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The Issues of Democratization in Relations between Turkey and the USA in the Post-War Period

Zagadnienia demokratyzacji w stosunkach Turcji z USA w okresie powojennym

• Abstract •

At the end of the 20th century and in the first decade of the 21st century, the relations between Turkey and the United States of America attracted the attention of the international community. Since the end of the Cold War, the relationship between the Republic of Turkey and the United States has been mainly focused on security. The foreign policy of the two countries, from time to time, was conducted at counterpurposes. Parallel to this, the periods of ups and downs in political relations had an impact on economic relations as well. It was the matter of security that determined the acceptance of mutual cooperation between the two countries. On the one side stood the USA – one of the leaders of the Western bloc in the Cold War, and on the other Turkey – a state very important in its region, but the most dependent on the US. Despite being in the NATO bloc together with the USA, Turkey has never felt secure itself. Assessing Ankara's domestic and foreign policy, it is necessary to take into account the relationship with the United States, as it had the biggest impact on the overall shape of Turkey's policy. Although the real and potential power of these

• Abstrakt •

Pod koniec XX i w pierwszej dekadzie XXI wieku relacje między Turcją a Stanami Zjednoczonymi Ameryki zwróciły uwagę społeczności międzynarodowej. Od zakończenia zimnej wojny stosunki między Republiką Turcji a Stanami Zjednoczonymi koncentrowały się głównie na kwestiach bezpieczeństwa. Polityka zagraniczna obu krajów w niektórych okresach prowadzona była w zupełnie innych kierunkach. Momenty wzlotów i upadków w stosunkach politycznych wpływały również na stosunki gospodarcze. Zasadniczo kwestia bezpieczeństwa determinowała gotowość obu krajów do wzajemnej współpracy. Z jednej strony stały Stany Zjednoczone – jeden z liderów zachodniego bloku w okresie zimnej wojny, z drugiej Turcja – kraj bardzo ważny w swoim regionie, ale też najbardziej zależny od USA. Pomimo przynależności do bloku NATO razem z USA Turcja nigdy nie czuła się bezpieczna. Oceniając politykę wewnętrzną i zagraniczną Ankarę, należy przede wszystkim wziąć pod uwagę jej stosunki ze Stanami Zjednoczonymi, które miały największy wpływ na całość polityki Turcji. Chociaż rzeczywista i potencjalna siła tych dwóch krajów nie była rów-

two countries was not equal, during the Cold War Turkey became a stronghold of NATO and the Western bloc against the Soviet Union. Turkey was one of the countries that appeared on the border between the Eastern and Western hemispheres. Perhaps due to the peculiarities of its geographical location, Turkey became a country with equally special role in the world politics. The relations with the United States evolved precisely in this direction.

Keywords: modern Turkey; Turkey-US politics; democratization

na, w czasie zimnej wojny Turcja stała się bastionem NATO i bloku zachodniego przeciwko Związkowi Radzieckiemu. Turcja była jednym z krajów na pograniczu półkul wschodniej i zachodniej. Być może ze względu na specyfikę położenia geograficznego Turcja stała się krajem o szczególnej roli w polityce światowej. Właśnie w tym kierunku ewoluowały jej stosunki ze Stanami Zjednoczonymi.

Słowa kluczowe: nowoczesna Turcja; polityka Turcja – USA; demokratyzacja

Introduction

The disappearance of the main threat to Turkey – the Soviet Union – from the political map in the 1990s gave Ankara a chance to act independently in the region, although it never severed its partnership with the US. Nevertheless, the relations between these two countries were not always running smooth, and this fact was determined not only by the differences in their objective interests, but also due to opposing viewpoints of their political leaders on the ongoing processes in the region or in the world. The fundamental changes in Turkey-American relations begun in 2002, when the “Justice and Development”, party of the Islamic leaning, came to power in Turkey. The party was led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan – the current president of the country. According to the foreign affairs strategy of this then new political force, authored by the former Prime Minister of the country Ahmet Davutoğlu, Turkey was to be considered a powerful independent country with its own geostrategic interests (Grigalashvili, 2009, p. 256).

