

Consecuencias para Europa de la compleja relación ruso-turca

Resumen:

La compleja relación ruso-turca, de profundas raíces históricas, ha afectado tradicionalmente a la situación de seguridad en Europa. Ambas potencias apoyan a facciones enfrentadas en tres teatros geoestratégicos y mantienen sus diferencias con la Unión Europea y potencias europeas en el Mediterráneo oriental. Aun así, han conseguido desarrollar una forma de entendimiento funcional, que podríamos denominar de «confrontación cooperativa», del que ambas se benefician y que pretendemos analizar en el presente artículo, así como sus posibles consecuencias para el continente europeo.

Palabras clave:

Rusia, Turquía, OTAN, Unión Europea, Mediterráneo, Libia, Nagorno Karabaj, mar Negro.

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Introduction

If there is one thing that characterises the relationship between Russia, Turkey and Europe, it is a long-standing mutual love-hate interaction with deep historical roots. The bilateral relationship between the first two has been experiencing a complex and problematic cooperation-confrontation in recent years, with a major impact on the various crises unfolding in Europe's geostrategic neighbourhood. It is striking that, despite having suffered substantially from the pandemic both socially and economically, each of these states has reacted differently to the pandemic: Russia is restricting its external activity, while Turkey has increased it markedly, from Libya to the Caucasus. But the common feature of both foreign policies is that they are being used as projection outside their borders to neutralise domestic problems, shoring up the image of their respective leaders through foreign policy successes.

In any case, there is no doubt that Turkey's assertive foreign policy in recent years, which has caused great consternation among its Western allies and partners in NATO and the European Union, has forced Moscow to reassess its relationship with Ankara¹. Not least because it is precisely Russia that often benefits from the consequences of Turkey's new power projection policy.

Admittedly, there is a certain compatibility between the progressively autocratic political systems that both leaders are forging in their respective states, despite the fact that one belongs to NATO, an organisation that is seen by the other as a permanent threat. Indeed, President Putin's statements about his colleague Erdoğan make clear Russia's willingness to maintain a fluid strategic dialogue: "No matter how tough President Erdoğan's stance may look, I know that he is a flexible person, and finding a common language with him is possible"².

But many of the forces that govern their relations are beyond the control of both sides, such as variations in the energy market or growing domestic discontent. Both powers have thus come to create a kind of cooperative model of understanding in conflict zones where, despite supporting opposing factions, they have developed a collaborative

¹ Mardasov and Semionov, 'Best Frenemies: Russia and Turkey', *Riddle*, 26 November 2020. Available at: www.riddle.io

² Putin's remarks at the Valdai discussion group meeting, 22 October 2020. Available at: www.valdai.ru

relationship from which both benefit, at the expense of other actors, in what might be termed a 'cooperative confrontation'.

This study does not aim to analyse the full depth and breadth of the evolution of this bilateral relationship, but rather to examine the possible impact that its ups and downs have on security on Europe's southern and eastern borders. To this end, we will analyse four significant areas: Syria, the Black Sea, Libya and the Caucasus.

A complex relationship

To analyse the Russian-Turkish relationship, it is perhaps useful to start with economic exchanges, as these help to clarify mutual interests.

Russian exports to Turkey in 2019 were around \$17.75 billion and its imports around \$3.45 billion. An increase of 2.5% compared to 2018 and lower than the 31 billion reached in 2014, before the serious clash between the two powers over the Russian bomber downed over Syria in 2015. The only sector that is experiencing significant growth is tourism, with more than 7 million Russian tourists visiting Turkey each year, making Russia one of the largest visitors to the Mediterranean country before the pandemic³.

An important aspect to consider is the gradual decrease in Turkey's dependence on Russian gas supplies. The slowdown of the Turkish economy, as well as the development of liquefied gas infrastructure, has accelerated the trend in recent years towards reduced Russian gas imports⁴. While Gazprom once supplied up to 52% of Turkish gas imports, even planning to expand supply by building the TurkStream pipeline, this fell to 33% in 2019, in favour of Azerbaijan, which became the main supplier. Moreover, the promising gas exploration *results* in the Black Sea could make it possible to completely eliminate Turkey's dependence on Russian gas⁵.

