



REGIONAL POWERS IN GROWING DIALOGUE: THE BRAZIL-TURKEY STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

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With a new government in Brasilia, and with Dilma Roussef appearing to distance herself somewhat from some of the most controversial aspects of Lula`s foreign policy, speculation abounds regarding how Brazil will follow up on its decisive steps in the Middle East. Iran is a telling, albeit extreme, example. Already, Mrs. Roussef has shown herself to be far more critical of the regime in Teheran, and Antonio Patriota, the new Foreign Minister, has manifested his skepticism with regards to Iranian sincerity, a notable departure from Lula`s stance in late 2009 when he publicly asked European leaders to show patience concerning the Iranian case.

While we may well be witnessing a change in Brazil`s policy towards Iran, this by no means suggests a shift of Brazilian foreign policy interests away from the Middle East. In fact, all signs seem to be suggesting that under Patriota, the Brazilian Foreign Ministry`s involvement in and interaction with the region is likely to increase. And while ties with Iran may never reach the level of “warmth” that the Lula-Ahmadinejad handshake suggested, the forecast for Brazil`s

relations with its real key partner in the region, Turkey, is, if nothing else, promising and likely to endure well beyond the coming year.

In fact, the development of bilateral relations between Turkey and Brazil offers international relations analysts a case that is particularly interesting in terms of the reshuffling of power in the global order. Without a doubt this should be attributed to the fortunate coexistence of a number of decisive variables: both are large states in their regions, rich in natural resources, with growing economies that fared reasonably well during the economic crisis and evolving industrial sectors. In addition, they are both accepted by the “West” as having achieved a satisfactory degree of democratization, albeit with room for improvement, and as partners in multilateralism, while not having to share the “West’s” inevitable condemnation by the global “non-westerners” as hegemonic, universalist and culturally intolerant. Representing potentially huge markets (Turkey encompassing 74 million and Brazil 195 million) and with GDP growth rates



of 3,6% and 4,5% respectively¹, it is a no-brainer that Turkey and Brazil should look at each other as extremely suitable partners.

When news of Brazil and Turkey's collaboration on Iran first saw the light, however, why did the international media rush to coin the partnership unlikely? Clearly, this perception of unlikeliness bore some reference to the replacement of traditional media-tors by states such as Brazil and Turkey, which are at present often referred to as emerging or middle powers.

But beyond this, the surprise of international commentators at the Turkish-Brazilian alliance also had something to do with the genuine bilateral nature of the partnership. While both countries have been consistently involved in deepening economic, political and cultural ties since 2008, these negotiations are often neglected by the international media. It was only with the Tehran Agreement, a rather controversial occasion, that the relationship received attention in international media.

Take for example the Action Plan for a Strategic Partnership (APSP) between Brazil and Turkey, signed by President Lula and Prime Minister Erdogan on May 27, 2010, only 10 days after the Teheran Agreement. The Plan established an overarching framework, resulting from the realization of a number of concrete initiatives between the two countries that began in 2004, when the then Minister of Foreign

Affairs, Celso Amorim, visited Ankara. Two years later the visit was reciprocated by the Turkish President Abdullah Gul, who at the time was serving as Minister of Foreign Affairs. As a result of these visits and of the subsequent intensification of cooperation between the two ministries of foreign affairs, relations between the two countries were advanced through a series of Memoranda of Understanding in various areas. This development added continuity to the few but existing earlier agreements such as the bilateral visa waiver agreement (2001) and the Agreement on Cooperation in Defense Related Matters (2003).

The exchange of diplomatic visits rose to the highest level with the visit of President Luiz Inacio "Lula" da Silva to Turkey in 2009 and, in the following year, Prime Minister Recep Tayip Erdogan's visit to Brazil. During Erdogan's visit, the two states formally proceeded to the signing of the APSP, consolidating the results of their cooperation so far and solidifying their commitment to strengthening bilateral ties.

