

TURKEY'S NEW FOREIGN POLICY LANDMARKS AND CENTRAL ASIA

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The geopolitical tension that became even more evident in the wake of the 2001 events, the de facto unfolding global war over energy sources and transportation corridors in the Middle East and Central Asia, and certain aspects of Turkey's domestic developments have greatly altered Ankara's international status, its political weight, and its role.

The victory of the candidate from the pro-Islamic Justice and Development Party (JDP) at the 28 August, 2007 presidential election created tension between the Islamic circles and the Turkish generals, since the JDP posed itself as the custodian of Kemal Atatürk's traditional principles of a secular state.¹ Today, however, the party is no longer perceived as another Islamic party, but rather as a conservative party resolved to blend Islam with the Turkish model and contemporary developments.²

¹ See: V. Akhmedov, "Armiya i vlast v novykh politicheskikh usloviakh Turtsii: perspektivy konfrontatsii i predely sotrudnichesva," The Middle East Institute, available at [<http://www.iimes.ru/rus/stat/2007/02-10-07c.htm>].

² See: N.Z. Mosaki, "Situatsia posle parlamentskikh vyborov v Turtsii," The Middle East Institute, available at [<http://www.iimes.ru/rus/stat/2007/29-07-07a.htm>].

It seems that the outcome of the latest presidential election was not paradoxical and perfectly fit the current global trends in the Islamic world, on the one hand, and was a logically justified response of the Turkish electorate to the post-2001 international developments, on the other. The party's obvious and growing popularity testifies that the nation is more or less united on the republic's foreign policy aims and its relative continuity.

The steadily increasing dependence on energy resources suggests that Ankara should concentrate on ensuring an adequate level of the republic's energy security. Indeed, nearly all the planned thermal power stations, which are expected to produce over 63 percent of energy in the republic, will use imported coal and gas. According to certain experts,³ continued economic growth in Turkey and the need to bring its infrastructure to the EU level will increase the country's dependence on imported energy to become, in the final analysis, the "professional aptitude test" of the JDP Cabinet.

³ See: A. Turker, "Turkey's New Challenge of Energy Usage," available at [<http://www.turkishweekly.net/energy/>], 31 July, 2007.

Foreign Policy Priorities Revised

The events around Iran and Iraq, the far from simple Turkey's relations with the Euro-Atlantic community, and its de facto international isolation on the Kurdish and Cyprus issues developed into fairly contradictory and even ambiguous foreign policies.

On the one hand, the country is still seeking a higher global and regional status, which it aspires to achieve by joining the EU and serving the Euro-Atlantic community as the main transit and cultural-civilizational “bridge” between the East and the West. In the long term, Ankara is working toward joining the group of big “players” responsible for the European countries’ energy security and diversification of energy sources for the EU, which accounts for the plans to unite the Caucasus and Central Asia into a single energy transportation system that would reach Europe via Turkey.

The Turkish leaders argue that as a neighbor of countries with 73 percent of the world’s oil and 72 percent of the world’s (proven) natural gas reserves, their country forms a natural bridge between the oil-rich Caspian, Central Asian, and Middle Eastern countries and the consumer (mainly European) markets.⁴ In the globalized economy, the republic can exploit its unique geographic location to become the largest terminal and energy bridge between the East and the West.

On the other hand, recent events have been breeding even more skepticism in Turkish society regarding the United States and the EU, two of Turkey’s sponsors in Central Asia, and have cast doubt on the recent Euro-Atlantic priorities.

The U. S.-EU: About 83 percent⁵ of Turkish citizens have a negative opinion about the United States, which was further confirmed by the disagreements with Washington over the Iraqi issue and recognition on 10 October, 2007 by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives of the U.S. Congress of the fact of genocide of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in 1915.

The Turkish leaders⁶ accuse the United States of inadequate support of their country and, therefore, of indirect support of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party in northern Iraq. Turkish experts are inclined to explain the American administration’s reluctance to take strict measures against the KWP by Washington’s plans to use the Kurds against Iran.⁷ Ankara cannot accept this; it needs to fight terror today.

