



## Dynamics of Transformation in Turkey's Foreign Policy\*

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### Abstract:

Turkey is an economically and strategically significant country that is located in Eurasia and Western Asia. It has a unique synthesis of Western and Islamic culture and civilization. It focused on relations with the West and the European Union since 1924. However, under the government of Erdogan, its foreign policy is being shifted to the Muslim world and to pursue a balanced approach to growing multilateralism. The paper is focused to exploring the growing changes in political, economic, social and diplomatic aspects of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey's growing energy demands, expanding economic linkages and changing patterns in relations with regional and global countries and institutions are some prominent factors that depict a new form and picture of Turkey. This paper aims to discuss the underlying causes of political, economic, social and diplomatic change in Turkey as well as the country's policies on various fronts. The ongoing transformation in Turkey and its impacts on regional and global levels have been analyzed. The descriptive-analytical method has been used to describe the policies and events and to analyze these with arguments.

**Keywords:** Turkey, foreign policy, transformation, policy shift, economic growth, social change

### INTRODUCTION

Turkey is significant to study due to its distinct and unique geo-strategic, political, social, economic and diplomatic position. Reflecting on its Ottoman past from 1300s to 1923, Turkey was primarily an Islam-oriented state until 1924 – a year after the establishment of the modern Turkish Republic. Mainly driven by economic considerations, it then adopted a secular constitution and social system. However, since then, numerous social and non-state actors within modern Turkish society have continued to practice and advocate Islamic education and values, exerting a dominant influence on society, economy and politics. For instance, the Gülen Movement or the Hizmet Movement stands out as the most influential Islam-inspired non-profitable social organization, wielding significant social influence that indirectly influence politics and people's choices in Turkish society. It has been witnessed that the conservative/Islamic and secular ideologies have been engaged in a longstanding conflict since the founding of the Republic of Turkey in October 1923.

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At the international level, Turkey's foreign policy is characterized by its clear economic and political strategies within and beyond its region. Turkey demonstrates a consistent evolution in both its domestic and foreign policies. Its strategic location, spanning Europe and Asia, positions it as indispensable for facilitating connections between Africa, the Middle East, Caucasia, Central Asia, and the Balkans. Turkey's geographical reach extends to South Asia and encompasses the energy-rich water resources of the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. Functioning as a transit corridor for energy and trade among these regions, Turkey is set to become a pivotal hub for cross-transit oil, gas pipelines and economic trade. These developments will surely increase the political and economic influence of Turkey on the global level. Turkey's increasing involvement in foreign affairs signals a shift away from its zero-sum policy towards a more cooperative approach.

Today, the growing energy needs are increasing the interdependence of states, including Turkey. This will bring about changes in Turkey's structural, political and economic landscape consequently leading to cross-political impacts, particularly within Turkey and at regional and global levels. In international politics, globalization has reached a point where a state's religion, domestic policies, foreign policies, ideologies, politics, social dynamics and diplomatic relations become matters of concern for other states and non-state actors. The aforementioned factors about the state are considered significant, playing pivotal roles in world politics and shaping relations among states and institutions. To highlight the regional and political importance of Turkey, the paper first describes its strategic and economic significance. Subsequently, it elaborates on and analyzes the structural changes in the political, economic, diplomatic and social spheres, assessing their impacts on Turkey and their effects at regional and global levels. Additionally, it seeks to examine the reasons behind Turkey's shifting policies towards the East and their potential implications for the future. The paper also analyzes the nature of Turkey's policies towards the East and the West, discussing its relations with the EU and the other dominant powers considering Turkey's evolving policies.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Bill Park in his book 'Modern Turkey', describes and analyzes the impacts of globalization on Turkey's politics, economy, society and foreign policy. He discusses the challenges facing Turkey's foreign policy in the post-Cold war era, the role of the European Union and Kemalism in shaping the country's policies, the Kurdish identity, the Gülen Movement and Turkey's role as a bridge between the West and East. While the book provides detailed insights into different aspects of Turkish society that significantly influence its politics and foreign policy, it falls short in providing detailed literature on its diverse foreign policies and goals.

Soner Cagaptay, in his book 'The New Sultan: Erdogan and the Crises of Modern Turkey' published in 2017, focuses on Erdogan, who secured central power for the fourth time by gaining a majority of votes. The author mainly focused on secular Turkey, the role of Kemal Atatürk, the foundations of political Islam in Turkey, Erdogan as a leader and his Islamic policies. However, the book lacks coverage of Turkey's rapidly changing foreign policy and trends that are steering it towards the Muslim and multilateral world. In another work by Soner Cagaptay, 'The Rise of Modern Turkey', published in 2014, he explores the Islamic and Western legacies of Turkey, Turkey's relations with the West and its associated challenges, the evolving foreign policy of Turkey, and the role of the military. However, the author overlooks the changing political, economic and social aspects of

Turkey's foreign policy, its challenges in the West and the EU and Erdogan's new policies amidst the growing trend of world multilateralism.

### **ECONOMIC AND STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF TURKEY**

Turkey currently holds the position as the world's 17<sup>th</sup> largest economy. Analysts predict that due to its growing economic revenues and the establishment of economic and energy linkages, Turkey will soon emerge as one of the top ten influential actors in world politics (World Bank, 2023).

