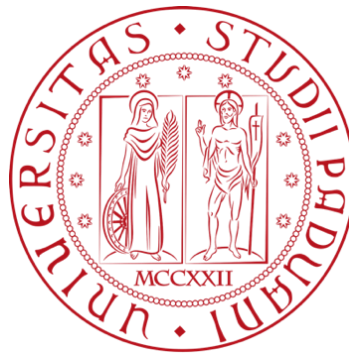


UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA

SCHOOL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE,  
LAW AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Master's degree in  
European and Global Studies



UNRAVELING TRANSNATIONAL STRATEGIES IN  
TURKISH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS:  
EXPLORING ITS 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SIGNIFICANCE  
THROUGH HISTORICAL LEGACIES

*Supervisor:*  
Prof. Giovanni Cadioli

*Candidate:*  
Tugay Kest  
*Matriculation N.*  
2041209

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Furthermore, conducting research on Turkish and Ottoman history as part of my thesis in Padova in Türkiye's centenary year holds profound significance, given the city's crucial role in shaping diplomatic ties between Türkiye and Italy, where Ottoman interpreters actively engaged in academic pursuits along these historic roads.

Finally, I am grateful to my parents, Fatma and Kenan, for teaching me the significance of dedication, knowledge, and passion, as well as for their unwavering support and sacrifices, which have been the wellspring of courage in my life.

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## Notes

### *Transliteration:*

In this thesis, sources in Russian are transliterated from Cyrillic to Latin script according to the American Library Association – Library of Congress (ALA-LC) system. While efforts were made for accuracy, there may be very few minor transliteration discrepancies, which do not compromise the integrity or narrative coherence of the thesis.

### *Terminology:*

It should be noted that the country officially changed its English name to “Türkiye” in 2022, and this is the terminology employed within the scope of this thesis. However, due to the need to direct quote from previously printed sources in English in the years prior to this change, “Turkey” is retained in certain instances.

### *Place Names:*

The names of places were utilized in accordance with the historical context and the specific year, decade, or century of the narrated content. When referring to places in present times, the names most widely known or adopted in English were used. Though, to maintain continuity and facilitate better understanding in some cases, historical names have been provided in parentheses to preserve the connection between different sections.

### *Formatting:*

In adherence with university guidelines, this thesis minimizes the use of endnotes and footnotes. Non-English terms are elucidated within the text and referenced as necessary. General details regarding transliteration, terminology, and place names are provided on this page for the reader’s reference and clarity. Additionally, in the final bibliography, English translations of titles for sources not in mainstream European languages are enclosed in square brackets for accessibility and comprehension.

*“Vita brevis,  
ars longa,  
occafio praeceps,  
experimentum periculofum,  
judicium difficile”*  
(Albanesii, 1649, p. 7).

*“Let no act be done without a purpose,  
not otherwise than according to the perfect principles of art”*  
(Aurelius, 1993, p. 22).

*“We are going to travel all over the world”*  
(Verne, 1971, p. 31).

*“(…) man must remake himself.  
And he cannot remake himself without suffering.  
For he is both the marble and the sculptor”*  
(Carrel, 1939, p. 274).

## Abstract

This thesis examines the complex interplay of transnational strategies within Turkish-Russian relations, drawing from their shared historical legacies rooted in the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire. We emphasize the term “transnational” rather than “international” because the historical dynamics of the Turkish-Russian relationship have also influenced interactions with other major powers on the world stage, shaping policies that extend beyond their own borders and perspectives on the global order. Focusing on the transition from imperial pasts to modern state structures in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the study explores how historical policy behaviors from these empires continue to shape contemporary foreign policy decisions. Beginning with the Russo-Turkish conflicts spanning centuries, this research traces the evolution of their global positioning and policies on geopolitics and international relations. Despite periods of initial friendship, historical animosities and power struggles persisted across various regions. While the Republic of Türkiye and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) experienced a brief period of reconciliation after World War I, tensions resurfaced prior to World War II. Today, Turkish-Russian relations exhibit a balanced dynamic marked by robust diplomatic dialogue and strategic cooperation, particularly evident in regions such as the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Balkans, and the Middle East. Therefore, the thesis emphasizes how historical legacies persist in shaping contemporary foreign policy decisions and actions, elucidating the intricate interplay of interests and rivalries in the modern global landscape, with the Turkish-Russian relationship serving as a compelling case study. Key events such as Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the Second Karabakh War, the prevalence of politics of influence in the Balkans, and the ongoing civil war in Syria serve as focal points for analyzing these dynamics. By shedding light on the enduring significance of historical legacies, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of Turkish-Russian relations and their implications for global politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Keywords:** Russia-Türkiye Nexus, Transnational Policy, Historical Legacy, Ottoman Empire, Russian Empire

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

To comprehend today's anxieties on transnational security policies, it is essential to investigate the enduring traces and legacy left by history, as they have undoubtedly played an instrumental role in the evolution and identity creation of nations, societies, and states of the modern world. In simpler terms, the major events of the past continue to exert their influence on the global stage in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, especially in the context of international power dynamics. In the broader context of examining the enduring impact of historical legacies on transnational security policies, it is essential to explore the specific dynamics of the relationship between Türkiye and Russia. This bilateral relationship provides an engaging case study, illustrating the complex interplay between history, geopolitics, and security concerns while offering important insights that characterize the contemporary global geopolitical situation. Given that both nations are the rightful successors of two formidable imperial forces, namely the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire, which exerted significant influence over vast regions in close proximity for centuries and considering that the architects of the Republic of Türkiye and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were individuals educated within these imperial frameworks, this analysis takes on added significance.

Indeed, when considering historical legacies, it is important to acknowledge not only the influence of these two empires but also factors such as the Golden Horde and the Roman Empire since these entities left indelible imprints on the development of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, thus shaping the subsequent state structures that emerged in later periods. This viewpoint is not intended to advocate for an imperialistic or expansionist agenda in 21<sup>st</sup>-century politics. Instead, it aims to comprehend how the legacies of influential imperial structures and historical objectives manifest in present-day social frameworks and political systems. Furthermore, it underscores that a nation's concept of security is not formed hastily; rather, it often evolves over decades or even centuries of experience. In times of threat, there is a tendency to revert to familiar and ingrained policy cycles that have been internalized over time.

### *Thesis Question*

Many of the crises dominating the global agenda today can be interpreted within the geographical or political spheres of influence of Türkiye and Russia. This encompasses their expansive borders spanning across both the Asian and European continents, their intricate historical relations, their engagements with neighboring nations, and their roles within international frameworks. Examples of such crises include Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Second Karabakh War, the politics of influence in the Balkans, and the protracted civil conflict in Syria. This is precisely why delving into the historical trajectory of Turkish-Russian relations from their origins is crucial for illuminating the complexities of today's global crises. Through this exploration, events or figures from one chapter will intersect with narratives from another; the "*unraveling*" in the title of the thesis corresponds to this, akin to the unraveling of clues in a detective series where evidence is pieced together on a whiteboard. In this analysis, we will navigate through the historical corridors to examine areas where the threads are most tightly woven, and we will assess the current state of these intricate issues. In this context, the main question we will ask in this thesis is, "*How do historical legacies of the Ottoman and Russian Empires affect the transnational strategies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Turkish-Russian Relations?*"

### *Methodology*

A multifaceted approach will be employed to comprehensively explore the historical legacies of the Ottoman and Russian Empires and their impact on contemporary Turkish-Russian relations. The primary methodological framework of this thesis will involve a rigorous analysis of both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources will include historical documents, chronicles, diplomatic archives, official government records, treaties, correspondence between key figures, and relevant speeches or declarations. These sources will offer firsthand accounts and insights into the historical events, policies, and decisions that have shaped the trajectory of Turkish-Russian relations over time. By delving into these primary materials, we aim to gain a nuanced understanding of the motivations, strategies, and ideologies that have influenced the behavior of both nations in the past and continue to inform their actions in the present. In addition to primary sources, a wide array of secondary sources will be consulted. These

include scholarly works, academic articles, dictionaries, monographs, and analyses by experts in the fields of history, international relations, political science, etymological studies, and security studies. By drawing upon the existing body of literature, we seek to contextualize our analysis within broader academic debates and theoretical frameworks. This will allow us to critically engage with existing interpretations of these relations and identify gaps or areas for further exploration.

Furthermore, supplementary sources such as etymological studies, analyses of warfare, travel accounts, legal documents, newspaper articles, and reports from international organizations will be utilized to enrich our understanding of specific historical events, cultural contexts, and geopolitical dynamics. These diverse sources will provide valuable insights into the complexities of Turkish-Russian relations and help illuminate the various factors at play in shaping transnational strategies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. By employing this comprehensive methodological approach, we aim to offer a thorough examination of the historical legacies that continue to influence Turkish-Russian relations today. Through an analysis of primary and secondary sources, we seek to uncover the underlying patterns, tensions, and dynamics that define this complex bilateral relationship and shed light on its significance in the contemporary global geopolitical landscape.

### *Roadmap*

To ensure a thorough exploration of our research question and a nuanced understanding of historical dynamics, we plan to adopt a structured approach in our study. Chapter 2 will delve into the historical origins of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, providing a succinct overview of key developments spanning centuries. Moving on to Chapter 3, we will analyze the factors influencing Turkish-Russian relations that date back almost a thousand years, with a focus on the intricate balances, ambitions, and historical events shaping the Russo-Turkish wars. Chapter 4 will center on World War I and its implications, examining the evolving dynamics between Türkiye and the Soviet Union, starting from the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Finally, Chapter 5 will synthesize our findings, highlighting the contemporary significance of Turkish-Russian relations based on the insights garnered from preceding chapters. It should be noted that this roadmap is only one of many possible narrative options.

# **Chapter 2**

## **Imperial Echoes: Legacies of the Ottoman and Russian Empires**

### **2.1. Ottoman Empire: Rise, Fall, and the Roots of Contemporary Türkiye**

Every historical power that has had a role on the world stage and the chance to influence the future comes with its unique qualities and values. These aspects are like decorations that make up the identity and collective memory of the society it represents. They directly affect the everyday lives of its people and how their culture is passed down. It is clear that these distinctive features have a big impact on how a state is run, how the citizens engage, and how it communicates with other nations. The Ottoman Empire was a power of more than six centuries, with territories stretching from Asia to Europe, from the Middle East to Africa, encompassing different cultural blocs and nations, and whose interaction with the East and the West brought great advantages and various challenges. With respect to this, Ortaylı (2015) provides a valuable perspective on how specific historical circumstances and evolutionary processes shape the national identities of different countries. The French national identity, for instance, is intrinsically tied to pivotal occurrences, such as the French Revolution. Similarly, Italy's identity is deeply rooted in the process of unification. In the case of Turkish national identity, it is closely intertwined with the sacrifices and enduring struggles marked by "blood, gunpowder, fire, sweat, and tears" during the tumultuous period of the Ottoman Empire's disintegration. Ortaylı's insights underscore the profound interconnection between Turkish national identity and the unique circumstances that emerged during the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. (p. 28) Before embarking on this exploration, it is crucial to lay the groundwork by tracing the origins and history of the Ottoman Empire briefly, thereby establishing a solid foundation for our narrative. Certainly, the goal of this thesis is not to provide an exhaustive account of Ottoman history or its origins, as such a comprehensive treatment is not possible within the confines of a thesis. However, it is necessary to offer a certain level of perspective by addressing specific historical events and figures.

### *2.1.1. From Central Asian Steppes to the Anatolia*

According to the existing knowledge, the historical origins of the Turks date back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE (Leiser, 2006). Emerging from the vast expanses of Central Asia, which now include present-day Mongolia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Russia, the Turkic people lived nomadic lifestyles, affording them flexibility in various forms of pastoral and tribal existence (Golden, 1992, pp. 4-5). Their adaptability allowed them to navigate the extensive terrains of Central Asia, later engaging with neighboring tribes and civilizations such as the Chinese, Mongols, Persians, and Arabs. This intercultural exchange played a key role in shaping the evolution of the Turkic identity and laid the groundwork for the Seljuk Empire. Seljuk Bey, a distinguished leader within the Tengric Oghuz Yabgu State originated in Central Asia, ascended to prominence on account of the significant contributions of his father, Tuqaq. Upon assuming the position of Subashy, a chief of police, Seljuk's favor with Yabgu, the state's leader, aroused envy among fellow officials. Fearing Seljuk's growing influence, Yabgu resolved to eliminate him. Consequently, Seljuk was compelled to depart from Jankent, eventually settling in Jand, where he and his tribe embraced Islam (Bar Habraeus, 1932, pp. 195-196). This conversion bolstered Seljuk's status, setting the stage for military endeavors and the establishment of the Seljuk Empire. Founded by Seljuk's grandson, Tughril Bey, the empire saw its establishment shaped significantly by Tughril's nephew, Alp Arslan, the empire's second sultan. Alp Arslan's decisive success in the Battle of Manzikert (Malazgirt) in 1071 facilitated the migration of Turkmen tribes to Anatolia, representing a critical turning point (Barber, 2012, p. 9). In 1077, Suleyman Shah, Seljuk Bey's great-grandson, marked the foundation of the Sultanate of Rûm, or Anatolian Seljuk State, the extension of the Seljuk Empire in Anatolia. In 1243, the Sultanate of Rûm faced a formidable clash with the Mongol Empire at the Battle of Kösedag, leading to its loss and subjugation to the Mongols (Cahen, 1968, p. 246). The Mongols, known for their military excellence, achieved a significant triumph, causing the subsequent fragmentation of Anatolia into smaller Turkish beyliks (principalities)—these were essentially small ones in Anatolia governed by beys (chieftains), including the tribe of Ertuğrul Ghazi and Osman Ghazi (Köprülü, 1992, pp. 76-77). Over a span exceeding two centuries, starting from the Seljuks' entry into Anatolia to the emergence of the

Ottomans, noteworthy demographic and cultural shifts took place. The crucial factor was the migration of Turkmen communities from Central Asia, prompted by the aftermath of the devastating Mongol invasions (Uyar, 2012, p. 411). Seeking refuge and stability, these communities played a key role in shaping Anatolia into a predominantly Turkish region by the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This demographic transformation is underscored in historical accounts such as Polo's (1912) reference to Anatolia as "Turcomania," emphasizing its Turkish cultural and demographic character before the rise of the Ottomans (p. 16).

### *2.1.2. Foundation of the Ottoman Beylik and Dynasty*

Ertuğrul Ghazi and his son, Osman Ghazi, played pivotal roles in shaping early Ottoman history following their tribe's migration to Anatolia. There are some uncertainties surrounding the exact time of Ertuğrul Ghazi and his tribe's arrival in the region (Cengiz & Yücel, 1992, p. 375; İnalçık, 2007, pp. 479-480). Initially awarded territories, Söğüt and Domaniç, for their allegiance during conflicts between the Empire of Nicaea and the Sultanate of Rûm, Ertuğrul Ghazi achieved significant territorial gains (Neşri, 1949, pp. 62-65). At this juncture, it is crucial to acknowledge that the structure of the Ottomans was an uç beylik or frontier beylik—a term in the Middle Ages for small principalities positioned in the border areas between Christian and Muslim lands. Defenders on the Byzantine side were Akritai, and on the Ottoman side, they were known as Ghazi. (Witteck & Heywood, 1958, p. 33; Brauer, 1995, p. 53). After Ertuğrul Ghazi's death, Osman Ghazi took charge of the raids, initiating warfare on Byzantine territory, and other beys began uniting under his leadership (İnalçık, 1970b). A notable conquest was Karacahisar, strategically positioned to control passages from the Anatolian plateau to the plains of Bithynia. (Shaw, 1976, p. 14) Osman Ghazi adhered to Islamic tradition by converting churches into mosques post-conquests, symbolizing Ottoman supremacy and the triumph of Islam, which carried complex political and cultural implications influenced by the specific dynamics of the time. This practice happened in Karacahisar as well; beyond asserting dominance, it also highlighted the Ottomans' ability to integrate local populations, demonstrating adaptability and cultural accommodation. The occurrence aligned with a khutbah presented for Osman Ghazi by Tursun Fakih, a respected religious figure in the community, subsequently leading to his appointment as

the inaugural Ottoman qadi (Paşazade, 2003; pp. 71-73). It not only underscored the symbolic tradition but also showcased Osman Ghazi's organization of the administrative system, thus adding a ceremonial and organizational significance to the occasion in Karacahisar. Ortaylı (1994) notes a resemblance between this historical Turkish administrative role and the functions of the *Bürgermeister* or Lord Mayor in medieval Europe. The qadi's dual role as a community leader and administrator uniquely shaped the Ottoman governance structure, seamlessly blending religious and administrative functions. From managing notary duties to land registry and diverse administrative tasks, the qadi's responsibilities mirrored those of *Bürgermeister*'s and Lord Mayor's. Despite changes in governance and laws over centuries, the qadi's enduring significance lies in shaping traditions and facilitating communication between society and the state administration, just like the similar roles in medieval European governance (p. 26).

### *2.1.3. The Onset of Ottoman Rule in the Balkans and the Interregnum*

Osman Ghazi's son, Orhan Ghazi, held the throne from 1323/24 to 1362. Before his reign in 1320, he married Holorifa, later known as Nilüfer Hatun, daughter of the Byzantine Prince of Yarhisar (Oliva & Oliva, 1832; Paşazade, 2003, pp. 68-71). This union went beyond mere romance; it was a crucial element in a political alliance during the consolidation and expansion process of Ottomans. Upon his arrival, he promptly captured Bursa and designated it as the capital. The Battle of Maltepe in 1329 severed Byzantium's connections with Anatolia. Acquiring regions like İznik and İzmit played a role in strengthening the empire, and the integration of the Beylik of Karasi ensured political unity. Additionally, in 1346, Orhan's marriage to the daughter of Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos further solidified the diplomatic alliance with the Byzantine Empire. During his period, the Ottomans seized Tzympe (Çimpe) Castle, paving the way for the capture of the Balkans. Finally, Orhan Ghazi also concentrated on nationalizing the beylik, founding the first Ottoman madrasah, and organizing the state administration.

Murad I, also known as Murad Hüdevandigâr, ruled from 1362 to 1389; upon ascending the throne, he sought to expand Ottoman territories in the Balkans and Anatolia. The victory at the Battle of Sazlıdere led to the capture of Adrianople (Edirne), Plovdiv (Filibe), and Komotini (Gümülcine), disrupting Byzantium's land connection. He

arranged the union between his son, Bayezid I, or Bayezid the Thunderbolt, and Devlet Hatun, the daughter of the Germiyanids' ruler; an alliance resulted in the incorporation of Kotyaion (Kütahya) into the Ottoman domain. The pivotal Battle of Kosovo in 1389 marked a significant victory since it accelerated Ottoman expansion into the Balkans, introduced Ottoman artillery, and led to the annexation of the Kingdom of Serbia. Additionally, emphasizing state institutionalization, Murad I established the Janissary Corps, divided the state into provinces, and created the Eyalet of Rumelia, encompassing most of the Balkans and the largest administrative division (İnalçık, 1991, p. 721).

The Ottoman Interregnum erupted among the sons of Bayezid I following his defeat and capture by Timur, the founder of the Timurid Empire, at the Battle of Ankara in 1402. The existence of the Ottoman Empire was threatened, and the archives kept until then were destroyed by Timur's army (Witteck, 1938, p. 1; Egemen & Orhan, 1995, p. 106). The sons of Bayezid I engaged in a power struggle for the throne, igniting a protracted civil conflict lasting nearly 11 years. The culmination of the strife occurred with Mehmed I, or Mehmed Çelebi's triumph at the Battle of Çamurlu in 1413 against his brother Musa Çelebi, where he proclaimed himself the new sultan, successfully restoring the empire (Neşri, 1957, pp. 516-517).

#### *2.1.4. Conquest of Constantinople*

Under the rule of Murad II, the Ottoman victory in the Second Battle of Kosovo in 1448 resulted in an increasing Ottoman influence in the Balkans. This marked the final Crusade directed at defending Constantinople and symbolizing the path to its eventual Ottoman conquest. Subsequently, the response to Pope Sixtus IV's call for a new Crusade post the Ottoman seizure of Constantinople was tepid, with only the Italians showing interest—an indication of the weakened foundations of the crusading movement in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Madden, 2014, pp. 185-188). Transitioning to the Ottoman perspective, undoubtedly, it was under the leadership of Mehmed II, widely known as Mehmed the Conqueror, that the empire reached its peak. Under the guidance of Akshamsaddin, an influential Ottoman scholar and mystic saint, Mehmed II received advice and direction in the realms of life, philosophy, and Islam while concurrently participating in intellectual pursuits alongside the Italian philosopher Cyriacus of Ancona, an Italian humanist and

antiquarian (İnalçık, 1954; Yücel, 1953; Raby, 1980). Engaging in scholarly endeavors not only offered Mehmed II valuable counsel but also advanced his proficiency in Latin, sharpened his literary skills, and expanded his education beyond conventional methods while enriching his learning experience from history. In 1451, at the age of 19, he ascended to the throne following the death of Murad II and strategically aimed for Constantinople, a city previously besieged by his grandfathers (Eroğlu, 2004). The military, backed by Ottoman weaponry crafted by the skilled artisan and engineer Orban, working under the guidance of Saruca Pasha, significantly contributed to the successful conduct of the operation (Rauf, 2016, p. 27; Sadeddin, 1979, pp. 271-273). Obstructed by a chain hindering passage from Karaköy to the Golden Horn, the Ottoman Navy confronted a major obstacle, altering the existing dynamics. To address this challenge, Mehmed II issued an extraordinary command, directing the overland transport and deployment of galleys into the Golden Horn, reshaping the trajectory of the operation (Gregory, 2010, p. 785). On the 29<sup>th</sup> of May 1453, Ottoman forces successfully seized Constantinople, marking the downfall of the Byzantine Empire after more than a millennium and profoundly shook the Western world and Christendom (Sphrantzes, 1980, p. 70; Madden, 2014, p. 186; Norwich, 1999, p. 382). Afterward, the city was originally called “Kostantiniyye,” denoting “the city of Constantine.” Turkish variations like “İslambol” (full of Islam) emerged to highlight its significance as the Ottoman capital, and the formal renaming as “Istanbul” took place in 1930 (Room, 1993, p. 86).

After securing victory, Mehmed II took a symbolic action by converting Hagia Sophia into a mosque, and the old figures were covered with plaster (Müller-Wiener, 1977, p. 91). However, we can argue that he envisioned the city not as a traditional Islamic one but as a diverse metropolis since his policies encompassed safeguarding the city’s intellectuals, freeing captive Greeks, providing opportunities for the less privileged to work, and actively supporting the return of refugees from the Byzantine era (Dursteler, 2006, p. 142). Protection of Christian neighborhoods and religious freedom edicts attracted Jews from Europe, making the city a melting pot of three religions. In a letter dated 1454, Jewish notable Yitzhak Sarfati highlighted Istanbul’s unique religious freedom, inviting persecuted Jews from Europe to the city with these words: “*Here every man may dwell at peace under his own vine and fig-tree. Here you are allowed to wear the most precious garments.*” (Kobler, 1953, pp. 283-285) Additionally, Gennadius II’s

appointment as patriarch, ensuring the continuity of the Orthodox Church, and his translation of Christian doctrine into Ottoman Turkish underscored Mehmed II's commitment to transforming the newly conquered city into a hub of cultural and religious tolerance (Runciman, 1965, p. 199; Papadakis, 1972, p. 96). Another significant instance is The Ahidname, a document signed by Mehmed II to the clergy of Bosnia, considered as reflective of the Ottoman Empire's tolerant policies towards diverse religious groups (Çelik, 2018, pp. 172-173). Furthermore, following the negotiation of a peace treaty with the Venetian Republic in 1479, Mehmed II expressed a desire for an Italian painter to reside at his court and create artworks. Gentile Bellini was assigned this task, and the resulting masterpiece has had a lasting impact on the Western perception of Turks for centuries (Kim, 2015, p. 157; Rodini, 2011, p. 23). These actions, coupled with Mehmed II's intellectual character, led to his self-proclamation as the new Caesar, asserting legitimacy as the rightful successor to Rome, claiming territories beyond the established borders of the Ottoman Empire. Finally, during Mehmed II's reign, in the 1460s, Amastris (Amasra) and Trebizond (Trabzon) were captured, respectively, leading to the demise of the Empire of Trebizond and establishing Ottoman rule over the north of Anatolia. Afterward, the Genoese colonies of Azov and Caffa were captured, followed by the annexation of Crimea as an autonomous province in 1475 (İnalçık, 2017, pp. 62-63).

#### *2.1.5. A Catalyst for the Renaissance*

The 15<sup>th</sup> century Italian Renaissance represented a period of profound transformation in art, science, literature, and architecture, fueled by a deep fascination with Ancient Greek and Roman civilizations. The Medici family, through their influential patronage of the arts, support for intellectual pursuits, and substantial contributions to the cultural and political milieu, played a crucial role in shaping the Renaissance era. (Strathern, 2005, p. 27) This period is also characterized by the migration of Byzantine scholars, together with the intellectuals in Western Europe who later became students of the arriving scholars (Landino, 1991, pp. 197-198; Hancock, 2005, p. 35; Geanakoplos, 1958, pp. 158-159). In this context, the capture of Constantinople, representing the catalyst for the Renaissance, had a significant impact mirrored in Cardinal Bessarion's house in Rome. This residence serves as a noteworthy example, bringing the Byzantine

and Italian thinkers, reflecting the vibrant intellectual atmosphere (Setton, 1956, p. 73). Initially beneficial for the Ottoman Empire, nurturing cultural and scientific enrichment alongside strategic advantages, the Renaissance eventually posed long-term challenges. The growing disparity in cultural and scientific development between the Ottomans and Europe hindered the empire's adaptability to changing circumstances.

#### *2.1.6. Selim the Resolute and Golden Age of Suleiman the Magnificent*

After Mehmed II, Bayezid II seized control of the strongholds of Kilia and Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiyi (Akkerman), which were part of the Principality of Moldavia, and severed its link to the Black Sea in 1484 (Shaw, 1976, p. 73). Bayezid II's aim was to ensure an uninterrupted land connection to Crimea. In 1492, Ivan III of Muscovy recognized Ottoman control over the Black Sea, and he proposed an agreement for unimpeded passage and trade. Transitioning to the Ottoman perspective, Selim I, commonly known as Selim the Resolute, ascended to the throne in 1512, succeeding Bayezid II and shaping the Empire's trajectory through ambitious military campaigns and strategic conquests. Notably, confrontations with the Safavid Empire, exemplified by the triumphant Battle of Chaldiran in 1514, solidified Ottoman dominance in the region and influenced the religious and ethnic composition of the territories involved (Eggenberger, 1985, p. 85). Expanding his military endeavors, Selim I successfully seized Egypt in 1517, marking the defeat of the Mamluks and bringing Egypt under Ottoman rule. After this defeat, the Sacred Relics moved to Istanbul, underscoring the religious and symbolic importance. Simultaneously, under Selim I's rule, Sunni Islam consolidated as the dominant faith within the Empire, with the Ottoman sultans adopting the title of Caliph after the conquest of Egypt, emphasizing the Empire's claim to religious leadership in the Islamic world (İnalçık, 1970a, pp. 320-323). Selim I's incorporation of culturally diverse regions into the Ottoman Empire posed governance challenges while strengthening geopolitical prominence, making the Empire a formidable global player. Moreover, Selim I's reign witnessed a notable intellectual stride, exemplified by the creation of a world map by the distinguished cartographer Piri Reis (Soucek, 1992, pp. 265-279; Yerci, 1989). Alongside the intellectual achievements, Selim I also made lasting contributions to architecture, notably seen in the construction of the Selimiye Mosque in Edirne.

Following Selim I's rule, Suleiman I, commonly known as Suleiman the Magnificent or the Lawgiver, ascended to Ottoman leadership in 1520 and held the position until 1566, initiating what is frequently celebrated as the golden age of the Ottoman Empire. His reign, spanning over four decades, became synonymous with unprecedented military successes, expansive cultural flourishing, and significant administrative reforms. Suleiman I's military campaigns, such as the capture of Belgrade in 1521, the Rhodes Island in 1522, and the Battle of Mohács in 1526, not only expanded Ottoman territories but also solidified the empire's dominance in Europe. However, the Siege of Vienna in 1529 put a significant limit on Ottoman expansion into Central Europe, mainly due to severe winter conditions and lack of equipment (Shaw, 1976, p. 93; Uzunçarşılı, 1988, p. 330). Following the Ottoman capture of Belgrade, the Italian War of 1521–1526 commenced, leading to a conflict between the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain, Charles V, and King François I of France. After a defeat in Pavia, François I was captured and imprisoned in Madrid. This event marked the Ottomans' entry into European politics, prompted by a plea from François I's mother, to which Suleiman I was careful to avoid any specific statement as to what he was willing to do (Merriman, 1944, pp. 128-132). Suleiman I, serving as a counterbalance in European politics, seized the opportunity; a campaign in 1526 aimed at assisting France strategically turned into the Ottoman conquest of a significant portion of the Kingdom of Hungary, with a probable aim of establishing a strategic base against the Habsburgs. At this point, it is crucial to understand that Suleiman I's adept long-term diplomacy with European powers played a crucial role in shaping the empire's strategic political maneuvers (Barker, 1974, pp. 28-33; Miller, 2005, p. 208). Notably, Suleiman I's support for Martin Luther amidst the lingering effects of the Renaissance reflected a forward-thinking strategy, anticipating potential benefits from the religious discord in Europe (İnalçık, 1974, p. 53). The Franco-Ottoman alliance also had repercussions for the conflict between the Ottomans and the Safavids. Several land disputes, the Bey of Bitlis seeking Safavid protection, Tahmasp I's assassination of the governor of Baghdad (a supporter of Suleiman I), and sectarian propaganda were catalysts for the wars between the Ottomans and Safavids (İnalçık, 1970c, p. 330). In this context, a Habsburg-Safavid alliance was attempted to jointly confront the Ottoman Empire and alleviate the pressure on Charles V, while Suleiman I pursued a Franco-Ottoman alliance to counterbalance the Habsburg threat (Kearney,

2004, p. 112). Furthermore, the Naval Battle of Preveza in 1538, under the leadership of Hızır Hayreddin Pasha, or Hayreddin Barbarossa, the Ottoman Navy secured its supremacy in the Mediterranean through this battle, effectively transforming the region into a dominant sphere of influence for the empire (Phillips, 2000, p. 15). Beyond the battlefield, Suleiman I's support and encouragement for the development of literature, poetry, and the fine arts played a massive role in shaping the Ottoman artistic style (Mansel, 1998, p. 70). His patronage not only cultivated a dynamic cultural environment at the Ottoman court, fostering masterpieces in literature, calligraphy, and miniature painting, also manifested in the architectural masterpiece commissioned by him, the Süleymaniye Mosque—an enduring testament to the artistic renaissance during his reign (Atıl, 1987, pp. 24-27). Often hailed as the “Lawgiver,” Suleiman I played a vital role in shaping the Ottoman Empire's legal system through extensive legal reforms, codification of laws, and the establishment of a centralized bureaucracy. In 1566, he died during the siege that led to the Ottoman capture of Szigetvár (Ágoston, 2009).

#### *2.1.7. The Second Siege of Vienna and its Aftermath*

Fast forward to the next century, the once formidable Ottoman Empire faced significant setbacks and challenges, marking a period of stagnation in both its military power and overall influence, most notably at the Second Siege of Vienna in 1683. The year before, heightened conflicts between Imre Thököly's forces (the King of Upper Hungary, an Ottoman vassal state) and the Holy Roman Empire led Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa Pasha to convince Mehmed IV. Subsequently, the Dîvân-ı Hümâyûn (Imperial Council) terminated the Peace of Vasvár that concluded the Austro-Turkish War of 1663–1664 (Genelkurmay Askerî Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı, 1983, p. 39). The Ottoman forces besieged Vienna and faced a coalition of European armies, including the Holy Roman Empire and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The siege ended in a decisive victory for the European alliance, halting the Ottoman advance into Central Europe (Finkel, 2007, pp. 286-287). The key factors contributing to the Ottoman defeat in Vienna were the strategic errors made by Kara Mustafa Pasha and the more effective utilization of firearms by the army under the command of King John III Sobieski (Yilmaz, 2015, p. 251). In 1684, a new Holy League united the Holy Roman Empire, the Polish–Lithuanian

Commonwealth, and the Venetian Republic, with the Tsardom of Russia joining in 1686, backed by subsidies from Pope Innocent XI (Gerin, 1886, p. 141). Afterward, the Great Turkish War, or Wars of the Holy League (1683–1699), including the Russo-Turkish Wars of 1686–1700, and tensions with the Habsburgs, placed additional stress on the military. Consequently, Mustafa II's reign culminated in the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699, signifying the end of Ottoman influence in a substantial portion of Central Europe and marking the empire's major territorial setbacks in the region (Ágoston, 2009). The Tsardom of Russia, unable to acquire Crimea, abstained from signing the treaty. Instead, the Treaty of Istanbul in 1700, an extension of the Karlowitz, marked Russia's territorial gains from the Ottoman Empire, granting a permanent ambassador in Istanbul and access to the Black Sea for commercial vessels (Phillips, 1995, p. 102). The Ottoman Sultan Ahmed III, however, deftly managed the trials of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1710–1711 and the consequent Treaty of the Pruth (1711), a diplomatic milestone that curtailed Russia's access to the Black Sea. Having secured Crimea and its surroundings, the Ottoman Empire reclaimed dominion over the Black Sea (Mikaberidze, 2011, p. 726).

#### *2.1.8. Modernization Efforts and the Impact of the Russo-Turkish Wars*

The Tulip Period (1718-1730), considered as the start of the Ottoman intellectual awakening, led to significant reforms in cultural, social, and economic domains, including the establishment of the first Ottoman Turkish printing press by Ibrahim Muteferrika (Shaw, 1976, p. 235; Afyoncu, 2001, p. 607). This period abruptly concluded with the Patrona Halil Rebellion, primarily driven by societal discontent over Grand Vizier Nevşehirli Damat Ibrahim Pasha's "opulent" lifestyle (Aktepe, 1976, p. 3). Moreover, Mahmud I's governance saw the Austro-Russian-Turkish War (1735–1739) and the consequential Belgrade Treaty, which saw the recovery of lost territories and the affirmation of Ottoman sovereignty in the Black Sea (Laugier, 1770, pp. 466-485). However, the Battle of Chesma during Osman III's rule dealt a severe blow to the Ottoman navy, leaving it weakened for an extended period. Besides, Abdulhamid I confronted the challenging terms of the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji (Küçük Kaynarca), which concluded the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–1774. This led to the Ottoman Empire surrendering control over the Black Sea, granting Russia access through the Straits,

securing diplomatic advantages, and concurrently reducing Ottoman sovereignty in the Mediterranean (Sazonova et al., 1992, pp. 78-93).

Another Russo-Turkish war was still ongoing when Selim III ascended the throne. It was followed by the Treaty of Jassy in 1792, underlining the constant foreign policy difficulties the empire was facing as Russia gained control over the entire Northern Black Sea (Ekaterina & Benkendorf, 1792). The magnitude of the need for reform in the Ottoman Empire became even more evident now, and Selim III was aware of it prior to assuming the throne (Sakaoğlu, 2015, p. 360). An advisory council was established, and Selim III, seeking insights from local and foreign experts on the state's decline, incorporated their findings into reform proposals. He implemented his reforms under the name of Nizâm-ı Cedîd (New Order) to eliminate the outdated and corrupt Janissary Corps with a modern military organization, reduce the influence of the scholars of Islamic doctrine and law on the state and the society, and align the empire with European advancements in science, art, and the military (Beydilli & Şahin, 2001, pp. 62-83). In 1807, Selim III was ousted, and the reforms were abandoned due to a Janissary rebellion led by Kabakçı Mustafa, who garnered support from various opposition factions.

After taking over the throne in the aftermath of a tumultuous era, Mahmud II faced political upheaval throughout his rule, grappling with challenges such as the Balkan revolts and the rebellion led by Governor Muhammad Ali of Egypt. Despite these challenges, he undertook transformative reforms that laid the groundwork for the Edict of Gülhane, earning him praise as a reformer and criticism as “gavûr” (non-believer) for his modernization initiatives (İnce, 2017, p. 449). Perhaps the most important of his reforms was the abolition of the Janissary Corps and the establishment of the Asâkir-i Mansûre-i Muhammediye (The Victorious Soldiers of Muhammad) (Levy, 1971, p. 21).

Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümâyûnu, or Edict of Gülhane of November 3, 1839, following Abdulmejid I's ascension, was the Ottoman Empire's first large-scale move towards Westernization. It ensured no punishment without a fair trial, transparent courts for equality, state security for life, property, and honor, tax fairness, military service as a citizenship duty, and the recognition of property rights, allowing individuals to own, buy, sell, and bequeath property freely (*Düstur*, 1289 [1872], pp. 4-7). The Edict primarily aimed to introduce a new order based on a modern understanding and to reorganize the empire's relationship with its people. It also sought European support to solve Governor

Muhammad Ali of Egypt's rebellion against the empire, to prevent European states from interfering in the internal affairs under the pretext of protecting minorities, mitigating the impact of nationalism after the French Revolution, and managing pressure from Ottoman intellectuals' advocating for constitutional government (İnalçık, 2006).

Islâhat Hatt-ı Hümâyûnu, or the Ottoman Reform Edict of 1856, declared on February 18, 1856, marked a significant stride in the empire's reform movements. Abdulmejid I proclaimed a commitment to equality in education, government appointments, and the administration of justice, regardless of religious affiliation (*Düstur*, 1289 [1872], pp. 7-14). The decree is often seen as a result of the assistance given by France and Britain to the Ottoman Empire during the Crimean War of 1853–1856 against the Russian Empire. This culminated in the Treaty of Paris (1856), which, as part of resolving the conflict, specified the prohibition of any navy in the Black Sea (Erim, 1953, pp. 341-353). The war was primarily sparked by a disagreement over holy sites, particularly the key to the Great Church of Bethlehem. It centered on deciding whether Latin or Orthodox clergy would hold the key and determining their priority in conducting services at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (Badem, 2010, pp. 64-65).

Despite appearing successful, the Ottoman Empire suffered significant losses after the Crimean War of 1853–1856. To fund the expensive conflict, the state borrowed beyond its means, leading to financial control by European states through the establishment of the Ottoman Public Debt Administration (*Düyun-u Umumiye-i Osmaniye Varidat-ı Muhassasa İdaresi*) in 1881 and the subsequent loss of economic independence. (Stolz, 2022, p. 480) Additionally, trade agreements with European states brought lower customs taxes on imports, diminishing state revenues. This, coupled with the abuse of the system by foreigners and minorities, further contributed to the decline of domestic industries (Geyikdağı, 2011, pp. 5-8). Concurrently, libertarian ideas and the nationalist movement, catalyzed by the French Revolution of 1789 and the Revolutions of 1848, stirred unrest within the Ottoman Empire. Balkan uprisings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century sought independence, fueled by support from European states and the Russian Empire. Due primarily to these factors, in the 1860s, the Young Ottomans promoted the idea of a constitutional monarchy, drawing inspiration from European models to save the empire. After Abdülhamid II's accession, the Shipyard Conference convened at the Golden Horn shipyards, where major European powers deliberated on the Balkan issue and urged

Ottomans to implement reforms (Edwards, 1902, p. 109). To break the effect of this situation, Abdülhamid II proclaimed the Kânûn-ı Esâsî, the Constitution of the Ottoman Empire, on December 23, 1876, marking the commencement of the First Constitutional Era (*Düstur*, 1299 [1882], pp. 1-40). Thus, a general assembly called the Meclis-i Umûmî was established, comprising two subordinate chambers: the Meclis-i Mebûsan with elected parliamentarians and the Meclis-i Âyan with sultan-appointed members. However, the First Constitutional Era ended in 1878 when Abdülhamid II shut it down due to the Ottoman defeat in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, also known as the War of 93.

### *2.1.9. Western Colonial Aggression, War of 93, Balkan Wars and the Downfall*

Wallerstein (1979) highlights Europe's instrumental role in shaping the global economy before the 16<sup>th</sup> century, establishing a capitalist international system with a center-periphery-semi-periphery division (p. 18). In this context, the factors influencing the peripheralization of the Ottoman Empire were complex and intertwined. The Empire, grappling with internal issues and the shift of major trade routes to the seas, exacerbated by European industrialization and colonial aggression, experienced a simultaneous decline in financial stability as its economic vulnerabilities further weakened the Empire (Eldem, 1999, pp. 184-185). The 1838 Treaty of Balta Liman marked a turning point, ushering in a free trade system and increased foreign influence. Post-1840s, British and French capital surged, focusing primarily on infrastructure. The railway sector, especially with mileage guarantees, became a lucrative avenue for European capital (Coşar & Demirci, 2009, p. 21). Later, Britain and France, bolstering their influence in Syria and Egypt through railroads, sought regional control under the secret Sykes–Picot Agreement in 1916, also aiming to establish new ones in Mesopotamia (Fromkin, 1989, p. 192).

In 1870, Russia rejected the Treaty of Paris (1856), with the aim of freeing itself from Black Sea limitations. Then, it began to pressure the Ottoman Empire on the provisions of the treaty about the Ottoman Orthodox subjects. The British-called London Conference of 1877, saw the Ottoman Grand Vizier, Ibrahim Edhem Pasha, rejecting this protocol, citing interference in internal affairs. Russia entered Wallachia and Moldavia on April 24, 1877, declaring war on the Ottoman Empire due to the rejection of the

protocol; Romanians, Bulgarians, and Serbs joined later. Russia, then, aimed to encircle the Ottoman Empire from both east and west, also entered Doğubayazıt on April 27. This forced the Ottomans into a challenging defensive war on two fronts, the Caucasus and Danube. The Russian army halted in San Stefano (Yeşilköy), leading to an armistice mediated by European states. The Treaty of San Stefano on March 3, 1878, a victory for Pan-Slavism, saw Russia's dominant influence over the Ottoman Empire disrupt the political balance, sparking opposition, especially from Britain (Erim, 1953, pp. 387-400). The treaty underwent reconsideration and amendments at the Berlin Congress on July 13, 1878 (Erim, 1953, pp. 403-424). As a result, Montenegro, Serbia, and Romania secured full independence, with Austria temporarily overseeing Bosnia and Herzegovina. Simultaneously, the Ottomans, grappling with a substantial debt to Russia, witnessed the effective annulment of the Treaty of San Stefano as Britain successfully hindered Russia's Mediterranean ambitions. Additionally, the Cyprus Convention on June 4, 1878, constituted a covert agreement between Britain and the Ottoman Empire, granting the British administrative control over Cyprus in exchange for supporting the Ottomans during the Berlin Congress. Lastly, the conflict is referred to as the "War of 93" in Turkish historical accounts due to its alignment with the year 1293 on the Rumi calendar.

Following the 1908 meeting in Reval (Tallinn) between King Edward VII of England and Russian Emperor Nicholas II, England loosened its stance on Russia in the Balkans ("Meeting of King Edward and the Tsar of Russia off Reval," 1908, p. 9). The lasting repercussions of the French Revolution, coupled with Pan-Slavism and failed reforms, culminated in the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 (Hall, 2000, p. 21). The Treaty of London (1913) saw the Ottoman Empire ceding lands west of the Midye-Enez line to Balkan states, and major powers came to dominate the Aegean islands (Anderson & Hershey, 1918, p. 431). This outcome marked the Ottoman Empire's loss of control over Balkan territories, accompanied by a decline in the Muslim and Turkish population there (McCarthy, 2014, p. 142). The aftermath witnessed the emergence of new sovereign states in the region, including Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro. As the Ottoman Empire saw its grip on the Balkan territories slipping away, the First World War and invasions loomed on the horizon. In the wake of this, Anatolia experienced a resurgence, initiating a period of profound change—the Turkish National Movement, guided by a visionary leader: Mustafa Kemal Pasha, later known as Atatürk.

## **2.2. Russian Empire: Emergence, Decline, and the Seeds of Modern Russia**

Journeying through the annals of history, we encounter the narratives of powers that have left enduring imprints on the global stage, serving as instructive tales that mold the destinies of nations and sculpt the contours of geopolitical landscapes. In this league of giants, the Russian Empire stands out as one of them, casting a colossal shadow on the historical stage with its expansive reach and centuries-spanning roots. Delving into the empire's ascent, transformative junctures, and the resonant echoes it has etched in the corridors of time, we uncover the historical tapestry of the Russian Empire, which necessitates an exploration of cataclysmic events, from the earliest origins of Slavic tribes to its eventual collapse, briefly. This narrative is a significant historical mosaic woven together by the interplay of power, cultural evolution, and geopolitical maneuvering. Our research seeks to shed light on how this deep-seated past has outlined the dynamics between modern Russia, thereby playing a role in shaping the geopolitical landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this context, Riasanovsky (2005) argues that the basis of historical Russian identity, stretching into the present Russian Federation, differs from commonly highlighted events like the emancipation of the serfs, Napoleon's invasion, or Stalin's nationalism, emphasizing instead the foundational role of the Christianization of Kievan Rus'. This scholar suggests that the baptism of Rus played a vital role in shaping Russian identity and might have influenced the course of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, potentially averting an entirely distinct historical and identity-related outcome if it had not occurred. The Christianization of Kievan Rus' established Orthodoxy as a central element in Russian history, leaving a lasting impact across various stages, starting from the governance of the Kievan rulers. However, navigating the exploration of Russian identity is challenging due to factors such as speculation, a lack of clear structure, limited reliable sources, and the inherent risks tied to arguments relying on interpolation or analogy. These challenges may suggest the complexity or absence of a well-defined structure, with potential repercussions resonating in contemporary times. In this context, again, the Christianization of Kievan Rus' emerges as a foundational cornerstone in comprehending the nuanced fabric of Russian identity (pp. 4-5). Certainly, one cannot ignore the significance of the Russian Empire's conflicts with European nations and its pursuit of a power balance with the Ottoman Empire as indications of its endeavor to establish a

global presence. In brief, we can argue that, in the continuum of Russian history, together with its predecessors, the empire sowed the seeds, and the subsequent era of the USSR, building upon these seeds, laid the roots for modern Russia. This event sequence shaped Russian identity, influencing the dynamics between state structures and society, with enduring historical impacts on citizens' sense of belonging, social frameworks, and governance dynamics. Now, as in the prior section, following our brief exploration of the origins and history of the Russian Empire, which highlights key events and figures to establish a foundation for our upcoming discussion, where we will delve into the complex relationship between history and identity, demonstrating their continuous influence on the trajectory of nations from the past to the present.

