

## CHAPTER 11

# UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF CONFLICT-COOPERATION NEXUS IN TURKEY-RUSSIA RELATIONS: 2011-2016\*

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to analyze Turkey-Russia relations within the period of 2011 and 2016. Since the selected time period in bilateral relations has been characterized by rapid rapprochement after a severe political crisis, the study particularly concentrates on the impact of the Su-24 crisis caused by the downing of a Russian jet in 2015. The paper in this aspect aims to give an answer to the question of how bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia have recovered from the detrimental effects of the 2015 crisis towards the achievement of high-level political cooperation within a short period of time. In order to analyze this research question, the study draws on the theoretical framework of neoclassical realism as a theory of foreign policy analysis in international relations. The study in this respect is divided into three parts. While the first part intends to evaluate how the change of relative distribution of power in bilateral relations have affected the course of political relations between Turkey and Russia, the second part focuses on the impact of domestic factors that stem from internal political developments in both countries. The last part, on the other hand, attempts to complement this analysis with an overlook on the individual dynamics by analyzing the impact of state leaders for the resolution of the Su-24 foreign policy crisis. In this endeavor, the paper attempts to validate the argument that the dramatic change in Turkey-Russia relations is the outcome of intertwined relations between structural factors, internal political developments, and individual dynamics.

**Keywords:** Turkey-Russian relations, Russian Jet Su-24

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## Introduction

Being the only Russian aircraft to be shot down by a NATO member since the Cold War, the Su-24 crisis led to the beginning of a process determined by economic sanctions and worsened political relations. On 24 November 2015, Turkish authorities announced that they had shot down an unidentified aircraft as a response to a violation of Turkish airspace, and later that the aircraft was a Su-24 Russian aircraft. Turkey's justification had formed around the argument that, although several warning signals had been sent to the aircraft crew to halt its airspace violation, they had not received any reply from the aircraft and decided to shoot it down. Turkey later stated that there had been two unidentified aircrafts violating Turkish airspace. After Turkey's warning signals, one of the aircrafts left the airspace while the second one continued to violate Turkish airspace for 17 seconds and was shot down due to its continual violation (Henry, 2016).

After the downing of the Russian aircraft, different arguments were framed by the authorities of the two states. According to Turkish officials, the incident was in compliance with international law because Turkey previously declared that it would implement new engagement rules due to the ongoing destabilization and military threats to Turkish territorial space. For this reason, Turkey drew on the argument that, although several warning signals (10 times in 5 minutes) were sent to the Russian aircraft to end its violation of Turkish airspace, the Russian jet did not give a reply. Though Turkey's new engagement rules clearly stated that any airspace violation would be responded to without any prior warning, Turkish authorities emphasized that several warning signals had been sent to the Russian aircraft. As the last resort, however, Turkey had to hit the Russian jet (Henry, 2016).

In contrast to Turkey's arguments on the downing of the Russian jet, Russia's policy-makers have insisted that it was a disproportionate reaction given by Turkish authorities. Besides, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that the jet had not even violated Turkish airspace since it was at that time flying over one kilometer distance from Turkish territorial space. Additionally, Russian authorities rejected that there had been a warning signal sent by Turkish authorities prior to the downing of aircraft. Moreover, Russian authorities claimed that similar airspace violations in small scale had been observed due to operational requirements but Turkey had not resorted to any similar strict measures. Russia therefore drew on the argument that it had absolutely been a disproportionate act and incompatible with the requirements of customary international law (Özertem, 2017).

In response to the downing of the Russian jet, the Russian President issued a Presidential Decree that envisioned a package of economic sanctions against Turkey. As a retaliatory step in the economic sphere, Russia's restrictions had targeted particular import goods in addition to sanctions that directly targeted Turkish citizens working for Russian businesses. Russia's sanctions even included a ban on Russian tour operators selling trips to Turkey and also the cancellation of the visa exemption that had previously been agreed on by the two countries (The Guardian, 2018).

Considering that Russia was Turkey's second largest trading partner, the economic effects of the Su-24 crisis brought about serious consequences as did its political impact. During the implementation of sanctions, it had been considered that Turkish economy was affected due to the loss of the large numbers of Russian tourists who regularly visit Turkey in addition to the sharp decrease in the amount of imported goods to Russia in the field of agriculture (BBC News, 2018).

In addition to economic consequences of the Su-24 crisis, the main political consequence of this incident has been observed in Turkey's declining political and military capacity in Syria. Although Turkey had attempted to carry out more effective policies before the Su-24 incident, the crisis put Turkey's operational capacity in an unfavorable position, and it has even restricted Turkey's ability to control PYD activities in order to secure its southern border from PKK threat (Sputnik News, 2017).

As an example of how the Su-24 crisis has hindered Turkey's active military operations in the field, Russian authorities have disregarded the possibility of a military operation in northern Syria by designating it as an attempt of invasion which needs to be resisted by Russia. On February 4, 2016, the Russian Defense Ministry spokesman, Igor Konashenkov stated that:

*“We have good reasons to believe that Turkey is actively preparing for a military invasion of a sovereign state – the Syrian Arab Republic. We're detecting more and more signs of Turkish armed forces being engaged in covert preparations for direct military actions in Syria”* (Sputnik News, 2017).

Moreover, Russia's attempts to discourage Turkey's political capacity in Syria have even reached the level of overt accusations against Turkish authorities. For example, the Russian Defense Ministry spokesman, Konashenkov, claimed the existence of an alleged link between Turkey and some terrorist organizations in Syria.

Surprisingly however, the same short period between 2011 and 2016 was characterized by another turning point in Turkey-Russia relations. After a deteriorating period, the two states managed to carry out various cooperation attempts in the political and military fields. Moreover, the political cooperation attempts between the two states culminated in joint military operations in Syria along with the dynamic phase of the Astana process, which aims to end the Syrian war under the aegis of Turkey, Russia, and Iran.

Therefore, in a short span of time, political relations between the two states witnessed a rapid transition period from economic sanctions towards the actualization of high-level political cooperation.

In order to find a viable answer to the question of which factors led to the rapid betterment of bilateral relations from the negative atmosphere of the Su-24 crisis to the positive atmosphere of ongoing political cooperation, the study drew on the theoretical framework of neoclassical realism as a theory of foreign policy analysis.

