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Introduction:

In a historic meeting of the highest governing body of the European Union (EU) held in Copenhagen, Denmark, 15 member governments decided to admit 10 new members from Eastern and Central Europe including Cyprus and Malta. Simultaneously, the summit was also deeply preoccupied with the controversial question of whether a date should be given for Turkey to begin accession talks for eventual membership. The summit had been preceded by a fury of diplomatic and lobbying activity on the part of the newly elected Turkish government as well as Turkish civil society groups. This was accompanied with a bitter debate about Turkey's European credentials in the international media particularly provoked by the statement of the former president of France Valery Giscard d'Estaing, currently serving as the president of the "Convention on the Future of Europe". Early in November he had argued that Turkey was not a European country and admitting Turkey as a member of the European Union would be the end of the Union. There were Turkish as well as international reactions accusing the European Union of being an exclusively Christian club failing to recognize the secular, democratic and modern credentials of Turkey and hence failing to live up the EU's own aspirations of becoming a union based on values such as democracy, rule of law, human rights and multi-culturalism. Thus many in and out of Turkey argued that those who were against the possibility of Turkey's membership would knowingly or inadvertently be courting with Samuel Huntington's infamous theory of "clash of civilizations". Many American personalities from within as well as outside government and including President George Bush advocated the importance of recognizing the achievements of Turkey in reconciling a Muslim

society with democracy and pressurized EU member governments to grant an early date for starting accession negotiations.

It was against this background of controversy that the French president Jacques Chirac and German chancellor Gerhard Schröder days before the Copenhagen summit proposed that accession negotiations with Turkey could start after July 2005. France and Germany have long been recognized as the leading “engines” of European integration. However, both countries during the course of 2002 had held national elections during which right wing nationalist and xenophobic candidates came close to defeating both leaders. They both face in their respective countries powerful anti-immigrant public sentiments particularly directed towards Muslims and Turks. Furthermore, it is generally recognized that EU public opinion in general have been at best apprehensive about the current enlargement and at worst have expressed views against it. The reasons have ranged from fear of immigrants from the new member countries flooding their job markets to concerns about whether EU political institutions would be capable of functioning once membership increased from 15 to 25 countries. Public attitudes towards the question of Turkish membership have been exacerbated by cultural and religious factors too. Turkey and Turks historically has held the position of the “other” in Europe and undoubtedly 9/11 accompanied with Islamic fundamentalist violence has worsened this problem. Except for narrow well informed circles in Europe the public have remained either ignorant or aloof to the 80 years of achievements of republican Turkish history. The Chirac and Schröder position was very much determined by these considerations.

Yet at the same time, Turkey’s presence in European governmental organizations, in European economics, and extensive societal contacts and long standing aspirations to become part of the EU had culminated in Turkey being granted candidate status for EU membership in December 1999, on the condition that it met the Copenhagen criteria. These criteria were originally adopted back in June 1993 by the EU for future enlargements and expected candidate countries to be fully fledged democracies and respect the rule of law, human rights and minorities as well as have developed liberal market economies and administrative institutions with a capacity to adopt and implement EU rules and regulations. A series of reforms adopted by the previous as well as current government led Turkey to forcefully seek a date for accession negotiations by the end of 2003. Turkey’s aspiration was supported by the US administration as well as a number of EU governments, such as Britain, Belgium, Greece, Italy and Spain while Scandinavian countries, Holland and the European Commission opposed to any dates being given on the grounds that Turkey had still not met completely the Copenhagen criteria. Intense and at times acrimonious bargaining during the course of the summit meeting culminated in a compromise decision to start accession talks with Turkey “without delay” if the European Council summit in December 2004 can reach the decision that Turkey meets all the Copenhagen criteria. Many Turkish and international commentators consider this decision as an acceptable decision that most importantly reinforces EU’s commitment to Turkish membership. Clearly, in Turkey there are many who are disillusioned. Most importantly the Turkish president Ahmet Necdet Sezer, long standing advocate of EU membership and reform in Turkey, defines it as a let down and an unfair decision. The government leadership that had entered into bitter and nasty exchanges with some of the EU leaders during the run up to the summit and the summit itself on the other hand has been less critical of the final decision and has announced that they can live with the decision and that they would go ahead with the reforms packages and their implementation full steam.

A historical background to the summit:

Turkey has long aspired to be part of Europe. Many scholars actually date this endeavor to the late 18th century Ottoman early effort to “westernize” first its military and subsequently its bureaucracy and eventually its political system. However, it would be Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the modern Turkish republic in 1923, that decisively embarked upon a political project to transform the Turkish society into a secular and modern society that has since 1950 also been trying to improve and consolidate its democracy on the basis of European norms. Atatürk had defined his objective as “contemporary civilization” and in due course this has come to mean becoming part of the European integration process and eventually joining the European Union. In this respect the first step was taken when in 1959, only a year after the formation of the European Economic Community, Turkey applied for membership. In 1963 an associational agreement was reached which in stages envisaged an eventual Turkish membership. In 1987 an application was filed for membership to the then European Community (EC). However, the EC at the time rejected this application. It argued that even if Turkey in principle was qualified to become one day a member but it considered Turkey not to be ready and instead recommended the formation of a customs union.

