Spheres of Influence in the Eurasian Theater

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Introduction

In the Eurasian theater, 'spheres of influence' have functioned as pillars of peacetime cooperation, allowing 19th century great powers and 20th century nuclear superpowers to coexist without conflict for long stretches of history. At the same time, misunderstandings about spheres of influence have produced geopolitical upheaval and conflict. If states generally seek to avoid costly war, and if drawing spheres of influence has been an effective means to avoid war, why would states ever risk those spheres breaking down? Despite their historical importance and the obvious puzzle they pose, social science currently lacks an explanation of why states have relied on spheres of influence at some times, and violated them at others. Such an explanation is necessary for anyone interested in promoting cooperation or avoiding conflict in Eurasia.

We ask the question: under what conditions are state spheres of influence agreed upon, and under what conditions do they become contested? We motivate this broader research question with an empirical puzzle in Eurasia: the Turkish experience in regional geopolitics. Since the formation of the Turkish republic in 1923, Turkey's position as squarely in the Western sphere of influence, and outside the Russian sphere, has been generally uncontested. Turkey's Western geopolitical orientation has remained stable despite (1) between 3 and 5 military coups, as well as surrounding lurches from center-left Kemalist to center-right Islamist governments, (2) the collapse of the Soviet Union and its replacement as a competing would-be patron by the Russian Federation, and (3) a change in the international system from bipolarity to unipolarity.[1] Yet in recent years, Turkey has shown the potential to move out of the Western sphere of influence, towards the Russian one. The consistency of the Turkish geopolitical position despite dramatic changes in the domestic, international, and systemic context, and its potential re-orientation today, is an outcome that needs to be explained.

Existing research characterizes spheres of influence as a mutual understanding achieved by great powers, seeking to avoid costly conflicts. However, this characterization fails to explain when spheres of influence are mutually agreed upon, and when they become contested. Drawing on the case of Turkey and its relationship to the United States, the European Union, and the Russian

[1] And some would argue, a second change from unipolarity to multipolarity.

Federation, we point to the role of the *client* state in bringing about changes to the status-quo. Case studies drawn from three policy sectors – regional secession, intergovernmental organization, economic cooperation – all point to potential changes in Turkey's orientation motivated by Turkey itself. Today, it is ultimately Turkish motives and Turkish decision-making that, in the context of key changes in the strategic context, have created the opportunity for a move out of the Western and into the Russian sphere of influence. For scholars seeking to explain how states understand their spheres of influence, the Turkish case suggests that would-be great powers do not dictate the international system without constraints; instead, they negotiate in time with the domestic politics and foreign policy preferences of 'minor' powers. For policy makers seeking to promote cooperation and avoid conflict in the region, the Turkish case suggests that the policy preferences of ostensibly minor states should be given serious weight.

Theory: The Role of Client States in Defining Spheres of Influence

As a concept, 'spheres of influence' has been featured prominently in the vocabulary of foreign policy, in diplomatic history, and in international relations textbooks. However, the concept is almost completely absent from the academic literature in political science and international relations. Only two published articles in American political science explicitly conceptualize 'spheres of influence:' in 1983 Paul Keal developed the concept in realist terms, drawing chiefly on the Soviet and American experiences with the Brezhnev and Johnson Doctrines; in 2015 Amitai Etzioni amended Keal's formulation, adding a psychological dimension to 'spheres of influence' in an attempt to reconcile a doctrine that seemingly permits coercive intervention with a 'liberal' international order.

'Spheres of influence' may be defined along two dimensions: as a relationship between the great power 'patron' state and the minor power 'client' state, and as a relationship between two patron states. The patron-client relationship is hierarchical, and the sphere is "a definite region within which a single external power exerts a predominant influence, which limits the independence or freedom of action of states within it."[2] The patron's influence over the client is coercive: the patron state

[2] Keal, "Contemporary understanding about spheres of influence," 156.

affects the domestic politics of the client state under the threat of brute force, and under the justification of an overriding geopolitical principle (for example, 'containment').[3]

