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TURKEY'S RELATIONS WITH THE COUNTRIES OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN IN THE 21ST CENTURY: IN SEARCH OF STRATEGIC AUTONOMY ¹

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Abstract. *Introduction.* Turkey's search for a new regional and global role in a changing world order has increased Ankara's attention to the Global South, which was peripheral to its foreign policy priorities during the Cold War. Although Ankara's growing engagement and influence in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region has attracted increasing attention from the research community, Turkey's foreign policy in this region is still poorly understood. This article attempts to explore Turkey's policy in LAC during the first decades of the 21st century, placing it in the context of Turkey's increasing desire for "strategic autonomy." *Methods.* The author used a case study approach to analyze Turkey's policy in LAC. *Results.* After the Justice and Development Party came to power in Turkey in 2002, Turkey began a systematic effort to develop relations with LAC, expanding political, economic, and cultural ties with countries in the region. Since the July 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, Turkey's foreign policy has been increasingly guided by the desire for "strategic autonomy." Growing mistrust and conflicts in Turkey's relations with the U.S. and the EU have increased Ankara's interest in seeking alternative partnerships and building situational alliances. Although Ankara's growing ties with LAC countries (especially Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina) increase the autonomy of its foreign policy, Turkey remains critically dependent on the West, both economically and in terms of security.

Key words: strategic autonomy, Turkey, Latin America and the Caribbean, Erdoğan, Global South, diplomatic relations, institutionalization.

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ОТНОШЕНИЯ ТУРЦИИ СО СТРАНАМИ ЛАТИНСКОЙ АМЕРИКИ И КАРИБСКОГО БАССЕЙНА В XXI в.: В ПОИСКАХ СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКОЙ АВТОНОМИИ ¹

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Аннотация. *Введение.* Поиск Турцией новой региональной и глобальной роли в меняющемся миропо-рядке повысил внимание Анкары к странам Глобального Юга, которые в период холодной войны занимали периферийное положение в списке ее внешнеполитических приоритетов. Хотя рост ее активности и влияния в Латинской Америке и Карибском бассейне (ЛАК) привлекает растущее внимание исследователей, это направление внешней политики Турции все еще мало изучено. Между тем анализ взаимодействия Анкары со странами ЛАК может пролить дополнительный свет на трансформацию внешней политики Турции в период правления Партии справедливости и развития (ПСР). В данной статье автор предпринял попытку исследовать политику Турции в ЛАК в первые десятилетия XXI в., рассматривая ее в контексте усиливающейся

гося стремления Турцией к «стратегической автономии». *Анализ.* После прихода к власти в Турции ПСР в 2002 г. Анкара начала предпринимать систематические усилия по развитию отношений с ЛАК, расширяя политические, экономические, а также культурные связи со странами региона. После попытки государственного переворота в Турции, предпринятой в июле 2016 г., внешняя политика Турции стала все в большей степени определяться стремлением к «стратегической автономии». Рост недоверия и конфликтов в отношениях Турции с США и ЕС повысили интерес Анкары к поиску альтернативных партнерств и созданию ситуационных альянсов. Сближение с Венесуэлой позволило укреплять новую идентичность Турции как антигемонистского актора и как глобальной державы, преследующей свои интересы в разных регионах мира. Хотя расширение связей Анкары со странами ЛАК (и прежде всего с Бразилией, Мексикой и Аргентиной) повышает степень автономности ее внешней политики как с точки зрения экономики, так и с точки зрения безопасности, Турция по-прежнему критически зависит от Запада.

Ключевые слова: стратегическая автономия, Турция, Латинская Америка и Карибский бассейн, Эрдоган, Глобальный Юг, дипломатические отношения, институционализация.