### *2.2.1. Early Eastern Slavic Tribes and Proto-State Development*

From the 6<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the Slavic tribes underwent significant changes, splitting into Western, Eastern, and Southern groups and using various migration routes (Curta, 2019, pp. 49-51). The settlement of the Slavs in the Early Middle Ages, but especially in the Balkans, is an unresolved issue in modern historiography, and there are numerous theories, making it an important field of study in both archaeology and philology (Dvornik, 1956, pp. 3-13; Wexler, 2016, pp. 20-23). The East Slavic tribes we know about, expanding from the White Sea to the Dnieper River, were centered on agriculture. Abundant resources in forested areas facilitated hunting, fishing, limited beekeeping, and the utilization of slash-and-burn techniques (Pipes, 1974, pp. 27-28). Geographical advantages enabled lucrative trade routes, connecting the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea through the Dnieper and Neva rivers and opening Slavs to Byzantine markets. Social and administrative reforms during this period witnessed changes in land distribution, political centralization, and proto-state institutions. The tribes practiced distinctive rituals and held unique belief systems, contributing to the rich tapestry of their society. The pre-Kievan Rus' era involved both cooperative and conflicting interactions with neighboring groups, shaping regional dynamics (Gołąb, 1992, pp. 310-311). Debates surround the formation of Kievan Rus', with the Norman theory proposing founders from Lake Ilmen and the Dnieper River, while the Slavic theory argues for Slavic origin, particularly Rurik from the Oder River (Beerli, 1747; Lomonosov, 1952). In 862, the

invitation of Rurik, a chieftain, to Novgorod marked the beginning of Kievan Rus', the old Russian state (Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 1953, p. 59).

### *2.2.2. Kievan Rus' in Transition*

After Rurik's death, Oleg, or Oleg the Wise, assumed the Novgorod throne in place of the young Igor, seeking to expand Kievan Rus'. He captured Kyiv from Varg-origin knights Askold and Dir, establishing trade with the Byzantine Empire. Oleg's death led to Igor's continuation of expansion, organizing a successful expedition to Byzantium but facing rebellion from the Drevlian tribe (Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 1953, pp. 60-61, 79-80). As Igor I's wife, Olga of Kiev's visit to Constantinople in 957 catalyzed her conversion to Christianity, shaping the religious landscape of Kievan Rus' (Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 1953, pp. 82, 239). Subsequently, Sviatoslav I's rule (945-972) saw conflicts with the Khazars and Bulgarians, ending in the Rus'-Byzantine Treaty of 971 (Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 1953, p. 89). Vladimir I, widely known as Vladimir the Great's reign (978-1015), marked a turning point as he adopted Christianity in 988, influenced by political and cultural factors (Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 1953, p. 113). The formalization of Christianity through a treaty with the Byzantine Empire and marriage to Anna strengthened Kievan Rus', impacting its culture, literature, and ties with the West. Vladimir I's conversion played a crucial role in the development of Russia's civilization and culture, fostering national identity and modernization through the Orthodox Church's contributions to literature, alphabet, and infrastructure (Philaret, 1992, pp. 219-222). After a strenuous four-year struggle for the throne, Yaroslav I, or Yaroslav the Wise, ascended to Kyiv, ushering in a remarkable era for Russia. Prioritizing Christianity, he commissioned Byzantine masons to build churches, notably the St. Sofia Cathedral in Kyiv. Yaroslav I promoted Christianity through schools, libraries, and translations while also codifying laws in the *Russkaya Pravda*, a medieval legal code shaping Kievan Rus' legal and social landscape (Rauschenbach, 1992, p. 50). Diplomatically adept, he defeated the Pechenegs in 1036 and solidified ties with Byzantium. Yaroslav I's expansive military endeavors and strategic marital alliances not only bolstered Russia's influence but also sowed the seeds of fragmentation in Kievan Rus' following his demise. Moreover, political upheavals left Russia susceptible to

Cuman attacks, leading to the fall of Kyiv in 1068 and 1093 (Martin, 2007, pp. 54-55). This period saw the emergence of regional autonomy, with the Principality of Galicia–Volhynia flourishing in the West under the leadership of Roman Mstislavich or Roman the Great, the Principality of Vladimir-Suzdal declaring independence under Yuri Dolgorukiy, also known as Long Arm and Novgorod Republic thriving as an autonomous entity (Martin, 2007, p. 108; Nazarenko & Samoilova, 2000). However, the Principality of Vladimir-Suzdal experienced a decline during Andrey Bogolyubsky’s rule, signaling a period of vulnerability. The Galicia–Volhynia Principality grappled with internal conflicts and external pressures, gradually succumbing. In contrast, Novgorod, freed from Kyiv’s control, became a self-governing entity (Birnbaum, 1981, pp. 40-41).

### *2.2.3. The Mongol Invasion and the Rise of Moscow*

Genghis Khan founded the Mongol Empire in 1206, rapidly expanding its influence across Central Asia, China, and Persia. The Mongol invasion of Russia, initiated in 1223, resulted in a major defeat for South Russian princes amidst internal conflicts. In 1235, Ögedei Khan appointed Batu to conquer Russian territories, leading to subsequent Mongol raids on cities, including the historic center of Kyiv in 1238, and ultimately resulting in the siege of the city in 1240 (Martin, 2007, pp. 154-155). This devastating invasion marked a profound turning point in Russian history. In addition to this, established in 1242 by Batu Khan, the grandson of Genghis Khan, the Golden Horde marked a significant historical era in the interplay between Central Asia and Eastern Europe, asserting control over an expansive territory. During the rule of the Golden Horde, the leaders embraced Turkish cultural elements, blending them together, making this era a significant benchmark for the duality and interactions between the Mongols and Turks (Pelenski, 1980). Within Russian history, the Golden Horde’s captures left an imprint on Russian territories, shaping the development of feudalism, conducting censuses, and collecting taxes, which laid the groundwork for future political structures (Vernadsky, 1953, pp. 226-227; Halperin, 1983, pp. 244-245). Throughout the Golden Horde’s governance, Russian culture experienced enrichment and diversification through the infusion of Mongol, Turkish, and Islamic influences (Abylov, 2019). After the Mongol invasion, Moscow’s ascendancy gained momentum, highlighted by the symbolic

victory at the Battle of Kulikovo in 1380 (Bushkovitch, 2012, p. 23). This pivotal moment not only fortified Moscow's influence but also served as a harbinger of the Golden Horde's decline. The Crimean Khanate, founded by Melek Haji Girai, or Hacı I Giray, took control of territories outside the Grand Duchy of Moscow under Meñli I Giray's leadership and considered themselves the legitimate heirs of the Golden Horde (Kırımlı, 2004, p. 62). This shift in power dynamics ultimately positioned Moscow as the primary focal point for Eastern Slavs while giving rise to independent khanates like Crimea, Kazan, and Astrakhan, which asserted their autonomy after post-collapse.

This era also saw the Orthodox Church playing a crucial role in the cultural and spiritual identity of the Russian people. One contributing factor to this development was Vasily II, or Vasily the Dark's decree in 1448, appointing Bishop Jonah as metropolitan, breaking from the tradition of Patriarch of Constantinople ordination and signifying the start of the Russian Church's independence (Golubinskii, 1900, pp. 479-480). Ivan III's reign, marked by his marriage to Sophia Paleolog from the Palaiologos dynasty, influenced further developments significantly, which we will argue at the beginning of the upcoming chapter. From now on, we can argue that the Ottomans' conquest of Constantinople not only ushered in their dominance but also indirectly facilitated Moscow's regional rise by filling the political vacuum left by the Byzantines, providing opportunities for Moscow's autonomy and efforts of influence to flourish. Particularly, there was a cultural and religious shift, prompting the Orthodox Christian traditions to find refuge in Moscow (Crummey, 2013, p. 134). These changes, coupled with the economic opportunities arising from altered trade routes, contributed to Moscow's symbolic appropriation of the Byzantine legacy and solidified its position as a formidable force in Eastern Europe, culminating in the adoption of the title "*Tsar*," a Slavicized version of the Byzantine Emperor's "*Caesar*" (Vasmer, 1958a).

Between 1533 and 1584, during Ivan IV or Ivan the Terrible's rule, a crucial era unfolded for Moscow as he embraced the title of Tsar, becoming the first monarch to be crowned as such (Arheograficheskaya Komissiya, 1904, pp. 150-151). This period witnessed the establishment of the Zemsky Sobor, the assembly of the land council, introducing a group of clergy and boyars, the Russian nobles who held land and served as advisors to provide counsel to the Tsar (Cherepnin, 1978, pp. 68-78). Ivan IV implemented sweeping measures, including legal regulations and the creation of

ministries, aiming to reinforce the central government. During his time, the Orthodox Church, deeply entwined with the state, played a vital role in shaping societal norms and cultural developments, as we can see in his ambitious and politically controversial plan to be crowned as the Tsar of all Rus' (Bogatyrev, 2006, p. 245). Under Ivan IV, Russia's expansionist policy involved endeavors to control trade routes through the Baltic Sea, such as the conflicts with the Kingdom of Livonia. Additionally, wars were waged against neighboring territories, including the khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan, culminating in an eastward campaign that ended Muslim dominance in the region, except the Crimean Khanate (Pavlov & Perrie, 2003, pp. 89-95, 206). The economic landscape evolved with the integration of new territories, fostering trade and cultural exchange.

The establishment of the Oprichnik, the Tsar's private force, aimed to enforce his authority and suppress opposition, and the ensuing hardships imposed on Russian society were among the notable occurrences of Ivan IV's reign (Pavlov & Perrie, 2003, pp. 95-105). Following his death, Russia's influence initially waned during Fyodor I's reign (1584-1598). Fyodor I's feeble leadership paved the way for Boris Godunov's ascent to power as the de facto ruler (Polovtsov, 1908). Yet, the crises following Fyodor I's demise, the False Dmitry I uprisings, and Polish intervention thrust Russia into internal conflict. Russia, succumbing to Polish influence and grappling with internal uprisings, found itself at a critical crossroads. With Fyodor I's death, the Rurik dynasty concluded, ushering in the turbulent era, the Time of Troubles (Alekseev, 2018, pp. 564-566). However, in 1613, the Zemsky Sobor elected Michael Romanov, or Michael I, as the new Tsar, marking this election as the beginning of the Romanov dynasty's rule (Belkovskiy, 1913, p. 1).

#### *2.2.4. Romanov Dynasty Takes the Power*

Under Michael I's leadership, the foundational years marked the beginning of the 300-year Romanov Dynasty, with him ascending the throne. Despite governing in consultation with the boyars and the Zemsky Sobor, the return of Patriarch Filaret of Moscow from Polish captivity heightened the period's turmoil. Michael I's nominal authority concealed the reality of Filaret's rule, where Filaret filled the vacuum left by his son's incapacity without usurping power (Keep, 1960, p. 334). Filaret's control strengthened Michael I's leadership, aiding Russia in overcoming a political crisis.

Administrative and economic reforms centralized the power and facilitated military expansion. Further territorial growth occurred through peace treaties, with Władysław IV Vasa relinquishing his claim to the Polish throne (Czapliński, 1972, pp. 88-90). Following Michael I's death, Alexis' rule commenced, characterized by a focus on state affairs led by Boris Morozov, a prominent boyar and influential advisor to the Tsar. Financial reforms increased revenue but caused economic difficulties, which were evident in the Moscow uprising of 1648, commonly known as the Salt Riot, reflecting discontent among the middle class and boyars (Kivelson, 1993). Alexis convened the Zemsky Sobor, passing laws that formalized serfdom, setting the stage for future challenges (Tikhomirov & Epifanov, 1961, Chapter XII). The Russian church underwent significant reforms under Patriarch Nikon of Moscow, aligning rituals and texts with old traditions. Alexis' wars expanded Russia's territory, ultimately annexing left-bank Ukraine (Braichevskyi, 1974).

#### *2.2.5. Peter the Great and Transition into an Empire*

Peter I, commonly known as Peter the Great's rule, was a vital period in Russian history, transforming it into an imperial power that departed significantly from the country's traditional structure. He initiated an extensive process of modernization and Westernization. Peter I's initial move involved overhauling Russia's entrenched system of boyars and the Tsar, governed by a specific law that discarded medieval perspectives, and he established the Governing Senate (Filippov, 1911, p. 1). Through the establishment of a formidable navy and the modernization of the army, he aligned Russia's military strength with Western standards, showcasing its prowess notably in the victory over Sweden at the Battle of Poltava in 1709, which gave Russia control of the Baltic shore (Tucker, 2011, pp. 222-225). Conversely, Peter I's policies of secularization, coupled with an increased grip on the Orthodox Church, the modernization of education, and a dedicated focus on scientific advancements, propelled Russia into significant strides in the cultural and intellectual domains. As a leader embracing Western culture, he reformed the Russian alphabet, embraced the Julian calendar, and introduced the first Russian newspaper, *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti*, to foster integration with Europe (Oudard, 1930, p. 137). Finally, in 1712, Peter I established the city of St. Petersburg on the Neva River and relocated the capital from Moscow to St. Petersburg, materializing

his vision, not only linked Russia to Europe but also solidified his perspective on shaping a modern capital and ensuring Russia's maritime significance (Wilson, 2010, p. 82).

His territorial expansion efforts included acquiring lands like Livonia, Estonia, and Karelia, along with successful wars against the Ottoman Empire to gain access to the Black Sea. In this context, we can argue that Peter I's foreign policy was characterized by triumphant military campaigns, particularly against the Ottomans. The successful capture of the Azov fortress in 1696 provided Rus' with a gateway to the Black Sea, contributing significantly to its ascendancy as a regional power (Jaques, 2007, pp. 88-89). However, Peter I's territorial advance, extending until the Pruth River Campaign of 1711, faced a setback with the Treaty of the Pruth (1711) (Mikaberidze, 2011, p. 726). The Azov Fortress was returned to the Ottomans, and Russian fortresses along the Dnieper were dismantled. Undaunted by the setback, Peter I shifted his focus to the Caucasus region in his determined quest for access to warm seas. Starting from 1714, he launched expeditions aimed at capturing the Caspian coast and uncovering the route to India (Wanner, 2014, pp. 18-20). In 1723, Peter I's expedition along the west coast of the Caspian Sea secured Russian control over Baku and Resht, prompting the Shah to concede Caspian Sea-bordering provinces to Peter I, who concurrently defused tensions with Ottomans concerned about Russian expansion into the Caucasus (Lee, 1993, p. 31). Moreover, the 21-year Northern War with Sweden concluded with Russia gaining Baltic Sea access and annexing territories, including Livonia, leading the Senate to bestow upon Peter I the title of "All-Russian Emperor" in a tradition reminiscent of the Roman Senate honoring emperors for exceptional deeds ("3840," 1830, p. 446).

From 1725 to 1762, Russia experienced an era of palace coups marked by frequent leadership changes and political instability. The period, influenced by the 1722 decree allowing the tsar to choose a successor, witnessed struggles between political groups and notable state coups in 1741 and 1762 ("3893," 1830; Anisimov, 1986, p. 3). Succession dynamics within the Romanov dynasty, familial disputes, and overthrows added complexity. Internal politics involved power struggles and attempts to limit monarchic authority, while financial crises prompted reforms like reducing public spending and altering tax collection. Trade development, a new customs tariff, and industrial growth marked the late 1730s, with Russia leading in charcoal and iron production (Hill, 2006, pp. 127-129). Economic challenges prompted reforms, including raising prices and

creating banks in 1754. Furthermore, Elizabeth's reign (1741-1761) brought stability, fostering economic and cultural development, while Peter III's rule in 1762 resulted in significant domestic and foreign policy changes, including the manifesto on the freedom of the nobility ("11.444," 1830). Russia engaged in wars, notably with the Ottoman Empire and the Seven Years' War, marking a significant milestone despite mediocre commanders. Besides, during this era of palace coups, Königsberg, now Kaliningrad, briefly fell under Russian control in 1758 before returning to Prussia in 1762 amid notable leadership changes (Roqueplo, 2018, p. 32).

#### *2.2.6. Catherine the Great and Her Reforms*

Catherine II, commonly known as Catherine the Great, who reigned from 1762 to 1796, is recognized as the leader of Russian modernization, and her era is commonly referred to as the Russian Enlightenment. In an attempt to streamline administrative affairs, Catherine II initiated the formation of the Legislative Commission in 1766. Fueled by widespread discontent among the Russian peasantry due to heavy taxation, serfdom, and harsh working conditions, the rebellion led by Emelian Pugachev from 1773 to 1775 marked a major uprising challenging Catherine the Great's rule, revealing weaknesses in the central authority and prompting discussions on the need for social and economic reforms in the Russian Empire (Billington, 1970, pp. 217-226). The rebellion, rooted in profound social and economic issues, particularly the peasants' sense of abandonment by the modern state, ultimately faced brutal suppression and probably marked the very beginning of the Russian Revolution in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Forster, 1970, pp. 163, 201). In the aftermath, laws were enacted in 1775 to regulate local governance, and geographical administration was restructured. Economically, Catherine II, convinced of agriculture's role as the foundation of wealth, took the Free Economic Society, founded in 1765 under her patronage (Leckey, 2005, p. 359). Having been influenced by French philosophy, she dedicated herself to illuminating the state with knowledge from the Kingdom of France. She played a pioneering role in introducing modern schools, inviting the Serbian educator Teodor Janković Mirijeovski in 1782 (Okenfuss, 1979). She also played a crucial role in church reform, overseeing the nationalization of church property and advocating for the return of Old Believers. Furthermore, she implemented a stringent control mechanism for

her non-Orthodox subjects and established institutions like the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly to better regulate Muslim-populated regions (Fisher, 1968).

The Russo-Turkish War of 1768–1774 commenced in the era of Catherine II, marked by the Russian triumph led by Pyotr Rumyantsev against the Ottoman forces in the Balkans and Bessarabia. Russia's incursion into Crimea and the annihilation of the Ottoman fleet at the Battle of Chesma in the Aegean Sea further intensified the conflict. In 1774, the Ottomans conceded to the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji (Küçük Kaynarca), ceding territory to Russia and acknowledging the independence of Crimea. This treaty granted Russia the right to traverse the Straits and dispatch merchant ships to the Mediterranean. It also included provisions for free trade and the construction of an Orthodox church in Istanbul, formalizing Russia's influence on Orthodox subjects (Sazonova et al., 1992, pp. 78-93). Following the annexation of the Crimean Khanate in 1783, Russia secured the Black Sea coast up to the Fortress of Ochakov through victories in the Russo-Turkish War of 1787–1792. The Treaty of Jassy, signed in 1792, resulted in Russia gaining lands up to the Dniester River and asserting control over Crimea, marking a significant outcome of the conflict with the Ottomans (Ekaterina & Benkendorf, 1792).

#### *2.2.7. French Invasion of Russia*

During Alexander I, or Alexander the Blessed's reign, Russia aligned itself with Britain, forming a coalition aimed at thwarting France's expansionist designs (Schroeder, 1987, p. 266). However, the collaborative efforts faltered in the face of the formidable French invasion, compelling Russia to sign the Treaty of Tilsit on July 7, 1807. France promised to support Russia against the Ottoman Empire, and in return, Russia agreed to join the Continental System against the British Empire (Zawadzki, 2009, p. 122). The financial pressure induced by the treaty compelled Alexander I to abandon the Continental Blockade in 1810, not only robbing Napoleon I of a crucial diplomatic weapon against the British but also serving as an act of defiance (Riehn, 1990, p. 26). The turning point emerged in 1812 when conflict erupted with the French Empire, and the Russian army, commanded by General Mikhail Kutuzov, exhibited extraordinary resilience at the Battle of Borodino. Despite their efforts, the Russians ultimately had to cede control of Moscow to Napoleon I's forces, a setback that, paradoxically, marked the

inception of a strategic shift for the Russian military. Despite that, Napoleon I retreated from Russia in 1812 due to the combination of harsh winter conditions and logistical challenges (Hanoteau, 1935, pp. 167-168). Following Napoleon I's withdrawal, the Russian army embarked on a successful campaign in Europe in 1813. This military endeavor reached its zenith with the Battle of Leipzig, or the Battle of the Nations, where the combined forces of Russia and its allies secured a decisive victory. By 1814, Alexander I entered Paris, symbolizing the ultimate defeat of Napoleon I and the conclusive end of his hegemony in Europe (Mikhailofsky-Danilefsky, 1839, pp. 383-386). The historical legacy of this era highlights the resilience of the Russian military and its pivotal role in reshaping the European balance of power, also representing the largest pre-World War I battle in Europe (Grant, 2009, pp. 212-213).

#### *2.2.8. Nicholas I, the Gendarme of Europe and Alexander II*

Nicholas I, ruling from 1825 to 1855, emphasized conservative governance and strict censorship. From 1830 to 1840, he took harsh measures to suppress European uprisings, earning the nickname "Gendarme of Europe." Concurrently, Russia bolstered its stance against the Ottoman Empire, suppressed the Polish rebellion, and grappled with local resistance in the Caucasian War. Nicholas I implemented reforms that spanned legal, economic, and social dimensions involving fiscal restructuring. However, these changes also brought about increased censorship and the imposition of state control over universities (Seton-Watson, 1967, p. 277). On the foreign policy front, Nicholas I's initiatives against the Ottoman Empire contributed to significant events such as Greece's independence and the Polish uprising. The Muridism Sufi movement, led by Imam Shamil, emerged in the Caucasus, particularly in Dagestan and Chechnya, seeking to establish an Islamic state and resisting Russian expansion (Tsvetkova, 2017, pp. 88-91). Concurrently, conflicts with Persia heightened regional complexities, with the Caucasus being a contested area between Russia and Persia. Treaties like Gulistan in 1813 and Turkmenchay in 1828 solidified Russia's territorial gains in the Caucasus, intensifying tensions (Cronin, 2003, p. 85; Riasanovsky, 1969, p. 240). Later, Muridism added an ideological dimension to the problems, blending military and socio-religious resistance against Russian control. Russia's response involved military campaigns, diplomacy, and

efforts to co-opt local elites. Imam Shamil's capture in 1859 following Nicholas I's rule reduced Murid influence but did not quell resistance (Seton-Watson, 1967, pp. 416-417).

Another noteworthy period in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the rule of Alexander II when the Russian defeat in the Crimean War against the Ottoman Empire in 1853-1856 triggered substantial shifts in domestic politics and societal dynamics. Recognized for his liberal vision, Alexander II, following the Treaty of Paris in 1856, perceived the inevitability of a reform movement, prompting the abolition of serfdom, also known as the Emancipation Reform of 1861 ("36657," 1863). This reform served as a crucial point for 19th-century Russia, necessitating changes across various domains, including the flourishing of revolutionary ideologies. The Narodnik movement, spearheaded by Alexander Ivanovich Herzen, who would later be hailed as the father of Russian socialism, stood out among these ideologies. According to Pedler (1927), this movement ardently pressed for the abolition of autocracy and the restoration of land to the peasantry. Narodniks passionately championed ideals, envisioning a transformative shift in Russia toward socialism. Their advocacy went beyond politics, seeking to reshape the socio-economic fabric and lay the foundations for a more egalitarian and empowered society. Simultaneously, administrative, military, legal, and economic reforms were set in motion. First, the military restructuring aimed at modernizing the Russian army, including the introduction of the universal draft in 1874. Second, the administrative changes saw the establishment of local assemblies, the Zemstvos, and the city Duma. Finally, the legal reforms enhanced the autonomy of the courts (Radzinsky, 2005, pp. 148-150). Moreover, Alexander II's expansionist policies targeted the Caucasus and Turkestan, achieving control in the North Caucasus after the 1865 Caucasian War and annexing the Khanates of Kokand and Khiva in 1868 (Radzinsky, 2005, pp. 242-243). Post-Crimean War, Russian-Ottoman relations were strained, culminating in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin, which Ardahan, Kars, and Batum were left to Russia.

### *2.2.9. Pan-Slavism, Russo-Japanese War and the Downfall*

Under Alexander II, Pan-Slavism, which advocated for the cultural and political unity of Slavic nations, held significant sway in Russian intellectual and political circles during the 19th century. The aftermath of the Crimean War prompted influential Russian

intellectuals, including figures like Alexander Ivanovich Koshelev, Ivan Sergeevich Aksakov, and Mikhail Pogodin, to convince Alexander II to establish the Slavic Charitable Society in January 1858. This committee operated from Moscow and aimed to support the religious, educational, and national activities of South Slavs (Popov, 1868, pp. 1-3). Authorized by Alexander II, the committee swiftly provided aid within the Ottoman Empire, with the South Slavic Relief Committee in 1860 specifically focusing on uniting Slavic populations under Ottoman rule. By openly supporting the 1875 Serbian Revolt and aiding Serbs and Montenegrins in their 1876 war against the Ottoman Empire, the committee played a crucial role in coordinating volunteer units and dispatching Russian officers, significantly weakening Ottoman influence in the lead-up to the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. Continued support from Russia strengthened political influence, contributing to the empowerment of Balkan peoples, with the committee playing a crucial role in the independence of the Serbs and Bulgarians, showcasing a broader geopolitical impact (Aslan, 2018, pp. 198-208).

Under Nicholas II, Russia expanded its influence in the Far East with the completion of the Trans-Siberian Railway in 1894, and Meakin's (1901) account of the train being fully booked highlights the importance of this historical development (p. 23). Thus, Russia's interference thwarted China's cession of territories to Japan in the Japan-China war. Between 1897 and 1902, Russians constructed another one, the Chinese Eastern Railway. With this increase in Russia's influence in the Far East, the Boxer Rebellion in China (1900) led to a peace treaty with the Eight-Nation Alliance, including Russia, bringing Manchuria and Port Arthur under Russian control (Dukes, 2022, p. 40). These events, coupled with Russian advances and Japan's countermeasures, ignited the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905. Despite its Asian theater, the war held global ramifications. Britain strategically allied with Japan to safeguard its Asian colonies, with France withholding support to Russia and Germany abstaining from direct involvement, collectively influencing the war's trajectory as Japan successfully neutralized the Russian navy. The Treaty of Portsmouth saw Russia relinquishing Manchuria while Japan retained Port Arthur (Jukes, 2002, pp. 86-92). This conflict starkly revealed the Russian Empire's standing and marked the conclusion of its imperialist aspirations in the Far East, laying the groundwork for the Great Russian Revolution under a charismatic leader: Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, also known as Lenin.

# Chapter 3

## Contours of Power:

### Historical Dynamics in the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Balkans, and the Middle East

#### 3.1. Initial Encounter, Historical Bonds, and the Evolution of Relationships

Understanding the historical roots of relations between Türkiye and Russia requires examining the rich history of the confrontation between the two nations. This chapter opens the door to untangle the complexity of the past encounters and interactions of Ottomans and Russians and to delve deeper into this past that laid the foundation for modern relations. By exploring the evolving patterns between the two empires, we can gain valuable insights into the geopolitical, diplomatic, and cultural factors that have shaped the Türkiye-Russia relationship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The interactions between these two nations surpassed conventional power struggles, embodying the dynamic metaphor inherent in the chapter's title, "*Contours of Power*." The term "*contours*" signifies the fluid and complicated nature of power relations, where strategic moves, alliances, and fluctuations of interests are orchestrated, highlighting its nuanced and ever-changing characteristics. Thus, we can initiate by acknowledging that the diplomatic ties between these two nations trace back to the significant year 1492 when Ivan III established communication with the Ottoman authorities in Bakhchisaray and Caffa. In this historical communication, Ivan III expressed his intent to establish friendly relations with the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II and petitioned him for the granting of free passage and trade privileges to Muscovite envoys and merchants (Creasy & Hammer-Purgstall, 1854, p. 203). However, it is imperative to recognize that the cultural foundations and defining moments of this interaction have much deeper historical origins with the events that affected the way the two powers perceived each other.

Delving into the evolution of diplomatic communication between the Ottomans and Russians, which began in 1492, reveals a rapid shift from amicability to

confrontation, often leading to conflicts and eventually evolving into a competition for power and supremacy across diverse regions. We can argue that this transformation can be attributed to two main factors. Initially, the proclamation of Moscow as the Third Rome following the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Empire emerged as a potent force. It is undeniable that Moscow's assertion significantly contributed to the deterioration of Ottoman-Russian relations, ushering in an era characterized by a tangible shift towards an adversarial dynamic between the two powers. Second, a critical exploration of the period succeeding the power vacuum left by the Golden Horde becomes imperative. Following the collapse of the Golden Horde, the Ottomans, Russians, and Crimean Khanate embarked on a strategic quest to take its place and inherit its legacy in Eastern Europe. This transformative phase not only laid the foundation for geopolitical shifts but also cultivated a complicated backdrop marked by escalating rivalry and heightened hostility between Ottoman-Russian sides. Thus, instead of determining the chronological influence of one situation over the other, it is more beneficial to recognize them as a complex interplay of intertwined social-historical and power-balanced policies.

### *3.1.1. Baptism of Kievan Rus'*

To illustrate the initial aspect of this transformation, let us begin by trying to construct a simple analogy. Imagine two young individuals from distinct regions, where one was profoundly influenced by a temporary visit to a specific city, which left an indelible mark on their life. Meanwhile, the other later chose to establish their residence in that same city, carrying a rich tapestry of unique life experiences. Every analogy naturally possesses a margin of error, of course, however, this closely mirrors the probable starting point of the historical narrative of Ottoman-Russian relations without a face-to-face encounter. Moving from the analogy to the historical context, we find this compelling link in Olga of Kiev's baptism in Constantinople in the year 957, a city later would be conquered by the Ottoman Empire (Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 1953, p. 239). Importantly, the impact of Olga's conversion extended to Vladimir I or Vladimir the Great's Christianization efforts in Kievan Rus', given his subsequent alliance with Basil II of the Byzantine Empire and his marriage to Anna, Basil II's sister (Skylitzes, 2010, p. 319). While this kind of historical connections are important to understand the context of

interactions between the two powers and nations, the cultural roots of the Russian and Ottoman states primarily developed along separate religious and ethnic lines. Nevertheless, even when two entities have disparate origins, there can still be meaningful connections between them; seemingly small historical events can have a significant impact on the broader context of international relations, cultural exchange, and identity building. Of course, one should not forget the convergence and interaction of the Turkic and Slavic cultures, especially in the Crimean Peninsula.

### *3.1.2. Ottoman and Russian Claims on Third Rome*

As we discussed in the earlier chapter, the conquest of Constantinople by Mehmed II marked a significant development for both the future of the Ottoman and Russian empires as well as it played a catalyst role in the Renaissance. Within this context, it is essential to explore two notable historical documents related to this theme, one pertaining to Ottoman history and the other centered on Russia. Both documents are dedicated to assert and claim the Roman legacy. The Ottoman perspective emphasizes the strategic shift of the capital to Constantinople and Mehmed II's self-reference as the Kayser-i Rûm (Caesar of Rome), symbolizing his claim as the Third Rome following the conquest of the city. Additionally, there were other developments in the Ottomans' journey towards becoming an Empire, which extended well before the 15<sup>th</sup> century, contributing to this complex historical landscape. For instance, the marriage of the daughter of the Byzantine Prince of Yarhisar, Holofira, and Orhan Gazi, a union that played a crucial role in shaping the Ottoman narrative and its interactions with Byzantine heritage in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, as we mentioned earlier. A similar thing happened years later with Orhan's marriage to the daughter of Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos. This alliance sought to secure Ottoman assistance in safeguarding the Byzantine Emperor's domain against the Serbian ruler Stefan IV Dushan (Bryer, 1981, p. 474). Of course, all these developments, together with Mehmed II's capture of Constantinople, filled the historical background of his goal to dominate all the lands that Rome had ruled. Not only these, but the Ottoman claim to the Third Rome went beyond Mehmed II's concept and gained widespread acceptance as a reasonable proposition. In 1466, George of Trebizond, Byzantine Greek philosopher and humanist, wrote a letter to Mehmed II: *"No one doubts that you are emperor of the*

*Romans. Whoever holds, by right, the center of the Empire is emperor, and the center of the Roman Empire is Istanbul.*” affirming Sultan’s status as the Roman emperor (Babinger, 1959, pp. 265-267). Certainly, Mehmed II’s idea of making Constantinople a world capital and having the chance to control the intellectual accumulation in the city that had been the center of Byzantium for more than a thousand years (including the Latin Empire) obviously brought a new layer and superiority to the Ottoman Empire.

On the flip side, in Moscow, under the governance of Ivan III, the demise of his wife prompted the necessity for a new marriage to ensure the continued survival of the dynasty. In a letter originating from Rome in 1469, Cardinal Bessarion proposed a union between Ivan III and Zoe Palaiologina, the daughter of Thomas Paleologos (Anonymous, 1568, pp. 101-105). He was the brother of the last Byzantine emperor, Constantine XI, while also the legal charge of Bessarion. Upon arriving in Moscow, Zoe adopted the name Sophia, and three years later, she entered into matrimony with Ivan III (Anonymous, 1568, p. 426). It was a move by Cardinal Bessarion aimed at making Moscow the cultural heir of Byzantium. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, this move becomes even more important if we consider that Bessarion played a vital role in the influence of Byzantine Greek intellectuals on the Renaissance. At the same time, in the era of Ivan III, religious authority started aligning itself with the power of the Russian administration. As a result, Ivan III adopted the Byzantine designation autocrat and informally embraced the title of emperor (Bercken, 1999, p. 142). In this context, the second document addresses the assertion of the Roman legacy, with the noteworthy detail that the concept of the succession of grand-ducal authority from the Byzantine emperors was from 1492, Metropolitan Zosima’s Notice of Easter. According to him, God placed Ivan III as *“The new Tsar Constantine, in the new city of Constantine, - Moscow and the entire Russian land and many other lands of the sovereign”* (Pavlov, 1908). We must understand that the intention to claim Rome’s legacy was aimed at establishing a new balance of power, preserving Russian unity, and strengthening Moscow’s political position as the last independent center of Orthodoxy (Strémooukhoff, 1953, p. 88).

Considering all these together, it is not surprising that the letter written by Ivan III to Bayezid II, which is considered to be the beginning of Ottoman-Russian diplomatic relations, was in the same year as Metropolitan Zosima’s assertion on the Third Rome idea. In this context, a significant piece of literature for the Slavic people over an extended

period has been *The Tale of Constantinople*. This narrative, authored by Nestor-Iskander, who, as a young observer, witnessed the day Mehmed II conquered Constantinople, holds particular significance. Notably, the work underscores the notion of the Third Rome, which is believed to contribute to the Russian interpretation of national history (Pertusi, 1976; Tvorogov, 1982). Undoubtedly, Moscow's assertion as the Third Rome significantly impacted the diplomatic ties between the Ottoman Empire and Moscow. (Korenevskiy, 2016) As the Ottomans witnessed Moscow's growing influence and its self-proclaimed significance, there was a significant shift in their interactions with the Russian state. It is crucial to emphasize that designating Constantinople as "Tsargrad" is an expression within Moscow's claim to the Third Rome, with the Slavonic translation signifying the imperial city (Vasmer, 1958b). In brief, Moscow's desire for recognition as the new center of Orthodox Christianity, a facet integral to Russian identity since Olga's time, not only reshaped the diplomatic landscape but also impacted the cultural perceptions shared between the two powers.

### *3.1.3. The Competition for the Golden Horde's Legacy*

After the Ottoman conquest, some theorists, such as Bessarion, began proposing Moscow as a replacement for Constantinople. The assignment of such a religious mission to Moscow likely stemmed from the region's diverse population, particularly those of Turkish origin. The notion was that by controlling Moscow, these communities could be gathered and assimilated under a more lenient form of Christianity than Catholicism. Moreover, in 1449, Hacı I Giray declared himself the rightful heir of the Golden Horde and established the Crimean Khanate. He also assumed the titles of Khan for the Great Horde, the Great State, and the Crimean Throne, which persisted among subsequent rulers (Mirgaleev, 2017, pp. 82-85). In that respect, Adzhi (2006) argues that, by imposing Sharia law, the Khanate created a cultural and linguistic divide with its non-Muslim subjects. Seizing the opportunity, Ivan IV declared himself Tsar in 1547. In a symbolic yet pivotal move securing the Rurik Dynasty's existence, Moscow achieved a significant political victory, subsequently elevating the prominence of the Grand Duchy of Moscow; although the title held more of a theoretical nature than practical significance, it garnered recognition from the majority of the population (pp. 975-977).

İnalçık's (1992) perspective, however, elucidates the evolution between the Ottomans and Russians, contending that the commencement of Ottoman-Russian relations began with positive interactions, from 1492 to 1512. In 1475, the crucial Genoese port of Caffa on the Black Sea came under Ottoman control, and the Crimean Khanate became an Ottoman vassal. As a result of the weakening of the Golden Horde, the Kazan, Astrakhan, and Crimean Khanates, descendants of Genghis Khan, were competing for inheritance. While the Crimean Khanate, the most powerful among them, continued to seek power over the others, Ivan IV found it necessary for his imperial policy to annex the middle Volga to his own state. Opting for military intervention to diminish the influence of the Crimean Khanate, he asserted himself as the legitimate successor of the Golden Horde, contending that the princes, with lineage traced back to Genghis Khan, were under his protection, thereby affirming his entitlement to the Golden Horde's legacy (pp. 28-29). Thus, as Russia rose to a dominant imperial power in Eastern Europe, competitive tensions and frictions emerged, leading to a progression from a brief period of friendship to rivalry and, eventually, hostility, fueled by Ivan IV's strategy to replace the Golden Horde in the Volga basin and assume its role in the region. This transformation highlights the intricate interplay of historical events, political tactics, and cultural perceptions that shaped Ottoman-Russian relations.

Therefore, examining the nuanced power relations within these elements offers valuable insights into the broader context of international relations and cultural exchanges between Ottomans and Russians. Now, let us delve into their conflicts and interactions from their initial diplomatic contacts in 1492 until the onset of the First World War, predating the Turkish National Movement and Bolshevism. Our focus zones include the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Balkans, and the Middle East—symbolically representing the four pillars underpinning our analysis of Turkish-Russian relations. Until now, our historical exploration has covered events shaping the Ottomans' and Russians' comprehension of global power balance and the evolution of their identities. These revelations were compounded by the wars, conflicts, collaborations and alliances that took place in the following centuries, laid the groundwork for enduring political strategies, assertions, and ideological currents. Moving forward, considering the influence of historical legacies, we will examine developments contributing to our understanding of advancements in transnational security policies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **3.2. Historical Balances Shaping Russo-Turkish Relations**

### *3.2.1. Crimean Khanate's Ottoman Protectorate*

After the demise of Hacı I Giray, his eldest son, Nur Devlet Giray assumed leadership in the Crimean Khanate. The younger brother, Meñli I Giray, opposed him, sought refuge with the Genoese in Caffa, and gained the Crimean leadership with the help of Genoese, who had established dominance over the Black Sea and controlled the trade routes in the region, Eminek from Nogai Shirins and other tribal lords. However, facing resistance from his brothers, Meñli I was defeated and imprisoned by the Genoese. Tribal lords sought Mehmed II's assistance, and eyeing increased influence in the Black Sea region post the Constantinople conquest, Mehmed II accepted the plea, given Crimea's strategic location on Genoese-influenced trade routes (Girây, 2019, p. 52). Subsequently, in 1475, Gedik Ahmed Pasha led a successful naval campaign, capturing Caffa and other coastal cities, reshaping the regional geopolitical landscape. Following the seizure of Caffa, the Ottoman navy swiftly took control of Sudak, Kerch, and Azov. The capture of these three strongholds marked the conclusion of Genoese influence on the Crimean Peninsula and the entire Black Sea. Additionally, the Ottomans captured Mangup Fortress, the hub of the Principality of Theodoro, or Gothia, in the southern part of the peninsula, eliminating the final rump state of the Roman Empire (Vasiliev, 1936, p. 259). The Ottoman forces, instrumental in freeing Meñli I, reinstated him under the protection of the Ottoman Empire, turning Crimea into an Ottoman protectorate. In brief, Gedik Ahmed Pasha's military campaign liberated Crimea from Genoese control, solidifying Ottoman dominance in the Northern Black Sea trade routes. Besides, this victory empowered the Crimean Khanate with Ottoman support, ultimately ending the remnants of the Roman Empire's influence.

### *3.2.2. Russo-Turkish War of 1568–1570 and Don-Volga Canal Project*

Following the establishment of official relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Grand Duchy of Moscow, as we mentioned earlier, an envoy was dispatched to Istanbul to formalize bilateral trade relations. However, in this relationship, the Ottoman

rulers, asserting their dominance, refused to recognize Moscow as a direct negotiating party. Instead, they insisted on conducting diplomatic affairs through the Crimean Khans, who were under the Ottoman protectorate. After the Golden Horde weakened and disintegrated, in 1552 and 1556, Moscow annexed the Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan, solidifying its presence along the Don and Volga rivers. Ivan IV embraced the title of Tsar, disrupting trade and pilgrimage routes in the region and aiming to extend influence from the Urals to the Black Sea. At this stage, it is important to underscore that, given the information outlined in preceding sub-sections, it is apparent that Ivan IV's adoption of the Tsar title was a nuanced and multi-angle policy.

Recognizing the threat of Russian expansion, Selim II and Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha devised a strategy to conquer the Astrakhan fortress, hindering Russian advancement southward. This aligned with the Ottoman goal of expelling the Safavid Empire from the Caucasus and Azerbaijan. The plan sought to reopen east-west Asian caravan routes and establish connections with anti-Safavid Turkic groups, envisioning a canal between the Don and Volga and a water route between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea (İnalçık, 1948). We need to emphasize the significance of Selim I's letter, written in 1550 to Abdullatif Khan from Shaybanids, lies in his acknowledgment of the crucial need to unite the Central Asian Turks against the Safavids (Bey, 1265-1274 [1848-1857], pp. 606-608). He emphasized the establishment of an alliance grounded in both political and religious principles, foreseeing the complete eradication of the Safavids through collaboration. This underscores the importance placed on maintaining direct communication with the Central Asian Turks and ensuring uninterrupted transportation routes, signifying not only political considerations but also a recognition of the cultural ties that bound them together. Years later, Selim II dispatched a Hatt-ı Hümayûn (imperial decree) to instruct Crimean Khan Devlet I Giray to prepare for the Don-Volga-Astrakhan Expedition in 1568, eventually recognized as the starting point of the Russo-Turkish wars. Fearing Ottoman intervention in Crimea, the Khan remained passive, leading him to send an envoy to Ivan IV, notifying the Tsar of Ottoman preparations—an attempt to dissuade the Ottoman Sultan from proceeding with the campaign, which also included plans for the strategic canal (Smirnov, 1946, p. 96). Therefore, Sokollu Mehmed Pasha's campaign against Astrakhan faced hindrances due to the Crimean Khan's "betrayal." Despite an abundance of food, necessary tools, and equipment and the arrival of 30,000 Nogai Tatars

for construction, a rumor spread among the troops about the harsh winter conditions in the field, resulting in demotivation (Efendi, 1981). At the same time, upon being informed about the canal excavations, Ivan IV deployed his troops to disperse the workers, leading to substantial losses for the Ottoman forces, who then abandoned the siege. Failing to execute their plans, the troops regrouped in Crimea, with only a quarter of the army successfully returning to Anatolia (Kamalov, 2011). Although encountering a notable military setback and withdrawal, the Ottoman Sultan, acting as the Caliph of all Muslims, not only guaranteed safe passage for Muslim pilgrims and traders but also entered into an agreement with Moscow to dismantle the Russian fort along the Terek River (Martin, 2007, pp. 393-400).

### *3.2.3. Struggles Amidst the Tsardom of Russia and the Crimean Khanate*

In May 1571, the Moscow Fire was ignited by winds and engulfed the city after an attack by Crimean Khan Devlet I Giray while the Russian leader was engaged in another conflict, the Livonian War. The defenseless city was set ablaze, encompassing the Oprichnina court and the suburbs, all of which were completely consumed by fire within hours. Amid the chaos, people sought refuge in churches and the Moscow River, but an arsenal explosion in the churches resulted in asphyxiation, while those attempting to escape to the river drowned (Staden, 1967, p. 47). This event, one of the few urban fires of such magnitude globally, led to a significant loss of life, with an estimated 40,000 casualties and a noticeable decline in the population (Penskoy & Penskaya, 2013, p. 192). Following the fire, the Crimean Khanate briefly occupied Moscow, but logistical challenges led to evacuation despite the victory. The subsequent Battle of Molodi in July-August 1572 marked a crucial victory for Ivan IV. Facing a force twice the size of his own, he triumphed over Crimean Khan Devlet I Giray, backed by Ottoman support near Moscow (Penskoy, 2012, p. 156). The battle, unfolding near the city, saw the Ottoman-backed Tatars confronting the Russian Army. Despite crossing the Oka River, Devlet I Giray was unaware of entrenched Russian forces on the other side, and the ensuing conflict saw Tatars constrained by Russian fortifications, resulting in hand-to-hand combat (Madariaga, 2005, p. 277). Swords and spears dominated the battlefield, with Russians effectively utilizing artillery and firearms in later stages (Tucker, 2010, p. 531).

The outcome marked a turning point as the Crimean Khanate was unable to advance towards Moscow again. Meanwhile, Russia embarked on a process of strengthening, solidifying its position in the aftermath of the battle.

#### *3.2.4. Prior to the Major Conflicts*

At this juncture, another assessment of İnalçık (1992) gains significance, illuminating the nuanced development of Ottoman-Russian relations up to the Russo-Turkish War of 1676–1681. This period is characterized by geopolitical complexities and intense economic competition, providing a context for the exploration that follows. According to him, this period witnessed the rise of the Tsardom of Russia, led by Ivan IV, as a formidable commercial rival challenging Ottoman dominance in the lucrative Asia-Europe trade network. The Ottoman Empire found itself struggling not only with the relentless pressure from Russia but also with the challenging aspects of British interests. British initiatives through Moscow and the Caucasus posed a significant threat to Ottoman trade routes and shook the strategic balance. The Ottomans annexed Azerbaijan, consolidating their control over the critical Caucasus route and taking an important step to protect their commercial interests. Amid this turbulent environment, the Safavids' rapprochement with Russia and England created additional complications. Despite these challenges, the Ottomans made a diplomatic move by granting capitulations to the British after the Battle of Cyprus, demonstrating their ability to maintain dominance while adapting to external powers. However, the Ottoman Empire faced a confluence of conflicts, not only with Russia but also with the Safavids and the Habsburgs. This multi-front struggle strained Ottoman resources and limited its ability to mount a strong response to Russia's expansionist ambitions. Russia's strategic focus on acquiring Western technology, especially advanced weaponry, made it a formidable military power in 1615 (pp. 30-31). Ottoman inertia in the face of Russian expansion in Asia stemmed from the empire's complex web of problems, which allowed Russia to extend its influence beyond the Urals. This period marked the rise of Russia as a global player, taking advantage of Ottoman restrictions and profiting greatly from the flourishing fur trade. In short, the historical narrative of Ottoman-Russian relations during this period was characterized by a complex chain of politics of power, strategy, and economic interests.

