The Mechanism of Trilateral Meetings in Action

This mechanism was launched in Dushanbe in September 2011 during the 14th SCO Summit when, on President of Mongolia Tsakhia Elbegdorj’s initiative, the first trilateral meeting was held between the leaders of Mongolia, Russia and China, at which the parties agreed to make such meetings regular, and between them, to conduct consultative meetings on issues of trilateral cooperation at the level of deputy foreign ministers. Indeed, over the past year, three rounds of consultations at this level have been held and in May 2015, Ufa hosted the first meeting of transport ministers of the three countries.

As you know, on July 9-11, Ufa hosted the meeting of the heads and delegations of member states of the SCO, BRICS, and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). And from the first day of these forums on July 9, the second trilateral meeting of the presidentsTsakhia Elbegdorj, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping took place, indicating the importance attached to such a dialogue.

President of Mongolia, Tsakhia Elbegdorj, the originator of the idea for this event, opened the meeting. Certainly, Mongolia was perhaps the most active party to the talks, and, apparently, has high expectations from the outcome. Evidence of this was a whole package of proposals for trilateral cooperation, which the President of Mongolia put forward in his speech at the opening of the meeting. He proposed to establish, on an equal footing, a Research Center in Ulan Bator for consultations on Feasibility Studies and solutions to problems of financing of joint projects, to reach an agreement to improve the conditions of transit transportation of Mongolian raw materials to markets of third countries through the territory of Russia and China; and to explore the possibility to cooperate in the construction of pipelines for transportation of oil and natural gas through the territory of Mongolia. Note that Mongolia has been persistently pushing this proposal through in all bi- and trilateral meetings. It was also suggested that the use of national currencies in the trilateral trade relations be extended and a mechanism for cooperation on trade and economic issues between the relevant departments of the three countries be created, long-term and stable price rates for electricity imported from Russia and China be ensured, and efforts be made to reduce tariffs.

According to the Mongolian side, the adoption of these proposals (they are subject to further refinement through diplomatic channels) will help accelerate tripartite cooperation and, in addition, solve some of Mongolia’s economic problems.

In his speech, Tsakhia Elbegdorj thanked Vladimir Putin for organizing this meeting on Russian soil, and Xi Jinping for his invitation to take part in the 70th anniversary celebration of the end of the liberation war in China in September this year, and offered as part of the celebrations in Beijing to meet again and to sign a Mongolian-Russian-Chinese Intergovernmental Agreement on Transit Transportation (UNCTAD), an Agreement on Transit Auto Transportation (UNESCAP) and a General Agreement on the Establishment of a Joint Venture on Transport and Logistics.

All these proposals from the Mongolian side have a common goal, that is, to bring and enrich the friendly political relations between the three countries by an economic convent, which should benefit all three countries. Speaking of politics, President Tsakhia Elbegdorj said that Mongolia does not have any political or territorial disputes with any of
its neighbors. "Our country," he said, "has friendly relations at the level of strategic partnership with Russia, and a full-fledged strategic partnership with China, developing joint activities in all fields." The subtle distinction in appraisal is quite obvious.

Expressing confidence that the tripartite cooperation will only grow stronger and develop, filled with more extensive content in the future, President Tsakhia Elbegdorj invited his partners to organize a summit in Ulan Bator in 2016 not in the framework of the SCO but the "Asia-Europe" Summit Meeting (ASEM) to be held in Mongolia.

It should be noted that in their speeches both Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping focused on the presentation of their position and did not give direct answers to the Mongolian side’s offers, although some of them are reflected in the agreements.

The Russian side has presented a Roadmap defining the priority areas of cooperation: these comprise politics, security, economy, cross-border inter-regional relations, science and technology and humanitarian spheres; regional and international relations. The document is comprehensive and is focused on issues of trade and economic cooperation: the parties agreed to explore the possibility of increasing the volume of freight traffic by JSC "Ulan Bator Railway" and the establishment of a tripartite company for transport and logistics; to expand the operation of national currency in foreign trade transactions; to establish an inter-agency mechanism for cooperation on trade and economic issues.

As a result, the Roadmap for the medium-term development of trilateral cooperation was adopted.

Vladimir Putin also noted such long-term projects as the construction of transit power lines from Russia to China through Mongolia, the creation of a transport corridor on the basis of the Ulan Bator Railway, the deepening of cooperation in the tourism sector, in particular, the organization of the route "The Great Tea Road", a special excursion train "Star of Eurasia" (Beijing - Chita - Ulan-Ude - Irkutsk), the formation of a tourism cluster and hosting of an international tourism exhibition.

Chinese President, Xi Jinping, expressed satisfaction with the preliminary results already achieved by the trilateral cooperation and said that the priority here is economic cooperation. China supports the coordination of joint projects on the principle of “phasing”, such as the modernization of Ulan Bator Railway, the development of cross-border rail and road transport, tourism, etc.

Xi Jinping also made a proposal to instruct the relevant authorities to implement in practice and seriously address the preparation of the long-term program necessary to create an economic corridor, in particular by merging such projects as "The Economic Belt of the Silk Road", the Eurasian zone of cooperation based on the Trans-Siberian Railway - "The Steppe Route"- and the construction of Trans-Mongolian routes. According to Xi Jinping, "...the formation of this corridor will certainly have a far-reaching and important impact on the long-term development of our countries and interregional economic cooperation."

Xi Jinping called for holding the third trilateral meeting on the sidelines of the SCO Summit in Beijing in 2016.

In the words of Vladimir Putin, the "New Page" – opened by these tripartite meetings of the three countries – “has only just opened, but it has a huge potential and bright prospects." As noted by Xi Jinping, "China, Russia and Mongolia are neighbors and strategic partners for each other, and we have a good foundation and great potential for the development of trilateral cooperation. From the standpoint of long-term strategic planning, we have to push forward the trilateral cooperation." One of the stages of this promotion was the second trilateral meeting, and the negotiations held during its course. They resulted in the signing of the Roadmap and, in addition, three other important documents, namely:

- Memorandum of Understanding on the establishment of an economic corridor between Mongolia, Russia and China;
- The General Agreement on cooperation in creating favorable conditions and support for the development of trilateral trade relations between the General Administration of Customs of Mongolia, the Federal Customs Service of Russia and the General Administration of Customs of China;
- The General Agreement on development of cooperation between border ports of the aforesaid customs services of the three countries.

All of these agreements, respectively, form a favorable legal environment for the development of trilateral
cooperation, open up new opportunities and prospects.

In general, we can say that the “triangle” works successfully, the dialogue is continuing and yielding tangible results.

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