Цитирование. Шерстюков С. А. Отношения Турции со странами Латинской Америки и Карибского бассейна в XXI в.: в поисках стратегической автономии // Вестник Волгоградского государственного университета. Серия 4, История. Регионоведение. Международные отношения. – 2024. – Т. 29, № 1. – С. 193–202. – (На англ. яз.). – DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15688/jvolsu4.2024.1.17>

Introduction. Turkey's growing engagement in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region is described in official narratives using different perspectives. The first maintains that Turkey's new, Latin American foreign policy orientation will allow it to become a global actor. The other holds that Turkey, transformed from a regional power to a world power, cannot neglect LAC [16]. Each of these descriptions demonstrates that Ankara's foreign policy ambitions go far beyond regional politics or even the so-called "spheres of influence" stretching across the territory of the former Ottoman Empire.

Although Turkey has only recently emerged as a prominent extra-regional actor in LAC, the Turkish government stresses that Turkey's relations with the region have considerable historical depth. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs website points out that "Turkey's relations with Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) go back to the second half of the 19th century" and that it was then that "diplomatic and consular contacts between the Ottoman Empire and some Latin American countries began" [43]. Also, Ankara's non-involvement in regional conflicts and its lack of colonial experience in the region allow it to position itself as an alternative force offering mutually beneficial cooperation.

In recent years, a growing number of publications have explored the southern direction of Turkey's foreign policy and, among others, the factors (domestic, regional, and international) that have prompted Turkey to intensify relations with countries of the Global South. Researchers have

examined these ties in terms of economic interdependence, the concept of the "commercial state," and "soft power" policies [1; 21]. The accelerating securitization of Turkey's foreign policy after 2014 calls into question the applicability of previous approaches to analyzing its global and regional foreign policy strategies, as well as its relations with other countries. Since 2014, the foreign policy of the AKP government has become increasingly determined by Turkey's desire for "strategic autonomy." At present, however, there are few studies that analyze how this change in Turkish foreign policy has affected its relations with LAC countries [18; 23].

According to L. Haugom, Turkey's quest for strategic autonomy has two dimensions, the first being "Turkey's efforts to develop a national, technologically advanced defence industry" [11, p. 212]. The second is the desire to build flexible alliances "with different states on different issues to achieve specific foreign policy objectives" [11, p. 212]. These efforts should not only provide Turkey with regional leadership but also make it an important global player. Key to the search for autonomy is Turkey's new identity, which is described in civilizational categories. Turkey perceives and positions itself as a leader not only in the Muslim world but also in the Global South and, therefore, upholds the rights of the least developed countries [18, p. 1092].

The concept of "strategic autonomy" is also used by Brazil and Argentina, which, similarly to Turkey, seek to increase their role and status in the changing world order by reducing "their

dependence on hegemonic power structures" [18, p. 1089]. It should be noted that the concept of autonomy as a theoretical approach was proposed by Latin American researchers and is seen today as "a Latin American contribution to IR discipline" [24, p. 1].

Can the similarities in interests and attitudes between Turkey and some LAC countries create the necessary prerequisites for rapprochement and the formation of situational or long-term alliances? How have the aforementioned shifts in Turkey's foreign policy affected its relations with the LAC countries? The author has attempted to answer these questions by analyzing the Latin American dimension of Turkey's foreign policy during the AKP period.

Methods and materials. In this article, Turkey's relations with the LAC countries are analyzed as a case study. The author explains the motives and driving forces behind Turkey's foreign policy toward LAC, appealing to both realist and constructivist theoretical perspectives. The realist perspective provides insight into the reasons for Turkey's increasing desire for strategic autonomy, pushing Ankara to build closer ties with the LAC countries. The constructivist approach explains Turkey's foreign policy in terms of Ankara's new foreign policy identity, whose strategy in the Global South is an integral part of its aspiration to a position of global power. The sources used were: 1) official documents of Turkish government agencies; 2) secondary sources dedicated to the analysis of Turkey's relations with the LAC countries; and 3) the materials of Turkish and Western media.

