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THE ROLE OF TURKIYE IN THE BLACK SEA AND THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR: A SHORT OVERVIEW

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Abstract: *After the end of the Cold War, the new conjuncture that appeared in the region of the Black Sea turned into an important place on the international scene. During the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Turkish diplomacy played a significant role in this region and international relations based on its new 'active neutrality' strategy. Turkiye's extensive efforts at a ceasefire through implementing the mediatory role between Russia and Ukraine were its more significant diplomatic endeavors throughout the war. Simultaneously, one of the more critical segments that marked the Ukrainian resistance against invasion is the success of the Turkish armed drone Bayraktar TB2. Turkiye plays a vital role in the so-called 'grain corridor' function with the aim of activization of Ukrainian export of grain and mitigating the world's grain crises.*

Keywords: *Russia; Ukraine; Bayraktar TB2; Grain Corridor; Energetic Crisis*

INTRODUCTION

The Black Sea has been considered throughout history, but also today and especially after the end of the Cold War, as one of the vital strategic regions in the international context. The increased interest in global and regional factors towards the Black Sea and their politics and strategies towards this region indicates the region's vitality in the international arena. This article will examine the importance of the Black Sea in international relations, strategies and politics of global and regional factors for this region. In the next part of this article, we will analyze the most critical segments of Turkish-Ukrainian relations, which had and still have vital reflections on the bilateral relations of these countries. The last part of our article will focus on Turkiye's foreign politics toward Ukraine and its role in the Russian-Ukrainian war, focusing on its role in the ceasefire. Also, the influence of Turkish drones during the war and Turkish diplomacy's success in opening the 'grain corridor' will represent an important part of this article.

THE BLACK SEA REGION

Before we analyze the importance of the Black Sea region for international relations, we will try to define the concept of the Black Sea and introduce the countries that belong to this region. In ancient times, this region was considered one of the most important centers of the Mediterranean region. Since the X century BC, the people of the Mediterranean got in contact with the people of the Black Sea, after which they came to various geographical discoveries. On the other hand, the sailors who came from the Aegean region came across storms and waves in the Black Sea region and encountered tribes that they had not known before. That is why the Black Sea was named 'Pontos Aexeinos', which means inhospitable sea. After a while, along with the progress of technological possibilities, the people from the Aegean and Mediterranean regions built ships that could endure the dark and severe conditions of the Black Sea. On this occasion, they have begun to exploit the treasures of the Black Sea. As a result, the name Black Sea was changed to 'Pontos Euxeinos', which means hospitable sea (Arıdemir 2011, 30-31). The Ottomans initially used the term Black Sea and later translated it into European languages (Arıdemir 2011, 30-32).

Besides the fact that Russia and Georgia surround the Black Sea coast from the east, Bulgaria and Romania from the west, Ukraine from the north and Turkiye from the south, there are various opinions about the borders of this region following the strategies and interests of numerous regional and international factors. Simultaneously, it should be highlighted that the following concepts are also used for the demarcation of the mentioned region: Danube/Black Sea region, Greater Black Sea Region (according to this term, Azerbaijan and Armenia are located in the Black Sea region, by which we create the Eurasian energy corridor that connects the West with the energy sources in Central Asia), Black-Caspian Seas Region, Wider Black Sea Region, Black-Mediterranean Seas Region in the Baltic-Black Sea Zone of Security, a term that NATO is using in the framework for its extension (Arıdemir 2011, 34). The essential characteristic of the Black Sea region is its vicinity to the Balkans, Central Asia, Caucasus and the Middle East. Because of this, during history, the dominant regional and world powers always tried to dominate the Black Sea region and keep it under their control as a strategic aim of their relevant countries. The most apparent proof is that the region mentioned above was a target of various empires throughout history like the Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman and Russian empires (Özbay 2010; Baran 2008, 87).

