

The Role of Energy in the Strengthening of Turkey-Russia Relations, 2016-2021

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Abstract

During 2016-2021, energy security and power were a priority for states. All this period, it was Turkey's strategy to seek independence in the international system, while Russia's was to establish a multipolar world. In this framework, their relationship improved, going from a low point in November 2015, after the downing of a Russian Sukhoi by a Turkish F-16 in the Turkish-Syrian borders, to a state of 'smart alignment and flexible competition' by the end of 2021. In the same era, there was a bloom in the Russian-Turkish energy relationships, leading to the rise of projects, like the gas pipelines Turkish Stream 1 and 2, the Akkuyu nuclear power plant (NPP). The article presents the importance of energy in the evolution of Russian-Turkish relations.

Keywords

Turkey-Russia relations, Turkey's strategy, Russia's strategy, energy security, energy power, Turkey-Russia energy cooperation

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Introduction

During 2016-2021, energy security and power were a priority for states. The financial risk that went with the import and export of energy-related raw materials and their potential utilisation for political extortion were at the centre of international attention. Raw material can be relevant to the security of a state if its contribution to the Primary Energy Supply (TPES) is equal to or more than 1/3, and that 1/3 or more comes from non-replaceable imports or strategic storage facilities. Imports security: In case of threat or loss of it, the state is threatened with or experiences economic disaster. The revenues from its export account for 1/3 or more of the state's budget revenues. Exports security: In case of threat or loss of its export markets, the state is threatened with or experiences economic disaster. Similarly, raw materials can increase the power of a state if it has an advantage in production, infrastructure, and technology, and the state can use this advantage to increase its international political influence. Consequently, the degree of availability (existence), accessibility (supply ability), affordability (price) and acceptability (environment, etc.) of energy raw materials significantly influenced international policy.²

² Michael Klare, 'Σκληρή Δύναμη, Ήπια Ισχύς κι Ενεργειακή Δύναμη' (Hard Power, Soft Power, and Energy Power) *Foreign Affairs: The Hellenic Edition*, 6 March 2015 available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.gr/articles/70213/michael-t-klare/skliri-dynami-ipia-isxys-ki-energeiaki-dynami?page=show>. Theodoros Tsakiris, *Ενεργειακή Ασφάλεια και Διεθνής Πολιτική* (Energy Security and International Policy) (Athens: Papazisis, 2018), 19-22, 38. Aziiz Sutrisno, Önder Nomaler, Floor Alkemade, 'Has the Global Expansion of Energy Markets Truly Improved Energy Security?' (2021) *Energy Policy*, Vol.148 (1), 1-2.

In the same period, Russian-Turkish relations improved dramatically. Going from the low point that the two nations found themselves at, in November 2015, after the downing of a Russian Sukhoi by a Turkish F-16 on the Turkish-Syrian border, and Russian sanctions imposed on Turkey, they subsequently rose to a state of ‘smart alignment and flexible competition’ by the year 2021. All this period, it was Turkey’s strategy to seek independence in the international system, while Russia’s was to establish a multipolar world.

Inevitably, the Russian–Turkish rapprochement currently is of interest to international relations experts and public opinion. The reason that this is interesting is twofold. On the one hand, it has developed in parallel to the escalation of the NATO-Russia rivalry centred on Ukraine —while Turkey is a member of NATO. On the other hand, Russian-Turkish relations are traditionally antagonistic. The two countries have historically belonged to different coalitions, fought often, and have different interests in Libya, Syria, and Ukraine, they battle over influence in Central Asia, the Black Sea, and the Caucasus Region, and they diverge on both the Chechen and the Kurdish conflicts. Consequently, both literature and the public debate revolve around the depth and dynamic approach and focus on analysing the stability of this relationship.

Energy as a resource has been by far the main point of cooperation and growth leverage of the bilateral relationship between the two countries since 1984, when it effectively was established. Moscow holds its place among Ankara’s key hydrocarbon suppliers, a role that was retained through the collapse of their relationship in 2015, while their energy relationships skyrocketed -Turkish Stream pipelines, Akkuyu NPP- after their political rapprochement in the next period. Therefore, the development of their relationship on energy matters concerns many

articles and positions, while its economic and political framework has been extensively covered.³

However, the effect it had on Russian-Turkish relations has not been illuminated enough. This article aims to contribute to this process by promoting two objectives: To shed light on the relationship of energy as a resource within the course of Russian-Turkish relations, and to make it distinct as causational or accidental. Then, to find the effect of energy as a resource on the course of their general relationships. Thus, two questions are asked for an answer: What is the effect of Turkey-Russia energy relations on their general relations? Are these the defining aspects of their overall relationship? Accordingly, two hypotheses are assessed: 'In the period 2016-2021, the development of Turkey-Russia energy relations served their strategies. Turkey-Russia energy relations pushed the development of their general relations at the same time since their political cooperation was already flourishing.' The first hypothesis is verified by the method of controlled comparison in the context of a case study for theory testing. As can be seen below, their energy relationship supported their energy security and power, while this was critical to the economic

³ Mehmet Bardakçı, 'Is a Strategic Partnership Between Turkey and Russia Feasible at the Expense of Turkey's Relations with the EU and NATO?' (2021) *Comp. Southeast Europe. Stud.*, Vol.69 (4), 537-544. Alperen Zengin Kürşad, Topsakal İlyas, 'The Intersection of Grand Strategies in Turkey-Russia Relations: Reflections of Smart Alignment and Flexible Competition in the International Arena' (2021) *Insight Turkey*, Vol.23 (4), 162-164. Pavel Baev, 'Russia and Turkey: Strategic Partners and Rivals' (2021) *French Institute of International Relations* 35, 11-12, 15, 17-18. Soli Özel, 'The Crisis in Turkish-Russian Relations' (*CAP*, 10 May 2016) available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-crisis-in-turkish-russian-relations/>. Theodoros Tsakiris, 'Η Ρωσοτουρκική Διακρατική Συμφωνία για το δίκτυο αγωγών Turkish Stream: Ευκαιρίες & Προκλήσεις για την Ελλάδα' (The Russo-Turkish Interstate Agreement for the Turkish Stream Pipeline Network: Opportunities & Challenges for Greece) (2017) 26 *ELIAMEP* 6-10.

survival and the degree of political independence of the states, thus pushing Turkey's quest for autonomy towards the international system and Russia's to that of a multipolar world. The second hypothesis is proven by a controlled comparison in a case-control study of an assumed condition, but also by a controlled comparison in a case-control study of a theory. In other chapters, it is made clear that, when their political relationship was in crisis, in 2015, their energy relationship was harmed, and their general relationship shattered. Instead, their political approach since 2016 has favoured their energy relationship, which has strengthened their interdependencies and thus the overall relationship between the two states. At the same time, energy security/power did not determine the general policy of the two countries, since there was no direct energy threat to their position in the international system. On this basis, the article claims that: 'Political rapprochement was the necessary condition for the development of Turkey-Russia general relations between 2016-2021, while energy had a positive contribution.'

