IS NATO'S PRESENCE FADING IN RUSSIAN NEAR ABROAD IN TIMES OF CHANGE?*

Arif BAĞBAŞLIOĞLU**

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to examine the evolving place of NATO in the Russian near abroad, giving an overview of the Alliance's partnership activities in the region. The article aims to clarify how the Alliance's partnership policy has changed in this region and the contributions of Turkey to this policy since the 1990s as well as how NATO's activities will be affected after Afghanistan operation and Ukraine crisis. In the Post-Cold War era, a bond between the NATO and the Russian near abroad has been established through NATO's expansion, its partnership policy and its military operations. Given the withdrawal troops from Afghanistan and the relations with Russia at an impasse each of these core missions' future now appears to be in question. The article claims that maintaining the suspension of the Alliance's cooperation with Russia caused by the Ukraine crisis could have a limiting effect on NATO's partnership policy in the Russian near abroad. In this framework, the impact of the crisis on the Alliance's enlargement policy and its partnership policy are addressed in the article.

Keywords: NATO's Partnership Policy, Turkey, Russian Near Abroad, Eurasia, Ukraine Crisis

ÖZET

Bu makalenin amacı NATO'nun Rusya'nın yakın çevresindeki ortaklık faaliyetlerini ele alarak, İttifak'ın bölgedeki evrimini değerlendirmektir. Çalışma, İttifak'ın ortaklık politikasının 1990'lı yıllardan beri nasıl değiştiğini, Türkiye'nin bu politikaya yönelik katkılarını incelemekte ve Afganistan operasyonunun sona ermesinin ve Ukrayna krizinin seyrinin NATO'nun bölgedeki faaliyetlerini nasıl etkileyebileceğini açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde Rusya'nın yakın çevresi ile NATO arasındaki bağ, NATO'nun genişlemesi, ortaklık politikası ve İttifak'ın liderliğinde gerçekleştirilen askeri operasyonlar aracılığıyla kurulmuştur. NATO'nun Afganistan'daki operasyonunu sona erdirmesi ve Rusya ile ilişkilerdeki müşkül durum dikkate alındığında, kurulan bu bağların ve gerçekleştirilen görevlerin geleceği problemli görünmektedir. Bu makale, Ukrayna krizi nedeniyle İttifak ve Rusya arasındaki iş birliğinin askıda kalmasının NATO'nun Rusya'nın yakın çevresinde uygulamaya çalıştığı ortaklık politikasına

sınırlandırıcı bir etkisi olacağını iddia etmektedir. Çalışmada bu çerçevede Ukrayna krizinin NATO'nun genişleme ve ortaklık politikalarına olan etkileri de incelenmektedir.
Anahtar Kelimeler: NATO'nun Ortaklık Politikası, Türkiye, Rusya'nın Yakın Çevresi, Avrasya, Ukrayna Krizi

Since its inception, NATO has regularly had to review its tasks and focus in view of the evolution of the security environment. After the disappearance of the Soviet threat, NATO's adaptation to the changing security environment has been more remarkable and NATO has searched for a new raison d'être. In so doing, NATO has expanded its purpose from collective defence to broader security tasks. This adaptation has been reflected in NATO's three strategic concepts, adopted in the Post-Cold War era in November 1991, April 1999 and November 2010. With every new Strategic Concept, NATO's basic text, the Washington Treaty of 1949, is re-interpreted within a specific geopolitical context to fit an ever-changing strategic landscape. NATO's Strategic Concepts are official documents that aim to outline NATO's enduring purpose and nature and the fundamental security tasks of the Alliance. They are road maps to fit the members' security needs in a changing environment. Through its strategic concepts NATO has released new duties such as peace-keeping, crisis management and providing security based on cooperation other than the assigned duties set forth under the North Atlantic Treaty. At the same time, expansion by means of welcoming new members, establishing partnership programs in different geographical regions, military modernization, and rearrangement of power structures were made, essential components of the Alliance's security policy. With its 28 members and 40 partners, NATO, carrying out several missions[1] on three continents today, has gained the title of a global security organization.