In this realist formulation, the critical characteristic of spheres of influence is that they are *mutually recognized*. Mutual recognition is communicated by signals: precedents set by the use of force, verbal pronouncements, or symbolic acts. Spheres of influence may be formalized in a treaty (i.e. the Congress of Vienna; the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact), or they may be tacit.[4] In either case, the chief purpose of spheres of influence is to reduce uncertainty over what actions each great power is willing to take, and to permit, where. For example, when the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, the United States signaled its recognition of the Soviet sphere of influence by abstaining from military contestation. By reducing uncertainty and providing a clear signal of intentions, the drawing of spheres of influences allows both geopolitical rivals to avoid costly war.[5]

Three features of this characterization stand out. First, this definition of spheres of influence is tautological: in order to provide information about states' preferences for intervention, great powers establish 'spheres of influence' that require information about their preferences for intervention. Second, this formulation fails to explain why states sometimes uphold and sometimes violate spheres of influence: if spheres of influence help to avoid costly conflict, then we should expect states to *always* uphold them.[6] Third, this approach conceptualizes spheres of influence as a rational strategy by the patron states – it does not allow any agency on the part of the client state.

Our argument reconciles these issues by drawing attention to the role of the client state in defining spheres of influence. Great powers may wish to maintain spheres of influence that usefully avoid conflict; however, such an arrangement is not always beneficial for the client state. Furthermore, as in any patron-client relationship, client states also have something valuable to offer the patron in return for security: by remaining in the patron's sphere of influence, the client conforms to the patron's policy preferences in a variety of policy domains. However, changing strategic context can offer the client leverage to re-negotiate this hierarchical relationship. When the strategic

[3] Keal, "Contemporary understanding about spheres of influence," 156 – 60.
[4] Ibid.
[5] For a theoretical account of the role of uncertainty as a cause of war, see Fearon, 1995.
[6] It is true that, for a potential violator, the gains from revising spheres of influence may outweigh the costs of conflict. However, even in this case we should expect states to re-negotiate spheres of influence through (relatively) costless diplomacy rather than costly conflict. For the basic logic behind this argument, see again Fearon, 1995.

environment provides the client with sufficient leverage, the client can even force a potential re-negotiation of spheres of influence. Thus, it is often the client state, pursuing its own preferences, that forces normally agreed-upon spheres of influence to become subject to contestation.

In the remainder of this essay, we examine the changing position of Turkey relative to its three great power neighbors – the United States, the European Union, and Russia – in three salient policy domains – the Kurdish issue, EU membership, and economic cooperation, respectively. In all three domains, we observe recent Turkish reorientation potentially away from the West that cannot be explained by reference to great power negotiation alone. Instead, we find that Turkey itself, with new domestic political motives and facing a new security environment, has been the chief driver of its own geopolitical orientation in all three settings.

In the American Sphere: Strain Over the Kurdish Issue

In 2014 Iraqi Kurdish President Massoud Barzani was a finalist for Time Magazine's Person of the Year. Despite the fact that Iraqi Kurdistan had recently supplied the People's Protection Units (YPG) -- the main armed service of the Federation of Northern Syria identified as a terrorist organization by the Turkish government – with tons of small arms and medical supplies, the American magazine highlighted how the Barzani "legacy of stubborn resistance and noble failure defined the Kurds as the region's hard-luck heroes, earnest and worthy but doomed to remain the world's largest ethnic group without a nation of its own."[7] The subtext of this sentence may read: "without U.S. support, our friends, the Kurds, are doomed."

The onslaught of ISIS has caused U.S. perceived interests in the Middle East to change. These modifications have resulted in closer ties with Kurdish military forces despite Turkish resistance. Playing on the idea of state sovereignty as a corner stone of American foreign policy, the U.S. has favored the Kurds, viewing them as one of the few key partners in the fight against ISIS. The budding American-Kurdish relationship, while it may be line with American ideology, continuously tests Turkey's limits and trust, and therefore could have devastating results in the region.