Our claim is the product of mixed research. The qualitative method highlighted the strategy, the foreign and energy policy, and the course of political, energy and general relations between Turkey and Russia. The quantitative method sheds light on those energy aspects related to their security or power. Finally, products from the analysis of both methods were examined in combination, merged, and integrated into a single background. This was preceded by a systematic review of literature, official policy texts and reports of international or government organisations.⁴

⁴ Stephen Van Evera, *Εισαγωγή στη Μεθοδολογία της Πολιτικής Επιστήμης* (Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science) (Athens: Poiotita, 2001), 97-99, 122. Elizabeth Halcomb, Debbie Massey, Neesha Gunowa, 'Mixed Method Results' in Debra Jackson, Elizabeth Halcomb, Helen Walthall (eds), *Navigating the Maze of Research: Enhancing Nursing and Midwifery Practice* (6th edition, Australia: Elsevier, 2023), 126, 130-131.

In this research, Defensive Realism theory was used as an investigative tool, a type of Neo-Realism. Neo-Realism accepts states as rational and principal actors in international politics, who take care of their survival and interests. In this process, they constantly interconnect and interact, creating a system, the structure of which constrains their behaviour. This is an anarchic structure that makes their intentions uncertain, raising suspicion. Thus, states establish themselves as functionally similar ‘beings’, prioritising national security/safety, through the pursuit of relative power, thus reducing the relative power of others and pushing them to counterbalance. Ultimately, a security dilemma takes hold, forcing competition within international relationships.

Defensive Realism, however, views the world as less dark. The international system is considered sufficiently secure. Danger to states arises from those other actors that are perceived threatening, not simply powerful —through aggression, power, geographic proximity, and offensive capability. The relative power that states need is sufficient to maintain their position in the system, not the maximum that they can hold. Generally, the balance of power prompts states to balance, rarely to bandwagon to, a threat. Their choice concerns the polarity of the system —unipolar, multipolar, bipolar- and that of structural modifiers —leadership calculations, access to raw materials, economic pressures, border defensibility, local balances- and defensive or offensive superiority all play a part. The system has self-regulatory mechanisms that penalise demand for excess of more than adequate power. Thus,

states tend toward self-restraint, not aggression, while some cooperation is permitted.⁵

In turn, states enter energy-trade relations. Interdependence is the product of these. The motive is primarily profit. The influence on international politics though, is intense. The basis of industrial economies is energy, while economic viability is a fundamental condition for the security of a state. A state's interests can be threatened in conditions of energy insecurity, while the threat increases if interdependence is distinctly asymmetric against this state. The lack of its energy power is not counterbalanced by other sources of power. Its alternative energy partners are worse than its current partners, or they are non-existent. Its political relations with energy partners become fraught with rivalry/deterioration. As a consequence, states are driven to seek comparative, not absolute, gain in their energy relations.

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⁵ Eric Hamilton, Brian Ratbbun, 'Scarce Differences' (2013) *Security Studies*, Vol.22 (43), 437-450. Kenneth Waltz, *Θεωρία Διεθνούς Πολιτικής* (Theory of International Politics) (first published 1979, Athens: Poiotita, 2011), 10-29, 182-183, 197-205, 211-214, 221-230, 267-273). Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1990) at 1-33. Jeffrey Taliaferro, 'Security Seeking under Anarchy' (2001) *International Security*, Vol.25 (3), 136-141.

partners become fraught with rivalry/deterioration. As a consequence, states are driven to seek comparative, not absolute, gain in their energy relations.

The primary issue is energy security. The energy and general balance of power usually favour balancing the threat actor, not bandwagoning. However, energy insecurity causes a crisis or war only if it is a direct -not a potential- threat to the economic viability, to the degree of political independence and international political influence of a state, which all translate to a direct threat to its position in the international system.⁶

The choice of this theory was made to include the landscape of the time when rivalries were heating up, but a major war was unlikely. The international order was receding, but it existed. The system was unipolar and therefore relatively stable, despite the decline in US power, while liberal institutions, rules, and mechanisms were dominant, albeit beginning to thin out. Security, though diminishing, was sufficient for states if their action respected systemic constraints.⁷ Thus, the international environment was in line with the principles of Defense Realism as a whole.

The article consists of five Chapters. The second and third reflect the importance of energy in Turkey's and Russia's strategies, respectively. In the fourth, the role of energy in Russian-Turkish relations is laid out. The fifth Chapter presents the conclusions.

⁶ Waltz, (no. 4) 226-230. Tsakiris, (no. 1) 105-160.

⁷ Graham Allison, 'Just How Likely Is Another World War?' *The Atlantic*, 30 July 2014, available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/07/just-how-likely-is-another-world-war/375320/>.

John Ikenberry, 'The End of Liberal International Order?' (2018) *International Affairs*, Vol.94 (1), 17-20; Waltz, (no. 4) 341.

1. The Role of Energy in Turkey's Quest for Strategic Autonomy

A. Turkey's Strategy

Since the end of 2002, the AKP leadership has been promoting Neo-Ottomanism as Turkey's main ideology. This ideology is adopted as a combination of Ottoman nostalgia, pan-Islamism, and pan-Turanism, which aims to unite its people, overcome Islamic nationalisms, and establish Turkey's leadership over Turkic-speaking peoples in Central Asia, the post-Ottoman area, and Muslims. This choice reflects an imperial perspective on post-Cold War challenges, such as the decline of Turkey's importance in NATO, the rise of new nationalisms, and the process of the birth of a Kurdish state triggered by the Gulf War. The first phase of this ideology, until 2011, aimed for 'zero problems' with its neighbors. Ankara wielded soft power and functioned as the core of a new international political center based in Asia Minor. The second phase, as of mid-2013, concerns the 'Arab Spring'. Turkey supported Islamic conservative groups during the Arab uprisings in the region. The third phase, called 'precious loneliness' as of mid-2016, was a time when the Arab Spring was receding, and Turkey came under pressure. The fourth phase, which continues until now, is focused on Turkey's 'strategic autonomy'. In general, Neo-Ottomanism is a means of understanding the 'world' and documenting Turkey's 'correct' place in history.⁸

⁸ Ioannis Theodoros Mazis, *Μεσογείον Παλίμψηστον: Από τον Νταβούτογλου στον Ερντογάν* (Mediterranean Palimpsests: From Davutoglu to Erdogan) (Athens: Leimon, 2021) at 19-29, 38-42, 66. Janko Bekic, 'Revisionism as a Characteristic of Authoritarian Ex-Empires: A Case Study of Turkish Neo-Ottomanism (1990-2020)' (2021) *Međunarodne Studije*, Vol.21 (3), 130-137.

