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SEVEN MONTHS OF TENSION: REFLECTIONS OF TURKISH- RUSSIAN TENSION IN THE CAUCASUS AND SOLUTION SEEKING

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On November 24th, 2015, the day when the new government in Turkey was formed, a SU-24 type fighter aircraft belonging to the Russian Federation Air Force was shot by Turkish Armed Forces within the framework of the rules of engagement on the grounds that border violation has occurred. Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin said that this claim was untrue and added, “When the aircraft was hit, it was 6 thousand meters in height and flying 1 kilometer away from the Turkish territory” (Sputniknews December 2015). One of the aircraft’s pilots has survived, other one lost his life. One Russian soldier was killed during search and rescue operations.

Turkey did not experience such a deep crisis with either Soviet Union or with Russian Federation after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991. Turkish-Russian relations have been resilient enough for overcoming all kinds of political crises of various significance. Previously despite being part of the Western world Turkey was able to take a neutral stance on Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2015) crises by adopting a different attitude from the West. De-



spite being at opposite sides when the Syrian civil war began in 2011, Turkey and Russia have been able to maintain good relations.

Although the Turkish-Russian relations have been tested with different crises in different regions, why has the aircraft crisis which began at exactly the time that the 64th Turkish Government was formed (November 24th, 2015) continued to grow? Why have not both Moscow and Ankara tried to bring aircraft crisis under control? Why has not the quarrel war stopped?

Assassination of the Soviet dissident Bulgarian journalist Georgi Markov by the KGB in London in 1978 and poisoning of the former FSB agent Alexander Litvinenko by the FSB in November 2006 in London led to controlled crisis in the UK-Russia relations. Notably, serious effort was made in order for this crisis not to reflect negatively on the relations between the two countries (political, military, economic, cultural, etc.). While Russia and the UK were able to manage previous crises between them, Russia and Turkey could not manage the crisis between themselves.

There are psychological factors not strategic and economic ones behind the deepening of the Turkish-Russian crisis. Shooting of Russian military aircraft by Turkey has created a national trauma in Russia like the psychological trauma arising from the images US soldiers in Iraq putting sack over Turkish soldiers' head. Therefore for this crisis, we need to adopt an approach that tries to understand the trauma.

Aircraft crisis is a milestone for Turkey-Russia relations and the relations of Turkey and Russia with neighboring countries. Former republics of the Soviet Union in the European continent (except Armenia) have adopted an attitude close to Turkey. Because those republics are integrated with the West, or are trying to integrate to the West. While Kyrgyzstan, one

of the former Soviet Union Republics in Central Asia, stands near Russia, Kazakhstan has tried to be a mediator. Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have preferred to remain silent. EU, US and NATO have stood by Turkey.

Aircraft crisis has demonstrated that governmental and social structures of Turkey and Russia have Western outlooks but they still carry Eastern mindset. In both countries, a process has been felt in which rational people and institutions kept silent, all sorts of people who will help to deepen the crisis speak and negative steps have been taken. The wars in the 18th and 19th century have been brought to the agenda and an emotional outburst has begun to be experienced. The trauma of the Moscow government and the Russian people headed to hostility towards Turkey and Turkish people. Punishments on political and economic fields to Turkey have not been found sufficient. There is an obsession for an absolute military tit-for-tat and recovery of Russia's honor.

1. North Caucasus amid the Turkish-Russian Tension

After 1864, forced migrations from the North Caucasus to the Ottoman Empire had taken place. Migration from Abkhazia took place in 1877-78 Ottoman-Russian War (93' War). As a result of this around seven million of Turkish citizens in Turkey have North Caucasus origins. Furthermore, population of peoples of Northwest Caucasus people (Adyghe, Abkhazians, and Ubykh) in Turkey is more than the population of them in the North Caucasus.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, versatile and multi-dimensional convergence between Turkey and the Russian Federation has transformed the North Caucasus from a tension field to a relationship bridge between the two countries. Mutual trust, kinship and cultural communication had

increased and also trade and investment had begun.

The Turkish-Russian tension began on November 24th have affected North Caucasus (Rostov-on-Don, Krasnodar, Stavropol, Adygea, Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Ossetia, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan) and Abkhazia most. All the progress which was made step by step since the disintegration of the Soviet Union have begun to disappear after November 24th, 2015.

North Caucasus has begun to be marginalized, demonized and identified with terrorism again. The vast majority of Turkish citizens who have North Caucasus origin have believed that friendly relations would be developed with Russia. After November 24th, Kremlin has turned the North Caucasus into a target and this has caused a deep disappointment in the minds of North Caucasian peoples. Efforts to establish close relations between Turkey and the Caucasus have also damaged.

The day before the 7th General Assembly of KAFFED (*Kafkas Dernekleri Federasyonu* -Federation of Caucasian Associations) held in Ankara on November 29th, 2015; the meeting of the International Circassian Association would be held. However, delegates failed to come from the North Caucasus to the meeting.

