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## The New Ambitions of Turkey for a Multivector Policy in a Pluralist World

### Abstract

The paper attempts to find an answer to the question of how a successful multivector policy by Turkey would be possible in today's world of escalating global conflicts. This seems to have been bequeathed by Atatürk, and one could say that RT Erdogan's mission is to achieve it and pass it on to his successors. This policy helped at the beginning of the Turkish Revolution to defeat foreign troops and establish a secular democratic republic. In the last two decades, it has become possible again in the conditions of the world's development from a unipolar to a multipolar world. Thanks to this, Turkey can solve its most important national security problems, such as curbing Kurdish intentions for independence and conducting a nationally responsible policy with all its neighbors and especially with the major geopolitical powers. One can say that Turkey's influence on decisions and actions in the field of security in several regions is testimony to the trend of its transformation from a regional to a great power. Successes in this regard are based on the consistent and uncompromising policy in defense of one's own national interests, the successful finding of allies in the direction of the "geopolitical wind" and the understanding of the mutual complementarity of various political and economic processes. This analysis has been carried out through the methodology of the theory of regional security complexes.

**Keywords:** regions of power, theory of regional security complexes, Turkey

### How is a Multi-Vector Policy Possible for Turkey Today?

The paper attempts to find an answer to the question of how a successful multivector policy by Turkey would be possible in today's world of escalating global conflicts. This seems to have been bequeathed by Atatürk, and one could say that RT Erdogan's mission is to achieve this and pass it on to his successors. This policy helped at the beginning of the Turkish Revolution to defeat foreign troops and establish a secular democratic republic. In the last two decades, it has become possible again in the conditions of the world's development from a unipolar to a multipolar world. Thanks to this, Turkey can solve its most



important national security problems, such as curbing Kurdish intentions for independence and conducting a nationally responsible policy with all its neighbors and especially with the major geopolitical powers.

During the period of military regimes and limited democracy at the end of the last century, Turkey was a loyal part of the West, the second army in NATO, and the allies turned a blind eye to human rights violations. Negotiations for EU membership have dragged on for several decades, but today's Turkey is not giving up on this prospect. Erdogan's state has established an independent policy towards Russia and joint action in Syria against the Kurds and the Islamic State. It did not join the economic and political sanctions. Ankara suffered the worst consequences of the migrant crisis by not receiving support from the EU under a number of terms of the deal. Turkey has its own independent policy towards Ukraine as well, with support for the grain deal and a position on the case of Crimea with reference to the situation of the Tatars there. In recent times, the country has expressed its desire to be accepted into BRICS to take advantage of the economic benefits of the major countries there.

We will see that a multivector policy is possible thanks to an accurate diagnosis of threats to national security and an idea of real measures to preserve and protect it. Turkish political researchers do not have significant differences in their assessment of the problems and prospects in this process<sup>1</sup>. This also applies to the main Turkish political parties.

Turkey's new ambitions, developed under the rise and rule of Erdogan, can be analyzed in different frames of reference. One option could be found in S. Huntington's concept of the "clash of civilizations"<sup>2</sup>. In the book of A. Davutoglu, it is pointed out that in the new era, the Asian peoples will seek a new place and space in the making of world history<sup>3</sup>. At the heart of the popularity of the theory of the "clash of civilizations" is the project to replace the role of social and economic factors in politics with identity politics, in the lens of which cultural differences are the cause of conflicts and wars. In my previous publication I defended the thesis that contemporary conflicts continue to be of social and economic nature, and cultural differences can be overcome through rational critical discussion and lead to agreement on issues of value and mutual enrichment of the peoples and cultures involved<sup>4</sup>.

A further option for our analysis is the concept of the Wider Black Sea Region, introduced into American political science about 15 years ago. Some arguments will be advanced below in support of the perspectives to consider this region as a specific security complex in the context of the theory of regional security complexes developed by the Copenhagen School in International Security Studies (ISS)<sup>5</sup>. At least three processes determine the de-

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<sup>1</sup> P. Ercan (ed.), *Turkish Foreign Policy: International Relations, Legality and Global Reach*, Palgrave Macmillan 2017.

<sup>2</sup> S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon&Schuster, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> A. Davutoglu, *Strategicheska dalbochina. Miastoto na Turcija v mejdunarodnite otnoshenia*, Sofia: Iztok-Zapad, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> V. Bouzov, *Global Conflicts and Dialogue of Civilizations from the Perspective of Southeast Europe*, in: *Southeast Europe: History, Culture, Politics, and Economy*, D. Dimitrov, M. Palangurski, N. Hristova, V. Bouzov (eds.), Proceedings of Scientific Conference, Italy: Filodritto, 2018, pp. 63–70.

