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TRACING PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT INITIATIVES IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY: COULD THE SIX-WAY PLATFORM BECOME A NEW ASTANA PROCESS?

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Abstract

This article compares and contrasts the Astana Process, which Türkiye, Russia, and Iran devised for Syria, with the Six-Way Platform Initiative, which Türkiye has offered as a solution mechanism to promote peaceful conditions and foster cooperation in the South Caucasus. In this vein, the process tracing method is applied to assess the Six-Way Platform initiative's chances of success. Over the past twenty years, peace proposals for the South Caucasus have been placed on the agenda under various titles but solutions have never been realized. This article makes a case that the regional-global context and the inclusion of relevant actors has a direct impact on the likelihood of success. Given that Türkiye, İnan and Russia have demonstrated their ability to cooperate in the Astana process designed for Syria, there is a greater chance that the Six-Way Platform will be feasible in this case. On the contrary, this fact also increases the likelihood that the Six-Way Platform collaboration endeavor could fail. The opposing interests that Türkiye, Russia, and İnan attempt to advance in Syria have at times stalled the Astana Process, which is still ongoing. This dynamic could have negative repercussions for the Six-Way Platform, as this article argues that, what transpires in Syria will have a

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significant impact on the South Caucasus' politics, which are already on very fragile ground.

Key words: *Six-Way Platform, Astana Process, process-tracing method.*

TÜRK DIŞ POLİTİKASINDA BARIŞÇIL ÇÖZÜM GİRİŞİMLERİ: ALTILI PLATFORM YENİ BİR ASTANA SÜRECİ OLABİLİR Mİ?

Abstract

Bu makale, Türkiye, Rusya ve İran'ın Suriye için tasarladığı Astana Süreci ile Türkiye'nin Güney Kafkasya'da barışçıl koşulları teşvik etmek ve işbirliğini geliştirmek için bir çözüm mekanizması olarak sunduğu Altılı Platform girişimi arasındaki benzerlikleri ve farklılıkları ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, Altılı Platform girişiminin başarı ihtimalini değerlendirmek için süreç izleme yöntemi uygulanmıştır. Son yirmi yılda Güney Kafkasya'ya yönelik barış önerileri çeşitli başlıklar altında gündeme getirilmiş ancak bir türlü çözüme ulaşamamıştır. Bu çalışmada, bölgesel-küresel bağlamın ve ilgili aktörlerin dahil edilmesinin başarı olasılığı üzerinde doğrudan etkisi olduğu iddia edilmektedir. Türkiye, İran ve Rusya'nın Suriye için tasarlanan Astana sürecinde işbirliği yapma kabiliyetlerini ortaya koydukları düşünülürse, Altılı Platform'un bu durumda uygulanabilir olma şansı yüksek gözükmektedir. Bununla beraber, bu durum aynı zamanda Altılı Platform girişiminin başarısız olma olasılığını da artırmaktadır. Zira, Türkiye, Rusya ve İran'ın Suriye'de birbirleriyle çatışan çıkarları, halen devam eden Astana Süreci'ni zaman zaman sekteye uğratmıştır. Bu makale, Suriye'deki gelişmelerin, zaten çok kırılgan bir zeminde olan Güney Kafkasya siyaseti üzerinde önemli bir etkisi olacağını öne sürdüğünden, bu dinamiğin Altılı Platform girişimi için olumsuz yansımaları olabileceği esasını tartışmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Altılı Platform, Astana Süreci, süreç izleme yöntemi.*

1. INTRODUCTION

There are a variety of factors that affect how a state acts and makes decisions. Turkish foreign policy is no different in this regard. The Turkish War of Independence, which followed the fall of the Ottoman Empire, was fought with the primary goal of establishing an independent Turkish State within its own borders. This mindset, which resisted expansionist tendencies, did not compromise on independence and left its mark on a number of developments that guaranteed the Republic of Türkiye's absolute independence. In the end, the modern Republic of Türkiye came into being as a nation-state, acting with consciousness of its youth in a highly unstable region. Through the years, maintaining the status quo and avoiding hostilities with neighbors became the foundational pillars of Turkish foreign policy. "Peace" was thereafter identified as Türkiye's core foreign policy tenet. Ataturk's dictum "Peace at Home, Peace in the World" provides the best articulation of this goal, and it still serves as the fundamental tenet of Turkish foreign policy today (Oran, 2001, p.46-47).