The relations between the Republic of Turkey and the United States of America are at present more important, more difficult and at the same time less predictable than ever. Uncertainty prevails in the relationship between the two countries nowadays for, inter alia, the following reasons:

1. Turkish and US opposing political views on ways to resolve such conflicts as the Cyprus’ one, as well as on settlement of disagreements existing between Greece and Turkey and Turkey and Armenia;
2. Turkey has shown that it is ready to refrain from supporting America on issues such as Syria as well as the war in Iraq and the problem of Kurds;
3. Turkey is trying to implement a foreign policy independent from Washington’s interests.

Nevertheless, the United States and Turkey share goals when it comes to certain questions – in general, the Turkish-US cooperation is based on the following:

1. Agreement that Turkey should become a restraining force for the Russian and Iranian geopolitical ambitions in the region, unanimously recognized by the Turkish elite;
2. Ankara being interested in participation in the development of the European defense system. Consequently it strives to become a full-fledged member of the EU, and the US greatly supports this ambition;
3. 80 percent of Turkey's military arsenal are the US-made weapons, which confirms close military cooperation between these countries;
4. Cooperation with the US offers Turkey strategic advantage in pursuing success in such projects as “Baku-Ceyhan” (BTC) pipeline; more broadly Ankara strives also to increase its influence in the Black–Caspian Seas region, which is quite rich in energy deposits;
5. Turkey is ready to allow establishment of the US missile defense system on its territory, as it would not only provide additional resources for the country and increase its military security, but strengthen its overall significance in the region as well.

When assessing the Turkish-American relations, generally it would be apt to use the term “strategic partnership” – though not always. For example, since 2002, Turkey has been trying to pursue a “zero problems with neighbors” policy and, with this in mind, friendly steps were taken with regard to economic cooperation with Syria and Iran – both states with which America does not have friendly relations. These steps themselves did not harm the strategic partnership, but in 2003 Turkey did not allow the American armed forces to use Turkish military bases to wage war on Iraq, which ran counter to the basic principles of “strategic partnership”. After this fact, the Americans have not mentioned the term “strategic partnership” for a long time; only after the re-warming in relations did the American politicians begin using the term again. Namely, on November 5, 2007, the then President of the United States – George Walker Bush – employed the term again during the visit of the then Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in the United States.

So, where did the Turkish-American relations lay at the end of the 20th century? First of all, let us consider the most pivotal issues.

The terrorist act of September 11, 2001 against the United States had a strong influence on the Turkish nation. Shortly after the terrorist attack, the Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit attended the meeting at the US embassy and expressed his condolences to the American people. A month later, on October 7, 2001, the American

and NATO military forces launched a war against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, and on March 20, 2003, they attacked Iraq, assuming the existence of mass destruction weapons on its territory. On February 15, 2002, Turkey sent its troops to the capital of Afghanistan, Kabul, but refused to take over leadership of the NATO Armed Forces in the area without any financial guarantees. The US plans to expand its anti-terrorist military campaign outside Afghanistan made clear the limits to the US-Ankara strategic partnership, when a serious disagreement between the Republic of Turkey and Washington regarding Iraq emerged. Turkey was particularly opposed to conducting offensive operations against this state and expressed fear that such a move would cause discontent in Turkey itself.

The officials in Ankara thought it would be difficult to deny the United States the use of Turkish air bases in their attempt to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. In their opinion, only close cooperation with the United States would give Ankara a chance to block the formation of a Kurdish state or other autonomous entity in post-war Iraq. The ensuing events have set the Turkish people against the United States. Information provided by Iraq led to American actions being interpreted by Turks as an attack of the American Armed Forces against Muslims.