Through finding an answer to this question, the study intended to understand whether the factors that led to the rapid development of Turkey-Russia relations after a process of political crises could be examined under the categories of systematic, state-level, and individual factors.

By establishing a correlation between dependent and independent variables, neoclassical realism distinguishes itself from other variants of realist theories. According to the representatives of this theoretical view, the analysis of international relations needs to be supplemented by additional variables. Norrin Ripsmann explains these variables under the categories of leader images, strategic culture, state-society relations, and domestic institutions (Ripsmann, Jeffrey & Lobell, 2016).

While the term “leader image” deals with the influence of decision-makers in international politics, the term “strategic culture” concentrates on the ability of political and military institutions to mobilize societal resources for particular policy aims. On the other hand, “state-society relations” focus on the impact of domestic actors and interest groups over foreign policy-making processes (Ripsmann, Jeffrey & Lobell, 2009).

From the point of these arguments, the study added two intervening variables for the analysis of Turkey-Russia relations. While the first intervening variable concentrates on the impact of leader images in the crisis-resolution process, the second intervening variable aims to interrogate how respective state-society relations in Turkey and Russia affect their foreign policy outcomes.

The intent of adding the impact of leader images as an intervening variable has the purpose of assessing the role of state leaders in overcoming of the Su-24 crisis. The incorporation of the second intervening variable (i.e., state-society relations), on the other hand, aims to examine whether the autonomous positions of foreign policy executives from the constraining factors in domestic politics such as institutional oversight on foreign policy decisions enabled the two state leaders to achieve rapid normalization in bilateral relations.

Another point that distinguishes neoclassical realism from structural realism becomes visible in the notion of the balance of power. According to a neorealist view, states tend to enact counter-balancing measures against rising powers (Smit & Snidal, 2008). Because of the zero-sum approach of structural realism, which presupposes that the gains of one state equals the loss of others, structural realism argues that states apply to balance-of-power politics in order to achieve security for state survival (Walt, 1990).

In contrast to the above-mentioned view, neoclassical realists put forward another explanation for alliance formation besides the balance-of-power theory. Randall Schweller, for example, argues that the balance-of-power theory overstates the importance of security problems. This, in effect, leads to a misreading for the explanation of alliance formations (Rose, 1998).

According to Schweller, the achievement of security is not the main motivation of international politics. Instead, he claims that states tend to act in accordance with the expected gains rather than immediate threats. Schweller explains it through the notion of bandwagoning, which presupposes that states tend to act with more powerful actors in order to gain more benefits. According to this view, states apply to the method of bandwagoning in order to benefit from opportunities in the international system (Schweller, 1994).

The usage of bandwagoning on the basis of expected utility confers another advantage for the analysis of foreign policy problems. This advantage is especially evident for the distinction between status-quo and revisionist states. While balancing policies are enacted with the aim of sustaining the existing international order against rising threats, bandwagoning is implemented by the desire of achieving additional gains from international politics (Walt, 1990).

The utility of applying the concept of bandwagoning for the analysis of Turkey-Russia relations is twofold. One of these fields is observed through Russia's presence in the Syrian Civil War. Since Schweller's theory of bandwagoning rests upon the idea that states that pursue revisionist strategies look to exploit policy opportunities, like power vacuums in

regional politics, Russia's military presence in Syria seems to reflect its regional and global ambitions in terms of Schweller's presumption of expected utility (Notte, 2016).

On the other hand, the concept of bandwagoning confers another theoretical utility for the explanation of Turkey's sidelining with Russia in the Syrian Civil War. In contrast to the initially opposite positions of the two states, the current efforts for further cooperation such as the introduction of Astana peace process under the aegis of Russia, Turkey, and Iran illustrate that Turkey prefers to realign with Russia instead of the predictions of the balance-of-power theory (Flanagan, 2013).

The question of why Turkey prefers to realign with Russia rather than enacting balancing policies despite Russia's increasing political and military presence in Turkey's neighborhood stands as a disjuncture from the perspective of the balance-of-power theory. This discrepancy, on the other hand, constitutes a convenient field of study for the implication of Schweller's concept of bandwagoning.

Additionally, neoclassical realism makes a distinction between restrictive and permissive strategic environments. While restrictive international environments refer to the imminency of foreign policy threats, permissive international environments point out the absence of immediate challenges against state security. From this distinction, neoclassical realists argue that the two types of international environments are expected to bring about different foreign policy strategies. While restrictive international environments compel states to implement short-term strategies between the choices of balancing and bandwagoning, permissive international environments allow states to carry out long-term strategies outside the narrow alternatives of balancing and bandwagoning (Ripsmann, Jeffrey & Lobell, 2016).

For example, the combination of a restrictive strategic environment with the immanency of direct security threats enhances the decisive influence of leader images. In such circumstances, other intervening variables such as the impact of a domestic group's orientation are expected to fall behind the influence of individual dynamics. The figure below demonstrates how the coexistence of a restrictive environment and immanency of security threats increase the importance of individual actors (Ripsmann, Jeffrey & Lobell, 2016).

		Degree of Systemic Clarity (High to Low)	
		High Clarity	Low Clarity
<b>Nature of Strategic Environment (Restrictive to Permissive)</b>	Restrictive Environment	<i>Leader images and Strategic culture</i>	<i>Leader images and Strategic culture</i>
	Permissive Environment	<i>Strategic culture, Domestic institutions, and State-society relations</i>	<i>Indeterminate—all four clusters could be relevant.</i>

**Source:** Norrin M. Ripsmann, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro and Steven E. Lobell, (2016). *Neoclassical Theory of International Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 95.

Given that the study took its dependent variable from the rapid normalization of bilateral relations after the Su-24 crisis, the independent variable is formulated around the question of how the post-Cold War period has affected the relative distribution of power among the two states. More precisely, the study in this regard interrogates the question of whether the dissolution of the Soviet Union reduced the necessity of counter-balancing policies from Turkey's foreign policy objectives vis a vis Russia.

In addition to the formulation of independent variables, the study added two intervening variables for the analysis of Turkey-Russia relations. While the first intervening variable concentrates on the impact of leader images in the crisis resolution process, the second intervening variable aims to interrogate how internal political developments in Turkey and Russia affected the course of their bilateral relations.

