

## PROSPECTS FOR THE EUROPEAN NON-WEST

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As strange as it may seem, Russia and Turkey have many similarities. Not only does this bring a positive angle to our mutual relations, but it also poses a serious problem. Is a strategic partnership really possible for two states that are so similar and yet so often find themselves at odds with each other?

Relations between Russia and Turkey have almost never been friendly. We have always competed between ourselves in a very limited geographical space (the Caucasus, Southern and Eastern Europe, Central Asia). In spite of the more than three hundred years of history characterised by Russian-Turkish war, Russia and Turkey have still remained partners in both the economic and cultural fields.

Today, both Russia and Turkey are somewhat a part of a Greater Europe, but not necessarily the West *per se*. In other words, they belong to the European non-West, which includes those countries that

have accepted European values and institutions, but, at the same time, have never become full-fledged members of the West for one reason or another. **Both Moscow and Ankara are, in a sense, outcasts from the West. They are not welcomed as members of Western organisations, and their present image in the minds of Europeans is defined by stereotypes of the past.**

All these factors make our countries look for the right approach in dealing with each other, so as to become closer together. In the period that Vladimir Putin was the President of Russia, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey came closer to achieving real partnership for the first time. They have started to forge relations in the sphere of economics and energy and reached an agreement concerning the Caucasus. Russia and Turkey have even outlined common foreign policy initiatives. Nevertheless, the question remains as to whether this is just a tactical friendship of two 'outcasts from the West', or whether old geopolitical philosophy will ultimately end up winning out as soon as there is no longer any need for this 'friendship against' the current common partner-enemy, that being the West and the USA.

It is a known fact that it the typical approach taken by the pro-Muslim Party of Justice and Development (PJD), which governs in Turkey today, to be prag-

matic on the one hand, while paying close attention to what's happening in the East on the other hand. Despite the fact that the desire to join the EU remains the first priority of Turkish foreign policy, the majority of the Turkish political elite realises that this is not going to happen any time in the near future. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan needs Turkey to become a member of the European Union, since such a move would present the opportunity to prevent the military from putting pressure on the authorities under the convenient pretext of democratisation, observing respect for human rights, and establishing European standards with respect to social and political life.

As for Turkey's relationship with Russia, since the policy of confrontation, which was in place from 1945 to the 2000s, did not produce the expected outcome, nowadays the PJD has set itself up as an alternative for all the previous political parties responsible for bringing Turkey to a deadlock. As a result of this, its programme reads as follows: *Friendly relations with the Russian Federation should be supported on the basis of co-operation, not of competition in Central Asia and the North Caucasus*. In general, developments in the near future will demonstrate whether the old paradigm of relations between these two countries can indeed be broken and whether the countries of the 'European non-West' can move on to a new level of becoming closer.

For the first time since the early 2000s, the elites of these two coun-

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tries, feeling some kinship and identity in terms of existing problems, have found a common space for co-operation. This occurred when Recep Erdogan came to

power in Turkey, and Vladimir Putin had just positioned himself as the leader of Russia. At that time, during semi-closed consultations, an agreement was reached whereby Moscow and Ankara would not provide any help to the Kurdish and Chechen separatists correspondingly. In 2008, as a consequence of the war in South Ossetia, Russia and Turkey started to discuss a collective plan to create 'A platform of stability for the Caucasus', which was to resolve the conflicts through the involvement of regional actors (Moscow, Ankara, Teheran), without any involvement on the part of the West. So the countries tried to expand relations from the sphere of economic co-operation to that pertaining to security issues. However, it is fair to note that the US government has suffered a whiplash of fear, which was probably exactly what the authors of the treaty had been striving to achieve.

**The Turkish elite is obviously somewhat outpacing Russia in terms of its development along the lines of the European non-West.** To understand the Turkish model better, it should probably be seen as a variant of what we call 'sovereign democracy'. Both there and here, it is about creating a kind of modern state, which has absorbed the main social-political, economic and technological achievements of recent years, while also preserving the sovereignty and internal special nature of the country in the context of a globalising world.

A 'sovereign democracy' in different countries usually relies (or tries to rely) on the same wider social grouping (the masses). This is the middle class, not in the Western but in the local understanding of the term. In Russia, this group is represented as 'Putin's majority', while in the Muslim world, particularly in Turkey, it is the urban middle class and those who are usually called the black-coated proletariat. This group includes students, engineers, intellectual and professional elites, who are not satisfied with the present lines of revenue distribution within society.

Russian-Turkish relations also pose certain threats. While statements made by European leaders about the end of multiculturalism are harmful to relations between Turkey and the EU, as well as any plans for their mutual integration, Turkophobia in the Russian media and security services is also harmful in terms of our own relations with Turkey, especially in terms of their strategic prospects.

Turkey is offended by what is written in the Russian media about the PJD. Russian journalists can with ease call the Turkish national football team 'janizary'. The situation is even worse when it comes to Russian cultural figures. One example of this happening is the miserable representation of the Osmons in the recent TV series *Bayezet*. And also there is the absurd ban on books written by the marvellous Turkish theologian Said Nursi, the pride of Turkey and the most prominent intellectual of this country in the twentieth century. For the time being, while it is all being hidden behind the curtain of Oriental diplomatic courtesy, there can be no doubt that nothing will actually be forgotten. ■

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## NON-EUROPEAN WEST, NON-WESTERN EUROPE



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**Russia is European but not Western, while Turkey has been Western for a long time – with all qualifications – but not (fully) European.** The leadership of both the West (the US and the EU) and Russia have missed a lot of opportunities to build common institutions and instil trust in this relationship.

For a long time, Turkey has been part of the West – thanks to its alignment with NATO during the Cold War and membership in institutions such as the Council of Europe and the OECD. Relations with Europe have been more problematic, however, as Turkey has, since the early 19th century, tried to emulate European models but has often been rebuffed by Europe as culturally different. We are now witnessing the latest episode in this lengthy history. Secondly, Turkey has significantly fallen short of European standards of democracy and human rights. It was only the promise of EU membership that served as a catalyst of political changes within the country after 1999. Sadly, since that time, much of that momentum has been lost.

Nowadays, Turkey has turned away from the West (although this cannot be said to be altogether

true given its continued and committed support for NATO) and this is happening due to the fact that it feels it has been betrayed by the EU. In the 1990s, Turkey was still considered to be in the Western fold thanks to its support for the West's efforts in Iraq (during the first Gulf war) and in the former Yugoslavia. It was only after 2008, when it came to the clash with Israel over Gaza and later on, with respect to support for Iran, that policymakers in Washington and the major European capitals started to question Turkey's decisions. That tendency encouraged Ankara to invest much more into deepening ties with its neighbours: the countries of the Middle East, Russia, the Caucasus states, and the Western Balkans. That is why Turkey's policy was ultimately called *zero-problems*.

Turkey's present policy is of a 'multi-vector' nature. Cooperation with Russia is key for Ankara but Turkey believes that one can simultaneously do business with Moscow, Washington and – with all qualifications – Brussels. Relations with Moscow will continue to deepen and expand since there are many areas of common interest; however, this will not result in any kind of union. ■