Local analysts believe that the slow progress of the Turkey-EU talks forced the republic to use energy-related issues to put pressure on Brussels.⁸ The recent economic progress allows Turkey to use it as another lever of pressure and to assert⁹ that the country can move ahead even outside the EU. According to Turkish experts, the socioeconomic changes in Turkey have raised its economy to fifth place in Europe, while export rates increased from \$2.9 billion in 1980 to \$36 billion in 2002. At the same time, experts believe that the fast economic growth may bring EU membership closer.

Aware of Turkey’s role and importance in the Euro-Atlantic strategy in the Middle East and Central Asia (energy, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other issues), European circles¹⁰ and the United States agreed that they should “restore the primacy of Turkey as one of our most important strategic partners.”¹¹ The U.S. Administration points out that Washington is Ankara’s partner in fighting the KWP, that it supports Turkey’s EU membership and approves of the new Cabinet’s course aimed at

⁴ See: “Kontseptsia strategicheskoy roli,” *Ekonomicheskoe obozrenie*, No. 11-12 (86-87), 2006, p. 54, available at [www.review.uz].

⁵ See: *Washington ProFile*, 30 June, 2007.

⁶ See: İ. Bal, “Why Turkey has Various Reasons to be Skeptic about the USA?” available at [http://www.turkishweekly.net/comments.php?id=2719], 11 September, 2007.

⁷ See: A.A. Gur’ev, “Situatsia v Turtsii: oktiabr-noiabr 2007,” The Middle East Institute, available at [www.iimes.ru/rus/stat/2007/01-12-07.htm].

⁸ See: I. Shleyfer, “Energeticheskoe sotrudnichestvo mezhdru Turtsiey i ES omrachenno problemami,” available at [http://www.eurasianet.org], 12 June, 2007.

⁹ See: H. Kader, “Turkey’s Booming Economy and the European Union,” available at [http://www.turkishweekly.net/comments], 5 October, 2007.

¹⁰ See: *Opening Speech Given by Foreign Secretary David Miliband to the House of Commons*, British Embassy, Berlin, available at [http://www.britbot.de/en/news], 12 November, 2007.

¹¹ “Burns Reiterates Importance of Turkish Relationship,” available at [http://www.washdiplomat.com/DPouch/2007/October/100307news.html].

promoting secular democracy and deeper political and economic reforms within the Turkish Muslim community. It seems that U.S. Under-Secretary of State Nicholas Burns was referring to Russia when he said: "We share a common interest in preventing the domination by one country of the oil and gas sources and pipelines."¹²

Despite the Turkish-American complications and because of this, Ankara is continuing its consultations with the U.S. leaders within the bilateral dialogue. On 27 October, 2007, the sides tried to find a mutually acceptable way out of the crisis at the meeting of the National Security Council of Turkey, as well as on 5 November, 2007 during the Turkish prime minister's visit to the United States.

The United States still supports Turkey-related projects in the economic sphere. On 16 August, 2007, the Republic of Azerbaijan and the United States signed an official agreement in Baku on feasibility studies of the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline across the Caspian that is expected to bring Central Asian gas to Europe via Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey.

Today, Nabucco, the project that will bring natural gas to the EU (the Union approved in June 2003), is coming to the fore as one of the main European projects involving Ankara. It will bring gas from Iran, but Turkey wants to involve the Central Asian countries as well.

Russia: The relations between Ankara and Moscow are highly contradictory. On the one hand, their bilateral cooperation is going in the right direction in trade, investments, tourism, and security in the Black Sea region.

The trade turnover between the two countries rose from \$4.4 billion in 2001 to \$20.9 billion in 2006; the figure for the first 7 months of 2007 is over \$15 billion. Russia is Turkey's second largest trade partner after Germany.¹³ According to Turkish experts, the long-term economic relations between the two countries hinge on their mutual dependence, if we take into account not only Turkey's gas imports from Russia, but also the transportation of Russian gas to Europe across Turkey.¹⁴

On the other hand, the two powers remain rivals in the transportation of hydrocarbon resources.

The Muslim World: To consolidate its economic (primarily energy) and political security, Ankara is actively operating in the Middle East.

