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TURKEY'S POLICY TOWARDS THE BALKANS DURING THE COLD WAR

Abstract

This research examines the foreign policy of the Republic of Turkey towards the Balkan region during the Cold War. The article aims to elucidate the fundamental principles underpinning Turkey's approach to the region within the context of the bipolar international system. With the onset of the Cold War, the Balkan Peninsula found itself bifurcated into two blocs, reflecting the reconfigured international order. Consequently, segments of the Balkan states fell under Soviet sway. While Turkey had previously maintained a stance of active neutrality during the Second World War, there was a swift shift in its foreign policy. Driven by security imperatives and apprehensions regarding the Soviet threat to its territorial integrity, Turkey aligned itself with the Western bloc. This article seeks to address the nature of Turkey's policy towards the Balkan nations that were part of the opposing political and military bloc and the factors influencing its relations with these countries.

Keywords: Türkiye, Turkish foreign policy, Cold War, Balkans

The Balkan Peninsula, situated in the south-eastern part of Europe, stretches westwards to the Adriatic Sea, eastwards to the Aegean Sea, the Sea of Marmara, and the Black Sea, encompassing the Dardanelles and Bosphorus Straits. To the north, it reaches the plains shaped by the Danube-Sava rivers. To the south, it touches the Mediterranean Sea, dotted with numerous islands and peninsulas. The peninsula's geopolitical position has consistently piqued the interest of global superpowers. Its boundary location, bridging the West and the Orient, amplifies its economic and strategic significance¹. Historically, during Antiquity, the region was a nexus for vital trade routes, drawing the attention of superpowers eager to exert influence and control over these pathways. As time progressed, the

¹ About the Balkans as a bridge between the West and the Orient, see M. Todorova, *Balkany wyobrazone*, Sejny 2022.



peninsula's role became even more pronounced. From the early nineteenth century, European powers vied for supremacy in the region, capitalizing on Turkey's internal crises to further their economic and political agendas².

Many geostrategists and geopoliticians deem the Balkans a crucial communication and transport juncture, viewing it as the western gateway of Eurasia, often referred to as the *Heartland*³. Nicholas Spykman's theory posits that the Balkan Peninsula (inclusive of Turkey), constitutes part of the *Rimland*, serving as a barrier to the Eurasian continental power (notably Russia/USSR) from accessing the Mediterranean. This perspective was prevalent amongst the US ruling elite⁴. The Balkans provide the most direct trade route connecting Europe with the Middle East and Central Asia. Furthermore, the region has historically been susceptible to the tumults accompanying periods of significant change and transformation. With the onset of the Cold War, the Balkan Peninsula found itself bifurcated into two blocs, reflecting the reconfigured international environment. While portions of the Balkan states fell under Soviet dominion, others, like Turkey and Greece, aligned with the Western alliance.

For Turkey, the Balkans' significance transcends mere geopolitical and geo-strategic considerations. The region, having been under Ottoman dominion for centuries, shares profound historical, social, and cultural ties with Turkey. Owing to these connections, Turkey, arguably an intrinsic part of the Balkans, was profoundly influenced by regional developments. Moreover, the Balkans held special strategic importance for Turkey in safeguarding Eastern Thrace and Istanbul against potential Soviet aggression.

This research examines in this article the foreign policy of the Republic of Turkey towards the Balkan region during the Cold War. The main academic objective of the article is to expose the basic principles of Turkey's policy towards the said region within the bipolar international system. This article seeks to address the nature of Turkey's policy towards the Balkan nations that were part of the opposing political and military bloc and the factors influencing its relations with these countries. In charting the trajectory of Turkish policy toward the Balkan nations during the Cold War, and in quest of discernible patterns and causative links to elucidate the issues at hand, the author employed the historical method. When applied to international relations and geopolitics, this method primarily hinges on both sourced and unsourced information. It is through these sources that historical narratives are crafted. By interpreting these sources and leveraging unsourced knowledge, one can effectively identify causative links and subsequently address the research queries posited earlier⁵. As such, the author's research techniques encompassed source interpretation, content analysis, and a critical review of existing literature.

² J. Olchowski, K. Pawłowski, *Region Europy Południowo-Wschodniej*, in: *Regiony w stosunkach międzynarodowych*, ed. I. Topolski, H. Dumala, A. Dumala, Lublin 2009, pp. 73–100; D. Gibas-Krzak, *The geopolitical importance of the Balkans: A general overview*, "The Journal of Slavic Military Studies", Vol. 33(2020), Issue 3, pp. 460–479.

³ D. Gibas-Krzak, *Geopolityka Balkanów*, Warszawa 2021, pp. 411–437.

⁴ P. Eberhardt, *Koncepcja Rimlandu Nicholasa Spykmana i jej konsekwencje geopolityczne*, "Przegląd Geograficzny", Vol. 86, Issue 2 (2014), pp. 264–267.

⁵ R. Woźnica, *Perspektywa historyczna w badaniach nad geopolityką*, in: *Teorie i podejścia badawcze geopolityki*, ed. P. Borowiec, A. Tyszkiewicz, Kraków 2020, pp. 138–141.

