

CONSIDERING TURKISH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: BORIS NIKOLAYEVICH YELTSIN'S PERIOD

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Abstract. Following the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which Putin described as a “geopolitical disaster”, a rhetorical process began that gave rise to the thesis of the “end of history”. This thesis filled romantics and idealists with hope that peoples of the Caucasus would be granted the right to self-determination. However, Chechen Uprising revealed the difficulty of making this hope a reality. Russian Federation considered the Chechens’ desire for independence as an act of terrorism and suppressed it. All these developments indicated that certain ethnic and cultural problems, as well as conflicting ideas regarding borders and territorial divisions in the region that were dormant during the Soviet era resurfaced with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This study explores and addresses various issues, such as relations between Türkiye and Russia in the axis of the problems that emerged with the end of the Cold War, the Russian-Chechen struggle that affected the relations, Russia’s approach to the PKK terrorist organization, and Russia’s “Near Environment Doctrine” during the period of office of President Boris Nikolayevich Yeltsin.

Keywords: *Türkiye, Russia, Period of Boris Yeltsin, Türkiye-Russia Relations, International History.*

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1. Introduction

After the end of the Cold War, Türkiye was no longer a distant neighbor of Russia as it was during the Cold War period. The two states were now in a position where they could resolve their issues and engage in open discussions about regional and international concerns. Türkiye, situated in a complex region, had no option but to pursue a multilateral foreign policy in the post-Cold War era. Developing close relations would be advantageous for both nations. (Kasımlı, 2012, p.423).

The disintegration of the Soviet Union gave rise to regional opportunities for Türkiye’s foreign policy and changed the nature of the relations between Türkiye and Russia. Both countries were attempting to find their footing in the evolving global landscape and forge a new model of political relations, which often revealed underlying contradictions (Svistunova, 2016).

Since Russia and Türkiye were members of two opposing blocs during the Cold War, it was necessary to renew the content of mutual relations in the new conditions that emerged as a result of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The agreement signed between Russia and Türkiye in 1925 was unilaterally terminated by the Soviet Union and was not replaced with any other agreement. During the Cold War, the only relevant document that provided a basis for Turkish-Russian relations was the Treaty of Friendship and Brotherhood (Kurban, 2014, pp.143-157), signed in 1921 (Svistunova, 2016, p.76).

Indeed, the agreements signed between the Soviet Union and Türkiye were still

valid, but the new political formations that occurred in the Russian Federation in December 1991 made it obligatory to make a new agreement between the two states. In such an environment, the “Treaty on the Principles of Relations between the Republic of Türkiye and the Russian Federation” was signed on May 25, 1992 (<https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-cumhuriyeti-ile-rusya-federasyonu-arasindaki-iliskilerin-yeni-bir-asamaya-dogru-ilerlemesi-ve-dostlugun-ve-cok-boyutlu.tr.mfa>)

In the 1990s, the regions that interested both Türkiye and Russia were the Caucasus and Central Asia as Prime Minister Turgut Özal stated: “Turkic World from Adriatic to Chinese Wall!” disturbed Russia (Urazova, 2003, p.132) and, at the same time, caused geopolitical rivalries and tensions between the two states (Bdoyan, 2017, p.52).

The internal turmoil in Russia in 1993 culminated in Boris Nikolayevich Yeltsin’s triumph over the opposition and his ascent to power. Under his leadership, the new government remained committed to its objectives, ultimately resulting in the dissolution of the entire Soviet Union. Yeltsin’s ascension also marked the establishment of the constitutional framework of Russia’s political system. In December 1993, the Constitution of the Russian Federation was ratified, officially transforming the country into a presidential republic. (<https://histrf.ru/read/biographies/ieltsin-boris-nikolaievich>).

According to many researchers, Russia faced numerous challenges during Yeltsin’s tenure, including conflicts in the south and north of the Caucasus, which also had an impact on its foreign relations. Additionally, Russia’s Armenian policy during the period of the Russian-Chechen conflict and the occupation of Azerbaijani lands by Armenia had a profound effect on the relationship between Türkiye and Russia.