It is commonly believed that Turkey with its newly acquired observer status in the League of the Arab States can influence the important political processes in the Arab world. Turkish diplomats have achieved considerable success in developing the country's relations with Iran (more details below) and Saudi Arabia, two heavyweights of the Islamic world. Over 100,000 Turkish citizens work in Saudi Arabia, while the volume of bilateral trade has already reached \$3.3 billion.¹⁵

Today Turkey has shifted its attention in its Middle Eastern policies to Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian problem, which cannot be resolved unless the region pools its resources. To achieve this Turkey is out to interest the Turkic states in worldwide issues by means of these two major problems. From the Turkish point of view,¹⁶ the absence of coordinated foreign policy efforts in all the Turkic-speaking countries with shared historical and cultural values and humanitarian contacts is damaging their own interests. This is important because social and economic factors have moved to

¹² "Burns Reiterates Importance of Turkish Relationship," available at [<http://www.washdiplomat.com/DPouch/2007/October/100307news.html>].

¹³ See: I.I. Starodubtsev, "Ob uchastii turetskikh mezhdunarodnykh kompaniy v mezhdunarodnom investitsionnom forume 'Sochi-2007.' VI Mezhdunarodny investitsionny forum 'Kuban-2007,' 19-24 sentiabria 2007, Sochi," The Middle East Institute, available at [<http://www.iites.ru>].

¹⁴ See: H. Kader, "Booming Economic Relations Between Turkey and Russia," available at [<http://www.turkishweekly.net/comments.php?id=2769>], 28 November, 2007.

¹⁵ See: "Ob izmeneniiakh v voenno-politicheskoy obstanovke na Blizhnem Vostoke i v Severnoy Afrike (5-11 noiabria 2007 goda)," The Middle East Institute, available at [www.iimes.ru/rus/stat/2007/12-11-07.htm].

¹⁶ See: N.Z. Mosaki, "Nekotorye aspekty vneshney politiki Turtsii," The Middle East Institute, available at [www.iimes.ru/rus/stat/2007/30-11-07a.htm].

the fore in dealing with international crisis situations, which has been amply demonstrated by Ankara's Kurdish problem.

It is no wonder that when speaking at the 11th congress of the Organization of Friendship, Brotherhood, and Cooperation of the Turkic-Speaking Countries and Communities held on 17-19 November, 2007 in Baku, Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan put forward an initiative to set up a political union of Turkic-speaking states to coordinate their efforts in the main foreign policy spheres. The Turkish leaders pointed out¹⁷ in this connection that the intensive relations with the Central Asian countries typical of the Demirel presidency should be restored.

In view of this, Turkey points out that its diplomacy has outstripped all other foreign policy departments in organizing the meeting between President of Afghanistan Karzai and President of Pakistan Musharraf that took place in Ankara.¹⁸

The Energy Transportation Sphere

Despite its strained relations with the United States, Turkey is still pinning its political expectations on expanding the U.S. sponsored BTC pipeline that carries oil from Central Asia and the Caucasus. Today, it is mainly used to move Azeri oil, while Ankara aspires to link it to the Central Asian energy sources. There are other alternatives: the Nabucco, Samsun-Ceyhan, and Turkey-Greece-Italy pipelines.

To justify these measures, the Turkish expert community is holding forth about the need to lower their country's dependence on Russian gas (in 2006 about 60 percent of the gas used in Turkey arrived from Russia).¹⁹ Russian projects of the Burgas-Alexandroupolis and South Stream type, as well as the new pipeline between Turkmenistan and Russia, might defuse the tension around the Black Sea straits somewhat, but they are interfering with Turkey's plans to become the main East-West and North-South energy corridor.

In these conditions Turkey had no choice but to step up its energy-related cooperation with Iran in disregard of Washington's displeasure and possible U.N. sanctions. On 20 November, 2007, the two countries signed an Agreement on Cooperation in the Energy Sphere in Ankara, which was a follow-up to the earlier Memorandum of Intent to Extend Cooperation in the Energy Sphere signed in July 2007. In the summer of 2007, Turkey reached an agreement with Greece and Italy on deliveries of non-Russian gas from the Caspian. It is expected that by 2011 this pipeline will reach its designed capacity and will bring gas to Europe and Turkey (15 percent of the total supply). Turkish experts²⁰ expect that some time later Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan will join the project.

