

Bilateral Relations Between Türkiye and Spain in Relation to Foreign Policy and Security

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Abstract

This paper discusses bilateral relations between Türkiye and Spain and Türkiye's foreign policy approach in a complex international context. Over the last few years, ties between the two countries have significantly strengthened, motivated by strategic, economic and geopolitical interests. As one of the few countries in the European Union that actively supports Türkiye's accession to the bloc, Spain has maintained a constant stance of cooperation and support towards the Turkish nation. On the other hand, Türkiye, as an emerging regional power, has boosted its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and other areas of tension, developing an increasingly independent and robust defense policy. Through a chronological and contextual analysis, this study examines and explores the essential factors underpinning this bilateral relationship. It explores joint initiatives in trade, technology, and security sectors. By assessing current dynamics and prospects, this analysis contributes to a better understanding of the role that both countries play on the international scene and the potential benefits of their collaboration in the long term.

Keywords: Türkiye, Spain, Defense, Economic, Strategic.

Introduction

This study explores key questions in the realm of international relations: How have Türkiye and Spain adapted their bilateral relations amidst shifting geopolitical, economic, and security landscapes? What strategic, economic, and cultural factors have solidified their partnership? This paper addresses gaps in existing studies, which often focus narrowly on individual sectors or timeframes, by offering a holistic analysis of Türkiye-Spain relations. Uniquely, this study integrates historical context, economic trends, and geopolitical strategies to provide a multidimensional perspective.

For its part, Spain has been one of the few countries in the European Union to support Türkiye's candidacy for the bloc openly, maintaining a consistent po-

sition since the 2000s. This support, which contrasts with the resistance of other European powers such as France and Germany, has positioned Spain as a reliable partner for Türkiye in the European arena. The reasons for this support are varied and range from strategic interests in the Mediterranean to the desire to strengthen trade and investment ties with an emerging market such as Türkiye.

This analysis employs a liberal international relations framework, emphasizing mutual benefits derived from economic interdependence, institutional cooperation, and shared strategic objectives. This perspective highlights the mechanisms that have shaped Türkiye-Spain relations.

The bilateral relationship between Türkiye and Spain is based on several factors. On the one hand, both countries have experienced historical and political parallels that include transitions to democracy and the fight against separatist and terrorist movements. These shared experiences have facilitated mutual understanding and have generated a basis for cooperation that encompasses both economic, political and strategic. On the other hand, joint initiatives in areas such as technology, renewable energies and digitalization have contributed to economic cooperation growth. At the same time, the presence of Spanish companies in Türkiye continues to increase thanks to bilateral agreements signed in recent years.

This paper analyses the main milestones and elements that have defined the relationship between Türkiye and Spain, exploring the current opportunities and challenges in the context of Turkish foreign policy.

History of Bilateral Relations Between Türkiye and Spain

The historical relationship between Spain and Türkiye can be traced back to their encounters during the Ottoman Empire (Ágoston, 2021). Unlike the confrontational dynamics between the Ottoman Empire and many European powers, the lack of territorial conflicts between the Spanish and Ottoman empires allowed for a relatively neutral and cooperative relationship. These historical interactions laid a foundation of mutual respect that persists in the modern era. The influence of Islamic culture in Spain, particularly during the Al-Andalus period, adds another layer of shared heritage that resonates in contemporary dialogues.

In the 18th century, formal diplomatic ties were initiated through envoys and treaties, such as the appointment of Ottoman ambassadors to Spain. These exchanges emphasized a peaceful coexistence and mutual respect that laid the groundwork for future cooperation.

First Diplomatic Contacts

The first diplomatic contacts between Spain and Türkiye date back to the eighteenth century when the European powers began formalizing relations with the Ottoman Empire. Although these contacts were initial and limited, they constituted the prelude to a bilateral relationship based on pragmatism and respect for the respective spheres of influence. This absence of territorial conflicts or direct interests between the Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of Spain facilitated the development of stable and relatively peaceful diplomatic relations (Barkey, 2008). Spain and the Ottoman Empire established formal diplomatic ties, beginning with the Treaty of Friendship in 1782, which aimed to protect the rights of Spanish and Ottoman merchants operating in each other's territories.

These agreements fostered economic exchanges and paved the way for stable relations during a period marked by European rivalries. The appointment of ambassadors, such as Ahmed Efendi to Madrid, symbolized a mutual interest in avoiding conflict and promoting trade. This shared history of pragmatism and cooperation influences modern Türkiye-Spain relations, particularly in their efforts to bridge cultural and geopolitical divides.

