

FROM CONFLICT TO CO-OPERATION

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Russia and Turkey are two countries that have perpetually had a friend-enemy relationship. For several centuries already, they have encountered conflict in the Caucasus and in the Black Sea region. However, that time is history is behind us now. Today, **in the era of geopolitical insecurity, close strategic co-operation is possible between Russia and Turkey exactly where Turkish and Russian troops have shed their blood - in the Crimea, the Caucasus, and in the region around the Black Sea.** Present-day Turkey is ready for such a strategic partnership. The country's relationship with its European allies leaves a lot to be desired, the issue of its application for EU membership has not been resolved to date, and conflicts between Turkey and the United States are becoming more frequent. Consequently, willy-nilly Turkey has found it necessary to look in our

direction for a partner.

For the time being, Russia certainly looks upon Turkey not so much as an ally but actually as a reliable partner. **The main task is to prevent any conflict situation from emerging in the Caucasus and Crimea regions.** Our countries should be on the same side in this regard. But to make this possible, what is required is mutual proposals in terms of the development of a co-operation strategy, and beyond that, strategic planning in relation to our collective actions in the Black Sea region, as well as co-operation in the Caucasus and Crimea.

It seemed that the events that occurred in South Ossetia in 2008 would have put Russia at odds with Turkey, or at the very least result in strained relations. But fortunately this did not happen. The lesson learned during those events was that one should cooperate with the Turks in a broad and comprehensive way.

I paid a visit to Turkey recently. During various meetings with Turkish politicians and public figures, I often asked them why the Americans were running the show in the Turkish ports, why NATO ships have come to establish a presence on the Black Sea, and why our own countries' fleets do not maintain a dominant presence in that regard? These questions are also of interest to the Turks and they are willing to answer them.

In order for Turkey's answers to these questions to accord with Russian interests, the Turkish side should first listen to our arguments as well. **Likewise, we must listen to the Turkish proposals** and analyse them. Then, on this basis, we should develop counter-offers, which will ultimately allow our countries to come to a compromise agreement.

In the case that Russia and Turkey are to form an alliance, they should definitely exclude the United States from involvement therein. However, such an arrangement could potentially also include Iran and Syria. Ankara enjoys rather warm strategic relations with these countries. In order to suc-

ceed in the Black Sea region, Russia will have to work closely within the Iran-Turkey-Syria triangle.

The economic development of Turkey is not effective at the present time. But **this represents an economy that can become the basis for strong partner relations** in the fields of geopolitics, strategy, and culture. After all, economic co-operation between our countries is developing much better at this point than our common political dialogue.

It is necessary to realise that Russia is neither East nor West. It represents a civilisation that is unique in its own right, while Turkey is an absolutely Eurasian state, which can be seen as part of Muslim civilisation while professing its own branch of Turkish Islam. As for Muslims living in Russia today, they mostly profess this category of Turkish Islam too. In that regard, we have very close ties to Turkey. As for Europe, we do not quite see eye to eye, not in terms of our cultural codes and not in terms of our system of values, morality, and spirituality.

It should be understood that in terms of technology, administration and legal culture, the Western experience can be borrowed from, but development in this respect is possible only on an original and traditional basis. Turkey is already following this path, while we still have to learn to do so. The Turks have already realised the mistakes that were made by their leader Kemal Ataturk, whereby they now understand that the Turks cannot be transformed into Europeans. The Russian thinker Nikolay Danilevsky argued nearly the same thing when he stated that the civilisation-related principles of one cultural-historical type cannot necessarily be transmitted to others. Only in the USSR did we enjoy a unique experience of co-existence and mutual enrichment of different nations' cultures and faiths within a single civilisation. ■

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