

THE MODERN PERCEPTIONS OF UKRAINE IN THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY

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Introduction

Ukraine and the Republic of Turkey (Türkiye) have a complex history of bilateral relations that has developed significantly since the post-Soviet era. Although both countries were historically separated by geography and political affiliations, their relationship has evolved due to shared trade, security, and regional stability interests. Official diplomatic relations were established in 1991, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with an Agreement on Friendship and Cooperation signed in 1992, laying the foundation for political, economic, and cultural collaboration. Despite periods of stagnation, particularly due to Türkiye's strategic focus on Europe and its improving relations with Russia, the mutual connections have particularly strengthened only in the past ten years. Both countries have sought to enhance their cooperation, especially in the Black Sea region, with security and defence playing a crucial role. (Tarasiuk, 2017)

The Republic of Türkiye's role in the on-going Russian war against Ukraine has been pivotal. The Bayraktar drones supplied by Türkiye have become symbols of Ukrainian resistance, with Türkiye gaining an unprecedentedly positive image in Ukraine's society as a reliable partner. Türkiye also acted as a mediator in the grain deal during the war, while seeking to promote peace negotiations between Ukraine and Russia in 2022.

The overall perception of Ukraine within Türkiye is shaped by a multifaceted set of geopolitical, economic, and cultural dynamics that have evolved significantly in the context of recent developments, particularly the on-going conflict between Russia and Ukraine. These perceptions are influenced by Türkiye's strategic positioning, historical ties, and foreign policy orientations, which together contribute to a nuanced and often contradictory view of Ukraine.

Türkiye perceives Ukraine through various lenses – namely as a strategic partner, geopolitical ally, cultural kin, and economic collaborator – each shaped by contemporary and historical factors.

This research, grounded in geopolitical theory and employing both multi-dimensional and content analysis, seeks to explore three key dimensions that form modern perceptions of Ukraine Turkish society. These dimensions not only potentially influence societal attitudes but also impact decision-making processes at both the state and international levels. The study conducted by the authors examines the perception of Ukraine within Turkey through three critical dimensions: academic and political environment, media discourse, practical overview of the bilateral relations, all of which together offer a comprehensive understanding of Turkey's evolving stance towards Ukraine.

Political and Academic Thought

To start with, since prominent political science and international relations scholars belong to different socio-cultural backgrounds and the research areas they focus on are manifold, their professional views on the Russian invasion of Ukraine have a strong tendency to vary from country to country. The majority of Turkish scholars have been considering the impact of the war in Ukraine on the Republic of Türkiye, and investigating the power structures in both regional and international realms, in addition to the role of NATO and the European Union in this conflict (Devlen, 2014, p. 2). As a trend, they advocate for a more nuanced and balanced approach to the war, and their works also highlight the necessity of taking into account both Türkiye's long pragmatic relations and past historical experiences with Russia, as well as Moscow's regional interests that nowadays have a significant impact on Turkish foreign policy. To put it simply, most academic foreign policy experts from Türkiye support the so-called "Türkiye's interests first" approach in this conflict.

The other group of Turkish scholars has been focusing on the humanitarian, legal, and human rights aspects of the war, advocating for more vigorous

condemnation of the Russian Federation and greater support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Some of them openly criticize Ankara's pragmatic approach to the conflict and even raise doubts about the country's true commitment to the norms of human rights, humanitarianism, and democratic principles. Yet, these researchers are currently in the minority in Türkiye (Our Entrepreneurial and Humanitarian Foreign Policy as We Enter 2023, 2022; Think Tanks Reports on the Invasion of Ukraine, 2023). Moreover, certain Turkish academics have devoted much energy toward the analysis of bilateral historical and cultural relations between Ukraine and Türkiye, including the common problematic areas of interaction that both nations have. They call for improving the level of cooperation and increasing interstate exchange, as well as for reference to joint history and cultural contexts that often led to misunderstandings and political crises in the past. Overall, the scientific community in Türkiye has engaged in a critical and meaningful discourse around the situation in Ukraine since 2014 (Dalay, 2022, p. 5), reflecting the rich diversity and depth of intellectual potential of Türkiye.

