

Crimea in Turkish-Russian Relations: Identity, Discourse, or Interdependence?¹

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Black Sea has been an important scene in Turkish-Russian relations since the times of Ottoman and Russian Empires. For the Ottoman Empire it was an "Ottoman/Turkish Lake", while for Russia it was an exit to open seas or "warm seas" with the widespread term. Crimea had the leading role in this scene. First of all it has always been an important port with its geostrategic position. But at the same time it was also an important Tatar centre, which had religious and cultural ties with the Ottoman Empire and historical ties with the Russian Empire. When Crimea became part of the Russian Federation in 2014 as a result of the crisis in Ukraine, Turkey did not intensely react neither to the annexation, nor the events that followed as it would be expected. This attitude was a clear sign for confident inferences about Turkish-Russian relations - a relation marked by an asymmetric interdependence. However these kinds of conclusions on Turkish-Russian relations have lost confidence when a Russian warplane was shot down by Turkey at Syrian border on 24 November 2015. Although this incident opened a new debate on the historical rivalry of Turkey and Russia, following events showed once more the endurance of economic interdependence. This paper will try to expose the underlying reasons of Turkey's position towards Crimea focusing on Turkish Foreign Policy discourses and practices in the general framework of Turkish-Russian relations, as a case study to see the limiting effect of the structural asymmetry in Turkey's economic relations with Russia. In this context it will be mentioned that, despite the discursive emphasis on Crimea's importance in terms of security, culture and religion, economic interdependence dominates other concerns in Turkish Foreign Policy in a way that even the plane crisis could not alter.

Keywords: *Crimea, Identity, Interdependence, Russia, Turkish foreign policy.*

Introduction

At the end of 2013 Ukraine stepped into a crisis upon President Yanukovich's decision to suspend the European Union (EU) association agreement which was to be signed in 2013. Events that took place afterwards and replacement of Yanukovich by a pro-European government were met by Russia with a proactive policy which nowadays is defined as an indicator of the end of the post-unipolar world or as well the end of the post Cold War status quo in Europe. It is widely

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accepted that the roots of the crisis lie in the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, which ended the prospect enlargement of NATO for both Georgia and Ukraine (Mersheimer 2014, Trenin 2014). However it is equally important to take into account that the only reason of the crisis was not Russian opposition to NATO enlargement, after all it was also a result of Russian opposition to the European Union.

By late 2013 Ukraine had become an important element of both Russia's and the EU's geopolitical projects. The Europeans tried to associate Ukraine through their Eastern Partnership Program (EaP) with the EU. Russia for its own part, tried to attract Ukraine to be a part of the customs union project which was accomplished with the treaty of Eurasian Economic Union in May 2014. Seeing it as a zero-sum game, both Russia and the European Union expected Ukraine to side with them (Trenin 2014). Russia, trying hard to influence Ukraine's choice, put pressure on it, especially by trade barriers, which proved successful with the suspension of Association Agreement by President Yanukovich.

This suspension was the trigger for protests in Kiev, by pro-Westerners called "Euromaidan". The protests that began in the Independence Square turned into violence in mid-February after the Ukrainian parliament did not approve the opposition demands of changing the Constitution to lessen presidential power. In the meantime the protests spread to other regions of Ukraine, bringing out another crisis in Crimea, which ended up with the transfer of Crimea from Ukraine to Russia, to whom it actually belongs according to the majority of Russians. As Solchanyk had put it almost 20 years before "most Russians feel that Crime territory, that it has little to do with Ukraine, that it should never have been transferred to Ukraine, and that rightfully it should be a part of Russia" (Solchanyk 1996). The ultra-right wing Russian politician Vladimir Zhirinovskiy has even linked this claim to a threat that could come from Turkey, which hosts a significant Tatar population and declared itself the protector of those who remained in Crimea. According to Zhirinovskiy "12 million Russians are left to the mercy of fate, the rue Russian territories are lost, first of all Crimea which is given not to Kiev, not to Ukraine but to the Turks... Within ten years the Turkish flag will appear in Crimea" (Turkistan Newsletter 1999 in Williams 2001: 232). Zhirinovskiy's prophecy did not fulfill itself and no-one was expecting to be so. Turkey's interest in Crimea has always been limited to the protection of the Crimean Tatars, which has remained mostly on the discursive level and never turned into any action against neither Ukraine nor Russia. Williams has noted that the "Crimean Tatar Diaspora of Turkey has the potential to offer considerable support to its beleaguered kin in Crimea, but both the fears of the Russians and the expectations of the Crimean Tatars concerning this diasporas' economic, political and especially military potential appear to be exaggerated." To this must be added the fact that neither Turkey has this potential. The 2014 crisis in Crimea and its annexation by Russia is the clearest appearance of this fact.