In the year 2016, the Republic of Turkey was confronted with a rising sense of threat stemming from a multitude of internal and external challenges. Internally, the country was grappling with escalating tensions among various factions, including Kemalists, Gulenists, and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Externally, the expansion of territories controlled by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), an ally of the PKK, along Turkey's shared border with Syria and Iraq, were rising, posing significant threats. Moreover, the potential export of Israeli gas through Cyprus and Greece threatened to marginalise Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean. Concurrently, Russia was altering the regional balance of power through its actions in the Middle East and the Black Sea, saving the Assad regime and crippling Ukraine. The decline of unipolarity was prompting the US to realign its forces and establish new alliances in the Middle East. This realignment, coupled with the easing of pressure on the Assad regime, the alliance with the PYD, the refusal to sell Patriot missiles to Turkey, and the stance on the Russian-Turkish crisis, undermined their credibility as a Turkish ally. As a result, the risks to Turkey's stability, security, and position as a multi-regional power, were escalating, necessitating a new strategic approach.⁹

Turkey implemented a strategy of 'strategic autonomy' following the failed coup d'état on 15 July 2016. This policy demanded the capability for unilateral military action and autonomy in economic, foreign, and security affairs. The necessary means for this strategy were identified as sufficient power and resources, and

⁹ Bekic (no. 7) 137-138. Dries Lesage, Emin Daskin, Hasan Yar, 'The War in Ukraine and Turkey's Hedging Strategy Between the West and Russia' (2022) Occasional Paper *Ghent Institute for International and European Studies* 2-3. Acar Kutay, 'A Historical Analysis of the AKP in Power' (2021) *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, Vol.123 (1), 67-70. Theodoros Tsakiris, 'Inflammable Waters' (2020) *Mediterranean Yearbook IEMed*, 284-287.

freedom of action. The overarching goal was to conduct independent politics and resist systemic pressure.

Consequently, Turkey prioritised stability. The presidential system was established and the conjecture of Islamic and Nationalist sentiment along with the co-government between AKP-MHP enforced central political power. The hunt for the PKK, Kemalist military and Gulenists', authoritarianism, intensified. The government also pursued a low-interest rate policy to boost domestic production while it expanded defense production. The aim was to weaken centrifugal forces and reduce the ability of third/external parties to exert leverage.¹⁰

Regionally, Turkey sought to assert its leadership. It aimed to exert influence on every issue and prevent other powers from achieving supremacy. It took preventive and immediate action against threats. President Erdogan's references to the 'national oath', the 'outdated' Treaty of Lausanne, and the doctrine of the 'Blue Homeland' signaled a shift towards revisionist policies. Turkey preferred multilateral schemes and bilateral dialogues as the framework for these policies, but it did not hesitate to use or threaten with the use of military force to enforce or provoke them. The operations against the PKK/PYD-ISIS and the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq-Syria, the involvement in Libya, the military cooperation with Ukraine, the searches for natural gas in the Cypriot and potentially the Greek Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), the naval blockade of EastMed pipeline surveying operations in the Greek EEZ and that of natural gas research in

¹⁰ Murat Yeşiltaş, Ferhat Pirinççi, 'Turkey's Strategic Conduct under the Changing International System' (2021) *Insight Turkey*, Vol.23 (4), 128-129, 136; Kutay (no 8) 66-68. Pelin Güney, 'Interest Rate Uncertainty and Macroeconomics in Turkey' (2022) *ERF*, working paper No.1558 3. Janna Jabbour, 'After a Divorce, a Frosty Entente: Turkey's Rapprochement with the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia' (2022) *IFRI Notes* 4, 12, 14.

the Cypriot EEZ, hindering plans that would prove negative to its own energy strategy, the demand for a confederation or two-state solution in Cyprus, the support of Qatar in the intra-Arab conflict, and Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh war, all were carried out in this pursuit. These actions were facilitated by the emergence of Turkey's Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV), which proved to be a game changer on many fronts. Turkey prioritised the acquisition of vital space between its borders and 'threatening' areas, control of trade routes, access to raw materials, and its rise to a transportation hub. The pursuit was the consolidation of a sphere of influence of three continents, securing Turkey as a multi-regional power.¹¹

Internationally, Turkey sought strategic hedging from the US. It aimed to shield their relationship through NATO assistance, balancing Russia in certain areas, and fostering defense relations with Russia's neighbors such as Poland, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine. As a counterbalance, Turkey sought rapprochement with China and Russia, leadership among Islamic and Turanian actors, strengthening of Islamic countries in the UN Security Council, penetration into Africa, and a new relationship with the European Union using the refugee issue as a tool. The ultimate goal was to establish an equal relationship with the US and other great powers in the medium term.¹²

¹¹ Mazis (no7) 19-29, 44; Alexandros Diakopoulos, Nikos Stournaras, 'Turkey's Quest for Strategic Autonomy' (2022) 102 *ELIAMEP*, 2-7, 10-20, 24; Bekic (no. 7) 137-141. Jabbour (no 9) 12, 14. Yeşiltaş, Pirinççi (no. 9) 128-129, 135-142. Kürşad, İlyas (no 2) 155-157. Şener Aktürk, 'Turkey's Grand Strategy and the Great Powers' (2021) *Insight Turkey*, Vol.23 (4), 97-98.

¹² Lesage, Daskin, Yar (no 8) 2-4. Diakopoulos (no 10) 6, 12, 24. Jim Zanotti, Clayton Thomas, 'Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations In Brief' (August 2021) *CRS Report* 3-4, 9-13. Mazis (no. 7) 67-68. Yeşiltaş, Pirinççi (no. 9) 133-135.

Nonetheless, the strategic approach adopted by Ankara was not without its limitations. The international system, advocating for fiscal discipline, exerted pressure on the Turkish Lira. In the eastern Mediterranean, anti-convergences were emerging, as evidenced by the tripartite alliances of Greece, Cyprus, and Israel, as well as Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt. Turkey's alliance with Qatar and its actions in the Middle East elicited economic countermeasures from the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The US expressed concern over Turkey's approach towards Russia and its aggressive policies towards its allies and partners in the region. This led to the imposition of sanctions that halted the modernisation of Turkey's air force and encouraged the aforementioned countries to align more closely. Furthermore, Russia exerted pressure on Turkey in Libya and Syria. In light of these challenges, Ankara sought to improve relations with the US and its partners starting in the year 2021.¹³

B. The Role of Energy in Turkey's Strategy

Turkey's energy security and power are related to its geographical location and the overwhelming dependence of its rapidly growing energy consumption on imports. Ankara controls the Dardanelles-Bosporus straits, through which about 3.7% of the world's daily oil consumption passes, while Turkey's territory serves as a land-bridge between hydrocarbon-consuming countries in Europe and hydrocarbon-holding countries in the Middle East and the Caspian Sea. Correspondingly, in 2019, imports accounted for 93% of oil, 99% of natural gas and 58% of coal consumption, when their cumulative share in TPES was 82% —oil 29%, natural

¹³ Jabbour (no 9) 12-15. Zanotti, Thomas (no. 11) 3-5, 11-13.