[7] "Person of the Year 2014 Runner-Up: Massoud Barzani,"

American involvement in Kurdistan dates back to the interwar years with the publication of President Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points, which promised "autonomy" for "the other nations [of the Ottoman Empire] which are now under Turkish rule."[8] Colonial powers quickly moved to control the oil-rich region, however, thus quashing Kurdish hopes for independence. After Turkey joined NATO in 1951, the U.S. adopted the Turkish stance on Kudish minority rights, viewing them as a risk for stability in the already fragile country. Kurds in Turkey thus became "'bad Kurds' from the point of view of U.S. foreign policy."[9] The U.S. stance on the Kurdish population in Turkey differed greatly from the Kurdish minority in Iraq, who came to be seen as "'good Kurds'" since Mulla Mustafa Barzani led the revolt against the Iraqi government in the early 1970's.[10] Kurds have enjoyed autonomy in Iraq since 1991 when U.S. President George H.W. Bush ordered a no-fly zone over their land to protect the Kurdish people from Saddam Hussein's forces. This timeframe relatively coincides with Turkey's orientation towards the West beginning in the 1980's. The Kurds understood that "Turkey would have to guarantee their cultural rights if it hoped to join Europe."[11] The U.S., however, remained mute on the issue until fairly recently when the formation of a sovereign Kurdish state began to align with U.S. perceived interests in the Middle East.

It should be stated that Turkey has acted as a key ally to the U.S. over the past fifty years in their mutual quest to create regional stability. Not only does Turkey have the second largest military in NATO, but it should also be understood as a country that has its own sphere of influence, one that is still growing and developing. As geopolitical forecaster and strategist George Friedman writes "When we look at the wreckage of the Islamic world after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 and consider what country must be taken seriously in the region, it seems obvious that it must be Turkey."[12] Accompanying this statement in his book *The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century* is a map captioned "Turkish Sphere of Influence 2050" that could hardly be differentiated from a map of the Ottoman Empire.

Turkey is not a geopolitical power to tamper with, but after their disapproval of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Turkish-U.S. relations have been on the fringe. The cooling of diplomatic relations between the

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[8] Bemis, *A Diplomatic History of the United States.*
[9] Michael M. Gunter, "United States Foreign Policy Toward the Kurds."
[10] Ibid.
[11] Kinzer, *Reset: Iran, Turkey, and America's Future.*
[12] Friedman, *The next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century.*

two states presented an opportunity for the Kurds. Identifying U.S. fears surrounding the spread of ISIS, Kurds quickly stepped up to become the "most influential" forces on the ground.[13] Their efforts paid off. On July 13th, 2016 U.S. officials signed a deal to give the Kurdish government some "$415 million for ammunition, food, pay, and medical equipment": a historical measure as it became the first military treaty in U.S.-Kurdish history.[14] This agreement troubles Turkey, who sees the Kurds as a threat to its stability and prosperity. In an attempt to maintain a balancing act, U.S. Vice President Joe Biden has instructed the Kurds that they will have to stay east of the Euphrates river, thus drawing a clear geographical boundary between the two allies.[15] The U.S. oscillating between these two partners is indicative of the necessity of Turkish support for military action in Syria and also of the need for Kurdish manpower.

American foreign policy has pushed the Turkish government's limit of tolerance in the name of national sovereignty by maintaining military relations with Kurdish armed forces. Success would gain the U.S. a new client state in its regional sphere of influence; however, these policies also threaten to give a NATO ally reason to turn to other patrons. Put differently, the changing strategic context brought about by the emergence of the Kurds as a viable client in the U.S. sphere of influence has produced new motives for Turkey. With the potential to lose its status as pre-eminent client state in the region, Turkey has gained a motive to potentially seek a new patron and disrupt the U.S. regional sphere.

In the European Sphere: Turning away from EU Membership

Since 1959, Turkey has patiently waited at the borders of Europe, hoping to gain membership to the EEC and later, the EU.[16] Despite a deepening of relations with a bi-lateral customs union, membership in NATO and the Council of Europe, the past 29 years have seen virtually no movement towards integration. Membership negotiations stalled shortly after they began in 2005- as Austria, Germany, and France sought to block any movement on the issue.[17] European leaders have historically opposed Turkish accession to the EU on grounds of cultural and religious notions of

[13] "Ignoring Turkey, U.S. Backs Kurds in Drive against ISIS in Syria."
[14] "US Signs Military Aid Deal with Iraq's Kurdish Fighters."
[15] Walsh, "US Headache: Keeping Turkey and Kurds Apart."
[16] Eu.boell.org
[17] Ferguson, "European Review," 365.

