Growing Cooperation between Turkey and Russia is a Concern for the West

Russian President Vladimir Putin’s meeting with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Sochi on August 5 remains in the center of international attention and the media, given the very broad agenda of the talks — bilateral issues, regional problems and global challenges. The two presidents discussed the key importance of a relationship of trust between Moscow and Ankara in achieving international stability. The multifaceted nature of the discussions was confirmed by the composition of the Turkish delegation, which included the heads of key departments, such as the Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, Treasury and Finance, Trade, Agriculture and Forestry. Hence, it is not surprising that the negotiations lasted more than four hours. They ended with the signing of a joint statement on the further development of ties between the countries.

Incidentally, this is the second face-to-face meeting between Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the last 17 days, as before Sochi they met in Tehran at a trilateral summit in the “Astana format”, forming a peacekeeping axis together with Iran to counter Western aggression. The past meeting in Tehran has already been very positively assessed by the international community as a rather important stage in the development and strengthening of Turkey-Russia relations and the creation of the humanitarian conditions for a multipolar world that meets global requirements.

As for the negotiations in Sochi on August 5, they opened, in the already published assessments of many international experts, “a new page in Turkey’s bilateral relations with Russia.” According to analysts, the sides have demonstrated a willingness to find mutually beneficial solutions and have sent a clear signal to the West that Ankara is no longer looking to Washington in its growing cooperation with Russia, but is pursuing an independent policy.

During the discussions, very important decisions were reached, taking economic relations to a new level. In 2021, trade between the two countries increased by 57%, and between January and May 2022 it doubled. At the meeting in Sochi, Turkey and Russia signed a roadmap for further economic cooperation, which envisages an increase in trade turnover to $100 billion.

The meeting in Sochi paid particular attention to cooperation in the energy sector. In particular, the example of the successful construction of the Akkuyu NPP was cited, referring to the large projects that are being implemented jointly. In addition, Vladimir Putin noted that the jointly built Turkish Stream pipeline, through which Russia supplies about 26 billion cubic meters of gas to Turkey, has become “one of the most important arteries for supplying Europe with Russian gas” and Europe should be grateful to Turkey for the uninterrupted transit of gas to its market. At the same time, against the background of the West’s illegal sanctions policy against Russia, the two leaders have agreed on partial payment for gas in rubles, as well as on a general switch to bilateral trade in rubles.

During the meeting, the presidents stressed the need for full implementation of the Istanbul “grain deal”, including unimpeded exports of Russian grain and fertilizers.

The two presidents noted the key importance of Moscow and Ankara’s relations of trust in achieving international stability. In this context, among the issues discussed were the recent developments in Syria and the importance attached to advancing the political process, preserving political unity and the territorial integrity of Syria was reaffirmed. The determination to act in close coordination with each other in combating all terrorist organizations was also reasserted. Ankara’s so far rejection of ambitious plans for a military operation in northern Syria, which Moscow has recently called for more than once, provides some evidence that the sides are willing to coordinate their actions in Syria.

The Libyan issue was also touched upon: the presidents reaffirmed their commitment to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of Libya.
These aspects of the meeting in Sochi show that Russian-Turkish relations represent a new kind of inter-state cooperation, where contradictions are not of an ultimatum nature and problems are resolved with respect for the interests of each side.

While talking in Sochi, Russian President Vladimir Putin invited the Turkish leader to a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Uzbekistan in September. President Erdoğan told the media that Ankara plans to join the Shanghai Five and become an observer in the organization and a partner, like Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Western states have already expressed concern about the deepening cooperation between Russia and Turkey, as reported in particular by the Financial Times. The US and the EU were especially alarmed by statements by Presidents Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan about their intention to strengthen economic and trade cooperation after the summit. At the same time, the publication highlighted statements by US authorities about the risk of possible secondary sanctions that the US could impose on countries which would help Moscow circumvent the restrictive measures imposed on it by the West. In addition, a high-ranking source suggested that the EU might urge companies to refuse cooperating with Ankara because of its active engagement with Russia.

Social media users in Turkey have been very supportive of the Russian and Turkish presidents’ agreement on trade in rubles, predicting the collapse of the dollar once the treaty comes into force. In addition, the Turkish president’s comments on August 6 about the consequences of such a decision, stating that it would “bring money to Moscow and Ankara”, are highly appreciated on social media. At the same time, Erdoğan added that he had discussed with his Russian counterpart the application of the Russian Mir card in Turkey, and that there was serious progress on this issue — five Turkish banks were already working on it.

However, it should be borne in mind that the announced switch to the ruble in trade between the two countries is a formal consolidation of what has in fact already been in place for many months. Almost all trade in vegetables and fruit that comes from Turkey, as well as many types of services have been operating in this bilateral mode for almost a year now.

Commenting on the results of the Sochi meeting, a number of experts emphasize that for Turkey, such contacts with Russia, even if there are some discrepancies on specific issues, are a chance to establish itself as a global player.

It is also pointed out that the meeting clearly confirmed the shift of the future world political order to the East. And in this respect Russia has succeeded in developing a special format of interaction with Turkey.

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