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Challenges in The Mediterranean region
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Foreword

Summer is coming to the Mediterranean region, with an announced food shortage and instability in tow. From Egypt to the Maghreb countries, the region must face the challenges and accommodate its policies to ensure financial stability and food security.

The war in Ukraine put a shadow on the other conflicts in the region, however, despite several efforts to normalize relations, the Syrian conflict remains, with the possibility of ISIS re-emerging. The withdrawal of Russian forces and mercenaries from the region, long awaited by some, will likely be done at the cost of regional stability. Nonetheless, military conflicts are not the only regional struggles, as migration policies in Greece and Turkey highlight their impact on the populations and these political decisions’ price for governments. Partly related to that point, Ankara still has cards to play as a regional power between EU’s and Russia’s struggle over the region.
March 2022
Russia seeks Middle Eastern soldiers for the war in Ukraine

15/03/2022
President Bashar al-Assad visits the United Arab Emirates in his first trip to the Arab state since 2011.

25/03/2022
A total of 14,429 Ukrainian refugees including 4,580 children had crossed the border to Greece

Syrians gather in local demonstrations and rallies to express support for Russia’s struggle against alleged Western policies aimed at destabilizing its security and stability.

07/04/2022
Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez visits Morocco

28/04/2022
Russia begins withdrawing troops and mercenaries from Libya and Syria

05/05/2022
Inflation in Turkey rises to 6th place in the inflation league in the world.

10/05/2022
The United States formally lifts sanctions on foreign investments in non-regime held areas of northern Syria and pledges $800 million in humanitarian aid

07/05/2022
Egyptian President Sisi announced government programme to sell state and army-owned enterprises to the private sector

25/05/2022
Greece has reported an unusually high flow of immigration entering the country from Turkey because it resumed its practice of allowing boats packed with migrants to depart from its coast for the Greek islands in the eastern Aegean.

18/05/2022
Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis: It was a Greek, Plato, who first proposed equal rights for women.

07/05/2022
President Erdogan officially announces the beginning of a plan to return one million Syrian refugees to their home country

03/05/2022
President Erdogan officially announces the beginning of a plan to return one million Syrian refugees to their home country

23/04/2022
Turkey blocks Russian armed forces from using its airspace to reach Syria.

02/04/2022
Turkey sends a message to Syria with the aim of normalizing relations with the Assad regime

Turkey starts interventions to improve the Saudi Arabia relations.

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02/04/2022
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Turkey starts interventions to improve the Saudi Arabia relations.

18/03/2022
March 18th 2022: Spain backs autonomy plan under Moroccan sovereignty for Western Sahara

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The Islamic State names a new leader: Abu al-Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurashi

07/04/2022
President Sisi announced government programme to sell state and army-owned enterprises to the private sector

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The Islamic State names a new leader: Abu al-Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurashi

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The Russian invasion of Ukraine has been a one-two punch of acute wheat shortages and the medium-long term effects of rising fertilizer prices to the global agriculture market; and the Middle East and North African region (MENA) will bear the brunt of the shock. Israel will face its own acute upward pressure on food prices that may threaten the governing coalition’s frail grip on power, but its neighbors (particularly and in order of increasing likely severity: Egypt, Lebanon and Syria) are likely to face more dire consequences ranging from slowed economic growth or recession, civil unrest, armed conflict, governmental collapse and/or famine. To combat these problems, Israel and its neighbors must search for new suppliers of the precious commodities and/or credit with which they can be secured at a higher cost. The wheat reserves in the MENA countries mentioned in this article should hold them over until or through the summer of 2022, but thereafter the scramble for the shrinking 2022–23 global supply of wheat will bite at the pocketbooks of the wealthy and at the stomachs of the poor.

Where is the Fertilizer?

There are 3 basic nutrients that are used in fertilizer – nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus. Different farmers growing different crops will apply fertilizers to meet their needs, but several factors have removed a significant portion of all types of fertilizers from the global export market. Therefore in recent months, the prices of the major types of fertilizers have dramatically increased. Here is a quick overview of the types of fertilizers and some of the main reasons behind their rising costs:

Nitrogen based fertilizers are synthesized using the patented Haber Bosch process, which uses natural gas as a base input. Thus, the prices of these fertilizers rise with the price of natural gas (Mosaic 2022). The price of Urea, the most common nitrogen based fertilizer, is up 96% YoY (Quinn 2022). About half of the world's food is...
produced using nitrogen based fertilizer (Mosaic 2022).

Potassium based fertilizers, commonly called potash, increase yields as well as help plants resist disease, insects and other adverse environmental conditions; and are generally produced by mining potassium salt deposits underground or in dried sea beds and processing it into a finished product (ICL 2022). Russia and Belarus are the second and third largest producers of potash fertilizer at 21% (Colussi 2022) and 17.6% (Keen 2022) of global production in 2021 respectively and they have been cut off from the international export market. The price of potash fertilizer YoY is up 99% (Quinn 2022).

Phosphorus based fertilizers promote root and seed development and plant maturation (Indorama 2022). The most common usage of phosphorus in fertilizer is diammonium phosphate (DAP), a compound fertilizer that uses both phosphorus and nitrogen. China made up 30% of the global export market, but in September 2021, China banned the export of phosphate (the phosphorus based compound used in fertilizers) until June 2022 (Clayton 2021). The price of DAP is up 65% YoY (Quinn 2022).

The rising cost of these agricultural inputs means that farmers will use less fertilizer, if any at all in poorer places, which will result in reduced agricultural output worldwide. For an extreme example, The International Fertilizer Development Center predicts that this year’s West African rice and corn harvests will decrease by a third (Elkin 2022). Even in wealthy countries, farmers are adjusting their crop treatments and locking in their contracts with lower amounts of fertilizer in order to be financially sustainable (FB 2021). The coming contraction of the global food supply this next harvest due to increased fertilizer costs will highly likely compound whatever political or economic instability comes out of the wheat shortage in MENA.

Meet the Neighbors

Below are a handful of MENA countries that will be affected by both the wheat shortage and the fertilizer prices in the coming years. We will briefly cover the current political situation, wheat reserves, and the efforts to combat the challenges to food security in each country.

Israel is by far the wealthiest country in terms of GDP per capita on this list. Currently, Israel is led by a coalition government headed by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, who has promised to alternate his office with current Foreign Minister Yair Lapid. This diverse coalition came to power in June 2021 after forging an uneasy alliance between opposition parties against former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is now the subject of a number of criminal investigations (Kerschner 2020) and whose government failed to pass a budget in 2020, thus triggering the election in 2021. The current government lacks the political capital to make drastic pushes for reform (Rabinovich 2021), and may be politically upended at the ballot box by rising prices and economic pressures. According to The Media Line, Israeli Finance Minister, Avigdor Lieberman,
claimed in early March 2022 that Israel had enough wheat reserves for 3 months, and if the Russo-Ukrainian war is shorter than that, then no shortage is expected (Mohnblatt 2022). However, he did say that regardless of when the war ends, there will be a shortage the following season because "The farmers in Ukraine can’t plant for next year.” (Mohnblatt 2022) To combat these challenges, Israel has a budgetary surplus of around $6 billion (Scheer 2022) which can act as a cushion when absorbing the impact of the price hikes or in securing new suppliers. Additionally, Israel has raised its import quotas on eggs, of which 30% has traditionally come from Ukraine (Steinberg 2022), as well as honey (Rabinovitch 2022) in an effort to reduce prices because the domestic prices of these products are significantly higher than the global market’s. The number that should keep people up at night in Israel is the percentage of Palestinians who are food insecure (31.2% in Palestine and 64% in Gaza as of March 2022 (Oxfam 2022)). The Palestinian Authority has no food reserves and relies heavily on humanitarian aid and the Israeli food reserves for such emergencies (Oxfam 2022). There could be significant risk of civil unrest, particularly if neighboring countries also fare poorly in the coming food crisis.

Egypt is the most exposed country in the world to the loss of Russian and Ukrainian wheat with 80% of its wheat coming from the embattled countries (El Safty 2022). Surprisingly, wheat imports rose in March after the invasion began and Egyptian importers are working to find ways around the challenges to their wheat imports from Russia like sanctions, port closures, vessel financing etc (El Safty 2022). In April 2022, their reserves were estimated to last for around 2.6 months (Chibani 2022) with more hopefully to replenish it after the harvest later that same month (El Safty 2022). According to the data from the Egyptian Ministry of Agriculture, Egypt expects to be around 60 percent self-sufficient with wheat this season (El Safty 2022). With first hand knowledge of what food insecurity can do to a country after the Arab Spring (Zurayk 2011), Egyptian officials are moving with purpose to diversify wheat imports, securing imports from Latvia, France, Canada, India and the United States. Furthermore, wealthy Gulf States are extending credit to the Egyptian Central Bank and investing in the country (Turak 2022), perhaps because Egyptian food security is in their interest so as to keep the Suez Canal open and free from the turmoil like what is expected from the last two countries listed in this article.

Lebanon can’t catch a break, it seems. It had already faced significant food insecurity in 2021 due to the rising price of fuel (Chehayeb 2021) and a staggering inflation rate of 239.68% in January 2022 (Baff 2022). Half of the population is estimated to live in poverty and the country only has a 1 month reserve of wheat thanks in part to an explosion in Beirut in 2020 that destroyed a main grain silo and a significant portion of its national reserves (Francis 2020). All this coming into a 60% wheat import exposure to Russia and Ukraine being shut off (Chibani 2022). With no budget surplus to work with and little, if any, wealthy Gulf State interest in their plight, Lebanon has turned to the World Bank to extend them a $150 million loan in an attempt to stabilize the price of bread (Chibani 2022). Meanwhile, the Lebanese Finance Minister, Amin Salam, has talked with the United States and Romania as potential replacement suppliers, albeit more expensive ones, for their lost imports. India, France and Canada were also mentioned as potential new suppliers (Rose 2022). The government controls the price of bread, which has increased 5 times since the economic crisis that began in 2019 (Rose 2022) and it is yet to be seen if they can secure new imports at prices affordable for the government, let alone the half of the population living in poverty. Here the acute wheat crisis is likely to hit hard, with a potential famine on the horizon and an impact on regional security which is worth considering, especially going into the leaner years ahead.

Syria is an ongoing humanitarian disaster. The civil war may have died down in the media with American and European military disengagement, but the violence, destruction and other hallmarks of the grinding conflict continue to wreak havoc.
on the people remaining in the country. Earlier in the same month of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the World Food Programme estimated that 9.3 million people were already suffering from acute food insecurity in a country of 17.5 million (Al Shami 2022). The Syrian exposure to the loss of wheat imports was less significant as a percentage (24.1% (ISPI 2022)) than the other countries on the list, but the ongoing crisis puts them leagues behind all of the other countries in their capacity to act. Bread is distributed by the government in areas controlled by the Assad regime, and the paltry rations of 275g of bread per person per day are, in some cases, the only food people receive (Al Shami 2022). The World Food Programme, an organization that provides food assistance to around 5 million Syrians, was seeking $375 million to continue operations through July, before the invasion and added price hikes (UN 2022). The situation in Syria is highly likely to turn even worse in the foreseeable future, and the war-torn government is unable to meet these challenges, relying now even more on the help of NGOs to feed its people.

Spaces to Watch

In Israel, the government faces significant challenges already due to the competing parties in its fractious coalition. Will the financial pressure from the crisis spell the end of the current political configuration? Will current Palestinian food insecurity worsen and heighten already inflamed tensions?

In Egypt, the extent to which the government can secure wheat imports and manage the rising price of wheat will mirror the economic impact and thereafter the political impact of the crisis. Will the Egyptians be able to secure enough wheat and at what cost to the treasury and the pockets of its people?

