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ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ НАУКИ /
POLITICAL SCIENCE

**Политика Турции на западных
балканах в начале XXI века: основные
направления и результаты**

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**The Turkey's policy in the western
balkans at the beginning of the XXI
century: main directions and results**

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Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются основные тенденции и противоречия развития сотрудничества Турции с государствами Западных Балкан в начале XXI века. В материале выделяются причины активизации политики Анкары на Западных Балканах, ее этапы и механизмы реализации, поставленных внешнеполитических целей. В заключении автор приходит к выводу, что Турции становится основным, вместе с Европейским союзом, США и Китаем, фактором международных отношений, влияющим на развитие Западных Балкан.

Ключевые слова: Западные Балканы, Турция, политика мягкой силы, мусульманская община, НАТО, Р.Эрдоган, Босния-Герцеговина.

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Abstract. The article deals with the main trends and contradictions in the development of Turkey's cooperation with the states of the Western Balkans at the beginning of the 21st century. The material highlights the reasons for the activation of Ankara's policy in the Western Balkans, its stages and mechanisms for the implementation of the set foreign policy goals. In conclusion, the author comes to the conclusion that Turkey, together with the European Union, the United States and China, is becoming the main actor in international relations influencing the development of the Western Balkans.

Key words: Western Balkans, Turkey, soft power policy, Muslim community, NATO, R. Erdogan, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

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After the collapse of the SFRY, the Balkans did not belong to the main direction of Turkey's foreign policy. In the 90s. she maintained stable relations with Albania, Croatia, North Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ties with Serbia and Montenegro remained difficult. Ankara was involved in the conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo to one degree or another, but at the same time it did not suffer major image losses, which created the prerequisites for building a dialogue in the future with all the states of the Western Balkans. Turkish military units were part of the peacekeeping forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. Ankara showed interest in the speedy stabilization of the situation in the Balkans. Since the Balkan Peninsula opens the way for Turkey to

Europe and allows it to act as a transit zone in the development of cooperation between Europe and the states of the Middle East and North Africa.

At the beginning of the XXI century. Ankara's foreign policy in the Balkans is changing radically. She was no longer going to be a passive observer or follow the lead of foreign policy in the region of the great powers and the EU. Turkey's increased attention to the Balkans is partly a reaction to the slowdown in the country's contacts with the EU. It is no coincidence that it has been heading towards the development of close political, economic and cultural contacts with the states of the Western Balkans since 2006, when the negotiation process between Ankara and Brussels on its EU membership was stalled [4, p.65].

In 2009, with the advent of the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, A. Davutoglu, Turkey's Balkan policy became more active. His foreign policy concept, in addition to reducing dependence on the West, assumed Turkey's performance as an intermediary in the dialogue between the states of the Balkan Peninsula and the West. Thus, the new minister did not refuse close cooperation with the West. This doctrine contributed to the strengthening of Turkey's position in the Balkans. A. Davutoglu disowned the doctrine of neo-Ottomanism, putting forward the principle of "Zero problems with neighbors" on the agenda. The doctrine of neo-Ottomanism irritated the Balkan states. In it they saw a possible variant of the next Turkish expansionism in the region [23, p. 381]. The Zero Problems with Neighbors policy is based on the observance of four principles: security, economic cooperation, political dialogue and preservation of the multicultural regions, including the Balkans. A. Davutoglu staked on the transformation of Turkey into a great power. The implementation of this approach involved expanding cooperation with states outside the Euro-Atlantic bloc, primarily those located in the former Ottoman Empire. Therefore, many politicians suspected A. Davutoglu of sympathy for neo-Ottomanism, despite his statements on this matter.

Ankara supported the desire of the Western Balkans to join NATO and the EU as soon as possible. Turkey understands that further advancement of the EU and NATO on the peninsula is inevitable, trying to adapt its Balkan policy to this factor. It somewhat reduces Turkey's ability to implement its own policy in the Balkans. Turkish politicians are well aware that the EU has a huge advantage over other players in the Balkans in terms of promoting its own interests [25]. At the same time, the political elite of the country understands the benefits for Turkey itself from the expansion of NATO and the EU in the Balkans, their establishment on the peninsula will help reduce conflict and stabilize the political situation in the region. In the summer of 2022, Turkey officially welcomed the start of negotiations between Brussels and Macedonia and Albania on EU accession.