Turkey is considered as one of the prime destinations for attaining economic and energy influence, meeting needs and generating profits. Many countries are focusing on Turkey as a gateway for exporting or importing their natural resources including oil and gas to other regions, aiming to achieve multiple political and economic goals. There are multiple proposals and plans from different quarters, including the consideration of transportation pipeline projects such as the one involving Israel and Greek Cypriot natural gas via Turkey (““Natural Gas has potential,” to reshape ties in East Mediterranean,” 2014), the proposed natural gas pipeline project from Azerbaijan to Turkey and other European states (“Turkey, Azerbaijan gas pipeline construction,” 2014) and Turkey's increased involvement in projects like the Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline (TANAP) and the Shah Deniz Project in the Caspian Sea. These projects, which include the South Caucasus Pipeline (also known as the Baku-Tiflis-Erzurum Pipeline) and TANAP, aim to carry Azeri gas both to Turkey and to other European markets, alongside projects like the blue stream gas pipeline by Gazprom, which is currently natural under-consideration (“Turkey inks deal to raise,” 2014, 1).

Israel and Cyprus discovered large and enriched gas fields decades ago, sufficient for their domestic use and even for export. Talks on the East Med Pipeline, initiated in 2013, involve these three states (Psaropoulos, 2020, 1).

On January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020, Italy, Greece, Israel and Cyprus signed an agreement to construct the East Med pipeline, facilitating the transfer of gas from Israeli and Cypriot gas fields to Greece and then to Italy, traversing the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Turkey is currently excluded from this project due to strained relations with Israel and Greece, intentionally kept at arm's length (“Turkey best option,” 2022; “Turkey still interested,” 2022). This pipeline aims to reduce the Europe's dependency on Russian gas. It would be completed in 2025 and the three states decided on financial investments in 2022. In its initial phase, the project is expected to supply around 10 billion cubic meters of gas to Europe. Turkey's exclusion from the project is notable, despite support from the US and Europe, as Europe wants to decrease its dependence on Russian gas. In December 2019, the US Congress passed a bill of \$1 billion to fund this project, aiming to diminish dependence on Russian gas (“Greece, Cyprus, Israel sign,” 2020). The EU has pledged approximately 36.5 million euros for research and technical programs related to the project.

Turkey opposes the EastMed pipeline project, claiming that the Mediterranean part of this project falls within its maritime jurisdiction. While, Greece has also claimed the same area within its jurisdiction since 2011. The European Union considers Turkey's claims legally invalid. However, Article 79 of the International Law of the Sea stipulates that pipeline placement in the continental shelf requires the consent of coastal states (Psaropoulos, 2020, 1). The Turkish government has declared that any project in the Mediterranean that violates the rights of Turkey and Northern

Cyprus cannot succeed. Its naval forces have even intercepted research vessels associated with this project ("US voices doubt," 2022).

Turkey opposes this project because it cannot function without its consent and participation. It alleges that its exclusion from the project is due to longstanding strained relations with Greece and Cyprus and Israel's lack of cordial relations as well. Turkey has accused these three countries of encircling it ("Greece, Cyprus, Israel sign," 2020). While, Greece claims jurisdiction over the part of the Mediterranean Sea through which the pipeline passes, citing a law enacted in 2011. The European Union has also declared Turkey's claims as false and illegal. Greece President Mitsotakis has assured Turkey that the pipeline is not intended to threaten any country and it does not have any ill intentions towards anyone. Nonetheless, Article 79 of international law specifies that while coastal states cannot stop the placement and maintenance of pipelines by other states, such actions must be undertaken with the consent of all affected coastal states (Psaropoulos, 2020, 1).

Despite the opposition, Turkey has expressed interest in joining gas pipeline project and transporting this gas to Europe through its territory. Turkish President Erdogan said on his visit to Kyiv that Turkey wants to improve relations with Israel and has no objection to use Israeli gas for European transit ("Turkey still interested," 2022). However, Israel has yet to express a willingness to supply gas to Europe via Turkey ("Turkey, Israel to weigh," 2022). Currently, following opposition from US President Joe Biden, the project is on hold ("US voices doubt," 2022). Concerns over economic feasibility and environmental impact have also been raised, suggesting that regional politics could potentially ruin this project ("Turkey still interested," 2022).

The proposed pipeline project will span 1900 km, connecting four countries in the region: Italy, Greece, Cyprus and Israel. There are future possibilities for its extension to other European Union countries (EU). The EU has expressed its interest by committing to invest 36.5 million euros in research and technical work of the project. The estimated total cost of this pipeline is six billion euros, with completion expected in 2025. Initially, it will transport 10 billion cubic meters of gas, with transactions expected to double annually or even exceed this rate. This pipeline aims to reduce Europe's gas dependency on Russia and promises economic benefits and growth for Israel, which will supply gas from its Leviathan and other gas fields with trillion-cubic-gas reserves. The project's interconnectivity is expected to provide trade benefits and strengthen the security and development of the involved states (Psaropoulos 2020, 1).