To further the notion of "Peace at Home, Peace in the World," two significant peace initiatives have recently been undertaken by Turkish foreign policy. The Astana Process is one of them, and the Six-Way Platform proposal is the other. The March 2011 popular uprising in Syria descended into a protracted conflict, which had a significant impact on regional security and stability, particularly in Syria. Despite this, the Geneva discussions on the future of Syria that were launched under the auspices of United Nations (UN) were unable to produce actionable plans. Following the signing of a joint declaration in Moscow on December 22, 2016, Türkiye, Russia, and Iran—all of which have a presence in

Syria—met for the first time on January 24, 2017, in Astana, a location that had been designated as neutral. The Astana Process, one of the most significant instances of recent regional collaboration, was launched as a result (Delibaş, 2022, p.79-85). The prospect of developing a similar process for the South Caucasus with the Six-Way Platform Initiative was put forth by Türkiye after the Nagorno-Karabakh War. The conflict, which lasted 44 days, ended with Armenia and Azerbaijan signing a ceasefire agreement with Russian mediation on November 9, 2020. The Six-Way Platform Initiative is also being considered by these three countries.

Comparing and contrasting the two peace initiatives and peering at their processes is possible due to the fact that Türkiye, Russia, and Iran are not directly parties to the conflicts but are external actors in both the Astana process and the Six-Way Platform initiative. It should be noted, that despite the similarities between the two initiatives' initial motivations, methods, and processes, there are also significant variances. The Syrian Civil War, which broke out in 2011, was sparked by armed conflict among several local actors inside Syria. Despite their late engagement in the conflict, the direct diplomatic and military involvement of Türkiye, Russia, and Iran have made them key players in Syria's future. In contrast, the Nagorno-Karabakh War was a conflict between two independent states, namely Azerbaijan and Armenia, in which Türkiye, Iran, and Russia are all indirectly involved.

Türkiye, Russia, and Iran all have different reasons for being involved in Syria. For Türkiye, protecting its national security was the key driver for involvement. This led Ankara to launch multiple military operations named Euphrates Shield (2016), Olive Branch (2018), Peace Spring (2019), and Spring Shield (2020) with the objective of neutralizing terror groups like ISIS and the PKK/PYD that directly threatened its national security. These counter-terrorism operations

also helped eased the refugee crisis that the Syrian Civil War had created and ended the possibility of creating energy and logistic corridors that could exclude Türkiye (Polat, 2020, p. 53-96). Iran's involvement in Syria is a result of its regional strategy, which it refers to as a "Axis of Resistance" (Anderson, 2020). Through its sponsorship of local and imported ideologically-linked proxies in Syria, Tehran has been able to create and maintain a contiguous sphere of influence. Russia's involvement in Syria is an outcome of its global policies (Frolovskiy, 2019). Moscow's footprint in Syria has secured Russia key military installations in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Many of drivers that led Türkiye, Russia, and Iran to become involved in Syria are similar to the reasons why these three powers are vying for influence in the South Caucasus. All three actors are in a simultaneously cooperative and competitive relationship with one another since they all want to exert influence over Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia to benefit from economic and political opportunities.

This article will compare and contrast Türkiye's two most recent peace initiatives using the process tracing method, which is frequently utilized in foreign policy analysis. The primary reason for applying the process tracing method in this article is that it enables one to address the connection between causes and consequences in a comprehensive way. Understanding the shifts that occur in case studies is greatly simplified by the method's continuous monitoring of the relationship between causes and outcomes. As a result, it is possible to track the process's intermediate steps from beginning to end (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 205-209). The article sought to more accurately describe the parallels and differences between the two most significant recent peace initiatives, namely the Astana Process and the Six-Way Platform Initiatives, by tracing the processes in which Türkiye is involved with the same actors but with different dynamics.

2. PROCESS TRACING IN FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS

Just like in other social science disciplines, there are two primary research methods in the field of International Relations (IR). These are both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The procedure of gathering and interpreting numerical data is referred to as quantitative research in the broadest sense, and research that relies on non-numerical and descriptive data rather than statistical data is referred to as qualitative research.

Discussed in the literature is the notion that there is no straightforward difference between these quantitative and qualitative research methods. In their book entitled *Designing Social Inquiry*, first published in 1994 and updated in 2021, Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba (KKV) point out that qualitative research, which is not based on statistics, will become more reliable and scientific if it adopts some principles from quantitative research. The four characteristics of scientific research, according to the KKV, are as follows: First, the essential feature that sets scientific inquiry apart is its goal of reaching inferences that go beyond the particular data that were gathered. Second, since all research is public, it is necessary for the public to be aware of the methods used in order to properly assess the data. Third, the derived conclusions are based on strong probability, thus they should not be taken as absolutes. Fourth, since there are no boundaries in research, the techniques and rules are what matter most when it comes to the content of scientific work (King, Keohane & Verba, 2021, p. 7-9).