Turkey assists the countries of the Balkan Peninsula in the modernization of the armed forces, bringing them closer to NATO standards, helps Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia to open military academies, willingly accepting officers from the Balkan states in their own military schools. So, in August 2021, Turkey and North Macedonia signed an agreement on cooperation in the military sphere, which provides for the annual allocation of funds by Ankara to increase the combat readiness of the Macedonian army. In the EU, Turkey's promotion of its interests causes great concern. Many European politicians suspect R. Erdogan of promoting political Islam in the Balkans, which often does not fit in with European values, and will contribute to the excessive expansion of Turkey's influence in the region.

The activation of Turkish policy in the Western Balkans from 2006 to 2016 gave the first positive results. From 2002 to 2016, Turkey's trade with the states of the Western Balkans increased from \$435 million to \$3 billion [8]. Contacts are expanding in other areas. According to Turkish experts, Turkey's rapid return to the Balkans was facilitated by the loss of EU and US interest in the Balkans after 2006-2008. despite all their rhetoric [22].

Since 2016, after an unsuccessful coup attempt in Turkey and the constitutional reform carried out by R. Erdogan, Ankara's relations with the West are clearly cooling. Since that time, the next stage in the Balkan policy of Turkey begins. It relies on building its own more independent policy in the Balkans and other regions of the world. Turkey is acting very cautiously and pragmatically in achieving its foreign policy goals in the Balkans, prioritizing soft power politics.

One of the instruments for its implementation in the Balkans is the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA). From 1995 to 2022 it has implemented more than 990 projects in Bosnia-Herzegovina, more than 340 projects in Serbia from 2002 to 2022. and about 100 projects in Croatia from 2015 to 2022.

Turkey is closely watching the competition of the US, EU, China, Russia in the Balkans. Recognizing the weight of the positions of these actors of international relations, it is aware of its ability to achieve long-term goals in the region. As an important condition for the development of relations with the Balkan states, Turkey considers its centuries-old historical and cultural ties with the Balkans [25]. At one time, the peoples of the region were part of the Ottoman Empire, which serves as the basis for building a dialogue between Ankara and them in the present and future. The concept of Balkan identity arises as a result of the civilizational interaction of the Ottoman Empire with the Balkans, the similarity of the cultural codes of the Turks and the peoples of the peninsula. In modern Turkey, they tend to idealize the history of the Ottoman Empire, forgetting about the difficult relationship between the Balkan peoples and the Port in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Therefore, an important tool for expanding Turkey's influence in the Balkans is the formation of a new historical memory. An important impetus to the implementation of this policy was the centenary of the beginning of the Balkan wars, widely celebrated in 1912 [7]. Representatives of the historical community of the countries of the Western Balkans are invited to events held in many cities of Turkey. Turkey emphasizes the policy of "genocide" by Russia and its allies against the Muslim population in 1877-1878. and 1912

With Albania, North Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, joint history textbooks are being prepared. In 2013, sections of textbooks devoted to the Ottoman Empire were rewritten in Kosovo in order to somewhat smooth out the hard facts from its history. It should be noted that attempts to rehabilitate the history of the Ottoman Empire with the previous historical experience of the peoples of the peninsula. References to historical experience cause a negative reaction among the Christian population of the region. However, among the Muslims of the Western Balkans there is also no complete unanimity on this issue. In Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina, their Ottoman past is rather cool. For example, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the policy of the Porte, when it ceded the provinces to Austria-Hungary, is still difficult to perceive. On the contrary, in Kosovo and North Macedonia, the new historical rhetoric of Turkey finds support [21, p. 162].

In the mass consciousness of the inhabitants of the region, "history is being rewritten" with the help of Turkish television series that idealize the history of the Ottoman Empire and lay a new perception of it among the population of the Western Balkans. Moreover, they create the image of a strong Turkey with a great historical past [3, p. 153]. All sociological surveys show the incredible popularity of Turkish TV series among TV viewers in the Western Balkans. In North Macedonia, they came second in popularity after the release of news, and in Montenegro they replaced Latin American series. Such series include "The Sultan of My Heart", "Magnificent Age", "The Last Emperor", "Once Upon a Time in the Ottoman Empire" and others. Many series are financed from the state budget of Turkey, which shows how important they are for promoting Ankara's interests outside the country and the ruling elite understands this [13]. Turkish talk shows, such as "Leaf Fall" or "The Bride from Istanbul", provided free of charge to TV channels in the countries of the Western Balkans and melodramas create an image of a developed Turkey, where there is no domestic violence, where the traditional way of family life and religion are honored [2].