<sup>5</sup> B. Buzan, O. Wæver, *Regions and Powers. The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge University Press 2003.

cisive change in the role played by this region in international relations and in the balance of power within it: the war between Russia and Ukraine, the strengthening of Turkey under the rule of Erdogan and the new confrontation in the Middle East between Israel and its traditional adversaries because the devastating war in Gaza. Three traditional security regions – the Balkan sub-region of the European region (associated with the EU), the Post-Soviet Space and the Middle East, are intertwined in this zone, and the Black Sea Zone could be described as the next (after Syria and Ukraine) most important and wider area of increasingly intense global confrontation between the West and Russia. The term “Wider Black Sea Zone” is justifiably considered as a “a new strategic frontier for Europe, Russia and the United States in terms of energy security, frozen and festering conflicts, trade links, migration, and other key policy areas” and a prediction has been grounded that its security prospects “in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be shaped by the interaction between major external actors, the ambitions of states and peoples in the region, and the region’s role as a crossroads of civilizations”<sup>6</sup>. Its introduction is a kind of innovation in the theory, because it allows to consolidate the analysis on several regions of security, which form a larger cluster of inter-related problems.

The Theory of regional security complexes of the Copenhagen’s School is a good methodological tool for analysis of the security perspectives of the Wider Black Sea Zone. The theoretical approach of B. Buzan and O. Weaver tries to describe the relative autonomy of regional security, which constitutes a pattern of international relations radically different from the established structure of superpowers bipolarity that defined the Cold War Era. It provides theoretical instruments for analysis of the world order and for studying specific regions. The Regional Security Complex theory (RSCT) enables us to understand the world system structure in depth and to evaluate the relative balance of power and mutual relationships within it, between the regionalizing and globalizing trends. It distinguishes between the system level interplay of the global superpowers, and the subsystem level interplay between the lesser powers, whose security environment is limited to their local region. The central idea of the RSCT is that security interdependence is normally patterned and divided into regionally based clusters: regional security complexes<sup>7</sup>.

This theory is focused on the conflicts of nation states and the impact of superpowers in the aspects of regions, not of the international system. It is very important in the context of the deepening tensions between the globalist elite of the main superpower and the nation states in some dominant conflict zones.

In the RSCT, superpowers and great powers define the global level of polarity, and the line between them and regional powers is the one that marks the difference between global and regional security dynamics. Superpowers, in the RCST perspective, are countries with broad-spectrum capabilities demonstrated across the whole international system – first class military capabilities exercised in global context and the political power and economic potentialities to support them. The discursive aspect of their position is extremely important – “they need to see themselves, and be accepted by others in rhetoric and behaviour, as

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<sup>6</sup> G. Hamilton, D. Mangott, *Preface*, in: G. Hamilton, D. Mangott (eds.), *The Wider Black Sea Zone in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Strategic, Economic and Energy Perspectives*, Center for Transatlantic Relations, Johns Hopkins University 2008, pp. v-1.

<sup>7</sup> B. Buzan, O. Weaver, *Regions and Powers...*, pp. 27–29.

having this rank” and “must be active players in the processes of securitization and de-securitization in all, or nearly all, of the regions in the system, whether as threats, guarantors, allies, or interveners”<sup>8</sup>.

We would be justified to expand the circle of superpowers, besides the U.S., adding Russia and China, which meet these characteristics today.

It is true that achieving “great power” status is less demanding in terms of capability and behavior. They need not necessarily have such enormous capabilities in all sectors and be actively present in the process of securitization in all direction of the international system. What is the difference between them and superpowers? The “single key” for differentiation is “that a great power is treated in the calculations of other major powers as if it has a clear economic, military and political potential to bid for superpower status in the short or medium term”<sup>9</sup>.

The EU is a specific applicant for this position, but it is on the road of division of two great powers after the Brexit vote in 2016: the U.K. and the EU, managed by Germany. The present elite of the EU has led this organization to a deepening crisis, and it is in danger of losing its great power status. It has become a bureaucratic corporation of elites, subjected to the global ambitions of the U.S. neoconservatives. We can attribute the position of great powers also to India and Japan, especially in economic and political context. In the Black Sea region, Turkey is very close to this position – let us consider its leading role in the Balkans and Europe as an energy-distributing center and at the Middle East as a stabilizing factor. At present, this country has overtaken Iran, Israel and Saudi Arabia.

New light on the considered processes is also shed by the change of concepts of prominent experts on the structure of security in the present-day world. In 2018, during his speech as honorary professor at the University of Craiova, Romania, Barry Buzan presented a revised version of the constructivist theory. The present-day world is not monocentric or polycentric: superpowers no longer exist. The falling down of the old security order leads to a pluralist world: a world without powers capable to be responsible for the world system. I then asked him a question about Russia’s role in the Balkans and whether Turkey continues to be a “buffer state”, as in his early theory, but he refused to answer. He stated that he had undertaken to come to Romania if he was not asked about these two subjects. Even without that answer, it was clear that Turkey’s new policy of emancipation and defending its sovereignty beyond its borders was creating difficulties for traditionally minded experts.