The modernization of relations between Spain and Türkiye was consolidated in the twentieth century, when both countries, after having lost their respective empires, began modernization and insertion into the system of international alliances. During the Cold War, both Türkiye and Spain played essential roles in the Western bloc, which further strengthened their relations. The two countries shared a geopolitical affinity as allies of the United States and NATO members (Türkiye joined in 1952 and Spain in 1982), which increased exchanges and cooperation on defense and security issues.

The Twentieth Century

Strengthening ties and consolidation within NATO Today, Türkiye and Spain actively collaborate in NATO-led missions, addressing challenges like counter-terrorism and cyber defense. Joint military exercises and strategic dialogues further underscore their commitment to collective security.

During the Cold War, Türkiye and Spain shared a strategically important position on the periphery of the Soviet bloc (Keohane & Nye, 1973). Türkiye, due to its proximity to the Caucasus and the Middle East, and Spain, on the Western European flank, played crucial roles in defending the Western bloc. Including US military bases in both countries strengthened the indirect link between them and consolidated their role in the NATO alliance system.

In recent years, Türkiye and Spain have strengthened their collaboration within NATO. Spain's deployment of Patriot missile batteries in Türkiye since 2015 has

been a critical contribution to regional defense, protecting against potential threats from neighboring conflict zones. Additionally, joint military exercises, such as NATO's Trident Juncture 2018, highlighted the interoperability between Spanish and Turkish armed forces, underscoring their shared commitment to collective security.

Recent NATO developments, such as the accession of Finland and Sweden in 2023, have reshaped the alliance's strategic priorities, including its focus on the Baltic Sea and the Arctic. These changes have indirectly influenced Türkiye and Spain's roles within NATO. For instance, Spain's contribution to the enhanced Forward Presence in Eastern Europe complements Türkiye's focus on the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean. Both nations have worked together on NATO-led operations, such as Sea Guardian, to secure maritime trade routes and counter piracy.

In the diplomatic sphere, Turkish-Spanish relations remained cordial and pragmatic but with a focus limited to the spheres of defense and security (Moravcsik, 1997). From the 1980s, with the entry of both countries into the democratization processes, a new dimension emerged in their relations, as both began to be interested in democratic consolidation and exchanges of technical and economic cooperation.

The Contemporary era: Spain's Support for Türkiye's Accession to the European Union

One of the most significant moments in the recent history of Turkish-Spanish relations occurred in Türkiye's candidacy for the European Union. Since the early 2000s, Spain has stood out as one of the strongest European countries supporting Türkiye's entry into the EU (Florensa, 2009). This support is evident in official statements and the positions held by governments on

both the left (PSOE) and the right (PP). Spanish support has been motivated both by strategic reasons and the desire to strengthen economic ties and take advantage of the potential of the Turkish market.

In 2005, during the Euro-Mediterranean Summit in Barcelona, Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero was an active promoter of the "Alliance of Civilizations" initiative. This proposal sought to promote dialogue and cooperation between the West and the Islamic world, in which Türkiye played a relevant role. This alliance symbolized Spain's willingness to reach out to Türkiye and represented a recognition of Türkiye's value as a bridge between Europe and the Middle East.

The Turkish-Spanish Summits: A Space for Dialogue and Cooperation

The holding of bilateral summits between Spain and Türkiye from 2009 onwards marked a new milestone in the relationship between the two countries. These summits, in which the leaders of both countries participate together with high-level delegations, have made it possible to sign essential agreements in various areas, from defense and security cooperation to trade, technology and renewable energies. The first Turkish-Spanish summit, held in Istanbul in 2009, witnessed the formal launch of the "Alliance of Civilizations" and Spain's commitment to support Türkiye's candidacy for membership in the EU.

Since then, the summits have continued to be held regularly, reflecting the commitment of both countries to strengthen their ties and expand their areas of cooperation. At the last summit in 2024, held in Ankara, thirteen memorandums of understanding and four trade and investment agreements were signed, underlining the importance of economic ties and growth potential in strategic sectors such as logistics and renewable energy.

Table 1**Türkiye- Spain Bilateral Summits and Key Outcomes**

Date	Location	Key Outcomes
June 13, 2024	Madrid	Signing of 13 memorandums of understanding in areas such as renewable energy, logistics, and scientific cooperation.
		Commitment to reaching a bilateral trade exchange of €25 billion within five years.
		Reaffirmation of collaboration in security and defense, including the continuation of the Patriot air defense system in Türkiye.
November 17, 2021	Ankara	Elevation of bilateral relations to the level of a “Comprehensive Partnership.”
		Signing of agreements in sports and scientific cooperation.
		Establishment of a follow-up mechanism between summits to implement commitments.
2018	Ankara	Strengthening of cooperation in defense and security.
		Discussions on regional stability in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.
2014	Madrid	Signing of bilateral agreements focused on energy and infrastructure development.
		Promotion of mutual investments and collaboration on transport projects.
2009	Istanbul	-Launch of the Alliance of Civilizations, a joint initiative to promote intercultural dialogue.
		Agreements on cultural and educational cooperation.

