

**TURKEY AND THE EU: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

Yarmukhamedova Irodakhon Nosir kizi

Department of Social Sciences Independent researcher

Uzbek State World Languages University,

**ANNOTATION:**

In the last decade, the relations between Turkey and the European Union have been characterized by periods of ups and downs. Although the two sides recognize the importance of economic cooperation, relations remain complicated on the political front. Contrary to the statements of the Western press, Ankara's foreign policy aimed at protecting national interests is not the choice of just a government, but of the entire country. The ineffective past years showed that joining the ranks of "civilized countries" did not justify itself both economically and culturally, and the reluctance of Europe to accept Ankara as an equal partner at the heart of the disagreements between Turkey and the EU led the country to reconsider the direction of its foreign policy. As a result, the western vector gradually lost its importance in Turkish geopolitics.

**KEYWORDS:** European Union, Turkey, Maastricht Treaty, "national minority".

The first step in the relations between Turkey and Europe was determined in the middle of the 19th century as the aspirations of the Ottoman Empire to modernize the country in a western style, to bring the economic, political and social life to the European level and to take its rightful place in it. After Turkey was declared a republic in 1923, Turkey realized that it would be difficult to strengthen its position on the world stage without European countries, and took the first steps towards achieving cooperation with Western countries. From the period from the establishment of relations with the CIS in 1959 to the withdrawal of accession to it in 1989 can be considered as the first stage of the foundation of relations between the parties, in which a number of important obligations for the further development of mutual cooperation were defined. The signing of the Association Agreement in 1963 laid the foundation for the development of cooperation in almost all areas. It is logical to start the second stage of relations between the parties with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty on the European Union in 1992. A real achievement of Turkey's new direction towards Europe was the Customs Union Agreement signed between the parties in 1996. The rapprochement process within the Customs Union has established multi-format economic cooperation between the parties. The third phase, which began with Turkey's EU candidate status in 1999, was first of all seen as a radical change in relations between Ankara and Brussels was required and characterized by the revival of active political dialogue on the problems of democratization in the country. This political dialogue created the necessary channels of cooperation, allowing the parties to study

and discuss each other's interests and intentions, and to agree on them to a certain extent, but Turkey's failure to complete the reform roadmap according to the Copenhagen criteria by mid-2000 led to a temporary freeze on membership negotiations.

When the Justice and Development Party came to power, democratic reforms were implemented in the state system. In particular, as a result of the cessation of military intervention in state administration, the legal equalization of women's and men's rights, and the abolition of the death penalty in 2005, it was possible to resume negotiations on Turkey's entry into the EU, and in turn, this marked a new modern stage in the development of mutual cooperation between the parties. To a large extent, this was facilitated by the interest of the European Union in the wide use of political, socio-economic and humanitarian tools to neutralize threats such as terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, and illegal immigration. One of the most important meetings in this regard was the meeting at the level of foreign ministers in Turkey-European Union format held in Istanbul in 2010. It should be said that until 2015, EU countries showed little interest in activating the process of negotiations with Turkey, and their real bilateral relations in most cases were related to the economy. Any meetings held in Turkey on the issue of integration were welcomed with the hope of achieving progress. For the EU, in turn, they were a convenient excuse to create the appearance of active work, which in fact did not interest anyone.

It is appropriate to enumerate the problems that arise between Turkey and the European Union and several factors that prevent the country from being accepted into the union:

Firstly, violation of democratic principles and human rights in the country;

Second, international and regional problems (Cyprus conflict, Armenian genocide);

Third, the existence of contradictions in the internal political elite of Turkey on the issue of EU accession;

Four, the difference in cultural and religious views;

The main reason for Turkey's accession to the Union and the delay in negotiations was explained by the fact that the social life of the country does not meet the Copenhagen criteria - the list of necessary conditions. In particular, in recent years, due to the weakening of Turkey's status as a legal and democratic state, criticism of its domestic policies by the European Union has increased: for example, in June 2013, the violent dispersal of protesters in Gezi Park by the police caused a sharp protest in Brussels. At the same time, they criticize the country for not respecting human rights and freedoms and mass arrests of journalists, which they equate with restricting freedom of speech.

In addition, the European Union notes that, despite its geostrategic position, the Republic of Turkey is actually surrounded by the countries of the Middle East, armed conflicts are constantly escalating in their territory, and at the same time, Turkey has unresolved territorial conflicts with a number of countries, namely Greece and Cyprus. It is one of the most important geopolitical problems in relations between the Union.



Emergence of the Cypriot-Turkish problem in 1960, after Great Britain granted independence to Cyprus, the country's president Makarios III proposed to amend the country's constitution, according to which the rights of the Turkish Cypriots were limited in relation to the Greek society of the island, which caused a serious protest of the Turkish government. As a result of the Turkish Cypriots' rejection of the president's offer, clashes broke out between the Greeks and the Turks on the island. In 1974, they supported a state coup in Greece, and President Makarios III was forced to leave the country. Turkey, under the pretext of the impossibility of a peaceful solution to the conflict and the protection of the Turkish society and the restoration of the constitutional system, occupied the north-east of the island, and the government introduced its troops into Cyprus. By 1983, Rauf Denktosh announced the establishment of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which today is recognized only by Turkey. In 2004, the UN made active attempts to find a peaceful solution to the Cyprus problem, which is the biggest obstacle to Turkey's EU membership, and even proposed the Annan plan (the plan was developed at the initiative of the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan), which envisages the creation of a single state with two autonomies. The Turkish government has repeatedly stated that it would open sea and air ports to the Republic of Cyprus only after the international recognition of Northern Cyprus. Ankara's position is that the Cyprus problem should not be a subject of bilateral discussions with the European Union, but should be discussed between the two sovereign states of the island - the Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Ankara says it is ready to recognize a united Cyprus only after the island's Greek community accepts a plan proposed by the UN. But the Greek side refused to resolve the conflict according to the established plan, and the issue remains open to this day.