It should be noted though that the Russian war against Ukraine impacts on the current interstate relations between Ankara and Moscow remains a priority research topic for Turkish scholars. Underlining the significance of a Russian factor in Turkish foreign policy, many conclude that the Russian Federation still remains one of the 15 ex-Soviet republics Türkiye has the firmest ties of all. This claim is easily confirmed by the number of academic institutions within the country that specialize specifically in Russian studies rather than any other topic, along with the number of Turkish researchers on the history, politics, or culture of Russia who speak Russian as their second/third language. None of the neighbouring states or Turkish allies, including Ukraine, have established a similar network of scientific connections, which significantly affects the positive national image of these countries compared to the Russian Federation (Nikolko, 2024). Nevertheless, one of the largest fields of international study in Türkiye is global affairs with a special emphasis on NATO and the European Union. And while some

authors, mainly from the first category, centre their war research on historical and cultural connections between Ukraine and Russia, often appealing to Russian propagandistic narratives and worldview claims, others outline the conflict's origins in the rivalry between Russia and the West over the post-Soviet territory forming a unique Turkish idea in this regard (Hacıtahtiroğlu, 2014, p. 261-262). Several scholars interpret this crisis as an East-West confrontation, thus contributing to the narrative popular in the countries neutral to Russia's war in Ukraine. In this context, major scholars from the most prestigious universities and think tanks stress the importance of keeping the balance in Türkiye's geopolitical interaction with both the Western world and Russia. Supporting this idea, they suggest rationalizing geography, energy, and strategic interests, seeking a more pragmatic setting for the current crisis in international affairs.

Still, there are a number of distinguished researchers who disapprove of their government's close ties with Russia at this critical moment of war, as they see such cooperation as a lack of adherence toward NATO obligations and Western values on the whole. Eventually, the purely humanitarian and human rights dimensions of the conflict are another area to which the academia in Türkiye accustoms interest. Particularly starting from February 2022, many scientists at public foundations and NGO consultants like those at Kızılay [the name for Turkish Red Cross] have been raising concerns about civilian's fate, especially in the Donbas region of the East of Ukraine (Our Entrepreneurial and Humanitarian Foreign Policy as We Enter 2023, 2022). Some of them have been offering the parties to promptly negotiate a resolution and find a way to delineate their conflict in favour of mitigation and life-saving, while others advocate condemnation and a stronger stance towards Russia's actions and larger international legal support for Ukraine's rights to defend its territory. Thus, the discussions in Türkiye initiated in the academic environment are highly polarized, which signifies the need for a very complex analysis of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, and the causes that resulted in its development, taking into consideration not only the home country's prospects

but also the geopolitical, cultural, and historical contexts of both Turkish allies and rivals.

As a result, Türkiye's official stance toward the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has underscored its firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine – an approach the need for which is elaborated on by scholars. According to the mainstream political research line nowadays, this position aligns with Turkish broader foreign policy objectives in the Black Sea and Eastern European regions, wherein Ukraine, the second largest country in the former USSR and the current EU, serves as a counterweight to potential Russian hegemony. Notably, the political tradition founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk more than one hundred years ago should not be neglected. Following his view, at that time Ukraine had had an impressive political weight in the region possessing a positive image as a neighbour (Günay, 2022, p. 7 – *translated by the author*): “It is possible to say that Ukraine and Türkiye are two neighbouring countries. Look carefully to the north. There is the [*Black*] sea there. But if you imagine for a moment that there is no sea, you will see that Türkiye and Ukraine are much closer countries...” said by Mustafa Kemal on January 3, 1922, in the building with a Ukrainian delegation. Since the core of modern Turkish political thought is grounded in the principles of Kemalism, it is possible to state that certain visions of the founder of the Republic's first president, though to a lesser extent, still affect the construction of Türkiye's geopolitical reality today.