During the Post-Cold War era, NATO's connection to Eurasia[2] and the Russian near abroad was established through its official enlargement policy, partnership policy and operations carried out in the framework of NATO's mission of crisis management. With the withdrawal of NATO combat troops from Afghanistan, for now NATO's enlargement and partnership policies will define the NATO-the Russian near abroad relationship. This

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[1] As of July 2015, NATO performs five missions: peacekeeping operations in Kosovo; anti-terrorism patrols in the Mediterranean; anti-piracy in the Gulf of Aden and off the Horn of Africa; assistance to the African Union in Somalia; Resolute Support in Afghanistan. Following the completion of the mission of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) at the end of 2014, a new, follow-on NATO-led mission called Resolute Support was launched on 1 January 2015 to provide further training, advice and assistance for the Afghan security forces and institutions. Resolute Support is expected to conclude at the end of 2016.
[2] Eurasia can be described as a region, though flexible and indeed an indefinite designation of space (Gleason 2010: 26). In this study, Eurasia is used as a convenient way of referring to what was Soviet territory.

article evaluates how the Ukraine crisis could have a limiting effect on these two basic policies in the Russian near abroad. The article also examines the contributions of Turkey to NATO's partnership policy in the region, in particular to the Partnership for Peace (PfP). In this context, this article will assess decisions taken at the NATO Summit in Wales in September 2014 as a framework to deter Russia.

NATO's Presence in the Russian Near Abroad

According to Nazemroaya (2012), the globalization of NATO's in Eurasia pursued a two aims: to control Eurasian natural resources and energy routes, and to contain Iran, Russia and China. In the post-Cold War era, NATO's policy towards the Russian near abroad, especially in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, can be examined in three periods. The first period is between 1991 and 2001, the second is between 2001 and 2010, and the third begins after the adoption of NATO's New Strategic Concept in November 2010 at the Lisbon Summit.

The first period began with institutional frameworks for dialogue and military cooperation such as North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) and the PfP programme. Established in December 1991, NACC, was an institutional relationship for consultation and cooperation on political and security issues" open to all former members of the Warsaw Pact. The NACC served as forum for sharing information on technological, scientific, and environmental issues and facilitated the dissemination of information about NATO among the NACC Countries (Kay 1998: 66). In January 1994, NATO launched the PfP programme. The difference between PfP and the NACC was that while the NACC was open to former Warsaw Pact states and focused on detailed work plans for military co-operation between the NACC as a whole and NATO, PfP was open to all states in the Organization for Security and Cooperation for Europe (OSCE), and each PfP agreement was signed between the individual partner country and NATO (Aybet 1999: 71). Although NATO's early partnership initiatives focused on the integration and stabilization of Europe, the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001 prompted a new phase in NATO's thinking about the role of partnership (Moore 2010a: 94). The Afghanistan operation is the main determinant in the forming of the following period. Afghanistan is a major geo-strategic hub that conveniently flanks Iran, the former Soviet Union, and China. Afghanistan also constitutes a doorway into energy-rich Central Asia, which permits bypassing the territories of Iran, Russia and China (Nazemroaya 2012: 119).

NATO's involvement can be explained through its willingness to prevent any likely threat emanating from the region and to keep the region's supply routes to Afghanistan open. Particularly, the contribution from the partner countries in Central Asia and the South Caucasus has been enormously important due to their geographical locations. The geography of

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Afghanistan has prompted NATO to devote greater attention to these countries, all of which have provided various forms of assistance that are critical to NATO's ability to operate in Afghanistan: military bases, transit routes, and cooperation on border security. Ties established with these countries through the partnership policy facilitated NATO's insertion and presence in the region (Bağbaşlıoğlu 2014: 89).

