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# 'Let the black sea unite Us': the 1967 Soviet-Turkish industrial agreement and Ankara's cold war rapprochement with Moscow

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**ABSTRACT**

This article explores a turning point in Soviet-Turkish relations during the Cold War: the 1967 interstate agreement that enabled construction of the backbone of Turkey's post-war state-owned industry, including the petroleum refinery in Aliağa, the steel plant in İskenderun, and the aluminium plant in Seydişehir. It shows that Turkish leaders were not unusual in their balancing of Western and Soviet aid, nor in their attempt to use state intervention to overcome underdevelopment. During the 1950s and 1960s, Jawaharlal Nehru and Gamal Abdel Nasser employed similar tactics for similar ends. What was indeed unusual, was that Turkey was the only NATO member to receive such significant Soviet industrial aid. To explore the Soviet approach and the Turkish response, the article uses recently declassified records from the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI) and the Turkish state archives (BCA).

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## Introduction

In 1961, Turkey's first democratically elected prime minister was hanged at the gallows on a small prison-island in the Marmara Sea. The year before, after ten years in power, Adnan Menderes had been ousted by a coup; found guilty of treason, he was executed along with two ministers of his cabinet. In light of the coup contagion at that time, with the US government involved either covertly or overtly in regime change across Latin America and the Middle East, a number of Turkish journalists, diplomats, and historians have suspected foreign orchestration of Menderes's downfall (Yön Dergisi 1963; Genç 1977; İlhan 1977; Avcıoğlu 1979). Incidents like Mohammad Mosaddegh's removal from power in 1953 – in neighbouring Iran after an Anglo-American-backed coup – lent plausibility to this narrative, which has contributed to a myth in Turkish historical scholarship that portrays Menderes as the victim of a Western conspiracy. The alleged motive for US intervention is Menderes's public announcement that he would travel to the Soviet Union in July 1960 (Cumhuriyet 1960).[1]

Recently, historians have combed accessible US archival records and found no evidence of US involvement in the 1960 coup (Danforth 2021); nevertheless, the myth holds

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(Yıldız 2018; Ünlü 2021). If Washington's archival records cannot convince, it is worth noting a puzzle that emerges from Russian and Turkish holdings. We might begin with the fact that Menderes's outreach to the Soviet Union was not new. In the mid-1950s, with his economic policies faltering and the US refusing requests for additional aid, Menderes was forced to trade with the Eastern Bloc (Tellal 2020). Second, before announcing his own trip, Menderes had already sent a delegation to Moscow to negotiate Soviet investment (Kayra 2013). But, perhaps most importantly: if a disgruntled US government had indeed orchestrated the coup, why did the Kremlin welcome Menderes's demise?

Soviet newspapers celebrated the Democrat Party's collapse, arguing that the 'degenerate Menderes regime' had supported US aggression and led the Turkish economy to the brink of collapse (Miller 1960). From his Moscow exile, the Turkish poet Nazım Hikmet published a scathing piece about Menderes, arguing that Moscow should court Turkey's new leadership (Hikmet 1960). And Moscow did reach out to Turkey's next government. In relatively short order, the Soviet Union's relations with post-Menderes Turkish governments culminated in a major industrial agreement in 1967. This article explores that agreement, and it reflects on events in the preceding and subsequent years. It argues that the persistence of the myth about the 1960 coup is connected to assumptions about Soviet-Turkish relations that exaggerate the Cold War ideological confrontation between communism and anti-communism. It shows, instead, that economic exchanges were a significant determinant of Soviet-Turkish relations throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

The Soviet Union's post-Stalin courting of Turkey was part of a broader policy towards the Global South that had strong overlaps with Washington's policy towards Ankara (Westad 2005; Engerman 2011; Hirst and Işçi 2020). The US supported Turkish governments with a range of political profiles – from those of İsmet İnönü and Adnan Menderes to Bülent Ecevit and Süleyman Demirel. Washington did have an ideological vision of domestic politics (an anti-communist version of modernization) but was willing to work with anyone who supported US foreign policy goals (Danforth 2021). Given Turkey's membership in NATO, it might seem surprising that Moscow could see Ankara aligning on Soviet foreign policy goals, but in many ways, Turkey pursued a balancing act like countries in the non-aligned movement. Soviet investments in Turkey resembled those in other parts of the Global South as loans for the state-led development of heavy industry, to be paid off with local exports. Moscow's developmental aid to this NATO member fits well into a broader narrative of Soviet interactions with the Third World (Engerman 2011, 2018; Schayegh 2012; Nunan 2016).

The first part of this article explores the period that culminated in the 1967 agreement, which established the framework for the construction of industrial plants in Aliağa, İskenderun, and Seydişehir. It shows that Turkish leaders were not unusual in their balancing act of the 1960s, nor in their attempt to use state intervention to overcome underdevelopment. Jawaharlal Nehru and Gamal Abdel Nasser employed similar tactics towards similar ends. Other scholars have written about Soviet-Turkish relations in this period largely from a bilateral perspective; this article emphasizes that the Soviet-Turkish relationship followed general patterns in global politics (Gasymly 2008; Tellal 2020). The second part of the article helps explain why Moscow paid relatively little attention to day-to-day politics in Turkey, including of the left, in the aftermath of the 1967 agreement. To illustrate the Soviet mindset and how the Turks reciprocated, the article

draws heavily on documents from the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History in Moscow (RGANI) and the State Archives of the Turkish Republic (BCA).