But let us go back to the concept of the Wider Black Sea Zone. Its political boundaries include the whole of the EU through its members on the Balkans – Romania, Greece and Bulgaria, and much of the Post-Soviet Space – from Russia and Ukraine to the Caucasus and even the Caspian Region. To the superpowers (or “great powers” as Buzan now claims) – the US and Russia, with interests of penetration in the region, we need to add China with its new strategic infrastructural and cultural projects. For this reason, the Central Asian Security Complex could be considered as an important factor determining the security relationships of the Wider Black Sea Zone. In this new security region, we have a superpower – Russia, one regional power in a process of establishment as a great

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<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, pp. 34–35.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 35.

power – Turkey, the EU as a great power and some influential regional powers – Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia.

In this paper, I will develop some arguments that the more intensive cooperation between the countries from the South-Eastern Europe may become a basis for building a regional alliance that would defend the idea for a free economic development and growth of our region in favor of our peoples. We cannot agree with turning it into a battlefield, conquered territory from the Western corporations or a “cordon sanitaire” for the illegal migration flows. At the basis of such an alliance can be placed the cooperation of the Balkan countries and the stabilization policy of Turkey, which systematically opposes the escalation of conflicts and the invasion of brutal external players through the Bosphorus.

Turkey’s position in this region has been changing very dynamically since 2003: from its treatment as a “buffer state” between two neighboring regional security complexes – the European and the Middle East, to a regional power, which the authors of the Copenhagen School consider a challenge to their theory 20 years ago, to the prospect of becoming a great power today. In this development, it can be cited as a good example of defending one’s own national interests as the main priority and an adequate assessment of the change in geopolitical circumstances on a global scale to comply with politics with them. 2003 was the beginning of the political rise of RT Erdogan: mayor of Istanbul, prime minister and finally president. In these 20 years, Turkey has become a regional power with pretensions to be a great power to be reckoned with.

Turkey is poised to become a major energy distribution hub in the Balkans and a key seller of Russian and Azeri and Iranian gas to Europe. With its policy of demilitarization of the Black Sea and strict adherence to the Treaty of Montreux, it has been a factor in maintaining stability in the face of Western attempts to turn it into a field of military confrontation. Its refugee deal with the EU was mutually beneficial – it gave the EU a breather in the migrant crisis and redirected flows across the Mediterranean and gave Turkey the prospect of restarting its integration talks. Unfortunately, the West did not fulfill its part of the bargain and thus made the migrant invasion through Turkey a constant risk.

One could say that by firmly asserting the inviolability of the borders in the Western Balkans region, our southern neighbor firmly opposes attempts to ignite the frozen conflicts there: in Kosovo, Bosnia and Macedonia. Support for a deal between the Kosovo Albanians and Serbia to exchange territories for autonomy for the Serbian municipalities in Kosovo started from the US under Trump and may also be supported by Russia. However, this will unlock almost all frozen conflicts and lead to the breakup of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in the future to a new confrontation between the superpowers for the Balkans. It is significant that in December 2023, Erdogan made a historic visit to Greece to improve relations with this country. Positive processes are also developing between Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia, which want to make a kind of mini-economic union for cooperation.

There are strong reasons to claim that in some of these directions, Turkey could be supported by the Balkan countries, especially Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania, because it suits their interests. Moreover, EU member states from the Balkans should unequivocally lobby for the continuation of integration negotiations with this country, including the fulfillment of the commitment to visa-free travel for certain categories of Turkish citizens: businessmen, researchers, students. The EU betrayed the hopes of pro-Western people in Turkey by granting visa-free travel to Ukraine and Georgia and leaving them to wait indefinitely.

## **Dominant Themes of Turkish Policy in the Middle East and North Africa**

To the greatest extent, the efforts of our southern neighbor to resolve the crisis in Syria and the destruction of the Islamic State, especially after the end of 2015, should also be viewed positively. In this military conflict, it managed to win maximum advantages from its transition from one team to the other. The other side was the victorious coalition together with Russia and Iran. These are the countries that in the Muslim world and throughout Africa are seen as defending national sovereignty against the new imperialism. Through this coalition, Turkey rethought age-old tensions with these rivals and united in the name of common interests.

Its dominant role in the Caucasus region of security, in cooperation with the Turkic peoples in Central Asia and the partnership with the members of the Shanghai Organization are other actively developing axes of its prosperity. Turkey's intervention was particularly effective in extinguishing the next fire that had been stoked for years by the West and Israel: the project for a Kurdish state, which was aimed at a new destabilization of Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria. The independence flag in Erbil was quickly taken down. In the liquidation of the Kurdish rebellion, Turkey received support from Russia, Iran, Iraq and other neighboring countries. The Kurds are not a unified national entity, and the hopes of Western geopolitical thinkers that they can destroy the unity of Turkey are groundless.

