

## TÜRKİYE CUMHURİYETİ'NİN UKRAYNA-RUSYA FEDERASYONU SAVAŞINDAKİ ROLÜ

### THE ROLE OF THE REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE IN THE UKRAINE-RUSSIAN FEDERATION WAR

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#### Özet

Küresel ekonomik krizler, özellikle kırılgan bölgelere odaklanarak, mevcut çatışmaların şiddetlenmesine yol açmaktadır. Bu krizler, geçmişte çözülmeyen ve dondurulmuş olan uluslararası sorunların yeniden gündeme gelmesine sebep olmaktadır. 1. ve 2. Dünya Savaşları ile Soğuk Savaş dönemi boyunca çözülmeyen, dolayısıyla donmuş durumdaki kritik bölgesel problemler, günümüzde küresel ekonomik buhran koşulları ile benzer bir dinamik oluşturmakta, I. Dünya Savaşı öncesindeki depresyon dönemine özgü ekonomik zorlukları yeniden canlandırmaktadır. Bu durum, yalnızca bölgesel değil, küresel düzeyde de istikrarsızlığa yol açmakta ve uluslararası ilişkilerdeki güç dengelerini etkilemektedir.

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye'nin Ukrayna ve Rusya ile olan güçlü tarihsel bağlarını ve aktif tutumunu dikkate alarak, bölgede aktif bir rol oynayıp oynamadığını değerlendirmektir. Araştırma, pozitivizm/rasyonalist teorilerine dayanmakta olup, nitel araştırma yöntemleri kullanılmış ve öncelikle PESTLE Analizi ile siyasi, ekonomik, sosyal, teknolojik, çevresel ve yasal faktörler değerlendirilmiştir. Ardından, mevcut durumu göz önünde bulundurarak bir SWOT analizi yapılmıştır. Türkiye, Ukrayna ve Rusya'nın güçlü ve zayıf yönleri değerlendirilmiş, fırsatlar ve tehditler bu bağlamda ortaya konmuştur. Türkiye'nin Ukrayna-Rusya çatışmasındaki rolünü etkileyen faktörler belirlenmiş ve analiz edilmiştir.

Araştırma sonucunda, Türkiye'nin ulusal güç seviyesine orantılı olarak kriz yönetimine önemli bir katkı sağladığı ve bölgesel bir aktör olarak rolünü etkin bir şekilde yerine getirebileceği sonucuna varılmıştır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Türkiye, Ukrayna-Rusya Savaşı, Arabuluculuk, PESTLE Analizi, SWOT Analizi

## Abstract

Global economic crises, particularly in fragile regions, are intensifying existing conflicts. These crises are causing previously unresolved and frozen international issues to resurface. Critical regional problems that remained unresolved and dormant during the First and Second World Wars, as well as the Cold War, are now reemerging amid the current global economic downturn—reviving economic difficulties reminiscent of the pre-World War I depression era. This situation is creating instability not only at the regional level but also globally, affecting power balances in international relations.

This study aims to assess whether Türkiye plays an active role in the region, considering its strong historical ties with both Ukraine and Russia. The research is grounded in positivist/rationalist theories and utilizes qualitative methods, primarily employing PESTLE analysis to evaluate political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors. A SWOT analysis was also conducted to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to Türkiye, Ukraine, and Russia. Key factors influencing Türkiye's role in the Ukraine-Russia conflict were identified and analyzed.

The study concludes that Türkiye has significantly contributed to crisis management in line with its national power and can effectively fulfill its role as a regional actor.

**Keywords:** Türkiye, Ukraine-Russia War, Mediation, PESTLE Analysis, SWOT Analysis

In the known history, the world has been at war for almost five thousand years, according to a report published by the Stockholm Peace Research Institute in the 1980s. In fact, humanity has only spent 26 days without fighting in the last 300 years (1). There are many problems in today's world, perhaps a few the most important reasons for these problems are the socio-economic imbalances arising from the development differences between countries, the survival and economic concerns that one country feels towards another, and this situation has created many problematic/fragile regions in the world. Today, hot conflicts are taking place in many regions of the world or frozen problems from the past in these regions are re-emerging. The problems in critical regions that could not be solved and were frozen after World Wars I and II and during the Cold War have re-created the conditions of the pre-World War I depression period with the onset of global economic crises.