In Lebanon, the situation is highly likely to degrade significantly. Already on its last legs before the coming crisis, Lebanon will need support from international organizations to have a chance of staying off famine. Will they receive enough aid to hold them over, or will Lebanon descend into civil unrest and conflict?

In Syria, the government already relied on international organizations to feed its desperate people. The civil war has drained the coffers and potency of the government, and therefore, its ability to manage such a crisis as besets the region presently. The question in Syria is, how severe will the crisis be and what effects will it have on its neighbors?

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With the advent of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the world has become divided into two camps, pro-Russia and pro-Ukraine. However, some, like Turkey, are critically balancing their political and economic position over the erupted war, instead of taking clear sides. To understand this unique dynamic, one must look into the rocky EU-Turkey relations and history which, arguably, has led to deepening Russian-Turkey relations. In this regard, it is found that while Turkey initially leaned into being more influenced by Europe, Western alienation later drove it to become more independent in its policies; eventually, driving it to have a deeper, yet “compartmentalized”, relationship between itself and Russia.

The Turkish republic was founded in 1923 based on the principles of European nation states; this is demonstrated by Turkey’s adoption of secularism, the Latin-script and a legal system similar to that of Europe (Szigetvári, 2014). In fact, Turkey is involved in all major European organizations such as NATO and the Council of Europe, with the notable exception of the EU (Yesilada, 1999). Furthermore, its decision to apply for EU membership in 1987 shows its full eagerness to fulfill its “national goal” of being part of Europe (Yesilada, 1999; Yılmaz, 2019, p.22). It can be argued, however, that this enthusiasm is only one-sided; the EU has consistently shown over the years its latent and blatant rejection of Turkey to be a part of the European community. This drives many analysts to argue that it was the US, and its strategic interests in the region, that drove the European Community to partly accede Turkey in its community (Szigetvári, 2014).

Concurrent to the time of Turkey’s application for EU membership, the country had undergone drastic changes of liberalizing its economy and strengthening its democracy in efforts to join the union (Bal, 2016). In fact, in 1995, Turkey agreed to a contentious customs union agreement with the European Union, in hopes of being a step closer to membership (Szigetvári, 2014).

This agreement removed most trade barriers between Turkey and the EU; it also brought Turkish enterprises to align more closely to European standards, essentially integrating the Turkish market to reach competitive global standards (Szigetvári, 2014). While it’s true that this agreement brought economic benefits to Turkey, such as increasing EU-Turkish trade by six-fold, the competitiveness of the Turkish economy against that of the EU failed in many sectors such as manufacturing (Yabancı, 2016; Szigetvári, 2014).

In this regard, when the EU announced in 1997 its efforts to expand membership to Eastern and Central European states, the Turkish government and public felt betrayed (Yesilada, 1999). Although Turkey was informed by the EU that the rejection of their membership was based only on their weak economy and democracy, many of the states that were included in the accession process had worse economies and political systems than that of Turkey (Yesilada, 1999). For example, Turkey’s political system was seen as more developed democratically than that of the weak democracies of Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania at the time (Yesilada, 1999).

On top of this, most of the new potential members had weaker economies than Turkey (Yesilada, 1999). Another sticking point was the inclusion of Cyprus as one of the listed candidate countries. This was problematic on
several grounds; not only was Cyprus' entry to the EU a violation of its' constitution, but also the 1960 agreements created restrictions for its membership in international organizations (Yesilada, 1999).

On top of this, the acceptance of Cyprus' as a full member state in the EU downplayed the contentious on-going problem it has with Turkey; this was heightened even further when the EU applied "double standards" by pressuring Turkey to accept Cyprus as a full member, while not giving Cyprus the same measure in its accession process (Usul, 2014, p.295).

As a result of this politically motivated step, not only did the EU's meritocratic value decrease, but it also alienated the Turkish public (Usul, 2014). For these reasons, analysts have speculated other reasons behind the rejection of Turkey's accession to the EU beyond the political and economic sphere. Some concluded that the EU is defensive over accepting Turkey into the EU based on cultural grounds, given that its Middle Eastern and Islamic character is antithetical to the Western and nominally Christian character of the EU (Yesilada, 1999).

Clear indications of this is found by the candid claims made by top leaders over their rejection of Turkey based on cultural grounds, such as ex-French president Nicholas Sarkozy who blocked several chapters of EU talks with Turkey for this particular reason (Szigetvári, 2014). The notion that Turkey's cultural status causes an issue to the EU is also evident by the double-sided argumentation which one can give for and against Turkey's accession (Rumelili, 2008).

For instance, while one may argue that Turkey's youthful population provides an economic solution to Europe's aging population, many believe that having free and "uncontrolled" movement of Turkish youth into the EU is a problem in and of itself (Rumelili, 2008). The notion that these migrants can induce a flow of "unwanted" migration, despite their economic value, gives some basis that the rejection of Turkey into the EU is based on cultural grounds.

Why then, would the EU continue to provide Turkey with candidacy status since 1999, despite its alleged aversion to it (Yılmaz, 2019)? To this, some have argued that the EU utilizes the
possibility of accession to the EU as a tool of leverage over Turkey (Yabancı, 2016). For instance, the EU’s acceptance of Turkish candidacy in 1999 drove the government to undergo massive changes in its political sphere; during the Justice and Development Party’s first political term, the role of the military in politics was reduced, freedoms increased and penalties for maltreatment and torture increased (Yabancı, 2016).

Since democratization of nations is a primary norm of the EU, whether or not such a state is part of the EU, it can be said that the EU could “control” Turkish politics through the leverage it has with membership rights. One can also find other evidence to the “the EU leverage argument”. For example, prior to 2004, Turkey was promised that it would join the Union immediately upon fulfilling the Copenhagen agreement; however, when the accession negotiation process was scheduled to begin in 2005, many of the previous promises were dismantled (Yılmaz, 2019).

The EU not only created stipulations outside of the Copenhagen criteria to be accepted for accession but also, it claimed that even if Turkey fulfilled all requirements of conditionalities, it may still not be accepted as a member state (Usul, 2014). This point is critical, given that some of the EU’s stipulations touch upon deep political issues like the Cyprus problem. This shows that the EU’s accession process was transformed into a tool for changing political norms deeply embedded within states.

On top of this, the EU stated that even if Turkey became a member of the EU, there may be some permanent limitations on the rights of people’s movement and the amount of funds it receives, which effectively reduces a large portion of the benefits given to member states who join the EU (Usul, 2014).

Furthermore, several countries, including Germany, France and Austria, dictated since the start of the accession process in 2005, that they rejected Turkish enlargement and sought to give it a “privileged partnership” instead (Yılmaz, 2019, p.23).

To this day, it can still be argued that the continued candidacy status of Turkey is only used to create leverage over it. For example, during the Syrian refugee crisis, the EU agreed to open up previously blocked negotiation chapters and grant visa liberalization to Turkey by 2016 in return for Readmission agreements (Bal, 2016; Yabancı, 2016). Today, not only do we find that these chapters have not gone further but also, visa liberalization has not been granted to Turkey (SchengenVisainfo, 2022; Yılmaz, 2019).

Due to the continued lack of fulfilled promises, Turkish leaders have become fatigued by the EU; this lead Erdogan to candidly state that “the EU would lose Turkey, if it was not granted membership by 2023” (Szigetvári, 2014, p. 39). Undoubtedly, all of this created negative feelings among the Turkish public and pushed Turkey to become more independent in its foreign policy, possibly by making amends with its long-time foes, such as Russia.

Over the past years, Turkey increasingly became less dependent on the EU and sought to forge new relationships with different global actors. Not only has it done that by creating economic, institutional and political linkages with Central Asian countries, but also with the Middle East (Öniş & Yılmaz, 2016; Szigetvári, 2014).

It has often worked to their advantage; for instance, when demand for Turkish products within the EU fell as a result of the global financial crisis in early 2000s, so Turkey expanded its trade to Africa and Middle East (Szigetvári, 2014). One can also notice a change within the Turkish public’s understanding of its allies; for instance, when asked in a recent survey about who is Turkey’s “top ally and most important partner”, 47% responded Azerbaijan (Lepeska, 2022). In this regard, as Turkey has become more ostracized by the West and has begun to have a more independent approach within its foreign
It’s clear from history that Russia and Turkey are natural adversaries, evident by the 13 different wars their empires have engaged in against each other (Öniş & Yılmaz, 2016). In the 20th century, the Soviet Union mainly saw Turkey as a Western proxy due to its deep integration within NATO and other Western organizations (Hill & Taspinar, 2006).

However, with the beginning of the 21st century, both Turkey and Russia attained greater connectivity and interlinkages. This is evident by high-trade volume, top-level visits, cooperation agreements in energy and nuclear fields as well as the removal of visas in 2011 between Russia and Turkey (Özbay, 2011; Öniş & Yılmaz, 2016). Turkey has invested heavily in Russia by opening construction firms, banks and consumer-goods companies (Öniş & Yılmaz, 2016; Hill & Taspinar, 2006).

In return, Russia provides Turkey with energy through the new Blue Stream pipeline, accounting for more than half of the Turkish gas imports; moreover, in 2010, the Akkuyu Nuclear Power plant agreement was signed (Hill & Taspinar, 2006; Mikhelidze et. al, 2017). These actions are particularly important for both Turkey and Russia, since it delivers the former’s goal of becoming an “energy hub”, and the latter’s goal of bypassing Ukraine when exporting gas to Turkey (Bechev & Köstem, 2021, p.7). Trading in defense is also accounted for as found by Russia’s deliverance of the “S-400 surface-to-air missile systems” to Turkey (Bechev & Köstem, 2021, p.2).

With Turkey becoming one of the most visited destinations for Russian tourists, it has greatly benefited from the established visa-free regimes (Hill & Taspinar, 2006). All these economic interlinkages show strong economic cooperation between the nations; however, this relationship is far from ideal or safe.

For instance, when Turkey accidently shot down a Russian jet in 2015, Russia responded by imposing an embargo on Turkish contractors and exports, banned charter flights and lifted its visa-free regime (Özertem, 2017). This shows not only an imbalance of power between the two nations, but it also reveals that their alliance is not holistic, but rather uniquely compartmentalized.

The unique “compartmentalized” relationship between Turkey and Russia is evident when observing their dearth of common political views. In the Ukraine, Syria, Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, one finds that Russia and Turkey support opposing sides, holding completely divergent views on the matter (Bechev & Köstem, 2021). Yet, what unites these two countries in their politics is twofold; firstly, it is the desire to solidify their regional concerns and political power in the midst of feeling alienated and excluded by the West (Hill & Taspinar, 2006).

For example, when the United States attacked Iraq in 2003, both Turkey and Russia viewed it unfavorably; it not only destabilized a neighboring country to Turkey, but it also halted Russian contracts with Iraqi companies (Hill & Taspinar, 2006). On top of this, the growing alienation that both Turkey and Russia face consistently from the EU and the West has led many to believe that their concerns and political power is being seriously undermined (Hill & Taspinar, 2006).

Recent surveys conducted in Turkey show that the United States is reported as the “biggest threat against Turkey’s national interest” (Ünlühisarcıklı, Tastan & Canbilek, 2022). Effectively, this alludes to the notion that their alliance has a defensive tone, one which seeks to counterbalance US and European power (Özbay, 2011).

Secondly, it is based on a shared political understanding which highlights pragmatism, the importance of national interest and “state security over individual rights” (Özbay, 2011;
The importance given to national interest is not only reported by Erdogan, but also by Vladmir Ivanovskiy, Russia’s former Ambassador to Turkey (Özbay, 2011). A unique example of this can be found during the 2008 Russian–Georgia war. When Russia banned imports of fruits and vegetables from the West, in retaliation to their sanctions, not only did Turkey refuse to sanction Russia, but it also utilized this opportunity to export fish and meat, reaching records high (Öniş & Yılmaz, 2016). Similarly, in the current Russian–Ukrainian war, Turkey plays a balancing and neutral position by refusing to join in sanctioning Russia and delivering its S-400 to Ukraine; instead, it has chosen to play a mediator role, allowing it to play a balanced position between the two sides (Antonopoulos, 2022).

