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## Artículos y entrevistas

### 'The latest developments have shown that Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is not frozen'

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- You are doing a study of the Russian-Turkish relations. How do you assess the prospects for cooperation between Moscow and Ankara in the light of regular attacks in Turkey?

- Since the start of the normalization process – which finished the worst period in the bilateral relations since the end Cold War, the relations between Turkey and Russia are passing through a transitional moment, characterized by three elements: cooperation in the Syrian conflict resolution, geopolitical regional divergences, and rebuilding of economic ties. This tripartite setting has transformed the previous 'dualism' based on the compartmentation of the economic from the geopolitical issues. Now, the agenda is mixed and characterized by uncertainty and lack of confidence. Russia and Turkey are cooperating actively in the Astana peace talks related to the Syrian Civil War; show serious differences on regional topics such as Crimea, some of the Russian sanctions on Turkey are still active, and the Russian energy projects – the basis of regional economic complementarity – are showing progress based on the Kremlin's special interests to invest strategically, and not only for profits, on Ankara. While in late 90s the mutual understanding for the terrorism interlinked dilemma was central for the construction of a regional modus vivendi, today the problem is much more complex in terms of actors, extension, and regional involvement. There is great potential for cooperation, but also for conflict if both countries move away from each other grounded on the actual geopolitical tensions. For the effective reconstruction of a concerted regional order in Central Eurasia, there is a need for a common fight against terrorism, in addition to increasing efforts to regain trust on the Turkey's side.

- Many Russian experts say that the terrorist attacks on the territory of Turkey are organized by the United States. What can you say about this issue? Will the West be able to regain Turkey in its sphere of influence?

- This opinion is also shared in Turkey, both for high-rank governmental officials and common people. For many reasons – including the 15-J failed coup attempt – the image of the United States and the European Union is at its lowest levels. According to the last Social and Political Trends of Turkey Survey conducted by the Kadir Has University, United States is the second most unfriendly state for Turkey, while only 11.3% thinks that United States is a reliable ally. This is a very unreliable figure for a NATO member. The prospects for Turkey's accession to the European Union are almost gone, while the Eurasianists, and ultra-nationalist groups are pushing for the Turkey's departure from NATO. The first Trump's moves with the migration ban are not helping, but if the US government repatriate Fethullah Gulen – indicated by the Turkish government

as the major plotter with his Fethullah Terrorist Organisation (FETO), and the change its policy in relation to the Syrian Kurds, the relation can be reconstructed quickly. However, the prospects for that materialization are still very far from being real.

- Some Western media report that Russia, Iran and Turkey will divide Syria into their spheres of influence. But what about the US? Can they divide Syria without Washington?

- It is difficult to think a definitive solution without Washington, whilst it is not realistic that Russia, Iran and Turkey will divide Syria in zones of influence. Even if United States is for the time being out of the Astana meeting, is still active part as co-chair of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), which auspices the Geneva peace talks on Syria. Any political solution that involve international partners would include United States, although still there is not clear attitude of the Trump administration in relation to tone and engagement in these peace talks. In relation to the zones of influence, the named countries are involved directly in the conflict with troops on the ground, and they will be central not only for the conflict resolution, but also for the later settlement, although its characteristics are still not clear. If the Syrian government and opposition can achieve peace, the Islamic State and Al-Nusra will be there, and this situation can open an opportunity for an international coalition with an active military participation of the United States. On the other hand, the status of the Syrian Kurds – backed during these years by US – is still unclear, and it may trigger additional conflictivity, and military operations from Turkey.

- How will the Russian-Turkish relations influence the relations between Baku and Moscow, in particular, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?

- It is clear that the role of Turkey in the Caucasus has been neutralized by Russia, even more after the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. Turkey openly supports the Azerbaijan position in relation to Nagorno-Karabakh, and the seven occupied territories by Armenia. This position has improved traditionally the Turkey's leverage on Azerbaijan, but for the same reason, cannot play the role of regional mediator in the Caucasus. The April 2016 military clashes on the line of contact showed clearly that only Putin's Russia can be the regional peacemaker, while Turkey is an outsider in relation to conflict resolution. Russia is the only one with leverage in Azerbaijan and Armenia who can brings both countries to the bargaining table. Even if the relations between Turkey and Russia during that crisis were the worst since the Cold War, Turkey's attitude during the military crisis was rather passive, and cautious. Turkey is not an arbiter, but an external player who supports one part of the conflict.

- As you know, Nagorno-Karabakh and 7 regions of Azerbaijan are occupied by Armenia. How do you see the solution to this problem? Can the tripartite format of Russia-Iran-Turkey solve the Karabakh problem?

- The Nagorno-Karabakh issue has been characterized over and over as a frozen conflict, but the latest developments have shown that it is not 'frozen', while Azerbaijan has certainly improved not only their military capabilities, but their effectiveness in the terrain. For economic and military reasons, Armenia has no other option but to rely more and more on Russia, so right now the Putin administration is central to move the balance towards a definitive political solution. About the tripartite format we had some antecedents. In January 2000, inspired by the European Union-led Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, Turkish President Suleyman Demirel proposed, next to the Georgia's President Eduard Shevardnadze, the creation of a Caucasus Stability Pact. The idea was broadly discussed by the Turkish, Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian delegations during the 1999 OSCE Istanbul summit, and included participation of the United States and the European Union. Russia dismissed it. In the middle of the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, Erdoğan again promoted the 'Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Pact', this time only with regional and local actors, and leaving Iran out. Of course, a similar framework hosted by Kazakhstan to tackle the Karabakh issue is possible, but we should take into account that Russia would require to centralize the discussions as the key arbitrator over other regional participants, who – in the Russian's eyes – should legitimize the outcomes. For the international community the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is not urgent as the Syrian, but regional powers are very aware about the negative consequences for the regional stability if this issue is not solved in the short term.