Analysis. Ankara's turn to the Global South and the "opening" of the LAC. The quest for a more independent and autonomous foreign policy, which has been inherent in the Republic of Turkey since its founding in 1923, has received a new impetus after the end of the Cold War. The disintegration of the USSR and the global shift in the balance of power have set the stage for Ankara's foreign policy to move beyond its previous regional and bloc-based frames. Turkey's leadership rethought its global position and formulated a new foreign policy that would be sensitive to both opportunities and threats posed by the drastic changes in the international environment. The crisis of the Western-centric version of Turkish identity and the attempts by

the Turkish elites to forge a new identity also accelerated the change in Turkey's foreign policy agenda.

During this period, Turkey began to rediscover not only Central Asia but also the wider Global South as a whole. In the emerging vision of Turkish experts and policymakers, Latin America is perceived and described no longer as a "distant region, but as a possible partner with which to establish and develop political and economic relations", and "where necessary, unity of action should be pursued" [29, p. 18]. Turkish President Suleyman Demirel, who made an official visit to Argentina, Brazil, and Chile in April 1995, was the first Turkish President to visit the region. This visit ushered in a new era in Turkish-Latin American relations. In 1998, Turkey adopted the "Action Plan for Latin America and the Caribbean," which has become the basis of Ankara's foreign policy strategy in LAC. Ankara's efforts fell on fertile ground, as during this period the countries of the region were also looking for opportunities to expand international (and, above all, economic) ties [15, p. 293].

Turkey's turn towards the Global South in the 1990s became even more visible after the AKP government came to power in 2002 and announced its "policy of opening up Latin America" and "policy of opening up Africa." The motivations and drivers of Turkey's policy in Latin America at the beginning of the 21st century were a set of interrelated factors that lie in the realm of global governance, political identity, economy, and security. In 2006, the Turkish government updated the "Action Plan for Latin America and the Caribbean," and 2006 was declared the "Year of Latin America and the Caribbean" in Turkey [8, p. 55]. The updated plan envisaged the implementation of Turkey's quadrilateral strategy in the region, which was supposed to foster the development of political contacts with regional countries and regional organizations. The next phase pursued the institutionalization of political relations as well as the parallel strengthening and institutionalization of trade and economic relations at both bilateral and multilateral levels [13, ss. 498-499].

Turkey's economic growth in the early 2000s was the main impetus for the search for new markets and the reason for the growing interest of both government agencies and Turkish businesses in the Latin American region [21,

p. 99]. The early 2000s saw a rapid increase in trade between Turkey and Latin American countries, which increased from \$827 million to \$2.5 trillion between 1999 and 2006 [8, p. 54]. During this period, Turkish government representatives positioned Turkey as a country whose geographical position would allow businessmen from Latin American countries to use Turkey as a gateway to the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Balkans [2].

Ankara's intensified policy in the Global South was conceptually consistent with the transition to a so-called "multi-dimensional foreign policy" initially championed by Ismail Cem and later by Ahmet Davutoğlu [7, p. 97]. Turkey's efforts to develop its cooperation with non-Western powers gained new impetus with the appointment of Davutoğlu as foreign minister in 2010 [20, p. 134]. The principles of the "new" foreign policy formulated by Davutoğlu provided not only for building closer relations with neighboring regions, but also for "rapprochement with distant geographical spaces" [22, p. 183].

It should be noted, however, that this rapprochement was possible as a result of the structural changes in international relations that took place at the beginning of the 21st century. In particular, as a number of researchers point out, the crisis of U.S. leadership in the LAC led to a vacuum that opened "an unexpected space for new 'discoverers'" [35, p. 20], one of which was Turkey.

