



## TÜRKİYE'S NEW MULTI-DIMENSIONAL FOREIGN POLICY

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**Abstract** - This study will analyze Türkiye's new "multi-dimensional" foreign policy and focus on why Ankara does not want to restore its classical pro-Western foreign policy. To do this, the author will first look at the current situation of Türkiye in different aspects (humanitarian aid, democracy, rule of law, economy, human development index, etc.) in addition to its critical connections such as its energy needs as well as its strategic and economic ties, and then analyze two critical foreign policy issues, namely; the ongoing Russia-Ukraine and Hamas-Israeli wars to understand Türkiye's peculiarities and different choices. These cases will help us to understand Türkiye's multi-dimensional foreign policy approach, which in many ways conflicts with the classical Atlanticist paradigm of the Cold War and early post-Cold War periods.

**Keywords:** Turkish Foreign Policy, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Multi-dimensional foreign policy, Russia-Ukraine War, Hamas-Israeli War.

### INTRODUCTION

Türkiye has been a 'special' and somehow 'different' Western country from the very first day due to its predominantly Muslim population, strong statist (military-centered) tradition, and its peculiar culture although it became a member of the Council of Europe in 1950 and NATO in 1952, much earlier than many -if not most- European nations. Türkiye's enormous self-confidence and grandeur feelings coming from its glorious Ottoman past and strong army as well as its stubborn diligence in defending Turkic and Muslim peoples' rights all over the world also separated Ankara from other Western countries. As a middle power trying to achieve its national goals, Türkiye's divergence from the United States (U.S.) and the Western bloc began to be felt even in Cold War settings when Ankara decided to challenge Washington and make a military intervention into Cyprus as a guarantor state to save Turkish Cypriots from Greek Cypriot brutality and opposed to some U.S. policies in domestic and foreign policy. In that sense, Uslu claimed that even during the Cold War, the Turkish-American alliance was not based on a satellite state model.<sup>i</sup>

Following the end of the Cold War and the weakening of the communism (USSR) threat in the early 1990s, Türkiye's self-confidence increased further and its self-ordained policy goals multiplied as Ankara wanted to develop ties with non-Western countries such as the Russian Federation (Russia), the People's Republic of China (China), and the Islamic Republic of Iran (Iran) in addition to Islamic and Turkic states while trying to keep its good relations with the U.S., the European Union (EU), and other Western or pro-Western states. Former Turkish Prime Minister and President of the Republic Süleyman Demirel explained this by describing a country exercising influence "from the Adriatic Sea to the Chinese Wall".<sup>ii</sup> This was caused by the country's increasing energy demand in addition to its search for new markets to expand its economy as a developing non-rentier state that does not have significant natural resources. So, other than classical Transatlantic and European-oriented foreign policy approaches, new foreign policy perspectives such as Eurasianism (cooperation with Russia and other non-Western countries in Eurasia), the unification of the Turkic world, leading the Islamic world in a civilizational-based dialogue with the West against the danger of the 'Clash of Civilizations' as predicted by Huntington, and investing in the Third World countries in the Balkans, Africa, Middle East, Asia, and Latin America flourished and developed. While these perspectives were initially discredited and labeled as 'marginal', the suggestion made by the then-National Security Council Secretary General Tuncer Kılınç in 2002 about establishing a new axis with Russia and Iran<sup>iii</sup> showed that there is high interest in alternative paradigms at the top state level including the military, often conceived as the most pro-Western institution in the country.



In the 2000s, with Islamist-oriented AK Parti and its charismatic leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's coming to power as part of a new populist right-wing trend, this orientation accelerated especially in the 2010s when Türkiye's hopes for EU membership faded and trust towards Western nations weakened considerably due to political events such as the 2013 Gezi Park protests and the 2016 failed coup attempt. Thus, in many issues including supporting settlement talks in Cyprus, implementing the European Court of Human Rights' decisions, allowing Swedish accession to NATO, implementing economic sanctions against Russia, denouncing China for its treatment of Uighurs, etc., Ankara has been acting -visibly- differently from its Western allies. This led to increasing criticism against the Erdoğan regime with terms such as "awkward ally"<sup>iv</sup>, "frenemy"<sup>v</sup>, and "the West's Turkey conundrum"<sup>vi</sup> etc. Some Western experts even proposed Türkiye to be thrown out of NATO.<sup>vii</sup> İbrahim Kalın, the current President of Türkiye's intelligence organization MİT (National Intelligence Agency) and former top foreign policy adviser to President Erdoğan on the other hand described this situation as "precious loneliness" (*değerli yalnızlık*)<sup>viii</sup> in the recent past to praise his country's honorable stance against coups, slaughters, and attacks toward civilians (in Syria, Egypt, and Gaza particularly). In short, Türkiye's somehow different and peculiar foreign policy stance has become increasingly worthy of attention in academia in recent years which requires a detailed analysis by looking at the country's current strategic necessities as well as its foreign policy behavior in critical issues.

