



A subject that was raised in one of previous newsletters of the Yaroslavl Forum, concerning 'Russia and Turkey: the European non-West', was met with a notable response from our readers, as this issue remains relevant today and is becoming even more topical. In this current issue, the Russian Journal briefly returns to this subject, presenting the opinion of Alexander Svarants, a Professor at the Armenian Institute of International Law and Political Science (Moscow), who is the author of the book 'Pan-Turkism in Turkey's Geo-Strategy in the Caucasus' (in Russian, 2002).

THE PROSPECTS FOR PARTNERSHIP AND CONFRONTATION

Alexander Svarants

Relations between Russia and Turkey in the Black Sea region have a long history. As for the present stage of their interaction, it is possible to speak about several notable aspects about their relations. **The first aspect** is that of energy. Russia is supplying natural gas and other energy products to international markets and it is realising the 'South Stream' and 'Blue Stream' pipeline projects. Turkey is willing to re-export Russian gas, which doesn't suit Russia and it is also studying alternatives that have to do with running the pipeline across the territory of Bulgaria and Greece (the proposed Burgas-Alexandroupolis pipeline).

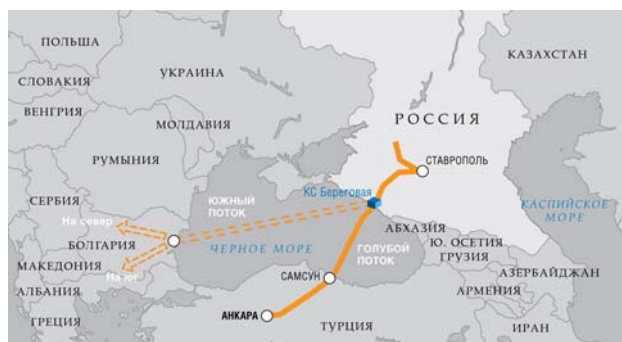
The second aspect is political and strategic in nature. In light of the global geopolitical transformations that occurred in the 1990s, which began with the breakup of the Soviet Union, combined with the present situation in Russia, Turkey has tried to vitalise its political, economic and military presence in the Black Sea basin. As is known, in the first half of the 1990s, Turkey initiated the Black Sea Economic Cooperation organisation, in which Ankara aimed to play the role of a regional leader, however, it was not particularly successful in its efforts.

The Crimean peninsula is an important object of competition area-wise between Turkey and Russia in the Black Sea region. **Using the ethnic and faith-based elements with respect to the Crimean Tatars, Turkey is trying to strengthen its position in the peninsula and, accordingly, to weaken Russia's military and political presence there.**

The active penetration of NATO in the Black Sea region essentially forces Turkey to pay attention to geopolitical actors in the aquatic area of the Black Sea. Thus, Bulgaria and Romania, which are both members of NATO, are expanding their space for U.S.-led manoeuvres in the region. If we look at the U.S. policy in Georgia and the policy of the Georgian state administration, we will also discover additional opportunities for the U.S. and NATO, both with respect to the military logistics involved in transferring American cargos in the direction of Afghanistan and Iran, and with respect to the prospects of Georgia becoming a member of NATO. Turkey is naturally apprehensive of similar lines of U.S. policy towards Ukraine, which was more successful during the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko and due to the actual division within Ukrainian society and NATO's partnership with Kyiv.

In other words, **while Turkey remains a member of NATO and a Western satellite, it is far from monopolising that role, and is no longer the flagman of NATO (a.k.a. American) policy in the Black Sea region.**

As for the conflict in South Ossetia and the subsequent process of official state recognition of both South Ossetia and Abkhazia by Russia, this did introduce serious changes into the



'Blue Stream' gas pipeline and the project map for the 'South Stream' gas pipeline

policies of other states in the region, as well as the leading countries of the West. As is known, Turkey had come up with several initiatives with regard to the formation of a security platform with the key participation of Ankara and Moscow. This idea of peacekeeping was officially welcomed, although it evoked certain contradictions not only with Russia but also with other countries, and especially with Iran. Iran is resentful of Turkey's regional initiatives and activities in the Caucasus region, as well as its interaction with the BRIC countries and the Middle East.

The prospects of a partnership between Russia and Turkey in the Caucasus is quite real; however, the platform that Turkey is proposing triggers suspicions among the countries of the Southern Caucasus, particularly Armenia. Since Armenia and Russia are important strategic partners, as well as military and political allies, the question of Russian-Turkish interaction in the region is likely to remain unclear for a long time to come. ■

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