

UDC 327

TURKEY'S FOREIGN POLICY DURING THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

ЗОВНІШНЯ ПОЛІТИКА ТУРЕЧЧИНИ ПІД ЧАС ПРЕЗИДЕНТСЬКИХ ВИБОРІВ 2023 РОКУ

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Abstract. *These conference theses are devoted to the evolution of Turkey's foreign policy during the 2023 presidential elections. The chosen topic is extremely relevant in the context of Turkey's foreign policy, as the elections took place against the background of serious global challenges, including the war in Ukraine. The aim of the study is to analyze Turkey's foreign policy during the 2023 presidential elections, in particular, to study its strategy and positions on key international issues, such as the war in Ukraine, as well as the impact of domestic political processes on the country's foreign policy course. Such an analysis can be useful for various participants in international relations in developing effective strategies to support democratic institutions and stability in difficult situations. For this study well-known research methods such as event analysis, case studies, as well as chronological methods were introduced, allowing for the identification of regional factors influencing the presidential race in Turkey.*

Key words: *evolution of foreign policy, presidential elections, geopolitical player, sanctions, effective strategies, democratic institutions, regional factors.*

Анотація. *Ці тези конференції присвячені еволюції зовнішньої політики Туреччини під час президентських виборів 2023 року. Обрана тема є надзвичайно актуальною в контексті зовнішньої політики Туреччини, оскільки вибори проходили на тлі серйозних глобальних викликів, зокрема війни в Україні. Метою дослідження є аналіз зовнішньої політики Туреччини під час президентських виборів 2023 року, зокрема вивчення її стратегії та позицій щодо ключових міжнародних питань, таких як війна в Україні, а також вплив внутрішньополітичних процесів на зовнішньополітичний курс країни. Такий аналіз може бути корисним для різних учасників міжнародних відносин щодо вироблення ефективних стратегій підтримки демократичних інститутів і стабільності в складних ситуаціях. Для цього дослідження були запроваджені відомі методи дослідження, такі як аналіз подій, тематичні дослідження, а також хронологічні методи, що дозволяють виділити регіональні фактори, що впливають на президентські перегони в Туреччині.*

Ключові слова: *еволюція зовнішньої політики, президентські вибори, геополітичні гравці, санкції, ефективні стратегії, демократичні інститути, регіональні фактори.*

Introduction.

The 2023 elections were an important moment in determining the country's foreign policy course, as politicians actively discussed strategies for the global

challenges on the world stage and, in particular, the war in Ukraine, sanctions, and international relations concerned. Turkey, as an important geopolitical player, was in a difficult situation trying to balance its relations with NATO, Ukraine, and Russia. Following constitutional changes in 2017, Turkey turned to a presidential form of government and direct presidential elections. Elections are to be held every five years, and candidates should be at least 40 years old, have a university degree, and have at least 100,000 voters or be nominated by a political party. The candidate who receives more than 50% of the votes in the first round of voting becomes president. If no candidate reaches this mark, a second round is held between the two candidates who received the most votes. Elections in Turkey are held using paper ballots, and the Supreme Electoral Council of Turkey (YSK) works to ensure that the process is transparent. The 2023 elections demonstrated a significant level of support for Recep Tayyip Erdogan's policies from different segments of the population, mainly determined by nationalist, Islamic, and conservative sentiments. Despite the economic crisis, high inflation, and falling living standards, voters have retained their loyalty to the government due to the stability that Erdogan and his party have duly promised, as well as his ability to maintain a certain level of social and political cohesion in the country.

Main text.