One of these crises is the Ukraine-Russia War in the North of the Black Sea. The First Russia-Ukraine War began on February 20, 2014, with Russia occupying Crimea and many regions in its extension, and after a long period of stagnation, the war entered its second phase with Russia's all-out attacks on Ukraine on February 24, 2022, following disagreements, and is still ongoing.

From the beginning, Türkiye has taken on the role of an effective mediator by advising moderation to the parties that did not recognize the occupation and annexation of Crimea, and has maintained political, economic, and even military ties with both parties. However; has Türkiye been able to play an active role in the region in the context of its strong historical ties and active stance with Ukraine and Russia?

In order to scientifically answer this question, it would be beneficial to conduct an examination based on the theories of positivism<sup>1</sup>/rationalism<sup>2</sup>, which enable us to better understand international relations.

<sup>1</sup> Positivism: An international relations methodology that applies many of the trappings and traditions of behaviorism in a more sophisticated fashion. Fundamentally, positivism is a scientific approach. Its proponents believe that there can be objective knowledge about the social and political dimensions of the world, and that this knowledge is attainable through the careful development and testing of empirical propositions. From this perspective, the social scientist is almost identical to the scientist (2).

<sup>2</sup> Rationalism: As a dictionary meaning "the belief or principle that actions and opinions should be based on reason rather than emotion or religion" (3). Rationalism views states as legal organizations that operate according to international law and diplomatic customs thus international relations are policies and activities subject to the mutually recognized authority of sovereign states (2).

In this context; first, we can benefit from scientific studies that evaluate the political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal situation using PESTLE analysis, and then a SWOT analysis taking into account the current situation.

A complex and strategically important aspect of the international crisis is the role played by the Republic of Türkiye after Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Türkiye, which has historical, economic, and geopolitical ties with both Russia and Ukraine, has a special position at the intersection of the Europe and Asia. Türkiye has carefully balanced its interests in maintaining regional stability, maintaining economic ties, and fulfilling its obligations as a member of international organizations, especially The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The conflict in Eastern Ukraine has been ongoing since Russia annexed Crimea in 2014. In this study, Türkiye's complex and changing position in the war between Ukraine and Russia has been its diplomatic efforts, energy considerations, security contributions, and broader consequences.

In order to understand Türkiye's role in the war, its relations with the parties must first be examined.

### **Türk-Russian Relations**

To understand the current state of relations between the Republic of Türkiye and the Russian Federation—shaped by complex geopolitical dynamics—it is essential to examine their historical background. The first recorded interactions between Turkic groups and early East Slavic peoples date back to ancient times. Over the centuries, wars, intermarriages, and trade fostered extensive intercultural exchange. As a result, the two peoples share a deep and intertwined history. It is fair to say that neither the Russian state nor the Russian people are unfamiliar with Turkish culture.

Russia established diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Sultan Bayezid II, primarily aiming to use Black Sea ports for trade. The first Russian ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Mihail Andriyevich Pleshcheyev, was appointed in 1495 (4). Between the 17th and 19th centuries, several Russo-Turkish wars occurred, most of which ended in territorial losses for the Ottoman Empire and the southward expansion of the Russian Empire.

After World War II, Russia's expansionist policy turned toward the eastern provinces of Türkiye, particularly Kars, Ardahan, and the Turkish Straits. On August 7 and September 24, 1946, the Soviet Union sent two memorandums expressing its strategic intentions regarding the Straits. In response, the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK) declared their support for Türkiye. This geopolitical pressure played a key role in Türkiye's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) on February 18, 1952.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 dramatically reshaped the global political order. The foundation of the modern relationship between Türkiye and Russia was laid in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when both countries agreed to set aside their historical animosities and focus on cooperation, considering the new world dynamics. Türkiye's growing sense of marginalization by the West and its desire to emerge as a strong, independent power beyond NATO's influence contributed to closer relations with Russia. Both countries found mutual benefit in economic collaboration: Türkiye aimed to become a regional energy hub due to its strategic location, while Russia sought reliable partners to export its vast energy resources. This shared interest laid the groundwork for a pragmatic and multifaceted partnership that continues to shape their relations today.

Examining the turning points in Turkish-Russian relations over recent years, the airspace violation and subsequent downing of a Russian military aircraft by Türkiye on November 24, 2015, severely tested the limits and patience of both nations. Contrary to widespread expectations, however, Russia and Türkiye managed to restore their cooperation and build a resilient relationship within a remarkably short timeframe. One significant development was Türkiye's procurement of the Russian S-400 missile defense system, which resulted in Türkiye becoming the first NATO member state to face military sanctions imposed by the United States.

