

# The crisis as catharsis in european union-turkey .....relations.....

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At the Helsinki European Council of December 1999 the political leaders of the European Union Member States have declared Turkey "a candidate State destined to join the Union on the basis of the same criteria as applied to the other candidate States." The year and a half that have passed since the Helsinki decision have shown that Turkey is a particular candidate whose path towards full membership will require innovative approaches by the main actors on each side. Let us summarize what was achieved or rather what was not achieved in the course of this period. In Helsinki the European Union provided a perspective to Turkey and thus created a momentum towards membership that Turkish politicians have not been able to seize and exploit at home. The euphoria created by the candidacy was short lived. The least one can say is that no particular effort has been made to keep it alive. Contrary to what is happening in twelve other candidate countries, "joining the European

Union" is not seen as a national policy objective in Turkey. At best it is "one of the issues", and placed on the same footing as the fight against inflation or the restructuring of the banking sector. Joining the European Union is not yet seen as a formidable dynamic for the overhauling of Turkish economic, social and political concepts and practices. Unable and unwilling to lead the Turkish society towards the goal of integrating with the European Union, Turkish politicians have adopted a "wait and see" attitude which has had the negative effect of slowing down the beginning of the pre-accession process.

#### **State of affairs**

In the course of the year 2000, the Association Council, the highest decision making body involving Turkey and the European Union, has met only once, in April 2000. In theory it should have met every six months at the minimum. The next meeting took place on June 26, 2001. Nothing substantial came out of this meeting.

The April meeting has led to the setting up of eight sub-committees covering almost the entirety of the *acquis communautaire* chapters. These sub-committees were given the task of conducting a screening of the existing Turkish legislation and judge its compatibility with the *acquis*. Although the final decision on the establishment of the sub-committees is still pending in Brussels, all sub-committees have already met at least once mainly to set the terms of references. The other important decision of the April meeting was to open negotiations on the liberalization of the services and the mutual opening of procurement markets. This was indeed a part of the agreement on the Customs Union that had not been addressed until then.

In Turkey, political and administrative reorganization has been advancing at the slowest possible pace and the General Secretariat for the European Union was finally set up only towards the end of last summer.

The Secretariat was put in charge of drafting the National Program for the Adoption of the Acquis Communautaire (hereafter the National Program). On the political front the junior minister responsible for European affairs was removed from office soon after Helsinki and it took the government over six months to fill the European portfolio. In July, Mr. Mesut Yılmaz, the leader of the Motherland Party (ANAP) took his seat in the Government as the third

publication of the Accession Partnership and its approval by the General Affairs Council in early December, major differences appeared over the definition of the "political criteria" between the Commission and the Council on the one hand, and Turkey on the other. Through a last ditch effort led by the French presidency, a compromise formula was found regarding the Cyprus issue in particular. However, the *modus vivendi* reached in early December was

the Cyprus issue from the National Program and the other three issues were far from being properly addressed in that document.

Not everything went smoothly on the other side either. Following the Luxembourg European Council of December 1997, the Commission was quick to produce the Accession Partnerships for the eleven countries designated as candidates. The process took, on average, less than three months. In the case of Turkey the



deputy Prime Minister, in charge of European affairs.

The real problems emerged as the Accession Partnership slowly took shape in the course of the summer. Various governmental and administrative sources started to express concerns over a number of political issues likely to be included in the Accession Partnership. These issues related to the tasks to be undertaken in order to comply with the Copenhagen political criteria. Between the official

indeed a temporary solution. Soon after, major disagreements appeared between the coalition partners in the government. These were related to four fundamental topics: television/radio broadcasting and education in mother tongues other than Turkish; the abrogation of the death penalty without conditions; the redefinition of the role of the National Security Council as an advisory body to the government; and the Cyprus question. The government decided to preclude

process was notable for its absence. The scope and the mass of the issues to be tackled in the Accession Partnership as well as the unreadiness of the incoming Commission might have been the reasons behind the delay concerning Turkey. In the end though, both the Accession Partnership and the Regular Report 2000 that were presented by the Commission turned out to be comprehensive documents that gave an accurate picture of today's Turkey and put forward an ambitious

plan of action in the context of the pre-accession strategy. This having been said, European Union institutions and Member States have neither given themselves the adequate tools to convey this strategy to their Turkish counterparts nor the financial and human resources to implement it.

Thus, regarding the quality of communications between the two sides, the eighteen months that passed in the post-Helsinki period have been characterized by a number of misunderstandings and contradictory messages emanating from various European Union institutions. These messages concerned sensitive topics related mainly to the political and historical taboos prevailing in Turkey.

no measure to counterbalance the negative effects of such developments. To the contrary, a number of politicians have fueled the negative feelings by denouncing the European Union as a threat to Turkish territorial integrity.