'Europeaness', democratic and economic concerns, as well as human rights issues. Far from welcoming Turkey into its sphere of influence, Europe has taken a strategy of appeasement and containment for the state, seeing Turkey "as a "strategic neighbor" more than a "strategic partner".[18] The distinction is critical for Turks. However, the past 5 years have seen a dramatic shift in the Turkish-European relationship which can best be analyzed through the lens of contemporary migration flows and movement in EU accession talks.

With the outbreak of war in Syria, rise of the Islamic state, and resulting outpouring of displaced Syrians, Iraqis, and Afghans seeking refuge in the West via the Balkan route, Turkey has become a critical player in European security in the last 5 years. Decisions to open or close borders to migrants, pursuit of military action in Syria, and eroding political stability in Turkey all have a direct effect on European security. Likewise, the European stance on Turkey has shifted dramatically to reflect the negotiating power now held by Erdoğan over the neighboring bloc.

Recent concessions from the European Union, such as the refugee deal penned this March, reveal a rebalancing of power which elevates Turkey to level negotiating ground with the EU, if not to a more favorable position. The deal provides humanitarian support for refugees held in Turkey in the form of 3 billion Euros, an acceleration of visa liberalization for Turkish citizens traveling to the EU, a "one in, one out" Syrian refugee resettlement scheme, and a re-opening of EU membership negotiations.[19] This deal reflects the deterioration of European resolve and steadfastness in regard to Turkey's democratization reforms, as one columnist noted, "We don't care about democracy or freedom of press, as long as refugees do not come our way."[20] The deal is evidence of a significant weakening in the European position, as rising xenophobia and right-wing political movements have begun to strangle the continent.

Still, it should be noted that these concessions are not cause for renewed hope for Turkish membership. As the stopgap for 2.5 million refugees and asylum seekers and the host of the largest refugee population in the world,[21] the state is effectively acting as a buffer, insulating Europe from the conflicts of the Middle East and their consequences. Furthermore, Europe is acutely aware of

[18] Keyman, "Turkey at the heart of the refugee and ISIL crises: Can the buffer state be a solution?," 9.
[19] Greene. "Europe's Lousy Deal With Turkey."
[20] "Turkey: EU partner or buffer state?"
[21] "UNHCR forced displacement global trends report 2015," 7.

the demographic shift that full membership would bring about. With a population exceeding 77 million, (excluding the refugee population) accession would see Turkish representation in Brussels dwarf that of the majority of European states, second only to Germany.[22]

Meanwhile, support for EU accession has dropped in Turkey as well as in Europe, as Erdogan very clearly omitted EU membership in his vision for 2023 speech last year. Perhaps more significantly, public opinion for membership has dropped in Turkey from 73% in 2004 to around 34% in the last few years.[23]

The founding father of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, believed strongly in secularism and Westernization, enacting sweeping reforms which brought the country firmly into the European orbit. Still beloved and revered in Turkey, Atatürk "believed the only way that Turkey could modernize and prosper was by taking on Western values and technology, or as he called it 'civilisation"'.[24] However, as contemporary Turkey veers from Atatürk's vision and continues to be slighted by European leadership, it is not unlikely that Erdogan will chart a new course for the country. Key changes in the regional strategic environment – namely the rise of ISIS and the migration crisis – have provided Turkey new leverage for enacting its own policy preferences, even when they countervail the preferences of its ostensive 'patrons' in the European community and the West.

In the Russian Sphere: New Opportunities in Economic Cooperation

Turkey's relations with Russia have historically been characterized by conflict, competition and cooperation. In spite of Turkey's traditionally Western vector, there is some speculation that the country is abandoning its traditionally Euro-Atlantic trajectory in favor of closer ties with Russia. The potential for realignment is most noticeable in the economic sector, especially after Erdoğan and Putin's recent rapprochement.