The Turkish government has emerged as one of the most outspoken supporters of Ukraine, in terms of backing its territorial integrity and sovereignty during the war with Russia. Political leaders and influences from all across the Turkish political spectrum have reacted to the Russian aggression by criticizing it and at the same time appealing for a political solution and peaceful resolution. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has made numerous public statements condemning the invasion of Ukraine and expressing solidarity with its people. In February 2022, he stressed that this country would support Kyiv, noting that “the aggression against Ukraine violates international law, human rights, and

democracy, and is unacceptable” (Dinçer, 2022). Erdoğan has also called for the fair exchange of hostilities and the complete withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine, which points to his desire to mediate the conflict.

Likewise, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a series of statements criticizing Russia’s invasion and recognizing Ukraine’s right to self-defence, though calling for problem-solving through negotiations. Moreover, other senior Turkish officials echoed worries about the humanitarian crisis in several Ukrainian regions and offered assistance to those affected by the war (Our Entrepreneurial and Humanitarian Foreign Policy as We Enter 2023, 2022, p. 13; Devlen, 2014, p. 1). Yet, an issue has emerged as a subject of debate in Türkiye when it comes to the war of 2022 because Turkish politicians have different concerns due to their party affiliations and foreign policy priorities. Some of the political leaders had supported Ukraine in the past, in 2014 and earlier. On February 28, 2022, the leaders of six opposition parties gathered in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye and released a joint statement against the Russian invasion and in support of Ukraine. This statement called on the global society to act to immediately stop the war and provide assistance to Ukraine fighting for its independence and territorial integrity (Statement by the Main Opposition Party, 2022). The ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) has adopted a very pragmatic approach to the situation, avoiding overt condemnation of Russia and stressing the importance of diplomacy in resolving the conflict, while trying to balance both (Kusa, 2022; Explaining Turkish Foreign Policy Moves in the Context of Russia’s War against Ukraine, 2022, p. 3).

In contrast, the main opposition forces the Republican People’s Party (CHP) and the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) have chosen a more aggressive strategy in protesting against the Kremlin in this war. Moreover, not once have their representatives criticized the government for acting too friendly in relations with Moscow and reminded the adherence to NATO and European values. In sum, exactly like in academia and popular culture, the political Türkiye has no consensus for the Russian-Ukrainian war (Ермав, 2022). Some politicians

advocate the need for effective realistic diplomatic measures to bring both parties to the table and make them talk, whereas others advocate for the supremacy of human rights and international law to maintain the pre-war order (Our Entrepreneurial and Humanitarian Foreign Policy as We Enter 2023, 2022, p. 4-5; Devlen, 2014, p. 1-2).

Therefore, since then, based on Türkiye has been consistent in its recognition of the Kremlin's atrocities and deportations in Crimea back in the 1940s, a stance that not only reinforces its time-tested commitment to Ukraine but also highlights the broader geopolitical contest for dominance in the region. Türkiye's backing of Ukraine's territorial claims has now only fostered a sense of solidarity between the two nations, especially in light of their shared opposition to the expansive policies of Russia.

Media Narratives

The Turkish media landscape plays a critical role in shaping public perception of Ukraine. Media coverage in Türkiye has largely portrayed Ukraine as a resilient and sovereign state defending itself against Russian aggression, a narrative bolstered by the successful use of Turkish-made military equipment. However, Turkish media also reflect the complexities of the nation's foreign policy, often depicting Türkiye's balancing act between supporting Ukraine and maintaining relations with Russia. This balancing act is evident in the mixed narratives presented to the Turkish public, with some outlets emphasizing Türkiye's strategic neutrality and others advocating for stronger support for Ukraine based on shared values and mutual interests.

It is important to notice that Turkey's media landscape has been increasingly vulnerable to Russian narratives, as shown in comprehensive analysis news items related to the war in Ukraine across Turkish media channels (Brusylovska, 2022).

According to the research focused on popular outlets like CNN TÜRK, Hürriyet, Habertürk, Sözcü, and OdaTV, many of which have mirrored Russian propaganda lines in their coverage of Ukraine (Tarasiuk, 2024). The main media

narratives regarding Ukraine in Turkish media after 2022 do not directly reflect the perception of Ukraine as a strategic partner or geopolitical neighbour, but mostly consider Ukraine through the prism of the war of Russia against Ukraine. It should be noted that the portrayal of Ukraine in Turkish media in the first year of the war and now, at the end of 2024, differs primarily in the intensity of mentions and the polarization of themes. The main media narratives at the beginning of the war often echoed messages from Russian propaganda that were being broadcast by the Russian government at that time.