Broadly, this article demonstrates that the forms of Soviet-Turkish economic cooperation were not the happenstance products of bilateral negotiations but a reflection of long-term strategic thinking. As can be seen below, the Soviet Union did appreciate the formation of socialist parties in the 1960s, including the Turkish Workers Party (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*, TİP); after all, this was the first time that working-class interests had official representation in Turkish politics. On the other hand, Moscow realized that TİP could not hope to achieve widespread support in the country in the short or even the mid-term future. Despite differences among the mainstream Turkish parties, Moscow saw all non-socialist parties as 'bourgeois.' Like its American counterpart, the Soviet Union subscribed to a vision of modernization that justified cooperation with a range of bourgeois politicians, so long as the foreign policy benefits were clear. The Soviets were optimistic that they could capitalize on Turkish frustration with Washington; they were not blind anti-capitalists, but they believed that the US had forced Turkey to become an economically dependent military vassal. They saw their advantage not only in heavy machinery that would help Turkey industrialize but also in a relationship that could primarily be economic. Soviet archival references to Turkey's expenditures on military procurements are often less about the possible threat that Turkey posed to the Soviet Union than about the economic trap into which Turkey had fallen.

Soviet openness to NATO member Turkey is perhaps surprising, but it can be explained by a conviction that Turkey was fundamentally an underdeveloped, bourgeois country. Moscow saw the difference between centre-left and centre-right – between the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) and the Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi*, AP) – in terms of a division within the bourgeoisie. According to Soviet analysis, the CHP represented the industrial-commercial bourgeoisie whose interests rested in domestic markets and statism; the AP, on the other hand, represented the landowning bourgeoisie that was interested in the export of agricultural produce to the West. In the end, however, the Soviets believed that neither bourgeois party would truly break with the West or allow Turkey to develop towards socialism. In the meantime, the bourgeois parties could shepherd Turkish society to a more developed state, one in which socialist parties would finally come to power. To be sure, Turkey's membership in NATO loomed large in the Soviet mindset, but in 1967, the Soviet foreign ministry expressed hope that in 10–15 years, Turkey might be like Finland – a country with whom the Soviet Union's relations were determined by economic ties rather than membership in a geopolitical alliance (RGANI 1967b). For the moment, they were happy to work with either centre-right or centre-left, if either expressed interest in cooperation on developmentalist goals.

## Breakthrough: Soviet-Turkish rapprochement in the 1960s

Turkey sought to improve trade relations with the Soviet Union as early as the mid-1950s, but it was the following decade that brought the real breakthrough. We should note that even when Menderes was negotiating with the Soviet Union, he was following international trends. After Stalin's death, Nikita Khrushchev sought new trade relations with non-socialist countries, and Turkey's clearing agreements fit this pattern (Sanchez-Sibony 2014). In 1959, just as Menderes was planning a visit to

Moscow, the Shah of Iran was engaged in similar manoeuvres (Alvandi 2014a). In many ways, Turkey followed the lead of other countries that entertained relations with both Washington and Moscow. As Turkey's conflict with the US over Cyprus deepened, Soviet and Turkish elites carefully worked out a balancing act through frequent interstate visits. Ironically, it was during these years that the Soviet Union became more optimistic about an organized left in Turkey, and yet the Kremlin continued to work with the 'bourgeois' parties. Indeed, when it was time to sign the 1967 agreement, it would fall to the leader of Turkey's centre-right, Süleyman Demirel, to sign it. In some sense, Demirel was a useful figurehead for rapprochement with Moscow because he could not be accused of pro-communist sympathies. What is interesting in the lead-up to the 1967 agreement is how thoroughly interstate economic negotiations drove bilateral affairs.

In the aftermath of the 1960 coup, Moscow reached out to the military leadership in Ankara and reiterated the Soviet Union's commitment to increase bilateral trade. The Soviet Union hoped that Ankara would reconsider its unqualified allegiance to the US-led containment, but the post-coup military regime was timid and initially sought to reaffirm Turkey's commitments to NATO. In less than two years, Turkey was drawn twice into intense US-Soviet conflicts; first, the U2 spy plane incident of May 1960, and later, the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962. While the former incident predated the coup (the U2 plane was shot down on 1 May) and proved manageable, the latter became a source of frustration because the US withdrew its Jupiter missiles from Turkey without consulting the Turkish government. Izvestiia (1960) published extensive coverage of the coup on 3 June 1960, and it referred to the recent U2 spy plane fiasco, arguing that Turkey had become a springboard for the US and that hopefully, Cemal Gürsel, the new Turkish President, would bring change to the Soviet-Turkish relationship (Izvestiia 1960). Moscow was closely monitoring US-Turkey relations after the Cuban Missile Crisis and knew that Turkey was at a crossroads. The Soviet explanation for Ankara's conundrum was that the Democrat Party had spent too much on the military, and the Turks needed to disassociate from America's aggressive politics and concentrate on the agricultural and industrial development of their country (Bragin 1963).

During the peak of the Cuban Missile Crisis, on 20 October 1962, Khrushchev took the time to ridicule Turkey's US-aid-based development politics, arguing that, in 1948, when Ankara first accepted American economic aid, the industrial sector comprised 10.5% of the national economy, and that in the span of 12 years this number went up by a meagre 0.04% to 10.9% (Viktorov and Kovalev 1962; Criss 1997). The Soviets acknowledged the Turkish government's focus on agriculture but described it largely as an effort to reclaim arid lands, blaming the state of the Turkish economy and lack of industrialization on membership in the American-led military bloc.