Characterizing the 2023 presidential elections in Turkey as an important milestone in the country's political life, it is necessary to take into account the fact that for the first time since 2002, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) was not the clear favorite. Despite predictions that the opposition would win, Recep Tayyip Erdogan won with 52% of the vote in the second round. This question raises interest: why, despite economic difficulties, the crisis, and the aftermath of the February 2023 earthquake, did he manage to maintain his position? One of the main factors contributing to Erdogan's victory is the achievements in Turkey's economic development under the AKP. Over the past 20 years, the country has shown stable economic growth, which has strengthened the trust of the electorate. The authorities focused on large infrastructure projects — new airports, bridges, and highways —

which not only increased the comfort of the population, but also created the image of Turkey as a successful, and developing state. This was an important factor in the party's support among the middle class and the economic elite. Another important part of the election campaign was to emphasize Turkey's foreign policy successes. Erdogan was able to strengthen Turkey's position on the international stage, continuing to develop strategic ties with important countries in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Europe. In particular, Turkey's participation in initiatives such as agreements on the export of Ukrainian grain demonstrated the country as a key player on the international political front, which also positively affected the government's image at home. No less important was the government's effective domestic policy in the field of social support. The government actively supported social programs, targeting the most vulnerable segments of the population, offering subsidies for housing, energy, and assistance to the unemployed. This created a dependence of some social groups on state payments and gave the government the opportunity to maintain the loyalty of important electoral groups. Thanks to a well-established system of social benefits, the government received support not only from those who benefited from economic reforms but also from the poorer sections of the population [7].

One of the reasons for Erdogan's victory was also the weakness of the opposition. Even by uniting several political forces in the "National Alliance," the opposition was unable to put forward a strong candidate. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who was elected as the candidate, was unable to gain the trust of conservative voters and did not have sufficient popularity among the majority of the population due to low charisma and the lack of an effective political strategy. As a result, despite the disappointment of part of the electorate in the actions of the authorities, the majority of voters remained loyal to Erdogan, who, with the help of effective media support and political maneuvers, was able to gain popularity among the broad masses of the population [2].

Another important moment that influenced the elections' outcome was the earthquake of February 6, 2023, one of the largest natural disasters in Turkish history.

Although the government was initially unable to respond quickly to all the needs of the victims, steps were subsequently taken to provide humanitarian aid and restore infrastructure in the affected regions. Voters, especially those affected by the earthquake, expressed gratitude to the government for the prompt assistance, which strengthened Erdogan's image as a leader capable of governing the country in crisis situations. The media actively supported the government's activities in the context of the natural disaster, which further contributed to strengthening his popularity among voters.

Strengthening the army and strengthening Turkey's defense capabilities were key factors in the victory. Defense spending has increased significantly under the AKP. Turkey is proud of its own military hardware, including drones, tanks, and helicopters. This allowed the government to strengthen the country's defense capabilities and increase support from nationalists, for whom Turkey's strength is an important security factor [6].

Neo-Ottomanism played a significant role in Recep Tayyip Erdogan's victory in the 2023 presidential election. The ideas embodied in the concept of neo-Ottomanism, aimed at restoring Turkey's geopolitical influence in former Ottoman territories, were reflected in the president's foreign policy and election campaign. Erdogan actively used this concept to increase his popularity among nationalist, Islamic, and patriotic voters, who saw in him a leader capable of restoring Turkey's greatness on the world stage. One of the most obvious manifestations of neo-Ottomanism was Turkey's active foreign policy, particularly in the Middle East and Africa. Turkey carried out large-scale humanitarian missions, built infrastructure, and concluded agreements with African countries, in particular with Somalia, Sudan, and other states where Turkey's activism has made voters at home proud of its achievements on the international stage. In addition, the growth of Turkish military influence in these regions, including the opening of military bases and participation in peacekeeping operations, has added elements of patriotic pride, which has strengthened Erdogan's position among the electorate.