Since the XVIII century, this region has become a center of tensions and conflicts between the Ottoman and Russian Empires. In this context, it should be highlighted that the Ottomans entered World War One precisely through the bombardment of Russian vessels and harbors in the Black Sea. On the other hand, the disappearance of Imperial Russia from the international arena began exactly with its deprivation of help that was supposed to arrive through the Black Sea after the Dardanelle war in 1915 (Özbay 2010). The geographic and geostrategic position of the Black sea, various underground resources and the population's potential turned this region into a critical strategic, economic, political and transport center. Simultaneously, this region can play an important role in using military power. The movements of countries with expansionist politics from this region above this sea and the role of the Turkish

strait in military strategies are indicators of the military importance of the Black Sea region (Koca 2010, 74-76).

The regional and global powers of the XX century produced various strategies toward the Black Sea. During the Cold War period, the general paradigm of the Soviet Union towards the Black Sea was to be closed for military ships of the non-coastal countries. As a result of this strategy, this sea was considered closed to the outside world during the Cold War period. Besides the NATO Member State Turkiye, all other countries on the borders with the Black Sea were a part of the Warsaw Pact. In the period from the fall of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the Soviet Union, there were apparent changes on the international scene. As a result, the Black Sea region began to open itself to the outside world (Özbay 2010).

On the other hand, the US policy toward the Black Sea region, the expansion of NATO and the EU into the region, and the colorful revolutions in some coastal nations like Georgia and Ukraine, show the new problems Russia faces. The newly created conjuncture is forcing Russia, under the leadership of Putin, to create new policies towards this region. The intervention of this country in Georgia, the annexation of Crimea and the recent war between Russia and Ukraine in 2022 depict the new proactive Russian attitude towards the region (Arıdemir 2011, 136; Yekelchyk 2007).

In the newly created conjuncture after the Cold War period, except the Russian Federation and Turkey, the USA and EU began to have a close interest in this region. According to US strategies, the Black Sea borders are not limited only to the countries that are on borders with this sea, but they also include a region that extends from Central Asia to the Balkans. According to these strategies, with the end of the Cold War and the establishment a geostrategic vacuum of power in the Black Sea region, the gap mentioned above should be filled by the USA and EU factors. Considering the USA's foreign policy attitude, the proximity of the Black Sea region with the most important energy sources in the world indicates that it possesses a significant strategic position. In the post-Cold War period, the USA undertook essential steps towards integrating the countries from this region towards Western institutions like NATO and the EU, aiming to weaken Russia's position (Özbay 2010; Arıdemir 2011, 103-115).

The EU's attitude towards the Black Sea is new compared to its policies towards other regions (like the Adriatic and Baltic seas etc.). However, the following strategic steps undertaken by the EU are considered some of the most critical steps in the road of its factorization in the region mentioned above: a) European Neighborhood Policy; b) SYNERGY project, which aims the establishment of cooperation in the field of energy in the Black Sea, c) The Black Sea Euro-region Initiative, d) INOGATE (Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe, e) TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia, an international transport program involving the European Union and 12 member states of the Eastern European, Caucasus and Central Asian region) (Isic 2008; Arıdemir 2011, 99-103; Özbay 2010). It should be highlighted that EU policies towards the Black Sea region are usually in conflict with the Russian, but on the other hand, compatible with the US policies (Isic 2008; Arıdemir 2011, 99-103; Özbay 2010).

Regarding the Turkish attitude toward the Black Sea, it can be stressed that this region has had an important strategic position in the eyes of the Turkish political elites. The Black Sea was considered an internal sea of the Empire during the Ottoman period; the protection and

sovereignty of the strait that connects this sea with the outside world represents the external strategy's most important priority in the Republic's traditional foreign politics of Turkiye. Besides the fact that the attitude of Turkiye toward the Black Sea during the Cold War period was very passive because of the circumstances of the bipolar world from that period, the role of Turkiye in the Black Sea region increased with the end of the Cold War period.