Turkey's opposition to all projects that could lead to the creation of a Kurdish state will continue to define its policy in the Middle East. It expects assistance in this direction from its allies in the victorious coalition in Syria: Russia, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. The victory against the Islamic State, for which Turkey and the pro-Turkish units of the so-called "moderate" Syrian opposition were responsible, pitted them directly against the most active American ally on the battlefield: the Kurds. Barzani's management team in Erbil tried to "shuffle" all the regional players, relying above all on American support. As a bonus, regions with natural resource reserves around Kirkuk are emerging, occupied by Kurdish fighters. Currently, 80% of the sources of natural resources in Syria have been captured by the American and Kurdish forces (YPG), and the former are exploiting them for free. And in Damascus, there is no fuel for the ambulances.

What was Turkey's goal in joining the coalition in Syria? First, to prevent a Kurdish state along the border around Kobani; that is why Erdogan gained the right to occupy Idlib. Second, to displace the pro-Turkish groups from Syria as a shield along that border along with the refugees and give them Turkish citizenship to join the region. For too long, the pro-Turkish forces in Syria have been seen by the West as a "democratic" opposition.

Turkey also has its own goals in the confrontation with Israel. This country has the greatest opportunity to protect the Palestinians from genocide and in doing so to present itself as the informal leader of the Islamic world. At the same time, Israel is a direct competitor for the use of the gas field near Cyprus and removing it from the competition would be a good move.

Turkey has unexpectedly improved its relations with Saudi Arabia, and it is likely that Erdogan will come to an understanding with Prince Salman about the future of conflicts in the region. An important dominant trend in Turkish policy has always been the fight against the aggressive imposition of the interests of Saudi Arabia with the sup-

port of the USA in the region. In the last major crisis of 2017, Turkey intervened on Qatar's side and even committed military and economic support. Qatar has clashed with the Sunni monarchies over its desire to share with Iran the exploitation of a major energy field. Saudi Arabia and Qatar were identified as major sponsors of jihadism and terrorism on a regional and global scale. The change of government and the rise to power of Prince Salman in Saudi Arabia quickly changed its course as well. In December, this country was admitted to BRICS. A peace process began with Israel, but it was interrupted by the war against the Palestinians in Gaza. Relations with Iran were restored along with the coalition in Syria.

In 2008, the African Union declared Turkey a strategic partner. Turkey has an extremely active policy in North Africa as well. It is at odds with the military regime in Egypt, supports the formally UN-recognized government of Libya against Marshal Haftar's troops, which puts it in opposition with Russia and the United States simultaneously. Both the former president of Egypt Mursi and the government in Tripoli are close to the Muslim Brotherhood. Turkish experts are training Somalia's new army and have a military base built near Mogadishu. Turkey sells weapons to almost all of Africa. It is not only the ties with the Muslim Brotherhood, but rather the vacated space of great powers such as Great Britain that spurs Turkey to actively intervene in Libya and North Africa. Erdogan can rival Russia in popularity, especially in the Islamic countries of this region.

### **Turkish Domination in the Caucasus**

We can note that in the Caspian region, which is part of the post-Soviet space in the regional analysis of the Copenhagen School, Turkey is also among the leading players. After a short-lived confrontation with Russia, since the end of 2015, it has activated Azerbaijan to revive the "frozen" Karabakh conflict. Likewise, it was quickly put back in the "freezer" in the name of reconciliation with Russia.

Turkish domination in the Caucasus is carried out in cooperation with Azerbaijan. Turkey helped Azerbaijan capture Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) and expel the Armenians from there. Turkey trains the army of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and has claims to the Zangezur Corridor, which will connect Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan and Turkey. In 2023, Russia and Iran agreed to keep outside players in the Caspian Sea region, but Turkey, with influence and intelligent politics, is gaining a presence there.

The previous Armenian-Azeri war was activated after Turkey's conflict with Russia over the downing of the Russian plane in late 2015 and was won by the Azeris with Turkish help. The second war between Azerbaijan and Armenia ended in 2020 without a complete catastrophe for the latter, thanks only to the intervention of Russia and the introduction of peacekeeping forces. The liquidation of the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic was completed in 2023 under the guise of the war in Ukraine. One can say that Azerbaijan also pursues a similar multi-vector policy, but this country relies on old close relations with both Russia and Western countries. Turkey and Azerbaijan's plans for a military alliance of the Turkic countries do not bode well for external geopolitical powers with ambitions in the region.