gas 25% and coal 28%. Against this background, Ankara's energy priorities in 2016-2021 were linked to the security of fossil fuel imports and the development of its power as a hydrocarbon transit country.¹⁴

Turkey's security of fossil fuel imports was concerned with high costs and fear of disruptions. Between August 2020 and 2021, gas imports accounted for 65.2% of the current account deficit on a rolling basis. In 2019, crude oil, natural gas, and coal imports were each more than 70% from three different states. Russia, a rival of NATO, was the leading supplier of petroleum products with more than 30%. It was also the first supplier of crude oil with 33%, gas with 34%, and the second supplier of coal with 36%. Unstable Iraq was the second supplier of crude oil with 30%, and US rival Iran was the third supplier of gas with 17%. Before the US-imposed oil sanctions in 2018, Iran was a major supplier of crude oil with 34%. Additionally, Russian gas was arriving until 2020 via the volatile Ukraine. To reduce its dependence on fossil fuel imports, Ankara focused on increasing domestic energy production, energy efficiency, shielding Russian gas imports, hydrocarbon storage, and overall supplier diversification.¹⁵

¹⁴ John Koutroumpis, 'Russia and Turkey: An Ambiguous Energy Partnership' (*E-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS*, 11 September 2019) available at <https://www.e-ir.info/2019/09/11/russia-and-turkey-an-ambiguous-energy-partnership/> & IEA, Turkey 2021, *Energy Policy Review*, (2021), available at https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/cc499a7b-b72a-466c-88de-d792a9daff44/Turkey_2021_Energy_Policy_Review.pdf 11, 171. Erdal Karagöl, İsmail Kavaz, Salihe Kaya, Büşra Özdemir, 'National Energy and Mining Policy of Turkey' (2017) 35 SETA 9, 9, 16. Kürşad, İlyas (no. 2) 152.

¹⁵ Suha Cubukcuoglu, 'Energy Geopolitics' (*MENAF Manara Magazine*, 5 November 2021) available at <https://manaramagazine.org/2021/11/05/energy-geopolitics-turkish-russian-relations-and-the-economic->

The development of its power as a hydrocarbon transit country was influenced by the opportunities of the time. The EU wanted to diversify its hydrocarbon imports from Russia, while Russia its gas export pathways to the EU from Ukraine, and Kazakhstan wanted to increase its exports of crude oil via the Black Sea. Turkey could be or was advantageous as a route to supply the EU with Russian gas and hydrocarbons from Caspian-Central Asia. Therefore, Turkey acted accordingly. Subsequently, Turkey's energy priorities emerged. The security of fossil fuel imports was linked to reducing their cost and the threat of disruption or rising prices. The transit power referred to Turkey's emergence as a hub for the export of Russian gas, the import of hydrocarbons into the EU, and the upgrading of its straits in the oil trade. The first was a condition for energy security, and the second was for its energy power.¹⁶

Each step that Ankara took in this direction strengthened its economic independence and negotiating position. The trade deficit was limited to the benefit of the Lira, as was the possibility of its internal leverage by energy suppliers —Iran, Iraq, Russia, or trade partners— while its importance as a partner of the West, Russia and the Caspian countries increased, as did revenues from the passage of hydrocarbons.¹⁷ Thus, its internal stability, regional leadership and US hedging were favoured. On this basis, Turkey developed its energy policy. Onshore exploration for shale oil, coal, and gas exploration in the Black Sea and the eastern Mediterranean have

[outlook/](#). Kürşad, İlyas (no. 2) 152. IEA (no 13) 116-118, 139, 173. Tsakiris (no 2) 6-10. Karagöl, Kavaz, Kaya, Özdemir (no 13) 9, 11, 13.

¹⁶ Tsakiris (no. 2) 10. Tuba Eldem, 'Canal Istanbul: Turkey's Controversial Megaproject' (2021) 42 *SWP Comment* 2. IEA (no 13) 127-128, 149-152. Cubukcuoglu (no 14).

¹⁷ Cubukcuoglu (no 14). Tsakiris (no 2) 10. Pavel Baev, 'Russia and Turkey: Strategic Partners and Rivals' (2021) *French Institute of International Relations* 23.

favoured domestic fossil fuel production. Turkey's aggression in the region was also related to the pursuit of participation in the exploitation of its hydrocarbons, while the Turkish state oil company TPAO operated in Iraq, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Libya. Electricity production from photovoltaic arrays —Karapinar, coal—Hunutlu, nuclear—Akkuyu, wind-turbines—Aegean, water—dam construction that raised humanitarian issues in Tigris and Euphrates-dependent Iraq, and geothermal were prioritised. Gas import from Azerbaijan —TANAP pipeline, and liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports increased —construction of three floating storage and regasification units (FSRU) and reinforcement of two gasification plants. Gas imports from Russia shielded —Turkish Stream 1 pipeline. Oil refining capacities increased —upgrade of four refineries and inauguration of STAR. The contribution to EU gas imports from Azerbaijan —TANAP-TAP connection and FSRU construction in East Thrace, and to the export of Russian gas to Eastern Europe —Turkish Stream 2 pipeline, was achieved. Facilitating the flow of oil through the Straits was launched —Istanbul Canal Project. Coal import conditions eased —USA, S. Africa, Indonesia. Multi-year gas import contracts were replaced by shorter ones —Azerbaijan, Russia. These moves improved Turkey's energy security/power.¹⁸

However, its needs persisted. Dependence on unreliable providers remained high. It found itself outside the EMGF and the framework of the exploitation of hydrocarbons in the eastern Mediterranean, while the cooperation of its countries

¹⁸ Karagöl, Kavaz, Kaya, Özdemir (no. 13) 13-14, 17-19; Mazis (no 7) 100-101, 329-330; IEA (no 13) 117-118, 149-152; Eldem (no 15) 2-3; Cubukcuoglu (No 14); Firat Ergene, 'Turkey Softens Coal Import Restrictions' *Argus*, 21 October 2021, available at <https://www.argusmedia.com/en/news/2265933-turkey-softens-coal-import-restrictions>.

with the oil monarchies of the Gulf was progressing. The EastMed project was still alive, and the EU was planning to wean itself off Russian gas. But its survival, degree of political independence and international political influence were not directly threatened by a sharp price explosion, a deficiency in its supply or a deterioration of its transit power.