In building bilateral and multilateral relations with the states of the Western Balkans, Turkey relies on promoting its own economic interests, realizing that this is the key to creating long-term ties with the Balkans. Therefore, for Ankara, pragmatism, and not loyalty to Islamic identity, becomes the dominant principle that determines its Balkan policy. Even in the restoration and construction of mosques in the region, Turkey focuses on the restoration of the historical and cultural heritage of the region, which will allow the Balkan states to successfully develop tourism and thereby improve their own economic situation.

Ankara is not only building bilateral ties with the states of the Western Balkans. She supports various integration processes within the region, believing that they can improve relations

between the Balkan states and bring additional benefits for Turkey itself. In June 2021, Serbia, North Macedonia and Albania establish an alliance of three states "Open Balkans", which is heading towards the creation of a single economic space. In June 2022, Turkish Foreign Minister M. Cavusoglu took part in the Open Balkans summit held in Belgrade.

The Muslim community is one of the tools for promoting Turkey's interests in the region [19, p. 122-123]. This fact is also of internal political significance for Turkey, since on its territory, in particular, there is a large Albanian community that supports the development of Turkey's equal relations with Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. According to Turkish official structures, from 16 million to 20 million inhabitants of Turkey have Balkan roots [18]. This circumstance reinforces Ankara's sense of its "historical responsibility" for the fate of the Balkan Peninsula.

Turkey's policy finds understanding, first of all, among the Muslim part of the population of the Western Balkans, and R. Erdogan's personality is very popular among Muslims. Muslims make up over 90% of the population of Kosovo, over 65% of the population of Albania, about 53% of the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina, about 33% of the population of North Macedonia, about 18% of the population of Montenegro, over 3% of the population of Serbia and 1.5% of Croatia. In total, more than 7.6 million people live in the Western Balkans. [21, p. 158]. Despite all the deportations and other historical conflicts, the Turkish community has survived in the Western Balkans. According to various estimates, it numbers from 35 thousand people. up to 100 thousand people. The Turkish Foreign Ministry notes the presence of the Turkish community in Macedonia (about 80 thousand people) and Kosovo (about 18 thousand people) [26].

They see Turkey as a defender of their interests both inside the Western Balkans and beyond. R. Erdogan supports these sentiments, constantly emphasizing in his speeches the intention to protect the interests of Muslims in the region [9, p. 63]. Turkey is a model for Kosovo, Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the field of political structure and economic development model, where moderate Islamization is combined with a secular development model. However, there are also some difficulties here. After the failure of the coup in 2016, the governments of the countries of the Western Balkans refused to close the structures associated with F. Güllen. In 2020, there were 8 educational institutions controlled by the F. Güllen Foundation in Kosovo, 6 in Albania, 5 in North Macedonia, and 4 in Bosnia-Herzegovina [9, p. 69].

About the degree of intensity of Turkey's relations with the states of the Western Balkans are the constant contacts of senior officials of the participants in the political dialogue. President R. Erdogan regularly travels to the Balkans, and the heads of the Balkan states to Turkey. R. Erdogan made the largest number of visits to Bosnia-Herzegovina, where he has been visiting annually since 2018. The President of Turkey has been visiting several Balkan states at once. For example, in September 2022 he visits Bosnia-Herzegovina (secondary), Serbia and Croatia. Contacts are maintained at the level of individual ministries and departments, heads of parliaments. Thus, on December 20-22, 2022, the Chairman of the Turkish Grand National Assembly M. Sentop visits North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, etc.

A striking example of the effectiveness of Turkish policy in the Western Balkans is the relationship between Ankara and Belgrade. They evolved rather complicated, being weighed down by the historical past. In 1999, during the NATO operation in Kosovo, all relations between the countries are frozen. Since 2005, a thaw has begun in Serbo-Turkish relations. Turkey's recognition of Kosovo's independence in February 2008 again worsened Ankara's ties with Belgrade. It should be noted that there was no complete unanimity of opinion among the ruling elite of Turkey on this issue. Ankara understands the importance of developing relations with Belgrade in order to expand its influence in the Balkans. Therefore, even during periods of significant cooling of Serbo-Turkish relations, Ankara has always emphasized the need to normalize contacts with Belgrade [24]. Serbia has significant economic potential and has a favorable geographical position, opening a convenient way for Turkey to Europe.

