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ALEKSEY ILIN. TÜRKİYE-NATO DEAL: WHAT RUSSIA IS PREPARING FOR AND THE ESSENCE OF ERDOĞAN'S POLITICAL BENEFITS

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Abstract. The Türkiye Parliament ratified Sweden's accession to NATO. The process was quite complex and accelerated after a telephone conversation between Türkiye President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the US President Joe Biden. It should be assumed that the parties were able to reach an agreement among themselves and each received a certain benefit. It is obvious that Türkiye asked for EU membership, strengthening the country's defense potential, and economic benefits. The US put forward a number of its demands, which certainly affected the issue of relations between Türkiye and Russia. The article also

examines the historical prerequisites for concluding a deal between countries.

The author analyzes the political, economic and military bonuses for countries as a result of the agreement, identifies possible threats to Russia and prospects for further cooperation with Türkiye, makes a preliminary forecast about Sweden's prospects in NATO and assesses the long- and medium-term interests of the US.

Several decades are already behind us, and Türkiye is still not a member of the European Union. And, it may seem, it no longer particularly strives to become an ally with the Europeans, but when the opportunity arises, the country's authorities remind the Western political establishment that their request has not been granted. Therefore, Türkiye builds its relationship with the West based on its own benefit. According to Türkiye, the West and the US must pay for decades of waiting. Now it is just the time for reckoning, according to Türkiye's political elite, and the country has begun trading. Before analyzing today's deal between Türkiye and the West, let me remind you what difficulties and reforms the state had to go through to obtain EU membership.

It should be noted that "Türkiye's 'movement towards' Europe dates back to the "Tanzimat era" (1840-1875), when the Ottoman Empire began economic, political and military transformations on the European pattern. Later, in the twentieth century, a huge step in this direction was taken by Kemal Atatürk, who was elected the first president of the country after the proclamation of the Türkiye Republic in 1923. Atatürk was convinced that the root cause of the empire's backwardness lay in its adherence to many outdated traditions and Islamic dogmas." [1] It was then that Türkiye began internal modernization and embarked on a secular path of development. These were not just words, but a whole complex of events, which began with the transformation of traditions.

In 1925, the national parliament decided to close religious monasteries, liquidate numerous sects, prohibit the wearing of the burqa, and introduce European suits, ties, and hats. At the same time, Türkiye starts implementing a far-reaching economic policy and establishing trade ties with European countries.

The Türkiye government of that period earned the trust of Europe largely due to the fulfillment of its financial obligations. In particular, it paid off part of the Ottoman debts, which made it possible to receive loans from the West for the development of the country. Permission to join the League of Nations can be considered an important political success of Türkiye in the last century and a kind of reward from the West. It seemed that Türkiye was getting closer to Europe, but in 1938 K. Atatürk died and relations with Europe became cooler. True, Türkiye did not lost connections with Europe. During the Cold War, the state joined the Western coalition, which helped it receive large loans and non-repayable subsidies. Then membership in NATO, later joining other international organizations.

In the late 50s of the last century, Türkiye made repeated attempts to join the EU. And only in 1964 it received the status of an associate member, but this, I note, is far from full membership. The state still needed to go through quite a lot of stages of verification, notes researcher G.I. Starchenkov: "Through the efforts of the leadership of the EEC and Türkiye, a three-stage fifteen-year program was developed with the aim of achieving Türkiye's full membership in this organization. In particular, it was envisaged that at the first stage (1965–1969) Türkiye would receive a number of benefits in trade and financial relations with the Common Market (preferential tariffs on some export goods, loans for industrial development, etc.). Since 1973, the country entered the second stage (the delay occurred due to the coup d'état of 1971 and a number of "technical reasons"), which was called the "transition period", designed for a long 22 years. Türkiye pledged to reduce and, after 12 years, completely abolish customs duties on almost all industrial products of the EEC

countries... At the final stage, Türkiye was supposed to completely liberalize the import of EEC industrial goods and adopt regulations on the migration of labor and capital. It was planned that in 1995 Türkiye would become a full-fledged EC member.” [2] I’d like to note that the Türkiye authorities fulfilled the designated obligations, but did not receive proper assessment from the EU elite.

In 1999, the EU again gave Türkiye hope, the country was included in the list of applicants, and even a new deadline was set – 2015. Nine years have passed, but Türkiye is still not a member of the EU.