In view of the geographic proximity and historical, cultural, and religious affinity between Iran and Central Asia, as well as Iran's energy potential, Ankara tends to regard it as a reliable, economically useful, and consistent partner for Turkey and the EU at some later date. The Nabucco agreement between Ankara and Tehran suggests that Turkmenistan might join it later. Turkish analysts²¹ are convinced that this will integrate the republic into the shared Iranian-Turkish plans for the region. The

¹⁷ See: B. Yinanç, "Gül to Revive Relations with Central Asia," available at [<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=88982>], 19 November, 2007.

¹⁸ See: Ö. Sanberk (former deputy Turkish foreign minister), "Vneshniaia politika Turtsii v obstanovke neopredelenosti," available at [<http://cpanel.host.am/~karabakh/src/index.php?lang=ru&id=2&nid=12201>], 26 July, 2007.

¹⁹ See: H.S. Ozertem, "Is Turkey Back in the Game?: New Deal with Iran and Nabucco!" available at [<http://www.turkishweekly.net/comments.php?id=2666>], 16 July, 2007.

²⁰ See: H.S. Ozertem, "Pipeline Politics and Turkey," available at [<http://www.turkishweekly.net/comments.php?id=2683>], 31 July, 2007.

²¹ See: H.S. Ozertem, "Is Turkey Back in the Game?..."

project, however, is stalling for several reasons, particularly due to the anti-Iranian U.S. policy, which is creating money problems and making it hard to find enough gas to justify the project.

Turkey is actively cooperating with the Black Sea countries and looking into every possibility to extend and boost regional cooperation in all spheres and in the light of the Istanbul Declaration of June 2007 adopted by the summit of the BSEC members.

The Samsun-Ceyhan pipeline, which will cross Turkey to connect Black Sea and Mediterranean ports, is planned within Turkey's Black Sea initiatives; the expert community believes²² that its future looks doubtful in view of the Russia-sponsored Burgas-Alexandroupolis pipeline.

On 21 November, 2007, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project was launched in Georgia as an alternative to the Trans-Siberian Mainline of Russia. Ankara plans to create a special economic zone to tie Georgia and Azerbaijan to its own economy.

Central Asian Involvement

The Central Asian states, which would like to see more diversified energy transportation routes based on the balanced interests of all the countries involved, eagerly responded to the current changes in regional geopolitics and geo-economics.

Kazakhstan pooled its efforts with Turkmenistan to set the price of gas exported mainly to Russia; Astana sends more oil to the BTC pipeline, which bypasses Russia, while Turkmenistan is involved in the Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline project, which will move Iranian and Turkmenian gas across Turkey to Europe (Central Asia-Azerbaijan-Turkey-the Balkans) and later branch off to what was the Soviet Union's western part. According to Russian experts,²³ if Astana and Ashghabad ratify the European Energy Charter as distinct from Moscow, they will support America's and the EU's plans to leave Russia outside the main energy routes.

On 5 November, 2007, during Turkmenian President Berdymukhammedov's visit to Belgium, where he discussed the Nabucco project, he hastened to assure²⁴ the European partners that closer cooperation with the EU was high on the list of his priorities.

Turkish analysts believe²⁵ that Kazakhstan is also showing its interest in the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project, which will provide it with the opportunity to move its products to the European markets. This will help Turkey to become even more involved in Central Asia.

No energy and communication network designed to connect Central Asia with the rest of the continent and Europe can be created without Uzbekistan, which is situated in the very heart of the region and the Eurasian transportation system. The republic, which is rich in natural resources, should accelerate its economic growth and raise its standard of living, which makes it an interested partner in all the energy transportation corridors either planned or in the process of construction. Under present conditions, it could not only supply its energy sources and other commodities, it could also become a "transshipment point" in the international distribution networks. To develop its transit potential and

²² See: R. Ibrahimov, "Kashagan: Possible Outcomes of the Kazakhstan Government Decisions," [http://www.turkishweekly.net/energy], 17 October, 2007.

²³ See: A. Chichkin, "Kazakhstan i Turkmenia ne khotiat 'priviazivat' svoy gaz tol'ko k rossiyskomu rynku," *Ros-sia*, No. 36, 20 September, 2007, p. 7, available at [http://www.arba.ru/news/3145].

²⁴ See: Ch. Durdiyeva, "Berdymukhammedov Enters a New Phase of EU-Turkmenistan Relations," *CACI Analyst*, 14 November, 2007.