An Ever-Evolving Relationship

In summary, the history of Türkiye-Spain relations reflects a progressive evolution from initial diplomatic contacts to a multifaceted collaborative covering of politics, economics and security. Unlike Türkiye's relations with other European powers, such as France or Germany, often marked by tensions and disagreements, the relationship with Spain has been characterized by constancy and mutual support.

This historical context helps to understand why Spain remains one of Türkiye's prominent defenders in the European Union and how both countries have built a strong relationship based on shared interests and a history of primarily peaceful interactions. With a forward-looking approach, collaboration between Türkiye and Spain continues to develop in a world where strategic alliances and cooperation in security and the economy are increasingly important.

Spain's Support for Türkiye's Accession to The European Union

One of the most distinctive and defining aspects of the relationship between Türkiye and Spain has been Spain's strong and continuous support for Türkiye's accession to the European Union. Since Türkiye's first attempts to join the bloc, Spain has shown strong support, becoming one of the few European countries to maintain a state policy in favor of this integration despite the reservations of other EU members.

France and Germany have expressed significant reservations about Türkiye's EU accession, citing concerns over human rights, democratic standards, and geopolitical alignment. France has consistently emphasized its opposition based on cultural and demographic factors, while Germany has raised issues related to economic stability and governance. In contrast, Spain's support for Türkiye stems from shared strategic goals, such as regional stability and economic interdependence. For example, Spain has advocated for Türkiye's inclusion to enhance the EU's influence in the Mediterranean and to benefit from Türkiye's role as a transit hub for energy resources.

European Context and the Case of Türkiye

Türkiye's candidacy for membership of the European Union has been debated for decades. Türkiye officially applied for membership in 1987, but its integration has faced multiple obstacles and resistance. Among the reasons that have limited the support of other EU members are concerns about human rights, the situation of democracy in Türkiye, fear of migration, and cultural and religious differences (Martin, 2015).

Several EU countries, including France and Germany, have openly expressed opposition or reservations to Türkiye's accession. The objections of these countries reflect not only a concern about Türkiye's ability to meet EU standards on issues such as human rights and democratic governance but also a fear that the entry of Türkiye, a Muslim-majority country with a young and large population, will upset the political balance. Economic and cultural of the bloc.

Spain's Position

Unlike other EU members, Spain has maintained a consistent stance in favor of Türkiye's membership. This support has been sustained by successive PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) and Pp. (Popular Party) governments, reflecting a political consensus around the benefits of Türkiye's integration into the bloc.

Spain believes that Türkiye's accession to the EU could bring with it several strategic benefits, including:

Strengthening the link between Europe and the Muslim world: Türkiye represents a connection between Europe and the Middle East, and its accession could help build a relationship of greater cooperation and understanding between the West and the Islamic world. Stability in the Mediterranean region: Spain shares an interest in the stability and security of the Eastern Mediterranean region with Türkiye. From a security perspective, Türkiye's integration into the EU would strengthen Europe's borders in an area with multiple hotbeds of conflict, including Syria and the Caucasus.

Economic growth potential: Türkiye is an expanding emerging market with a geographical position that makes it a trade bridge between Europe and Asia. Türkiye's entry into the EU would open up new opportunities for European companies, including Spanish ones, in strategic sectors such as technology, infrastructure and renewable energy (International Energy Agency, 2022).

Key Moments of Spanish Support

One of the most notable milestones in Spain's support for Türkiye was in 2005, during the Euro-Mediterranean Summit in Barcelona, where the then Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero was one of the foremost leading promoters of the "Alliance of Civilizations" initiative. This initiative launched with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, sought to promote dialogue and cooperation between Western and Islamic cultures. The collaboration between the two countries on this initiative symbolized Spain's vision of Türkiye's potential to be a bridge between Europe and the Middle East and reinforced it. It reinforced Spain's support for Türkiye's candidacy in the European context.

In subsequent years, the governments of Mariano Rajoy (PP) and Pedro Sánchez (PSOE) maintained support for Türkiye's accession. This position was ratified in multiple forums and summits, including the V Turkish-Spanish Summit in 2014 and the VII Turkish-Spanish Summit in 2024. In the latter, both countries renewed their commitment to work together to promote peace and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean. They reinforced their shared interest in Türkiye's integration into the EU.