Ankara has sought to expand its diplomatic representation in the region as part of its commitment to "opening up" Latin America, increasing the number of its embassies in the region from six in 2009 to nineteen in 2023. At the same time, Turkish researcher M. Yetim suggests that the description of Ankara's cooperation with the region should be less about Turkey's orientation toward Latin America and more about mutual rapprochement, emphasizing the interest of the countries of the LAC countries to further develop relations with Turkey, which they perceive as "a country with growing political and economic influence in the international arena" [14, s. 643]. Latin American researchers, in turn, consider Ankara's (and a number of other states') growing ties with LAC countries as one of the manifestations of the changing position and role of the Global South in international relations

and the intensification of South-South cooperation [37, pp. 5-7].

Turkey's "soft power" in Latin America.

The annual reports of the pro-government Turkish Political, Economic, and Social Research Foundation (SETA), produced since 2009, show how Turkish policy in LAC has changed, both in terms of spatial coverage and substantive content. Since 2014, reports issued by the SETA have begun to mention a new, fifth dimension of Turkey's strategy in LAC, namely "revitalising cultural ties with countries in the region" [13, s. 499]. Ankara relies on the same set of instruments and actors in LAC as it does in Africa, offering Latin American countries models of cooperation and forms of assistance that have been tested in other regions. As in Africa, a significant aspect of Ankara's policy in LAC is humanitarian activities carried out by the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) and other actors. It is worth mentioning in this regard that Ankara made humanitarianism a key point of its foreign policy, with explicit goals of restructuring the current international order under the AKP government [10, p. 43]. TIKA implements a range of projects in the region in the fields of education, health, agriculture, and infrastructure. There are currently two TIKA offices in the region (in Mexico and Colombia).

Both state and non-state (as well as quasi-state) institutions are involved in promoting Turkey's soft power in the region. Turkey's Diyanet Foundation, a key actor in spreading Turkey's Islamic "soft power" around the world, carries out projects in the region [32]. In addition to TIKA and Diyanet, these include the Turkish and Kindred Communities Abroad (YTB), the Turkish Scientific and Technological Research Council (TÜBİTAK), the Turkish Red Crescent (Türk Kızılay), Anadolu Agency, the Maarif Foundation, and the Yunus Emre Institute [23, p. 1114]. Maarif Foundation, Yunus Emre Institute, Ankara University, and other Turkish universities are active actors in the education market in Latin America. In 2009, the Center for Latin American Studies was opened at Ankara University, initiated by A. Davutoğlu [39, p. 68].

In recent years, religious diplomacy, or so-called "mosque diplomacy," has become an increasingly important tool in Turkey's foreign policy [4]. LAC has become one of the areas of

this diplomacy with a global reach. Although the share of Muslims in the region's population seems to be less than 1%, Turkish experts point out that "Islam is the fastest growing religion on the continent" [30]. During his visit to Cuba in February 2015, Turkish President R.T. Erdoğan proposed building a mosque in the Cuban capital that would be "the first place of worship for the island's 3,500 Muslims" [36]. Although the initial project has not yet been realized, a mosque has nevertheless been opened in Havana with Turkish support [31]. In December 2018, during his visit to Venezuela, Erdoğan also said that "Turkey has started work on the construction of a mosque in Caracas at the request of the Venezuelan authorities" [42].

An important event in this context was the first summit of Muslim religious leaders from Latin America held in Istanbul in November 2014, organized by the Office of Religious Affairs. In their speeches, Erdoğan and the head of the Office of Religious Affairs, Hermez, emphasized the cultural affinity between Latin America and Turkey, noting that this cultural affinity has a 150-year history, dating back to the final period of the Ottoman Empire [13, s. 500].