Recently, some interesting academic studies made to conceptualize the new direction of Turkish foreign policy. For instance, Mehmetcik and Çelik focused on the concept of the "militarization of Turkish foreign policy"<sup>ix</sup>, Kutlay and Öniş underlined the "middle power activism"<sup>x</sup>, Akkoyunlu distinguished pragmatism and transactionalism after Davutoğlu's departure<sup>xi</sup>, Altunışık wrote about the unilateralism aspect as well as increasing security concerns in the "new turn"<sup>xii</sup>, and Oğuzlu introduced the concept of "Realism redux in the emerging multipolar world order"<sup>xiii</sup>. Coupled with President Erdoğan's unexpected success in the presidential and parliamentary elections in May 2023, many academics from different Turkish universities have recently begun to consider the status quo as "permanent" and started making new conceptualizations about Türkiye's sui generis foreign policy path centered on the concept of "multi-dimensional" and "multi-vector" foreign policy.<sup>xiv</sup> President Erdoğan and his newly appointed Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan -former Undersecretary/President of MİT- on the other hand, used the concept of the "Türkiye Century" to defy the world and present a new national vision of foreign policy which would be institutionalized in the new term.<sup>xv</sup> Türkiye's growing importance in global politics in a deepening multipolarity situation is also cited by Kupchan<sup>xvi</sup> and Ünal<sup>xvii</sup>.

This study will analyze Türkiye's new "multi-dimensional" foreign policy and focus on why Ankara does not want to restore its classical pro-Western foreign policy. To do this, the author will first look at the current situation of Türkiye in different aspects (humanitarian aid, democracy, rule of law, economy, human development index, etc.). In the second part, the author will summarize Ankara's critical connections in terms of its energy needs as well as its strategic and economic ties. In the third part, the author will analyze Türkiye's foreign policy behavior in two critical foreign policy issues, namely; the Russia-Ukraine War and the Hamas-Israeli War to understand Türkiye's peculiarities and different choices. These cases will help us to understand Türkiye's multi-dimensional foreign policy approach, which in many ways conflicts with the classical Atlanticist paradigm of the Cold War and early post-Cold War periods.

## 1. Türkiye Today: Analysis of the Socioeconomic Conditions in terms of International Indexes

In analyzing today's Türkiye, the first thing to be referred is Ankara's increasing humanitarian aid under the current (Erdoğan) regime. According to Britain-based Development Initiatives-DI's "Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2022", Türkiye is ranked number 2 after the U.S. in terms of total donor humanitarian assistance.<sup>xviii</sup> Statistics show Türkiye's commanding position in the global humanitarian assistance in the world. Especially in terms of hosting millions of Syrians (approximately 4 million) and other Muslim refugees, Türkiye has been doing an extremely



important humanitarian job; providing stability to the current global order and the United Nations (UN) system as well as keeping the European countries secure from migration flows. In addition, Türkiye and the EU agreed on a deal in March 2016 about keeping Syrian immigrants on Turkish soil and preventing their illegal entry into Europe in exchange for financial support provided by Brussels to Ankara.<sup>xi</sup> In that sense, Türkiye pursues more benevolent policies under Erdoğan than past governments. This notion also weakens Realism claims about Turkish foreign policy since the government considers international stability and balance equally important as its national interests. In that sense, while the anti-immigrant rhetoric has become the dominant narrative of the political scene in the West (Donald Trump in the U.S. and anti-immigrant right-wing parties in Europe), Türkiye adopts a very different attitude and repositions itself as a country open to victimized immigrants escaping from totalitarian regimes or war-torn countries.

Secondly, despite its benevolent aid policies, due to its serious democratic deficits, and limitations on the freedom of the press and political opposition, Türkiye's current regime is classified as "not free" by the Freedom House.<sup>xx</sup> Türkiye scored 32 points over 100; equally bad in political rights and civil liberties with 16 points over 100. This shows that Türkiye's humanitarian policies are not backed by an open and democratic regime inside the country, which overshadows the regime's benevolent acts. *The Economist* magazine's 2022 Democracy Index also strengthens this view and puts Türkiye into the "hybrid regime" category, slightly better than authoritarian regimes and away from full and flawed democracies.<sup>xxi</sup> The report suggests that Türkiye's elections are not completely free and fair, the media is subject to censorship, the rule of law is weak, and corruption is rife.<sup>xxii</sup> In that sense, the second important characteristic of today's regime in Türkiye is the erosion or the backsliding of democracy.

Thirdly, in addition to the democratic flaws of the regime, Türkiye's new hyper-presidential political system adopted in 2017 via a controversial referendum has begun to be criticized based on serious problems within the judicial procedures and the implementation of the rule of law principle. For instance, recently two high courts of the country, namely; the Constitutional Court and the Court of Cassation got into a legal dispute and the Court of Cassation dared not to implement the decision of the Constitutional Court -the highest legal authority in the country- by taking political support from the government.<sup>xxiii</sup> To support this view, in the World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index, Türkiye is ranked 117 out of 142 countries and performs poorly with only 0.41 points.<sup>xxiv</sup> This shows that the lack of formal procedural democratic norms is another problem for Ankara and the current regime needs to institutionalize the *de facto* situation with a harmonious political system with a new constitution and relevant mechanisms.