In the next stage of this new "Cold War", one of the main reasons for strained relations between the US and Turkey is still considered the recognition of the Armenian genocide by the US. In 1996, the US House of Representatives adopted a resolution referencing the mass extermination of Armenians by the Turks at the start of the 20th century as genocide, although, under the influence of the administration, the resolution was removed from the Congressional agenda. Despite this, the government in Ankara strongly reacted to the Committee's decision, and immediately recalled its Ambassador to the US back to Turkey "for consultation". It should be noted that Turkey has taken similar steps in 2007, when the Senate Congressional Committee adopted the so-called "Armenian Resolution" (*Turkish Foreign Policy*, 2014, p. 367) (earlier, in 1974 and 1985, attempts were made to acknowledge the events as genocide, however to no avail). Although the Ambassador soon returned to Washington, the relationship between the two countries cooled significantly and the support for the US in Turkey fell sharply, which was confirmed in sociological surveys on foreign policy sympathies of Turkish citizens.

In particular, at the end of January 2001, the Turkish newspaper "Jumhuriyet" published the results of a survey conducted by sociologists from Ankara University, according to which only 9.9 percent of respondents were in favor of a rapprochement with the US (Kupreishvili, 2016, p. 38).

The issue of recognition of the Armenian genocide by the US is periodically raised with intention of "intimidating" Ankara. "Let no one think that due to

fear Turkey will take any steps of which it is not itself sure”, said Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu after the meeting with the US First Deputy Secretary of State, James Steinberg, in Munich. In his words, the aforementioned resolution adopted by the Congress Committee was serving neither the interests of Turkey, nor Armenia, nor the United States, and it only inflicted damage instead of offering any benefits (Obama, 2010).

With the ultimate recognition of the 1915 events as genocide, Washington would lose Turkey as a significant partner. Everybody expected the US President B. Obama to use the term “genocide” on the day of the 95th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, but he did not – thus he “irritated” the Armenians, but also showed his readiness to “reconcile” with Turkey (Gentleson, 2015, p. 85).

Another deep reason for disagreement between Turkey and the US is Israel. After Turkey joined NATO in 1952, close relations were established between Ankara and Tel Aviv. Together with other countries, Israel became one of Turkey’s main arms suppliers. At the beginning of the 21st century, Turkey was the second most important partner country for Israel, right after the United States. Despite the traditional alliance, the relations between the two states have cooled dramatically since. The relations plummeted in 2008, when Israel attacked the Gaza Strip, killing about 1400 Palestinians. Turkey threatened Israel that in case it continues the war campaign in the Gaza Strip, Ankara would take appropriate measures. As a result of US involvement, Israel suspended the military campaign and tensions between Ankara and Tel Aviv eased at that stage.

In early October 2009, Ankara did not allow Israel to take part in NATO military trainings on the territory of Turkey. The Prime Minister at that time, R.T. Erdoğan, reported that this step was taken as a result of public opinion consensus – the population of Turkey did not approve of the actions of Tel Aviv in the Gaza Strip. Some experts explain Erdoğan’s decision by other causes and suggest that the step was a mark of a significant geopolitical change in the Middle East (Oran et al., 2013, p. 58).

The tension between Turkey and Israel peaked on May 31, 2010, when Israel attacked a ship carrying humanitarian aid to Palestine sailing under the Turkish flag. Israel explained that it acted in self-defense (Davutoğlu, 2012, p. 634). Nine Turkish citizens were killed as a result of the attack. Ankara requested an international investigation into the incident, but it understood early that the US would not take any concrete steps to “punish” Israel. In this regard, the former Foreign Minister of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoğlu, said: “In Turkey, psychologically Israel’s attack is similar to the terrorist act of September 11. We will not be silent. Turkey is not happy with American actions”.

The third source of tension between the US and Turkey is the Iranian issue. Washington believes that the diplomatic means of stopping Iran are not yet exhausted, and it does try to find a common language. However, its position still hinders Turkey, which has continuously been trying to maintain good relations with Iran and thus solve all problems. According to R.T. Erdoğan's announcement, "diplomacy, diplomacy and only diplomacy can solve the Iranian problem" (Gentleson, 2015, p. 89).

