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Turkey reminds Russia of the contradictions...

Erdoğan characterised relations with Russia as ‘multifaceted’ at the BRICS summit in Kazan. However, the many facets do not mean that everything is in perfect order. The Turks once again reminded the Russians of some of the contradictions.

What are the main contradictions between Turkey and Russia?

It cannot, of course, be said that there may not be contradictions in the interstate relations of even close partners. And in the situation between Turkey and Russia, this peculiarity is supplemented by issues of complex history, geographical neighborhood, the military and political attachment of Turks to the Anglo-Saxon-led West, as well as ethno-political and religious aspects.

After the Special Military Operation, Europe itself will speed up the restoration of ties with a strong Russia

The collapse of the USSR and subsequent geopolitical transformations in the post-Soviet space were perceived in Turkey, as well as in the NATO bloc as a whole, as an historical weakness of Russia. Being a small part of Europe and a significant area of Asia, Turkey, while retaining its Western vector of strategic orientation in terms of security and economy, began to orient towards the East (or rather the post-Soviet geography of the newly formed Turkic republics).

Ankara is well aware that the EU will not soon accept Turkey as a member. However, Turkey and continental Europe are linked by a common NATO shield, Ankara is a member of the EU Customs Union; it is still on the agenda of European integration, it

receives modern production technologies from Europeans, and it uses its favorable geography for EU logistics services.

It is Turkey's tactic of a 'Eurasian bridge' for the West's (US, UK, NATO and EU) access to post-Soviet Asia (South Caucasus and Central Asia) that allows Ankara to resuscitate its ambitious geopolitical plans to upgrade its status from a regional state in favor of the cornerstone of the Turkic pole (arising from the doctrines of neopanturanism and neo-Ottomanism). In the economy, Turkey seeks to ensure a connecting role on the way to the richest natural resources of the 'Turkic world'. All this is possible with the systemic weakening of Russia and reduction of its leading role in the mentioned southern regions of the post-Soviet space.

Accordingly, pan-Turkic (ethno-cultural, economic, energy, transport and communication, military and political) integration under Turkish leadership creates the basis for serious contradictions with Russia. Obviously, the institutionalization of this process, which started in 1992 with the formation of the Turkish Agency for Cooperation and Coordination of Communication (TIKA) and then transformed in 2009 into the Turkic Council and then in 2021 into the Organisation of Turkic States (OTS), has not yet been completed.

The OTS has become an expression of the political interstate integration of Turkic states, but its system also includes the All-Turkic Academy (as an institution of educational and intellectual integration) and the Conference on Cooperation of Special Services of Turkic Countries (established in 1998). In the future, Turkey plans to create, with the assistance of NATO, an Asian bureau of the alliance called 'Army of Turan' within the framework of this policy, to form a unified transport and energy system and the Turanian economic market.

Meanwhile, Turkey also adheres to positions opposite to Russia's interests in other regions of the post-Soviet space, in particular, with regard to the Crimean peninsula and Ukraine. In Crimea, Ankara relies on the local Turkic factor represented by the Crimean Tatars and so it publicly calls the reunification of the Crimean peninsula with Russia an annexation by Moscow, because it wants to annex Crimea to itself at a later point in time (or reproduce the Cyprus scenario) given its strategic importance in the Black Sea basin. It is easier for Turkey to take Crimea from weak Ukraine than from powerful Russia.

Turkey maintains active military and technical co-operation with the Kiev regime and supplies the regime with its weapons and military equipment (including drones, armored combat vehicles, small arms), which is used by the Ukrainian armed forces against

Russian servicemen and civilians. Obviously, Ankara is trying to compensate its alleged disagreement to support the sanctions regime against Russia with political revelations and military aid to Ukraine in front of the West.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan stated in an interview with Hurriyet on 3 November: “A fair solution to the war must be found within the framework of Ukraine’s territorial integrity.”

This statement by Fidan on preserving the territorial integrity of Ukraine is in fact a continuation of past public statements by President Erdoğan himself and his predecessor in the Foreign Ministry, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu. The Turks have previously considered Crimea to be part of Ukraine, and called the liberation of well-known regions in the southeast a “Russian annexation”.

Naturally, such an unambiguous political position and Turkey’s military-technical assistance to the Kyiv regime does not allow us to count on Ankara’s objective mediation in the political settlement of Russian-Ukrainian relations. If Turkey calls the Russian Armed Forces’ Special Military Operation in Ukraine “aggression and annexation”, then how can we characterize the actions of Turkey’s own security forces in Syria, Iraq and Karabakh?

Another controversial issue in contemporary Turkish-Russian relations is the blocking of bank payments to Russian businesses by Turkish financial institutions under US pressure. In other words, the Turks want to receive multi-billion dollar profits from Russia (e.g. in the construction business, tourism, gas supplies and sales), but are “afraid” of American sanctions in terms of its own payment situation to Russia.

Turkey is interested in opening the shortest route for spatial communication with the rest of the Turkic world through a weak and defeated Armenia, i.e. the Zangezur Corridor. At the same time, Turkish diplomacy is building its tactics in such a way that Russia will provide them with maximum assistance in terms of pressure on Armenia with promises to establish Russian border control over the 43-km section of the road in Zangezur.

Where can the aggravation of Turkish-Russian contradictions lead? Despite all the divergent positions and interests of Turkey and Russia, it is obvious that we are united by a common desire to eliminate the dictates of the West (the United States and Europe). And in this context, for almost a quarter of a century Russia and Turkey have been able to achieve a mutually beneficial and dynamic partnership mainly in the economic sphere. The latter has made it possible to somewhat strengthen Turkey’s economic sovereignty, to exclude military escalation in the Black Sea Straits zone during the period of the Special

Military Operation, to offer and partially implement major energy projects (two gas pipelines — the Blue Stream and TurkStream; the Akkuyu and Sinop Nuclear power plants, a gas hub, a grain hub, mass tourism, construction business, etc.) to the Turks.

However, the deepening contradictions over Ukraine and Crimea, as well as Central Asia and the South Caucasus, may eventually nullify the positive dynamics of bilateral relations and create a conflict situation between our countries. Turkey with or without NATO is unlikely to be able to defeat Russia in a military conflict, and all its plans with ‘neo-’ prefixes will fall apart like a house of cards. Some local military successes of the Turkish army in Libya, Karabakh and Syria have formed false stereotypes about Turkey’s invincibility. However, in the situation with Israel, Ankara cannot offer either the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip or the Arabs of Lebanon tangible military assistance, apart from loud verbal threats.

Russia is not interested in aggravating relations with neighboring Turkey, and has invested a lot of time, money and effort to increase trade turnover and improve ties with Ankara. However, Russia will not be forever ‘perplexed’ by the continuing policy of Turkish complicity with the Kiev regime, disguised as some kind of mediation. If Turkey cannot reach an agreement with Europe for more than half a century, then Russia is certainly not even intending to apply to the EU: after the Special Military Operation, Europe itself will speed up the restoration of ties with a strong Russia.

Erdogan’s time is not eternal, but the principles of relations with Russia must form a positive continuity. Otherwise, everything can be lost in a short period of time.

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