Conversely, James Mahoney and Gary Goertz published a study that challenged KKV's claims in an article titled "A Tale of Two Cultures: Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences" that debuted in the *Political Analysis* in 2006. They later released a book version of this essay in 2012. Mahoney and Goertz claim that there are two distinct traditions in quantitative

and qualitative research. As a result, it would be more accurate to see these two distinct approaches as alternatives to one another rather than as something that should be combined. In light of this, the quantitative approach does not outweigh the qualitative approach, despite what KKV seems to be saying. From the perspective of Mahoney and Goertz, a completely incorrect assumption made by KKV is that the qualitative method should only be used in situations where the quantitative method is impractical (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006, p. 227-249). As each outcome is examined through distinct cases in qualitative research, the researcher should not disregard a case because it does not conform to the paradigm behind the investigation. Instead, the researcher looks for the specific circumstances that prompted using a new model to examine the situation.

In the vein of these two contradictory views, the goal of qualitative research is to learn as much as possible about the phenomenon or the subject of the study, to come up with ideas for additional research, or to test the researcher's hypothesis about the phenomenon. Setting up initial hypotheses and identifying variables are the researcher's goals. Observation, interview, discourse analysis, and case studies are a few examples of qualitative research methods for gathering data (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012, p.5-6).

Case studies are frequently used in research based on qualitative methods in the field of foreign policy analysis, which are subfields of the IR discipline. The idea of a case study was initially introduced to social sciences by drawing inspiration from clinical research in psychology and medicine (Eckstein, 2000, p. 120). According to Martyn Hammersley and Roger Gomm a specific type of inquiry is referred to as a "case study". In this regard, a case study is a scientific method that requires a thorough analysis of a constrained system employing numerous data gathering to compile organized data about how it operates

(Hammersley & Gomm, 2009, p. 1-15). John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth (2007) defines a case study as a qualitative research method in which the researcher examines one or more constrained situations over time using data collection tools (observations, interviews, audio-visuals, paper works, reports), which draw on a variety of sources, define the situations, and identify situation-related themes (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p.153)

Case studies are preferred in foreign policy analysis for a variety of reasons. First of all, without significantly reducing the amount of variables, it is possible to dive deep into a case. Secondly, every phase of the theory-building process, but particularly the phase in which alternative ideas are tested, is where case studies are most useful. Studying macro political issues like party systems, nation-states, or political cultures is best accomplished through the use of case studies. A universally applicable theory can be developed from a single case study (Eckstein, 2000, p. 119-120).

It should be emphasized, nonetheless, that the literature has some ambiguities about the purpose of case study studies. Bent Flyvbjerg highlights and clarifies misunderstandings about case studies as follows:

- i. theoretical knowledge is more valuable than practical knowledge. In response to this viewpoint, she argues that case studies are crucial for researchers because they aid in their own learning processes and the development of the abilities required to do effective research. Case studies are rich in details and closely resemble real-life circumstances.
- ii. one cannot generalize from a single case, therefore, the single-case study cannot contribute to scientific development. According to her response, on the basis of a single case, it may frequently be generalized, and the case study can be at the center of scientific advancement through generalization as an addition to or substitute for other approaches. However, formal

generalization is exalted as a means of advancing science, whilst the "power of example" is undervalued.

iii. the case study is most useful for generating hypotheses, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building. If an observation (or case study) does not support the hypothesis (or general theory), it is often regarded as invalid and should be amended or dismissed, according to her response.

iv. the case study contains a bias toward verification. She expressed the following criticism of this notion: The case study has no stronger bias toward validation of the researcher's preexisting views than other forms of research. Contrarily, experience suggests that the case study involves a higher bias toward debunking popular beliefs than toward supporting them.

v. it is often difficult to summarize specific case studies. The following is how she refuted this assertion: It is true that outlining case studies can be challenging, particularly when it comes to case process. Concerning case outcomes, it is less accurate. Nevertheless, the difficulties in summarizing case studies are frequently caused by the characteristics of the reality under examination rather than the case study as a research tool (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 221-241).