Lecturers of Adyghe origin who worked in Düzce University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Caucasian Languages and Cultures, Circassian Language and Literature Department which opened in 2013-2014 academic year - were called back to the Russian Federation on December 11th, 2015.

About 300 Turkish citizen university students studying in North Caucasus universities began to be disturbed.

Adyghe State University cut off relations with Turkey. Kabardino-Balkaria State University gave assurances that Turkish citizens would continue their education.

On December 7th, 2015 KAFFED, and on December 17th, 2015 ABHAZFED (*Abhaz Dernekleri Federasyonu* - Abkhaz Associations Federation), met with Ambassador of the Russian Federation Andrey G. Karlov and conveyed their concerns about the deterioration of Turkey-Russia relations. In the meeting with KAFFED, Turkish citizen students studying in the North Caucasus, sanctions against businessmen who invest in the North Caucasus, visa application as well as the crisis about Düzce University Circassian Language and Literature Department were discussed. Ambassador Karlov was smooth and constructive during talks with an understanding of the negative humanitarian impact of the crisis.

Moreover, Russian Federation has stopped direct flights from Turkey to the North Caucasus. In contravention of the ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization) regulations Russian Federation has requested visas from the crews of the Turkish aircrafts as of January 1, 2016, and they have not responded to the visa applications either. Pegasus Airlines stopped Istanbul (Sabiha Gökçen)-Moscow and Krasnodar direct flights until January 13, 2016. Onur Air also stopped Istanbul (Sabiha Gökçen)--Nalchik direct flights up until January 14, 2016. Flights resumed after mid-January, 2016.

Since April 2011, there were 30 days visa exemption between Turkey and Russia. Russian Federation has launched the visa regime for Turkish citizens starting from January 1, 2016. Special (Green) passports of active and retired civil servants and Service (Gray) Turkish passports were included into visa regime entered into force on April 1st, 2016. Only Turkish diplomatic passports are exempted from visa requirement. In contrast, Turkey does not yet apply visa to the citizens of Russian Federation. Before April 2011, while the Russian Federation was applying visa for Turkish citizens, Turkey was giving a 90-day visa to Russian citizens at border crossing.

1.A. The North Caucasus Moved to the Center of Turkey-Russia Tension

One day after Russian aircraft was shot on November 24th in Sochi, when a traffic police saw a Turkish driver at the traffic control, he apparently said sadly “Why did you shot our aircraft? It was totally unnecessary. We used to love you”. November 24 shock gave its place to reaction in the Russian Federation.

Since 24th of November, the most affected region from the Turkish-Russian tension was the North Caucasus. Everyone in North Caucasus who has kinship ties with Turkey and had strengthened these ties with commercial ties were restless and sad. Bilateral rupture of the relations has reflected badly on the federal republics in the North Caucasus, Abkhazia, governors of the region, peoples of the North Caucasus, Turkish citizens of North Caucasus origin who have settled in the North Caucasus, Turkish and Russian businessmen who run trade between the two countries.

As Lavrov announced, mutual visa exemption between the Russian Federation and Turkey has been suspended since January 1st, 2016. Moscow, explained the reason for the suspension of the visa exemption as the presence of real terrorism threat in Turkey.

On November 30th, 2015 at the UN Climate Change Summit in Paris, Vladimir Putin said:

“Terrorists fighting us in Russia and the Caucasus often show themselves especially in Turkey. There, after a period of hiding under the auspices of Turkey, again they appear at Russian territory and organize terrorist acts. We have brought forward this issue repeatedly with Turkish government. But so far, unfortunately, we have not seen help and understanding from Turkish counterparts about this issue (Hürriyet, 30 November 2015).”

and placed the North Caucasus in the center of the Turkish-Russian tension. On December 2nd, 2015, in his Address to the Nation speech,

Putin said, “We remember that the terrorists in the North Caucasus in 1990s and 2000s obtained material and moral support exactly from Turkey. Now there we notice them again”(RTR Planeta TV 2 December 2015) and he continued his policy of making the North Caucasus main part of the tension with Turkey. When finishing his traditional end of the year press conference held on December 17th, 2015 Putin said, “The era of freely sightseeing, settling and disappearing with Turkish passport in the North Caucasus has ended”(RTR Planeta 17 December 2015) and signaled - on his part an unwillingness of rapprochement between Turkish citizens and the North Caucasus.

At the airports in North Caucasus (Sochi, Krasnodar, Rostov Na Donu, etc.), luggage of Turkish citizens who have come to Russia have been re-opened and re-searched again after their first check through the x-ray. Also suspected Turkish citizens have been followed or deported to Turkey since that day. Furthermore, Cafes do not serve the Turks, at the construction of the port of Rostov Na Donu, Russian workers attacked their Turkish counterparts with iron sticks and several insulting behaviors have taken place. Turkish citizens doing small and medium-sized business in North Caucasus are mostly settled in Maikop (280 persons), Nalchik (150 persons), Abkhazia (1.500 persons) and Sochi, Rostov-on-Don, Krasnodar. Very few of these inhabitants have Russian citizenship. Due to the difficulties at acquiring Russian citizenship after 2001, they have settled in Russia only by means of a residence permit. After the crisis of November 24th, cancellation of work and residence permits have been the main sources of concern. Indeed, in Sochi, Maikop, and Nalchik, tax officials and FSB (Federal Security Service) have begun to raid workplaces belonging to Turkish citizens. Like the Cold War period, detention within the scope of ‘spying charge’ between Russia and Turkey seemed to begin then.