Regarding Israeli and Greek Cypriot natural gas, Turkey currently maintains strained relations with both states ("Natural Gas has potential," 2014). While Israel paid \$20 million in remittances to families affected by the Freedom Flotilla incident in 2020, relations remain tense due to Turkey's support for a separate Palestinian state ("Exclusive: Turkey saves \$2 billion," 2023). Similarly, longstanding tensions persist with Greek Cyprus since 1974 over the issue of Cyprus's reunification. However, there have been efforts, such as US mediation in peace talks, notably on February 11, 2014, aimed at resolving these conflicts. The US's involvement underscores its political and economic interests in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The resumption of negotiations is driven by economic incentives, including the potential billions of dollars in revenue from pipeline projects, as well as political motives to counter Russian influence in Europe and reduce the European Union's increasing dependency on Russian oil and gas ("New hope for peace

in Cyprus," 2021). Russia currently dominates energy exports to the European Union, accounting for 34 percent of gas sales (Ratner, et. al. 2013, 1-3).

Recent gas discoveries in Israel, such as the Leviathan field and Tamar fields, have significant implications for regional geopolitics. The Leviathan field alone, with its 19 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, and the Tamar field, with about 11 trillion cubic feet, are considered substantial resources. Greek Cyprus also possesses gas reserves ranging from 3.5 to 6 trillion cubic feet. These discoveries are considered as a better substitution to Russian gas imports (Ukraine Crises may boost," 2014).

This have spurred Israel and the Greek Cyprus to pursue pipeline extensions from their regions, considering the costs and potential revenues of supply to other states. According to estimates, utilizing Turkey for gas exports would incur export charges of 2 to 3 billion dollars. In contrast, transporting liquefied gas via tankers would result in higher costs of 10 to 15 billion dollars for these countries. Oil and gas are currently highly sought-after energy resources by nations worldwide. These energy components elevate Turkey's significance from both energy and political standpoints. Positioned strategically as an energy hub, Turkey would play a key and decisive role in global politics, given its pivotal role in the surrounding regions of the European Union, Middle East, and West Asia, all of which rely heavily on Turkey ("Natural Gas has potential," 2014). On February 28, 2014, an agreement was reached between Turkey and Azerbaijan regarding the Trans-Anatolia Gas Pipeline (TANAP), designed to transport gas from the Azerbaijani natural gas field of Shah Deniz II to Europe via Turkey. The Shah Deniz field, situated in the Caspian Sea, is renowned as one of the world's largest gas fields ("Trans-Anatolia gas pipeline," 2014). On June 18, 2018, both states celebrated the completion of the second phase of the Shah Deniz project. TANAP spans 1793 km and is part of the 3500 km long Southern Gas Corridor gas pipeline Project (SGC)<sup>4</sup> (Külliyesi, 2018; "Türkiye-Azerbaijan partnership," 2024, 1).

The project commenced in 2006 between Azerbaijan and Turkey upon the completion of the first phase of Shah Deniz. It has been delivering natural gas annually to Turkey, amounting 10 billion cubic meters per annum ("Shah Deniz begins gas deliveries," 2020), equivalent to approximately 1.5 percent of Europe's total consumption, destined for Europe. This pipeline project not only meets Turkey's growing energy demands but also enhances Turkey's regional political and economic significance, particularly as an energy transit corridor.

On the domestic front, the pipeline project has generated approximately 5000 jobs across 21 provinces of Turkey. These developments have prompted various political challenges, reshaped Turkey's foreign policy and altered the political and interdependence dynamics of the region. ("Trans-Anatolia gas pipeline," 2014).

According to figures released by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), the unemployment rate in Turkey surged unexpectedly in 2013, rising by 0.5 points to reach 9.7 percent, a notably high figure.

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<sup>4</sup> Southern Gas Corridor Pipeline System (SGC) contains various sections includes 'the Trans Ariatic Pipeline (TAP), Trans Anatolian Pipeline (TNAP), THE South Caucasus Pipeline Expansion (SCPx). This system delivers natural gas from Azerbaijan's gas field in Shah Deniz located at Caspian Sea.

Despite the construction of pipeline projects through Turkey having a positive impact, they have not fully mitigated the unemployment rate in the country ("Turkey's Joblessness soars," 2014).

Turkey and Russia are currently engaged in negotiations for the construction of gas pipeline projects, namely the Turk Stream and Nord Stream gas pipelines. These projects have the potential to position Turkey as an energy hub for Europe and are proposals put forth by Russia ("Erdogan says Turkey and Russia," 2022, 1). On January 8, 2023, Turkey and Russia signed a deal to commence work on this project, aiming to initiate the pipeline in the same year, 2023. It is anticipated that this pipeline will deliver 31.5 billion cubic meters of gas from Turkey to Europe ("Greece, Cyprus, Israel sign," 2020).