### *3.2.5. Russo-Turkish War of 1676–1681 and the Treaty of Bakhchisarai*

In line with the terms of the Treaty of Żurawno (İzvança), which marked the conclusion of the Polish-Ottoman War of 1672–1676, Podolia was relinquished to Ottoman control (Kolodziejczyk, 2000, pp. 520-527). The Right-bank Ukraine, bordering Podolia was under Hetman Petro Doroshenko, had been a vassal of the Ottoman Empire since 1669. Consequently, Ottoman influence gained ascendancy over a significant portion of the Ukrainian territory. By 1672, Ivan Samoylovych, the Hetman of the Cossacks of the Left-bank Ukraine and under the protectorate of the Tsardom of Russia since 1667, proclaimed himself as the Hetman of all Ukraine. This declaration was contested by Petro Doroshenko, the Ottoman Empire, and the Crimean Khanate. Furthermore, in 1676, Chyhyryn came under siege by Russian and Ukrainian forces commanded by Samoylovych and Grigory Romodanovsky, leading to the surrender of Doroshenko. Subsequently, the Russian and Ukrainian armies withdrew to the left bank of the Dnieper while maintaining a garrison in Chyhyryn. The Ottoman Porte then decided to use the famous name of Yurii Khmelnytsky, who was then in Istanbul, to strengthen its claims to the Right-bank Ukraine and appointed him as the Hetman of the Right-bank (Davies, 2007, pp. 158-159). In July 1677, Ottoman and Crimean armies, commanded by Ibrahim Pasha, laid siege to the Chyhyryn fortress in August that proved unsuccessful, prompting Ibrahim Pasha to abandon the effort and withdraw. In July 1678, the Ottoman army, led by Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa Pasha, in conjunction with the Tatar army, laid siege to Chyhyryn for the second time, resulting in its fall to the Ottomans in August 1678 (Kallek, 1993). Later on, the treaty signed in Bakhchisaray in January 1681 agreed to a 20-year truce and established the Dnieper River as the border between the Ottoman and Russian territories. Recognizing Moscow's authority, the Sultan conceded sovereignty over Left-bank Ukraine, while Russia acknowledged Ottoman dominion over southern and southwestern Ukraine. A mutual agreement prohibited settlement in the region between the southern Bug and Dnieper rivers, granted the Crimean Tatars and Nogai tribes the right to maintain a nomadic lifestyle in the southern steppes of Ukraine, and the Cossacks retained rights to fish the Dnieper and the Black Sea (Mikaberidze, 2011, pp. 180-181). Finally, it is crucial to underscore that the successes achieved at Bakhchisarai motivated Moscow to seek further gains (O'Brien, 1953, p. 267).

### *3.2.6. Russo-Turkish War of 1686–1700 as part of the Wars of the Holy League*

The conflicts known as the Wars of the Holy League or the Great Turkish War (1683–1699) unfolded as a sequence of battles, where a coalition of European nations formed a Holy Alliance in response to the Ottoman setback during the Second Siege of Vienna in 1683. This series of wars led to the control of Hungary, Ukraine, and Dalmatia by the alliance, dealt a significant blow to Ottoman influence in the Balkans, and is referred to as “The Disastrous Years” in Ottoman historical accounts (Refik, 2009, p. 8). Thus, the Russo-Turkish War of 1686-1700 was intertwined with the Wars of the Holy League as Russia formally joined the alliance in 1686. The Treaty of Perpetual Peace between the Tsardom of Russia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, signed on May 16, 1686, officially brought an end to the Russo-Polish War of 1654–1667, also known as the Thirteen Years’ War. Prior to this treaty, the Truce of Andrusovo had been declared, but the specific terms of peace had not been agreed upon. However, with this treaty, Kyiv, the Left-bank and Zaporozhia came under Moscow’s jurisdiction, and it also signaled the moment when Moscow attained unquestionable geopolitical dominance (Lerski, 1996, p. 183; Hughes, 1990, pp. 179-180). The motivation for the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth to accept the harsh terms was the desire to side with Russia against Ottoman forces, as Ottoman policies were a threat to both (Cohen, 1996, p. 43).

In May of 1687, Vasily Golitsyn’s Russian forces united with Hetman Ivan Samoylovych’s Cossack army on the Eastern bank of the Dnieper River. For the first time, the Russian army had a large number of modern infantry and was conducting a conquering campaign against Crimea. However, the Crimean army had poisoned the waters and set fire to the meadows in the steppe through which the Russian army was to pass, in accordance with the tactic of scorched earth. As the Russian army began to face greater difficulties in terms of supply, they decided to retreat. In 1689, Golitsyn’s army, in its second assault on the Crimean Khanate forces now strengthened by Ottoman janissaries, experienced a more significant defeat. Nevertheless, these two campaigns kept the Crimean Khanate busy and prevented them from coming to the aid of the Ottomans in the Great Turkish War.

In 1694, Leopold I, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and John III Sobieski, with a particular emphasis, encouraged the Moscow army to continue its efforts for the Holy

League and launch a new campaign. Davies (2007) argues that it is also possible that Peter I also perceived the moment as crucial to execute a final significant operation in the south, securing a tangible advantage before the alliance fell apart. Moreover, this operation would not only allow the Tsar to enhance his influence in the region but also test the elite troops developed over the past eleven years in combat (p. 183). In the spring of 1695, Peter I led the Russian army in a land siege of Azov. However, due to their inability to control the river, they could not prevent Ottoman supplies, leading to the lifting of the siege after two unsuccessful attacks (Davies, 2007, p. 185). Towards the close of 1695, the Russians geared up for the second Azov campaign, having constructed a fleet by the spring of 1696 to impede Ottoman reinforcements. Setting sail in May, Peter I and his galley successfully blockaded Azov. Despite the damage the battle inflicted on Russian ships and equipment, the Azov garrison surrendered after intense bombardment from both land and sea, and the fortress was captured by Moscow. Thus, due to the impracticality of employing sizable Crimean Tatar armies in the Balkans until the end of the Great Turkish War, this became a key factor in the ultimate Ottoman defeat, leading to the signing of the Treaty of Karlowitz (Shapira, 2011, p. 135). Following the capture of the Azov fortress, Peter I's account of the military operation was scrutinized by the Boyar Duma, leading to the issuance of a decree on October 20, 1696, initiating the construction of a navy, which is regarded as the formal establishment date of the Imperial Russian Navy (Elagin, 1864, p. 52).

The Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699, concluded between the Ottomans and the Holy Alliance following the Great Turkish War, holds significance as it marked a substantial loss of western territories for the Ottoman Empire (Abou-el-Haj, 1969). The treaty was also the first to involve diplomatic engagements with several states and led to the end of Ottoman rule in Central Europe, marking the onset of a phase of decline for the empire. In the context of Russian-Ottoman relations, discussions with the Tsardom of Russia continued for an additional year within the terms of a truce established. In light of the neglect of Russian interests by the other members of the alliance during the Karlowitz negotiations, Peter I abstained from signing the treaty. Subsequently, he signed the Treaty of Constantinople, or Istanbul, in 1700 with Ottoman Sultan Mustafa II, securing the cession of the Azov fortress to Russia and the establishment of a permanent Russian ambassador in Istanbul (Özcan, 2001; Solovyov, 1962, pp. 607-612).

Sicker (2001) points out another noteworthy aspect of the Russo-Turkish War of 1686–1700, especially in relation to the Azov campaign, was the heightened tension between Russians and Persians in 1697. In this period, a representative from Russia expressed concerns about the support provided by certain Caucasian tribes, who were ostensibly Persian subjects, to Ottoman forces during the siege of Azov. The diplomatic note called for Persia to declare war against the Ottomans and settle a longstanding debt from the era of Shah Safi. However, the Russian envoy was imprisoned due to a diplomatic disagreement, and no further action was taken by the Tsar. In the subsequent year, the Persian authorities rejected a Russian naval fleet's request for unrestricted entry into the Baku port. Despite their attempts to identify vulnerabilities, the Russians showed no inclination to initiate hostilities with Persia (p. 16). In essence, Moscow's strategic initiatives to bolster its geopolitical influence entailed engaging with multiple states. The Great Turkish War, acting as a spark hastening the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, paradoxically fueled a rising trajectory for the Tsardom of Russia.

### *3.2.7. Russo-Turkish War of 1710-1711 and the Coalition Against Swedish*

The Ingrian War, fought between the Tsardom of Russia and the Swedish Empire between 1610 and 1617, was a part of the Time of Troubles of Russia. The war ended in 1617 with the Treaty of Stolbovo, in which the Swedish Empire gained territory from Russia and recognized Michael Romanov as the rightful Russian Tsar, ending Sweden's claims to the Russian throne. Years later, the Treaty of Preobrazhenskoye, established through a secret accord in 1699, outlined the partition of the Swedish Empire among its signatories—Russia, Denmark, and Saxony (Zhukov, 1968, p. 531). Aligned with Peter I's strategic vision to recover earlier losses, this clandestine pact laid the groundwork for an alliance that, later joined by Prussia and Great Britain, instigated the Great Northern War. In 1709, the Battle of Poltava marked the end of the Swedish Empire's status as a major European power and its eastward expansion (Schnakenbourg, 2018). Following the surrender of his army, King Charles XII of Sweden sought refuge in Ottoman territory with a small group of soldiers. In response to Peter I's demand for the removal of Charles XII and the Sultan's refusal, the Tsar initiated an invasion into the Ottoman Empire, leading to Ottoman Sultan Ahmed III declaring war on the Tsardom of Russia.

At this juncture, a crucial and alternative viewpoint regarding another potential factor contributing to the onset of this conflict gains significance—specifically, Peter I’s aim of expansion toward warmer seas. According to the German Naval Captain Stenzel (1894), a nation’s industrial and natural progress, particularly when engaged in substantial trade with foreign nations, hinges on its control of sea routes, straits, and the extent of roads leading to its borders. Peter I was the first Russian emperor to grasp the importance of this notion. The Arctic Sea and the Kamchatka Peninsula were unsuitable for maritime trade, prompting Peter I to extend his territorial boundaries to encompass the Baltic Sea in the north and the Black Sea coast in the south, all in pursuit of fostering maritime commerce. Subsequent Russian emperors adeptly continued this Black Sea policy to further these objectives (pp. 3-4). This succinctly captures how the Great Northern War against the Swedish Empire in the north, coupled with interconnected political aims, resulted in the Pruth Campaign against the Ottoman Empire in the south.

A segment of the Russian military led by General Carl Ewald von Rönne moved towards Brăila, a significant port city in Wallachia under Ottoman control. In the encounter, the Russian forces confronted a faction of the Wallachian army commanded by Spatharios Toma Cantacuzino, the second-ranking military officer after the monarch. Cantacuzino disregarded the directives from Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu of Wallachia. Peter I also made a secret agreement with the Moldavian prince Dimitrie Cantemir and benefited from his military service (Kurat, 1951, pp. 327-340). Following a two-day siege, the combined Russian and Wallachian forces successfully captured Brăila in July 1711. Then, Peter I concentrated his troops on the right bank of the Pruth, across the river from the Ottomans. The Ottoman forces, under Grand Vizier Baltacı Mehmet Pasha, supported by the army of the Crimean Khanate, encircled the Russian-Moldavian troops. This position was located in a swampy area on one side and a cliff on the other, near the town of Stăniliești. Peter I found himself compelled to agree to a peace settlement on terms dictated by the Ottoman Empire on July 21, 1711.

According to the Treaty of the Pruth, the Azov Fortress would be restored to the Ottomans, and the Ottoman rule would be fully reinstated over the Black Sea. The Russians would not interfere in the internal affairs of Poland, maintain no permanent ambassador in Istanbul, and permit the unrestricted return of King Charles XII of Sweden to his homeland. Mikaberidze (2011) argues that Baltacı Mehmet Pasha’s decision to sign

a treaty with comparatively advantageous terms for the Russians was a significant strategic blunder (p. 772). If he had opted to capture Peter I instead, the course of history might have unfolded differently, potentially averting Russia's transformation into an imperial power and reshaping the dynamics of its future competition with the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, the Black Sea basin, and the Caucasus. Consequently, the Grand Vizier was dismissed and exiled to Lemnos in the face of accusations that he had missed the opportunity to capture the Tsar, that he had freed the Russian army in exchange for cannons, rifles, goods, and provisions, and that he had not obtained the consent of the Swedish king (Beydilli, 2007b).

### *3.2.8. Russo-Turkish War of 1735-1739 Originating in Persia, Involving Austria*

To comprehend the characteristics of this war, it is necessary to backtrack a few years. The conflict known as the Russo-Persian War of 1722-1723 commenced as Peter I aimed to seize the opportunity presented by the weakening of the Safavid Empire, safeguarding the territorial acquisitions in the region against the Ottoman Empire and seeking to extend Russian influence in the Caspian and Caucasus regions. Consequently, following the war, the governments of the Ottoman and Russian sides entered into a treaty in Istanbul on June 12, 1724, delineating the division of a substantial portion of Persia between them. In return for the Ottomans' acceptance of Russian territorial gains on the shores of the Caspian Sea, Russia accepted Ottoman sovereignty over Azerbaijan and most of the southern Caucasus (Mikaberidze, 2011, p. 762). However, Nader Afshar, who took power in Persia after the Safavid Shah Soltan Hoseyn was captured during the Afghan invasion, did not recognize this treaty. He declared war and inflicted a heavy defeat upon the Ottoman Empire.

The Treaty of Ganja, concluded in 1735, marked Russia's acceptance to return territories in the Caucasus, such as Derbend and Baku, captured by Peter I in the Russo-Persian War of 1722-1723. It also upheld the provisions of the 1732 Treaty of Resht, wherein the Safavid state acknowledged the pro-Russian exiled Georgian king Vakhtang VI (Mikaberidze, 2011, pp. 329, 746). We can argue that this situation provided Russia diplomatic leverage in its conflicts with the Ottomans while also offering relief to the Safavid ruler on the western border of his empire. Additionally, the Treaty of

Constantinople, or Istanbul, in 1736, signed with the Ottoman Empire, recognized Nader as the new Shah of Persia, leading to the Ottoman Empire conceding the territories in the Caucasus to Persia (Axworthy, 2006, pp. 175-177). Yet, prior to the signing of this treaty, Russia, taking advantage of the absence of Crimean troops on the Peninsula and the fact that the Ottoman Empire was busy fighting Persia, launched a surprise attack. During that period, Anna Ioannovna held the throne, adhering to the path established by Peter I, which encompassed both governance and foreign policy strategies (Kurat, 1987, p. 276).

The Field Marshal of the Russian Empire, General Burkhard Christoph von Münnich, headed south and recognized that his forces would not be prepared until the next year and dispatched the chief general of the Russian imperial army, Mikhail Ivanovich Leontiev, on a raid. Leontiev advanced east of the bend of the Dnieper and reached Perekop and Kamenny Zaton but, due to cold weather and casualties, was forced to turn back unsuccessfully. This campaign, as noted by Maslovskiy (1891), also hastened the return of Tatar forces to Crimea (p. 206). On May 20, 1736, Munnich led an assault on the Isthmus of Perekop and the fortress of Orkapi and successfully seized the position, gaining access to Crimea. By June 17, 1736, they had captured Bakhchisarai, the capital of the Crimean Khanate, and initiated a widespread campaign, setting Crimea ablaze. However, the extensive supply lines posed challenges, hindering the replenishment of rations, supplies, and additional troop strength. Rampant diseases and an epidemic resulted in significant human casualties, compelling Munnich to order a retreat (Shkolnik, 2012, pp. 60-61).

In 1736, the Russian government devised a strategic plan for military operations in both Azov and Crimea. Field Marshal Munnich, in a letter to Duke Ernst Johann von Biron, articulated the envisioned progression of the war:

*“In 1736: Azov will be ours. We will become the masters of the Don, Donets, Perekop, the territories between the Don and the Dnieper along the Black Sea, and perhaps even Crimea will belong to us.*

*In 1737: The entire Crimea submits, Kuban is acquired. Kabarda is gained, the Empress reigns over the Azov Sea and the estuary between Crimea and Kuban.*

*In 1738: Belgorod and Budjak hordes beyond the Dniester submit without the slightest risk. Moldavia and Wallachia, suffering under the yoke*

*of the Turks, come under Russian influence. Greeks are saved under the wings of the Russian eagle.*

*In 1739: The banners and standards of Her Majesty are raised... Where? in Constantinople.”* (Baiov, 1906, p. 199)

We must note that this letter carries significance as it illuminates Russia's evolution in consolidating imperial prowess and consistently refining military strategies, often putting them to the test in confrontations with the Ottomans. In light of these developments, in May 1736, following a night attack, Mustapha Aga, the Pasha of Azov, agreed to surrender, and after negotiations, he conceded to the castle falling under Russian control. In exchange, he would relocate to Ottoman territory, with the stipulation that he and his forces would refrain from engaging in hostilities against the Russians for a year (Baiov, 1906, p. 225).

As a consequence of the Russian army's triumph in 1736, Austria stepped into the fray, officially declaring war on the Ottoman Empire in July 1737. It is crucial to grasp that Austria's eventual participation in this Russo-Turkish War, initially rooted in tensions over Persia, also goes back to the past. The signing of the Treaty of Vienna Union on August 6, 1726, involving the Habsburg Monarchy and the Russian Empire, holds a distinctive position in history as one of the long-lasting alliances. Beyond its temporal significance, this agreement laid the foundation for Russian foreign policy, a role it played until the events of the Crimean War of 1853-1856 (Bagger, 1974, pp. 231-232). According to this secret agreement, they mutually decided that should a conflict arise involving either Austria or Russia, the partnering nation would provide military assistance and now it was Austria's turn to help against Russia (Martens, 1874, pp. 32-44).

On July 12, 1737, troops of the Austrian forces, led by Francis I, crossed the border and entered the Ottoman Empire, deploying in three separate corps. On the eastern front, Field Marshal Georg Olivier Graf von Wallis commanded troops that advanced into Wallachia. An Ottoman army, advancing through Wallachia, defeated the Austrian forces in a battle near Bucharest, compelling them to retreat into Transylvania before winter set in. On the western front, Prince Joseph Friedrich of Saxe-Hildburghausen led another section of the Austrian army, also in corps strength, which, with the assistance of Montenegrins, took control of Bosnia, including the provincial capital Sarajevo. Hekimoğlu Ali Pasha, the governor of Bosnia, organized Ottoman resistance and, with

Bosnian volunteer troops, achieved victory against the Austrians at the Battle of Banja Luka on August 4, 1737 (Malcolm, 1994, p. 86). Simultaneously, on August 1, 1737, the primary Austrian army led by Seckendorff achieved the capture of Niš. Following this success, he dispatched a unit commanded by Field Marshal Ludwig Andreas von Khevenhüller, to besiege the fortress of Vidin. However, the Ottoman Empire had reinforced its forces there. Hacı İvaz Mehmed Pasha managed to break out of the castle, causing significant casualties to the Austrian troops, leading to the inevitable retreat of the Austrian army (Sarıcaoğlu, 1996a).

The Ottoman forces were caught off guard by the unexpected advance of the main Austrian army. In response, the Ottomans swiftly organized their armies and launched a counter-attack. Consequently, Niš was reclaimed by the Ottomans, and the coordination among the different branches of the Austrian armies broke down. In 1738, there was a change in leadership for the Austrian armies, with Dominik von Königsegg-Rothenfels taking over as the new commander-in-chief. A critical factor in the course of the conflict was the fact that the Ottoman armies had adopted the reforms introduced by Humbaracı Ahmed Pasha, also known as Claude Alexandre, and in particular, had begun to use Speed Artillery effectively and captured fortresses in Serbia, forcing the Austrians to retreat (Özcan, 1998). Austria, recognizing the need for a resolution, initiated peace negotiations through the French ambassador in Istanbul, Marquise de Villeneuve (Roider, 1972, p. 198). However, the negotiations progressed slowly. In July 1739, the Ottomans dealt a decisive blow to Austria at the Battle of Grocka, consequently leading to the capture of Belgrade. Faced with these setbacks, the Habsburgs had no alternative but to enter into a peace treaty (Roider, 1972, pp. 168-169). Shifting focus to the Russian front, the Russo-Turkish War of 1735-1739, dominated primarily by disputes over Ochakov and Crimea from the summer of 1737 to the fall of 1739, concluded with the signing of the Treaty of Niš. Despite the Russian armies proving more successful than their Austrian counterparts, they entered into the treaty with the Ottomans on October 3, 1739. This decision was driven by the Ottoman troops' release in Serbia following the Treaty of Belgrade, poised to be directed against the Russians, and the anticipation of a potential Swedish attack.

The main provisions of the Belgrade Treaty and its extension, the Treaty of Niš, set forth the following terms: Austria relinquished control of Serbia, Belgrade, portions of Wallachia, and a border area in Bosnia—excluding the Banat region that had been

acquired through the Treaty of Passarowitz. The Azov Fortress was slated for demolition, and the surrounding areas were to be evacuated. The Kabardino region in the North Caucasus, serving as a strategic control point for mountain passes, was designated as a neutral territory. In reciprocity, the Russians committed to withdrawing from Crimea and were prohibited from maintaining warships and merchant vessels in the Black Sea (Mikaberidze, 2011, pp. 201, 647). Shapira (2011) argues that the Treaty of Belgrade was the most brilliant Ottoman diplomatic success of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (p. 138). Yet, as per Kurat (1987), the commitment to dismantle the Azov fortress, which had been captured by the Russians, ultimately provided Russia with the essential conditions and opportunities to access the Black Sea (p. 276). As easily observed, the considerable geographical separation between the initial war commencement at ground zero and the locations where the concluding agreements were signed underscores the extensive scope of the Russo-Turkish War of 1735-1739, including Austria. These conflicts were shaped by various factors, encompassing political objectives, military capacities, alliances, and religious influences. The diverse interplay of these elements played a pivotal role in determining the ultimate outcomes of the wars.

### *3.2.9. Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774, Orlov and Ali Bey Revolts and the First Partition of Poland*

Stanisław August Poniatowski ascended to the throne of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth through the support of Empress Catherine II of Russia, facilitated by their romantic involvement (Gribble, 1912, 145; Eversley, 1973, pp. 38-39). Thus, the Russian ambassador, Nikolai Vasilyevich Repnin, wielded significant influence over Poland. He imposed the 1768 Perpetual Treaty between Poland and Russia, which was detrimental to Poland's geopolitical interests. This treaty challenged the political dominance of the Polish Catholic faith and granted permission for Russian forces to take control of Warsaw, effectively placing the Kingdom within the sphere of influence of Russia (Scott, 2001, p. 182). In response, the Bar Confederation emerged in the fortified town of Bar, near the Ottoman border, on February 29, 1768. Led by the Polish nobleman Casimir Pulaski, this confederation evolved into a rebellion that united conservative Poles (Szumlakowski, 1918). The unrest escalated into the Bar Confederation's major revolt, during which the

Russian Army captured the Bar fortress on June 20, 1768. As surviving confederates fled toward the Turkish border, clashes occurred with pursuing troops, including between the Zaporozhian Cossacks and Ottoman janissary. Reports reached Ottoman Sultan Mustafa III that the Cossacks had massacred the Ottoman-held town of Balta. Although Russia denied the accusations, it was reported that the Cossacks had indeed completely destroyed Balta and killed all inhabitants. Under the influence of Poland's supporters and the pro-war counselors from the French embassy, the Sultan delivered a decisive ultimatum (Bogdanovich, 1866, pp. 89-94). Following this, Aleksei Mikhailovich Obreskov and the entire staff of the Russian embassy were arrested, effectively signaling a declaration of war against Russia (Sicker, 2001, pp. 69-70).

The Russian military was organized into three distinct armies for strategic purposes. Firstly, there was the main offensive force, led by Prince Alexander Mikhailovich Golitsyn, strategically positioned near Kyiv. Secondly, a defensive army under Pyotor Rumyantsev was stationed near Poltava and Bakhmut, assigned to protect the southern borders of Russia from potential Tatar invasions. Lastly, Pyotr Olitz commanded the third army near Lutsk, serving as the forward unit for the main army. On January 31, 1769, Qırım Giray Khan entered Russia with a cavalry force deployed in three separate groups. They successfully defeated opposing forces and proceeded to plunder numerous towns and villages. The Russian troops, taken aback by this assault, responded by poisoning the Crimean Khan to avert the looming danger (Tott, 1883, p. 192).

After completing their war preparations, Russia initiated action by entering Ottoman territory. Despite besieging Khotin, the Russian forces led by Golitsyn suffered defeat at the hands of Ottoman soldiers who came to assist on May 1, 1769. Golitsyn's second attempt to siege Khotin on July 17 also ended in failure, with the Ottomans emerging victorious. Some Ottoman forces led by Moldovanci Ali Pasha, who were advancing towards the Russian army in Podolia, constructed a bridge to cross the Dniester River, but heavy rain and Russian explosives destroyed the bridges. Unable to aid the crossing soldiers, the Russians successfully countered and defeated the Ottoman forces that had crossed. With the remaining Ottoman army in retreat, the Russian forces seized Khotin, followed by the conquest of Wallachia and Moldavia, ultimately advancing to the banks of the Danube (Petrov, 1866, pp. 251-255, 258-260). Because of this failure,

Moldovanci Ali Pasha was dismissed as both grand vizier and commander of the army, and Ivazzade Halil Pasha was appointed in his place (Sarıcaoğlu, 1996b).

Meanwhile, in the 1760s, Russia began to take an interest in the Mediterranean region and the situation of Orthodox and Slavic-origin peoples under the Ottoman Empire. In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, southern Greece and the islands of the Aegean Sea were visited by several Russian agents (Kadyrbaev, 2007). Among these, there was a spy using the pseudonym Haci Murad. Fluent in Turkish, Arabic, and Persian, he made his way to the Peloponnese (Mora) in 1765 (Gundogdu, 2012, p. 227). There, he managed to win the favor of Panagiotis Benakis, a prominent figure and a businessman in the region and the wealthiest individual in Kalamata (Nagata, 1988, p. 90). Subsequently, Murad successfully persuaded the Moreans in the southern part of the peninsula by offering them the assurance of ammunition and military assistance in case of rebellion. Furthermore, in 1763, Grigory Orlov, who was the favored individual of Catherine II at that time, dispatched two envoys to Greece. These emissaries were Manuel Saro, a Greek merchant from St. Petersburg, and George Papazoli, an artillery lieutenant. Their task was to assess the feelings of the Maniots and other Greeks in anticipation of a possible conflict with the Ottoman Empire and to report on what was needed for a future operation (Arsh, 2004, pp. 435-436). Returning to St. Petersburg in May 1765, Saro compiled a report, in the conclusion of which he stated:

*“In my zeal, I dare to imagine sending ten Russian warships to the Mediterranean Sea (Archipelous too) against the Turks, and loading them with a fair number of guns. Where, as soon as the Greeks saw such a great multitude, considerable ships communicated with the Russian Greeks. If only they would be content with guns, because they are not enough. One can say about them that they are a people of courage and bravery.”* (Arsh, 2004, p. 437)

Later, with other reports and letters from certain officials, Catherine II initially viewed the sending of the fleet and the prepared uprisings in the Ottoman rear rather as military sabotage and wrote to Ivan Grigoryevich Chernyshyov, the Field Marshal General of the Fleet and de facto head of the Admiralty Board: *“I am setting fire to the Turkish Empire from all four corners”* (Solovyov, 1878, p. 579). Which is exactly what was going to happen in the Gulf of Chesme. Moreover, after the uprising began, violent

clashes erupted between Muslim and Christian communities in the cities of Mystras and Arcadia. The revolt was quelled thanks to the intervention of Albanians from Rumelia; however, they also engaged in killing and looting in the aftermath, causing significant casualties among both Muslims and Christians. The situation persisted until 1779, when the forces led by Gazi Hasan Pasha managed to restore order. The devastation was extensive, prompting 10,000 Moran Greeks to flee on ships to Anatolia, where they found refuge and were welcomed by local âyans, such as the Karaosmanoğulları family. These local leaders constructed houses and churches for the refugees and granted them a ten-year exemption from taxes (Alexander & Kiel, 2020, p. 282).

In the Peloponnese Peninsula, Mandalzade Hüsameddin Pasha led the Ottoman navy to quell this Greek rebellion, also known as the Orlov Revolt. However, anticipating the Russian fleet's inability to sustain a lengthy voyage without supplies, Hüsameddin Pasha directed his forces to the Aegean Sea, anchoring between Chios and Karaburun near Chesme. Learning of the Ottoman fleet's movement, two Russian fleets sailed into the Mediterranean to locate them. A confrontation unfolded on July 6, and owing to a misjudged maneuver, the Russian forces faced initial setbacks on the first day, resulting in casualties on both sides. After this first confrontation, the Ottoman ships were anchored side by side in front of the Chesme castle, unable to maneuver. Although Hüsameddin Pasha was informed that this situation was dangerous, he refused to accept this advice, saying that the land cannons placed at the mouth of the bay and between the castle and the coast could protect the navy. However, the Ottoman fleet encountered challenges in managing the Gulf of Chesme entrance, while the Russian navy, leveraging their strategic edge, utilized arson ships. Subsequently, the Ottoman fleet was exposed to fire due to the arson ships and the fact that they were anchored in such a way that they could not maneuver in a row (Uzunçarşılı, 2007, pp. 400-401). Due to the Ottomans' tactical misstep, coupled with the Russian navy's superiority and well-executed maneuvers, the Ottoman fleet was entirely destroyed, leading to the dismissal of Hüsameddin Pasha. On the Russian side, Catherine II conferred the title of Cheshmeski upon Alexei Orlov, who demonstrated excellence in the battle, and a victory monument was subsequently erected in Russia to commemorate this significant event (Aktepe, 1993, p. 288).

Prussia, Austria, and Britain proposed mediation in the conflict between Russia and the Ottomans to curb Russian expansion (Kaplan, 1962, pp. 119-120). Facing the

prospect of a European war and concerned about the proximity of the Austrian army to her own forces, Catherine II decided to endorse Frederick II or Frederick the Great's plan while secretly agreeing to return the captured principalities to the Ottomans. This move alleviated Austria's apprehension about having a powerful Russian neighbor in the Balkans, as it eliminated the possibility of a formidable Russian presence in the region. Consequently, the first partition of Poland transpired following a shift in the balance of power in Europe, wherein Russian triumphs over the Ottomans during 1768-1774 bolstered Russia and posed a threat to Habsburg interests in the region. Subsequently, on February 19, 1772, a partition treaty was formally signed in Vienna. In 1793 and 1795, the second and third partitions led to the complete dissolution of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Lewinski-Corwin, 1917, pp. 310, 345, 355). The Ottoman Empire was one of the two states that condemned the partition (Prażmowska, 2010, p. 25).

Back to the Ottoman perspective, after a period of truce, at the Battle of Kozluca in June 1774, the Russian army led by Alexander Suvorov gained the advantage over the Ottomans, who were outnumbered but demoralized by previous defeats. Moreover, the need for military reform became glaringly evident when François de Tott, a key figure in the 18<sup>th</sup> century modernization of the Ottoman military, highlighted the concerning trend at the beginning of the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–1774. Janissaries were frequently observed assaulting their officers, a situation that, initially hinted at during the war's beginning, had now become patently evident, together with the tactical mistakes (Kinross, 1979, p. 396; Uyar & Erickson, 2009, p. 118).

Certainly, the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–1774 encompassed more than the specific regions discussed in this overview. The parts we have selected for this sub-heading are some of the significant ones of the intense and complex geopolitical moves that have shaped Turkish-Russian relations, extending to the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Balkans, and the Middle East. In this context, as previously noted, Russia's strategies and actions against the Ottoman Empire, which then held territories across diverse regions, played a crucial role in propelling Russia into a prominent position on the global stage, adopting an imperial power and mindset. The conflicts occurring between 1768-1774, unfolding across multiple theaters, also served as a catalyst for the diminishing Ottoman influence in the Middle East in subsequent years. Thus, one less conspicuous event on other fronts, specifically the occupation of Beirut between 1772-1773, contributed to this

shift in dominance. Taking advantage of the Ottoman Empire's preoccupation with fighting the Russians, Bulut Kapan Ali Bey held Egypt in its entirety and partially Palestine, southern Syria, and Hejaz for about four years. He did not send taxes to the Ottoman Empire and issued coins in his own name in 1768, cutting all the ties with the Porte in 1769. Ali Bey's revolt, directly connected with the Russian war that commenced in 1768, found its opportunity for declaring independence through the Ottomans' engagement with Russia. Aware of the Porte's deep entanglement with Russia, Ali was determined to ensure his autonomy during this critical period. His plea for assistance, communicated to Alexei Orlov through an intermediary named Yaqub and then relayed to Empress Catherine by Orlov, garnered approval. The Empress unequivocally embraced the concept of an alliance, leading to Russian squadrons consistently deploying to Egypt or Syria in support of Ali Bey from the spring of 1772 onwards. This was not a permanent occupation but a purely Russian wartime policy (Persen, 1955, pp. 278-279, 284). Although the rebellion was suppressed and Kara Halil Pasha was appointed as the governor of Egypt by the Porte, the order could not be restored in Egypt after the revolt of Ali Bey (Güner, 2013, p. 175).

The Russians, who had achieved great success throughout the war, now had the opportunity to make a treaty after the Battle of Kozluca, in which they could put forward the conditions they wanted. Under these circumstances, the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji (Küçük Kaynarca) was signed on July 21, 1774. In the negotiated settlement, Crimea was granted independence, maintaining only religious ties with the Ottomans, while the fortresses of Azov, Kılburun, Kerch, and Yenikale were ceded to the Russians. Russia, in turn, committed to returning the territories it had occupied during the war. As part of the agreement, the Ottoman Empire declared a general amnesty, temporarily suspended tax collection, and extended capitulations to the Russians, allowing them to have a permanent ambassador in Istanbul and establish consulates at their discretion. In addition to paying war indemnity, the Ottoman Empire granted the Russians permission to maintain a navy and shipyard in the Black Sea and provided commercial access through the straits. The treaty handed the Russians the authority to oversee all Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire (Hurewitz, 1975, pp. 92-101). In the face of external pressures from Christian Europe, this deepened the ties between the Ottoman Christian subjects and European states. These challenges did not just boost the confidence of the Orthodox people in the

Ottoman Empire; they nurtured a sense of superiority. Adding to this, the extensive network of European missionary schools operating within the Ottoman Empire played a vital role in reinforcing these dynamics (Katsikas, 2021, p. 32).

### *3.2.10. Annexation of Crimea, Russia's Strategic Pursuit of a Warm Water Port, and Their Role in the Eastern Question*

*“Since the first entry of the Turk into Europe, there has been an Eastern Question; and since first Russia became a European Power, it has been her aim to solve this question to her own advantage”* (Sorel, 1898, p. ix). The Eastern question, a significant aspect of European history often characterized as the expulsion of the Turks from Europe, carries a broad range of implications that resist simplification into a single definition. Although a more specific viewpoint entails seeing it as a contest for territorial distribution arising from the Ottoman Empire's decline in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the origins of this issue trace back to a period predating the establishment of the Ottoman Beylik and even before the Turks' entrance to Anatolia (Djuvara, 1914, pp. 7-9). Moreover, the competition, which encompasses the establishment of political and economic dominance over the Ottoman Empire and involves the division of its extensive territories, particularly in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, is marked by both material and moral support for the aspirations of non-Muslim populations seeking independence (Beydilli, 2010, p. 353). However, based on Sorel's views given above, our analysis here will focus on Russia's stance towards the Eastern question within its imperial journey, but with a special focus on the Greek project, as we have seen in the Orlov Revolt and annexation of Crimea.

Within this chapter of the thesis, we have delved into pivotal facets of Russia's perspective on Constantinople, the heart of Rome that became the Ottoman capital in 1453. However, as Russia emerged as an imperial power on the historical stage in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it firmly embraced the role of protector for the Slavs and the Orthodox Church, positioning itself as the heir to Rome, which became a key foreign policy and existential tool for the empire. For Russia, capturing “Tsargrad” is not only a symbolic claim to Rome's legacy but also a strategically vital point at the straits, representing a multifaceted goal imperative for ensuring uninterrupted passage from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. Beydilli (2010) also argues that, in addition to pursuing an expansionist

policy driven by economic interests, Russia's imperialist ambitions in the Eastern question took on a distinct dimension with the mission of liberating its Christian brethren in the Balkans from Ottoman rule. The concept of the Third Rome and the symbolic act of "recreating the cross" atop Hagia Sophia served as the driving force behind this endeavor. Beyond military, economic, and expansionist nuances, the most significant cultural and religious factor was the bond that united Orthodox peoples in Ottoman lands with Russia, creating a shared ambition. This cultural-religious factor delineated the Eastern question into an East-West dichotomy, aligning Greek-Orthodox and Roman-Catholic perspectives against the Turkish-Islamic part of the issue. The cultural heritage passed down by segments closely tied to the liberal West, Enlightenment-era ideals, and their understanding of the modern and industrialized world, shaped by various intellectual movements and social perspectives arising from the French Revolution, introduced a new dimension and complexity to the internal dynamics of the issue, challenging significant state policies in the process. As for their reflection on the Ottoman side, examining the post-1774 developments, it becomes apparent that for the Ottoman Empire, the Eastern question took on significance in the context of addressing challenges like overcoming its decline vis-a-vis the West and determining the necessary reforms to restore the state to its previous strength. This issue, entailing the process of Westernization, emerged as a pivotal factor, marking crucial periods of renewal and restructuring for the Ottoman Empire (p. 354).

In this context, the attainment of these objectives by the Russian Empire hinges on maintaining a robust economic balance. This entails bolstering control over trade routes leading to warm waters and strategic waterways, which is also crucial for ensuring the empire's security. Thus, characterized by Western geopolitical thinkers, Russia's geopolitical position emphasizes the considerable constraints on its sea access imposed by climate and geography, driving a historical focus on policies aimed at transcending these inherent limitations. That highlights the critical importance of securing dominance in Crimea and, consequently, in the Black Sea. The statements of Grigory Alexandrovich Potemkin, a statesman, and favorite of Catherine II, effectively articulate this perspective:

*"Most gracious empress! My unlimited zeal for you forces me to say: despise envy, which has no power to hinder you. You are obliged to raise the glory of Russia. Look who was challenged, who gained what: France took*

*Corsica, the Caesars took more from the Turks in Moldova without a war than we did. There is no power in Europe that does not divide Asia, Africa, and America among themselves. The acquisition of Crimea can neither strengthen nor enrich you but will only bring you peace... Believe that with this acquisition you will receive immortal glory such as no sovereign in Russia has ever had. This glory will pave the way to another and greater glory: with the Crimea will also come dominance in the Black Sea. It will depend on you whether to block the Turks' passage and feed them or starve them".* (Bolotina, 2014, pp. 223-224)

Bolotina (2014) states that Potemkin's proposition on Crimea aligned with his former nephew Alexander Nikolaevich Samoilov's renowned Greek project (Samoylov, 2002). Indeed, the initiative for the Greek project, aimed at restoring the Byzantine Empire with its capital in Constantinople and placing a Russian protege on the throne, is attributed to another statesman from the Catherine II era, Alexander Andreyevich Bezborodko, the personal secretary of the Empress, who was specifically assigned responsibilities related to relations with the East (Solovyov, 1863, pp. 163-164). Back to Bolotina's (2014) arguments, this scholar also claims that the Catherine II and Potemkin consistently displayed a profound appreciation for Hellenic culture: The Empress named her second grandson Constantine, Potemkin founded Kherson, and a student association for young Greeks was established in St. Petersburg. Furthermore, as reported by foreign diplomats, the Empress nurtured a vision of reviving Byzantium (p. 224). Consequently, on December 14, 1782, the Empress sent Potemkin a most secret rescript, in which she announced to him her desire to seize the peninsula and annex it to the Russian Empire:

*"Meanwhile, we are certified that you, bringing and tilting the affairs there to the state we desire and towards our direct goal, do not fail to use all means to establish close connections among the Tatar peoples, to instill in them goodwill and trust in our side, and, when necessary, to persuade them to bring us a request to accept them into our citizenship."* (Shtendman, 1880, pp. 223-224)

Following Crimea's independence in 1774, as the true intentions of Russia became clear to the people and some of the local leaders, a faction in Crimea expressed a desire to maintain loyalty to the Ottoman Empire, seeking protection as they had before. This

sentiment led them to pressure Sahib Giray, the previously chosen Khan, to abandon independence and propose that the Ottomans appoint khans as they had done in the past. The Ottoman response to the delegation from Crimea, which visited Istanbul, was to reject the proposals in line with the 1774 treaty. Instead, they agreed with the Crimean delegation on symbolic gestures such as mentioning the Sultan's name and inscribing coins with his name as the Caliph and the Porte sending appointment letters to Crimean qadis (Uzunçarşılı, 2007, p. 444). The Russians did not view these events negatively, as they saw them as a potential advantage in the future. Their primary objective was to relocate Şahin Giray, who had spent a few years in the Empress' palace in St. Petersburg and was adapted to Russian customs, back to the khanate at an opportune moment. Capitalizing on the rising social unrest in Crimea, they amassed a significant number of soldiers at the strategically important Or Qapi, the entrance to the Crimean Peninsula, offering moral backing to Şahin Giray. In March 1777, unable to secure assistance from the Ottoman Empire and losing local support due to unfavorable Russian propaganda, Devlet IV Giray left the khanate for Istanbul. The new ruler, Şahin Giray, gained control over the Crimean Khanate with Russian support. The Ottoman administrators were well aware of the implications of the Russian Empire's involvement (Uzunçarşılı, 2007, p. 445-446). When the news reached Istanbul, Sultan Abdulhamid I's response, stating, "*Şahin is a tool of consideration. The Russians' aim is to capture Crimea,*" underscored the seriousness of the situation (Uzunçarşılı, 2007, p. 447). In the spring of 1783, it was decided that Potemkin went to the south and personally led the annexation of the Crimean Khanate to Russia. On April 8, 1783, the Empress signed the manifesto on the acceptance of the Crimean Peninsula, Taman Peninsula, and the entire Kuban side under the Russian Empire ("15.708," 1830).

### *3.2.11. Russo-Turkish War of 1787–1792 and the Austro-Russian Alliance*

In 1787, the Ottomans insisted that the Russians withdraw from Crimea and relinquish their lands around the Black Sea. Following the refusal on August 13, 1787, the Ottoman Empire declared war against the Russian Empire, which Russia responded to on August 19, 1787. Consequently, the Ottomans detained the Russian ambassador Yakov Bulgakov (Cunningham, 1993, p. 2). However, the Ottoman preparations were

insufficient, and the timing was not favorable, as in 1781 the Russian Empire and Austria had signed a military alliance (Madariaga, 1959, pp. 114-115). One week after the war was declared, the Ottoman fleet launched an attack on two Russian ships positioned near the fortress of Kinburn, compelling them to retreat to the Dnieper estuary. Although the Ottomans made attempts to seize Kinburn in September and October, with support from a landing in Ochakov on the opposite side of the Dnieper estuary, these efforts were thwarted by a detachment under the command of Aleksandr Suvorov. The triumph at Kinburn on October 1, 1787, marked the initial significant success for Russian forces in this Russo-Turkish war, effectively concluding the campaign for that year as the Ottomans refrained from further active actions (Velichko et al., 1913, pp. 528-531). During the winter, the Russian Empire solidified its alliance with the Holy Roman Empire and secured a commitment from Emperor Joseph II to support a declaration of war against the Ottoman Empire. Faced with threats from both sides, the Ottomans opted to initiate an attack on the Austrians first, considering them as potentially more manageable and chose to temporarily limit the conflict with Russia.

In February 1788, the Austrians joined the war, but their opportunity for an easily won victory had diminished as the Ottomans focused their efforts on Belgrade. The Austrians, relying on Russian assistance in Moldavia, faced a delay in support that only commenced in late 1788. By July, the Ottomans crossed the Danube into Banat. Both sides grappled with shortages of supplies and logistical challenges, with Austrian soldiers being particularly affected by disease (Aksan, 2013, p. 163). In mid-August, Emperor Joseph II dispatched troops to Banat. Concurrently, the Serbian Free Corps was formed there, composed of people from previous conflicts in the Ottoman Empire and were ready to fight for the liberation of Serbia and its unification under Habsburg rule (Schroeder, 1996, pp. 58-59). Eventually, the tide turned in favor of Austria, and Ernst Gideon von Laudon successfully took Belgrade, which marked the establishment of Habsburg-occupied Serbia from 1788 to 1791.

In May 1788, the Austrian corps led by Prince Frederick Josias of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, victorious at Batushan and Rohatyn, besieged Khotin. On July 10, the Second Russian Army, commanded by Field Marshal Rumyantsev, crossed the Dniester near Khotin. The main forces, with Austrian and Russian artillery batteries, laid siege to Iasi after abandoning Saltykov's corps near Khotin. Intense Russian artillery fire caused

flames in the city, destroying the Ottoman arsenal and warehouses. Despite the Austrian commander's offer to surrender, the Ottomans delayed, hoping for relief from the outside. In August, Ottoman forces attempted to break through to Iasi but were unsuccessful. As a result of the Ottomans' retreat, initially to Ryabaya Mogila and then to Focșani, their relief forces withdrew to the south. Ultimately, this led to the occupation of the city by Russian and Austrian troops in September 1788 (Petrov, 1880a, pp. 171-180).

In addressing the most pivotal maritime engagement in this Russo-Turkish War, it started in the summer of 1787, the main base of the Ottoman fleet in Ochakov, under the command of Cezayirli Ghazi Hasan Pasha, operated on the northern shore of the Black Sea. The Russian Black Sea Fleet, divided between Sevastopol and Kherson, faced potential Ottoman landings in Crimea. Potemkin ordered Admiral Nikolay Mordvinov to attack the Ottoman fleet wherever they were, but the September expedition ended in failure. Meanwhile, the Ottomans continued reinforcing their naval forces in Ochakov. Appointed as the commander of the Southern Army, General Suvorov strengthened Kinburn and called part of Mordvinov's Sevastopol squadron to monitor the Ottomans. A successful surprise attack on Ottoman ships leaving Ochakov was led by midshipman Lombard. Despite this success, an October bombardment of Ochakov, encouraged by Potemkin and Suvorov, ended in failure due to Mordvinov's indecisiveness. Ottoman ships wintered in Varna, and operations near Ochakov ceased until the following spring (Novikova, 1948, pp. 108-110).

In 1788, during the winter in Kherson, the construction of new ships for the Dnieper Flotilla and the repairs of the Sevastopol Flotilla were rapidly completed. The one in Dnieper, under Suvorov's command, was augmented with the addition of ships from the Black Sea Cossacks, led by Prince Nassau-Siegen, invited by Potemkin from France. In May 1788, the Ottoman fleet, strengthened under Hasan Pasha, arrived at Ochakov. On May 20, Captain Christian Ivanovich Osten-Sacken achieved a victory in the Dnieper-Bug Harbor, boosting the morale of both the Black Sea Fleet. In June, two naval battles at Ochakov saw the Ottoman fleet's surprise attack, with the Russians successfully countering the first one. The second battle, characterized by coordinated efforts from the Russians, resulted in the defeat of the Ottomans. Consequently, they were compelled to abandon Ochakov, and the Russians took control of the city (Duffy, 1985, p. 187).