As far as the human and financial resources are concerned, the Commission declared from the beginning that it would dissociate Turkey, together with Cyprus and Malta, from the ten Central and Eastern European countries, especially as regards its main financial instruments i.e. PHARE, ISPA\* and SAPARD\*\*. Although conceived as a starter, the yearly grant allocation of EUR 177 million had a negative

of deception in Turkey rather than one of encouragement. Neither have human resources to be devoted to Turkey-European Union relations been adequately revised to reflect the new candidacy decision, be it in Brussels or in Ankara.

#### Dilemmas

All in all, if the parties involved in the process of accession do not strive for a new momentum, we will be fated for many years to come to read in the Commission's reports on Turkey, and on enlargement as a whole, that "compared to last year, the situation on the ground has hardly improved and Turkey still does not meet the political Copenhagen criteria" (Regular

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In a country where large segments of the political and economic elite cannot tell the difference between the Council of Europe, the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council and European Union Member States' Europe-specific institutions, every single declaration broadcast from the West was received as the European position on Turkey. Declarations and initiatives about the Cyprus or Kurdish issues, as well as the alleged "Armenian genocide" have had an overkill effect. They have indeed exhausted the absorption capacity of the Turkish public opinion. Moreover, a government committed only half-heartedly to the European project took

symbolic effect in a country where billion dollar figures are mentioned everyday in relation to this or that financial transaction and where the current account deficit with the European Union amounted to approximately EUR 9 billion in 2000. Euro-skeptics have seized this opportunity to point their fingers at double standards, demagogically comparing the grant allocation to the yearly total allocations of similar candidate countries such as Poland and Rumania.

As the European Union authorities, too, failed to mention the outstanding grants and loans, the grant allocation decision generated once more a feeling

Report 2000 p.72) or that "as a candidate country Turkey has to start making substantial progress in alignment with the acquis in other fields than the Customs Union" (Composite Report 2000 p.61). This would mean that no serious perspective will be at sight, no membership negotiations will take place and Turkey could well end up as an eternal candidate, condemned to stand forever in the waiting room. Such a situation would certainly satisfy the members of the "holy coalition" in Turkey and those in Europe who are against Turkey's full membership. To break free of these negative trends, to accelerate and to strengthen the efforts

on each side, a great deal of creativity and imagination is needed within a spirit of partnership and joint responsibility.

#### **The economic program and EU accession**

At the beginning of 2000 Turkey launched two major "stabilization" programs, namely the macroeconomic stabilization program with the IMF, and the accession process to the European Union. The macroeconomic stabilization program of December 1999 and its May 2001 version entitled "Program for Transition to a Stronger Economy" (hereafter the Economic Program) underscore the necessity to tackle the chronic illnesses of the economy:

High inflation and high public deficits. Structural reforms and market liberalization are the two major instruments of these programs.

It is curious to note that the preparations for EU membership and the implementation of the National Program on the one hand, and the Economic Program on the other have not been treated as related processes in Turkey. For instance "European Union" is referred to only once and in very general terms in the cover letter of the Memorandum on Economic Policies submitted to the IMF. Similarly

the National Program does not refer to the Economic Program in any specific way, just citing general principles on the Maastricht criteria for adopting the single currency.

The holistic nature of the accession preparations, the comprehensiveness of the Accession Partnership and the National Program are not properly appreciated in Turkey. Therefore, obvious synergies that could be obtained by relating the Economic Program to the pre-accession process



are missed. In fact, the Economic Program has a perfect fit with the pre-accession strategy and actually constitutes a part of it. In the short term, the economic and social costs of the Economic Program, which are yet to be felt, could be partly alleviated through the implementation and the streamlining of a variety of policy tools by recourse to EU expertise in many areas. These relate in particular to agriculture, SME's, social policies, education, health and regional policy.

Such synergies are not necessarily new or specific to any particular candidate; they exist in every candidate country. Furthermore the pre-accession phase for candidates provides burden sharing mechanisms between the European Union institutions and International Financial Institutions.\*\*\*

It is indeed a fact that, the EU's financial facilities could be fruitfully used in the Economic Program. Along these lines, the amendments proposed by the European Parliament for the

Framework Regulation included Turkey's participation in both ISPA and SAPARD. This welcome development was not given proper consideration by the Council and the Commission. Instead, they chose to bureaucratically refer to budgetary

ceilings set by the Berlin European Council for these instruments. For the time being, the only

remaining option seems to be the release by various EU institutions of some EUR 1 billion of outstanding loans and compensatory facilities that were due between 1996-1999 as part of the Customs Union decision. If these funds are released, they could be instrumental in addressing the need for a better financial synergy between the Economic Program and the pre-accession assistance.