Ankara in search of alternative partnerships. As part of its strategy of "opening up" the region in the 2000s, Turkey has focused on relations with Brazil, Mexico [33], and Argentina. From the point of view of Turkish experts, the development of relations with these three countries, as well as with Venezuela, would allow Turkey to strengthen its influence in global politics and "form alternative power blocs" [5, ss. 499-500]. Turkey's relations with Brazil are often seen in academic literature as a partnership between two "rising" or "new" powers, allowing for an alliance in order to bring about "systemic shifts in the global distribution of power" [20, p. 138]. Both countries advocate reform of the UN (and especially the UN Security Council), criticizing existing international institutions that do not represent "the poorest and minor states" [38, p. 147]. Although Ankara has expanded its engagement with other Latin American, Central American, and Caribbean states in subsequent years, relations with Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina are at the core of its network of regional partnerships. Researchers from Latin America emphasize the aspirations of the "new powers"

of the Global South, such as Turkey, Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina, to promote new approaches to international relations (and North-South relations) in which autonomy and proactive foreign policy are key [37, p. 6]. The closeness, though not coincidence, of these countries' approaches to the world order, as well as their desire to improve their positions in it, create preconditions for interaction between them both at the bilateral level and within the framework of multilateral institutions.

The cooperation between Turkey and Brazil, which in 2010 launched a joint initiative aimed at concluding a nuclear deal with Iran, was at first sight consistent with Erdoğan's approach to foreign policy, which involved "flexible alliances with various states on different issues to achieve specific foreign policy objectives" [11, p. 207]. However, despite the importance of this example, which has attracted a lot of attention not only from politicians but also from academics, it remains so far the only example of cooperation between the two countries on important international issues. A number of factors, in particular regional crises near their own borders and the need to respond to them, have hampered the intensification of bilateral relations between Turkey and Brazil in recent years [38, p. 146].

Erdoğan's official visits to Mexico, Colombia, and Cuba in 2015, and Chile, Peru, and Ecuador in 2016, and Argentina, Paraguay, and Venezuela in 2018 were an important manifestation of Turkey's "Latin American initiative" and its strategy to diversify its foreign policy [19]. An indicator of Turkey's unusually robust diplomatic engagement in LAC is that, in recent years, Turkish leaders have visited countries in the region more often than senior officials of any other extra-regional power, including China and Russia [27]. In his speeches, Erdoğan stresses relations with Latin America and the Caribbean as one of the main pillars of Turkey's "multifaceted foreign policy," emphasizing the increasing number of Turkish diplomatic missions in the region as well as the growth of mutual trade turnover.

Following Turkey's proactive policies in Latin America in the early 2000s, Ankara has sought to build cooperation not only with individual countries but also with regional integration groupings. So far, Turkey has joined regional multilateral institutions such as the Organization of American

States (OAS), Central American Integration System (SICA), Association of Caribbean States (ACS), Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) as an observer country [27]. Ankara seeks to remove barriers to economic cooperation with Latin American countries and prioritizes the signing of free trade agreements both with individual countries and with regional integration structures. Turkey's free trade agreement with Chile entered into force in 2011 and the agreement with Venezuela in 2020. The Turkish government is negotiating free trade zones with Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru and is seeking free trade agreements with regional organizations such as the Caribbean Community, the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR), and the Pacific Alliance [6]. However, in Turkey's foreign policy narrative, cooperation with major regional groupings is increasingly linked to security interests. The leaders of Turkey see the integration processes in LAC as a factor that increases the significance and subjectivity of the region in the international arena and as a process in line with Turkey's strategic interests aimed at creating a multipolar world. Such a vision is reinforced by the fact that a number of new regional organizations are banking on "South-South cooperation and their growing autonomy from the United States" [37, p. 7].

Interaction with Latin American states in international structures (including G20 summits whose participating countries are Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina) and their possible support for Turkey at the United Nations is an important dimension of Ankara's policy in the region. Latin American countries played an important role in Turkey's election as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2009–2010 [8, pp. 57–58].

Although new emphases emerged in Turkey's policies in the region in the 2010s, economic interaction remains a key focus for both bilateral and multilateral cooperation between Turkey and the LAC countries. Ankara actively participates in global economic reconfiguration processes and seeks to establish "new economic ties with other emerging powers" [25, p. 191]. Turkey's trade with the LAC countries, which was one US billion in 2000, had risen to eight billion by 2012 and reached a record of twelve billion in 2021. At the same time, the Turkish government

claims this figure can double or even triple in the coming years [3].