When Crimea became part of the Russian Federation in 2014 as a result of the crisis in Ukraine, it was expected that this would become an issue in Turkish-Russian relations. This expectation was the reflection of the fact that even today the Crimean Tatars are embraced by Turkey on the basis of not only history but

also religion or ethnicity by being referred as "Crimean Turks" instead of Crimean Tatars. The Tatar population living in Crimea and Turkey who are mentioned as "ethnic Turks" thus creates an important foreign policy issue for Turkey. Turkey put forward a new aspect of Turkish foreign policy mentioned as the "kinship aspect" (Kasapoğlu and Ergun 2014). This policy perspective is not surprising, especially in an era when Turkey attempts to become a regional soft power to foster its regional zone of influence. In this context, Crimea, with its important geostrategic position, has the potential to change the power balance in the Black Sea, against Turkey's regional interests. However to everyone's surprise, Turkey did not react intensely neither to the annexation of Crimea by Russia, nor the events that followed. This attitude was a clear sign for inferences about Turkish-Russian relations, as a relation being marked by an asymmetric interdependence. However with the shooting down of a Russian warplane by Turkey at its Syrian border on 24 November 2015, debates on Turkish-Russian relations has increasingly began to sound the historical rivalry, instead of interdependency. Nevertheless events that followed the crisis have showed once more the endurance of economic interdependence.

This paper will try to expose the underlying reasons of Turkey's attitude towards the Crimean issue, focusing on the discourses of Turkish decision-makers and foreign policy practices within the general framework of Turkish-Russian relations. In order to get a better grasp of the Crimean crisis and its impact on Turkish-Russian relations historical events will also be portrayed. By examining the development of Turkish-Russian relations in the post-cold war era, it will be mentioned that with the evolvement of the relations into an interdependency, where Turkey is the more dependent part, the determining factor of Turkish foreign policy has become its economic interdependence/ dependence on Russia. As it is known for a long time economic interdependence influences the political behavior of states. It is also widely accepted that asymmetry is not an exception in bilateral economic relations. Interstate relations in general take place in asymmetrical context, where the foreign policy of the country on the lower side is shaped by the degree of dependence on its partner. (Gilpin 2001). So when Turkey faced the Crimean issue, its foreign policy was dominated by other concerns despite the discursive emphasis on Crimea's importance in terms of identity, culture and religion.

The Background

The geography, history and demography of Crimea have made it a space of instability and conflict over the centuries. Throughout history Crimea was settled and ruled by different groups of peoples and placed under different socio-economic and political institutional structures. This is mainly due to Crimea's crucial geostrategic position, which has turned it into a scene of severe rivalries for centuries. Crimean Khanate was one of the successors of the Golden Horde which has dominated and ruled Russian principalities including Grand Principality of Moscow or Muscovy. Before its annexation by the Russian Empire in 1783,

Crimea had been a vassal of the Ottoman Empire from 1478 to 1774. The Ottoman Crimea was a totally separate administrative entity, with its own officials, jurisdictions, and carefully defined territorial integrity (Fisher 1979/1980). With the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca which was signed in 1774 after the Ottoman-Russian War of 1768-74 Crimea became independent, only to be annexed by the Russian Empire in 1784.

The annexation of Crimea by the Russian Empire also marks the first major change in the demography of Crimea:

Between 1784 and 1790, out of a total population of one million, about 300,000 Tatars left the peninsula for Turkey. This voluntary emigration was supplemented by forcible transfers instituted by the Russian government under the pretext of defence requirements. Thus, a large number of native inhabitants were transferred from the sea coast or strategically important positions to other areas in the interior of the Crimean peninsula where they could be better controlled. The years 1807 to 1811, the time of the Russo-Turkish war, witnessed a further outflow of the Crimean Tatar population. In the years 1859-1863, during and after the Crimean War, still another large emigration took place. This large exodus of Tatars from the Crimean peninsula reduced the native population to 34.1 per cent of the total by 1897 (Potichnyj 1975).

The migration of Tatars from Crimea to the Ottoman lands after the Russian annexation of Crimea is the main source of the large Tatar population in Turkey today. As Williams mentions according to most estimates there are between 3 million and 5 million citizens in Turkey who trace their origins to the 18th and 19th century Tatar migrations from the Crimean Peninsula (Williams 2001). As a result of these huge waves of emigrations, the number of the Crimean Tatars who had remained in their homeland became much less than the number of those who had emigrated to Turkey (Kırımli 2003). Another aspect that the demography of Crimea matters is that it is the only administrative region where the Russians exceed the Ukrainians. According to the 1989 census, Russians accounted for 67% of the population, while Ukrainians constituted only 25.8%; an even larger majority Russian to be their native language, including 47.4% of the Ukrainians (Solchanyk 1999).

