

EU-Turkey Relations: Towards a Constructive Re-engagement?

Aycan Akdeniz



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THE LONG STALEMATE

Turkey's EU bid hit ground zero during the second half of 2012, seven years following the launch of the accession negotiations in October 2005, for all the well-known reasons on the side of the EU (a Franco-German position not favourable to Turkey's accession and the Cyprus issue) and of Turkey (loss of appetite for accession and the stagnation of reforms). With no new negotiating chapters opened since June 2010, the track record of Turkey stayed at a dismal thirteen out of thirty-three chapters opened: only one provisionally closed, eight formally blocked by the European Council and six others blocked by France and Cyprus unilaterally. This went in parallel with a public opinion largely not supportive and/or sceptical of Turkey's EU accession, in Turkey and the Member States¹. For many in Turkey, politicians and citizens alike, the country's membership to the EU seemed more uncertain than ever before; commentators on both sides almost unanimously declared the relations between the EU and Turkey moribund, few looking into how to avoid an "acrimonious divorce"².

This bleak picture in the accession negotiations has been overshadowing the positive "fundamentals" that nevertheless continue to underpin EU-Turkey relations which officials of the European Commission stress time and again³. Economic cooperation comes first to mind. The EU remains (despite the deep economic and financial crisis in Europe) Turkey's primary trading partner, accounting for about 40% of her total trade in 2012, almost five times the trade volume of the second largest trading partner of Turkey, Russia. The EU is also the largest foreign investor in Turkey, accounting for three-quarters of the Foreign Direct Investment inflows to Turkey⁴, and a major source of technology transfer. Human interaction is another element. Each year more than 50,000 students and academics from Turkey travel to the EU to study and work and around 3,500 EU students come to study in Turkey under the Erasmus scheme. This adds to the already significant cross-mobility in tourism and business. And finally, there is foreign policy cooperation where a steady intensification of dialogue between the EU and Turkey can be observed, following the appointment of the EU High

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Aycan Akdeniz is a political analyst at the Delegation of the European Union to Turkey where she has been serving in different capacities since 2005, including on the EU support to the promotion of democratic reforms, fundamental rights and civil society in Turkey. Prior to joining the Delegation, she held research and management positions in think-tanks in the USA, Turkey and Cyprus. She is the author of a number of publications on democratization, state-society- religion relations and minority rights in Turkey and an academic thesis on "The Dilemma of Israeli Democracy: The Secular-Religious Divide and Politics of Identity".

1 Transatlantic Trends surveys (German Marshall Fund), & Eurobarometer surveys (European Commission).

2 Sinan Ülgen, *Avoiding a Divorce: A Virtual EU Membership for Turkey* (Carnegie Europe), 5 December 2012.

3 20. EU-Turkey Journalists Conference, *Address by H.E. Jean-Maurice Ripert (Head of the EU Delegation to Turkey)*, 11 March 2013.

4 EU investment has established 15,700 companies in Turkey or 52% of all companies with foreign capital participation.

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Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the establishment of the EU's new External Action Service.

More important, the three-year stalemate in the accession process had its costs domestically for Turkey and more broadly on the realization of the full potential of the political, economic and foreign policy cooperation between the EU and Turkey. The stagnation of reforms went hand in hand with the loss of EU leverage on Turkey, although home grown reasons have also been at play. On economic cooperation, the Customs Union, which has been a major instrument of integration for Turkey's economy into both European and global markets facilitating the country's strong economic development of the past two decades, turned into a source of major friction. Mutual frustrations over the proper functioning of the Customs Union left unresolved for years, boiled up to the point where Turkey (pointing *inter alia* at the unilateral conclusion by the EU of free trade agreements with third parties disrupting the proper functioning of the Customs Union) cautioned annulment of the agreement. And on foreign policy cooperation, despite the significant intensification in regular political dialogue between the EU and Turkey covering international issues of common interest, Turkey's alignment with the relevant EU declarations and the Council decisions in the international fora remained around 50% over

the past years⁵, with markedly divergent Turkish and EU positions on key developments, most recently as in the case of the military intervention in Egypt in July 2013. The lack of any reference to the EU in the two and a half hour speech of Prime Minister Erdoğan during the ruling Justice and Development Party's most recent party congress of September 2012, where the party announced its vision for Turkey in 2023- the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Republic (*AKP: Political Vision to 2023*), and the presence of almost no European statesperson in office among the foreign guests to the party congress were a stark wake-up call on the parting of ways between Turkey and the EU.