In the meantime, Turkey will have to go well beyond the framework of the

existing Customs Union to ensure its continued competitiveness and to attract foreign direct investment. Here again, the solution lies with the accession preparations and the compliance with the entirety of the proposed criteria. Recent trends on both sides regarding the Customs Union, though, are worrisome.

Turkey seems to have lost its competitive edge on certain products. It can no longer derive any advantages from the Customs Union that provides substantially more benefits to the European Union. The reason behind this state of affairs goes deeper than the trade imbalance that was in favor of the Union until February. Structural causes help explain Turkey's inability

Broadening the framework of the ongoing negotiations on services by giving them a scope for membership may provide a way out of this impasse.

Turkey's candidacy also necessitates a larger number of qualified staff to be employed both on the domestic and the European offices dealing with the integration process. One of the amendments of the European Parliament to the Framework Regulation was designed to remedy this gap but was equally ignored by the Commission and the Council. It is hoped that the need for adequate staffing will be properly addressed when twinnings\*\*\*\* start. Furthermore, Turkey is currently unable to take advantage of the

reconsider its communications strategy and to develop innovative approaches to push its agenda for hot political issues without necessarily altering the substance of its requirements. On several political issues, Turkey needs to be treated with less arrogance, more empathy and reassurance from its European partners. In other words, there is a great need for confidence building. On the other hand, Turkey needs to attain a higher degree of appreciation for the demands of modern democratic politics. And above all, Turkey needs to understand the structural causal link between sustainable stability and political reforms.

Keeping in mind the objective of

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to export more. Turkey cannot compensate for the deficit through foreign direct investment either, for the same structural reasons. Moreover the Commission takes a rigid position in the ongoing negotiations concerning the freedom to provide services, limiting the framework of the discussions to the Customs Union and even GATS (General Agreement on Tariffs and Services), thereby ignoring the overall membership perspective. The Customs Union has always been nothing more than a step towards membership. If not superseded, the Customs Union cannot continue to function smoothly since it has reached its structural limits for Turkey.

substantial experience gathered over the years in PHARE mechanisms. Nor can it participate in PHARE Horizontal programs with other candidate countries. It would be helpful to remedy this exclusion in due course, since many issues are common and experience on some topics could also be shared by Turkey with its Eastern European neighbors.

#### **The political picture**

On the political front, much remains to be done to deal with the present deadlocks since without any progress on the political criteria, Turkey's candidacy cannot move forward. It must be possible for the EU to

dealing with the present deadlocks, and given the basic assumptions and constraints, a number of solutions could be explored by using the existing tools and perhaps considering new ones. Although not directly part of the political criteria, the Cyprus issue is included in the political agenda. European Union institutions and Member States cannot continue to content themselves with passive monitoring of this conflict if they want to avoid the undesired accession of a divided island. Full support for the United Nations sponsored proximity talks could be enhanced through political dialogue with local non-governmental partners and with active

support mechanisms for the benefit of civilian and non-governmental institutions in the north. Such openings should not hamper the international status quo regarding the sovereignty issue. EU Member States and institutions could use their financial leverage, indirectly by easing the embargo, or directly by channeling accession related funds to the north under some conditions and to specific institutions. Similarly a constructive dialogue with non-governmental organizations of the north could certainly help in these endeavors. The solution to the Cyprus question is closely linked to the dynamics of the integration process. The division of the island should cease progressively as the pre-accession process advances.



As far as the issue of television/radio broadcasting in mother tongues other than Turkish

(read Kurdish) is concerned, the EU's decision not to call groups other than those mentioned in the Lausanne Treaty "minorities" has generated a positive feeling in the Turkish public. Referring to the best European practices on the subject could further strengthen these positive reactions. Recent developments in France regarding the Corsica issue can serve as an example here.

In order to communicate better, share experiences and develop

innovative approaches, the two sides may need new channels in addition to the existing consultative and executive bodies of the EU institutions and their Turkish governmental and non-governmental counterparts. A comprehensive communications strategy is needed with an aim to raise public awareness of the issues at stake during the pre-accession phase in Turkey. Similarly public opinion in European countries is doubtful about the desirability of the enlargement

process as a whole. Turkey appears at the bottom of the list in the last Eurobarometer in terms of the desirability of its membership. Without the support of public opinion, no enlargement can be successfully implemented. The joint initiative on communications about enlargement by the Commissioners in charge of Culture Education and Enlargement could certainly offer the essential support needed for the conceptualization and implementation

of this campaign. Philippe Morillon, the outgoing Rapporteur for Turkey in the European Parliament, had proposed to set up discussion forums consisting of political leaders from the European Union and Turkey as well as representatives of civil societies. This is certainly an excellent initiative and it should be implemented. Also, proper information is probably needed on Turkey's new status as candidate for membership, within the institutions of the European Union itself, where

eurocrats sometimes tend to ignore it.

