

“Russia and Turkey in Global Perspective” Seminar Series

Workshop Report: Public Perceptions and Hybrid Influences

5 June 2024, Kadir Has University

I. Abstract:

As part of the “Russia and Turkey in Global Perspective” seminar series, organized by the Global Academy in partnership with the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Türkiye Office, the third workshop was held at Kadir Has University on June 5, 2024. This project aims to bring analysts, academics, and policymakers together to flesh out a nuanced and fuller understanding of current Russian-Turkish relations. More broadly, the workshop series encourages foreign policy debate in Turkey.

The central theme for the third workshop was “Public Perceptions and Hybrid Influences” which brought together three speakers and a group of experts who contributed to the roundtable discussion. This report highlights the main arguments and subjects raised during the event.

II. Participants:

Moderator:

Prof. Mustafa Aydın, Kadir Has University

Speakers:

Dr. Ayşem Biriz Karaçay, İstanbul Ticaret University

Prof. Mitat Çelikpala, Kadir Has University

Dr. Kaan Kutlu Ataç, Mersin University

Discussants: A group of 20 scholars, researchers, and journalists working on Russia-Turkey relations from Kadir Has University, Mersin University, İstanbul Bilgi University, İstanbul Ticaret University, Bologna University as well as the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Türkiye Office, Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata (ANSA), Atlantic Council, Aposto.

III. Highlights:

Professor Mustafa Aydın, who served as a moderator, kicked off the workshop with a brief analysis of the main currents that fall beyond the scope of geopolitics and economics, which had been discussed in our first two workshops respectively. Building on Prof. Aydın’s introduction, the three panelists focused on the public perception and hybrid influence aspects

of Turkey-Russia relations. Overall, the meeting consisted of two parts: three presentations followed by a recess for a casual conversation among attendees and a second, longer part for a roundtable discussion. The roundtable discussion looked at public perceptions and hybrid influences, emphasizing the economic and energy-based interdependence between Turkey and Russia, the symmetrical/asymmetrical nature of this interdependence, the migration flows of Russians and Ukrainians towards Turkey and Russia, hybrid capacity and cyber issues and their impacts on the relations between Russia and Turkey.

The first panelist, **Dr. Ayşem Biriz Karaçay of İstanbul Ticaret University**, examined the dynamics of Russian migration to Turkey, set against a backdrop of historical, political, and economic factors. She mentioned the migration system theory, which integrates macro, micro, and meso-level variables to analyze international migration dynamics. This theory considers the interconnected roles of the sending country, receiving country, and migrants. It provides a historical overview, tracing migration patterns between Russia and Turkey from the early 20th century, highlighting the impact of events like the Russian Revolution and the Cold War on migration flows.

In terms of the evolution of the Turkish-Russian migration system, she pointed out five periods: the Early Contacts and Cooperation between 1923 and 1984, the Initiation Period between 1984 and 1991, the Transition Period between 1991 and 2000, the Consolidation Period between 2000 and 2014, and the New Emigration Wave Period between 2014 and onwards. The first period was marked by initial interactions and cooperation, including state-planned economic initiatives where Turkish engineers and Soviet experts collaborated on projects like the Nazilli Textile Plant. On the other hand, the 1984 Natural Gas Agreement was highlighted as a significant turning point, where Turkish construction services played a vital role in the Soviet Union, fostering the growth of bilateral economic relations for the second period.

The third period included that the post-Soviet political changes led to new migration patterns, characterized by short-term labor migration and shuttle trade, as well as a shift in Turkish foreign policy towards “Eurasian Politics”. In the fourth period, a strategic alliance between Turkey and Russia emerged, with significant economic contributions from migration flows, including substantial foreign direct investment and construction projects by Turkish firms in Russia.

In the fifth period, the downing of a Russian aircraft by Turkey in 2015 led to economic sanctions by Russia, affecting trade and migration. Despite political tensions, migration flows have continued, with Turkey becoming a significant destination for Russian emigrants, especially after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The influx of Russian migrants and businesses has significantly influenced Turkey's economy, particularly in real estate and business relocation. A notable increase in residence permit applications underscores Turkey's role as a temporary hub for migrants due to its visa-free regime and established Russian-speaking communities.