During the Post-Cold War period, the main characteristics of the Turkish policy towards the Black Sea region were the following: a) promoting stability and peacekeeping, b) protecting of territorial integrity of countries in the region, c) the establishment of economic unions, and d) diplomatic and economic activities for transforming the Black Sea region into a commercial attraction etc. Turkiye's leading role in establishing BLACKSEAFOR and The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) in the Post-Cold War period is the best evidence for the statements mentioned above (Özbay 2010; Koca 2010, 78; Arıdemir 2011, 161).

TURKIYE-UKRAINE RELATIONS

In Turkish foreign politics, Ukraine is considered one of the most important countries in the Black Sea region. The strategic location of this country in the Black Sea and Eastern Europe region, its economic potential, its presence of energetic corridors (for example, 80% of the Russian gas that goes to Europe passes through the territory of Ukraine), the region of Crimea which is extremely important for Turkiye) are considered as most important factors that influence the vitality of the Ukrainian country within the strategies of the Turkish state. At the same time, some factors, like the increased power of Turkiye in the Balkans, the Middle East and Central Asia and its transformation into a vital factor in the Black Sea region after the Cold War period, are strengthening the position of this country for Ukraine's strategy (Özdal 2012). Immediately after Ukraine's independence and confirmation of the decision brought by the population through a referendum, Turkiye recognized the independence of this country on 16 December 1991. Political relations Turkiye-Ukraine were established on 3 February 1992. After that, numerous political, legal, economic, military, educational and cultural agreements and protocols were signed between these two countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022).

Similarly, a significant contribution was made to develop bilateral relations through mutual visits on the level of the President, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. We should highlight that the official visit of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkiye to Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine and the Autonomous Region of Crimea, on 13-15 September 2012 is the best example. At the beginning of the 2000s, bilateral relations gained momentum. On 24-25 January 2011, during the official visit to Ukraine by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkiye, Erdogan, the Turkish-Ukrainian Strategic Council at a High Level was founded, which raised the bilateral relations to the position of strategic relations. The first meeting of this Council was held during the official visit of Ukrainian President Yanukovich to Turkiye (22 December 2011), when essential steps for negotiations of the agreement for free trade and entering into force of the agreement for visa-free regime between these countries. In this context, the Mutual Group for Strategic Planning was established as a part of the Council. This was expected to be essential in developing international and regional issues and economic and cultural dimensions in bilateral

relations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022; Özdal 2012). The last meeting of the Strategic Council at a high level was held on 3 February 2020 in Kiev (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022).

One of the important segments of relations between Turkiye and Ukraine is the Crimean Tatars. The source of interest of Turkiye for the Crimean Tatars should be looked at in the historical depths. The fact that almost 1 million citizens of Crimean-Tatar origin live in Turkiye and that the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, until the occupation and annexation by Russia in 2014, was inside the borders of Ukraine serves as a bridge in the bilateral relations (Drohobycky 1995; Özdal 2012). In this context, we should highlight that, except through diplomatic discourse, the Turkish state supported the reintegration of Crimean Tatars into Ukrainian society by building apartments and infrastructure (Dağlı 2009, 52-53).

Also, another important segment of Turkiye-Ukraine relations is that both countries play an active role in international and regional organizations. These two countries, besides their active roles in international organizations like OSCE, Council of Europe and NATO, and regional economic initiatives such as the Black Sea Organization for Economic Cooperation, are also involved in preserving the environment, like the Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution etc. They are also developing intensive relations within military cooperation and initiatives like the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (BLACKSEAFOR) and Operation Black Sea Harmony (OBSH) (Paçal 2007, 77-92; Bülent 2007, 77 - 92; Dağlı 2009, 176-191).