²⁵ See: R. Ibrahimov, "Baku-Tbilisi-Kars: Geopolitical Effect on the South Caucasian Region," available at [http://www.turkishweekly.net/comments], 23 November, 2007.

lower the trade costs, which are fairly high because of the republic's present isolation from the world markets, it needs the widest possible international cooperation, including with Turkey. Both countries are obviously interested in developing the republic's energy resources, energy security, and wider trade contacts.

Russia, Turkey, and the EU in Central Asia

The recent events around Iraq and Iran as well as Washington's ambiguous treatment of these countries make speedy normalization of the U.S.-Turkish relations improbable. At the same time, more moderate and more rational EU strategies make cooperation of Ankara with Brussels much more preferable and realizable. This gives Turkey a chance to go on with its alternative plans in Central Asia, which will include the EU's and Russia's regional projects.

The EU likes this alternative; German analysts stressed Moscow's and Ankara's key strategic position in Eurasia and their stabilizing role in Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Arab world. They are rightly convinced that the West cannot realize its common interests—security and stability in the changed situation and adequate supply of energy resources on acceptable conditions—without drawing Russia and Turkey into the process.²⁶

Ankara, in turn, stresses²⁷ that its interests coincide with those of the EU and that it may become an intermediary between it and the Middle East, be it with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian problem, Iran, Syria, or Iraq. Turkey wants the region to become gradually integrated into the global system and believes that its EU memberships will help the EU to go ahead with its Middle Eastern strategies with Ankara, an influential and prospering Muslim actor, at its side.

President Putin and his Cabinet's flexible and realistic policies in Central Asia are conducive to this. Russian analysts, first, believe that Russia's revenue from gas exports to the EU will not suffer much if Turkmenistan starts trading directly with Europe. "According to the most optimistic forecasts," writes one of them, "by 2015 Turkmenistan will increase its gas production to 120 billion cu m. By that time, the EU will need up to 700 billion cu m of gas, while the share of imported gas will reach 75 percent. Turkmenian gas, therefore, will cover a small fraction of the EU's needs for energy resources, which means that the demand for Russian gas will remain stable."²⁸ This creates a considerable leeway for a compromise between Russia and EU in Central Asia and their continued energy-related cooperation.

Second, Moscow promptly responded to the changed Kazakhstani and Turkmenian approaches to gas prices. During the Gazprom delegation's latest visit to Turkmenistan, the sides agreed on a new gas price: \$130 per 1,000 cu m in the first half of 2008 and \$150 in the latter half of the same year. Later, until 1 January, 2009, gas prices will follow the market.²⁹

For objective reasons—globalization and the mounting economic and political instability in the Middle East and Central Asia tied to Turkey historically and culturally—Ankara has to cooperate with Moscow and Tehran, its rivals. "This is all the more important," said Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan,

²⁶ See: R. Lotar, "Geopoliticheskaia shakhmatnaia doska i mesto na ney Tsentral'noy Azii," *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 15 November, 2007, available at [<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php4?st=1195160640>], 16 November, 2007.

²⁷ See: S. Laçiner, "Turkey's EU Membership's Possible Impacts on the Middle East," available at [turkishweekly.net], 23 March, 2007.

²⁸ R. Fedoseev, "Prezident Turkmenii Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov podderzhal ideiu prodavat gaz Evrope napriamuiu, minuia Rossiiu," *Delovoi gazeta "Vzgliad"*, 16 November, 2007.

²⁹ See: "Turkmenistan Raises Gas Price for Russia," available at [www.itar-tass.com/eng], 27 November, 2007.

“because Russia and Iran are still two major suppliers of natural gas to Turkey. It is unthinkable to discontinue our cooperation with them in the energy sphere.”³⁰

This means that while the American-Turkish disagreements continue and while America goes on with its sanctions against Iran, Turkey will build up its presence in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Middle East and will rely on the EU and Russia. Today, it is stepping up the pan-Turkic dimension in Central Asia in the hope of reaching security and economic stability and limiting any possible pressure from its potential rivals in Central Asia.

Past experience and the present contradictions will hardly help to transform cooperation of the Central Asian and Caucasian countries with Turkey into a union of the Turkic states. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation, including within the SCO, looks much more promising.

³⁰ “Turtsia budet sotrudnichat s Iranom, dazhe esli OON vvededt sanktsii,” *NEWSru*, 21 September, 2007.