Overview of Turkish Foreign Policy during the Cold War

Recognizing the escalating tensions in global politics and the looming threats to peace, the government under İsmet İnönü entered into alliance treaties with France and Britain on October 19, 1939, aiming to safeguard Turkey's peace during these volatile times. In its pursuit of security through defensive alliances and non-aggression pacts, Turkey signed agreements with Bulgaria on February 17, 1941, the Soviet Union on March 25, 1941, and a German–Turkish Treaty of Friendship on June 18, 1941. Throughout the Second World War, Turkey's foreign policy was guided by the doctrine of "effective neutrality"⁶.

After the end of the Second World War, maintaining a balanced policy became untenable for Turkey. The dawn of a bipolar global system meant Turkey could not remain indifferent amidst such profound shifts in the international landscape. Its strategy of distancing itself from the epicenter of the Second World War events inadvertently led to its isolation and subsequent face-off with the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union's ambitions to amend the Montreux Convention-regulated regime governing the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, coupled with territorial claims over Karso and Ardahan⁷, compelled Turkey to align with the Western bloc⁸. During this period, the security interests of the US and Turkey largely converged. The primary objective was to counteract the Soviet threat and halt its expansion. From Turkey's vantage point, the US-led alliance catered to the concerns of medium-sized nations, a courtesy the Soviet Union did not extend⁹. Turkey's strategy was rooted in pragmatism, molded by the prevailing circumstances, and underscored by a realistic assessment of the power dynamics. Furthermore, Turkey perceived itself as an ideological member of the Western world. It identified with the West and wanted to be seen as part of it, and the West – at that point – was the United States.

Given its strategic significance, Turkey emerged as a coveted ally. Positioned at the forefront of the anti-communist movement, Turkey benefited from military and financial support under the Truman Doctrine (1947) and was incorporated into the Marshall Plan (1948). The culmination of Turkey's integration into the Western security apparatus was its induction into the North Atlantic Treaty in 1952. As the rift between the blocs deepened, Turkey's foreign policy became more resolute. Especially under the Democratic Party's governance¹⁰, Prime Minister Adnan Menderes not only sustained collaboration with the West but staunchly believed that Turkey's security was intrinsically linked to that of the Western bloc¹¹. In practice, the Democratic Party exhibited a cautious approach toward

⁶ Selim Deringil characterizes this principle, suggesting that "Turkey did not wish to engage in the war, but given its strategic position, it could not merely retreat behind its borders and adopt a stance of passive neutrality. Consequently, Turkey fortified its defences, fully mobilised, and above all, sought to sway global politics in its favour" (S. Deringil, *Denge Oyunu: İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Türkiye'nin Dış Politikası*, İstanbul 2017, pp. 90–91).

⁷ E. Tellal, *SSCB'yle İlişkiler, 1945–1960*, in: *Türk Dış Politikası, Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar Cilt 1*, ed. B. Oran, İstanbul 2001, p. 502.

⁸ M. Aydın, *Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy: Changing Patterns and Conjunctures During the Cold War*, "Middle Eastern Studies", No. 1, 2000, pp. 116–117.

⁹ W. Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy: 1774–2000*, London 2002, p. 110.

¹⁰ Between 1950 and 1960.

¹¹ M. Serhan, *Yucel, Menderes Dönemi (1950–1960)*, "Türk Tarihi Ansiklopedisi", XVI, 2002, p. 835.

any engagement with nations from the rival bloc. While Greece adopted a proactive stance in the Balkans during this era, Turkey remained more reticent¹².

The so-called “Johnson’s Letter” of 1964¹³, which delineated the American stance on Turkey’s Cyprus policy, played a pivotal role in reshaping Turkey’s approach. The independence of Cyprus failed to quell the Greek-Turkish discord, and by 1963, the conflict had escalated, taking on a militarized dimension. The rising violence between the Greek and Turkish communities on the island led to casualties. Intent on safeguarding its nationals¹⁴, Turkey contemplated a military intervention in Cyprus¹⁵. This move, however, was stymied by a stern letter from US President L. Johnson to Prime Minister İsmet İnönü. The US leader communicated in harsh terms that “the United States cannot agree to the use of any United States supplied military equipment for a Turkish intervention in Cyprus”¹⁶ and offered no assurances of protection against potential Soviet involvement, caused profound disillusionment in Turkey. The letter caused great disappointment in Turkey and led to the alliance with the West being questioned for the first time during the Cold War. This episode also sowed the seeds for a more independent trajectory in Turkish foreign policy¹⁷.

The US’s overt support for the Greek stance on Cyprus, juxtaposed with the early signs of détente, facilitated a Turkish-Soviet rapprochement. From 1965, the normalization of bilateral ties evolved into collaboration, marked by high-level visits, bilateral agreements, and economic aid from the USSR. During this period, as relations with the Soviets began to improve, Turkey refused to join the Multilateral Force proposed by the US. However, the underlying political issue was Soviet opposition to the idea of “Enosis” and support for Turkey’s federation proposal in the Cyprus issue¹⁸. The Turkish-Soviet rapprochement was noticed by the United States, so that Secretary of State Dean Acheson proposed a solution close to the Turkish position and supported Turkey in the UN General Assembly vote¹⁹. However, when Turkey sought to intervene on the island again in 1967 due to heightened

¹² O. Özkaya Duman, H. Birsnel, *Demokrat Parti Dönemi Türk Dış Politikası ve Bu Politikanın Dinamiklerine Etki Eden Dış Gelişmeler*, “Ataturk Dergisi”, 1/1/2012, pp. 301–307.

