

Russia-Turkey: a new era of strategic partnership?

Russian-Turkish relations have experienced such rocky times in the last couple of years that it would have been almost impossible to predict the further development of the partnership in the foreseeable future. Yet, since the beginning of 2017 the relationship between the two countries have started to warm up as both leaders, Putin and Erdogan have managed to find some important touch points to strengthen the sustainable economic ties with strategic political cooperation.

The recovery of the diplomatic relations has been gained much due to the Turkey's collaboration with Russia and Iran over Syria and their further fight against terrorism and the ISIS in the region. The successful development of the Astana process led by Russia, Turkey and Iran and the perspectives of hosting the National Dialogue Congress in Russia's Sochi have raised a wave of anxiety in Washington as the United States were counting much on Ankara's support in pursuing its military plans in Syria. Provided that Turkey's decision to join Russia and Iran and its engagement in the Astana process met some serious controversies and tensions with the United States and the European Union one cannot help but ask the question if Turkey is shifting away from NATO toward the East.

The facts speak for themselves: since the beginning of 2017 Presidents Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayip Erdogan have held eight face-to-face meetings not to mention multiple visits of Russian and Turkish diplomatic representatives and military officers in both ways.

Apart from the cooperation over Syria and the joint fight against terrorism, the renewal of business, trade and economic relations as well as the prospective cooperation in the energy sector might launch a new era of partnership for both Russia and Turkey not only at the international or at federal levels but also at the regional levels as well.

On December, 13-14, Husseyin Dirioz, Ambassador of the Turkish Republic to Russia visited the city of Yekaterinburg, situated in the Urals and known as the country's industrial hub. During his meeting with the local government authorities Mr. Dirioz expressed the intention to strengthen the mutual collaboration in such industries as machine building, oil and gas, construction and development, pharmacy and chemical sector as well as in the spheres of tourism, science and education.

However, a closer partnership with Russia is pulling Ankara in quite a confusing situation in which Turkey will have to make bigger efforts to keep the balance with the U.S. and the EU. While the European Union continues to remain the major region for Turkish exports Ankara still benefits from holding the NATO membership on some political and military matters. Given that, the United States will likely to start manipulating Turkey's vulnerable position and take the target the Turkey's most sensitive issues. For instance, Washington has reportedly been encouraging Syrian Kurds for military interventions to the territories on the East bank and further overtaking the key Syrian natural resources fields. The move, explained by the United States as an effort to create a Syrian Kurdish autonomy, has been highly criticized by Ankara as a driving force for the U.S. that will enable Washington to take control over Ankara and Damask.

But despite both leaders Recep Tayip Erdogan and Vladimir Putin look at the mutual partnership through the prism of their domestic interests which sometimes causes some structural controversies in such questions as pursuing policies towards the U.S. and the E.U, the possibility of a fast development of Turkey-Russia cooperation into a strategic partnership is very high. What's bringing together Turkey and Russia today is perhaps the common mistrust of the Western policies. The emotional statements by U.S President Donald Trump such as announcement of Jerusalem as an Israel's capital, the U.S. support of Syrian Kurds (that directly crosses the Ankara policy towards the Kurds) consolidate the strategic collaboration between Moscow and Ankara against "moody" President Trump and unfold incredible opportunities for expansion of economic and trade relations between Turkey and Russia. Moreover, with Turkey's recognition of the Crimea as a Russian territory Moscow will open the "green corridor" for

Turkish companies that will also let Turkey pursue its policy towards the Crimean-Tatar community in the peninsula.

As the historical experience proves, the strong partnerships are created by those countries who have managed to resolve the most controversial and unwanted situations between each other. The common historical background, strong cultural and ethnic ties and the geographic proximity can become a solid ground for Russia and Turkey to build a strong alliance.

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