Thus, the search for energy security and power did not define its general policy, nor was it sufficient to provoke war or crisis. Its contribution to its aggression in the eastern Mediterranean was complementary to that arising from urgent strategic issues, which were expressed in the ‘Blue Homeland’, the ‘Turkish-Libyan Memorandum’ and the pursuit of increasing its control over the maritime space. After all, the price of natural gas at the time considered did not favour investments in expensive projects, such as the EastMed. Subsequently, the energy policy followed its more general policy in 2021.¹⁹

In summary, the balancing of threats, based on changes in system structure and structural modifiers, defined Turkey’s action. ‘Strategic autonomy’ responded to the aggravation of internal contradictions, regional risks, and friction with the USA, against the background of its progress in military technology and the deterioration of unipolarity. Its policies increased friction with the USA/West and regional powers. Autonomy and its resistance to systemic pressures were requested, through internal stability, regional leadership, and strategic hedging of the USA. Energy security/power went hand in hand with them. Reducing the cost of importing fossil fuels and the threat of raising or disrupting their prices, its rise to a hub for exporting

¹⁹ EIA, Türkiye, *Country Analysis Brief* (11 July 2023), available at <https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/TUR>.; Jabbour (no. 9) 13; Mazis (no 7) 335; Zanotti, Thomas (no. 11) 10-14; Tsakiris (no. 8) 283-287.

Russian gas, importing hydrocarbons to the EU, and upgrading the straits oil trade, limited the deficit and the potential of its internal leverage from suppliers or trading partners and increased its importance as a partner. However, its policy was modified in 2021, even though its energy needs persisted. Energy security/power did not define its general policy. Its survival, degree of political independence and international political influence was not threatened by any price boom, insufficiency in supply or deterioration of its transit power. The correction of relations with the USA and its partners in its neighborhood was its reaction to the economic pressure, to the counter-gatherings, to the sanctions it received. Its energy policy followed the general one. Thus, its behaviour was in line with the principles of Defensive Realism.

2. The Role of Energy in Russia's Strategy for a Multipolar World

A. *Russia's Strategy*

Securing its status as a great power is what Russia wanted after the Cold War. The reduction of the post-Soviet space to its sphere of influence and an essential role in shaping international affairs are sought as synonyms. Their demand speaks to Moscow's post-Soviet self-confidence. The primacy of US power is taken as a challenge, while the rise of new powers is an opportunity. Its position in the UN Security Council, its strategic/nuclear and conventional power, and its raw materials, are understood as favourable factors. Its status as a great power was deemed compatible with US international leadership until about 2007. Then, it was pursued through the multipolar world. The partnership with the USA was considered necessary until 2014. Since then, its rise to an equal pole of the system

has been pursued unilaterally. In general, its attitude and place in the ‘world’, and systemic changes are put in the light of its status as a great power.²⁰

In 2014, the US was seen as an agent of instability that wanted a return to unipolarity. Their policy for regime changes and NATO expansion was seen as a threat. The overthrow of the government of Ukraine was blamed on them. The pro-Western stance of its new leadership was an unacceptable development because Ukraine’s geopolitical orientation was considered particularly critical for Russia’s international position. Hence, the annexation of Crimea and the support of the Donbas separatists.²¹

As a result, the ‘multipolar world’ became an intensive, unilateral strategy. Russia claimed a role as guarantor of systemic strategic stability, a leader in the former USSR and international relations based on mutual interest. Thus, it acted mainly on three axes.

Selective cooperation involved the US/West. The goal was to drag them into the acceptance of multipolarity. Conflicts were considered a given — Syria, Western sanctions on Russia. But agreements on matters of mutual interest were sought —

²⁰ Samuel Charap, Dara Massicot, Miranda Priebe, Alyssa Demus, Clint Reach, Mark Stalczyński, Eugeniu Han, Lynn Davis, *Russian Grand Strategy Rhetoric and Reality* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2021) at xiv, 18-21. Robert Donaldson, ‘Boris Yeltsin’s Foreign Policy Legacy’ (2000) *Tulsa Journal of Comparative and International Law*, Vol.7 (2), 288-295, 308-315; Jim Nichol, William Cooper, Carl Ek, Steven Woehrel, Amy Woolf, Steven Hildreth, Vincent Morelli ‘Russian Political, Economic, and Security Issues and U.S. Interests’, *CRS Report*, 27 July 2009, 15-16, 20-21.

²¹ ‘The Foreign Policy Concept of The Russian Federation’, *The Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, 30 November 2016, available at https://www.rusemb.org.uk/rp_insight/. Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians* (12 July 2021) available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.

terrorism, strategic weapons. So, balancing and engagement coexisted against them.

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The integration of the post-Soviet space accelerated. The Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization were the levers. Moscow acted as a guardian, prevented Western penetration, guaranteed order, regulated affairs, and spoke of a 'Russian world'. Traditionally, space is considered a protection zone for its territory from external threats and its economic support —infrastructure, markets, and workers- while today it is also considered a Europe-Pacific 'bridge'. The goal was to engulf it in a Russian sphere of influence.

A multipolar order was promoted along with new powers, such as members of the BRICS. Their existence, especially China's, was recognised by Russia as an opportunity. Moscow did not want alliances or close cooperation, but relations of mutual benefit. Thus, it moved to deepen relations with them.²³

But Russia found obstacles. Western sanctions crippled its 11th largest economy, while NATO reinforcements continued. Its influence in the post-Soviet area decreased, as shown by the pro-Western turn of Armenia, the demonstrations in Belarus, the acquisition of a role by Turkey in Nagorno-Karabakh, the penetration

²² The Foreign Policy Concept of The Russian Federation', *The Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, 30 November 2016, available at https://www.rusemb.org.uk/rp_insight/. Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians* (12 July 2021) available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>; Charap, Massicot, Priebe, Demus, Reach, Stalczyński, Han, Davis, *Russian Grand Strategy Rhetoric and Reality* (no 19) 18-21.

²³ Alexey Bogdanov, 'Contested "Logic of Anarchy" in the Post-Soviet Space' (2021) *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol.68 (6) 487, 491-494; Daria Isachenko, 'Turkey and Russia: The Logic of Conflictual Cooperation' (2021) 7 *SWP* 23-24; Charap, Massicot, Priebe, Demus, Reach, Stalczyński, Han (no. 19) 22.

of China, Turkey, etc., into Central Asia. The sharpening of the asymmetry in the relationship with China and the India-US rapprochement reduced the value of the two countries as Western counterweights. The war in Donbas continued at the expense of the Minsk agreements, while Moscow feared changes in the field and the Kiev-NATO relationship. So, in 2021, it was reconsidering options, massively deploying troops to the Ukrainian border, and demanding a new security treaty in Europe from the US/NATO.²⁴

B. The Role of Energy in Russia's Strategy

Russia is an energy superpower, but also a country whose security is very much dependent on energy.²⁵ In 2020 it was the world's first exporter of natural gas, the second exporter of crude oil and petroleum products, the third exporter of coal and the largest overseas nuclear reactor manufacturer, while fossil fuels and nuclear energy accounted for 87.5% of global TPES —oil 31.3%, natural gas 24.7%, coal 27.2%, and nuclear 4.3%.²⁶ In 2019, Russia's revenues from hydrocarbon export

²⁴ Putin (no 21); Paul Stronski, 'There Goes the Neighborhood: The Limits of Russian Integration in Eurasia' (2020) *Carnegie* 2, 7-12; Andrew Bowen, Cory Welt, 'Russia: Foreign Policy and U.S. Relations', *CRS Report* 1, 14 April 2021, 10-21, 44-46; Andrew Roth, 'Russia Issues List of Demands it Says must be Met to Lower Tensions in Europe', *The Guardian*, 17 December 2021, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/17/russia-issues-list-demands-tensions-europe-ukraine-nato>;

Stuti Banerjee, 'India-US Relations: Convergencies and Divergencies under the Biden Administration' (2021) *Defence and Diplomacy*, Vol.10 (3), 67-70.