The case of Turkey reveals the problems of continued ostracization from the West; Ankara, fatigued by empty promises, would rather form a shaky and unideal relationship with longtime foes to assert their power and concerns. Thus, despite having politically divergent views, Russia and Turkey’s economic ties and their united front against unfavorable Western policies continues on. This leads one to believe that the more alienation Turkey faces from the EU, the more likely it will become independent in its foreign policy, and thus more influenced by and closer to Russia.

Sources


Greece, traditionally an immigrant-sending country, transformed in the period of 1990–2009 into a destination country for economic migrants as well as a transit country for asylum seekers (Dimitriadi, 2022). In the 1990s, the dissolution of both the USSR and Yugoslavia produced large-scale migration in Europe. The migratory movements of economic migrants and asylum seekers created a multi-ethnic immigrant population that, to this day, maintains a significant presence in Greece.

Greece’s immigration policy since the 1990s has predominantly sought to manage and reduce the inflows of migrants. Policy design has been focused on numerous legislative changes that are often complex and bureaucratic yielding limiting results (Triandafyllidou, 2010). Between 1998 and 2008 several regularisation programs sought to address the presence of a growing number of people living in the country irregularly by facilitating the acquisition of residence/work permits for undocumented migrants.

Between 2008 and 2014 the policy focus was on border control and a reform of the asylum system. However, Law 3838 of 2010 on Current Provisions related to Greek Nationality and the Political Participation of Expatriates and Legally Residing Immigrants (L3838/2010) was made to improve the integration processes by facilitating naturalization for second generation children as well as by granting third country nationals residing in Greece the right to vote and to stand for election at the local level. However, aspects of the law were ruled unconstitutional in 2013 and the previous system was reinstated.

Throughout 2014–2015, legislative changes sought to address gaps regarding the settlement and integration of migrant groups already present in the country. In 2014, the Immigration and Social Integration Code (L4251/2014) was introduced. An important element of the code was the introduction of a long-term residence permit for third country nationals. The codification facilitated the passing
of a new law (L4332/2015) offering citizenship to second generation children born and/or educated in Greece and providing refugees with the possibility to apply for naturalization after three years of stay. In 2019, the new liberal-conservative government of Nea Dimokratia introduced a mandatory written citizenship test prior to a verbal interview and increased the stay requirement for naturalization of refugees to seven years.

Greek migration policy overall has been restrictive since the early 1990s, especially as regards asylum. Particularly since the refugee crisis of 2015, several legislative changes have sought to grapple with the asylum-seeking population in the country by placing a strong focus on deterrence. Most notable is the International Protection Act (IPA) (Law 4636/2019) that was amended shortly after its adoption on 1 November 2019 (by L4686/2020). These two reforms restricted access to the asylum procedure further and regularized the practice of detention of asylum seekers for up to 18 months while massively reducing access to material care (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2021).

The Greek government under Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis places emphasis on border security, with the reinforcement of the border fence along the land border with Turkey in the Evros region and strengthened border patrols both after the February 2020 Evros incident when thousands of migrants were encouraged to attempt to cross the Greek land border from Turkey (Boffey, 2020) and the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan in August of 2021. Persistent issues since 2020 remain the alleged pushbacks at the Greek-Turkish borders, poor reception conditions (especially on the Greek islands in the Aegean) and an insufficient framework of assistance for asylum seekers and recognized refugees, as well as insufficient education for asylum-seeking minors and young adults, and the absence of a comprehensive integration plan.

According to the Greek City Times (2022), despite these regulations and statements from the Greek government about the reduction of migrant numbers by 70.5% since 2019, humanitarian groups have accused the Greek government of fomenting a hunger crisis in refugee camps with “conscious” policy choices.
that have left thousands unable to access food. Decisions aimed at deterring migrant flows had created an intolerable situation in which refugees were left struggling to feed themselves for months. The IRC said it estimated that 40% of camp occupants – about 6,000 refugees – had been denied basic means of subsistence because of the center-right administration’s decision to halt food provisions for those no longer in the asylum procedure. Worryingly high numbers were children. About 40% of the population residing in the state-run facilities are minors.

The European home affairs commissioner (The Guardian, 2022), Ylva Johansson, noted that Greek authorities had been repeatedly called on to “ensure that all persons, particularly the vulnerable” receive food and other necessities. However, Manos Logothetis, the General Secretary of Reception of Asylum Seekers of Greece, rejects any suggestion of a hunger crisis describing the allegation as “nonsense”, saying it had been manufactured by NGOs. Mr. Logothetis reiterated that, under Greek and European law, only people applying for international protection could be considered “beneficiaries eligible for material conditions of reception, and therefore food”. In recent months, camp residents who do not fit that description have grown. Under legislation implemented last year, recognised refugees are quickly left to fend for themselves with benefits they once enjoyed, including cash assistance and food, suspended after 30 days. In a society with little integration support, survival is often impossible, and most are forced to return to camps after confronting bureaucratic hurdles, linguistic challenges and difficulties finding work. Turkey’s refusal to readmit rejected asylum seekers has not helped either. A landmark deal reached between the EU and Ankara in 2016 aimed to send migrants who failed to win refugee status back to Turkey. The country has refused to take any back since March 2020 when the president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, encouraged thousands of asylum seekers to enter the bloc, via Greece, sparking a border crisis that further soured the Nato allies’ already strained ties. With their claims rejected and without anywhere to go, they, too, are forced to remain in camps.

Greece expanded the use of inadmissibility procedures on the basis that Turkey is a “safe third country” to asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Somalia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.
threatening to leave thousands of people in limbo, denied protection in the EU, and unable to return to Turkey as the country has not accepted returns from Greece since March 2020. These nationals represent more than 65 percent of asylum seekers in the country. Syrians have been subject to the same rules since 2016.

This situation creates a scenario where thousands have been left in legal limbo and in utter destitution without access to food and other basic rights in the camps, where the hunger crisis unfolding in Greece is a direct result of the conscious policy choices of the government.

According to Human Rights Watch World Report 2022, the Greek government continues its heavy-handed and often abusive immigration controls. There is a mounting chorus of criticism of Greece’s practice of summarily returning thousands of people to Turkey, including through violent pushbacks.

Greek officials deny the allegations, and authorities regularly fail to carry-out proper investigations into pushbacks.

The media reported that the European Commission asked Greece to set up an independent mechanism to monitor abuses at borders before it releases.

€15.83 million (around $18 million) in EU migration funding. However, the evidence is overwhelming. Nongovernmental groups (NGOs) said the new rules had already resulted in people being denied protection within days of their arrival, following perfunctory asylum interviews, without legal representation. More than 2,800 people were denied protection on that basis in 2020.

A law that threatens asylum seekers’ rights was adopted in September 2021. NGOs and the CoE commissioner for human rights raised the alarm over the law, which undermines the right to asylum and weakens safeguards against detention and return to the risk of persecution or other human rights abuse.

Ironically, The Greek government is welcoming Ukrainian refugees, guaranteeing reception capacity and support, while the situation for asylum seekers and refugees in camps across Greece remain dire and support is lacking.
The Greek National Transparency Authority found “no evidence to corroborate” mounting evidence of pushbacks from Greece.

According to authorities (The European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2022), by 25 March of 2022 a total of 14,429 Ukrainian refugees including 4,580 children had crossed the border to Greece. On March 25 alone, 278 Ukrainian refugees entered, of which 74 were children. Greek authorities have applied an unusually welcoming approach to the specific group of refugees from Ukraine as Minister of Migration and Asylum, Notis Mitarakis, recently stated “We are ready for the hospitality arrangements. And we are ready to register people and provide them with temporary protection”.

According to the minister: “The national reception system has the immediate availability of 15,000 beds” – a capacity that can be upgraded to 30,000. Greek authorities have prepared a container camp for those arriving from Ukraine through the Bulgarian border: “open 24 hours with staff from the nearby camps. Once they enter, we provide them pamphlets with numbers they may need, we give the cell-phone cards, we provide them with any information they might need”. Further, initiatives include an electronic pre-registration platform allowing personalized appointments at the Asylum Service Offices, a dedicated jobsite and a website with relevant information.

While Mitarakis has labeled people arriving from Ukraine “real refugees,” leading politicians have defined asylum-seekers from the Middle East or Africa as “illegal immigrants,” and the differential ‘welcome’ reportedly creates tension and frustration among other groups (ECRE, 2022).

It clearly shows that Greece is operating two welcoming systems. One is the system being established for Ukrainian refugees flowing in from the north. At Greece’s border with Bulgaria, officials have rapidly staffed up reception centers to greet the Ukrainians escaping Russian bombs. They hand out cell phone cards, snacks and a warm meal to arrivals. The government is even encouraging NGOs in Greece to shift their resources toward Ukraine.

The other is the system for those arriving from the Middle East and Africa. Along the country’s maritime borders and land connection to Turkey, migrants leaving behind the war in Syria or Taliban rule in Afghanistan have been turned away — often illegally, according to human rights workers and the U.N. Refugee Agency, but not according to a recent Greek government probe. Those who do make it across can face criminal charges for smuggling. The NGOs assisting these migrants argue their work has similarly been criminalized.

The roughly 1,750 people including 450 women and children remaining in the Mavrovouni camp on Lesvos also referred to as Moria 2.0 are facing strict physical control, mandatory return after 9 pm, police patrols inside the camp and exposure to sewage and dirt. Reportedly, the majority of the camp residents are unlikely to be granted protection because of the Joint Ministerial Decision (JMD) from June 2021, when Greece unilaterally declared Turkey a safe third country for asylum-seekers originating from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Somalia, and Syria. Refugee Support Aegean (RSA) has released a series of International Organization for Migration (IOM) statistics from January 2022 illustrating the dire situation for some 15,226 people residing in 24 camps on the Greek mainland. 3,100 of which are unregistered and 5,750 of which are children.

More than 90 percent of the camp population are above the age of 15 lack unemployment cards (OAED) and cannot apply for specific benefits or employability programs nor benefit from free public transportation. More than 40 per cent above the age of 18 lack a tax number needed to open a bank account, rent a flat, work or apply for rental subsidies. 14 per cent lacks a Social Security Number (AMKA), and thereby access to health care and medicine (ECRE, 2022).
The situation is not an exact comparison. Ukrainians enjoy visa-free travel to the EU, as well as a special dispensation from Brussels giving them the immediate right to work and live within the bloc. Afghans, Syrians, Somalis and others do not automatically have similar legal rights. And the Greek government says the country has always done and will continue to do its duty, pointing out that it was at the forefront of the migration surge in 2015, when many EU nations were wary of taking in refugees.

Still, the current situation in Greece illustrates the bifurcated approach unfolding across much of Europe (Stamouli, 2022): Ukrainians are being ushered in with supportive rhetoric, while other refugees are still quietly subject to an EU system that prioritizes keeping refugees out of the bloc and still has no settled agreement on how to distribute arrivals. The government denies these differences lead to discrimination in its asylum policies. Billions in EU funding have done little to improve the Greek immigration system in which rights violations and mismanagement continue. Yet, little has been solved in the southern member state.

Since 2020, the number of new arrivals, pending applications, and people in camps have dropped significantly. The Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MoMA) claims these figures indicate it has “regained control” of the situation. But they are largely driven by policies and practices that prevent and limit access to protection and dignified reception. On both the islands and mainland, asylum seekers remain confined in increasingly restrictive and securitized settings, marginalized instead of welcomed. The government narrowly delimits displaced people's access to aid and stymies civil society efforts to help.

