

OUTCOME OF STRATEGIC CHOICE

Ozgur Unluhisarcikli



OZGUR UNLUHISARCIKLI is a political scientist, public figure, and the director of the Turkish branch of the German Marshall Fund (USA) in Ankara, Turkey

Being western is a function of some factors that you have mentioned such as history, culture, language, common values, and geopolitical aspects, but it is also strategic choice. In this sense Russia could be called a 'European but not Western' country. **If Russia is not part of the west, it's because of strategic choice beyond anything else.** Geopolitical ambitions and legacy of past wars are some of the factors that have lead to this strategic choice.

However, Turkey by strategic choice, is a western country. Turkey's westernization began centuries ago during the late Ottoman Era and gained speed with the Kemalist revolution. Membership to NATO has bound Turkey to the West with unbreakable ties. The questions that have arisen lately as to Turkey's westernness is a reaction to differences Turkey has had with its transat-

lantic allies regarding some foreign policy issues. At the end of the day, Turkey remains a western country.

There is indeed a growing cultural divide within the Turkish elite as within the wider society. Some people even call it a 'kultur-campf.' This divide is mainly based on the role of religion in society and politics. I would agree that this is also linked to the attitude towards the west, although indirectly. This divide certainly plays a role in Turkish Foreign policy, but alongside several unrelated factors some of which are structural.

I am not sure if Turkey can be called a regional leader, but it certainly has become a key regional actor. There are several factors that have helped this outcome. Being a member of NATO as well as a close ally of the United States and prospects for further integration with the EU are among the factors that strengthen Turkey's role as a regional actor.

I don't think that there is confrontation between Russia and Turkey in the Black Sea Region.

Both countries regard the Black Sea as a region within itself where collateral states should have exclusive say. Increasing cooperation in other areas like energy and trade also make a confrontation of any sort less likely

Both countries regard the Black Sea as a region within itself where collateral states should have exclusive say. Increasing cooperation in other areas like energy and trade also make a confrontation of any sort less likely. This doesn't mean that there isn't competition, especially when it comes to the

Southern Caucasus. The Russian-Georgian War in 2008 has positioned Russia as a more assertive power in the Caucasus region. The Caucasus Region is too complicated to name clear alliances except the special relationship between Turkey and Azerbaijan.

The latest initiatives to settle co-operation between Russia and Turkey in this region are rather ambiguous. The Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform, offered by Recep Erdogan after the war in South Ossetia, is a good idea that might have a chance when countries in the region as well as outside actors are all on the same page. But we are not there today.

Co-operation in the energy field is still unclear too. Turkey is now supporting two competing projects, South Stream and Nabucco. Nabucco is an EU led project and Turkey as a candidate for EU membership can not disregard this fact. It is very unlikely that both projects can be feasible at the same time however. Several other factors particularly regarding supply and

demand are going to determine which one, if either, will be feasible in the future. Before the answer to this question is clear, it will be extremely difficult for Turkey to make any decision. ■

Exclusively for Yaroslavl Forum