²⁵ Jakub Godzimirski, 'Energy, Climate Change and Security: The Russian Strategic Conundrum' (2022) *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol.23 (1), 16-17.

²⁶ BP, *Statistical Review of World Energy*, 2020, available at <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/business-sites/en/global/corporate/pdfs/energy-economics/statistical-review/bp-stats-review-2020-full-report.pdf> 11, 33,

accounted for more than 40% of total state budget revenues. Therefore, Moscow's energy security was related to hydrocarbon exports and its energy power was mainly related to the production-export of fossil fuels, but also to nuclear reactors. At the same time, the EU was a crucial partner of Russia. In 2021, 25.7% of oil and 42% of gas imports came from Russia, when the former reached 36.4% and the latter 24.5% of its TPES. Accordingly, 45% of Russia's oil and 73.8% of its gas went to the EU, when its hydrocarbon exports amounted to 36% of budget revenues. Thus, a hydrocarbon co-dependency existed between them.²⁷

But the EU would suffer more from a gas import disruption from Russia. The value of Russia's gas exports was 34.5% of its oil exports. Its gas reached the EU via pipelines. EU heating relied on gas at 37.6% (largest source). Replacing Russia or the EU in their gas relationship required new pipelines and/or new infrastructure to supply/purchase expensive LNG, a time-consuming and expensive process. The

42, 51; Ivan Nечepurenko, Andrew Higgins, 'Coming to a Country Near You: A Russian Nuclear Power Plant', *The New York Times*, 21 March 2020, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/21/world/europe/belarus-russia-nuclear.html>.

²⁷ Eurostat, 'EU Imports of Energy Products - Recent Developments', 2022, available at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=EU_imports_of_energy_products_-_recent_developments&oldid=564016#Main_suppliers_of_natural_gas_and_petroleum_oils_to_the_EU; BP (no 49) 9; 'Factbox: How Much Oil does the European Union Import from Russia?', *Reuters*, 31 May 2022, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/how-much-oil-does-european-union-import-russia-2022-04-06/>; Isabeau van Halm, 'How can the EU End its Dependence on Russian Gas?', *Energy Monitor*, 11 May 2022, available at <https://www.energymonitor.ai/policy/how-can-the-eu-end-its-dependence-on-russian-gas>; IEA, 'Energy Fact Sheet: Why does Russian Oil and Gas Matter', 2022, available at <https://www.iea.org/articles/energy-fact-sheet-why-does-russian-oil-and-gas-matter>; 'Russia's Oil and Gas Revenue Windfall', *Reuters*, 21 January 2022, available at <https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/russias-oil-gas-revenue-windfall-2022-01-21/>.

same was true for changing a heating source. So, the EU's problems would be much greater than Russia's in the event of a cessation of their gas relationship, especially in winter. Consequently, their interdependence was asymmetric to the detriment of the EU in gas, while the EU was a major power centre and a leading ally of the US.²⁸

However, since 2010 Russia's energy security/power has been under pressure. Fossil fuel demand has been low, as a result of low international growth and the Covid-19 crisis, and climate policies. Ukraine's geopolitical shift increased the risk of the passage of Russian gas to the EU. The rivalry with Saudi Arabia for oil purchases in Europe, China, and India was increasing. The EU's green transition accelerated. Unconventional hydrocarbon producers were strengthening, while new conventional ones emerged. Thus, holding up hydrocarbon prices, diversifying fossil fuel exports, especially gas from the EU and gas export routes to the EU from Ukraine–Belarus, shielding/expanding fossil fuel market shares and reactor construction internationally became a priority.²⁹

²⁸ 'Interim National Security Guidance', *The White House*, 2021'), available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>, 10; Vladimir Putin, 'Valdai International Discussion Club Meeting', *President of Russia*, 27 October 2022, available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69695>; 'Electricity and Heat Statistics', *Eurostat*, July 2022, available at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Electricity_and_heat_statistics&oldid=552866#General_overview.

²⁹ Alexander Alekseev, Aleksei Bogoviz, Ludmila Goncharenko, Sergey Sybachin, 'A Critical Review of Russia's Energy Strategy in the Period until 2035' (2019) *International Journal of Energy Economics and Policy*, Vol.9 (6), 97-99. Enrica Massalin, 'Strategic Analysis on the Energy Security Measures of Russia', 2021, available at <https://ensecocoe.org/data/public/uploads/2021/08/strategic-analysis-on-the-energy-security-measures-of-russia-enrica-massalin.pdf> 12-14, 17-18, 24, 26; Nikolay Kozhanov, 'Russia-GCC Economic Relations: When Quality Matters more than Quantity' (2021) *Insight Turkey*, Vol.23 (1), 192, 196.

At the same time, energy security/power affected Russia's economic security and power, military, and diplomatic capabilities. The stability of its political system, the modernisation of its strategic and conventional arsenal, its prestige vis-à-vis the West and the new centres of power, the possibility of influencing EU policy and thus the Euro-Atlantic plans, the ability to exert 'peaceful' pressure on Ukraine and in Belarus, financing the shift of the Russian economy from fossil fuels to high value-added sectors, related to Moscow's success in the above priorities. Therefore, its energy security/power affected its strategic issues.³⁰

As a result, Russia is actively looking for them. Oil prices, the basis of international gas pricing, were stabilised in partnership with Saudi Arabia using the OPEC+ scheme which ran from 2016 to March 2020, while prices since April 2020 have been moving upwards. For market shares, Russia caused an oil war with Saudi Arabia —March-April 2020- in which Russia retreated by reaching an agreement with it, continuing cooperation in the OPEC+ scheme.³¹ The diversification of gas export routes to the EU from Belarus and Ukraine was promoted with the Nord Stream 2 and Turkish Stream 2 pipelines.³² Increasing the volume of hydrocarbon exports to the EU was attempted with the Yamal LNG, Baltic LNG and Arctic LNG-2 gas projects, the Vostok oil project, the new agreement of 2019 to export 65 bcm/y

³⁰ The Russian Federation's National Security Strategy, 683 *Edict of the Russian Federation President*, 2015, available at <https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf> 6-9, 13-15; Aleksei Bogoviz, Svetlana Lobova, Yulia Ragulina, Alexander Alekseev, Russia's 'Energy Security Doctrine: Addressing Emerging Challenges and Opportunities' (2018) *International Journal of Energy Economics and Policy*, Vol.8 (5), 1. Massalin (no 50) 8-9; Godzimirski (no 24) 16-18, 28.

³¹ Kozhanov (no 28) 196-198.