Fourthly, Türkiye's economic performance also has been slowing down in the last few years. Regularly being the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world since the late 1980s during which former Prime Minister Turgut Özal liberalized the economy and opened the Turkish economy to the global market, Türkiye is now (2022) ranked 19<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world with an economy smaller than a trillion dollars (907 billion dollars) behind much less populated countries like Saudi Arabia and the Netherlands.<sup>xxv</sup> According to the Legatum Prosperity Index, the country poorly performs and is ranked 95<sup>th</sup> country in the world.<sup>xxvi</sup> In terms of GDP per capita, Türkiye's situation is not very good either with an average of 10.674 dollars.<sup>xxvii</sup> Thus, we can claim that Türkiye's democratic regression also coincides with its economic slowing down. Important economists such as Daron Acemoğlu also underline that the Turkish economy has great potential, but due to the lack of democracy and inclusive institutions, and the misuse of technology, Türkiye underperforms economically.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Fifthly, despite its poor performance in democracy, rule of law, and economy, Türkiye's position in the UN-prepared Human Development Index (HDI) has been surprisingly good in recent years. HDI measures three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living. Türkiye is ranked among the best human development standard countries in this list with a "very high" grade.<sup>xxix</sup> This shows the success of the Erdoğan regime especially in terms of health services, which increases people's satisfaction with the current government.



In total, Türkiye's democratic and economic performance has not been very good in recent years although the country has always had similar problems as a typical developing state. Moreover, unlike other developing countries, Türkiye's human development performance is very good, and its foreign policy actions which are based on welcoming refugees and providing humanitarian aid to victimized Muslim groups provide a good reputation for the country both inside and outside. In that sense, Türkiye's democratic backsliding could be interpreted as part of a general democratic regression trend in the world as well since the country's ruling system has become more civilian-based and European oriented in fact since the last two decades with EU harmonization laws adopted in the 2000s. In addition, a country that has been performing record-level humanitarian aid should be praised as a stability provider Idealist state that contributes to world order and human rights.

## 2. Evaluation of Türkiye's Strategic Military, Political/Diplomatic, Economic, and Sociocultural Relations

Türkiye is a NATO member and it has been in full accession talks with the EU since 2005 although the process is de facto frozen and no one expects Türkiye's membership into the Union anytime soon. In that sense, Türkiye is a pivotal Western state playing key roles in the Western military alliance, and having an important place in European politics. Furthermore, Türkiye's role is not new because the Ottoman Empire had always been an important factor in European politics as well and it had transformed into a party of the 'Concert of Europe' system following the Vienna Congress of 1815. In that sense, Türkiye's Westernization efforts take their roots in the last century of the Ottoman Empire, making it an essential country for the Western world.

Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) is the second-largest army within NATO after the U.S. Army. In addition, as the gatekeeper of NATO's southern flank, Türkiye hosts U.S. and NATO military infrastructure.<sup>xxx</sup> According to Global Firepower, TAF is the 8<sup>th</sup> strongest army in the world.<sup>xxxi</sup> As a traditional U.S. and NATO ally, TAF's inventory was composed of mostly American and other Western-made weapon systems until the recent past. An analysis conducted by the U.S. government in 1995 found that close to 80 % of the military equipment in TAF inventory was supplied by the U.S.<sup>xxxii</sup> However, with Türkiye's strategic decision to steer toward its indigenous solutions in weapons technology in the late 1990s, at the end of 2014, the percentage of national products rose to 60 %<sup>xxxiii</sup> and it is now estimated around 70 % by military experts such as Cenk Özgen.<sup>xxxiv</sup> On the other hand, Türkiye's only air missile defense system is the Russian-made S-400, which was purchased in 2017, but has not been used actively by TAF so far due to American warnings and CAATSA sanctions.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Diplomatically, Türkiye has been an official UN member since 1945 and takes part in many important international organizations. Among these, the World Bank (1947), IMF (1947), Council of Europe (1950), NATO (1952), OECD (1960), Islamic Cooperation Organization (1969), Islamic Development Bank (1974), G-20 (1976), Black Sea Economic Cooperation (1992), World Trade Organization (1995), D-8 (1997), Union for the Mediterranean (2008), and Organization of Turkic States (2009) are strategically most important and striking platforms. Moreover, Türkiye became a dialogue partner to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2013 and ASEAN in 2017 as well as a strategic partner to the African Union in 2008. In that sense, diplomatically Türkiye has a global appeal, but its critical memberships (the Council of Europe and NATO) are primarily directed to Western institutions. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Türkiye has around 250 different foreign missions<sup>xxxvi</sup> and is the fifth most active country in diplomacy in the whole world.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Türkiye's membership into BRICS+ has also become a popular political discussion in the country recently.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Türkiye's most important trade partners have significantly changed in recent years. While Germany has traditionally been Ankara's most important trade partner, in the last two years, Russia and China passed Germany and have become Türkiye's most important economic partners.<sup>xxxix</sup> However, Ankara has a large trade deficit against both of these countries. Moreover, except Russia, China, the U.S., Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates, all other most important trade partners of Türkiye are