Austria, the ally of Russia, designated a corps positioned along the Seret River to collaborate in military operations with the Russian forces under the leadership of Coburg in July 1789. Suvorov's troops were stationed in the area between the Pruth and Seret rivers, and their mission included coordinating with Coburg's army when necessary. On the contrary, Koca Yusuf Pasha led the Ottoman corps, which set up camp in the Focşani region with the objective of defeating Coburg and Suvorov at the Putna River crossing. Suvorov got wind of the Ottoman strategy and informed Coburg that the Ottomans would not succeed if they acted in unison. When the forces converged, a reconnaissance unit sent by the combined Russian-Austrian force under Suvorov's command encountered an Ottoman army group preceding the main force in the Putna River area. The Ottomans, anticipating a confrontation solely with the Austrian forces, were caught completely off guard during the decisive encounter, resulting in their defeat and substantial losses. During the night of July 20 to July 21, the combined Russian-Austrian forces crossed the Putna River and launched an attack on Focşani, situated 15 km away, successfully driving back small Ottoman cavalry units. Following an escalated exchange of artillery fire, the batteries under Yusuf Pasha's command were effectively silenced. The Ottoman attempt to detonate the gunpowder depot had a negligible effect on the Russian forces. A handful of Ottoman soldiers seeking shelter behind the monastery wall were captured, compelling the Ottoman troops to retreat (Grant, 2017, p. 476). In October of 1789, Potemkin's army initiated a siege on Bender and commenced the assault. Although capturing the fortress posed considerable challenges, its defender, Ismail Pasha, along with the Ottoman forces within the stronghold, eventually surrendered to Potemkin due to insufficient troops and ammunition for defense in the impending winter. Consequently, Ismail Pasha faced exile to Tekfurdagi by the Ottoman Porte, while the Russian Empress rewarded Potemkin with a golden laurel wreath (Petrov, 1880b, pp. 84-87).

In July 1790, Admiral Ushakov led the Russian fleet from Sevastopol to southern Crimea upon receiving reports of the Ottoman fleet's presence. Giritli Hüseyin Pasha, despite his young age and enjoying the trust of the Sultan, promised, with the help of the fleet, that he would regain control of the Crimean Peninsula and force Russia to peace. On July 19, the Russian fleet anchored at the mouth of the Kerch Strait and dispatched ships to locate the Ottomans. The Ottoman fleet deviated from their formation, aligning parallel to the Russian line after initially forming a group. Recognizing that the Ottoman

battle line comprised only battleships, Ushakov took strategic measures to establish a second line to the left of the main formation. The Ottomans altered their course, resulting in a collision between two of their ships due to a maneuvering error. By evening, the damaged Ottoman ships were towed away, preventing the Ottoman Empire from realizing its objective of landing an army in Crimea (Gribovskiy, 2012, pp. 66-72).

The Siege of Izmail was one of the most important events that determined the outcome of the Russo-Turkish War of 1787-1792, although there were some other clashes afterward. The fortress of Izmail stood on the left bank of the Kilia branch of the Danube, between the lakes Yalpukh and Katlabukh, on a gently sloping hillside with a low but rather steep slope ending in the Danube bed. Izmail held significant strategic value due to the convergence of roads from Galați, Khotin, Bender, and Kilia. This made it the most favorable location for the Russians to initiate an invasion across the Danube into Dobrudja. Moreover, the garrison of Izmail consisted of people under the command of Aydoslu Mehmed Pasha, and a part of it was commanded by Kaplan Giray, brother of the Crimean Khan. In 1790, following the capture of the fortresses of Kilia, Tulcea, and Isaccea, the Russian army's commander-in-chief, Potemkin, directed some detachments to take control of Izmail. On November 26, the military council proposed ending the siege due to the onset of winter; he disagreed and instructed Suvorov, whose troops were stationed in Galați, to assume command. Upon taking charge, Suvorov initiated the siege and presented an ultimatum to Mehmed Pasha, demanding their surrender within 24 hours, a demand that was rejected. Then, Suvorov wanted to launch the initial assault under cover of darkness to catch the defenders by surprise. Fighting in the dark was deemed unfavorable as it hindered troop control, and anticipating staunch resistance, Suvorov aimed to have maximum daylight available for the operation. At 3 am on the morning of December 22, the troops, guided by the first flare, left their camp, advanced towards their designated positions, and officially commenced the assault at 5:30. Despite encountering strong resistance from Turkish and Tatar forces, the entirety of the Ottoman garrison was either killed, wounded, or captured (Orlov, 1890, pp. 139-145). In 1995, a federal law was enacted to officially recognize the day of military glory, commemorating the capture of the Ottoman fortress of Izmail by Russian troops under the command of Suvorov (O Dnyakh Voinskoy Slavy (Pobednykh Dnyakh) Rossii [About the Days of Military Glory (Victorious Days) of Russia], 1995).

The conflict initiated by the Ottoman Empire against Russia in 1787, seeking to reclaim Crimea, took a turn for the worse with the involvement of Austria in the war. Russian forces gained control of key fortresses such as Ochakov, Kilia, and Izmail. Peace negotiations commenced in the city of Jassy in November 1791, lasting for two and a half challenging months. Eventually, on January 10, 1792, the Treaty of Jassy was signed, marking the end of hostilities between the Ottoman Empire, represented by Grand Vizier Yusuf Pasha, and the Russian Empire, represented by Prince Bezborodko. According to the treaty, the Ottoman Empire would acknowledge Russia's authority over Crimea, and in exchange, the Russians would evacuate the territories they had taken control of. The boundary between the two nations would be defined by the Pruth River, and trade relations would be re-established in an amicable manner. The terms imposed on the Ottoman Empire in Kuchuk-Kainarji were further aggravated by the Treaty of Jassy, and Russia's military superiority over the Ottoman Empire became an indisputable fact (Kurat, 1987, p. 291). However, on the Ottoman side, the urgent need for state restructuring became apparent with onerous challenges like the army's admission of incapacity to fight and the agreement to pay war indemnity to Russia, paving the way for the initiation of comprehensive Nizâm-ı Cedîd (New Order) reforms following the establishment of the treaty (Beydilli, 2013a, p. 347).

### *3.2.12. Russo-Turkish War of 1806–1812, Resumed Hostilities Following a Brief Period of Alliance*

Similar to the patterns observed in earlier Russo-Turkish conflicts, the sequence of events that unfolded from hostilities in 1806 is deeply entwined with a nuanced history of complex occurrences. The starting point likely lies in the collaboration between the Ottoman and Russian sides, which was initiated as a response to the conditions imposed by the prevailing circumstances and turned into hostility again. In the era of Selim III, Ottoman-Russian relations flourished, leading to a strategic alliance between the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and England against French forces in Egypt. In 1798, the first treaty was formally executed, spanning a duration of eight years and outlining the Ottoman Empire's involvement in the Second Anti-French Coalition. The decision to enter into this agreement was prompted by France's aggressive actions, particularly its invasion of

Egypt under Ottoman rule. As a coalition member, Russia aimed to bolster its position in the war against France and increase its influence in the Balkans, with the treaty guaranteeing the protection of all allied territories and commitments to thwart French ambitions. Notably, the confidential sections of the treaty obligated Russia to provide military support to the Ottomans in their conflict with France, marking the first official permission for Russian warships to navigate the Straits. Moreover, the treaty of 1805, extending the terms of the one in 1798 for a decade, comprised some secret clauses. The involved parties committed to aiding each other during wartime with resources like arms, ships, troops, or funds while also pledging not to engage in agreements harmful to either party. In the event of potential French aggression, the Ottoman Empire was obligated to coordinate actions with Russia in support of the overall anti-French coalition, with specific measures outlined. This coordination aimed to facilitate the passage of Russian warships and transports through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits into the Mediterranean during the conflict with France while also preventing the entry of warships from other nations into the Black Sea. Additionally, the Ottoman side was mandated to safeguard the privileges of its Christian citizens in the coastal areas of Albania (Grinevetsky et al., 2015, p. 660).

While these agreements secured new advantages for Russia, including dominance in the Straits, the attitudes in Istanbul towards Russia underwent a transformation. This shift was influenced by the strategic decisions of statesmen following Napoleon's victories over the Russian and Austrian armies at Austerlitz (Yılmaz, 2019, p. 466). A discernible air of skepticism permeated the atmosphere in Istanbul, emblematic of the collective realization that Russia, with its actions, warranted a diminished level of trust, casting a perpetual shadow of danger (Karal, 1988, p. 50). Furthermore, General Sebastiani, the French Ambassador, orchestrated strategic maneuvers designed to wield significant influence over the Ottoman viewpoint on Russia. Upon Sebastiani's recommendation, the dismissal of Constantine Ypsilantis, the hospodar, or lord of Wallachia, and Alexander Mourouzis, the hospodar of Moldavia—both identified as pro-Russian—were dismissed without informing Russia due to their alleged involvement in preparations for an uprising (Armaoğlu, 1997, p. 91). Citing the 1791 Treaty of Jassy, which required Russia's consent for the appointment and dismissal of the rulers in Moldavia and Wallachia, the Russian Emperor Alexander I saw it as an act of defiance;

consequently, on November 11, 1806, General Ivan Ivanovich Mikhelson led the Russian army across the Dniester, marking their entry into Wallachia and Moldavia. In response, the Ottoman Sultan Selim III took the measure of closing the Straits and officially declared war on Russia on December 22. Without facing a regular Ottoman force, the Russian army rapidly seized strongholds like Kilia, Bender, Khotin, and Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy (Akkerman).

Understanding the beginnings of the Russo-Turkish War of 1806-1812 requires briefly exploring another dimension, specifically the role of French influence in the formation of the Republic of the Seven Islands, or the Septinsular Republic, and its repercussions on the Russo-Turkish conflict. The status of the seven major islands in the Ionian Sea underwent changes with the French invasion of Egypt in 1789, leading to an alliance between the Ottoman and the Russian empires, as we mentioned. Under the command of Admiral Fedor Fedorovich Ushakov of the Russian Empire and Abdülkadir Bey of the Ottoman Empire, the allied navy conducted an expedition to the Adriatic Sea and its coastal fortresses. The capture of the Corfu Fortress, housing French forces, was followed by the signing of a foundational treaty in March 1800 between the Russians and Ottomans, establishing a republic with internal autonomy yet subject to the Ottoman Empire in external affairs under the guarantee of Russia. The island of Corfu, integral to this republic, also functioned as a Russian fleet base. In 1805, Russia entered the War of the Third Coalition against Napoleonic France to thwart a potential alliance between the Ottoman Empire and Napoleon. Apprehensive about the French fleet's possible presence in the Adriatic, Russia opted to dispatch a military squadron to the Ionian Islands for this purpose, designating Vice Admiral Dmitry Nikolaevich Senyavin as its commander. However, the expedition's objectives shifted, compelling the Russian fleet to engage in dual fronts — battling the French in the Adriatic and the Ottomans in the Aegean Sea (Tarle, 2015, pp. 149-166; Uzunçarşılı, 1937).

In February 1807, Mikhelson assumed command of a corps, setting out for Bucharest, where he secured victory against an Ottoman detachment in the Battle of Turbat, retreating to Bucharest in April. Simultaneously, the Ottoman Vizier, Keçiboynuzu Ibrahim Hilmi Pasha, had assembled a formidable army near Shumen, intending to enter Wallachia. However, the Vizier's plans were foiled by the Janissary revolt in Istanbul, leading to the removal of Selim III and the ascent of Mustafa IV as the

new Sultan, fueled by the Janissaries' perception of Selim III's Nizâm-ı Cedîd army as a threat to their interests. It can also be stated that this revolt prevented a great opportunity for the state to reform itself to keep pace with the developments of the era. (Beydilli, 2001, p. 8) Back to the conflict dynamics, when the Vizier declared his resolve to escalate the war, he crossed the Danube at Silistra, advancing toward Bucharest. Despite his intention to unite with Alemdar Mustafa Pasha's corps, the attempt at coordination failed along the way. On June 2, Mikhail Miloradovich defeated the Vizier's vanguard at Obilești, prompting a strategic retreat to the right bank of the Danube. Meanwhile, Serbian rebels led by Karađorđe, with support from Ivan Ivanovich Isaev's Russian detachment, seized control of Belgrade in early 1807. They aimed to seek protection from Austria, to demand greater autonomy from the Ottoman Sultan, and to request Russian protection from the Russian ambassador in Istanbul. Although the Russian government initially appeared to be neutral to this rebellion, which started in 1804, due to the recent Russo-Turkish alliance, it later changed its policy in order to increase its influence in the region (Vucinich, 1982, p. 44).

Due to the commencement of hostilities with the Ottomans, Admiral Senyavin's fleet, initially deployed in the Mediterranean against France, received orders to transition to the Aegean Sea to blockade the Dardanelles and join forces with Admiral Pavel Vasilievich Pustoshkin's Black Sea fleet. On February 23, 1807, Senyavin approached Bozcaada (Tenedos), where Admiral Sir John Duckworth's British fleet was stationed after a previous defeat in the Dardanelles campaign against the Ottoman Empire. The British declined Senyavin's suggestion to launch an assault on the Dardanelles, apprehensive of a potential second defeat (Anderson, 1952, p. 442). Faced with insufficient strength to attack the Dardanelles immediately, the military council opted to prioritize the capture of Bozcaada, a strategic anchorage, and a location to potentially close the strait. As the Ottomans refused to surrender the fortress, a landing force led by Senyavin and Rear Admiral Alexey Samuilovich Greig disembarked on the coast. Extensive preparations were made to bombard the fortress, and following Senyavin's subsequent proposal, the Ottomans agreed to surrender. Therefore, the successful operations of the Russians provided their fleet with a base near the Dardanelles (Bronevskiy, 1837, pp. 18-22). However, the Ottoman navy held a strategic advantage due to the favorable geography for defending the Straits. In response, the Russian navy

in the Aegean adopted a strategy to entice the Ottoman navy into the open sea. The Ottoman Admiral Seydi Ali Pasha landed on May 19, 1807, to liberate Bozcaada but was unsuccessful. On May 22, as the Senyavin approached the Dardanelles, a clash broke out with the Ottoman fleet carrying Nizâm-ı Cedîd soldiers returning to the strait. As the Ottoman fleet withdrew into the narrow Dardanelles, three galleons were left outside, and Senyavin's forces inflicted significant damage upon them. On June 19, Senyavin triumphed over the Ottoman fleet at the Battle of Athos, or Lemnos, while from June 17 to 26, the Ottomans, attempting to reclaim Bozcaada, again faced defeat against Senyavin's returning fleet (Anderson, 1952, p. 453).

In Transcaucasia, the 1807 campaign was initially unsuccessful for Russian troops, who were unable to capture Kars, Akhalkalaki, and Poti. However, repeated Ottoman attacks on positions near Gyumri were stopped. In the battle near the Arpaçay River, Ivan Vasilievich Gudovich defeated the Erzurum Serasker (commander) Kôr Yusuf Ziyaüddin Pasha on June 18, after which a truce was concluded in the Caucasus on September 2. At the same time, Napoleon altered his approach toward the East and entered into the Treaties of Tilsit with Russia, significantly impacting the course of the war. As per the terms of this treaty, Russia committed to aligning with France in Europe, while France agreed to act as a mediator between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. In the event of the Ottomans rejecting these terms, France would engage in warfare alongside Russia against the Ottoman Empire, and they would divide the empire between them (Tuncer, 2008, pp. 40-44). Following negotiations on Slobozia Island involving Ottoman, Russian, and French representatives, a truce between Russia and the Ottoman Empire was signed on August 25, 1807. Per the agreement's stipulation, Russia agreed to withdraw from occupied Ottoman territories, with the provision that Ottoman forces would not enter these lands until a peace treaty was finalized. The truce primarily covered the region between Vidin and Kladovo, with Russia leveraging the Serbian issue to pressure the Ottoman Empire into recognizing the Danube as the border, thus legitimizing its control over Wallachia-Moldavia. Meanwhile, France aimed to maintain influence over both parties by prolonging negotiations. However, Napoleon's actions had destabilized European politics, as he sought Ottoman support against Britain while also proposing the division of the Ottoman Empire to Tsar Alexander I. Their meeting in Erfurt on December 23, 1808, failed to reach an agreement on partition. Thus, France's withdrawal from

negotiations hindered the Ottoman Empire's ability to secure favorable terms with Russia. Consequently, the Ottoman Empire sought an alliance with Britain on January 6, 1809, prompting Russia to fortify its troops along the Danube. In anticipation of the Ottoman Empire's alignment with Britain, Russia perceived that the Ottomans would refuse any treaty acknowledging Russian control over Wallachia and Moldavia. Consequently, Russia aimed to control the Serbs while reinforcing its troops along the Danube, and under these circumstances, the war recommenced (Aslantaş, 2009, pp. 124-126). Meanwhile, the Ottoman Empire was trying to resolve the conflict with Russia in the most logical way for the empire and dealing with the dynamics of domestic problems. During the reign of Mustafa IV, there was great turmoil in the Ottoman palace, and the Janissaries dominated the palace. The throne saw another transition on July 28, 1808, as Mahmud II succeeded Mustafa IV as the new Sultan (Sakaoğlu, 2015, pp. 388).

In March 1809, hostilities resumed, and the Russians devised a new strategy to cross the Danube and target Ottoman fortresses in the lower reaches, shifting the battleground to the river's right bank. The Russian Commander-in-Chief, Alexander Alexandrovich Prozorovski, preferred to capture the fortress in a raid, but the Ottoman garrison under the command of Ahmet Efendi showed a strong defense, leading to a significant defeat for the Russian forces (Petrov, 1887, pp. 227-228). Meanwhile, with British assistance, the Ottoman army had substantially bolstered its forces. Seizing the opportunity presented by the withdrawal of the primary Russian troops towards the Lower Danube, the Ottomans formulated plans to seize control of Wallachia and Bucharest. This strategic move aimed to compel Russian General Pyotr Bagration to retreat across the Danube's left bank. In the latter part of August, the Grand Vizier commenced troop movements near Giurgiu. Upon receiving intelligence, Louis Alexandre Andrault de Langeron collaborated with General Peter Essen's division to engage and overcome the Ottoman advance guard. Bagration persisted with his offensive, achieving victory over the corps commanded by Husrev Pasha at Rassevat on September 4 and subsequently halting his advance in front of Silistria on September 18 (Petrov, 1887a, pp. 354-359).

As for the developments in the Caucasus in the first months of 1809, Alexander Petrovich Tormasov assumed the position of Gudovich in the Caucasus region. Faced with threats from Persia and the Ottoman Empire, Tormasov refrained from initiating aggressive measures. However, when Persian forces encroached upon Russian territory,

he confronted them at the Shamkir River, compelling their withdrawal and prompting a resumption of peace negotiations. Seizing the opportunity, Tormasov dispatched a unit to seize control of the Poti fortress, a vital link between the Ottomans and the regions of Abkhazia and Imereti, successfully capturing it on November 16. Simultaneously, another detachment was sent to Imereti, where they captured the fortress and apprehended its ruler, Suleiman, compelling his people to pledge allegiance to Russia. Additionally, a fleet dispatched from Sevastopol, carrying landing troops, was deployed to Anapa, a fortress recently renovated by the Ottomans. The Russian forces successfully captured Anapa on July 15, establishing Russian control over the area (Grebentchikova, 2016).

During the 1810 campaign, the Russians engaged in a prolonged siege of Ruse, or Rushchuk, although their efforts were ultimately unsuccessful as the Ottoman garrison managed to repel all attacks. Meanwhile, the main body of Ottoman forces, commanded by the Grand Vizier, was concentrated at Shumla. In the ensuing battle on July 23, Alexander Lvovich Voinov's troops dealt a decisive blow to the Ottoman right flank, while Vasily Yurievich Dolgorukov's forces simultaneously struck their left flank. This well-coordinated assault compelled the Ottoman forces to retreat (Petrov, 1887b, pp. 118-122). Ruse remained besieged, and on August 26, the Battle of Batin commenced as the Ottomans persisted in their efforts to free the fortress. Meanwhile, Russian forces occupied Svishtov, Bela, Tarnov, and Orşova, leading to the surrender of Ruse and Giurgiu. The deployment of Joseph Cornelius O'Rourke's detachment, followed by Andrei Pavlovich Zass's corps to aid the Serbs, infused them with renewed hope. Following the events at Ruse, Nikolai Mikhailovich Kamensky advanced along the Danube, capturing Ottoman fortresses up to the Serbian border and securing additional territories. However, the Russians recognized the impracticality of launching a winter offensive in the Balkans due to logistical constraints. Consequently, they opted to station half of their army in the occupied fortresses for the winter while the other half remained in the principalities (Mikhailofsky-Danilefsky, 1843, pp. 84-87). Simultaneously, the Russians captured Sukhum-Kala in July 1810 as a result of a series of events that took shape after the murder of the Abkhaz prince Kelesh Ahmed-Bey Sharvashidze on May 2, 1808, in Sukhum-Kala under unclear circumstances (Petrov, 1887a, p. 231).

Concurrently, the hostilities started in the Lovech region continued into the following year, and in January 1811, the Ottoman commander Omer Bey was killed in a

surprise attack launched by the Russians at night. As a result of the disorganization caused by this situation, Ottoman resistance was broken, and Lovech Fortress was captured by the Russians (Mikhailofsky-Danilefsky, 1843, pp. 142-144). In early summer, Ottoman troops under the command of Ahmet Pasha departed from Shumla towards Ruse. Kutuzov, who was aware of this movement, crossed to the right bank of the Danube on the night of June 19 and stationed his army near Ruse. The Ottomans, concentrating substantial forces on the Russian right flank, aimed to encircle the Russian army, dividing their troops and annihilating them by pushing them towards the Danube. Recognizing this threat, the Russians devised a counter-strategy and launched a vigorous assault against the Ottoman cavalry. Ahmet Pasha's forces subsequently retreated and assumed defensive positions, anticipating a Russian advance. However, Kutuzov, cautious of engaging in risky maneuvers, chose instead to withdraw to the left bank of the Danube and demolish the fortifications of Ruse (Murzaev, 1979).

Subsequently, Kutuzov led his forces across the Danube to the left bank, where they encamped at Giurgiu. Meanwhile, Grand Vizier Ahmet Pasha maintained his position in Ruse. However, Kutuzov's apparent inaction sparked an idea in Ahmet Pasha's mind—to take advantage of the situation by crossing the Danube and launching an attack against the Russians. Fortifying the area with formidable coastal batteries, he initiated the crossing during the night of August 28. Upon receiving intelligence of the Ottoman incursion, Kutuzov formulated a plan of counterattack, but it was unsuccessful. On October 2, in a sudden and unexpected assault, a Russian detachment defeated the Ottoman army at Ruse, catching them off guard. The Russian soldier unit under the leadership of Yevgeni Ivanovich Markov initiated artillery bombardment against the Ottoman forces positioned on the left bank, effectively striking them from behind, while Kutuzov's forces engaged them from the front. The Danube military fleet played a crucial role in the Russians' success in the operation, enabling the capture of a sizable enemy encampment along with all its provisions and weaponry (Leera, 1895, pp. 235-236). Consequently, the Ottomans, hemmed in within their camps, faced relentless attacks from all directions. Famine became rampant, and outbreaks of disease spread rapidly among the troops. In light of these harsh conditions, Laz Aziz Ahmet Pasha was compelled to accede to peace negotiations on terms dictated by the Russians, leading to the surrender of the Ottoman army and forcing the Empire to enter early peace negotiations.

The war concluded with the signing of the Treaty of Bucharest on May 28, 1812. According to its terms, the Ottoman Empire ceded the Budjak and the eastern half of the Principality of Moldavia, known as Bessarabia, situated between the Pruth and Dniester rivers, to Russia. Additionally, Russia secured the right to unrestricted navigation and trade along the Danube River, while the banks of the Prut and Danube rivers on the Ottoman side were recognized as the border between the two nations. In Transcaucasia, the Ottomans accepted Russia's annexation of the Kingdom of Imereti in 1810, thereby renouncing their claims to most of western Georgia. However, they retained control over Akhalkalaki, Poti, and Anapa, territories previously captured by Russian-Georgian forces during the conflict. Furthermore, perhaps as one of the most important results of the war, autonomy was granted to the rebellious Serbs. In essence, throughout the Russo-Turkish War of 1806–1812, the Ottoman Empire grappled with internal unrest and changes in leadership, striving to navigate the complexities of external power dynamics. Besides, the Treaty of Bucharest afforded Mahmud II the necessary time and opportunity to consolidate his authority and reconcile the internal divisions within the Ottoman state that had been exacerbated by the war (Robarts, 2009). However, Russia had the opportunity to formulate comprehensive strategies at almost every juncture, with the crucial factor beyond the war being its challenges with France.

### *3.2.13. Russo-Turkish War of 1828-1829 and the Road to Greek Independence*

During the reign of the Ottoman Empire, the Greeks were acknowledged as a distinct community within the Empire's multinational framework. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate held authority as their representative and guide, overseeing disputes and legal matters through its courts. As the millet system primarily categorized groups by religion rather than linguistic or ethnic criteria, other Orthodox communities like the Serbs, Bulgarians, and Romanians fell under the jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. Certainly, at this point, it is crucial to acknowledge the significance of the devshirme system as well. Devshirme involved the selection of young, talented Christian children, primarily from the Balkans. These young people underwent intensive training with the objective of shaping them into exceptional soldiers or administrators. In the Balkans, however, the term "blood tax" was also used for this system, or it was referred to as

“Ottoman slavery” in the history books of Bulgaria until 1990 (Svanberg & Westerlund, 1999, p. 140; Ersoy-Hacısalihoğlu, 2017, p. 133). The primary goal of the devshirme system was to cultivate a cohort of loyal soldiers and officials dedicated to the Sultan. From the 1400s to the 1600s, this system yielded the majority of grand viziers, provincial governors, and military leaders (Beydilli, 2013b, p. 452). Those enrolled in the devshirme received formal education encompassing various disciplines such as science, warfare, and administration. They ascended to roles as Sultan’s advisors, elite infantry, army generals, navy admirals, or financial bureaucrats, while others served as janissaries.

During the Ottoman era, Istanbul emerged as a focal point for Greek cultural and economic activities. Particularly in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Greeks residing in the neighborhood of Fener, where the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate was situated, wielded significant influence. Known as the Greeks of Fener or Phanariots, they possessed a superior command of languages such as Latin, French, Italian, and German, thanks to their education in Europe. Consequently, they began to play a crucial role in the Ottoman Empire’s diplomatic relations with European nations. In 1671, Köprülüzade Fazıl Ahmed Pasha appointed Alexandros Mavrokordatos, as the chief interpreter and he subsequently assumed the role of chief negotiator on behalf of the Empire during the signing of the Treaty of Karlowitz (Mansel, 1998, p. 150). Earning the trust of the Ottoman Sultans, the Greeks from Fener served as governors of Wallachia and Moldavia under Ottoman rule throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Western Enlightenment ideals brought to the Ottoman lands under the influence of the process referred to as the Greek Enlightenment, the Orlov Revolt, as we mentioned, and the Russian protection provided by the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji (Küçük Kaynarca), gradually seeped into the social fabric of Christian communities throughout the Balkans under Greek influence. Concurrently, Greek élites, benefiting from their privileged status within the Ottoman Empire, amassed wealth and maintained continuous contact with Europe, thus gaining insight into movements such as nationalism and independence.

In 1814, the Greeks established the clandestine group Filiki Eteria with the intention of spearheading their uprising against the Ottoman Empire. Originating as a freemasonic organization in Odessa, it was founded by Emmanuil Xanthos, Nikolaos Skoufas, and Athanasios Tsakalov, drawing clear inspiration from similar covert societies across Europe (Phillips, 1897, pp. 21-22). The primary objective of the organization was

twofold: to secure Greek independence and to bring an end to Ottoman dominance in the Balkans. However, the ultimate goal of it was to revive the Byzantine Empire, with Istanbul serving as its capital (Jelavich, 1983, pp. 204-205). It is apparent that even prior to the formal establishment of the organization, certain foundational elements underlying its formation were already in existence in secret. There existed a fundamental solidarity and communication between the founders, suggesting a pre-existing network of like-minded individuals laying the groundwork for the organization's eventual creation (Kürşad et al., 1978, p. 40). Hence, the interaction among the members of the Filiki Eteria and their concerted efforts to attain their objectives led to swift outcomes, as it reached 200,000 members in 1820 (Marriott, 1979, p. 59). In January 1820, Xanthos, one of the founders, went to St. Petersburg and initiated contact with Alexander Ypsilantis, an aide to the Russian Tsar. Xanthos elucidated the objectives of the Filiki Eteria to Ypsilantis, emphasizing the need for assistance. In response to Ypsilantis' question, "*Why do the Greeks not try to act, so that even if it is impossible to free themselves of the yoke, then at least they might lighten it?*", Xanthos replied, "*Prince, how are the unfortunate Greeks to enhance their political circumstances without the means and leadership?*" Shortly afterward, when Xanthos offered Ypsilantis the leadership of Filiki Eteria, Ypsilantis accepted it. (Clogg, 1976, pp. 192-193) Subsequently, at a meeting convened in April 1820, Ypsilantis was elected as the leader of the organization (Brewer, 2001, p. 34). His leadership undoubtedly bolstered Russian influence within the Filiki Eteria.

In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire viewed Wallachia as the primary bulwark against emerging Russian and Austrian threats, prompting a shift in policy towards the region. Instead of appointing local lords to administer Wallachia, the empire opted to install Greek Phanariot lords in these positions, a practice that persisted from 1716 to 1821. Karpát (1994) states that these Phanariot lords not only exploited the local populace through nepotism and partnerships with Greek merchants but also cultivated a pervasive culture of poverty among the Wallachian peasantry, reinforcing the notion that they were divinely ordained to serve their lords. While this situation under the Ottoman protectorate served to reduce the Russian threat, it unintentionally and indirectly paved the way for efforts to revive Byzantine ideals. By the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, the beys of Wallachia and Moldavia sought to resurrect the Byzantine Empire in collaboration with the Patriarchate of Istanbul, promoting Byzantine nationalism. Despite Wallachia's

adoption of Western practices, establishment of educational and healthcare institutions, and progressive measures such as the abolition of slavery, the populace continued to endure significant hardships. In response to this dire situation, Tudor Vladimirescu orchestrated a rebellion in 1821 with the aim of overthrowing the oppressive rule of the Phanariot Greeks. His uprising, which encompassed political, national, and social dimensions, not only liberated Wallachia from the Phanariots but is also considered one of the most important historical events for the Romanians (p. 468). It is worth noting that Vladimirescu's revolt coincided with the activities of the Filiki Eteria led by Ypsilantis. In March 1821, Ypsilantis organized a military force in Wallachia, the Sacred Band, with the participation of volunteer students from the Greek communities in Moldavia, Wallachia, and Odessa. The formation of this band marked the inception of the Greek Revolt or the Greek War of Independence, serving as the pioneering organized military unit in this historic series of events. It is important to note that the uprising led by Vladimirescu involved Romanian peasants and Pandurs rising against Phanariot rule initially, but later evolved into a bid to overthrow the boyar class. Some of those who took part in the uprising later joined the Filiki Eteria troops led by Ypsilanti.

Following the commencement of the rebellion in April, the Ottoman army orchestrated a synchronized offensive. Troops led by Derviş Mehmed Pasha, Mehmed Selim Pasha, and Yusuf Berkofçalı advanced towards different sections of Wallachia and Moldavia while Ibrahim Pasha navigated into the region aboard Ottoman river vessels. In May, the Ottoman forces successfully seized Kopăceni and Cățelu, situated opposite Bucharest (Igora, 1921, pp. 341-342). A firman issued by the Porte declared the intention of the Ottoman army to establish justice by distinguishing between the oppressed and the oppressors. It commended a former Eterist, Sava Fochianos, and Constantin Negri, for their loyalty and appointed them to govern Bucharest until stability akin to former times was restored. Besides, Vladimirescu was portrayed as a loyalist advocating for mercy and justice, while Ypsilantis was disparaged as a vagabond (Igora, 1921, pp. 286-288). Ottoman general Nuri Pasha, along with Kara Ahmed Pasha, put forth new proposals for collaboration with the Pandurs, offering assurances of a more equitable resolution for the peasants. The contrasting viewpoints of Ypsilantis and Vladimirescu were evident in this context. Vladimirescu's uprising, driven by his aspiration to overthrow Phanariot rule and establish fairer governance, contrasted with Ypsilantis' Eterist objectives, as

Vladimirescu believed in Ottoman promises of reforms. Following these developments, Vladimirescu was arrested in Golești on May 21, where he was tortured to death during the night of May 27 to May 28, accused of collaborating with the Ottomans against Eteria (Philimon, 1859, p. 167). Consequently, the divergence led to the loss of Romanian support for Ypsilantis and culminated in Ottoman intervention in the Wallachian territory, ultimately resulting in the demise of the Sacred Band at the Battle of Drăgășani in June 1821 by the Ottoman Empire.

Meanwhile, taking advantage of the weaknesses of the Ottoman Empire during that era, Tepedelenli Ali Pasha, the Governor of Ioannina, extended his influence and began acting semi-autonomously from the Empire; even the travelogues of that time mentioned that he lived like a monarch when they visited him (Holland, 1815, pp. 123-124). Ali Pasha's behavior was ignored to some extent because he maintained order in the region and created a balance. While the Ottoman Sultan was uncomfortable about Ali Pasha's rising power, the Empire faced other pressing issues and could not intervene immediately. However, as Ali Pasha and his sons edged closer to establishing an independent state, Sultan Mahmud II dismissed him from his position. Ignoring this decision, Ali Pasha rebelled. To quell the rebellion, Mahmud II dispatched the grand vizier Hurshid Ahmed Pasha against Ali Pasha, who, having violated the prohibition against leaving his position, led to Hurshid Ahmed Pasha reclaiming the territories held by Ali Pasha. Although Ali Pasha surrendered in January 1822, under the condition of sparing his life, this agreement was revoked, and he was sentenced to death due to fears of future problems (Beydilli, 2011). While the rebellion was thus suppressed, its aftermath signaled the onset of the Greek uprising.

During these occurrences, Ypsilantis participated in the rebellions in Wallachia and Moldavia, as we mentioned, intending to amplify the effects of the planned revolt in Morea or the Peloponnese. Despite Ypsilantis' attempt to spread the uprising to Serbia by contacting Miloš Obrenović, the Ottoman Empire became aware of this agreement, prompting them to take preventive measures, resulting in Obrenović's decision not to be involved in the Greek revolt (Böreççi, 2001, p. 155; Melichárek, 2011, p. 35). As Ypsilantis focused on the uprisings in Wallachia and Moldavia, he dispatched his allies to Morea and other islands to incite rebellion among the populace. With the majority of Ottoman forces there directed against Tepedelenli Ali Pasha, Hurshid Pasha could only

deploy a limited number of soldiers to Morea. However, before Hurshid Pasha initiated action against Ali Pasha, several individuals associated with the Filiki Eteria in Morea had been apprehended. Consequently, with the suspicion of rebellion brewing in the region, Salih Agha, the district governor, convened the chiefs, metropolitans, and bishops from all districts to Tripoli, the regional center. During this meeting, when questioned about the rumors of rebellion, they provided evasive responses, asserting that these rumors were merely part of Ali Pasha's ploy to foment unrest in Morea and divert some of the Ottoman forces to the region, possibly to evade a siege (Yılmaz, 2022, p. 484). The meeting proved futile, as Greek rebel leaders convened and decided to launch an attack on the Turks and Muslims residing in the region on March 25, the same day as the Feast of the Annunciation, known in Ottoman historical accounts as the Easter night of that year (Cevdet Paşa, 1993, p. 2759).

Greeks from the Seven Islands and neighboring regions converged in Morea, igniting uprisings across the region. Particularly instrumental were Demetrios Ypsilantis, brother of Alexander Ypsilantis, and Prince Kantakouzenos, who journeyed to Morea to galvanize Greek communities towards rebellion. Unfurling the flag of the Filiki Eteria, adorned with phoenix hues symbolizing rebellion and black for mourning, Ypsilantis and Kantakouzenos rallied the Greeks to revolt. Their resonating call drew support from sailors and young people, also leading rebel forces, spearheaded by Teodoros Kolokotronis, to capture key cities such as Patras, Navarin and Tripoli (Driault, 1921, p. 109). The Filiki Eteria operated in tandem with the Patriarchate of Istanbul, with the latter playing a pivotal role in the Morean revolt. Moreover, Bishop Germanos III of Old Patras, who headed the local Filiki Eteria organization, by symbolically waving a flag bearing the image of the Virgin Mary, he told the Greeks that the Turks must be cleansed from this land, thereby infusing the revolt with a distinctly national and religious essence, underscored by fervent religious chants in his slogans ("Exterieur: Pelopponèse.," 1821; Şahin, 1996, p. 190). Upon the attacks of rebels in Morea, the Muslim people living in Mystras, Levendar, Fenar, and Bardine took refuge in Tripoli; the people of Endruse and Nister took refuge in Koron, Moton, and Anavarin; and the people of Gaston took refuge in Lâle Castle. It is important to note that the Ottoman Empire did not pay much attention to these events as it was concentrating on the elimination of Tepedelenli Ali Pasha (Cevdet Paşa, 1993, p. 2681).

In March 1821, led by Konstantinos Pierrakos Mavromichalis, the siege of Neokastro, also known as Anavarin, commenced. Lasting until August, the fortress eventually capitulated; many Turkish families who sought refuge from starvation among the Greeks were brutally massacred. Despite the Greek rebels proposing an agreement wherein the Turks would receive safe passage to Egypt upon surrender and relinquishing all their possessions, the Greeks failed to uphold the agreed-upon conditions, attributing it to the demise of their leader Mavromichalis. When the gates finally opened on August 19, all the Turks were mercilessly slaughtered, except for a very few who managed to escape. Several years later, Greek negotiator Poniropoulos proudly confessed to General Thomas Gordon that he had destroyed the duplicate of the surrender agreement provided to the Turks, ensuring no evidence would survive of such a transaction being finalized (Finlay, 1861, p. 262). Emphasizing the horrific scale of the events, George Finlay (1861) quotes Phrantzes, a Greek priest who witnessed the massacres:

*“Women, wounded with musketballs and sabre-cuts, rushed to the sea, seeking to escape, and were deliberately shot. Mothers robbed of their clothes, with infants in their arms plunged into the sea to conceal themselves from shame, and they were then made a mark for inhuman riflemen. Greeks seized infants from their mother’s breasts and dashed them against rocks. Children, three and four years old, were hurled living into the sea and left to drown. When the massacre was ended, the dead bodies washed ashore, or piled on the beach, threatened to cause a pestilence.”* (p. 263)

Similarly, in Tripoli, Greek rebels persisted in a prolonged siege. By August, the Ottoman garrison faced heightened difficulties as the blockade tightened, exacerbated by dwindling drinking water supplies and famine. Recognizing the deteriorating situation, Kolokotronis initiated discreet negotiations with the besieged leaders, aiming for a structured surrender. He successfully persuaded Elmas Bey, commanding the Albanian contingent, to agree to a separate arrangement ensuring safe passage to Argos, significantly weakening the defenders. Despite ongoing communication between Greek leaders and Ottoman defenders, coordination was minimal. On September 22, throngs of Greeks encircled the city in anticipation of its imminent downfall. The following day, exploiting a vulnerable point in the walls, the Greeks breached the city defenses, leading to its swift capture and the surrender of its occupants, including those in the castle. In the

aftermath, within the span of three days, the Muslim and Jewish populace met a tragic fate, facing extermination (Lieberman, 2013, p. 9; Spiliadis, 1851, p. 246; Raybaud, 1824, pp. 480-483). Based on the testimonies of many foreigners who witnessed the events in Tripoli, William St. Clair (2008) summarizes the events as follows:

*“The Turks of Greece left few traces. They disappeared suddenly and finally in the spring of 1821 unmourned and unnoticed by the rest of the world. Years later, when travellers asked about the heaps of stones, the old men would explain, ‘There stood the tower of Ali Aga, and there we slew him, his harem, and his slaves’. It was hard to believe then that Greece had once contained a large population of Turkish descent, living in small communities all over the country, prosperous farmers, merchants, and officials, whose families had known no other home for hundreds of years. As the Greeks said, the moon devoured them.”* (p. 1)

The 1828 Greek Census sheds light on the severity of the clashes between Greek rebels, the Muslim and Turkish communities, and the Ottoman forces, particularly in Morea. According to Mansolas (1867), in 1821, the Muslim and Turkish population in Morea and Central Greece stood at 63,615. However, by the end of 1828, following the destruction of fortresses in Patras and Messinia, there were no Ottoman residents left in Morea. This translates to the disappearance of over 50,000 individuals in total (pp. 2-3).

Amidst the turmoil, the Ottoman Empire sought assistance from Muhammad Ali, the Governor of Egypt, to break the deadlock. Muhammad Ali’s son, Ibrahim Pasha, was tasked with leading operations in Crete in 1824. By 1825 and 1826, Ottoman and Egyptian forces appeared to be making significant headway in quelling the rebellion in Morea, and the Ottoman response to the uprising and the atrocities in Morea was notably severe. Simultaneously, pressure mounted in Europe to support the Greek rebels for independence. These circumstances led London to emerge as a key financier of the Greek insurgency, with British loans being extended to the Greek rebels from 1824 onward (Jelavich, 1964, p. 68). This support was driven by British interests, public sentiment, and a strategic plan to align with the Tsar in countering Russian ambitions, with the effect of acting together. Following Ibrahim Pasha’s notable victories, the major European powers found themselves increasingly compelled towards some form of intervention. The pressure arose from both domestic public sentiment and concerns over potential

advantages gained by European rivals, with the primary objective being to prevent unilateral action by Russia. Recognizing Russia's ability to leverage the threat of independent intervention, an ultimatum issued to the Ottomans by Russia in March 1826 played a pivotal role in the formation of an Anglo-Russian treaty in April of the same year (Brown, 1984, pp. 51-53).

Following the Congress of Vienna, the majority of European powers, committed to preserving the status quo established by the Congress, lent their support to the Ottomans. The Great Powers of Europe, including Great Britain, France, Prussia, Austria, and Russia, formed the Quintuple Alliance and adopted a policy of convening congresses to address diplomatic issues collectively, thus maintaining the Concert of Europe to deter war and revolution on the continent. Among the European powers, Russia exhibited the most interest in the conflict, partly due to the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji (Küçük Kaynarca), which granted it a vague claim as the protector of Orthodox peoples within the Ottoman Empire (Brewer, 2001, pp. 248-249). Moreover, a key concern in 19th-century British foreign policy, the Eastern Question, centered on safeguarding the declining Ottoman Empire and countering Russian influence in the Balkans, often prompting British support for the Porte against Russia. However, in December 1825, Alexander II passed away without legitimate children, leading to his brother, Grand Duke Nicholas, ascending to the throne as Emperor Nicholas I. To clarify the uncertainty regarding the new Emperor's intentions, the British cabinet opted to dispatch the Duke of Wellington to St. Petersburg to offer congratulations to Nicholas on his assumption of the throne while simultaneously assessing whether he would uphold his brother Alexander II's efforts for Anglo-Russian mediation in the Greek war of independence. As a result of the meetings, the Protocol of St. Petersburg was signed on April 4, 1826.

Under the proposed terms, Greece would attain autonomy within the Ottoman Empire and pay annual tribute to the Porte. The Greeks would have the right to elect their own government, although the Sultan would have a role in selecting leaders. Greece would enjoy freedom of religion, trade, and internal governance. To bring an end to the conflict, Greek control over all Muslim-owned property in Greece was stipulated. The delineation of the new Greek autonomous region's borders would be determined through negotiations involving British and Russian diplomats alongside representatives from the Greek and Turkish sides. Both Russia and Britain pledged not to seek territorial expansion

or exclusive political and economic influence in Greece. Austria, Prussia, and France were invited to serve as guarantors of any agreement mediated by Britain and Russia in Greece, an assurance Britain declined to provide (Brewer, 2001, p. 256).

Following the St. Petersburg Protocol, Russia succeeded in its objective by issuing an ultimatum to the Porte on March 17, 1826, urging clarification and interpretation of the provisions outlined in the Treaty of Bucharest in 1812, a pursuit ongoing since 1814. Negotiations commenced in Akkerman with Ottoman and Russian delegates, and as negotiations progressed, the Russians expanded their demands, securing acceptance of almost all of them. Consequently, the Treaty of Akkerman, signed on September 25, 1826, underwent a significant transformation from a mere interpretation and elucidation of the Treaty of Bucharest in 1812 to a revised agreement that substantially altered the terms of 1812. In the aftermath of negotiations, the Ottomans relinquished control of the Caucasian fortresses that were originally designated for them, agreed to compensate Russian nationals for losses incurred during the war, permitted Russian merchants unrestricted trade access within Ottoman territories, and pledged assistance to the Tsarist government in enhancing Russia's Black Sea trade with vessels from other states. The first annex to the Treaty outlined the election of hospodars in Wallachia and Moldavia by their Divans for a seven-year term, granting them autonomy from the Porte's authority and stipulating that their dismissal required Russia's consent. The second annex committed to issuing a decree within eighteen months regarding concessions granted to the Serbs in 1812, following negotiations with Serbian representatives, with Russia being duly informed of the decisions reached (Aslantaş, 2013, pp. 150-152).

According to Kurat (1987), Nicholas I sought to capitalize on the Ottoman Empire's vulnerability, stemming from the dissolution of the Janissary Corps in June 1826, which left the empire practically without an army and in the process of establishing a new military structure. Kurat also asserts that Nicholas I aimed to annex Ottoman provinces in the Balkans, the Straits, and Anatolia to Russia, viewing this as a significant move in addressing the Eastern Question (p. 324). Furthermore, the Treaty of London, signed on July 6, 1827, among the United Kingdom, Russia, and France, marked a significant escalation in tensions. The treaty centered on the establishment and recognition of Greek independence, stipulating that all Turkish properties in Greece would be transferred to Greek ownership. The Ottoman Empire was granted one month

to accept these terms; failure to comply would result in the three signatory states assisting the Greeks and compelling Ottoman acceptance through military force, underscoring Europe's increasingly firm stance towards the Ottoman Empire (Usta, 2007, pp. 20, 311).

Following the Ottoman Empire's official rejection of the Treaty of London, both the French and British governments dispatched their navies to the Mediterranean to exert pressure on the Porte, with Nicholas I also sending Russian ships to partake in this naval demonstration. The combined fleet of the three states converged in front of the port of Navarin, where Ottoman and Egyptian naval forces were stationed. Despite the absence of a declared state of war, the French initiated an attack, prompting Ottoman ships to retaliate. In response, the Russian, British, and French navies simultaneously engaged, resulting in the destruction of the Ottoman and Egyptian fleets at Navarin (Cowles, 1990, p. 688). With the Ottoman Empire lacking both a land army and navy, Nicholas I aimed to swiftly conclude the conflict and seize Istanbul. A substantial Russian army, led by General Hans Karl von Diebitsch, crossed the Danube and advanced on the fortresses of Varna and Shumnu. While Varna fell to the Russians, Ottoman forces at Shumen repeatedly thwarted their advances. However, the Russians achieved a significant victory near Kulevcha against Reshid Mehmed Pasha's forces, altering the course of the war. Subsequently, General Diebitsch led his forces across the Balkans, marching on Edirne. Despite having limited troops under his command, the Russian general even contemplated an assault on Istanbul. Meanwhile, Ivan Paskevich's army, advancing on the Caucasian front, posed a threat to Anatolia by capturing key Ottoman fortresses, including Kars, Akhaltsikhe, and Erzurum. Consequently, the Porte was compelled to seek peace negotiations (Kurat, 1987, p. 325).