The literature on the value of case studies is fairly broad, as can be seen from the debates above. This is related to the fact that case studies in foreign policy analysis allow us to identify causal effects through case-to-case comparison. The term "causal effect" relates to providing a response to the "what" question that results from comparing situations. Process tracing is the practice of establishing a causal link between outcomes and causes (Vennesson, 2008, p. 223). Establishing and assessing the relationship (or lack thereof) between various elements is the most fundamental goal of process tracing. This kind of study frequently makes use of archival records and other sources. As a result,

the researcher can see the collection of variables that are essential to the causal process and determine whether the indicators used to measure the dependent and independent variables were effectively chosen, including whether they were consistent with the actors' perceptions and opinions (Vennesson, 2008, p. 232). Incidentally, it is important to distinguish between process tracing and the narrative of political history. While they are extremely similar, process tracing translates a rich historical story into an analytical explanation presented with theoretical (not empirical) variables (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 224-225).

There is no established road map for process tracing. As a result, it can be used in different contexts and various ways. According to Bennett, the following actions are necessary for fruitful process tracing: i. The door should remain open to other views or approaches. ii. It is recommended to maintain an equivalent distance from alternative disclosures or policies. iii. Observable results of hypothetical processes that will actually occur must be identified in order to establish if a statement is truthful or a policy is sound. iv. The decision should be made as to when to cease looking for evidence and analyze fresh evidence as varied and pertinent material is gathered. v. It is important to consider any potential biases in the data utilized as a source. vi. It is important to keep in mind that the preferred course of action or justification can be flawed (Bennett, 2015, p. 230-231).

A final point that should be highlighted is that the process tracing method does not have a miraculous answer mechanism for the problem of providing genuine patterns in qualitative case studies. To clarify specific occurrences, draw conclusions about the cause-and-effect links that form the cases, identify the causal mechanisms, and lastly offer commentary on related events are all achievable with this method in foreign policy analysis (Vennesson & Wiesner, 2014, p. 101).

3. THE SIX-WAY PLATFORM PROPOSAL FROM TÜRKİYE'S PERSPECTIVE

During a visit to Baku to take part in the military ceremony marking the Nagorno-Karabakh Victory on December 10, 2020, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan brought up the Six-Way Platform proposal. The idea of a regional and multilateral platform for the South Caucasus has historical roots. When the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) met in Istanbul in 1999, then-president Süleyman Demirel made the first reference of this topic. Demirel urged European nations to create a Stability Pact for the Caucasus in this situation, which would serve as an international guarantee of security, peace, and stability in the region (Demirel, 1999). This idea for cooperation fell short of producing a tangible outcome, despite efforts to make economic measures like the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline effective at the time. In 2008, then-prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, reintroduced the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (CSCP). In this context, there were two preliminary meetings where the corporate structure and operation of the CSCP were addressed; nevertheless, despite the formal proposal of the CSCP being made to all of the countries in the region, no institutionalization could be achieved (Çelikpala, 2010, p. 108–110).

What does the Six-Way Platform (which includes Russia, Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Iran, Armenia, and Georgia if it approves participation) call issued by President Erdoğan on December 10, 2020 imply given that there have been other Caucasian initiatives that had previously failed? The OSCE Minsk Group, which was created to bring a peaceful end to the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh, has not been operational since 1992. The tripartite co-chair system run by

France, Russia, and the United States was not able to provide solutions and ended up prolonging the impasse (Aslanlı, 2020). This diplomatic bottleneck pushed Russia to turn to other endeavors and increase collaboration with Türkiye in the South Caucasus, just as it had in Syria. Ankara's strong historical, economic, diplomatic and cultural ties with regional actors made it an attractive partner for Russia to tackle regional issues.

The fact that Türkiye has a military presence in both Syria and the South Caucasus is the fundamental factor driving Russia's desire for collaboration with Türkiye in these regions. Russia and Türkiye began the Astana Process as a result of Türkiye's effective Euphrates Shield operation. Additionally, Russia is collaborating with Türkiye in the South Caucasus as a consequence of Türkiye's influential employment of armed and unarmed drones in the settlement of the disputes in Nagorno-Karabakh infavor of Azerbaijan (Köker, 2020). In this context, it is noteworthy that on November 11, 2020, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu signed a Memorandum of Understanding via video teleconference (similar to the joint Memorandum of Understanding signed in Sochi on October 22, 2019 to provide joint patrols in Syria) and decided to establish a Turkish-Russian Joint Observation Center to monitor the implementation of the ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh (DW Türkçe, 2020).