European countries such as Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Netherlands, etc. EU countries constitute a 40.6 % share in Türkiye's total exports by 2022<sup>xl</sup> and are the most important markets for Turkish industries and companies. Thus, although Türkiye has been trying to diversify its exports with new initiatives such as the "Asia Anew" since 2019<sup>xli</sup>, Europe is still the most important market for Turkish businesses.

**Table I. Türkiye's most important economic partners (2022)<sup>xlii</sup>**

Rank	Country	Türkiye's total exports (U.S. dollar)	Türkiye's total imports (U.S. dollar)	Total trade volume	Trade balance
1	Russia	7,666,749,642	57,362,105,078	65,028,854,720	-49,695,355,436
2	China	3,017,842,583	38,682,077,743	41,699,920,326	-35,664,235,160
3	Germany	19,208,120,332	22,247,395,028	41,455,515,360	-3,039,274,696
4	The U.S.	15,485,677,360	14,102,336,436	29,588,013,796	1,383,340,924
5	Italy	11,444,925,212	12,899,396,555	24,344,321,767	-1,454,471,343
6	France	9,111,235,078	8,883,783,023	17,995,018,101	227,452,055
7	United Kingdom	12,534,275,266	5,444,960,869	17,979,236,135	7,089,314,397
8	Spain	9,121,471,793	6,698,192,760	15,819,664,553	2,423,279,033
9	Iraq	11,766,911,690	854,912,871	12,621,824,561	10,911,998,819
10	Netherlands	7,492,166,585	4,238,855,848	11,731,022,433	3,253,310,737

**Table II. Türkiye's most important economic partners (2023)<sup>xliii</sup>**

Rank	Country	Türkiye's total exports (U.S. dollar)	Türkiye's total imports (U.S. dollar)	Total trade volume	Trade balance
1	Russia	9,449,820,704	43,926,219,884	53,376,040,588	-34,476,399,180
2	China	3,073,157,902	43,007,937,523	46,081,095,425	-39,934,779,621
3	Germany	18,819,058,737	26,426,962,926	45,246,021,663	-7,607,904,189
4	The U.S.	13,289,775,152	14,500,453,921	27,790,229,073	-1,210,678,769
5	Italy	11,189,946,758	13,340,879,832	24,530,826,590	-2,150,933,074
6	France	9,827,020,741	10,892,010,975	20,719,031,716	-1,064,990,234
7	United Arab Emirates	7,992,072,538	11,429,505,773	19,421,578,311	-3,437,433,235



8	Spain	9,164,925,171	9,004,829,754	18,169,754,925	160,095,417
9	United Kingdom	11,865,540,417	5,987,904,886	17,853,445,303	5,877,635,531
10	Iraq	11,021,491,707	694,319,954	11,715,811,661	10,327,171,753

Regarding energy policy, Türkiye's Western ties slacken and non-Western countries such as Russia, Azerbaijan, and Iran get into the picture. Although Türkiye has accelerated its hydrocarbon discovery activities in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean in recent years, the country still imports 99 % of its gas and 93 % of its oil from other countries.<sup>xliv</sup> According to the official statistics provided by the Energy Market Regulatory Authority (EPDK), in 2022, Türkiye imported approximately 40 % of its natural gas from Russia, 17.2 % from Iran, 16 % from Azerbaijan, 10 % from the U.S., 9.6 % from Algeria, and 3.3 % from Egypt.<sup>xlv</sup> In the LNG market, EPDK statistics in 2022 suggest that Türkiye has 42.85 % dependency on Algeria, 36.82 % on the U.S., 9.48 % on Russia, and 5.27 % on Kazakhstan.<sup>xlvi</sup> In terms of oil, according to official statistics provided by EPDK, Ankara purchases 40.75 % of its oil needs from Russia, 26.39 % from Iraq, 9 % from Kazakhstan, 4.73 % from India, and 4.01 % from Saudi Arabia.<sup>xlvii</sup> Overall, Algeria, the U.S., Iraq, Iran, Azerbaijan, and especially Russia have become key actors for Ankara in satisfying its energy demand in recent years, which could be considered a major reason for Türkiye's search for a more diversified and multi-dimensional foreign policy. It should be added that a high amount of dependency cannot be overridden in a short time, especially when the country is in an economic crisis.