“Ukraine as a Victim of American Geopolitical Ambitions”

In the context of strained Turkish-American relations – exacerbated by issues such as the failed 2016 coup attempt, U.S. support for Kurdish groups in Syria, and Turkey’s stalled EU integration – Ukraine is portrayed in Turkish media as a victim of U.S. hegemonic ambitions. Russian propaganda exploits Turkey's historical scepticism toward the West, framing the war as a consequence of America's quest for a unipolar world order, with Ukraine caught in the crossfire (Kalin, 2022). President Erdoğan’s adviser, Ibrahim Kalin, has repeatedly emphasized that the war is the result of "mutual misunderstandings" between Russia and the West, a narrative that downplays Russia's responsibility and instead focuses on the broader geopolitical contest (Milliyet, 2022).

“Russia is Fighting Nazis in Ukraine”

The portrayal of Russia’s war as a fight against “Nazis” in Ukraine was another dominant narrative in Turkish media at the beginning of 2022, particularly among pro-Eurasians’ outlets like OdaTV and Aydınlık Daily. These media platforms have amplified Russia's claims of combating Ukrainian nationalist groups, often drawing comparisons to Turkey’s own battles against Kurdish militant groups. For instance, false reports of Ukrainian soldiers supporting Kurdish forces were circulated to stoke anti-Ukrainian sentiment (OdaTV 2022). These narratives were bolstered by Russian media outlets like Sputnik, which remains operational in Turkey despite being banned in many other countries (Öncan 2022).

“Ukraine Cannot Win the War”

Another historically rooted narrative in Turkey is the perception that Russia is militarily undefeatable, a belief stemming from the Ottoman Empire’s repeated defeats in Russo-Turkish wars. This sentiment, reflected in media commentary, perpetuates the idea that Ukraine stands no chance of defeating Russia in the long term. However, recent Turkish analyses of Ukraine's military successes – such as the liberation of Kherson and Kharkiv – have somewhat challenged this fatalistic view (Ozkan, 2023).

In general, Turkish media has been giving a relatively balanced overview of what is going on in Ukraine in 2023-2024. Although some authors revealed bias regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this can be fairly justified by the great diversity of views among the press. Some would immediately call for a non-violent and diplomatic solution to the conflict, while others kept utilizing the pro-Russian vision of the problem. Following the academic view, most sections of the media condemned Russia’s actions and demanded a higher degree of response toward the war, while others focused more on peaceful solutions. In 2023-2024, Ukrainian topics in Turkish media have undergone significant shifts, both in intensity and the framing of narratives. Early in the war, many Turkish outlets echoed Russian propaganda, often relaying Moscow’s talking points. However, by late 2024, the coverage became more diverse and polarized, with mentions of Ukraine decreasing in quantity but becoming more focused on specific themes like the grain deal and energy cooperation. Turkish media often portrays Turkey as a mediator between Russia and Ukraine, reflecting Turkey's unique geopolitical position, balancing its NATO commitments with its deep ties to Russia.

Public perception in Turkey of Ukraine is often filtered through this lens of mediation and *realpolitik*. Reports suggest that Turkish news channels have covered Ukraine less frequently than during the war's initial phase, but the framing has evolved to discuss larger geopolitical implications and Turkey's role as a potential intermediary.

Practical Overview of the Bilateral Relations After 2022

Official Ankara practically views Ukraine as an important regional actor, especially within the spheres of security and defence, which has become increasingly prominent since the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022. Türkiye's defence industry has played a crucial role in this bilateral relationship, most notably through the provision of Bayraktar TB2 drones, which have garnered international attention for their effective deployment by Ukrainian forces against Russian advances. The defence collaboration between the two nations extends beyond these drones and includes joint ventures in high-precision weaponry development, further cementing Ukraine's role as a key security partner in Türkiye's strategic calculus within the Black Sea region. This collaboration enhances Türkiye's influence in regional security affairs while helping to counterbalance Russian military dominance in the area.

