

New developments in Turkey and EU misalignment

In July and August 2017 there have been more diverging elements in the projection of strategic interests between Europe and Turkey. The main driver of this misalignment is represented by the new perception of Turkey national security positions, many of them appear to be in collision course with the Euro-Atlantic ones. But it would be unfair to relate this process only on Ankara's shoulders and a big responsibility is attached to the process of geopolitical fragmentation of Turkish southern near-abroad, namely the collapse of Syria and Iraq. Two processes that have not originally been driven by Turkish action but to whom Turkey adapted progressively. The absence or contradictory policies of European Union and NATO in the region and the substantial strategic difficulties of US in reshaping a new post-Iraq Middle East matched with the return of Russian power politics in Southern Mediterranean, and the Shia geopolitical revival have completely changed the strategic context of Turkey's external action.

The following four developments have contributed to a further de-structuring of Turkey – NATO platform of common strategic interests:

- **Turkey – Iranian cooperation in addressing the risk of creation of a Kurdish independent State**

After the recent (August 2017) visit of Iranian Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Mohammad Hossein Bagheri to Ankara, the Turkish government and President Erdogan announced the two countries' immediate intention to strengthen strategic co-operation between Iran and Turkey for joint common anti-terrorist action. The two countries have declared a common intention to coordinate the Turkish and Iranian military operation in Iraq in order to carry out joint operations against Kurdish militiamen that are moving across the border areas between Iraq, Iran and Turkey.

The announcement of such cooperation appears, given the specific geopolitical momentum, to go far beyond a tactical cooperation against the Kurdish military formations fighting for the independence of Kurdistan.

The fact that the Kurdistan Regional Government has announced a referendum on independence for Iraq on 25 September is certainly an element that urged Ankara and Tehran to collaborate both politically and militarily to prevent a new state to rise in North Iraq.

The referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan, repeatedly postponed in recent years, has taken place during a very special moment in the country's history, where the Kurdish military contribution to the defeat of the Islamic State has been decisive. On the Kurdistan secession dossier, Europe, US and Turkish positions are at antipodes. United States of America and several European States generally consider the referendum for the secession of Kurdistan a viable option, but they are sceptical on the timing, since they are afraid it may weaken the struggle against the Islamic State. They also push for a negotiated secession process to be carried out on the base of a political agreement with Baghdad and respecting the principles of international law. Turkey, of course, disagrees with these options and finds in Teheran the only unrelenting ally opposing the secession of Iraqi Kurdistan. It is not excluded that Iranian-Turkish cooperation on this issue may be strengthened in the coming months to include joint military operations in northern Iraq, in support of the central government of Baghdad. These may become a concrete option if the referendum vote will be followed by the proclamation of the independence and its implementation on the ground.

A scenario that would push Turkey towards closer strategic cooperation with Iran, while it could damage Ankara's relations with the Sunni Arab countries in the region, who might opt to support the proclamation of an enlarged Kurdistan, including large Arab areas - Sunni, subtracted to the Shiite influence that spreads from a Teheran backed Baghdad. A very complex scenario is configuring in Northern Iraq, driving Ankara in the opposite direction to American and European positions in the region. A scenario that the US hopes to avoid pushing the KRG to delay the practical consequences of the independence referendum.

- **The attempt to differentiate Turkish air-defense system with Russian S-400**

A key step in further alienating Turkey's defence posture from Europe and the West has been represented by Ankara's July announcement to be ready to enter into an agreement with Moscow for purchasing Russian S-400 long-range missile anti-aircraft missile defense system (SAM).

The S-400 is the most advanced integrated Russian defense system capable of sighting, tracing and destroying aircraft, drones or missiles within a range of 250 miles. If this option will be effectively finalized, it will have far-reaching strategic consequences, whose real meaning will be clearer as the terms of the agreement will be known, especially as far as the eventual level of technological transfer and the number of batteries that will be purchased. The deal was announced worth \$ 2.5 billion for four batteries, two sold from Russia and two that will be built in Turkey. The agreement as, on paper, all the potential to boost Turkey's strategic unbundling from the Atlantic military alliance air-defence system. Up to now, the protection of Turkish skies has been guaranteed by NATO's air defense system through a rotating mechanism of European or US batteries. The agreement under negotiation with the Moscow for the purchase and production in Turkey of a non-NATO missile system will produce a strange coexistence on Turkish territory between the two systems that cannot be integrated between them.

According to the information circulated, Russia will provide to Turkey its air-defence system without binding caveats like those required by NATO, for example relating to the geographic are of development (for example NATO air defence system operating in Turkey cannot be located on the border with Armenia, on the Aegean coast or on the border with Greece). From the released details on the preliminary agreement between the two countries, the missile systems will not be equipped with the friend-or-foe recognition system, so they can actually be used against any aircraft, even on the Russia ones. One of Turkish goals in this preliminary agreement with the Russians – apart from attempting to demonstrate their resolution to quit, if politically necessary, NATO aviation security and its geopolitical constraints – is to launch a national production of these weapon systems as a tool for strengthening the Ankara Defense Industry. That is a non-secondary aspect why Russian offer has been favoured vs other western proposal that didn't dare to grant to Ankara enough guarantees on the level of domestic technological transfer. What will be the future of the Russian-Turkish deal is still to be seen, since these are the kind of agreements that don't happen overnight but are progressively matured over a long number of years and are very sensitive to the changes in the geostrategic environment. At the moment, it appears to be grounded on stronger basis than a similar agreement that was inked few years ago between Turkey and China, and that it was cancelled due to repeated American political pressures. But the political moment is now changed, the failed coup in Turkey transformed dramatically Ankara's desire for autarchy and US foreign policy is under reset. In this new international condition Ankara's ambition of building its own defense industry capacity appears to be more likely than in the past.