Besides the demographic composition the status of the region was changed several times, especially in the period between 1917 and 1991, when it was under the Soviet rule. The debates about Crimea in both post-1917 and post-1991 periods are almost the same, shaping around Crimean independence or autonomy. But when the option of autonomy is in question, another question rises about whether this autonomy would be within Ukraine or Russia. As Sasse (2014) mentions there were four competing views on what Crimea's status should be after the 1917 Revolution: Crimean Tatars aspired to national Crimean autonomy; Ukrainian nationalists wanted to incorporate Crimea into independent Ukraine; Bolsheviks aimed to establish control over as much of the former tsarist empire as

possible and White-Russians wanted to defend Crimea as a bastion of anti-Bolshevism (Kırımlı 2003).

The period between 1917 and 1921 witnessed rapid change in the region. In the year 1917 both Ukraine and Crimea declared their independencies separately but Crimean independence was very short-lived since first Bolsheviks came to the region in January 1918 to be followed by Germans and Ukrainians in the spring of 1918. The ties between Turkey and the Crimean Tatars had taken a novel turn with the national awakening movements of the latter, when the attempts to establish an independent Crimean Tatar state almost realized (Kırımlı 2003). Crimean Tatars, in search for independence or at least autonomy supported the Germans against the Bolsheviks. But the German occupation ended in the autumn of 1919 and Bolsheviks took control of Crimea in the spring of 1919 establishing the Soviet Socialist Republic of Crimea. But this republic was also short-lived and ended in the summer of 1919 when the White Army occupied Crimea and established the Taurida Government. This government shared the destiny of the Socialist Republic of Crimea and ceased to exist by November 1920 when the Red Army reached Crimea and defeated the White Army and its government. Next year in October Crimea was declared an autonomous republic with in Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.

The level of Crimean autonomy was high as in other autonomous republics in the union due to the *korenizatsiia* policy of the 1920s. As Sasse (2014) mentions Crimean Tatar politicians refer to this period and demand the re-establishment of similar type of autonomy, claiming that the Soviet ASSR recognized the Tatars' status as the indigenous people of Crimea. Like other republics of the Union, Tatars, being recognized as the indigenous people of the republic, were placed to the key political, economic and administrative positions and their cultural and linguistic revival was supported. But as it is often the case in the Crimean history this period, too lasted very short and came to an end with the 1930s. The end of more liberal nationalities policies was common in all Soviet republics and was furthered with the Second World War and rise of Russian nationalism. But what is unique to the Crimean case is that their accepted titular ethnic group as Tatars was erased from the region. Crimean Tatars who co-operated with the Germans during wartime with the hope of gaining their independence were punished harshly and deported to Central Asia and Siberia in 1944. The major change in the demographic composition of Crimea grew even bigger with the settlement of Slavic people replacing the deported Tatars.

Once the Tatars were removed from the region the Soviet government felt no need to preserve an autonomous republic associated with the titular group of the republic and in June 1945 Crimea was turned into an ordinary oblast within RSFSR, once again losing its autonomy. The issue was furthered when in 1954 this oblast was transferred to Ukrainian SSR, on the 300th anniversary of Treaty of Pereyaslav with which Ukraine was incorporated into the Russian Empire. Brezinsky points out that, as reported by Pravda and Izvestiia of February 27, 1954, there was a meeting of the USSR Supreme Soviet on February 19, 1954, where Chairman of the Russian presidium, Tarasov stated that the Russian people recognize as expedient the transfer of the Crimea Province to the Ukrainian

Republic and said: "Crimean Oblast, as is known, occupies the entire Crimean peninsula and, as it were, is a natural continuation of the southern steppes of Ukraine" (Brezinski 1996).

The motives of such transfer are unclear to this day and the transfer was not deemed important in the Cold War period since both Ukraine and Russia were part of the Soviet Union which gave no signals about a potential collapse at the time. But the Soviet Union did collapse and this transfer has planted the seeds of the 2014 crisis.

Once it was apparent that the collapse of the Soviet Union was inevitable the communist elite in Crimea "restored to a typical Soviet political instrument for securing its position of power by giving itself the status of an ASSR" as Sasse describes, and "attempted to acquire a mechanism that would provide an exit from Ukraine, should it secede from the USSR" (Sasse 2014: 134). With the initiatives of this group a referendum was held in January 1991 about the establishment of a Crimean ASSR within the USSR. The result of the referendum, boycotted by the Tatars who had gained the right to return to Crimea but lacked official presentation at the time, resulted in 93% in favour of autonomy. Ukrainian SSR recognized the autonomy of Crimea but did not allow this autonomy to take place in USSR, which meant the secession of the region and in order to avoid secession gave Crimea the status of ASSR within Ukraine. This way Ukraine inherited the issue of Crimea when shortly after the referendum the Soviet Union officially collapsed. Crimean legislature, disappointed with Ukrainian backsliding on the details of a power-sharing agreement, adopted its own Declaration of Independence on 5 May 1992. The response of Ukrainian officials to the fears of forced Ukrainianization was providing support and encouragement for the cultural aspirations of both Russians and Tatars, by granting the region a considerable measure of political autonomy on the condition that the territorial integrity of Ukraine was in turn recognized by the Crimean Supreme Soviet - an acknowledgment that entailed that the peninsula would remain a constituent part of Ukraine; that its citizens would also be citizens of the larger state; and that its sovereignty would not cause Crimea to become an independent subject of international law with the right to its own defense and foreign policy (Furtado 1994).

