Bolivia-Brazilian relations in a new regional context

The report will review the current state of Bolivia-Brazilian relations as an illustration of the transformation of the regional scene related to the processes of political polarization. In both Bolivia and Brazil, a serious restructuring of the political course has taken place, which is reflected on the external contour. At the same time, the governments of these countries stick to the opposite positions in the political spectrum.

One of the key issues of bilateral cooperation is the export of natural gas. The nationalization of the gas industry in 2006 compromised cooperation with the Brazilian company Petrobras. However, the ideological and personal friendship between Presidents Evo Morales and Luis Inacio Lula helped to reduce this tension. The gas issue was also used as a political tool in the perspective. Thus, the government of Jair Bolsonaro expressed support for the interim administration of Jeanine Áñez in Bolivia by guaranteeing more profitable contracts and increase in imports of Bolivian gas.

Another aspect of the relationship is participation in multilateral formats. The Bolivian traditional diplomatic set as a «country of contacts» implies the exploit of its central geographical position on the continent. In this paradigm, for example, it was supposed to implement a megaproject to construct a railway that would connect the Pacific side in Peru with the Atlantic coast of Brazil.

In addition, La Paz seeks to position itself as a link between various projects of South American regional integration. The Government of Luis Arce declared as a priority to join Mercosur trade bloc (since 1996, Bolivia has had the status of an associate member). Bolivia intends to purse the full membership, which is hindered by Brazil.

Today, strategic and ideological differences in the policy of the leaders do not allow to expect favorable development of relations. Nevertheless, gas contracts remain at the center of agenda, that are of mutual interest.