

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نېاشد تن من مېباد بدين بوم وېر زنده يک تن مېباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهيم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهيم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2016/12/07/russia-europe-relationship-on-threshold-new-era.html>

Russia-Europe Relationship: On the Threshold of New Era

12/7/2016

Matteo Renzi resigned as the Italian Prime Minister after the people of Italy voted «no» in a historic referendum on constitutional reform on December 4. The vote results triggered a shock wave across Europe much like Brexit. It's up to Italian President Sergio Mattarella now to decide what will happen next – an appointment of new prime minister supported by parliamentary majority or a snap election, paving the way for an anti-euro party, the 5-Star Movement, to come to power.

This political force is the biggest winner. The party wants to abandon the EU budget strictures and has said it might favor printing a parallel currency. Another popular party – the Northern League – also opposes the eurozone membership. Actually, the opponents of the reform voted against the EU. An Italian «mini Brexit» becomes a possibility. Both - the 5-Star Movement and the Northern League – call for better relations with Russia. They want the anti-Russia sanctions to be lifted.

The resignation of Mr. Renzi is a heavy blow to the EU already facing multiple crises and struggling to fend off an attack of anti-establishment forces, which are clearly on the rise in Europe. German Chancellor Angela Merkel – the unofficial European leader – is also vulnerable seeking a fourth term in 2017.

Europe is facing a prolonged period of political upheaval, with elections also slated for 2017 in Germany, France the Netherlands and, probably, Italy – all countries where economic anxiety, opposition to the EU and a surge in migration have fed growing support for populist parties. The established order is in retreat everywhere in Europe, except Austria.

Far-right leader Norbert Hofer of the anti-immigration Freedom Party was defeated on December 4 by independent candidate Alexander van der Bellen, a former Greens leader, becoming «a pro-European president of Austria open to the world.» But it was the vote when all Austrian political forces joined together against the Freedom Party's candidate. It was «all against one» but the result was a close call.

From Moscow's perspective, any outcome was a step forward to bolster the forces willing to improve the relations between Russia and the EU. Mr. Hofer said he wanted to recognize Crimea as part of Russia. But both candidates stood for the improvement of bilateral relations with Moscow and supported the idea of lifting the anti-Russia sanctions to mirror the popular sentiment. After all, Austria was the only EU member state Russian President Vladimir Putin visited after the Western sanctions were imposed.

At his 45, Hofer is a promising politician. Only a year ago he was the second person in the leadership of the main opposition party and a vice-speaker of the parliament. Today he is the man who was close to becoming president. All other parties of the country had to unite preventing him from winning the presidential race. That's very indicative.

Austria will hold a parliamentary election next September. The Freedom Party has a good chance to win an outright majority of seats.

The trend is visible. The Euro-Atlantic establishment suffers one defeat after another. It started with Brexit, followed by Trump's victory and election results in several European countries. Renzi's setback is a good example. The Eurosceptics won in Italy and lost in Austria but Hofer's Freedom Party is still going strong.

Brussels has each and every reason to be concerned over its future. Anti-EU forces are expected to greatly improve their positions. With Donald Trump as US President, the pro-European integration forces face big problems. Trying to hold Eurosceptics at bay, the establishment forces will willy-nilly have to shift their policies towards national interests, a lesser role for the EU and its supranational structures.

It is taking place against the background of new alliances emerging within the EU, like «Alliance of Europe's South» or the «mini-Schengen» in addition to the already established and functioning Visegrad Group, which has its own vision of the European integration.

With Donald Trump's priority to «America First», the EU faces the need to take care of its own security which cannot be guaranteed without normalizing the relations with Moscow. Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, believes that Europe should adopt

its own policy towards Russia, which would not be influenced by the US. The president has said he «would like to have an agreement with Russia that goes beyond the ordinary framework, bearing in mind that without Russia, there is no security architecture in Europe». Mr. Juncker believes that «Russia must be treated as one big entity, as a proud nation».

In mid-November, Bulgaria and Moldova voted for leaders who called for lifting the sanctions and improving the relations with Moscow.

Western big business has started to re-invest in Russia. They would never risk doing it not being sure the investments were to pay off.

NATO «continues to strive for more constructive relations with Russia», NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said at a press conference on December 5 ahead of a meeting of the NATO countries' foreign ministers. The date of the next NATO-Russia Council meeting is being discussed. More than a dozen European countries have recently expressed willingness to engage in dialogue with Russia toward reaching an arms control deal.

The calls to lift the sanctions and improve the relationship with Moscow are growing stronger. The EU has started turning toward Russia. The trend is becoming increasingly apparent. The recent events clearly demonstrate that Russia and Europe are on the threshold of a new era in the history of their relationship.