In the third period starting after 2010, NATO decided to pull out from Afghanistan and to renew its partnership policy that defines the structure of the relations of the Alliance with the countries in the region. While forming NATO's policies for the region, the important need to provide political and logistical support to the ISAF to while maintaining the balance in NATO-Russia relations was recognized. During previous periods, NATO's partnership policy and its tools have played a facilitating role in ensuring ties between NATO and the countries in the region. The most important reason for the change in NATO's policy towards the region is that the relations between NATO and Russia have constantly undergone remarkable changes since the end of the Cold War. According to Oğuz (2015: 10) in the post-Cold War era NATO has in practice neglected the basics of deterrence, while ignoring the sensitivities and the red lines of Russia. On the other hand, Russia focused mostly on bolstering its sphere of interest, even at times challenging and confronting the Alliance. One of the most important elements which determines the degree of NATO's effectiveness in the region is the relations NATO has established with Russia. However, the Ukraine crisis that started at the end of 2013 has turned into a global issue for NATO and challenges the status quo.

After the Ukraine crisis, NATO Foreign Ministers agreed to "suspend all practical civilian and military cooperation between NATO and Russia". On 1-2 April 2014 NATO Foreign Ministers met and an agreement was reached to strengthen the collective defence of the Alliance's territory and to signal solidarity with NATO's Baltic and Eastern European allies, in particular after the developments in Ukraine. Member States also agreed to increase the defensive power of Ukraine. The decision on suspension of on-going cooperation with Russia in the fields of military and civilian was taken at the meeting because of Russia's acts contrary to international law. The decision indicated that political dialogue could continue only at the ambassadorial level in the NATO-Russia Council in order to provide opportunities to exchange views on the crisis in Ukraine (http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_108501.htm).

It should be stated that this was not the first time that NATO-Russia relations had been suspended. Conflict and reconciliation periods between NATO and Russia have not been an unusual situation since the end of the Cold War. During that period Russia maintained relations with NATO through institutional arrangements such as Partnership for Peace in 1994, the Founding Act in 1997 and the NATO-Russia Council in 2002. The U.S.

has not desired to see Russia either inside NATO or opposed to NATO. This position has been departed from at various international conjunctures. The Founding Act ceased to function after the intervention by NATO in Kosovo in 1999 and NATO-Russia relations were suspended. Relations were suspended once more due to Russia's military intervention in Georgia in August 2008. The tension between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 is but one example that illustrates Moscow's eagerness to maintain an active presence in the region at any cost. Russia's willingness to expand its power in the "near abroad" has clearly held back NATO's efforts in the region, because it cannot compete with Moscow's influence (Pertusot 2011: 29). The impact of the Ukraine crisis, however, has been more significant in terms of solidarity between the NATO members and the NATO policies.

NATO's Partnership Policy:
A Connection with the Russian Near Abroad
The post-Cold War era brought about a new international system requiring the reorganization and reconstruction of international institutions. NATO, being affected by this process, has attempted to alter its capabilities, interests and activities. This process has also provided a reason for the establishment of NATO partnerships: Partnership for Peace, Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI); in different geographic regions that underpin the changing security role that the Alliance has taken on beyond its treaty area. In addition to these formal partnership frameworks, NATO also cooperates individually with countries outside the Euro-Atlantic area who contribute to allied missions, such as Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea and New Zealand which are not part of NATO's other partnership frameworks.

The New Strategic Concept raised the profile of partnerships by promoting cooperative security to the level of one of the Alliance's three "essential core tasks", alongside collective security and crisis management. Following up on the Lisbon decisions, Allied foreign ministers endorsed the new partnership policy at their meeting in Berlin on 15th April 2011. Allies also restated their goal of achieving cooperative security through partnerships during NATO's Chicago Summit in May 2012.

The partnership concept originated in bilateral contacts between the US and Soviet Union in 1990 during discussions on how to manage post-Cold War European security.[3] The development of NATO partnerships is implicitly linked to the American grand strategy, with Washington seeking to extend its influence through a 'hub-and-spoke' system - the US acting as the 'hub' and NATO as the force multiplier (Rougé 2011: 25-30). Since the

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[3] See, for more information about the relationship between American national security objectives and the use of partnerships as a tool for managing the international security environment, (Kay 2011: 18-40).

early 1990's NATO has maintained multiple partnership frameworks which have over time served several functions. According to Moore (2010: 232-233), partnership initially constituted an essentially political means of integrating and democratizing Europe.