Turkey's post-coup leaders admitted that dependence on US aid harmed the economy, and they decided to negotiate new trade agreements with the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Poland (BCA 1961a, 1961b, 1961c). To expedite transportation and facilitate cross-border trade, Turkey asked the Soviet Union to jointly modernize railways, repair stations, and fix tracks (BCA 1961a). While Turkey had invested in direct phone lines with a few Eastern Bloc capitals (Sofia and Bucharest), there was an urgent need for a line between Ankara and Moscow. To that end, Soviet Ambassador Nikita Ryzhov submitted a Soviet proposal in 1962 to modernize

existing radio-telegraph lines and establish a telecommunication network between Ankara, Moscow, Sofia, and Bucharest (BCA 1962, 1963a).

These smaller steps were taken on an ad hoc basis, and in 1963 the only existing framework for cooperation was an outdated agreement from 1937. As a short-term measure, the two states signed an additional protocol whereby the Soviet Union pledged to supply Turkey with 3.5 million dollars of chemicals, fertilizers, paper, rubber, industrial machinery, trucks, and tractors, in return for Turkish livestock, dried figs, walnuts and cotton (BCA 1963b). Among the archival records about the 1937 Treaty, Soviet and Turkish bureaucrats found an aborted enterprise – the construction of a dam on the Akhurian River (Arpaçay). In October 1963, they agreed to resurrect this project, updated the figures, and calculated that construction expenses would be approximately 40 million Turkish liras. Given the Turkish economy's state and the lack of foreign currency, they decided to split the expenses and trade in local currencies (BCA 1963c).

Then, in 1963, Turkey embarked on an ambitious gambit to decrease dependence on the US. Again, this coincided with a major breakthrough in Soviet-Iranian relations (Alvandi 2014b). After signing a treaty of association with the European Economic Community (EEC), Senate President Suat Hayri Ürgüplü declared that he would travel to Moscow, leading a parliamentary delegation with representatives from all parties. The inclusiveness signalled a desire to build a non-partisan coalition to support a new phase in relations with Moscow. Ürgüplü was the first high-ranking Turkish statesman to visit the Soviet Union since 1939, and he used growing trade relations to discuss a Turkish political priority – Cyprus. The Soviet leadership gave a warm welcome to their Turkish visitors as they did others from the Third World and sought to demonstrate Moscow's ability to transform societies. The guests were treated to extended tours of Volgograd, Baku, and Tashkent. Still, it would be wrong to assume that bilateral relations became suddenly cordial, as many members of the Turkish delegation were wary, not necessarily for ideological reasons, but because they still felt bitter about Stalin's post-war territorial demands (RGANI 1963a).

In an interview with Ürgüplü, *Izvestiia* newspaper quoted a line from a Khrushchev speech about relations with Turkey: 'the Black Sea should not divide but unite the two states' (Khruschchev 1963). Ürgüplü responded in kind, that his trip sought to cultivate a friendship that rested upon economic cooperation and cultural exchange rather than political divisions. Nevertheless, Soviet reports on Ürgüplü's trips to Volgograd, Baku, and Tashkent indicate that the Turkish delegation had mixed feelings. When conversations turned to geopolitical issues, some members did indicate that 'Turkey would not participate in NATO aggression against the Soviet Union' (RGANI 1963a), and that only 'Molotov's declaration in 1945 pushed them into American arms' (RGANI 1963a). Others, however, were more reserved and openly said that 'they did not like anything they saw in the Soviet Union, neither in Volgograd nor in Moscow' (RGANI 1963a). The Turks frequently referred to the Soviet-Turkish tension in 1945–47, and they complained that no one from the Soviet side admitted responsibility for the post-war downturn in the relationship. Ahmet Fuat Ak, parliament member from the opposition, claimed that 'Turkey had not allowed Nazi troops to take Batumi,' and that Turkey 'in fact, assisted the Soviet Union quietly in 1942' (RGANI 1963b). Likewise, Ahmet Oğuz, CHP member, repeatedly asked cynical questions about Azerbaijan's and Uzbekistan's rights to trade in international markets.

The Turkish delegation was represented by two political factions, one representing the CHP and the other from opposition parties. The Soviets were acutely aware that the first group (with a few exceptions) was more sympathetic to Moscow than the latter. Khrushchev believed, for example, that Ürgüplü himself was well-disposed to the Soviet Union. He gave as an example the following story: when a Turkish senator claimed that prices were higher in the Soviet Union than what he had anticipated, Ürgüplü's wife interrupted and observed that, while Soviet healthcare and education were free, one had to pay 500 dollars in America just to have an appendix removed (RGANI 1963b). Overall, Soviet newspapers gave positive coverage of the Turkish delegation's visit, arguing that, after Adnan Menderes had taken Turkey away from the principles laid out by Atatürk, Cemal Gürsel and İsmet İnönü were now trying to put the country back on the Kemalist track, including through a return to friendly relations with Moscow (Bragin 1963; Khruschchev 1963; Alekseev 1963).