Cooperation in the construction of the Akkuyu nuclear power plant by the Russian company Rosatom thus remains one of the most important mutual economic projects, at a cost of approximately 20 billion dollars, with full operation planned for 2023.

³ BAEV, Pavel. 'Russia and Turkey Strategic Partners and Rivals', IFRI, May 2021. Available at: www.ifri.org

⁴ 'The state of Turkey's gas market and reducing foreign dependency', *TRT World*, 21 August 2020. Available at: www.trtworld.com

⁵ SANCHEZ TAPIA, Felipe; *Geopolitical impact of natural gas discoveries in the Black Sea*, p. 8. Available at: http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2020/DIEEEA37_2020FELSAN_gasmarNegro.pdf

This picture reveals economic relations that are not particularly strong, are in decline and may indicate a certain decrease in Turkey's interest.

In the field of mutual influence, it seems that Ankara might have some leverage over Moscow. We cannot forget the thousands of Russian students (especially from Tatarstan) who attend Turkish universities; the diaspora that connects people from the North Caucasus with relatives in Turkey; or the millions of Russians who as tourists enjoy Turkish beaches every year and are to some extent attracted by its culture. In any case, at least Moscow is clearly showing its desire to preserve the relationship, with a clear willingness to de-escalate the latest crises that have arisen between the two states. Thus, while Erdoğan attended the inauguration of a mosque in Moscow, Putin refrained from commenting on the transformation of Sofia Cathedral into a mosque, despite protests from Patriarch Kirill; while Moscow is displeased by Turkish support for Crimean Tatars or Chechens⁶, it has so far done nothing to establish ties with or support the secular liberal Turkish opposition or Kurdish independence fighters; while Russia has employed its wide panoply of hybrid capabilities in the West, it is reluctant to employ them in Turkey; when Turkey shot down a Su-24 bomber in Syria in November 2015, relations were very tense (even close to rupture), but Russia renounced an 'eye for an eye'. In fact, it unreservedly supported Erdoğan after the attempted coup in July 2016, taking advantage of the situation for Turkey to buy the S-400 anti-aircraft system (along with Erdoğan's own apologies, perhaps as a way of ingratiating himself with Russia for the aforementioned shoot-down).

Nor should we forget that Turkey is a NATO member, which forces Russia to consider the possibility of far-reaching geostrategic options, since in the event of a crisis Turkey could close the Bosphorus (with the support of its allies and regardless of what the Montreux Convention says), which would interrupt a crucial Russian line of communication with the Eastern Mediterranean. On the other hand, serious disputes between Turkey on the one hand and Greece and France on the other, in the Eastern Mediterranean and Libya, open up opportunities for Russia to exploit them and weaken Atlantic solidarity. In this sense, the sale of the S-400 anti-aircraft systems was a Russian masterstroke that will continue to cause problems for the cohesion of the alliance, as it jeopardises the integration of the alliance's air defence and control system.

⁶ Available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/turkey-breaches-russias-sphere-of-influence/>

We must bear in mind that even if Turkey's relationship with the EU were to continue to deteriorate due to its pressure on Cyprus, civil rights issues, its operations in Libya or its use of uncontrolled immigration as a tool of pressure, the problems of cohesion in the alliance will foreseeably tend to be solved in the future.

Thus, for Moscow, the military aspect of the mutual relationship, Turkey's NATO membership is undoubtedly the most important component to take into account in geostrategic planning.

Moreover, the two leaders have not developed a personal affinity that would ensure a mutual desire to deepen and solidify their relationship. The two autocrats have been in power for about a decade (Putin since 2000 and Erdoğan since 2003), having had dozens of personal meetings and telephone conversations (with the Chinese leader he has had four telephone conversations), according to the Kremlin itself. This dense interaction would suggest that both are relatively clear about each other's intentions, aspirations and character, which has led to great mutual sympathy and relatively little mutual trust. The autocratic nature of both political regimes (Russia to a much greater degree) has not generated the necessary incentives for deep and extensive cooperation, as in the case of Russian and China. The issue that causes Putin's greatest distrust is undoubtedly Erdoğan's support for the cause of political Islam and more specifically for the Muslim Brotherhood, an organisation banned in Russia. Thought overall it could be said that on this issue Moscow is counting on Ankara in the fight against religious extremism, but with nuances, as Turkey, while supporting the Tatar minorities in Crimea, substantially moderates such support so as not to irritate Russia.