Spain's Arguments in Favor of Türkiye's Accession

Spain has articulated several arguments in favor of Türkiye's integration into the EU, highlighting the benefits that Türkiye and Europe could derive from this union. Some of these arguments include:

Diversity and tolerance within the EU: Spain argues that Türkiye's integration would be a step towards a more inclusive Europe, where cultural and religious diversity is seen as an asset rather than a barrier. Spain, with its history of coexistence between cultures, sees

Türkiye as a valuable partner in strengthening the values of pluralism and tolerance in the bloc.

Reducing the influence of external actors in the region: Türkiye's accession to the EU could reduce the influence of other actors in the Eastern Mediterranean region, such as Russia and China, promoting stability favoring both Europe and Türkiye.

Strengthening the EU's foreign policy: Spain believes that, by including Türkiye, the EU could take a more active and cohesive role on security and foreign policy issues in a critical region. Since Türkiye is already a member of NATO, its integration would also strengthen the ties between the EU's security policy and the Atlantic alliance.

Resistance and Challenges to Turkish Accession: Spain's Role

Despite Spain's strong support, Türkiye's accession faces several challenges within the EU. Countries such as France and Austria strongly oppose Türkiye's candidacy. At the same time, other EU members have expressed doubts about democratic governance in Türkiye, freedom of the press and human rights. These concerns have slowed down the progress of negotiations and generated tensions within the block.

In this context, Spain has worked to mitigate some of this reluctance by promoting a "constructive conditionality" approach. According to this perspective, Spain proposes that the EU maintain an open dialogue with Türkiye and continue to offer technical and financial support to help it meet the accession requirements without closing the door to possible future entry.

Spain's Prospects and Commitment

Spain's support for Turkish accession is maintained, although it is aware of the difficulties in the process. As Türkiye continues its internal development and redefines its role in the region, Spain's engagement could be vital in driving the necessary reforms and building a favorable political environment for Türkiye's integration into the EU.

In conclusion, Spain's support for Türkiye's accession reflects a combination of strategic and economic interests and an inclusive and diverse vision of Europe. Although the process faces significant challenges, Spain continues to be committed to a policy of cooperation and commitment, positioning itself as a constant ally of Türkiye in its ambition to join the European bloc.

Common Economic Interests

Recent initiatives include Spanish investments in Türkiye's wind energy projects and collaborative efforts in digital transformation (Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism of Spain, 2024). In 2023, bilateral trade showed significant growth in the technology and infrastructure sectors.

The shared economic interests between Türkiye and Spain have been a fundamental pillar in developing their bilateral relations. Both countries have identified growth opportunities in strategic sectors such as renewable energy, technology, tourism, and infrastructure. These interests foster growing economic collaboration and consolidate the diplomatic and strategic relationship between the two nations, reinforcing interdependence in critical areas.

Spain and Türkiye have collaborated on multiple renewable energy projects, including Spanish investments in wind energy farms in the Aegean region. Additionally, Spanish firms such as Iberdrola have par-

ticipated in Türkiye's solar energy initiatives. In tourism, the two countries signed agreements to promote joint cultural tourism campaigns. However, challenges such as Türkiye's inflation rate, which reached 55% in 2023, and currency volatility have posed risks to investment stability.

Trade between Türkiye and Spain has grown steadily (World Bank, 2021). In 2023, bilateral trade reached €18 billion, with Türkiye exporting machinery, textiles, and vehicles to Spain, while importing chemicals, technology, and agricultural products.

Table 2

Estimated data based on bilateral trade trends reported by wits.worldbank.org and portal.mineco.gob.es.

Year	Exports from Türkiye to Spain (€B)	Imports to Türkiye from Spain (€B)
2019	8.2	4.8
2020	6.9	4.7
2021	9.4	6.2
2022	10.0	6.8
2023	9.1	8.8

Strategic Sectors of Cooperation

The Turkish and Spanish economies share a structure in which the service sector, especially tourism, has a considerable weight, and both nations stand out in the Mediterranean region as top tourist destinations. In addition, sectors such as technology, energy and infrastructure have become areas of mutual interest, especially given the commitment of both economies to move towards sustainable and high-value-added models.

Tourism and Services Sector: Türkiye and Spain are two of the most popular tourist destinations in the Mediterranean, which has driven a significant flow of travelers between the two countries. In particular, Türkiye has sought to learn from Spain's success in developing sustainable tourism infrastructure and strategies while both countries collaborate to attract investment and improve tourism infrastructure.

Renewable Energy and Sustainability: Renewable energy represents one of the most promising areas in the economic relationship between Türkiye and Spain. Spain has a developed renewable energy industry, especially in wind and solar energy, while Türkiye is working to diversify its energy matrix and reduce its dependence on fossil fuels. Spanish companies have seen an opportunity in the Turkish market to invest in renewable energy technologies and projects, while Türkiye benefits from Spain's experience and advanced technology in this field.

