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The main directions of Turkey's policy in Central Asia

Abstract. *Central Asia is strategically important for the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic region. The region's energy resources are vital to global energy security and it is a major hub for oil and gas pipelines and trade corridors. This article provides an overview of Turkey's bilateral and multilateral relations with the states of Central Asia since independence. The relevance of the article is due to the major political changes that are taking place in the states of Central Asia, and in the two largest of them, there is a change in political leadership. Despite the fact that the foreign policy of the Republic of Turkey in Central Asia over the past thirty years has had its ups and downs, it is considered indisputable that the country has managed to become one of the significant geopolitical players in the region through the strengthening of bilateral relations, as well as in the framework of multilateral cooperation.*

As the largest Turkic-speaking state, Turkey is considering the new "Turkic" states of the CAR from the point of view of creating a Turkic union under the auspices of Turkey – the "Great Turan" project. The idea of a Turkic union is one of the main priorities of the Turkish foreign policy strategy, which would allow it to strengthen its position in the international arena. Historical, cultural, linguistic, and religious identity with the countries of the Central Asian region, as well as in the context of R. Erdogan's new foreign policy and a more active role in international relations, Turkey is becoming a new participant in the "Great Game". In this sense, when analyzing the foreign policy of the Republic of Turkey in Central Asia in this article, this issue is studied both in bilateral and regional formats.

Keywords: *Central Asia, Turkey, foreign policy, international relations, the "Great Turan" project.*

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Introduction

Central Asia has a strategic meaning for the stability and sustainability of the Euro-Atlantic region. Its energy reserve plays an important role in world energy security, and it is a large junction of gas and oil pipelines, as well as economic corridors. As soon as the regional states gained their independence in the early 1990s, Turkey increased its diplomatic activity on the stated mission of helping the «Turkic brotherly

republics» to become stable, developing states, and integrated members of the international system. Over the 30 years of their sovereignty, the Central Asian republics have made impressive progress in many areas, including strengthening their sovereignty, institutionalizing their state structures, and increasing the pace of integration processes with the outside world.

Turkey is one of the first countries to recognize the sovereignty of Central Asian countries. Since 1991, the trend to build a steadily developing

sovereign in Central Asia has been orienting Turkey's policy in the region towards the formation of a market economy and the creation of a democratic system. Given the common past and linguistic and cultural ties, Turkey sought to expand cooperation with this region in all sectors. High-level Strategic Cooperation Councils with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and recently Uzbekistan provides a useful platform for deepening relations between countries. There is a similar mechanism in Tajikistan.

These relations were based on alleged linguistic, cultural, religious, ethnic, and historical ties with the Turkic peoples of Central Asia. The historical background for this was Turkey's refusal to become a member of the European Union in 1989, hoping to establish ties with newly independent states and build a Turkic community that will be under its leadership. This concept was put forward by Turkish President Turgut Özal. From an economic and political point of view, this community would bring great benefits to Turkey, serving as a gateway to the Islamic post-Soviet world, would show the need for Ankara for Western countries. In addition, the "Turkish model" as one of the methods of countering the alleged impact of the Islamic regime of Iran on democratic politics was promoted in the West and presented to the states of Central Asia.

Research methods

This article is based on information and statistical data from various scientific works in the field of foreign policy of Turkey. Among the methods used in the study, it is worth highlighting the analysis, thanks to which individual properties, vectors and constituent elements of Turkey's foreign policy were studied; synthesis, which made it possible to bring together, generalize the data obtained as a result of the analysis. In addition, an "ideological and value approach" was applied in the study of Turkey's foreign policy. This approach implies the study of Ankara's foreign policy through the prism of not only interests, but ideas and values within the framework of foreign policy ideology,

as well as the integration of the foreign policy of the Turkish Republic in Central Asia.

Research results and discussion

After R. Erdogan came to power

Turkey was able to increase its own influence especially significantly in Asia under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The goals of this policy are defined in the new strategy of Turkey, focused on strengthening relations with Central Asia. On August 5, 2019, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Minister Cavusoglu) launched the New Asia Initiative, which has four goals: 1) improving interstate relations, 2) expanding the trade potential of the private sector, 3) strengthening academic cooperation and 4) developing interaction between societies [1].

