

## RUSSIA-TURKEY: DOOMED TO BE ETERNAL NEIGHBOURS

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Viewed in historical retrospect, Russian-Turkish coexistence can hardly be described as an idyll. The two countries fought each other fiercely and for a long time. They fought more than traded. Nevertheless, even in the most stagnant and cloudy periods in relations between the two peoples the process of mutual enrichment of their cultures was not interrupted. The eternal rivals have always remained eternal neighbours. In Russian literature there are more than a few stories of how the two nations stunned the world with the thunder of bloody fighting. In the life of the people, too, stories about warlike Turks have been passed down from generation to generation. On returning from the Russian-Turkish war, a soldier living in a remote place would tell his neighbours about the vehement attacks of Turks, enhancing in this way his own valour in the eyes of his relatives and countrymen.

In short, vast Russia always knew about Turks no less than about Germans. The image of Turks was associated first of all with naval and land battles, the storming of fortresses, crosses on graves and crosses awarded for valour. Later on, it was associated with foreign goods and spices. In view all this, those who are inclined to exaggerate the overall picture of Russian-Turkish relations always have a tested and speculative ground for arguments about the 'inborn hostility' allegedly existing between the two peoples. These arguments are stoked up both in Russia and Turkey.

The balance of public notions about the good and the bad in the past and present of Russian-Turkish coexistence is largely regulated by the ruling circles. In each concrete period of history they pull on different ideological levers. In the 1920s, stimulating the wave of reconciliation, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk literally stunned his compatriots by a phrase which became an aphorism. He said that Turks and Russians are very much alike. This idea of the father of the nation struck ordinary Moslems by its incredibility. Nevertheless, it was imprinted upon their memory. The constructive contribution of the first Turkish president to an improvement of relations with Turkey's northern neighbour has naturally left its trace.

Scholars and journalists influence public sentiments in our countries to no less a degree. With equal success, they can extract both negative and positive facts, depending on the moral level of their aims. Some prefer to relish stories about friendship between a Turkish sultan and a Crimean khan, directed against the Russian tsar. Others focus public attention on lively ties in the period of the rise of two young republics or on present economic and political ties which can unite both countries in the common desire for mutual benefit.

There is a third force of interaction. The potential of its influence on the general atmosphere of the two people's neighbourhood can hardly be overestimated. I have in mind a large army of ordinary citizens engaged in the mass supply of Turkish consumer goods to Russian wholesale and retail markets. We can debate much about trends in the military and politician situation in the Black Sea region, the ulterior motives of military and economic strategists, or the Cypriot knot of contradictions. At the same time, some villager in the Tambov region, trying on clothes delivered to the local market from Istanbul, will exclaim without any diplomacy: long live the Turkish tailor.

A great number of men and women across Russia can say the same because Turkish business, quickly responding to Russian consumer demand, has created a whole light industry to produce clothes and shoes for citizens of its great northern neighbour. Together with the flow of goods from Germany, Italy and the United States, the Turkish flow puts local industries in a difficult position. But it is a problem of the Russian state-how to regulate the traffic of foreign goods so that they would not ruin local manufacturers but encourage them to take part in the competitive struggle.

It is not only a matter of winter leather coats and high boots. Many people in Russia can see for themselves the high quality of the work done by Turkish builders. Among them are Russian servicemen who received well-appointed housing from Turkish firms. In general, it is an objective reality. On the one hand, this reality naturally impels Russians to understand that Russian-Turkish neighbourliness is advantageous and useful. On the other hand, it also impels the authorities to take more energetic actions for the promotion of bilateral co-operation.

After Germany, Turkey is Russia's second largest trade partner. This fact is now noted with satisfaction by leaders of both countries. At the same time, Moscow and Ankara can hardly rest content with what has been achieved because the building of an appropriate political superstructure remains a sluggish process. The reason for such an obvious discrepancy lies mainly in historical circumstances. Russia and Turkey have always had regions where their interests and claims clashed: the Caucasus, the Black Sea straits and the Balkans. Time is changing the style and methods of competition but, unfortunately, not its essence. It is safe to say that nothing revolutionary will take place in the near future. But a favourable evolution is quite possible.