Additionally, the stance of the Western bloc—especially that of the US, Germany, and the UK—following the July 15, 2016, failed coup attempt in Türkiye, as well as unconfirmed reports that Russian intelligence had warned Ankara about the coup or that President Putin personally offered military assistance to President Erdoğan, further complicated the diplomatic landscape. Alongside these political tensions, energy cooperation between Türkiye and Russia has remained a crucial pillar of their bilateral relations.

Despite these cooperative efforts, competition between the two countries persists in several areas. They support opposing sides in the Kosovo issue, and diverging positions on conflicts such as the Libyan Civil War, the Crimean annexation, and the Syrian Civil War—including differing views on the new Syrian regime—highlight ongoing geopolitical divergences.

In economic terms, Türkiye's strategic efforts to become a regional energy hub—facilitated by key infrastructure projects such as natural gas pipelines and the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant—are central to its energy security. Tourism also plays an important role; approximately seven million Russian tourists visit Türkiye annually (5). Türkiye remains highly sensitive to imports of Russian wheat, natural gas, and oil.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Türkiye notably refused to impose sanctions on the Russian government, despite considerable pressure from the European Union. Beyond its neutral stance on sanctions, Türkiye and Russia signed agreements aimed at strengthening commercial cooperation, particularly in the banking and energy sectors (6). Bilateral trade volume increased significantly, rising from \$34 billion in 2021 to \$68 billion in 2022. Cooperation in the energy sector—viewed by both parties as the cornerstone of their traditional ties and strategic projects—has persisted without fundamental change, even during times of heightened tension. Currently, Türkiye serves as a vital gateway for Russia to global markets.

### **Turk-Ukrainian Relations**

The historical roots of Türkiye's interest in Ukraine can be traced back to the Treaty of Friendship and Brotherhood, signed in January 1922. Through this treaty, Türkiye recognized Ukraine as an independent state, while Ukraine declared that the future of the Black Sea and the Turkish Straits should be decided at a conference of Black Sea littoral states—favoring Türkiye's sovereignty in the region. This agreement also marked the beginning of a new alliance in the Black Sea, focused on financial and social cooperation. However, relations were disrupted later that same year with the formation of the Soviet Union, which included Ukraine as a constituent republic (7).

Türkiye recognized Ukraine's independence on December 16, 1991, and diplomatic relations were officially established on February 3, 1992. The relationship evolved into a strategic partnership with the establishment of the Türkiye-Ukraine High-Level Strategic Council (YDSK) in 2011.

Russia's occupation and annexation of Crimea in 2014 further deepened bilateral ties. After 2015, Türkiye provided psychological and medical support to many Ukrainian military personnel and their families. Ukraine, concerned about the potential military threat posed by its powerful neighbor, began efforts to modernize its armed forces in line with NATO standards.

At the same time, despite having a well-developed military, Türkiye faced long-standing restrictions from its NATO allies in acquiring technology or defense-related products. As a result, Türkiye turned to Ukraine for complementary technological cooperation across a wide range of sectors—including fighter jets, missile systems, aircraft engines, UAVs, radar systems, armored vehicles, navigation, and space technologies. Within this framework, several joint production initiatives have been undertaken, most notably involving the Bayraktar TB2 UAVs.

The Turkish Straits, which connect the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, have been of strategic importance for thousands of years—for the Caucasus, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Black Sea littoral states, the Middle East, and even Western Europe. Türkiye's firm application of the 1936 Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits, at the request of the Ukrainian government, played a significant role in bilateral relations during the conflict.



The total trade volume between Türkiye and Ukraine reached 7.4 billion USD, with Türkiye becoming Ukraine's fifth-largest trading partner in 2021. Although the war led to a decline in overall trade volume, Türkiye's share in Ukraine's foreign trade rose from 5.21% in 2021 to 6% as of November 2022—despite ongoing hostilities. One of the key sectors of cooperation between the two countries is also tourism (8).