From this point of view, the study argues that Turkey is located around a restrictive environment due to the security threats of Syrian Civil War. This situation, in effect, compels Turkey to be torn between the alternatives of balancing and bandwagoning. Unlike permissive strategic environments that give room for long-term strategies in the absence of immediate security challenges, Turkey's positioning under the restrictive environment of the Syrian War required the implementation of either balancing or bandwagoning strategies. In relation to this view, the study in the following part argues that Turkey's realignment with Russia -despite their initially divergent positions in Syria- reflects the realities of this restrictive strategic environment.

## **1. How does Neorealism Explain Turkey-Russia Relations?**

The neorealist tradition in international relations explains the changing dynamics in bilateral relations by taking the relative power capabilities of states as the starting point of analysis. According to this view, the implementation of counter-balancing measures takes

place against rising threats. The rise of threats, on the other hand, is understood by the increase in material capacities. As the gap of material capacities between states, enlarges the necessity of implementing counter-balancing policies also increases due to the perception of rising threats. The decreasing power gap, on the other hand, diminishes the importance of balance-of-power politics (Welch, 2014).

Although neoclassical realists mostly agree with this analysis, they argue that two other factors are required to explain systemic changes in bilateral relations. These factors, according to them, consist of threat perception and domestic variables. Therefore, the evaluation of Turkey-Russia relations after the Cold War era from a neoclassical realist perspective are supposed to concentrate on three interrelated variables: relative power capacities, threat perceptions, and domestic variables (Rose, 1998).

Neorealist thinking suggests that the comparison of material capacities help researchers to draw conclusions about the individual foreign policy choices of states. According to the results of this comparison, it becomes possible to conclude whether balancing policies are required (Ripsmann, Jeffrey & Lobell, 2016).

This logic of comparing material power resources also confers an advantage for the evaluation of Turkey-Russia relations. According to the changing dynamics in these three pillars of material power, it becomes possible to realize why Turkey-Russia relations during the initial stages of the post-Cold War period displayed a relative rapprochement of cooperation like in the field energy politics (Aktürk, 2007).

Accordingly, the comparison of material capacities also enables one to differentiate the initial stages of the post-Cold War period from the early 2000's, when Turkey began to feel the requirement of balancing policies as a result of Russia's assertive policies in Turkey's neighborhood.

According to the studies that aim to analyze Turkey-Russia relations from a structural point of view, the dynamics of change in bilateral relations need to be explained in terms of structural changes after the Cold War period. Şener Aktürk, for example, applied this logic of comparison to the analysis of Turkey-Russia relations after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Aktürk, 2014).

In his studies, Aktürk compared how the three pillars of material power gap between Turkey and Russia changed over the course of the post-Cold War era. Through comparing the shifts in economic, military, and population sizes in this period, Aktürk reached the conclusion

that the initial stages of the post-Cold War period brought about a convenient environment for rapprochement in Turkey-Russia relations. According to him, the main reason behind this rapprochement was the result of the reducing power gap in terms of material power (Aktürk, 2007).

To begin with the economic dimension of this diminishing power gap, Aktürk stated that Russia's economic difficulties led to a considerable decline of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) while Turkey's GDP increased twofold in comparison to the Russian economy during the 1990's.

In terms of military strength, Aktürk argues that Russia's internal problems in the Chechen conflict illustrated how its conventional military capability and power projection ability were exposed to a visible reduction after the Cold War while Turkey's successful military advancement against the terrorist organization of the PKK, like in the case of the capture of the PKK's leader in 1999, displayed Turkey's developing military capacities (Aktürk, 2007).

Like the reducing power gap on the basis of economic and military strength, the demographic features also signaled a similar trend in this comparison. As a result of the secession of the Caucasus and Central Asian states in addition to Ukraine and Belarus from the Soviet Union, Russia's population retreated vis a vis Turkey's steadily increasing population growth.

Since the military, economic, and population sizes between the two states became closer during the 1990's, Aktürk claims that the seriousness of balancing policies against Russia lost its justification among Turkey's foreign policy goals (Aktürk, 2007).

As a result of this diminishing material power gap between the two states, Turkey-Russia relations gained an impetus for rapprochement (Öniş & Yılmaz, 2016). Instead of implementing counter-balancing measures, two states began to interrogate whether they may manage to enlarge potential fields of cooperation. In addition to the mutual efforts to enhance cooperation in energy policies, such the construction of Blue Stream pipeline, Russia became a new alternative for Turkey's attempt to diversify its foreign policy options. Especially in the field of defense policies, Turkey's desire to acquire technology and to transfer and develop an indigenous defense industry that was not backed by NATO members led Turkey to find a new partner in Russia (Aktürk, 2014).

The implementation of the same comparison for the current political events on the other hand does not validate the theoretical propositions of structural thinking because Russia's assertive policies in this period constituted an adverse impact on Turkey's security priorities.

For example, while Russia's increasing naval power in the Black Sea region increased the material power gap in favor of Russia, the 2008 Georgia intervention showed that Turkey's northern borders were exposed to potential political instability (Özertem, 2017).

Moreover, Russia's military capacities in the Black Sea region displayed a visible increase as a result of its annexation of Crimea following the Ukrainian crisis in 2014. As part of Russia's State Armament Program, spanning between 2011 and 2020, a new complementary military program was endorsed in the Black Sea region. In this aspect, the Russian Black Sea Fleet was strengthened by the inclusion of four vessels between 2015 and 2017 (Erşen, 2017).

Furthermore, Russia's Armament Program was intended to improve its naval capabilities to carry out cruise-missile strikes that might confer additional advantages for Russia in order to reach beyond its near proximity. Russia's deployment of the S-400 missiles system to the region is considered an important step in establishing an anti-access/area-denial zone (*The National Interest*, 2018).

These military moves, on the other hand, constituted a contrary position when compared to the political efforts of Turkey and Russia during the 1990's. Especially, the political efforts to establish a regional security mechanism under the framework of BlackSeaFor and Black Sea Harmony, for example, had been backed up by the littoral states of the Black Sea region. In addition to the importance of these efforts in terms of establishing regional mechanisms, they were also the reflections of Russia's diminishing material capabilities. Due to the relative power decline in this period, Russia preferred to achieve regional security through the facilitative mechanism of regional organizations.