As soon as Boris Yeltsin came to power, he started military operations against the Chechens fighting for independence. The operation was officially called the “restoration of constitutional order in the Chechen Republic” and lasted from December 11, 1994, to August 31, 1996.

During that period, Türkiye supported the Chechen insurgency, which drew strong reactions from the Russian state. Russia even officially condemned Türkiye for its support of the Chechens. The fact that Russia occupied Chechnya with nationalist rhetoric and did not consider the PKK a terrorist organization, despite its destabilizing impact on Türkiye, also had a negative effect on the bilateral relations between the two countries.

Another issue that affected the Turkish-Russian was Russia’s approach to the South Caucasus, which was perceived differently by the Turkish government. The dissolution of the Soviet Union brought to the surface certain ethnic, cultural and regional problems that were dormant during the Cold War became more apparent after, and the Caucasus once again became a hotbed of national issues and conflicts. (Kurban & Ergün, 2020).

Russia considered it crucial to maintain its dominance over the South Caucasus in order to keep Iran and Türkiye at a distance from its southern borders, restrict Western access to Turkestan via the region, safeguard its control over the Caspian and Black Seas, and establish a shorter route to the Indian Ocean (Aslanlı, 2013).

In this process, the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh by Armenia and some settlements of Azerbaijan, which threatened the national security of Azerbaijan and caused the deterioration of its territorial integrity, took place under the control of the Russian administration.

In this period, cooperation in the field of energy can be cited as an example of the factors that strengthen mutual relations. With the Blue Stream project, it was agreed on the transportation of natural gas from Russia to Türkiye via the Black Sea, and this agreement was evaluated as a win-win strategy for both states.

Apart from these issues, it was observed that Russia and Türkiye had different attitudes towards some international issues in the '90s. For example, there was disagreement between the states over the Bosnian and Kosovo issues. There are still some differences of opinion between the two states on these issues (Svistunova, 2016).

Additionally, there were also many frictions between Russia and Türkiye over the regime of the Straits. However, the disagreement on this issue was largely resolved when the new navigational regulation was adopted in 1998. Russia's objection to the restrictions imposed by Türkiye on the transportation of oil through the Straits, and Türkiye's dissatisfaction with Russia's sale of S-300 missile systems to the Greek Republic of Cyprus in 1998 can be given as examples of other issues of disagreement between the parties (Svistunova, 2016).

2. Russian-Chechen Struggle in the Framework of Yeltsin's Foreign Policy

Boris Yeltsin, who was born on February 1, 1931, was promoted to chief engineer in 1963 after graduating from Ural Technical University, Department of Construction Engineering, and his achievements caught the attention of the Communist Party. Yeltsin was elected the secretary of the Communist Party's Sverdlovsk Regional Committee in 1975. In 1976 he became the First Secretary of the Sverdlovsk Regional committee. Later in 1981, he became a member of the Communist Party's Central Committee. When the year 1985 came, B.N. Yeltsin had already started working at the party's headquarters in Moscow (<https://yeltsin.ru/news/biografiya-boris-nikolaevich-elcin-prezident-rossii-19911999/>).

In September 1987, Yeltsin sent a letter to the General Secretary of the Communist Party's Central Committee stating his resignation from the Politburo candidacy. However, Gorbachev did not respond to the letter. Yeltsin's resignation was considered a "political mistake" by the party, but Yeltsin, who had to remain in office until November 1987, left his post in November. Mikhail Gorbachev, on the other hand, reacted to this situation saying "I will not allow you to engage in politics again" (Hasbulatov, 2011).

In 1989, B.N. Yeltsin was elected as a deputy with 91.5% of the votes (<https://www.rcoit.ru/lib/history/1918-1990/17243/>) and in July 1990, he resigned from the Soviet Communist Party at the 28th Congress (last) of the party. On June 12, 1991, Yeltsin was elected as the first President of the Russian Federation by receiving 57% of the votes (while his closest rivals N.I. Ryzhkov and V.V. Zhirinovskiy received 17% and 8% of the votes, respectively) (<https://tapp.ru/spec/eltzin25>).

