

## THE NOTION OF THE REGIONAL LEADER HAS BECOME MURKY



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When examining Turkey's membership in the Western world one cannot help but notice that Turkey is part of almost all Western institutions, and in some cases, has been there since their inception. Take for instance Turkey's role in the European Council or NATO. From these two institutions it seems there is no question that Turkey is very much a Western country. However, the real question about Turkey is that from the perspective of the European Union, it can be considered as a European country, and that is why it has candidacy and accession prospects. Moreover, Turkey is in a similar position to that of Russia, as both countries are part of Europe owing to their historic ties and, whether they like it or not, their geography. They are also very large countries, which are difficult to swallow. However, it should be noted that both nations have a different way of looking at themselves – as Eurasians and, of course, as Muslims.

This contradiction also affects the elites. Some representatives of Turkey's elite have worked hard to integrate into the West, but not all of them. Some reject this objective, remembering the nation's colonial past and its current situation. Nevertheless, this sentiment is common amongst the elites of

nations everywhere and is not only characteristic of Russia or Turkey. Every society has its own version of 'Slavophiles' and 'Turkophiles.'

In the Turkish case, there is also the added component of Islam. In regards to the context of the world today this Islamic identity is a very forceful one, and one that complicates matters in terms of Turkish relations with Europe and the West.

Turkey has a great desire to become a regional power. In fact, to a certain extent, Turkey has already become a regional power. That being said, I believe that **currently, we have a rather murky understanding of what being a regional power means.** Many people perceive that being a regional power means that you can do whatever you want regionally, yet Turkey is now learning that this is not the case. Turkey must take care of its relations with the United States and its responsibilities as a NATO member. There are all sorts of other relations as well and with them come numerous conditions. In the meantime, Iran is Turkey's chief competitor for regional influence and it will take a while before the region really settles. Turkey must also come to terms with its multi-regional identity before it can fully assert itself as a steadfast regional power. ■

## TURKEY'S DELICATE GAME



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There are mainly two points of confrontation with respect to Russian-Turkish relations. They are the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and Turkey's ambition to become a regional hub. First, Ankara's tense relations with Yerevan is hugely cumbersome in terms of Turkey's relations with Russia, which supports Yerevan. It is especially sensitive on the issue of the allegations of genocide against the Armenians. Moreover, the protracted conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh continues to be the main obstacle to the process of normalising Turkish-Armenian relations. Given the fact that Russia has been supporting – both military and financially – Armenia and Yerevan's position in this conflict, it is not likely that Armenia will withdraw from these territories.

Second, **Russia is not interested in seeing Turkey position itself as a regional energy hub, which would link non-Russia-based energy sources, such as the Caspian, Iranian, and Iraqi sources, with European markets.** This would ultimately mean that Russia would lose its monopoly with respect to European energy markets. In this regard, the energy sanctions imposed on Iran are in line with

Russia's energy interests in Europe, but they are contrary to Turkey's energy interests, as this country not only wishes to diversify its energy supplies, but is also interested in materialising its dreams of becoming a regional energy hub.

It would not be incorrect to assume that **Turkey has been playing a delicate balancing game between Russia and Iran, in one camp, and the US and EU in the other.** An attempt to play this elusive game is sufficient to explain why Turkey is delaying the decision with respect to the construction of the South Stream pipeline. Most likely, the country is trying to use the South Stream as a bargaining chip to win concessions for itself in relation to the Samsun-Ceyhan oil pipeline project. Along with this, Turkey has been playing a delicate balancing game between Russia and the USA. According to many energy experts, either the Russian-supported South Stream or the American-supported Nabucco (but likely not both) has the chance of being materialised. In this context, one could argue that Ankara is trying to buy time for the Nabucco partners to resolve their disputes by delaying its decision on the South Stream. ■