In 2009, Turkey created an institutional framework with the help of which the country was able to present itself most decisively as an actor of external influence in the region. Due to the creation in the town of Nakhichevan (Azerbaijan) of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States (CCTS), also called the Turkic Council, the format of the annual summit of the heads of Turkic-speaking states was expanded. At the stage of formation, the Turkic Council included Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan [2].

Since 2010, Turkey's multilateral influence has been expanding in the region. This was facilitated by the interest in the field of humanitarian cooperation and investments of the countries of the region. Many business projects between Turkey and the countries of the Central Asian region were implemented: the opening of new flights, the Turkish side began to hold bilateral business forums every year Turkey also invested in the construction of an international airport in Ashgabat and the reconstruction of the "Turkmenbashi" port on the Caspian Sea. Investment projects contributed to the closest integration of the economies of the Central Asian region together with Turkey. From 2010 to 2020, trade between Turkey and the countries of Central Asia increased from \$5.5 billion to \$6.3 billion. However, this figure is only 1.5% of Ankara's total foreign trade turnover, indicating

that there is the growth potential for Turkey. Turkey mainly trades with Uzbekistan and also with Kazakhstan – the trade turnover with each of the states exceeds \$ 2 billion, but in the list of the main trading partners of these republics, Turkey is not even in the top three [3].

The victory in the 2014 presidential election of the former prime minister and leader of the Justice and Development Party (JDP) Recep Tayyip Erdogan was a turning point in Turkey's position in Central Asia. Following the results of the 2017 national referendum on changing the form of government, Turkey switched to a presidential form of government. In turn, the change of power in Uzbekistan in 2016 made it possible for Turkey to restore relations with Tashkent, which had been frozen since 1997 due to Karimov's incident with the Turkish authorities.

With the advent of Erdogan, in the domestic and foreign policy of the Turkish leadership, the desire to use an Islamic factor in order to mobilize support both within the state and beyond its borders is clearly visible.

Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism

The concept of Pan-Turkism has been repeatedly criticized by political circles. Some believe that pan-Turkism is only an objective aspiration of ethnically native people to rapprochement; the rest do not in any way trust in its viability, citing all sorts of contradictions among the political elites of the Turkic countries as an explanation, in addition, there are fears regarding the increase in Turkey's influence.

But it is impossible to refute the fact that Turkey has successfully formed the basic principles for civilized as well as internal integration of the Turkic society, acting as a key link in the rapprochement of the post-Soviet countries. Despite the fact that the economic support of the republic is not so huge, Turkey finds ways to help the growth of the Turkic states using other tools: holding pan-Turkic summits, creating cooperation councils of Turkic states, consultations on military development. The actions taken to form a common Turkic society in the future will give Turkey the opportunity to

pursue a coordinated foreign policy, which may not always be acceptable to the interests of other regional forces, including Russia[4].

Turkey pays special attention to the construction of its own subsystem of international relations – the “Turkic world”, for which integration structures and platforms are created in various fields (political – the Parliamentary Assembly, scientific – the Turkic Academy of Sciences, cultural – the International Organization of Turkic Culture TURKSOY (TÜRKSÖY), economic – Turkish Agency for International Cooperation and Development (TİKA), an international organization uniting modern Turkic states – the Turkic Council, etc.)

The trend towards the revival of the policy of pan-Turkism is clearly observed in the foreign policy strategy of Turkey. Explaining the increase in Turkey's activity in Central Asia as well as in the Middle East by the manifestation of «neo-ottomanism», «pan-Islamism» or «Muslim solidarity» of the Justice and Development Party, it was often overlooked that to a large extent, this process was launched even before R. Erdogan's party came to the government. Later, within the framework of the policy of «strategic depth», this idea was promoted by Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmed Davutoglu and the ruling Justice and Development Party (neopan-Turkism and neo-ottomanism in the outer political figure in Turkey). The current president of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, sees an opportunity for all the Turkic republics in the effective implementation of the policy of transition of pan-Turkism from the status of «an object of foreign policy to the position of a subject» [5].