More emphasis on Türkiye's justifications for the Six-Way Platform initiative would be helpful at this stage. The Six-Way Platform was proposed by Türkiye for a number of reasons, one of which being the necessity of a stable environment in the region for the active implementation of some economic objectives. The Middle Corridor Project, designed by Türkiye, is at the outset of the economic objectives in question. This project, a multinational transportation undertaking with Türkiye as its starting point, involves a railway

and landline that will travel to the People's Republic of China through Georgia, Azerbaijan, the Caspian Sea (via the Caspian crossing), Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, or Kazakhstan (Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Official Website, 2021a). At this point, it is reasonable to conclude that Türkiye aims to use the Six-Way Platform plan to further this initiative in the South Caucasus.

The Middle Corridor Project also refers to Türkiye's rivalry with Iran and Russia. Considering that the same region is the location of projects for both Russia and Iran. In this regard, the International North-South Transport Corridor, a significant transit route that Iran, along with Azerbaijan and Russia, intends to link with other nations and which it designed to ease the transportation of goods from Mumbai, India, to Finland using Iranian ports and railways, is significant. These linkages are intended to give Russia access via a rail connection to both the Persian Gulf and India (Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Trade, Official Website, 2019). It is entirely inevitable in this situation for Türkiye, Russia, and Iran to compete economically despite their intentions to work together in the South Caucasus through the Six-Way Platform. In addition, although the Middle Corridor project of Türkiye currently appears to be consistent with China's Belt and Road Initiative, this ambition of Türkiye is likely to result in a conflict of interest with China in the future due to shifting political priorities. As a result, China, Türkiye, Russia, and Iran all place a high strategic value on the South Caucasus (Çolakoğlu, 2019).

At this point, it is necessary to compare the Six Way Platform with the Astana Process in terms of the involvement of the three actors, namely Türkiye, Russia, and Iran. In the Astana Process, Türkiye, Russia, and Iran are effective decision-makers in the resolution of the conflict, and their focus is only the Syrian crisis. In contrast to this, in the Six-Way Platform, the position of these three actors is

not as strong. In addition, the focus of this initiative is not only the Nagorno-Karabakh issue but also a peace process that encompasses the entire South Caucasus region. As such, the perspective of local actors in the South Caucasus becomes much more decisive. It is essential to mention Georgia's position in this particular circumstance. From the very beginning of Türkiye's proposal, Georgia made it very clear that while it supports a regional peace initiative, it will not join any group that includes Russia. Georgia's stance on Russia stems from the 2008 conflict, also known as the South Ossetia War, which ultimately led to Georgia cutting diplomatic ties with Russia. This is because, following the South Ossetia War, the Russian-supported regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia unilaterally declared their independence from Georgia. In 2008, Russia acknowledged the purported independence of these two regions (Seskuria, 2021). According to Georgia, partnering up with Russia, even for a regional issue, could give that country political immunity for its unlawful position regarding Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Nonetheless, despite Georgia's reservations and decision to abstain, the inaugural Six Way Platform meeting, which was attended by Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs from Türkiye, Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Iran, took place in Moscow on December 10, 2021. An exchange of views about multifaceted progress in regional cooperation took place during the meeting, where it was decided to concentrate on practical topics of mutual interest to all parties. Priority was placed on initiatives geared at advancing peace and stability through confidence building, developing trade, economy and transportation and improving humanitarian conditions (Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Official Website, 2021b).

4. GROWING RIVALRY BETWEEN IRAN-TÜRKIYE AND IRAN-RUSSIA

Iranian relations with Russia and Türkiye are now more competitive as a result of developments in Syria and the South Caucasus. Although there has been a strengthening of ties between Iran and Russia following Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine, it should be underlined that these developments are cyclical and the two nations have distinct viewpoints, particularly with regard to Syria's future (Alagöz & Farzam, 2022, p.13-17). The positions of the two states in the South Caucasus as well as the relations between Iran and Türkiye are thus impacted by this circumstance.

In terms of elucidating the continuous division between Iran and Russia, the Nagorno-Karabakh War was a turning point. In actuality, this dispute has roots that date back to Syria. The media reported in January 2021 that negotiations between the Assad regime and Israel had taken place in secret, mediated by Russia (Kedar, 2021). On the other hand, Iran's reaction to the allegedly covert talks that Russia was taking part in was negative. Russia viewed a prospective Damascus-Tel Aviv rapprochement as a positive development, which would diminish Iran's influence in Syria as a result. Since then, Moscow's initiatives to resolve the conflict between Damascus and Tel Aviv have raised questions about the relationship between Russia and Iran in Syria. The strongest indication of the deteriorating ties between Iran and Russia came when Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, the speaker of the Iranian parliament, visited Moscow on February 7-9, 2021. Along with the letter from Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, the Iranian politician presented Russian President Vladimir Putin with a proposal for a strategic alliance in the Middle East. Putin, however, was against the Iranian proposition for strategic collaboration and did not meet with Qalibaf (Mehdi, 2021).