NATO's first partnership program, PfP, paved the way for practical cooperation between NATO and the states of Central and Eastern Europe, including former Warsaw Pact members. In this context NATO created a wide range of practical mechanisms, such as the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) and the Planning and Review Process (PARP), and activities to promote cooperation with partner countries. Within the expansion process, PfP served as an important instrument to foster security reform and prepared the partner countries for accession to the Alliance through these frameworks. PfP has been an important institution in non-NATO countries in Northern and Central Europe as well as being a mechanism for engagement at varying levels for countries of Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. PfP was employed to prepare twelve states, which were incorporated as full members between 1999 and 2009: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. The following 22 states are still members of PfP: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia, Finland, Georgia, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Russia Federation, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Special cooperative links were also set up with two PfP countries: Russia and Ukraine.

During the PfP process, NATO set forth rules specifying conducts that are deemed acceptable in domestic and foreign operations of countries wanting to be members. NATO tried to keep its PfP program and partnership understanding dynamic by adding new mechanisms and members. PfP was considered as an initiative on the path to NATO membership particularly for Eastern and Central Europe. However, it has not had that kind of influence in Central Asia and the South Caucasus. This fact partly clarifies why concrete cooperation remains limited, even though all five Central Asian Republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) and three South Caucasus countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) take part in the PfP programme. The ISAF mission in Afghanistan largely defines NATO relations with these countries instead. Above mentioned ties established with these countries through the partnership policy facilitated NATO's presence in the region. Turkey also made significant contributions to cooperation in defence with regional countries under the framework of NATO's PfP program, and assumed the command of ISAF twice. Because of recent Russian actions, particularly its 2014 annexation of Crimea, promoting cooperation and contributions between NATO and Central Asian and South Caucasus countries will be more difficult.

Besides being an element of endorsing expansion policy, another contribution of the PfP programme to NATO is that PfP countries joined in the operations led by NATO. The contributions of these countries increase as their ability to cooperate with NATO countries increases. Fifteen percent of forces under NATO led operations in Afghanistan and the Balkans are composed of personnel from PfP countries.

With NATO's New Partnership policy, adopted in Berlin on 15th April 2011, while preserving the institutional partnership programs (PfP, MD, ICI), all partners are offered access to the whole spectrum of partnership activities NATO offers. It is clear that the new partnership policy envisages more political cooperation with partner countries. "Political Military Framework For Partner Involvement In NATO-Led Operations" is one of the documents of the Berlin package which provides for full consultation, cooperation, and transparency with operational partners and, as appropriate, potential operational partners, on all relevant aspects of the operation throughout its life-cycle (http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2011_04/20110415_110415-PMF.pdf). With its new partnership policy, NATO has focused more on developing its relations with global partners. In fact, this is directly related to both the change in the international conjuncture and the corresponding shift to the Asia Pacific in US foreign policy.

Since partners have different aims and interests, NATO's policy makers decided that NATO's new partnership policy must be flexible and variable. Yet, this objective also bears the risk that NATO may turn into a developed coalition of the willing led by more powerful states in the Alliance. For this reason NATO must be clearer about the aims of its partnerships and how they can contribute to Alliance as well as to partner interests. If the new partnership policy fails to achieve its objectives or acts as a mere developed coalition of the willing, NATO's necessity can be brought into question. To remain viable and relevant NATO must establish a consensus about what it wants to achieve with partners (Bağbaşlıoğlu 2014-2015: 101).

Turkey's Role for NATO's Partnership Policy
NATO's transformation process, which brought about changes in NATO's structure, membership and functions, has directly influenced Turkey as it is located at the center of a geography in which NATO is engaged in constructive dialogues, comprehensive partnership mechanisms, as well as a number of other operations. Turkey has played a supportive role in this process and NATO's partnership policy is a remarkable example of this role – although Turkey was not the main decisive actor in the creation of this process.

As NATO shifted from a predominantly collective defence organization to a collective security organization in the 1990s, Turkey's key geopolitical location allows her to keep her significance for NATO. Turkey is bordering four security hotspots of concern for the alliance: the Balkans, the Caucasus,

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and the Middle East and the Basra (Persian) Gulf. Particularly after 9/11 attacks, the change in the geography that poses threats for NATO and the idea that the potential of threats turning into action could be eliminated before the occurrence of any such attack changed and expanded NATO's fighting and intervention domain. Turkey, which is the only country in NATO that has cultural and historical links with the countries where out-of-area operations took place during this period, stood out with its capacity and ability to establish contact between regional countries and the Alliance.