In some quarters in Turkey North Caucasus is seen as a tablespoon to stir Russia up. They

again wanted to use the spirit of Imam Shamil and 1864 against Russia. These policies are both very dangerous and fruitless. They will not bring peace either to Russia, or to Turkey or to the North Caucasus.

1.B. Softening role of Abkhazia in Turkish-Russian Tension

Abkhazia Commercial Representative Office in Ankara, has quietly opened in December 2015 at Turan Güneş Boulevard at where the diplomatic missions are located. It is only a few kilometers away from the Georgian Embassy. It seems that Abkhazia wants to copy the Taiwan model in its relations with Turkey.

Abkhazia also has close family ties with Turkey. In the past, the convergence of Turkish-Russian relations was reflected positively on the Turkey-Abkhazia relations. Deterioration of Turkish-Russian relations has begun to reflect negatively on Abkhazia which has been preparing to enter a new era of rapprochement with Turkey. Moreover, people in administrative positions in Abkhazia, businessmen doing business with Turkey, and Turkish citizens who have settled in Abkhazia have become anxious. Turkish citizens settled in Abkhazia are often conducting small and medium-sized businesses. Although the majority of them have Abkhazian citizenship, very few of them have the citizenship of the Russian Federation as mentioned above. After the November 24th crisis, cancellation of the work and residence permits of Turkish citizens in Abkhazia was a concern for worry.

After November 24th, lights of the Presidency of Abkhazia building were on till the morning. Without hurting those settled in Abkhazia from Turkey, a common ground was reached. President of Abkhazia, Raul Khajimba went to Moscow abruptly on November 30 and met with Putin. It has been reported that Abkhazia was demanded to start sanctions against Turkey. However, no official explanation was given. World Abkhaz-Abaza 7th Ordinary Con-

gress which was to be held between the December 10-13 has been postponed indefinitely on December 1st, 2015 on account of the fact that “there are transportation difficulties due to trans-national problems”. As Turkish vessels come from Turkey to the Abkhazia ports (Sokhumi, Oçamçıra) via Tuapse-Sochi, these vessels were expected to be blocked by Russia. Turkish ships which set off from İstanbul were heading towards Russian territorial waters once they passed Sinop, in order not to be captured by Georgian forces. They used to reach Abkhazia through the Tuapse-Sochi line. Therefore they used to cover additional 250 miles in total for the round trip. After November 24th, the Turkish vessels headed to Abkhazia were feared to be disturbed by the Russian Federation Navy as Georgia did before. In the face of such a situation, the use of foreign-flagged ships between Turkey and Abkhazia was considered as a solution.

Since December 1st, at the Adler (Sochi) border checkpoint between Russia and Abkhazia, Russian Federation border police started to give difficult time to passengers with Turkish passport. Turkish citizens who came to Abkhazia have been secluded from other passengers and were subjected to practices used for potential terrorist. They were searched with dogs and devices drearily and kept waiting for hours for no reason. Furthermore, border transfer vehicles belonging to Apsatur which were carrying Turkish citizens were “punished” in some way or the other at the border. Only in December 1st, 2015, seven vehicles were punished by wrecking them including engines, sunroofs, seats and doors of vehicles. Turkish music CDs in cars which were entering to Abkhazia were broken and they were sternly warned as “Why are they Turkish? Here is not Turkey”. Turkish citizens with green Abkhazian passport which is called *zagran passport* (international passport) in Abkhazia which are also valid in Russia, did not have any difficulty. They can easily pass Russia and Abkhazia border bidirectionally.

1. C. Russia Urged Abkhazia to Impose Sanctions against Turkey

The night connecting January 13th to January 14th is the New Year celebration in Abkhazia. This day in Abkhaz is called *Azbyrnykhua* (АЖЫРНЫХУА) “the world’s creation day”. *Azbyrnykhua* day is celebrated in places where iron is forged. Forger families stab iron skewer to the heart of a goat and they roast the heart of the goat at the ember where the iron is melted. The origin of this celebration is based on the *Anyha* (Abkhazian shamanism) culture, before the monotheistic religions.