On October 26, 2009, Turkish President A. Gul visited Belgrade for the first time since 1986, opening up new prospects for the development of relations between the countries. In 2009,

the parties are establishing active economic cooperation, in particular, Turkey is an investor in the construction of two international strategically important highways Belgrade-Bar and Belgrade-Sarajevo, as well as the national highways Novi Pazar-Tutin and Kuzmin-Rach. In October 2013, R. Erdogan's speech in Prizren (Kosovo) caused a diplomatic scandal, after his words that "Kosovo is Turkey, and Turkey is Kosovo." The Serbian public was outraged by these statements of the Turkish Prime Minister. However, neither Ankara nor Belgrade were interested in breaking off relations. Serbia was one of the first to condemn the coup attempt in Turkey in 2016, which had a positive impact on its further relations with Ankara. In October 2017, R. Erdogan makes his first visit as president to Serbia, confirming his intention to develop comprehensive ties between Ankara and Belgrade.

In October 2018, R. Erdogan again visited Serbia, he was accompanied by 8 ministers and about 200 entrepreneurs. The parties agreed to increase mutual trade and implement a number of joint projects. The development of the Turkish Stream gas pipeline in Serbia is a topic for a separate discussion. In September 2021, Serbian President A. Vučić highly appreciated the relations between Serbia and Turkey, calling it, like Russia, a friendly country. However, according to the Serbian President, the stumbling block for the strategic partnership of the parties is their attitude towards Kosovo. If Turkey strives to create favorable conditions for the international recognition of Kosovo, Serbia, on the contrary, is making efforts to slow down this process [1]. In 2022, another conflict topic arose in relations between Ankara and Belgrade, it is about Turkey's intention to transfer a large consignment of weapons to Kosovo, including the famous Bayraktar drones.

In recent years, Turkish companies have shown great interest in cooperation with Serbia. As a result, in 2021, 50 Turkish companies had contracts worth \$847 million in the country. In total, about 700 Turkish companies operated in Serbia in 2021. In 2010, the trade turnover between the countries reached 306 million dollars. In 2021, the volume of Turkey's foreign trade with Serbia exceeded 1 billion 730 million euros. The volume of Turkish investments in Serbia reached 300 million euros [10]. Great hopes are placed on the development of tourism. Citizens of Serbia willingly visit the resorts of Turkey. In 2022, according to preliminary estimates, about 300 thousand Serbian tourists will have a rest in Turkey.

Ankara is showing great interest in the Muslim community in Serbia. During visits in 2017 and 2018 R. Erdogan visited the city of Novi Pazar, where a significant part of the Muslims of Serbia lives. The city council declared him an honorary citizen of the city. When a military coup is attempted in Turkey in 2016, local residents staged a massive demonstration in support of it. After that, Turkey invests heavily in the modernization of the urban economy of Novi Pazar, the development of education and culture of Muslims. Ankara fully coordinates these actions with Belgrade. In September 2022, during the visit of R. Erdogan to Serbia, a decision was made on the possibility for their citizens to visit the partner country according to internal documents, which was a good signal for the further development of Serbian-Turkish relations [10].

Turkey's interest in Bosnia-Herzegovina is connected with the complex process of formation of the national identity of the Bosnian Muslims, which is largely based not on the ethnic, but on the religious factor. Ankara sees Bosnian Muslims as one of the most important factors contributing to the advancement of its interests in the Western Balkans. Moderate Islamization is noted in the country, affecting, first of all, that part of the country that is controlled by Bosnian Muslims and partly by Croats. Various Turkish NGOs and jamaats provide multilateral assistance to the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina, including in the construction of mosques and Islamic centers. Türkiye is interested in developing the identity of Muslim Bosnians and moderate Islamization of the country. In this regard, it is an example for Bosnia-Herzegovina. During the civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in the first post-war years, much was said about the possibility of an increase in the popularity of the Salafi ideology or Shiism in the country. This option does not suit Turkey, since both currents are on anti-Turkish positions [22]. Turkey's religious policy in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in the Balkans in general is welcomed by the EU and the US. It is seen as an important barrier to the spread of Salafism in the Western Balkans, promoted by the Arab monarchies of the Persian Gulf and Shiism - by Iran.