## The Balkans and the EU – Turkey as a Leading Gas Distribution Hub

The priority of protecting national interests in Turkey's foreign policy is also based on considering cooperation with major geopolitical players in the world as mutually complementary. The country does not request to leave NATO, regardless of the conflicts with the USA and Germany. It does not leave the negotiations with the EU, and it even insists on their restart. At the same time, it seeks inclusion in the SCO and other formats viewed by the West as hostile. The answer to the American demand to buy their missile system was sufficiently robust: turning to the Russian S400 missile systems. It can be argued that such a policy, which leaves the camp opposition from the time of the first "Cold War" in the past, is a way to build a new architecture of security based on a balance of forces and interests.

The regionalist conception has a clear historical dimension because it considers the contradictions, tensions and cooperation in the respective region before and during the Cold War. This makes it possible through to understand and explain the development in each region. Through it, one can simultaneously cover international security and study security in a certain region. It is fundamentally different from Huntington's model of the "clash of civilizations"<sup>10</sup>, because it assumes that conflicts do not arise at some supranational level (of "civilizations"), but each region forms its own subregions and a greater part of the dynamics of security is internal. Regions are defined in terms of security policy practices rather than cultural factors as in Huntington.

Regional security is that aspect that unites the national and the global, the latter being more of a claim than a reality. The planet is not so closely integrated in terms of security, and in particular, with regard to superpower or great power relations, whose actions on a much more limited scale can affect a larger number of countries. In the model of the theory, superpowers, great powers and regional powers are involved, differing according to the scale of their influence and involvement in different regions. In each region, there are also ordinary countries involved in the distribution of power and security relations. As superpowers, we can consider the US, China and Russia with influence in all regions and a defining role in the security discourse, and the position of "great powers" is very variable.

The reasons to see the advantages of regional analysis are because modern conflicts arise and escalate on a regional scale, with a significant part of the world remaining unaffected by it. Regional security complexes are defined by enduring patterns of understanding and enmity that have taken the form of sub-global, geographically coherent, patterns of security interdependence.

Erdogan's Turkey is about to meet all the criteria of a "great power" formulated by B. Buzan and O. Wever (2003). Great powers do not need to be present in all sectors and present in all fields of "securitization" in the international system, unlike "superpowers". By this specific term, constructivism in security theories means making something a threat to security by talking about it. The readiness of other powers to comply with their economic, military and political potential to seek an even higher position in the hierarchy in the distribution of power in the international system is indicated as criteria. They must think of themselves as more than regional powers and be able to operate in more than one region. In contrast, regional powers are influential in determining relations within a region.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, pp. 36–37.



A dominant perspective in this direction is the transformation of Turkey into a major energy and gas distribution centre for the Balkans and the southern part of Europe. It has a sufficiently developed pipeline network, which, together with the Turkish Stream, provided an opportunity to transfer Russian and Azeri gas to the countries of the Balkans and the EU.

At the same time, the prospect of the Cyprus Gas Corridor from the fields in the Eastern Mediterranean has not yet disappeared. The USA and Brussels hope for diversification from Russian gas supplies on it and Israel for new big profits. A problem before its implementation is the Turkish-Greek opposition around Cyprus, which is escalating, and there are no prospects for its consensual resolution. Both countries want a share in supplies, Egypt also has its own interests in this region. Turkish claims are based on the lack of an agreement on the division of the maritime area around Cyprus, as it has one with Libya. It will be justified to say that international law permits its explorations in the coastal waters of Northern Cyprus. These conflicts could leave the project for the longest pipeline from the Eastern Mediterranean incomplete.

Evidence of Turkey's growing political weight is the creation of political entities dependent on the Justice and Development Party in Bulgaria and N. Macedonia, as well as the influence of our southern neighbor in the Western Balkans. The main claims of the EU for not fully fulfilling its commitments under the deal with Turkey are the claims to maintain "democracy" there. The fact is that neither Brussels nor Washington condemned the attempt to carry out a military coup on 15/07/2016. The American "Deep State" with its entourage Fethullah Gülen is also deeply involved in it. Then, the Secretary of State John Kerry even made statements that night that he hoped for "stability and continuity" from the new administration<sup>11</sup>. This is a continuation of the policy of the Cold War era, when the West was tolerant of several military regimes, ignoring their crimes and insisting on the ideology of the army as the guardian of the "secular state". The coups overthrew democratic Turkish governments and ensured total US dominance in Turkey, even at the cost of hanging Turkish politicians (Adnan Menderes, 1960) and thousands of martyrs with leftist convictions: communists, Kurdish activists, and anarchists.