Despite the significance of January 13th, November 24th in 2016 has become a major milestone in the history of Abkhazia. Moscow has extended its political, military, humanitarian and economic sanctions on Turkey beyond the borders of the Russian Federation and to Abkhazia as well. On December 28th, 2015 Russian Federation Vice President Vladislav Surkov met with President of Abkhazia Raul Khajimba in Sokhumi. After the meeting, Surkov was the first to make statement to reporters and in the Abkhaz society this event was seen as a proof that Russia “formally” agreed on the independence of Abkhazia. Moreover, it was commented that Raul Hacimba were still imagining himself as a KGB officer, and he was not aware that he was the president of a country moreover if Moscow had not face with the political and economic embargo of the West after the annexation of the Crimea, it could have also annexed Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Surkov said that there were certain circles in Turkey which are approaching Abkhazia on the basis of potential benefits, and some measures should be taken to limit the political and economic presence of Turkey in Abkhazia. He also stressed that Turkey had not recognized the sovereignty of Abkhazia and despite having been trying to maintain economic and political benefits in Abkhazia. He said, “Turkish contractors will not be able to do construction

businesses with Russian money anymore”. He stated that they would take the centuries-old relationship between the people of Abkhazia and the Abkhazian diaspora in Turkey into account. Lastly Surkov announced that Russia had allocated 4.7 billion rubles to Abkhazia in 2016.

According to the statement of Abkhazia Current Politics Center Director Alexey Chesnakov, during the crisis between Russia and Turkey, Abkhazia was in solidarity with Russia. Abkhazia has decided to prepare a list about the limitation of relations with Turkey on construction, fishing, commercial activities, education and scientific research. This list should be prepared and announced by January 11th, 2016. Turkey is the second country after Russia with regard to the trade volume with Abkhazia. According to unofficial figures, Abkhazia’s half of foreign trade is with Turkey. And according to official figures of foreign trade of Abkhazia, Turkey’s share is 18 percent. In this 18 percent, while imports make up 7.6 percent, exports make up 10.4 percent of it. The main components of imports from Turkey are construction materials and fuel (25 percent), base metals (15 percent), machinery and equipment (15 percent), textile and food. Abkhazia’s exports are fish products (80 percent), timber and coal. In December 2015, Abkhazia Minister of Agriculture Timur Eshba announced that Turkish fishing vessels would not be allowed catch at Abkhazia territorial waters. The Government of Abkhazia has also met with the Russian fishermen. For the Abkhazian fish processing plants that can process more than 3000 tons per day, 600-700 tons of Russia’s bid will not be enough. As it was understood this ban would impose heavy burden in Abkhazian economy, but it was not enforced during 2016 hunting season. Likewise Abkhazia, which has prepared a list about restrictions that will be applied to Turkey on areas including construction, fishing, commercial activities, education and scientific studies has not mentioned goods which are part of foreign trade with Turkey in this list as much as possible.

Since Abkhazia has not only commercial but also cultural and kinship ties relationship with Turkey Abkhazian government tried to protect the economy and the people against the adverse effects of November 24th crisis as much as it could.

After November 24th Crisis some Turkish and Russian intellectuals got together in different countries. In this context, on April 22nd, 2015, hosted by Abkhazia State Repatriation Committee, the first tripartite meeting between Abkhazian-Russian-Turkish delegates was held in the city of Sukhumi. Abkhazian-Russian-Turkish Friendship Platform was established.

Abkhazian side was represented by, First Deputy Prime Minister Shamil Adzynba, Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Chirikba, State Repatriation Committee Chairman Vadim Harazi, Presidential Strategic Research Center Director Oleg Damenia, Historian and Abkhaz State University Professor Stanislav Lakoba, Deputy Tayfun Ardzynba, the Republic of Abkhazia Turkish Republic Plenipotentiary İnar Gitsba. Russian Federation side was represented by the Prof. Dr. Aleksander Kolesnikov (RISS – Russian Institute for Strategic Studies), Jan Zelinski (State Duma Deputy from LDPR – Liberal Democratic Party of Russia), Viktor Panin, (Director of The Institute of International Relations of *Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University* - PSLU), Alexander Belov (St. Petersburg Business Community Representative). Turkish Republic side was represented by Hasan Kanbolat (Ankara Policy Center), Erol Uğurlu (art historian), and Ahmet Hapat (Chairman of ABHAZFED - Abkhaz Associations Federation).

In his speech Shamil Adzynba stressed that this meeting was very important for Abkhazia. He said that:

“This meeting should not raise too many eyes nor should it be underestimated. There is a certain tension between Russia and Turkey. Abkhazia has a strategic, military and political

alliance with Russia. On the other side, hundreds of thousands of Abkhazians and Adiges are living in Turkey. Strengthening the relationship with them is a matter of national security and state security for Abkhazia. I'm sure that the relations between the Russian Federation and Turkey will normalize and I hope and wish that our meeting will make a contribution to the future meetings at the least. We know and remember the history. 200 years ago, the two empires, the problem between Ottoman Empire and Russia influenced the destiny of our people tragically. But today, I am sure that our people and the wisdom of our leaders will solve this problem.”

At the meeting, views were exchanged about the measures to be taken to overcome the crisis between Russia and Turkey. Significance of returning to the good relations that existed between Russia and Turkey in the last 25 years and ensuring the coordination work under the supervision of a third party were underlined. Russian and Turkish participants of the meeting stressed the positive role of Abkhazian mediation that can act as a bridge or a discussion platform towards the development of Turkish-Russian relations.

