



TURKISH MEDIA AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR

The events in the Eastern Europe lately and particularly the Russia's invasion of Ukraine's territories have sparked great interest in the Turkish media and public discourses. While most contemporary wars have also taken public attention, the Russo-Ukrainian war was perceived with an extraordinary importance. The reasons for this can be traced in several domains: Firstly, Turkey's actual political position in the region and needless to say, its geographical location. Secondly, Turkey's vast historical and cultural interest and influence in the region, which puts an even further emphasis in its rivalry with Russia. Thirdly, the economic outcomes of such a war for Turkey are very damaging and puts the Turkish government in the spotlight. Especially during a period of the Turkish government's indecisive efforts to strengthen its bonds with Russia, this war comes at two costs; not only the direct economic consequences themselves, but also delegitimizing a strategic alliance between Russia and the Erdogan government and further make it more difficult to maintain a balance policy and hence its ambitions in the region. The more the Turkish public opinion swings towards anti-Russian sentiments, the more pressure the Turkish government feels to go back towards a pro-western position constrainedly. Hitherto, the Turkish public opinion about Russia was largely negative until recently. Going back centuries, from the historical hostility between the two empires; centuries of wars between Ottomans and Russians and continuing with the cold war into the twentieth century. Today, we can safely claim that the Ukrainian war has revived this negative perception in the Turkish public sphere, and especially more so within the Turkish nationalists and liberals, which are two main pillars of the Erdogan government's social structure. However, the government tries to continue towards a more balanced policy nonetheless. This separation between the Turkish public opinion and politics drives the Erdogan government to a great challenge. In this public lecture, we will discuss this inevitable duality and try to identify the issues the war has created within the Turkish media and public domain; then finally will seek answers to what the future may offer.