Growth of trade and business cooperation

Due to the close relationships and independent cooperation at the level of small and medium-sized businesses, Turkey has consistently been among the key trading partners. Since Turkey does not have enough government funding for such needs, such business relationships are mostly executed on an individual basis. The pandemic has led to an increase in unemployment in Turkey to 26%, and the country's budget

in 2020 came out with a deficit of \$24.7 billion against \$21.77 billion in 2019. In 2021, the deficit was \$30.74 billion. However, since 2012, Turkey's foreign aid has increased dramatically from \$1.3 billion in 2011 to \$8.1 billion in 2017, despite the slowdown in the Turkish economy [6].

Turkmenistan. In terms of economic influence in Turkmenistan, Turkey surpasses Russia. In 2020, the trade turnover between Russia and Turkmenistan amounted to \$1 billion, and between Turkey and Turkmenistan - \$2 billion, which is 3 times more than in 2018. The total volume of Turkish investments exceeds \$47 billion [7].

Kyrgyzstan. Construction of infrastructure facilities, trade, transport and energy are the main areas of Turkish investment in Kyrgyzstan. Investments are provided mainly by public-private companies. Thus, in September 2019, the Sheraton Hotel was opened in Bishkek, a five-star hotel that is part of the Marriott Group (USA) hotel chain, managed by the Mystachoglu group of companies (Turkey).

Turkey shows its interest in the cultural and humanitarian area of cooperation with Kyrgyzstan. Thus, for example, Turkish language research centers have been opened in Kyrgyz higher educational institutions, and the Turkish language training center "TTEOMER" operates at the Turkish Embassy in Kyrgyzstan, which contributes not only to the study of the language but also to the departure of students from Kyrgyzstan to Turkey in order to learning. In addition, the assistance of pro-Turkish institutions in sponsoring and supporting the III World Nomad Games in Kyrgyzstan in 2018 was extremely effective [8].

Uzbekistan. In 2017, the new President of Uzbekistan S. Mirziyoyev made his first state visit to Turkey in 20 years. According to the results of the meeting of the two leaders, 26 agreements were signed in the field of economy, education, culture, healthcare, banking, and military industry. Turkey is considered one of the main trading partners of Uzbekistan and also takes the 4th place after the Russian Federation, China, and Kazakhstan. The leaders of the countries set the task to bring the trade turnover between

the two countries to \$10 billion within 10 years. On October 15, 2019, at the next CCTS summit in Baku, Uzbekistan officially joined the Union. Thus, this organization has already included 3 out of 4 Turkic-speaking states of the region [9].

Kazakhstan. Turkey, of all partners in Central Asia, shows a significant interest in Kazakhstan. For the implementation of transport corridors with Turkey, Kazakhstan has the proper infrastructure and a favorable geographical position. The country borders the Caspian Sea with Turkey's friendly Azerbaijan (it is worth noting that Erdogan calls Azerbaijan and Turkey «two countries, one nation»). Kazakhstan has always been pragmatic and multi-vector, which appeals to Turkey. In 2020, the trade turnover among the states amounted to just over \$3 billion, which puts Turkey in 5th place among the key trading partners of Kazakhstan. The states are going to increase trade between countries by up to \$10 billion [10].

Since according to the terms of the agreement concluded in November 2020 after the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan received the right to create a transport corridor connecting the main territory of the country with Nakhichevan, the importance of Kazakhstan for Turkey has increased even more. Turkey has previously announced a plan to build a railway. In a similar way, the implementation of the Trans-Caspian corridor for Turkey is becoming an increasingly real task. In addition to railway communication, Turkey has an interest in building an air hub in Central Asia through the Almaty airfield. In May 2020, the Turkish company TAV Airports acquired 100% of the airport's shares.