Turkey, NATO's sole predominantly Muslim member, is an important contributor to various post-Cold War missions, from IFOR and SFOR in Bosnia, and its follow-on mission led by the European Union, to EUFOR Althea, Operations Essential Harvest, Amber Fox, Allied Harmony, Concordia and Proxima in Macedonia, KFOR in Kosovo and ISAF in Afghanistan.[4] Turkey's military potential and its army's capability of civil-military cooperation in peace support operations allow Turkey to participate in these missions. Turkey has also contributed to counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and Operation Active Endeavor, which is a security and counterterrorism effort in the Mediterranean. Despite its initial reluctance Turkey also contributed to Operation Unified Protector in Libya. At this point, it is necessary to point out that Turkey emphasized NATO operations must be in line with UN resolutions in order to provide international legitimacy. All activities referred to above were carried out in line with UN Security Council resolutions. In that sense, it can be said that Turkey does not oppose out-of-area NATO operations in principle. Yet, the fact that NATO's out-of-area interventions were carried out in Muslim-populated regions compelled Turkey to act more carefully especially in the case of the interventions in Afghanistan and Libya. Some of the most notable examples were demonstrated in Afghanistan where Turkish troops refused to perform combat duties that would bring them in direct clashes with Taliban militia, and in Libya where Turkey tried to limit NATO's mission to supervising the sanctions. Even so, Turkey's geographical, historical and cultural familiarity with the regions where NATO intervenes, along with the advanced capacity

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[4] For more information about Turkey's contribution to peace support operations see, (http://www.tsk.tr/ing/4_international_relations/4_1_contribution_of_turkish_armed_forces _to_peace_support_operations/contribution_of_turkish_armed_forces_to_peace_support_oper ations.htm). Turkish Armed Forces has so far supported Kosovo in all fields and Turkish military personnel serving at the Turkish Representative in Kosovo. As 1 February 2015, Turkey contributes 372 of 4651 personnel in KFOR (‚http://www.nato.int/nato_stat ic_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2015_02/20150127_150201-kfor-placemat.pdf). As one of the countries that have actively contributed to ISAF operation from the very beginning, Turkey providedbetween 900 and 1400 personnel in the period between June 2002 and February 2013. During the period, Turkey ranked between 9th and 11th place among 50 countries contributing to ISAF. With the beginning of the transition process regarding the handover of security responsibilities in Afghanistan to Afghan security forces, Turkey and other allies began to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan.

and abilities of Turkish Armed Forces boost Turkey's role and contribution in NATO.

Turkey is consistently supportive of the Alliance`s open door policy. It must be kept in mind that Turkey, which overall endorses NATO's expansion policies, has not come to this point without some discussion. NATO's first expansion invitation was made to Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary during the Madrid Summit held in July 1997. The essential concern of Ankara prior to this summit was that Turkey's advantage deriving from being a NATO member would diminish with the expansion of NATO; although this was not officially voiced. Ankara also tried to associate NATO's expansion with Turkey's EU membership at official levels. However, this attempt was not supported by material policies. As it is widely known, Turkey was not accepted into EU membership although it endorsed three NATO expansion policies during the post-Cold War era. Today, Turkey officially supports the idea of NATO enlargement as a means to expand the area of stability. Turkey's stance, however, varies depending on a specific candidacy. While favoring the accession of Macedonia, Ankara is skeptical about the case of Ukraine and Georgia whose accession would be seen as provocative in nature. Ankara is inclined to take into account the effect that their accession would have on NATO-Russian relations.

