

RUSSIA AND TURKEY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

"Throughout his academic career, Prof. Norman Stone has given lectures at Cambridge, Oxford and Bilkent universities, founded the Russian Studies Centre at Bilkent University in 1998, written articles, apart from his academic studies, for British papers and Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Germany) and The Wall Street Journal (USA), conducted Margaret Thatcher's foreign policy consultancy on Europe. He was the spokesman at the conference titled *Turkey and Russia in Historical Perspective* which took place at AVİM on October 26th with the participation of a wide audience."

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Thank you very much and thank you for this splendid invitation. I have chosen a huge subject, it is really too big. Because you are talking about an enormous land mass and complicated history. So, it is good to take, just one or two themes and run with them. Maybe I can start with a bit of autobiography if you allow me. When I came here (slightly by accident) in 1995, I remember I was going down in İnönü Bulvarı and among the gigantic Ministries you could see Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Foreign Trade. It was all slightly reminiscent of Moscow. When I got into them there was a strong and ghostly resemblance to Russia. It almost begins with the Turkish sense of humor and blood curdling sometimes.

I remember my first class. I was talking about communism. I had not done a book list. I relapsed into the sort of classic English mode in lessons like "yes, it is a book in the library on the left as you go, you can see a yellow book", and meanwhile asked "who read Dostoyevski?", in the class of thirty, fifteen hands went up and said, they had read it.

And I began to take interest in this. The level of interest in Russia was remarkable. I think Russian

literature is the one which in a way Turks are closer to. I don't want to talk about this too much. But, on one level, you can say Turks and Russians are of course historic enemies. They are like cowboys and Indians, that sort of thing. But in practice, when you look into the history, it is a great deal more complicated than that. I won't talk about the Orthodox past and how it enmeshed the Ottoman Empire but it is obvious. It is a bit more interesting to see how the Tatars get on in Russia historically. Again it is not a question cowboys and Indians. Cengiz Han. A family called "Blinsky" who were convert Tatars. And of course, on the other side the Paleologos, in the Byzantines. Further, the Russian ability. Tatar originated names started to be used. More to the point, when that Russian plane was shut down, I must say it was very distressing. When the plane was shut down I thought, in modern times, Turkey and Russia cooperated quite understanding each other, in fact remarkably well. I think the point which was most strikingly obvious in 1919, here in Ankara, a nationalist movement started up and has taken on the Greeks and British and Armenians and French and the Italians. What chance would you give it?

Well, somehow, people in Moscow understood.



These are the people to bank, not on Enver Pasha. Once Lenin and Chicherin got in touch with Atatürk, they sent an ambassador to him when transport over the Black Sea could take three months. But in that time you face some problems. Somehow, they understand each other. The first Commissar I want to mention is Chicherin, the Commissar of Foreign Affairs. He had to deal with Ali Fuat Cebesoy, an Ottoman Pasha.

He and Ali Fuat Cebesoy addressed each other solemnly as “yoldaş”. And they thought up a treaty. And again there is this immediate understanding. They agree that they have no interest in Armenia. Now it is perfectly true that Republic of independent Armenia had made a perfect new sense of itself and ended up fighting everybody. And then Kazım Karabekir arrived outside Kars and made a rude noise, they all run away. The high commander of the Armenian Army was found under the kitchen table in the General Staff building.

Russian side said we forget about Armenia and the Turks said we will not make a fuss about Azerbaijan. It's a kind of bargain that works. That border remained to this day. Turks went further, you have to tell me about this. Because I think it is true. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Republic actually banned exile Caucasus literature. Zeki Velidi Togan for instance. A bad time of things, he was a part of the old University, but I am not sure of the details on this.

I think the next real thing is the deal that was done in the field of economy. It makes sense for two countries which were cut off from the West by tariff barriers, quotas and rest of it. The Russians gave the Turks I believe a shirt factory in Kayseri. And in return Turks, Trotsky. If I may make a polite reproach, he was an enormous failure in public relations in 1919. You could have produced a film or even a musical called “Trotsky In Prinkipo”. He was there for four years.

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Relations kept on perfectly well, until the WWII. There is an episode in 1957 in the Politburo where Krushchev berated Molotov and said, "You and Stalin are responsible for making an enemy of Turkey and Iran, countries which need not be enemies at all, with which we cooperated perfectly happily in the past." And it was Molotov's fault. Because forcing Turkey into NATO, it was a mad thing to do, mad megalomania. Trying to take over the Dardanelles. Perhaps raising the question of Kars and Ardahan. It was all about megalomania.

So we are dealing with the basic situation, where I don't think there is necessarily much to fight about unless, one or the other side tries to find one issue. Turkey and NATO, of course, is an issue itself let's suppose. However it has to be said, the connection has worked out very well indeed. One thinks that Turkish economy is worthwhile more than I suppose the rest of

this part of the world put together, even including oil, but I am not sure. This is obviously a country which has a considerable success. I could indicate it in all sorts of ways. The best thing to unplug is me! If I want my health dealt with, then I come to Turkey.