It's important to note that Iran has expressed discomfort with the warming of ties between Türkiye and Russia. The increase in communication between

Russia and Türkiye since 2016, has prompted Iran's reluctant participation in the Astana Process, as Tehran did not want to be left out of the dialogue after learning that Russia was committed to working with Türkiye. Similar circumstances occurred during the 2018 Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, which was hailed as the century's most important deal. During this period, Iran felt compelled to sign an agreement, which provided Russia with big gains, as Moscow's support was needed to counter the negative impact Tehran was feeling due to America's policy of maximum pressure on Iran (Kemaloğlu, 2018).

Similar situations have evolved in the South Caucasus following the Nagorno-Karabakh War; Russia has, in contrast to Iran's expectations, prioritized collaboration with Türkiye. Iran sought to be a part of the final dynamic. For this reason, Iran has been making a concerted effort to take part in the process since October 2020. Abbas Araghchi, then-deputy foreign minister, first traveled to Baku, Moscow, Yerevan, and Ankara on a diplomatic mission that started on October 28, 2020. On December 9, 2020, Jeyhun Bayramov, the then-foreign minister of Azerbaijan, received an invitation to Tehran. Finally, on January 25, 2021, then-Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif set off on a regional diplomatic tour and paid visits to Azerbaijan, Russia, Armenia, Georgia, and Türkiye, respectively. After meeting with the president of Azerbaijan, İlham Aliyev, and foreign minister, Jeyhun Bayramov, in Baku, Zarif traveled to Moscow to meet with his counterpart, Sergei Lavrov. This trip marked Zarif's sixth official trip to Moscow in a year (Tehran Times, 2021).

It should be underlined in this context that Türkiye's expanding role in the South Caucasus significantly alarms Iran. Tehran is concerned, in particular, about Türkiye and Azerbaijan's expanding strategic ties. The collaboration between Türkiye and Russia in the South Caucasus is equally unsettling for Iran. Russia

was able to coordinate its actions with Türkiye after the war owing to Türkiye's diplomatic measures and defense assistance for Azerbaijan. On the hand, Iran acted under the assumption that the regional dynamics should not change in favor of Azerbaijan and refrained from making any pro-Azerbaijani statements, in contrast to Türkiye (Mamedov, 2021).

The following statements by Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei, which directly reflect Iran's perspective on the South Caucasus, should be addressed in this context: *"Of course, if there is a policy intended to block the Iran-Armenia border, the Islamic Republic will oppose it, for this border has been a connecting route for thousands of years."* (Khamenei, 2022). Khamenei made this statement after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan went to Tehran on 19 July 2022 as part of the Astana process and met with him. It is notable that Khamenei portrayed Azerbaijan's liberation of the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh territory as a strategy against Armenia's territorial integrity. The Zangezur corridor project, which is a road and rail construction project with the goal of establishing direct transit between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, was also presented in this context. Iran is primarily motivated by its desire to stop Türkiye from pursuing a more ambitious posture in the South Caucasus.

5. CONCLUSION

The Republic of Türkiye has accepted the establishment of "peace" within its own boundaries and in relations with its neighbors as a fundamental principle ever since it was founded. It has led the way in this regard with two efforts for two recent adjacent regions—Syria and the South Caucasus—where wars have lately erupted. The Astana process and the Six-Platform both feature key stakeholders who are not parties to the conflict but are still active in the process. Along with Türkiye, these external actors are Russia and Iran. The most

crucial aspect shared by the two peace proposals is this. In this background, this essay attempted to analyze these two recent peace initiatives by Türkiye through the process tracing method in order to understand the similarities and contrasts between the two.

First of all, the dynamics that connect countries in Syria and the circumstances in the South Caucasus are distinct from one another. However, the three nations' divergent views on what will happen to Syria have a direct impact on how they view the South Caucasus and how they interact with one another. The Astana Process and the Six-Way Platform should be seen as complementing structures for this reason. The future of Iran's nuclear program, on the other hand, is the subject of most political debate on a worldwide scale with reference to its foreign policy. As of right now, Iran is beginning to place more weight on the actions of Russia, a United Nations Security Council member, and Türkiye, a significant neighbor and NATO member who shares Iran's border. This makes it more crucial than ever for Iran to maintain stable relations with both nations. Iran, though, feels uneasy about the partnership-focused alliance between Russia and Türkiye. Iran sees Türkiye and Russia's involvement in both Syria and the South Caucasus as a threat, but despite this, Iran is working to forge a tight, moderate relationship with both nations.