She concluded by emphasizing the complexity and dynamism of the Turkish-Russian migration system. It highlights the need for further research into different migrant categories and comparative studies to fully understand the nuances of migration patterns between these two countries. The analysis illustrated how geopolitical events, economic interests, and historical ties shape the complex web of migration flows, impacting both countries in various dimensions.

The second discussant, **Prof. Mitat Çelikpala of Kadir Has University**, examined the complex energy dynamics between Russia and Turkey, focusing on how energy resources shape geopolitical and economic relations.

In terms of Turkey's energy landscape, Turkey has experienced strong economic growth and industrial development, leading to increased energy demand. The country heavily depends on energy imports, with over 70% of its energy supply sourced abroad. Specifically, 93% of oil, 98% of natural gas, and 77% of coal are imported. A significant portion of Turkey's energy (approximately 30%) is generated from natural gas, with a substantial reliance on Russian imports. Despite diversification efforts, infrastructure constraints mean that a large portion of Turkey's natural gas continues to be supplied via pipelines from Russia.

Regarding energy strategy and security policies, Turkey is working to increase its use of local and renewable energy resources to meet rising demand and reduce the economic impact of energy imports. The strategy emphasizes developing a competitive energy market, reducing import costs, and enhancing free market principles. Turkey aims to utilize its strategic geographic position to create alternative transportation routes and increase energy cooperation through assertive energy diplomacy. Incorporating nuclear and other advanced technologies into the energy system to boost efficiency and sustainability is a significant policy for Turkey's energy diversification.

In terms of Russia's role as a primary energy supplier, Turkey's overall dependency on Russian energy has decreased from 60% in 2013 to 39% in 2022 despite the volume of natural gas trade remaining steady. The dominance of Russian pipelines, such as Blue Stream and TurkStream, highlights infrastructure's role in maintaining energy ties. The natural gas trade is governed by long-term contracts, limiting short-term flexibility in sourcing. Regarding recent developments in energy trade, between February 2023 and February 2024, Turkey increased its energy purchases from Russia by 105%. During the same period, the Ceyhan port processed 22 million barrels of fuel, 92% of which originated from Russia. This indicates a significant growth in fuel imports from Russia, with 85% of Ceyhan's exports going to the EU.

In conclusion, he emphasized the complex balance between dependency and interdependency in Turkey-Russia energy relations. While Turkey seeks to diversify its energy sources and reduce reliance on Russian imports, infrastructural and contractual constraints maintain Russia's pivotal role in Turkey's energy landscape. The evolving dynamics reflect broader geopolitical strategies and economic interdependencies, shaping both countries' energy security and international relations approaches.

The third discussant, **Dr. Kaan Kutlu Ataç of Mersin University**, examined the complexities of Russian hybrid threats and their implications on international relations, particularly focusing on Turkey.

He began by discussing allegations of Russian political influence in Turkish politics, highlighted by opposition leader Kılıçdaroğlu's accusations against Russia during the May 2023 elections. This incident exemplifies Russia's potential direct intervention in Turkey's political landscape.

Generally speaking, Russia employs hybrid warfare tactics, blending conventional and unconventional methods such as cyberattacks, misinformation, and political subversion. The objectives are to create discord, disrupt Western cohesion, and assert Russian influence globally. Examples of hybrid warfare include sabotage plots in Europe, arson attacks, and disinformation campaigns targeting significant events like the Paris Olympics. These actions illustrate Russia's strategic use of hybrid tactics to challenge the West.

He highlighted the challenges Western nations face in responding to hybrid threats, including strategic intimidation and the complexity of attributing attacks due to Russia's use of proxies. Strategies to counter hybrid warfare include building national resilience, enhancing cybersecurity, and developing deterrence strategies. Collective international cooperation is emphasized as crucial for effective responses.

Those Russian actions were situated within the historical context of great power politics, where its strategic ambitions continue to influence global dynamics despite the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Turkey's geographic and strategic importance was analyzed, highlighting its role as a critical juncture for energy pipelines and its complex relationship with Russia, marked by collaboration and competition.