Even when governmental and non-governmental actors identify common problems and interests, the response often founders. A lack of trust and coordination among stakeholders undermines an effective and humane response, leaving thousands of forcibly displaced people without critical protections.

Restrictive new policies and camps perpetuate a Greek strategy of deterrence, containment, and exclusion that systematically closes the space for asylum. The government—together with EU, UN, and NGO partners, and displaced people themselves—must halt or reverse implementation of policies that cause these harms. Responsibly and humanely managing asylum and reception requires taking the long view and implementing an approach that puts displaced people first. (Panayotatos, 2022).

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Since the end of February, Ukraine has been the battleground of Europe’s largest-scale war in almost 80 years. But the images coming from there, for many experts, historians and politicians, are reminiscent of another tragedy less than a decade ago in the Middle East in which the Russian army was also involved.

Russian President Vladimir Putin announced in early March that his country would seek Middle Eastern troops to fight in Ukraine, confirming Western intelligence reports. But in 2015, it was the Kremlin’s soldiers who were deployed to Syria in the first military operation outside Russian territory since the fall of the USSR (Mardasov & Korotayev 2021). Putin’s planes and troops were sent to support the dying government of Bashar al-Assad and launched a great campaign in the Arab country’s long war (Cafarella & Zhou 2019).

On February 24, the first day of the Russian offensive, Bashar al-Assad claimed that “Western nations bear responsibility for the chaos and bloodshed” (Makki 2022). On that same day, Russia Today’s Arabic station live-streamed two correspondents, one based at Hemeimeem air base in Latakia and the other in Damascus, who reported on Syria’s enthusiasm for Russia’s military actions in Ukraine (Makki 2022). Furthermore, Syria was one of just five countries that voted against a United Nations draft resolution condemning Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, 141 voted in favor and 35 abstained (Makki 2022).

The Syrian Chamber of Industry, meanwhile, built a massive billboard showing Putin in military attire next to the words “Victory for Russia” and placed it in one of the main squares of the Syrian capital (Makki 2022). In different Assad stronghold parts of Syria, such as Jableh, some civilians showed their support to Russia by marking their homes and cars with the letter Z (short for Za pobedu, “For Victory”) in white tape. This letter, with which the Russian military marks its armor to avoid confusion with similar-looking Ukrainian equipment on the battlefield, has been taken up as a symbol by the Kremlin’s partisans (Makki 2022).

Less than a decade later, similar questions are being repeated after the invasion and bombings in Ukraine. According to some scholars, Syria was Russia’s school of war to later invade Ukraine (Lima 2022). In fact, according to Lima (2022), the most effective military operations in Ukraine are those taking place outside Crimea, where Russia’s Southern Military District is pushing to secure the Ukrainian coast.

It is also relevant because the Southern Military District and its commander, the General Alexander Dvornikov, have been running the war in Syria. So, in many ways, it is the most experienced unit that the Russians have in Ukraine and may explain why they are having relatively more success on the ground – a review of the Russian advance on Ukraine shows that it is the troops that were in Syria that have had the most success (Lima 2022).

It is therefore interesting to understand the relations between the Moscow and Damascus regimes over the past few years in order to understand the current state of the war in Ukraine.

Russia-Syria relations in recent decades

Relations between Moscow and Damascus were particularly intense during the Cold War. Western influence in Syria was undermined due to internal instability and mainly after the 1948–1949 war against Israel, creating a new opportunity for the
Soviet Union to expand its sphere of influence in the region (Lund 2019). In 1970, after the arrival of Hafez al-Assad into power, he purged the most left wing elements of the Baath regime. From then on, Syrian politics would be extraordinarily stable: "its internal intrigue kept in check by an elaborate and ruthless police state staffed at senior levels by Assad’s new regime" (Lund 2019: 6).

Once in power, Assad moved rapidly to console the Soviet Union that Syria would in truth stay a partner of the Eastern Bloc. The value-based nature of the modern Syrian-Soviet relationship got to be clear early on. In 1971, the Soviet Naval force was allowed consent to use ports in Latakia and Tartous, whereas Syria indeed received more weapons from the Soviet Union (Lund 2019). Assad, moreover, incorporated the Communists in the Syrian political system, even though they were a mere ornament within the political structure of the country (Lund 2019). For the remainder of Assad’s many years in power, including his successor Basahr al-Assad, “the Syrian government would bank on Soviet support in public, while pursuing its own interests with ruthless pragmatism and little regard for the Kremlin’s point” (Lund 2019: 7).

However, these relations cooled with Russia’s international withdrawal in the 1990s. From the Syrian side, however, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 revalued the relationship with Moscow, both in terms of arms supplies and possible diplomatic backing in the Security Council (Kreutz 2010). From the Russian side, for similar reasons, but also to compensate for the rapprochement between Georgia and Israel and for fear of possible NATO advances in the Black Sea after the ‘Orange Revolution’ in Ukraine (2004) and the war with Georgia (2008), which reinforced the value of the Russian naval base in Tartou, located on Syria’s Mediterranean coast (Kreutz, 2010).

Thus, in the context of the Arab Spring, Russia’s intervention on Syrian territory began in 2015 under the pretext of the fight against jihadism. However, despite the potentially serious threat posed by the Islamic State, Russia’s military intervention is primarily motivated by international and domestic political considerations (Russell 2018). Moscow has supported Assad with supplies and diplomatic encouragement since the first protests against his regime in the spring of 2011 and, at certain points - the proposed elimination of Syria’s chemical arsenal in September 2013 - has been a key handhold for Damascus (Russell, 2018).

In Moscow’s view, the Libyan precedent plays a key role. In the context of different Arab uprisings and the repression carried out by Gaddafi against the protestors, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1973, authorizing the Council the use of all necessary measures, commonly understood as a license to use military force, “to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack in Libya and to secure the no-fly zone” (Ulfstein & Christiansen 2013: 161). On 19 March, an ad hoc coalition of states such as the United States, the United Kingdom and France began missile and aircraft attacks on Libyan government air defense and other military targets to enforce Resolution 1973. By the end of March, NATO, under Operation Unified Protector, had taken over the command of the international military operation in Libya (Ulfstein & Christiansen 2013). In this matter, France and the UK’s use of UN Security Council resolution 1973 (March 2011) - which established a no-fly zone and for the first time explicitly appealed to the principle of Responsibility to Protect to topple Muammar al-Gaddafi’s regime, deeply irritating the Kremlin (Rusell, 2018).

The wave of demonstrations between December 2011 and March 2012 in St. Petersburg and Moscow, in reaction to the electoral fraud in the parliamentary elections and the announcement of Putin’s return to the presidency, only reinforced a perception that feeds a climate close to paranoia in a Kremlin with a beleaguered fortress mentality and a tendency to interpret any event in a conspiratorial key (Blanga 2020).

Military intervention in Syria should therefore be approached from a threefold perspective: as a
safeguard for Russia’s position in its last remaining unconditional ally in the Middle East; as a mechanism to force a readjustment with the West and the acceptance of Russia as an indispensable actor in the international system; and as a tool for propaganda and legitimation in the eyes of domestic audiences (Mardasov & Korotayev 2021). As for the first dimension, while coming from the side of Assad in what is a regional civil war, Moscow is protecting known interests such as its naval base in Tartus, the only one outside the post-Soviet space and which gives it greater projection capacity in the eastern Mediterranean, as well as juicy arms contracts that it would have to renegotiate (or eventually lose as happened in Libya) in the event of a new power in Damascus (Blanga, 2020).

**Differences between the Russian army’s presence in Syria and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine**

To begin with, it is important to note that the character of the military campaign that the Russians have conducted in Syria is very different from what is happening in Ukraine.

In Syria, the Russians were essentially supporting an already ongoing war effort by the Syrian regime and Iran, and were providing air power to support a range of different militias on the ground (Cafarella & Zhou 2019). Now, in Ukraine, we are looking at a full-scale invasion which in many ways is a more complex task than the deployment of a small number of Russian forces like in Syria.

If in Syria they were dealing with an insurgency or Islamic State groups (Cafarella & Zhou 2019), now the Russian military is conducting or trying to conduct a conventional maneuver campaign against another conventional army, the Ukrainian army. So the type of fighting and the types of military operations they are conducting in Ukraine are very different now.

Beyond the difference in the type and scale of operations, many military analysts have pointed to similarities between the Russian strategy employed in Syria and what we see today in Ukrainian cities. There are several similarities, such as the use of air strikes and artillery and missile attacks against civilian areas, especially in cities, in an attempt to terrorise the population either into submission or to make them flee and become refugees in order to depopulate Ukraine. That’s a tactic that the Russians used in Syria, and we have started to see them do that on a large scale over the last weeks in Ukraine (Lima 2022).

The Russians are also trying to drag Ukraine and the West into negotiations that are similar to a Russian tactic in Syria, where the Russians offer humanitarian concessions, like humanitarian corridors or other kinds of options, while they try to solve logistical problems (Cafarella & Zhou 2019). They then violate those agreements and essentially use the time they gain in each of
those negotiations to continue to reinforce their troops on the ground or prepare for a new military push. This is exactly the Russian behavior we have seen consistently in Syria (Lima 2022). It should also be noted that Russians have not succeeded in dismembering the government and turning the military into an insurgency (Lima 2022). But that could change if the Russians significantly reinforce the theater of operations or manage to overpower the Ukrainians in the coming weeks. Russians are facing an insurgency in Ukraine, and we could therefore start to see more similarities with Aleppo in the following months.

The situation is too recent to know how long it will last and, more importantly, what the outcome will be. For now, Russia continues to count on the support of Syria, its great ally in the region and its great training ground for the operation in Ukraine. It is a matter of time to see whether Russia will achieve its objectives in Ukraine as it did in Syria.

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Turkey General Election 2023: The Migrant Issue and Economic Crisis Set the Agenda

Asya Ergun

“It is this longing for a center, an authorizing pressure, that spawns hierarchized [hierarchical] oppositions” (xix) Derrida, Grammatology

In March 2022, Turkey awoke to a wide spread of Twitter posts that (En Son Haber, 2022) tagged a video post from a social media platform (TikTok) by a migrant. The video image shows that the owner of the TikTok profile has been recording videos of several different women in Turkey, in their daily life walking on the streets, hanging out at bars or waiting at a bus stop; unaware that their body parts are being explicitly recorded and shared on a social media platform. But it was not until another TikTok profile which belonged to another migrant, who has in his account several video images of one young girl playing on the balcony next door to his apartment, sparked condemnation through several social media platforms (Haber3, 2022). After two days of mass social media outrage, both migrants were caught by police; identified as having no registration, they were sent to the directorate of migration for a deportation process.

This wasn’t the first time the public in Turkey, which is increasingly polarized on many other cultural and social issues, came together in solidarity (Evrensel, 2021) to condemn the migration flow that Turkey has been experiencing since the Syrian Civil War. The influx of migration has also swelled from other countries in recent years such as: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Bangladesh. The migrants are mostly men, passing through Van province (Independent Turkish, 2022) en masse without any registration process, living in Turkey and integrating into the Turkish economy, which relies on illegal, unregistered migrant labor and as a consequence, exploitation (Cumhuriyet 2021a)

They not only lack access to basic social services such as healthcare and labour rights, but are also not willing to claim those rights through relevant registration processes (Prof. Dr. Murat ERDOGAN, 2022) due to the fear of losing their jobs or even an imminent deportation. This has led some of the public to condemn the state for turning a blind eye towards the exploitation of migrants within the labour ecosystem.

The general public in Turkey on the other hand, with increased inflation and unemployment rates due to a recent economic crisis, has been grappling with how to position themselves with the conundrum of “guests” in their presence. This shift is beginning to influence discussions among political parties who are getting ready for the year of 2023, a milestone general election for Turkey’s future, and according to the recent events, these political parties are not willing to refrain from using the issue as a political ploy.