During the Yeltsin period, Russian-Chechen conflict took place in northern Caucasus. While Aleksandr Dugin evaluated the Chechen movement within the framework of a plan to take the Caucasus out of the Moscow axis, the fact that the Chechen Republic did not join the Russian Federation after declaring its independence and that it possesses the oil resources, which is the basis of the economy, made the city of Grozny open to a Russian invasion. (Çeçen, 2019, p.20). Although it is known that the first sparks of this crisis, which had a decisive role in Turkish-Russian relations, emerged in the 1800s, the Chechen problem could not be settled at that stage and fell into the center of national and regional goals after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Sagramoso, 2007, p.686). The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs defined this crisis as "the establishment of justice and order within the Russian borders" (Terek, 1995, p.6). It is known that Russia has political, economic, and military ambitions in the Caucasus geography, which has deep historical ties with Türkiye (<https://www.otuken.com.tr/u/otuken/docs/Transkafkasya.pdf>)

and Russia attempted to establish political structures of its own in the region by claiming rights over the region (Aydın, 2005: 6-8). Turkish-Russian relations were negatively affected by ethnic conflicts and instability in the regions ranging from the Balkans to the Caucasus during the post-Cold War period (Çelikpala, 2015, p.119).

The outbreak of ethnic conflicts in the North Caucasus following the collapse of the Soviet Union was a clear sign that long-suppressed issues were coming to the fore. After the former Soviet General Dzhokhar Dudayev became the first head of state in Chechnya and refused Russia's control over the region (Fanning, 2003, p.237), the Russian government took a hardline stance on regional stability (Kurban *et al.*, 2020). Yeltsin, did not recognize the independence of the Chechens, whom he defined as "Caucasian separatists in Russia" (Patel, 2020, p.7), and his government directly intervened in the conflicts by sending troops to Grozny, but the troops had to withdraw (Uyar, 2018, p.289). Russian troops suffered a humiliating military defeat at the hands of Chechen fighters gathered around Dudayev, resulting in thousands of Russian casualties. This was a major setback for the Yeltsin administration, which was already struggling with weak domestic support (Hughes, 2001, p.11). The success of the Chechen insurgency against the Russian army had a significant impact on international media and added to the negative perception of Yeltsin's rule (Budak & Ermağan, 2018, p.192).

It has been observed that Yeltsin, who acted with the desire to reach Russia's oil resources but could not achieve success in the region, tried to normalize the use of force against the Chechen insurgency in the diplomatic context. Russia's membership in NATO's "Partnership for Peace" program and its signing of the "Partnership and Cooperation" Agreement with the European Union can be interpreted as the Yeltsin government's search for support or as security measures. The initiation of the Chechen invasion was an action that invalidated the aforementioned cooperation and agreements and violated international norms and the rules of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (Smith, 2017, p.358).

The Yeltsin government attempted to manipulate the perception of the Chechens as a terrorist organization in the international community. As a result of the Russian invasion, around 1.5 million Chechens lost their lives (Çeçen, 2019, p.158). According to international law, all nations have the right to self-determination. However, by labeling the Chechen insurgency as a terrorist action, the Chechens were effectively deprived of this right recognized by international law (Sönmez & Aygen, 2019, p.674.).

İsmail Cem, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye, stated that Russia could not consolidate itself after the period of the USSR saying, "Russia has not yet settled down. Russia has a mountain to climb." Emphasizing that human rights and democracy issues were no longer an issue of internal affairs, Cem said, "The kids killed, the women murdered, and the civilian settlements under bombardment in Chechnya are of course not Russia's internal issues. These are the issues that concern all of us." (Cumhuriyet, 2000).

3. Terrorism as a Controversial Concept in Turkish-Russian Relations

The relationship between Türkiye and Russia underwent significant changes during the 1990s due to shifting international circumstances and radical transformations (Ozbay, 2011, p.37). The Turkish government's protective stance towards Chechnya, along with the characterization of Türkiye as a safe haven by the Chechen people (Brody, 1970), was perceived by the Russian government as a reflection of the tension between Great Russian

nationalism and Chechen separatism, which fueled Turkish sympathy for the Chechen cause (Traynor, 2001).