The changing power relations during the 2000's, however, resulted in a different direction. As a result of a relative increase in Russia's material capabilities, these regional efforts were put in a less important position. Instead of a regional collaboration among littoral states for the achievement of security in the Black Sea, changing dynamics in Russia's material power led to the implementation of individual policies.

This policy view was also supported after the political results of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and Russia's active presence in Eastern Ukraine and Syria. In this atmosphere, Russia embarked on a decisive modernization program of its Black Sea fleet and also strengthened its military forces in Crimea.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, in this respect, explained this political change by arguing that, "Russia will continue to strengthen its forces around the Black Sea in order

to neutralize the security threat in the Black Sea region from NATO.” (*The National Interest*, 2018).

In addition to Russia’s strengthening its position in the Black Sea region, another area that witnessed Russia’s assertive policies was Georgia. Through its support of South Ossetia’s secession, Russia’s 2008 military intervention in Georgia resulted in the increasing military presence of Russia in Turkey’s northern neighborhood (Allison, 2014). Moreover, Russia’s ongoing military intervention in the Syrian War has led to a visible advancement of its political and military existence on Turkey’s southern borders (Dannreuther, 2012).

Furthermore, the initially diverging positions of the two states in the Syrian War enhanced the potential security challenges that Turkey encountered after Russia’s military intervention in Syria (Ünver, 2015).

Consequently, Russia’s assertive policies in the 2000’s constituted an adverse impact on Turkey’s security priorities. While Russia’s increasing naval power in the Black Sea region increased the material power gap in favor of Russia, the 2008 Georgia intervention showed that Turkey’s northern borders were exposed to a potential political instability. Additionally, Russia’s decision to directly involve itself in the Syrian War resulted in its increasing military presence in Turkey’s southern neighborhood (Aktürk, 2017).

As a result of these factors, it is pertinent to raise the question that, from the perspective of structural realism, why Turkey was expected to carry out counter-balancing policies due to Russia’s assertive movements. However, the question of why current Turkey-Russia relations are characterized by the efforts of cooperation instead of potential sources of divergence illustrates the inadequacy of merely applying systemic factors to the analysis of Turkey-Russia relations.

Since neorealism claims that an evident increase in military capacities is expected to require the implementation of counter-balancing policies, the current Turkey-Russia cooperation in the resolution of the Syrian conflict stands in contrast to the premises of neorealist theory. According to the premises of neorealism, an appropriate response to Russia’s assertive policies in this aspect needs to develop along the line of counter-balancing policies.

Given that relations between Turkey and Russia are overshadowed by Russia’s foreign policy actions in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean, it is proper to ask the question of how current cooperation between the two states takes place despite Russia’s assertive actions around Turkey’s northern and southern borders.

This in turn necessitates the incorporation of state-level and individual factors as intervening variables. For this reason, the next part aims to interrogate the internal political factors that influenced the current course of bilateral relations.

## **2. What is the Role of State-Level Factors in Bilateral Relations?**

Since neoclassical realism claims that domestic political actors within state organizations may represent varying foreign policy visions, a research concentrating on political groupings in Russian politics is expected to yield an answer to the question of how these political groups position Turkey's role in their respective foreign policy visions (Ripsmann, Jeffrey & Lobell, 2016).

The study in this aspect argues that a Eurasianist perspective as the dominant policy view in Russian politics among these political groups attaches a special importance to rapprochement in Turkey-Russia relations.

The origins of Eurasianism in Russian politics lies in the 19th century political debates for the determination of optimal foreign policy orientation that Russia needs to follow between the alternatives of Westernizers and Slavophiles (Zimmerman, 2015).

As a result of philosophical movements during the 19th century, Slavophiles in this period advocated that Russia had a unique characteristic which required a different path of development than Western countries. Westernizers, on the other hand, supported the idea that Russia needed to adopt the features of Western civilization, including its political system and cultural traits (Zimmerman, 2015).

After the disintegration of the USSR, the division between Westernizers and Slavophiles was revived in a new geopolitical setting. In a similar vein to the 19th century intellectual movements, political debates in this period concentrated on the question of whether Russia should follow a Western developmental path or, instead, pursue its own unique characteristics outside the scope of the Western example. For the latter view, the main argument was gathered around the theme that Russia has unique historical and geographical features and these differences require Russian politicians to implement a different developmental path (Nugraha, 2018).

According to the arguments of Westernizers in Russian politics during the 1990's, Russia's development in economic and political spheres rested on the incorporation of a market economy along with a liberalized political system of parliamentary democracy (Senderov, 2009).

For the neo-Slavophiles, the main endeavor was to struggle for reunification with Belarus and Ukraine. This view found its repercussions, particularly, in economic cooperation efforts in addition to attempts for the establishment of a customs union with these states (Nugraha, 2018).

Neo-Eurasianist in this atmosphere took up the anti-Western sentiments of Slavophiles on the basis that Russia needs to implement its own unique developmental path. Instead of theoretical discussions between Westernizers and Slavophiles, the neo-Eurasianist view also preferred to give more importance to the real political problems taking place around Russia's immediate vicinity. For the purpose of reinstating Russian influence in the Caucasus region and Central Asia, this political view also became a theoretical justification for Russia's attempt to restore its status in international politics. In addition to the Russia-Georgia War in 2008, political developments in Ukraine as a result of the EU's rapprochement with Ukraine exacerbated the anti-Western side of the neo-Eurasianist view (Senderov, 2009).

For the aims of Eurasianists, it is apparent that Russia is required to establish strategic partnerships with third countries. Among these partnerships, for example, Alexander Dugin, the main representative of neo-Eurasianist thinking in Russian politics, pays special attention to Turkey's geostrategic significance. According to him, realignment in Turkey-Russia relations is a vital requirement on the grounds of Russia's achievement of a great power status and gaining leverage against Western influence in the context of its regional neighbors. Furthermore, Dugin argues that Turkey-Russia realignment needs to be consolidated through the extension of this strategic partnership towards Iran. In his book, "Eurasian Mission: An Introduction to Eurasianism," Dugin clearly describes this situation as follows:

"Our main regional partner in the integration process of Central Asia is Turkey. The Eurasian Idea is already becoming rather popular there today because of Western trends that have become interlaced with Eastern ones. Turkey acknowledges its civilizational differences with the European Union and recognizes the importance of Eurasianism for its regional goals and interests, as well as in countering the threat of globalization and a further loss of its sovereignty. It is vitally imperative for Turkey to establish a strategic partnership with the Russian Federation and Iran. Turkey will only be able to maintain its traditions within the framework of a multipolar world. Certain factions of Turkish society understand this situation, from politicians and socialists to the religious and military elites. Thus, the Moscow-Ankara axis can become a geopolitical reality despite a long period of mutual estrangement." (Dugin, 2014).