On September 14, 1829, as per the Treaty of Edirne, also known as the Treaty of Adrianople, signed with Russia, the Ottoman Empire accepted the terms and protocols agreed upon by Russia, Britain, and France in London on July 6, 1827, and subsequently on March 22, 1829, which outlined the establishment and independence of the Kingdom of Greece. Additionally, the Ottoman Empire granted significant autonomy to the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, with Russia serving as the guarantor of this arrangement. Ottomans also acknowledged the Russian Empire's annexation of the khanates of Revan and Nakhchivan as per the Treaty of Turkmenchay signed with Persia on February 10, 1828, and ceded numerous ports and fortresses along the Black Sea to

Russia. Furthermore, Russian merchants in the Ottoman Empire were placed under the legal authority of the Russian ambassador. Perhaps one of the most important consequences was that the Ottoman Empire was forced to pay war reparations, which would seriously damage its economy (Yalçın, 2023, pp. 520-521).

#### 3.2.14. *The Crimean War and Russia's Perception of the Ottoman Empire as the 'Sick Man of Europe'*

*"In one sense, it was predestined and had deep-seated causes. Neither Nicholas nor Napoleon nor the British government could retreat in the conflict for prestige once it was launched. Nicholas needed a subservient Turkey for the sake of Russian security; Napoleon needed success for the sake of his domestic position; the British government needed an independent Turkey for the security of the eastern Mediterranean. Yet none of the three had conscious plans of aggression, not even Napoleon, despite his welcome of disturbance for its own sake. The British fears that Russia planned the dismemberment of Turkey were as ill founded as Russia's fears that the western Powers threatened her security in the Black Sea. Mutual fear, not mutual aggression, caused the Crimean war."* (Taylor, 1954, pp. 60-61)

Taylor's analysis, given above, of the events leading up to the Crimean War, along with the ongoing conflicts and power struggles throughout the duration of the war, offers perhaps the most insightful portrayal of the beginning nature of the events spanning from 1853 to 1856. Certainly, akin to preceding Russo-Turkish conflicts, the Crimean War had its origins in a continuum of historical events prompted by diverse tensions and the involvement of various states. In this sense, following the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-1829, Muhammad Ali of Egypt rebelled against the Ottoman Empire with France's support. Consequently, the Ottoman Empire sought Russia's aid to quell the rebellion, leading to the Sultan's request for Russian troops stationed along the Danube to protect Istanbul. With Russia's agreement, the Sultan explored alternative strategies to address Muhammad Ali of Egypt problem, but French interference thwarted these efforts. Subsequently, a Russian fleet commanded by Admiral Mikhail Lazarev crossed the Bosphorus and anchored near Büyükdere. Due to Russia's pressure on Egypt and the

interventions of France and England, who realized the situation was not to their advantage, the Treaty of Kütahya was brokered between the Ottomans and Muhammad Ali of Egypt on May 14, 1833. However, this treaty fell short of resolving disputes with the Egyptian governor (Kutluoğlu, 1997). Despite achieving peace, Sultan Mahmud II remained wary and opted to secure a mutual assistance and non-aggression treaty with Russia. This presented an opportunity for the Tsar to secure favorable terms for his aid to the Sultan. Consequently, the Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi was signed for eight years, and a secret clause of the treaty stipulated that the Straits would be closed to other nations but open to the Russian navy in times of war (Beydilli, 1998).

Following the Egyptian revolt, the Ottoman Empire was severely weakened, and the matter of the Straits became a prominent concern for the European powers. Serving as the eastern entrance to the Mediterranean, the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits held immense importance for interstate relations and power dynamics. As conflicts between the Ottoman Empire and Egypt intensified in 1839, posing a threat to Ottoman territories, Lord Palmerston initiated discussions with Russia, Austria, and Prussia in London in 1840, leading to the signing of the London Convention. Subsequently, the London Straits Convention of 1841 obligated the closure of the Straits to warships during peacetime and granted the Ottoman Empire the authority to control the Straits and permit the passage of warships of its choosing in times of war. Consequently, Russian influence and pressure on the Ottoman Empire diminished, France's sway over Egypt vanished, and the terms of the Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi were rendered obsolete. (Kurat, 1970, pp. 64-65).

In the midst of all these circumstances, there was another development that would mark a significant economic turning point in Ottoman history. The Treaty of Balta Liman was signed with the British, granting great commercial privileges in return for their support in suppressing the revolt of Muhammad Ali of Egypt. Ratified in October 1838 by Queen Victoria and a month later by Sultan Mahmud II, the treaty put an end to the monopoly system established since 1826, which had previously restricted foreign merchants from exporting vital domestic raw materials needed by the Ottoman Empire (Kütükoğlu, 1992). The agreement allowed for British involvement in domestic trade and offered significant tax reductions in customs and transit trade. As per Eşiyok's (2010) analysis, the dynamic between the Ottoman Empire and European powers, particularly Britain, had evolved into an uneven power dynamic as the latter had undergone

industrialization and sought new markets. The 1838 treaty marked the beginning of a period where the Ottoman Empire gradually specialized in the production of primary goods, reflecting the emerging international division of labor (p. 79). During the 19th century, Great Britain's approach to the Ottoman Empire was primarily guided by two imperial strategies. Firstly, it aimed to maintain the Ottoman Empire as an ally against Russian and French expansionism. Secondly, it sought to facilitate the unhindered flow of British goods into the Ottoman market and ensure the availability of necessary inputs for British industry without obstacles (Kasaba, 1993, p. 50).

Meanwhile, as a member of the Holy Alliance, Russia had assumed the responsibility of maintaining Europe's equilibrium following the agreements of the Congress of Vienna in 1815, and Tsar Nicholas I became known as the "gendarme of Europe" (Hosking, 1997, p. 32). This role included providing support to Austria during the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. Russia, in turn, expected to have a free hand in addressing its own concerns with the Ottoman Empire. However, Britain, concerned about preserving its supremacy in the Eastern Mediterranean, opposed any Russian dominance over Ottoman affairs. Russia, seeing the Ottoman Empire as a weakened entity, openly referred to it as the "sick man of Europe" (Vitzthum von Eckstaedt, 1887, pp. 28-30). Following Russia's complete annexation of the Crimean Khanate, which had served as a buffer zone between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, the two empires found themselves in direct confrontation, leading to growing conflicts in scale that drew in various power dynamics over time. Russia's perception of itself as the traditional defender of Orthodox Christians and the Eastern Orthodox Church within the Ottoman Empire was one of the significant factors, and it ultimately emerged as Russia's primary objective.

*"France takes Algeria from Türkiye, and almost every year England annexes another Indian principality: none of this disturbs the balance of power; but when Russia occupies Moldavia and Wallachia, albeit only temporarily, that disturbs the balance of power. France occupies Rome and stays there for several years during peacetime: that is nothing, but Russia only thinks of occupying Constantinople, and the peace of Europe is threatened. The English declare war on the Chinese, who have, it seems, offended them: no one has the right to intervene, but Russia is obliged to ask*

*Europe for permission if it quarrels with its neighbor. England threatens Greece to support the false claims of a miserable Jew and burns its fleet: that is a lawful action, but Russia demands a treaty to protect millions of Christians, and that is deemed to strengthen its position in the East at the expense of the balance of power. We can expect nothing from the West but blind hatred and malice.”* (Pogodin, 1874, p. 71)

The letter of Mikhail Pogodin from December 7, 1853, which is provided above, was from a history professor at Moscow University, who conveyed Russia’s perspective on this matter to the Tsar. The comment in the margin by Nicholas I, “*This is the whole point,*” underscores the significance of the Tsar’s stance on the European power balances and the Ottoman Empire (Figes, 2011, p. 134). Furthermore, Tsar Nicholas I appointed Prince Alexander Sergeevich Menshikov, a figure closely aligned with conservative Orthodox circles who shared the Tsar’s views as his special envoy to the Porte. Menshikov was granted broad discretion in his instructions, aiming to uphold the terms of the February 1852 firman of the Sultan, which settled disputes over control of the keys to the church in Bethlehem and the renovation of the Holy Sepulchre in line with Russian and Orthodox preferences (Zander, 1971, pp. 178-180). The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem is primarily significant for Christians as it embodies the foundational events of the Christian faith, such as the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and is regarded as a focal point due to its location at the site where these events occurred, symbolizing a central spiritual significance (Avcı & Özdemir, 2019, p. 37). Back to Menshikov, to prevent similar conflicts in the future, he sought to secure solid guarantees through negotiations for a solemn undertaking or convention with the legal weight of a treaty, clarifying Russian rights. Menshikov was also provided with a draft treaty consisting of seven articles for this purpose. Besides, he was authorized to establish a confidential defense alliance, with a limited duration and applicable solely to the existing circumstances, in the event the Ottoman government felt threatened by France. In return for Russian military assistance, the Porte was expected to acquiesce to the Russian-desired resolution of the Holy Places dispute (Jelavich, 2004, p. 118). However, when the Ottomans rejected these terms, Menshikov departed Istanbul on May 19, 1853. Subsequently, Russian forces invaded Wallachia and Moldavia on June 22, 1853, without a formal declaration of war.

Although Tsar Nicholas I asserted that the action was not a precursor to war but rather a security precaution, it was evident that the intention behind it was to alter the balance of power in Europe. Subsequently, a conference was convened in Vienna at Austria's suggestion, yet it yielded no resolution. In Istanbul, public sentiment mounted, urging Sultan Abdulmejid I to declare war on Russia. On October 4, 1853, a diplomatic note was dispatched to Russia demanding the withdrawal from Wallachia and Bogdan within 15 days. Russia showed little regard for this ultimatum, and hostilities commenced once the deadline expired (Figes, 2010, p. 178). The Ottoman troops, under Omar Pasha's command, crossing the Danube, effectively defended their captured positions by defeating Russian forces at Oltenița on November 4, 1853. However, they were compelled to retreat back to the Danube shortly thereafter. These initial clashes prompted the Tsar to decide to launch a broader offensive. However, the Russian Commander Ivan Paskevich harbored concerns regarding potential opposition from the Austrians to a Russian advance into the Balkans, where they faced vulnerability due to Slavic uprisings in neighboring regions (Figes, 2010, p. 179). He hesitated to involve Russian troops in a conflict against Ottomans, fearing possible Austrian retaliation, especially in Poland, the loss of which could spell the downfall of Russia in Europe. Paskevich articulated these concerns in a subsequent letter to the Tsar, suggesting that such a move would align Russia with the fiercely militant tribes of the Ottoman Empire—the Serbs, Herzegovinians, Montenegrins, and Bulgarians—who, with some assistance, could effectively dismantle the Turkish empire without the need for Russian casualties. Aware of the Tsar's aversion to foreign intervention, Paskevich justified the proposal on religious grounds, emphasizing the protection of Orthodox, citing precedents from previous wars with the Ottomans (Nikitin, 1946; Figes, 2010, p. 180).

In a significant note drafted at the outset of November 1853, Tsar Nicholas I outlined his strategic vision for the conflict against the Ottoman Empire. Circulated among his ministers and senior commanders, it bore the unmistakable imprint of his most trusted general, Paskevich. The Tsar anticipated a revolt by the Serbs against the Ottoman rule, with the Bulgarians eventually joining their cause. According to this plan, the Russian army would fortify its defensive positions along the Danube before advancing southward to support the Christian uprising against the Turks. This strategy entailed an

extended occupation of the principalities to facilitate the organization of Christian militias by the Russians. The Tsar's words unequivocally elucidated Russia's intentions:

*“The authorized formation of volunteer battalions will then serve as the foundation or root of new militias in Serbia and Bulgaria, for which the winter of 1854 will be used. (...) At the beginning of 1855 will indicate to us what hope we can place in the efforts of the Christian population of Türkiye, and whether England and France will remain hostile to us then. We should not move forward unless a popular uprising for independence takes on the most extensive and general scale; without this common support, we should not advance; the struggle must be between Christians and Turks; we, however, must remain in reserve.”* (Zaionchkovskii, 2002, pp. 523-524)

The reasons why the first conflicts were planned through Wallachia and Moldavia were clear from the Tsar's remarks. Soon after, another conflict broke out on the Caucasian front. Meanwhile, at the Sultan's request, an Anglo-French fleet awaited off the coast of Istanbul while a sudden Russian raid targeted the Ottoman fleet in Sinop. Until then, Russia had justified its incursions into Wallachia and Moldavia under the pretext of protecting Orthodox communities within Ottoman territories, but the attack in Sinop constituted an unmistakable act of aggression. This event triggered a significant outcry in Europe, particularly in Britain and France. At a meeting in Vienna involving representatives from Austria and Prussia, it was agreed to maintain the borders unchanged post-war, yet Russia refused to comply. In January 1854, British and French forces landed in the Black Sea to safeguard Ottoman vessels and the Anatolian coastline against Russian assaults, prompting Russia to cut diplomatic ties with Britain and France upon learning of this intervention. Following an ultimatum demanding Russia's withdrawal from Wallachia and Moldavia by April's end, Britain and France, alongside the Ottoman Empire, declared war on Russia when the deadline passed without compliance. During the conference in Vienna, Austria and Prussia officially endorsed the ultimatums issued by France and Britain and acknowledged the inviolability of the Ottoman Empire's borders. They also committed to integrating the Ottoman Empire into the Concert of Europe and pledged to enhance the status of non-Muslim subjects within the empire without encroaching upon the Sultan's sovereignty. As a result, Russia found itself isolated, facing the unified strength of Ottoman, British, and French forces.

With Russia now isolated from the European powers, the conflict escalated across all fronts. Ottoman forces, particularly under the leadership of Omar Pasha, achieved significant victories in Rumelia, notably at Silistria in June 1854. This decisive triumph dealt a severe blow to the Russian forces, compelling them to withdraw north of the Danube, effectively ending the Danubian phase of the war (Ágoston & Masters, 2009, p. 162). Additionally, a diplomatic maneuver aimed at resolving the occupation of Wallachia and Moldavia also proved effective: On June 14, 1854, Austria and the Ottoman Empire finalized the Convention of Boyacıköy. Under this convention, Austria assumed control over Wallachia and Moldavia, citing the need to protect navigation on the Danube, and explicitly declared that it would not permit passage to any of the warring parties. Faced with this ultimatum, Russia chose to evacuate the region rather than risk a confrontation with Austria (Badem, 2010, p. 186). In a bid to compel Russia into seeking peace, Britain and France opted to open a new front in Crimea and landed in the peninsula on September 20, 1854, with the objective of capturing Sevastopol. Despite gaining an initial advantage by defeating Russian forces obstructing the path to Sevastopol at Alma, the Russians scuttled their navy and effectively closed off the city from the sea (Taşdemir, 2019, p. 17). Hence, Sevastopol could only be besieged from the landward side. The prolonged siege resulted in significant human losses, prompting the Sardinia-Piedmont, which aspired to establish an Italian union in the future, to join the war alongside the Allies in a bid to garner favor with France and Britain. The siege of Sevastopol persisted for almost a year, becoming one of the longest and most costly sieges in military history, as the Allies focused on capturing the city rather than developing alternative strategies to weaken Russia's land armies (Figes, 2010, p. 252).

Furthermore, the most crucial military engagement of the Crimean front, aside from Sevastopol, occurred at Yevpatoria (Gözleve), serving as a pivotal strategic turning point as Russian forces suffered heavy losses while attempting to assault the fortification (Russell, 1865, p. 309). Shortly after this battle, news arrived of the death of Tsar Nicholas I, marking a significant transition in leadership as Alexander II ascended to the throne on March 2, 1855. Following the capture of Sevastopol, Omar Pasha redirected his focus to the Caucasian front with the aim of relieving the dire situation in Kars. His strategy involved landing in Batumi and advancing towards Tbilisi via Kutaisi, effectively cutting off the Russians from their main bases. Setting up his base in Sukhumi, he moved forward

on October 15, 1855, and secured victory against a Russian army on the banks of the Ingur River on November 7, 1855. However, adverse weather conditions hindered him from thwarting the occupation of Kars. Despite criticism for not managing the operation effectively and resulting in time wastage, he was honored with the Order of the Garter by the British in recognition of his previous accomplishments (Saydam, 2007).

Taking into account the historical backdrop of previous Russo-Turkish conflicts, the Greek project, and the broader Eastern question, it is pertinent to briefly mention another aspect with ideological significance: the Greek Volunteer Legion. The onset of the Crimean War sparked considerable enthusiasm among some of the Christian populations residing within the Ottoman Empire. In the fledgling Kingdom of Greece, it was viewed as an opportunity to advance the irredentist aspirations of the Megali Idea. Consequently, the Greek government backed uprisings against Ottoman rule in Thessaly, Epirus, and Macedonia in early 1854. However, due to poor organization and formidable opposition from Ottoman forces, these uprisings ultimately met with failure, exacerbated by Greece being compelled to adopt strict neutrality in the conflict following the Anglo-French occupation of Piraeus (Todorova, 1984).

Despite the occupation of Kars, the Russians lacked the strength to sustain the war any longer, prompting them to seek peace. As the Crimean War neared its conclusion, the British advocated for further exhaustion of Russia and continuation of the conflict, while France favored bringing the war to an end. In these circumstances, Tsar Alexander II requested an armistice. On December 16, 1855, Austria issued an ultimatum to Russia and outlined the terms of the armistice. These terms stipulated the lifting of Russian protection over Wallachia and Moldavia, the freedom of the Danube and its mouth, the neutralization of the Black Sea, and the granting of new rights to Christians and Muslims within the Ottoman borders under European guarantees. Tsar Alexander II acquiesced to the demands of the Allies, leading to the decision to convene a congress in Paris for peace negotiations. To achieve this aim, the Paris Congress was convened on February 25, 1856, with the Ottoman Empire, Britain, France, Russia, Austria, Prussia, and Piedmont-Sardinia in attendance. Besides orchestrating a peace treaty, a notable aspect of the congress was the Ottoman Empire's participation on equal footing with the states comprising the Concert of Europe. Until this congress, this system had solely consisted of states composed of Christian societies.

The congress, overseen by the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Colonna-Walewski, saw the participation of the Ottoman Empire led by Âli Pasha, accompanied by Mehmed Cemil Bey, the ambassador to Paris. Russia was represented by Prince Alexey Fyodorovich Orlov and Plenipotentiary Count Philipp von Brunnow, who served as the ambassador to the German Confederation. The participating states at the congress pursued diverse objectives. The Ottoman Empire aimed to impose stringent conditions on Russia while seeking inclusion in the Concert of Europe, hence issuing the Islahat Edict before the congress, granting equal rights to non-Muslim subjects. Britain aimed to curtail Russia's military influence and ensure the preservation of the Ottoman Empire's territorial integrity. France, however, was reluctant to completely neutralize Russia due to its discomfort with the burgeoning British-Ottoman rapprochement. Prussia maintained a passive stance during the meetings, whereas Piedmont-Sardinia, although lacking political ambitions in the Black Sea or Crimea, sought to align with the victorious side in the war and leverage this position as a strategic asset in the pursuit of Italian independence (Arnold, 2002, p. 112). On the contrary, Russia's objective at the congress was to minimize any potential damage and emerge with the least possible consequences.

On April 27, 1856, the Treaty of Paris was signed, marking an agreement among the parties to return captured territories to each other. Furthermore, the treaty stipulated that the Ottoman Empire would be recognized as a European state, enjoying the benefits of European state law, with its borders and independence guaranteed. The Islahat Edict aimed to protect non-Muslims within the Ottoman Empire, while foreign states were prohibited from interfering in its internal affairs. The Black Sea was designated to be closed to warships and open to merchant vessels, demilitarized, and existing shipyards were to be dismantled. While preserving the privileges of Wallachia and Moldavia, the region was to receive a new constitution under the protection of the Ottoman Empire. No state was permitted to interfere in their internal affairs, although the Porte was not allowed to intervene without the consent of other signatory states in the event of disturbances. The Ottoman Empire was also prohibited from interfering in Serbia's internal affairs but retained the right to station troops in the fortresses there, with Serbia's rights continuing under the guarantee of the signatory states (Erim, 1953, pp. 341-353).

When considering all these developments collectively, it becomes evident that the terms of the treaty resulting from the Crimean War were not particularly advantageous

for the Ottoman Empire. While the formal recognition of the Empire as a European state and its entitlement to European state law seemed promising, however, in practice, European states did not consistently uphold these principles. Additionally, the autonomy of Ottoman administrations in the Balkans came under the guarantee of European states, leading to a decline in Ottoman influence in these regions. Furthermore, the provisions of the treaty regarding the Black Sea not only applied to the defeated Russia but also imposed restrictions on the Ottoman Empire itself. Another significant consequence of the war for the Ottomans was their unprecedented need to borrow substantial sums of money from foreign states. As the Crimean War inflicted a severe economic crisis on the Ottoman Empire, the decision was made to seek foreign loans. On August 24, 1854, the Ottoman government entered into a contract with two banking groups in London, Palmer, and Earisic-Goldschmid, borrowing £3,000,000, with tax revenue from Egypt pledged as collateral for the debt. The following year, in 1855, the need for further borrowing led to a £5,000,000 contract with the Rothschild Brothers, this time guaranteed by the British and France. Collateral for this loan included revenues from the customs of Izmir and Syria, along with the remaining portion of the Egyptian tax from the first borrowing. Additionally, it was agreed that the funds from this contract would be allocated solely for war expenses, with a commission comprising representatives from the governments of England and France established to oversee the expenditures. Thus, with the Crimean War, the Ottoman Empire borrowed foreign capital for the first time in its history, concurrently accepting foreign financial oversight (Özdemir, 2010, pp. 48-50).

As for the consequences for Russia, across Europe, the Treaty of Paris was widely seen as a setback to Russia's longstanding policy of expansion towards the Ottoman Empire, which had been in place since the time of Catherine II. By nullifying the 1774 Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji (Küçük Kaynarca), the new treaty was viewed as a significant affront in Russia, precipitating profound military, social, and financial crises, prompting radical reforms within the empire (Beydilli, 2007a, p. 171). However, the pursuit of reforms in the aftermath of the Crimean War quickly transformed into an endeavor that echoed the conflict's impact and spurred innovations in Russia's imperial ambitions (Gorizontov, 2012, p. 90). Moreover, the treaty reshaped the political landscape of Europe in several ways. By neutralizing Russia's navy and shipyards in the Black Sea, England mitigated a significant threat to its colonies and Near Eastern trade, albeit temporarily.

France's involvement in the war stemmed from concerns over Russia encroaching upon its spheres of influence, particularly in the Straits and the Mediterranean, under the pretext of the Holy Places dispute. The prevention of this perceived threat through the Treaty of Paris was a source of satisfaction for France, elevating its status in European politics, particularly with Paris hosting the congress and the treaty negotiations. Piedmont-Sardinia's participation in the Paris Congress provided an opportunity to advocate for its vision of Italian unity within an interstate framework. Overall, the Treaty of Paris established a new political equilibrium in Europe. However, the peace it brought proved short-lived, succumbing to various factors that disrupted stability in Europe.

### *3.2.15. Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, Pan-Slavism and the Complete Independence of Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania*

As the end of the 19th century neared, there was a swift transition in the global balance of power, hinting at the imminent possibility of a significant worldwide conflict. Meanwhile, the tensions emerging from 1877 were laden with major developments that would significantly shape the narratives of Ottoman and Russian history. Certainly, while the underlying causes of the previous Russo-Turkish conflicts would undoubtedly play a role once again, the profound influence of Pan-Slavism stood out as arguably the foremost factor that rocked the foundations of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. Since the second quarter of the 19th century, Pan-Slavism has been a political ideology deeply pondered by its proponents and thinkers, centered on safeguarding the cohesion and solidarity of the Slavic populace through ethnic kinship. The main reason for the emergence of this idea is that it originated in the Balkans, where non-Slavic empires such as the Byzantine Empire, Austria-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and the Republic of Venice ruled the South Slavs for centuries. However, it is also important to note that Pan-Slavism initially stemmed from the principles of Russia's foreign policy, yet it was not until the Crimean War that it evolved into a doctrine with philosophical foundations. As the latter half of the 19th century approached, it transformed into a political movement that attracted supporters and sparked debates. When examined in conjunction with early Russian policies advocating Slavic solidarity, it becomes evident that the origins of Pan-Slavism extend further, tracing back to Ivan Gundulić, who is recognized for pioneering

the concept of Slavic unity (Fine, 2009, pp. 297-298). Yet the term “Pan-Slavism” was first introduced in János Herkel’s 1826 publication, gaining significance as it integrated into a linguistic context within his work (Herkel, 1826, p. 4).

During Tsar Nicholas I’s rule, the concept of Slavic unity evolved from mere ideology into a potent form of nationalism, giving rise to the Pan-Slavic movement. *Moskovsky Vestnik* (Moscow Gazette), a philosophical journal established in 1827 under the editorship of Mikhail Pogodin, a professor from Moscow University, as mentioned earlier, served as a platform for intellectuals who spearheaded Pan-Slavic ideals. Alongside the journal, Pogodin and influential figures like Alexander Ivanovich Koshelev and Ivan Sergeevich established the Slavic Charitable Society in early 1858, further promoting the cause. Based in Moscow, this society sought to provide backing for the religious, educational, and cultural endeavors of the South Slavic communities (Popov, 1868, pp. 1-3). The society distributed free books, established prizes for scientific works, helped those migrating to Russia, organized readings of essays on the Slavs and Slavic affairs, and financed the opening of schools and churches. With the authorization of Tsar Alexander II, it also promptly extended assistance within the Ottoman Empire, with the South Slavic Relief Committee established in 1860 to concentrate efforts on consolidating Slavic communities under Ottoman governance. In 1876, Andrei Nikolaevich Kartsov, serving as a diplomatic agent in Serbia, corresponded with the Russian ambassador in Istanbul, Nikolay Pavlovich Ignatyev, discussing the role of this committee and associated organizations in the preparations for a conflict against the Ottoman Empire (Nikitin et al., 1961, pp. 241-243). We must note that the primary goal of the Pan-Slavists was to create a grand state unifying all Slavic and Orthodox nations under Russia’s leadership. To achieve this aim, it was deemed necessary to drive the Turks out of Europe and Rumelia, establishing a significant Slavic state with Istanbul as its focal point. This ambition seemed to echo Moscow’s claim of the Third Rome but with altered characteristics. Ultimately, due to these factors and the influence of some officials and intellectuals on Alexander II, a new Russo-Turkish war erupted.

Meanwhile, grappling with serious difficulties, the Ottoman Empire’s economy declared a moratorium and succumbed to bankruptcy on October 6, 1875 (Özdemir, 2010, pp. 68-71). This financial collapse was precipitated by various factors, including loans obtained from institutions like the Comptoir D’escompte Bank to address the Cretan

revolt of 1866-1869, loans secured from the Belgian banker Baron Hirsch for the construction of the Rumelia Railways, and other forms of general borrowing (Özdemir, 2010, pp. 59-67). The impact of the financial bankruptcy of the Empire, together with other factors, on domestic politics led to the dethronement of Sultan Abdülaziz in 1876 by a coup d'état and his replacement first by Murad V and then by Abdülhamid II. In other words, a favorable environment had already been created for Pan-Slavist ideals. The spread of intellectual currents under the influence of the French Revolution to the Balkans, the administrative and economic difficulties the Ottoman Empire was going through, and the fact that the Ottoman lands were seen as a market area to meet the need for raw materials and markets under the influence of the Industrial Revolution led to an increase in the influence of European states on the Christian communities living in the Empire. Additionally, the Ottoman Empire's challenges with managing rebellions and economic issues led European eyes to view it as nearing collapse since the 1830s. Consequently, this environment provided fertile ground for the proliferation of ideologies like Pan-Slavism, which aimed to expedite the independence of Christian communities within the Empire (Stojanović, 1939, p. 2).

The Christian communities residing in Nevesinje, within the Sanjak of Herzegovina, voiced their grievances to Prince Nikola of Montenegro, asserting that heavy taxation during the drought of 1874 and poor crop yields were burdening them. Seeking to avoid direct confrontation with the Ottoman government, Prince Nikola appealed to Ignatyev, the Russian ambassador in Istanbul, to intervene with the Ottoman authorities to secure the return of these individuals to their hometowns. The Prince of Montenegro returned these people to the Ottoman Empire, but when they returned to their villages, they were welcomed as heroes. People of Nevesinje, spurred by their compatriots returning from Montenegro, started a rebellion due to the oppression shown to them by the tax collectors also tasked with acting as intermediaries between local government and state administration. They kidnapped the region's administrator and killed the gendarme soldiers, thus starting the rebellion on July 24, 1875 (Karal, 2003, pp. 74-75). Shortly thereafter, another rebellion erupted in Bosnia, spearheaded by a considerable number of Serbs, some of whom were well-equipped. The primary objective of the Bosnian rebel factions was to hinder the Ottoman forces' continued consolidation along the Drina River. Given the challenging terrain and lack of organized revolt in Bosnia, the collective

objective of these rebels was to completely occupy the Turks in order to prevent any further concentration of Muslim troops or irregulars on the Drina on Serbia's western border (Mackenzie & Irby, 2010, pp. 42-43).

Another significant organization that played a role in the events leading up to the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 was the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee. Established in 1869 within Bulgarian immigrant communities in Romania, this committee emerged from the efforts of Lyuben Karavelov. Karavelov, a former student of Moscow University's Faculty of History and Philology who had participated in student uprisings, commenced publishing the newspaper *Svoboda* (Freedom) in 1857. *Svoboda* served as an inspiration for the formation of the committee. Others who took an active part in the formation and work of the committee were Panayot Hitov, Vasil Levski, and Dimitar Tsenovich (Stoyanov, 1977, pp. 57-60). Following a general meeting, the organization's network of committees in Bulgaria experienced significant expansion. Preparations for the uprising were well underway when a faction within the organization launched an attack on an Ottoman postal service convoy near Sofia with the aim of acquiring money to purchase ammunition. This robbery resulted in the revelation of several committee members' identities in the Sofia region. Consequently, on February 18, 1873, Levski was apprehended and subsequently executed by hanging (Crampton, 1987, p. 18).

The planned rebellion orchestrated by the committee, initially scheduled for May, commenced unexpectedly in April and quickly escalated into harsh violence. Aziz Pasha, present in the region, appealed to the Porte for military reinforcements, but his plea went unanswered. Despite his insistence on deploying at least one battalion to quell the uprising, Mahmud Nedim Pasha heeded the advice of the Russian ambassador, advising against exaggerating the situation, and refrained from sending reinforcements. This decision further fueled the rebellion's rage, prompting the severing of telegraph wires and the isolation of the region from communication. Subsequently, intense clashes ensued between Turks and Bulgarians in the area, and Ottoman forces were eventually dispatched; they firmly suppressed the rebellion. Journalist Januarius MacGahan and diplomat Eugene Schuyler, both affiliated with the American community-based at Robert College in Istanbul, argued that these events should be brought to the attention of European public opinion, claiming that an atrocity had taken place and expressing their outrage at it ("Inclosure 2.," 1876). On the other hand, Frederick Burnaby, a British Army

intelligence officer, embarked on a journey to the Ottoman territories to personally investigate the reports of massacres highlighted in the British press. He later compiled his findings into memoirs published as two books. Burnaby contended that many Western depictions of atrocities were exaggerated or even fabricated, while instances of violence against Muslims were often omitted from press coverage. During his stay in Ankara, Burnaby's host voiced discontent, pointing out the biased portrayal in newspapers. The host lamented that while stories of Bulgarian women and children being massacred were widely circulated, accounts of Turkish women facing similar fates or soldiers enduring brutal mutilations by rebels in Herzegovina were rarely mentioned (Burnaby, 1877, p. 135). Burnaby also stated that the European opinion was largely a product of propaganda mechanisms, while American missionaries in Sivas asserted that Turks were not inherently cruel but rather criticized the inefficiencies within their system of justice administration (Burnaby, 1877, pp. 321, 326). Following the quelling of the rebellion in Bulgaria, two semi-autonomous principalities, Serbia and Montenegro, capitalized on the political instability sparked by the New Ottomans' deposition of Abdülaziz and the ascension of Murad V as Sultan. They declared war on the Ottoman Empire in June 1876, with demands for independence. However, they were poorly equipped for warfare, and with the intervention of the Russian Tsar, an armistice was negotiated, which remained in effect until February 1877 (Forbes et al., 1915, pp. 123-124).

Under pressure from European public opinion, the Ottoman Empire acquiesced to peace negotiations, leading to the convening of an international conference consisting of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, the Russian Empire, the French Republic, the German Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Kingdom of Italy at the Golden Horn shipyards in Istanbul to address the Balkan issues on December 23, 1876 ("Conférence de Constantinople," 1876, pp. 380-382). Anticipating substantial pressure on Ottoman policies towards Christian populations, particularly during the Shipyard Conference, Abdülhamid II hurriedly declared the First Constitutional Monarchy on December 23, 1876, coinciding with the conference's commencement. However, despite these efforts, the conference resulted in severe decisions against the Ottoman Empire. In 1870, Russia had notified the Treaty of Paris (1856) signatories that it disavowed certain provisions, particularly those pertaining to shipyards and warships in the Black Sea, citing concerns over the rising power of Germany and the shifting

European balance. Consequently, Russia found itself relieved from most obligations restricting its actions in the Black Sea and the Balkans, leading it to exert pressure on the Ottoman Empire to adhere to treaty provisions regarding its Orthodox subjects. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom initiated the London Conference in March 1877 to dissuade Russia from declaring war on the Ottomans. However, the Grand Vizier Ibrahim Edhem Pasha rejected the London Protocol, viewing it as interference in internal affairs. Russia, having announced that rejection of the protocol would be seen as an act of war, declared war on the Ottoman Empire in April 1877 (Karal, 2007, pp. 40-41).

Days before the declaration of the war, Romania and Russia reached an agreement in which Romania permitted Russian troops to transit through its territory to launch attacks against the Ottomans (Maciu, 1978). As the war commenced, the headquarters of the Eastern Danube army, led by Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha, was situated in Shumnu. Additionally, there were stationed military units in the southern region of the Danube. Following Romania's declaration of independence and subsequent declaration of war against the Ottoman Empire in May 1877, Russian forces escalated their offensive against the Ottomans, advancing through Bucharest and Dobrudja. They swiftly captured Zistovi (Svishtov) and Tirnovo (Veliko Tarnovo) as part of their rapid advance. The primary war strategy of the Ottoman government was to create a defensive line along the Danube and to orient its military plans around defense (Karal, 2007, p. 45). Following multiple clashes between Russian and Ottoman forces at Shipka, a pivotal pass in the region, the Ottoman forces ultimately evacuated Shipka in July 1877, resulting in the area falling under Russian control. Following this move by the Ottoman forces and the news of successive defeats, Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha was dismissed from his position (Özcan, 1988, p. 252).

After the fall of Shipka, Osman Pasha, the western commander of the Danube Front, arrived at the strategically important Plevna (Pleven) and repelled the attack of the Russian division on July 19, 1877. In the second clash on July 30-31, despite being outnumbered, the Russian forces were forced to retreat due to the effective attack of the Ottoman troops, whose artillery was well positioned (Hülagü, 2006, p. 89). After the third unsuccessful attempt by Russian troops to seize the city, Osman Pasha was awarded the title of Gazi, along with a telegram and gifts sent by Sultan Abdülhamid II for his achievements in Plevna (Hülagü, 2006, pp. 140-143). Meanwhile, the Russian forces opted to alter their tactics. Their insistence on capturing Plevna stemmed from their

perception of the risks involved in advancing southward without securing the city first. On September 3, the Russians managed to capture Lovcha (Lovech), thereby cutting off Plevna's access to the Balkan army and eliminating the possibility of supply deliveries from Filibe (Plovdiv) to Plevna (Hülagü, 2006, p. 116). In September, both Russian and Romanian troops intensified the siege in Plevna, and by October 24-29, the city was entirely encircled. On October 31, Grand Duke Nicholas sent a surrender offer to Osman Pasha, which was declined (Hülagü, 2006, p. 170). However, as the Russians held control over the supply routes, Osman Pasha's besieged troops were unable to receive any reinforcements or assistance. The conditions of the siege grew increasingly dire, with shortages of food and medical supplies. In the light of these developments, Osman Pasha was left with two options: either to surrender or to fight to the end by making a breakthrough.

The Ottoman forces opted for the second option, and Osman Pasha was put in charge of the first breakthrough group. On December 10, the first echelon of Russian positions was captured in a fierce offensive, but the second breakthrough group was prevented from leaving their trenches. Meanwhile, Osman Pasha, who was retreating under heavy fire, was taken prisoner when his horse was shot, and he himself was wounded in the leg. During his captivity until the signing of the peace treaty, Osman Pasha was treated decently and not subjected to mistreatment. However, upon the engagements' end, only a third of the Ottoman soldiers captured alongside him managed to return home (Hülagü, 2006, p. 177-190; Herbert, 1911, p. 345). Taylor (1954) argues that the significance of Plevna extends beyond mere military engagement; rather, it represents a turning point with far-reaching historical implications. He contends that had the Russians managed to reach the Ottoman Empire's capital in July, the survival of the Empire in any form within Europe would have been highly uncertain. The scholar also states that Plevna's defense not only reshaped the Ottoman Empire's future trajectory but also granted it an additional 40 years of existence (p. 245).

Another significant theater of conflict during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 was the Caucasus. Here, engagements occurred between Russian forces commanded by Mikhail Loris-Melikov and Ottoman forces led by Ahmed Muhtar Pasha. Ottoman Pasha's overarching military strategy relied on defensive tactics followed by counterattacks aimed at luring the enemy deeper into Ottoman territory before engaging

them decisively. In April 1877, a contingent of the Russian army breached the border at Arpaçay and initiated offensive operations, seizing Doğubayazıt. Under Melikov's command, Russian troops besieged Ardahan and successfully captured the city by June. According to the historian Mehmed Ârif Bey, who was in Ahmed Muhtar Pasha's entourage, the Ottoman forces in Ardahan were insufficient (Mehmet Arif, 1970, pp. 131, 185). Thus, this campaign resulted in significant casualties for the Ottoman forces, as well as the loss of a substantial quantity of ammunition to the Russians.

Russian forces devised a plan to besiege Kars Fortress and then proceed with their march towards Erzurum. However, Ottoman forces, led by Ahmed Muhtar Pasha, successfully defended the city against the initial Russian assault. Despite this victory, the siege persisted. During August and October of 1877, Ottoman forces achieved two more triumphs, but the engagements resulted in consistent casualties, while Russian troops continued to receive reinforcements. On August 25, following his victory at Gedikler (Kızıltepe), achieved through a surprise assault that repelled the Russians, Ahmed Muhtar Pasha was bestowed the title of "Gazi" by Abdülhamid II. Additionally, he was honored with the Order of the Medjidie in recognition of his valor and leadership (Uçarol, 1996, p. 446). This time, Russian forces, led by Ivan Davidovich Lazarev, utilized heavy artillery fire to obliterate the trenches of the Ottoman troops stationed in Alacadağ. As a result, some of the Ottoman soldiers who emerged from their positions were captured by the Russians. Afterward, following another setback at Deveboynu, the Ottoman army retreated towards the Aziziye Bastion located in Erzurum, where they were compelled to engage in a defensive battle. On November 5, 1877, Sultan Abdülhamid II underscored the gravity of the situation in a decree addressed to Muhtar Pasha, emphasizing the substantial material and moral repercussions the Empire would suffer should Erzurum succumb to Russian invasion (Topdağı, 2017, pp. 99-100).

Meanwhile, some Armenian factions comprising pro-Russian Ottoman citizens infiltrated the Aziziye Bastions, acquiring the Ottoman soldiers' passwords and collaborating with Russian forces to orchestrate an attack aimed at breaking through the defensive line (Gnkur. Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı, 1985, pp. 166-167). Despite Colonel Bahri Bey, the bastion commander, sustaining injuries, he persisted in battle alongside his remaining troops. However, Russian troops arriving from the rear effortlessly seized control of the bastion. Responding swiftly, Ahmed Muhtar Pasha

allocated two battalions to Captain Mehmet Pasha, the reserve commander, instructing him to proceed towards Aziziye and repel the Russians into the fortifications. Simultaneously, at the break of dawn, numerous muezzins ascended the minarets of mosques, rallying the populace and soliciting their assistance upon learning of the dire situation (Topdağı, 2017, p. 76). As the sounds of artillery and gunfire emanated from the Aziziye Bastion in the predawn darkness, the people of Erzurum hurried from their homes, deeply distressed upon receiving news of the Russian occupation of the bastion. Under the leadership of Nene Hatun, a 20-year-old young woman, the people of Erzurum joined forces with Ottoman soldiers, wielding any available weapons, such as picks, shovels, and shotguns, to launch a counteroffensive against the Russians. Following hours of intense combat, the Ottoman army, supported by the populace, successfully reclaimed control of the bastion, compelling the Russian forces to abandon their attempted line establishment. The thwarting of the Russian advancement into Eastern Anatolia at the Aziziye Bastions in Erzurum during the events surrounding the Erzurum Defense significantly influenced the overall trajectory and outcome of the war and helped the army regain its morale (Uçarol, 1976, p. 108). Decades subsequent to the Erzurum Defense, which holds significant prominence in Turkish historiography and collective memory, the Aziziye Martyrs Monument was unveiled in 1952, with the participation of Nene Hatun, one of the foremost figures of the resistance (Topdağı, 2017, p. 102).

By 1878, the Russians had breached the defenses of Plevna and were pressing forward towards Istanbul, with scant Ottoman military units capable of mounting a serious interception. Faced with the imminent threat of an occupation of Istanbul, the Ottoman Empire proposed an armistice to Russia. Negotiations commenced in Kızanlık and transitioned to Edirne after its surrender, with Ottoman representatives Server and Nâmık Pashas and Russian representative Grand Duke Nicholas. The Edirne Armistice, signed on January 31, 1878, outlined several key points: Erzurum, having withstood enemy siege, was to be handed over to the Russians; an autonomous Bulgaria, with its own militia and tax obligations to the Porte, was to be established within the boundaries set at the Shipyard Conference; Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania's independence was to be acknowledged; Russia was to receive war reparations; and certain concessions regarding the Straits were to be granted to Russia. Furthermore, Bosnia-Herzegovina's autonomy and reforms in Christian-populated provinces in Rumelia were to be agreed

upon (Aydın, 1994, p. 499). Seizing the opportunity presented by Ottoman vulnerability, Greece seized control of the defenseless Thessaly region. The situation became dire for the Ottomans as Bulgaria, Northern Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, and Edirne fell into the hands of Russia and its allies. Although an armistice was signed with Russia, Russian forces continued their advance towards Istanbul, with their army even entering the city. With no regular army left to resist the Russians in the Balkans, the Ottoman Empire teetered on the brink of collapse. Kuleli Military High School was evacuated, and extraordinary measures were implemented in Istanbul. Ahmed Muhtar Pasha, swiftly appointed as commander of the Ottoman Army in Istanbul following his successes on the Eastern Front, endeavored to rally the remaining forces against the Russians in Yeşilköy (San Stefano) and establish a final line of defense. The British dispatched a fleet of battleships with the intention of dissuading Russia from advancing further into the city, prompting Russian forces to halt their progression at Yeşilköy.

Consequently, negotiations commenced at Yeşilköy, with the Ottoman Empire represented by Foreign Minister Safvet Pasha and Berlin Ambassador Sâdullah Bey, while Russia was represented by Ignatyev and Aleksandr Nelidov. The Treaty of San Stefano was eventually signed on March 3, 1878. As per the treaty terms, the Ottoman Empire agreed to recognize the independence of Romania, Montenegro, and Serbia. Romania would cede Bessarabia to Russia in exchange for retaining Dobrudja. Bulgaria was designated to become an autonomous principality under Ottoman sovereignty, with its borders stretching from the Danube to the Aegean Sea and from Albania to the Black Sea. The Bulgarian prince was to be elected freely by the populace and confirmed with the endorsement of European states and the Ottoman Empire's ratification. Reforms were stipulated to be implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Christian-populated regions in Rumelia, and Eastern Anatolia, where Armenians resided, under the supervision of Russia and Austria. Besides, the Ottoman Empire was obligated to pay war reparations to Russia, and in return for a significant portion of this indemnity, it would cede certain territories to Russia, including areas in Rumelia, Kars, Ardahan, Batum, and Doğubayazıt (Holland, 1885, pp. 335-348).

The impact of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 on Turkish, Russian, and Balkan historiography and social memory has left a profound mark. This impact can be illustrated even through two examples reflected in 20<sup>th</sup>-century cinema. Firstly, the burial

of Russian soldiers who perished during the conflict posed a logistical challenge, with their graves scattered and difficult to maintain. To address this issue, the Russian government proposed consolidating the graves into an ossuary accompanied by a chapel for religious observance. The Ottoman government, grappling with the aftermath of a treaty with stringent conditions, initially treated this proposal as a technical matter. Eventually, a suitable plot of land was allocated in San Stefano, where the treaty was signed, and the Russian army had been stationed during the war. The resulting monument, known as the Russian Monument at San Stefano, was constructed there by the Ottoman Empire as part of the war indemnity to the Russian Empire. Years later, the movie “Ayastefanos’taki Rus Abidesinin Yıkılışı” (The Demolition of the Monument at San Stefano), filmed by Fuat Bey on November 14, 1914, marked the inception of Turkish cinema history. This short documentary captures the demolition process of the monument and stands as one of the earliest known films in the annals of Turkish cinema (Odabaşı, 2018). Likewise, the 1912 film “Independența României” (Independence of Romania), directed by Aristide Demetriade, depicting the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and its role in Romania’s independence, is regarded as the country’s initial foray into the realm of cinematography and the earliest Romanian scripted film that has survived to this day (Căliman, 2017, pp. 29-32).

Undoubtedly, the Treaty of San Stefano marked a triumph for the Pan-Slavist ideology. However, Russia’s significant sway over the Ottoman Empire and its unilateral alteration of the prevailing political equilibrium encountered resistance from various other nations, notably Britain. Consequently, the provisions of the treaty underwent reevaluation and modification at the Berlin Congress, convened on June 13, 1878. Following the war, Russia had effectively seized nearly all of the Ottoman Empire’s European territories. The Ottomans recognized the sovereignty of Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia while simultaneously creating a significant Principality of Bulgaria as an independent vassal state under the Sultan’s jurisdiction, influenced by Russia. This move significantly extended Russia’s influence across the Balkans, prompting concerns among other European powers. Britain and France were wary of another power gaining dominance in the Mediterranean or the Middle East, regions where they aimed to secure significant colonial interests. Austria-Hungary sought to assert Habsburg control over the Balkans, while Germany aimed to prevent its ally from being drawn into conflicts.