The Nord Stream gas pipeline project offers two routes for supplying gas to Europe: one route transports gas from Turkey through the Black Sea, while the other route delivers gas from Germany to Europe via the Baltic Sea ("Erdogan says Turkey," 2022). However, the pipeline passing through Germany has faced setbacks, including damage caused by a bomb explosion ("Putin courts Erdogan to pump," 2022, 1). Furthermore, Germany has stopped work on this project in solidarity with Europe against Russia following the conflict in Ukraine ("Erdogan says Turkey and Russia," 2022, 1). The Nord Stream pipeline has the capacity to deliver the largest amount of gas to Europe, amounting to 27 billion cubic meters ("Putin offers to boost gas supplies," 2022, 1). Negotiations and technical studies between Turkey and Russia for this project are currently ongoing, with both parties, eager expedite its initiation. In the future, Bulgaria and Greece may also become part of this project. However, the relationship between Europe and Russia has soured since Russia-Ukraine war, leading to sanctions and strained relations. Currently, Europe is not purchasing gas from Russia, making the transportation of gas to Europe through these pipeline projects contingent upon the normalization of relations between Europe and Russia. European countries criticize Russia's reduction in gas supply to Europe, viewing it as an attempt to divide Europe in opposition to Russia's actions in Ukraine ("Erdogan says Turkey and Russia," 2022, 1). During a recent high-level meeting between Turkish and Russian in Kazakhstan, Turkey presented several proposals to precede peace talks between Europe and Russia ("Putin courts Erdogan," 2022, 1).

Despite being located within Europe, Turkey supports the construction of gas pipeline projects with Russia and ensures the security of the Turk Stream pipeline from foreign attacks ("Erdogan says Turkey and Russia," 2022, 1). Unlike the European and NATO members, Turkey has never imposed economic sanctions on Russia following the. This strategic stance is significant for Russia, as it relies on Turkey for exports of grain and other products to developing states in the Middle East, among other regions. However, Turkey has criticized Russia's annexation of four Ukraine regions, considering it a violation of international Law ("Putin courts Erdogan," 2022, 1).

Throughout history, the relationship between Turkey and Russia has been characterized by both contention and friendship (The International Centre for Defense and Security, 2020). In 2000, a significant shift occurred in bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia, marked by closer ties, particularly in energy, trade and political sphere (Markedonov, S & Ulchenko, N, 2011). Turkey's growing energy demands for oil and gas have been increasing rapidly over time (The International Centre for Defense and Security, 2020). Alongside the US, Russia and China, Turkey is ranked among the emerging economic giants as Turkey's economy is expanding rapidly in the West and the East ("The mint countries," 2014). Despite European sanctions on Russia, Russia remains one of

Turkey's major suppliers of oil and gas energy resources ("Turkey energy needs," 2014; "Exclusive: Turkey saves \$2 billion," 2023). Notably, Turkey stands as the only European country still purchasing oil and gas from Russia ("Exclusive: Turkey saves \$2 billion," 2023). In 2023, Turkey's imports of natural gas accounted for 59.14 percent, while oil imports comprised 40.74 percent of its energy imports ("Russia becomes Turkey's main energy supplier," 2024). Turkey purchases natural gas from Azerbaijan, Iran and Russia, as well as liquefied natural gas from Algeria and Nigeria. However, Turkey's heavy reliance on Russian gas highlights the significance of Russian resources for Turkey ("Turkey energy needs," 2014; "Exclusive: Turkey saves \$2 billion," 2023). Turkey has signed and established many gas and oil transportation projects, highlighting its significant dependency on Russian oil and gas resources. These projects include Russia's gas exports through the western route via Ukraine and Bulgaria, the Blue Stream gas pipeline project constructed under the Black Sea, which further increased Turkey's reliance on Russian gas, and the Gazprom Project, one of the largest gas projects globally, aimed at establishing Russia's monopoly over Europe and the Middle East. Recent crises in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea by Russia have increased the strategic, political and economic importance of Turkey for the EU and the US, particularly concerning the Black Sea region ("Ukraine Crises may boost," 2014).

The Black Sea holds crucial significance for both Turkey and Russia due to its energy resources and trade routes to Europe, where they are endeavoring to assert their influence in a shifting world order. During the Cold War era, Turkey's policies in the Black Sea region were largely pro-NATO or pro-Western, aimed at promoting democracy, facilitating open trade and addressing soft security challenges such as illicit drugs and human trafficking (Tanrisever, 2012). However, Turkey's current trajectory is shifting towards closer relations with Russia, Central Asia and the Caucasus region. It seeks to make cordial relations with Russia and China ("Kazakhstan, Eurasian Union and Turkey," 2015; Dalay, 2021).

Presently, bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia are growing in maritime security, energy, trade and political fields. The significance of Turkey in the Black Sea region makes it mutually important for both Europe, serving as a transit route for energy and trade, and for Russia, as it helps mitigate ethnic unrest in influential Russian areas including Georgia and Romania (Şimşek, et. al., 2017, 1-26; Dalay, 2021; Chivvis et al., 2023). A substantial portion of Turkey's trade deficit stems from Russian tourists, while Turkey ranks as the fifth largest trade partner of Russia (Markedonov & Ulchenko, 2011; Chivvis et al., 2023). Situated on the Black Sea, Turkey serves as a vital corridor for transmitting energy from east to west, offering the EU an alternative to its reliance on Russia for energy resources. Through the close cooperation with Azerbaijan, Georgia and the US, Turkey has facilitated the supply of gas and oil to both its territory and Europe via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) crude oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) natural gas pipeline. In doing so, Turkey plays an important role in curtailing the monopoly of Russia over hydrocarbon sources in the Caspian Sea (NATO School Research Department, 2007, 74-80).