In addition, the rhetoric of opposition to Western countries, especially in the

context of Africa, has been an effective tool for mobilizing support among citizens who have rejected Western colonial influence. Erdogan, by emphasizing that Turkey does not have economic and political interests like Western states but is building "stable" and mutually beneficial relations with African countries, strengthened his position as a leader representing an independent and strong state. Neo-Ottomanism also helped Erdogan strengthen his popularity among the Islamic electorate and nationalist circles, emphasizing Turkey's ties with Muslim countries, which have become especially important in the context of globalization. Turkish support for Muslim minorities in Africa, particularly in countries where Muslims predominate, also contributed to strengthening the president's positive image in the international arena. Thus, neo-Ottomanism became an important tool for mobilizing support for Erdogan in the context of competitive presidential elections. This approach allowed him not only to strengthen his position among nationalist and Islamic voters but also to convince part of the electorate of the need to support his policies aimed at restoring Turkey's influence in the international arena [3].

The Justice and Development Party, which has ruled the country for 20 years of the Republic's history, especially in the last 10 years, has defined one of the main foreign policy themes as a departure from the West. Relations with the Western Alliance have become part of Turkey's national political agenda and social divisions. Turkey's relations with the European Union have experienced significant difficulties in recent years. They have become largely transactional in nature, with practical rather than principled aspects prevailing. On the one hand, the opposition bloc considered the Western Alliance to be the country's pillar; on the other hand, the government bloc believed that Turkey was limited by this alliance. This division between supporters and opponents of the Western Alliance also had a strong relationship with the secular-conservative split that has defined the country's politics for the past 20 years [5].

In the context of Turkey's foreign policy during the 2023 presidential elections, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's position on Ukraine and the war on its territory is very important in relation to. Traditionally, Turkey supports the independence,

sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and even after the outbreak of the war against Russia, this position has remained unchanged. President Erdogan has repeatedly emphasized his support for Ukraine on the international stage. At the same time, Turkey supports the territorial integrity of Ukraine, including support for the Crimean Tatars — part of the Ukrainian national minority — and also notes the historical and cultural ties between Turkey and Crimea. Turkey actively supports the Crimean Tatars in their efforts to defend their rights and opposes the annexation of Crimea by Russia [4].

Since the beginning of the war, Turkey has also actively supported peace talks between Russia, and Ukraine. President Erdogan has stated that he is ready to contribute to the restoration of peace through diplomatic methods, which were a special form at critical stages of the conflict. Turkey has participated in negotiations at various levels, acting as a mediator on important issues, such as agreements on the export of Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea, and has also helped to create mechanisms for humanitarian aid. Erdogan stressed that Turkey continues to support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, despite the difficult balancing act between the West, Russia and Ukraine. Thus, Turkey's position, in particular that of President Erdogan, on the war in Ukraine during the 2023 presidential election was aimed at diplomatic support for the world, protection of the rights of the Crimean Tatars, and support for the sovereignty of Ukraine. Turkey also reported on efforts to maintain strategic relations with Russia, emphasizing the complexity and diversity of the country's foreign policy in the face of global and regional challenges [1].

Summery and conclusions.

The 2023 elections in Turkey were an important stage in the country's political life, reflecting trends that will determine its domestic and foreign policy for the coming years. The results of the elections, where Recep Tayyip Erdogan continued his political career by becoming president again, not only confirmed his leadership but also revealed a number of key moments that characterize the current situation in Turkey, its relations with other countries, and its role on the world stage. One of the main factors in Erdogan's victory was his ability to effectively mobilize domestic

support through social and economic initiatives, especially in a difficult economic situation.

Turkey's foreign policy after the 2023 elections will certainly continue to be one of the main aspects of the country's international strategy under Erdogan's leadership. One of the main characteristics of Turkish foreign policy is its pragmatism and balancing between different geopolitical centers. Turkey maintains important strategic ties with both the West and other major powers such as Russia, China and regional players. This allows Turkey to take a neutral but active position in resolving international crises, while seeking to protect its national interests.

Turkey's role is particularly important in the context of the conflict in Ukraine, where it acts as a mediator that can facilitate peace negotiations while maintaining a balance between the various major powers. Turkey also seeks to use the situation to strengthen its economic and political ties with the European Union and NATO while maintaining contacts with Russia, with which it has numerous strategic interests. This flexibility and ability to adapt to changing circumstances makes Turkey an important player on the world stage.