Given that the major issue is for military security, the effectiveness of the Astana Process for Syria is crucial from Türkiye 's perspective. On the other side, the South Caucasus stands out more on Türkiye 's axis of economic interests. To bolster its position against Russia and Iran, with which it cooperates in Syria and frequently has conflicts of interest, Türkiye has, nevertheless, become more and more reliant on the South Caucasus. However, in light of previous failures, the Six-Way Platform initiative is a highly vulnerable proposal. It is therefore difficult to suggest that Türkiye will adapt the proactive policy it takes in the

Astana Process to the South Caucasus because the country's top concern is military security. Türkiye can refrain from acting on specific matters in this region if it is considered necessary, but it cannot do so for Syria. Therefore, despite the Six-Way Platform's parallels to the Astana Process, it is fair to conclude that these distinctions are far stronger.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Giriş

Bu makale, Türk dış politikasının temel bakış açısını oluşturan uyumsuzlukların barışçıl yollarla çözümünü prensibi gereği yakın zamanda ortaya koyduğu Astana Süreci ile Altılı Platform girişimi arasındaki benzerlikleri ve farklılıkları ele almayı ve buradan hareketle Altılı Platform girişimine bir projeksiyon yapmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, Altılı Platform girişiminin başarı ihtimalini değerlendirmek için süreç izleme yöntemi uygulanmıştır. Suriye'nin geleceği konusunda Birleşmiş Milletler (BM) nezdinde başlayan Cenevre görüşmelerinin somut çözümler üretmemesi üzerine Suriye'de etkin olan Türkiye, Rusya ve İran, 22 Aralık 2016'da Moskova'da imzaladıkları ortak bir bildirin akabinde 24 Ocak 2017'de tarafsız yer olarak seçilen Astana'da ilk kez bir araya gelmiş, böylelikle yakın zamanın en önemli bölgesel işbirliği örneklerinden biri olan Astana Süreci'ni başlatmıştır. Benzer bir sürecin, 44 gün süren ve 9 Kasım 2020'de Ermenistan ile Azerbaycan'ın, Rusya'nın ateşkes planını imzalamasıyla sona eren Dağlık Karabağ Savaşı sonrası Güney Kafkasya için de ortaya çıkması

ihtimali üç ülke tarafından değerlendirilmektedir. Nitekim girişimin uygulanmasına yönelik Gürcistan'ın şerh düşmesine rağmen katılımcı ülkeler arasında ilk toplantı 10 Aralık 2021 tarihinde dışişleri bakan yardımcılarının katılımıyla Rusya'nın başkenti Moskova'da gerçekleştirilmiştir. Gürcistan'ın temsilci göndermediği toplantıya Türkiye, Rusya, İran, Azerbaycan ve Ermenistan katılmıştır.

Bulgular

Öncelikle Türkiye, Rusya ve İran'ın Suriye sahasında bulunma gerekçeleriyle Güney Kafkasya bölgesinde etkin olma çabalarının dayanakları birbirinden farklıdır. Dolayısıyla iki politikanın birbiriyle ayrışan yönleri vardır. Ancak iki bölgesel sorundaki dış aktörlerin aynı olması (Türkiye, Rusya ve İran), iki politika arasında benzerlikler yaratmaktadır. 2011'de başlayan Suriye İç Savaşı'nda problem, ülkedeki farklı unsurların birbirleriyle sıcak çatışmaya girmesiyle başlamıştır. Doğrudan veya dolaylı olarak müdahale eden ülkeler yani Türkiye, Rusya ve İran, daha sonra sahaya dâhil olmuş fakat Suriye'nin geleceği açısından daha belirleyici aktörler hâline dönüşmüştür. Dağlık Karabağ işgalinde ise Azerbaycan ve Ermenistan yani iki ayrı devlet arasında yaşanan bir sıcak çatışma söz konusudur. Türkiye, Rusya ve İran, buradaki çatışmanın doğrudan bir tarafı olmayıp dolaylı müdahil konumundadır.