Tajikistan. Among the countries of the Central Asian region, Tajikistan is the only non-Turkic-speaking country. However, Turkey has and is interested in trade, economic ties, and military-technical cooperation with Dushanbe, especially in the circumstances when Ankara is trying to remain a guarantor of the security of the Kabul airport after the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. Recent visits to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan by Turkish Defense Minister H. Akar and R. Erdogan's planned visit to Dushanbe confirm Ankara's growing interest in Tajikistan. According to experts, Turkey's long-term plans

include the creation of a military bloc “Army of Turan” with the participation of Turkic states [1].

The “Great Turan” project

A new military-political bloc of all Turkic states is expected to form the government of Turkey. After the battle in Nagorno-Karabakh, this concept is becoming increasingly relevant. Turkish government actively supported the Azerbaijani army in the conflict, which won a convincing military victory.

If earlier the slogan «One nation - two states» (meaning Turkey and Azerbaijan) was actively used by Ankara; today it has changed to «One nation - five states.» And the first candidate for allies is Turkmenistan. Erdogan called on Ashgabat to join the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States at a recent conference dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the declaration of Turkmenistan as a neutral country.

The military-political cooperation between the two states is developing rapidly. In order to determine its own presence in the Caspian region, Turkey signed several agreements on the transfer of military facilities to Turkmenistan, as well as boats and patrol ships in the first place. In a similar way, despite the current principle of non-deployment of weapons in the Caspian Sea, they de facto appeared earlier in this region.

Turkey is establishing military cooperation with other Turkic-speaking states of Central Asia. A new agreement on military cooperation between Turkey and Uzbekistan was signed at the end of October 2020. Under the terms of the bilateral contract, Uzbekistan has established the production of Turkish armored vehicles on its territory.

Erdogan’s plans extend far beyond Karabakh and Armenia itself – one of the few obstacles to the unification of all Turkic entities and states of Asia and Siberia into “the Great Turan” project. Christian Georgia is de facto in a state of creeping occupation, and Batumi is already an internal airport in Turkey.

The idea of the “Great Turan” – a confederation of Turkic peoples: Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Turkmens, as well as many peoples professing Islam in the post-Soviet space, includes,

in addition, the neo-Ottoman ambitions of spreading in the Arab world and even Africa. Turkish military bases have been set up in Qatar, Libya, Syria, Iraq, Somalia.

In order to achieve this goal, Turkey started a war for its version of human history, with funding (for now) marginal figures from science. According to him, the foundation of world history was founded by the Turks 40 thousand years ago. Erdogan’s strategy is designed for the collapse of Russia with the development of the Caspian and the Volga region, and the development of the resource zones of Siberia and the Far East with access to the Pacific Ocean.

Of course, the Great Turan project carried out by Turkey and its Central Asian partners carries certain risks. The conclusions of the specialists of the Institute of Russian Strategies, according to which Turkey is going to be an alternative center of the geopolitical assembly of the Eurasian region to the detriment of other integration projects in this region, look very constructive, which “threatens the integrity of the Russian Federation and also goes against its goals in the Transcaucasus and Central Asia” [11].

Conclusion

Turkey is considered one of the main states in the region of Central Asia, not only because of its geography but also because of its history and today’s progressive mentality. Its strategic importance in this region is determined not only by its geographical location. Its degree of formation, its alliances, and relationships, including the socio-political, financial, military, and cultural sectors, which it has promoted in the region for many years, are considered elements of its strategic importance (Turkey enters the number of 20 major states of the world along with the point terms of national income).

Turkey’s subtle approach to the Central Asian states sets it up as their neutral if not benevolent partner. Turkey wants them to mature rapidly. Its economic share in the formation of relations with the states of Central Asia, although small, does not contain primary significance. However, strengthening their independence, financial

formation, development in state building, and integration with the world remains the main political goals of Turkey. Undoubtedly, the presence of significant, stable countries in Central Asia is a necessary component of the stability of the entire Eurasian region.

Turkey encourages Central Asian countries to develop friendly relations with their neighbors.

However, we believe that the development of relations, circumventing or solving existing problems between them is an essential element of their stability and economic well-being. They should remember that Central Asia is a single economic space, and benefiting from their economies depends on the degree of cooperation they achieve.