¹³ For the text of the letter, see: Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Turkey, Washington, June 5, 1964, 12:15 a.m., Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Vol. XVI, Cyprus; Greece; Turkey, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v16/d54> (accessed 01.03.2023).

¹⁴ The Turkish leadership believed that the inter-community strife was a precursor to a broader attempt to exterminate the Turkish people, as envisaged by the Akritas Plan.

¹⁵ At a meeting attended by the Turkish President, Cabinet members together with the Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed the issue. As a result, a statement was issued by the Foreign Minister F. C Erkin saying that “if the Greek Cypriots keep on attacking Turks, Turkey will invade the island within a short period of time. If they think that we will allow their violation of constitution, kidnapping the Turks and killing them, they are mistaken.” (M. Günlübol, *Olaylarla Türk Dış Politikası (1919–1973)*, Ankara 1982, p. 393). On June 4, 1964 Prime Minister İnönü, just before the Cabinet meeting on intervening in Cyprus, invited the US Ambassador Raymond Hare stating that Turkey would operate immediately.

¹⁶ Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Turkey, Washington, June 5, 1964, op.cit.

¹⁷ M. Erdem, *US President L.B. Johnson’s letter of 1964 and its impact on Turkish Public Opinion*, “Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi”, No. 7, 33/2014, pp. 311–313.

¹⁸ In a statement of January 15, 1965, Andrei Gromyko, the Foreign Minister of the USSR, expressed his support for Turkey’s stance. Consequently, the USSR, which had earlier seemed to back the Makarios administration on the island, shifted its foreign policy regarding Cyprus. See S. Bölükbaşı, *Barışçı Çözüksüzlük*, Ankara 2001, p. 776.

¹⁹ Question of Cyprus: resolution A/RES/2077(XX) adopted by the General Assembly, 12.18.1965, A/RES/2077(XX), 12.18.1965, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/660053?ln=en> (accessed 01.03.2023).

EOKA activity, the United States adopted a stance akin to that of 1964. Nevertheless, I would not posit the theory that the amicable relations between Turkey and the USSR from 1965 to 1970 were Turkey's political answer to its challenges with the West. During this time, the reduction in economic aid and backing from the US simply prompted Turkey to explore new alternatives, and its relations with the USSR predominantly revolved around economic cooperation²⁰.

During the Cyprus crisis in 1974, Turkey's policy stood out as the sole instance of Turkish action independent of NATO throughout the Cold War. The successful coup by Greek Cypriots on July 15, 1974, dramatically altered the island's situation. When diplomatic efforts did not yield the outcome Turkey anticipated, the Turkish government opted for a military intervention on July 20²¹. This operation in Cyprus was untenable for the Western bloc, the USSR, and the non-aligned nations. Consequently, following the Cyprus incursion, the US and the international community censured Turkey, imposing both military and economic embargoes among other measures. Nonetheless, Turkish authorities believed they had no alternative, prioritizing the protection of the Turkish community in Cyprus²².

Turkey's isolation at the UN concerning the Cyprus issue prompted it to re-evaluate its prior foreign policy stance. Strained relations with the United States, a diminishing threat from the USSR, and escalating economic challenges drove Turkey towards a more multilateral and multifaceted international policy. Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit contended that Turkey had become overly reliant on the United States and should endeavor to cultivate its own defense industry and foster "relations with neighboring countries based on mutual trust"²³.

The resurgence of international political tension, exemplified by the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan and the Islamic Revolution in Iran, both in Turkey's vicinity²⁴, reshaped Ankara's view of security threats and amplified its geo-strategic significance. This shift, considering the budding mistrust and animosity in Turkey's relations with the Soviet Union, nudged Turkey closer to the West. Moreover, the military coup in Turkey in 1980, leading European nations to distance themselves from Turkey, played a role in Ankara's renewed alignment with Washington²⁵. Consequently, the final decade of the Cold War witnessed a rejuvenated Turkish-American rapprochement. Yet, bilateral relations encountered challenges across various sectors (military-strategic relations, the Cyprus issue, Turkish-Greek relations, the Kurdish matter, etc.), indicating that the cooperation was not seamless²⁶.

²⁰ F. Sönmezoğlu, *II. Dünya Savaşı'ndan Günümüze Türk Dış Politikası*, İstanbul 2006, p. 355.

²¹ E. Çuhadar-Gürkaynak, B. Özkeçeci-Taner, *Decisionmaking Process Matters: Lessons Learned from Two Turkish Foreign Policy Cases*, "Turkish Studies", Vol. 5, No. 2, 2004, pp. 69–71.

²² P. Osiewicz, *Turkey and Its Position on the Cyprus Question Since 1974*, "Rocznik Integracji Europejskiej", No. 7 (2013), p. 119.