The US was extremely irritated by Turkey's support for Iran's nuclear program. It can be said that at that moment Ankara became a diplomatic ally of the Islamic dictatorship in Tehran. Turkey and Iran have sought to return to the nuclear energy exchange plan, which was outlined by the Obama administration in 2009. Being a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Turkey obviously caused the West's dissatisfaction by refusing to impose additional sanctions on Iran in March 2010. It is noteworthy that during his visit to Iran in 2010, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan blamed the West for "double standards" and unfair attitude towards Iran, and stated that "the rumors of the Iranian military nuclear program are unreasonable and may not be true". It should be said that such Turkish position was a surprise to the West. The current course of Ankara enables Iran to be more resistant to economic pressures and promotes the strengthening of Iranian influence in the region, which, from a strategic point of view, may turn out to be a very erroneous calculation on the Turkish side. Nevertheless, open conflict between Sunni Turkey and Shiite Iran can break out at any time due to the current situation in the Middle East.

Despite the number of disagreements between Turkey and the United States, economic partnership between them is developing. One of the largest economies in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, Turkey ranks 17th in the world and 6th in Europe. Even lack of mutual investments and trade relations cannot change the fact that the Republic of Turkey is a country of political and strategic importance in the eyes of American politicians. The light industry in the Republic of Turkey has not seen much interest from the American partners. Although growth in short-term investments and trade is not easy to achieve, both sides are trying to make mutual economic cooperation more important and noteworthy.

Despite the fact that international business and investments have declined in the wake of the global economic crisis, free trade has still increased revenues 11-fold in the last 15 years, while at the same period investments abroad multiplied 10-fold. Although the US is the largest foreign investor in the world (with 3.9 trillion dollars worth of investments), Turkey's share of this amount is quite small – only 5.7 billion dollars. About half of these investments have been carried out in recent years,

when Turkey pursued the policy of achieving political stability in the country. The Turkish investments in the US are relatively small (reportedly less than 2 billion dollars), but we should keep in mind that Turkey has not been an exporting country in the recent years (Uzgel, 2001). Trade flow value increased 25 times since 1980, and by 2010 it reached 300 billion dollars. Since August 2011, Turkey has been the 6th largest American business partner in Europe.

Markets like the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), Europe and the USA receive 65 percent of Turkey's total exports. Bilateral trade relations between the United States and Turkey somewhat intensified in 1985, but by 2007 they grew only 7-fold – a relatively low factor. In 2007, the bilateral trade relations amounted to 12,226 billion dollars. The United States itself is the 7th largest export and 5th largest import market for Turkey. The US receive 3.9% of Turkey's exports, and 4.8% of imports to Turkey originate there. The Turkey's share in the US market from the US perspective is somewhat significant. The open and diverse economy of Turkey contributes to the development of economic activity necessary for a strong democracy. Turkey, with its relatively developed economy, can be a model for countries in the region both economically and politically. Such a position of Turkey makes it a “major economic partner” for the US.

In 2009, US President Barack Obama and Turkey's President Abdullah Gül came to an understanding that a strong and intense economic cooperation is required for further strengthening of strategic economic partnership between the two countries. Turkey and the US both agreed to pay greater attention to cooperation in the field of power engineering, which included both electricity and renewable sources. In addition, the politicians did not exclude the option of commercial cooperation in the field of nuclear energy development. During the negotiations, Turkey and the US agreed to be actively engaged in joint economic projects in North Africa and Eurasia.

Turkey is a potentially growing market for US businesses, while the US is one of the largest export markets for Turkey. Since Turkey is located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia and it has good economic relations with its neighbors, it is an important partner for the United States in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asian markets. Together with the US, Turkey can help North African countries revive their economies. The US recognizes now the importance of strengthening economic ties with Turkey and wants to bring this cooperation to such a level that has long existed between the two countries in the military and political spheres.

As President B. Obama noted in his speech to the Turkish parliament in 2009, “Turkey is the most important part of Europe and the most significant ally of the

United States. Turkey and the United States should stick together to overcome the challenges existing in the world today” (Özel, Yılmaz, & Akyüz, 2009, p. 89).