It is true that Gülen-funded universities were closed and many people who passed through his schools and networks were removed, along with inconvenient political opponents, but still this political struggle is being waged within the law. If the Russian special forces had not rescued Erdogan on July 15, the country would have been covered in blood. Thousands of people disappeared without a trace under the rule of the military. They had banned political demonstrations, which Erdogan's government re-authorized a few years ago in a referendum. The balance of political power and the elections won by the Justice and Development Party since 2002 show sustained support from most Turks for the political course in defense of the national interest. It is true that until the beginning of 2016, the government of Davutoglu was carrying out the plans of the warmongers: support for the Islamic State and the illegal fuel trade, war against the democratic and secular government of Syria.

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<sup>11</sup> *Djon Keri sled prevrata: nadiavam se da ima stabilnost i priemstvenost w Turcija*, //Actualno.com, 16.07.2016, [https://www.actualno.com/balkani/djon-keri-sled-prevrata-nadjavam-se-da-ima-stabilnost-i-priemstvenost-v-turcija-news\\_551010.html](https://www.actualno.com/balkani/djon-keri-sled-prevrata-nadjavam-se-da-ima-stabilnost-i-priemstvenost-v-turcija-news_551010.html) (date accessed: 10.01.2024).

The change had already begun before the coup with negotiations with Russia mediated by Kazakhstan. But this rapprochement “put Turkey back in the game” because it offered the prospect of support for a military intervention in Syria to prevent a Kurdish entity there. The Americans have never fully defended their allies and have always brutally pursued their own interests. The Kurds in Syria and Iraq were one of their proxy armies, freeing them from the need to directly use their own forces in the conflict.

Is there democracy in Turkey is the big question that determines the attitude of the EU and the prospects for its integration. The dual approach in the search for an answer is obvious. Military regimes were not defined as undemocratic because they were always obedient. But Erdogan began to change Turkey’s pro-Western orientation to protect its national interests and regional ambitions and became undemocratic. The arguments were drawn from the crackdown on opponents of the F. Gülen network after the coup attempt, as well as the intervention in the judicial system. Control over the judicial system is an old dream of many European politicians. There are many examples: Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria.

Intensification of economic cooperation in the Balkans, with Turkey leading the way, is the next trend. More than a decade ago, this country was among the initiators of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. Initiatives for various unifications – market, “Slavic”, “European” – are periodically launched in our region, but the countries driven by their economic interests can most certainly go this way.

An April 2017 referendum on increasing presidential powers leveled the odds with the disaffected, but Erdogan managed to fight the next presidential election against Kulçdaroğlu’s pro-Western Socialists. The clash of moderate Islamism with democratic secular culture will continue to define Turkey’s domestic political life. Anti-Western orientation and rapprochement with Russia enjoy serious support. Let’s not forget that the USSR’s support for Atatürk was important for the success of the Turkish revolution. At the monument to the Turkish Revolution in Taksim Square on either side of Atatürk are the Soviet military leaders Voroshilov and Frunze.

We can summarize that the termination of cooperation with Turkey, which is proposed by some EU members, is not a good decision. The EU-Turkey deal is perhaps the only successful foreign policy achievement of the EU’s involvement in the conflict regions of the Middle East. It reduced the migrant flow and redirected it through the Mediterranean Sea, Spain, and Italy. In this regard, the attempts of our former Prime Minister Borissov to be a mediator in EU-Turkey relations deserve recognition.

We cannot avoid the discussion whether the “Energy Silk Road” (Erdogan’s expression from a speech at the 22<sup>nd</sup> World Petroleum Congress in Istanbul, 9–13.07.2017, <https://www.22wpc.com/>) with the support of the US and Great Britain, can bypass Russia and become the main corridor for Europe from the south for Azeri gas and for one from Central Asia in perspective. These intentions are based on the fact that Turkey is the main operator of TANAB (Trans-Anatolian Gas Pipeline), which is the European branch of the Southern Gas Corridor, together with Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan. Israel also looks to these projects with hope but given its position in support of Kurdistan and against Iran, its participation is quite questionable. The Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline is a serious alternative to the Russian projects for access of Russian gas from the south to the countries of Europe, and its strengthening will concentrate enormous power in the hands of Erdogan and Turkey.

I associate the positive perspective with the possibility of reaching agreements between the Balkan peoples to jointly oppose the West's plans to create a military confrontation in the Black Sea region. So far, Erdogan's project has not been coordinated with the Bulgarian authorities and the neighboring countries and negotiating it may turn out to be a favorable prospect. The core of an active alliance could be with the participation of Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Greece, which would revive and give new impetus to grand economic projects and resist the transformation of the Balkans into a battleground for the clash of the world's superpowers. The outlines of such cooperation are already visible in the frequent meetings of the leaders of these countries and several successful agreements. But for such an alliance to be successful and to bring real fruits, Turkey – the leading regional power – must be included in it. Its position as an energy distribution center would lend strength and weight to such cooperation and ensure that it does not develop as a Washington-designed project to inspire geopolitical confrontation. The unification of the countries of the Balkans in the name of protecting the interests of the peoples of the region will give impetus to projects and investments that can bring growth and advantages and a reason to reject others – imposed by force – such as the imposition of expensive American liquefied gas or the rejection of nuclear energy.