**Table III. Türkiye's Natural Gas Import Quantities by Source Countries (million Sm<sup>3</sup>)**

	Russia	Iran	Azerbaijan	The U.S.	Algeria	Egypt	Other*	Total
Quantity	21.575	9.405	8.705	5.642	5.261	2.231	1.843	54.662

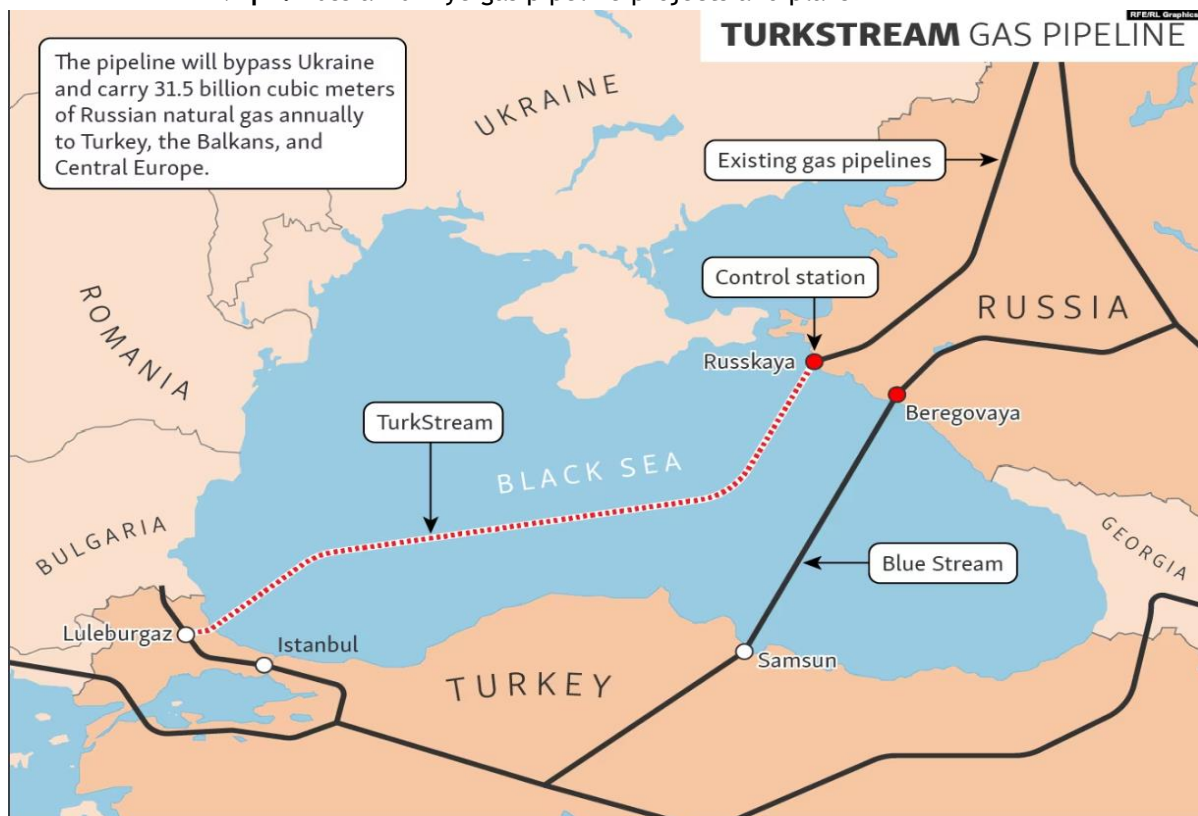
Source: EPDK<sup>xlviii</sup>

**Table IV. Amount of Türkiye's Oil Import by Countries (tonnes) in 2022**

Country	Crude Oil	Gasoline Types	Fuel Oil Types	Aviation Types	Marine Fuels	Other Products	Total	Share (%)
Russian Federation	12.000.979,011	4.058.127,641	0,000	362.655,652	4.811,540	2.897.869,421	19.324.443,265	40,75
Iraq	12.515.895,845	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	12.515.895,845	26,39
Kazakhstan	4.245.417,494	5.792,070	0,000	0,000	15.726,411	0,000	4.266.935,975	9,00
India		2.178.434,506	0,000	65.056,436	0,000	0,000	2.243.490,942	4,73
Saudi Arabia	1.664.258,096	236.932,665	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	1.901.190,761	4,01
Nigeria	1.189.695,381	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	1.189.695,381	2,51
Israel		1.016.958,392	31.189,914	0,000	8.090,000	0,000	1.056.238,306	2,23
Italy	60.619,623	900.588,896	33.619,956	0,000	0,000	0,000	994.828,475	2,10
Libya	812.319,577	0,000	0,000	0,000	1.260,000	0,000	813.579,577	1,72
Greece		631.726,092	0,000	17.057,928	6.390,000	32.768,095	687.942,115	1,45