This analysis will explore how major political parties position themselves within the current economic and migrant issue, and if Turkey is willing to use this conundrum as an opportunity to integrate itself into international protection mechanisms under the principle of rule of law.

History of Economic Crisis in Turkey

It is not the first time Turkey is going through an economic crisis. In 1994, both the budget and the current account deficit had risen to very serious levels due to poor policies back in the 1990s where the state began to borrow mainly from public banks for its expenditures, manifesting a severe debt burden. Although there was temporary relief in the economy after the 1994 crisis, the lack of structural reforms delayed solving the underlying problems. Ankara’s
difficulties multiplied, both due to the 1999 Marmara Earthquake and to the internal crisis one of its most important trade partners, Russia, faced at the time (Deutsche Welle, 2021a).

To reduce the rampant inflation, an IMF program was implemented, however, the liquidity crisis in November 2000 dealt another blow to the Turkish economy. Interest rates rose sharply, and even banks with large amounts of treasury bills faced difficulties. As foreign investors grew worried, a large amount of funds diminished: the overnight interest rate in the interbank market was over 1000 percent, its monthly average was 223 percent in November 2000.

In that context, the 2007 economic crisis, whose effects were felt mainly in 2008, affected developing countries like Turkey relatively less (BBC, 2018a). As such, the country, already under the effect of a previous crisis and austerity plans, managed to go through another economic disruption.

Turkey’s still ongoing economic crisis started in 2017. It was this time tied to another issue: migrants. In 2017, poor policies, administration and inadequate reforms (BBC, 2018a) resulted in a total of 220 billion TL in loans (Milliyet, 2018) with a treasury guarantee being opened to 364,000 enterprises through a mechanism called the Credit Guarantee Fund. This move naturally resulted in superficial growth, as a significant change could not be realized in 2018, the treasury incurred a cost which increased the budget deficit. While the dollar closed at 3-4 TL in 2017, it also exceeded the 5 TL limit after the 24 June 2018 presidential and general elections.

As a result of the referendum held in April 2017, Turkey switched from a parliamentary system to a presidential system, and in the 2018 elections, Erdogan was elected president. Erdogan said, “This exchange rate and so on, none of these things determine our future. We will determine our future. On the 24th, give this brother the authority, and then you will see how to deal with this interest, this and that,” adding that if he wins the election, the dollar will fall. However, two months after the election, the development in early August 2018 dealt a heavy blow to the TL (Diken, 2021).

Since then, inflation continued to rise in 2021 and Erdogan continued his statements on interest rates. The Central Bank started the interest rate cuts that President Erdogan had wanted for a long time with 100 basis points in September 2021, and then made another 200 and 100 basis point cuts, respectively. Erdogan’s insistence on low interest rates caused a great loss of value in the TL, especially in November. The dollar exchange rate, which was around 8.30 at the beginning of September 2021, reached 9.50 until November 2021 which led to the current situation where the inflation rates have reached the highest of all times where Turkey’s rise continues in the group of countries with the highest consumer inflation in the world. According to TURKSTAT, annual consumer inflation rose to 69.97 percent in April 2022, while Turkey rose from 7th to 6th among the countries with the highest inflation in the world (Sozcu, 2022) and continues to host more than 5 million migrants in the country.
**EU -Turkey Agreement**

It has been 6 years since the agreement between Turkey and the European Union on refugee influx entered into force. The agreement, which foresees the financial assistance of the EU to prevent the mass migration of Syrians who want to go to the Greek Islands, Bulgaria and Greece, and from there to other European countries to ensure that these immigrants stay in Turkey, was signed on 18 March, 2016, which lead Turkey to host nearly 5 million of migrants as in the year of 2022.

EU countries find themselves in different positions when it comes to effort and/or accountability stemming from the Syrian refugee crisis. On one hand, Germany hosted almost 1.24 million refugees, half of whom were from Syria. Hungary, on the other hand, has made it near impossible to claim asylum and has deported many refugees to Serbia, disrupting the non-refoulement principle.

Non-refoulement which is regarded as Jus Cogens normative, is not susceptible to any derogation or violation. It is worth mentioning a few decisions of the European Court of Human Rights in this regard. The Court, in its M.S.S. v. In the Belgium and Greece decision in 2011, stated that it was a violation of Article 3 on the European Human Rights Convention when an Afghan refugee who came to Belgium via Turkey and Greece later on was deported from Belgium and sent back to Greece.

As it is known, Article 3 of the Convention on Human Rights regulates the prohibition of torture: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”. The result here tells us that although Greece is a European Union country, an asylum seeker is transferred to a third country that does not meet the necessary conditions, regarded by the Court as persecuting the person, which is the violation of the principle on the prohibition of torture where the all the states who ratified the Convention, is regarded as the duty bearer holding negative and positive obligations. Within these dynamics, Turkey was able to gain leverage in its foreign affairs. According to the agreement, immigrants arriving in Greece were going to be sent back to Turkey.

So what are the articles of the EU-Turkey agreement?

- As of March 2016, all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey to the Greek Islands will be returned to Turkey. The extradition will be carried out in full compliance with EU and international law; there will be no mass deportation under any circumstances.

- For each Syrian returned to Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian from Turkey will be resettled, taking into account the UN Criteria for groups in need of protection. With the support of the Commission, EU agencies and other member states as well as UNHCR, a mechanism will be established to ensure that this principle is implemented from the first day of returns. Priority will be given to immigrants who have not entered or attempted to enter the EU irregularly before.

- Turkey will take all necessary measures to prevent new sea and land routes for illegal migration from Turkey to the EU and will cooperate with neighboring states as well as the EU for this purpose.

- The Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Plan will be put into effect when irregular crossings between Turkey and the EU are ended, or at least drastically and sustainably reduced. EU member states will contribute to this plan on a voluntary basis.

- Provided that all expectations are met, the implementation of the Visa Liberalization Roadmap for all participating Member States will be accelerated with the aim of removing visa requirements for Turkish citizens.
The EU, in close cooperation with Turkey, will accelerate the payment of the 3 billion Euros initially allocated under the Asylum Seeker Facility for Turkey and finance more projects for persons under temporary protection, which will be determined by rapid notifications from Turkey before the end of March 2016.

The EU and EU Member States will make every joint effort with Turkey to improve humanitarian conditions inside Syria, especially in certain areas close to the Turkish border, and to ensure that the local population and refugees live in safer areas (European Commission, 2016).

**Opportunity or Burden?**

When looking at the political history of Turkey, the economic situation always played a key role on the population's voting strategy, compared to aspiration for a democratic nation, or the respect of the rule of law. Opposition parties and their coalitions have been, according to the surveys made by private research companies for the last nine months (Cumhuriyet, 2021b), gaining a large intention of vote, and that potentially at the cost of parties struggling with turning the economic crisis back on track such as The Justice and Development Party (AKP), Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and Great Unity Party (BBP) coalition, The People's Alliance (Turkish: Cumhur İttifakı). The latter, affiliated to right-wing and far right values, were leading parties since the Presidential Election in 2018, but did not manage to gather as much vote intention, even by turning a major shift in the strategy within the foreign affairs (Deutsche Welle, 2022c). There have nonetheless been other several short-term political and economic strategies (BBC, 2021b) put in place by the leading coalition, The People’s Alliance, disrupted with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Lately, the public opinion being skewed toward migrants with the outrages on the social media platforms towards the presence of migrants, the People's Alliance and its members made statements on sending more than 1 million migrants to North West Syria (BBC, 2022c). Even though the People’s Alliance has made such statements for now, their further statements (BBC, 2022d) make it clear that they are not willing to disrupt the current exploitative labour ecosystem, which could be further disrupted and thus wreak havoc on the Turkish economy before elections.

The migrant question plays a key role in this dilemma: Turkey is heading towards general elections, where on one hand the public opinion highlights the importance of the economic crisis in their daily life and how this crisis has led to a decrease in their quality of life. Those concerns were mixed with negative opinions on the state policy toward migrants, including their financial support by the government, or the fear of the employment sector being taken over by cheap labour. On the other hand, The People’s Alliance established a labour ecosystem where it cannot survive without the exploitation of the migrants (Cumhuriyet, 2021c) who are being employed while unregistered and thus not financially supported by the employer for retirement, neither having access to healthcare or further insurances, and without a minimum wage.

This situation does not take into account the strong leverage that the migrant issue brings when it comes to foreign affairs (Sabah, 2022a) for the Erdogan administration with the European Union. After an airstrike carried out by the Russian and Syrian Armed Forces against a battalion of the Turkish Armed Forces in Syria in 2020, Ankara didn’t receive the support from NATO it wanted, and the People’s Alliance and its administration made statements on their involvement with migrants, “guests” by circling around the religious sentiments of the public opinion (Sabah, 2014b).

Opposition parties on the other hand, some of whom (i.e. Republican People’s Party, CHP) formerly voted “yes” to the People’s Alliance proposed a petition to start a military operations in Syria back in 2015 (BBC, 2015e), and who were...
majorly criticized among the liberal voters, have shown an increased level of negative signs in regards to handling this situation. While opposition groups such as the Turkish Labour Party, and The Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) have a diligent rights-based approach on migrant issue; the biggest opposition coalition, Nation Alliance which includes CHP, The Democracy and Progress Party (Deva), Good Party (İYİ), Democrat and Felicity Party, have been so far unable to use this opportunity to mobilize the public to seek a more democratic country where rule of law is respected, including the migration issue.

Within the Nation Alliance, each party has put forward an outline of how Turkey should go forward with the migrant issue, and all of them aim to ensure that migrants (not refugees) will be sent back to their own countries in line with public opinion, however they backed this plan with any references to international law nor an internal legal system, making it clear that the Nation Alliance is either reluctant to use this opportunity to lead and mobilize their voters who are already increasing due to the economic crisis, or feeling confident that the voting numbers will increase as long as they put their statements on the baseline of the public sentiments. Among these is ethnic nationalism, which has been a major barrier to integrating Turkish society into international human rights legal mechanisms.

More importantly, this reluctance opens a gate for new political parties whose main discourse and whose main offer to the public is to send back the migrants to their countries immediately, which led the public voting polls to increase 3% over the last couple of months for Victory Party led by Umit Ozdag (Cumhuriyet, 2022d), after the social media outbreak on migrants recently.

At the end, the opposition groups, which criticized the major disruption within the Turkish Democracy for the last 20 years and highlighted the need for changes within the country, are unable to show their strong unity and mutual accountability that when they are elected, they will be ready to ensure that rule of law will be respected in every level of society dynamics including migrants. However, opposition groups reluctant to use the economic crisis to promote a rights-based approach towards the migrant and labour exploitation issues will create a major burden if they want to work on human rights issues.

Migrant male groups who are taking the video shots of women in Turkey without their consent, and labour exploitation are not two different issues. The Istanbul Convention, which promotes individual rights from all gender, age and diverse groups and obliges states to protect and respond to the domestic violence against women, was effective in 2014 and withdrawn in 2021. Erdogan and the People’s Alliance mobilized the public against the Istanbul Convention, which was also adopted during his administration, by pressing the sentiments of the public, through statements against the LGBT+ community and by promoting family unity.

These sentiments have always been strong among the public in Turkey: if the public continues to be mobilized and influenced as in the case with the migrant issue, they will not recognize a future attempt by any party who wants to improve a human rights issue.

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Nothing is crueler than hunger threatening one's life... and living without knowing whether sufficient sustenance will be found the next day.

No one can deny that food security is an urgent and constant need for our societies, and securing it is inevitably linked to deliberate plans aimed at increasing the area of agricultural land, the efficient use of water, fertilizer, and organic waste; and reducing food waste while controlling rapid population growth, but it is also linked to good management and planning success, advance and encourage "self-sufficiency" elements (Michaël Tanchum, 2022).