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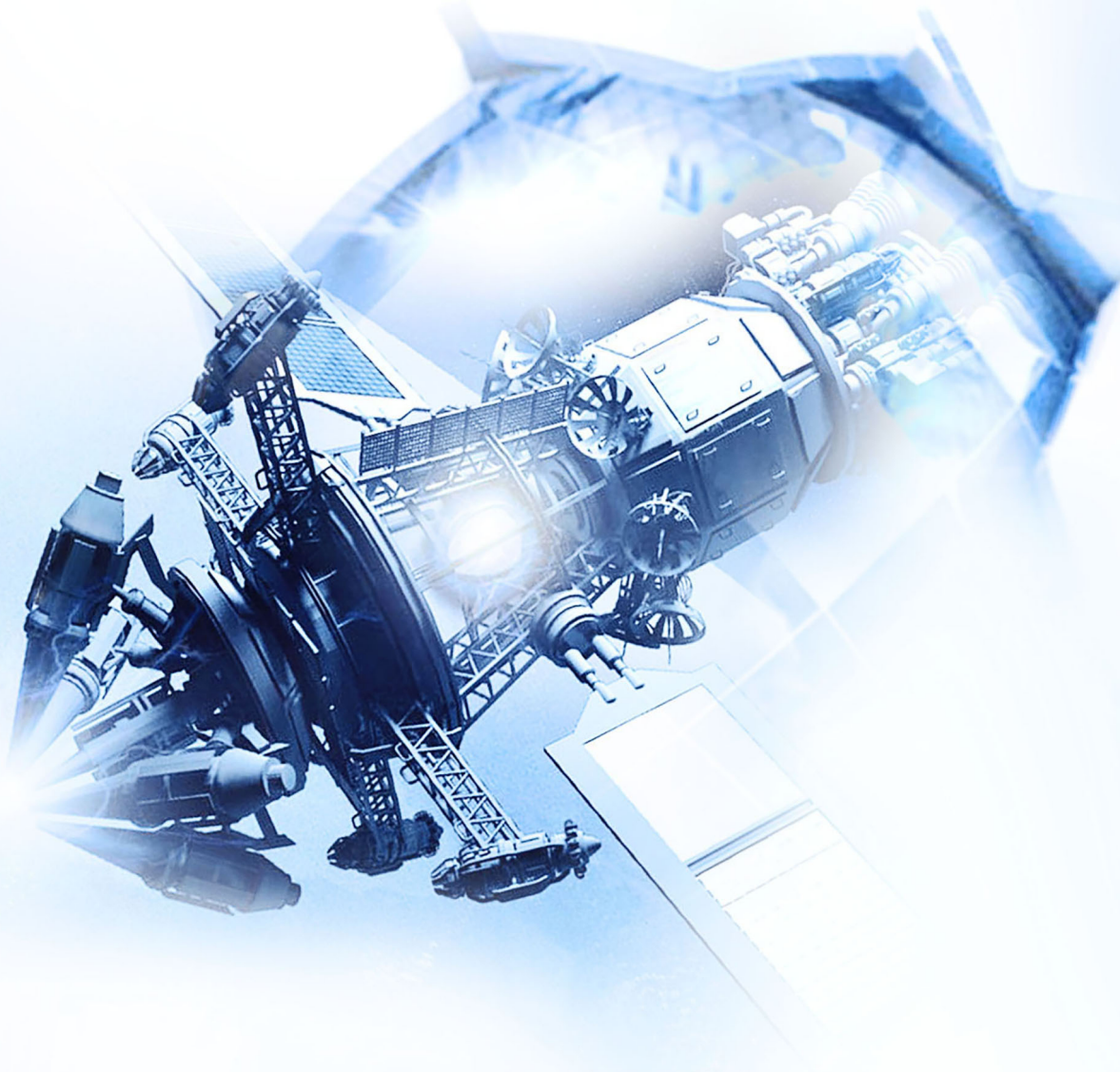


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