Source: EPDK<sup>xlix</sup>

Here, the key factor is -without doubt- the Russian effect on Türkiye, a country that has been in a struggle with the collective West in recent years due to the Syrian and Ukrainian crises under the leadership of Vladimir Putin. Russia and Türkiye together constructed many natural gas pipeline projects such as the Blue Stream (*Mavi Akım*) and the Turk Stream (*TürkAkım*) successfully in the recent past.<sup>l</sup> Türkiye and Azerbaijan on the other hand successfully implemented the TANAP (Trans Anatolian Pipeline Project) as part of the Southern Gas Corridor. In that sense, energy politics have begun to dominate Turkish foreign policy with Russia as the biggest influencer and Azerbaijan as the second most influential actor. It must be added that Russia (Rosatom) also established Türkiye's first nuclear power plant in Mersin, Akkuyu, which provides over ten regions of Turkey and a total of over 12 million consumers with electricity, including civil and industrial infrastructure facilities.<sup>li</sup> Akkuyu will begin to be run at full capacity in 2025 or 2026 and a second nuclear power plant to be constructed by Russian Rosatom in Sinop was previously announced by the government. In that sense, the 'Russia factor' in Turkish foreign policy might be one of the main reasons for Ankara's multi-dimensional foreign policy inclination since Moscow's democratic demands from Türkiye are low, its challenges to Türkiye's political positions against the international law (e.g. the situation of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus-TRNC) are much softer compared to Western countries, and it seems more willingly to share its technology with Ankara unlike Washington as proven by the S-400 and Akkuyu initiatives.

Map I. Russia-Türkiye gas pipeline projects and plans<sup>lii</sup>

In terms of sociocultural relations, Turkish people primarily prefer Turkic and Muslim countries, as well as some neighboring states and victimized nations as friends and allies. According to the results of Istanbul-based Kadir Has University's annual "Public Perceptions of the Turkish Foreign Policy" study, in the year 2022, Turkish people consider Turkic states such as Azerbaijan (the leading country with 55.3 % support), the TRNC (the second country with 48.4 % support), and Uzbekistan (the fourth country with 35.2 % support), Türkiye's neighbors such as Georgia (the third country with 38.3 % support), Islamic countries like Qatar (the sixth country with 31.9 % support), Pakistan (the seventh country with 28 % support), and Saudi Arabia (the ninth country with 23 % support), victimized -due to war with Russia- countries like Ukraine (the fifth country with 32.7 %



support), historical allies such as Germany (the eighth country with 26.5 % support), and intensive trade partners such as China (the tenth country with 22 % support) and Russia (the eleventh country with 20.9 % support) as Türkiye's friends and allies.<sup>liii</sup> Among the Western states, the highest ranked countries after Germany on the other hand are the United Kingdom (19.2 %) and France (17.6 %).<sup>liv</sup> This shows that there is a substantial societal wish and support for a multi-dimensional foreign policy targeting the Turkic and Islamic world rather than a Western-oriented foreign policy inclination.

In total, Türkiye can be described as a country that has intensified military-based relations with the U.S. and other NATO members, political/diplomatic relations having a global scope but primarily targeting the West (the U.S. and the EU), diversified economic relations more focused toward Europe (the EU countries), extensive energy-based strategic relations with non-Western countries such as Russia, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Iraq with the by far highest effect of Moscow among these, and a sociocultural inclination coming from its people's preference to develop closer relations with other Turkic and Muslim states instead of Western countries.

### 3. Two Cases: Russia-Ukraine War and Hamas-Israeli War

To better understand Türkiye's search for a new and multi-dimensional foreign policy, two specific cases will be analyzed in this part. Accordingly, Ankara's different positioning during the ongoing Russia-Ukraine and Hamas-Israeli wars will be analyzed to understand the peculiar stance of Türkiye in international affairs.

#### 3.1. The Russia-Ukraine War

It is a historical fact that Western promises given to Russia such as the "not one-inch eastwards" rhetoric of then-U.S. Secretary of State James Baker were not kept<sup>lv</sup> and NATO continued to expand towards Russia in the last few decades. Consequently, since 2014, with the Ukraine crisis turning into an arm wrestling between the West and Moscow, Russia first took Crimea from the hands of pro-Western Ukraine and in 2022, started a 'special military operation' into this country. With the Russian plan and efforts to capture, first fully, and then, some parts of Ukraine starting on February 24, 2023, a war erupted between the two sides. While Moscow considered the war as a "special military operation", Kyiv, based on international law, insisted on an "invasion" and its right to defend its sovereign territories. While the fighting led to terrible humanitarian tragedies (thousands of dead soldiers -also civilians for Ukraine- on both sides, in addition to millions of Ukrainian refugees in other countries) and continues, all Western countries decided to implement harsh sanctions against Russia due to its aggressive behavior. These sanctions included strict financial measures such as freezing the assets of the Russian Central Bank in many Western countries and the removal of Russian banks from the SWIFT system, etc., the decision of major international companies -including McDonald's, PepsiCo, H&M, and Adidas, etc.- to stop operating in Russia, the banning gold and diamond imports from Russia in some Western countries, and more importantly cutting all oil and gas purchases from Moscow in almost all Western countries.<sup>lvi</sup> While these sanctions negatively affected the Russian economy, Moscow has been able to survive so far thanks to its extensive trade network with the Eastern world (primarily China) and the war economy. Moreover, due to its problems with the U.S. and other major Western countries, Türkiye decided not to join the sanction regime against Moscow and instead, began to welcome Russian investors and companies to facilitate and coordinate Russia-Europe trade.