The customs union was negotiated and signed in 1995 and subsequently came into force in 1996 with great political difficulties. This period coincided with one when the violence resulting from the confrontation between the Turkish security forces and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) was causing massive violations and displacement of Kurds in south east Turkey. Turkish-EU relations were particularly foul during this period as the EU governments criticized Turkey bitterly for failing to solve the Kurdish problem. The Turkish government, in turn, accused the EU of interfering in Turkish domestic affairs and of supporting the PKK’s agenda to carve up a separate Kurdish state from Turkey. Relations between Turkey and the EU reached its lowest point when in December 1997 the European Council decided not to include Turkey among the list of candidate countries for the next round of enlargement.

The apprehension of the leader of the PKK in February 1999 very quickly brought the violence to an end. A general improvement in the political climate in Turkey occurred and the coalition government elected to power in April 1999 committed itself to reforms. This also coincided with a period when Greek- Turkish relations subsequent to the massive earthquakes that both countries suffered began to improve. In December 1999 at the Helsinki European Council summit Turkey was granted candidate status for eventual membership as long as it met Copenhagen criteria. Membership would also require a solution of the disputes with Greece over the Aegean Sea and the settlement of the Cyprus problem. In October 2001 the government succeeded in adopting historic constitutional amendments, opening the way for political reforms to improve the quality of democracy and respect for human rights as well as open the way for Kurds to use their language in education and public broadcasting. The government also accepted an American- British compromise deal that would break the deadlock over Turkish objections to the use of NATO facilities for the European Security and Defense Policy. In November a major breakthrough on the Cyprus issue was achieved when Rauf Denktaş, the president of the Turkish state in northern Cyprus, led the way for direct talks with his Greek-Cypriot counterpart. These developments culminated in an EU decision, in spite of initial objections by Germany and Austria, at the Laeken summit, to invite Turkey to attend the “Convention on the Future of Europe” together with all the other candidates. This Convention was given the task of debating the future of the Union as well as to make proposals about a constitution for the EU and suggest ways of improvements to the

institutional operation of the EU. The government as well as civil society groups actively participates in the ongoing meetings of the Convention. This development was at the time considered as sign of the EU commitment to eventual Turkish membership.

However, the coalition government during the course of 2002 began to experience major differences between its partners over further critical reforms such as the lifting of the death penalty and the adoption of legislation that would actually open the way to education and broadcasting in Kurdish. A good part of the first half of 2002 was also dominated by a public campaign against the advocates of reform and European membership. Furthermore, little progress was being achieved in talks over the settlement of the Cyprus problem. Nevertheless, the Turkish parliament in August 2002 in spite of divisions with the coalition government succeeded in adopting a major round of reforms towards meeting the Copenhagen criteria. At the same time, the strains in the coalition led to the decision to hold early elections in November. The election ushered in a single party majority government for the first time since the 1980s led by the relatively new Justice and Development Party (AKP) party while established political figures and their parties were politically wiped out. AKP is composed of politicians that once had been associated with the Islamist Saadet (Prosperity) and its predecessor Refah (Welfare) parties. The party was led by Tayip Erdoğan who had been convicted by courts for inciting religious hatred and was denied the right to participate in the elections. However, subsequent to his party's electoral victory Tayip Erdoğan and his colleagues were successful to allay the fears that they might have an Islamist ideological agenda. Instead, they demonstrated their commitment to furthering political reforms with the purpose of opening up negotiations for membership to the European Union.

The government was sworn into office late in November and Erdoğan embarked upon a taxing series of trips to visit Europe Union leaders and a subsequent trip to the USA to mobilize support for receiving a date for the beginning of accession negotiations. His task was made particularly difficult by the European Commission progress report on Turkey published in October 2002 that failed to recommend the beginning of accession negotiations with Turkey and was aggravated by d'Estaing's remarks. Many in Turkey believed that the European Commission had failed to appreciate the significance of the reforms adopted in Turkey and that the Commission was discriminating against Turkey and Turks. The Turkish president during the Prague NATO summit held talks with EU governmental leaders and complained that the leaders he talked to were blaming other members of the EU for the reluctance to support Turkey's case while these "other" leaders were actually were offering him the same excuses. His remarks resonated deeply with the Turkish public. A public opinion survey ran by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation in May-June 2002 shows that although 64 % of those surveyed support EU membership, only 3.7 on a scale of 1 to 10 think that the EU is sincere about Turkey's membership. The words of the President clearly reflected the deep mistrust held by the Turkish public towards the EU. This mistrust and the frustration felt by the Turkish public were reflected in the leadership too. It is against such a background that the Turkish prime minister and his delegation went to the Copenhagen summit. During the actual negotiations at Copenhagen they held to their declared goal of a negotiation date for December 2003 and could not resist issuing thinly veiled threats that attracted considerable criticisms by both the media and some of the EU leaders.