[22] Ferguson, "European Review," 366.
[23] "Turkey and the European Union, Journey into the Unknown."
[24] eu.boell.org

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, a new page was turned in Russo-Turkish relations. Bilateral trade took off in the 1990s and has continued to grow since the millennium. Turkey is now heavily reliant on Russian gas as an energy source and in 2015 55% of the country's natural gas imports came from Russia.[25] This trade in natural gas, combined with significant oil imports from Russia (12.4% in 2015),[26] makes Russia Turkey's largest import partner. Furthermore, Russia remains a significant export market for Turkish food products, textiles and chemical products.[27] A recent CSIS report states that Russia has invested around $10 billion in the Turkish market, while Turkish investments in the Russian economy are of a similar amount.[28] In fact, Turkish contractors have already carried out 1576 projects in Russia with a total value of $56.4 billion and bilateral trade volumes in 2014 reached $31.2 billion, a figure Erdoğan wishes to increase to $100 billion.[29] Although bilateral trade suffered in 2015, the pain inflicted on Turkey's economy by Russian sanctions demonstrated how economically reliant Turkey has become on Russian trade.

Indeed, the recent rapprochement benefited both sides as the return of Russian tourists will reverse losses in Turkey's important tourism industry, accounting for 12% of GDP in 2014,[30] while the resumption of agricultural exports and energy projects may give the Russian economy a much needed boost. In spite of residual tensions from the Su-24 incident, both countries see energy cooperation as a shared interest. While Turkey harbours ambitions of becoming a regional gas hub, Russia needs to find a European gas transit route which can replace Ukraine, especially once current contracts expire in 2019.[31] Consequently, at the recent bilateral meeting Erdoğan declared that the fabled Turkish Stream pipeline would go ahead, [32] while Putin stated that the project could be realised 'in the very near future'.[33] Erdoğan has hinted that two pipelines could ultimately be built, while the Russian Energy Minister has said that the first branch will be completed by 2019.[34] In fact, Alexey Miller, the CEO of Gazprom, has already met with the Turkish Energy Minister[35] and

[25] "Turkey's Energy Profile and Strategy."
[26] Ibid.
[27] **"**Factbox: Impact of Russian sanctions on trade ties with Turkey.**"**
[28] Cevikoz, "Turkey in a Reconnecting Eurasia."
[29] Safronov, "Slushali – vosstanovili."
[30] "Travel, tourism sectors generate 12 pct of Turkey's GDP: Report."
[31] Simon and Yafimava. "Russian Gas Transit Across Ukraine Post-2019 – pipeline scenarios, gas flow consequences, and regulatory constraints."
[32] "Putin and Erdoğan seek to enhance improving Russia-Turkey ties."
[33] Barsukov, "Blizkiye kontrakty lyuboy stepeni: Kak Rossiya I Turtsiya vzyalis' za energetiku."
[34] "Aleksandr Novak: pervaya nitka "Turetskogo potoka" dolzhna byt' postroyena k kontsu 2019 goda."
[35] "Gazprom nye dotek do Turtsii: Monopoliya ne poluchila nuzhnykh razresheniy."

discussions are underway.[36] If the pipeline is built then Russia might be able to pump gas to Southern Europe via Turkey, although only if the European Commission gave such a project the green light.

A less hypothetical energy investment is the Akkuyu nuclear power plant which is to be built by Rosatom, the Russian State Nuclear Energy Corporation. Akkuyu and another new nuclear plant at Sinop will provide 10% of Turkey's electricity by 2023,[37] making this a significant investment. As part of the makeup deal with Russia, Erdoğan agreed to grant the Akkuyu project 'strategic investment status' and a beneficial tax regime,[38] as well as promising to establish a 'mutual investment fund' for similar projects. [39] In real terms, this is likely to mean that Turkey will foot half of the bill for the plant's construction, a significant increase on the prior agreement.[40] It seems that the cost of doing so – around $ 8-9 billion, is the price of regaining Russian affection.