The sensitivity towards the violation of human rights and the massacre of thousands of Chechen civilians caused distrust between Türkiye and Russia. The Russian Federation accused Türkiye of hosting Chechen insurgents. Furthermore, they claimed that the Turkish government fought together with the Chechen insurgents against Russia and provided financial aid to the Chechens. During that period, naming a park in Istanbul as “Dudayev Park” and a square in Ankara Beşevler as “Dudayev Square” was also condemned by Russia. Russia condemned Türkiye on the grounds that Dudayev was welcomed as prime minister twice in Ankara (Oran, 2020). Due to the aforementioned reasons, Russia described Türkiye as a “tolerant state towards terrorists” and claimed that Türkiye was cooperating with groups that threatened Russian security (Balta, 2021).

Russia responded to Türkiye’s stance on the Chechen issue by leveraging the PKK, refusing to recognize it as a terrorist organization and providing support for its actions (Ercan, 30). The establishment of the Kurdish Cultural Center in Moscow in 1989-1990 is an example of such support (Mirzaliyeva, 2016, p.12). Another retaliatory action by Russia in 1990 was the commencement of Kurdology studies conducted by the Kurdology Department at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, and the “Kurdish Research Center,” which started its operations in 1994 (Uren, 2020, p.43). These actions raised concerns for the Turkish government, especially after the organization of a conference titled “History of Kurdistan” in 1994 and the establishment of a “Kurdish House” in Yaroslavl in 1995 (Yeşilot & Özdemir, 2016, p.62).

4. Second Way in the South Caucasia: Diplomacy

Attempting to turn the ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus into an opportunity, taking an active role in these conflicts, and even promoting such conflicts were the extensions of Yeltsin’s “Near Environment” doctrine (Ercan, 2010, p.30). In terms of geopolitics, the South Caucasus, located between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, is important for the great powers both in the region and outside the region as it is not only a junction point for energy and transportation lines from south to north and east to west but also possesses the energy resources of the Caspian Basin. It has an important geopolitical position in the Asian continent, gaining new momentum after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Cabbarlı, 2017, p.51; Elma, 2009). Russia supported the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians in Azerbaijan, the Abkhaz and Ossetians in Georgia, and the anti-government communities in Tajikistan to weaken these countries with the aim of reinforcing the Russian hegemony in the region (Sönmez, 2015, p.279).

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, a power vacuum emerged in the Caucasus and the long-standing competition between states and/or alliances to fill the vacuum continued. The USA involved in the region, and the European Union (EU), led by France and Germany, followed suit. While Russia was already making its presence felt in the region, but it is noteworthy that Türkiye and Iran, who were seeking to establish their positions in the power balance within the region, also entered the stage. In the new era, the USA, which was a global superpower, Russia, which had lost its global power position but was trying to gain it back, and China and the EU that were trying to become global powers and Türkiye and Iran that were trying to consolidate their position as regional powers and might later claim to be regional powers were constantly developing strategies to achieve their goals in the South Caucasus and to have a say in that

strategically significant region. (Caferov *et al.*, 2009). This was the first indication that the Caucasus had become a site of geopolitical contestation (Çelikpala & Veliyev, 2015, p.3).

While Russia sought to strengthen its economic, political, and military ties with Armenia by establishing a military base in Gyumri, the second-largest city of Armenia, the USA aimed to maintain its military and political presence in the region following its control of the Caspian energy resource, competing with the members of EU who also sought to claim a share of this resource. In the early years, Türkiye pursued the rhetoric of a “Turkic World from Adriatic to Chinese Wall” while Iran attempted to establish a political, religious, and economic presence for itself in Azerbaijan and Central Asian states (Cabbarlı, 2017, p.57).

Azerbaijan is an energy country that surrounds great “Heartland” although it is theoretical in geopolitical terms and that both takes up and connects the axis of Europe, Middle East, Front, and Far Asia, lying its back to the Caspian Sea. In the process of becoming a nation-state, Azerbaijan’s intellectual infrastructure kept up with global developments and, as the only country in the region with an enhanced “awareness”, it went a long way in the struggle for national independence. However, the process was interrupted due to countercyclical changes. The political consciousness that was enhanced before and after the struggle promoted the intellectual infrastructure of sovereignty and self-determination. This characteristic could not reach such a level in other post-USSR countries in the Central Asian geography, and the political unity remained weak in the “nation” base.