Putin is obviously acutely aware of the threat posed by jihadist extremism, so the fact that the Turkish leader has ambitions to lead the Muslim world is no small matter for the Kremlin, which is constantly advancing the common cause of fighting Islamic terrorism alongside Europe, while at the same time appeasing Russia's Muslim minorities.

But it is in the different geostrategic scenarios where we can see that, although the interests of the two states—increasingly mimicking the ambitions of the two leaders—are increasingly diverging, a mutually beneficial method of agreement has been created. This is not to say that there is a geostrategic agreement, as shown by the case of Iranian oil, which Moscow is trying to prevent from flooding the world market as it would result in a drop in oil prices, drastically reducing its revenues. On the contrary, Ankara is keen for

Iranian oil and gas to come to the market through its territory, which would further Turkey's goal of becoming an energy distributor.

While, as mentioned, Ankara may have some influence over Moscow, there is no doubt that Moscow has the most leverage. This asymmetrical power relationship began to take shape after the Russian bomber was downed over Syria in 2015. From then on, Russia used various tools to put pressure on Turkey: restrictions on trade and movement of people between the two countries, the threat to cancel the nuclear energy infrastructure construction project, and even a media and social media campaign targeting Erdoğan and his family. But undoubtedly the most serious factor in Russia's arsenal of pressure remains the level of political support for the Kurds on Turkish and Syrian territory, and above all its traditional military support for the PKK since the days of the former Soviet Union, an experienced, relentless and bitter enemy of Turkish military forces, which is a serious problem for Ankara and a constant source of Turkish irritation⁷.

Russia would therefore be the strong side of the relationship, and there is no doubt that Turkey has benefited from this type of arrangement in the aforementioned scenarios, as we will see below, and could still continue to do so, since Russian intervention in Syria would *de jure* prevent the consolidation of Kurdish autonomy in the region. In Libya, in turn, binary domination would contribute to Turkish economic interests and political ambitions over hydrocarbon reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean.

As an indirect but far-reaching effect, one might think that as Russian and Turkish interests intermingle and expand into other potential areas (such as Ukraine), the risk of mutual confrontation would diminish, as problems that might be created in one area could be solved by resorting to a *quid pro quo* in another region. But there could also be more grounds for discord. Turkey has recently sold Ukraine six Bayraktar TB2 drones, like the ones successfully used in the Azerbaijan war⁸.

⁷ The PYD (Democratic Union Party), an offshoot of the Kurdish PKK in Syria, maintains an office open in Moscow. Available at: <https://ekurd.net/pyd-open-representative-moscow-2015-10-20>

⁸ Available at: <https://www.defensenews.com/unmanned/2019/01/14/turkish-firm-to-sell-drones-to-ukraine-in-69-million-deal/>

The Syrian scenario: a cooperative confrontation model emerges

Syria is undoubtedly the arena with the greatest risk of collision between Turkey and Russia, but interestingly it is the area where they have first managed to establish a certain style of unstable cooperation. Russian intervention since September 2015 has prevented the toppling of Bashar al-Assad's regime, which was (and still is) Turkey's objective. It was thus surprising that in 2016 Putin managed to bring Erdoğan to a trilateral meeting with Iran (so-called 'Astana' format), which has however not been possible in February 2021⁹, although this forum remains active at various levels, where it is able to design small-scale solutions. The fact is that this meeting laid the groundwork for a compromise in October 2019 on zone control, which, although it did not satisfy any of the parties, remains in place and unstable despite the violations. When Turkey significantly increased its involvement in the Syrian conflict, following the US withdrawal in 2015, the Assad regime had no choice but to throw itself into Russia's arms, as Iran did not have the capacity to counter Turkey. Thus, Turkish involvement allowed Moscow to dominate the Syrian regime, albeit indirectly, reducing Iranian influence. In turn, other regional actors such as Saudi Arabia gradually lost influence, as did Western diplomacy, making Ankara the dominant power supporting Syrian opposition forces. Therefore, due to Russia's successful military intervention, armed rebel groups are aware that their survival depends on Turkish support.

In this way, by controlling the warring factions in Syria, Moscow and Ankara control the conflict. The Astana format meeting in 2016 also contributed to moving the focus of international mediation mechanisms—put in place in both Vienna and Geneva—, thus helping to increase their control of the conflict.