German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck advocated for the convening of the Congress of Berlin to address the partitioning of the Ottoman Balkans among European powers and to uphold the League of the Three Emperors (Glenny, 2012, pp. 135-138).

Meanwhile, Britain, concerned about countering potential Russian encroachment in the Eastern Mediterranean, sought to utilize Cyprus as a strategic base. It asserted its determination to acquire the island, even by force if necessary, to bolster its position in the region. In hopes of gaining British support at the Berlin Congress, the Ottoman government ceded Cyprus to Britain through a treaty dated June 4, 1878. However, an additional treaty dated July 1, 1878, introduced a provision stipulating that Britain would relinquish control of Cyprus if Russia withdrew from the territories it occupied in Eastern Anatolia. Furthermore, it was established that the ownership of the island belonged to the Ottoman Empire (Gencer, 1992, p. 516). The congress participants aimed to undermine the burgeoning Pan-Slavic movement, which had sparked apprehension in Berlin and Vienna due to fears of a potential uprising against the House of Habsburg. Meanwhile, the British and French governments were troubled by the diminishing influence of the Ottoman Empire and Russia's cultural expansion into regions like Egypt and Palestine, which Britain and France had designs to colonize in the south. This dynamic set the stage for the Great Game, in which Great Britain became increasingly wary of Russia's expanding influence in the Middle East. The establishment of a new principality, encompassing a substantial portion of Macedonia and providing access to the Aegean Sea, posed a potential threat to the Dardanelles, a strategic passage separating the Black Sea from the Mediterranean. This arrangement was unacceptable to Britain, which regarded the entire Mediterranean as its sphere of influence. Any Russian attempt to gain a foothold in the region was perceived as a grave threat to British power.

The Berlin Congress commenced on June 13, 1878, with Bismarck presiding over the proceedings. The Ottoman Empire entered the congress, hopeful that the terms of the Treaty of San Stefano would be alleviated and significant revisions would be made. However, as negotiations unfolded, it became evident that the participating states were primarily focused on safeguarding their interests within Ottoman territories. Even the British representatives, whom the Ottomans had anticipated support from, did not hesitate to advance proposals contrary to Ottoman interests. Notably, Bismarck's firm control over the congress and his notably stern demeanor towards Ottoman representatives were

particularly striking (Altıntaş, 2018, pp. 83-87). According to the Treaty of Berlin, signed at the conclusion of the month-long congress, the territory of Bulgaria, as delineated by the Treaty of San Stefano, was to be divided into three distinct regions. Firstly, there would be a principality of Bulgaria under nominal Ottoman suzerainty, enjoying internal autonomy. The prince of this principality would be elected by the populace, endorsed by the Porte, and appointed with the consent of the major European powers. Ottoman troops would be absent, and the borders of the principality would be reduced. Secondly, Eastern Rumelia would be established as an administratively independent province but remain politically and militarily subordinate to the Ottoman Empire. It would be governed by a Christian governor appointed by the Porte for a five-year term, subject to the approval of the European states. Lastly, Macedonia would remain within the jurisdiction of the Ottoman Empire, contingent upon the implementation of specified reforms.

Furthermore, other provisions of the Treaty included the implementation of the 1868 Regulation in Crete by the Ottoman Empire and informing European states about it. Thessaly would be ceded to Greece, while Bosnia and Herzegovina would be occupied by Austria-Hungary. Montenegro's independence would be acknowledged, with minor adjustments to its borders. Serbia's independence would be recognized, and it would be granted Nis and Pirot. Romania's independence would also be recognized, and it would acquire Tulcea and Dobrudja in exchange for ceding Bessarabia to Russia. The Danube would be closed to warships but open to merchant vessels. Furthermore, the Ottoman Empire was compelled to concede Kars, Ardahan, and Batum to Russia in return for a portion of the war indemnity, while Kotur was given to Iran. Additionally, the status of the Straits was to adhere to the conditions outlined in the London Treaties of 1841 and the Paris Treaties of 1856 (Gencer, 1992, p. 517; Holland, 1885, pp. 277-312). To sum up, expanding from a bilateral concern between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, the Treaty of San Stefano drew the attention of major European powers through the Berlin Congress, wherein the principle of the integrity of the Ottoman territories as enshrined in the Treaty of Paris of 1856 was disregarded, resulting in territories being allocated to Iran and Greece despite their lack of involvement, ultimately failing to achieve the intended peace and fostering future conflicts. Thus, the increasing tensions in global politics and the shift in realpolitik resulting from this congress and the subsequent agreement would sow the seeds of a war unprecedented in scale in world history.

# Chapter 4

## Geopolitical Crossroads: Transformation of the Relations Following the World War I

*“Some wars name themselves - the Crimean War, the Civil War, the Franco-Prussian War, the Thirty Years’ War, the Revolutionary War, and many others. This is the Great War. It names itself.”* (“The Great War,” 1914).

In the October 1914 issue of Maclean’s Magazine, a brief text appearing at the bottom of the published page marked the initial assessment of what would later become known as “The Great War” following its outbreak. The war, later termed as the “World War” and eventually acknowledged as “World War I,” persisted for four years, three months, and two weeks, claiming millions of lives had already begun to show echoes of what was to come, perhaps decades before. Among these tensions and conflicts, the Balkan Wars undeniably stood as the closest, both geographically and historically, directly precipitating the outbreak of World War I. Furthermore, the assassination of the heir presumptive to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, by a Bosnian Serb named Gavrilo Princip, was followed by a sequence of diplomatic and military escalations among the major powers of Europe in the summer of 1914. The Congress of Berlin in 1878, as well as the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s unilateral annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in October 1908, which was previously under Ottoman authority, collectively contributed to the occurrences of the Balkan Wars and the subsequent chain of events. In this context, we will investigate how the historical dynamics of Turkish-Russian relations, as we handled in the previous chapter, the ideology of Pan-Slavism, and the interventions of European powers aimed at altering the geopolitical landscape have influenced tensions in the Balkans. We will also evaluate how specific events spanning from World War I to the Cold War impacted the broader framework of Turkish-Russian relations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## 4.1. Towards the Onset of the World War I

### 4.1.1. *Bosnian Crisis*

Under the terms of the Treaty of Berlin in 1878, the Ottoman Empire maintained control over the Straits, the crucial passage linking the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and enforced a prohibition on any foreign warships entering the Black Sea. This arrangement placed significant pressure on the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Navy and proved ineffective for Russia during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. Alexander Izvolsky, the Russian Foreign Minister, sought to amend this situation to secure passage for Russian vessels through the Straits. Meanwhile, Alois Aehrenthal, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, aimed for complete control over Bosnia-Herzegovina. Although Austria-Hungary had administered these territories since 1878, the Ottoman Empire retained legal ownership. Aehrenthal orchestrated a comprehensive diplomatic agreement that promised substantial advantages for both parties involved. With Russia's approval, Austria would acquire full sovereignty over Bosnia, while Russia would gain the desired access through the Straits for its naval ships. During a clandestine meeting held on September 15-16, Aehrenthal and Izvolsky engaged in discussions without keeping any official records, resulting in divergent recollections from both sides.

Aehrenthal operated under the assumption that his plan had obtained full approval from Russia, albeit without specifying the intended timing. Conversely, Izvolsky expected prior notification before any action occurred. Aehrenthal ambiguously informed major powers of the impending event but withheld specific details. The international community was taken aback when a press release was issued on October 6, 1908, in Vienna announcing the complete annexation of Bosnia. Contrary to Aehrenthal's anticipation of widespread European support, the move provoked strong condemnation from all sides. Izvolsky vehemently criticized the action and called for an international conference on Bosnia and Pan-Slavic factions mobilized in opposition in Russia. While Rome severed its alliance with Vienna, the British expressed outrage. France issued a condemnation, and the Ottoman Empire found itself bewildered, but Serbia reacted with particular fury and initiated clandestine efforts to foment rebellion in Bosnia through the formation of secret guerrilla groups (Albertini, 1952, pp. 206-216).

#### *4.1.2. Bulgaria's Declaration of Independence*

One significant administrative change brought about by the Treaty of Berlin in 1878 was the establishment of the Principality of Bulgaria within the Ottoman Empire, with the subsequent unification of Eastern Rumelia in 1885. Afterward, Bulgaria's primary foreign policy goal was the consolidation of all Bulgarian-populated regions under "foreign" control into a unified Bulgarian state. Yet, to pursue this objective and join an anti-Ottoman coalition to reclaim these territories through military means, Bulgaria needed to assert its independence first. Under normal circumstances, Bulgaria's declaration of independence would have constituted a breach of the provisions outlined in the Treaty of Berlin and would have faced significant resistance from the Great Powers. However, the upheaval within the Ottoman Empire following the Young Turk Revolution of July 1908 presented opportune circumstances for Bulgaria. Moreover, Austria's intention to annex Bosnia prompted the pivotal meeting in September 1908, as mentioned earlier, during which the Austrian and Russian envoys mutually agreed not to obstruct Bulgaria's potential declaration of independence (Albertini, 1952, pp. 216-219). Emboldened by these developments, Prince Ferdinand I of Bulgaria proclaimed independence on October 5, 1908. As part of the proclamation, he announced Bulgaria's elevation from a principality to a kingdom and assumed the title of "Tsar" (Anderson & Hershey, 1918, pp. 380-382).

#### *4.1.3. Creation of the Balkan League*

Hall (2000) states that following the Bosnian crisis, the governments of Belgrade and Sofia embarked on addressing their respective national unity concerns. The Serbs, facing heightened anti-Serbian measures by Austria-Hungary, sought backing. Meanwhile, the Bulgarians maintained their focus on aspirations in Macedonia and, to a lesser extent, Thrace (Trakya). Both governments aimed to take action before the Young Turks could enact significant reforms. In the autumn of 1911, Bulgarians and Serbs initiated talks for an alliance treaty led by Bulgarian Prime Minister Ivan Evstratiev Geshov and Serbian Foreign Minister Milan Milovanovich. After three months, aided by Russian diplomacy, they reached an agreement on March 7, 1912. It aimed for joint

military action against the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires and outlined territorial interests in Thrace, Kosovo, and Albania. In case of Macedonia's autonomy failure, Bulgaria would claim southern parts while a disputed zone, overseen by the Russian Tsar, would handle negotiations for the north. The treaty hinted at potential conflict with Austria but primarily targeted war with the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, the eruption of the Tripolitan War or the Italo-Turkish War of 1911 acted as a trigger, exacerbating the already fragile state of the Ottoman Empire and fueling the ambitions of Balkan nations. Serbia and Bulgaria, influenced by Russia, strengthened their alliance against Austria-Hungary on March 13, 1912. However, beneath the surface of this agreement lay a hidden agenda, subtly shifting their focus toward weakening the Ottoman Empire. Serbia formed a joint alliance with Montenegro, while Bulgaria made a similar pact with Greece, expanding their diplomatic maneuvers. With the inclusion of Montenegro in the agreements, the League reached its full composition. In the final phase, Bulgaria had official written alliances with Greece, Montenegro, and Serbia, while Serbia had a written pact with Montenegro. On the other hand, the agreements between Greece and Serbia, and Greece and Montenegro were informal. Despite these shortcomings, the Balkan allies were prepared to engage in conflict to advance their goals of national unity (pp. 9-13).

#### *4.1.4. First Balkan War*

In September 1911, the Tripolitan War, also known as the Italo-Turkish War, erupted, with Italian forces not only occupying the Twelve Islands (Dodecanese) but also posing a threat to the Dardanelles and even the Ottoman capital. Additionally, the resurgence of the 1910 Albanian rebellion added to the turmoil. Amidst the suppression of the Albanian uprising, Said Pasha's cabinet resigned under pressure from opposing officers within the army. The new government, led by Gazi Ahmed Muhtar Pasha, was unaware of the united front formed by the Balkan nations against the Ottoman Empire. He even demobilized the Ottoman troops in Rumelia, relying on the assurance given to the Ottoman Foreign Minister Gabriel Noradounghian Efendi that there would be no war by Russia, which secretly supported the Balkan alliance. Meanwhile, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), then in opposition, advocated for a conflict to bring about the government's downfall through an inevitable defeat. When Albanian rebels sought refuge

in Montenegro, the Ottoman government dispatched troops to address the situation. On October 3, 1912, Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro jointly communicated a note to the Ottoman government, urging the grant of autonomy to former Serbian territories, Macedonia, Albania, and Crete within a three-day ultimatum. At the expiration of this period, they put a three-day deadline again and also issued a joint note to the Western powers, warning that if their demands were not met, they would resort to military force. Thus, the initial phase of the Balkan Wars commenced on October 8, 1912, with Montenegro's declaration of war on the Ottoman Empire, followed by Serbia, Bulgaria, and then Greece on October 17, 1912 (Küçük, 1992, pp. 23-24).

The war unfolded primarily on two fronts: the eastern theater, where Bulgarian forces fiercely fought in Thrace, and the western theater, where a coalition of Allied forces operated in Macedonia and Albania. Additionally, naval confrontations involving the Greek navy heightened tensions at sea. An important turning point of the war was the decisive defeat of the Ottoman Eastern Army on October 23, 1912, when the Bulgarian army, three times superior in numbers, inflicted a decisive defeat on the Ottoman Eastern Army and forced it to retreat to Çatalca. Concurrently, on the western front, the Serbs achieved victory over Ottoman forces in Kumanovo on October 23-24. Meanwhile, Tahsin Pasha surrendered to the Greeks in Thessaloniki with his sizable army of over 30,000 soldiers. These consecutive setbacks and the chaotic nature of the war led to significant political divisions within the Ottoman Army. Subsequently, on October 29, Gazi Ahmed Muhtar Pasha's cabinet resigned, and a new governmental leadership emerged with Kâmil Pasha at the helm. Amid the ongoing conflict and the urgent need for a cessation of hostilities, diplomatic efforts were initiated to seek mediation for an armistice. However, taking advantage of the vulnerabilities exposed by the Balkan defeat, the Committee of Union and Progress moved strategically to seize control of the government. This calculated maneuver led to the dramatic events of the 1913 Ottoman coup d'état, also known as the Raid on the Sublime Porte, on January 23.

Following the coup, the newly established Ottoman government opted to withdraw from the London Peace Conference negotiations, which commenced on December 3, 1912. Following an unsuccessful Ottoman counterattack in Western Thrace, Ioannina fell to Greek forces on March 6, Edirne (Adrianople) was seized by Bulgarians on March 26, and Iskorda was occupied by Montenegrins on April 23. Consequently, the

First Balkan War marked the end of Ottoman control west of the Çatalca line in Europe after nearly five centuries. As per the Treaty of London, signed on May 30, 1913, following the resumption of peace negotiations, the territorial distribution was as follows: Bulgaria retained control over Edirne, Thrace, and Alexandroupoli (Dedeağaç); Greece gained possession of Thessaloniki (Selanik), Southern Macedonia, and Crete; Serbia acquired Northern and Central Macedonia; and Romania took Silistra. Furthermore, the fate of the Aegean Islands was deferred to the decision of the major powers involved (Anderson & Hershey, 1918, pp. 429-432). However, this peace, which pushed the Ottoman Empire to the Midye-Enez line, would not last long.

#### *4.1.5. Second Balkan War*

Following the Treaty of London, dissatisfaction with the established borders prevailed among all involved states. They perceived the territorial division as unjust and skewed, particularly with Bulgaria being allocated more land than deemed appropriate. Romania, although not directly engaged in the conflict, harbored discomfort over Bulgaria's expansion and was dissatisfied with the territorial adjustment that granted Silistra to it. Certainly, the primary objective of the Ottoman Empire was to reclaim the territories it had lost during the First Balkan War. Indeed, the issue extended beyond merely removing the Ottoman Empire from the Balkans; it also pertained to determining who would step in to fill the power vacuum left by it. Bulgaria's national ambitions, as articulated by Tsar Ferdinand I prior to the Balkan Wars, encompassed the desire to control both Eastern and Western Thrace, along with the entirety of Macedonia, including Thessaloniki, Edirne, and even Istanbul. However, the impracticality of these aspirations became apparent early on, notably with the Bulgarian leadership persisting in their efforts to seize the Ottoman capital despite clear warnings from Russia. On November 5, 1912, Russia issued explicit threats of military action should the Bulgarian army advance towards Istanbul, indicating a lack of realistic foresight on the part of Bulgarian leadership (Penchev, 2006).

On March 9, 1913, Greek Foreign Minister Lambros Koromilas directed the Greek ambassador in Belgrade to initiate negotiations with the Serbian government for a bilateral alliance agreement. As a result, the final Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Mutual

Protection was signed at Thessaloniki on June 1, 1913, by the Greek ambassador to Belgrade, Jean Alexandropoulos, and the Serbian ambassador to Athens, Mateja Bošković. According to this agreement, in the event of a Bulgarian attack, Serbia and Greece would provide military support to each other. (Bataković, 2004, pp. 59-60) Bulgaria declared war against this alliance united against it, and high tensions between the signatories of the Treaty of London quickly escalated into war by the end of June. Under attack from all sides, Bulgaria was forced to evacuate Edirne. The Ottoman Empire then moved to recapture the city and took it back in July without firing a single shot (Hall, 2000, p. 119).

In the wake of dire developments on the battlefield, Stoyan Danev's pro-Russian government in Sofia stepped down on July 13. Danev found himself in an unsustainable position, and Russia offered no relief amidst Bulgaria's escalating crisis. The subsequent government, installed just four days later, comprised politicians harboring anti-Russian sentiments, who turned to Germany and Austria-Hungary for support against occupation and for post-war guidance. Led by Vasil Radoslavov, this new administration promptly pursued diplomatic avenues to address the worsening situation. Tsar Ferdinand's appeal to King Carol via the Italian ambassador in Bucharest on July 22 halted the Romanian advancement, likely safeguarding Sofia as the sole Balkan capital untouched by foreign occupation throughout all the conflicts. Meanwhile, efforts by Russia and other major powers to conclude the war commenced, urging Serbia and Romania to cease hostilities. Despite these initiatives, talks faltered as the Serbs and Greeks, keen on maximizing territorial gains in Macedonia before negotiations, hesitated to agree to a cessation of fighting. Nevertheless, all sides concurred with the Romanian proposal to hold peace discussions in Bucharest (Hall, 2000, p. 120).

Under the Treaty of Bucharest signed on August 10, 1913, among delegates from Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, and Greece, significant territorial adjustments were made. Dobrudja was ceded entirely to Romania, while Macedonia was partitioned between Serbia and Greece, with Montenegro retaining all of Akova (Bijelo Polje). Following the conclusion of the war, another significant agreement was signed between Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire in Istanbul on September 29, 1913. According to this agreement, certain territorial arrangements were made: Edirne, Dimetoka (Didymoteicho), and Kırklareli were confirmed to remain under Ottoman control, while

Kavala and Alexandroupoli (Dedeağaç) were assigned to Bulgaria. The Maritsa (Meriç) River was established as the official border between the two nations, and provisions were included to ensure the protection of political, religious, and social rights for Turks residing within the Kingdom of Bulgaria (Anderson & Hershey, 1918, pp. 439-443).

#### *4.1.6. Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the Crisis Afterward*

Starting from the latter half of the 19th century, the dynamics of power between the Ottoman Empire, grappling with internal rebellions and numerous economic and political challenges, and the Russian Empire, actively involved in supporting rebellious movements within Slavic and Orthodox communities in the Ottoman lands, became increasingly intricate with the interference of major European powers (Roudometof, 2001, pp. xi-xiv). In 1908, following the Austrian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a gathering took place at the Town Hall in Belgrade, attended by ministers, officials, and generals. During this meeting, they inaugurated Narodna Obradna (National Defence), a semi-secret society with a focus on Pan-Serbism. It quickly integrated with other local factions like Mlada Bosna (Young Bosnia), primarily comprising young Serbian male students. This movement drew inspiration from a wide range of sources, including German Romanticism, anarchism, Russian revolutionary socialism, the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky and Friedrich Nietzsche, as well as the Battle of Kosovo between the Serbian Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović and the Ottoman Empire under the command of Sultan Murad I in 1389. (Pavlowitch, 2002, p. 90) Over the subsequent three years, Narodna Obradna developed connections with the similarly inclined “Ujedinjenje ili smrt” (Unification or Death), also known as the “Black Hand” association, established by Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijević in 1911, leading to parallel activities and shared membership between these organizations (Roudometof, 2001, p. 170).

Gavrilo Princip, whose father had been involved in the Herzegovina rebellion of 1875 against the Ottoman Empire, was 20 years old at the time of the assassination in Sarajevo (Kidner et al., 2014, p. 756). He had connections with both the Black Hand and Young Bosnia groups and maintained a close friendship with Danilo Ilić, one of the key figures behind the assassination plot (Kantowicz, 1999, p. 97). Nedeljko Čabrinović, positioned by Ilić on the opposite side of the street near the Miljacka River, approached

the convoy of Franz Ferdinand during his visit to Sarajevo and hurled a grenade at the Archduke's car. However, the grenade landed on the street, exploding underneath another vehicle in the convoy. Following this failed attempt, Ferdinand and his wife Sophie proceeded to the town hall for a scheduled reception, albeit after a tense few moments. After stopping here for a while, they left, accompanied by General Oskar Potiorek, who had identified a safer route out of the city. However, due to a miscommunication regarding the route change, after the warning, the driver halted the vehicle to make a reverse maneuver on the way out of the city. Seizing this opportunity, Gavrilo Princip approached the car and fatally shot Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie (King & Woolmans, 2013, p. 206). Princip's statements in court following the assassination contributed significantly to the already intense tensions of the time. These remarks acted as a catalyst, sparking a crisis that ultimately precipitated the outbreak of World War I: *"I am a Yugoslav nationalist, aiming for the unification of all Yugoslavs, and I do not care what form of state, but it must be free from Austria"* (Dedijer, 1967, p. 341).

Indeed, the words of Gavrilo Princip, a 20-year-old student, illuminated numerous underlying issues, including the idea of Pan-Slavism, which contributed to the complex geopolitical landscape of the time. Following the assassination, the Austro-Hungarian Empire issued an ultimatum to the Kingdom of Serbia, and the hostilities commenced on July 28 with the Austro-Hungarian invasion of Serbia. Subsequently, Germany invaded Belgium, Luxembourg, and France, while Russia launched an offensive against Germany. On the eastern front, Russian forces initially achieved success against Austro-Hungarian forces but faced setbacks against East Prussian, Polish, and German armies. The war expanded further as the Ottoman Empire entered in 1914, followed by Italy and Bulgaria in 1915 and Romania in 1916. During the initial battles, two German battleships, SMS Goeben and SMS Breslau, sought refuge in the Dardanelles after being pursued by a large British fleet. After Britain sent a note to the Ottoman Empire, which considered this a violation of neutrality, these ships were purchased by the Ottoman Navy and put into Ottoman service under the names "Yavuz" and "Midilli." These ships left Istanbul for patrolling and drilling in the Black Sea, and bombarded Odesa and Sevastopol on the night of October 29-30 (Van Der Vat, 2000, pp. 11-16, 19-30). In response, Russia and the Entente powers declared war on the Ottoman Empire one after another. Consequently, on October 30, 1914, the Ottomans officially entered the World War I.

## **4.2. Parallel Paths, Different Destinies: National Struggle and Bolshevism**

### *4.2.1. The Rise of Bolshevism in Tsarist Russia*

The Russian Empire's recalibration of strategic maneuvers after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 not only set the stage for subsequent conflicts but also entangled it in intricate alliances in Europe, and this complex geopolitical panorama found its reflection in the socio-political landscape of Russia. Deep-rooted social disparities, economic hardships, and discontent among the marginalized segments of society created a fertile environment for the burgeoning of revolutionary ideologies. World War I acted as a catalyzing agent, intensifying pre-existing grievances and fanning the flames of anti-establishment sentiments. The war's immense strain on resources and the populace exacerbated latent frustrations, providing an opportune milieu for the emergence of radical movements. The Tsarist regime's authoritarian rule, marked by political repression and perceived neglect of the immediate needs of the people, not only alienated substantial portions of the populace and fueled discontent but also created an environment ripe for revolution, serving as potent fuel for Bolshevism. Bolshevism, heralding the prospect of sweeping societal metamorphosis, fair allocation of land, and the inception of a socialist state, struck a profound chord with the yearnings of individuals relegated to the fringes of the prevailing societal structure. In the crucible of discontent and amidst the chaos of war, it emerged as a powerful force, captivating minds with its radical vision and igniting fervent desires for change (Mawdsley, 2011, pp. 18-24).

Given that the Russian Revolution stands out as one of the most transformative and intricate occurrences in history, comprehending its cultural roots and intellectual undercurrents, particularly among the intelligentsia, is imperative. Within this framework, the escalating social unrest within the Empire served as a trigger, prompting Russian intellectuals to unite in their quest for solutions. Naturally, the impact of the nationalist concept, disseminated under the influence of the French Revolution, instigated revolts against the Tsarist regime. Concurrently, this ideology impelled Russian intellectuals to establish covert organizations and partake in activities opposing the regime. Throughout this progression, intellectuals encountered challenges in eliciting a widespread response; however, the pervasive social tensions and discontent were so

pronounced that the masses began to vocalize their concerns, coalescing in a collective pursuit of a shared remedy. By the year 1917, it became evident that the pleas of the Russian populace fell on deaf ears within the government, and the Tsarist regime resiliently withstood threats from both liberal and socialist quarters. This resistance, coupled with the substantial defeat against Japan, the setbacks in World War I, and the political estrangement on the home front, converged into a revolutionary movement. Lenin adeptly harnessed growing discontent and the desire for change through sophisticated propaganda techniques and organizational strategies, leading to a series of events that amplified the impact of his propaganda (Suny, 2011, p. 198).

The 1917 Revolution had its roots in bread shortages and led to a workers' uprising in St. Petersburg, then known as Petrograd, which quickly turned into a revolt. Commencing in January 1917, strikes unfolded, involving thousands of workers across many workplaces throughout the Empire, with Petrograd and Moscow notably experiencing robust strike movements that further deteriorated in February, compelling all workers in these cities to partake in the strikes. At the time, the Tsar was in Pskov, responding to the disturbances by instructing Petrograd garrison commander Khabalov to quell the uprising. However, on February 26, the Vyborgsky district of Petrograd fell into workers' hands, and soldiers started joining the rebel cause. Moreover, the Duma speaker sent a telegram to the Tsar, urging him to heed the people's pleas. The Tsar declared the Duma dissolved, but its members defied this order and continued their meetings in the Tauride Palace. Meanwhile, troops sent to Petrograd aligned themselves with the revolutionary movement and played an important role in the victory of the revolutionaries on February 27, eventually leading to the formation of the Provisional Government on March 2, 1917. As a result, Nicholas II abdicated, and his brother Michael temporarily took the throne until the All-Russian Constituent Assembly was convened to draft a new constitution approving the rule of Russia by the Provisional Government. During this period, the influence of this government remained limited. As political struggles, strikes, and demonstrations persisted, the Bolshevik Party, led by Lenin, faced a loss of public confidence when documents revealed financial support from the German government (Sisson, 1918). Another government change occurred in July, and Kerensky was elected Prime Minister. However, Kerensky's insistence on continuing the war, coupled with public war weariness and Lenin's promise to promptly end the conflict, ultimately led to

the Bolsheviks seizing their power and changing the direction of the wind. In a letter to the Central Committee and the Petrograd and Moscow Committees, Lenin emphasized the critical nature of the situation, stating, “*History will not forgive us if we do not assume power now*” (Lenin, 1977, p. 21).

Furthermore, the erosion of military discipline resulting from some of the reforms initiated by Kerensky to address army discontent played into the hands of Lenin and his associates. The failure of the Kerensky Offensive propelled army commanders into the political arena, fostering internal divisions among the soldiers (Ferro, 1971, p. 496). The Bolsheviks overthrew the Kerensky government, taking advantage of propaganda efforts, and on October 25, 1917, they organized an armed uprising led by Lenin and Trotsky, signaling a decisive turning point in the Russian Revolution, leading to the establishment of the Soviet government and the beginning of the Bolshevik era. The Council of People’s Commissars, Sovnarkom, chaired by Lenin, emerged as the highest executive authority, reflecting the Bolshevik commitment to socialist principles. This transformative period set the stage for the Russian Civil War and the formation of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, laying the foundation for the world’s first socialist state. The government formed as a result of the revolution was against engaging in war, prompting it to swiftly initiate the signing of peace treaties with European states. Despite its reluctance to concede territory, the new Soviet government, prioritizing peace over conflict, ultimately acquiesced to the substantial territorial demands put forth by the European states after internal negotiations. In essence, the convergence of the factors we already mentioned, with economic grievances playing a major role, gave rise to the upheaval known as the Great October Socialist Revolution. This transformative event resulted in the formation of a state that adopted a political and economic system rooted in socialism: the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

#### *4.2.2. The Turkish National Movement and the Creation of the Republic*

When the Ottoman Empire entered World War I, it found itself in a notably fragile state marked by internal challenges and external influences, notwithstanding its expansive territorial holdings. The Ottoman government’s confidence in Germany’s prospective triumph in the conflict, coupled with the anticipated benefits of such victory and a motive

to alleviate political isolation, led it to seek a strategic partnership and shared interests with Germany, thus aligning itself with the Central Powers. Upon entering World War I, the Ottoman Empire actively engaged on multiple fronts, confronting the British Empire, the French Republic, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada in the Dardanelles; clashing with the Russian Empire in the Caucasus; contending with the British Empire in Mesopotamia; encountering British and Egyptian forces in Sinai and Palestine; and battling British and Indian troops in Iraq. While ultimately ending the war with an overall defeat, one standout success was the Empire's effective defense during the Gallipoli Campaign, since it thwarted the Allies' attempt to capture Gallipoli and blockaded their passage through the Straits. For this reason, the echoes of the Battle of Gallipoli have resulted in wide-ranging consequences. The temporary liberation of İstanbul and the Ottoman Empire from occupation, albeit significant, marked a crucial turning point. Similarly, the strategic impact of preventing aid from Entente powers to Russia, indirectly facilitating the conditions for the emergence of the Bolshevik revolution, is noteworthy. However, the existence of the Gallipoli front extended the impact of World War I globally for at least two more years (Şahin, 2009, p. 108).

Simultaneously, geopolitical maneuvers emerged, including agreements for the partition of the Ottoman Empire, which would play a crucial role in shaping the post-war landscape. We can argue that, in the midst of this prolonged conflict, Mustafa Kemal Pasha's name became widely recognized due to his leadership during this battle. Mustafa Kemal's role as the commander of the Anafartalar Group in the Battle of Gallipoli is particularly noteworthy. He successfully organized the defensive line and put up an effective resistance. Besides, his leadership skills motivated the Ottoman forces during the critical moments of the Gallipoli Campaign and led them to success (Fewster et al., 2003, p. 8). It is obvious that this battle laid the foundations for Mustafa Kemal's visionary leadership journey. In light of the aforementioned details, the economic challenges and scarcity of resources confronted by the Ottoman Empire during the war further undermined its already fragile structure. Throughout this period, the Empire grappled with social, economic, and political upheavals. As the war neared its end and the Allied Powers faced defeat, the Ottoman Empire became the focal point of post-war treaties. Among these agreements, the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920 proposed a substantial division of Ottoman territories. This circumstance elicited a strong reaction and a fervent

desire for resistance among the Turkish nation, laying the groundwork for the commencement of the Turkish War of Independence.

Mustafa Kemal Pasha embarked on the journey for national independence in Anatolia with his arrival in Samsun on May 19, 1919. Surveying the overall landscape, he firmly conveyed his resolve by declaring, “*Either independence or death!*” (Kemal, 2020, p. 26). Subsequent to his arrival, efforts to consolidate local resistance movements against occupation became crucial. A series of declarations and meetings followed one after another. Firstly, the Havza Circular, issued on May 28-29, 1919, as a result of this unification, urged protests against occupations, the retention of armies, and the safeguarding of weapons and ammunition. Secondly, the Amasya Circular, declared on June 22, 1919, and signed by Mustafa Kemal Pasha and others, formed the core leadership for the War of Independence. Addressing civil administrators and military commanders, it emphasized the peril to national independence and homeland integrity, asserting that İstanbul was under occupation and only the determination of the nation could preserve independence. Thirdly, the Erzurum Congress, held in July-August 1919, attended by representatives from Eastern Anatolia and the Eastern Black Sea regions, made crucial decisions such as recognizing the borders before the Armistice of Mudros, which caused the occupation of İstanbul as homeland and opposing territorial disintegration. Fourthly, the Sivas Congress, held in September 1919, ratified significant resolutions, including the unification of defense societies into the Association of the Defence of Rights of Anatolia and Rumelia and appointing Mustafa Kemal Pasha as its chairman. Lastly, the Amasya Meeting, held in October 1919, aimed to apprise the İstanbul government of Anatolian developments, leading to the establishment of the Ali Rıza Pasha government. This meeting conveyed Sivas Congress decisions, emphasized the need for prompt Chamber of Deputies, Meclis-i Mebûsan, underscored the pitfalls of lacking a parliament, and reinforced the National Struggle and the importance of national will.

Adopted on January 28, 1920, by the final Chamber of Deputies of the Ottoman Empire, the Declaration of the National Pact, Misak-ı Milli, is a significant document underscoring the goal of safeguarding the independence and territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. This pact asserted the preservation of the borders, which was in effect on October 30, 1918, the conclusion of World War I. This decision faced opposition from the Entente and the İstanbul government. On March 16, 1920, the Entente extended

occupation, entering İstanbul with additional forces, shutting down Parliament, and exiling members of the Felâh-ı Vatan Group, Liberation of the Homeland, to Malta. In response, the Representation Committee, led by Mustafa Kemal Pasha, resolved to establish a new parliament in Ankara, which later became the Grand National Assembly, convened on April 23, 1920, serving as the focal point of the National Struggle and sustaining the fight for independence. Among its initial actions, the Assembly enacted the Law on Treason and Patriotism on April 29, establishing the Independence Courts. This was primarily prompted by the substantial challenge posed by internal uprisings during the War of Independence, with both the İstanbul government and the Entente coordinating different rebellions to quell resistance in Anatolia. Throughout this period, the Entente sought to compel the Empire to sign the Treaty of Sèvres. While the İstanbul government, led by Damat Ferit Pasha, signed the treaty, the Ankara government declared it unacceptable, issuing a treason warrant against the signatories.

On November 9, 1920, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Pasha, the Ankara Government made the decision to establish a regular army to bolster the progress of the National Struggle and halt the Greek army's advance. During this period, clashes with Armenia occurred on the Eastern front in September-October 1920, led by Kazım Pasha. As a result, Kars and Sarıkamış were captured, and Türkiye's northeastern borders were defined by the Treaty of Alexandropol, or Gümrü, on December 2, 1920, and the Treaty of Moscow on March 16, 1921. Despite these victories, the primary threat was the expansion of Greek forces, with British support, towards central Anatolia. The Battles of İnönü were crucial engagements aimed at halting the Greek advance. The Turkish side emerged victorious in the battles of Eskişehir-İnönü and İnönü II, limiting the Greek progress. The subsequent Battle of Sakarya compelled the Greek army to retreat to the Eskişehir-Afyon line, safeguarding Ankara, the focal point of the War of Independence, despite significant Turkish losses. From August 26 to August 30, 1922, the Battle of Dumlupınar resulted in a Turkish victory, leading to the liberation of occupied cities one by one. The Mudanya Armistice, signed on October 11, 1922, marked the departure of occupation armies from Anatolia. Subsequently, on July 24, 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne was signed, officially recognizing Türkiye's independence and sovereignty, abolished capitulations, rejected plans to establish other states by fragmenting and dividing in Anatolia, and successfully concluded the War of Independence (Tusan, 2023, p. 218).

#### *4.2.3. The Crucial Role of Timing*

All the reasons, both internal and external, that drove the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire into World War I were, in one way or another, also the reasons for the emergence of these two movements, both, of course, distinct and unique. While these movements are marked by separate details, certain situations and moments draw parallels between them, with timing standing out as the most significant factor. The culmination of World War I saw the effective dissolution of the Russian Empire in 1917, and the Ottoman Empire *de facto* ended in 1918. In 1917, pervasive discontent fueled a revolution, enabling the Bolsheviks to prevail in the Russian Civil War from 1922 to 1923 and ultimately establish the USSR across a significant expanse of the former Russian Empire (Volkov, 2005, p. 4). Moreover, subsequent to the Ottoman Empire's defeat in World War I, it ratified the Armistice of Mudros in 1918, leading to the Turkish War of Independence, waged against the occupying Entente States, ultimately resulting in the declaration of the Republic in 1923 (Bayarslan, 2023, p. 424). In brief, the War's devastating impact and shifting global dynamics became a catalyst for reshaping the equilibrium and interaction between state and society in numerous regions, exemplified by the USSR in Russia and the Republic of Türkiye in Anatolia.

#### *4.2.4. Dismantling Dynastic Authorities From Power*

The transformations in the wake of global upheavals made it inevitable that regimes and governing cadres would undergo change. Because, in the eyes of the revolutionary movements, it was the mistakes of the rulers that led the world into such disasters. Thus, both movements opted to eliminate the dynastic families that had governed for centuries. Undoubtedly, this is inherent in revolutionary movements. In the Russian context, it manifested as the execution of the Romanov family, while on the Turkish side, it took the form of the compelled deportation of the Osmanoğlu family (Sokolov, 1925, p. 191; Bardakçı, 2006, p. 5). The primary objective was to inhibit any member of the dynastic family from engaging in activities that could disrupt the revolutionary movements. This aimed to prevent a regression to the past and thwart foreign states from exploiting these family members for future strategic planning.

Moreover, these groundbreaking endeavors were motivated not only by a wish to distance themselves from historical norms but also to institute a fresh system that reflected the principles advocated by the revolutionary groups.

#### *4.2.5. Perceptions of Each Other and the Evolution of Russo-Turkish Relations*

Certain unfolding events that are bound to influence the dynamics of their future engagement have contributed to a sense of closeness between the two movements. One aspect of this is connected to the Turkish perception of Bolshevism. According to Baytal (2023), the revolution in Russia brought relief to the Ottoman army on the Caucasus front, and Istanbul, along with the Bosphorus, were no longer under Russia's threat. Simultaneously, as the Bolsheviks withdrew from the war, they exposed the secret treaties from the Tsarist era, leading to increased interest and credit from the Turkish populace toward the Soviet regime. Starting November 27, 1917, the Turkish press extensively covered the secret treaties, highlighting how the Ottoman Empire was delineated through these covert agreements. Consequently, a spontaneous admiration for the Bolsheviks emerged within Turkish society. Moreover, Lenin's pledges of freedom for nations were perceived as a highly positive development by the Turkish people, raising hopes for the independence of Turks in Russian lands. Consequently, the Istanbul and Anatolian press published articles and poems emphasizing Russo-Turkish identity, attempting to shape public opinion favorably towards the liberation of the Caucasus and Turkestan (p. 72).

The Anatolian movement, evolving from the organization of national resistance units, adamantly resisted the Entente forces' occupation, the enforcement of the Treaty of Sèvres, and the Greek presence in Anatolia. In response to these challenges, it embarked on a resolute struggle. Throughout this phase, participants in the National Struggle were committed to forging collaboration with the Bolsheviks, a sentiment reciprocated positively by the Bolsheviks. This mutual support between 1919 and 1922 culminated in a strengthened relationship between the governments of the two states, both actively seeking international legitimacy. Genç & Esin (2018) argue that the shared principle of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" was applicable to both parties. Soviet Russia, at the time, was embroiled in a civil war against factions backed by the Entente, aiming to curb the global spread of Bolshevism. Simultaneously, the National Struggle

fought against Greek forces in Anatolia, also backed by the Entente (p. 70). It became evident that Britain was viewed as a shared adversary by both Ankara and Moscow.

This was underscored by various factors, such as Russian soldiers occasionally inscribing “*We do not want the Straits anymore!*” on the trenches along the Caucasus fronts and Britain’s increasing dominance in regions crucial for Russia’s access to warm seas, including the Caucasus, Iran, and Afghanistan. On April 26, 1920, the Grand National Assembly penned a letter to the Council of Executive Commissars in Moscow, affirming its resolve to combat imperialism alongside revolutionary Russia. It further declared its intention to dispatch a delegation to Moscow. This decision of the Grand National Assembly can be seen as the initiation of formal relations between the new Turkish state and Soviet Russia. The progression of relations encountered a significant hurdle due to the Soviet Russian Foreign Commissioner Georgy Chicherin’s demand that Armenians be granted control over some territories in the Caucasus. In response, the negotiations were interrupted, and the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps, commanded by Kâzım Karabekir, launched an offensive on the Eastern Front in September 1920, reclaiming Sarıkamış, Kars, Ardahan, Artvin, Batum, and Iğdır – all within the borders outlined by the National Pact. Additionally, Gyumri was captured, prompting the initiation of peace negotiations on November 22, 1920 (Akarslan, 1995).

Consequently, the Treaty of Moscow or the Treaty of Brotherhood was signed on March 19, 1921, as a result of the defeat of the Turkish armies in the Eastern Front against the Armenians in September 1920 and in the West against the Greeks at the First Battle of İnönü in January 1921, which increased the negotiating power of Ankara’s representatives in Moscow. Thus, Soviet Russia emerged as the inaugural state to acknowledge the Turkish parliament, leading to the establishment of amicable relations between the two sides (Belov et al., 1959, pp. 597-604). Afterward, Russia assured that any treaty unrecognized by Türkiye would similarly be rejected by them. They pledged to supply the Ankara government with arms and ammunition for two divisions and offer 10 million gold rubles in aid while also acknowledging the terms of the Treaty of Gyumri. With the exception of Batumi, Georgia agreed to reincorporate Kars and Ardahan, two of the three sanjaks separated from the Ottoman Empire by the 1878 Treaty of Berlin, back into Turkish territory. Other issues were resolved with the signing of the Treaty of Kars on October 13, 1921 (Küçük, 2020).

### 4.3. Milestones in Turkish-Soviet Relations

#### 4.3.1. Mosul Dispute and the Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality

The official establishment of Turkish-Soviet relations through the 1921 treaty persisted following the formation of the Soviet Union in 1922, the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye in 1923, and the passing of Lenin in 1924. Under the leadership of President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Türkiye and Joseph Stalin on the Soviet side, these relations continued to develop. Yakov Zaharovich Surits, an experienced diplomat who had previously served as the Soviet Union's Ambassador to Afghanistan, Ambassador to Norway, and Turkestan Commissioner, assumed his role as the Soviet Ambassador to Türkiye on June 23, 1923. Surits' appointment carried significant weight in shaping and sustaining Turkish-Soviet relations at the beginning of the Stalin era. At Surits' suggestion to Prime Minister İsmet Pasha to revise and enhance the terms of the 1921 treaty, negotiations commenced to further develop Turkish-Soviet relations through a new framework. Chicherin instructed Surits via telegram in September 1924 to propose to the Turkish side the inclusion of conditions on military neutrality and refraining from participating in alliances against each other (Koblyakov et al., 1963, p. 766).

At this juncture, another significant international event was unfolding, which would have a bearing on the dynamics between Türkiye and the Soviet Union. According to Benhür (2008), the Mosul dispute, left unresolved by the Treaty of Lausanne, remained a longstanding issue between Türkiye and Britain, leading to periodic tensions. Factors such as the Sheikh Said rebellion, European developments, and Türkiye's socio-economic conditions influenced the Turkish government's position on the matter of Mosul. Given the League of Nations' heavy British influence at the time, prospects for an outcome favoring Türkiye seemed dim. Recognizing this, Mustafa Kemal tailored Turkish foreign policy accordingly, while the Soviet Union, wary of potential alliances against it, prioritized maintaining friendly dialogue with Türkiye and supported Türkiye's stance against Western powers. (p. 297) Moreover, the remarks made by Mustafa Kemal during his speech at the opening of parliament in November 1925 underscored the reciprocal nature of this endeavor by the Turkish government: *"Our relations with our neighbor and friend, the Soviet Republic, are sincere. We behave in ways that inspire trust towards*

*each other.*” (Atatürk’ün Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Açılış Konuşmaları [Atatürk’s Opening Speeches at the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye], 1987, p. 154). Consequently, the League of Nations’ Mosul Commission of Inquiry rendered its verdict on the Turkish-Iraqi border on December 14, 1925. According to the Commission’s findings and its recommendation, it influenced the League of Nations’ decision, which, on December 16, 1925, accepted the Commission’s report, resulting in Mosul being placed under the British mandate and left to Iraq. One day after the League of Nations’ decision, Türkiye responded by signing the Turkish-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality with the USSR on December 17, 1925. This significant agreement, between two countries that had become strong allies since the National Struggle, was signed in Paris by Chicherin and Tevfik Rüştü Aras (Sabanin & Shakhov, 1927, pp. 9-10).

#### 4.3.2. *The Straits Crisis and Montreux Convention*

In an interview conducted by American journalist Gladys Baker on May 26, 1935, with Atatürk, he responded to Baker’s inquiry about whether the situation in Europe was more tense than it had been a few months earlier, stating, *“It is worse, much worse.”* Additionally, when asked about the Straits, he provided the following answer:

*“Since the Treaty of Lausanne, when Türkiye agreed to leave the Straits open, the situation in the world and certain circumstances have changed. The Straits divide the Turkish territory into two parts. Therefore, the fortification of this sea passage is very important for the security and defense of Türkiye. It is also a crucial element of international relations. Such an important key location cannot be left to the whim and mercy of any adventurous aggressor. Türkiye is obliged to prevent possible peace breakers from passing through the Straits to wage war with each other. Türkiye will never allow this.”* (“Atatürk’le Mis Baker’in Mülâkatı [Miss Baker’s Interview with Atatürk],” 1935, pp. 1,3)

The Dardanelles and Bosphorus Straits serve as vital links between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, holding immense significance for Türkiye and the Warsaw Pact nations situated along the Black Sea coast, including the Soviet Union, Romania, and Bulgaria. Strategically, the Turkish Straits held considerable military importance.

They represented the sole passage for the navies of Black Sea-bordering nations to access other maritime regions. Besides, Atatürk remained keenly aware of the escalating global tensions following the economic depression in 1929. Out of concern over Italy's territorial ambitions in the Eastern Mediterranean and Balkans, as well as apprehensions regarding the vulnerability of the Straits, the Republic of Türkiye made efforts to eliminate the demilitarization provisions concerning the Straits. Actually, this issue was initially raised at the London Conference on Disarmament in May 1933. Subsequently, Türkiye advocated for amendments to the Straits Convention in various international forums in which it participated. Amidst Italy's invasion of Abyssinia and Germany's remilitarization of the Rhine region, which violated the Versailles Peace Treaty, Türkiye dispatched an equal note to the Lausanne signatory states on April 11, 1936. Turkish government argued that the escalating crisis in Europe had nullified the collective guarantee provided for the security of the Straits in the 1923 Straits Convention and demanded a change in this status quo, advocating for the militarization of the Straits to safeguard its security, defense, and sovereign rights. To achieve this goal, Türkiye advocated for convening a conference to legally amend the earlier convention and, between 1935 and 1936, engaged in intensive diplomatic efforts with relevant states, which were generally met with understanding and receptiveness (Atabey, 2013).