Turkey's strategic autonomy: the Latin American context. The pursuit of strategic autonomy has become a defining feature of Turkey's foreign policy since 2014. This period has seen a shift in foreign policy priorities, which are increasingly driven by security considerations and responding to internal and external threats rather than economic growth [23, p. 1105]. The accelerated securitization of Turkey's foreign policy after 2014, caused by the breakdown of the existing world order, regional crises along Turkey's borders, as well as domestic factors, has led Ankara to make greater use of hard power to achieve its objectives. It was also manifested in a relative decline in the importance of soft power in its foreign policy toolbox. The described transformation of Turkey's foreign policy could not but affect Ankara's relations with the Global South and, in particular, its approach to Latin America [23, p. 1105]. Ankara's growing interest in developing defense cooperation, as well as military-technical cooperation with LAC countries, has become one of the manifestations of the continuing shifts in its foreign policy. Turkish defense companies are actively promoting their products in the region by exporting defense products and establishing defense cooperation with countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Uruguay, Guatemala, and Bolivia [40, p. 131]. While aiming to popularize Turkish education in the region, the Turkish government is simultaneously pursuing another objective by seeking to eliminate schools in LAC and any other structures associated with the Gülen movement [26, p. 8]. According to TİKA coordinator in Colombia, Mehmet Özcan, Latin America has become "the new base of the Gülenist Terror Group (FETÖ)" [9].

From the outset, the AKP government's policy towards the region has combined two approaches. According to the first one, Ankara's main interests in the Latin American region lie in the fields of economy and mutually beneficial economic cooperation. The second approach viewed Turkey's activism in the region in terms of the possibility of changing the global balance of power in the international arena and turning it into a global actor. At the opening ceremony of the Centre for Latin American Studies (LAMER) at Ankara University in 2009, Davutoğlu pointed

out that Latin America (along with Africa) “has a very important role in transforming Turkey’s regional influence into a global actor” [28, p. 249]. These approaches can be seen not as competing but as acting as complementary cogs in Turkey’s foreign policy mechanism. The development of both political and economic cooperation with leading countries in the region and regional blocs could strengthen Turkey’s position in relations with the US and the EU and thus help achieve its strategic autonomy. In a situation of increasing rivalry between the major powers and the blocs created by those powers, Turkey seeks to build networks of partnerships with the “middle-tier” powers “to balance out the American, Russian and Chinese-driven coalitions” [25, p. 186], avoiding becoming dependent on one of those powers.

After the July 2016 coup attempt in Turkey and the West’s mixed response to the event, combating national security threats has become a top priority in both Ankara’s domestic and foreign policies. At the same time, anti-Western motives are gaining strength in Turkish diplomatic rhetoric. Growing distrust and conflict in relations with the United States and leading EU countries encourage Turkey to seek alternative partnerships.

Against this background, a rapid rapprochement between Turkey and Venezuela is taking place. Immediately after the attempted coup in Turkey, Maduro strongly condemned the coup plotters and expressed full support for Erdogan’s government [26, p. 4]. The political rapprochement that followed (including the exchange of mutual visits) was accompanied by a rapid increase in economic ties between the two countries. Under pressure from Ankara, the Maduro government in Venezuela handed over two schools in Caracas linked to the Gulen movement to the state education foundation, Maarif [26, p. 8]. Negotiations are ongoing to open a TIKA office in Caracas as well as a Turkish cultural center for Yunus Emre.

Ankara has become one of Caracas’ key partners in the established model of relations, with which cooperation has helped the Maduro government mitigate the impact of US sanctions imposed on Venezuela [12, s. 387]. In December 2016, Turkish airlines launched flights (Istanbul-Havana-Caracas) between Istanbul and Caracas, which also strengthened ties between the countries [44]. The relationship with Venezuela

helps Erdoğan position Turkey as a country that pursues an independent foreign policy in spite of US discontent or direct pressure [26, p. 8]. This discourse, in turn, reinforces Turkey’s new identity as a global power pursuing its interests in different parts of the world.