Who would have thought this to happen in 1923 or in 1945? So, it's been a success story. If you look into the past, there is no reason for Russia and Turkey to fight. This goes quite a long way. In the 18th century, Catherina the Great, raised the idea of Byzantine Commonwealth. And in the 19th century, the British thought, Russians were trying to take over the Ottoman Empire, perhaps divide it. But Russians looked at the consequences, they drew back. You could see this before WWI. By the way a very good book came out by Onur Onöl, "The Tsar's Armenians: A Minority in Late Imperial Russia". The Armenians pushed the Russians to split up the Ottoman Empire. And then Russians think, If the Ottoman Empire goes, what follows? Greece which is a British satellite. Nobody trusts the Armenians. What about the Kurds? All these questions come up. And the Russians said, what we want is Turkey's existence. One that we can manage, but not one that disappears from the map. That is fairly consistent Russian view. When the time comes in 1920,



there is an assertive Turkey which could make allies over the Straits against the British. Russia jumped at the possibility, and I think you would not disagree with me for saying that Turkish republic got help from Moscow. The next stage is, with the end of the Cold War, it becomes obvious that NATO has changed, Turkey has changed and Russia has changed.

I think the first thing to be said in this chapter is that the big new factor in the game is the Turkish economy now over-scale of what it was in the past. And it has gone the early stages of industrialization by producing things. I know from the quality of my students and from the various things they produce. But this is a country which is going somewhere I don't need to tell you. Frankly, a relief is coming from Budapest to Ankara. Because people are doing useful jobs, useful shops, a general prosperity. That is the first thing. The next thing, Putin and Russia get a very bad image. I have read again and again in things like *The Economist*, that the Russian economy is wholly dependent on oil. This is nonsense. When I was a young academic, in 1968, lecturing on Russia for the first time, I mean when you are a young lecturer, you pick up the common subjects. A common subject of that time was the Russian agriculture which was a failure. Tsarist Russia had exported, eight million tons per annum which is a lot for 1914. And the collectivization of agriculture by Stalin had destroyed Russian agriculture. By 1964, grain import from America happens. All brought up on that. Russia now exports 38 million tons of grain. And, it is far more than before. Russia is the second biggest exporter of grain. In other words, the central problem of Russian economics does not exist anymore. I think that there is one example. There are two come back economies. The new Turkey does not have to deal with that for long, she is prosperous and going somewhere. It is obvious that two countries are going to cooperate in trading and in energy. That is only too obvious.

There is also the issue of foreign residents in Turkey. I was just embarrassed again and again by the way in which this country was treated by the Europeans. I could never understand why North Cyprus was not just recognized as an independent state although, it has been there for fifty years now. The island is not going to be put together again. Recognize it and, get on with life! Do without the nonsense by the United States. Time is time.

I don't understand why the questions of 1915 and the Armenian business come up. Western world seems to tolerate that it can be manipulated by Armenian lobby. This is just irritating for Turks. We all know that everybody suffered in the WWI. There is no document proving that there is a genocide and so on and so forth. I looked into this. There was a Commission doing some research on the refugee business in the summer of 1915.

Appalling visa treatment you get from the West Europeans. Remember Halil İnalçık, aged 90, nestor of the Turkish Historians, and internationally recognized figure, turned up at the airport in Vienna for some conference and has been told to go away, because they told that he has no proper visa, lack of some photograph. Things like that. We all know the stories. You know that this came about, here some ambassadors know it much better than I do, some 200.000 refugees were going across the Aegean. Europeans wanted the Turks to take them back. And they to put pressure on the Turks. They said, otherwise we will make it difficult for you to get visas.

Something happened in 1915, and in 2015 hundreds of thousands of them poured over into Greece. This is something which the Europeans deserved and of course the system then fell apart. They know now how to deal with it. But you are still dealing with the visa regime which is a sort of punishment. And I am just embarrassed any time professional class Turks ask me about stupid visa problem. It should never have happened. Turkey is doing quite well in explaining that Europe is not the only alternative as far as Turkey is concerned. Yes! It is important. Yes, NATO is important. But is this not the moment for Turkey to have a strategy which will respond to changing circumstances? It is at least thinkable. There is of course the question of where we can dress this up. The theory of the Eurasia, for example. Eurasia I don't think is very much to the Turks. But there is a strand in Russia which thinks quite fondly of Eurasia. It goes back to a certain kind of resentment in late Tsarist times. There is a side of Russia, which was a great deal to Germany. But there is also a side of Russia which is resentful of that German presence. You only need to look up Russian literature to see how Russians look on Germans, particularly look up Tolstoy. So, they develop an idea of Russian past which accommodates Tatar element. And it is perfectly right to do that. It is not historically inaccurate by any means. In lots of ways Russia was made by the Tatars.