- **Diplomatic escalation with Germany for human right situation and the threat of economic retaliation against Ankara**

In July, there was a dramatic deterioration of political and economic relations between Turkey and Europe, in particularly with Germany. The internal political transformation of Turkey that was turned with the vote of referendum to a presidential republic with decision-making powers increasingly focused on the president's role and pursuing a foreign policy progressively based on Islamism, has changed the landscape in the geopolitical area from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Gulf.

One year after the failed coup in July 2016, Turkey does not seem to go towards internal normalization, indeed it maintain its massive purges against Erdogan's dissidents and political adversaries, meanwhile its foreign policy is breaking radically with the European vision. The situation deteriorated further in June and July, with a series of diplomatic crises between Berlin and Ankara that worsened after 9 people who were conducting a small training seminar for Amnesty International Turkey were arrested on July 5, in the island of Buyukada, near Istanbul. The reason for the arrest was the alleged contacts of some of the participants to the seminar with people connected with the Gulen group, considered by the Turkish government as a "terrorist organization" (FETO). Many of the supposed members of FETO network after July's coup fled to Germany, receiving, in many cases asylum or support. The Buyukada workshop - whose trainers were two foreign nationals, German citizen Peter Steudtner and the Irish citizen (of Iranian origin) Ali Gharavi - was devoted to training Turkish NGOs on matters such as cyber-security and information management that could allow greater protection data and information to Turkish human rights activists.

The two foreigners were initially accused of conspiring to organize new anti-government protests in Turkey and being in contact with people accused of conspiring against the government after the coup in July 2016. Some of the people that have been connected to the Buyukada group have been arrested or accused for the utilisation of the forbidden application called Bylock, an amateur encrypted messenger software that Turkish authorities believe it has been used by sympathizers of the Gulen movement. On July 8th, the Turkish court confirmed the arrest of the group blocked few days before, and the accusation against them was better defined as external support (material support in Anglo-Saxon legal language, "concorso esterno" in the Italian juridical language) to terrorist organizations, without being formally part of it. The trial is scheduled for 26 December 2017, since than the prisoners will remain in prison.

The arrest of another German citizen (a total of 22 German citizens have been arrested since July 2016, 9 of them remain still in prison; among them the German journalist of Turkish origin Deniz Yücel, the correspondent of the German newspaper "Die Welt") triggered the anger of Berlin which has decided to react extremely muscular to Turkey. German Foreign Minister Gabriel has decided to stop his vacation returning back to Germany and declaring that, with Merkel's full support, a series of potential economic retaliation measures against Turkey are under study un German government, and they will be implemented if Turkey does not proceed to release at least three German citizens (Peter Steudtner, Deniz Yücel, Meşale Tolu) and Ankara doesn't guarantee unrestricted access to the German consul to prisoners and warrants a fair trial for all the German citizens accused by Ankara of political crimes.

Ankara retaliated accusing Berlin of not cooperating with its authorities on the search for "terrorists" or people involved in the coup last July. Germany does not want to give up on indiscriminate and apparently unjustified demands for extradition of Turkish citizens who have fled Turkey for Germany following a coup attempt against Erdogan. According to Turkey there are over 7,000 people who have applied for asylum in Germany after July 2016, of which 400 are diplomats or military personnel. According to the Turkish authorities, among the 7,000 people who applied for asylum in Germany there are numerous "terrorists" (the term by which the Turkish government indicates both PKK

militants and members of the Gulen movement, for which the acronym is used FETO (Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü, Terrorist Organization Fethulla).

Of this group Turkey has in recent months requested the extradition of 182 Turkish citizens residing in Germany, but only three have been handed over. These latest allegations add to the long-standing grievances from Ankara, accusing Germany of granting to PKK a safe haven in German from where they rise financial and political support, as well as they supposedly recruit combatants to be sent in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Germany has been discussing a number of economic retaliation against Turkey targeting the sectors of tourism, export insurance, arms transfers, EU transfers, Customs Union. For example, German citizens received an official warning of the risk of travelling to Turkey due to the increased risk of arbitrary detention and they have been advised that their Government may have difficulty in securing consular assistance to German tourists in the case of arrest. With 3.8 millions of visits, German tourism in Turkey represent 15% of the total tourist industry.

At the same time, it was put in question the future operability in Turkey of Hermes, the German state insurance company for international investment and commercial operations, putting on hold for a while the insurance company from issuing export-credit guarantees for business in Turkey. This will have an impact on the overall business climate and, above all, on German direct investment.

In addition - to confirm the strategic and long-term sense of the Berlin position - it has been announced that German armament export to Turkey (and its final customers) is under review. Finally, on a more global scale, the German government has announced that it will raise in the European Union the issue if it is necessary to block EU transfers (pre-accession) funds to Turkey (only the 2020 program is worth 5 billion for Ankara) and to froze the process of modernization of the EU – Turkey Custom Union, which dates back over 20 years ago, and it is in need to be updated in order to give to Ankara the same commercial privileges that have been drafted in the more modern free trade agreements signed by the EU in recent years.