Under the newly signed convention on July 20, 1936, Türkiye's sovereignty over the Straits was reaffirmed by eliminating the demilitarization provisions. Consequently, during times of war or imminent threat of war, only merchant vessels from non-belligerent nations will be permitted passage through the Straits, provided they did not aid the enemy. In times of peace, light surface ships, small warships, and auxiliary vessels, irrespective of their flag, could traverse the Straits without facing duties or charges, albeit subject to daylight hours and specified conditions for entry. Warships from the Black Sea littoral states were granted unrestricted passage through the Straits upon prior notification, regardless of their size. Additionally, submarines from these states were allowed passage during daylight hours and surfaced with prior notice. However, restrictions were imposed on the entry of warships from other nations into the Black Sea. The number of warships from non-littoral states permitted entry was capped at 30, with a combined tonnage limit of 45,000 tons. Arguably, the most pivotal clause stipulates that during wartime, if Türkiye becomes a belligerent or perceives an imminent threat of war, the passage of

foreign warships through the Straits will be subject entirely to Türkiye's discretion. If it is not a belligerent, warships of belligerent countries will be prohibited, while warships of non-combatants will be allowed to pass freely. For warships to pass through the Straits, Türkiye must be given prior notification through diplomacy (Soysal, 2020).

The Montreux Convention, entered into force on November 9, 1936, before the escalating international tension leading up to World War II reached its final point, was a visionary move that Atatürk had been trying to resolve for years. Just three years after its signing, in 1939, Stalin initiated efforts to renegotiate the convention, coinciding with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, during which Commissar for Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov expressed intentions to seize control of the Straits and establish a nearby military base to his German counterparts. Subsequently, with the onset of the invasion of Poland in September 1939, Turkish Foreign Minister Şükrü Saracoğlu's visit to Moscow was met with Stalin's snubbing and Kremlin officials' insistence on allowing a Soviet military presence along the Straits. This meeting, occurring months after Atatürk's passing, is recounted in a narrative deeply etched in the collective memory of Turkish society, underscoring Atatürk's paramount role as the architect of the Republic of Türkiye's foreign policy. It encapsulates the significance of the meeting, serving as a poignant summary thereof: When Stalin welcomed Saraçoğlu, he said, "*I hope you have brought the keys to the Straits.*" Saraçoğlu is reported to have replied, "*Unfortunately, Your Excellency, Mustafa Kemal took the keys with him.*" Necmi Osten, then a deputy from Giresun, raised doubts about the authenticity of the widely circulated narrative during a conversation with Saraçoğlu documented in his memoir. Osten mentioned this popular anecdote, and Saraçoğlu responded by laughing at him, admitting that he had not heard this exact phrase before, but that it captured the essence of his discussion with Stalin (Osten, 1992, p. 66).

#### *4.3.3. Soviet Territorial Claims and Türkiye's Accession to NATO*

Following the Second World War, tensions between the Soviet Union and the Western world escalated, particularly concerning Greece, Iran, and Türkiye. The Soviet Union expressed dissatisfaction with the Montreux Convention, which granted Türkiye exclusive control over the vital waterway crucial for Soviet exports. In 1945, after the

Yalta Conference, where post-war European order was discussed among victorious powers, the Soviet Union's stance towards Türkiye turned menacing. On March 19, 1945, Molotov declared the non-renewal of the 1925 Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality between the Soviet Union and Türkiye, citing the need for adaptation to new conditions and improvements. Negotiations commenced on June 7 between Türkiye's ambassador to Moscow, Selim Sarper, and Molotov. Sarper conveyed Türkiye's openness to a mutual assistance agreement but highlighted the difficulty in altering the Straits' status due to the involvement of other treaty parties. Molotov asserted that an agreement between the Soviet Union and Türkiye regarding the Straits would likely face no objections. However, he stipulated that for the agreement to be renewed, it was imperative to resolve Georgia and Armenia's territorial claims over Kars and Ardahan (Hasanli, 2011, pp. 123-173). He also emphasized that if no consensus could be reached on the territorial dispute, negotiations between the two sides would focus solely on the Straits issue. He expressed the Soviet Union's desire to reclaim the region transferred to Türkiye by Russia through the Treaty of Kars, which was now being claimed by the two Soviet republics. Molotov likened this situation to the Soviet Union reclaiming lands ceded to Poland in 1921, aiming to legitimize the renegotiation of the matter (Roberts, 2012, pp. 103-110).

However, in his personal opinion conveyed in the report to Türkiye during these negotiations, Sarper suggested that he did not believe territorial demands would be insisted upon. Instead, he interpreted Molotov's stance on this issue as a means to extract concessions on other points. Sarper speculated that Molotov might push for a base in the Straits but only to secure concessions on joint defense arrangements during wartime (T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Araştırma ve Siyaset Planlama Genel Müdürlüğü, 1973, p. 266). The successful assertion of Soviet claims would have bolstered the state's control over the Black Sea region while concurrently diminishing British influence in the Middle East. Moreover, during a visit to Türkiye in February 1951, US official George McGhee was informed by Turkish President Celal Bayar's expectations for full NATO membership, particularly following its deployment of troops to the Korean War. Türkiye sought security assurances in the event of a conflict with the Soviet Union. Following deliberations at NATO headquarters and consultations with officials from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the US Army, it was agreed in May 1951 to extend a full membership offer to Türkiye, given its perceived significance in a potential conflict

against the Soviet Union. Throughout 1951, the United States conducted diplomatic efforts to persuade other NATO allies of the benefits of Türkiye and Greece's inclusion in the alliance. In February 1952, Bayar officially ratified the accession document, confirming Türkiye's NATO membership (Leffler, 1985). Finally, in 1953, following Stalin's death, the Soviet government informed the US of its decision to relinquish its territorial claims on Türkiye to enhance friendly relations (Ro'i, 1974, pp. 105-107).

#### *4.3.4. Cuban Missile Crisis*

In 1957, the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration decided to deploy medium-range missiles in Europe to counterbalance the Soviet technological advances made by launching the first artificial satellite, Sputnik, into space and acquiring intercontinental missiles. A total of 45 Jupiter missiles were sent to Italy and Türkiye, 15 of which were stationed in Izmir-Çiğli (Sever, 1997, p. 648). However, this decision would become the focal point of another international tension: the Cuban Missile Crisis. In this context, the Bay of Pigs Invasion, an unsuccessful military intervention orchestrated by US-supported Cuban exiles in Cuba from April 17-19, 1961, aimed at toppling Fidel Castro's government, is widely regarded as a significant flashpoint in US-Cuban relations and a precursor to the Cuban Missile Crisis. The failure of this landing exacerbated tensions between the two sides and prompted Cuba to seek closer ties with the USSR. It facilitated Cuba's pursuit of increased military and economic support from the Soviet Union to bolster its security, ultimately leading to the notion of deploying nuclear missiles in Cuba.

The placement of missiles was conducted covertly to evade US intelligence detection, leading to the onset of the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962 when US reconnaissance aircraft identified nuclear missile launchers in Cuba. Although some essential launch components had yet to arrive, on October 22, following intelligence from the USSR about ships carrying these parts en route, US President John Kennedy publicly demanded their return via television. However, the USSR disregarded this request. As Soviet ships transporting missile components approached Cuba, Kennedy ordered a naval blockade, prohibiting any vessels from docking in Cuba and authorizing the sinking of any ship attempting to breach the blockade. In his letter to President Kennedy on October 27, 1962, the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev proposed that if the US dismantled its

missiles in Türkiye, the USSR would reciprocate by dismantling its missiles in Cuba. Additionally, he pledged to respect Türkiye's territorial integrity and independence, refrain from interfering in its internal affairs, and commit to not invading it. In his response letter dated the same day, after extensive deliberation between the Soviet Union and Kennedy's cabinet, Kennedy clandestinely agreed to remove all missiles stationed in Türkiye and potentially in southern Italy as well, the former being positioned on the border of the USSR. This agreement was reached in exchange for Khrushchev's commitment to remove all missiles in Cuba (Fursenko & Naftali, 1995).

This crisis, which had brought the world to the brink of nuclear war, was apparently resolved quickly, but diplomatic initiatives involving Türkiye created tensions on all sides involved. On October 23, 1962, the Soviet Ambassador to Ankara, Nikita Ryzhov, likened Türkiye to Cuba for the United States, explicitly demanding that Foreign Minister Feridun Cemal Erkin dismantle the Jupiter missiles (Nash, 1997, p. 137). This direct comparison between the missiles in the two countries by Moscow heightened Türkiye's anxiety, underscoring the significance of the Jupiters in defusing the crisis. During the December 1962 NATO Conference, as discussions commenced between the US and Türkiye regarding the dismantling of missiles, Erkin expressed that it would not pose a significant issue as long as the United States addressed Türkiye's security concerns in alternative ways rather than solely relying on the Jupiters. In response to this stance, the Kennedy administration opted to bolster the Turkish Air Force with F-104G aircraft (Nash, 1997, pp. 163-164). According to Sever, initially, the dismantling of the Jupiters did not provoke significant outrage in Türkiye regarding US relations. However, because the decision to dismantle these weapons was taken unilaterally by the United States and imposed on Türkiye, but especially after Lyndon B. Johnson's letter in 1964 stating that the US would not help Türkiye if its intervention in Cyprus led to a conflict with the Soviet Union, the Cuban crisis came to be seen as an important example of Washington potentially ignoring Türkiye as an ally and placing it in a passive position, which increased Türkiye's suspicion of the United States (Sever, 1997, p. 660; "Johnson'un Mektubu [Johnson's Letter]," 1966). Weeks before Johnson's letter, Turkish Prime Minister İsmet İnönü had stated that the allies should change their attitude and said, "*A new world would be established with new conditions, and Türkiye would find its place in this world*" ("Batı İttifakı Yıkılır" ['The Western Alliance Would Fall'], 1964).

# Chapter 5

## A Geostrategic Chessboard: Navigating the Complex Realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Turkish-Russian relations have spanned over five centuries since formal dialogue began in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Initially marked by friendly exchanges during imperial and tsarist eras, this dynamic shifted towards conflicts and power struggles as both empires expanded their territories. The Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire frequently clashed over overlapping spheres of influence, particularly in regions like the Black Sea, the Caucasus, and the Balkans, also affecting the Middle East, especially during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Following World War I, there was a period of reconciliation between Türkiye and Russia; however, relations became strained once more on the brink of World War II. Despite their divergent ideologies, the two sides maintained cautious relations for most of the Cold War. With the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, a new phase emerged in the relations characterized by economic collaboration and diplomatic efforts. Pro-Western reformers who took power in Russia expressed a favorable stance towards Türkiye, and this led to the signing of a goodwill agreement on May 25, 1992.<sup>1</sup>

Yılmaz (2023) argues that Russia has strategically employed ethnic conflicts, particularly in the Caucasus region, as a means to advance its near-abroad doctrine, which aims to reassert Russian influence in former Soviet states during the post-Cold War era. Consequently, beginning in 1993, Russian troops entered various locations, including Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. This development has caused concern for Türkiye, which also seeks to expand its sphere of influence within the same region. Other developments in Turkish-Russian relations in the 1990s that caused concern for Türkiye

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<sup>1</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ile Rusya Federasyonu Arasındaki İlişkilerin Esasları Hakkında Antlaşmanın Onaylanmasının Uygun Bulunduğuna Dair Kanun [Law on the Approval of the Ratification of the Treaty on the Principles of Relations between the Republic of Türkiye and the Russian Federation], 3927 (1993).  
[https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR\\_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc077/kanuntbmmc077/kanuntbmmc07703927.pdf](https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc077/kanuntbmmc077/kanuntbmmc07703927.pdf)

include Russia's provision of arms support to Syria, the sale of S-300 missiles to Greek Cypriot Cyprus in 1995, which had the capability to target southern Türkiye, and Russia's close relations with Greece (p. 31). All of these were not uncommon when examined from a historical perspective on the details in the third chapter of this thesis.

In an effort to bolster economic ties with former Soviet states, Russia vehemently opposed the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, designed to transport Azerbaijani oil to Western markets via Türkiye. Instead, Russia advocated for shipping from the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk through the Turkish straits to reach Western markets. However, despite exerting pressure on Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye, Russia failed to prevent the commissioning of the pipeline in 2005, which Türkiye highly valued. The US sided with Türkiye in this endeavor, offering full support for the pipeline's construction. Beyond strategic considerations, the US also aimed to break Russia's monopoly on transporting Caucasian and Central Asian oil to Western markets and ensure Russia was not the sole alternative. Moreover, following Russia's abrupt military intervention in Georgia in 2008, Türkiye openly sided with Georgia, collaborating with NATO and Western allies in support of Georgia's stance (Yılmaz, 2023, p. 32).

In 2010, an agreement for the construction of a nuclear power plant at the Akkuyu site was signed between the Türkiye and Russia.<sup>2</sup> In 2012, following a decision by the Turkish Atomic Energy Authority, the Kalinin Nuclear Power Plant was designated as a reference for the project. Moreover, another significant event that defined bilateral relations in the 2010s was Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. As a NATO member, Türkiye declared its non-recognition but adopted a softer and more balanced approach, aiming to avoid exacerbating tensions. However, on November 24, 2015, the downing of a Russian warplane in Turkish airspace strained relations. Then, another process of reconciliation between the two countries began in mid-2016. A significant turning point in the normalization of relations occurred when President Putin called President Erdoğan during the coup attempt on July 15, 2016, offering open support and vital information.

During a joint press conference following the 2017 summit of the heads of state of Türkiye, Russia, and Iran in Sochi, Russia, there were discussions about the future of Syria and the shared expectations. The previous summit of the three states in Astana and

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<sup>2</sup> Milletlerarası Andlaşma [International Agreement], 2010/918 (2010).  
<https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2010/10/20101006-6.htm>

the subsequent renewed declarations in Sochi after 2017 underscored their commitment to acting as guarantors for a solution that prioritizes stability, security, and prosperity in Syria.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, in 2019, following the US forces' withdrawal from northern Syria, Türkiye initiated Operation Peace Spring in the region against the YPG, which it designates as a terrorist organization. Besides, Türkiye's acquisition of S-400 air defense systems from Russia, despite objections from the US and NATO, led to a thaw in relations between the two countries. However, on February 24, 2022, after Russia's attack on Ukraine and subsequent invasion attempt, Türkiye, similar to its approach in 2014, acted cautiously and assumed a role akin to that of a mediator. Thanks to Türkiye's efforts, the parties involved were able to convene periodically to discuss critical matters, including a partial ceasefire, exemplified by the Black Sea Grain Initiative. Therefore, from now on, we will analyze the developments in Turkish-Russian relations along four main lines, as in the third chapter: the Black Sea, Caucasus, Balkans, and Middle East.

## **5.1. Key Developments in the Black Sea Region**

### *5.1.1. Blue Stream and TurkStream Projects*

One of the significant energy agreements and collaborative endeavors between Russia and Türkiye is the Blue Stream project. Its primary aim is to utilize Turkish territory to transport gas from the Caspian region to Europe. Planning for this project commenced in 1997, culminating in a 25-year gas sales contract signed between Russian firm Gazprom and Turkish BOTAŞ.<sup>4</sup> The construction of both the onshore and offshore segments in Russia occurred between 2001 and 2002. The offshore pipeline section was executed by the Italian contractor Saipem, while the onshore segment was handled by Stroytransgaz, a Gazprom subsidiary. The natural gas pipeline originating from the Izobilny gas plant in Stavropol Krai, Russia, travels through the Beregovaya compressor station located near the Black Sea, and ultimately reaches its destination at the Durusu terminal. Gas flow from Russia to Türkiye commenced in February 2003, though an

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<sup>3</sup> Özer, K. (2017, November 23). *Turkish, Russian, Iranian Presidents Meet in Sochi*.

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/pg/photo-gallery/turkish-russian-iranian-presidents-meet-in-sochi>

<sup>4</sup> Abbasova, V. (2022, January 10). *Russia's Gazprom Export Signs New 4-Year Gas Supply Deal with Turkey's BOTAŞ*. Caspian News. <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/russias-gazprom-export-signs-new-4-year-gas-supply-deal-with-turkeys-botas-2022-1-9-0/>

official opening ceremony at the Durusu gas metering station was delayed until November 17, 2005, due to a price dispute between the two sides. Notably, the opening ceremony saw the presence of Russian President Vladimir Putin, the then Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and the then Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. Today, the significance of the project lies in Türkiye's continued role as a crucial conduit for energy, supported by the pipeline's entry points and capacity. Moreover, the existing agreement is set to endure until 2025, with prospects for future renewal. Elena Burmistrova, President of Gazprom Export, emphasized the importance of the Blue Stream project, stating, "*Blue Stream was the pioneer offshore pipeline linking Gazprom directly to a major export market. Nearly two decades later, we witness the validation of this approach. The remarkable shipments via Blue Stream serve as a testament to the efficacy of direct supply through offshore gas pipelines.*"<sup>5</sup>

Another significant instance of energy collaboration in Turkish-Russian relations is the recently initiated TurkStream project. It was initially unveiled in December 2014 by Russian President Vladimir Putin during his official visit to Türkiye. This project emerged as a response to the discontinuation of the South Stream initiative in the early 2010s. South Stream had aimed to transport Russian gas through Bulgaria via pipelines under the Black Sea to destinations including Greece, Italy, and Austria. However, Russia opted to terminate this project due to delays caused by the Ukraine crisis, as the European Union had raised concerns. In early 2015, TurkStream's route was finalized, and President Erdoğan disclosed in a speech that same year that Putin suggested naming it "*TurkStream*" or "*Turkish Gas Stream*."<sup>6</sup> The intergovernmental agreement for the project, slated to operate for a minimum of 50 years, was inked on October 10, 2016, by then Turkish Energy and Natural Resources Minister Berat Albayrak and Russian Energy Minister Aleksandr Novak.<sup>7</sup> On January 8, 2020, Erdoğan and Russian Putin jointly

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<sup>5</sup> *Mavi Akım'dan Türkiye'ye rekor gaz akışı* [Record gas flow to Türkiye from Blue Stream]. (2022, January 28). Bloomberg HT. <https://www.bloomberght.com/turkiye-ye-2021-de-mavi-akim-uzerinden-rekor-gaz-sevkiyati-yapildi-2297668>

<sup>6</sup> *TürkAkım: Putin'in isim babası olduğu doğalgaz boru hattı projesi* [TurkStream: The natural gas pipeline project, with Putin as its eponymist]. (2020, January 7). BBC News Türkçe. <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-51018807>

<sup>7</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Hükümeti ve Rusya Federasyonu Hükümeti Arasında TürkAkım Gaz Boru Hattı Projesine İlişkin Anlaşmanın Onaylanmasının Uygun Bulduğuna Dair Kanun Tasarısı (1/788) ve Dışişleri Komisyonu Raporu [Draft Law on Approval of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Türkiye and the Government of the Russian Federation on the TurkStream Gas Pipeline Project (1/788) and Report of the Foreign Affairs Commission], 1/788, Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi. <https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/sirasayi/donem26/yil01/ss441.pdf>

inaugurated TurkStream, which comprises two sea lines stretching 930 kilometers each from Anapa in Russia to Kıyıköy in Türkiye, along with two separate land lines spanning 142 and 70 kilometers each.<sup>8</sup> The first line of TurkStream, boasting a total gas capacity of 31.5 billion cubic meters, serves as a conduit for gas delivery to Türkiye, while the second line facilitates gas transportation to Europe. TurkStream Gas Transmission Company, a joint venture with 50 percent ownership by Turkish BOTAŞ and Russian Gazprom Export each, undertook the construction of a 142-kilometer, 48-inch pipeline from Kıyıköy to Bulgaria. Additionally, as part of the project, the Kıyıköy Gas Receiving Terminal was established by South Stream, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Gazprom. Furthermore, within the project framework, BOTAŞ invested in a 70-kilometer, 48-inch pipeline connecting the receiving terminal in Kıyıköy to the national grid in Tekirdağ. In 2 years, 34.8 billion cubic meters of gas was transported to Türkiye and Europe via TurkStream.<sup>9</sup>

### *5.1.2. Russia's Invasion of Ukraine and the Montreux Convention*

In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea following events that unfolded against then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, culminating in the fall of the Ukrainian government. Subsequently, Russian forces extended their presence into southeastern Ukraine, especially in the Donbas region, backing separatist movements in Luhansk and Donetsk. In March 2021, tensions rose sharply when Russia began a significant military buildup near the Ukrainian border, deploying troops and advanced weapons in large numbers, sparking fears of a potential large-scale clash. The situation reached a critical juncture on February 21, 2022, when Russia officially acknowledged the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic as independent entities. The following day, the Russian Federation Council approved the use of military force, allowing Russian troops to enter both regions. On February 24, Russian forces took

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<sup>8</sup> Kutlu, Ö. (2020, January 8). *TurkStream gas pipeline launches in Istanbul*. Anadolu Agency. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/energy/energy-projects/turkstream-gas-pipeline-launches-in-istanbul/28014>

<sup>9</sup> Kılıç, Z. B. (2022, January 7). *TürkAkım üzerinden 2 yılda Türkiye ve Avrupa'ya 34,8 milyar metreküp gaz taşındı* [34.8 billion cubic meters of gas transported to Türkiye and Europe via TurkStream in 2 years]. Anadolu Ajansı. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/turkakim-uzerinden-2-yilda-turkiye-ve-avrupaya-34-8-milyar-metrekup-gaz-tasindi/2467928>

control of the strategically vital North Crimean Canal, further cementing their hold over Crimea. This action highlighted Russia's determination to establish control over disputed areas and strengthen its influence in the region despite strong opposition from Ukraine and the international community.

Days before the invasion, on February 3, 2022, Turkish President Erdoğan expressed his willingness to organize a Ukraine-Russia conference during his visit to Ukraine. After the invasion began, he announced his support for Ukraine.<sup>10</sup> On February 25, the Türkiye did not participate in the vote on suspending Russia from the Council of Europe, calling for open dialogue between the parties in all circumstances. The then Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu reiterated Türkiye's readiness to host negotiations between the Russian Federation and Ukraine: "*We are on the side dialogue under all conditions.*"<sup>11</sup> On February 27, 2022, Çavuşoğlu stated that Türkiye acknowledged the situation as war and committed to implementing elements of the 1936 Montreux Convention, the international pact that allows Türkiye to ban all warships belonging to certain powers.<sup>12</sup> This has resulted in the entry of ships of the Russian navy into the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, thus blocking the passage of Russian ships from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. President Erdoğan, for his part, publicly announced on February 28 that the straits would be closed to prevent an escalation of the war and promised to maintain relations with both Ukraine and Russia.<sup>13</sup>

### 5.1.3. Black Sea Grain Initiative

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022 caused a complete halt in seaborne grain shipments from Ukraine, a significant exporter via the Black Sea. This disruption led to a surge in global food prices and posed a threat of famine in

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<sup>10</sup> Gumrukcu, T. (2022, February 24). *Erdogan "saddened" by Russian invasion, Ukraine urges Turkey to shut straits*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/ukraine-expects-solidarity-turkey-envoy-2022-02-24/>

<sup>11</sup> Gumrukcu, T. (2022, February 25). *Erdogan says NATO, Western reaction to Russian attack not decisive*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/erdogan-says-nato-western-reaction-russian-attack-not-decisive-2022-02-25/>

<sup>12</sup> *Turkey to implement pact limiting Russian warships to Black Sea*. (2022, February 28). Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-implement-international-pact-access-shipping-straits-due-ukraine-war-2022-02-27/>

<sup>13</sup> *Erdogan says Turkey cannot abandon ties with Russia or Ukraine*. (2022, March 1). Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/erdogan-says-turkey-cannot-abandon-ties-with-russia-or-ukraine-2022-02-28/>

impoverished nations. According to Human Rights Watch, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has worsened the food security crisis in many African countries.<sup>14</sup> As the crisis became more serious, discussions to tackle the issue commenced in April and were hosted by Türkiye, which controls the routes from the Black Sea via Montreux Convention, also with support from the UN. An agreement was reached in Istanbul on July 22, 2022, valid for 120 days. António Guterres, the secretary-general of the United Nations, expressed his thoughts on the day the agreement was signed: *"To our hosts, President Erdoğan and the government of Türkiye: Your facilitation and persistence have been essential through every step of this process. (...) It will bring relief for developing countries on the edge of bankruptcy and the most vulnerable people on the edge of famine."*<sup>15</sup> This agreement outlined protocols for the safe export of grain through designated ports in an attempt to address the food crisis of 2022.

Additionally, as stipulated in the agreement, a Joint Coordination Centre (JCC) was established under the UN's supervision in Istanbul on July 27.<sup>16</sup> The JCC's main mandate is to oversee and track the departure of commercial ships through satellite, internet, and other communication channels. Its principal duty involves verifying that the vessels are free from unauthorized cargo and personnel. Situated on the premises of the National Defense University, the JCC is overseen by a Turkish admiral. It comprises a total of 20 delegates, with five representatives from each of the four participating parties. Notably, Ukrainian and Russian delegates operate independently, with communication between them occurring only in emergencies when deemed necessary. The original agreement was due to expire on November 19, 2022. However, Russia temporarily halted its involvement in the agreement after a drone attack targeted Russian navy ships elsewhere in the Black Sea, only to rejoin following mediation. On November 17, 2022, the UN and Ukraine jointly announced a 120-day extension of the agreement.<sup>17</sup> In March

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<sup>14</sup> *Ukraine/Russia: As War Continues, Africa Food Crisis Looms*. (2022, April 28). Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/28/ukraine/russia-war-continues-africa-food-crisis-looms>

<sup>15</sup> *Secretary-General's remarks on Signing of Black Sea Grain Initiative*. (2022, July 22). United Nations Secretary-General; United Nations. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2022-07-22/secretary-generals-remarks-signing-of-black-sea-grain-initiative>

<sup>16</sup> *Joint Coordination Centre opens in Istanbul to facilitate safe export of commercial foodstuffs and goods*. (2022, July 27). United Nations in Ukraine. <https://ukraine.un.org/en/192320-joint-coordination-centre-opens-istanbul-facilitate-safe-export-commercial-foodstuffs-and>

<sup>17</sup> *Statement of the Secretary-General – on the renewal of the Black Sea Grain Initiative*. (2022, November 17). United Nations Secretary-General; United Nations. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2022-11-17/statement%20of%20the-secretary-general-%E2%80%93-the-renewal-of-the-black-sea-grain-initiative%20>

2023, Türkiye and the UN disclosed that they had successfully negotiated another extension, this time for at least an additional 60 days.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the summer of 2023, Russia repeatedly declared its intention to withdraw from the agreement by July 2023 unless its conditions were met. As of July 17, 2023, no new agreement was concluded, leading to the expiration of the existing agreement.

## 5.2. Major Issues in the Caucasus

### 5.2.1. Second Karabakh War

The aftermath of the revolution in Russia following World War I saw a transition from Tsarist rule to the establishment of the USSR, sparking years of conflicts and tensions in the Caucasus region. By 1922, with the Soviet Union's ascendancy, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan came under Soviet sovereignty. Nagorno-Karabakh was annexed by the Soviet Union to the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic on July 5, 1921. Subsequently, on July 24, 1923, the Soviet Union established the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. In November 1989, the USSR opted to revoke the autonomy of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast and directly incorporate it into the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. However, both Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast opposed this decision, asserting that Nagorno-Karabakh had merged with Armenia. Nevertheless, this assertion contradicted Article 78 of the Constitution of the Soviet Union, which was ratified in 1989 before the dissolution of the Soviet Union: *"The territory of a Union Republic may not be altered without its consent. The boundaries between Union Republics may be altered by mutual agreement of the Republics concerned, subject to ratification by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics."* (Constitution (Fundamental Law) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, 1982, p. 45).

Following the dissolution of the USSR, Azerbaijan and Armenia failed to reach an agreement on the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, leading to the outbreak of the First Karabakh War, which lasted from 1991 until a ceasefire was signed in May 1994. On

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<sup>18</sup> *Note to Correspondents—On the extension of the Black Sea Grain Initiative.* (2023, March 18). United Nations Secretary-General. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/note-correspondents/2023-03-18/note-correspondents-the-extension-of-the-black-sea-grain-initiative>

December 28, 1991, Armenia seized control of the region and proclaimed the establishment of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. According to Human Rights Watch/Helsinki (1994), on February 25-26, 1992, the Khojaly Massacre occurred, resulting in the deaths of 500-1000 Azerbaijani civilians (p. 45). Amidst the conflicts of the First Karabakh War, the Minsk Group, formed within the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), intervened to broaden the scope of the negotiations beyond Russia's involvement. However, despite international efforts, tangible progress towards resolving the conflict was not achieved.

Leading up to the Second Karabakh War, Azerbaijan and Armenia experienced numerous conflicts. The last of these lit the fire that started the war; on September 27, 2020, a significant number of Azerbaijani civilians lost their lives in an attack. In response, Azerbaijan initiated a military operation aimed at reclaiming territories occupied by Armenia until the Second Karabakh War came to an end on November 10, 2020, with the signing of a ceasefire agreement. As per the agreement, both Azerbaijan and Armenia maintained their existing spheres of control. However, Armenia was obligated to cease its occupation of territories in the Aghdam and Kazah regions and transfer them to Azerbaijan by November 20. Russian peacekeeper forces deployed in Karabakh and the Lachin corridors and will remain for a duration of five years in the region. Besides, a monitoring center was established to oversee the implementation of the treaty. Furthermore, Armenia was required to return Kalbajar to Azerbaijan by November 15, 2020, and the Lachin region by December 1, 2020. Armenia will retain a 5 km wide corridor in the Lachin region. Both countries will negotiate the layout of the Lachin corridor connecting Khankendi and Armenia within three years. Russian peacekeeper forces will be stationed in this region to facilitate the construction of the route, while Azerbaijan will ensure the security of the Lachin corridor. Armenia, in turn, is responsible for facilitating transportation and communications between the western regions of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (Çeliksoy, 2021, pp. 128-129).

An important aspect of the Second Karabagh War, particularly in assessing the relationship between the Republic of Türkiye and the Russian Federation, is the agreement reached on November 11, 2020, between Türkiye and Russia to establish the Turkish-Russian Joint Center. This center was established to monitor the adherence to the terms of the ceasefire agreement. Negotiations between Türkiye and Russia were

concluded on December 1, 2020. This joint monitoring center, named Birge, was established in Agdam to oversee compliance with the ceasefire agreement, to record violations, if any, and to resolve complaints and problems raised by the parties. The center is staffed by a total of 120 soldiers, 60 from Türkiye and 60 from Russia, and it enables 24/7 aerial surveillance of the key regions as outlined in the agreement.

According to Çeliksoy (2021), Russia's intention to maintain its role in the region is evident both through the provisions of the ceasefire agreement and its historical presence. The agreement grants Russia the authority to establish a peacekeeping force, officially acknowledging its presence in the area. Despite this, Azerbaijan and Türkiye advocate for Türkiye's involvement in the region, highlighting their collaborative efforts across various sectors, notably in the military domain. This collaboration aligns with previous international agreements between the two nations, including the Treaty of Kars of 1921, as well as subsequent accords such as the February 9, 1994 Protocol on Cooperation and Mutual Assistance,<sup>19</sup> and the August 16, 2010 Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance Agreement.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, the Shusha Declaration signed on June 15, 2021, following the Second Karabakh War, stands as a significant testament to ongoing mutual cooperation and strategic partnership between the two nations<sup>21</sup> (p. 129).

### 5.2.2. *The Role of Turkish UCAVs*

Military experts and defense analysts highlight the pivotal role played by both unarmed and armed unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs) in Azerbaijan's victory during the 44-day conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, ultimately establishing superiority over

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<sup>19</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyeti İle Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti Arasında İşbirliği ve Karşılıklı Yardımlaşma Protokolünün Onaylanmasının Uygun Bulunduğuna Dair Kanun [Law on the Approval of the Ratification of the Protocol on Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between the Republic of Türkiye and the Republic of Azerbaijan], 4208 (1994).  
[https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR\\_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc078/kanuntbmmc078/kanuntbmmc07804028.pdf](https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc078/kanuntbmmc078/kanuntbmmc07804028.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ile Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti Arasında Stratejik Ortaklık ve Karşılıklı Yardım Anlaşmasının Onaylanmasının Uygun Bulunduğuna Dair Kanun [The Ratification of the Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance Agreement Between the Republic Of Türkiye and the Republic of Azerbaijan], 6204 (2011).  
[https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR\\_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc095/kanuntbmmc095/kanuntbmmc09506204.pdf](https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc095/kanuntbmmc095/kanuntbmmc09506204.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> *Şuşa Bəyannaməsinin TAM MƏTNİ* [Full Text of Shusha Declaration]. (2021, June 16). Report News Agency. <https://report.az/xarici-siyaset/sadek-hamid-baki-konfransi-islamofobiya-problemini-global-gundemde-saxlamaq-ucun-bir-fursetdir/>

Armenia on the battlefield. Köker (2020) reports that Nagorno-Karabakh serves as a significant case study demonstrating the potential impact of UCAVs and unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs) on future war and conflict scenarios, particularly if appropriate precautions are not taken. There are comments suggesting that the demand for UCAVs manufactured by Türkiye may surge post-war, given their demonstrated effectiveness. The report also emphasizes that UCAVs conferred a substantial advantage to Azerbaijan, particularly in the mountainous terrain of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, where conventional aircraft maneuverability is constrained. In response to inquiries of Köker, a defense industry expert, preferring anonymity, described the role of UCAVs as “highly significant.” The expert also noted that UCAVs significantly weakened Armenia’s defense lines and preempted its counter-offensives, and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict serves as a crucial illustration of the pivotal role UCAVs can play in conventional warfare. Furthermore, Azerbaijani President Aliyev emphasized the significant impact of Turkish-produced UCAVs in the destruction of Armenian ammunition worth over 1 billion dollars. During an interview with France 24, when asked about the quantity of UCAVs in their possession, President Aliyev simply responded with, “*There are enough,*” indicating the substantial presence and effectiveness of these unmanned aerial assets in Azerbaijan’s military operations (Trent-Norris, 2020). Also, it must be noted that the role of Turkish UCAVs in Ukraine’s struggle also has been very important and Ukrainian soldiers have even written a song about Bayraktar TB-2s: “*Those shiny tanks are being set ablaze – Bayraktar – that’s the new craze.*”<sup>22</sup>

### 5.2.3. Zangezur Corridor

In accordance with Article 9 of the ceasefire agreement signed between Azerbaijan and Armenia after the Second Karabakh War, it was planned to build a corridor connecting Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, which is part of the exclave.<sup>23</sup> In 1920, with the establishment of Soviet rule in Azerbaijan after the

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<sup>22</sup> Karadsheh, J., & Sariyuce, I. (2022). Turkish drones have become a symbol of the Ukrainian resistance. *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/04/11/middleeast/mideast-summary-04-11-2022-intl/index.html>

<sup>23</sup> *Statement by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation*. (2020, November 10). Official Web-Site of President of Azerbaijan Republic. <https://president.az/en/articles/view/45923>

Russian army invasion, the Soviets handed over the Zangezur region, situated between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan, to Armenia. This action severed Nakhchivan's land link with other Azerbaijani regions. Presently, the absence of this land connection with western Azerbaijani provinces is viewed as the primary hindrance to Nakhchivan's progress. Azerbaijan has substantially finalized railway and road projects along the segment it designates as the Zangezur Corridor. According to Tarhan (2024), in Kotam village, located in Ordubad rayon and situated at the convergence point of Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, Armenia, and Iran, photographs were taken of the old railway and land route leading to the potential Zangezur Corridor, which might traverse Armenia. The railway, which used to pass through Nakhchivan's Salamalik station and was actively utilized during the Soviet era, has been out of service since 1991 despite extending to Aghbend via Armenia. Should the Zangezur Corridor go through Armenia, the tunnels along the defunct railway would require refurbishment.

Additionally, there exists a dirt road running parallel to the railway, connecting to Armenia and further to Azerbaijan, necessitating repairs, expansion, and opening for vehicular transit. Completion of this 43-kilometer route, known as the Zangezur Corridor, would establish direct access from Nakhchivan to Azerbaijan, facilitating regional economic growth. On December 7, Azerbaijan and Armenia jointly issued a statement for the first time, announcing an agreement to undertake significant measures aimed at bolstering trust between the two nations. This development, coupled with Nakhchivan's connectivity to Azerbaijan's western regions via Iran, is expected to eliminate longstanding barriers to regional cooperation. The corridor, which is geopolitically and geo-economically important for the countries in the region, is expected to open up new integration initiatives in the South Caucasus.

President Erdoğan expressed the importance of this corridor for Türkiye during a press conference: *“With the opening of the corridor, cooperation and trade with the Turkic world will increase, uninterrupted access to Central Asia will be possible, regional peace and cooperation will be strengthened, and contribution will be made to the revival of the historical silk road. (...) Türkiye-Azerbaijan-Iran will be integrated with each other and perhaps the Beijing-London line will be opened.”* (Göçümlü & Özdener, 2023) In his press statement, Erdoğan also highlighted that there is no contention with Armenia concerning the corridor project but rather with Iran. The opposition from Iran toward this

project stems from various concerns. It is projected that the Iran-Armenia border might cease to exist upon the opening of the Zangezur Corridor. There is a notion that this corridor, running parallel to Iran's border, could effectively sever Iran's connection with Europe. Therefore, Iran would potentially lose its foothold in the Caucasus, which serves as a secure passage for its European access, and Iran might have to seek permission from Türkiye and Russia to maintain its European connectivity. Additionally, since Russia is expected to ensure the security of this corridor, Iranian experts often highlight the possibility of Russian forces being stationed along the Iranian border. Moreover, it is underscored that the opening of the corridor would strip Iran of its role as a transit country linking Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan. If operational, this corridor would enable the direct connection of Baku and Nakhchivan without reliance on Iran, and it could facilitate the transportation of Turkmen gas to Europe through Azerbaijan.<sup>24</sup>

According to Ketenci (2022), the interruption of transportation corridors from Central Asia to Azerbaijan has severed crucial connections, preventing Azerbaijan from linking with Nakhchivan and, subsequently, with Türkiye. According to Ketenci, the importance of opening the Zengezur Corridor should be examined from three aspects. First, while reinstating this corridor poses a daunting challenge, its realization could establish an uninterrupted route spanning Central Asia to Europe via the Caspian Sea and Türkiye. Consequently, Türkiye's trade volume is expected to surge not only with Azerbaijan but also with the broader Middle East. The implementation of the Zangezur Corridor holds the potential to fortify commercial, logistical, and political bonds within the Turkic world, thereby positioning Zangezur as a prominent hub within this realm. Secondly, alongside the longstanding friendship between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, the transportation of Azerbaijani gas to Europe via Türkiye, facilitated by TANAP, strengthens economic ties. On the one hand, Azerbaijan's recent victory over Armenia and its liberation of occupied territories, coupled with gas exports to Türkiye and Europe through TANAP, underscore its efforts to bolster relations with numerous countries, particularly within the Organization of Turkic States. On the other hand, internal challenges such as the Mahsa Amini incidents and ongoing protests, as well as external embargoes hindering access to global hydrocarbon markets, have tested Azerbaijan's

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<sup>24</sup> *İran'ın ulusal korkusu: Zengezur Koridoru* [Iran's national fear: Zangezur Corridor]. (2023, June 14). Yeni Şafak. <https://www.yenisafak.com/dunya/zengezur-koridoru-irani-neden-rahatsiz-ediyor-tahran-yonetimi-koridorun-acilmasiyla-hangi-adimlari-atacak-4538427>

aspirations to assert dominance in the region, notwithstanding its proactive engagement with regional affairs, non-state actors, and nuclear energy endeavors.

The third aspect is that Iran, meanwhile, has exerted considerable effort to maintain its perceived regional power status. It fears that Azerbaijan may emerge as a magnet for Azerbaijani citizens living within Iran and anticipates a potential blockade of its Black Sea access upon losing its connection with Armenia due to the Zangezur Corridor. This perceived threat is viewed as a border alteration and a geostrategic setback detrimental to Iran's interests. Iran apprehends losing influence in the Caucasus and relinquishing its role as a transit country along the Belt and Road Initiative routes. Beyond Iran's concerns, the primary apprehension regarding Zangezur revolves around the potential for increased activity from Azerbaijan and Türkiye in the region. The solidarity and military cooperation demonstrated between them during the Second Karabakh War have propelled these two nations as rising powers in the region. Consequently, Iran aims to forestall a shift in the regional balance of power against itself, hence adopting a more assertive rhetoric. However, the opening of the corridor holds promise for facilitating easier connectivity among regional countries and beyond, fostering enhanced trade, logistics, and economic relations, which could mitigate existing tensions.

Moreover, the development of the Trans-Caspian Transport Route (CTN) and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) would bolster Eurasia's supply lines and transit capabilities. Embracing inclusive approaches to developing commercial and political ties without excluding any regional actors could pave the way for innovative solutions. Finally, again, the most important aspect is to be able to establish an uninterrupted land connection with the Turkic nations, which has been dreamed of for centuries and to which Türkiye's historical and cultural ties extend. The significance of this matter can be seen in Foreign Minister Fidan's address during the 14<sup>th</sup> Ambassadors Conference in Ankara on August 7, 2023. In his speech, he outlined the fundamental principles guiding the country's foreign policy, and we can argue that this corridor can be interpreted as a component of the integration strategy he discussed: "*The Organization of Turkic States (...) We will carry forward this initiative, which has led to enthusiasm in the great Turkic world, in order to achieve further stages of integration.*"<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Speech by H.E. Hakan Fidan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye at the Opening Session of the 14<sup>th</sup> Ambassadors' Conference, August 7, 2023, Ankara. (2023, August 7). Republic

### 5.3. Important Milestones in the Middle East

#### 5.3.1. Military Operations Carried out by Türkiye in Northern Syria

The ongoing civil war and unrest in Syria, which began in April 2011, have yet to reach a comprehensive resolution. Over the course of this conflict, an estimated 3.6 million Syrian refugees have fled to Türkiye through the 877-kilometer land border shared between Türkiye and Syria, which makes Türkiye the country hosting the most refugees in the world.<sup>26</sup> During the war, bullets and mortars fell on Turkish villages close to the border, and many tension-raising incidents occurred, including the shooting down of the RF-4E Phantom reconnaissance aircraft of the Turkish Armed Forces by Syria without warning.<sup>27</sup> On May 11, 2013, 53 people died and 146 people were injured in two separate bomb attacks in Reyhanlı, Hatay. This was the biggest security crisis on Turkish soil near the Türkiye-Syria border since the Syrian civil war began. Between 2015 and 2022, more than ten serious terrorist attacks were carried out by DAESH (ISIS) and other terrorist organizations and outlawed Kurdish groups, mainly PKK, YPG, and PYD. More than 350 people lost their lives, and nearly 900 people were injured, most of them civilians.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, in order to ensure border security, the Turkish army carried out cross-border operations against DAESH (ISIS) and PYD and YPG, which Türkiye recognizes as terrorist organizations. The first operation of the Turkish army into Syria took place on February 22, 2015, with Operation Euphrates Shield.

Operation Euphrates Shield, which was carried out between August 24, 2016, and March 29, 2017, was the second operation, and its aim was to remove the groups that Türkiye sees as a threat to its existence and defines as terrorist organizations from the region, to ensure the security of the border line and the people in the region and to take them under control, and to eliminate the migration problem. President Erdoğan expressed

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of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs. <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-hakan-fidan-in-14-buyukelciler-konferansi-acilisinda-yaptigi-konusma--7-agustos-2023.en.mfa>

<sup>26</sup> *Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Turkey*. (n.d.). UNHCR Türkiye.

<https://www.unhcr.org/tr/en/refugees-and-asylum-seekers-in-turkey>

<sup>27</sup> *Ankara vows response after Syria downs Turkish jet*. (2012, June 23).

