jamestown (2008. p. 9, <http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/GeorgiaCrisisTorbakov.pdf>.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

24 *Ibid.* p. 30.

Turkey and Russia have adopted similar formal positions regarding Iran. Nether government wants the Islamic Republic to obtain nuclear weapons, but neither Ankara nor Moscow objects to Iran’s pursuit of limited nuclear activities under appropriate international monitoring. In addition, Turkey and Russia want to prevent other countries from using force against Iran to attack its nuclear facilities. Both Russian and more recently Turkish leaders have proposed that they could help mediate the nuclear dispute between Tehran and Washington.<sup>25</sup> The Turkish government has played such a role in the case of Syria and Israel as well as between Afghanistan and Pakistan, but Iranian officials have denied the need for intermediaries, pushing for a direct U.S.-Iranian government dialogue instead. A joint Turkish-Brazilian effort to mediate a resolution of a dispute over whether Iran can enrich uranium for its research reactor in Tehran, which requires uranium fuel enriched to higher than normal levels, failed to secure Washington’s approval. To bolster its regional and energy security, the AKP government has sought to improve ties with Iran. Russian and Turkish officials have generally resisted U.S.-led efforts to impose additional economic and energy sanctions on Iran. But If Iran

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25 “Erdoğan Offers Turkish Mediation between U.S. and Iran,” *Today’s Zaman*, 13 November, 2008, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=158588>; see also Karen Kaya, “In Search of New Role, Turkey Offers to Mediate U.S.-Iran Dispute,” *WMD Insights*, February 2009, [http://www.wmdinsights.org/130/130\\_ME2\\_TurkeyOffers.htm](http://www.wmdinsights.org/130/130_ME2_TurkeyOffers.htm).



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and the West were ever reconciled, then Turkish and Russian policies regarding Iran could significantly diverge. Turkey would presumably be open to having Iranian gas flow into Nabucco or through a more direct Persian Pipeline, whereas Moscow would not welcome direct competition with the country holding the second largest gas reserves in the world after Russia.

The dispute over the status of Nagorno-Karabakh still remains a source of tension in Russian-Turkish relations. Turkish diplomats have hoped that Russia, which is an historic ally of Armenia as well as member of the OSCE Minsk Group, would help promote a reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia. When he met with Putin in January 2010, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called on Moscow to play a more active role in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.<sup>26</sup> Yet, Putin declined to commit to exerting any pressure on Armenia to make concessions regarding Nagorno-Karabakh in order to secure Turkish parliamentary ratification of the recently signed peace protocols

26 E. Tariverdiyeva, "Russia-Turkey Cooperation Will Contribute to Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Resolution, but in the Long Term: Experts," Trend News Agency, January 14, 2010, <http://en.trend.az/news/karabakh/1618377.html>.

between Turkey and Armenia. When asked about the issue at their joint news conference on January 13, Putin argued that linking the Turkish-Armenian reconciliation with the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute would simply delay progress on both.<sup>27</sup> Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov made similar remarks the following day when he visited Yerevan.<sup>28</sup> Skeptics might suspect that Russian officials are not eager to see a reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia since, while offering the possibility of drawing Azerbaijan and Turkey clos-

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er to Russia, the protocols' adoption could reduce Moscow's influence in Armenia and promote the development of new East-West energy and commercial routes through Turkey that circumvent Russian territory.

### **Syria and Beyond**

Despite vigorous efforts by Russian and Turkish policy makers, differences over Syria continue to challenge

27 "Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan Address a News Conference on the Outcome of their Negotiations," Prime Minister of Russia website, 13 January, 2010, <http://www.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/8965/>.

28 "Russian FM Urges Progress on Turkey, Armenia Rapprochement," RFE/RL, 14 January, 2010, [http://www.rferl.org/content/Russian\\_FM\\_Urges\\_Progress\\_On\\_Turkey\\_Armenia\\_Rapprochement/1929902.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Russian_FM_Urges_Progress_On_Turkey_Armenia_Rapprochement/1929902.html).

this harmonious relationship. Leaders in Ankara are calling for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's immediate departure, while Moscow continues to support his regime if not Assad personally (though in practice these have become indistinguishable). Turkey's leading role in organizing the anti-Assad resistance, Syria's cross-border attacks against Turkish territory, and Ankara's October 11, 2012 decision to force a Syrian passenger plane from Russia to land in Turkey threaten to worsen ties. Russia has repeatedly joined with Moscow and Beijing to block UN resolutions and other measures that would try to force Assad's removal from office. Russia has been supplying arms to Syria that have on occasion been used to shoot down a Turkish plane or fire across the border into Turkey. The Turkish leaders' newfound commitment to popular democracy, sometimes backed by foreign military intervention to depose recalcitrant Arab dictators, has clashed with the continued primacy Russian officials place on national sovereignty and non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries. These strains might explain why, even before the October 11 plane incident, President Vladimir Putin postponed his planned High Level Cooperation Council meeting in Turkey, from October 15 to December 3. Turkish analysts continue to debate how Putin's return to the presidency might affect bilateral relations, which some expect him to pursue a harder line toward An-

kara than his predecessor, Dmitry Medvedev.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, the Turkish government is becoming irritated by the burdens the protracted conflict in Syria is inflicting on their country, which is now hosting around 100,000 refugees, seeing a rise of anti-Turkish terrorism linked to the rise of Kurdish militarism in Syria, and finding itself unwilling to end the crisis by sending its own troops to Damascus.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, the Syrian conflict is unlikely to inflict an enduring blow on the bilateral relationship. By all objective economic and strategic measures, Turkey is more important to Russia than is Syria.

The Syrian crisis is a good test of the strength of the Russia-Turkish detente. Thus far, neither government has considered the Syrian issue

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so important as to warrant breaking ties with the other party. Although Erdoğan and Putin are prone to unhelpful rhetorical gestures, two factors have helped minimize the damage. First, no other major problems divide Turkey and Russia. Second,

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<sup>29</sup> Alakbar Raufoglu, *Turkey, Russia at odds over Middle East, Caucasus*, 3 June, 2012 <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2012/06/03/turkey-russia-at-odds-over-middle-east-caucasus/>

<sup>30</sup> Steven Heydemann, "Turkey's Mounting Syria Problem," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 17 October 2012 <http://www.cfr.org/turkey/turkeys-mounting-syria-problem/p29293>

Turkey and Russia see net benefits in compartmentalizing their differences over Syria so that they can continue other dimensions of their improving relationship. Despite tensions over Syria and other issues, the Turkish government is clearly eager to deepen relations with Moscow on security as well as energy and economic issues. Russia has taken care to cultivate key business sectors in Turkey through enticing offers of energy and commercial partnership. Perhaps more important, however, have been the negative variables that have been driving Turkey away from the West, especially a sense that the European Union is not serious about admitting Turkey into its ranks. Russian analysts identify Turkey as a rising power with a dynamic economy and newly flexible foreign policy that shares with Russia the experience of being geographically part of Europe but practically treated as a peripheral country not suitable for membership in core European clubs such as the European Union.<sup>31</sup> Turkey will continue to look eastward as long as the EU continues to treat Turkey as a non-European state.

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<sup>31</sup> Fedor Lukyanov *Russian-Turkish Gambit*, \*Rossiyskaya Gazeta\* 17 October 2012.