Since the late Soviet period, federalism has been an idea for political opposition and figured prominently in the political debates in western Ukraine. But once the Ukrainian independence had been proclaimed Ukraine's national democratic forces reversed their position and turned into the staunchest supporters of a unitary Ukrainian state and state consolidation became inextricably linked with centralization while the federal idea translated into a vague concept of regional autonomy that travelled to the east and south of Ukraine (Sasse 2014). This tendency has always been supported and even furthered by Russia from the very early years of Soviet collapse. Brezinsky mentions that Igor Tuliev, Minister of CIS Relations in the Yeltsin cabinet, stated that Sevastopol was experiencing the third great siege in its history, being besieged by the Ukrainians and warns that in Crimea there were elements which were supported from the outside, particularly are engaged in efforts from Turkey, and to isolate Crimea from Russia, which are tactics to make it easier for NATO to gain some sort of a foothold but that they

were determined to cope with this third siege as he calls it (Brezinski 1996). This statement is in line with Sezer's comment that Russia has reacted to the post-Soviet developments in the Black Sea region in a spirit of frustration, as they cumulatively have represented part of Russia's global retreat whereas Ukraine and Turkey have welcomed the general outlines of the new order, as they are perceived to be serving each country's national interests and have displayed identical positions toward many of the controversial issues in which Russia has been involved, or possibly been the driving force (Bazoglu Sezer 1996:80). Post-Soviet Russian foreign policy's reawakening took place first in the 2008 Russian-Georgian war (Mankoff 2009), but Crimea has been the most visible and important stage where Russia's offensive policy appeared. While the offensive policy is widely labeled as a new policy, it should also be noted that Crimea has for a long time been on the agenda of Russian policy, though intermittent.

Russia's Crimean Policy during Ukrainian Crisis

As early as spring 1992 Russian Vice-President Rutskoi openly claimed that Crimea was Russian whereas the Russian parliament adopted a resolution declaring the 1954 decision on Crimea "without the force of law" (Solchanyk 1996) Likewise in June 1993 the Russian State Duma adopted a resolution designating Sevastopol as Russian land, in accordance with the argument that Sevastopol was not a part of Crimea, therefore was never actually transferred to Ukraine. Most importantly, in April 2008 at the session of the NATO-Russia Council, Vladimir Putin mentioned the possibility of absorbing Eastern Ukraine and Crimea into the Russian Federation. Ukrainian Foreign Ministry protested Russia's declared policy of possible military interventions to protect Russian citizens living abroad. In August 2009, anti-Ukrainian demonstrations broke out in Crimea calling on Russia to act in the same way as it did in Southern Ossetia and Abkhazia during the war with Georgia in 2008. Thus the situation in Ukraine; the power vacuum, and the state takeover by groups supported by the West encouraged Russia to take steps to realize its pending plans for annexing Crimea (Bebler 2015, Salushev 2014). The main reason Crimea has been on the Russian agenda since the collapse of the Soviet Union is that it is a crucial way out for the Russian navy. As Solchanyk has mentioned the fact that Black Sea Fleet is based largely on Crimean port of Sevastopol, "imparts a military and geostrategic dimension to Russia's policies with regard to the region" (Solchanyk 1996). Although the two states had reached an agreement in May 1997 about the partition of the Black Sea Fleet and the conditions to base the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea and its right to use the port of Sevastopol for the next 20 years, it was clear that the issue had not been solved. The Black Sea Fleet of the Russian navy had been restricted and even neglected due the fact that it was mainly based on Ukrainian territory. As mentioned before this fact did not pose a problem when both countries were part of the Soviet Union but once the Union was dissolved the problems revealed itself. (Eberle 1992) This became apparent especially during the war with Georgia in 2008, which "revealed Russia the need

to modernize and increase the size of its Black Sea Fleet" as Alex Schneider has mentioned (Schneider 2017). Indeed two years after the war Russia and Ukraine signed another agreement known as the Kharkov Accords, to extend the lease on Russia's naval base in Crimea, which had 7 more years to expire (The Guardian 2010) This decision was also fostered by discount in Russian gas, as is the case in Turkish-Russian relations, but still Kiev kept its power to prevent any buildup or modernization of Russia's Black Sea Fleet from occurring (Schneider 2017). For this reason having Crimea was crucial for Russia and since for most of the Russian it was a Russian territory there was no controversial at all in terms of domestic politics.