Proposals in order to strengthen the Turkish-Russian-Abkhazian relations included Abkhaz State University Professor Stanislav Lakoba suggestion of expanding the framework of the participants at the next tripartite meeting and inviting the representatives of the world of culture and art, for instance the famous Nobel-winning writer with Circassian origin Orhan Pamuk. In his speech, Erol Uğurlu from Turkey offered to organize a festival that will bring the representatives of art and culture together from Russia, Abkhazia and Turkey. From the Russian side, RISS (Russian Institute for Strategic Studies) St. Petersburg Representative Prof. Dr. Alexander Kolesnikov proposed to organize an exhibition in St. Petersburg for the exhibition of Turkish artists with Abkhaz origin and also he offered to hold a Caucasian Cultures Festival. Besides, Kolesnikov put for-

ward a proposal to arrange an international conference at the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow entitled “The role of Abkhazians in Russian-Turkish Relations in history”. Russian side also offered to hold a youth forum to resolve the crisis on the basis of youth discussions. Overall, at the end of the meeting, it was expressed that the Abkhazian-Russian-Turkish Friendship Platform should perpetuate.

1. Reflection of Turkey-Russia Tension to South Caucasus

2.A. Reflection of Turkey-Russia Tension to Georgia

According to the opinion expressed in personal communications apparently some elites of Tbilisi think that Turkey-Russia tension would delay the Georgia’s full membership to NATO. Streets of Georgia feel both joy and expectation. As they are familiar with Russians - the last confrontation being in 2008-, they are aware of the fact that things have not come to the conclusion yet. Kremlin continues to soften its policy against Georgia. Until 2008, citizens of Georgia were able to travel to Russia without visas, but after clashes between Russia and Georgia in 2008, Russia abolished the visa-free travel. On December 23rd 2015, Russia has opened its land and air borders with Georgia which was closed since 2008. Russia also ceased making the visa process difficult.

2.B. Reflection of Turkey-Russia Tension on Armenia

Armenia was first silent then favored Russia after November 24th. Yerevan administration contemplated that after the deterioration of Russian-Turkish relations, Russian-Armenian relations would enter the honeymoon period. According to Yerevan, after the breakdown of Turkey-Russia relations, Russia would have

equipped Armenia with heavy and modern weapons. Moscow would support Yerevan against both Azerbaijan and Turkey more than ever. Additionally when Russia-Turkey relations broke down, Russia-Azerbaijan relations would have been broken too.

Breaking points of Turkey’s Ukraine and Crimea policies have been directly related with Armenia. Ankara had tried to remain neutral during Ukraine-Russia crisis and Russia’s annexation of Crimea to avoid disrupting relations with Russia. Despite this fact, Turkish businessmen and academics whose passports have Ukraine entrance and exit stamp have become subject to enforcement of a five-year entry ban to Russia. In order to maintain bilateral good relations, Ankara ignored this Russian policy and did not make a big deal about the entry ban. However, after Russia’s ‘April 24th, 2015’ policy, Turkey’s Crimean policy shifted towards being in favor of Ukraine. Moscow’s recent Armenian policy had hurt Turkey. Moscow government gave full support to the 100th anniversary of 1915. In the Russian Federation, more than two thousand official events were held for the 100th anniversary of 1915. Duma, recognized the Armenian genocide. Putin attended to the 100th anniversary event on April 24th, 2015 in Yerevan and used the term ‘genocide’ in the official letter that he sent to 100th anniversary event held in Moscow.

2.C. Reflection of Turkey-Russia Tension on Azerbaijan

After November 24th crisis, the importance of Azerbaijan for Turkey has increased. Turkey’s need for Azerbaijani gas has also increased. For the Turkish trucks bound for Central Asia, Azerbaijan has become an alternative route to Russia. Russia’s increased political and military support to Armenia has changed the balance between Armenia and Azerbaijan again. For this reason, on November 26-27, 2015 Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu and December 3-4, 2015 the then Prime Minister Davutoğlu paid official visits to Baku.

About half of Turkish exports to the Russian Federation are carried by land. Turkish trucks which are embarked on ships from Istanbul or Zonguldak are once disembarked at Ukrainian and Russian ports (Novorossiysk) then go towards Russia. As a second route, they exit from the Sarp border gate and cross over Georgia and enter Russia by land. Land transportation towards Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia in Central Asia is done by means of passing Russia in transit. Russia has escalated the crisis by holding Turkish trucks and other countries' trucks which carries Turkish export goods through at customs starting from November 25, 2015. In order to reach Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and beyond, instead of transit passing over Russia, Turkish tractor trailers started to drive to Azerbaijan (Baku) and from there by ship over the Caspian Sea they reach Turkmenistan (Turkmenbashi) and Kazakhstan (Aktau) since December 1st, 2015. The new route increases the cost per truck about 2 thousand dollars. Therefore Azerbaijan made a 40 percent discount for Turkish trucks bound for Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and a 20 percent discount for the transportation fee of Ro-Ro ships in the Caspian Sea. However, storms in the Caspian Sea and problems in Aktau port lead to disruption of navigation.