The Nabucco gas pipeline project designed to link Caspian and the Middle East to Europe, presents an opportunity for Turkey. However, the success of this project hinges on securing adequate gas supplies. Furthermore, the pipeline's route, traversing Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary, poses a threat to Russia, as it overlaps significantly with the Southern Stream gas pipeline project. The

Nabucco project faces challenges: firstly, it has insufficient gas sources, and secondly, its construction relies heavily on support from the EU (Tanrisever, 2012).

### **TRANSFORMATION IN FOREIGN POLITICAL POLICIES AND EXPANDING TRADE RELATIONS**

Turkey has pursued full membership in the EU since 1987 but has faced ongoing challenges in achieving this goal. European states have raised concerns about issues such as freedom of expression, undemocratic practices, human rights violations, conservative ideology, and the Kurdish issue. Turkey, in its enduring pursuit of aligning with Western civilization and, most lately, seeking EU membership, embarked on a series of sweeping reforms. These initiatives aimed to distance the country from its Ottoman legacy and promote secularism. Constitutional changes were initiated, including the removal of references to Islam from the 1924 Constitution, signaling a commitment to 'secularize' both the state and its citizens. Throughout this period, Turkey made concerted efforts to adapt its policies, culture, values, and systems to the standards and regulations set forth by the European states and the EU.

However, Turkey's Islamic and Ottoman legacy appears to constantly haunt it, despite its efforts to draw closer to European integration. This persistent influence seems to elude Turkey, keeping it at arm's length from EU membership. Over the past decade, Turkey has actively pursued political, trade and diplomatic relations with countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. The reason behind this shift in Turkey's foreign policy means a pivot from the West to the East, based on multiple interests such as growing economic needs, particularly in oil and gas, reaching out to emerging markets, and most importantly, mounting ties with its Muslim conservative heritage and transnational brotherhood—a facet less prevalent in Europe.

Turkey's deepening relations with the Middle East and neighboring region have opposition and challenges to its EU membership ambitions (“EU, Turkey and Visa ban,” 2009,” 2; Uras, 2023). Turkey's President Erdogan has stated that Turkey has numerous policy options to enhance its military, economy and many other strategic opportunities in the East. Western countries view Turkey's growing cooperation with Muslim countries, the Eurasian block, Russia and China as assertive policies (Falak, 2022). In November 2023, the EU's executive commission issued a report stating that Turkey still does not meet the requires standards of rule of law, human rights, fundamental rights and liberties in its war against terrorism (European Commission, 2023). Turkey's government has rejected these claims, declaring them groundless and unfair (“Ankara slams EU report,” 2023). Recently, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev invited Turkey to become a member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EaEU), established in January 2014 with a treaty signed by the presidents of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. The union aims to challenge the economic power of the US, the European Union and China, with Russia expected to wield significant control. It is positioned to become a dominant economic regional organization compared to the EU. Turkey's potential membership in this organization is significant due to its strained relations with the EU in recent years. Despite Turkey's application for EU membership in 1987 and subsequent negotiations starting in 2005, full membership has remained elusive, accompanied by ongoing challenges (“Kazakh leader: Turkey Leader,” 2014, 1; Colakoğlu, 2019). Although Turkey has not yet joined the Eurasian Union, it receives substantial support from its member states on various matters and issues (Colakoğlu, 2019). With dwindling hope, Turkey seems to be increasingly inclined towards the East, seriously considering becoming a part of the Shangai Cooperation



Organization (SCO). In November 2013, during a joint press conference held in St. Petersburg as part of the High-Level Cooperation conference, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan urged Russian President Putin to allow Turkey to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan articulated his request with the words, "Include us in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and relieve us from this pain," with a hidden reference to Turkey's protracted EU membership process. Turkey was granted dialogue partner status by the Shanghai Five during its annual summit in Beijing on June 7, 2012 ("Turkish PM Erdoğan to Putin," 2013; Turkey's Erdogan targets joining," 2022). Turkey continues to await and direly needs permanent membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. President Erdogan has emphasized that, as a significant political actor, Turkey should establish strategic relations with the Eastern world as well. However, Western states views Turkey's growing relations with Eastern world as further distancing Turkey from the West (Falk, 2022). On the Crimea issue, Turkey has adopted a particularly cautious foreign policy towards Russia. Turkey has historical and ethnic ties with Crimea, as it was a part of the Ottoman Empire from 1478 to 1774. Moreover, 12 percent of the current Crimean population, approximately 300,000 people, are ethnically Tatar Turks. With these longstanding historical connections and good relations, Turkey could leverage its diplomatic influence over Crimea following Russia's intervention and the initiation of a referendum to safeguard Ukraine's sovereignty and the freedoms of the Tatar Turkish population. However, Turkey has refrained from posing any diplomatic challenge to Russia, primarily to avoid potential energy crises that Russia might initiate in retaliation. Turkey heavily relies on other states for oil and gas sources, with Russia being the most prominent energy-rich country on which Turkey depends ("Security of Crimean Tatars," 2014).

Turkey has sought to reduce its dependence on Russia for oil and gas reserves, exploring alternative sources such as Iranian gas. However, Iran refused to export its oil and gas reserves to Turkey at a cheaper price (Feith, 2019; Wilson, 2022). Despite this setback, in 2022, Turkey and Iran signed a 25-year agreement for export of natural gas to Ankara. Iran has become the second-largest gas importer to Turkey after Russia, supplying approximately 10 billion cubic meters of gas annually. This gas is transported to Turkey through a pipeline stretching 2,577 kilometers from Tabriz to Ankara (Onyango, 2022).