According to this view, the optimal policy option for Russia is to resist a unipolar world order that is dominated by US unilateralism. This, in turn, requires implementing particular policy initiatives that enable the consolidation of a multipolar international system. However, the establishment of such an international order is considered to lie in the restoration of Russia's lost influence in Eurasia. Eurasianists, in this regard, see Russia's growing assertiveness as a prerequisite for the realization of their foreign policy visions in order to gain a great power status on an equal basis vis a vis the Western states (Dugin, 2014). More precisely, the foreign policy orientation of Eurasianists serves for Russia's grand strategic adjustment to gain an equal status in world politics. This policy view, in turn, renders Eurasianism to adopt a pragmatic policy view. This pragmatic side, on other hand, enables the selection of balancing and bandwagoning policies under the requirements of different circumstances. Instead of a fixed orientation, balancing and bandwagoning turn into complementary instruments for Russia's grand strategic orientation from the perspective of Eurasianism (Shlapentokh, 2007).

These views of Eurasianists, on the other hand, are considered to have a direct influence over the foreign policy objectives of Russian decision-makers. It is therefore needed to analyze how these policy views over the prospect of Turkey-Russia relations represent the policy activities of Russian decision-makers. In this regard, it is pertinent to remember that Russia's current foreign policy activities are described by two key terms. While the first dimension of this term concentrates on the pragmatic side of the Russian President, the other dimension refers to Russia's overemphasis on the necessity of establishing a multipolar international order, which in effect refers to implement counter-balancing measures against US influence (Tellal, 2017).

Given that Dugin also establishes a direct linkage between Russia's multipolar objective and Turkey's role in this endeavor by saying that, "Turkey will only be able to maintain its traditions within the framework of a multipolar world," it is plausible to argue that the foreign policy aims of Russian decision-makers coincide with the policy views of Eurasianists.

From the perspective of this view, the resolution of the Su-24 crisis appears to be strictly linked with the abovementioned policy vision. Despite the initially souring bilateral relations under the pretext of Russia's economic sanctions on Turkey, both states have managed to bring about a rapid normalization in their relations. These rapidly changing dynamics in bilateral relations therefore support the argument that the Eurasianist foreign policy perspective gives a special importance to Turkey's constructive role for the implementation of Russia's strategic goals on the basis of multipolarity in world politics (Tellal, 2017).

In order to achieve this goal, however, the Eurasianist perspective emphasizes the necessity of consolidating Turkey's realignment with Russia, as in the case of the current bilateral relations for the resolution of the Syrian Civil War (Piet & Siamo, 2016).

### **3. The Impact of the 15 July Coup Attempt in Turkey**

Like Russia's domestic views that enabled the normalization of bilateral relations, internal political developments in Turkey also brought about positive results for the development of Turkey-Russia relations. The consequences of the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016 constituted a major turning point for the prospect of Turkey-Russia relations (Kalkışım and Erdoğan, 2018, pp. 339-410). As a result of Turkey's dissatisfaction with regard to the US's attitude towards this terrorist attack, Russia's overt support to Turkey brought about a positive effect toward overcoming the negative impact of the Su-24 crisis (*Foreign Affairs*, 2016).

Apart from the severity of this incident for Turkey's internal political structure, the event indirectly contributed to the normalization of Turkey-Russia relations due to the unwillingness of Western states to accede that the coup attempt had been executed by the terrorist network FETO. While the Western reaction to the coup attempt displayed a low level of support for Turkey's political acts and brought about the resentment of Turkish decision-makers, Russia's overt support to Turkey was evaluated as a sign of mutual willingness to normalize bilateral relations after the Su-24 crisis (Özertem, 2017).

As a result of this support, the Turkish Foreign Minister stated that, "Russia gave us unconditional support during the attempted coup. We want to thank President Putin and all of Russia's officials for that support" (*The Moscow Times*, 2017).

The unwillingness of EU states to articulate their overt support to Turkey's political measures after the coup attempt gathered around two arguments: violation of democratic principles and the in compliance with the rule of law due to the purges of FETO-linked groups in several institutions by Turkish authorities.

In response to these criticisms from the EU states, Turkish politicians stated that the EU members intended to utilize political consequences of the 15 July coup attempt in order to reflect their anti-Turkey sentiments along with their personal hostility to Turkish President Erdoğan.

On August 10, 2016, the Turkish Foreign Minister also argued that, "Unfortunately, the EU is making some serious mistakes. They have failed the test following the coup attempt. Their issue is an anti-Turkey and anti-Erdogan sentiment." (*Reuters*, 2017).

Behind Turkey's souring relations with the EU lies the argument that the member states either preferred to apply a wait-and-see policy or preferred to sustain their silence about the perpetrators of this terrorist act. As Turkey restored democratic mechanisms following the coup attempt, the EU states then felt the obligation of stating their support to Turkey, albeit in an ambiguous way (Kakışım & Erdoğan, 2018).

While Turkey tried to take necessary precautions due to the damages caused by the FETO terrorist organization, the EU states insisted on the rhetoric which continuously called Turkey to return to constitutional and democratic mechanisms without taking into consideration the difficulties that Turkey had to face after the failed coup attempt (Kakışım & Erdoğan, 2018).

As a result of the unwillingness of EU members to overtly condemn this incident, Turkey emphasized that the enthusiasm for the EU accession process had considerably diminished among Turkish people. The Turkish Foreign Minister described this reducing level of enthusiasm for Turkey's accession to the EU by stating that:

“We have worked very hard towards EU (membership) these past 15 years. We never begged, but we worked very hard. Now, two out of three people are saying we should stop talks with the EU.” (*Reuters*, 2017).

Like the EU's unfavorable response to the 15 July coup attempt that led to the worsening of EU-Turkey relations, the US response was also found to be insincere by Turkish decision-makers. The relations between the two states in this aspect were overshadowed by the extradition of the FETO terrorist leader to Turkey. However, the US's reluctance for the completion of this extradition process constituted a significant motivation for Turkey's determination to normalize its relations with Russia.