As long as the need for food is equal - and perhaps even more significant - in importance to the need for energy, a fateful question arises about the world's trends regarding food security impacted by the Corona pandemic and the Ukrainian crisis, which is: Will the trend of "self-sufficiency" escalate and turn into isolationism? Or will the "globalization" imposed by the system of unilateralism not allow transient circumstances to destabilize it? (Ohlan, R., & Ohlan, A. 2022).

The second decade of this century began with two severe and widespread global crises, leaving no one untouched by the negative repercussions of the Corona pandemic, and no State spared the direct or indirect effects of the war in Ukraine. Here we will learn about the current impacts and plans to meet future challenges in Egypt.

How is Egypt dealing with the current crisis?

The state has placed the food reserves at the forefront of priorities since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war. It is working at all levels towards achieving food security and advancing the agricultural policy, both by creating more control tools and controlling markets to prevent attempts at monopoly and manipulation of traders; or by working to provide the largest amount of strategic reserves of basic commodities, which was praised by many countries in the presence of food shortages in many other countries (Sky news, 2022).

The Cabinet’s Media Center published a report (state information service staff, 2022) that included infographics on the state’s efforts to provide a safe strategic stock of basic commodities, and the effective policies to control markets and prices in light of the current crises plaguing global markets. He stressed that the food security is a top priority for the Egyptian state as they work on parallel tracks to launch giant national projects to provide food commodities and increase production. Additionally, they seek to diversify the sources of imports, developing supply chains, activating...
more control tools, and controlling markets to prevent monopoly and price hikes. This has contributed directly to the provision of strategic reserves of commodities and keeping them within safe borders, and strengthening the capacity and resilience of the Egyptian economy in the face of the repercussions of political and economic variables in the world (Egypt today staff, 2022).

The political and economic situation in Egypt has been praised by various international institutions such as the International Monetary Agency and the World Bank (Ahram online, 2022).

How does the government face the expected cost of inflation due to global inflation?

The state is working to protect the country from a wave of high prices expected in 2022. In response, the Ministry of Agriculture has developed a strategy based on increasing the area of arable land by counting and classifying the soil to determine the areas that can be cultivated, while the Ministry of Solidarity has adopted new social protection policies that keep pace with the development stage that the country undergoes. Many programs are being worked on to target multidimensional poverty, and a comprehensive strategy has been developed to extend the umbrella of cash support to the most vulnerable groups (Patrick Werr, 2022).

The Ministry of Planning has prepared three scenarios about the impact of the global inflation crisis on the Egyptian government's goals for the performance of the economy during the current fiscal year 2022-2023. The government worked to take a package of social measures worth about 130 billion pounds, which it began implementing this month, including an increase in pensions by 13%, the inclusion of 450,000 new families for the Takaful and Karama program, an increase in the periodic and special bonus and the additional monthly incentive for government employees, and raising the exemption limit and raising the exemption taxes to limit at a rate of 25% to 30,000 pounds annually. Rather, among the measures to confront the crisis is also the localization and deepening of the industry and everything related to measures in the real economy that require structural transformation from the rentier orientation to more added value, reducing dependence on imports, and rearranging priorities in public spending to serve this trend (Ahmed Shosha, 2022).

And, based on the directives of President Sisi, the Ministry of Supply increased the strategic stockpile of wheat and essential commodities by increasing the agricultural area allocated to wheat, which made the state stand steadfast with minimal damage from the global inflation wave so far (Ahmed Shosha, 2022).

The Russian–Ukrainian war and the threat to Arab food security

The two conflicting countries provide about 60 percent of the Arab world's needs for wheat and grain, and the high oil price does not change this reality. Whereas, the availability of cash in the oil-producing countries does not mean that they can easily obtain their food and agricultural needs, which will be the subject to fierce international competition, reminiscent of the fierce competition for medical and preventive materials related to the Corona pandemic. Not to mention that global supply lines and navigation are affected by the breadth and intensity of military operations.

What is happening in the world in this period, even if it is extremely dangerous, is not new. The fragments of the two world wars have already affected the political, social, and economic structure of most countries of the world. The peoples of the earth suffered comprehensive and severe economic crises, but the main difference between one country and another, and one people and another, is evident in how to deal with the crisis. Which made the difference for modern Germany, which was able to quickly overcome defeat in two world wars, impose itself on the strongest victors over it, and place its name in the record of the largest global
The Middle East was among the regions most rapidly affected by the Russo-Ukrainian crisis. In an attempt to search for the link between the high prices in their countries and a military crisis far from their borders, citizens of a large number of Arab countries circulated numbers related to the contributions to their food supply from the two sides of the crisis, Russia and Ukraine. When considering wheat and corn and their derivatives, many may not be surprised to find that Russia is the largest exporter of wheat in the world with 37.3 million tons annually, while Ukraine comes in fourth place with 18.1 million tons annually. But what is surprising is that most Arab countries in which bread is the main food depended mainly on wheat imports from Russia and Ukraine in 2020.

For example, Arab countries alone acquired about 11 percent of world wheat exports and imported about (13.165) Thirteen million one hundred and sixty-five thousand tons of wheat from Russia. This constitutes 35.3 percent of the total exports of one side of the crisis of this strategic crop, and about (7.598) Seven million five hundred and ninety-eight thousand tons from Ukraine, which represents 42.1 percent of the total exports of the other side of the crisis of this crop, according to the data of the Union of Arab Banks, and this is in relation to the Arab countries as a whole (Elethad online paper staff, 2022).

Therefore, in light of these figures, it seems logical that the Middle East is one of the regions most affected by the crisis, and the most affected by its continuation and prolongation, given that most of its countries possess a strategic stock of wheat that is sufficient for only a few months. Therefore, the Russian-Ukrainian crisis represents a serious, existential, and direct threat to Arab food security that calls for urgent solutions to minimize the consequences of this crisis, and a long-term one to avoid its recurrence. Perhaps the first lesson learned here is to redefine the concept of Arab national security and include food security as one of its components.

Conclusion

The world is closely watching the developments of the Russian-Ukrainian war, and the consequences of this war on the global economy, especially for the third world countries. Egypt is dealing with reducing its dependence on importing strategic crops such as wheat, so that the area of agricultural land increases continuously, as we have previously explained. Through the events we are going through, it becomes clear to us how important it is to achieve food sufficiency and the extent of its impact on the people of countries.

Not only the third world countries, but Europe suffers from the problems of lack of energy that it imports from Russia. Despite the world’s attempts to recover from the Corona epidemic and the economic disasters that it has caused, the world is facing endless human ambition. In the next months and years, the people of most of the countries in the world will hope for changing the leaders’ priorities from fighting each other for personal ends to coming together to confront climate change and epidemics.

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Relations Between Spain and Morocco: the Recent History of Two Countries at Odds

Juan Carlos Benítez

Relations between the two nations have been complicated since Morocco’s independence. This relationship has been marked in recent months by the Sahara issue and relations with Algeria.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez’s trip to meet with King Mohammed IV in April is a new chapter in the recomposition of diplomacy between the two nations, a transcendental bond in North Africa. It was the first official meeting between the two countries since the disagreement that occurred last year when the Spanish government received the leader of the Polisario Front, who was ill with Covid-19.

The head of the Spanish government, Pedro Sánchez, carried out an official visit to Morocco on the 7th of April, where he was received by King Mohammed VI in the framework of the first bilateral meeting in three and a half years, with the aggravating factor of the crisis that occurred in 2021, severing diplomatic ties (Euronews 2022).

From the Spanish side, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, José Manuel Albares, spoke of a very strong show of friendship between the nations. “Today I believe that not only is a crisis coming to an end, but that a new stage in relations between Spain and Morocco is beginning” (Euronews 2022). It will be the formalisation of the rapprochement that began on 17 March, when Madrid modified its position on the status of Western Sahara, a former Spanish colony, considering Rabat’s proposal as the best for the region (Euronews 2022).

This Moroccan national cause has been in contention since 1975, opposing the Sahrawi separatists of the Polisario Front, who are supported by the Algerian authorities, another key ally for Spain (Stenner 2019). Sánchez abandoned Spain’s historic neutrality on the issue and publicly announced support for the autonomy plan under Moroccan sovereignty that was proposed in 2007, which he described as “more serious, realistic and stable”. Eighty percent of Western Sahara is in Rabat’s hands and is considered a non-self-governing territory by the UN (Stenner 2019).

The origins of the latest dispute

The latest outbreak between both nations occurred in April 2021. Their alliance frayed after the presence of Brahim Gali, leader of the Polisario Front, came to light. The Sahrawi leader arrived in mainland Spain in an Algerian state sanitary plane and with a diplomatic passport in danger of death due to a severe case of coronavirus (Oxford Analytica 2022). Considered Morocco’s main enemy, the Spanish government claimed humanitarian reasons for welcoming him and providing him with medical care (Oxford Analytica 2022).
Nevertheless, the justifications were not enough for Rabat, which denounced that Ghali was carrying forged documents and a usurped identity, demanding "a transparent investigation" into the conditions in which he arrived in Europe (Oxford Analytica 2022). Ghali’s subsequent departure in June, denounced for torture and genocide, did not heal the damage that had been done, because it was still seen as a reversal of Madrid’s position on the sacred cause of Western Sahara (Oxford Analytica 2022).

In retaliation, Morocco lowered its border guards in May, making it easier for 10,000 immigrants to cross the border into the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, which was considered "blackmail" by the Spanish authorities (Oxford Analytica 2022). Despite the internal criticism, especially from its coalition partner, Podemos party, Pedro Sánchez chose to encourage the Moroccan autonomy plan in line with other powers such as France, the United States and Germany (Oxford Analytica 2022).

However, this 'turnaround' to befriend Rabat generated new resentment with Algeria, an important partner as the main gas supplier, which withdrew its ambassador from Spain, initiating tension with another North African member.

Moroccan and Algerian relations

The history between Morocco and Algeria is characterised by tension, indirect attacks and the funding of insurgencies. The Maghreb countries have been antagonistic neighbours since their respective independence (Lounnas & Messari 2018). The Algerians support the Polisario Front whereas the Moroccans fund groups that Algeria considers terrorists, such as the Islamist Rachad and the separatist MAK (Movement for the Self-Determination of Kabylia) (Lounnas & Messari 2018).

The latest episode in this tense relationship between the two Maghreb nations took place in August 24th 2021, when Algeria severed diplomatic relations with Morocco after a series of fires swept through the Kabylia region in what Algeria claims was a covert Moroccan operation to bolster the MAK at a delicate time for the Algerian government due to the economic crisis, the 2020-2021 protests and the death of historic leader and one of the architects of today’s Algeria, Abdelaziz Bouteflika (Oxford Analytica 2022).

The European country most affected by the recent escalation between Morocco and Algeria is Spain, where taking a position in favour of one or the other would have direct consequences on the security of its southern border or the supply of natural gas, at a time when migrations flows are increasing and the price of electricity exceeds the previous day’s historical record every day (Oxford Analytica 2022).

Therefore, the closure of the Maghreb gas pipeline has serious repercussions in Spain, since 25% of all the natural gas received by Spain has passed through this gas pipeline for two decades. This pipeline also passes through Morocco, which keeps part of the fuel that contributes for the generation of 12% of the country's electricity in exchange for allowing it to pass through Moroccan soil (Oxford Analytica 2022).