As far as economic and trade relations between Turkiye and Ukraine are concerned, we can state that these relations began with the agreement for trade and economic cooperation, which was signed on 4 May 1992 and implemented on 20 April 1994. In the later periods, numerous agreements and protocols were signed, which played a role in developing mutual trade and economic relations. The most important are the following: Agreement for customs cooperation and mutual administrative assistance; Mutual promotion and protection of investments; Agreement for prevention of double taxation; Mutual action plan Turkiye-Ukraine; Protocol for development of trade relations; International agreement for road transport; Agreement for the establishment of business council; Agreement for energy cooperation; Agreement for cooperation in the field of tourism; Agreement for cooperation between TSE and Ukraine; State committee for standardization, metrology and certification; Agreement for air transportation; Agreement for cooperation in the field of veterinary; Agreement for commercial sea freight (Türkiye Cumuriyeti Ticaret Bakanlığı 2022). We should also highlight that on 3 February 2022, during the visit Erdogan to Ukraine, these two countries signed additional eight agreements to strengthen bilateral relations in different spheres (Mutlu 2022). Table 1 presents the data for the extent of trade between Turkiye and Ukraine in millions of US dollars.

Table 1: Turkiye and Ukraine Trade (Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022)

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Trade Extent	4.700	3.926	4.401	4.437	4.881
Export	1.181	1.330	1.465	1.684	2.156
Import	3.519	2.596	2.936	2.753	2.725

It can be concluded that the holdings and companies of Turkish origin actively work in Ukraine. Dogus, Altinbas, Enka, Aysel, Cukurova and many other companies are investing in numerous sectors. Following the aim of strengthening the economic and human relations with Ukraine, the travel regime with an ID was implemented on the 1st of June 2017. In 2019, Turkish export to Ukraine reached 2.156 billion US dollars, whereas import from Ukraine was 2.725 billion US dollars, and the extent of mutual trade was 4.881 billion US dollars (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022). The total amount of investments from approximately 600 Turkish companies, most small and middle, which work in Ukraine, is approximately 3 billion US dollars, including those implemented in third countries. The total value of 184 projects undertaken by Turkish companies in Ukraine until now is 6.28 billion US dollars (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022). Simultaneously, it should be emphasized that tourism also represents an essential sphere of cooperation between Turkiye and Ukraine. The number of Ukrainian tourists that visited Turkiye in 2018 reached 1 million and 386 thousand, whereas, in 2019, it was 1.547.996 Ukrainian tourists (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022).

TURKIYE'S ROLE IN THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR

On 24 February 2022, Russian troops launched an attack on Ukraine under the command of President Vladimir Putin, who announced a 'special military operation' despite the warnings of world statesmen that this move could lead to the biggest war in Europe since the Second World War. A few minutes after Putin's short television broadcast, at around 4 o'clock Central European Time, the first explosions were heard near Ukraine's biggest cities, including Kiev. In Putin's first statement related to the aggression on Ukraine, he emphasized that it is about the 'demilitarisation and denazification' of Ukraine by repeating the claims that the radical right controls the government in Kiev. Simultaneously in his announcement, Putin highlighted that "Russia can not feel safe, it cannot develop and exist under the constant threat which comes from the territory of modern Ukraine" (Rusija ja napadna Ukraina 2022), followed by a warning against the western countries with the statement: "To those who are intending to interfere from outside: if you do that, you will face the consequences bigger than any of those you have faced in history. All relevant decisions have been brought. I hope that you can hear me" (Rusija ja napadna Ukraina 2022). On the same day, the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that major cities of Ukraine were targets of ballistic missiles. On the other hand, the Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dmytro Kuleba, announced that: "Putin has launched a total invasion against Ukraine" (Rusija ja napadna Ukraina 2022), adding that" "peaceful Ukrainian cities are under attack. This is aggression. Ukraine will defend itself, and it will win. The world can and must stop Putin. Now it is the time to act" (Rusija ja napadna Ukraina 2022). The UN Security Council held an emergency session, where the UN General Secretary, Antonio Guterres, stated: "President Putin, give peace a chance. Too many people have died" (Rusija ja napadna Ukraina 2022). Besides the UN, at the same time, Western factors called for Russia to stop the invasion of Ukraine. The President of the USA, Joe Biden, stated through an announcement that the whole world is solidarizing with the Ukrainian people with the statement: "President Putin chose a premeditated war, which will lead to catastrophic loss of human lives and suffering. Russia is the only one responsible for the death and destruction this attack will bring, and the USA and its

