

# TWO ALLIES IN THE BLACK SEA: TURKEY-UKRAINE DEFENSE INDUSTRY RELATIONS

Burak Çalışkan



**INSAMER**  
İHH İNSANİ VE SOSYAL ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ  
IHH HUMANITARIAN AND SOCIAL RESEARCH CENTER  
مركز البحوث الإنسانية و الاجتماعية

To cite this article: Çalışkan, Burak. "Two Allies in the Black Sea: Turkey-Ukraine Defense Industry Relations",  
INSAMER, 30.08.2019.

 Analysis

Following the 2014 Russian invasion of Crimea, Ukraine stepped up its efforts to strengthen its military in facing any potential threat from its powerful neighbor. So, Kyiv has been trying to modernize its military to adhere to NATO standards. Henceforth, Turkey, as the second largest army in NATO and as the Black Sea's littoral state had come up as an important actor for Ukraine.

Cooperation between the two countries has actually been around for a number of years. Ankara and Kiev had agreed in 2014 to pursue a number of joint projects, including that of the defense industry. In this process, joint production decisions were made in many areas such as warplanes, missile systems, aircraft engines, UAVs, radar production, armored vehicles, navigation and space projects.

The two countries' complementary objectives in the defence industry proved to be effective in political relations to the aforementioned

decisions. Indeed, Turkey has made a significant progress in recent years in its defence industry as well as in its defence-related technology transfers. Meanwhile, Ankara's NATO allies have neither acted in a win-win relationship in the defence industry nor shared their know-how. Ukraine however has – inherited from the former Soviet Union - the knowledge and companies of defence industry. In this context, Turkey, who is trying to empower itself defence industry and Ukraine, who is trying to modernize its armed forces, regard each other as a valuable partner.

Turkish and Ukrainian military industry representatives gathered in Ankara in 2015, where Ankara sent approximately \$ 1 million of military ammunition to Kiev. In 2016, a strategic cooperation agreement was signed between the two countries in the field of defense industry. This was soon followed by Turkey's provision of \$ 4 million in military ammunition and equipment to the Ukrainian Armed Forces.



**INSAMER**  
İHH İNSANİ VE SOSYAL ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ  
IHH HUMANITARIAN AND SOCIAL RESEARCH CENTER  
مركز البحوث الإنسانية و الاجتماعية

In July 2018, Turkey and Ukraine conducted the first ever Turkey-Ukraine Defense Industry Cooperation meeting to accelerate their defense cooperation. The most significant outcome from the meeting was the cooperation protocol between Ukraine's state-owned company Ukroboronprom and Turkey's company Aselsan.

## A Cornerstone for Ukraine - Turkey Relations

In January 2019, Ukraine's former President Petro Poroshenko declared on social media that the country has signed a deal with Turkey regarding the Bayraktar's TB2 Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV). The purchase serves an important milestone for military cooperation between Ankara and Kiev.

The agreement included the delivery of six Bayraktar TB2 UAVs to the Ukrainian Army within one year. It also aimed to provide the systems and vehicles of three ground control stations in Ukraine. Ukraine announced that the delivery of UAVs and flight tests of Bayraktar TB2 were successfully performed in March 2019. After Qatar, Ukraine became the second country to buy Bayraktar TB2. Ukrainian delegations that attended the test flights for Bayraktar

TB2 said they were impressed with its combat success and flight performance. The vehicles are purchased to fight Russia-backed militias, especially in Donbass.

## Zelensky's Visit

Vladimir Zelensky, who won the elections held in April 2019, he made an official visit to Turkey on 7-8 August as the President of Ukraine.

Zelensky visited Baykar Makine's armed drone and its Research and Development (R&D) facilities following his attendance at the Turkey-Ukraine Business Forum and the Fener Greek Orthodox Patriarchate.

Zelensky listened to the details of the projects carried out in the previous administration within the Baykar's program framework; and he also had the opportunity to examine Baykar's new projects closely. Indeed, his stated wish to develop cooperation with Turkey in the field of defense industry proves how the Ukrainian President has taken concrete steps in this regard.

At this point, the joint company agreement between Ukroboronprom (Ukrpetrskport) and Baykar Makine was signed with the participation of Zelensky. This partnership company is expected to operate in the field of high precision weapons and aerospace



technologies.

The National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine also announced that the aim of the joint agreement is to produce modern weapons by bringing together the defense industry capacities of the

*The problems that both countries have with Russia have served as a blessing in disguise in the development of Turkey-Ukraine relations.*

two countries, which leads to the creation of many important projects in this regard. In this sense, what has been achieved previously gives hope for new, bigger and better projects.

## **Rising of Turkey's Defense Industry**

Since mid 2000s in particular, Turkey with its accelerated domestic production activities in the defense industry has become an exporter in a short period of time, evident of its tremendous success.

According to Honorary Consul of Ukraine Görkem Şehsuvar, Turkey's success in defense industry technology has attracted the other countries in the region. The agreements held between Turkey and Ukraine also demonstrates the value of Turkish brands. One of the leading Ukrainian security experts Maksim Gluşenko also uttered that Turkey made great progress in its defense industry in the last decade; he also said that Ukraine needs to continue to work more closely with Turkey in this field.

In addition, it can be said that the problems that both countries have with Russia have served

as a blessing in disguise in the development of Turkey-Ukraine relations. Tension did rise between Moscow and Ankara, especially after Russia sent its troops to Syria in 2015.

Despite the fact that Turkey and Russia are now in a normalization phase and are working together on Syria, the fact remains that the two countries have disagreements and conflicts of interest in the Caucasus, Middle East and the Black Sea. In this framework, considering that Turkey and Ukraine are located at the south and north corners of the Black Sea, the geopolitical importance and interest of both countries become crystal clear. Regardless of how Turkey and Russia have to cooperate within certain aspects in Syria, Russia's influence in Southern Turkey (via its presence in Syria) can become a threat for many years to come. As such, a strategic partnership that Turkey develops with Ukraine has the potential to break Russia's lurking threat for Turkey (via its influence on Damascus) and reduce Russia's ability to maneuver in the region.