In addition to the supply of drones, Türkiye and Ukraine have pursued broader defence industry collaboration, including joint production and technological exchanges. In 2021, before the full-scale invasion, the two countries signed agreements to co-produce high-precision weaponry, which included efforts to manufacture advanced drones and other military hardware. This collaboration has continued into the war, with Ukraine and Türkiye jointly developing the Akıncı drone, which incorporates Ukrainian engine technology. Such cooperation has not only strengthened Ukraine's military capabilities but also helped Türkiye diversify its defence industry partnerships, reducing dependency on traditional suppliers and fostering innovation (Bomprezzi, Kharitinov, & Trebesch, 2024). In a further deepening of their defence cooperation, Türkiye and Ukraine signed agreements to establish a joint production facility in Ukraine for Bayraktar TB2 drones. Construction of the plant began in 2023, and it is expected to be fully operational by 2025. This initiative not only strengthens Ukraine's military capabilities but also helps to secure the supply of critical defence technologies amid the on-going war (Bisht, 2023; Soyulu, 2022). Beyond drones, Ukraine and Türkiye have been implementing over 30 defence contracts since the war began. These contracts

cover various defence technologies, including armoured vehicles, missile systems, and joint engine production. Ukrainian companies, for example, have contributed to the engine development for Türkiye's KAAN fighter jet project, showcasing the mutual benefits of their defence industry collaboration (Yeşilada, 2024).

Economic relations between Türkiye and Ukraine have only deepened despite the on-going war, underpinned by robust bilateral trade and cooperation in critical sectors such as energy and infrastructure. Before the conflict, trade between the two nations was gradually but constantly growing, and the economic partnership has persisted despite the disruption. The grain export deal, brokered by Türkiye in 2022 under the auspices of the United Nations, exemplifies the economic interdependence between the two countries and highlights Türkiye's role as a key mediator in preserving global food security. This economic collaboration continues to shape Turkish perceptions of Ukraine as a valuable economic partner, particularly in agriculture, energy, and logistics. Since 2022, economic cooperation between Ukraine and Turkey has significantly expanded, driven by mutual strategic interests, particularly during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. One of the key milestones was the signing of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two countries on February 3, 2022, which aimed to boost bilateral trade and remove tariffs on a wide range of products. (Урядовий портал, 2022) Despite the war, trade between Ukraine and Turkey reached \$7.4 billion in 2022 and \$10 billion in 2024, showing resilience in sectors like steel, agriculture, and energy. (Resmi Gazete, 2024). Turkey also has been actively investing in Ukraine's post-war reconstruction, particularly in infrastructure and renewable energy sectors. In January 2024, an agreement was signed in Istanbul allowing Turkish firms to participate in rebuilding Ukraine's damaged infrastructure, including housing, roads, and water transport. This cooperation stems from a memorandum of understanding signed in 2022. Turkey is also engaging in long-term recovery efforts, aiming to boost bilateral trade and contribute to Ukraine's economic recovery.

Cultural and historical connections, particularly regarding the Crimean Tatar diaspora, play a significant role in shaping Türkiye's perception of Ukraine. Türkiye has long-standing cultural ties to Crimean Tatars, an ethnic Turkic group that maintains a significant presence in both Ukraine and Türkiye. These ties have strengthened Türkiye's humanitarian posture toward Ukraine, particularly after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, which led to the displacement of many Tatars. Particularly because of their large historical presence in Türkiye, the word "Ukraine" itself is now often associated with resilience and resistance having a very positive connotation. The local Crimean Tatar communities notably contribute to the view of Ukraine as a nation struggling for justice, freedom, and human rights. These narratives find fertile ground in Türkiye for which Crimea is a recurring theme regarding historical readings and discussions on its association with the Ottomans and the Russians. Way before the current crisis, Türkiye had been concerned with the fate of Crimean Tatars, given the fact of four massive waves of Tatar immigration from the peninsula due to the Russian aggression recorded in Turkish history.