In that direction, Russia's influence efforts in Turkey, aimed at swaying policies in favor of Russian interests, have significant implications for NATO cohesion. Turkey's balancing act between Russia and the West creates strategic ambiguity and potential weaknesses within the alliance.

He concluded by emphasizing the need for credible deterrence strategies and collective action to counteract Russian hybrid warfare. Understanding these dynamics is essential for informed policy-making and maintaining international security. He provided a comprehensive analysis of Russian hybrid threats, highlighting the geopolitical strategies employed by Russia to influence global politics and the specific challenges faced by Turkey and Western allies in countering these threats.

After a recess, the second part of the workshop started again with **Prof. Aydın**'s remarks, in which he directed the discussion towards the asymmetry in the economic, especially energy, relations between Russia and Turkey. He questioned the effect of the Russia-Ukraine War on the asymmetry level of these economic relations.

Prof. Çelikpala underlined that the dynamics of energy issues and sanctions highlight the complex interdependency between Russia and Turkey. When Russia imposed sanctions on Turkey, there were discussions about the potential for Russia to weaponize energy resources against Turkey. However, this interdependence is a two-way street. At the same time, Russia relies on a substantial volume of energy trade, which provides Turkey with some leverage. Turkey also serves as a strategic partner for Russia. This relationship mirrors the situation with Iran, where maintaining a balance in oil prices is crucial. The price per barrel is kept at around \$70—low enough to remain profitable without destabilizing global markets.

For Turkey, this interdependence is advantageous; although Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan have the infrastructure, their energy resources are insufficient to fully utilize Turkey's pipelines, unlike the Russian ones. President Erdoğan's ambition to position Turkey as an energy hub plays into this dynamic, presenting a mutually beneficial scenario where Turkey's geographical and infrastructural assets become a valuable tool for Russia in maintaining its energy trade routes.

One of the discussants noted that Turkey maintains self-sufficiency in the grain market, but logistical challenges arise due to price caps and increased insurance costs. Russia aims to bypass these hurdles by selling energy to Turkey without insurance, illustrating the nuanced dependency in their relationship. This arrangement functions effectively as a business model for Turkey and is viewed as a strategic partnership. However, Western perspectives often interpret these ties as dependency, reflecting ideological concerns about security threats to Turkey. Despite these apprehensions, Turkey finds itself reliant on this relationship economically, balancing its strategic autonomy with economic dependencies.

In terms of the migration issue, **Dr. Karaçay** emphasized that citizenship issues, such as getting residence permits, are difficult in Göç İdaresi. However, Russians easily adapt to Turkish society. They want to adapt to Turkish society rather than integrate. Generally, Russians move to countries that give easy citizenship. Nevertheless, Turkey is a good alternative for Russians.

One of the discussants pointed out that most Russians see Turkey as a vacation place, not a place to integrate. They are not like Syrians in Turkey. The situation for Syrians and Russians is different. It can be seen in the numbers that the ratio of Russians to Syrians in Turkey is 1:30. For example, in Antalya, Russians have their own taxi system, radio system, newspaper, bookstore, etc. Online announcements are made for them regarding their foundations, associations, cultural days, and nights.

According to **Dr. Karaçay**, authoritarian regime and populist policies in Russia play a significant role in anti-migrant rhetoric. There is also a debate on transnational repression. More research has to be done to understand Russian government's transnational repression. As some of the Russians abroad are suspicious and hesitant to speak with a foreigner.

Dr. Ataç added that too many Russians, Ukrainians, and Moldovans live in Antalya. The children of them go to private schools. He exemplifies the Russian cyber influence in Turkey as *Beyond the narrative (Anlatılanın Ötesi)*. Turkey is already compromised with Russia, so Russia does not prefer to attack Turkey with paramilitary tools.

Prof. Çelikpala pointed out that the beginning of intelligence cooperation against Chechens between Russia and Turkey was the Trilateral Agreement in 1999. Due to this agreement, Turkey and Russia have exchanged information.

Finally, it was concluded that Turkey is asymmetrically dependent on Russia, especially in the field of energy; Russians in Turkey are eager to adapt to Turkey rather than to integrate, and they already have a comfort zone; Russia uses its hybrid capacity on Turkey via newspaper materials.