In late 2008, further problems arose in Turkey's relations with the Republic of Cyprus due to disagreements over oil and gas exploration on the island's shelf. The government of the Republic of Cyprus gave permission to begin exploration on the shelf, but Turkey strongly opposed it. The Turkish Navy raided Cypriot oil exploration vessels several times under the pretext that they were in Turkish territorial waters. In November 2008, the president of Cyprus sent a complaint to the UN about Turkey's actions, stating that the actions of the Turkish side had a negative impact on the peace talks on the divided island. In May 2009, Ankara reiterated that it would not allow oil and gas exploration off the coast of Cyprus and threatened to send warships to the area to protect its interests. As a result, the Republic of Cyprus blocked the discussion of a complex of energy issues within the process of negotiations on Ankara's EU membership. Thus, despite repeated efforts by the international community, there is currently a demarcation line between the Turkish and Greek parts of Cyprus. So, in the EU, there is a country that is against the Copenhagen criteria for membership of this organization and has territorial problems.

Another painful issue that hinders EU-Turkey relations is the recognition of the " Armenian genocide " during the Ottoman Empire in 1915, which is still denied by the ruling circles of

Turkey. " Armenian Genocide " is undoubtedly one of the most sensitive issues for Turkey. It should be said that this is already a politicized issue, and in recent times politicians, not historians, are arguing about this topic. During the years 1915-1923, 1.5 million Armenians were exterminated by various means in the territories belonging to the Ottoman Empire, as a result of forced starvation, forced migration to long distances in extremely difficult conditions. Historians recognize this massacre as the first genocide of the 20th century. More than 20 countries of the world recognized the massacre of Armenians as genocide, that is, the heaviest crime against humanity. These countries include Russia, France, Italy, Austria, Brazil, Sweden, Poland, Argentina and others. Following the Turkish government's denial of the massacre of Armenians, by 1999 diplomatic relations between the two countries were severed and the borders were closed. **According to a government statement, Turkey recognizes that a large number of Armenians died in 1915.** However, they vehemently deny that genocide was committed. Turkish historians say that Armenians in Eastern Anatolia died of starvation, disease and other causes during mass deportations to keep them away from the front lines. Armenians were mostly moved to Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, which were considered Ottoman territories at that time. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been repeatedly repeating for several years that historians should deal with this issue, not politicians, and that all archives of Turkey are open to those who want to study those events. At the beginning of 2009, the development of a road map for the Armenian-Turkish agreement by the foreign ministers of Armenia, Turkey and Switzerland was interpreted as the beginning of a new era of conflict resolution between the two countries caused the situation to escalate. In addition, the six-week war in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 further worsened Armenian-Turkish relations. As a result of Turkey's use of Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh, an area controlled by ethnic Armenians since the 1990s war, Azerbaijan has gained large swaths of territory and pushed Armenian forces out of neighboring areas.

It is also mentioned that the Turkish government, according to the European Union, has not solved the problem of the Kurds, who violate the rights of the national minority living in the country. The core of the Kurdish problem is the rejection by both regional and international powers of the aspirations of the Kurds living in the so-called Kurdistan region for many centuries to have their own independent state. The Kurds have already come to the attention of the international community by demanding their cultural, social and political recognition and by trying to establish their own state in the territory divided between four countries. The solution of the Kurdish problem, which has gained regional importance, is hampered by the differences in the policies of each country towards the Kurds in its territory, and in turn, the differences in the ideas and actions of the Kurds in each country towards having a separate state. The fact that the Kurdish leaders of the 20th century took different paths for liberation movements (some chose militancy, some diplomatic) is one of the main reasons why the Kurdish problem is still ongoing. The countries of the region have always been afraid that the



independence of the Kurds could derail the situation in their countries and the region, and the possibility of breaking the territorial unity. Therefore, in order to preserve their territorial unity, the regional governments have been trying to forcefully suppress the Kurds' movements. And the radical actions of the Kurds complicate the problem even more. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the conflict from both sides. For example, the Kurds in Turkey demand that the existing constitution be amended and the Kurdistan Autonomous Region be established within the Republic of Turkey on the basis of this constitution. This does not correspond to the interests of Turkey, which adheres to the idea of a "single state" by itself.

Accession to the European Union requires maximum efforts from the applicant country to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria. However, the example of Turkey shows that not only the fulfillment of the "pragmatic" part of the requirements cannot be the basis for membership of the organization. Although the requirement to adhere to these factors is not officially specified, the ideological component, which includes shared values, history, culture, even religion, is important. Another noticeable difference between the parties is represented by the diversity of religious and cultural views. Thus, for example, the Islamic factor characteristic of Muslim Turkey played an important role in the process of Turkish integration, which is not positively accepted by European countries. It is not difficult to understand the position of European countries: no matter how much Turkey tries to adapt to Western values, the specific features of the social and political life of this country do not correspond to European ideals.

In conclusion, it should be noted that at the moment, it is difficult to call Turkey's relations with Europe still friendly - apart from the issue of the future structure of the European Union, there is no other dialogue between the parties. Europe is not ready to sever relations with Turkey, and at the same time, it does not want to bring Ankara closer to itself. If Turkey is really systematically moving away from policies in line with US interests, Europe is still afraid of losing its partner in the form of Washington, which makes bilateral cooperation much more complicated. Stable relations between the parties will be possible only if there is a reasonable approach based on mutually beneficial partnership.

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