Turkey's outreach to Moscow continued in 1964, with foreign minister Feridun Cemal Erkin's Moscow visit to discuss trade relations offering another occasion to probe Moscow's position regarding Cyprus (BCA 1964a). There can be no question that 'the Johnson Letter,' in which US President Lyndon B. Johnson used heavy-handed pressure to warn Ankara off intervention in Cyprus, facilitated the Soviet-Turkish rapprochement (Harris 1982). Yet, given the longer and structural nature of the changes in Soviet and Turkish foreign policy, it would be a mistake to see any one event as definitive. In Moscow, Erkin signed a comprehensive agreement that emphasized the strengthening of cultural ties, ranging from music, opera, and painting to museums and sports (BCA 1964b). Furthermore, the two states agreed to cancel tourist visa fees and establish a team of experts to draw up a plan for cooperation in energy, natural resources, and oil (BCA 1964c, 1964d). The Turkish-Soviet rapprochement bore its fruits in 1965, when Nikolai Podgorny, chairman of the Soviet Presidium, visited Ankara. Podgorny delivered a speech in the Turkish parliament, in which he commented on the Cyprus issue at length and declared support for a federal solution that recognized the bi-communal structure of the island (Milliyet 1965). While economic cooperation picked up, Moscow continued to stress the cost of Turkey's military commitments to NATO. In casual conversation, the newly appointed Soviet Ambassador in Ankara, Andrei Smirnov, drew a negative comparison with West Germany, noting Turkey's much larger army and infinitely smaller industry (Erim 2005, 842).

As the volume of Soviet-Turkish trade grew in the following years (Koptevskii 2003), Turkey's intra-party debates were mainly about maintaining friendly relations with both Washington and Moscow. This was so much the case that İnönü was able to argue explicitly that Turkey could and should ally with the competing blocs, and, in a potential conflict, it should remain neutral (Erim 2005, 800, 849, 861). Throughout the remaining Cold War years, this intricate balancing act drove Turkish diplomacy. On the eve of the 1965 elections, when the CHP would lose to Demirel's Justice Party, Alexei Kosygin invited Suat Ürgüplü to Moscow (BCA 1965a). In August 1965, Ürgüplü signed several agreements ranging from exchanging agricultural know-how and tractor sales to purchases of Soviet-made petrol tankers to modernize and move gas stations out of downtown İstanbul (BCA 1965b).

Kosygin's week-long visit to Turkey in December presaged the breakthrough. That year, Soviet-Turkish trade was 72% higher than in 1964, and the two sides agreed

to increase it by a further 50%. Soviet papers noted cooperation in the cultural sphere, and observed that, just days before Kosygin's arrival, Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades* had premiered at the Ankara opera, where the new Turkish president Cevdet Sunay congratulated the famous Soviet Azerbaijani conductor Niyazi Hacıbeyov (Kobysh and Sharifov 1966). Turkish excitement, however, related to discussions of industrial plants (BCA 1966c).

Upon Kosygin's return, two teams of experts crunched numbers for the industrial plants and agreed to increase Turkey's one-time credit limit by 50% (from 1.5 million to 2.25 million pounds), which would be paid off with agricultural products (BCA 1966a, 1966b). Meanwhile, the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Ministerstvo inostrannykh del*, MID) prepared a comprehensive report about Moscow's new policy towards Turkey. The Soviets acknowledged that Turkey was already an export market for Moscow but that the Turks did not have much that they could export to the Soviet Union. The report's authors proclaimed, 'if [it] works hard enough, in 10–15 years, Turkey could be an economic partner like Finland. . .independent of the West' (RGANI 1967a). Because Turkey received generous credits from the West, the Soviet Union decided to make targeted investments in particular sectors. To that end, the Soviet foreign ministry instructed Ambassador Smirnov to pay special attention to Ankara's interest in the construction of a nuclear power plant, which could allow the Turks to produce aluminium and copper, which the Soviets could then import. The economic strength of the Western powers meant that, at least initially, the Soviets could not directly challenge them. Remarkably – if we think in terms of Cold War binaries – the Soviet Union indicated willingness to buy refrigerators and electronic equipment produced by American-financed factories in Turkey.

In this Soviet report's new scheme of increased cooperation with Turkey, geopolitics loomed large in Soviet calculations. But, given US interference in Turkish domestic politics, subordination of the army to NATO command, extraterritorial bases, and American fanning of Russophobia in Turkey, the authors included a rhetorical question about how to achieve the most ambitious plans. Simply repeating Khrushchev's 1953 declaration of Soviet respect for Turkey's territorial integrity would not be of much help since Turkish parliamentarians had expressed continued doubt about Soviet motives when they visited in 1963. Hence, MID proposed employing historians and journalists who would speak positively about Turkish neutrality during World War II. To dispel the myth that Russia had sinister designs on Turkey, Moscow invited the Turkish government to establish a joint commission for the re-demarcation of the Soviet-Turkish border in Eastern Anatolia (BCA 1969b). MID noted that, since the Turkish proletariat was still weak and the Turkish Workers Party still in its 'infancy,' it was unlikely that leftists would replace the 'bourgeois-landowning bloc of CHP and Justice Party' within the next 10–15 years. The 1967 Soviet-Turkish agreement would not have been possible without the Soviets' sober recognition that, to push Turkey into a more non-aligned position, they would have to set aside hopes for a socialist government. By the end of 1966, Turkish-Soviet trade increased by 25% compared to the previous year, which some thought was still relatively modest compared to the 108% increase in 1965. Nevertheless, between 1961 and 1965, bilateral trade volume grew by more than 300%, reaching 20 million dollars (BCA 1967a).