Öte yandan bu üç ülkenin, Suriye sahasında olma gerekçeleri de birbirinden farklıdır. Türkiye, ulusal güvenliğini doğrudan tehdit eden DEAŞ ve PKK/PYD gibi unsurları ortadan kaldırmak, Türkiye'yi bertaraf edecek enerji koridorlarının açılmasına önayak olabilecek projeleri kalıcı olarak imha etmek için Fırat Kalkanı (2016), Zeytin Dalı (2018), Barış Pınarı (2019) ve Bahar Kalkanı (2020) operasyonlarını yapmıştır. İran'ın burada olması, Direniş Ekseni olarak tanımladığı bölgesel politikanın bir iz düşümüdür. Rusya ise küresel politikaları bağlamında Suriye sahasındadır. Üç ülkenin Güney Kafkasya'da nüfuz kurma mücadelesi ise birbirine benzer gerekçelere dayanmaktadır. Her üç aktör de ekonomik ve siyasi avantaj sağlamak amacıyla Azerbaycan, Ermenistan ve Gürcistan üzerinde etkin olmaya çalışmakta, bu sebeple de birbirleriyle hem iş birliği hem rekabet ilişkisine girmektedir.

Sonuç

Suriye'de üç ülkeyi bir araya getiren dinamikler ile Güney Kafkasya'nın durumu birbirinden farklıdır. Öte yandan üç ülkenin Suriye'nin geleceği konusundaki görüş ayrılıkları, Güney Kafkasya'ya bakış açılarını ve birbirlerine dönük politikalarını da doğrudan etkilemektedir. Bu sebeple Suriye için geliştirilen Astana Süreci ve Güney Kafkasya için gündeme gelen Altılı Platform önerilerini, birbirini tamamlayan oluşumlar olarak değerlendirmek gerekir. Bunlara ek

olarak gerek İnan-Rusya arasında gerek İnan-Türkiye arasında ayrı rekabet konularının olduğunu da belirtmek gerekir. Her iki rekabet konusunun odağında yer alan İnan'la ilgili olarak hâlihazırda küresel siyasette en çok tartışılan konu, 2015'te imzalanmış olan Kapsamlı Ortak Eylem Planı (Nükleer Anlaşma)nın geleceğidir. Bu noktada Birleşmiş Milletler Güvenlik Konseyi (BMGK) üyesi, Rusya'nın ve İnan'ın önemli sınır komşusu ve aynı zamanda bir NATO üyesi olan Türkiye'nin politikaları İnan için çok daha fazla önem kazanmaktadır. Bu sebeple İnan'ın her iki ülke ile ilişkilerini istikrarlı bir seviyede tutma ihtiyacı artmaktadır. Öte yandan İnan'ın, Rusya ve Türkiye'nin iş birliği odaklı ilişkisinden rahatsızlık duyduğu görülmektedir. Dolayısıyla hem Suriye'deki hem Güney Kafkasya'daki Türkiye ve Rusya varlığı, İnan tarafından giderek bir tehdit olarak algılanmakta; bu sebeple de İnan, her iki ülkeyle mesafeli bir yakınlık ilişkisi kurmayı hedeflemektedir.

Türkiye için ise askerî güvenlik kaygısının başat olduğu düşünülürse Suriye nezdindeki Astana Süreci'nin işlevselliği hayati öneme sahiptir. Öte yandan Güney Kafkasya, Türkiye için daha çok ekonomik çıkarlar ekseninde ön plana çıkmaktadır. Ne var ki Güney Kafkasya, Türkiye için Suriye'de iş birliği hâlinde olduğu ve zaman zaman çıkar çatışması yaşadığı Rusya ve İnan karşısında pozisyonunu kuvvetlendirmek adına giderek önemi artan bir coğrafya olmuştur. Ancak Altılı Platform önerisi, geçmiş deneyimler de düşünülürse kırılabilirliği yüksek bir inisiyatiftir. Dolayısıyla Türkiye'nin önceliği askerî güvenlik olduğundan Astana Süreci'nde izlediği proaktif politikayı Güney Kafkasya için de uygulayacağını söylemek zordur. Burada, belli konularda Türkiye gerekli görürse geride durabilecekken Suriye için bunu yapması mümkün değildir. Bu sebeple de bu çalışmada ortaya koyulduğu üzere, her ne kadar Altılı Platform, Astana Süreci ile benzerlikler gösterse de farklılıklarının çok daha fazla olduğunu ve geleceğinin büyük oranda bu üç aktörün Suriye'de barış yönünde kat edebilecekleri yola bağlı olduğunu söylemek mümkündür.