

A SCENARIO: ALLIANCE OF FRUSTRATION

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While the relations between the European Union and Russia are getting tense, we see at the same time EU and Turkey are moving away from each other as a result of deterioration of their relations. In my speech, I will look at the relations between Russia and the EU by trying to figure out basic problems; then I will discuss the possibility of a Turco-Russian alliance if both countries are dismissed from Europe. I will consider the consequences of this alliance by providing a brief focus on the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which is not very well known in Europe.

What the Europeans think about their biggest neighbour Russia is not positive. The EU seems worried that a powerful, energy rich Russia will become a rival to the West. As Russia has recently started to use its energy card as a political instrument for coercion, especially in order to regain influence in the former Soviet realm, she is considered as a potential dangerous power. For many in the EU, Russia is on the march to create another empire in a different form. Actually, it is interesting that the Europeans are surprised with this, because they would also like to revive their colonial empires in one form or another.

While the EU is seriously in need of energy, Russia is also in need of a secure market to sell her energy resources. We shouldn't forget that the Russian economic growth is to a great extent result of her energy import to European markets. Both sides does not have better alternatives to each other though they are searching for desperately. Russia would like to have better economic relations with Europe, but

without allowing it to intervene. While there is a case of mutual needs, the mutual mistrust is sometimes bringing the relations to a deadlock. It should also be noted that the Russian people is traditionally hostile to foreign existence in their countries, including foreign investments. When these sentiments are combined with nationalism and revivalism, then a perception of a European threat follows.

Perhaps, the most important problem is within the EU itself. It is a group of states with different and sometimes conflicting interests. However Russia is a single state without any problems of decision making. It is almost impossible to see a compromise on foreign policy among member states. While Italy and France, and Germany to some extent are more enthusiastic to build closer relations with Russia, this is almost the opposite case for the East European and Baltic states. We cannot say that the newcomers of the EU are overreacting, because after the fall of the Soviet block, Russia sought to ensure her dominance in the former Soviet realm; and which was also the reason for these states to become members of the EU and NATO immediately to stop the possible Russian domination. So, the EU seems ambivalent in determining its relations with Russia. The two big problems within the EU are firstly the lack of the ability to act as a single entity, secondly making Russia a devoted partner without being a member.

Europe wants a “democratic” Russia to deepen cooperation, because for Europeans, lack of democracy, rule of law and strong institutions makes her unaccountable. It seems that the EU cannot consider Russia as a potential member due to these defects. However will it accept Russia as a member if Russia emerges as a market economy and a stable liberal democracy with strong institutions?

In 2002 the then Commission President Romano Prodi had told Russian President Vladimir Putin that Russia was too big to become an EU member. Equally, membership is not among short term objectives of Russia, where the political elite has never loved the EU. While Putin states that Russia, as a world power, should continue to preserve her independence; he also sees Russia in Europe and as a European state. Dimitri Medvedev is also on the same track contending that Russia is part of Europe and European civilisation.

Accession of Russia is a complicated issue, not only for the Russian side but also for the East European members of the EU. Which Russia will be less menacing for them, the one within the EU or outside the EU? This is another interesting discussion point.

The history of the European integration taught us not to make long term enlargement plans. The membership of Spain, Portugal, or former communist countries were nothing than fantasy. Impossible sometimes materializes, so a closed door policy for any state is not pragmatic for the EU.

What the EU can do for normalising its relations with Russia is in my opinion, including Russia into European affairs. Secondly, Europe should reconsider its traditional style of imposing values in return for closer cooperation to the third parties. They also need to learn to treat the third parties as equals. European way of building and improving relations is not only humiliating especially for a quondam empire like Russia, but also impulsive for these countries to overreact and become hostile to the west.

Both Turkey and Russia have complicated and unstable relations with the EU. I must also stress that the type of their relations with the Union is uninstitutional, because the progress of the relations change through leaders, whether they are pro or not. For instance, Chirac and Schröder who were pro-Putin leaders are gone and the relations deteriorated.