It is said that Azerbaijan Republic is the best state about utilization of the intricacies of diplomacy and politics among the Turkic Republics. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991, once it was thought that Turkey would assimilate and swallow Azerbaijan. The last 25 years have shown that this analysis is wrong. Azerbaijan with 10 million population affects Turkey of 80 million people. Whenever it wants it has the capacity to influence the Turkish public. For example, while Azerbaijan has a great think tank in İstanbul, Turkey has high-salary officials in Baku. For her anti-democratic practices Baku uses Turkey as a shield against Europe. When the general elections in Turkey held on November 1st, 2015, the date of the general elec-

tion in Azerbaijan was changed to November 1st. It should be regarded as "oriental cunning" invented by Baku to overshadow its anti-democratic general elections. Although the OSCE did not send international observers, through the Istanbul-based Turkish Council, Turkey has announced that general elections of Azerbaijan is transparent and democratic. Turkey, does not want to leave Azerbaijan alone in a difficult situation under any circumstances.

Press and people of Azerbaijan took a position beside Turkey about the Turkey-Russia tensions that began on November 24th. Only the older Russian speaker intellectuals who were educated in Soviet Union have supported Russia. Azerbaijan had a breaking point at her traditionally good relations with Russia after the November 24th crisis between Turkey and Russia. Baku is aware of the fact that if it unconditionally stands next to Russia about November 24th crisis, the country may even lose its independence. For November 24th crisis, Baku government has taken a position like Georgia. In other words, Turkish investors come to Georgia, it has good relations with Turkey politically and militarily, but no one says "Georgia supports Turkey". Azerbaijan has been encircled by Russia, Armenia and Iran. In this case, Azerbaijan can be able to be in a neutral position only by strictly working on it. Like Turkmenistan, encircled by Uzbekistan, Russian Federation and Iran, which highlights its neutrality for twenty-five years and celebrates this as a festival.

Since the Tsarist Russia, Russian Federation is governed by the school of St. Petersburg who are advocates of integration with Europe. Russia wants to be a power in Europe. After Hollande's visit to Moscow, Kremlin's desire to become European has surged. Russia is ally with the West (the US, EU, Israel) in Syria. It tries to re-establish good relations with the West by way of Syria, without a result. Since for Kremlin Europe and USA relations have the utmost importance therefore Russia's international position has changed and its impact on Kara-

bakh has been less. Nagorno-Karabakh issue is not priority for Kremlin. In this context the main reason for Azerbaijan not entering the Eurasian Customs Union has been Nagorno-Karabakh.

November 24th has changed the geopolitics of South Caucasus once again. Stones have moved but yet they have not fallen into place. Baku has realized that the dissemination of racist rhetoric arising out in Russia against Turkey and Turks has also begun to be aimed at Azerbaijan. Russia's increasing political and military support to Armenia can disrupt Azerbaijan-Armenia balance further.

3. Other Side of the Caspian Sea: Central Asia

After November 24th, Moscow blamed Ankara for Turkism and Pan-Turanism. This is not nothing but wandering off the subject. Russian Federation Ministry of Culture has cancelled the TURKSOY (International Organization of Turkic Culture) memberships of the federal republics in the Russian Federation. Russian Federation which has the observer status in TURKSOY, has accused the organization of being a racist terrorist group. Turkish people who have *ülküçü* (a nationalist, "Idealist Heart Organization member) origin in Bayırbucak, Syria have become the target of Moscow. These Turkish people with *ülküçü* views in Syria are very few in number, not more than a hundred. Although it is known that the Salafist armed organizations are powerful there, *ülküçü* Turks have become a target. However, it is a known fact that Moscow has been supporting Turanist and Turkic ideas in Russian Federation and in Eastern Europe (Hungary, Moldova, Poland, the Baltic Republics), not Ankara.

Russian Federation is experiencing economic problems because of the West's political and economic sanctions and decline in oil prices. Russia's oligarchic structure leads to increase in the inequitable distribution of national income.

For these reasons, Kremlin continues to nationalism propaganda against Turkey and Turks so as to suppress internal problems and make them forget. Kremlin's Turkey evaluation which insists and considers Turkey as an underdeveloped third world country is full of mistakes.

3.A. Atambayev factor in Turkey-Russia tension

The President of Turkish Republic Erdoğan attended to 20th Neutrality Conference on December 12th, 2015 in the capital city of Turkmenistan, Ashgabat. After the Turkey-Russia crisis began on November 24th, Turkey has continued official trips to the countries which have natural gas resources. After Erdoğan's Qatar visit on December 1st, 2015 and Davutoğlu's Azerbaijan visit on December 3-4, 2015, the third stop was Turkmenistan. In Ashgabat, Erdoğan held bilateral talks with leaders in the conference where approximately 80 countries were represented. Aircraft crisis with Russia was in the front place of the agenda again. Erdoğan had long meetings with President of Turkmenistan, Berdimuhamedov, President of Georgia Margvelašvil and the presidents of Belarus and Kyrgyzstan. President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko called "Russia and Turkey to find a common path, at least take a step to maintain good relations". He said

"Mistakes are inevitable, one should not exaggerate these mistakes, instead they should be fixed and a common path should be found. This includes the recent crisis between Russia and Turkey. At the very least they need to take a step towards each other, after that problems will be solved and the good and close relations between these two peoples and states will improve".