Therefore it was not to anybody's surprise that one major outcome of the crisis in Ukraine had been the sparking of a political crisis in Crimea, which initially began as of February 2014 against the new government, but turned into a separatist political unrest with the support of Russia to pro-Russian separatist factions. By February 26, clashes between pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian protesters broke out in front of the Parliament building in Simferopol. The pro-Russian protesters were demanding the secession from Ukraine and asking for assistance from Moscow. Russia responded this call from Crimean pro-Russia factions by using special forces; Russian troops first took control of the main route to Sevastopol, set up a military checkpoint with a Russian flag and Russian military vehicles, and later on February 27 the same special forces seized the regional parliament of Crimea. The Crimean parliament held an emergency session under occupation and voted for the termination of the government with replacing the Prime Minister Anatolii Mohyliov with Sergey Aksyonov, a supporter of Crimea's unity with Russia.

Simultaneously with the official call of Aksyonov for Moscow's assistance in ensuring peace and public order in Crimea, President Putin received approval from the Russian parliament to use force in Ukraine to preserve Russian interests on March 1.² The next day Russian troops exercised complete control over the Crimean Peninsula. Russia also encouraged those elements to hold a referendum on Crimea's status and pursued a campaign in favour of Crimea's reunification with Russia. The referendum on Crimea's reuniting was called on February 21, and held on March, 16, and finally similar to the 1938 Austrian Anschluss, (Aydn 2014) an overwhelmingly 95% voted for the union with Russia. Two days later on March 18, a treaty was signed in Moscow to incorporate Crimea and the city of Sevastopol into the Russian Federation.

The annexation of Crimean peninsula into the Russian Federation has dramatic global outcomes, especially in terms of European and US interests. As mentioned previously, the chain of events that took place since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis has come to a point where post-Cold War status quo has been shattered. In

²The official call from Crimean government has prepared a base for Russia to legitimize its military intervention under the label of the responsibility to protect (R2P) principle. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, in the opening session of the UN Human Rights Council echoed the R2P principle in stating " ... we are talking here about protection of our citizens and compatriots, about protection of the most fundamental of the human rights – the right to live, and nothing more", "Russian option to send troops is only to protect human rights" (Russia Today 2014).

this way, Russian policies were met with reaction from the US and EU countries and allies. Russia was considered an aggressor, NATO froze its cooperation with Moscow, and also EU downgraded its relations with Russia. The G8 returned to be G7 because the Russian Federation was expelled. Moreover the EU and the US imposed sanctions against the Russian Federation. Russia faced wide condemnation nearly universal and in a UN General Assembly held on March 27, resolution 68/262 which affirmed the General Assemblies commitment to the territorial integrity of Ukraine was supported by 100 UN member states. The sanctions imposed on Russia over Ukrainian crisis and Crimea's annexation proved to be worthless since the sanctions could not stop Russia to pursue its objectives. As many analyses has put forth, despite the short term effects on Russia's economy, Russia has enough of a buffer to a 2-3 year financial storm (Dreyer and Popescu 2015). Moreover, the sanctions helped Putin domestically by uniting Russians in support of him. On the other side, the loss of Crimea had a dramatic consequence on the European energy security; therefore it seems that the crisis in general and the attitude of Europe towards it, has revealed the incompetence of European politics.

Turkish Foreign Policy in the Face of the Crimean Annexation

The issue of Crimean Tatars was not voiced by Turkey in the Cold War years. But following the fall of the Soviet Union Crimean Tatars, along with the other Turkic groups of the Soviet Union entered the agenda of Turkish foreign policy. The most significant feature of the Crimean Tatars in this context was the existence of a considerable Tatar population living in Turkey as mentioned earlier. Immediately after the Soviet Union collapsed high level Turkish officials visited Crimea and supported the return and resettlement of the Crimean Tatars in various ways, also hoping to gain their support which could provide a stronghold for Turkey in the Black Sea region. Turkey's president for most part of the 1990s Suleyman Demirel described the Crimean Tatars as "*our Turkish brothers*" promising to help them rebuild their society and also declared "*We are interested in the fate of the Crimean Tatars. They are numerous in our country, as well as in Russia and Ukraine. Our interest in the Tatars is not of a political nature. We want them to have safety and respect in their own country since they are our brothers*" (Williams 2001). Therefore it is possible to say that Crimea has been on the discourses of Turkish politicians since the early 1990s but even then they felt the need to mention that this interest was not one of political nature. This need became even more apparent as Turkish-Russian relations gained momentum in the 2000s.