Europeans think that Russia and Turkey cannot join the Union, but should not be left aside, and anchored to Europe with a special relationship. For Europe, they are not only too large, but also too different. According to the argument, both states baffle Europe and they cannot be considered as European. (Maurice Keens-Soper, Europe in the world)

The division of the international system between liberals and communists during the cold war has been among the fundamental impetus for the start and progress of the European integration. Russia has been, and for some still is, Europe's "eastern other" while Turkey is Europe's "Muslim other". But of course I should emphasize that Turkey is believed to be much more "other" than Russia.

As Samuel Huntington in his famous "Clash of Civilisations" argues, both Turkey and Russia are torn states, which are, according to Huntington, in one civilization but want to join another. He also states that Russia cannot change because not only the elites but also the Russian people do not have such a desire. According to his argument, Turkey cannot change either, because the West does not have a desire to accept her.

Both being excluded, alienated, humiliated and frustrated, can join their power against Europe. A clear, institutional and an official “no” to Turkey will probably force her to shift her direction to the reverse, to the east. Closed door policy of the EU can in fact help Turkey to diversify her foreign policy alternatives, perhaps making her to realize the value of her vital neighbours and other regional powers around. Of course this will change the balances upside down in more than one region.

Russia and Turkey have a history of imperial competition; their relations include both conflict and cooperation at the same time. In the 1990s, it was anticipated that the two countries would become rivals in the Central Asia. However this has not been the case, though Russia perceived Turkey as a danger for her allegedly pan-Turkist movements and support for the Chechen separatists. 1990s were the best opportunity for Turkey to return Central Asia but she did not have any aggressive policies, nor an intention for this. Since 2000, Russia appears to see Turkey as a harmless competitor, and a potential partner.

However, this is not the exact case for Turkey. Russia is one of the states with historical hostilities. As Atatürk stated during the Turkish War of Independence, *“Friendship between Turkey and the Russians is a one which is completely the result of compulsory conditions”*. This is actually what we call reel politics.

Today Russia is Turkey’s second trade partner following the EU. There is a strong pro-Russian lobby which includes mainly the businessmen, and media to some extent. While Turkey is dependent on Russian gas which is around 65 %, we can

also contend that Russia is or will become dependent on Turkey as a transit corridor to sell its resources.

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In 1996, a Chinese initiative has come up as “Shanghai Five” with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as members. When Uzbekistan joined in 2001, its name has changed into Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Today Iran, Pakistan, Mongolia and India are attending to the meetings as observers. The organisation is a truly functioning one, focusing on results where each member will gain, which we can say it has the aim of producing a win-win situation. They are cooperating in economy, trade, energy, terrorism and military issues.

What is drawing attention is the organisation do not have a method of imposing values or conditions; the only point is cooperation for common interests, the rest, the domestic politics, the regime for example do not matter; which is also the secret of Chinese success in Africa.

One of the fundamental points in Eurasian policy of Russia is to keep her potential regional actors out of her strategic backyard. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is helping Russia to keep other potential powers down; like the European Community did for Germany. On the other hand, the more Turkey comes closer to Europe, the more the EU will undermine Russian interests. So a “no” answer to Turkey will be in Russia’s advantage. In this case, the best choice for Russia will be the membership of Turkey to the Shanghai Organisation. And Turkey will be the Western port to deliver Russian gas to Europe.

When we look at the issue from Turkish side, we see that it has not become a popular issue yet. Secondly, discussing alternatives to the EU project is still a taboo in Turkey. Besides, there are no official statements, no invitation or demand from any of the parties.

If we look at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation from the European side, we see a negative approach. While it is little known and mostly ignored, Europeans are hostile to the organization, because it is perceived as a group of dictators who are after preserving anti-democratic regimes. For Europe, the organisation appears as an anti-western club. China and Russia might have some ambitions of counterbalancing the west, but it is not the case for other members.

Distinguished participants,

What I've tried to argue is only a scenario, a possible and realistic alternative. It may not be the best choice neither for Turkey, for Russia or for the EU. But a think-tanker should have some future reflections, should produce different and sometimes impossible looking scenarios or plan Bs. And what I've done was to share these scenarios.