

THE PRAGMATIC FRIENDLINESS

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Nowadays, the ruling party in Turkey is the Party of Justice and Development, which positions itself as a moderate fundamentalist group within the Islamic context. While Islamic solidarity might not be highlighted, it is nevertheless one of the central ones in the general ideology of the Turkish leadership. But there is one exception to that – **Turkish foreign policy involves the development of relations with all countries, first of all with its neighbours in the region.** This strategy is mainly due to the fact that, around 2002-2003, Turkey began to feel somewhat isolated in terms of foreign policy. Turkey was not approved for accession to the European Union and from the look of it, the country will not be admitted anytime in the next 10-15 years.

In understanding the position of Europe, the Turks started to develop relations with their Arabic neighbouring countries, though Turkey has had traditionally complicated

relations with these neighbours, including both Iraq and Syria. Suffice it to say that there was significant barrier, consisting of mine fields of nearly 60 thousand mines on the border between Turkey and Syria. Turkey has started to develop relations with Iran. It has rendered and still renders many services to Iran, receiving rather visible economic profits in return. Over recent years, Turkey has encountered a number of strategic agreements with Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and a number of other countries. Its relationship with Qatar is very good. The Turks greeted the fact that Mubarak was ousted because, following the Egyptian revolution, the Muslim Brothers have gained ground, and they are ideologically aligned with Turkey.

'At the same time, over the last 5-7 years, a pan-Turkic direction in Turkey's foreign policy, which dominated in the 1980s and especially in the 1990s, has fallen by the wayside. And the pragmatism demonstrated by the Party of Justice and Development, when the long-term geo-economic interests are cornerstones, made them hide such nationalist rhetoric as 'Turkey is the leader of the Turkic world' further in the background. This is evidenced, in particular, by the growing number of contradictions between Turkey and Azerbaijan. Also it is proven by the fact that Turkey is now avoiding any warming of its relations with the Central Asian republics, which it previously tried to advance in the early 1990s. A few Turkish colleges and cultural centres remain outposts of pan-Turkism on the territory of Ukraine and Russia. But the situation is nevertheless not as it used to be about 15-20 years ago.

Speaking with respect to Turkey's position on the Northern Caucasus, we should consider the following important point: both officially and

in reality, **Turkey primarily supports the policy being pursued by Russia in the Northern Caucasus in spite of the Islamic factor.** This position corresponds to the specific national geopolitical interests of Turkey. Stability in the country is very important for the Turks, but for the last twenty or thirty years the Kurdish issue has been the main internal destabilising problem. There are obvious similarities between the Russian and Turkish situations in terms of their respective national movements. Conditionally speaking, if Turkey supports quasi-national liberation movements in the Northern Caucasus, why then does Turkey not support the similar national liberation movement of the Kurds? Ankara supports Russia although it is discreet about it. However, according to democratic principles, the Turks did not proceed to repress the rather strong Chechen expatriate community residing in Turkey.

As for the whole Caucasus region, the Turks, on several occasions, have unofficially offered to help Russia stabilise the situation – since the region is also close to the Kurdish regions. The Turks made such an offer as early as 1989, when problems with Baku started to emerge. The Turks have a rather good relationship with the Saakashvili regime too. But this is also due to the fact that Saakashvili is evidently pro-American, and the Americans have pushed him to develop relations with Iran. The Turks strive to develop relations with Armenia, and the majority of the Armenian business community sees this in a good light, as the volume of trade between Armenia and Turkey is notably greater than, for example, that between Armenia and Russia. ■

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