**Mutual confidence - Common interests**

The Helsinki decision was a historic act, involving a double challenge, both for Turkey and for the European Union itself. EU countries,

most of them Turkey's old partners, have now inaugurated a new era of relations with

their southeastern neighbor. The Helsinki decision constitutes the strongest tie that is established between Turkey and the rest of the continent since 1918, when the Ottoman Empire was practically excluded from it. The country's membership to organizations such as the Council of Europe, OSCE, OECD and NATO cannot be compared to its future membership in the European Union. Besides the fact that the Union's founding philosophy and objectives encompass all aspects

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contained in these organizations, the size and the scope of transfer of sovereignty by Member States to supranational institutions in the Union make it a unique integration process. Turkey has been a by-stander of this process in spite of its early contacts with the EU but it has now assumed the role of active participant.

The decision to include Turkey in the current enlargement process and to invite it to join the European family is not an act of charity. It is a genuinely political act taking common and reciprocal interests into full consideration. Through the integration process, the European Union aims to help achieve sustainable economic, political and social stability in Turkey. In turn, normalization and stability in Turkey, as well as in other candidate countries of Central and Eastern Europe, are considered as the best guarantee for the freedom, peace, security and stability of the continent as a whole. In concrete terms, the integration process would avoid centrifugal temptations that might appear if Turkey is kept out of the European mainstream. Similarly, issues high on the common agenda such as the Cyprus question, the dispute over the continental shelf on the Aegean Sea, rejected asylum seekers, unauthorized migration and drug and human trafficking could be better tackled if Turkey was included in the joint consultative mechanisms of the Union. The demographic advantages of a young and dynamic Turkish population and the economic attractiveness of an unsaturated market of 65 million potential consumers are obvious to all. The potential economies of scale that could be generated with the economic integration of Central Asian States that are ethnically kin to Turkey as well as its southern and

eastern neighbors were most probably taken into consideration as well.

Integrating a secular but predominantly Islamic country in an ensemble where Judeo-Christian values form the common frame of reference for the majority of citizens, however much they live in a secular environment, is a huge challenge in itself. Political leaders of the European Union have taken this politically courageous decision to show and prove that "Grande Europe" as a future world power will be able to integrate countries with different cultural roots but sharing common values. In this sense, Turkey appears as a significant test case in so far as it personifies, still today, a number of value judgments situated at the exact opposite of European values. Furthermore, the success of this venture will no doubt serve as an example to the Islamic countries around the Mediterranean, since it will demonstrate that modernity is within reach of a secular Islamic society.

Turkey will have a lot to gain from integration to the European Union. It will have the opportunity to benefit from the experience and techniques of its partners to complete its 200 year-old westernization project. In that process Turkey is still only half way towards becoming a genuinely stable and prosperous democracy. Turkey will learn to live without the fear of being surrounded by enemies, it will be able to reconcile itself first with itself, and then with its archenemies. It will have the opportunity to rediscover its past, its memory, its history and the specificity it has repudiated in order to acquire a European appearance. All these would be realized in an environment of mutual confidence that should enable Turkey to feel at home in Europe.

We are undoubtedly at the beginning

of this long path and the stakes are high. There are also strong tendencies to derail the process and to spoil this common future based on shared values and a common interest. It would be a tremendous pity to abandon the courageous political project launched at Helsinki and abandon it at this stage. We should remember that arguments put forth by political forces and lobbies in Turkey and in Western Europe for the rejection of Turkey's membership run against the vision of Europe as a world power. Turkey's painful transition will certainly continue to give the opponents of its membership plenty of ammunition but we should not let them have the last word. In such a case the common future will turn into a common chaos. Perhaps the latest economic turmoil that profoundly shook Turkey could provide the opportunity to usher in a new era in Turkey-EU relations.

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\*ISPA stands for pre-accession instrument for structural policies. Worth EUR 1,040 million a year from 2000 to 2006, it is directed towards aligning the infrastructure standards in transport and environment for candidate countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The DG Regional Policy manages it.

\*\*SAPARD stands for special accession program for agriculture and rural development. It amounts to EUR 520 million a year from 2000 and is managed by the DG Agriculture.

\*\*\*Capital intensive big projects and programs in candidate countries require international financial co-operation. The 1998 Memorandum of Understanding, revised in 2000, between the Commission and the International Financial Institutions (IFI) address this need. Today PHARE, ISPA and SAPARD as the main financial instruments, co-ordinate and co-finance projects with IFIs.

\*\*\*\*This is the principal mechanism for the delivery of Institution Building projects identified in the Accession Partnership. Twinning bring together administrations in candidate countries with their counterparts in Member States to work in clearly defined projects that involve the transposition, implementation and enforcement of a specific part of the *acquis communautaire*.