While President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and other top-level Turkish state officials never approved or accepted the Russian annexation of Crimea or other Ukrainian territories, politically -openly-supported Kyiv, sold armed drones to Kyiv to defend itself, and even endorsed Ukraine's bid for NATO membership<sup>lvii</sup>, with the "business comes first" mentality, as well as to prevent Moscow to cut all its ties with the Western world, Ankara continued to trade with Moscow and even with a rapidly developing pace. Accordingly, due to European sanctions, an enormous 670 % increase in Russian investments in Türkiye took place in the year 2022<sup>lviii</sup> and this trend continued in 2023. Russia has become Türkiye's -by far- largest trade partner in the last two years by rapidly passing Germany. Türkiye-Russia trade exceeded 65 billion dollars<sup>lix</sup> and reached a new all-time-high level





in 2023 according to experts. In that sense, according to Çelikkpala, two leaders' (Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan) previously declared target of reaching 100 billion dollars in trade volume is a realistic goal now.<sup>lx</sup> Türkiye's then-National Defense Minister Hulusi Akar defended Ankara's stance with the idea that his country is obliged by international law and there is not an UN-backed decision against trading with Moscow.<sup>lxi</sup> However, Türkiye -later- in March 2023 joined the sanctions regime against Moscow for the sale of restricted products<sup>lxii</sup>, while it continued to welcome Russian investments, companies, and joint ventures. In addition, the U.S. sanctioned five Turkish companies in September 2023 for "helping Russia evade sanctions and supporting Moscow in its war against Ukraine".<sup>lxiii</sup>

Turkish and Russian leaders Erdoğan and Putin continued to keep their frequent communication as Erdoğan visited Sochi in September 2023<sup>lxiv</sup> and a Putin visit is expected soon. Türkiye also showed considerable diplomatic success by brokering a deal between Russia and Ukraine for the safe transportation of food from these countries -with the "Black Sea Grain Initiative" or the "grain deal" in short- to other countries and has become an important international actor praised by the UN and the World Food Programme (WFP).<sup>lxv</sup> Although it did not lead to a concrete result, Türkiye also initiated peace talks between Kyiv and Moscow at the 2022 Antalya Diplomacy Forum.<sup>lxvi</sup> In addition, Ankara has also become a "preferred venue for diplomacy between the West and Russia" as proven by CIA chief William Burns and his Russian counterpart Sergei Naryshkin's meeting in November 2022<sup>lxvii</sup>. President Erdoğan on the other hand criticized the West for following provocative policies against Russia<sup>lxviii</sup> and said that he trusts Moscow as much as the West<sup>lxix</sup>. Furthermore, İbrahim Kalın openly stated that they do not consider Russia as a threat despite its war with Ukraine.<sup>lxx</sup> Thus, Türkiye's peculiar foreign policy stance has been felt by almost everyone during the Russia-Ukraine War.

While at the beginning Western observers mostly focused on President Erdoğan's short-term plan to win the election with Russian support<sup>lxxi</sup>, Çağaptay later began to question the permanent positioning of this peculiar foreign policy and wrote about Türkiye's gradual transformation into a "Putin-style autocracy" with closer relations with Moscow<sup>lxxii</sup>. Chivvis, Coşkun, and Geaghan-Breiner also concluded that Türkiye follows a new and somehow different foreign policy closer to the "Global South" by underlining President Erdoğan's frequent calls for the reform of the UN Security Council's composition with the "World is bigger than five" slogan and its serious interest in becoming a full member to Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS+.<sup>lxxiii</sup>

### 3.2. The Hamas-Israeli War

With the unexpected attack made by Hamas on Israel on October 7, 2023, the 2023 Hamas-Israeli War started. Turkish President Erdoğan is often praised or criticized for being a very devout Muslim who cares about the Palestinian cause and who takes an emotional pro-Palestine stance concerning this issue against Israel. Erdoğan in the past engaged in serious troubled situations with Israel as in the case of the "one-minute crisis" at Davos in 2009 in which Erdoğan severely criticized then-Israeli President Shimon Peres and the Mavi Marmara crisis in 2010. Erdoğan repeatedly called Israel a "terror state". However, since Erdoğan met and shook the hand of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in late September 2023, just a few weeks ago<sup>lxxiv</sup> and this time the first attack came from Hamas on the Jewish religious holiday called "Yom Kippur", Erdoğan at the beginning showed a very calm stance. On the day of the Hamas attack, the Turkish President invited both sides to moderation to prevent bloodshed and received positive reactions from Israeli officials.<sup>lxxv</sup> However, when Israel began to bomb Gaza to take revenge for its killed citizens and soldiers (around 1,400), and kill innocent civilians (the death toll has recently surpassed 32,000) including women, children, and babies, Erdoğan could not keep his emotions and began to criticize Israel with harsh words. Turkish President even praised Hamas as a liberation organization and mujahedeen group and blamed Israel for acting like an organization rather than a state.<sup>lxxvi</sup> Erdoğan also commented on the U.S. decision to send its warships to the region as "a preparation for a massacre"<sup>lxxvii</sup>.