Turkey has contributed to NATO's partnership policy, which facilitates developing relations and cooperation with non-NATO countries, since the policy was proclaimed in 1994. Turkey endorsed the partnership policy without any hesitation. I believe that there are three underlying reasons for this unhesitant endorsement: The first one relates to Turkey's security concerns. NATO's desire to develop strategic relations with the countries in the geographies where Turkey stands in the centre (Eastern Europe, Balkans, Black Sea, Caucasus and Central Asia) was seen as a requirement to remove Turkey's security-based concerns. The second is that Turkey can more conveniently demonstrate its western identity in the above mentioned geographies through NATO. According to Oğuzlu (2013: 36), the obstruction in Turkey's EU accession process and strong reservations of some EU countries concerning Turkey's EU membership brought NATO into the forefront as a means to express Turkey's western identity. The third is the possibility of Turkey's developing better relations, with the participating countries, through PfP.

The most concrete contribution of Turkey to the PfP programme was achieved in training through the PfP Training Centre. The Turkish PfP Training Center was the first officially recognized center by NATO on 12 February 1999. Since its inception, this center has trained approximately 14.700 military personnel on several topics including crisis management, border security, civil-military cooperation in peace support operations, arms control, international law of armed conflict and combating human trafficking. The Turkish PfP Training Center has also contributed to NATO's

Iraq and Afghanistan Training Missions by accepting participants from these countries in the resident courses, conducting tailored courses and deploying mobile training teams (http://www.bioem.tsk.tr/tr/katilim.htm). This center has given an opportunity to Turkey to behave as the lead nation. It has also given NATO an opportunity to invest in Turkey through expanded training and exchange capacity without a large armed presence.

Turkey also hosts one of NATO's fifteen accredited Centers of Excellence, the COE for Defence Against Terrorism. Some of the courses conducted in the Center are also open to partner countries' personnel. Through these centers, Turkey exerts efforts to establish an understanding of security based on cooperation and collaboration, between NATO and personnel of the countries which participate in the partnership program.

Turkey's active participation in PfP activities has increased its significance for the Alliance. Turkey's embassies in Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan acted as NATO contact points in the period between 2007 and 2008. Ankara also decidedly supported involving Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Partnership for Peace program. Further, it advocated launching an intensive dialogue with the two latter countries.

Turkey has not only provided support for PfP but also for other partnership programs of NATO and its relations with global partners. The fact that NATO expanded its fighting and intervention area following 9/11 attacks boosted the significance of the Alliance's partnerships with Middle Eastern, East Mediterranean and Asia Pacific countries. Turkey supported NATO's said policies in its immediate geography and has made efforts to manage these policies. The most important example of this fact is that ICI, which institutionalized cooperation with Gulf countries, was announced during the Istanbul Summit in 2004. The underlying reason for Turkey's endorsement of relations through NATO established with countries in its immediate surrounding is that such action will contribute to Turkey's security (Oğuzlu 2013: 30).

Overall, it would not be realistic to assert that Turkey's role was a key factor in creating strategic concepts of NATO adopted between 1991 and 1999 or that it had a significant contribution in the matter. Nevertheless, Turkey's contribution in executing these strategies is evident. In the Bosnian and Kosovo crisis where NATO was involved, Turkey contributed in both pre-intervention and post-intervention activities. Turkey, which endorses NATO's expansion and partnership policies, paid attention to improving relations particularly with new member countries before and after their membership processes. Decisions and practices adopted in the 2000's created a perception that Turkey's foreign policy axis had shifted and moved away from the West. Yet, Turkey's relations with NATO were maintained under the government of the Justice and Development Party. Finally, it is worth noting that Turkey's policies have been consistent and in line with NATO's partnership policy. Turkey has always supported the development

of NATO cooperation with non-NATO countries on an institutional basis. Turkey suggests that PfP should be kept dynamic and flexible in order to adapt new challenges.

The Effect of the Crisis in Ukraine on
NATO's Approach for the Russian Near Abroad
Annexation of the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol is the first annexation of 21th century. The annexation and Ukrainian crisis as a whole initiated a new phase in the relationship between NATO and Russia. The confrontation between Western European countries, NATO, and the West and Russia due to Ukrainian crisis has been labelled the "second nuclear duel" after the Cuba Crisis (Erol 2014: 3).