The Turkish Foreign Minister explicitly articulated how Turkey had been alienated by the US policies by stating that, “sooner or later, the United States of America will make a choice. Either Turkey or FETO” (*AA*, 2017).

Consequently, the political results of the 15 July coup attempt constituted a strong motivation for the betterment of Turkey-Russia relations. The favorable attitudes of Eurasianist groups towards Turkey because of Turkey's intimate ties with Russia would be a prerequisite for Russia's grand strategic adjustment. Like this, the dominant policy groups in Turkey also came to the conclusion that a rapprochement between Turkey and Russia may serve Turkey's national security objectives in contrast to the US's overt support to the YPG terrorist organization along with the EU members' reluctance to condone Turkey's political measures after the coup attempt.

#### 4. The Impact of the Syrian Civil War

Another factor that led to the betterment of Turkey-Russia relations is linked with the US's overt support to the YPG terrorist organization in Syria. As a result of this policy, Russian presence in Syria turned into an alternative policy option in the eyes of Turkish decision-makers.

The main reason for Turkey's opposition to US military support for the YPG terrorist organization originates from its legitimate border security concerns that could lead to border security deteriorating by the establishment of a PKK-affiliated political structure in northern Syria. Since the YPG is a branch of the PKK terrorist organization, there is a growing concern of Turkish policy-makers on the grounds that any advancement by the YPG in northern Syria may find repercussions on Turkey's southern borders. Turkey's concern on this issue was clearly stated by President Erdoğan on June 29, 2015 as follows: "I say to the international community that whatever price must be paid, we will never allow the establishment of a new state on our southern frontier in the north of Syria." (*NY Times*, 2018).

This situation also deteriorated due to the debate on creating safety zones in Syria. The safety zone proposal was put forward by Turkey due to the increasing level of security threats on Turkey's southern borders. However, the proposal was not supported by the US on the grounds that safety zones could draw the US into Syrian Civil War. Considering the US's determination to maintain its off-shore balancing strategy in order to avoid ground involvement in Syria, Turkey's safety zone proposal could not find a favorable reply from US decision-makers.

The US's avoidance in this aspect was described by former President Barack Obama at the G20 summit in Turkey as follows: "A true safe zone requires us to set up ground operations, who would come in, who could come out of that safe zone? How would it work? Would it become a magnet for further terrorist attacks? How many personnel would be required and how would it end?" (*The Guardian*, 2017).

The US's avoidance from the safety zone proposal created another impetus for Turkey's rapprochement with Russia in the Syrian War. Moreover, Turkish policy-makers displayed their enthusiasm to carry out more concrete steps with the Russia-Iran axis for the resolution of the Syrian conflict. In response to Turkey's willingness, Russian policy-makers also supported the fact that Turkey had justifiable grounds for the safety zone proposal. For example, the Russian President on May 4, 2017 stated that, "*We both proceed on the basis that - and this*

*is our common position - the creation of safe zones should lead to further pacification and cessation of hostilities.”<sup>1</sup>*

## **5. What is the Role of Individual Factors For the Resolution of Foreign Policy Crises?**

Although the abovementioned domestic political dynamics constituted a significant motivation for the betterment of bilateral relations, these factors do not explain how the two states managed to overcome the severity of the Su-24 crisis within a very short period of time. Therefore, this part of the study endeavors to supplement the arguments that were deliberated in the previous parts by leaning towards the impact of individual actors in the foreign policy crisis. In this endeavor, the study firstly aims to elucidate how neoclassical realism evaluates the positions of decision-makers in moments of foreign policy crisis. Afterwards, the study attempts to evaluate the respective positions of the Russian and Turkish Presidents during the management of the Su-24 crisis.

In order to analyze the role of individual actors in international politics, neoclassical realism presents two components for their research programme (Rathbun, 2008). These components consist of the clarity of threats and the type of strategic environment in which individual actors are involved. Neoclassical realism makes a distinction between restrictive and permissive environments. While the former type represents the immanency of security threats and challenges, the latter stands for a more loosened situation in which security threats are not directly encountered. Among these two components (i.e., the clarity of threats and type of strategic environment), neoclassical realism argues that it becomes possible to assess the role of individual factors in foreign policy analysis (Walker, Schafer & Young, 1999).

According to this view, the combination of restrictive strategic environment with the immanency of direct security threats enhances the decisive influence of leader images. In such circumstances, other intervening variables such as the impact of domestic groups' orientation are expected to fall behind the influence of individual dynamics (Rose, 1998).

As a prominent representative of neoclassical realism, Steven Lobell puts a special emphasis on one particular decision-maker among a wide range of relevant policy actors. This particular decision maker is called the Foreign Policy Executive (FPE). According to Lobell

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1 Russia's safety zone proposal has envisaged constituting four safety zones in northern, central and southern parts of Syria. As a result of Turkey's Euphrates Shield Operation however, a de facto safety zone has been constituted in order to secure Turkey's southern borders from the advancement of terrorist networks. See, "Turkey and Russia Push for Safe-zones in Syria", <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/05/russia-turkey-push-safe-zones-syria-170504053138097.html> [05.08.2018].

“The FPE (i.e. state leaders) assesses threats at the systemic level, but also at the sub-systemic and domestic levels. Specifically, threats can emanate from other great powers and extra-regional actors, regional powers in the locale, or domestic opponents. The implication is that state leaders can act on one level, but the objective is to influence the outcome on another level(s).” (Lobell, Ripsman & Taliaferro, 2009).

Since the management of policy crisis requires the implementation of effective responses, neoclassical realism argues that the autonomous role of state leaders enhances the capability of implementing efficient policy actions.

Like Lobell’s emphasis on the autonomous role of state leaders in crises, Norrin Ripsman claims that the domestic constraints such as legislative control may retard the enforcement of rapid reactions. Since state leaders in such circumstances are expected to overcome the undesirable consequences of a political crisis, institutional limits on decision-makers may limit the FPE’s reaction ability (Ripsmann, Jeffrey & Lobell, 2016).

