The SCO's Role in Turkish Foreign Policy

Can the Shanghai Cooperation Organization become an alternative to Turkey's membership in the European Union or are the Eurasian trends in Ankara's foreign policy just a way of exerting "pressure" on the Europeans, who have been forcing Turkey to "wait at the threshold" for decades? For several years, this issue has been a matter of serious debate, inter alia, among Turkish experts, and officials have made contradictory comments about the prospects for the development of Turkey's relations with the SCO and the EU.

However, even skeptics agree that the axis of world development is shifting from the West to the East, so Turkey will eventually and inevitably lean in this direction regardless of the specific political preferences of its leaders. Having set the strategic goal of strengthening the global positions of Turkey, its leadership anyway will focus on global trends and try to "fit into them" at an early stage. And this is one of the reasons for the interest of Ankara in the SCO.

Today, Turkey has the status of "SCO dialog partner", which is below observer status and gives Ankara limited opportunities for cooperation with the organization. Turkish representatives may participate in meetings of heads of ministries and departments of SCO member states, working group sessions, and scientific and expert meetings related to the areas of Turkey's cooperation with the organization. These areas are enshrined in the partnership agreement and include regional security issues, combating terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime, as well as various aspects of economic and cultural interaction.

However, the status of a dialog partner strengthens the positions of Turkey in the international arena. This allows Ankara to demonstrate that the SCO countries see it as a state with which the largest Eurasian association is ready to maintain a special relationship. It also significantly increases the chances of Turkey achieving membership in the SCO.

Formally, there are no obstacles in front of Turkey to join the organization in the event of the submission of a corresponding application on the part of Ankara. However, it can be assumed that the Turkish government will not rush into full membership and prefers to first obtain the observer status. The fact is that the process of negotiations with the SCO (as well as the process of negotiations with the EU) is itself extremely beneficial to Turkey, allowing it to pursue its "multi-dimensional" political strategy. Ankara's priority task is to gradually increase its global weight, inter alia, through its presence in a particular status in various international markets.

Historically and geographically, Turkey has been a Eurasian country, which explains its ability to conduct multi-vector foreign policy not confined to any particular direction. The current stage of development of international relations, the acceleration of global processes and the formation of a multipolar world order only help expand the range of diplomatic activity in Turkey. The juxtaposition of the various areas of Ankara's foreign policy and attempts to "fit" a complex range of its international interests in the narrow confines of "the choice between going to the West or to the East" constitute a mistaken approach, mainly due to western thinking.

In fact, Turkey is not moving either to the East or to the West. It considers itself a "central state" between the East and the West, always "keeping at the ready" a wide arsenal of "local" strategies, and activates them in order to...
create a positive environment in any direction.

In this context, the contradictory statements of Turkish politicians on the issue of whether the SCO might become an alternative to the EU become clear. There is no doubt that at some points Ankara uses the "SCO factor" to strengthen its bargaining position in the dialog with the West. However, it should be understood that these two areas of Turkey's foreign policy are not mutually exclusive in principle, and Turkey is deeply interested in the parallel development of each of them.

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