Starting with the first such wave in the late 18th century, after Crimea 90% inhabited by Turkic people was incorporated into the Russian Empire; then, similarly faced ethnic cleansings in the second half of the 19th century, the date of which is still remembered in Türkiye as a national tragedy; going to the biggest flow of Crimean Tatar displacement by the Soviet Union in World War II; and also today with Tatars trying to escape the occupied territory where the Muslim population is limited to nearly 10-15%, the Turkish state has always been the place of shelter for this brotherly people (Nikolko, 2024). Nowadays, the city of Eskişehir in west-central Türkiye has become home to the largest Crimean Tatar diaspora in the world. Over the decades, it has been serving as a refuge to generations of Crimean Tatars, many of whom have assimilated and blended with the local population while still maintaining a strong connection to their historical homeland. These people openly advocate for Ukraine to achieve victory against Russia on the battlefield and ensure strong moral support, while mobilizing

Turkish resources at the same time. As an example, following the local Crimean Tatar diaspora's request, it was recently decided to open a centre in Eskişehir for assisting displaced Ukrainian mothers and children called "Kırım Ailesi" [*Crimean Family*]. Thus, the diaspora has played a key role in raising awareness about Ukraine among Turks and has been contributing to the formation of a cross-country agenda in favor of it (Aydın, 2024, p.13-14). Since 2021, Ukraine has received both political and humanitarian aid from Türkiye related to the Crimean Tatar needs. Turkish support for the Tatar community has reinforced the perception of Ukraine as an ally in protecting vulnerable populations and maintaining regional stability. Media coverage in Türkiye often highlights this humanitarian aspect of the conflict, framing Ukrainians as well as Crimeans as a direct victim of Russian aggression, thus further fostering public sympathy and support.

The topic of Crimea and Crimean Tatar migrants is particularly significant in Ukrainian-Turkish relations. Before being president, Abdullah Gül said that "Türkiye considers Crimean Tatars as loyal citizens of Ukraine and a community that will contribute to the friendship of the two countries" (Мхитарян, 2006, p. 16). Türkiye greatly supports Ukraine in integrating Tatars and other indigenous people of Turkic origin returning to the country from occupation or exile. On a broader scale, Ankara has always looked at Crimea as an important partnership point connecting Ukraine with Türkiye with Kyiv being a link between civilizations. Centred in Crimea, the key concept of regional cooperation is based on intercultural, humanitarian, and security interaction between Ukraine in Türkiye at times of the rising Russian threat in the Black Sea region. Given Ukraine's pivotal role in this security architecture system, its stability has always been crucial for Türkiye as well as for the people of Ukraine. Some even view Ukraine as a highly influential actor and stabilizing partner for Türkiye particularly in its traditional role of containing Russian entry into the Black Sea. As some political experts pointed out, an ideological, liberal, stable, and Western-oriented Ukraine may become a reliable strategic partner for Türkiye in countering the expansionist

ambitions of the Russian Federation and maintaining security in the Black Sea area (Dost, 2024).

Politically, the Crimean Tatars are one of the most active ethnic groups in Türkiye, advocating for greater cooperation and support for Ukraine. At first, there are about 30 non-governmental *Crimean Tatar Culture and Cooperation/Solidarity Associations* [Kırım Türkleri Kültür ve Yardımlaşma/Dayanışma Dernekleri] across the country, the largest of which are located in Ankara, İstanbul, Eskişehir, and Bursa. These organizations are constantly engaged in educational activities, publishing historical books and popular magazines in the Turkish, Ukrainian, and Tatar languages, at the same time cultivating awareness about Ukraine and fighting Russian disinformation (Aydın, 2024). It would not be an exaggeration to say the initiative to run the Crimean Platform – a Ukrainian state project that annually brings together dozens of country leaders to discuss the issue of Crimea de-occupation – belongs to the political leaders of Crimean Tatars. Obviously, the Republic of Türkiye and President Erdogan personally are regular participants in this network. For the Turkish President, the Crimean Tatar topic is both internal and foreign policy aspects. By addressing this issue, he reaffirms the list of Türkiye's interests in the region and the solidarity of Türkiye with Ukraine's non-recognition of the annexation of Crimea. Such a stance indicates concerns of Ankara about its own compatriots whose fate has long been drawing the attention of Turkish citizens. For many ordinary Turks, the Crimean peninsula is closely associated with the regional geopolitics, geostrategy, national and historical identity of the Turkish state.

