

On Turkey's new natural gas ambitions

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After the collapse of B. Assad's regime in Syria, there has been increased discussion in the global media about the “*Qatar Gas Pipeline*”, which is planned to run from the Persian Gulf to Europe. This project was agreed upon back in 2009, but the “Arab Spring” and the war in Syria delayed its implementation. The route was supposed to pass through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, and Turkey. This would allow Doha to fully supply Europe with the “*blue fuel*”, ending its dependence on Russia.

Now, with the removal of the main obstacle in the form of Assad's regime, many Middle Eastern and Western analysts believe that the project can be smoothly revived. However, in reality, over the past years, other, no less serious problems have been added to the “Syrian obstacle”, solutions for which have not yet been found. Firstly, there has been a radical deterioration in relations between Riyadh and Doha, and Saudi Arabia is not inclined to provide its territory for laying the pipeline. Secondly, Qatar has been successfully trading its energy sources in the form of LNG (Liquid Natural Gas), securing it from the expenses on the costly pipelines and their international security. Thirdly, Washington (which was once the main lobbyist for the Qatar route) has lost interest in the project, as Russia has practically left the European gas market, allowing the USA and Qatar to supply Europe with their LNG. Finally, Assad's departure has not solved the security problem of the Syrian segment of the hypothetical gas pipeline. Syria is on the verge of a new round of civil war, no matter how much the geopolitical patrons of its new authorities try to demonstrate confidence in the country's stable future.

Initially, it was believed that Turkey would benefit the most from the “Qatar pipeline” project. The pipeline would have realized its long-standing dream of becoming a Eurasian gas hub, allowing it to gain leverage over Europe, make a lot of money, and end the energy shortages it experienced during its industrial-economic leap in the 2000s. Consequently, if the situation with the “Qatar pipeline” is still far from being resolved, Turkey will have to postpone its plans.

In Ankara, however, this is not the case. Erdogan's team is currently considering changing the route of the gas pipeline from Qatar to Turkey through Iraq. Some Russian specialists believe that by bringing this issue to the agenda, Ankara is bluffing in order to negotiate more favorable conditions with Moscow within the framework of creating a “*Gas Exchange*” in Turkey based on the RF supplies. Russian analysts do not believe in the realism of the new “Qatar route” with an estimated cost of \$20 billion, considering that its laying and operation are associated with no fewer problems than the “*old version*”.

And there are problems indeed. Turkey will have to reconcile the Saudis with the Qatari Royal House, ensure comprehensive support from the central government in Baghdad (work is already underway in this area), and neutralize the “Kurdish threat” in the northern Iraq and Syria. But for Ankara, this complex game is indeed “worth the candle” as it seeks to

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synchronize the new Qatari gas route with the Persian Gulf–Turkey–Europe logistics corridor, thus providing itself with the conditions to become the political-economic hegemon in Western Asia.

In this light, the skepticism of Russian experts seems hardly appropriate: the events of the past 20 years demonstrate that Erdogan's ambitions and persistence consistently bring Turkey tangible results.