Over time, the understanding between the two powers has contributed to further diminishing Tehran's influence, as tensions between rebels, Turkish proxies and Assad's forces are better resolved through dialogue between Moscow and Ankara than through the trilateral Astana format.

Examples of this Russian-Turkish understanding or 'cooperative confrontation' can be found in 2016 when Russia gave the green light to Turkey's incursion into Syria, receiving in return the acceptance for the Syrian regime's takeover of Aleppo, the most important

⁹ THEPAUT, C. 'The Astana Process: A Flexible but Fragile Showcase for Russia'; *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 28 April 2020. Available at: www.washingtoninstitute.org

city under rebel control, in a clear *quid pro quo*. Ankara has historically pressured Washington to eliminate aid to the Kurds, which also benefits Moscow in the Syrian arena. The volatile situation in Syria may change, as the US could decide to return to the scene, supporting the rebels it once abandoned, which would destabilise the current situation. The EU, in turn, could play a prominent and perhaps decisive role by providing substantial funds for reconstruction, especially in the territories east of the Euphrates, thus limiting the Syrian regime's control over them. So far, only France and the UK are active in the area (in distant geographical areas related to oil fields). For its part, the EU is failing to forge an agreement among its partners to implement a decisive and effective joint strategy.

Libya and the South Caucasus: cooperative model takes hold

Towards the end of 2019, Turkey decided to increase its involvement in Libya by sending military advisors, Syrian mercenaries (there is also a suspicion of Turkish paramilitary presence) and armed drones in support of the UN and EU-backed government. On the opposite side are Marshal Haftar's forces, supported by the UAE, Egypt, Russia and, curiously, France.

Again we can see the pattern in which the decisive intervention of one in support of one faction enhances the importance of the other faction's support for the other. The intensity of Turkish support stopped Haftar's offensive in its tracks, forcing him to seek further support from Moscow, which reacted by sending Syrian and Wagner mercenaries and modern weapons systems (including MIG-29 fighters and Su-24 bombers) along with personnel trained to operate them. The result has been the freezing of the conflict, in which Turkey and Russia have once again contributed to becoming the most influential powers in a conflict in a third country, also favoured by US passivity and intra-European divisions. Should Russia also firmly establish itself on Libyan territory (it already has bases in Tartus and Latakia), be it a naval base in Benghazi or an air base in Tobruk (which it could share, why not, with China¹⁰), this would substantially strengthen its position in the central and Eastern Mediterranean.

¹⁰ So far China has not deployed permanent forces in the Mediterranean and Africa, except in Sudan and in the latter, due to Chinese oil interests in that region, but this does not rule out the possibility that an alignment of Russian-Chinese interests in the area might advise them to do so. Available at:

Meanwhile, we can also see the same model of cooperative, mutually beneficial confrontation in the recent revival of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The failure of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group platform to establish a negotiated settlement is the backdrop that has prompted Azerbaijan to launch its latest successful offensive, recapturing a large swathe of territory in the region, inflicting a heavy military defeat on Armenian forces strongly supported by Turkey with military advisors and state-of-the-art equipment in terms of drones, communications systems and sensors.

Although it may seem contradictory to say that Russia has benefited from the conflict by supporting the defeated Armenia, it is not so contradictory if we remember that since 2018, Armenian President Pashinyan has been convinced by the US and other Western powers to pursue a pro-Western agenda, to the detriment of Russia. But after the successful Azeri offensive, Armenia was abandoned by Western powers—powerless because of the strategic remoteness of the conflict—forcing it to turn to its traditional ally and security guarantor, Russia.

Both powers have thus consolidated their influence in the region. Turkey, which through Azerbaijan would gain access to the Caspian Sea and asserts itself in a region where its cultural, ethnic and linguistic ancestry gives it influence (in fact, after the conflict Ankara has tried to deploy observers in the area, but Russian opposition has prevented it)¹¹. Russia, for its part, is consolidating its position as the dominant power over weakened Armenia—displacing the West's fickleness—and the guarantor of the peace agreement.