Turkish President's critical stance against Israel and the U.S. came at a time when Western leaders such as Joe Biden, Rishi Sunak, Emmanuel Macron, Ursula Von der Leyen, etc. rushed in to visit



Israel to show their solidarity. While many Western leaders including French President Macron also focused on the “two states solution” during his Middle East tour, Erdoğan’s harsh rhetoric made Türkiye again a country different from its traditional allies. During his visit to Germany in November 2023, Erdoğan continued to criticize Israel and called Hamas a “liberator” while German Chancellor Olaf Scholz called this comment “absurd” and said it was no secret that he and the Turkish President had “very different views on the conflict”.<sup>lxxviii</sup> Although there are some Western countries such as Ireland and Spain to show solidarity with Palestinians after Israel’s brutal response targeting civilians<sup>lxxix</sup>, Erdoğan’s Türkiye came to the forefront once again as an awkward duckling of the West with its pro-Palestine positioning. In addition, accusing Israel of being a “fascist state”, Erdoğan underlined the fact Germany and many other European countries are taking a pro-Israeli stance probably due to their 20th-century Nazi past<sup>lxxx</sup>.

Analyzing Erdoğan’s pro-Palestinian stance, Aydıntaşbaş focused on Erdoğan’s both personal and ideological motives to become an important regional actor as the “wild card” of the Middle East.<sup>lxxxi</sup> While Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan put forward the idea of becoming a “guarantor state” for Palestine<sup>lxxxii</sup>, Erdoğan declared that Türkiye does not consider Netanyahu as “someone who could be talked with” anymore<sup>lxxxiii</sup>. While the events in Gaza decreased the possibility of Turkish-American normalization, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken had a cold reception from his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan in November 2023.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> In addition, an international conference to be held at Istanbul Aydın University on November 17-18, 2023 on Turkish-American relations was canceled by the university administration based on security concerns. It should be added that previous studies prove that Turkish people also strongly support the government’s pro-Palestinian policy. For instance, a study conducted by ASAL Araştırma in October 2023 concluded that 64 % of Turkish people support a pro-Palestine stance in foreign policy<sup>lxxxv</sup>, a strong social position very different from most of the European countries’ societies.

While there are fears of further escalating violence in Gaza in the coming days, it is almost certain that President Erdoğan and Türkiye will continue to support Palestine and harshly criticize Israel, and the U.S. and other Western states will continue to defend Israel’s right to defend itself against radical groups. Here, it should be remembered that Hamas has been designated a terrorist organization by Washington since 1997<sup>lxxxvi</sup> and Brussels since 2001<sup>lxxxvii</sup>. In that sense, Türkiye’s positioning is completely different from its traditional Western allies. While this could be interpreted as part of Ankara’s efforts to take more political support from the West in its fight against the PKK/PYD/YPG terrorism in Türkiye, Iraq, and Syria, ideologically also there are distant gaps between Ankara and Washington/London/Paris/Berlin/Brussels. However, it should be added that the AK Parti government did not try to cut Türkiye’s economic and diplomatic ties with Israel yet, although the new and rising Islamist party, the New Welfare Party (YRP) defends this policy<sup>lxxxviii</sup> and has recently become an attraction center for right-wing voters.

To conclude, the 2023 Hamas-Israeli War showed once again that Türkiye is a different Western member based on its peculiar characteristics, different social demands, as well as its increasing dependency on non-Western countries such as Russia, and this necessitates Ankara to pursue a multi-dimensional foreign policy contradicting with Transatlanticist and/or Europeanist foreign policy line. In that sense, this might not be a temporary phase and could become a permanent trend though Türkiye’s NATO membership will continue to pose problems for its relations with the non-Western countries.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, the author first tried to assess Türkiye’s position in important political, diplomatic, and socioeconomic issues by taking help from international indexes. Secondly, the author focused on Türkiye’s strategic military, diplomatic/political, economic, and sociocultural relations in recent years to understand the background of the country’s critical ties. Thirdly, the author came up with two new cases, namely; the Russia-Ukraine War and the Hamas-Israeli War for illustrating Ankara’s different foreign policy approach that is still in the flourishing process.

Although this should be considered as a preliminary study, the author concludes that multi-dimensional foreign policy or “multi-dimensionalism” has increasingly become a permanent foreign policy behavior for Ankara despite its extensive and historical Western ties and poor economic performance in recent years. The main reasons for this inclination on the other hand, Türkiye’s problems with the West in many issues (the Cyprus Dispute, the Kurdish Question, relations with Russia, relations with Israel, etc.) in addition to Türkiye’s growing dependency on Russia in the field of energy.

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