



Russia July 2016

NATO-Russia: the disappointing relationship

The July NATO Summit in Warsaw and the following NATO-Russia Council were discussed with some disappointment in Moscow. Despite persisting differences of views on the hypothetical Russian threat to East Europe and on the crisis in Ukraine, progress in the dialogue, but not in the agreements, was recorded on Afghanistan and on the fight against terrorism.

Moscow continues to underline that NATO's strengthening near the Russian borders is not justified and that the Alliance should focus efforts on more realistic threats. However, the West is still far from reaccepting Russia as a reliable partner and the pressures that the Alliance brings to bear and the tools employed, have the effect of limiting Moscow's will to cooperate in other fields, and at the same time they do not restrain Russia from greater ambitions.

Moscow does not accept to be assessed in terms of reliability by an external body, moreover of military nature, but it is also understood that the appreciation by the western community must be earned, and this is what the Russians are trying to do.

The path is still long and the Olympic doping scandal surely did not shorten it because it put under critical observation the methods and practices of a whole country and not just some sectors. If Russia will be excluded by the sport's agenda and will feel to be cut out from sharing and practicing the values and standards that unite the international Olympic community, it will be reasonable to doubt that it will display the ability or the will open up in other areas. The Independent Committee appointed by the Russian President should try to cope with this issue, but in Rio the Russian Olympic team will be significantly reduced with an immediate effect on the number of medals won and hence the image of the country.

On the other hand the failed military putsch in Turkey was considered an interesting development because it moved a NATO country, with significant interests in the Syrian crisis and the Middle East region, nearer to Russia and towards a colder relationship with Washington.

The paradigm of Moscow is that an authoritarian or semi-authoritarian government, whether moderate or radical (i.e. Assad in Syria, Erdogan in Turkey, Yanukovich in Ukraine and the same Putin in Russia), if legitimately elected, should not be overturned by palace conspiracies, external influences or military coups, but they must be defended and their territorial integrity must be guaranteed.

A fundamental condition for a serious rapprochement with Turkey will be the definition of common enemies and a reset the economic agenda, starting from the Turkish Stream gas pipeline, which was intended to provide leverage on Europe regarding the Nord Stream 2, before the stop by the Polish antitrust authority mid August

It has to be seen if the current Turkish leadership will retain its status of reliable NATO ally, or prefer, as with Europe, to go towards a self-fashioned isolation. Russia in parallel will have to demonstrate on the dossier of Turkish stability, human rights (currently suspended in Turkey), support of the Kurdish insurgency, and in Syria on the ground, how it will interpret its proximity and calculated distance with friends and adversaries.

The month of July has shown a certain passivity in Europe and somehow also in Afghanistan against numerous terrorist attacks, giving substance to Moscow's argument that continental security will falter without Russian co-operation and that cooperation with Moscow is strategically desirable.