

EXPLORING A COMMON FUTURE IN EUROPE

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Turkey has taken another significant step forward on the path of harmonization with the EU member states. Now, Turkey too has her own well-established and outspoken "eurosceptics". The more advanced and irrevocable Turkey's EU membership process becomes, the more focused are the reactionary attacks on its legitimacy on the grounds of national interest. Such eurosceptic trends have gained momentum in parallel to Ankara's efforts to start the membership negotiations before long. The conclusions of the Laeken European Council of 15 December 2001 provided an important stimulus to that perspective:

"Turkey has made progress towards complying with the political criteria established for accession, in particular through the recent amendment of its constitution. This has brought forward the prospect of the opening of accession negotiations with Turkey. Turkey is encouraged to continue its progress towards complying with both economic and political criteria, notably with regard to human rights. The pre-accession strategy for Turkey should mark a new stage in analysing its preparedness for alignment on the *acquis*."

Unsurprisingly and ironically,

opponents of Turkey's European future who are represented in different EU circles have also been more active, proving their solidarity with their de facto allies in Turkey. As the EU's good intentions were put to question in Turkey by some who advocated strategic alliances outside the EU, the flow of "bad news" from Brussels to Ankara has increased since the beginning of 2002. The EU failed to include some of the most dangerous illegal organizations such as the PKK in its list of terrorist organisations. The European Parliament kept on taking scientifically unfounded stances on the Armenian question. There were also the successive one-sided political statements on behalf of the Greek Cypriots that downplayed Nicosia's unwillingness to negotiate with their Turkish counterparts. These and other minor developments have been the main factors that damaged the credibility of the European project in the eyes of the Turkish public.

Even so, opinion polls show that more than 70 percent of Turkish citizens are in favor of joining the EU and only a group representing around 15 percent of the population is firmly against. Moreover, the pro-EU camp has also had the opportunity to raise its voice. When some members of the military and academia made

statements expressing concern with Turkey's prospective integration with the EU, not only the President of the Republic, the leading political parties and the business community, but also the Chief of staff of the armed forces came forth in support of EU membership as Turkey's main strategic choice.

For a sustainable pre-accession process

Despite the continuing balance of opinion in favor of membership, some essential questions remain decisive for the sustainability of this policy:

1. "Does the EU really assess Turkey's membership as an added-value to the peace and prosperity in the continent?"

Pro-Turkey views are voiced louder in Europe since the events of 11 September. They simply argue that in the emerging new global context, the EU needs to be a larger single market with enhanced political stability in its Eastern borders and standing against the "clash of civilizations" scenario. However, it is not very clear whether the EU's common policies vis-à-vis Turkey are guided by wisdom and rationality or historical prejudice and political short-sightedness.

2. "Can Turkey meet the conditions of the Copenhagen political criteria to start membership negotiations?"



This question conceals a more controversial one: "Do the necessary reforms in this respect present a threat to the country's security and territorial integrity?". This is still a source of concern for many in Turkey who favor EU membership and accept its requirements, but are unclear about the immediate consequences of the process. In autumn of 2001 the government went ahead with democratic reforms by amending the Constitution and the penal code. Still, as of Spring 2002, some important steps have yet to be taken for Turkey to meet the political criteria. They include abolishing the death penalty (no death sentence was executed since 1983) and further easing of restrictions on the use of the Kurdish language in broadcasting and teaching.

3. "Will the European Council take a decision on the opening of accession negotiations with Turkey in Copenhagen in December 2002"

Considering the pace of reforms and the intensity of the public debate in Turkey, it is likely that the essential part of the reform agenda will be accomplished by the end of this year. Then, it will be up to the European Union to evaluate this situation. The member states will have to agree whether on the basis of the progress made by Turkey, the European Commission can move ahead in the

process towards negotiations.

4. "Is the EU falling into a vicious cycle in the Cyprus problem?"

The evolution of the Cyprus talks will certainly play a role in the upcoming months. The essential challenge for the EU is to judge the extent to which this problem might take hostage the whole enlargement process. Brussels must also wonder whether such an eventuality would undermine its relations with Turkey.

Progress and Prospect

In 2002, in addition to Turkey's further progress towards meeting the Copenhagen criteria and the extension of the existing customs union to include services, two positive developments marked the EU-Turkey relations. First, Turkey took her seats at the Convention on the Future of Europe as all other candidate countries. Second, as all other candidate countries, Turkey will participate from now on in the EU summits to implement the Lisbon strategy destined to make the EU the "most competitive knowledge-based economy by the end of the decade". In this respect, the importance of the Barcelona summit of March 2002 was made clear to TÜSIAD by the Spanish PM Aznar.

Eurosceptics also use arguments based on the economic under-

performance of the EU in comparison with the USA. Fragmented market structures in sectors such as energy, finance and transports, problems in promoting the information society, and a failing social security system undermined by an ageing population are advanced as factors pointing to a Europe with a declining economic role on the international scene. The eventual success of the follow-up on the Barcelona Summit will strengthen business confidence in the EU's growing leadership role at the global level.

The year 2002 will be crucial for the convergence of Turkey's European role with the common European interests. The general framework of the relationship is particularly sensitive: a European context marked by the announcement of entry dates for all other candidate countries, an international context heated up by the developments in Iraq and a Turkish domestic scene in urgent need of a new political leap forward towards the EU to keep the momentum of democratic reforms alive as well as to consolidate the positive results of the IMF-supported economic program. This is why all parties concerned ought to realize that the future of Europe is also Turkey's future in Europe.

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