²³ B. Ecevit, *Turkey's security policies*, in: *Greece and Turkey: Adversity in Alliance*, ed. J. Alford, Surrey: Gower, 1984, pp. 136–141, <https://web.stanford.edu/group/tomzgroup/pmwiki/uploads/1293-Alford-a-CLH.pdf> (accessed 3/10/2023).

²⁴ Furthermore, the latter half of the 1970s proved tumultuous for Turkey, particularly in its domestic politics. During this era, Turkey grappled with political and economic turmoil: political instability, pervasive anarchy, "right-left" confrontations, a surge in Kurdish separatist movements, and worsening socio-economic conditions amplifying the nation's dependence on foreign assistance.

²⁵ W. Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy...*, p. 168.

²⁶ Nasuh Uslu even posited that "instead of harmonious cooperation, the two allies appeared to be on the verge of parting ways", N. Uslu, *Türk Dış Politikası Yol Ayrımında; Soğuk Savaş Sonrasında Yeni Sorunlar Yeni İmkânlar Yeni Arayışlar*, Ankara 2006, p. 183.

From the aforementioned, post-Second World War, Turkey's predominant foreign policy approach throughout nearly the entire Cold War era (barring the rift during the Cyprus crisis) centered on Atlanticism, thereby anchoring its relations and security to the United States and NATO. In line with this philosophy, Turkey kept the Soviet Union and its allies at arm's length.

Turkey's Policy towards the Balkan States

Following the post-Second World War international order, the Soviets secured significant influence in the Balkans. This led to the rise of communist governments in numerous Balkan states, naturally aligning these countries with the bloc established by the Soviet Union. In the distinctly bipolar world order, the Balkan states were constrained by the Cold War dynamics, influenced by mutual perceptions of risk and threat. Under these circumstances, they were limited to aligning with states sharing a similar political-ideological identity, either the Eastern or Western bloc. The reality that nearly all the Balkan states were aligned with the Eastern bloc not only hindered Turkey's cooperation with these states but also made Turkey tread cautiously. Turkey refrained from fostering bilateral relations with these states, adopting a bloc policy as a member of the Western alliance. This was particularly evident during the early stages of the Cold War. As Turkey's security aspirations became paramount, it opted to engage with the Balkan nations via international organizations within the Western alliance and sought to address its challenges through these organizations and the alliance to which it was affiliated.

During this era, Turkey adopted two distinct policies towards the Balkan states. The first was its bilateral relations with Greece, a fellow member of the same bloc. The second was the signing of the Agreement of Friendship and Cooperation, commonly referred to as the Balkan Pact. This was signed on February 28, 1953, in Ankara by Turkey, Yugoslavia, and Greece, aiming to bolster regional cooperation in the Balkans.

The groundwork for Turkish-Greek friendship was being established during the Republican era. The assistance Turkey provided during the Second World War fostered a positive sentiment towards Turkey in Greece. Amidst the Greek civil war, Ankara staunchly backed the central government, further intertwining the destinies of Greece and Turkey. Both nations joined NATO simultaneously and, for a while, pursued harmonized foreign policies. The early Cold War years can be likened to a "honeymoon" phase in Turkish-Greek relations. High-level official exchanges were frequent, and politicians from both nations consistently emphasized the cooperation and camaraderie binding the two countries. However, this amicable relationship suffered a significant setback with the onset of the Cyprus crisis in 1954. The ensuing disagreements over the Aegean Islands, the Continental Shelf, and subsequent Cyprus crises evolved into a series of unresolved issues that persist to this day.

The Balkan Pact and the Relations of Turkey, Greece, and Yugoslavia

Due to Josip Broz-Tito's pursuit of a policy of dissent and independence from Moscow, the Cold War division in the Balkan Peninsula took on a new dimension when Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform. Yugoslavia, whose relations with Moscow had deteriorated,

rated, struggled with economic difficulties and faced significant security concerns. The United States sought to capitalize on this situation by providing economic and military aid, aiming to integrate Yugoslavia into the Western bloc²⁷.

Turkish foreign policy was strongly aligned with the US policy of containing communism. After the 1950 elections, the Democratic Party, which came to power in Turkey, recognized the changing international landscape and aimed to foster closer ties with the United States. Prime Minister Adnan Menderes clearly understood the prerequisites for maintaining strong relations with the US, asserting, “the more we act in line with the Americans, the more foreign aid we will receive”²⁸. Consequently, Ankara’s stance on issues like Cyprus, the Middle East, and the Balkan Pact aligned with Washington’s expectations. However, establishing a united front in the Balkans against communism also served Turkey’s interests. The Soviet Union not only strongly opposed Turkey’s efforts to join NATO²⁹ but also utilized Bulgaria to exert pressure on Ankara³⁰.

Given these circumstances, Turkey initiated steps to form the Balkan Pact, collaborating with Balkan nations that were not under Soviet sway. Naturally, Greece and Yugoslavia were viewed as such allies. The reality was that all three nations – Turkey, Greece, and Yugoslavia – grappling with the post-Second World War international context, faced severe economic challenges and were in dire need of US aid to surmount these hurdles and kickstart reconstruction and development. The Balkan Pact, which would bolster NATO’s defense strategy, promised to enhance the military and economic support received from the West³¹.

Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, who placed immense value on establishing an anti-Soviet coalition in the Balkans, prioritized the formation of the Balkan Pact in Turkey’s foreign policy agenda in early 1953³². The Turkish Foreign Minister, Fuat Köprülü, visited Yugoslavia from January 20–25, 1953. After assuaging Yugoslavia’s reservations about the alliance, he proceeded to Athens and began the process leading to the signing of the Balkan Pact. The foreign ministers of the three countries finalized the agreement’s text in Athens on February 25, 1953. Subsequently, they traveled to Ankara, where the *Agreement of Friendship and Cooperation*, commonly referred to as the Balkan Pact, was signed on February 28, 1953. As per the agreement, the nations committed to cooperate in economic, cultural, and technical domains and pledged to amicably resolve any disputes³³.

²⁷ For more, see: A. Kastory, *Jugosławia w polityce Stanów Zjednoczonych, Wielkiej Brytanii i Związku Sowieckiego 1948–1956*, Kraków 2018.

²⁸ G. Özcan, *Ellili Yillarda Dış Politika*, in: *Türkiye’nin 1950’li Yılları*, ed. M. K. Kaynar, İstanbul 2015, p. 97.

²⁹ The Soviets communicated their stance in a memo dated 3 November 1951. In the said document it was stated that the inclusion of Turkey in NATO would cause great harm to the mutual relationship, see: *Belgelerle Türk-Sovyet İlişkilerinde 48 Yıl (1917–1965), Türkiye Disisleri Bakanlığı*, Ankara 1965, pp. 487–488.

³⁰ Between 1950 and 1951, Bulgaria’s policy of forcing Turks to relocate internally raised alarms in Turkey, as it was believed these actions stemmed from Soviet influence. Bulgaria was also discontented with Turkey’s prospective NATO membership. Hence, in Moscow, there were attempts to foster mutual distrust between the two nations.

³¹ It is worth noting that the pact would also enable Yugoslavia to solidify its stance concerning Italy on the Trieste issue. Greece, meanwhile, was keen to collaborate with Turkey and Yugoslavia to fortify its defences against Albania and Bulgaria.

³² By early 1953, it became evident that, despite the concerted efforts of Turkey and Greece, incorporating Italy into the bloc was becoming increasingly untenable.

³³ For the text of the agreement, see: *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ile Yunanistan Krallığı ve Yugoslavya Federatif Halk Cumhuriyeti arasında münakit Dostluk ve İş Birliği Anlaşmasına ek Anlaşmanın tasdikına dair kanun lâiyhası*

The agreement on the Balkan Pact was warmly received by both the United States and the United Kingdom. United States Deputy Secretary of State, J. Foster Dulles, and Anthony Eden expressed their full endorsement of the mutual security agreement between Turkey, Greece, and Yugoslavia. They emphasized the importance of resolving the Trieste issue for the mutual security of Italy and Yugoslavia³⁴. Securing the Balkan Pact was, above all, one of the most important tests for Turkey in the wake of its NATO membership. Despite the unsuccessful negotiations with Italy, uniting Yugoslavia and Greece was no small feat, and the Turkish foreign policymakers deserve credit for this achievement.

While the Balkan Pact was not strictly an alliance, it did pave the way for deeper relations among the three nations. Initially skeptical of the Balkan Pact, Josip Broz-Tito deemed the final version of the agreement inadequate, especially given the mounting pressure from the Soviet Union and the ongoing border dispute with Italy. Consequently, he sought to expand the pact to encompass military matters. A significant concern was the potential alliance with a non-NATO nation like Yugoslavia and the subsequent implications. Moreover, as of early 1954, the Trieste issue between Italy (a NATO member) and Yugoslavia (a non-NATO member) remained unresolved. It was not until the summer of 1954 that the US State Department acknowledged that the North Atlantic Treaty did not preclude a military alliance between a NATO and a non-NATO country. Furthermore, directives dispatched to the embassy in Ankara highlighted the US's primary concerns: Firstly, the forthcoming Balkan Treaty should bolster the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Secondly, the Balkan alliance discussions should remain separate from the Trieste issue. Thirdly, Italy's potential inclusion in the Balkan alliance should be deferred³⁵.

The evolution of the Balkan Pact into a full-fledged alliance culminated in the “Treaty of Alliance, Political Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance Between the Turkish Republic, the Kingdom of Greece, and the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia”, signed in Bled on August 9, 1954³⁶. This 14-point treaty, as per Article 2, stipulated that any armed aggression against one or more of them in any part of their territories shall be considered an aggression against all the contracting parties, and the three countries would take immediately and by common accord any measures, including the use of armed force, which they deem necessary for effective defense³⁷. The treaty also established a Permanent Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, which would convene biannually. If this council could not assemble, the Permanent Secretariat of the Treaty of Ankara would assume its responsibilities. Article 11 reaffirmed the validity of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in Ankara on February 28, 1953.

Although the Balkan Pact projected a 20-year collaboration, it was not as long-lasting as expected. The Balkan Alliance, backed by the West, was a defensive mechanism estab-

ve Dışişleri Komisyonu raporu (1/737), pp. 5–6, <https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d09/c029/tbmm09029063ss0111.pdf> (accessed 3/10/2023).

³⁴ A. Kastory, *Jugoslawia w polityce...*, pp. 81–83, 95–97.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 100–102.