President of Kyrgyzstan Almazbek Atambayev also called for an end to the crisis in bilateral relations between Russia and Turkey and added that the partnership relations between the two countries which are close to us and who are

our brothers - should be fixed. The call to find a compromise for Turkish-Russian crisis made by the two presidents, Lukashenko and Atambayev who are very close to Putin is important in reduction of the tension in the Turkish-Russian crisis. But it was not enough then. President of Kyrgyzstan Almazbek Atambayev, in the end of year assessment press conference carried out on December 24th, 2015 said that Turkey made the mistake by shooting Russia's SU-24 aircraft and Turkey should apologize from Russia for shooting the aircraft. He indicated that on account of the 17-second violation of airspace, breaking down the friendship of long years was a wrong decision. After Atambayev's words mentioned above, an unnamed cold air began to blow in the Turkey-Kyrgyzstan relations. The Kyrgyz opposition did not adopt Atambayev's forthright words against Turkey.

Atambayev was the only foreign leader with Erdoğan during his balcony speech after his success in the first round of the presidential election on August 10th, 2014. Atambayev also gave a speech on the balcony of the AK Party headquarters that night. What had happened and Atambayev took a stand at Moscow's side after November 24th Crisis? In fact Atambayev slowly began to move away from Ankara as from August 10th, 2014. Although Erdoğan asked Turkish bureaucracy to support Kyrgyzstan, Turkish bureaucracy did not show enough interest in Kyrgyzstan. Even though political leaders in Turkey adopted "one nation" rhetoric for the Turkic world, Turkish bureaucracy does not grant privileges to the Turkic world. For example, work quota has not been provided for Kyrgyzstan. In other respects, South Korea gives work visas to 12 thousand Kyrgyz citizens every year. About 1.2 million Kyrgyz work in Russian Federation and seventy percent of them have received the citizenship of the Russian Federation. In Turkey, convenience is not provided for Kyrgyz to be Turkish citizens. Russia announced that it would provide aid to Kyrgyzstan to build new hydroelectric dams.

Despite Erdoğan's instructions, disregard of

Kyrgyzstan by Turkish bureaucracy caused Atambayev to take offense to Ankara. Neither Erdoğan went to Bishkek during his presidency, nor did Atambayev come to Ankara. Even there is coldness between the top of these two countries, rapprochement of the Turkish people and the brotherhood of Erdoğan-Atambayev will continue. About 30 thousand Kyrgyz citizens live in Turkey (7 thousand in Istanbul). Every day about 10 Kyrgyz are getting married in Turkey. 1550 Kyrgyz university student, 1250 of which have Turkey state scholarship, are studying in Turkey. The main reasons for why Kyrgyz have chosen Turkey increasingly is Turkish citizens do not behave Kyrgyz differently and there is no racism in Turkey.

3.B. Nazarbayev Factor at Turkish-Russian Tension

Kazakhstan celebrates the twenty-fifth year of its independence. For a quarter of a century Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev has strengthened the independence of Kazakhstan and made it stable. He has transformed Kazakhstan into a modern country. In this way, besides being the founder leader of Kazakhstan, by means of right strategic moves in the international arena Nazarbayev have presented positive contribution and reached to a leader and arbiter position at both regional and global issues. The international role of Astana has become comparable with Moscow, Beijing, Brussels and Washington DC. Astana has helped to find middle ground in relations between the West and Moscow.

A middle way should be found to solve the November 24th Turkish-Russian crisis. The important part of Turkey-Russia relations is not the economic dimension of it. Kinship dimension of the relation between the two countries is more important. The presence of 35 million Muslims population in the Russian Federation, kinship of federated republics with Turkey, over hundred thousand of interethnic marriages, Turkish citizens resident in Russia, Russian

citizens resident in Turkey necessarily required the consensus.

Especially the republics of the former Soviet Union, Asia and Southern Europe (the Balkans) have negatively impacted by the Turkish-Russian tension, particularly Turkic republics in Central Asia. This tension does not only harm Turkey and the Russian Federation. It radically harms peace of the region. And breed bad blood between peoples of these two countries.

President Nazarbayev is aware of the negative impact of Turkish-Russian tensions. It is clear that, disturbing each other will not bring peace to these two countries. Therefore, Nazarbayev was the first leader spoke to President Erdoğan after November 24th. On November 30th, 2015 Nazarbayev gave address to the nation speech covering the 2016 objectives of Kazakhstan and emphasized the urgent need to establish a joint commission by the two countries in order to prevent further growth of the aircraft crisis between Russia and Turkey. He indicated that the joint commission that will be set up must punish the perpetrators of this event and the two countries need to re-establish their relations. He also underlined that Russia and Turkey are partners and friends, they need to find a common language to prevent the deterioration of relations. Nazarbayev recalled that he had worked hard during Süleyman Demirel and Boris Yeltsin era in order to establish friendly relations between Russia and Turkey. On December 13th, 2015 once more President Nazarbayev underscored that Russia and Turkey are the two major allies of Kazakhstan and his country had very strong relationship with the two countries and the tension between them should be resolved in a compromise.