Turkey has shown significant interest in Cyprus reunification talks, largely motivated by the potential for accessing oil and reserves in the East Mediterranean region. Turkey also tried much to mitigate conflicts with Iraq to overcome its energy problems. Ensuring Turkey's energy future in a peaceful region has emerged as a key priority driving the current Turkish foreign policy (Feith, 2019; Wilson, 2022; Rasheed,'2023).

However, December 28, 2011, marked a significant shift in Turkey's foreign policy when the country signed an agreement with Russia for the construction of the Southern Stream gas pipeline project under the Turkish exclusive economic zone in the Black Sea. This deal presents both advantages and disadvantages for Turkey. While the country stands to benefit from cheaper gas and oil from Russia, it also risks ceding its monopoly over Europe to Russia. Moreover, the deal aims to reduce Russia's dependency on Ukraine, which was originally part of its Southern Stream gas pipeline project plan as a bypass. Despite this apparent rapprochement, Russia has opposed Turkey's permanent membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, citing Turkey's pro-US

policy on Syria and its NATO alliance (Feith, 2019; Wilson, 2022; "Turk Stream: Russia's Southern Pipeline," 2021, 1-3).

Though, Turkey is currently a dialogue partner in the Shanghai cooperation organization and aims to join SCO as a permanent member, seeking closer partnerships with China and Russia while distancing itself from the West (Falak, 2022). Turkey's relationship with Russia deteriorated in 2016 when Turkey shot down a Russian aircraft near the Turkey-Syria border, leading to Russian sanctions on Turkey. However, following a military coup attempt in Turkey in the same year, Russia supported Erdogan, leading to improved relations between the two countries. Currently, they enjoy cordial relations, with projects such as Turk Stream pipeline under construction. Additionally, Russia is constructing Turkey's first nuclear power plant and has provided it with the S-400 air defense system. The getting worse relations of the Turkey and US, makes the relations of Russia and Turkey more close ("Turk Stream: Russia's Southern Pipeline," 2021, 1-3).

Turkey has adopted a balanced and responsive foreign policy, moving beyond the confines of the European Union template to cultivate influential relations with the Muslim World, particularly in the Middle East and Africa. Over the years, Turkey has been disillusioned by the EU's disregard for its interests. Turkey's current foreign policy prioritizes prudence, focusing on its own energy needs and survival. This approach recognizes the importance of maintaining a balanced stance in foreign decisions and policies to shield Turkey from potential consequences arising from its growing dependency on Russia (Cagaptay, & Jeffrey, 2014; Ozturk, 2021).

On trade matters, Turkey is swiftly expanding and strengthening its trade relations not only with European states but also with countries across the Middle Eastern, Balkans, Caucasus, Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa, Mediterranean and Black Sea regions. Turkey joined the UN in 1945 and became a member of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952. In 1964, Turkey attained associate membership in the European Community. Over the past decade, Turkey has implemented numerous reforms to strengthen its democracy and economy, commencing accession membership talks with the European Union in 2005.

Currently, driven by energy and trade needs, Turkey actively participates in different international and national trade institutions. It holds membership in the European Council, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the D-20, the D-8 and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Additionally, Turkey is poised to potentially become a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Eurasian Union. Turkey is mainly a large free-market economy primarily based on industrial and agricultural manufacturing products, tourism, vegetables and fruits, natural resources including cotton, crude oil and auto production ("History of Turkey-EU relations," 2014; "Turkey's growing foreign policy ambitions," 2022; Jamal, 2023, 1).

### **Turkey's Foreign Policy and Its Impacts on the Economic Growth**

Since its establishment as an independent republican state in 1923, Turkey has adhered to secularism, joined NATO, and pursued membership in the EU while maintaining close ties with the West. Over the last two decades, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, leading the 'Justice and Development Party' has appeared as an influential leader in the country. Under his leadership, Turkey's foreign policy has shifted towards independence and self-assertion, aiming to

establish its power status. In recent years, Turkey has pursued various policy initiatives aimed at establishing an independent and sovereign foreign policy. However, these actions have always strained relations with its neighbours and allies. Turkey's increased tensions over territorial claims, refugee strategies and military intrusions in Libya, Syria<sup>5</sup> have raised concerns among neighbouring countries and NATO members. Additionally, Turkey's assertive stance in Mediterranean Sea and its growing relations with China and Russia have complicated its efforts to join the EU. Despite these challenges, Turkey's membership in NATO and its extensive trade relations with the EU remain influential factors in its foreign policy. Erdogan, a popular political figure who secured victory in the 2023 general elections, ("Turkey's growing foreign policy ambitions," 2022) came into power for the Fifth time. He initiated numerous economic and social programs aimed at the development of the country. His foreign policy agenda includes efforts to secure permanent EU membership, address the Cyprus issue, and strengthen bilateral relations with non-western countries. During his tenure, Turkey has experienced political and economic stability, leading to increased strategic importance of the country both regionally and internationally (Külliyesi, 2023).

