

RUSSIA, TURKEY, AND THE ‘RETIRED POWER’

Ivan Krastev



IVAN KRASTEVA is the Chairman of the Centre for Liberal Strategies in Sofia, Bulgaria, a research fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna, and Editor-in-Chief of the Bulgarian Edition of Foreign Policy. He is also one of the founders and a trustee of the European Council for Foreign Relations, and a member of the Council of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London. His books include: ‘The Anti-American Century’ (co-edited, 2007), and ‘Shifting Obsessions: Three Essays on the Politics of Anticorruption’ (2004)

The very definition of what it means to be European or Western these days has been changed a lot. If you look at history, the initial division between Eastern and Western was very much about the divide within the Christian world: the Eastern and Western Roman Empire. During the Cold War, it was more a global division but it was based on the fact of the existence of two alternative world views. Now the West is no longer what it was, because

some of its major characteristics, like capitalism or democracy, are spreading globally to such an extent that it has become hard, for example, to define a power like Brazil.

If we go back to Europe, it seems that ‘European’ is now starting to be associated with a specific form of political arrangement. The European Union, being a post-national formation, has started to identify itself with Europe. So from this point of view there’s kind of a tension in the very definition of what European or Western means.

Countries like Russia and Turkey are basically both involved in identity building projects. Russia is in a kind of post-imperial period, and perhaps it has never been a nation-state in its history. So in Russia they are trying to define themselves – who are we? What kind of state are we? Russia is comparing itself to Europe all the time and the West in general.

Turkey is involved in a post-Kemalist project, and they are also asking the same basic questions. Turkey is a very interesting case, because **as it becomes more democratic, more market-oriented, and more Europeanized, its cultural identity and some of its foreign policy priorities have, at the same time, helped to push Turkey out of Europe.**

The major result of the democratization of Turkey was the fact that different religious groups that had once been very much repressed started to speak out; and this non-drinking alcohol

Turkey is not the result of de-modernization but of the modernization of Turkish society.

Someone might claim that Russia is Western but not European anymore. And there are others who basically would say: yes, Russia is European but Russia is not Western because Russia is not part of any Western political identity. In my view **these distinctions are going to be less and less important than they used to be, as the world has become bigger.** Before, in some sense, Europe was the whole world. This is not the case anymore. Due to many factors (economic, political, geographic) **Europe is no longer the major world player, and here I mean all European powers, including Russia, Turkey, and the European Union.** This is not where action is really taking place. Even during the Cold War there were two non-European powers dominating the scene: the United States and the Soviet Union. Basically this competition was very much about Europe. But this is not the case anymore. There’s much more people looking to Asia today. And if we look at some economic statistics it is easy to see why.

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A new world is emerging and both Russia and Turkey are looking for a place in it. For Russia this is a very difficult question. On one level Russia is a very important status quo power when we talk about the changes taking place in the world. Russia is part of the Security Council of

the UN, and Russia is part of the G8. **No matter how much Russia is talking about being treated as unequal, the truth is that Russia – as a result of being the successor of the Soviet Union – is very much part of the establishment ruling the World.** For Russia this reshaping and reordering of the world is an opportunity but it is also a threat because there are countries that are now becoming more popular and more economically developed than Russia.

Russia is not a classical emerging power. I would rather call Russia an aging power experiencing temporary growth. A very important question for Russia is how to balance its position as a status quo power and at the same time its ambitions, which are to a great extent conditioned by its resentment of the way it has been treated in the post-Cold War period.

Turkey is far too different. If you compare Turkey and Russia, Russia is very European from the point of view of its demography: it is an aging society. Turkey, on the other hand, is young and full of energy. Turkey has, to a certain extent, the structure, which we're going to see in many of the Third World countries; it's an extremely young society. For the last twenty or thirty years they had a major movement from villages to cities. Turkey is not European in this sense. Turkey resembles its neighbors, but not its European neighbors. From the other side, Turkey being part of NATO and being part of the West and now involved in negotiations with the European Union also has this type of a dilemma: What is more useful to us? What is more important to us? To be European and a Western power or to try to pursue our own political identity?

I do believe now this dilemma is going to become even stronger after the changes in the Middle East, where **many in Tunisia and Egypt are starting to treat Turkey as a model. Turkey is very much tempted to play a bigger role outside of Europe.** In the case of Turkey the religion is probably a problem. At least to some Europeans who are making a major problem out of religion and faith for Turkish accession to the European Union.

But at the end of the day Russia and Turkey are not different in their ambitions to reposition themselves. They are slightly different in where they start and also on the resources on which they rely. Russia is very much concerned with the incredible natural resources that it has. Turkey is very much concerned with the energy of its population and small and medium businesses. If you look at the structure of Turkish and Russian economies, you're going to see how different they are.

What makes EU, Turkey and Russia similar is the fact that they are three emerging projects and the three projects are very vulnerable. The EU is experimenting with a status of post-national political formation. Russia is trying to build a nation-state and this project today is encountering some difficulties. Post-Kemalist Turkey is a very much divided society that is trying to create a new political identity.

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Ultimately, I do not believe that Russia and Turkey might come closer to each-other on the basis of their incomplete integration and representation in Europe and the West. I do believe that there's going to be a lot of

pragmatic relationships and as you know the relations between Turkey and Russia are quite intense, they have a lot of economic cooperation and so on. But talking about union, no, I don't believe this. Turkey is very young and is very much on the rise now. The Turks look around and they do believe that the European Union is becoming cold and behaving more as a retired power than as a rising power. But also Turkey sees that Russia is a declining power and its territory should be economically conquered.

On the other hand, Russia is very much interested in pricking the European Union through a strong cooperation with some or the other important powers on EU's periphery. So from this point of view it is unlikely that Russia would be extremely happy if Turkey acceded to the European Union. There are certainly all kinds of uncertainties and fears concerning Turkey and its role in Central Asia. So there is always going to be some sort of a competition/cooperation relationship between them.

I do not believe that on the level of big politics, on the level of the social moves there's going to be any real possibility for this type of 'axis of the excluded,' between Russia, Turkey or Iran, for example. I don't believe this is realistic and I don't believe that this is in the interest of anybody. But, of course, **the very possibility of this type of strategic cooperation between countries like Russia and Turkey is purporting the European Union to be slightly more inventive and slightly more open in its relations with Russia and Turkey,** which is a good news. ■

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