Technology and Innovation: Another sector of great relevance is technology, particularly in digitalization and artificial intelligence. Türkiye is investing in modernizing its economy by digitizing key sectors and developing advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence. The experience and investments of Spanish companies in the Turkish market have contributed to the growth of this sector, with opportunities in areas such as cybersecurity, automation and the modernization of industrial processes.

Infrastructure and Construction: In the infrastructure field, Türkiye and Spain have internationally renowned companies in construction and development of large projects. Spanish companies have been actively involved in infrastructure projects in Türkiye, including developing transport networks, ports and airports. This collaboration has allowed Spanish companies to benefit from Türkiye's economic expansion and growing demand for modern infrastructure while Türkiye has access to Spanish technology and expertise.

Growth of Bilateral Trade and Investment

Trade between Türkiye and Spain has shown steady growth in recent decades, driven by economic diversification and favorable trade policies (Spanish Confederation of Business Organizations, 2022). Bilateral agreements have facilitated the flow of goods, services, and capital, allowing companies from both countries to take advantage of market opportunities in areas of mutual interest.

In 2024, during the VII Turkish-Spanish Summit held in Ankara, four trade and investment agreements were signed to further strengthen the economic relationship. These agreements focus on collaboration in strategic sectors such as logistics, digitalization, technology, and renewable energies, which highlights the relevance of these sectors to both nations' cooperation strategies.

Logistics and International Trade: Türkiye and Spain share a strategic geographical location facilitating trade between Europe, Asia and Africa. Collaboration on logistics infrastructure makes it possible to optimize trade routes, especially in the context of initiatives such as China's "Belt and Road", in which Türkiye plays a central role. With its ports and advanced transport networks, Spain offers Türkiye a more direct gateway to European markets.

Digitalization and Economic Transformation: Digitalization has become a key pillar for the economies of both countries (Perkmen et al., 2016). In the case of Türkiye, digital transformation is a priority to foster a more modern economy that is less dependent on traditional industry. Spain, which has made significant progress in its digitalization in recent years, has become an ideal partner for Türkiye, sharing its experience and supporting the implementation of technologies in productive sectors and public services.

Prospects and Opportunities

The future of economic relations between Türkiye and Spain looks promising, with multiple opportunities for both countries to strengthen their cooperation in critical areas (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, 2024). The renewable energy, digitalization and technological innovation sectors will continue to be strategic areas, while infrastructure and logistics offer new opportunities for investment and trade.

Sustainable Energy: With the shift to sustainable energy sources, both countries have incentives to expand their investments in renewable energy. In this context, Spanish companies can play a crucial role in developing wind and solar energy projects in Türkiye. In contrast, with its vast territory and high solar radiation, Türkiye offers a great potential market.

Innovation and Digital transformation: Türkiye's growing investment in artificial intelligence and cybersecurity presents an opportunity for both countries to collaborate on implementing these technologies in strategic sectors such as defense, public administration, and industry. In the future, this collaboration area is expected to expand into emerging technologies, including advanced automation and artificial intelligence applied to the economy.

Strengthening the Bilateral trade and investment framework: With an increasingly robust trade agreement structure, both countries can facilitate access to their markets and promote greater participation of Turkish and Spanish companies in joint projects. In the current context, where economies seek to reduce dependencies and build more resilient supply chains, Turkish-Spanish collaboration can be an example of productive interdependence (Spanish Confederation of Business Organizations, 2024).

Challenges in Economic Cooperation

Despite the growth potential, economic collaboration between Türkiye and Spain faces challenges. Financial volatility and uncertainty in the international context can affect investment decisions in both countries. Türkiye has experienced some economic instability in recent years, mainly due to inflation and the fluctuation of its currency, factors that can pose a risk to foreign investors.

In addition, differences in regulatory systems and standards between the EU and Türkiye can represent a barrier for Spanish companies, particularly in technology and renewable energy. However, Spain and Türkiye have expressed their commitment to overcoming these obstacles by strengthening the regulatory framework and creating incentives for investors (Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism of Spain, 2024).

In conclusion, the common economic interests between Türkiye and Spain represent an essential component of their bilateral relationship. Sectors such as tourism, renewable energy, technology, and infrastructure are areas of growth that allow both countries to strengthen their economies and benefit each other. The signing of trade and investment agreements in 2024 underlines the commitment of both countries to continue developing this economic cooperation, and future opportunities in sustainable energy and digitalization promise to open new avenues of collaboration (La Moncloa, 2024).