Ankara’s Latin American policy is marked by a desire to use a new political language to describe its strengthened presence in LAC and to expand both bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the states of the region. The key ideas in the emerging narrative are ideas about the similarity of problems and challenges (economic, security, and political development) faced by Turkey on the one hand and Latin American states on the other. This idea implies Ankara’s willingness to engage with countries that share similar “strategic, economic or political interests” [19, p. 138]. Another idea of the new language of cooperation is that both Turkey and LAC countries bear the “heavy burden of history” in their relations with the West [41]. Not only in Latin America but also in the Global South as a whole, Ankara “has positioned itself as the anti-imperialist and anti-hegemonic actor who challenges U.S. policies against ‘oppressed countries’ ” [26, p. 15]. Some Turkish experts draw direct parallels between the leftist movements in Latin America and the Islamist movements in the Middle East. According to M. Özkan, both the former and the latter expressed “alternative anti-Western political positions” during the Cold War, and after coming to power in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, they were excluded from the international system [31].

The structural changes in international relations after the Cold War gave Turkey the opportunity to pursue a more autonomous foreign policy in the 1990s. It seems that Erdoğan firmly believes that the ongoing changes in the world order have once again opened a window of opportunity for Turkey to change both its position in the global order and the global order itself. Erdoğan hopes that such changes can be realized if Ankara builds a network of partnerships with the states of the Global South. Turkey’s expansion in Africa and Latin America is seen by Erdoğan not only in the context of its movement towards world power status but also as Ankara’s contribution to a more equitable world order

where relations between countries are based on “mutual benefit” and “equal partnership”.

Conclusion. The first decades of the 21st century were a time of building the legal and institutional infrastructure of Turkey’s cooperation with the countries of the region in various fields. According to M. Kutlu, director of the Centre for Latin American Studies at Ankara University, “as a result of the steps taken to establish a framework of legal, political, economic, and cultural ties, Turkey’s strategic plan for the Latin American initiative has now been largely completed” [17]. Although this assessment seems overly optimistic, one cannot deny the fact that in a short time Turkey has managed to strengthen its position in the region, taking its relations with countries such as Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia to the level of strategic partnership and becoming the region’s sixth trading partner after the EU, China, India, Japan, and Russia [34, p. 123]. However, after the institutionalization phase, Turkey will have to find answers to a number of challenges, one of which is the need to pursue a more nuanced policy in the region, facing increasing competition from other extra-regional powers, most of which have more resources than Ankara. Ankara’s ability to maintain and expand its ties with the LAC countries in the long term will be key in this context [27].

One consequence of the securitization of Turkey’s foreign policy in recent years could be a reduction in the relative importance of geographically distant regions for Ankara. The crises near Turkey’s borders have been one of the reasons pushing Ankara to diversify its political and economic ties. However, the scale and depth of these crises may also be the reason for the reduction of Ankara’s activity in remote and less important regions from the point of view of ensuring its security.

Turkey has made great strides towards technological independence in recent years, but in terms of broader material strength, its capabilities are still limited. The diversification of ties has made Turkey’s foreign policy more bold and autonomous than it was at the start of the 21st century. However, in technological, economic, and investment terms, Turkey remains critically dependent on the West. While striving for strategic autonomy, Ankara maintains ties with the West and is integrated into Western institutions.

Paradoxically, Turkey’s desire for greater autonomy in its relations with the outside world (and above all with the West) is coupled with the recognition that to achieve this autonomy, it is necessary to maintain relations with the West “both in economic and security matters” [18, p. 1091].

The analysis of Turkey’s relations with the LAC countries shows not so much a shift from one foreign policy model based on economic interdependence and soft power to another based on the priority of security considerations, but rather a combination of these models with the continued predominance of the first model.

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