Turkey's foreign policy agenda is centred around promoting peace, security and development at both regional and global levels. The country plays a crucial and constructive role in fostering regional peace and development by actively addressing regional issues and problems. Turkey holds the responsibility in providing protection, shelter and basic facilities to Syrian migrants, spending approximately 40 billion since 2011, despite the adverse impact on its economic growth. Moreover, Turkey is actively expanding its regional possession and it plays an important role by promoting regional cooperation and contributing to regional challenges. As a member of various regional organizations such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC), the Southeast European Cooperation Process, and the Economic Cooperation Organization, Turkey actively promotes collaboration and seeks solutions to regional issues. Additionally, Turkey is a member of international bodies including the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Developing Eight (D-8), the Organization of Turkic States, the Asia Cooperation Dialogue and MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Türkiye, and Australia).

Currently, Turkey is extending and deepening its strategic partnerships with countries across the Western, Asian, Central Asia, Balkan and African regions through increased cooperation and the implementation of new policies aimed at fostering mutual growth and development.

Turkey's geographical location places it firmly with Europe, and its NATO membership and strategic alliance with the US ensures its security and development within the European region. As the fifth-largest NATO contributor in terms of operations and the eighth-largest contributor financially, Turkey plays a significant role in NATO's activities. Moreover, it is the founding member

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<sup>5</sup> In Iraq and Syria, Turkey's military take actions to eliminate security threats by Kurdish Workers party (PKK) who has been in fight with Turkish military since 1980s and killed thousands of innocent people. In Libya, it did deploy its forces to support UN recognized government of National Accord in Tripoli against eastern forces.

of various European organizations, including the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Achieving full membership in the European Union remains a top strategic objective for Turkey. Despite its European focus, Turkey is also enhancing its relations with the Muslim world. It is actively promoting its rich Muslim civilization and Turkic culture, particularly among Turkic-speaking populations, through initiatives such as the Organization of Turkic States.<sup>6</sup> Its aim is to promote its foreign policy objectives and promote greater cooperation among Turkic-speaking nations through making common institutions. In addition, it is engaged in promoting cooperation at international level through its participation in various multinational councils. With membership in numerous cooperation councils spanning thirty countries and participation in four intergovernmental summits, Turkey is committed to enhancing collaboration at the international level. etc.

Turkey is promoting economic and trade prosperity in the region by strengthening regional connectivity through the development of corridors. As a major energy hub, Turkey plays a pivotal role in facilitating the transit of energy to Europe from various other regions. Additionally, Turkey has earned recognition as the largest global donor, demonstrating its commitment to humanitarian causes (Yilmaz, 2023).

Despite past tensions, Turkey has developed close and cordial strategic and security relations with Russia. Following a period of disrupted relations, characterized by downing of a Russian airplane by Turkish forces over Syria, Turkey has worked to strengthen ties with Russia. However, in 2019, Turkey's decision to purchase Russia's S-400 air defence system led to its removal from the US F-35 joint strike fighter program. Despite this, Turkey has condemned Russia's actions in Ukraine and has provided drones to Ukraine in support. Furthermore, Turkey has opposed Western sanctions on Russia.

Turkey's influence across the Middle East, Europe and Africa has notably increased, particularly following its mediating role in the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Turkey has also forged strategic relations with China, joining China's Belt and Road Initiative in 2015. However, tensions persist between the two nations due to the Uighur issue, with Turkey accusing China of committing genocide against the Uighur population in 2009. In Africa, Turkey is strengthening its relations through trade, economic partnerships, and cultural exchanges, including the sale of drones, weapons and arms.

Additionally, Turkey is building closer ties with Muslim-majority countries such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran and the United Arab Emirates. Turkey has expressed support for movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the push for democracy in the Muslim world in 2011. Under Erdogan's leadership, Turkey's foreign policy aims to maintain and assert its Islamic identity. Many scholars and observers view Turkey's increasing influence in the Muslim world as a resurgence of the Ottoman Empire, which once held significant sway over the Middle East, Central

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<sup>6</sup> The Organization for Turkic States is an intergovernmental organization that members are Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Hungary and Turkmenistan. Its main purpose is to increase cooperation among Turkic speaking people.

Asia, the Balkans and Africa. However, Turkey's assertiveness has raised concerns among major European powers, who fear its expanding influence and historical dominance.

Turkey spent years to align its foreign policy, constitution and domestic policies with EU criteria, yet integration into Europe remains elusive. Many observers suggest that Western reluctance has compelled Turkey to focus towards the Muslim world under Erdogan's leadership. In result, Turkey intensified its cooperation and influence in Muslim-majority regions while also making efforts to maintain cordial relations with the US and European Union. The EU holds immense economic and trade significance for Turkey, serving as its major financial investor and trading partner (Jamal, 2023).

Despite this, Turkey's foreign policy objective is to maintain balanced relations across all regions rather than aligning solely with the West or the East. Recognizing the emergence of a multipolar global system, Turkey acknowledges China and Russia as pivotal actors alongside the traditional Western powers (Coşkun & Ülgen, 2022).

### **Regional and Global Implications**

Turkey is increasingly becoming a nexus for integrating Europe, the Middle East, the Balkans, Central Asian states, the Caucasus, Asia, and Southeast Asia. This integration spans economic, energy, cultural and political realms, heralding a new era where Turkey emerges as a key center for global economic, political, strategic center of the world activities.