Türkiye seeks to develop joint educational projects. In this regard, she shows great interest in Sarajevo University and the private Burch International University, founded in 2008 in Ilidzh [20]. Throughout the country (with the exception of the Republika Srpska), Turkish colleges are actively opening. In 2009, in Sarajevo, the first in the Balkans, the Institute named after. Yusuf Emre. For the first 10 years of the institute's activity, more than 5 thousand people. were trained in the Turkish language, which is introduced as one of the foreign languages in the educational program of the country's secondary schools. TIKA carries out the restoration of the monuments of the country's historical and cultural heritage that suffered during the civil war, including the Aladja mosques (included in the UNESCO World Heritage List) in Foca (it was completely destroyed in 1992), the Aranudiya mosque (destroyed in 1993) in Banya Luka and others.

Turkey consistently stands for the territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina, criticizing the actions of the Republika Srpska and its leader M. Dodik, which can upset the fragile balance of interests between the conflicting parties. At the same time, Turkish officials, including President R. Erdogan, regularly meet with M. Dodik, who supports the development of cooperation between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkey [16].

By 2013, Turkey's economic success in Bosnia-Herzegovina remained very modest. There was only one Turkish bank operating in the country, Bosna Ziraat Bankas I". The volume of investments also remained at a low level. While many European states guaranteed the rights of their investors in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Turkey did not resort to such practice. As a result, Bosnia-Herzegovina received most of Turkey's financial injections in the form of aid. This situation did not suit Ankara, so it stimulates economic cooperation with Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 2021, Bosna Ziraat Bankası already had 30 branches and branches in the country. Turkish companies *Hayat Holding Company, which owns a pulp and paper mill, and Şişecam Chemicals, which has become the flagship of the country's chemical industry, are becoming its largest exporters.* In 2021, Turkish investments reached 265 million euros, and the volume of trade was 876 million dollars [11]. Türkiye supported the country's accession to the Turkish Stream. An important step for Turkey to strengthen cooperation with Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as with Serbia, is the agreement on border crossing by citizens on internal passports, reached in September 2022 during the visit of Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Sarajevo.

Ankara is counting on strengthening ties between the leading states of the Balkan Peninsula under its auspices. In 2009, the Turkey-Croatia-Bosnia-Herzegovina and Turkey-Serbia-Bosnia-Herzegovina alliances are being created. One of the objectives of this interaction is to improve the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and reduce tension in its relations with its closest neighbors. In addition, large ethnic groups living in Bosnia-Herzegovina stand behind Croatia and Serbia [22].

Turkey's contacts with Croatia have been developing quite dynamically in recent years. After the abolition of the double taxation system, the trade turnover between them increased from 30 million euros in 2001 to 250 million euros in 2010 [18]. Croatia's accession to the EU only opened up new prospects for relations between the parties. They were given particular momentum by R. Erdogan's visit to Zagreb in January 2018, where the parties agreed to develop cooperation in various fields, primarily in the field of tourism, banking, and renewable energy sources. As part of these agreements, Turkish companies built the first geothermal power plant in Croatia. They are also building a railway line between Koprivnica and Krizhevtsi. Companies from Turkey are building shopping centers, participating in the modernization of the country's urban economy, including the reconstruction of the building of the Croatian Foreign Ministry. In 2021, Turkish investments in the Croatian economy reached 200 million euros, and the volume of trade was almost 900 million dollars [17]. However, Ankara and Zagreb constantly emphasize that they have not fully exploited the potential for further expansion of economic cooperation.

The countries are developing ties in the humanitarian sphere. In Sisak, Türkiye is building an Islamic cultural center named after R. Erdogan. More than 4,000 Muslims live in Sisak and the surrounding area, who at one time fled the civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina [15]. The Institute is opened in Zagreb. Yunus Emre, who provides everyone who wants to learn Turkish.

Demonstrating unanimity on many issues on the international agenda, Croatia and Turkey at the same time have certain disagreements, including in assessing the development of the situation in the Western Balkans. In September 2022, R. Erdogan paid a visit to Zagreb, where he met with Croatian President Z. Milanovic. They discussed a possible option for electoral reform in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Turkish President believes that the main communities living in the country should themselves come to a compromise on this issue. While his Croatian colleague spoke in favor of the development of the reform by the international community and its implementation in practice, regardless of the consent of the leaders of the communities, in this case, the Bosnian Serbs were meant [15].