### **Türkiye's Role as a Peace Envoy**

As is known, Russia occupied the Crimean Peninsula on February 27, 2014, during what is considered the first phase of the Ukrainian–Russian conflict, and officially declared its annexation on March 21, 2014. The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine began on February 24, 2022, following joint military exercises with Belarus and an incursion into Ukrainian territory from the north and east, accompanied by heavy airstrikes. This conflict remains ongoing. NATO strongly condemned Russia's aggressive and unjustified war against Ukraine, calling on Moscow to agree to a ceasefire, withdraw its troops, and engage in diplomacy to resolve the conflict (9). Similarly, the European Union (EU) denounced Russia's actions, urging an immediate halt to attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. In response to the invasion, the EU imposed both economic and individual sanctions on Russia and Belarus on June 3, 2022, aiming to limit their economic resources and reduce their capacity to finance the war. Unlike many Western states, Türkiye did not implement sanctions against Russia, primarily due to its heavy dependence on Russian wheat, natural gas, and oil, as well as the importance of Russian tourism to its economy. Nevertheless, Türkiye—while being a NATO member—publicly declared that Russia's invasion of Ukraine was unacceptable and a clear violation of international law, and it supported NATO's official statements and positions.

As both a neighbor and economic partner of Russia, Türkiye has actively sought a diplomatic solution to the war by engaging in intensive dialogue with Ukraine and showing sensitivity to regional dynamics (10). The first major initiative in this regard was the Tripartite Foreign Ministers' Meeting held on March 10, 2022, during the Antalya Diplomacy Forum, bringing together the foreign ministers of Türkiye, Russia, and Ukraine. However, this initial high-level meeting yielded no tangible outcomes on achieving a ceasefire or addressing humanitarian concerns. What set Türkiye apart in facilitating this meeting was its unique position as a trusted and capable regional actor. Türkiye's transparent and balanced foreign policy—maintaining diplomatic, economic, and even military ties with both sides—enabled it to gain the confidence of both Russia and Ukraine. For instance, while Türkiye sold drones and military equipment to Ukraine, it also sustained strategic dialogue and trade relations with Russia. This dual-track diplomacy helped Türkiye maintain its credibility as a mediator.

Importantly, Türkiye managed to remain neutral despite pressure from both the EU and NATO, while Ukraine continued to require comprehensive international support and Russia increasingly viewed Türkiye as a strategic channel amid global sanctions.

This mutual trust played a significant role in preventing potential disasters during the conflict. For example, after clashes near the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant—the largest in Europe—both parties accepted Türkiye's offer to mediate and facilitate access for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), allowing critical inspections to be conducted. Moreover, early in the war, Türkiye helped establish a humanitarian corridor in Mariupol, enabling the evacuation of civilians. Notably, orphans and their caregivers were transferred to Türkiye, where they were provided with shelter and protection (11).

### **PESTLE and SWOT Analysis**

Pestle analysis, which is used to evaluate the dynamic external environment, is known as a tool for situational analysis and provides a framework by determining opportunities and threats in order to create a backbone for SWOT analysis related to the organization.



The analysis creates the elements of political environment, economic environment, socio-cultural environment, technological environment, legal environment, and ecological/natural environment analysis (12). On the other hand, the information obtained with PESTLE analysis evaluates the internal strengths and weaknesses, external opportunities, and threats in an organization's environment with Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat (SWOT) analysis. Internal analysis explains resources, infrastructure, main capabilities, competitive advantages, source of competitive advantage, and other additional tools needed to remain competitive. The external environment is evaluated in terms of political, economic, socio-cultural, technological, legal, and ecological/natural consequences. The purpose of SWOT analysis is to frame its strategy in the light of insight into environmental factors (13).

In this context, PESTLE and SWOT analyses made for Ukraine and the Russian Federation can be accessed (9). We will evaluate the results of these analyses here. In this scientific study, as a result of the PESTLE and SWOT analysis of Ukraine and Russia, the following effective factors were determined: Political support, infrastructure, external sanctions, armament, refugees, trade, energy lines, the Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits, Syria operation plan, nuclear power plant, annexation of Crimea and NATO Sweden and Finland expansion. In order to evaluate Türkiye's role, these factors were analyzed comparatively for Ukraine and Russia with the complementary effect of Türkiye (12).

### **Türkiye's Regional Role**

Türkiye and Russia have largely set aside numerous complex and difficult-to-resolve issues within the international arena, thereby mitigating their potential negative impacts on bilateral relations. The foundation of Türkiye-Russia relations rests primarily on mutual interests, with a particular emphasis on energy and trade. Notably, Türkiye ranks as the second-largest importer of Russian natural gas, following Germany. Furthermore, both countries have expressed skepticism towards a unipolar world order (14).