On one hand, it was felt that Russian influence decreased in Azerbaijan that was struggling for independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union, on the other hand, the use of Armenians settled in Karabakh, a historical Turkish land, since the period of Tsarist Russia, as well as the deployment of Russian soldiers on the lands of Armenia and Georgia, affected the relations between Türkiye and Russia. In this process, the Russian support given to the activities to expand the territory of Armenia threatened the security of Azerbaijan and violated the principles of international law (Kurban & Çümen, 2020, p.22). This policy, which served the “Greater Armenia” project, was overlapping with the interests of Russia in a certain way (Cabbarlı, 2017, p.57). The advanced strategic position of the region and specifically of Azerbaijan-one of the countries included in the “Eurasian Balkans” concept defined by Zbigniew Brzezinski- (Brzezinski, 2005, p.154) made it become geography open to the struggle for influence (Yiğit & Gülbiten, 2017, p.3). The Nagorno-Karabakh problem was described by researchers as a frozen but chronic problem (Ataman & Pirinççi, 2021, p.18).

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the growth of economic problems, especially for the states that declared their independence, especially Russia itself (Reynolds, 1998: 66). Türkiye, on the other hand, demonstrated its political stance during that period by getting closer to the Turkish republics that had newly become independent. This approach should be considered compatible with its nature (Topsakal, 2016: 48). It is possible to limit bilateral relations to a competitive as well as collaborative range during the Yeltsin period. On the one hand, the competition continued in the Eurasian, Central Asian, and Caucasian geographies, on the other hand, rapidly advancing economic developments dragged these two states into a dilemma in terms of diplomatic relations (Yılmaz & Yakşi, 2006, p.33).

5. Effects of Economic Parameters on Mutual Relations

It is an indisputable fact that economic interests bring countries closer together. The definition of Türkiye as an “exporter in suitcase trading” in the 1990s is of great importance in terms of cooperation with Russia (Saçık, 2013, p.808). Suitcase trading—the purchase of duty-free and tax-free goods by tourists coming from the new states established after the collapse of the Soviet Union to merchandise them in their countries—and some other relevant developments advanced bilateral relations between the two states. However, it also gave rise to different problems (Kurtuldu, 2016, p.138).

Considering that almost 80 percent of the suitcase trading to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was done to Russia, it turns out that one of the most important commercial partners of Russia was Türkiye (Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı, 2018). According to the figures of the State Planning Organization and the State Institute of Statistics, based on the Laleli-Moscow Shuttle, the international trade relations reached serious levels as high as 10 billion dollars in the mid-1990s (Öz, 2003, p.113). As a matter of fact, it is understood when the figures are examined that the commercial relations that started with suitcase trading in the early 1990s developed rapidly and the trade volume between the two states increased 7 times in the 2000s (Çelikkpala, 2019, pp.6-7).

Besides suitcase trading, there were also unregistered areas, in which Russian citizens were employed in Türkiye, such as housework and labor force (Özel & Uçar, 2019, p.3).

One of the most important elements of Türkiye-Russia relations is energy cooperation. The influence of energy cooperation on diplomatic relations is indispensable. In this context, the fact that the Natural Gas Agreement signed with the USSR in 1984 came into effect in 1987 and that Russia’s strategic partnership with Türkiye lasted more than 30 years can be given as an example (Sakal, 2019, p.12). In 1989, a breakthrough was achieved in the field of transportation, with Turkish Airlines starting regular flights to Moscow (Kalugin, 2022). It is known that the strategic partnership of Türkiye and Russia dates back to earlier periods than the Russian Federation. Although the relations between the two states did not progress at the desired level during the Soviet Union period, the vicious circle of the relations was first broken during the office of Prime Minister Turgut Özal. According to Özal, the more intense the financial issues were, the more political disagreements would remain in the background. From this point of view, despite many problems that they had with Russia, the Turkish government sat around the table with Russia for natural gas trade (Aşula, 2010). Another development shaping bilateral relations was that in the 1990s, then Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel expressed that he was not worried about the fact that it was Russians who would establish and inspect the nuclear power plant in Akkuyu (Koritskiy, 2016, p.9). Süleyman Demirel showed an extremely moderate attitude towards Russia, which he described as our northern neighbor, and Demirel’s sensitivity to economic investments from Russia bore fruit with the strengthening of diplomatic bonds of the two states (Rusya Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, 2010).