Türkiye's Role in International Security and Regional Geopolitics

In recent years, Türkiye has assumed an increasingly prominent role in international security and regional politics, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. Türkiye's strategic geographical position at the crossroads between Europe and Asia gives it an essential role in the stability of the region. It makes it a key player in international conflicts and areas of tension. This foreign policy approach seeks to project Türkiye as a regional power capable of influencing security and global politics, primarily through its growing defense industry and its participation in strategic alliances.

Türkiye's Geostrategic Importance:

Türkiye's location between Europe, the Middle East, the Caucasus and the Eastern Mediterranean provides a unique position of great importance for the region's security. This positioning has allowed Türkiye to play a "gateway" role to Europe, Asia and the Middle East, influencing its participation in NATO since 1952 and its relationship with Western powers such as the United States and the European Union.

Türkiye shares borders with Syria, Iraq and Iran, countries marked by internal and regional conflicts. Its proximity to these conflict areas means that Türkiye plays a central role in controlling migratory flows to Europe, in the fight against terrorism and in regional stabilization. In addition, Türkiye is a crucial point on the energy routes that transport gas and oil from Central Asia and the Middle East to Europe, reinforcing its geopolitical and strategic relevance (Martin, 2015).

Regional Conflicts and Türkiye's Role as a Regional Power

In recent decades, Türkiye has adopted a more assertive foreign policy, intervening directly in several regional conflicts and seeking to consolidate its position as a regional leading power. This strategy includes:

Syria: Since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, Türkiye has played an active role in the conflict, establishing safe zones in northern Syria and leading military operations to combat the Kurdish forces of the YPG (People's Protection Unit), which Türkiye considers an extension of the PKK separatist group. Türkiye's presence in Syria is justified by the need to maintain security on its southern border and to prevent the formation of a Kurdish state in the region.

Libya: Türkiye has supported the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Libya in opposition to General Khalifa Haftar's forces, backed by countries such as France and Russia. Turkish intervention in Libya has been strategic in securing its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and its exploration rights in Libyan waters and establishing alliances in North Africa.

Eastern Mediterranean: Türkiye has been involved in territorial disputes with Greece and Cyprus over the rights to exploit energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean. Natural gas exploration and maritime claims have sparked tensions with the European Union, especially France, which backs Greece in these disputes. Spain, in contrast, has adopted a more neutral stance and positioned itself as an ally of Türkiye, seeking to foster dialogue and stability in the region.

Caucasus: In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Türkiye has been a staunch ally of Azerbaijan, providing it with military and diplomatic support. This alliance is based both on the ethnic and cultural affinity between Turks and Azerbaijanis, and on Türkiye's strategic interest in having more significant influence in the Caucasus, a region of critical geopolitical interest for energy security and the expansion of its regional power.

Modernization of the Defense Industry and Increased Military Autonomy

In parallel with its involvement in regional conflicts, Türkiye has embarked on an ambitious process of modernizing its defense industry. Over the past two decades, Türkiye has increased its investment in the defense sector to reduce its dependence on external suppliers and develop its capabilities in advanced technologies, such as drones and artificial intelligence systems (Borchert, 2024). Key developments include:

Drone Development: Türkiye has become one of the leading producers and exporters of military drones. Turkish drones, such as the Bayraktar TB2, have been used successfully in several conflicts, including those in Syria, Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh, and have demonstrated Türkiye's ability to effectively produce and deploy advanced technologies.

Artificial Intelligence and Cybersecurity: Investment in artificial intelligence for military applications and cybersecurity is a priority in Türkiye's defense strategy. The country has begun to develop its own technologies in these areas, with the aim of strengthening its surveillance, cybersecurity, and unmanned military operations capabilities. The adoption of artificial intelligence for defense allows Türkiye to modernize its military and adapt to new trends in modern warfare.

Increased Military Spending: Türkiye has increased its defense budget significantly, aligning its spending with its ambition to be a regional power. This increase has allowed Türkiye to carry out research and development projects in defense, as well as reduce the need to acquire foreign equipment.

Implications for Spain and the European Union

Türkiye's security policy has repercussions for the European Union and Spain in particular. As an ally within NATO, Spain benefits from the stability that Türkiye can provide in the Mediterranean and on its eastern borders. In addition, Türkiye's commitment to containing migratory flows from the Middle East to Europe contributes to the security of the European region, in which Spain plays an active role.

In the context of tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, Spain has opted for a mediation position, in contrast to other EU countries, such as France, which have adopted confrontational and aggressive positions toward Türkiye. The Spanish position is aligned with its interest in maintaining regional stability and strengthening relations with Türkiye as a strategic ally inside and outside NATO.