In the fall of 2023, Türkiye leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan spoke sharply about Europe’s promises about Türkiye’s accession to the EU: “We have no expectations from the European Union, which has made us wait for 60 years.” [3] Erdogan’s bold statement and reproach to the collective West happened after Türkiye felt its importance in resolving the issue related to Sweden’s accession to NATO. The decisive vote remained with Türkiye. (Hungary does not count in this matter.) Therefore, a public statement of this kind is a challenge to another dialogue, which should benefit Türkiye, the Türkiye leader considered. Otherwise, according to Erdogan, Türkiye will go down different paths with the EU. Which ones? – didn’t specify.

It should be noted that the European Parliament reacted to Erdogan’s statement quite calmly. Türkiye was not promised anything, but only noted the need to “begin a process of reflection in order to find a parallel and realistic model of relations between the EU and Türkiye, which takes into account the interests of all participants.” [4]

Based on this exchange of views, it is clear that Türkiye and the European Union have begun the bidding period. Türkiye’s international policy became a stumbling block for the collective West. The fact is that the European Union accuses Türkiye of developing Russian- Türkiye relations: “trade turnover between Ankara and Moscow has almost doubled since the introduction

of EU anti-Russian sanctions in 2022.” [5] It is obvious that the EU’s dissatisfaction is also caused by the fact that Türkiye refused to impose sanctions against Russia and maintained neutrality in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Accusations against Türkiye from the EU are also heard regarding the state’s retreat from democracy, discrimination and sexual minorities, the introduction of censorship, pressure on journalists and the use of the judicial system as a political tool. There are quite a few complaints, but the Türkiye leader has prepared tools to influence the EU. Now Türkiye’s resolution on the issue of NATO expansion acts as a kind of leverage. Realizing this, the Türkiye leader began to blackmail Brussels and the European Union.

Soberly assessing the situation that Türkiye will not be accepted into the EU, because it has serious problems in the economy, disagreements with Cyprus, and the number of citizens is too large for European countries – about 85 million people. Erdogan started bargaining according to the principle: “ask for more than you need, you will be given the needed.” Based on the fact that in January of this year, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announced that Türkiye voted for Sweden to join NATO, we should expect some overtures to Türkiye from the US and the West.

Official sources are already reporting that “In return, the Türkiye government received full support for the path of membership in the European Union, the lifting of sanctions against the Türkiye economy and the liberalization of visas for Türkiye citizens... Washington has agreed to conclude a \$20 billion deal to sell F-16 fighter jets and spare parts to Ankara.” [6] These agreements provide opportunities for business development, which is currently extremely important for Türkiye even without official EU membership. Not to mention strengthening our own army. Let us recall that after the purchase of S-300 aircraft from Russia, “Türkiye was first deprived of the opportunity to receive

the F-35, and then the F-16, in addition, sanctions were imposed against high-ranking Türkiye military officials.” [7]

The benefits of Türkiye, which were officially announced, are understandable, but it should be assumed that there were also unofficial demands. It is likely that Türkiye was asked to sever political-economic relations with Russia. Obviously, Türkiye did not take this step. Since trade with Russia is a guarantee of survival for Türkiye in an unfavorable economic situation, and a guarantee of the country's own security in case of pressure from the West. For example, Türkiye can form a political, economic, military alliance with Russia against the collective West. Therefore, one should not expect any deterioration in Russian-Türkiye relations. Russian Senator K. Kosachev drew attention to the main disadvantage in the deal between Türkiye and NATO: “A negative impact on us has already occurred after Finland joined NATO. And if Sweden's predicted membership in the alliance changes anything, it will be only quantitatively, not qualitatively. And measures on our part have already been taken, for example, the revival of the Leningrad Military District by decision of the President of Russia.” [8]

Despite the fact that NATO receives almost 800 thousand square kilometers of new territory near the very borders of Russia, it is too early to talk about a superiority of forces. It will take several years to reformat the armed forces of the Scandinavian countries. Sweden is beneficial to the American military-industrial complex from the point of view of the defense industry. “Sweden does not currently produce only tanks of its own design – in all other respects, military high-tech is quite at the world level. Saab Bofors Dynamics is able to build anti-ship missiles, and Saab AB is able to build fourth-generation fighters and AEW aircraft. Swedish gunsmiths are consistently among the top ten largest exporters in the world.” [9] It is obvious that Sweden will act as a supplier of weapons to the American military-industrial complex. It is clear that the Americans will dictate the quantity of production, the Swedes are assigned only

the role of the performer. This will hit the Swedes' own military developments.

Therefore, the expansion of the bloc does not carry anything beyond threatening for Russia. This is another party of the West, a step forward, after which they will take a few steps back. It is important that steps back are less painful for the US, so America is setting Europe up and watching our reaction. This is all that the political elite of Britain and the US are capable of.

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