Implications for Europe

As we have seen, the cooperative confrontation model has been successfully implemented in three different geostrategic theatres without the need for formal agreements, to the benefit of both sides. Remember that these successes have been

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-deploys-troops-in-south-sudan-to-defend-oil-fields-workers-1410275041>

¹¹ Turkey has very close ties with Azerbaijan, to the point of launching the idea of 'two countries, one people', and Erdoğan visited his Azerbaijani counterpart in December to celebrate the 'joint victory' over Armenia. Available at: <https://www.voanews.com/europe/erdogan-visit-azerbaijan-could-stoke-russian-rivalry-observers-say>

facilitated by the weakness of third actors with the capacity or will to influence/intervene in these theatres.

Strangely enough, both NATO and the EU could contribute to Turkey's assertive foreign policy, as NATO membership and thus membership of the Western bloc provides Ankara with the security of some implicit support, should the situation lead to an Article 5. An example of this can be seen in the Syrian scenario, where this feeling allows Turkey to push to limit the advances of Assad's forces, a card that allows it some security in its negotiations with Moscow, albeit always aware of its inferiority vis-à-vis Russia.

The EU could develop strategic options that would limit Turkey's capacity to manoeuvre in foreign affairs, thus forcing Ankara to cooperate more on issues such as immigration and the Cyprus standoff. To this end, one should be more aware and realistic about the nature of the de facto cooperative confrontation between Russia and Turkey. The same could be said of NATO, which could make its support conditional on less Turkish political obstructionism in the Council and in relations with the EU, as well as a more coordinated regional agenda with its Western allies.

Although the Russian-Turkish cooperation model—essentially a model with a high military content—has shown its usefulness, turning war zones into frozen conflicts that benefit both actors, it might have its limits. In Libya, the reconciliation process is largely due to the support it has received from Ankara and Moscow, which has also been backed by the UN, as well as the US, France and Italy. The intervention of strong international actors and organisations could weaken the control exercised by Ankara and Moscow, undermining the Russian-Turkish duopoly in certain geographical areas. This situation could lead Erdoğan to consider that aligning with his European allies could provide him with more lasting influence in the conflict zones and better options to win with peace, rather than simply controlling the conflict, although this would first require devising a common strategy among the actors involved, which seems a difficult goal to achieve.

On the other hand, it is striking that the communiqué following the NATO summit in June 2021¹² makes no mention of Russia's expansion into the Eastern Mediterranean and Libya, perhaps because it does not want to exacerbate Turkey, showing once again that the Alliance's political ability to adapt to Russian geostrategic evolution and its political

¹² Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm

character is being limited, affected by the Russian-Turkish 'entente'¹³. We are also witnessing a rift within the Alliance caused by the growth of national interests among some of its member states. This is limiting the organisation's political flexibility to re-establish a balanced security order in and around Europe. The situation leads Moscow (according to its own logic) to instrumentalise conflicts around the Euro-Atlantic area with the aim of creating and/or widening rifts within NATO and diversifying its focus.

Despite this, the Maghreb and Sahel remain a second-tier theatre for the Alliance compared to the priority given to the eastern border. But growing Russian presence in the area calls for a change of mindset and a rebalancing of priorities between the eastern and southern flanks.

Russian and Turkish movements and repositioning in the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa are part of a geopolitical trend in which emerging powers such as Russia and Turkey act in a more or less coordinated manner to challenge and circumvent Western, and in this case European, interests. Thus, the danger is that the model will become institutionalised and more emerging and/or regional powers will see the opportunity to pursue their own (political and military) interests outside those of NATO and the European Union.

Finally, Russia could use the existing state of tension between Greece and Turkey, or between the latter and France (in recent months there have been incidents between French and Greek vessels with Turkish vessels, which have almost led to armed clashes¹⁴) to encourage this, which could lead to an uncontrolled escalation, potentially leading to a military confrontation¹⁵, which would substantially weaken NATO cohesion, creating a serious internal problem that would greatly favour Russia's interests and position in the Eastern Mediterranean¹⁶.

¹³ RYNNING, Sten. 'Deterrence Rediscovered: NATO and Russia', Springer. Available at: <http://www.springer.com/series/13908> Last accessed on 2 September 2021.

¹⁴ Available at: https://www.elconfidencial.com/mundo/europa/2020-08-14/egeo-otan-claves-conflicto-turquia-grecia_2713788/

¹⁵ JABBOUR, Jana; 'France vs Turkey in the EastMed: A Geopolitical Rivalry between a keeper of the Old Order and a challenging Emergent Power'; L'IFRI Briefings, 6 May 2021.