In 1992, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC) came into agreement. This organization, which encouraged integration with the CIS and other countries in the Black Sea Basin (Karadeniz Ekonomik İşbirliği Örgütü, 2021), aimed to bring together energy producers and consumers (Oktay, 2003, p.246). Considering Türkiye’s energy deficit, it can be said that investments with Russia were progressing positively and partnerships were going on (Tokgöz, 2011, p.11). However, it is known

that the members could not effectively benefit from BSEC, and not a fully functional integration system was achieved among the member states. As a result, Türkiye could not achieve the expected intensity of cooperation with the states in the region, and regional dialogues were regarded as the only gain after the commercial relations (Oktay, 2006, p.173).

Although economic cooperation between the parties has increased since the 1990s, regional integration has not been achieved (Büyükakıncı, 2013, pp.404-405).

Table 1. Natural Gas and Oil Export Rates between Türkiye and Russia from 1986 to 1997 (Kalugin, 2022)

Year	Crude Oil		Natural Gas	
	Billion Dollars	%	Billion Dollars	%
1986	45.3	2.7	-	-
1987	49.9	2.0	9.0	9.6
1988	58.6	2.6	80.7	67.1
1989	97.6	4.3	179.7	66.3
1990	337.6	10.4	234.0	58.8
1991	24.5	1.1	312.4	63.4
1992	32.5	1.3	282.7	54.9
1993	192.2	6.3	350.2	59.6
1994	41.9	1.5	371.6	59.1
1995	197.9	6.0	522.3	51.8
1996	178.6	4.5	521.0	40.6
1997	107.5	2.9	637.7	59.0
1998	60.5	2.9	503.6	57.0

According to Alexander Dugin, the states in CIS were at the center of the geographical continent, Eurasia and integration had to be achieved around the identity of Eurasianism (Özsağlam, 2006, pp.120-121). Nation-building, which the Russian Federation tried to realize in the context of its “Near Environment” policy, was one of the political strategies implemented during the period (Sönmez, 2010, p.81).

In the early 1990s, Türkiye aimed to enhance its regional influence by serving as a conduit for energy between Russia and Israel. This objective was reflected in the agreement signed on March 2, 1991 between the parties on the electrification of the Çerkezköy-Kapıkule road railway. In general, the late '80s and early '90s can be characterized as a very rapid convergence of the two states (Kalugin, 2022).

The fact that Russia is a natural gas supplier and delivers energy to Türkiye has a strong political value. An important development in this context was the 1997 Blue Stream Agreement. It was agreed with this 25-year Natural Gas Purchase-Sale Agreement signed between BOTAŞ and Gazexport that natural gas would be delivered from the Russian Federation to Türkiye through a line in the Black Sea (<https://enerji.gov.tr/bilgi-merkezi-dogal-gaz-boru-hatlari-ve-projeleri>). For Türkiye, Russia was a reliable collaborator in terms of providing natural gas, which is the main energy source of the country and for Russia, Türkiye meant a large market and a steady customer, and thus, the principle of interdependence governed the relations between the parties. In conclusion, energy cooperation starting with the agreements signed between the parties in the 1980s would gain a new dimension with the agreement signed for the Blue Stream in 1997 (Çelikpala, 2019, pp.6-7).