allies and partners will receive a response in a united and decisive manner. The world will hold Russia responsible" (Rusija ja napadna Ukraina 2022). At the same time, the European Union, through its first diplomat Josep Borrell stated that: "these are some of the darkest moments for Europe since the Second World War" (Rusija ja napadna Ukraina 2022), while the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen stated that: "We will seek responsibility from Kremlin" (Rusija ja napadna Ukraina 2022).

As far as Turkiye's policy on the war between Russia and Ukraine is concerned, in the beginning, we should highlight that Turkiye has an evident attitude towards the preservance of the territorial integrity of Ukraine. After the meeting with Ukrainian Prime Minister Zelenskyy, during the days when tensions between Russia and Ukraine began, Turkish president Erdogan clearly stated the stance of Turkiye that the territorial integrity of Ukraine must be respected. Also, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that Turkiye supports the territorial integrity of Ukraine and does not accept the Crimea annexation to Russia (Baltacı 2022). On 24 February 2022, the western countries, led by the USA, began to introduce sanctions against numerous state institutions, officials and oligarchs due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In this context, we should emphasize that Turkiye did not introduce economic sanctions against Russia and has chosen to implement a policy of 'active neutrality' by balancing its relations with Ukraine and Russia. (Rusya, Batı yaptırımlarını Türkiye üzerinden delmeye çalışıyor uyarısı 2022). This neutral diplomacy of Turkiye created a disturbance in the political circles in the US, so the US Deputy Secretary of the Treasury, Wally Adeyemo, warned the Deputy Secretary of the Treasury of Turkiye Yunus Elitas that Russian institutions and individuals are trying to use Turkiye in order to bypass western sanctions introduced as a result of the invasion on Ukraine" (Rusya, Batı yaptırımlarını Türkiye üzerinden delmeye çalışıyor uyarısı 2022).

During the war between Russia and Ukraine, based on its 'active neutrality', Turkiye has played and is still playing an important role in the region and international relations. One of Turkiye's more significant diplomatic initiatives was its intensive effort for a ceasefire through the introduction of the role of mediatory between Russia and Ukraine. The Turkish city of Antalya was the first chosen for negotiations at the highest level between the two countries. Under the mediation of Turkiye, on 10 March 2022, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Dmytro Kuleba, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia met in Antalya and started negotiations for a ceasefire. However, the negotiations mentioned above did not provide the expected results. On 29 March 2022, under Turkiye's mediation, the Ukrainian and Russian delegations had two-day negotiations in Istanbul, where both sides stated their conditions for a ceasefire. David Arakhamia, a member of the Ukrainian delegation, stressed that Turkiye is considered one of the nations for which Ukraine wishes to be a guarantor. Simultaneously, the Ukrainian delegation has called on Russia to stop the occupation unconditionally.

On the other hand, Russia called Ukraine to accept the annexation of Crimea, disarm it, give up NATO membership and adopt a new approach towards the Donbas region (Baltacı 2022). Although the negotiations have increased the hope for a possible cease of military actions, the intensification of Russia's military activities on Ukrainian territory and the increase of western military aid to Ukraine were some factors that resulted in continued fights between the two countries.

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One of the more important segments that marked the Ukrainian resistance against the Russian invasion is the success of the Turkish armed drone 'Bayraktar TB2', considered one of the most famous symbols of Ukrainian resistance against the Russian invasion (Nailia 2022). The significant losses of Russian soldiers and the destruction of the expensive and modern Russian military equipment by the relatively cheap Turkish drones resulted in the motivation of the Ukrainian forces; on the other hand, they created disturbance between Russian political and military structures. (Rusya, Türkiye'nin Ukrayna'ya drone satışından rahatsızlığını Ankara'ya bildirdi mi? 2022). As a sign of gratitude, the Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, decorated Haluk Bayraktar, the executive director of the leading Turkish company for the defense industry Baykar, with an Order of Merit (Zelensky awards CEO of Turkey's Baykar with an Order of Merit 2022).