In a context of international tension due to the war in Ukraine, losing such an important gas administrator as Algeria would be particularly serious for Spain, although showing too much support for the Algerians could worsen relations with Morocco, which have been improving in recent months. Spain’s position must therefore seek a solution that is satisfactory for both sides and, above all, allows it to maintain its own national interests.
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In an address to the Security Council on March 23rd, the United Nations (UN) Secretary General, António Guterres, stru a powerful cord: after more than a decade of war and ruin, Syrians “feel abandoned by the world” (UN News, 2022a). Altogether, this sentiment may refer to the overall Syrian situation, but it is simultaneously demonstrated when examining notable events occurring in the Syrian region over the last several months. Between local infighting, mounting humanitarian issues, shockwaves coming off the Russia-Ukraine war and a resurgence of Islamic State (IS) operations, the local population is facing another round of harsh circumstances with no obvious reprieve.

To start, since the disastrous onset of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, multiple factions have fought to maintain control over, and conquer, disputed Syrian territories. This continues in the second quarter of 2022, particularly in Northern Syria (North Press Agency, 2022). The Northern countryside of Aleppo, which is under the control of Turkish-backed Syrian factions, most notably the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and its affiliates, has frequently seen such clashes between Islamist and Turkish-backed armed groups in the last several years (al-Kanj, 2020; Al-Monitor, 2022a). As indicated by the local population in the adjacent city of Afrin, these near daily altercations contribute to a sense of uncertainty and instability as any small provocation can easily escalate into an armed clash and civilian casualties (Al-Monitor, 2022a). Armed Turkish-backed opposition-groups took control of the territory in 2018, following Turkey’s Operation Olive Branch (al-Khateb, 2018), but this presumed attempt at stable governance has only placed the area into an indefinite insecurity (Al-Monitor, 2022a; Wilkofsky, Zaman and Hardan, 2021).

Moreover, despite the presence of Turkish security authorities, altercations, bombings, torture and denial of aid continue to claim civilian lives as the local population finds such authorities to be idle and uninterested (Al-Monitor, 2022a; Zaman al Wsl, 2021). Most recently, the hopeless security situation in the area has caused 85 members of the civilian police to resign on February the 22nd following injuries and civilian losses sustained during factional infighting (Syrian Observatory of Human Rights, 2022).
In line with a continually deteriorating security situation in Northern Syria, there have been mounting concerns about conditions in Syrian refugee camps (Hagedorn, 2022a; Marks, 2022). As an illustration of this, a humanitarian crisis has been unfolding in the Rukban camp located near the Jordanian border (Ford and O’Connor, 2019; Christou, 2022). Conditions have been steadily worsening in the camp since February 2019, which is when the Assad-government and Russian forces blocked access to refugee camps in the country by preventing humanitarian convoys from freely crossing territories held by the regime (Hagedorn, 2022b). Observed in isolation, this situation is quite grim, but the Ukraine-Russia conflict has added an extra complication to the intensifying humanitarian crisis.

Taking into account that The UN Security Council has until July to re-authorize the cross-border aid mechanism that allows supplies to be routed through neighboring countries (Zaman, 2021), observers have noted that Russia may take this chance to retaliate against Western powers (Hagedorn, 2022b).

The United States (US) has indicated humanitarian access in Syria to be one of its top priorities (Hagedorn, 2021), something which is evident in the Biden administration’s new $800 million+ Syria aid package that was announced on the 10th of May (Hagedorn, 2022c), and recently implemented sanction exemptions from the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act of 2019 for Kurdish and opposition-controlled areas in Syria (Oueiss, 2022; Zaman, 2022). Reports have shown that this sanction waiver is aimed at improving the immediate economic situation of the areas, pressuring the Assad regime, and providing new potential avenues for aid delivery (Zaman, 2022). Noting such movements by the US and the worsening humanitarian situation, some have argued that Russia may take this opportunity to block the UN resolution and punish the US for interfering in its Ukraine campaign (Hagedorn, 2022b; Mathews, 2022). This is particularly likely given Russia’s intensified air raids in Syria’s northwestern province of Idlib, with over 20 strikes occurring in the last week of April (Usta, 2022). This is likely a show of force aimed at mitigating reputational damages as the war in Ukraine stalls (al-Khateb, 2022a; Jalal, 2022).

Beyond affecting the provision of humanitarian aid, the Ukraine–Russia war has also bled into the Syrian political-security landscape. Syria is one of the few countries which supports the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Al-Monitor, 2022b), as demonstrated by it being one of the 5 countries that voted against UN General Assembly Resolution ES–11/1, which called for Russia to withdraw from Ukraine (UN News, 2022b). Additionally, Syria has seen a series of public demonstrations and rallies expressing support for Russia’s struggle against “Western policies aimed at destabilizing its security and stability,” as reported by Syria’s official news outlet (Syrian Arab News Agency, 2022a).

This positive sentiment towards Russia has also led to rumors on the potential recruitment of Syrian fighters by Russia to fight in Ukraine in early March (AFP-France 24, 2022). Nevertheless, despite some groundwork for recruitment being put in motion (Lubold, Youssef, and Cullison, 2022; Zaman and Hagedorn, 2022), military intelligence has shown that Moscow’s alleged recruitment of thousands of Syrian mercenaries is currently unfounded, but this might change as the conflict with Ukraine drags on (Szuba, 2022a). Evidence of this can be seen in Russia’s surprising troop/mercenary pull-out from Syria and Libya in late April (Middle East Eye, 2022). Significantly, support for Russia is not shared by all armed actors in Syria, with Syrians in opposition-held northwestern areas and FSA fighters seeking to open new battlefronts against Russian–backed Assad forces in a bid to exploit both the Assad-regime’s and Russia’s preoccupation with the war in Ukraine (al-Khateb, 2022b).

Similarly, on a political front, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has taken steps to exploit
Russia’s divided focus and resolve some issues with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. On April 4, President Erdogan purportedly sent a message to President al-Assad with the goal of normalizing ties between the two countries (Babacan, 2022; Tastekin, 2022). Some years or even months ago, this may have been an implausible move, but given Syria’s normalization of ties with Jordan (Aljazeera, 2021), and al-Assad’s recent visit to the United Arab Emirates (Aljazeera, 2022a), Turkey sees this moment as a potential “new beginning” with Damascus, as has been reported by the Turkish state-controlled daily Hurriyet (Babacan, 2022).

Despite this drive for a new beginning, Syria does not appear to have much incentive for reconciliation at the current time (Tastekin, 2022). Nevertheless, Turkey has still sought to reconfigure its relationship with the Assad-regime by announcing a new initiative that would work to ensure the ‘voluntary’ and safe return of Syrian refugees to their home country, a move some have noted to be unreasonable and dangerous given the current security situation in Syria (al-Kanj, 2022a). Such statements do not seem to concern President Erdogan as his address on the 3rd of May, in a publicized event, demonstrated the strong commitment of the Turkish government to return 1 million refugees to Syria (Aljazeera, 2022b).

The stages behind this plan were also revealed by the Turkish Sabah website on the 5th of May (Göksu, 2022), but commentators have noted how both the plan and announcement by President Erdogan left much to the imagination in terms of practical details (al-Kanj, 2022c). Some have even noted that this proposed plan may worsen the overcrowding in opposition-held areas and potentially lead to the withdrawal of Turkey from Syria (al-Kanj, 2022c). Noting the rather sudden change in policy, this political readjustment has been suggested to be an effort by Erdogan’s Justice and Development Party to appease angry Turkish voters in the face of an escalating economic crisis and in preparation for elections in 2023 (al-Kanj, 2022c; Sonmez, 2022). Early reports indicate that Syrian authorities have rejected this plan, but there is no evidence that this will deter President Erdogan from pressing forward (The New Arab, 2022b).

Alternatively, broader geopolitical exercises of military power have also troubled the Syrian region. For one, there has been an uptick in Israeli air strikes on the country. Notable instances include a strike on the 23rd of April targeting ammunition depots near Damascus that killed nine (News Wires -France 24, 2022), another that killed five and injured seven on the 13th of May (The New Arab, 2022b), and a third that killed three in Syria’s capital Damascus on the 20th (The New Arab, 2022c). Such strikes have also been met by a surprising response on the 17th of May by Russian forces in Syria, with a Russian S-300 defense system firing at Israeli jets for the first time since Israel began its strikes in Syria (Mehr News Agency, 2022).

Adding to the above, Turkey has also put pressure on Russia, and the Assad regime by association, after blocking Russian armed forces from using its airspace to reach Syria (Pitel, 2022). Such moves likely indicate that Turkey is seeking more influence in Syria (Abou Zahr, 2022), an intention further reinforced by its recent uptick in attacks against the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, a US-backed Syrian opposition group that it defines as a terrorist organization (Szuba, 2022b).

Finally, an older player has also taken advantage of Russian distraction and increased its activity in the Syrian region: The Islamic State (IS) (al-Kanj, 2022b). On March 6th, IS reportedly killed 13 Syrian soldiers and wounded another 18 (Syrian Arab News Agency), while on the 16th, the terrorist organization succeeded in killing three regime-allied Iranian militants (Zaman al Wsl, 2022). These attacks are further supplemented by an unprecedented increase in strategic attacks against regime military barracks, oil fields, and well-equipped military convoys in the first two weeks of April (al-Khateeb, 2022c). This sudden intensification may be an act of revenge.
for the killing of the former IS leader, Abdullah Qaradash (Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qarayshi) (Al-Monitor, 2022c), and a show of force by its newly elected commander, Abu al-Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qarayshi (Al-Monitor, 2022a). Overall, such an approach seems almost reflective of the security situation in Syria, where competing interests seek to dominate in a still hot conflict, while prospects for peace remain slim and frigid.

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In popular depictions of ancient Greece, the mythical Amazons loom large. A tribe of independent, fierce and powerful warriors, their legend is inspired by real nomadic women who lived in the Eurasian Steppe – and it reveals the roles women played in Greek society. For the ancients, these strong women represented a threat to the patriarchal order, and most versions of the myth see them tricked and overcome by the hero Herakles, the ultimate symbol of masculine Strength.

The ancient Greek ideal, Penelope, the wife of Odysseus in Homer’s Odyssey, beset by more than a hundred suitors, remained calm, dedicated to her domestic duties and loyal to her husband. Fortunately, the status and characteristics of ancient and modern-day women in Greece have evolved.

Greece is a European nation without a strong tradition of gender equity. Though Greece was the birthplace of democracy, Greek women have been fighting for their rights ever since 1887, when Kallirroi Parren started up Εφημερίς των Κυριών (“The Ladies’ Journal”) – the first magazine for women’s rights in Greece. Parren’s demand for female suffrage was finally granted in 1952 when women in Greece received the right to vote, and the first women were elected to public office that very year. In 1975, after seven years of military dictatorship, the principle of equality between men and women was enshrined in the Greek constitution: Article 22 declared a requirement for “equal pay for work of equal value.”

Although, some sources report Greek women making only 75 per cent of what the average Greek man will make, in the same line of work.

This gap is most often observable among higher-paying careers or those requiring higher education. In 1983, The Greek Parliament ruled Divorce by consent legal. Further, the long-standing tradition of dowry, which requires a bride’s family to present her future husband with a sum of money, ended as a requirement for a legal marriage. Also, during the 80s saw the passage of abortion legislation that still ranks among the most liberal in Europe (Tsomou, 2020).
From 2000 to 2006, the government passed major laws, such as Law 3488/2006, to protect women from workplace harassment and improve equal opportunity employment measures.

However, the everyday struggle for women in Greece is far to be solved due to violence against women. According to the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Greece (2021), last year the subject of attention was the heated debate after Olympic sailing medalist Sofia Bekatorou alleged on January 14 that an official in the National Sailing Federation sexually abused her, marking the first time a prominent woman made a public revelation and sparking the country’s version of the global “Me Too” movement. Government officials expressed solidarity with Bekatorou, and prominent newspapers and broadcasters reported on the topic, which generally had been taboo in mainstream media. The Supreme Court encouraged prosecutors to prioritize responding to such claims and the government launched the metoogreece.gr website that urged survivors of gender-based violence to follow Bekatorou’s example. In response, other women, primarily from the sports, entertainment and business arenas shared similar experiences. Prosecutors launched investigations against alleged perpetrators, some of whom were well-known actors and directors.