Beyond economic investments, with the signing of the 1967 agreement, Turkey found the Soviet position regarding Cyprus useful. Earlier Soviet declarations about Cyprus stressed support for an independent republic and the elimination of foreign bases on Cypriot territory, which was not at odds with Turkey's interests (BCA 1967c). Particularly on the question of ethnic communities, Soviet support for the legal rights of both Greek and Turkish Cypriots and of federation as a possible form of domestic government was welcomed in Turkey. Especially in light of the Johnson Letter, which many Turks saw as American betrayal, Turks increasingly saw the need for a foreign policy that reached beyond the NATO alliance.

## Highs and lows in the 1970s

When Turkey's leaders looked at the Global South in the 1960s, they saw the results of developmental aid from Moscow, such as the Bhilai Steel Plant in India or the Aswan High Dam in Egypt. Pictures of Jawaharlal Nehru with Soviet leaders in 1959, celebrating the inaugural firing of a massive steelworks, or of Khrushchev's triumphal visit to Egypt in 1964, when he and Nasser hailed the muddy Nile's swirl through the first canal, could not but impress Turkish politicians. The 1967 Soviet-Turkish agreement laid the groundwork for similar projects in Anatolia and allowed Turks to imagine a more ambitious cooperation with their northern neighbour. In the decade after the 1967 agreement, many of the Soviet-Turkish enterprises were built; yet this period was also one of extreme political and economic difficulties. Turkey's growing deficit, coupled with the global economic crisis after the OPEC crisis, did not leave much room to be too cheerful about the future. Thus, although the 1967 agreement launched the most capacious period of Soviet-Turkish cooperation since the interwar period, it came at a time when disillusionment with the international economic order was setting in across the world (Gilman 2015). In 1975, Aleksei Kosygin came to Turkey again to open the İskenderun steelworks. But the visit was quieter, as the timing was hardly propitious for the sort of celebration that Turks had imagined in 1967.

For the Soviet Union, the problems began after the Prague Spring, when Moscow felt disenchanted with fellow socialists in other countries, including TİP, whose anti-Soviet turn became increasingly apparent. The surge of Maoism among Turkish university students worried Moscow. To be sure, Soviet prestige in Turkey declined, but again, there was a strong global dimension here: this was the height of Sino-Soviet jockeying for leadership of international socialism (Friedman 2015; Radchenko 2024; Üngör 2013). Soviet intelligence after 1968 obsessed over Turkish street violence and the radicalization of left- and right-wing groups. There were a few fleeting moments, such as the May 1st demonstrations in 1976 or Bülent Ecevit's election victory in 1977, when the Soviet Union became cautiously optimistic about a united left under Ecevit's leadership, but that hope was very much restrained. Instead, the Kremlin elected to focus on relations with the Turkish state as such, regardless of the politics of the group in power.

What really accelerated Soviet-Turkish relations during this period was the Turkish military operation in Cyprus in 1974, which led to a US arms embargo and Turkey's international isolation. Turkey's economic problems were now compounded by political ones, and Moscow used economic cooperation as a foundation to expand discussions of Cyprus. The Soviet Union was not overtly pro-Turkish but insisted on Cyprus's

sovereignty to prevent a Greek solution that would create another NATO bastion in the Eastern Mediterranean. Back in 1965, Nikolai Podgornyi had exchanged views with Turkish colleagues, and Ankara celebrated two weeks after Podgornyi's trip, when Moscow declared support for a federal solution that recognized the bi-communal structure of the island (Milliyet 1965). Ten years later, in the mid-1970s, the Ankara government reaped the benefits of a Soviet position that opposed maximalist Greek claims.

In contrast with preliminary interstate-visits of the early 1960s like Ürgüplü"s 1963 Moscow trip when Ankara still felt bitter about Stalin's post-war demands, by the late-1960s the two states were managing geopolitical tensions through economic cooperation. Of course, ideological differences could still create hiccups. In 1969, a KGB (*Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Besopasnosti*) report on Turkish politics noted that reactionary circles within the AP had become more vocal. Boris Solomatin of the KGB reported that the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*, MİT) had given orders to increase propaganda in the name of Turkish nationalism to fight against the danger of communism. And Solomatin was right. Through civilian informants and undercover agents, the MİT systematically monitored left-wing groups to contain communist subversion (Safi 2023, 232–235). But Solomatin was equally critical of the CHP, arguing that the latter was resorting to demagogy to prevent the strengthening of TİP. The result of these ideological considerations was that the Kremlin greeted with pleasure Turkey's request to increase trade by 25%, claiming that only pressure from NATO in the wake of the Prague Spring prevented Turkey from asking for more (RGANI 1969a).

Turkey's balancing act did require caution, and the Soviets could see that the AP sought to remain loyal to NATO while avoiding confrontation with countries of the Eastern Bloc. Demirel sent Foreign Minister İhsan Sabri Çağlayangil to a NATO meeting in Washington, DC, in April 1969, and the latter submitted a detailed report to the council of ministers (BCA 1969a). The KGB obtained a copy of Çağlayangil's report, which showed that he had complained to his US counterparts about receiving less and less aid, and the Soviets could see that he contrasted this stinginess with Soviet counter-offers and a Romanian proposal to build a dam on the Yeşil Irmak. In the KGB's copy, a reader has highlighted the part where the US Secretary of State said that the Turks were 'welcome to take everything they could get from the Eastern Bloc' (RGANI 1969b).

