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## Turkish paper views risk, benefits of turkish-iranian « rapprochement ».

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Text of article by Ilter Turkmen entitled "Turkish-Iranian rapprochement" published by Turkish daily Hurriyet website on 1 July

Turkish-Iranian relations have followed a see-saw course, often marked with mutual distrust, especially since the Islamic revolution.

Recently we see that this situation has changed substantially, that cooperation in the economic and energy spheres has increased, and that coinciding interests are better evaluated in the light of developments in the Middle East.

Indeed there is an impression that Turkey wants to play a special role with regard to the resolution of the crisis that has erupted over Iran's nuclear programmes. However, Western perceptions and reactions to this role sometimes do not appear to be as positive or encouraging as might be expected. One sign of that was the statement issued by the spokesman of the US State Department during Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul's visit to Tehran with regard to reports that Turkey is playing a mediating role.

The spokesman said that, although there is general agreement between the views of the United States and Turkey, a communication channel with Iran already exists for the package of proposals offered by the five UN Security Council permanent members plus Germany and that EU Council Diplomatic Representative Javier Solana is performing that function.

Ali Larijani, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, apparently told Westerners that Tehran wants Turkey's mediation. This should not be surprising. Larijani probably hopes that Turkey will be more sympathetic to Iran's positions or that he can at least gain some more time.

That is fine but what would Turkey gain from such mediation? Prestige or disappointment? After all, at the end of the day, it is possible that Turkey may upset both sides. Consequently it would be best to continue parallel contacts with Iran as is being done now and to make the necessary suggestions in a friendly manner. Furthermore taking on airs of mediator - or "facilitator" as Gul calls it - in the problems of the Middle East is not very good from an image standpoint.

We give the impression that we think we have a monopoly on dialogue with Muslim countries. We must not forget that Western countries often have better relations than us with these countries in many spheres.

Although it is very significant that our relations with Iran are much better today than they were in the past, this development must not lead to a myth about the history of these relations. For example the argument that Turkey and Iran have had goodneighbourly relations with stable borders since the Treaty of Qasri-shirin in 1639 is not quite true.

There was no shortage of wars between Turkey and Iran after 1639. Iran attempted to seize Baghdad and Basra several times. In the first years

of the Turkish republic Kurdish gangs armed by Armenians entered Turkey from Iran and provoked a rebellion movement. Everyone remembers that in the very near past Iran supported both the PKK and fundamentalist terrorism in Turkey.

It is true that one needs to be free of the emotional claws of the past when relations are on the mend. However, this must not be done selectively. These days it is hard not to notice attempts at ridding Turkey's collective memory of negative historical perceptions of not only Iran but also Russia.

One cannot object to this as long as history is not distorted. However, there is also a tremendous effort under way to create the perception that our relations with the West, especially the United States, were always marked with adversity. Selective collective memory always prevents a country's foreign policy from being set on a rational course.

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