The development of Turkey's relations with Albania are in the nature of a strategic partnership. Albanian leaders will regularly meet with senior Turkish officials. In January 2022, R. Erdogan visited the country. Albanian Prime Minister E. Rama constantly visits Turkey.

The parties annually increase economic cooperation. In 2018, Turkish Airlines helped Albania establish its own airline. Turkish investors have built the new Avlonya International Airport. In 2021, about 800 Turkish companies operated in the country, investing almost \$3.5 billion in its economy, and the volume of mutual trade reached \$850 million [6]. Turkey and Albania are developing cooperation in the field of agriculture, education, culture and in the social sphere. In Albania, the Institute Yunus Emre is active in Tirana and Shkodra.

Türkiye is also developing comprehensive cooperation with Montenegro. In August 2021, R. Erdogan visited Montenegro for the first time, where he expressed support for the country's intention to join the EU. In December 2022, during the visit of President M. Djukanovic to Istanbul, both leaders summed up their preliminary results, emphasizing the need to further expand contacts between the two countries. Turkish businessmen master the country's market. In 2021, 3,800 companies invested \$67 million in the country, and mutual trade reached \$250 million [14].

The countries are developing cooperation in the humanitarian sphere. TIKA in Montenegro is implementing 400 projects worth 20 million euros. In Montenegro, there is the Institute. Yunus Emre (Podgorica). As a result, more than 2 thousand had the opportunity to learn Turkish. About 500 Montenegrin students received scholarships to study at universities in Turkey [14]. Moreover, scholarships include payment for travel and accommodation in student dormitories.

North Macedonia has established friendly relations with Turkey. In 2008, the parties entered into a strategic partnership agreement. Ankara facilitated the entry of North Macedonia into NATO in 2020. In August 2022, the parties celebrated the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. Ankara supports Skopje's intentions to join the EU, taking the side of North Macedonia in its conflict with Greece over the name of the country [5]. Turkey is alarmed by the activities of F. Güllen's supporters among the large Turkish community of North Macedonia, as M. Şentop stated on December 22, 2022 during his visit to Skopje. Turkey's economic ties with North Macedonia are developing dynamically. In 2021, 1,350 foreign companies operated in the country, of which 25% were Turkish companies. They are implementing various projects from the modernization of Skopje International Airport to helping the country modernize the agricultural sector. In 2021, the volume of mutual trade amounted to 780 million euros.

Ankara and Skopje pay considerable attention to cooperation in the humanitarian sphere. In Skopje, there is the Institute. Yunus Emre. Türkiye is helping Macedonian Muslims build mosques and open Islamic centers. At the same time, the North Macedonia Information Center begins its work in Istanbul. Cooperation between countries in the field of education and culture can be considered fruitful. In Turkey, the restoration of the house of M. Kemal's parents at the initiative of the government of North Macedonia caused a great resonance.

Turkey was one of the first to recognize the independence of Kosovo on February 18, 2008.¹ It immediately sets a course for the development of comprehensive relations with Kosovo. Ankara constantly declares the inviolability of the territorial integrity of Kosovo and supports its aspirations to join NATO and the EU. In particular, this position was once again voiced in September 2022 by

¹Russia, along with other states, did not recognize the independence of Kosovo.

M. Cavusoglu during his visit to Pristina [12]. At the same time, Türkiye is counting on further dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo, offering its mediation services. Türkiye is becoming one of the largest investors in the country. With her participation, the airport in Prishite is being modernized, bridges, highways and other facilities are being built. Cooperation between the two countries in the humanitarian sphere is developing.

Thus, Turkey at the beginning of the XXI century. intensified relations with the states of the Balkan Peninsula. It is interested in maintaining stability in the region, since the Balkans open the shortest route to Europe for Ankara. The significance of this fact especially increases after the increase in energy supplies through the country from the South Caucasus, Russia and the Middle East to Europe. Therefore, Türkiye supports the efforts of the states of the region to join NATO and the EU. After 2016, Turkey seeks to pursue a more independent policy in the Western Balkans from Western countries. In achieving its goals, Ankara quite effectively used a set of factors that ensure the strength of its positions in the Western Balkans (economic, military-technical, political cooperation, soft power policy, contacts with the Muslims of the region). At present, Turkey, along with the EU, the US and China, is the leading external player that determines the development of the Western Balkans at the beginning of the 21st century.

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