Türkiye’s huge need for energy resources enabled bilateral relations to progress in favor of Russia. It was known that Türkiye needed to consider nuclear energy projects

that would reduce dependency on foreign resources with an alternative formula (Bulut, 2018, p.73). In this context, Türkiye's idea of producing nuclear power domestically was embodied with the construction of the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant (<http://www.akkunpp.com/projenin-tarihcesi>). It was foreseen that the power plant's electricity generation would bring significant gains for the Turkish economy and it was expected that 80 percent of the investment would be built with Turkish construction companies, even if the investment belongs to a Russian company (Furuncu, 2016, p.204).

In 1997, the Union of Russian-Turkish Businessmen was established in Russia (Başaran, 2015, pp.127-128). The Russian-Turkish Businessmen's Association (RUTID), which mostly consists of Turkish investors and of which some large Turkish companies are among the members, was founded in 1998 in Istanbul (Erdoğan & Ülman, 2016, p.28).

On the last day of 1999, Boris Yeltsin announced that he had handed over the office and that presidential elections would be held in March 2000 (Ria.ru, 2021). In his speech, Yeltsin said, "Today, on the last of the 20th Century, I am resigning... I am leaving. I am leaving earlier than the set term.... I have done everything that I could do..." (Cumhuriyet, 2000). In his book "Putin - The Man without a Face", Gessen reflected the situation Russia was in at that time by writing, "Imagine you have a country and no one to run it. This was the predicament that Boris Yeltsin and his inner circle thought they faced in 1999." (Gessen, 2015, p.21).

Yeltsin who was 68 years old and had been ruling the country for 8 years told, "A new generation is taking my place... I have entrusted the duties of the president of Russia to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin... For the future, the citizens will make their choice in March..." Yeltsin apologized, saying that he was sorry that he failed to fulfill all expectations of the Russian people and frustrated their hopes after the collapse of the Soviet Union and said, "Russia needs new faces in the new century." (Cumhuriyet, 2000).

It is possible to suggest that the driving force of the 1990s was the economy and Türkiye was at the center of regional energy strategies. Nevertheless, the CIS countries that emerged with the collapse of the USSR and their desire to get into the world's energy markets with their rich natural resources were the factors that elevated Türkiye's importance. Türkiye's position as an "ideal transporter" with the Straits functioning as a bridge played a role in Russia's definition of Türkiye as a collaborator rather than a competitor. While moving forward to the 2000s, the years for which political decisions can be characterized as the driving force of bilateral relations, the important part was that the Russian Federation's foreign policy in Yeltsin's period progressed in the context of national interests. Another point that should be noted is that the course of the Russian conflict is determined by strategic cooperation.

Table 2. 1991-1997 on Cooperation Between Türkiye and Russia (Kalugin, 2022)

Name of Agreement	Date of Agreement	Place of Agreement
Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation	February 25, 1991	Ankara
Treaty on the Principles of Relations	May 25, 1992	Ankara
Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation	December 15, 1997	Ankara
Agreement on the Promotion and Reciprocal Protection of Investments	December 15, 1997	Ankara

6. Conclusion

The geopolitical rivalry, which gained momentum with the disappearance of Soviet influence, also created an evolution in the historical trade routes between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. The Modern Silk Road (One Belt, One Road) initiative carried out under the leadership of the People's Republic of China, and the energy transmission line projects carried out in Eurasia brought the Caucasus and Beyond to a point that was open to significant developments. At the end of the Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India axis, Azerbaijan-Georgia-Armenia and the North Caucasus were stuck with brand-new problems brought about by the new geopolitical environment.

Russia has historically made the most of the Caucasus's resources for security, political power, and energy. While trying to maintain its dominance in the region, other actors such as the USA, Russia, China, EU, Turkiye, and Iran began to adopt active policies in the region. In this competitive environment, Turkiye, with its cultural and historical ties and proximity to the region, with the countries of the region, found itself geostrategically surrounded (Containment Policy) from the south (Iraq and Syria) by Western states and even NATO members through the use of terrorist organizations (PKK-(Marxist Leninist) Kurdistan Workers Party)/PYD-Democratic Union Party). This development was a turning point in Turkiye's relations with Russia. Although the evolving relations have benefited the countries in the region, particularly Azerbaijan, Russia's attempts to unilaterally benefit from the situation in a way that aligns with its traditional imperialist aspirations may have adverse effects.

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