Erdogan Rushes to Form a Broad Coalition of pro-Turkish Forces

Amid the failure of US policy and credibility and the decline of the European Union’s role in international affairs and relations with the United States, Turkish leader Erdogan is rushing to build a broad coalition of pro-Turkish forces in Central Asia and the Mediterranean.

He emphasizes strengthening his influence in Central Asia, where the Turkish leader began to actively promote his views within the framework of the Turkic civilization instead of the Soviet ideology which united North and Central Eurasia in the recent past. The confrontation between religions, Christianity and Islam, around which the main cultural codes and values of Ankara’s Turkic offensive were concentrated, played an essential role in this shift.

Today, Turkey is actively pulling the countries of the Turkic world and the former Ottoman Empire under its control through “soft power” and quotas for education in Turkish Universities. A public demonstration of this process was the celebration throughout August in Turkey of the 30th anniversary of the independence of the states of the Turkic world: Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and even Turkmenistan, although this country remains neutral and is not part of the Turkic Council. The festivities were initiated by the International Organization of Turkic Culture, TÜRKSÖZ, headquartered in Ankara. Events were also held in Romania and Hungary, which received an observer status in the Turkic Council.

Demonstrating their intention to play a decisive role in politics and events in the region, the Turkic Council countries
discussed the situation in Afghanistan on September 27 in Istanbul, at the initiative of Turkey. Representatives of the
diplomatic missions of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Hungary were invited to the
meeting. "The fact that there are millions of Turkic people living in Afghanistan is of direct interest to us....," Turkish
Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu told the meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Turkic Council. The head of the
Turkish diplomacy also stressed that the meeting attests to the growing authority of the Turkic Council in the
international arena. "Today, we will give a strong message about the unity of the Turkic world and our cooperation
in international issues," he said.

Undoubtedly, the development of the situation in Afghanistan is significant for the region’s countries, first and
foremost in terms of security and preventing the penetration of destructive terrorist elements, drug trafficking, arms
traffic, and illegal migrants. However, this is primarily relevant for the Central Asian states bordering Afghanistan,
particularly Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. Especially since there are many Uzbeks, Turkmens, and
Tajiks living in Afghanistan, and the common border in the current turbulent situation in this country may at any
time cause numerous risks for the neighboring countries.

However, Ankara’s current emphasis is not entirely clear: what does this have to do with the Turkic Council? Yes,
Çavuşoğlu is correct in saying that many Turks are living in Afghanistan, and the country directly borders with
Turkic states. But it doesn’t border Turkey itself! Could there be an ulterior motive in Ankara’s actions? For example,
the intention to take control of the drug market and the reserves of rare earth minerals in Afghanistan. In particular,
lithium, which is essential for the booming production of batteries, as well as gold, copper, iron ore, and even oil.
Another wealth that Ankara is undoubtedly interested in is Afghanistan’s strategic geographic location at the
crossroads of the Middle East, Central Asia, the Far East, and the Indo-Pakistan region. And it is this strategic factor
that today especially interests the ambitious Turkish President, who is actively spreading Turkish influence in the
Balkans, Africa, the Middle East, Transcaucasia, and Central Asia. Therefore, Turkey’s active desire to get involved
in Afghanistan not on its own, but with the help of the Turkic Council attracts particular attention and even some
wariness. After all, the same security issues in the current events in Afghanistan are very actively discussed in such
stable regional associations as the CSTO, the SCO, and the EAEU. However, Ankara is trying hard to transfer such
efforts under the auspices of the Turkic Council it created in 2009, forming the prototype of a Great Turan, which
previously existed more as a cultural and historical project. The Turkish President openly says that he wants to turn
the Turkic Council into a full-fledged international organization. At his explicit instigation, there have been opinions
that such an organization could be transformed into the local counterpart of the European Union in the future. Back
in the spring, Erdogan said the enhancement of the role of the Turkic Council is scheduled to be considered at the
Council’s 8th extraordinary meeting in Istanbul this November, and a prestigious and historic building in Istanbul
has even been prepared to run the organization in the future.

At the same time, it is worth noting that the countries of the Turkic world have become increasingly active in
distancing themselves from the recent Soviet past. An example can be found in the rehabilitation in August this year
by the Supreme Court of Uzbekistan of 115 persons, purged in 1920-1930 of the last century, predominantly outright
Basmachi bandits. Thus, one of the evilst of them was a former Basmachi leader, Ibrahim-bek, who fought against
the Soviets on British money to bring back the power of the Emir of Bukhara, who had fled to Afghanistan. In
addition to the campaign to rehabilitate Ibrahim-bek, he has now been relegated to the ranks of the Jadid
enlighteners. However, his world view was that of an archaic conservative Islamist, close to today’s Taliban, and he
killed, for example, the Jadid doctors as “shaitans.”

In Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, the Islamic factor has recently begun to play an important role,
reinforcing Wahhabi sentiments in the social media segment, thanks to the Turkish President’s political views and
his proximity to the Muslim Brotherhood (an organization banned in the Russian Federation). Apart from
demonstrating Turkey’s growing influence in the region, all this poses a clear ideological threat to the area.

Erdogan started talking about “divided Azerbaijan” within such a policy framework, referring to North-Western Iran,
which 10 million Azerbaijanis populate. Justifiably concerned after Erdogan’s speech about destabilizing Iran, the
Turkish Ambassador was summoned to that country’s Foreign Ministry and was told that the “era of belligerent
empires” fell behind.

Vladimir Odintsov, political observer, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”.