Admittedly, there are periods when the relationship between Turkey and the United States becomes particularly difficult. In this regard, it should be noted that the period of uncertainty between the two countries began after a coup attempt on July 15, 2016 in Turkey. In reaction, US President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry called upon all the parties in Turkey to support the democratically elected government to avoid violence and bloodshed. The US Secretary of State stressed that the State Department will be ready to support those citizens of the United States who would choose to stay in Turkey. In the end, together with some other military men, General Bekir Ercan Van – chief of the NATO airbase “Injirlik” in Turkey – was accused of participating in the military coup in Turkey. The mentioned airbase was used by the USA and its allies to carry out air strikes in Syria and Iraq.

The blockade of the “Injirlik” base caused a lot of discontent and resentment in Washington. However, it is interesting to note the interview in “The Voice of America”, given by US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State and US ex-Ambassador to Azerbaijan Matthew Bryza, in which he said that “the United States fully supports the democratically elected civilian government of Turkey” – this was the first reaction of the White House to events taking place in Turkey.

After the coup, the Turkish government demanded extradition of Fethullah Gülen. President Erdoğan released a statement saying that any country that would support Gülen is Turkey’s enemy. If the conflict were to continue, the most pessimistic forecasts for the Turkish-American relations may have become true. Not so long before, a NATO summit considered how to best protect Turkey (according to Article 5) from the “Islamic State” – and suddenly Turkey, a NATO member itself, was restricting the military operations of NATO countries, including the United States, out of the “Injirlik” base.

The US did not intend to give up Fethullah Gülen to the Turkish side. “The Wall Street” magazine wrote that the officials in Ankara could not provide enough evidence of Gülen’s involvement in the attempted coup and, therefore, failed to persuade the American side to extradite Gülen. The new US president Donald Trump at the time stated that the leader of Turkey should protect the rule of law and the standards of Western justice. Speaking about the events in Turkey in an interview with “The New York Times”, he said that he appreciates Erdoğan’s actions: “I highly appreciate Erdoğan’s actions. He has managed to stop the coup attempt. Some say it was a staged performance, but I do not think so”, noted Trump.

Rex Tillerson, US Secretary of State, announced that “the US would like to resume relations with Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Turkey is our oldest NATO member country. The USA’s least activity in the region forced Turkey to turn toward Russia. Russia is not a permanent partner of Turkey and we have to prove that America is the only ally of Turkey”. Compared to Russia, the US has the largest military-strategic access to the region.

On May 16, 2017 the meeting of President R.T. Erdoğan and President Trump took place in the White House, where the US president pointed out: “We have always had good relations with Turkey and we are going to continue them in the future”. Ultimately, the Erdoğan government found itself in a situation where, on the one hand, straining relations with Russia did not bring significant dividends in any domain, and, on the other hand, the confrontation with the West reached its peak.

Conclusion

Erdoğan’s foreign policy for the last 2–3 years has been calling in question the partnership between Turkey and the US. Today, when the Turkish relations with Russia warmed again, Turkey’s policy towards Russia will primarily depend on the US choices in its cooperation with Ankara. I believe that stable relations with the US permit Turkey to not seek an alliance with Russia. In the Middle East, in the face of the Syrian problem, Turkey has become an unintentional participant in the game controlled by great opposing forces – America and Russia. The recent American bombings in Syria pushed the Turkish position to the side of the US. It can be said that Turkey’s stance is vacillating between supporting the US and Russia at a given moment in time. However, in the Syrian war Turkey has also its own interests, namely, the matter of the Kurds – which is one of the main topics in Ankara’s new agenda.

Over the course of its efforts, Turkey did not manage to either become the leader of the Islamic world, or accelerate its entry into the EU. It was more successful in using the problem of refugees to its advantage in the relations with NATO, although there is still a lot to do and not everything is clear.

If Turkey wants to become a country with a “first-class world economy” and a liberal democracy, it should strengthen its relations with the US, which would require some changes in priorities of its foreign policy and somewhat distancing itself from the Muslim world.

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