Simultaneously, Turkiye has played a significant role in the functioning of the so-called 'grain corridor', with the aim of activization of Ukrainian grain export and mitigating the world grain crises. On 22 June 2022, in Istanbul, an agreement between Ukraine, Russia, Turkiye and the UN was signed to re-export Ukrainian grain. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the General Secretary of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, signed the agreement. At the signing ceremony, Turkish President Erdogan stated that the agreement would prevent billions of people from facing starvation, stressing that: "We are proud to be a key of the initiative that will play a great role in solving the global crises of food which have occupied the world for a while. The agreement will not only prevent billions of people face starvation, but it will also mitigate global inflation" (Vo Istanbul potpisan istoriski dogovor2022), adding that the mutual coordination center will execute implementation of the agreement for grain in Istanbul (Vo Istanbul potpisan istoriski dogovor 2022). In this context, we should emphasize that the Russian President sent fierce criticism against the western world, stating that almost all of the Ukrainian grain will go to EU countries (Putin'den Batı'ya 'tahıl' tepkisi: Erdoğan ile görüşeceğim 2022).

CONCLUSION

Throughout history, the strategic importance of the Black Sea region has forced many global and regional factors to create domination policies in this region. Besides this region's geopolitical and geostrategic location, various underground resources and population potential have turned the Black Sea into a critical strategic, economic, political and transportation center. Regional and global forces at the end of XX and the beginning of the XXI century created various policies and strategies towards the Black Sea region. In Turkiye's foreign policy, Ukraine is considered one of the most important countries in the Black Sea region. At the same time, Crimean Tatars represent one of the most important components of Turkish-Ukrainian relations.

On the other hand, the fact that both countries play a mutually active role in international and regional organizations is one of the most important dimensions of bilateral relations. Regarding trade and economic relations between Turkiye and Ukraine are concerned, we should highlight that the world economic and financial crises in 2007-2008, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 had and are currently having negative reflections on these relations. However, when we consider the political relations between the

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two countries, we can presume that the economic relations will develop upward, especially after the eventual cease of the crises in Ukraine caused by the Russian invasion.

Regarding Turkiye's attitude towards the Russo-Ukrainian war, we should highlight that Turkiye has a prominent stance towards the preservance of the territorial integrity of Ukraine. During the war between Russia and Ukraine, based on its new strategy named 'active neutrality', Turkish diplomacy has played and still plays a vital role in the region and on the international stage. During the war, one of Turkiye's more important diplomatic initiatives was its intensive effort for a ceasefire by implementing its role of mediator between Russia and Ukraine. Simultaneously, one of the more important segments that marked the Ukrainian resistance against the Russian invasion is the success of the Turkish armed drone 'Bayraktar TB2', considered one of the most famous symbols of Ukrainian resistance against the Russian invasion. Significant losses of Russian soldiers and the destruction of the expensive and modern Russian military equipment by the relatively cheap Turkish drones resulted in the motivation of the Ukrainian forces. On the other hand, created a disturbance between Russian political and military structures.

Also, Turkiye played a vital role in the functioning of the so-called 'grain corridor' with the aim of activization of Ukrainian export of grain and mitigating the world's grain crises. Finally, we should highlight that Turkiye's new diplomacy created during the Ukrainian crisis and named 'active neutrality' is a strategy that needs to be supported by regional and global political factors in a time when dialogue is missing between Russia and the Western world, without forgetting that the need for the Turkish role will increase, even more, bearing in mind the fact that the coming 2022-2023 winter in the world, especially the West can face series of consequences in the energy sector.

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