Penalties for conviction of sexual harassment are up to three years’ imprisonment and may include longer terms for perpetrators who used positions of authority or the survivor’s need for employment. In November 2020 the NGO ActionAid reported that 85 per cent of women were subjected to sexual harassment. The research was based on a sample of 1001 women from across the country and an additional 376 women working in tourism and catering. Based on the same research, only 6 per cent officially denounced the incidents. In 2020, parliament passed several laws that addressed sexual harassment. On June 19, parliament adopted into law the International Labor Organization Convention on Violence and Harassment. The law includes provisions that require employers to investigate and report cases of workplace harassment (Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Greece, 2021).

On reproductive rights, there were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities. Some pregnant women and mothers with newborns, particularly those residing in the five reception and identification centers for asylum seekers in the Aegean islands during the COVID-19 pandemic, faced obstacles in accessing proper health care and hygiene products. There were no legal, social or cultural barriers to access to contraceptives. The government provided access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence (Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Greece, 2021).

On discrimination, the constitution and law provide for the same legal status and rights for women as for men, including under family, religious, personal status, and nationality laws, as well as laws related to labour, property, inheritance, employment, access to credit and owning or managing businesses or property. The government effectively enforced the laws promoting gender equality, although discrimination occurred, especially in the private sector. With the notarized consent of concerned parties, Muslim minority persons in Thrace may request the use of sharia for family and inheritance matters (Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Greece, 2021).

As Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 states, In May 2021, the government passed a controversial family law, despite the risk that the law poses to women and children who are victims of domestic violence. The law is scheduled to take effect in September 2021 and amends child custody provisions in Greece’s civil code placing women and children survivors of
domestic violence at risk. Also, HRW advises that the Greek government should take steps to immediately modify the law to ensure that the protection of domestic abuse survivors and the principle of the best interests of the child are properly safeguarded, in line with international human rights obligations (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Law No. 4800/2021, “Reforms regarding parent-child relations, other family law issues, and other urgent provisions,” presumes that “joint and equal” parental custody of children is in the child’s best interest in cases of divorce, separation, or termination of cohabitation. In cases of “poor exercise of parental responsibility,” which may include domestic violence, a court can make an alternate custody determination in the child’s best interest, but “joint and equal” custody applies during a potentially lengthy court process, placing domestic abuse victims and their children directly at risk (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

In March 2021, the nongovernmental group Diotima noted that during the pandemic there was an increase in reported incidents of domestic and other gender-based violence. At least 11 women have been murdered by their current or former husbands or partners in the first nine months of the year. The killings shocked the public, opening a debate on the issue of domestic violence. Women face multiple barriers to reporting domestic violence and seeking help from the state (Human Rights Watch World Report 2022). Law 4855/2021, adopted on 12 November 2021, approved new criminal provisions on violence against women. New provisions of the Penal Code on rape, sexual harassment, human trafficking and sexual exploitation of the prostitution of others.

What has happened in Greece over the last two years is worthy of attention: never before in the history of the country has the issue of women’s rights had so much attention, been the subject of such passionate public debate and occupied the forefront of the political scene.

Sadly, these regulations have a long way to go. The current Greek system appears to demonstrate a system of collateral damage and light sentencing for men who kill, rape and traffic women. It is also a consequence of a society that not only tolerates violence in general but also appears to still carry patriarchal, anachronistic ideas about a woman’s place in society (Wichmann, 2022).

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When the Ukrainian–Russian war broke out in late February, the global economy entered into a state of crisis. In the MENA region, Egypt had a much higher impact arising as a result of this war. On the one hand, its economy is heavily reliant on the output from the two nations involved; on the other hand, the war threatens the political balancing act which Egypt has historically maintained between Russia and the West. The Egyptian government responded accordingly to the crisis, yet their response is not without fault; as will be seen, its response reveals deeply rooted problems in the Egyptian society and economy.

Politically, Egypt tries to uphold a balanced foreign policy between Russia and the West, given the benefits it attains from each side as well as to counter the rocky relations it has often had with them (Mabrouk, 2022). Therefore, the war came to test the historically held Egyptian political position. At the outbreak of the war, Egypt set out a neutral statement, simply calling for “diplomatic solutions” and establishing “political settlement, international security and stability”; it also initiated an Arab League emergency session and produced a similarly neutral statement (Mikhail, 2022). It only highlighted the pressing humanitarian crisis stemming from the war, but did not condemn the instigator, Russia (Mabrouk, 2022).

Despite this, Egypt came to vote against Russian aggression during the March 2nd UN resolution; it’s believed that this action was taken due Egypt’s long-term record of siding with international law and due to calls from the G7 ambassadors (Mikhail, 2022; Hendawi, 2022; Aziz, 2022). Yet, to maintain a balance, Egypt coupled its vote with reprimanding the West for initiating economic sanctions outside of UN mechanisms (Hendawi, 2022). Moreover, Egyptian officials were quick to explain to their Russian counterparts that their vote was merely due to the “disturbing humanitarian crisis”, not due to political reasons (Mikhail, 2022). Later, these actions came to pay off as Russia promised to continue its upkeep of collaborative projects and wheat shipments with Egypt (Abu Zaid, 2022). Furthermore, El-Sisi and Putin spoke after the Ukrainian war, where they affirmed the continuation of friendly and cooperative relations, highlighting the upkeep of their 2018 comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation agreement (Abu Zaid, 2022; Hendawi, 2022). On the Western side, Egypt was able to uphold friendly relations, solidified by the 100 million euro grant given by the EU to help the Egyptian economy (Ghandour, 2022).
Economically, Egypt suffered grossly as a result of the war. Being the world’s largest wheat importer and one of the top 10 importers of sunflower oil, the increase in global wheat and cooking oil prices is a heavy blow to Egyptian society (Tanchum, 2022; Saleh, 2022). This issue is particularly sensitive considering the fact that Egypt attains 85% of its wheat and 73% of its sunflower oil from Russia and Ukraine (Africanews, 2022). Just overnight, prices of wheat in Egypt increased by 44% and sunflower oil by 32% (Tanchum, 2022). Wheat prices are particularly sensitive for Egyptians, considered to be highly intertwined with the stability of the regime. In the history of Egypt, any desire to change the prices of bread caused intense protests and riots, as found in the 1977 bread riots and the 2011 revolution (Tanchum, 2022). In fact, the 2016 Egyptian IMF loan failed to mention removing subsidies from bread, in spite of removing subsidies from other strategic goods, for this reason (Mabrouk, 2022).

In response to wheat problems, the Egyptian government was fortunate in that it had already secured a strategic storage of wheat back in November 2021 when wheat prices were low (Tanchum, 2022). With the outbreak of the war, Egypt had a strategic stockpile of wheat lasting 5 months, with local production allowing it to reach 9 months (Mohamed, 2022). For vegetable oils, however, Egypt had a strategic supply of only 5 months (Tanchum, 2022) (Tanchum, 2022).

To ensure that domestic food production remains inside of Egypt to serve local demand, the government banned the exportation of flour, pasta, beans, lentils and wheat (Ahram Online, 2022) (Ahram Online, 2022). Concurrent to this, the Egyptian government is seeking to diversify wheat sources by communicating with several countries; so far, India has officially become a new producer of wheat for Egypt (Mohamed, 2022; Mishra & Singh, 2022).

This deal might be hindered over the long run, as it was announced, on the 15th of May, that in the long-term only India said it would only allow exports backed by letters of credit that were already issued, and sales to countries that request supplies due to India’s scorching heat wave and increased domestic prices (Reuters 16/05/2022). Egypt should thus seek to reduce local bread consumption by working on overpopulation, destructed agricultural land and improving standards of living (Ahram Online, 2022) (Ahram Online, 2022).

Egypt has also been particularly affected in its foreign exchange reserves. The main causes behind such a fall is two-fold; firstly, it’s impacted by a decrease in tourism. Secondly, it’s impacted by the Egyptian economy’s reliance on non-residential investment in its local bond market. With regards to the first point, tourism is a major source of income for Egypt’s foreign reserves, constituting 12% of its GDP (Saied, 2022) (Saied, 2022). Egypt is a popular destination for both Ukrainians and Russians, accounting collectively for ⅓ of all tourists entering Egypt (Fitch Ratings, 2022) (Fitch Ratings, 2022). In 2021 alone, Egypt was the second most visited country in Ukraine (Saied, 2022) (Saied, 2022). Therefore, the start of the war has caused a major downfall in this critical sector.

In response to this, the government established charter flights with Israel, launched a tourism advertising campaign targeting several high-income countries and sought to provide cash subsidies to each charter flight landing in Egypt (Saied, 2022). With regards to the second point, Egypt’s high interest in its local bond market drives many foreigners to invest in Egypt (Fitch Ratings, 2022).

However, the problem with this method of investment is that it is highly volatile and dependent on external factors, also known as “hot-money” (Saleh, 2022). This explains the major capital flight endured by Egypt, which lost $15 billion by January 2022, as investors sought out safer markets (Saleh, 2022). Foreign exchange reserves were announced to be at 37$ billion in March, down from 41$ billion; this is the lowest recorded figure since mid-2020.
In April, only a slight increase was evident as reserves increased to $37.12 billion (Zawya, 2022). This issue is particularly pressing considering that Egypt’s debt is predicted to only increase further, reaching record levels (Middle East Eye, 2022). Egypt already has one of the highest debt burdens in the world and one of the highest “shares of government revenues” going to service interests from debts (Espanol, 2022). For instance, in the 2020/2021 budget, $30.7 billion went to servicing the debt out of a total revenue of $93 billion (Middle East Eye, 2022). To fight this, Egypt should be investing in sectors such as manufacturing to establish comparative advantage and reach export-led growth; instead of its current focus on real estate and construction services, which bring little growth (Zaineldine, 2022). By doing so, the Egyptian economy will become less volatile.

The economic situation is not completely bleak for Egypt; given the EU’s decision to cut energy trade with Russia, Egypt can utilize this opportunity to export natural gas to the European market (Mohamed, 2022). This comes at a time when Egypt discovered in 2015 the Zohr natural gas field, the largest in the eastern Mediterranean (Tanchum, 2022). However, in the short-term, Egypt faces surmounting financial issues, driving it to call for its third IMF assistance in the last six years, making it the one of the largest borrowers of the fund (Saleh, 2022). Egypt also devalued its currency by 17% and raised its interest rates to assure both investors and the IMF that it follows strictly orthodox macroeconomic policy (Africanews, 2022; Africanews, 2022).

This action is, however, dangerous; given that Egyptian borrowing has exceeded the IMF quota, it’s believed that the next loans will incur an interest rate surcharge, which may exacerbate the Egyptian debt crisis (Middle East Eye, 2022). This is exceptional given that Egypt has already a debt constituting 90% of its GDP (Africanews, 2022).

Lastly, the Egyptian government sought the help of the GCC by securing around $22 billion in investment; this being 4% of the Egyptian GDP, covering its current account deficit, and therefore a major achievement (Espanol, 2022). Yet, there is a backdrop; as opposed to opening new investments in Egypt to increase its national production, GCC states are seeking to buy already profitable and established state-owned enterprises (Middle East Eye, 2022). This raises criticisms among economists who believe that selling such profitable enterprises will only allow foreign hands to control Egyptian business, and by extension its economy (Middle East Eye, 2022). In fact, President Sisi announced in May the desire to accumulate $40 billion through a government programme, seeking to increase private sector participation in the economy. To do this, state-owned and army-owned enterprises are being set up to be sold by September of this year (Reuters, 2022).

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Challenges in The Mediterranean region

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