The rivalry between Türkiye and Russia over the Black Sea region has persisted for many years. Türkiye has supported Ukraine by supplying TB2 drones, which have been instrumental in successfully targeting Russian military assets. Concurrently, Türkiye continues to pursue diplomatic avenues to foster peace and alleviate the economic repercussions caused by the ongoing conflict. While the Western bloc criticizes Türkiye for refraining from imposing sanctions on Russia, Türkiye, in turn, accuses Western nations of exacerbating the conflict through the provision of advanced weaponry, thereby escalating it into a broader NATO-Russia confrontation. Türkiye has also taken a stance in support of Ukraine by condemning the annexation of Crimea, which is home to the Tatar-Turk minority and holds significant strategic value as a critical gateway to control of the Black Sea, potentially impacting regional geopolitics in the future. Based on a synthesis of regional opportunities and threats, as well as Türkiye's role in the conflict derived from PESTLE and SWOT analyses, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- As a NATO member, Türkiye has explicitly expressed political support for Ukraine, thereby enhancing Ukraine's diplomatic standing on the global stage.
- Leveraging its experienced construction sector, Türkiye possesses significant potential to contribute to the reconstruction of Ukraine's damaged or destroyed infrastructure.
- Due to profound economic interdependencies, Türkiye is unable to impose sanctions on Russia. Its substantial imports of Russian gas and wheat render it particularly vulnerable to potential retaliatory measures.
- Türkiye has provided tangible support to Ukraine through the provision of TB2 UAVs, which have been effectively utilized in combat against Russian forces.
- In addition to hosting a substantial Syrian refugee population, Türkiye has extended humanitarian support by accepting refugees fleeing the conflict in Ukraine.

- Acting as a mediator, Türkiye is actively engaged in efforts to lift the Russian blockade of maritime logistics routes, facilitating Ukraine's export of agricultural products. Simultaneously, Türkiye has maintained trade relations with Russia, thereby sustaining economic benefits for both parties.
- The commissioning of the TurkStream gas pipeline has reinforced Türkiye's role as a strategic energy hub; however, this development has concurrently diminished Ukraine's revenues from gas transit and decreased its reliance on gas transportation through its territory.
- Türkiye's adherence to the provisions of the Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits serves as a supportive measure for Ukraine.
- Nuclear power plant initiatives are of critical importance to Türkiye. While Türkiye currently relies on Russian technological expertise for these projects, their completion is expected to reduce Türkiye's long-term dependence on Russian gas supplies.
- Türkiye's supportive stance on Ukraine's Crimean issue is motivated by two primary factors: the presence of the Tatar-Turk minority in Crimea and Russia's influence over the Turkish Straits, which are geopolitically linked to Crimea.

### As a result

Although Türkiye is recognized as a national power, it assumes an asymmetric yet influential role as a regional actor. Türkiye has proven to be a pivotal actor capable of facilitating solutions to complex issues such as Ukraine's integration with the European Union and the United States, the strategic status of the Black Sea—a closed maritime basin—and the implementation of the Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits. Furthermore, Türkiye actively engages in mediating blocked exports and maintains dialogue with both conflicting parties. The Montreux Convention remains a fundamental instrument in preserving regional peace and preventing escalation into full-scale conflict. Türkiye's strategic position as an energy transit hub diminishes Russia's leverage derived from its energy resources. This dynamic serves as a constraint on Russia's conduct in its relations with Ukraine and compels Moscow to explore alternative energy routes. Following the 2005 Russia-Ukraine energy crisis, energy corridors have increasingly favored Türkiye, particularly due to the TurkStream pipeline project. Concurrently, Türkiye's declining prospects of accession to the EU have incentivized Ankara to strengthen bilateral economic relations with Russia. The potential supply of long-range missile systems to Ukraine by the EU risks prompting a reciprocal escalation by Russia, potentially expanding the theater of conflict. Consequently, any attempts to escalate hostilities may undermine Türkiye's capacity to act as an effective and constructive mediator. Moreover, Türkiye is emerging as a viable candidate to become Europe's new manufacturing hub, owing to its competitive exchange rate policies, geographical proximity to Europe, and disruptions in global supply chains—especially those originating from the People's Republic of China amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Should Türkiye assume this role, it is likely to witness enhanced trade relations with both Ukraine and Russia, thereby bolstering its influence and effectiveness as a regional mediator.

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