Conclusion

In the recent years, Ukraine has become an increasingly important factor in Turkish foreign policy, especially in the context of the Russian invasion of 2022. During the war, Türkiye provided increased multi-faceted assistance to Ukraine and was quite vocal in defending Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Furthermore, Türkiye is the most prominent supporter of Ukraine's control over

the Crimean Peninsula and an advocate of Crimean Tatars living in Ukraine and abroad. The Ukrainian-Turkish bilateral partnership is most noticeable in the sphere of economics and defence. The volume of interstate trade has been on the rise within these three years with Türkiye being the key market for Ukrainian exports. Türkiye also largely invests in projects in Ukraine to be fulfilled now and after the war ends. However, there is no clear consensus on the status of relations between Kyiv and Ankara in Turkish society and political circles. While several narratives are attempting to conceptualize Ukraine's role in Turkish foreign policy, in reality, this question has been raised recently to the on-going war. Despite the trend of sympathizing with and supporting Ukraine, the definition of its status as an emerging regional power or future strategic partner will take time to be elaborated on by academia, accepted by society, and adopted by the government,

In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the Republic of Türkiye has consistently supported the territorial integrity of Ukraine. However, the Turkish geopolitical view of this war, defined by political and military obligations, as well as economic interests and bilateral cooperation with Russia, has always been rather unorthodox compared to other NATO countries. Unlike many of the EU states, in recent years Türkiye has been generally appealing to several Russian geopolitical and propaganda narratives, especially concerning blaming the United States for the conflict and heightening suspicion of the West. Nevertheless, in Turkish media and expert circles, Ukraine is normally portrayed as a friendly state and a relatively significant regional actor, though not the most critically important strategic partner.

Over the years it has become obvious that Russian propaganda and disinformation have considerably affected the Turkish media and society. Many media outlets have been accused of spreading fake news or even adopting a pro-Russian stance. Moreover, Russia-affiliated media channels like RT and Sputnik have also been actively involved in the promotion of their geopolitical version of history and current affairs, including the situation around Ukraine. The bigger problem is that the good majority of news authors and scholarly researchers writing about Ukraine in the Turkish language are both political scientists and

politicians residing in Russia or domestic propagandists sympathizing with the Kremlin. And since a very small percentage of Turks understand Ukrainian, the broader ex-Soviet geography is studied by Russian-speaking Turkish academicians relying predominantly on Russian materials.

In summary, the continuation of war between Russia and Ukraine poses a serious threat to the vital Turkish interests. In case of a limited armed conflict, it allows the Turkish authorities to enhance their reputation in the international arena through mediation and diplomatic activities; however, any large-scale war weakens Türkiye's position and undermines its ability to maintain neutrality. The modern perception of Ukraine in Türkiye is predominantly shaped by strategic, geopolitical, cultural, and economic factors. Despite the complexities arising from Türkiye's relations with Russia, Ukraine is largely viewed as a valuable partner, particularly in the areas of defence cooperation, regional security, and economic collaboration. The shared history and cultural ties, especially regarding the Crimean Tatars, further reinforce this partnership. As the conflict between Russia and Ukraine continues, Türkiye's diplomatic and strategic engagements will likely continue to shape its evolving perception of Ukraine, maintaining a balance between solidarity with Ukraine and pragmatism in its relationship with Russia.

Ukraine, for its part, has been trying to challenge Russia's messages in Türkiye and spread its messages through public diplomacy, cultural activities, and media campaigns. Thus, the comparatively low penetration of Ukrainian messaging in media consumption in Türkiye can be explained by the high levels of media consumption in Türkiye and the low level of interest of many Turks in Ukrainian issues. Therefore, distinguishing a Ukrainian narrative from a Russian one in the light of cultural dominance in today's Türkiye is not an easy task and can hardly reveal a direct impact of the abovementioned factors.

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