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End of the Idyll

Expectations, following the election of the new US President Donald Trump, about a change of position towards Russia, have exhausted after a series of events. The scandal in the United States named Russiagate, assuming that Russian government has been interfering through Russian hackers to sabotage American elections and favour Trump's victory is very restrictive of the language and of the decisions of the new president. Several advisors and government representatives considered too close to Russia have been dismissed or resigned. At the NATO Summit in Warsaw certainly, the US President did not approach with a conciliatory but on the opposite with a very aggressive tone.

In their first bilateral meeting at the G20 Summit in Hamburg in July, despite the duration and an additional second meeting, they did not appear to the public as relaxed and not much has been disclosed. At home, Trump could not prevent the Congress from issuing new sanctions against Russia. Strong divisions remain on Ukraine, Syria, Iran, Venezuela and North Korea. The Russian response to the expulsion of Russian diplomats issued by the former President Obama was kept in the pipeline awaiting the development of events with the new President Trump. Disappointed by the hope of resetting the relations has resulted in the expulsion of 755 US diplomats from Russia, at par with the number of diplomats in both countries.

However, this additional measure has been interpreted as disproportionate by the American Administration and has started an escalation of expulsions with the closure of several Russian Consulates in the USA. It is expected that the Russian response will be of the same tenor and will, therefore, lead to a further reduction of the US diplomatic representations in Russia. Overcoming the expectations of resuming a constructive dialogue, the Russians are now bored of what they consider to be an eccentric policy, lacking to consider equal rights to protect national interests. They realize that are obliged to comment from time to time Washington positions, emphasizing that divergences are obviously more than contact points, but avoiding stimulating controversies.

A new era of confused dialogue opens up, filled with uncertainties and resuming the model of demonstrations of power with military exercises on border territories. The NATO Sea Breeze exercises provocatively held in Odessa, Ukraine in July as antisubmarine operation manoeuvres in the Black Sea. The subsequent NATO exercise in September again in Ukraine called Rapid Trident. The powerful joint Russian and Belarusian exercises called ZAPAD (West), (last edition in 2013) also held in September, in Belarus and in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad as well as on the Baltic coasts.

This new will of confrontation and propaganda rhetoric as a result of the alleged threat of the enemy, is coming out from the purely specialist domains of the military and the defense specialists and is entering in the new field of communication and use of press organs, with the media war that in fact

has been in the process for several years now. There is a new Russian approach to communication topics. On one hand, they seem to have forsaken to read their positions in response to Western criticisms or threats and thus oppose Western propaganda with arguments. Secondly, they accepted the idea that the West does not want and cannot consider the new role played by Russia, both in the regional and international arena toward different countries and international organizations.

If we consider Ukraine, the Customs Union, the Eurasian Union, Syria, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Libya, North Korea, BRICS and SCO (less engaged in APEC as seen at the last Summit in Vietnam) Russia is playing a leading role, or at least states itself as an important counterpart. From the point of view of communication, therefore, it is convenient for Russia to sustain the Western media mainstream positions that criticize or ostracize Russia and thus strengthens its positions. It is a rare case where Western mass media and social networks, including the huge contingent of fake news, aimed at creating consensus or fear in Western public opinion and thereby creating harm to Russia, in turn, create an advantage to Russia by exalting its positions and create consensus in Russian public opinion towards their leader in the center of Western attention.

A test of common sense and effective influence tool would advise that it would be better to ignore Russia on the media or not to give much emphasis and therefore decrease its visibility but at the same time to consider Russia as an interlocutor and then reopen all the dialogue platforms without emphasizing the Russian positions. A more pragmatic and silent approach aimed at obtaining and enhancing the benefits that Russia can deliver in different scenarios, but using the political and diplomatic channels rather than the media ones. In these days, foreign ministers of NATO countries state that Russia shows "excessive confidence in itself".

Putin, for its part, has long been spreading a message that Russian caution is interpreted in the West as weakness and condescension, and that the West "invents provocations in order to provoke" and that this undermines Western credibility. The last example is the missed bilateral meeting between Trump and Putin at the APEC Summit in Vietnam, when Trump Ceremonial has done everything to make it fail, according to the Russian version. This is a missed opportunity (except the talks and agreement on Syria) to give the world a signal that Russia's cooperation and availability on major issues can facilitate open dossiers, North Korea in the first place, but also the new ones that are facing the Middle East with Saudi Arabia and Iran on the foot of war and the new crisis that crashed in Lebanon.

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