Projections and Future Challenges

Despite its advances, Türkiye faces significant challenges in its security policy. Tensions with other NATO members, especially Greece and France, and its complex relationship with the United States and Russia, pose an international context in which Türkiye must balance its regional ambitions with the need to maintain strategic alliances. In addition, increasing its military capabilities and active role in regional conflicts could increase tensions with the EU, where some countries are concerned about Türkiye's growing power (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2023).

Türkiye's strategic importance in the Eastern Mediterranean has grown amidst disputes over maritime boundaries and energy resources. Its assertive policies, including naval exercises and exploration activities, have prompted both cooperation and tensions within NATO. Additionally, Türkiye has played a criti-

cal role in the Black Sea during the Russia-Ukraine conflict, facilitating grain export agreements under UN auspices. Relations with Russia remain complex, balancing economic ties with geopolitical rivalries, while Türkiye's partnership with the U.S. continues to navigate challenges such as the acquisition of S-400 missile systems (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2024).

Türkiye's role in international security and its expansion as a regional power are fundamental aspects of its foreign policy. Its strategic position and modernization in defense have given it considerable influence in its region and beyond. For Spain and the European Union, the challenge lies in finding a balance between working with Türkiye on security and stability issues and managing the tensions that may arise due to regional conflicts and Türkiye's aspirations for autonomy in foreign policy.

Türkiye's Defense Investments

Türkiye has significantly increased its investment in defense in recent decades, driven by the aim of consolidating itself as a regional power and reducing its dependence on external suppliers for military equipment (Kurç, 2024). This effort has resulted in the development of an advanced national defense industry, with proprietary technologies in strategic areas such as drones, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence. The expansion of Türkiye's military and defense capabilities not only responds to its national security needs, but also projects its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean region and conflicts such as those in Syria and Libya.

Defense Autonomy Strategy

One of the priorities of Türkiye's defense policy is technological independence. Türkiye has relied on NATO allies, such as the United States, to acquire military equipment and defense technology. However,

the country has sought to reduce this dependence in recent years to avoid vulnerabilities to possible sanctions or supply restrictions. This approach to autonomy has led Türkiye to invest substantially in research and development, producing advanced equipment that allows it to meet its defense needs.

Among the Strategic Areas in Which Türkiye has Invested are:

Development of National Military Equipment: Türkiye has made significant progress in producing helicopters, tanks, armored vehicles, and missile systems, much of which is designed and manufactured locally. The aim is to equip the Turkish armed forces with state-of-the-art equipment that will allow them to operate independently and export these products to other countries.

Drones and Unmanned Systems: Türkiye has been a pioneer in the development of military drones and unmanned aerial systems. The Bayraktar TB2 and Anka drones, manufactured by the Turkish industry, have gained recognition for their effectiveness in several conflicts, including those in Syria and Libya. These systems have enabled Türkiye to deploy surveillance and attack capabilities accurately and at low costs, consolidating its position in the global military drone market.

Artificial Intelligence and Cybersecurity

Türkiye has recognized the importance of artificial intelligence (AI) and cybersecurity in modern warfare and has allocated considerable resources to developing these technologies in the military field (Başer et al., 2021). AI applications in defense allow Türkiye to enhance its capabilities in critical areas such as surveillance, cybersecurity, and the development of autonomous battlefield systems.

Applications of Artificial Intelligence in Defense:

Türkiye has implemented AI in developing advanced drones and data analysis systems to improve efficiency in decision-making in combat situations. With the integration of AI, Türkiye seeks to automate surveillance and response functions, using technologies that detect threats and gather real-time information for tactical operations.

Strengthening Cybersecurity: In the field of cyber defense, Türkiye has established specialized centers and launched projects to protect its critical infrastructures and sensitive data against possible cyberattacks. This includes the development of cybersecurity platforms and threat detection systems that enable the government and military to defend against increasingly sophisticated threats.

Impact of Defense Industry Expansion

The growth of the Turkish defense industry has not only improved national capabilities in defense but has also allowed Türkiye to increase its influence in the global arms market. Türkiye has begun exporting military equipment to various countries, including drones and armored vehicles, which gives it significant revenues and allows it to establish strategic alliances with other states.

Defense Exports and New Alliances: Exports of drones and other defense equipment have allowed Türkiye to build ties with countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, cementing its role as a provider of affordable and efficient military technology. Strategic alliances based on these exports also strengthen Türkiye's regional and global political position, giving it an advantage in defense trade.

International Defense Cooperation Initiatives: Türkiye has fostered defense cooperation agreements with several countries, expanding its network of international partners. These agreements include but also the export of equipment and collaboration in the research and development of advanced technologies. The expansion of the Turkish defense industry has

thus become a foreign policy tool that projects Turkish influence and allows it to establish lasting relations with allied countries.