¹⁶ The possibility of confrontation between members of the Atlantic Alliance is very remote, given the number of political levers and mutual relations within the Alliance, and also the United States which would not allow it. But given the current situation, an armed incident is not entirely out of the question, i.e. it is possible.

Conclusions

In recent years we have witnessed the progression of the always ambiguous Russian-Turkish relationship, which, although not yet strategic, is bearing fruit for both sides. While we have seen how economic ties, mainly Russian gas exports to Turkey, have been shrinking and the lack of personal affinity between the two autocrats is evident, this has not prevented them from developing a mutually acceptable mode of cooperation, despite supporting opposing factions in various geo-strategic theatres.

Even so, Western policymakers and diplomats should look for incentives to explore opportunities to deepen the rift between Moscow and Ankara. Libya seems to be the most promising and particularly attractive scenario for Italy¹⁷. But when it comes to the EU, we must bear in mind that the possibility of forging a common foreign policy position is always difficult, which is especially clear in the Libyan case, where France and the EU are supporting different factions. But if Europe does not take more committed action in Libya, beyond its maritime monitoring mission, it will be relegated to remaining a mere observer of a situation controlled de facto by Turkey and Russia in a Mediterranean region of great importance to the Union.

On the other hand, the EU's capacity to influence the Caucasus is very limited, beyond economic development aid and the distant possibility of Georgia's integration into the Union. In the case of Syria, Brussels is a prisoner of the refugee crises that Turkey could unleash, if it sees fit, as it has done in the past, so its capacity to intervene in the region is rather limited, always obliged to appease Turkish interests.

In any case, time could play against the Russian-Turkish entente. The Turkish leader has been compensating for growing domestic discontent with external military successes and interventions, but these successes are short-lived. Sooner or later he might be forced to embark on new and costly foreign adventures or to increase pressure on the growing internal opposition. The latter option would undoubtedly clash with European interests and values, whether of the Union itself or of one of its powers. Even the first option could also produce Western criticism and, worse for Turkey, the possibility of economic sanctions from both the EU and the new US administration.

¹⁷ TOCCI, Nataly. 'Peeling Turkey Away from Russia's Embrace: A Transatlantic Interest', *IAI Commentary*, 14 December 2020. Available at: www.iai.it

Perhaps an issue of the utmost severity for Europe could be the likelihood of a military confrontation between Turkey and Russia outside the Article 5 coverage area, resulting from tension in one or more of the geostrategic areas mentioned. For its part, the EU would clearly be ill-equipped to deal with the risks of such a confrontation. To minimise any possibility of military escalation, the Union should avoid any steps that would make European engagement with Turkey politically imperative if its assertive foreign policy were to lead to military escalation with Russia.

In this sense, one possible scenario could arise from the decisive role Turkey is playing in the modernisation of the Ukrainian armed forces, much to Moscow's chagrin. In the face of a hypothetical Russian intervention, Turkey would most likely require protection, assistance and support from the rest of NATO, which could lead to an uncontrollable escalation with an extremely worrying and uncertain outcome. Conducting such a scenario should be foreseen in advance because of the enormous risks it would entail.

Given that the characteristics of the Russian and Turkish regimes are not conducive to rapprochement on security matters, the EU should continue to develop tools that simultaneously allow for cooperation and containment in its relationship with and between its two uneasy neighbours, where one of its main concerns should be to avoid the possibility of military confrontation between the two.

We must not forget that while Moscow has been accused of interfering directly against Western interests (cyber-attacks, disinformation and interference in electoral processes), Ankara remains a member of the Atlantic alliance and maintains its interest in closer relations with the European Union. The Union should therefore seize every opportunity to expand on issues where its interests do not fundamentally diverge from those of Turkey, looking at the wider strategic context, with the aim of pushing Turkey as far away from Russia as possible.

Finally, NATO should consider rebalancing its priorities, giving more attention, means and capabilities to the Eastern Mediterranean, where Russia is positioning itself and becoming a prominent player. In this scenario, the possibility of escalating tensions between Alliance members (Greece vs Turkey or France vs Turkey) must be neutralised before an incident leads to an armed confrontation with very negative consequences for the Western bloc.

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