The KGB was no stranger to AP's developmental diplomacy, and Moscow was not surprised to hear about Çağlayangil's request for more US aid. The previous year, the Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei Gromyko, had hosted a Turkish delegation in Moscow, also led by Çağlayangil, and Gromyko had heard similar lines about Turkey's desire to receive more Soviet aid (BCA 1969b). To place these requests in context, KGB reports on Turkish politics in 1969 highlighted Demirel's background as 'a product of the reactionary bourgeoisie and the *ulama*,' stressed how 'he came to power with American support in 1965,' and concluded that his policy was economy-driven. In a letter addressing the Politburo, Lieutenant General Tolokonnikov noted that, while economic interests drove the AP's rapprochement with Moscow, the country's gold reserves fell sharply in 1969 and it was running a strong trade deficit (RGANI 1969c). On the eve of Turkish elections, Soviet reports argued that (1) election results would not exert much influence on Turkey's foreign policy, as all major parties supported membership in NATO, and (2)

TİP had too many factions that looked unfavourably to Moscow, but that they had lost much of their influence anyway and would do poorly in the elections (RGANI 1969c).

The Soviet Union's decision to work with an unequivocally anti-communist and centre-right Turkish government was received positively in Ankara. Less than a month after the 1969 elections, Leonid Brezhnev invited Turkish President Sunay and his wife to Moscow on 12–21 November. Sunay drew up a list of 43 people to accompany him in the Turkish delegation, which included various ministers, editors of major newspapers, and economists (BCA 1969d). Sunay and Brezhnev agreed to work on a longer-term trade deal and discussed the ongoing construction of Soviet factories in Anatolia (Pravda 1969). Looking at Cevdet Sunay and his entourage, Soviet newspapers aptly recalled the crowded Turkish delegations who had visited the Soviet Union during the interwar period. They also noted the new possibilities for exchange, thanks to a recently established direct flight between Ankara and Moscow (BCA 1967b; Resmi Gazete 1973).

These attempts to maintain economic partnership despite ideological and geopolitical allegiance to rival camps reveal much about the nature of the Soviet-Turkish relationship. Indeed, even as Cold War tensions persisted, Moscow and Ankara shared a sense that their interests overlapped across the Black Sea. Yet Soviet support for Turkish industrialization throughout the 1970s had mixed results. The upswing in 1967 was part of a larger Soviet commitment that had helped Ankara's developmentalist aspirations. Equally, however, collaboration suffered from the two sides' ambition. Moscow and Ankara were frequently overzealous, commencing ventures with no specific deadline, cost, or technical specifications. In 1969, the planned construction of a vodka factory had to be aborted, along with a new glass plant, which turned out to be too costly (BCA 1969e). Funds from these two projects were transferred to the Seydişehir Plant since aluminium took precedence (BCA 1970a).

There were similar setbacks in the Aliağa Oil Refinery project, which required 50 thousand tons of equipment and machinery from the Soviet Union but received only 40 thousand tons, delaying the groundbreaking by months. Outstanding goods and materials were dumped in August 1970 at Ilichevsk, the port of Chernomorsk near Odesa, awaiting Turkish ships to pick them up (RGANI 1970a). Yet in all of September not a single Turkish ship had arrived, thereby forcing the Soviets to send two thousand tons on their own ship (RGANI 1970b). This might have been seen as a minor glitch if not for the 113.7 million dollars' worth of agricultural produce that Turkey was expected to ship to Odesa to pay off the İskenderun Steel Plant (BCA 1969c; BCA 1970b). The Soviets were rightly concerned when the Turks failed to pick up their own goods on time and were expected to pay the first instalment (45 million dollars' worth of produce) soon (BCA 1970c).

Despite technical hindrances, the easing of tensions between the US and the Soviet Union with the signing of the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty and the 1971 Seabed Treaty allowed the Turkish government to improve relations with both camps. Domestically, however, leftists and rightists experienced no such easing of ideological tensions. Protests, street violence, and ideologically driven massacres were exacerbated because of economic difficulties, and the process culminated in a second coup in March 1971, when the army forced Demirel to resign. A Soviet report, dated 8 January 1971, demonstrates that Moscow had begun to anticipate military intervention as early as March 1970. Pointing to increased prices, mounting strikes, and university closures, the report

included a detailed analysis of Turkey's financial crisis and argued that Demirel had achieved some success in boosting industrial production but allowed debt to grow, and the overall economic situation for most people was worsening. Unlike previous Soviet reports, here we see a strong sense that economic development needed to be connected to social reform (RGANI 1971a).

In response to the army's crackdown on leftists and the closure of TİP, the Politburo commissioned several damning articles in *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, which indicates that the Kremlin did not simply ignore Turkey's treatment of communists (RGANI 1971d). After the 1971 coup, the KGB continued to monitor Turkey's domestic unrest and noted that the struggle between the two branches of the bourgeoisie had intensified, 'further increasing class consciousness' (RGANI 1971d). Indeed, nationalist and socialist ideas were becoming increasingly popular among the intelligentsia, the students, and the junior officers of the Turkish army. Interestingly, KGB reports on Turkish politics began to see nationalists in a less critical light (in contrast with their export-oriented opponents), while, in previous documents, there was a clear sense of resentment against the Turkish government's use of nationalist propaganda for anti-communist purposes. Unlike the 1960 coup, which was seen as a positive development by both Turkish leftists and the Soviet Union, the 12 March 1971 memorandum came as a bad omen for bilateral relations, since this time the Junta organizers were right-wing generals. In a letter addressing the Politburo in December 1971, future Soviet leader Yuri Andropov predicted further worsening of economic conditions, political radicalization, and even the possibility of a temporary military dictatorship.