Challenges and Obstacles in the Turkish Defense Industry

Despite significant advances in the defense industry, Türkiye faces challenges that could limit its growth in this sector:

International Restrictions and Sanctions: Türkiye has been subject to sanctions from the United States and the European Union in response to certain foreign policy moves, such as acquiring the Russian S-400 defense system. These sanctions have affected its defense industry, especially in procuring critical components. The situation has forced Türkiye to look for alternatives and accelerate the development of its own technology, although restrictions remain a considerable obstacle.

Difficulties in Access to Advanced Technology: Despite progress, Türkiye still relies on specific advanced components from external suppliers, such as aircraft engines and tanks. This dependence limits Türkiye's ability to develop some systems autonomously and complicates its ambition to produce state-of-the-art defense equipment without external intervention. **Internal Economic Pressure:** The expansion of the defense industry has implied an economic burden for the country, with a notable increase in military spending. Against a backdrop of defense, financial instability and currency fluctuations; Türkiye faces the challenge of sustaining its levels of defense investment without compromising other sectors of the economy. As can be seen, Türkiye's defense investments have transformed its position both regionally and globally, allowing it to strengthen its autonomy and project its influence through exporting military technology and modernizing its armed forces. The quest for techno-

logical independence has driven Türkiye to develop a robust national defense industry, a defense industry focused on innovation and the use of artificial intelligence and cybersecurity to respond to contemporary threats. However, Türkiye still faces challenges that could affect the growth of its defense industry, including international restrictions, partial reliance on foreign components, and economic pressure. However, the progress made to date underscores Türkiye's determination to consolidate itself as a self-reliant and competent defense actor, an objective that, if fully achieved, would provide it with greater flexibility in its foreign policy and national defense capability. Türkiye's defense investments have notably benefited Spain through joint projects and technology transfers. The collaboration on submarine development and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) has bolstered Spain's technological capabilities. Furthermore, the Bayraktar drones have been integrated into NATO operations, enhancing collective security measures. Türkiye's advancements in artificial intelligence and cybersecurity have significant implications for its defense strategy, enabling the development of autonomous systems and enhanced cyber-resilience. For instance, the integration of AI in Bayraktar drones has improved targeting precision, critical for NATO missions. However, sustaining high levels of defense investment has posed economic challenges, with defense budgets affected by inflation and currency depreciation.

Conclusion

The relationship between Türkiye and Spain has evolved steadily from a pragmatic diplomatic connection to a strategic alliance based on common interests and a shared vision of cooperation on the international stage. Over the decades, the two countries have forged a strong relationship, characterized by mutual support on critical issues such as Türkiye's accession to the European Union, economic cooperation and collaboration in defense and security.

With a stance of firm support for Turkish integration into the EU, Spain has become a fundamental ally for Türkiye within the European bloc. This support has been sustained regardless of the government changes in Spain, showing a bipartisan commitment in fa-

vor of the government in Spain, showing a bipartisan commitment to the Turkish-Spanish relationship. Unlike other European powers, Spain has seen Türkiye as a key partner in building a more diverse and resilient Europe, capable of seizing the opportunities and facing the challenges of a complex region such as the Eastern Mediterranean. Shared economic interests have been a fundamental pillar of this relationship, with strategic sectors such as renewable energy, technology and tourism at the heart of cooperation. Bilateral agreements and Turkish-Spanish summits have made it possible to formalize this collaboration and lay the foundations for an economic relationship that continues to expand, benefiting both countries and strengthening their interdependence. In defense, Türkiye has made tremendous progress in modernizing its armed forces and developing its defense industry, focusing on self-sufficiency and advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and cybersecurity. These advances, combined with an assertive foreign policy, have allowed Türkiye to consolidate its regional power, with influence in critical conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean, Syria and the Caucasus. For Spain, cooperation with Türkiye in defense and security has become a strategic element, especially in its shared participation in NATO and its interests in stability in the Mediterranean region.

Looking ahead, the relationship between Türkiye and Spain faces both opportunities and challenges. Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean and the complexities of Türkiye's domestic and foreign policy present obstacles to the advancement of its EU candidacy and to its cooperation with European countries. However, the Turkish-Spanish alliance has proven to be resilient and adaptable, and both countries share the will to find solutions and foster ever-deeper cooperation. In conclusion, Türkiye and Spain have built a solid and beneficial bilateral relationship, based on mutual respect and a shared understanding of their strategic interests. As the international landscape changes, this relationship will continue to evolve, with the possibility of both countries playing an increasingly important role in the security, economy, and politics of their shared region and beyond. The Turkish-Spanish collaboration represents a model of alliance that balances national interests and shared objectives, consolidating its global influence potential.

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