According to the Brazilian Ambassador in Ankara, Marcelo Jardim, the Action Plan is a highly political document which "institutionalizes" and "specifies" cooperation between the two states, indicating selected sectors and symbolizing the particular importance that both states give to their partnership. While the document is in no way binding for its signatories as it has not been approved by the respective legislative bodies of the two states,

¹ Source: Economist Intelligence Unit, January 2011.

it is a de facto declaration – at the highest level – of their intention to pursue the execution of joint projects, while at the same time constituting a “road-map” and basic framework for the evolution of the emerging alliance. Another equally important function of the document is that it established institutional channels for dialogue at a time that offered itself for the joint promotion of mutual interests.

To an analyst’s eyes, the document manages to avoid the usual criticisms regarding vagueness which usually target similar documents, such as, for example, the much debated Strategic Partnerships of the European Union: rather than elaborate on principles and grand strategy, the Brazil-Turkey APSP is of a much more practical – almost “executive” – nature, with objectives including, for example “support for the Petrobras – TPAO cooperation in the Black Sea”; reaping the benefits of the new Turkish Airlines direct flights between Istanbul and Sao Paulo; and the transfer of high technology. In terms of general areas of cooperation the agreement includes nine distinct sections:

- (I) Political Dialogue and Cooperation in Multilateral Fora;
- (II) Trade and Investment;
- (III) Energy;
- (IV) Biodiversity;
- (V) Environment and Sustainable Development;
- (VI) Defense;
- (VII) Combating Terrorism and Organized Crime;

- (VIII) Science, Innovation and High Technology; and
- (IX) Cultural Exchange and Education.

The Action Plan also foresees annual Political Consultations, on the Ministerial Level, to review the progress in its implementation.

With the implementation of a number of these items already proceeding rapidly and with particular success, there is little doubt that relations between the two states will continue to grow in 2011 and beyond. The 2010 TPAO-Petrobras agreement for the exploration of oil in the Black Sea, estimated to be worth \$800 million, solidifies both cooperation in the field of energy and the transfer of high technology from state-owned Petrobras to Turkey. Academic exchanges between prestigious institutions such as the Getulio Vargas Foundation in Rio de Janeiro, and the Political Science Department of the University of Ankara have already taken place. And 2010 saw bilateral trade rise by over 60% compared to the year before according to data of the Brazilian Ministry of Development, Industry and External Trade.

The growing affinity between the two countries coincides with an unprecedented rise in their projected “attractiveness” on the international level. The engagement of Brazil and Turkey in regional and global affairs, and principally their attitudes towards intervention and mediation for the resolution of disputes, has been presented as offering an alternative model to traditional mediating

powers. While the latter have often been portrayed as hegemonic and imperialist, Brazil and Turkey are increasingly being branded as powers that are capable to produce solutions which accommodate conflicting parties without aiming to transform them. The ability of the two to stand between “the West and the Rest” was epitomized by their joint engagement with Iran, which in some analyses was presented as a move against American unilateralism and Western domination of the field of mediation, which failed to accommodate cultural differences. This discourse was central in the 2010 UN Alliance of Civilizations Forum, where both the Brazilian President and the Turkish Prime Minister emphasized the role of dialogue and cultural tolerance in their joint project of bringing peace to the world.

Given this short overview of bilateral relations in recent years, as well as the recognition of the importance of the bilateral alliance for the global projection of power, what should we expect for the future? The development of closer ties in all the aforementioned areas will certainly take place. Most probably, a joint front will be formed on issues such as energy, trade and security within multilateral fora, along the lines drawn in 2010 while Brazil and Turkey both held seats as non-permanent members of the UN Security Council. Additionally, a possible Free Trade Agreement that according to the Turkish Minister of State for Foreign Trade, Zafer Caglayan, is high on the list of

Turkey’s interests could be signed. If there were doubts last May about the “unlikely partnership”, those on the inside of things are definitely quite certain and confident about the likeliness of its future, at least when it comes to low politics. To quote Ambassador Jardim, “Today there is great familiarity and an excellent climate of mutual trust in the dialogue between Brasilia and Ankara [...] Their participation in the G20, the WTO and in practically all major multilateral organizations will allow for coordinated actions to evolve within these institutions; at the same time, we should expect to see an amplification of the areas of bilateral cooperation. And who knows, I think this partnership will serve as an example for other countries”.

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