However, amidst all the excitement over pipelines and infrastructure projects, it is easy to forget the geopolitical realities of the situation. There is no guarantee that Turkish Stream will actually be built and even if Turkey does begin to buy more gas from Russia, that does not magically make it part of Russia's 'sphere of influence'. In fact, Ankara will soon be competing with Moscow as an energy provider to Europe as Turkey is a lynchpin of the 'Southern Gas Corridor' which will bring Azerbaijani gas through Turkey to southern Europe in an attempt to diversify supply. Consequently, the inflow of Azerbaijani gas in 2020 will reduce Italy's consumption of Russian gas by half and the corridor could eventually be linked to other suppliers like Iran, Israel or Turkmenistan. [41] Moreover, Turkey is hardwired into the West's economic system and Russia cannot compete in terms of trade opportunities. In 2014 NATO and EU countries combined accounted for 49% of Turkish exports and 43% of imports whereas Russia made up only 3.8% of exports and 10.4% of imports.[42] In the same year, Russia was only Turkey's seventh largest export market, after Germany, Iraq, the UK, Italy, France and the US[43] and although Russia is Turkey's largest import partner, this is primarily

[36] "Turkey offers possibility of gas supplies through Turkish Stream to border with Greece."
[37] "Turkey's Energy Profile and Strategy."
[38] Barsukov, "Blizkiye kontrakty lyuboy stepeni: Kak Rossiya I Turtsiya vzyalis' za energetiku."
[39] "Rossiya i Turtsiya mogut sozdat' investfond dlya stroitel'stva AES Akkuyu."
[40] Doğan. "Putin gets big kiss-and-make-up gift from Erdogan."
[41] Krutikhin, "The New Pipeline Making Gazprom Nervous."
[42] Author's own calculation based on The World Bank's WITS http://wits.worldbank.org/.
[43] Ibid.

due to energy imports.[44] These figures are crucial because foreign trade accounts for almost 50% of Turkish GDP[45] and the EU remains Turkey's largest trading partner and greatest source of FDI.[46]

By contrast, trade with Russia has been declining and while exports to the EU rose by 9% in 2014,[47] exports to Russia fell by 15% and then by 40% in 2015.[48] A similar decline is expected this year and it will probably take some time for bilateral trade to reach earlier levels, let alone hit the $100 billion target. Furthermore, in contrast to Russia, Turkey does not have enormous hydrocarbon reserves or mineral wealth. As a result, the Turkish economy is more diversified and depends on relatively liberal market conditions to generate revenue and jobs. This can be demonstrated by comparing Russia's reliance on hydrocarbon exports with Turkey's considerably more diversified export portfolio (as shown in the graphs below). Thus, Turkey must continue to woo Western investment and uphold stability to create economic growth, making a Russian-style lurch into isolation less likely.

In conclusion, Turkey's economic fortunes rely largely on Western countries and Asian investment, not Russian involvement. Putin's Russia simply cannot offer Turkey the same economic prosperity promised by Europe and America, a fact unlikely to be overlooked by Turkish voters and politicians. However, although an economic pivot to Russia is unlikely for the reasons outlined above, greater cooperation should be expected. Russian investment in strategic sectors such as energy or defense is a useful card for Erdoğan to have in playing off Russia against the West to achieve the most favorable terms. A more mercenary approach to Western allies may be combined with 'quid pro quo' dealings with Russia in the pursuit of mutual interests. By threatening to cooperate more closely with Russia, Erdoğan may seek to squeeze concessions and funding from the West, thereby 'selling' Turkey to the highest bidder.

Thus, although Turkey cannot be said to be in Russia's economic sphere of influence, the country seems to moving into a grey zone where Russia, the West and even Asia will all court Turkey for trade, political influence and strategic cooperation. Most importantly, as in the case of EU ascension,