³⁶ *Treaty of Alliance, Political Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance Between the Turkish Republic, the Kingdom of Greece, and the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (Balkan Pact)*, August 9, 1954, in: *American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents 1950–1955*, Volume 2, Washington 1957, pp. 1235–1239, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/eu002.asp (accessed 3/10/2023).

³⁷ *Ibidem*, Article 2.

lished by three Balkan countries that perceived a threat from the USSR and had harmonious relations. Its relevance waned as the circumstances that birthed it changed. In fact, even at the time the treaty was signed, the reality had already begun to change. Stalin's death in 1953 signaled a relaxation of Soviet foreign policy, evident in Moscow's renewed ties with Balkan nations. The USSR's decision to lift economic sanctions against Yugoslavia and restore diplomatic relations were clear indicators. From 1955, Soviet endeavors to sway Yugoslavia away from Western influence diminished Yugoslavia's commitment to the Balkan Alliance. The rapprochement between Belgrade and Moscow led Yugoslavia to gravitate towards the non-aligned movement, a policy that sought to avoid political or ideological alignment with the major power blocs. On the other hand, with the deterioration of Turkish-Greek relations over the Cyprus issue in 1954, the alliance began to wane in importance.

Turkey received overtures for enhanced ties with Balkan nations beyond Greece and Yugoslavia during this time. However, these proposals were declined due to Turkey's "en bloc" foreign policy towards the Balkans. A notable instance was the 1957 initiative by Romanian Prime Minister Chivu Stoica. He proposed collaboration among six Balkan countries: Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Yugoslavia, Romania, and Turkey. In a letter to the Prime Ministers of these nations, Stoica suggested a conference in any of the countries' capitals to explore avenues for economic and cultural cooperation in the region. Turkey, however, declined this proposal. Undeterred, Prime Minister Stoica revisited the idea in 1959, this time incorporating the topic of Balkan disarmament³⁸. Yet, this proposal met the same fate. Turkey perceived it as a strategy to expand Soviet influence into the Aegean and Mediterranean by establishing a neutral Balkan zone.

In Search of Multi-Vectorality

The renowned "Johnson's letter", dispatched by US President Lyndon B. Johnson to Prime Minister İsmet İnönü³⁹ during the Cyprus crisis of 1964, compelled Turkey to re-evaluate its ties with the United States. This prompted a realization in Ankara that its prior "en bloc" foreign policy, coupled with its reliance on Washington, had led to its isolation. The Turkish leadership also recognized that a rigid bloc policy could not guarantee its external security. Furthermore, due to the thawing of relations between the blocs, Turkish foreign policy had the chance to transition from a strict bloc approach to a multilateral one. This strain in ties with the United States paved the way for a Turkish-Soviet rapprochement, which subsequently positively influenced Turkish-Balkan relations.

Although Turkey shifted its focus to the Balkans, influenced both by the détente atmosphere and the change in foreign policy post the Cyprus crisis, initial efforts were somewhat lackluster. As Turkey began to adopt a more proactive stance in the Balkans, regional countries perceived Turkey's outreach as a reaction to its isolation over the Cyprus matter, questioning its genuine intentions.

³⁸ E. Koç, *Turkey and Romania Bilateral Relations Past and Future*, in: *İlkçağlardan Günümüze Jeostratejik ve Jeopolitik Açından Karadeniz*, ed. M. Okur, Ankara 2018, p. 266.

³⁹ L.B. Johnson, I. İnönü, *Correspondence between President Johnson and Prime Minister İnönü, June 1964*, as Released by the White House, January 15, 1966, "Middle East Journal", Vol. 20, No. 3, 1966, pp. 386–393. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4324028> (accessed 3/11/2023).

The sole exception was Albania. Enver Hoxha's foreign policy rendered Albania an isolated nation, and issues surrounding Epirus and shared national minorities caused friction with Greece. However, as global politics began to relax, Albania looked for avenues to break its isolation. The fact that Albania was one of the five countries that voted for Turkey in the 1965 UN General Assembly vote on Cyprus was a sign that Albania also wanted to improve its relations with Turkey. A very important role in the normalization of relations with Albania was played by Turkey's decision to support Albania in 1965. During a meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Albanian situation was deliberated upon, and measures to alleviate Albania's global isolation were considered. According to the conclusions adopted, although it was a communist state, it was close to Turkey and it was decided to take some concrete steps to concretize ties in that direction. The decision was made to back Albania, even symbolically, through protocols set to be signed between the two nations⁴⁰. In subsequent years, Albania's suggested accords in trade, culture, and telecommunications came to fruition, and the diplomatic missions of both countries were elevated to an ambassadorial level.

However, in 1968, remarks deemed inappropriate against the Turks during a ceremony marking the 500th anniversary of Skanderbeg's passing sparked a diplomatic crisis⁴¹. While the previously amicable relations between Turkey and Albania prevented this from escalating, the incident did slow down the rapprochement. According to the former Turkish ambassador in Tirana, Bilâl Şimşir, bilateral ties "remained dull and uninteresting until 1985"⁴².