³² Tsakiris (no 2) 10.

of gas in 2020 and 45 bcm/y by 2024 to the EU via Ukraine. Hydrocarbon export diversification in Asia was also boosted by the Vostok oil and Yamal and Arctic LNG-2 gas projects, the full operation of the ESPO and Omsk-Atasu-Alashankou oil pipelines and the Power of Siberia gas pipeline.³³ Rosatom's overseas reactor construction reached 35.³⁴ All this improved Russia's energy security/power.

However, problems persisted. The explosion of competition with the West threatened the relationship with the EU. Western sanctions deprived it of the knowledge and capital to achieve the necessary production. Asian gas export diversification projects needed time. Thus, the quest for energy security/power was expected to intensify in the future.

However, this did not define its general policy. Russia's position as a great power was not immediately threatened by a drop in the volume of fossil fuel exports, a halt in gas exports to the EU or reactor construction abroad. On the contrary, it was strengthened by the rise in prices. The only moment of threat was their negative status in April 2020, which it got rid of by joining Saudi Arabia, unable to balance it. Ultimately, energy policy would follow its general policy.³⁵

In sum, the balancing of threats, based on changes in system structure and structural modifiers, defined Russia's action. The 'multipolar world' responded to the US'

³³ EIA, 'Country Analysis Executive Summary: Russia', 17 January 2023, available at https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/countries_long/Russia/russia.pdf 2-5, 10-13; Alekseev, Bogoviz, Goncharenko, Sybachin (no 29) 97-99; Vladimir Soldatkin, Natalia Zinets, 'Russia, Ukraine Clinch Final Gas Deal on Gas Transit to Europe', *Reuters*, 31 December 2019, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN1YY1H5/>.

³⁴ World Nuclear Association, 'Nuclear Power in Russia', 2021, available at <https://world-nuclear.org/information-library/country-profiles/countries-o-s/russia-nuclear-power.aspx>.

³⁵ EIA (no 32) 1-2; Godzimirski (no. 24) 28-29; Kozhanov (no. 28) 196-198.

‘attempt to restore unipolarity’, while Moscow had a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, enormous military power, and abundant raw materials. The position of equal power was sought through a multipolar order, US/West selective engagement, and the integration of the post-Soviet space. The stabilisation and subsequent rise in hydrocarbon prices, the diversification of gas export from the EU and its flow routes into the EU, the boost of Russia’s share in the fossil fuel market and the construction of reactors, contributed to the modernisation of the arsenal, its prestige vis-à-vis other powers, cohesion, its influence on Western plans, the exercise of ‘peaceful’ pressure on Ukraine–Belarus, the shift of the economy to areas of high added value. Energy security/power went hand in hand with its goal, but did not define its overall policy. Its international position was not threatened by a drop in fossil fuel export volumes, a halt in EU gas exports or reactor construction, but was boosted by rising prices after 2021. Its energy policy followed the general one, while this was being reviewed in 2021 in light of the challenges it encountered. It is then reasonable to conclude that its behaviour corresponds to the principles of Defensive Realism.

3. The Role of Energy in Shaping Russian-Turkey Relations in Smart Alignment and Flexible Competition

A. Russian-Turkey Relations

President Erdogan’s letter to President Putin on 27 June 2016, was a catalyst for the rewarming of their relations. The former expressed regret to the latter for the downing of the Sukhoi-24 in November 2015, while the latter accelerated the

restoration of their economic relations. Since then, their relations have developed steadily.

The two forces interacted based on mutual interest and developments in the system. Their competition was developing cautiously. Their collaboration was characterised by flexibility and the absence of binding rules. One maintained a defensive position against the other. Their positive relations were sought to be extended to more areas. Next, their relations are described as ‘smart alignment and flexible competition’.³⁶ The retreat of unipolarity and the management of the USA was their main challenge. Turkey sought their hedging, to accept it as an independent ally. Russia sought to balance them, to impose the multipolar world on them. The tactic of both was cooperation with other powers. Both were looking for support to promote their individual goals. More generally, the acceptance of their ambitions by the US was their central demand —Turkey an independent ally, Russia an equal power.³⁷

Subsequently, one functioned as a support for the other. Russia was using Turkey to leverage NATO. Turkey used Russia to promote itself when it did not have the desired US support. Both helped each other expecting individual benefit. A condition for their cooperation was latter benefit.³⁸

Cooperation in economy and defense stood out on a bilateral level. Turkey refrained from Western sanctions on Russia. Russia sold S-400s to Ankara after the US denied it Patriot anti-aircraft systems. Ankara was Moscow’s seventh largest trading partner in 2021, its small and medium-sized enterprises operated in Russia, and it

³⁶ Kürşad, İlyas (no. 2) 157, 161, 164.

³⁷ Yeşiltaş, Pirinççi (no. 9) 120-121, 127, 134. Charap, Massicot, Priebe, Demus, Reach, Stalczyński, Han (no 19) 19.

³⁸ Isachenko (no. 22) 6-7; Diakopoulos (no 10).

received the S-400s despite US sanctions. Thus, Turkey has been an economic supporter of Russia, while Russia has been an alternative supplier of armaments to Turkey.³⁹

At the same time, Moscow and Ankara tried to agree on regional issues. Their presence was facilitated in Nagorno-Karabakh, Syria, and Libya, as one utilised the action of the other. Their talks on the ‘Astana process’, at the Berlin Conference and on Nagorno-Karabakh, made them part of the attempted ‘solutions’ on these three fronts. In everything, they used each other to favour their positions.⁴⁰

Finally, they both supported a Realist international order. The framework of international relations that they supported was based on the national interest, on non-interference in the internal affairs of states, on the indivisibility of security. They called for a greater role for regional powers. Overall, each leverages the other to widen its footprint in the international order.⁴¹

However, their competition persisted. Turkey was in NATO, while its conflict with Russia was intensifying. Turkey relied on NATO to balance regional threats. Its relationship with Russia was distinctly asymmetric. Its dependency on military means from the US and on the economy from the West remained. Russia and Turkey were competing for influence in Central Asia and the Black Sea, and were fighting in Syria, Libya, and the Caucasus. The resolution provided by the UN Security Council as a reform proposed by Ankara was rejected by Moscow. Therefore, their relations cannot be characterised as strategic cooperation.⁴²

³⁹ Bardakçı (no. 2) 536, 541, 546-547.

⁴⁰ Kürşad, İlyas (no. 2) 162-163; Diakopoulos (No 10) 6-9.

⁴¹ Bardakçı (no. 2) 542; Diakopoulos (No 10) 8.

⁴² Diakopoulos (no. 11); Zanotti, Thomas (no 11) 3-9.

B. The Role of Energy in Russian-Turkish Relations

Between 2016 and 2021, Turkey-Russia energy interests converged on several issues. Turkey wanted to shield fossil fuel imports, become a Russian gas export hub, reduce energy costs, and increase domestic production. Russia wanted to shield/increase the volume of fossil fuel exports, diversifying gas exports from the EU, diversifying its gas export routes to Eastern Europe from Ukraine, and building/operating nuclear reactors abroad. Subsequently, their energy relations developed impressively.