Norman describes how the successful management of a policy crisis is strictly linked with the autonomy of state leaders in relation to the effects of domestic dynamics as follows:

“In a democratic polity, the most important institutional rules relate to the autonomy of the executive— be it presidential, parliamentary, or mixed— and its relationship to the legislature and the bureaucracy. Important institutional variables affecting the foreign policy of democracies include the degree to which power is concentrated in the executive’s hands... These variables will affect whether state leaders can harness the nation’s power, ... and whether democratic states can adjust and adapt readily to external shocks or shifts in the international distribution of power.” (Ripsmann, Jeffrey & Lobell, 2016).

According to this view, the management of a foreign policy crisis is highly influenced by the perception of state leaders. The impact of perception, on the other hand, could be derived from the statements of decision-makers.

The statements of the two leaders during the management of the Su-24 crisis also illustrates how perception plays a decisive role in moments of foreign policy crisis since the respective periods of deterioration and normalization in bilateral relations mostly reflect the statements of the two decision-makers (Keser & Meral, 2016).

While the initial statements given by the Russian President seems to bring about a deteriorating course in Turkey-Russia relations, the normalization of bilateral relations

accordingly appears to be influenced by more favorable statements of the two decision-makers. Just after the downing of the Russian aircraft, for example, the Russian President - referring to Turkish decision-makers- stated that “they stabbed us in the back.”<sup>2</sup>

Considering President Putin’s individual efforts to enhance Russia’s great power status within a multipolar world order, Turkey’s decision to shoot down a Russian aircraft seems to be perceived as a symbol of damaging Russia’s credibility in the international sphere (Sakwa, 2008).

This damaged credibility in effect caused to the worsening of the Su-24 crisis. Accordingly, the softening of this political crisis was achieved by Turkish President Erdogan’s statements that endeavored to change this damaged credibility towards a more favorable direction. One of these statements, for instance, was an attempt to emphasize how Russia constituted an important position in the eyes of Turkish decision-makers. In this statement, Erdogan argued that, “If Turkish authorities had known the aircraft was a Russian one, it would not have been shot down” (Özertem, 2017).

## **6. The Examination of President Putin’s Operational Code Analysis**

Before starting to talk about the autonomous role of the FPE in Russia, it must be emphasized that the presidency as an institution is endowed with a primary role in the policy-making process. Moreover, this primary position of the presidency is extended to incorporate the realm of both domestic and foreign policy. The Russian Constitution in this aspect clearly states that “ the president determines the basic guidelines of the state’s domestic and foreign policy.” (White, Sakwa & Hale, 2010).

Furthermore, the constitutional aspect of the president’s position in foreign policy-making gives a personalized character to the presidency. Instead of delineating the limits of the presidential institution, the constitution in this regard endows the president sole leadership in the policy-making process. This personalized aspect of the presidential institution could be inferred from the following article of the Russian constitution which indicates that, “the president exercises leadership of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation” (Sakwa, 2008).

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2 “Turkey Downing of Russia Jet 'Stab in the Back' – Putin”, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34913173> [20.12.2017]. Putin’s statement especially reflects a marginalizing dimension for the prospect of Turkey-Russia relations. This dimension on the other hand seems to be linked with the phrase of “stabbing back” which could be interpreted as a sign of the unreliability of Turkish policy-makers. Accordingly, President Putin has made distinction between Turkey as a friendly partner and inadequate leaders who currently govern the country by stating that “*Turkey has been, and remains, a friend and partner of Russia.* However, problems arise with the leaders of countries whose responses to situations are inadequate.” See, “Turkey Blocks Russian State-Run Sputnik News Agency”, <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/turkey-blocks-russian-state-run-sputnik-news-agency-52559> [20.11.2017].

Another sign of the personal character of the presidency in Russian politics is evident in the presidency's relation with other institutions that are involved in the conduct of foreign policy. For example, the Security Council in Russia is supposed to play an influential role in the determination of foreign policy strategies. However, the constitution also prioritizes the role of the president over the operations of the Security Council. The Russian constitution in this aspect states that the right of arbitrary selection and dismissal of the members of the Security Council belongs to the realm of the presidential institution (White, Sakwa & Hale, 2010).

The personalized character of Russian politics is exacerbated by President Putin's interpretation of state power. According to Richard Sakwa, the strengthening of state institutions from the perspective of President Putin does not mean that domestic institutions and the rule of law need to be strengthened. Instead, Putin's interpretation of a strengthened state equals to a more strengthened presidency as an institution in Russian politics. This in turn necessitates the enlargement of the president's autonomy in the policy-making process. Sakwa, in this aspect, describes the intimate correlation between a strong state and a strong presidency as follows:

“While Putin stressed the strengthening of the state, too often it appeared that his interpretation of state strengthening was synonymous with the consolidation of the regime, and within the regime, the enhancement of the presidency.” (White, Sakwa & Hale, 2010).

Consequently, the autonomous position of the Russian President -without the existence of constraining domestic dynamics originating from constitutional barriers or restrictive influence of public opinion- reminds one of the arguments of neoclassical realism, which argue that the management of a foreign policy crisis requires the rapid implementation of policy responses by an autonomous FPE. Since the overcoming of such circumstances necessitates enacting effective policy measures without being exposed to the constraining effects of domestic dynamics, the personalized aspect of the presidential institution in Russian politics appears to have contributed to the rapid normalization of the Su-24 crisis.

Within the framework of these theoretical positions, it is pertinent to concentrate on the question of how the two state leaders behaved in the moments of foreign policy crises. According to studies that analyze the foreign policy vision of President Putin, the main pillar of the Russian President's policy is based on pragmatism.

The notion of opportunism in these studies reflects the presence of power vacuums that President Putin finds utilizable in the absence of great power resistance. Russia's political

and military involvement in the Syrian War, for instance, presents the implications of this opportunism (Stephen, 2018).

According to a study made by S.B. Dyson and M.J. Parent, the notion of President Putin's pragmatism refers to the elimination of ideational factors from the conduct of Russia's foreign policy. For them, the pragmatic aspect of President Putin's foreign policy stands as complementary to his opportunistic view of international politics, which entails the utilization of power vacuums in regional politics (Stephen, 2018). To put it more precisely, President Putin's determination to utilize power vacuums in regional politics through the notion of opportunism requires becoming pragmatic in his dealings with other state leaders.