Although Soviet anxieties about the gradual worsening of Turkey's post-coup politics were justified, several developments sustained Soviet-Turkish cooperation. First, Turkey's former ambassador to Moscow (1960–1964), Fahri Korutürk, was elected Turkey's sixth president in 1973. Despite the widespread arrest and execution of leftists, Korutürk, although an admiral himself, was a familiar face for the Soviets. Second, contrary to expectations about Demirel's re-election in 1973, the centre-left came to power under Bülent Ecevit's leadership in a coalition government with political Islamists. Third, Turkey's military operation in Cyprus in 1974 brought an interesting geopolitical dimension to bilateral talks. Although the Soviet Union maintained ties to both Turkish and Greek Cypriots, from Ankara's perspective, even this equidistance was useful, given the Turks' diplomatic isolation. This was the context for Soviet Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin's trip to Turkey in December 1975 – for the inaugural ceremony of the İskenderun Steel Factory.

Kosygin's visit marked the culmination of the Soviet-Turkish exchange, a process in which Moscow's politicians were convinced that state-led development was imperative in Turkey. Even if the Soviet Union did not have true ideological allies in Ankara and despite the repression of Turkish socialists, Moscow was confident that worsening economic conditions and public opinion would force Turkey's bourgeois parties to cooperate with the Soviet Union. Even while Moscow signed off on shipments of industrial equipment to Turkey, Soviet newspapers disparaged Ankara's increasing oppression of leftist groups, which Moscow hoped would one day might triumph (RGANI 1971b).

There were moments when Moscow felt slightly more hopeful about the future of leftist parties in Turkey, such as the May 1st demonstration in İstanbul's Taksim Square

in 1976. Located within walking distance from where the demonstrations took place, the Soviet consulate in İstanbul applauded Kemal Türkler, the chairman of the Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions of Turkey (DİSK), for 'organizing the first truly progressive movement in Turkey.' The Soviets' appreciation for Türkler was unsurprising, given DİSK's connections to the Moscow-supported Turkish Communist Party (*Türkiye Komünist Partisi*). Perhaps more significant was the praise for Ecevit, who celebrated the demonstrations (RGANI 1976b). Alongside partnership with the Turkish state, Moscow began inviting more prominent fellow travellers and socialists, such as Ahmet Yıldız, a former officer who actively participated in the 1960 coup and became the leader of the People's Houses (Halkevleri), and Mustafa Timisi, an Alawi activist and leader of the Socialist Unity Party (*Sosyalist Birlik Partisi*, SBP). A delegation headed by Yıldız and Timisi met with the Soviet leadership in September 1976 and discussed ways of diversifying cultural exchange between the two states. Yıldız and Timisi proclaimed that the primary task should be to get rid of imperialism in Turkey and asked the Soviet Union to support a recently founded parliamentary group of Turkish senators that advocated economic cooperation and cultural exchange with Moscow (RGANI 1976e).

Aleksei Rodionov, the new Soviet ambassador who arrived in Ankara during the peak of tensions over Turkey's intervention in Cyprus, pursued the cultural exchange that Yıldız and Timisi had called for in their visit. During his term in Turkey, Rodionov arranged for Meriç Sümen, a prominent Turkish ballerina and choreographer, to play the lead role in *Giselle* at the Bol'shoi Theater in Moscow, invited Russian poets, including Konstantin Simonov to Turkey, and personally coordinated the joint production of the movie *Ferhad ve Şirin* (*Legenda o lyubvi*). Rodionov also brought to İstanbul Chingiz Aitmatov, whose short story, *The Girl with the Red Scarf*, was adapted to the screen (*Selvi Boylum Al Yazmalım*) and became an instant classic in 1978 (Rodionov 2006). Mainstream Turkish newspapers, which had previously refrained from giving too much coverage to the Soviet-Turkish convergence, advertised the premiere of *Selvi Boylum Al Yazmalım* in Moscow extensively, with pictures of the lead actress, Türkan Şoray, posing on Red Square (Tercüman 1978).

In stark contrast to the US arms embargo (1975–1978), Soviet-Turkish economic cooperation diversified. This was the period when many of the Soviet-built factories in Turkey became operational, albeit with various shortcomings. The aluminium plant in Seydişehir, for instance, turned out to be unprofitable, with production of 80,000 tons of aluminium per year instead of the projected 200,000 tons. In smaller quantities, the production price increased to 210 dollars/ton from a projected 87 dollars/ton. Rodionov (2006, 57) explained the shortcomings as a result of machines not working at full capacity. Nevertheless, in a private conversation with Demirel about this problem, Rodionov was surprised and pleased to hear that the Turkish government wanted to take Soviet-Turkish relations from their Cold War phase to 'full normalization.' The US arms embargo was clearly working in the Soviets' favour.

Novelty did arrive in Soviet-Turkish relations in 1976, when soon-to-be chief-of-staff Kenan Evren travelled to Moscow to negotiate arms sales. This was the first time since the 1930s that the two states discussed cooperation in the military sphere. Evren clearly enjoyed his trip, as Rodionov claimed in his memoirs that the embassy later sent rye bread to Kenan Evren to satisfy the liking he and Mrs. Evren had developed during their trip (Rodionov 2006, 89–90). Evren's

counterpart, Nikolai Ogarkov, made a reciprocal visit in April 1978, and Moscow was considering deliveries of military equipment to Turkey before Washington yielded to Turkey's request and lifted the embargo.