The outcome:

The Turkish government failed to receive the date it aspired for getting accession negotiations to start. The decision reached typically reflected EU style summitry bargaining. The final [Presidency Conclusions](http://europa.eu.int/index_en.htm) (http://europa.eu.int/index_en.htm) offers December 2004 as a date when the decision to open negotiations would be taken “without delay”, is clearly an improvement on the original EU position that had identified July 2005 as a possible starting date for negotiations. However, much more importantly the EU Council also decided to strengthen the accession strategy for Turkey. This means that EU will increase funding for Turkey and become much more actively involved in efforts to assist the harmonization of Turkey’s legislation with the one of the EU. The reference to “this assistance will from 2004 be financial under the budget heading ‘pre-accession expenditure’” may seem technical at first but at a closer look carries considerable political significance and from past practice with the other candidates it suggests a deeper commitment to eventual membership. Furthermore, in an effort to allay Turkish fears that if negotiations start well after the new members formally join the EU in May 2004 these new members might actually try to prevent the adoption of negotiation date, the Council adopted separately a declaration on United Europe in which the new members commit themselves to supporting the continuation of enlargement. This is considered as a clear understanding that they would not stand in the way of Turkey’s accession talks starting.

The issue of Cyprus’s membership was a highly contested issue between Turkey and the European Union. For a long time Turkey had argued that Cyprus’s accession to the EU without a settlement would be illegal. There was great diplomatic activity to try to get the plan proposed by the Secretary General of Kofi Annan signed by both sides on the island before the EU Council summit ended. However, when this did not materialize the EU Council adopted carefully worded paragraphs on Cyprus’s admission to the EU that has left the door open to the Turkish side joining in if a settlement can be reached on the basis of the Annan plan before the end of February. The Council has also foreseen the possibility of a settlement not being reached and has concluded that in that event “the application of the *acquis* to the northern part of the island shall be suspended”. This is a clear evidence of an effort to avoid a situation where there would actually be a direct conflict between Turkey and the EU. Furthermore, the Council also “invites the Commission, in consultation with the government of Cyprus, to consider ways of promoting economic development of the northern part of Cyprus and bringing it closer to the Union”. This can be read as an effort to try to address the long held grievance of the Turkish-Cypriots over the economic embargo imposed on them by the Greek-Cypriots as well the EU. If this decision can actually be implemented it would be in itself a major step in confidence building but also in encouraging integration between the two communities. In the short run, given the current Turkish government’s declared commitment to finding a negotiated settlement to the problem on the island, these decisions should help to alleviate the concern in some Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot circles about whether the Greek-Cypriot side would actually be motivated to reach an agreement given that they are now well on the way to becoming a full member of the EU by May 2004.

Another concern that Turkey has had is that recent public opinion surveys among Greek-Cypriots show very little support for a settlement based on the Annan plan. Considering that Greece is taking over the presidency of the Council and that Greece has been in an unequivocal manner supportive of Turkey’s membership to the EU, it can be expected that Greece will take an active role in encouraging the Greek-Cypriots to reach a settlement with Turkish-Cypriots. Furthermore, the EU itself has a long record of bridging deep differences

between countries and resolving long historical conflicts. The French-German reconciliation is a classic example however the EU has also had an important contributing role to the reconciliation between Greece and Turkey, Romania and Hungary as well as Turkey and Bulgaria. Hence, it is quite likely that the EU's ability to extend security and stability should also help to strengthen the likelihood of reaching a settlement on the island satisfactory to both sides.

An issue that the Council decisions do not address is the question of whether Turkey is a European country or not. This is a debate that will continue to rage and most probably gather intensity as Turkey comes closer and closer to membership. It is after all a centuries old debate. In many ways Giscard d'Estaing appears to have, inadvertently, done Turkey a favor. His remarks provoked a barrage of reactions in the international media that has been unusually sympathetic to the Turkish case. The answer will also depend a lot on how the EU will choose to define itself and its future. The media reactions to d'Estaing remarks have stressed how no where in the basic documents that constitute the EU is there any reference to religion. Instead, there is growing emphasis on the EU representing a shared set of values about democratic governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights and multi-culturalism. Many argue that the very admission of Turkey in the EU would be the acid test of whether the EU is able to actually live up to these values and also whether the EU can also live up to becoming a source of security and stability capable of averting a "clash of civilizations".

A lot will also depend on Turkey. Turkey has come along way in consolidating its democracy and secularism. Over the last year important steps have been taken in respect to improving respect for human and minority rights, the current government appears committed to strengthening these steps. The Copenhagen summit seems to open the way for Turkey and the EU to further engage each other and continue the integration process that is already occurring. This process should inevitably assist both Turkey's economic recovery as well as the consolidation of its democracy. In turn the EU but most importantly and immediately Greece and Cyprus should be benefiting too. The benefit to the US would be an ally of long standing that is much more stable and secure than it has ever been in the past. This should also facilitate the ability of the US to address many of the global challenges it is facing ranging from fighting terrorism to winning the hearts and minds of the Muslim world. However, one should remember that the Council decision is about a date to start negotiations for membership, the actual membership issue is a matter all on to itself.

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