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Түркияның Орталық Азиядағы саясатының басты бағыттары

Аңдатпа. Орталық Азия еуроатлантикалық аймақтың қауіпсіздігі мен тұрақтылығы үшін стратегиялық маңызды. Бұл аймақтың энергетикалық ресурстары жаһандық энергетикалық қауіпсіздік үшін өмірлік маңызды және ол мұнай-газ құбырлары мен сауда дәліздері үшін негізгі орталық болып табы-

лады. Бұл мақалада тәуелсіздік алғаннан кейінгі Түркияның Орталық Азия мемлекеттерімен екіжақты және көпжақты қарым-қатынастарына шолу жасалған. Мақаланың өзектілігі Орталық Азия мемлекеттерінде болып жатқан ірі саяси өзгерістерге байланысты және олардың ішіндегі ең ірі екеуінде саяси басшылықтың ауысуымен түсіндіреді. Түркия Республикасының Орталық Азиядағы сыртқы саясаты соңғы отыз жылда өзінің шарықтау шегіне жеткеніне қарамастан, ел екіжақты қатынастарды нығайту есебінен, сондай-ақ көпжақты ынтымақтастық шеңберінде өңірдегі маңызды геосаяси ойыншылардың бірі бола алғаны даусыз болып саналады.

Түркия ең ірі түркітідес мемлекет ретінде Орталық Азияның жаңа «түркі» мемлекеттерін Түркияның қамқорлығымен Түркі одағын құру – «Ұлы Тұран» жобасы тұрғысынан қарастыруда. Түркі одағы идеясы Түркияның сыртқы саяси стратегиясының негізгі басымдықтарының бірі болып табылады, бұл оның халықаралық аренадағы позициясын нығайтуға мүмкіндік береді. Орталық Азия аймағы елдерімен тарихи, мәдени, тілдік және діни бірегейлік, сондай-ақ Реджеп Тайип Ердоғанның жаңа сыртқы саясаты мен халықаралық қатынастардағы белсенді рөлі жағдайында Түркия «ұлы ойынның» жаңа қатысушысына айналуға. Осы тұрғыдан алғанда, бұл мақалада Түркия Республикасының Орталық Азиядағы сыртқы саясатын талдаған кезде бұл мәселе екіжақты және аймақтық форматта зерттеледі.

Түйін сөздер: Орталық Азия, Түркия, сыртқы саясат, халықаралық қатынастар, «Ұлы Тұран» жобасы.

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Основные направления политики Турции в Центральной Азии

Аннотация. Центральная Азия стратегически важна для безопасности и стабильности евроатлантического региона. Энергетические ресурсы этого региона имеют жизненно важное значение для глобальной энергетической безопасности, и это крупный узел газо- и нефтепроводов, и торговых коридоров. В данной статье представлен обзор двусторонних и многосторонних отношений Турции с государствами Центральной Азии после обретения независимости. Актуальность статьи обусловлена крупными политическими изменениями, которые происходят в государствах Центральной Азии, причем в двух крупнейших из них происходит смена политического руководства. Несмотря на то, что внешняя политика Турецкой Республики в Центральной Азии за последние тридцать лет имела свои взлеты и падения, считается бесспорным, что стране удалось стать одним из значимых геополитических игроков в регионе за счет укрепления двусторонних отношений, также как и в рамках многостороннего сотрудничества.

Как крупнейшее тюркоязычное государство, Турция рассматривает новые «тюркские» государства ЦААР с точки зрения создания тюркского союза под эгидой Турции – проект «Великий Туран». Идея тюркского союза является одним из главных приоритетов турецкой внешнеполитической стратегии, что позволило бы ей усилить свои позиции на международной арене. Историческая, культурно-языковая и религиозная идентичность со странами Центрально-азиатского региона, а также в условиях нового внешнеполитического курса Р. Эрдогана и более активной роли в международных отношениях, Турция становится новым участником «большой игры». В этом смысле, при анализе внешней политики Турецкой Республики в Центральной Азии в данной статье, этот вопрос изучается как в двустороннем, так и региональном форматах.

Ключевые слова: Центральная Азия, Турция, внешняя политика, международные отношения, проект «Великий Туран».

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