The first response of the countries in our region is regional collaboration against common threats. As a result of the Great Forces policy, the dividing lines between the Balkan countries have become all too deep. We need a new communitarian strategy for the understanding of common interests. It should be based on the idea of domination of the multipolar world. The Balkan countries should look for new types of economic and political cooperation with new global players: the BRICS countries or Shanghai Organization. A closer alliance of the Balkan states could be based on the institutionalization of the Black Sea economic cooperation. These forms of cooperation could be mutually complementary. We need to work for the emancipation from the irrational political decisions of the EU following the Visegrad Four.

The countries of our region need to develop new relations with the countries from the post-Soviet scope, especially with Azerbaijan, from which we will receive gas after 2019, with Georgia and Armenia, Moldova and Kazakhstan. They are part from the great Chinese trade and transportation projects which opens a new perspective for boosting our economic growth. There are no rational reasons to impose ideological and political limitations on these relations following misunderstood EU solidarity.

A few key objectives for such an association can be formulated. The first is the protection of the sovereignty of the countries and a joint response to the common threats: illegal migration, the use of the region for military confrontation of the superpowers. The second is the provision of energy supply in the most economically advantageous way. In this perspective, Russian gas through "Turkish Stream" has no suitable alternative. It can be supplemented by Azeri gas. The third objective may be to establish equal and mutually beneficial relations with the countries of Asia, and above all China and Japan, which are interested in investment projects of common benefit. The unification of the core of the Balkan countries must be linked not only to economic cooperation, but also to the categorical rejection of any change in the borders of the Balkans, because this could unlock the "frozen" conflicts again.

## The Conflict in Ukraine and Turkish Policy

Erdogan's ambitions to establish himself as the leader of the Muslim world have pitted him against two Russian spheres of interest. The first was Libya, where Turkey supported the officially recognized government and even brought its own "jihadists" to its aid. The other was the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, in which the Turks supplied Ukrainian security forces with drones and advocated for the rights of the Crimean Tatar minority. Putin hesitated to impose punishment for this position. Self-confidence from the successful actions of the Turkish president even went so far as to offer himself as a mediator for reconciliation between Ukraine and Russia. The grain deal that was supposed to bring Ukrainian grain to poor countries became a gigantic corruption deal<sup>12</sup>.

If Erdogan succeeds in completing a project to build the Istanbul Canal<sup>13</sup>, parallel to the Bosphorus, it will greatly increase the geopolitical weight of the country. However, if he gives up, for economic, environmental or other reasons, it could drag down the whole thing and result in a loss of power for him and his allies in the long run. The geopolitical significance of the project is related to the fact that the Montreux Convention of 1936 on the status of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles will most likely not apply to it. Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu said that his country is not giving up on this agreement, and, according to the Turkish president, the project has no connection with this international treaty and Turkey has sovereignty over the Istanbul Canal<sup>14</sup>. To extend this treaty to the alternative route, new negotiations are needed by all the countries that have signed it. However, this seems unrealistic against the background of today's strained international relations. The convention sets a time limit for the presence of the ships of countries that are not in the Black Sea for 21 days, after which they are obliged to leave. It can be said that with the strict observance of the convention, Turkey contributes to not turning the Black Sea into a field for military confrontation.

However, with the construction of the Istanbul Canal, Turkey will provide an alternative waterway not only for the commercial but also for the US and British warships that too often visit the region. There will be an option to choose, which also includes the possibility of staying longer than 21 days, including the construction of naval military bases.

In this way, the Turkish side, in a manner well-known for centuries, will sometimes be able to ally with the NATO countries when it wants to prove itself to Russia, sometimes with Russia itself, advocating for peace and the demilitarization of the Black Sea.

Even if corruption hurdles surrounding land expropriation are overcome, popular opposition Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu and environmental concerns remain. He calls the project a "murder" and "betrayal" of the city that could leave it without drinking water, as the construction of the future canal will enter the water supply area of the city of

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<sup>12</sup> J. Grace, *What was the Black Sea grain deal and why did it collapse?*, "Guardian" 20.07.2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/20/what-was-the-black-sea-grain-deal-and-why-did-it-collapse> (date accessed: 15.01.2024).

<sup>13</sup> *Kakvo e Kanal Istanbul? Karakteristiki i cena na proekta* [What is Istanbul Chanel? Characteristics and Praise of the Project], "Rayhaber" 26.07.2020, <https://bg.rayhaber.com/2020/07/kanal-istanbul-nedir-kanal-istanbul-projesinin-ozellikleri-ve-maliyet/> (date accessed: 22.01.2024).