<https://www.france24.com/en/20120623-syria-risks-major-crisis-after-downing-turkish-jet-erdogan-bashar-al-assad>

<sup>28</sup> *Timeline of major attacks in Turkey since 2015*. (2022, November 13). Al Jazeera.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/13/timeline-of-attacks-in-turkey-since-2015>

the intention to establish a safe zone covering an area of 5,000 square kilometers, with the objective of completely removing DAESH (ISIS) and YPG forces to ensure the safety of civilians.<sup>29</sup> With Operation Euphrates Shield, DAESH (ISIS) dominance on the Syrian border ended. Türkiye's third military operation, Operation Olive Branch, occurred from January 20, 2018, to March 24, 2018. The objective of this operation was to eliminate PKK, KCK, PYD-YPG, and DAESH (ISIS), which were perceived as threats to the Türkiye's existence and classified as terrorist organizations, from the region. The primary goals were to secure the border and ensure the safety and control of the local population. As outlined in Akyol's article, the map illustrated the YPG's advancement towards the Eastern Mediterranean by connecting the Cizre and Kobani cantons to the east of the Euphrates, as well as Manbij and Afrin to the west of the Euphrates, effectively encircling the southern border of Türkiye. This posed a significant security threat for Türkiye and not only jeopardized its security but also meant that its economic ties with the Middle East could be subject to the influence of the PKK. To counter this, Türkiye initiated the Euphrates Shield operation in September 2016, effectively cutting off this corridor. Moreover, the commencement of the Olive Branch operation by the Turkish forces with 72 F-16s, following the loss of 72 soldiers in a previous operation, symbolized a commitment to maintaining continuity in addressing security concerns. (Akyol, 2018) The sentiment was echoed by the then Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdağ as well.<sup>30</sup>

Another important cross-border military operation was the Operation Peace Spring, which was launched by the Turkish Armed Forces against the Syrian Democratic Forces, which declared unilateral autonomy in the north of Syria. The operation occurred in two phases: between October 9-17, 2019, and October 18 - November 25, 2019. Its objective was to eliminate the Syrian Democratic Forces, regarded by Türkiye as a terrorist organization due to its affiliations with the PKK, despite being considered an ally against the DAESH (ISIS) by the US. The operation aimed to clear the border region, establish a 30-kilometer-deep safe zone, and potentially resettle around 6 million Syrian refugees in this area. President Erdoğan announced the launch of the operation, framing

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<sup>29</sup> *Amacımız fiili güvenli bölge* [Our aim is to establish a safe zone]. (2016, September 21). Yeni Şafak. <https://www.yenisafak.com/dunya/amacimiz-fiili-guvenli-bolge-2534545>

<sup>30</sup> *Başbakan Yardımcısı Bozdağ: Terör koridoru oluşturma gayreti var* [Deputy Prime Minister Bozdağ: There is an effort to create a terror corridor]. (2017, October 14). Anadolu Ajansı. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/basbakan-yardimcisi-bozdag-teror-koridoru-olusturma-gayreti-var/935466>

it as a response to PKK/YPG and DAESH (ISIS) threats “with the overarching goal of dismantling the attempted creation of a terror corridor along Türkiye’s southern border.”<sup>31</sup> The then US Vice President Mike Pence, who came to Ankara on October 17, 2019, made a press statement after his meeting with President Erdoğan and announced that the US and Türkiye had agreed on a ceasefire in Syria. Pence stated that the YPG in northeast Syria will withdraw safely from Türkiye’s 20 miles (32 km) border within 120 hours and that the US will ensure this. He also said that Türkiye’s Operation Peace Spring will be suspended for this period and will end immediately after the YPG withdraws from northeastern Syria, that the two countries will work together within the scope of the safe zone work, and that the US will not impose sanctions on Türkiye. On the other hand, at the press conference he held in Ankara, then Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu stated that the US accepted the importance and functionality of the safe zone and said: “Türkiye will have control of this area. (...) We are suspending the operation for PKK/YPG to leave the safe zone. This is not a ceasefire. A ceasefire is between two legitimate parties. (...) We can only stop the operation after the conditions are met, that is, after the YPG withdraws.”<sup>32</sup>

Clashes resumed on October 19, 2019. However, on October 22, 2019, Russian President Putin and Turkish President Erdoğan agreed to prolong the ceasefire for an additional 150 hours to facilitate the withdrawal of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) from the border area, extending 30 kilometers away from Tel Rifaat and Manbij. On October 29, Major General Yuriy Borenkov, the Head of Russia’s Center for Reconciliation of the Parties in Syria, declared that the withdrawal of 68 Kurdish defense units, comprising a total of 34,000 individuals, along with more than 3,000 weapons and military equipment, has been completed 30 kilometers away from the line of contact with the Turkish Armed Forces. Borenkov also noted that Syrian government troops had established a total of 84 crossing checkpoints along the Turkish border, with 60 located

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<sup>31</sup> *Idlib Operation: “There Is a Serious Operation and It Will Continue.”* (2017, October 7). Presidency Of The Republic Of Türkiye. <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/84836/idlib-operasyonu-ciddi-bir-harekt-var-ve-devam-edecek>

<sup>32</sup> *Türkiye ile ABD anlaştı: TSK Suriye’de harekâtı durduracak, YPG 5 gün içinde sınırdan 32 km güneye çekilecek* [Türkiye and the USA agreed: Turkish Armed Forces will stop the operation in Syria, YPG will withdraw 32 km south of the border within 5 days]. (2019, October 17). BBC Türkçe. <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-50076380>

in the Qamishli region and 24 in the Kobani region.<sup>33</sup> The Turkish Ministry of Defense announced that nearly 200,000 Syrian refugees voluntarily returned to their villages as a result of Operation Peace Spring.<sup>34</sup>

On February 27, 2020, the Syrian Armed Forces, backed by Russia, conducted an air attack on a battalion of the Turkish Armed Forces in Syria's Idlib province. This incident resulted in the loss of 34 Turkish soldiers, marking Türkiye's most significant casualty in the Syrian Civil War. On the same day, the Turkish Armed Forces declared the commencement of a new military operation named Operation Spring Shield. The then Minister of National Defense, Hulusi Akar, stated that the objective of the operation was to secure a ceasefire in accordance with the Adana, Astana, and Sochi agreements, prevent further migration, and ensure the safety of troops, civilians, and Turkish borders. (Özer, 2020) President Erdoğan met with Russian President Putin in Moscow to discuss the Idlib problem. As a result of the approximately 6-hour talks between the two leaders and the delegations, a ceasefire was reached in Idlib (Çam, 2020).

### 5.3.2. Russia's Presence in Syria

According to Yüce (2016), gaining insight into Russia's interest in the Middle East requires an examination of its financial background. Russia has historically maintained a keen interest in Arab countries and the Eastern Mediterranean due to their geopolitical, economic, and cultural significance. As discussed in the third chapter of this thesis, this interest traces back to Tsar Peter the Great's aspiration to access warm seas, a pursuit that continued under subsequent rulers. Throughout Russia's history, efforts to strengthen ties with the target region have persisted. Beyond geopolitical and economic considerations, Russia's interest in the Middle East is also driven by factors such as the presence of Orthodox Christians and the significance of holy sites in Jerusalem. Russia has often invoked religious connections to safeguard Orthodox communities and extend

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<sup>33</sup> *Rusya: 34 bin kişinin yer aldığı 68 Kürt savunma birliğinin TSK ile temas hattından 30 kilometre çekilmesi tamamlandı* [Russia: The withdrawal of 68 Kurdish defense units, consisting of 34 thousand people, 30 kilometers from the line of contact with the Turkish Armed Forces has been completed]. (2019, October 29). Sputnik Türkiye. <https://sputniknews.com.tr/20191029/rusya-kurt-birliklerine-ait-3-binden-fazla-silah-ve-askeri-techizat-suriyedeki-tsk-ile-temas-1040507796.html>

<sup>34</sup> *Barış Pınarı Harekâtı* [Operation Peace Spring]. (n.d.). Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Millî Savunma Bakanlığı. <https://www.msb.gov.tr/BarisPinariHarekati>

influence over the Ottoman Empire. However, the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 marked a turning point, curtailing Russia's imperial ambitions and diminishing its religious-based influence. Consequently, control over the Middle East shifted to other Great Powers, sidelining Russia for an extended period (p. 277).

Despite the belief among Russian ruling elites that the Middle East lacks a conducive environment for communist ideology to thrive, Russia's interest in the region remained steadfast. This enduring interest stems from the alignment of some regional movements, such as the Baath movement, with socialist principles akin to Soviet ideology. The Baath Party, established in Damascus in the 1940s, aimed to unify Arab nations, liberate them from foreign influence, and promote socialism. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, at the behest of Egyptian General Gamal Abdel Nasser, Russia responded by providing military and economic assistance to these states. This invitation from Arab leaders effectively opened the door for Russian influence in the Middle East, countering the prevailing Western dominance in the region. Following the death of Nasser, Russia continued to exert influence over Syria and sought to bolster its relations in the region, particularly through Syria. The depth of the relationship between the two countries is also evident in Russia's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, as Syria refrained from condemning the Soviet intervention (Yüce, 2016, pp. 277-278; Çağ & Eker, 2013).

Coming to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, following the 2007 Israeli Operation Orchard, air strikes on an alleged nuclear reactor at al-Kibar, and again after Syrian protests in March 2011, Syria's air defenses were strengthened with Russian upgrades. A 2009 investigation by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) uncovered evidence of uranium and graphite at the site, raising suspicions of it being an undeclared nuclear reactor. However, Syria's lack of cooperation hindered the IAEA's ability to ascertain the true nature of the facility. Amidst the Syrian Civil War, the IAEA eventually confirmed the site's function as a nuclear reactor, with also Israel acknowledging its 2007 attack on the facility in 2018.<sup>35</sup> According to analysts, Russia provided Syria with Buk-M2 and Pantsir-S1 mobile missile launcher systems and radar upgrades after 2007. Additionally, Russian assistance included personnel training due to Syrian operators' lack of proficiency in fully utilizing

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<sup>35</sup> *IAEA and Syria: Chronology of Key Events*. (n.d.). International Atomic Energy Agency. <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/syria/chronology-of-key-events>

such advanced equipment. By the end of 2012, Syria's air defense command comprised numerous anti-aircraft guns and 130 anti-aircraft missile batteries (Borger, 2012).

On September 30, 2015, Russia initiated a military intervention in Syria following a request for assistance from the government of Bashar al-Assad in its struggle against both the Syrian opposition and the DAESH (ISIS) in the ongoing civil war.<sup>36</sup> The intervention commenced with widespread airstrikes across Syria, primarily targeting opposition strongholds such as the Free Syrian Army, the rebel coalition of the Revolutionary Command Council, and Sunni militant groups affiliated with the Army of Conquest coalition. In December 2017, the Russian government declared its intention to maintain a permanent military presence in Syria. At the onset of the intervention, the Assad regime controlled only a fraction, approximately 26%, of Syrian territory. While Russia initially framed its intervention as a counterterrorism effort primarily aimed at combating the DAESH (ISIS), it also targeted key positions held by the Syrian opposition. Shortly after the onset of operations, Russian officials indicated that Russian President Putin's primary objective was to uphold the allied Baathist government in Damascus and assert influence over areas where American-backed Free Syrian militias operated, aligning with broader geopolitical aims. (Arkhipov et al., 2015) In an October 2015 televised interview, Russian President Putin emphasized the extensive preparation preceding the military operation.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Russia established the Center for Reconciliation of Opposing Parties in the Syrian Arab Republic and Monitoring of Refugee Migration on February 23, 2016. This center serves as a peace monitoring facility and information hub. Established through consensus, the center is a joint initiative between the Turkish and Russian governments, with its headquarters situated at the Khmeimim Air Base in Latakia, Syria.<sup>38</sup>

At the onset of the Syrian civil war, Russian companies held significant stakes in Syria's infrastructure, energy, and tourism sectors. Notably, Stroitransgaz, a leading natural gas facility construction firm, was heavily involved in projects amounting to \$1.1 billion in 2010. Its most prominent project was the construction of a natural gas

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<sup>36</sup> *Russia carries out first air strikes in Syria*. (2015, September 30). Al Jazeera.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/9/30/russia-carries-out-first-air-strikes-in-syria>

<sup>37</sup> *Putin nazval osnovnyuyu zadachu rossiyskikh voyennykh v Sirii* [Putin named the main task of Russian military in Syria]. (2015, October 11). Interfax. <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/472593>

<sup>38</sup> *Reconciliation process in Syria supported by 1,475 settlements*. (2017, April 30). TASS. <https://tass.com/world/944035>

processing plant in the Raqqa region, situated 200 kilometers east of Homs. Stroitransgaz also played a crucial role in providing technical assistance for the construction of the Arab Gas Pipeline. Furthermore, Tatneft, a Russian energy giant, formed a joint venture with the Syrian national oil company in 2010 to exploit Syrian oil reserves, solidifying its position as a key player in Syria's energy sector. Other notable Russian companies with significant business interests in Syria included TMK, a steel pipe manufacturer; ITERA, a gas producer; and Aeroflot, the national carrier of Russia. These companies collectively underscored Russia's substantial economic presence in Syria prior to the outbreak of the civil war (Amos, 2011a; Amos, 2011b).

### 5.3.3. Astana Platform

The Moscow Declaration, following a meeting of the foreign ministers from Iran, Russia, and Türkiye in December 2016, signifies a collective effort by these nations, actively engaged in Syria, to address the Syrian crisis through political means. This declaration outlines a roadmap for political negotiations in Syria, with a focus on preserving Syria's diverse religious and ethnic fabric, promoting democracy, and maintaining secularism. Central to this declaration is a commitment to play a significant role in resolving the crisis while upholding Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2254.<sup>39</sup> Notably, the trio identified themselves as facilitators, acting as guarantors in potential negotiations between the Syrian Government and the opposition, marking a significant development in addressing the Syrian issue since 2012 (Çelikpala, 2019, p. 24).

The inaugural meeting convened in Astana at the invitation of the President of Kazakhstan, thus earning the designation of the Astana Process. Through this declaration and subsequent proceedings, the trio emerged as influential and legitimate stakeholders, adept at identifying and convening relevant parties involved in the Syrian conflict. Notably, negotiations within this framework addressed several key priorities aligned with Türkiye's interests, including combating the PYD/YPG effectively—of paramount concern since the conflict's onset—safeguarding civilians and moderate opposition

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<sup>39</sup> *Resolution 2254 (2015)*. (2015, December 18). United Nations Security Council. [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_res\\_2254.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2254.pdf)

factions, establishing de-escalation zones, maintaining focus on migration concerns, and striving for a lasting resolution in Syria. In 2018, the Astana Process gradually progressed towards the cessation of armed conflict and the subsequent phase of restructuring Syria. However, this phase also signaled a challenging period in Turkish-Russian bilateral relations, prompting discussions on the feasibility of continuing the Astana Process. Indeed, the Tehran Summit in September 2018 highlighted areas of disagreement between the parties as priorities and expectations began to diverge. The summit, as vividly portrayed in the media, brought to light critical issues such as how to distinguish between radical terrorist factions and armed moderate opposition groups, as well as the future of Idlib, the final conflict-free zone under Turkish control and guarantorship. Despite these challenges, it is evident that the parties surmounted their differences by endorsing a 12-article declaration and crafting a roadmap through intensive bilateral negotiations between Türkiye and Russia (Çelikpala, 2019, p. 25).

Moreover, in the joint final declaration issued after the twentieth Astana Talks on Syria, convened in June 2023, Türkiye, Russia, and Iran reaffirmed their dedication to upholding Syria's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. Moreover, they underscored the importance of ongoing efforts to mend relations between Syria and Türkiye. Alexander Lavrentiev, Russian President Vladimir Putin's Special Representative for Syria, disclosed that during the two-day talks, a four-party meeting was convened at the deputy foreign minister level, comprising representatives from Russia, Türkiye, Iran, and Syria. Discussions centered on the roadmap for normalizing Syrian-Turkish relations, which had been initially drafted at the presidential level. Lavrentiev also noted that further deliberation and approval were necessary.<sup>40</sup>

#### *5.3.4. Crisis Between Israel and Palestine*

Operation Aqsa Flood, named by the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, or Operation Iron Swords, as it is called by Israel, began on October 7, 2023, with a large-scale attack on Israel by the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas. Although it has been declared a terrorist organization by the US and countries in the European Union,

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<sup>40</sup> Eruygur, B. (2023, June 21). *Astana meeting on Syria stresses importance of Türkiye-Syria normalization*. Anadolu Agency. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/astana-meeting-on-syria-stresses-importance-of-turkiye-syria-normalization/2927879>

attempts to designate it as a terrorist organization by the United Nations have not materialized.<sup>41</sup> While this situation is seen as one of the factors of different approaches to the crisis in the region, there are various findings and interpretations that Israel's attitude in the region inevitably increases the support for Hamas.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, after the October 2023 attack, Israel decided to declare war on Hamas, and as of March 1, 2024, more than 31,000 people, including at least 1,200 Israelis and 30,228 Palestinian civilians, were killed and more than 76,000 people were injured in the clashes.<sup>43</sup>

Türkiye, which has been following the process closely since the day the conflicts began, has been implementing active diplomacy under the leadership of President Erdoğan and Minister of Foreign Affairs Hakan Fidan. Türkiye's main argument on this crisis is that it believes that the ongoing and increasingly violent conflict between Israel and Hamas stems from the failure to establish a sovereign and independent Palestinian state within the scope of the two-state solution and states that ensuring permanent peace in the Middle East is among its priorities. Fidan, who expressed Türkiye's position at the Peace Summit meeting held in Cairo on October 21, underlined this element in his statements and stated that the negotiations carried out in the last 30 years did not yield results; therefore new tools, especially the guarantor mechanism, should be put into effect and added: "*A new guarantee mechanism should be designed and implemented. The steps taken by the parties for a just peace must be guaranteed.*" He also emphasized that Türkiye is ready to take proactive measures towards this goal and conveyed Türkiye's willingness to serve as a guarantor for peace efforts.<sup>44</sup>

At this juncture, President Erdoğan's argument regarding the structure of the United Nations gains significance, wherein he posits that it is inherently unfair for only five countries to wield disproportionate influence over decisions impacting the entire world. In his 2021 book, Erdoğan delves into various global issues, notably addressing themes of injustice, corruption, the refugee crisis, global indifference towards events in

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<sup>41</sup> *Country Reports on Terrorism 2005*. (2006, April). United States Department of State Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism. <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/65462.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> Krauss, J. (2021, June 15). *Poll finds dramatic rise in Palestinian support for Hamas*. AP News. <https://apnews.com/article/hamas-middle-east-science-32095d8e1323fc1cad819c34da08fd87>

<sup>43</sup> *Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel—Reported impact | Day 146*. (2024, March 1). United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-reported-impact-day-146>

<sup>44</sup> Calli, M. E. (2023, October 21). *Israel-Palestine conflict requires new guarantee mechanism: Turkish foreign minister*. Anadolu Agency. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israel-palestine-conflict-requires-new-guarantee-mechanism-turkish-foreign-minister/3028344>

the Middle East, international terrorism, and Islamophobia. He articulates the viewpoint that Türkiye believes that the current structure of the UN has deviated from its intended purpose of promoting justice, prosperity, and stability (Erdoğan, 2021, pp. 60-63). In this context, upon the rise of tensions between Israel and Palestine and the deepening of the crisis in the region, Erdoğan often said, “*The world is bigger than five*” and reiterated this understanding as “*A fairer world is possible*”.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, before this crisis, Türkiye’s propositions regarding the reform of the UN, as assembled by the Directorate of Communications, are consolidated into another publication. The concluding section encapsulates the rationales behind advocating for UN reform and suggestions for restructuring the UN Security Council (UNSC). Türkiye’s arguments concerning the “legitimacy issues” within the UN system, particularly the concerns surrounding the five permanent member states of the UNSC and the challenges posed by their veto powers (*UN Reform: A New Approach to International Cooperation*, 2022, pp. 113-122).

On the other hand, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov underlined that it is unacceptable for Israel to collectively punish the Palestinian people by using Hamas as an excuse and called for an international observation mission for the Gaza Strip. Speaking at the 21<sup>st</sup> Doha Forum held in Qatar with the theme Towards Building a Common Future, Lavrov pointed out that the attack carried out by Hamas against Israel on October 7 was not without reason, and that the attack in question was actually a result of the blockade that has been going on for many years and the destruction of the Palestinian state. He noted that it was realized after unfulfilled promises regarding its establishment. Stating that they have been trying to explain to Israelis for years that the non-establishment of a Palestinian state is the factor that fuels extremism the most in the Middle East, Lavrov stated that not resolving the status of a Palestinian state is the most dangerous factor in the region. He also stated that he talked with UN Secretary-General António Guterres about the need for an international observation mission in Gaza and that they discussed the need to apply all international pressure to ensure a humanitarian ceasefire.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: “Adil bir dünya mümkün, ama Amerika’yla değil”* [President Erdoğan: “A fair world is possible, but not with America.”]. (2023, December 9). Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı İletişim Başkanlığı. <https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/haberler/detay/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-adil-bir-dunya-mumkun-ama-amerikayla-degil>

<sup>46</sup> *Israel cannot carry out ‘collective punishment’ of people in Gaza: Lavrov*. (2023, December 10). Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/10/israel-cannot-carry-out-collective-punishment-of-people-in-gaza-lavrov>

## 5.4. Important Aspects of Türkiye's and Russia's Influence in the Balkans

### 5.4.1. Türkiye's Balkans Policy

Following the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the constituent states within the federation progressively gained independence, with Kosovo, previously an autonomous region, emerging as an independent entity on February 17, 2008. Türkiye swiftly recognized Kosovo's independence on February 18, 2008, lending its support to Balkan states' NATO integration efforts for regional security and stability. Ülger (2022) argues that Türkiye views positively the burgeoning relations between Balkan countries and the European Union (EU), as evidenced by their candidacy and negotiation processes. Especially in recent years, Türkiye has maintained amicable relations with Balkan nations, aside from occasional tensions with Greece, with bilateral ties remaining robust and mutually beneficial. While conflicts between Türkiye and Serbia occurred during the 1990s due to the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo conflicts, today, Serbia is among the Balkan countries with which Türkiye enjoys close relations. Türkiye also prioritizes dialogue and cooperation with the Bosnian Serb Republic, one of Bosnia and Herzegovina's two political units. President Erdoğan can directly engage with both Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik during periods of heightened tension in the Balkans, demonstrating Türkiye's commitment to fostering peace and stability. The fact that the Balkans is a region in which Türkiye has very close historical, cultural, and humanitarian relations has a great impact on this.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, Türkiye attaches great importance to maintaining peace and stability in the Balkans because of both the Dayton Agreement, which was established to put an end to the Bosnian War, and the Ahtisaari Plan, which granted independence to the Republic of Kosovo. On the other hand, Türkiye, which opposed the isolation of Macedonia by Greece after independence, contributed to this country's integration with the international community and its membership and candidacy processes with NATO and the EU. Türkiye also strongly encouraged Albania and Croatia to join NATO in 2009,

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<sup>47</sup> Ülger, İ. K. (2022, September 7). *Türkiye'nin Balkan politikası siyasal istikrar ve barışın korunmasını esas alıyor* [Türkiye's Balkan policy prioritizes the preservation of political stability and peace]. Anadolu Ajansı. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/turkiye-nin-balkan-politikasi-siyasal-istikrar-ve-barisin-korunmasini-esas-aliyor/2678779>

Montenegro in 2017, and North Macedonia in 2020. All these examples express that Türkiye's activities in the Balkan geography are not a challenge to the West and that the fight against irredentist tendencies and overcoming the problems caused by micro-nationalism are only possible with the sovereign equality of the states. In addition to official diplomatic missions, Türkiye provides economic, technical, and humanitarian aid to the Balkan countries through semi-official organizations such as Turkish Teaching Centers, Yunus Emre Institute,<sup>48</sup> Red Crescent, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) which continues its work on the renovation and preservation of historical monuments from the Ottoman period in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and North Macedonia,<sup>49</sup> and Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD). In essence, it is possible to assert that Türkiye's Balkans policy, which it approaches within the framework of historical ties from the past, continues with a language that pioneers soft power factors, goodwill, and stability.

#### *5.4.2. Russia's Balkans Policy*

During the 2010s, Russia significantly enhanced its relations with Serbia, abolishing visas between the two states and signing free trade agreements. This development played a pivotal role in Russia's Balkans policy as it continued to uphold its historical alliance with Serbia. Russia perceives Serbia as crucially important to its influence in the Balkan region and thus refuses to recognize Kosovo as an independent country. In 2013, the two countries solidified their relationship by signing a strategic partnership declaration, subsequently followed by a military cooperation agreement. Serbia assumed the role of an observer within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) military alliance in 2013, engaging in joint military exercises with Russia and other CSTO partners. Notably, in 2015, Russia, Belarus, and Serbia initiated joint military exercises named Slavic Brotherhood. These exercises, hosted by Serbia in 2016 and 2019, culminated in the most recent iteration held in 2021 within the Novorossiysk region on

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<sup>48</sup> *Turkish Influence in the Balkans Increases*. (2023, April 7). Yunus Emre Institute.

<https://www.yee.org.tr/en/news/turkish-influence-balkans-increases>

<sup>49</sup> Tarhan, M. (2022, October 6). *Türkiye works to preserve cultural footprint in Balkans*. Anadolu Agency. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/turkiye-works-to-preserve-cultural-footprint-in-balkans/2704507>

Russia's Black Sea coast.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, to further integrate with the Serbian population, Russia established non-governmental organizations and subsidiaries under the name of Russia Center, organizing numerous social and cultural events primarily based in the Serbian capital. Moreover, in Bulgaria, there are several political parties that support Russia's political agenda, including the Russophile movement.<sup>51</sup> The Ruskiyy Mir Foundation, regarded as Russia's principal soft power element, has played a significant role in promoting Russian language education, showcasing Russian literature and films, and highlighting the shared cultural heritage between Russia and Bulgaria.<sup>52,53</sup> It is possible to see similar developments centered on Macedonia and Romania.

In May 2012, the Russian Orthodox Church donated approximately 500,000 euros to homeless Greeks,<sup>54</sup> and in the later year, when Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill visited Greece on June 7, 2013, he said the shared Orthodox faith underlies what he claimed are close and warm relations between Russia and Greece.<sup>55</sup> In the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a Russian Culture Festival took place in Banja Luka in December 2015, showcasing Russian music and films.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, on October 2, 2017, a statue of Russian Tsar Nicholas II was erected in the town of Rishetich, serving as a symbol of the bond between Russia and Serbia. The opening ceremony was attended by numerous Russian and Serbian clergy and officials to honor Tsar Nicholas, who endeavored to unite the Orthodox people.<sup>57</sup> In short, we can argue that Russia's Balkans policy is shaped by highlighting cultural ties on the basis of identity politics.

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<sup>50</sup> Sakman, D. T. (2022, April 6). *Rusya'nın Ukrayna müdahalesi Balkanlar için ne anlama geliyor?* [What does Russia's intervention in Ukraine mean for the Balkans?]. Anadolu Ajansı. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/rusyanin-ukrayna-mudahalesi-balkanlar-icin-ne-anlama-geliyor/2556479#>

<sup>51</sup> Eruygur, B. (2024, February 27). *Putin says Russophile movement counters Western efforts to isolate Russia*. Anadolu Agency. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/putin-says-russophile-movement-counters-western-efforts-to-isolate-russia/3148876>

<sup>52</sup> *The Slavic Fairy Tale Film Festival Concluded in Bulgaria*. (2021, September 17). Ruskiyy Mir Foundation. <https://ruskiymir.ru/en/news/292365/>

<sup>53</sup> *Concerts Dedicated to Russian Culture Held in Bulgaria*. (2023, December 11). Ruskiyy Mir Foundation. <https://ruskiymir.ru/en/news/320795/>

<sup>54</sup> *Russian Church raises 500,000 euros for Greek homeless*. (2012, May 25). Ekathimerini. <https://www.ekathimerini.com/news/141886/russian-church-raises-500-000-euros-for-greek-homeless/>

<sup>55</sup> *Patriarch Kirill: Russia-Greece Relations Based on Orthodoxy*. (2013, June 7). Ruskiyy Mir Foundation. <https://ruskiymir.ru/en/news/132401/>

<sup>56</sup> *Days of Russian Culture in Banja Luka*. (2015, December 22). Ruskiyy Mir Foundation. <https://ruskiymir.ru/en/news/200651/>

<sup>57</sup> *Monument to Nicholas II Opened in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. (2017, October 2). Ruskiyy Mir Foundation. <https://ruskiymir.ru/en/news/231238/>

## 5.5. Other Significant Advancements in Military Affairs

### 5.5.1. Prisoner Exchanges

Several months following Russia's attempted invasion of Ukraine, Erdoğan's diplomatic efforts, which maintained communication with Russia while continuing to support Ukraine, escalated with the interventions of the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MIT). In September 2022, a significant event unfolded as Russia and Ukraine conducted a prisoner exchange, long in negotiation. This exchange included the release of the commanders of the Azov Battalion and ten foreign nationals detained during Russia's siege of Mariupol. Ukrainian officials reported the release of 215 soldiers, who were held by Russia. In reciprocation, Ukraine extradited 55 individuals, among them Viktor Medvedchuk, the leader of the banned Opposition Platform — For Life political party in Ukraine, considered pro-Russian. Medvedchuk, facing charges of treason and previously under house arrest, escaped after February 2022 but was apprehended in April by the Ukrainian intelligence service, SBU. Following planned mediation efforts by the Turkish National Intelligence Organization, Medvedchuk was transferred from Poland to Türkiye and subsequently handed over to Russian authorities in Ankara on September 21, 2020. Concurrently, Ukraine handed over 200 soldiers near the border between Belarus and Russia. Furthermore, as part of the exchange, Russia received 55 captured soldiers in return for the release of 5 Azov Battalion commanders that Ukraine had received from Türkiye (Safi, 2023, pp. 453-454).

President Erdoğan's initial reference to the prisoner exchange during an interview on PBS NewsHour in New York, coinciding with his attendance at the 77<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly, served as a significant statement regarding Türkiye's position in global politics.<sup>58</sup> Afterward, the Head of the Ukrainian Presidential Office, Andriy Yermak said that it is extremely important for the Ukrainian side to be in constant communication with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during the prisoner exchange process with Russia with the mediation of Türkiye. Moreover, *"I would like to thank the Turkish government for helping facilitate the exchange of prisoners between Ukraine and*

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<sup>58</sup> Woodruff, J., & Sagalyn, D. (2022, September 19). *Turkey President Erdoğan on Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the future of NATO*. PBS NewsHour. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/turkey-president-erdogan-on-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-and-the-future-of-nato>

*Russia, building on their leadership on the grain deal,”* President Biden’s National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Twitter.<sup>59</sup> Besides, months ago, another prisoner swap between the US and Russia took place in Ankara, again mediated by Türkiye. Russia handed over former US infantryman Trevor Reed to US authorities, while the US returned Russian pilot Konstantin Yaroshenko to Russia.<sup>60</sup> We can argue that these developments were the other indicators that Türkiye’s role as a mediator between Russia and Ukraine was strengthening and that the balanced and calm tone Türkiye adopted in the aftermath of the invasion attempt that began in February was yielding positive results in practice. Moreover, according to Safi (2023), the role of MİT in this exchange should also be noted as an indicator of how autonomous and safe Turkish intelligence has begun to act (p. 441). On the other hand, at the start of September 2022, French President Emmanuel Macron expressed his dissatisfaction about Türkiye potentially becoming the dominant global player engaging with Russia amid the Ukraine crisis.<sup>61</sup>

#### 5.5.2. Türkiye’s Purchase of S-400 Air Defense System

During the final stages of the Cold War, as neighboring countries were advancing their missile systems, Türkiye intensified its efforts to secure a missile defense system against potential threats from Syria, Iraq, and Iran. However, despite tenders initiated by the Undersecretariat for Defense Industries since the early 2000s, no concrete outcomes were achieved. In response, in 2004, Türkiye shifted its focus from joint production supply agreements aimed at reducing foreign dependency on armament to a model prioritizing domestic arms production, with the goal of reaching 50% self-sufficiency.<sup>62</sup> This change was marked by the abandonment of tenders for significant defense projects, including modern tanks, unmanned aerial vehicles, and attack tactical reconnaissance

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<sup>59</sup> Gunerigok, S. (2022, September 22). *US thanks Türkiye for its support in Russia-Ukraine prisoner exchange*. Anadolu Agency. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/americas/us-thanks-turkiye-for-its-support-in-russia-ukraine-prisoner-exchange/2691639>

<sup>60</sup> *ABD ve Rusya’dan Türkiye’de tutuklu takası* [US and Russia swap prisoners in Türkiye]. (2022, April 28). BBC News Türkçe. <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-61252747>

<sup>61</sup> *Macron defends Russia dialogue to prepare “negotiated peace.”* (2022, September). France24. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220901-macron-defends-russia-dialogue-to-prepare-negotiated-peace>

<sup>62</sup> *Tank ve helikopter ihaleleri iptal edildi* [The tank and helicopter tenders have been canceled]. (2004, May 14). Hürriyet. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/ekonomi/tank-ve-helikopter-ihaleleri-iptal-edildi-225670>

helicopters, during the Defense Industry Executive Committee meeting in 2004. These projects, crucial for the Turkish Armed Forces, were intended to be realized through new supply models emphasizing domestic production and original design.

In 2011, as the civil war erupted in Syria, Türkiye extended support to the opposition against the Damascus administration. The conflict spilled over into Turkish territory by the end of 2012, resulting in civilian casualties. In response, Türkiye sought air defense reinforcements from NATO, and beginning in January 2013, temporary deployments of Patriot and SAMP-T missiles from five different countries were made to meet Türkiye's air defense needs. During the period from 2013 to 2015, the US deployed forces in Gaziantep, while German Patriots were stationed in Kahramanmaraş, and Dutch Patriots were positioned in Adana but eventually withdrew. Since 2015, Spanish Patriots have been stationed in İncirlik, and Italian SAMP-Ts have been deployed in Kahramanmaraş since 2016. However, recognizing the inadequacy of this temporary arrangement to address Türkiye's air defense requirements, efforts were initiated to develop and produce an indigenous air defense system. Acknowledging the strategic importance of this endeavor, Türkiye has embarked on studies aimed at achieving self-sufficiency in air defense, considering it too critical to rely solely on other countries' initiatives. Consequently, Türkiye has shown a positive approach towards acquiring air and missile defense systems from various nations while also investing in projects for the design and production of long-range air defense systems using domestic resources.

The initial tender, concluded by the end of 2013, resulted in a Chinese company securing the contract with a bid of 3.4 billion dollars. The decision favored China's CPMIEC company and its FD-2000 defense systems, as they aligned with Türkiye's requirements. However, complications arose due to the company's inclusion on the US sanctions list and objections raised by NATO. Consequently, on November 15, 2015, Türkiye announced the cancellation of the tender.<sup>63</sup> In 2013, Türkiye also explored the possibility of acquiring the Patriot missile defense system from the US. However, due to the US's reluctance to share technical specifications and the system's high cost, Ankara began seeking air defense systems from alternative sources. Russia emerged as a viable option for Türkiye, meeting its criteria in terms of price, delivery, joint production, and

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<sup>63</sup> *S-400: Türkiye'nin Rusya'dan satın aldığı, ABD'yle krize yol açan füze savunma sistemi* [S-400: Missile defense system that Türkiye purchased from Russia, causing a crisis with the USA]. (2021, September 27). BBC Türkçe. <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-58709766>

technology transfer. Consequently, Ankara showed interest in purchasing the S-400 system. From a technical standpoint, the S-400 system offers capabilities such as detecting threats up to 600 kilometers away and engaging ballistic targets at a range of 60 kilometers. It can also engage aerodynamic targets flying as low as 10 meters. In contrast, the Patriot missiles from the US have a minimum engagement altitude of 60 meters.<sup>64</sup>

Following these events, in December 2017, Türkiye disclosed the signing of a contract with Russia for the acquisition of S-400 air defense systems. Turkish officials revealed that the down payment, amounting to \$2.5 billion, was transferred to the Russian administration. They also expressed openness to further collaboration, including potential joint production of S-500 systems. As per the terms of the agreement, the Turkish Armed Forces retain complete control over the system. On July 12, 2019, the Ministry of National Defense announced the arrival of the first components in Türkiye, marking a significant milestone in the procurement process.<sup>65</sup>

### 5.5.3. Exclusion from the F-35 Program and CAATSA Sanctions

After Türkiye acquired the S-400 defense systems from Russia and received the first batch in Ankara, US officials made an announcement on July 17, 2019, stating that Türkiye would no longer be involved in the production process of the F-35 next-generation warplanes, despite being a strategic project partner.<sup>66</sup> Lockheed Martin, the US defense company leading the project, revealed that parts previously manufactured in Türkiye would now be produced in the US starting from March 2020. Türkiye had been producing numerous components for the aircraft, ranging from cockpit indicators to landing gear and had also ordered around 100 aircraft to expand its fleet. Following the US decision, the two F-35 planes that had been delivered to Türkiye were retained in the US. Additionally, the training of Turkish pilots who had gone to the US for F-35 training

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<sup>64</sup> Demirci, Z. (2019, March 8). *10 soruda Türkiye neden S-400 alıyor* [Why Türkiye is buying S-400 in 10 questions]. Anadolu Ajansı. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/10-soruda-turkiye-neden-s-400-aliyor/1412408>

<sup>65</sup> *S-400 Uzun Menzilli Bölge Hava ve Füze Savunma Sisteminin İntikali* [Transfer of the S-400 Long-Range Regional Air and Missile Defense System]. (2019, July 12). Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Millî Savunma Bakanlığı. <https://www.msb.gov.tr/SlaytHaber/1272019-78857>

<sup>66</sup> Garamone, J. (2019, July 17). *U.S. Begins Process of “Unwinding” Turkey From F-35 Program, DOD Officials Say*. U.S. Department of Defense. <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/1908351/us-begins-process-of-unwinding-turkey-from-f-35-program-dod-officials-say/>

concluded by the end of July of the same year. Approximately a year later, the US Senate Committee on Armed Services approved the modification of six F-35s, which had been sold to Türkiye but remained undelivered, for use by the US Air Force.<sup>67</sup>

The arrival of the second battery materials for the S-400 defense system in Türkiye occurred in September, with the Ministry of National Defense disclosing plans for the system to become operational by April 2020. However, on April 30, 2020, the activation of the S-400s in Türkiye was postponed. İbrahim Kalın, who served as President Erdoğan's spokesman and chief foreign policy advisor at the time, cited the postponement as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, assuring that activation would proceed according to the original schedule at a later date. Subsequently, on October 16, 2020, reports emerged in the international press indicating that S-400 air defense systems had been tested in Sinop, and Erdoğan confirmed it.<sup>68</sup> Following these events, a bill encompassing the sanctions proposed by the USA against Türkiye was first approved in the House of Representatives and later in the Senate during the votes held in December 2020.<sup>69</sup>

On August 23, 2022, the Greek S-300 Air Defense Battery, situated in Crete, locked its radar onto Turkish F-16s conducting reconnaissance missions in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. Türkiye responded to this incident by highlighting that a NATO member country targeting a NATO-standard aircraft with a Russian-made air defense system constitutes a hostile act according to NATO Rules of Engagement. On the other hand, Türkiye is expressing its concern over the presence of an active Russian-made air defense system in Greece and the absence of a response from the US regarding the crisis.<sup>70</sup> The presence of S-300s in Crete, which was activated in 2013, dates back even further. The government under Glafcos Clerides, which bought the S-300 Air Defense Missile System following the agreement with the Russian Federation in 1997, transferred the missiles to Greece, following reactions from Türkiye.

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<sup>67</sup> Hernandez, M. (2020, July 21). *US Air Force officially buying Turkey's F-35*. Anadolu Agency.

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/americas/us-air-force-officially-buying-turkeys-f-35/1917806>

<sup>68</sup> *S-400: Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, Sinop'ta S-400 denemeleri yapıldığını doğruladı* [S-400: President Erdoğan confirmed that S-400 tests were conducted in Sinop]. (2023, October 23). BBC Türkçe. <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-54664164>

<sup>69</sup> Pompeo, M. R. (2020, December 14). *The United States Sanctions Turkey Under CAATSA 231*. U.S. Department of State. <https://2017-2021.state.gov/the-united-states-sanctions-turkey-under-caatsa-231/>

<sup>70</sup> *Greece's S-300 air defense system harassed Turkish F-16 jets: Sources*. (2022, August 28). Anadolu Agency. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/greeces-s-300-air-defense-system-harassed-turkish-f-16-jets-sources/2671080>

## Conclusion

Every society carries imprints of its historical evolution over the past centuries, which is evident in its traditions, culture, and everyday customs. Similarly, the structures of states, shaped by these societies, reflect those influences. The dynamics of politics, both domestically and internationally, are intricately tied to societal norms, either fostering positive or negative outcomes. The decision-making processes within states and international bodies are significantly influenced by these dynamics. Consequently, it is inevitable to analyze events and circumstances through the lens of historical experiences, enabling the interpretation and comparison necessary for understanding. This historical perspective is particularly crucial for devising transnational strategies and forecasting geopolitical predictions. A prime example highlighting this phenomenon can be observed in the formation of new state structures following the collapse of the empires during World War I. For this reason, this thesis focuses on exploring the historical ramifications of Turkish-Russian relations, examining how the legacies of the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire continue to influence contemporary transnational strategies.

The emergence of the Turks in Central Asia and the subsequent historical processes leading to the establishment of the Ottoman Empire in Anatolia mirrored the establishment of the Russian Empire for the Russians after the formation of various state structures in the northern regions of the Black Sea. Indeed, a crucial distinction exists between the timelines of the Ottoman and Russian Empires. While the Ottoman Empire established its state organization as early as the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian Empire emerged on the historical stage much later, in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. This chronological gap underscores the divergent trajectories and historical contexts within which these two empires developed and interacted. The historical ties between these two empires and societies date back to before the 15<sup>th</sup> century when official relations were first established. One significant event that connected them was Mehmed the Conqueror's conquest of Constantinople. This event also played a crucial role in shaping Russian identity, as Russia aimed to be the Third Rome, which clashed with the Ottoman Empire's. Furthermore, the collapse of the Golden Horde triggered a competition to inherit its legacy, leading to conflicts until the Russian occupation of the Crimean

Khanate. All ensuing confrontations occurred devoid of any intermediate space separating the two empires, escalating in intensity as they unfolded.

Russia's adoption of Pan-Slavism in the Balkans intertwined with the conflicts over control of the Black Sea involving the historic drive for a warm water port and its neighboring territories, alongside territorial disputes in the Caucasus, particularly as the Ottoman Empire declined. Subsequently, these events led to further developments extending into the Middle East and impacting the global power dynamics of the time. The political tensions, also involving major European powers, grew increasingly intricate, culminating in the outbreak of the largest global conflict of the modern era at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, the interaction between the Bolsheviks and the Turkish National Movement laid the groundwork for the restoration of amicable ties. As World War II loomed, Russia's assertion of power in the Black Sea and the Straits, along with its territorial ambitions in the Caucasus, heightened tensions again. This factor played a significant role in Türkiye's decision to join NATO and cultivate strategic alliances with Western nations.

Following the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the conclusion of the Cold War, both countries endeavored to rebuild cordial relations. Türkiye was concerned over Russia's military interventions in the Caucasus. Nonetheless, collaboration and joint projects, particularly in the energy sector, facilitated the transportation of Russian natural gas to European nations and contributed to Türkiye's emergence as a pivotal energy hub. In the contemporary context, bilateral relations are structured around four primary aspects reminiscent of historical dynamics: the Black Sea, Caucasus, Balkans, and the Middle East. Firstly, tensions arise from Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine and Türkiye's stance of closing the Straits to warships, categorizing the invasion as an act of war. Moreover, Türkiye's careful and balanced policy, its role as a mediator between Ukraine and Russia, and initiatives such as the Black Sea Grain Initiative and prisoner exchanges have positioned Türkiye as a significant actor on the global stage.

In the Caucasus, the significance of Turkish-made drones in the Second Karabakh War between Azerbaijan and Armenia stands as a key factor. Furthermore, the ongoing planning and construction of the Zangezur corridor, which is set to extend to Azerbaijan through Nakhchivan, holds the potential to offer Türkiye an uninterrupted land link to the

Turkic world. Regarding the Balkans, Russia has been engaging in activities that emphasize identity politics, whereas Türkiye has adopted a more sensitive approach focused on strengthening cultural ties in the region. In the context of the Middle East, the ongoing civil war in Syria represents a pivotal issue. Through initiatives such as the Astana Platform, both Türkiye and Russia have demonstrated their commitment to serving as guarantor countries for a lasting solution in Syria, prioritizing its territorial integrity. However, it is noteworthy that Russia has begun to assume a more active role in the region, consequently diminishing the impact of policies led by the United States in the Middle East. Another significant crisis in the Middle East pertains to the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Regarding the place of this crisis in the equation of Turkish-Russian relations, we should realize that both Türkiye and Russia have expressed their support for a two-state solution, and their policies on this issue are parallel. Moreover, we can argue that Türkiye's acquisition of the S-400 air defense system from Russia, coupled with its unique position as the sole NATO member to maintain diplomatic relations with Russia without imposing sanctions from 2022 onwards, underscores its role as a mediator between the Western bloc and Russia. Of course, this is a natural outcome when developments are evaluated.

It is also essential to acknowledge that the current global political and economic order presents both opportunities and challenges. The interplay between historical legacies and contemporary geopolitics in Turkish-Russian relations highlights both possibilities and difficulties in the current global political and economic order. One opportunity lies in the potential for cooperation and collaboration between Türkiye and Russia, particularly in the energy sector. Despite historical tensions and conflicts, both countries have found common ground in energy projects. This cooperation not only strengthens economic ties but also contributes to regional stability and prosperity. Moreover, Türkiye's strategic position as a mediator between Russia and Western nations presents an opportunity for constructive dialogue and conflict resolution, especially for the crisis in Ukraine. By maintaining diplomatic relations with both sides and actively engaging in initiatives such as the Astana Platform for the Syrian conflict, Türkiye can play a crucial role in easing tensions and finding peaceful solutions to regional crises, including the Middle East.

However, alongside these opportunities, there are also significant challenges that must be addressed. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has raised tensions and posed security threats, leading to concerns from Türkiye and other neighboring countries, which prompts Türkiye to exercise caution and remain vigilant against provocations from any side that could escalate tensions, especially in the Black Sea. Additionally, Türkiye's procurement of the S-400 air defense system from Russia has strained its relations with NATO allies, particularly the US. This presents a challenge for Türkiye in balancing its strategic partnerships and maintaining its autonomy in decision-making, especially in the face of conflicting interests between Western allies and Russia. Furthermore, the shifting dynamics of global politics pose uncertainties and complexities for Türkiye and Russia alike. As new actors and alliances emerge on the global stage, both countries must adapt their strategies and navigate evolving geopolitical landscapes.

The dynamics central to this thesis, which have consistently manifested throughout history, are likely to endure in the future. Russia's historical policy of securing access to warm waters, dating back to Tsar Peter the Great, its annexation of the Crimean Khanate under Catherine the Great, its aim to maintain influence over the Orthodox Christian world, its strategic view of the Middle East as pivotal in global politics, and its efforts to exert religious and ethnic influence over Balkan populations all demonstrate the persistence of Russia's core policy cycles, which have remained largely unchanged for centuries. On the other hand, Türkiye's strategic position straddling the cultural and geographical divide between East and West, its aspiration to enhance communication and solidarity within the Turkic world, the strategic advantages afforded by its control over the Black Sea and the straits, along with its cautious approach to potential challenges, its strategy of balancing relations with the Western bloc against threats from the East, and its adoption of multilateral diplomacy when it perceives risks from Western powers, underscore its policy cycles inherited from history. Additionally, Türkiye's friendly engagement with the Balkans, informed by a shared historical legacy and sensitivity to regional dynamics, its adept and decisive handling of the complexities and security challenges in the Middle East, and its commitment to maintaining influence within the Islamic world further underscore the continuity of its historical policy frameworks into the present.

These considerations emphasize the importance of leveraging insights from the science of history when contemplating future geopolitical scenarios. In light of current situations and events reminiscent of the dynamics during the Cold War era, political strategists must conduct thorough and balanced analyses to inform their predictions precisely. Since the context of this thesis and the scope of the case study focuses on Turkish-Russian relations, we have placed our evaluations and our plane in the timeline of this bilateral relationship. While comparable studies could have been undertaken involving different country pairs, recent global developments, particularly in the past few years, have highlighted humanitarian, political, and economic issues of relevance to either Türkiye and its neighboring regions or Russia and its immediate vicinity, occurring with notable frequency and in varied angles and contexts. As a result, this study field presents an invaluable opportunity for meaningful academic exploration across the disciplines of history, politics, economics, security, and geopolitics, encapsulating the interplay between past, present, and future dynamics.

Selecting this thesis topic and engaging in research within this domain posed significant challenges. Primarily, extensive reading was necessary to grasp the historical contexts and relationships, and not all sources were readily available. Moreover, the abundance of details made it easy to overlook crucial aspects. While contemplating the interactions of historical figures with various states, empires, and alliances, it was also imperative to consider the domestic political dynamics of the era. In this context, merely aligning the names of geographical locations across different sources or time periods proved to be a time-intensive endeavor. Furthermore, analyzing diverse scholars' or historians' approaches and interpretations of events to present factual information and draw conclusions demanded careful attention. The inclusion of sources in different languages, each offering local historical information and perspectives, significantly influenced the writing process of this thesis. It underscored the profound impact of politics, geopolitics, transnational strategies, and international relations on everyday human life throughout history as a global reality. This realization was particularly poignant, highlighting the enduring relevance of these factors in contemporary times. Finally, in today's world, the powerful feeling of conducting research freely in the academic world merges with the profound longing for a humane, peaceful global order characterized by love and respect. In short, *peace at home, peace in the world*.

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