

Turkey follows Azerbaijan in escalating spy scandal

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On 20.02.2024, it was reported that the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MIT) had uncovered the activities of the French Intelligence Directorate in Turkey. As part of the MIT operation, 3 people were arrested for allegedly spying for France for a year. According to the Turkish media, one of the “spies”, *Ahmet Kati*, along with two others were detained by MIT and Istanbul police while trying to leave Turkish territory after being warned by French intelligence.

It should be noted that something alike was expected from Turkey after December 4, 2023, when Azerbaijan initiated an international scandal by detaining a French citizen, businessman *Martin Ryan*, on charges of espionage. The experience of the Turkey–Azerbaijan nexus in the international arena suggests that these countries almost always synchronize their steps to exert multi-level pressure on states or organizations that create problems for them. In this case, it was France, which, according to Baku, intends to upset the security balance in the South Caucasus for its own “mercantile” purposes.

At the same time, Ankara has its own game in its relations with France, including a wider horizon of interests than just the South Caucasus, and therefore the recent developments around the “French spy network in Turkey” should not be linked solely to intentions to play along with Azerbaijan.

In fact, the arrest of the “French spies” in Istanbul took place immediately after it became known that France, Greece, and Cyprus had banned a decision by the EU's Political and Security Committee to grant Turkey new contracts to supply Ukraine with combat drones and artillery ammunition. This was a painful blow to Ankara in terms of the loss of a substantial source of income for its defense industry. It was also a blow to Turkey's self-esteem.

Therefore, it can be assumed that the exposure of the “French spies”, even if they really are such and their activities have been monitored by MIT for some time, was preserved by Ankara for the most suitable moment in the political confrontation with France, which seems to be getting wider and more heated by the day.