

TURKEY IS INTERESTED IN VENEZUELAN OIL

(El Universal, by Ernesto J. Tovar)

The Republic of Turkey and Venezuela have a bilateral relation dating back to more than fifty years. In spite of this, the political, cultural, social or economic interchange between Ankara and Caracas has been little.

The Ambassador of Turkey in Caracas, Muhsin Tuğrul Kılıçaslan, explained to El Universal that “In Venezuela people doesn’t have any image of Turkey, neither good nor bad, and in Turkey we just knew President Chavez and the beauty queens. We are not known here and in Turkey we don’t know you. And we recently learned in Turkey that Venezuela is a source of oil.”

In the last 10 years Turkey accomplished a strong development in its economy, with an average growth above 5% in its GDP in a decade, despite the strong contractions of 0,7% and -4,8% in 2008 and 2009 during the global financial crisis. The Turks have achieved a strong development in sectors like car industries, appliances, ceramics, cement, building, textiles, agriculture, and food industries. These results implicate that the value of exportations leaped to 335% by going from 31 billion dollars in 2001 to 135 billion dollars in 2011. These are considerable development landmarks for a Republic that is precisely turning 89 years old today, 29th of October, founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

The Turkish economy, with such exponential expansion, is an avid consumer of energy, and that’s where Venezuela plays a relevant role. The Ambassador reminded that there is a recent Bilateral Cooperation Agreement Regarding Energy Sector, and that the combination of the energy sector with the construction sector renders many benefits for both nations. “We started the cooperation in the construction sector, and in this way we already have a win-win situation for both parties. You need construction –and we’re very good at it- and we require oil”.

In construction “we are undoubtedly good, number 2 in the world after the Chinese. The Turkish constructors are very active in more than 90 countries, but we had never been able to come to Latin America, for this reason we want to show our ability”.

He quotes as an example the construction of 1,480 living units in Vargas in the frame of “Grand Mision Vivienda”, carried on by the company Summa between November 2011 and May 2012, “employing many Venezuelans”, besides Turkish people. After this point, it is expected that other projects to be developed by Turkish enterprises.

On the other hand, Turkey pays attention to the offer of Venezuela in the energy sector. “The entire oil sector is important for us. We produce too little oil, for this reason our energy sources are limited and mostly imported. We have neighboring countries in the Middle East that produce oil such as Iran and Iraq and other Arab countries, but why not bring oil from Venezuela? We’re pretty interested in it”.

Here is included the Venezuelan petrocoke, a byproduct of the heavy oil that Ankara can use to feed its cement industries and it is to be exchanged for more construction of living quarters, following an agreement with PDVSA.

Tourism and Diplomacy

The cultural richness and the natural attractions of Turkey have been an important hook for the tourism sector, one of the most liable to create new jobs. The official data indicated that Turkey is the sixth most visited country during vacations worldwide, with 31,5 million tourists in 2011 and an income of 23 billion dollars for last year, presenting a growth of 11,4% between 2000 and 2011.

In the short term, it is expected that an Ankara-Caracas flight is going to be operated by Turkish Airlines in order to stimulate the touristic interchange. This is a pending matter since only 8.557 Venezuelans visited the country in 2011, despite an agreement to eliminate visas between these countries.

On the other hand, in the frame of the opening to Latin America, the Turkish government will widen its diplomatic presence in the continent with two new Embassies in Panama and Dominican Republic. "It's a strategic decision" Kılıçaslan points out, adding that while other countries have closed their embassies, Turkey has strengthened its relations with Latin American nations with more missions and more personnel in service. The opening of 4 embassies and consulates in Bogota, Lima, Quito and Sao Paulo during the last two years proves to be an example of this situation.