Arms deliveries in the 1970s are thus a subject of counterfactual history, but real change happened in the energy sphere. The relevant visits began with Foreign Minister Çağlayangil's trip to Moscow in March 1977, when he met with Andrei Gromyko and pressed for Soviet oil. After the discovery of the West Siberian Oil Basin, and particularly after the OPEC crisis drove global prices up, Ankara had shown interest in Soviet oil. In return, however, Moscow wanted to sign a political agreement with Turkey, which was something that Çağlayangil was not prepared to give (Rodionov 2006, 123). Gromyko told Çağlayangil that, while the Soviet Union wished to sign a comprehensive treaty (*dogovor*) with Turkey, they would settle for an agreement (*soglashenie*) but that they did not want a toothless declaration (*deklaratsii*) since they had already signed one in 1972. Çağlayangil's refusal to sign a new political document and intransigence on economic and scientific exchange failed to produce a deal on oil sales.

One year later, however, the newly elected Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit travelled to Moscow to follow-up on the oil deal and probe the possibility of a metro line for Ankara and İstanbul (Hirst et al. 2023). This was not the first time Kosygin heard such requests and, in a private Politburo meeting, he broached the sale of oil, provided that the Soviet Union could buy enough mohair and pharmaceuticals from Turkey. Kosygin did not want to send Ecevit home empty-handed because, before travelling to Moscow, Ecevit had been in Washington for a NATO meeting (Ecevit had questioned US President Jimmy Carter's emphasis on a renewed Soviet threat). The CHP politician remarked that the Soviets were not posing a threat to Turkey, for which Kosygin thanked Ecevit and expressed Gromyko's pleasure (Rodionov 2006). Nevertheless, the Soviet Union was transitioning from an industry- to an energy-exporting economy, and Kosygin told Ecevit that they would agree to oil sales in principle, but only if Turkey would pay them back with something other than agricultural products. Again, global trends were shaping Soviet-Turkish relations; at precisely this time, the Soviet government was trying to move away from the bilateral agreements typical of the Bretton Woods era to trade in hard currency (Sanchez-Sibony 2023). Ultimately, Ecevit returned with less than what he had asked for, but he had been able to secure a Soviet pledge to build an electricity line from Batumi to Hopa, which was completed in 1979, supplying most of Eastern Anatolia with Soviet electricity (Rodionov 2006, 200).

Ecevit's 1978 trip demonstrated that, while the two states were willing to broaden the scope of their cooperation, the model provided by the 1967 industrial agreement was no longer applicable. Rodionov had sensed that a new era was in the making when he heard from Turkish businessmen that state-focused exchange was restricting private incentives that might broaden bilateral cooperation. Of the many Turkish tycoons that Rodionov met in 1978, he particularly appreciated Sakıp Sabancı's frankness. Sabancı spoke of Turkey's economic difficulties and said that his enterprises in various branches of the economy were operating at only 50–60% of capacity. He emphasized that cooperation between the Soviet Union and Turkey should not be limited to the public sector. Establishing ties with the private sector would give Soviet-Turkish economic exchange more dynamism, allowing it to be more effective and bypass bureaucratic obstacles.

## Conclusion

By the late 1970s, Turkish and Soviet political elites were increasingly aware that the bilateral and state-managed exchange of the Cold War and Bretton Woods era was passing. Turkey's economic difficulties fuelled protests, street violence, and ideologically driven massacres, and the process led the country to its most traumatic coup in 1980. Tens of thousands were arrested, and several years of military rule painfully ushered in a less political era. In the aftermath of the 1980 coup, a new Turkish party jettisoned import substitution industrialization for the sort of neoliberal consumerism that Sabancı had pleaded for in his meeting with Rodionov. Unmanaged, Soviet-Turkish cooperation waned in the early 1980s and geopolitical problems resurfaced. In 1980 alone, the Soviet Union sent 12 diplomatic protest notes to Turkey, as, for example, the latter reopened a US base in Sinop that had been closed during the arms embargo and decided to host a new NATO early warning system.

The lesson to be drawn from the re-emergence of geopolitical conflict in Soviet-Turkish relations in the 1980s is far from clear. Other historians might use the documents studied for this article to argue that the Soviet Union's sole aim in the 1960s and 1970s was to use Turkey to undermine NATO. Looking at the Soviet Union's commitment to Turkey's development, however, a narrowly defined geopolitical approach hardly explains the whole story. The main purpose of this article has been to use the 1967 Soviet-Turkish agreement to move beyond a bilateral framing of Soviet-Turkish relations, by showing both the increasing subordination of political concerns to an economic logic and the broader patterns that the new economic logic followed.

Under İsmet İnönü's coalition government in the mid-1960s, important groundwork for Soviet-Turkish rapprochement had been made, but that labour bore fruit with Demirel in office. As this article has demonstrated, the Soviets were well aware that, under İnönü in the 1960s and later Ecevit in the 1970s, the CHP pursued economic politics that were more in line with Moscow's than those of the AP. The CHP was more statist and cautious about reliance on Western aid; the AP was more committed to private enterprise and foreign investment. But, despite the clear differences between the mainstream Turkish political parties, the Soviets showed remarkably little preference for the CHP and were remarkably cautions with socialist parties. The Soviets did not distinguish between Demirel and Ecevit because Moscow's approach to Ankara was determined overwhelmingly by structural considerations, considerations about Turkey's place in the global economy.

## Note

1. *Pust' chernoe more ne raz'ediniaet, a soediniaet nas* (Let the Black Sea not divide us but unite). Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, quoted in *Izvestiia*, May 29, 1963.

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