On this basis, three projects proceeded. The Akkuyu NPP implementation by Rosatom was pushed. The 15.75 bcm/y Turkish Stream 1 subsea pipeline replaced the Trans-Balkan pipeline that delivered 10 bcm/y of Russian gas through Ukraine to Turkey. The Turkish Stream 2 subsea pipeline was implemented to transport 15.75 bcm/y of Russian gas through Turkey to Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary. The importance of these projects for the two countries was also expressed in the speed of their implementation after the end of the 2015 crisis, when the Turkish Stream project was frozen and the Akkuyu NPP was called into question. Already on 12 October 2016, the intergovernmental agreement on Turkish Stream 1 was signed. Ankara and Moscow utilised each other in the search for energy security/power.⁴³

⁴³ Isachenko (no 22) 14-15; Tsakiris (no 2) 4-6; Georgi Gotev, 'Erdogan Fumes at Russia's "Restrictive Measures" after Jet Downing', *Euraktiv*, 27 November 2015, available at <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/erdogan-fumes-at-russia-s-restrictive-measures-after-jet-downing/>; Marc Ozawa, 'Russia's Energy Relations with Turkey and Iran: Between Commercial Interests and Regional Competition' 16 Research Paper NDC 39-42.

Thus, their energy contrasts disputes were managed condescendingly. Russia wanted long-term ‘take or pay’ gas sales contracts due to the low prices of the time, while Turkey wanted flexible and short-term ones.⁴⁴ Eventually, a compromise was reached. In 2021 a multi-year supply contract of 3.6 bcm/y was replaced by a four-year 5.75 bcm/y.⁴⁵ Also, the case of diversifying EU gas imports through Turkey worried Russia. But Russian oil company Lukoil and TPAO were partners in Azerbaijan’s Shah Deniz field, which supplied the EU via Turkey.⁴⁶ Finally, the Istanbul Canal project worried Moscow about its implications for the Montreux Treaty, for which attempts were made to overcome through consultations.⁴⁷ Their interdependencies became increasingly asymmetrical in favour of Russia, a development tolerated by Turkey.⁴⁸ Consequently, Russia and Turkey avoided undermining their competing energy goals.

Subsequently, the Turkey-Russia energy relationship favoured their energy security/power. For Turkey, import security, lower energy costs, additional transit power supported by the shielding of affordable Russian gas imports, the prospect of domestic nuclear power, and its rise as a Russian gas export hub to the EU. For

⁴⁴ Cubukcuoglu (no. 28).

⁴⁵ ‘Russia’s Gazprom Signs Four-Year Gas Deal with Turkey’s Botas’, *Reuters*, 6 January 2022, available at <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/russias-gazprom-signs-four-year-gas-deal-with-turkeys-botas-2022-01-06/>.

⁴⁶ Dimitar Bechev, ‘Turkey’s Energy Relations with Russia: How should the West Respond?’ (2021) *Frontier Europe Initiative MEI* 3-5; BP, ‘Shah Deniz’, available at https://www.bp.com/en_az/azerbaijan/home/who-we-are/operationsprojects/shahdeniz.html.

⁴⁷ ‘Russia Says Reassured by Turkey About Controversial Canal’, *Barrons*, 30 June 2021, available at <https://www.barrons.com/news/russia-says-reassured-by-turkey-about-controversial-canal-01625069707>.

⁴⁸ Diakopoulos (no. 10) 9.

Russia, export security and power, were helped by increasing gas exports, diversifying them from the EU, and diversifying their route from Ukraine. Thus, their energy relationship served their strategies.

Accordingly, it strengthened bilateral ties. Its interdependence in terms of producer-consumer, producer-transporter, and client-contractor relations, was intensified through the Turkish Stream pipelines and the Akkuyu NPP. Their compromise on the gas trade contract, the Lukoil–TPAO partnerships in Shah Deniz and the Istanbul Canal consultations, confirmed their partnership. Therefore, the development of their energy relationship has spurred the development of their relationship in general.

However, their energy relationship did not define their overall relationship. Energy power/security did not determine their strategies. Their position in the international system did not receive a direct energy threat, and their energy cooperation did not trigger any shift in their position within the system. Their strategies were a political response to non-energy threats to their international position, emerging against the background of changes in the structure of the system and their structural modifiers. Their energy policy and thus their energy relationship was a product of this political response and the political relations it created. The Turkish Stream project and Akkuyu NPP were ‘hit’ by the 2015 crisis, while their restart/acceleration followed the Erdogan letter in 2016. Thus, their energy relationship was one, yet not the main, aspect of their ‘smart alignment and flexible competition’.

4. Conclusions

Between 2016 and 2021, the Russian-Turkey relations rose from their nadir to ‘smart alignment and flexible competition’. The search for ‘strategic autonomy’ by

Turkey and a ‘multipolar world’ by Russia favoured their political approach, as it facilitated their central demands while pushing for a defensive response to their opposition. Thus, Russia chose their mutual political approach to become an equally great power and Turkey to expand its independence in the international system.

Their energy relationship was an aspect of this choice. Their energy security/power has been boosted, enhancing Turkey’s economic independence, and negotiating position, but also Russia’s internal cohesion, military and diplomatic capabilities, and issues that affect the strategy of the two countries. Therefore, their energy relationship served their strategy.

Accordingly, it strengthened bilateral ties. Its interdependence was intensified through the Turkish Stream pipelines and the Akkuyu NPP. Their compromise on the gas trade contract, the Lukoil–TPAO partnerships in Shah Deniz and the Istanbul Canal consultations confirmed their partnership. Therefore, the development of their energy relationship has spurred the development of their overall relationship.

However, their energy relationship did not define their overall relationship. Energy power/security did not determine their strategies. Their position in the international system did not receive a direct energy threat, while their cooperation in the energy sector did not spark a change in said position. Their strategies were a political response to non-energy threats to their international position, emerging against the background of changes in the structure of the system and their structural modifiers. The Turkish Stream project and Akkuyu NPP were ‘hit’ by the 2015 crisis, while their restart/acceleration followed the Erdogan letter in 2016. Thus, the development of their energy relationship was a product of this political response.

In summary, the two hypotheses of the article were verified. 1) In the period 2016-2021, the development of Turkey-Russia energy relations served their strategies. 2)

Turkey-Russia energy relations spurred the development of their general relations at the same time since their political cooperation was already developing. Thus, the main claim of the article was confirmed: Political rapprochement was the necessary condition for the development of general relations between Turkey and Russia between 2016–2021, while energy had a positive contribution. The theory of Defensive Realism has fulfilled its purpose.

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https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=EU_imports_of_energy_products_-_recent_developments&oldid=564016#Main_suppliers_of_natural_gas_and_petroleum_oils_to_the_EU

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