

Turkey in transition

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ERDOGAN SAID SORRY TO PUTIN. WHAT HAPPENED AFTERWARDS?

On 27 June 2016 the president of Turkey, Mr. Erdogan said “sorry” to the president of Russia because of the border airspace incident on 24 November 2015.

In my short presentation of five minutes, I will focus on the Russian perspective of what happened after the *sorry* of Erdogan. Erdogan sent a personal letter to the president of Russia, Mr. Putin in which he apologized for downing the SU 24 bomber on 24 November 2015. Erdogan sent this letter to Putin seven month and three days after the Russian pilot, Mr. Peshkov, had been killed during his flight in the SU 24 bomber. The Erdogan’s letter also contains an offer to compensate the family of Peshkov for immaterial damage.

It is said in the Russian media that Erdogan sent the letter to Putin because he wanted to repair the good relationship with Russia. The countries are *strategic partners* and Turkey depends economically on Russia for example, for energy. Putin accepted the Erdogan’s apology, stating that the relationship between the two countries will not directly be the same as before, but that he will give it a chance. Some weeks later, at the end of July 2016, the parties met in St. Petersburg and signed several contracts. The Turkish minister of foreign affairs proclaimed that he wanted to bring the relationship between Russia and Turkey to a higher level than before the incident with the SU 24.

During the meeting of Erdogan and Putin, not only new contracts were signed, but existing bilateral projects were also unfrozen. Due to the strategic partnership of the countries, which implies a commercial relationship, based on a win-win situation, parties decided to continue where they stopped after the SU 24 incident.

During the presidential meeting of Erdogan and Putin in St. Petersburg, a Dutch journalist of the Newspaper NRC Handelsblad reported that Russia and Turkey are together again in the international arena, but that the countries will never be allies and are possibly only together for a short period of time. The Dutch journalist argued that Russia and Turkey have never been friends before, that Crimea and the dominance of Russia’s Black sea fleet were always an issue or starting point of war.

Since Putin accepted the Erdogan’s apology, Russian airlines have again been allowed to fly to Turkey and Turkish tomatoes have been exported to Russia again. The renewed friendship does not mean that all problems and issues are solved: Syria and Gülen Fethullah divide Russia and Turkey.

Having analysed the Dutch and Russian media about Erdogan’s apology, I found that Dutch newspapers focused on the historically bad relationship between Russia and Turkey. Russian journalist’s focused on the question why Erdogan decided to say sorry and why Russia accepted that apology. Some possible reasons that parties decided to continue their strategic partnership are the gas transmission pipeline and the nuclear power plant project.

Concerning the latter, this project is the first Nuclear Power plant project for Turkey. The plant will be built with Russian participation of the company Rosatom. This project, called Akkoea, is a 20 billion USD project and was frozen in December 2015.

The gas pipeline is an interesting issue. When Putin came to power in 2000, negotiations about new pipeline projects between Turkey and Russia and between the EU and Russia were started. As energy security became a crucial debating topic in the Black sea region and the rest of Europe, Russia reemphasised its leading role in production and transportation, while Turkey highlighted its strategic geographic situation and the possible growing role in energy transit. The project of a pipeline with the EU is known as South Stream, the project with Turkey as Turkish stream. Since Russia had to choose between South Stream and Turkish stream, it decided in 2012 to opt for South Stream. However, in 2014, when the EU imposed sanctions on Russia, Putin decided not to continue the South Stream project with the EU. This project intended to bring Russian gas to Bulgaria by installing a pipeline underneath the Black Sea, bypassing Ukraine. Since Erdogan's apology the debate on the construction of a new pipeline through Turkey is reopened.

Gazprom announced to build the South stream gas pipeline across the Black Sea to reduce the passage to central and southern Europe through the territory of Ukraine. The pipeline should have been operational in 2018. The initial plan was to build the pipeline together with the EU. However, the project was cancelled because the European commission has repeatedly stated that the project violated the European Union's so-called Third Energy Package: to own a pipeline and to produce the natural gas that flows through it contradicts the third Energy Package. Moscow argued that it is no partner in the Third Energy Package and that the planned pipeline does not contradict any Russian regulation.

The Third Energy Package contains a clause bearing the name of Gazprom: the Gazprom clause. This means that it is forbidden to be producer and transporter of energy at the same time. The main objective of this clause is that the European commission wants to oblige Gazprom to be split up into a producing and a transporting company to avoid supremacy. For Turkey, however, there is no barrier to construct the pipeline with Russia because Turkey is no partner in the Third Energy Package. Turkish Stream will be built by Gazprom from Russian side and Botas from Turkish side. The price of the pipeline amounts to at least 14 billion euro.

Mid November 2016 the new president of Bulgaria, Mr. Radev, announced that he wants to terminate the sanctions against Russia as soon as possible. According to Western journalists the new Bulgarian president is Russia minded. However, the Russian press announced already in august 2016, before the new president was elected, that the Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov wants to participate in Turkish Stream. The Turkish opinion about the Gazprom clause and the South Stream is that the EU's initiative was strengthening the divisions among the regional states, which are already divided due to conflicts of interests. Therefore, Turkish politicians underlined that the EU needs to concentrate on existing initiatives such as the Black Sea Synergy rather than creating new initiatives and new dividing lines among the regional states.

What happened is that Russia reached its goal: to build a pipeline across the Black Sea, bypassing Ukraine without being hindered by the so-called Gazprom clause of the EU. The EU adopted the Gazprom clause for only one reason" that the gas supply to the EU has to be

protected”¹. Intended as a protectionist clause for the EU gas supply, it unintentionally resulted in the resurrection of Turkish Stream with other winners than expected.

¹ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?language=nl&type=IM-PRESS&reference=20080616FCS31737>