The complementary dimension of Putin's pragmatic approach may also be observed through the development of Turkey-Russia relations in Syria. Since the prospect of Russia's political influence in Syria necessitates establishing favorable relations with regional states, such as Turkey and Iran, the opportunistic dimension of President Putin's foreign policy vision brought about the result of being pragmatic in his relations with Turkey's decision-makers (William & Souza, 2016).

The two dimensions of President Putin's foreign policy approach (i.e., opportunism and pragmatism) become evident through the assessment of Russia's assertive foreign policy actions. According to the abovementioned study, President Putin's rhetoric which emphasized the precedence of Russia's sphere of influence under the framework of regional doctrine demonstrates the opportunistic aspect of President Putin's foreign policy vision.

However, in order to find international support for this rhetoric, Putin's pragmatism necessitates obtaining the support of regional states (Dyson & Parent, 2018). As stated in the previous part, Turkey's opposition against the US policies in Syria constituted an important motivation for this purpose.

Therefore, one of the main determinants of individual factors for the normalization of the Su-24 crisis seems to be motivated by the two dimensions of Putin's foreign policy vision. The combinations of these two pillars along with Turkey's alienation from US policies appeared to constitute a field of convergence between Turkey and Russia. In addition to this convergence, Putin's opportunistic side, which refers to the utilization of power vacuums in the absence of great power resistance, seems to have enabled the further improvement of Turkey-Russia relations in Syria.

## 7. The Examination of President Erdoğan's Operational Code Analysis

Studies that aimed to analyze the leader image of President Erdoğan, on the other hand, lay special emphasis on his talent of being resilient in moments of foreign policy crisis. According to these studies, like Putin's pragmatic dimension in the conduct of foreign policy-making, President Erdoğan also benefits from the advantage of implementing pragmatic policies (Derman & Oba, 2016).

Besides his pragmatism on the international stage, however, President Erdogan also takes advantage of being flexible during the resolution of political stalemates. Therefore, while President Putin's foreign policy approach contains the implementation of opportunism and pragmatism, President Erdogan's policy view contains the tenants of both pragmatism and resiliency (Görener & Uca, 2011).

As an example of his flexibility in foreign policy, it would be proper to remember that President Erdoğan attempted to alleviate the severity of the Su-24 incident by stating that, "if Turkish authorities had known the aircraft was a Russian one, it would not have been shot down" (Özertem, 2017). This statement came after a short period when President Erdoğan replied to the question whether Turkey would apologize for the downing of Russian jet by clearly stating that, "We are not the ones who should apologize; those who trespassed on our aerial territory should."

Although these two statements seem to represent two contradictory positions at first sight, they become consistent when looking from the perspective of flexibility, which gives room for maneuverability during the management of a foreign policy crisis (Derman & Oba, 2016).

Another individual factor relating to the normalization of the Su-24 crisis is linked with President Erdogan's domestic policy approach. As stated during the analysis of President Putin's leader image, the foreign policy approach of state leaders is in a strict relation with their treatment of domestic political dynamics.

Like President Putin's emphasis on the maintenance of his credibility in internal political sphere, President Erdoğan accordingly represents another perspective for his role in domestic politics. In this respect, the two leaders share a similar priority. Like Putin's emphasis over the importance of strengthened leadership, President Erdogan puts a special emphasis on the maintenance of stability in domestic politics. This stability, on the other hand, encompasses economic and political dimensions. However, the results of the Su-24 crisis posed particular challenges on the basis of President Erdogan's insistence on stability.

From the perspective of an economic dimension, Russia's unilateral economic sanctions in the fields of agriculture and tourism generated a potential damage to the long-run economic stability of Turkey. From the perspective of a political dimension, Russia's opposition to Turkey's political objectives in Syria posed a political challenge to Erdogan's credibility in domestic politics.

Thus, the flexibility of President Erdogan's foreign policy approach along with his priority of maintaining stability in internal politics constituted a decisive motivation that inclined Turkey to normalize bilateral relations with Russia. As emphasized before, President Erdogan's personal letter for the purpose of alleviating the severity of the Su-24 crisis stands as a supportive example of this political objective.

Consequently, the ability of both state leaders in terms of being resilient during the management of foreign policy crises contributed to the alleviation of the Su-24 crisis. Considering the fact that short-term crisis situations give more autonomy to the decisions of state leaders, the ability of foreign policy executives became a decisive element for the successful resolution of this foreign policy crisis (Walker, Schafer & Young, 1999).

## **Conclusion**

This study has attempted to explain the dynamics of change in Turkey-Russia relations between 2011 and 2016. By asking the question of how bilateral relations normalized so rapidly following a severe political crisis in international politics, the study aimed to put forward a theoretical analysis under the titles of structural, domestic and individual factors.

Through examining the arguments of structural realism, which argues that the decreasing material gap between states reduce the urgency of counter-balancing policies, the study concluded that the systemic factors originating from the shifts in relative power distribution between the two states after the Cold War fall short of illustrating the impact of domestic and individual factors that contributed to the rapprochement of Turkey-Russia relations.

Accordingly, the second part of the study was dedicated to the analysis of domestic factors behind the improvement of Turkey-Russia relations. In this respect, the study claimed that the foreign policy orientations of the Eurasianist perspective in Russian politics have played a facilitating role. Since the foreign policy notion of this perspective argues that Russia needs to resist a unipolar world order under the dominance of the US, the study concluded that the implication of this policy enabled the rapid normalization of bilateral relations.

The last part of the study on the other hand leaned on the question of how individual factors affected the course of the Su-24 crisis. In this regard, this study concentrated on the theoretical arguments of neoclassical realism, which argues that moments of foreign policy crises require the implementation of rapid movements by state leaders. By analyzing the traits of the foreign policy executives in the two states, the study showed that the individual talents of the two state leaders contributed to the current rapprochement in bilateral relations.

Consequently, the question of how Turkey-Russia relations normalized within a very short period of time after one of the most severe policy crises in the post-Cold War era lies in the combination of structural, domestic, and individual factors. Since such a combination requires incorporating a theoretical framework, the study tried to draw on the theoretical arguments of neoclassical realism. By briefly examining how neoclassical realism constitutes its self-coherency in the first part, the study moved on the analysis of bilateral relations, and it finally reached the conclusion that the dynamics of change in Turkey-Russia relations consist of the interrelated effects of structural, domestic, and individual factors.

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