Turkey's policy towards the Crimean crisis is strongly attached to its relations with the Russian Federation. While being two actors with similar geopolitical interests, Russia and Turkey are mostly rivals in their regions. However, geopolitical interests are not the only determining factors of the relations of those two regional actors. Although Turkish-Russian relations have been based on rivalry, antagonism and suspicion for most part of the history, since 2000s two

states took determined steps to overcome the difficulties by "compartmentalizing" their disputes. Focusing more on commonalities than on disputes (Trenin 2014), this compartmentalizing became possible on the basis of the economic dimension of the relations which in some regards have obliged both countries to keep their rivalry at a manageable level³ (Ersen 2011)

The main basis for commonalities is the improvement of economic relations in the post-Cold War era and the interdependence which is the result of these relations. The establishment of Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) with the founding membership of Russia and Turkey was a crucial step in economic relations which was mostly based on trade, energy and construction. The energy cooperation between two countries had begun before the end of Cold War, with the treaty signed in 1986.⁴ Ever since, Turkey and Russia have been partners in several energy related projects (Stratfor Global Intelligence 2015). Although Turkey is an important partner for Russia as an energy transportation route, it is possible to say that this partnership is more crucial for Turkey due to its energy dependency. Russia has always been in search for alternative routes and different projects.

The economic relations of Turkey and Russia are multi-dimensional which makes it even more indispensable for both countries. This is closely related to the diversification of actors. But still the pioneer of relations is energy, based on Turkey's import of natural gas from Russia. Turkey imports more than 50% of its natural gas from Russia, and this fosters interdependence between two countries (Kardaş 2012). Along with the rising trend in other trade areas this makes Russia the second biggest trade partner of Turkey while Turkey is the seventh biggest trade partner of Russia. The trade volume has been around \$35 billion a year for the last years, and the jointly declared goal for 2020 is to reach \$100 billion (SputnikNews 2013). Strategic investments like the Akkuyu nuclear power plant are also important for Turkey. However, bilateral trade relations are imbalanced in favour of Russia (Turkish Statistical Institute January 2014, Demiryol 2015).

The structural asymmetry in their relations causes also an asymmetry regarding foreign policy, by limiting the bargaining capacity of Turkey. The Crimean crisis is one of the cases that unfold this situation but not the only one. Events that have occurred since the end of 2015 proved on the one hand that foreign policy alternatives for Turkey in its relations with Russia are limited to balancing Russia's assertiveness, and on the other hand that the level of economic interdependence is an important motive for compartmentalizing relations for both countries. This can clearly be seen in the warplane crisis which took place in November 2015, when Turkey shot down a Russian warplane (SU-24) in the Syrian border in and the Russian government responded immediately with economic sanctions against Turkey which hit Turkish economy seriously,

³The compartmentalizing of relations is not only an observation, but it is often expressed directly by the presidential level. During his visit to Turkey in December 2014 Putin declared that, although the two countries have still matters that are approached and assessed differently, they have a common desire to focus on cooperation without sticking in disputable areas.

⁴This agreement signed for supplying up to 6 bcm of gas per year for 25 years, and the first deliveries of natural gas to Turkey from the Soviet Union began in June 1987, by transit via Romania and Bulgaria using the Trans-Balkan pipeline.

especially in tourism and construction sectors as well as trade. However, Russian government did not take any steps to reduce the amount of gas it supplies to Turkey, which would really bound Turkey. Instead Russian President declared that Moscow was ready for dialogue, if Turkey apologized for the incident and paid compensation, which was indulged partly by Turkey via President Erdoğan's letter of apology sent to Russian President Putin in June 2016. In the aftermath of the crisis numerous analyses focused on the historical rivalry between Turkey and Russia and the vulnerability of the unsound partnership between the two countries. In fact, as mentioned, Russia and Turkey have still significant and very consequential geopolitical disputes (Aktürk 2016) such as that of Crimea and Syria which often cast doubts on the credibility of any partnership trend in their relations. The annexation of Crimea was a critical juncture for that.

From the start of the political crisis in Ukraine at the end of November 2013 up to Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 Ankara remained relatively passive. When the issue of Crimea's status came to fore Ankara abstained from overtly criticizing Russia as aggressor. The only direct official reaction was then Prime Minister Erdoğan's statement in which he underlined that Turkey would not leave Crimean Tatars alone (Hürriyet 2014). This was not surprising since at the time of the crisis the kinship aspect was an important component of Turkish Foreign Policy. (Kasapoğlu and Ergun 2014). Moreover the Crimean's effect for Turkey is something more than being only a policy aspect. Crimea hosts some 300.000 indigenous Turkic-origin Tatar populations that has been siding with anti-Yanukovich protests and opposing the Russian intervention. The pro-Western stance of Crimean Tatars has put them on a course of collision with the ethnic Russian groups of the peninsula. Furthermore, there is a significant Tatar population in Turkey as mentioned, which would turn to be a critical domestic political factor. These Tatars in Turkey are among the best organized minority groups with dozens of associations and they have a very positive image in Turkey.