As a matter of fact, the manifestations of this evolution are already evident. About 20 years ago the sharply increased activity of Ankara in the Balkans would immediately be censured by Moscow as 'expansionist moves'. While police operations against the Kurds would be castigated as 'bloody crimes'. Ankara would use the same language for characterising Moscow's actions in the Caucasus. Today both sides are more accurate in the choice of expressions and show more discretion in general. They have learned from experience and now understand better than before that they have enough similar problems. It is better to work for the solution of these problems instead of adding fuel to the fire.

This thought was clearly expressed during Tansu Çiller's visit to Moscow at the end of last year. The Turkish foreign minister and her Russian counterpart, Yevgeny Primakov, clearly tried to create the impression among journalists and TV viewers that Russian-Turkish political differences are not so acute as they are presented. To ensure the gradual overcoming of these differences, it is necessary to act more energetically first of all in the areas where there are views in common, in this way setting concrete positive examples for imitation.

In particular, the positions of both sides on Nagorno Karabakh have become closer. The Russian and Turkish foreign ministries believe that the settlement must be achieved by granting Nagorno Karabakh the right to self-determination while observing the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. In Iraq, the problem of autonomy for the peoples inhabiting its north can also be solved within the bounds of a single state. Moscow can potentially help improve Turkish-Syrian relations, and it has promised to act in this direction. Both sides cleared up their views regarding the PKK. Primakov said that no terrorists would be given any support in Russia.

Special mention should be made of the joint struggle against terrorism. Firstly, it is a topical and universal problem. Secondly, it lies within the spheres where the two countries can achieve an appreciable result from co-operation. They have already some experience in this respect. Turkish and Russian special services acted jointly in the freeing of hostages on board the Avrasya ferry. It remains to hope that the memorandum on co-operation in the struggle against terrorism, signed by two parties last December, will acquire a real content in the work of special services.

Military security also deserves special consideration. Russian scholars of Turkish affairs know well that Turkish generals have traditionally enjoyed a privilege in the actual provision of state activity in this sphere and in policy formulation in this subject in Turkey. To put it more clearly, civilian officials do not usually risk objection if the generals think it necessary to place new accents in the sphere of military policy. There is perhaps simplification in this notion about the functioning of the Turkish security bodies. But in essence it is probably correct. In Russia, the generals have also exerted great influence on shaping security policy. However, changes have lately been noticed in this respect.

One can at least conclude from the above, that a keen perception of external threats to national security is characteristic of Turkey and Russia alike. This is quite natural. A military professional is

used to thinking in terms characteristic of the military. It would be strange to see the opposite. However, an appropriate conclusion suggests itself: the concern of the military to strengthen national defence, including concrete operational directions and flanks, should not arouse extreme suspicion on the other side. At the same time both sides should make consistent efforts to promote co-operation and trust in the contiguous areas.

In this sense, one can hardly assess as neighbourly the attempts to make use of Russia's present difficulties and step up military activity in the Black Sea or to talk more toughly about the regulation of shipping through the straits, though Russians understand Istanbul's concern for the ecology of and fire safety in that area of heavy traffic.

Russia's military and political leaders think that Ankara should not be agitated about military-technical co-operation between Moscow and Nicosia. The contract for the delivery of S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems to Cyprus will not enhance the offensive potential of the Cypriot army. These missiles can only help increase Nicosia's confidence at the talks on the settlement of the 25-year-old problem.

But, it seems, the row made about this contract is not explained by the combat characteristics of the anti-aircraft missile, though they have no analogues. The matter is that the Russian defence industry demonstrates its competitive power on the world arms market. There would be no row if these missiles were British-made, for instance. There is also another matter. Cyprus has been and remains a point of contradictions and political aspirations of Turkey and Russia. However, as it was already noted, it is not productive to lay stress on narrow aspects of policy.

Despite the present difficulties and lack of understanding in Russian-Turkish dialogue, the general trend can nevertheless be regarded as positive. Perhaps this is also so because at the end of the twentieth century the two countries have become more commensurable in their scales. Turkey has markedly advanced in its development and tries to assert itself as a more significant regional power. Russia, the successor to the vast Soviet empire, has waived its superpower claims and concentrated on the solution of domestic and regional problems. Thus, there is a clear field for common efforts.