There is a Polish historian who has looked into this and said simply that if Russia did not stop annihilation of Poland, it is because of the Tatar influence. Because the Tatars could have a state. Whether it is true or not, I cannot say. But it is not a senseless argument at all. In that case, Turkey, enters from a different sort of perspective. And there is a possibility of some kind of cooperation. Especially, if the West gets involved in adventures against Turkey's interest. Let's take for example that, we'll have to get in the Caucasus and let's take something. Idea leaves me absolutely baffled. Why? Is it any concern of Western Europe where the Eastern border of the Ukraine lies? Now, we all know, that in communist times as part of some dodge between artificial republics and energy and god knows what else. Rostov assigned to Crimea a good part of Ukraine and that did not matter at the time. You might say that in

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the Treaty of Brest – Litovks in March 1918, the Germans set up the first Ukrainian Republic and they could not decide what Eastern borders have to be. They had the mixed commission of Ukrainian Bolsheviks which were still sitting in November 1918, without decisions when the Germans had to evacuate the base.

We all know that, the nationalism of new nations, can be intoxicating. And it is perfectly true that Ukrainians had had a bad time under the Russians when their language was not promoted. When they came back, they said that they will take over the lands that they have as Ukraine now, and the Western world said that, we don't want to fight about borders and just accepted them. And so they think, well, that is Ukraine. So, places like Luhanks, Donesks which are Russian are assigned to Ukraine. In Crimea, they actually said that any Russian film shown in the Crimea, which is 90% Russian would have to be dubbed Ukrainian otherwise it is illegal. Now this sort of thing is not very wise. To offend a large section of educated population who is only crying. Why the West decided to fight about this I am completely baffled. I don't understand why we are having sanctions on the Russians.

Caucasus, now, this one is complicated and I know we have people who know far better than I do. You are dealing with something like Saakashvili's Georgia, here is a country again too big. It's got Abkhazia. Which does not want to be a part of Georgia. It might not. It's got Ossetia and so on. If you put Georgian nationalists and encourage them as the Americans did, NATO did, to think they can be independent members of NATO, and that they have free entrance to Europe



and so on you are playing with fire on the edges of Russia. Russians on their way, will respond by saying, well you make problems about Georgia. What about the third of the Estonian population or the nearly half of the Latvian population which speak Russian. What are their rights like in your wonderful European utopia? This are the Russians simply raising another little side of the problem. Still, the Russian policies are criticized so much in the West.

The last thing that I will touch upon is Syria. When I read that Turks shot the Russian plane, I said “No!”. It had flown over Turkish airspace for seventeen/sixteen seconds. Regularly, Russian planes fly over Alaska and pilots just wave to each other. I could not understand the logic behind that at all. It was a desperately provocative thing to do and damaged a relationship which have been coming over rather well. Of course, there is Syria. I could not understand why on earth Turkey would risk getting involved in something like that. As they themselves said, if Turks took Syria, it would blow up. And it did. I think so many Turks knew the country. And the Russians have a solid interest in the naval base. Syria it is an ally, it is a stepping stone in one of the important partion of the world. I think Turks made a mistake by getting involved in a situation like this. The Russians would be helpful for them as a way out. I do not know what the solution is. Do the people in this room know the answer? I suppose some part of in Syria the way the French did it in 1920 was possibly unavoidable. But I just do not know when you think of the embarrassments that Turkey had in Syria. There is Mehmet Ali and his son İbrahim Pasha came up from Syria twice to defeat Ottoman armies with Russian army camped outside of İstanbul to keep them off in 1833. I think we need to follow the great Atatürk’s method while dealing with Syria by just keeping economic interests going but not dealing other things related to it. I have got a game in international relations which is called “*One Bad Death and You are out*”. Syria is not a company to keep.

When I got to Bilkent, they told me to set up a Russian language section and a Russian department in the International Relations faculty. And they really have very qualified graduate students. And a lot of them indeed would love to study it. We finally set it up and

Turkey is doing quite well in explaining that Europe is not the only alternative as far as Turkey concerned.

we got excellent Russian speakers who have gone into all sorts of things. People went to learn Russian in the university. I would have loved to push that Russian group because it was so promising. The trouble is we were in the department of International Relations. And I had to beg Turks to gain independence from America in certain things. International relations theory is not a subject for civilized human beings. Our people are made to do it. There is a feminist international relations theory which is all American garbage. And I asked what this is about? It is all about peace and love. There is a tyranny of America over Turkish institutions and some of which has to be thought. Especially, international relations theory which is something ... I do not say more. But I would like to see Turkish universities working on subjects that matter to them such as obviously Russia. And so many groups are included in it. There is only one final point that I would like to make on this. Oh! Yes! Yes! The problem with doing Russia and Turkey is...well Russians have got all the archives and there are a lot of Russian Turkologists, really very good ones. What does happen to foreign office archives in Turkey? There are so many things that we do not know. The economic relations in the early 1930s which are very important. The business with Trotsky. What are the relations between these and Demirel time? Demirel, I think, knew how to handle Russia very well. I think Turkey is the only case I know of a country of this importance, this size and prosperity. I’ve heard rumors about the fact that foreign office archives of Turkey will be opened. But still, we are not told about this story totally. And we do not know many things because Turkish archives are not available.

So, if I can sum up by giving a general exertion about archives and training students about Russia.

Thank you