President Nazarbayev's call for a mid-way to the Turkish-Russian crisis is important for the ease of Turkish-Russian crisis. Nazarbayev said, "The best plan is a plan that can be shaped according to the needs of the time". President

12 Nazarbayev's initiative to start shuttle diplo-

macy between the two countries is a positive step to circumvent further damage to the peace in the region and to re-establish it.

4. Geopolitical Change in the Black Sea Begins to Disturb Russia

The deterioration of Turkish-Russian relations has created a geopolitical situation in the Black Sea to the detriment of Russia. During the Soviet Union era and for the period after the dissolution of it in 1991, there was a Turkish-Russian balance in the Black Sea region. After November 24th, that balance has been destabilized. Geopolitics of the Black Sea has begun to change in favor of the EU and NATO.

5. Have Good Relations Evaporated?

At the beginning of the 2000s, conservative businessmen of Turkey who put AK Party into power advocated Turkey's integration with the Middle East and getting into markets outside the West. The main reasons for the disinclination of Turkey from the Middle East were not the Arab Spring and the Syrian Civil War. Irregular structure of Middle East has disinclined Turkish businessmen. Turks who had forgotten the structure of the Russian state after World War I, remembered it again after the aircraft crisis. Turkish businessmen understand the importance of law and promises thanks to the Middle East and Russia. Consequently Turkey headed back to the West after the start of Turkey's accession process in 2004. It was also trying to re-integrate with NATO and the EU. Indeed, on November 29th, in Brussels, attending the EU-Turkey Summit, former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu spoke of a 'new beginning, and said "EU is our common home" and "We are people of Europe". However, migration of Syrian refugees from Turkey to the EU since 2015, mutual escalation of tension by the politicians of the EU and President Erdoğan has again stretched Turkey-EU relations.



6. Conclusion

On the date of June 2nd, 2016 in Moscow, APM (Ankara Policy Center) and RISS (Russian Institute for Strategic Studies), organized a meeting on Turkish-Russian relations. The meeting was held at the invitation of RISS, think tank of Russian Federation State Department,. On account of the fact that RISS directly reports to the Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin, invitation of APM and discussion of the Turkish-Russian relations since the beginning of the November 24th aircraft crisis were important in terms of the achievement of normalization between the two countries. Being in the first place Chairman of RISS, Dr. Leonid Rešetnikov and other RISS experts' expression of positive thoughts about Turkey were seen as steps of normalization between Turkey and Russia. Before the meeting, a joint cooperation protocol between APM and RISS was signed. By means of the protocol, boosting cooperation between the two organizations, development of joint research projects and organization of meetings were agreed upon.

With the exception of Syria politics there has not been a major clash between Turkey and Russia until November 2015. Presidents Putin and Erdoğan had even were together in the opening ceremony of Central Moscow Mosque in 23 September 2015. However, when Turkey brought a Russian plane down with a claim that it violated the Turkish air space the dynamic has changed suddenly. Russia rejected the Turkish claims and showed a strong reaction. Turkish Russian diplomatic ties and major part of trade connections have

ended dramatically. While Russia demanded an apology and compensation Turkey kept to the issuing of messages of piece. The tension lasted for seven months. Due to the deep crises of Turkish tourism the first move was made by Ankara. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan sent a letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin on the occasion of "Russia Day" on June 12th, 2016. Kremlin expressed that the letter "does not require an answer" and reiterated its "apology and compensation" demand. Attendance of Russia's ambassador in Ankara to the *if-tar* (fast breaking) invitation of Erdoğan, and travelling of the Turkish delegation to Moscow have led to the comments that ice between the two countries had begun to melt. On 27 June 2016 Turkish President another letter to Putin. Kremlin announced that the letter from Erdoğan included an apology to the family of the pilot and expression of his willingness of improvement in Russian- Turkish relations. However, Turkish president's office claimed that Erdoğan has not used the word "apology".

It has been understood that deepening the crisis by knocking each other out does not benefit the either of Turkey and Russia. Taking the steps which will complicate the lives of ordinary people in Russia and Turkey did make sense. In order to solve the crisis Turkey and Russia should find a mutual agreement ground by taking their common interests into consideration, keeping communication channels open and striving to prevent the repetition of similar events.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ABOUT APM

Ankara Policy Center (APM) is a non partisan and independent think tank. APM aims to support the decision making process with evidence-based analytical research. APM contributes to the formulation of innovative strategic options and to the better understanding of social transformations. The main purpose of APM is to strengthen international communication on domestic and foreign policy issues, to enhance participation in the policy development process and to promote an issue based problem solving approach. APM supports initiatives at achieving peace and democracy in the Middle East and Caucasus regions by building local, regional and global networks and coalitions among civil society actors.

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