NATO's first official response to the developments in Crimea was shown after the meeting of the North Atlantic Council held on March 2, 2014. In the statement released after the meeting, serious concerns about the use of the armed forces of the Russian Federation in the territory of Ukraine were expressed. By emphasizing Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity, Russia was asked to honor its international commitments, including those set out in the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, the Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation between Russia and Ukraine of 1997 and to refrain from interference elsewhere in the Ukraine (http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_107681.htm?selectedLocale=en). On 4 March 2014, Poland called the Alliance for an extraordinary meeting to discuss the collective defence on the basis of Article Four of the North Atlantic Treaty. Article Four, which embodies the solidarity among NATO members, allows any ally to consult with others if it feels its security, territorial integrity or independence are under threat.[5] At the meeting it was expressed that the developments in and around Ukraine were seen to constitute a threat to neighbouring Allied countries and having direct and serious implications for the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area. A strong solidarity of spirit between members was also emphasized at the meeting (http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_107716.htm?selectedLocale=en).

NATO's response to the referendum held in Crimea was hard. In the statement issued on March 17, NATO announced that the "so-called referendum" was contrary to the Ukrainian Constitution and international law and the results of referendum would not be recognized (http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_108030.htm?selectedLocale=en). On 1-2 April 2014 at the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting, the decision on suspending

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[5] NATO meetings under Article Four are rare. Only Turkey has used the option before, calling for consultations three times, once during the 2003 war in Iraq and twice, in 2012, over the Syrian conflict (http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/03/us-ukraine-crisis-nato-meeting-idUSBREA221VS20140303).

on-going cooperation with Russia in the fields of military and civilian was taken because of Russia's actions.

NATO has increased its military presence in the Baltic States, Poland and Romania, within the scope of the decision taken at the Foreign Ministers Meeting in June 2014 to improve the defence capacities of member states. NATO foreign ministers agreed on a Readiness Action Plan (RAP) and a higher frequency of maneuvers within the Connected Forces Initiative which aims to ensure the ability of member forces to be able to communicate and work with each other. These measures were officially passed at the Wales Summit in September 2014. In June, NATO maneuvers were carried out in Eastern Europe and in Baltic states (http://www.whitehouse. gov/the-press-office/2014/06/03/fact-sheet-european-reassurance-initiat ive-and-other-us-efforts-support-). Russia responded by maneuvers in the Black Sea. These mutual military maneuvers and provocative rhetoric have increased tension. After the inauguration of Petro Poroshenko on June 7, Ukraine declared independence unilaterally under the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) umbrella in Eastern Ukraine and in Russia, and began talks with the representatives of Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. The most concrete result of the talks was the ceasefire agreement on September 5. One day before the declaration of ceasefire, the NATO Head of States and Governments Summit was held in Newport (Wales-United Kingdom).

The Wales Summit: An Important Step for Solidarity
It is obvious that NATO allies have achieved political unity, at least in the rhetoric used, since the crisis in Ukraine broke out and this was attitude maintained at the Summit. The allies reaffirmed NATO's support for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, and committed to furthering the NATO-Ukraine Distinctive Partnership. It is clearly seen in the summit that NATO leaders explicitly regard threats to the security and territorial integrity of individual allies as causes for possible collective action. It must be highlighted here that collective defence was reaffirmed as NATO's core mission in the Summit.

The true challenge that the Wales Summit had to overcome was to adequately reinvent the Alliance in a way that would deter further aggressive steps, maintain credibility and demonstrate its resolution without reverting to Cold War attitudes, while incurring minimal costs for states that are both war-weary and in economic disarray (Lasconjarias 2014: 5). In the light of decisions taken at the Summit, it is obvious that NATO leaders aimed to deter Russia (http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964. htm?selectedLocale=en). Therefore, particularly the NATO Readiness Action Plan stands out as an important step, establishing a continuous rotation of air, land and maritime forces in Eastern Europe. The allies also agreed to establish a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) within

the NATO Response force as a spearhead unit, able to deploy at very short notice from the end of 2014 onwards, particularly at the periphery of NATO's territory.

