

## **Turkey revives relations with Egypt**

### **ARVAK Center comment, 21.02.2024**

On 14.02.2024, Turkish President R. Erdogan paid an official visit to Egypt for the first time in the last 11 years.

The relations between the countries deteriorated sharply after the overthrow of President Mohammed Morsi in Egypt in 2013, who was the leader of the Egyptian branch of the international Islamic organization “Muslim Brotherhood”, which has always enjoyed great favor and support from R. Erdogan. The countries then cut off all ties and called back their ambassadors, as the head of the TR declared the new Egyptian leadership, which came to power in a coup, to be illegal.

However, in 2021, then Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu announced the resumption of diplomatic contacts with Egypt. In 2022, the Turkish and Egyptian presidents held a short informal meeting at the opening ceremony of FIFA World Cup in Qatar, and in 2023, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry visited the earthquake-stricken Turkish city of Adana.

Erdogan's current visit was carefully prepared, and the fact that President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi personally greeted the Turkish leader at Cairo airport shows the great importance that Egypt attaches to normalizing relations with Turkey.

According to several analysts, Ankara had to reconsider its ties with Egypt mainly because of the current disappointing financial and economic situation in the country. Under the conditions of stagnation and the continuing decline of *lira*, it is irrational, at least, to deprive the Turkish economy of the export market of Egypt's 120 million population. It is also possible that Ankara is seeking grounds for possible close cooperation with Cairo in the context of creation of a global trade route from the Indian Ocean through the Red Sea to the Mediterranean and further to the Black Sea through the so-called “Istanbul Canal”, which is currently under construction. Ankara may also be interested in learning from the Egyptians' experience in the operation of the Suez Canal in terms of integrated navigation, maintenance, and customs policies.

All these facts are of great importance in themselves, which at the same time, does not contradict to the purely political motives that led Erdogan to make a sharp turn on the Egyptian track. The fact is that Egypt is the largest Arab country in terms of population and has a great weight in the League of Arab States (LAS) and its military power is comparable, for example, to the combined military capabilities of Iraq, Syria, and Jordan.

The rupture of relations with Egypt once had a serious impact on Ankara's ambitious plans to assume the role of leader of the Islamic *umma* in the Middle East and the Maghreb and contributed to the split in the Arab world in the context of its relations with Turkey. The Egyptian anxiety, which is linked to the memory of several wars of liberation against the Turkish metropolis in the past, was revived after the events of Morsi's ouster and the Turkey's response, and became a defining feature of Cairo's political agenda, forcing it to further expand its cooperation with another Arab League heavyweight that did not suffer from Erdogan's Turkish ambitions – Saudi Arabia. Cairo's fears were not unfounded and were clearly confirmed during the famous events in Libya, when, in early January 2020 R. Erdogan intervened into this Egypt's neighbor country to support Fayeze al-Sarraj's army against the forces of Cairo-backed Libyan Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar. As a result of such drastic steps of Erdogan, as well as Ankara's predatory deeds against Syria, Libya and Iraq, the main Arab countries that determine the policy of the LAS have been able to undermine the new Turkish strategy of turning from the West to the East with the aim of neo-Ottoman revisionism in the Western Asia. Even Ankara's accentuated "deterioration" of relations with Tel Aviv over the Palestinian issue has not rehabilitated Turkish expansionism in the eyes of the Arab world.

Perhaps it was the realization of the futility of his previous grandiose plans that prompted Erdogan to adopt a more flexible policy toward Cairo, especially in light of the events in Israel and the Gaza Strip. After all, a completely new geopolitical reality is emerging in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean, without which Ankara will find it difficult to maintain even its current shaky position in this most complex region.