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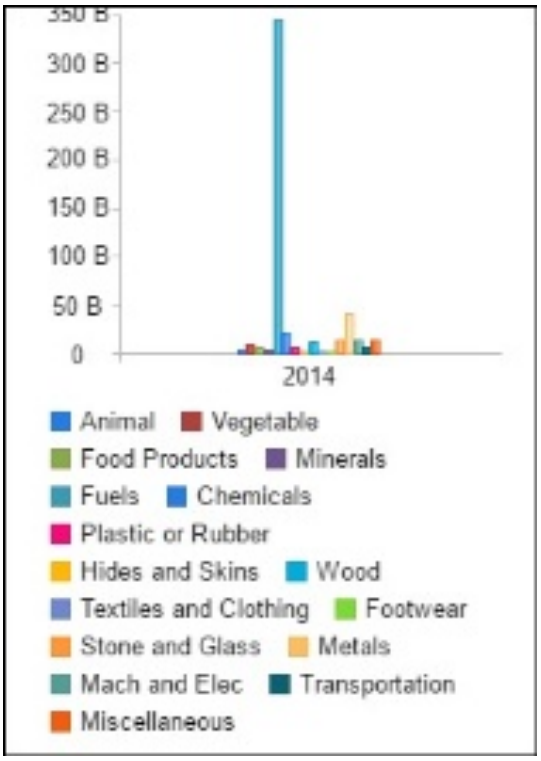
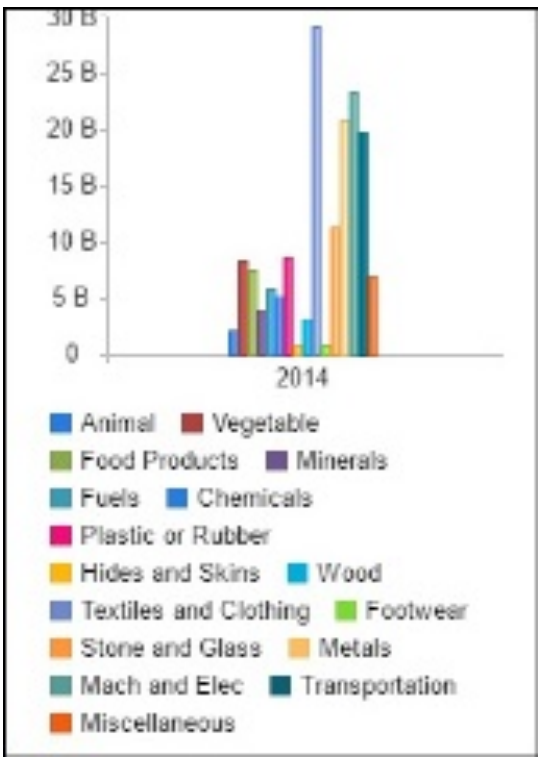
[44] Ibid.
[45] Kirişci, "Warming up Turkey: The importance of economic engagement."
[46] "Invest in Turkey."
[47] Kirişci, "Turkey and the Euro-Atlantic community: Turbulence and ties of interest."
[48] Kirişci, "Is Turkish foreign policy becoming pragmatic again?"

Turkey's capacity to define the terms of this 'grey zone' is made possible by the increased leverage it has gained as an independent economic actor with multiple options for serious trade partners.

Graph A – Russian Exports in 2014



Graph B – Turkish Exports in 2014



Conclusions

Recency bias may lead observers to suggest that Turkey is currently being drawn into the Russian orbit, as great powers renegotiate and redistribute spheres of influence between them. We argue, however, that what we are observing is a Turkey newly empowered by a changing strategic context to itself set the terms of its relationships with its 'great power' neighbors. The emergence of the Kurds as a viable client in the U.S. sphere of influence has generated new motives for Turkey to seek patrons more aligned with its own interests. The rise of ISIS and the migration crisis, as well as new opportunities for economic cooperation with Russia, have provided Turkey with the leverage necessary to disrupt or renegotiate spheres of influence in the region that, historically, have been remarkably stable.

More broadly, Turkey's active role in redefining its relationship with Western and Russian patron states suggests the importance of *client* states in the stability or contestation of great power spheres of influence. The conventional formulation of spheres of influence as a tool for great powers to reduce uncertainty and avoid conflict would predict stable geopolitics in the region, or else renegotiation of U.S., E.U., and Russian influence in the region in accordance with rising Russian ambitions, without the participation of minor state clients. Instead, we observe Turkey acting as the primary driver of new geopolitics in the region. This evidence helps to answer the question of why the historically stable position of Turkey as squarely in the western sphere of influence is now subject to contestation. The Turkish case suggests that otherwise stable spheres of influence become contested when changing strategic context empowers *client* states to disrupt existing hierarchical relationships and renegotiate them on terms more favorable to their own preferences. The implication for policymakers is that that to promote cooperation and avoid conflict in Eurasia requires giving the preferences of ostensibly minor powers serious weight.

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