Post the 1974 intervention in Cyprus, Turkey distanced itself from both the US and Greece, realizing once more that its "bloc policy" did not align with national interests. As a result, Turkey began prioritizing "regional considerations and neighboring countries" in its foreign policy, which again increased its interest in the Balkans. The widening gap in Turkey-US relations mirrored the warming of Turkish-Soviet ties, which indirectly benefited Ankara's relations with Balkan nations. Turkey not only elevated its diplomatic missions in the Balkan states to embassy level but also intensified mutual visits to counter the isolation stemming from the Cyprus issue. Turkey's proactive policy in the Balkans facilitated the establishment of cultural, scientific, and technical collaborations. Moreover, in 1975, declarations of amity and cooperation were inked between Turkey-Romania and Turkey-Bulgaria. During Yugoslav President Josip Broz-Tito's visit to Ankara in 1976, President Fahri Korutürk sought Yugoslav endorsement for Turkey's invitation as a guest to the upcoming Non-Aligned Movement conference⁴³.

In the second half of the 1970s, multilateral cooperation was initiated in the Balkans. This was primarily due to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which commenced in 1973, and the subsequent signing of the Helsinki Final Act. Turkey actively participated in these multilateral cooperation initiatives in the Balkans. The first expert meeting, organized to discuss cooperation principles between Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey in areas such as agriculture, energy, transport, telecommunications,

⁴⁰ *Dışişleri Bakanlığı Yıllığı 1964–1965*, <http://diad.mfa.gov.tr/diad/yillik/yillik-1964-1965.pdf> (accessed 3/10/2023).

⁴¹ B. Şimşir, *Türkiye – Arnavutluk İlişkileri Büyükelçilik Anıları (1985–1988)*, Ankara 2001, pp. 450–451.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 49.

⁴³ *Cumhuriyet Gazetesi*, 8 Haziran 1976 Salı, p. 1, <https://egazete.cumhuriyet.com.tr/oku/192/1976-06-08/0> (accessed 3/10/2023).

and trade, was held in Athens in 1976. Later meetings were organized periodically: in 1979 in Ankara focusing on Communications, in 1981 in Sofia on Transport, and in 1982 in Bucharest centered on Energy⁴⁴.

The Islamic revolution in Iran and the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan heightened fears of Soviet expansionism in Turkey. Consequently, the military coup that Turkey experienced on September 12, 1980 adversely impacted its relations with NATO countries⁴⁵. These events in the early 1980s influenced Turkey and the Balkan countries to drift apart, though bilateral relations remained cordial.

The only regional country with which Turkey faced issues during this time was Bulgaria, primarily due to concerns regarding the Turkish minority there. Relations between Bulgaria and Turkey remained strained for most of the Cold War, as both nations adhered strictly to their bloc policies. Additionally, frequent disputes arose concerning Turks residing in Bulgaria⁴⁶. Three significant migrations from Bulgaria to Turkey occurred during the Cold War. The first was in 1950–1951⁴⁷, the second followed the signing of the “immigration of close relatives” agreement in 1968⁴⁸ due to easing tensions between the blocs, and the third in 1989. Post-1984, the Bulgarian government initiated a “revival process” (Bulgarian: Възродителният процес) aimed at national unification by diminishing ethnic differences. This assimilation policy primarily targeted the Turkish minority, with measures against their language, culture, and religion. The Zhivkov administration, for instance, enforced name changes for Turks, prohibited religious practices, closed mosques, ceased Turkish language instruction, and banned its public use. Turks who resisted were deported to the Belene labor camp⁴⁹. Turkey attempted to address the situation through various international channels, including the Soviets, NATO, the US, the UK, and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, but with limited success. Eventually, following President Özal's announcement that he would welcome Bulgarian Turks to immigrate, Todor Zhivkov's regime permitted this group to exit Bulgaria. However, the migration scale exceeded expectations, with over 350,000 people moving. Unprepared, Turkey had to shut its borders within weeks, leading to the return of approximately 50,000 emigrants to Bulgaria⁵⁰. Dur-

⁴⁴ *Dışişleri Bakanlığı Tarihçesi, 1982*, <http://diad.mfa.gov.tr/diad/tarihce/1982.pdf> (accessed 3/10/2023).

⁴⁵ The notable exception was the United States; US-Turkish cooperation, despite numerous challenges, was considerably stronger in the 1980s than in the previous decade.

⁴⁶ In Bulgaria, the Turkish minority was referred to as “Turkish-speaking Bulgarians”, I. Stawowy-Kawka, *Islam w Bulgarii i Grecji – współczesne problemy*, in: *Niemcy-Europa-Świat*, ed. I. Stawowy-Kawka, Kraków 2007, p. 246.

⁴⁷ Turkey's participation in the Korean War led the Bulgarian socialist regime to deport over 160,000 Bulgarian Muslims in 1951. The Bulgarian government cited the Treaty of Ankara of 1925 to justify this, highlighting that the deportees were culturally and linguistically Turkish. Unprepared for such a large-scale migration, Turkey had to seal its border with Bulgaria. After extensive negotiations, over 162,000 Turks migrated before the Bulgarian-Turkish border closure in 1952. In 1953, a migration agreement was reached with Bulgaria, but the Bulgarian government prohibited the mass return of emigrants.