As a matter of fact in accordance with the statements of the then Prime Minister Erdoğan, Foreign Minister of the time Ahmet Davutoğlu immediately visited Kiev following the Russian manoeuvres in Crimea, stating that Turkey would seek to protect the rights of Crimean Tatars, emphasizing at the same time the importance of the territorial integrity of Ukraine: "*... it is of great importance for us that Crimean Tatars live in peace together with other groups in Crimea as equal citizens and within the unity of Ukraine.[...] Turkey is ready to provide every support for the bright future of both Ukraine and Crimea*" (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015)

However, Turkish official attitude beyond its rhetoric remained moderate and even questionable when compared to the attitudes of other regional actors. Turkey's policy towards the crisis was in a manner which could not be categorized under some specific categorization. While Ukraine's neighbours formed two distinct groups regarding their stance to Russia, Turkey has not sided clearly and unquestionably with Ukraine as did its traditional pro-European and Atlantic oriented neighbours (Foreign Policy Insight 2015). Turkey, on the one hand has not recognized the result of the referendum held in Crimea for uniting with the Russian Federation in March 16, and has repeatedly declared its adherence to the

principle of territorial integrity, but on the other hand it refused to introduce sanctions against Russia as the EU and the US did, even Turkey "eagerly has pursued investment deals in Russian sectors ranging from agriculture to car parts" (Clayton 2014) . While Turkey also approved the UN General Assembly Resolution 68/262 dated March 27, 2014 which affirmed the territorial integrity of Ukraine, it in some sense violated the resolution by using transportation lines for sailing Crimea under Russian occupation. Furthermore there has been an enthusiasm on the Turkish side about the potential to increase exports to Russia as a result of Moscow's decision to embargo food products from Western counterparts (Göksel 2014). The words of the then Turkish Economy Minister Nihat Zeybekci who described Russia "as an opportunity for Turkey" is a clear sign of this enthusiasm: "*We should make this opportunity a strong, long-term, permanent and corporate one*" (Clayton 2015).

Nevertheless, Turkey on all occasions officially expressed its interest in Crimea and the Crimean Tatars, which can be seen in most of the statements of Davutoğlu both as Foreign Minister and Prime Minister of Turkey. In February 2014, during his visit to Ukraine, Davutoğlu stated that Turkey activated its policy for protecting the rights of the Crimean Tatars. In Davutoğlu's words Turkey was "*in mobilization to defend the rights of our kin in Crimea by doing whatever is necessary*" (Al-Monitor 2014).

Actually Davutoğlu is a name who was also active in Crimean affairs before the crisis broke out, mostly as a part of the general framework of the Government's foreign policy which incorporated the kinship aspect as an important component of it. For example, in 2012 Davutoğlu facilitated talks between Tatar leaders and Ukrainian government (Davutoğlu 2012). However, regarding the crisis this active attitude was not materialized beyond discourse. In March 2014 while Davutoğlu underlined that the security of Tatars is the main strategic priority for Turkey also added that Turkey did not want to see Russia isolated internationally (BBC 15 March 2014), which was an indicator of Turkey's reluctance for imposing sanctions on Russia. Since keeping its relations with Russia smooth and good is a main concern for Turkey, every official expression included this type of reservation. In March 2015, in a press conference with former Chairman of the National Assembly of Crimean Tatar People Mustafa Kırımoğlu, then Prime Minister Davutoğlu stated that Turkey stand together with EU and NATO on Crimea; but he also mentioned one more time that Turkey also is keeping the door to diplomacy with Russia due to the geopolitical location (Hurriyet Daily News, 18 March 2015).

In the joint press conference in December 2014 held during Putin's visit to Istanbul, Erdoğan said that he found Russia's approach to the Crimean Tatars positive and that he had been given assurance that certain rights would be given to Crimean Tatars. Erdoğan also said that Russia was ready to address other issues regarding the Turkic group (Milliyet 1 December 2014). During the same visit announcing Russia's decision for the reduction of natural gas prices for Turkey by 6% and heralding intentions to develop alternative energy pipeline through Turkish territory, Putin put forth a new agenda for Turkish-Russian relations that push back the attention from the Crimean Tatars. But Turkish president kept

repeating the support Turkey gives to Crimean Tatars, again being limited to rhetoric as was the case during the 71st anniversary of the mass deportations of the Crimean Tatars, when he was reported to have called the Tatar leader Dzemilev on phone stating that; *"Turkey gives priority to the peace, welfare and security of Crimean Tatars from the beginning of the Ukrainian issue" while criticizing Russian ban on the commemoration of the anniversary of the deportations and calling it "unacceptable".*(Daily Sabah 20 May 2015)

Turkey actually limited its demands from Moscow to the guarantees for the protection of Tatar rights in annexed Crimea, due to its inability to turn the situation in favour of its own interest, however it was immediately appeared that even this limited demand would not be met by Russia (For human rights abuses in Crimea in the mentioned period see Human Rights Watch, November 17, 2014, Klymenko 2015). This concern was expressed in the words of Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu, who said in January 2015: *"We regrettably have to say that the promise given by Russia was not kept. Russia is a friendly country, but when it makes mistakes we have to talk about them"* (Sabah, 14 January 2015). A couple of months later Cavusoglu made a similar statement upon the silencing of a Tatar TV station: *"The Crimean people and particularly Crimean Tatars have been oppressed, attacked and their rights have been violated ... We are sending an informal mission to observe human rights violations in Crimea soon"* (Reuters, 3 April 2015)