<sup>14</sup> *Konvencija Montre ne budet destruvat na kanal Stambul, zajavil Erdogan*, RIA Novosti, 14.04.2021, <https://ria.ru/20210414/kanal-1728272832.html> (date accessed: 20.09.2023).

16 million inhabitants. Scientists believe that millions of square meters of forest and agricultural land will be lost<sup>15</sup>. The delta of the planned channel would be near the epicenter of a future large earthquake on the sea floor of the Marmara Sea of at least magnitude seven. The opposition of the popular mayor from the opposition and his party, as well as financial difficulties and environmental problems, could undermine the president's large-scale plans and lead to the loss of power from the Justice and Development Party. It still relies on the support of Bahçeli's nationalists.

## **Central Asia and China**

To this perspective, we should add Turkey's active interest in China's "One Belt One Road" project to participate in the planned transport, economic and cultural corridors. The stated desire for Turkey's integration with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is motivated by the desire to step up its relations with China.

Turkey seeks to expand its presence in Central Asia and through its communication with the Turkic-speaking peoples, where it has a legitimate claim to political leadership. The Turkic States Cooperation Council is a form of "soft" integration and search for collective solutions to global challenges in the region.

## **Turkey in the Perspective of the Present-day Global Confrontation**

Turkey is an extremely important factor at the border between several security regions, and each of the superpowers has certain hopes regarding this. The US, in the light of its strategy of global dominance, expects this country to continue to establish itself as an irreplaceable regional power and gain economic power by expanding its sphere of influence. To this end, its leadership in the Islamic world must be affirmed and extended to the concern for the security of the Arab states and their refraining from reckless acts along the lines of terrorism and confrontation with Israel. It is asked to expand its influence in the Balkans in opposition to the Russia. It is assumed that it will take increasingly decisive actions throughout the post-Soviet space based on pan-Turkism, which will bring it into an inevitable collision with Russia. It is strategically important for the US that Turkey becomes a powerful Islamic state that has a decisive voice in the Arab world and the Eastern Mediterranean. For this purpose, however, it must be separated and confronted with Iran.

The US has no qualms about working with the Islamic factor and promoting the Islamic path of Turkey. The problem, however, is that under Erdoğan's rule, the estrangement with Turkey may prove to be long-lasting. The negative attitude towards the USA is also widely shared by the Turks. Trump's coming to power again can repair these relations, but if it doesn't happen, the US can only rely on Erdogan to name his successor and he will initiate the necessary political turn to the Western vector. After the presidential election, Erdogan made a sharp U-turn and appointed several pro-Western figures to the government.

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<sup>15</sup> *Kanalat na Erdogan i riskat ot novo silno zemetresenie v Istanbul*, DW, 30.06.2021, <https://www.dw.com/bg/58111430> (date accessed: 13.01.2024).

Anti-Western interior minister S. Soylu was dismissed. However, Soylu says that the whole world hates the USA, and Europe is just a cog in the American machine. Hafize Erkan took the post of Governor of the Turkish Central Bank and Mehmet Simsek became the Minister of Finance. But the most interesting appointment in the new Turkish cabinet is Hakan Fidan. The head of the Turkish Intelligence Service (MIT) has assumed the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs. Fidan led Turkish intelligence for 13 years. His father is ethnically Kurdish. His longstanding relationship with Western services may predestine Fidan as Erdogan's eventual successor. It is possible that all these changes are just a facade, and the Turkish president has his own plan to defend Turkey's interests in the geopolitical struggle<sup>16</sup>.

What is even more interesting is what Russia expects from Turkey? The personal relationship between Putin and Erdogan is an important factor in the rapprochement, but more significant is the support for Turkey's interests against the American proxies, the Kurds. Russia expects support for closing the Black Sea to external agents and stopping the armament of Ukraine. Russia also relies heavily on the partnership with Turkey and Iran in resolving conflicts in the Middle East. Now on the agenda is the escalation of the conflict between Iran, Lebanon and Israel, where the choice of Turkey is predetermined.

It is possible that Russia will seek a place in the Organization of Muslim States against Turkey's support for BRICS. It will also seek a common language for relations with Muslim countries in the Post-Soviet space.

In conclusion, we will point out again that Turkey's influence on decisions and actions in the field of security in several regions is testimony to the trend of its transformation from a regional to a great power. Successes in this regard are based on the consistent and uncompromising policy in defense of its own national interests, the successful finding of allies in the direction of the "geopolitical wind" and the understanding of the mutual complementarity of various political and economic processes, for example, relations with the EU, NATO and integration with the SCO and BRICS countries.

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<sup>16</sup> K. Androlova, *Nakude shte trugne Turciya sled izborite*, in: *Politicheski nekorektno*, 2023. <https://infacto.bg/nakde-she-trgne-turciya-sled-izborite/> (date accessed: 12.01.2024).

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