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Analytical memorandum

CCEIS

Expert seminar « Making sense of Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy in the context of emerging poly-centric world order»



*On April 13, the Centre for Comprehensive European and International Studies, Higher School of Economics and the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs held the scientific online seminar «**Making sense of Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy in the context of emerging poly-centric world order**». The keynote speaker was Prof. **Tarik Oguzlu**, a professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Antalya Bilim University. The report focuses on features, tools and level of effectiveness of humanitarian diplomacy of Turkey. The professor also assessed the effectiveness of Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy, depicted its the key achievements and failures.*

*The detailed comments on the topic of humanitarian diplomacy of Turkey were made by the discussants: Dr. **Tsybenko Veronika**, the head of Center for Interdisciplinary Humanitarian Studies of the Southern Federal University, and Dr. **Pavel V. Shlykov**, the associate Professor at the Institute of Asian and African Studies of Lomonosov Moscow State University.*

I. Turkish humanitarian aid: institutions and instruments.

Turkish humanitarian aid can be conceptually divided into two main areas:

1. Turkish development assistance (within the scope of the sustainable development, economic development assistance, etc.)
2. Humanitarian assistance (post-war reconstruction, overcoming natural disasters, etc.)

Meanwhile, **the second category significantly dominates the first one** in terms of state funding. Thus, about 1% of Turkish GDP is allocated for humanitarian aid. That exceeds similar budget expenditures of such states, as, for instance, the United States and Germany.

Historically, the active phase of Turkey's involvement in international social and humanitarian policy began with the creation of the **Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency** in 1992, so, today it is the Turkish humanitarian policy's main driver. Another agency actively involved in humanitarian policy is the Turkish **Red Crescent**. There are also many NGOs that provide diverse assistance to the Muslim population of the Middle East.

At the moment, Turkey is actively involved in high-level humanitarian cooperation: it cooperates profoundly with international organizations, in particular with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

II. Basics of Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy: concepts and achievements.

Here are several concepts and achievements of Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy that can be pointed out. After Justice and Development Party came into power, the focus of humanitarian aid focused on the states of the Middle East and Central Asia has remained all the same. However, additional emphasis has been placed on **ethnic and cultural minorities** historically associated with Turkey.

In this sense, the geography of the distribution of Turkish humanitarian aid can be explained by several ideological concepts:

1. "**Geography as Fate**" - is related to the concept of predestination in Islam.
2. "**Geography of the Heart**" - historically postulates "centuries-old friendship" between peoples within a certain territory, also refers to Islam.
3. "**Geography of Memory**" - applies to the territory of the former Ottoman Empire.

It is obvious that, in addition to economic considerations, the choice of recipients of assistance is determined by **cultural and civilizational** affinity on one hand, and by **religious** affinity on the other hand. So, in 2020, Dagestan received masks, protective overalls and ALVs from Turkey.

At the same time, Turkish officials emphasize that Turkey **does not seek hegemony**, but only claims to be a "negotiator" on behalf of developing countries - both within the boundaries of European region and outside of it. For instance, in 2016, Turkey hosted the **World Humanitarian Summit**, which could not but have a positive impact on the image of Turkey in the world.

Thus, the positive image of a power open to cooperation and influential on the world stage is achieved by Turkey due to following:

- Humanitarian **aid** (going mainly through the Red Crescent) itself;
- Warm **rhetoric**;
- **Organizing and participating** in summits and other international events.

While answering questions about the goals and opportunities of Turkey as a pole of power (both “hard” and “soft” ones), Professor Tarik Ozuglu repeatedly noted that modern Turkey **has made its choice** in favor of cooperation and is not going to return towards the imperial past in any form.

III. Turkey and the rest of the world: a long-term strategy

In addition to cultural and religious considerations, **economic considerations** also played an important role in choosing the directions of Turkey's humanitarian policy. Thus, humanitarian aid to African countries is considered as the first step to **"nurture" new markets for Turkish export**. Within the framework of this strategy, Ankara planned assistance in the field of education, combating unemployment, contributing to the adoption of useful decisions by the domestic governments of the region, etc.

In recent years, Turkey moved away from the traditional perception of humanitarian aid (food, medicine, etc.) towards increasing **technological assistance** to developing countries. In the context of the formation of a multipolar world, Turkey sees the need to establish a **"sphere of communication"**, claiming the position of an independent power pole.

Despite the great interest and active implementation of the humanitarian policy,

Turkey still faced some **difficulties**. One of the main problems for the Turkish humanitarian policy makers was the lack of attention to the domestic peculiarities of the recipient states. Lack of understanding the processes on the ground significantly reduced the projected effect of the aid.

IV. Do all roads lead to Ankara?

The humanitarian policy is also reflected in the issues of **business support**. Turkish entrepreneurs launching a business or distributing it within the Turkish humanitarian aid geographic coverage may be asked to participate in humanitarian missions.

It is also worth noting the success of Turkey in creating **communities of influence**. New scientific communities of Turkish universities are being formed, and the image of **Turkish university graduates** abroad is being strengthened year to year. Turkey offers scholarships for scientists and students from developing countries. Outside of Turkey, the interests of its **"soft power"** are served by a number of organizations that promote the study of the Turkish language and culture.

Within the framework of the online seminar, issues were raised about the scope and political importance of Turkish support of **post-Soviet** Turkic-speaking countries - Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, as well as support of national minorities – the Crimean Tatars in Ukraine and the Gagauz in Moldova. Such an idea could still have a political connotation back in 1990s. Nevertheless, nowadays lobbyists for the **political union** with the post-Soviet Turkic nations are small in their numbers. In addition, the growing influence of Russia and China in region **does not leave Turkey even a hypothetical chance** of gaining a decisive influence on any of the post-Soviet states.

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