While as such Turkey mentioned on all occasions its strong support to the Crimean Tatars on the one hand and tried to keep its relations on a manageable level with Russia on the other it deliberately framed the crisis as a standoff between Russia and the West, aiming to keep Turkey out of the crossfire between Russia and the West. In February 2014 the then representative of EU's chief negotiator Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu accused Europe of inciting war in Ukraine and organizing provocations against Russia. Çavuşoğlu had said, *"Within two years 'our fellow Europeans inspire Ukrainians choose us or we will not support you' this was wrong. Europe should consider its policy"* (TRT News 23 February 2014). This claim was repeated several times on several occasions by Turkish decision makers by emphasizing that the EU is as responsible as Russia in the Ukrainian crisis. This attitude can also be interpreted as a clear sign of Turkey's stance towards Russia's actions, and might be explained through its economic priorities and weaknesses that determine its foreign policy initiatives.

Conclusion

The Crimean conflict increased the sense of insecurity in the neighbors of the Russian Federation, and the whole Black Sea region. The new situation has totally altered the Black Sea regional power structure, for all the actors of the region. The drastic increase in Moscow's political and military control in the region has had negative consequences in regard to Turkey's regional interests, as an important player of the regional politics. It is clear that a dominant Russia in the Black Sea region arises serious security threats for Turkey (Blank 2015). At the same time

since being a prominent actor in the regional affairs is an important aspect of Turkish foreign policy it is not surprising to expect Turkey to react strongly to the developments taking place since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis. However, what was thought as surprising is its unexpected passivity in relation to the developments in the Black Sea region, and specifically regarding the case of Crimea.

The crisis has called into question the efficiency of strategy which Turkey has been pursuing towards the Black Sea region so far. It is clear that Turkey is not capable of facing a Russian military aggression relying only on its own resources. But Turkey also did not pursue a policy supporting NATO deliberations to oppose the Russian designs in the Black Sea region. Furthermore by signing major energy deals with Russia Turkey made itself more dependent on Russia while freeing Russia's hands towards Western sanctions (Blank 2015). The attitude of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Ukrainian crisis, especially at the phase the crisis reached after the annexation of Crimea is a reflection of the trend in Turkish-Russian relations, which has been on the rise since the early 2000s. The first signs of this trend were seen in the Second Chechen war during which Turkey changed its pro-Chechen attitude. Turkish support for the Chechens during the first phase of the Chechen's fight against Russia had created a counter-reaction on the Russian side in the shape of support for Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey. This was the first time that both states figured out the tensions created by these supports could hamper the potential mutual relations provided for both sides. These potentials were concentrated in the field of economic co-operation, making it possible to call two states as "trading states". Consequently Turkey gave up its support for a group that shared religious ties with the majority of Turkey's population. The Crimean case can be read from the same perspective. The expectation about Turkey's reaction was based on the fact that Turkey shared historical ties with Crimea and religious and ethnic ties with the Crimean Tatars. But Turkey did not give the expected reaction except for discursive support for the protection of the rights of Crimean Tatars and positioned itself with Russia during the whole crisis. This could only be explained by the good state of relations and Turkey's determination to protect this, which mostly stems from the fact that, economic ties between two countries came to a point of interdependence in which Turkey is the more dependent part. Turkey brought economic issues to the fore in favor of identity issues like culture and religion in making its foreign policy. In line with this, Turkey's cautiousness in its Crimean policy is not surprising. We can even say that actually what would be a surprise would be to see a Turkey pursuing a more assertive policy. Therefore the policy pursued by Turkey during Crimean crises was a pragmatic one, which was determined mostly by prioritizing economic and trade relations over military and political ones, or in other words by Turkey's economic weakness and dependency on Russia. Turkey's dependence on Russian natural gas for more than half of its consumption, tourism, the business interests of Turkish companies in Russia are the main determinants of Turkey's policy. The determining effect of business circles in Turkish foreign policy, especially regarding Russian-Turkish relations can best be seen in the words of Davutoğlu, who described them as the "pioneers of Turkish foreign policy and strategic

vision". It would not be wrong to expect that in the making of Turkish foreign policy towards Russia, asymmetric interdependence does enter the scene as became evident once more in the warplane crisis and the way it was finally resulted in. The Crimean case is not and will not be the single example of such process as long as Turkey's economic dependence on Russia is not balanced by Turkey with alternative means. In another aspect, it is also important to point that for such balancing Turkey should reassess its relations with its European counterparts which is getting more deteriorated in recent years because of Turkey's choice of alienating itself with tendencies rooted rather in ideological concerns.

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