Turkey's significance lies in its role as a transit point for various gas and oil pipelines traversing the region. Notably, the potential integration of the Israel and the Greek Cypriot gas pipeline can solve conflicting relations of both states with Turkey, particularly the Cyprus issue.

Politically, Turkey holds sway over the interests of the USA, the European Union and Russia, all engaged in a silent Cold War, mainly over energy resources. Despite Turkey's persistent efforts towards EU membership, its aspirations remain uncertain. On the other hand, Turkey grapples with pressing energy needs, notably oil and gas. Its nuanced stance during the Ukraine crisis reflects its reliance on Russian natural gas. Turkey's evolving approach to the Syrian Crisis, aimed at de-escalating tensions in the Kurdish region and resolving the Kurdish issue through dialogue and peace processes, underscores a shift towards a more economically focused foreign policy.

In the future, Turkey seems to become a great economic and energy hub, vital for its political and strategic significance. As regions increasingly rely on Turkey, it can play decisive role in shaping their futures. Despite this, Turkey's democratic and humanitarian support for conflict-affected states, refugees, poor states and fostering brotherhood, zero-sum and compromising policies show its commitment to peace, prosperity and human dignity.

Since 2002, the AKP has adopted the policy to support democracy and freedom beyond its borders, advocating for nations like Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Tanzania, Azerbaijan, Sudan and addressing the Kurdish issue. Through democratic reforms and diplomatic efforts, Turkey aims to contribute to resolving conflicts and promoting stability in these regions.

Presently, Turkey's strategic geographic location is propelling it towards democracy, openness, and global integration. Turkey is binding itself and the other regions in chain of interdependence, cooperation, and peace across regions, Turkey's efforts are mitigating conflict. For instance, the

nuclear capabilities of Pakistan and India have led to shift towards dialogue and cooperation rather than conventional warfare, fostering peace and collaboration in different fields.

In case of Turkey, an underlying clash of identities persists, albeit in a covert manner. Despite years of constant reforms and structural changes, Turkey's prospects for EU accession remain uncertain, mainly due to its Islamic heritage. Turkey's shift towards engagement with Middle Eastern and other Islamic regions like Africa, Central Asia, and Asia reflects this reality. Despite these efforts, Turkey has yet to secure free trade privileges from the EU, resulting in challenges when exporting goods due to heavy export taxes. However, this dynamic may undergo a significant transformation as Turkey emerges as a hub for lucrative rich oil and gas pipelines, exemplified by projects like the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline transporting Azerbaijani oil and natural gas supply pipelines from Israel and Greek Cyprus. Such developments are considered to increase the dependency of energy-aspiring European states on Turkey.

The divide in identity between the European states and Turkey is gradually diminishing in significance. While Middle Eastern states are predominantly Muslim, their substantial oil-generated wealth and rich oil reserves have garnered favor from the West, highlighting the growing importance of economic factors over identity conflicts. Similarly, global powers like the United States, Russia, and China exhibit economic and identity disparities, yet the prevailing trend toward economic openness, interdependence and cooperation transcends these differences. Turkey, positioned as a potential economic giant, holds the capacity to leverage EU interdependence to compel European state towards full membership in the EU. A recent development in this direction is evident in the customs union agreement with the EU, which stipulates the EU's inclusion of Turkey in the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the United States and the EU. Failure to honor this agreement would grant Turkey the right to withdraw from the customs union agreement, a move that would entail losses for all parties involved, given Turkey's significant share in EU trade. Moreover, Turkey is poised to play a constructive role in bolstering the economies of developing Asian and African regions, fostering economic and diplomatic ties with countries such as India and China, and contributing to the region's overall growth and stability.

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## **CONCLUSION**

Turkey holds a rich old Islamic heritage and civilization that ruled the world for eras. Since its independence in 1924, it was converted a process of secularization, driven by its dependence on the West and aspirations for EU permanent membership. Despite longstanding efforts, Turkey has yet to attain full membership, hindered by factors such as its Islamic heritage, the Cyprus issue, and border disputes with Greece. The failure to meet the standard of EU for its membership has underscored the need for Turkey to reassess its foreign policy under the Erdogan administration. The current trajectory of Turkey's foreign policy reflects a commitment to achieving freedom, independence and sovereignty while adapting to the evolving landscape of global multilateralism It is strengthening its relations with Turkic-speaking countries, Muslim-majority countries, as well as burgeoning global powers like China and Russia. This strategic alignment signifies a departure from

past reliance on Western partnerships, marking a more balanced and inclusive approach to foreign affairs.

Turkey's strategic geographic location positions it at the crossroads of new opportunities, fostering economic growth, social development, and political stability. At present, Turkey's policy direction is increasingly focused on economic and energy priorities. Despite navigating latest challenges in the Middle East, Turkey deserves to be lauded for its role as a mediator among the states and its humanitarian aid to impoverished, conflict-ridden, and natural disaster affected nations. Embracing a stance of peace and democracy, Turkey remains committed to promoting stability and prosperity. Its expanding economic, political, cultural and diplomatic engagements across the Middle East, the Balkans, Central Asia, Asia and Africa are rooted in Islamic commonalities, encouraging cooperation, support and progress. The change indicates a growing unity within the Muslim world, characterized by shared religious values and a sense of solidarity in the face of perceived Western pressures on cultural identity.

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