⁴⁸ Following this agreement, around 130,000 individuals migrated from Bulgaria to Turkey over the next decade.

⁴⁹ More on the situation of the Turks in Bulgaria: I. Stawowy-Kawka, *Turecka mniejszość narodowa w Bulgarii po 1945 r.*, “Balcanica Posnaniensia. Acta et studia”, vol. XVII, 2010, pp. 107–118.

⁵⁰ I. Uslu, A. Ceylan, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'ne Yönelen Kitleli Göç Hareketleri ve Kabul Mekanizmasındaki Yaklaşımlara İlişkin Bir İnceleme: 1989 Bulgaristan, 1991 Irak ve 2011 Suriye Göçleri*, “Yakın Dönem Türkiye Araştırmaları”, (36) 2019, p. 202.

ing these events, the Western bloc countries supported Turkey. The exception was Greece, which, due to the presence of a Turkish community in Eastern Thrace and problems in its relations with Turkey, did not condemn Todor Zhivkov's actions. Conversely, Yugoslavia criticized Bulgaria and accepted fleeing Turks as refugees.

In the latter half of the 1980s, a change in Soviet Union leadership ushered in a period of détente between the blocs, positively influencing Turkey's relations with the Balkan nations. In 1988, upon Yugoslavia's invitation, Turkey, along with the other five Balkan countries, attended the Conference of Foreign Ministers on Balkan Cooperation in Belgrade from 24–26 February. The conference's final declaration echoed the prevailing sentiment of reconciliation among the Balkan nations. It emphasized the need to "strengthen comprehensive multilateral cooperation in the region" and highlighted the ministers' collective interest and readiness "to contribute to the expansion of cooperation between the Balkan countries in an atmosphere of mutual respect, understanding, and trust"⁵¹. The conference played a pivotal role in "alleviating tensions and fostering a congenial atmosphere and dialogue in the Balkans, thereby promoting peace and security in the region, Europe, and globally". The Joint Declaration released post-conference acknowledged national minorities as pillars of unity, stability, amicable relations, and inter-state cooperation. Operating on the premise that the growth of multilateral cooperation in the Balkans is intrinsically tied to the bilateral relations between the Balkan nations, Turkey underscored the humanitarian facet of cooperation⁵². It was agreed that such conferences would be hosted periodically in each capital. Until the Yugoslav civil war, the foreign ministers of the Balkan nations convened in Sofia (1989) and Tirana (1990), preserving this harmonious environment. This favorable atmosphere was also palpable in Turkey's bilateral relations, especially with Albania, Romania, and Yugoslavia. This led to numerous high-level official visits, including by President Kenan Evren, to the Balkan nations and the foundation of collaborations grounded in signed arrangements and bilateral agreements.

Summary

Due to its geopolitical significance, the Balkans emerged as a battleground for influence between two global powers during the Cold War. Turkey, being in close proximity and having historical, cultural, and social ties with the region, found developments there particularly significant. This was especially true given its geo-strategic importance, stemming from potential threats to Eastern Thrace and Istanbul.

During the period covered in this article, Turkey's Balkan policy was primarily influenced by concerns about border security in light of the Soviet threat. This led to a strong emphasis on collaboration with the United States and, to a lesser degree, on enhancing its own global standing. Given that nearly all Balkan nations were part of the Eastern bloc, Turkey, as a NATO member, generally avoided close cooperation with states from the opposing bloc due to the inherent nature of the bipolar system.

⁵¹ *Dışişleri Bakanlığı Tarihçesi*, 1988, p. 37, <http://diad.mfa.gov.tr/diad/tarihce/1988-2.pdf> (accessed 10.03.2023).

⁵² *Ibidem*.

However, there were three notable exceptions to this approach in Turkish foreign policy during the Cold War. Firstly, there was the relationship with Greece; secondly, the Balkan Pact followed by the Treaty of Ankara; and thirdly, the approach towards the Cyprus issue. Relations with Greece, which were initially strong during the early years of the Cold War, deteriorated due to the Cyprus conflict. Both the Balkan Pact and the Treaty of Ankara, endorsed by the United States, were seen as opportunities to pull Yugoslavia into the Western block. Turkish interventions in Cyprus, particularly the military action in 1974 and the subsequent diplomatic isolation from Western allies, led Turkey to accept that the “bloc policy” was not in line with its national interests and to move towards bilateral cooperation with the Balkan states (with the exception of Greece).

During the discussed period, Turkey's policy towards the Balkan region was shaped by three factors. The first was the dynamics between the blocs, with periods of détente facilitating limited cooperation with Balkan nations from the opposing bloc. The second was the nature of Turkish-American relations. In the early Cold War years, Turkey's foreign policy was largely aligned with the expectations of its principal ally, the US, undertaking actions in the Balkans that were sanctioned by Washington. Any strain in ties with the US typically led to efforts to foster closer relations with Balkan nations from the opposing bloc. Tensions in Turkish-American relations have emerged each time as a result of the American stance in the context of the Cyprus issue and Turkey's relations with Greece. Therefore, the Turkish stance towards the Cyprus issue should be considered as the third factor indirectly shaping Turkey's foreign policy towards the Balkan region during the period discussed in this article.

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