The allies agreed that all NATO members whose current defence expenditure is below two percent commitment will aim to increase their defence expenditures in real terms as their gross domestic product (GDP) grows and move towards the two percent guideline within a decade. Likewise Allies who spend annually less than twenty percent of their defence budgets on major new equipment including research and development, will aim to increase their annual investments to twenty percent within a decade. These pledges are related to the burden sharing which is regarded as the one of the four principles of function that are necessary to keep NATO working in viable and effective ways.[6] In addition to these steps, projection of additional measures, including continuous air, land, and maritime presence and meaningful military activity in European States, increasing the capabilities of High Readiness Corps in Poland, and increasing preparedness levels of some part of the NATO forces can be considered as appropriate measures.[7]

The Ukraine Crisis can be described as an apparent conflict of the Eurasian-based power struggle between the West and Russia. Russia's discomfort caused by EU and NATO expansion and desire to make clarify its border between its near-abroad and the West is a central dimension of the crisis. The tension created by the crisis has pushed the U.S. and Russia to the brink of a cold war. The continuation of tension between NATO and Russia can prevent the development of the relations between NATO and other countries in the Russian near abroad, which are dependent to Russia economically and cannot afford a conflict with Russia. NATO's partnership programs were developed while the NATO-Russia relations were on going. At a time when NATO-Russia relations have been suspended, it is possible for Russia to create a security dilemma in the immediate its vicinity for activities coordinated by NATO.

Conclusion

NATO's expansion and partnership policies have played a crucial role in achieving NATO's strategic aims in the early post-Cold War era. The expansion policy has aimed at accepting new members to provide stability and security in the Euro-Atlantic area. While the primary purpose of the partnership policy has been to develop relations with non-NATO countries. Turkey has greatly contributed to these two policies. These two main policies have provided an opportunity for NATO to enlarge its sphere of influ-

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[6] The other three principles are American leadership, intra-allied cohesion and trust, and credibility (Webber vd. 2014: 778-782).
[7] For more information about NATO activities after the Wales Summit, see (Bingöl 2015).

ence. During the Post-Cold War era, NATO's connection to the Russian near abroad has grown with its official enlargement policy, partnership policy and operations carried out in the framework of NATO's mission of crisis management. To emphasize an important point, the geography of Afghanistan has prompted NATO to devote greater attention to the countries in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, all of which have provided various forms of assistance that are critical to NATO's ability to operate in Afghanistan. These include military bases, transit routes, and cooperation on border security. Ties established with these countries through the partnership policy facilitated NATO's presence in the region.

The Ukraine Crisis has added new dynamics to NATO's enlargement policy in the Russian near abroad. Georgia is even more committed to joining NATO and has made a greater effort to fulfill membership requirements. Ukraine is likely to revise its 2010 decision of nonalignment and will insist on NATO honoring its membership guarantee of 2008 - even without a definite accession date (Kamp 2014: 362-363). Clearly, it would be unrealistic to assert that NATO's expansion will continue without problems. This is also the same for sub-regions of Eurasia, Black Sea and Caucasus. Russia's strong counter-stance; the reluctance, except for the US, of other major NATO members toward enlarging NATO beyond Eastern Europe borders; instabilities in the region; the partial change of Washington's policy toward region; and, the lack of internal consolidated national efforts at candidate states have adversely influenced NATO enlargement in the Black Sea and Caucuses regions (Demir 2015: 18-19).

Although Alliance leaders again declared in the Wales Summit that NATO's door will remain open to all European democracies, allies have chosen once again to postpone the issue of Georgian and Ukrainian membership. Most allies are skeptical of the accession of Ukraine and Georgia, whose additions are seen to be as provocative to Russia in nature; several allies are inclined to take into account the effect that their accession would have on NATO-Russian relations. As Kufčák (2014: 10) has noted, the postponement of Georgian and Ukrainian membership obviously indicated the gap between NATO's open door rhetoric and its internal politics.

Given the withdrawal of NATO combat troops from Afghanistan and the ongoing suspension of NATO's cooperation with Russia caused by the crisis in Ukraine, we can say that there is, in effect, a need for NATO to redefine and refocus its relations with Central Asian and South Caucasus countries. Because of recent Russian actions, promoting cooperation and contributions between NATO and Central Asian and South Caucasus countries will be more difficult.

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