The **Positive Agenda**, launched in 2012 to help put accession back on track through enhanced cooperation in a number of areas of joint interest (including political reforms, foreign policy dialogue, visas, trade, and energy), ensured some progress including steps to fulfil four "closing benchmarks" related to three different chapters currently blocked. On visas, parallel to the initialling of a negotiated readmission agreement between Turkey and the EU, in June 2012, the EU invited the Commission to take steps towards visa liberalisation as a "gradual and long-term perspective". By December 2012, the Commission prepared a roadmap for visa-free regime with Turkey, covering the necessary requirements to be fulfilled by Turkey (Council Regulation EC 539/2001), *inter alia* the full implementation of the readmission agreement vis-à-vis all Member States. Turkey has reservations on the implementation of the readmission agreement, its costs, as well as the specific requirements in the roadmap. The launch of the visa dialogue is pending the

⁵ *Turkey 2012 Progress Report (European Commission), October 2012.*

overcoming of these reservations and the signature by Turkey of the Readmission Agreement. Also within the framework of the Positive Agenda, the Commission launched an external evaluation by the World Bank of the functioning of the Customs Union to look into possible reforms to the benefit of both parties (report expected in autumn 2013). Despite its noteworthy achievements, however, the Positive Agenda could not, by default, unlock the political knot over Turkey's accession to the EU.

THE CASE FOR CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM

The tide may at last be turning. Recent developments allow for **cautious optimism for a constructive and pragmatic re-engagement between the EU and Turkey**, albeit one that is, and will likely remain for some time to come, complicated by the mutual frustrations of the past years (as well as new ones such as the heavy handed government response to the recent 'Gezi Park' protests), and the profound lack of trust that has hence been dominating this relationship.

On the surface, the election of Socialist François Hollande to presidency in France in May 2012 and his government's declared commitment to lift the unilateral French veto on some of the negotiating chapters with Turkey have set the scene for the resumption of the formal process (see below on the opening of Chapter 22). In the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAEC) of December 2012, Member States agreed to refer (in conclusions on the enlargement and stabilisation and association process) for the first time since 2007 to "accession" in relation to the on-going negotiations with Turkey, a reference vetoed by the former French president Nicolas Sarkozy. Moreover, the EU Council noted the importance

of "active and credible accession negotiations with respect to the EU's commitments and established conditionality" for the EU-Turkey relationship to achieve its full potential and that "it is in the interest of both parties that accession negotiations regain momentum soon". In May 2013, the President of the European Council, Mr Herman Van Rompuy, paid a landmark visit to Turkey, confirming the crucial importance of Turkey for the EU. We also saw an increase in the high-level bilateral visits, most notably with German Chancellor Angela Merkel paying her first official visit to Turkey in February 2013.

More profound developments, however, lie behind the fresh hope (so far a glimpse of it) for a constructive EU-Turkey re-engagement. Two are essentially changing the structural dynamics within Europe and between the EU and Turkey, offering new thinking on Turkey's accession and calling for more mutuality in this relationship: the Euro-zone crisis and (what began as) the Arab Spring. Both developments force policy makers on either side to adopt, beneath all the continued rhetoric, a more pragmatic and at the same time a more humble approach to each other.

First, the **Eurozone crisis** shook some fundamentals of the European construction. From the early days of the crisis (2009) on, many voices within Turkey have been arguing the collapse of an EU that Turkey may still

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At a time when Turkey maintained well above average growth rates, the government representatives in Turkey have not been so humble in their comments on a Europe on the brink of collapse, despite the Turkish economy's strong interdependence with the crisis-shaken European economy. Much of this seemed to stem from the emotional flashback of the perceived double standards a stronger EU applied to Turkey for long.

aspire to join; others have been pointing at the European leaders consumed in tackling the Eurozone crisis and pushing the already unpopular enlargement further down the agenda. At a time when Turkey maintained well above average growth rates, the government representatives in Turkey have not been so humble in their comments on a Europe on the brink of collapse⁶, despite the Turkish economy's strong interdependence with the crisis-shaken European economy. Much of this seemed to stem from the emotional flashback of the perceived double standards a stronger EU applied to Turkey for long.

Contrary to expectations, the Eurozone crisis did not have a fatal impact on the enlargement agenda. The EU renewed commitment to enlargement, with the accession of Croatia and the setting of a clear path for the Western Balkans by decisions to start membership talks with Serbia no later than January 2014 and to open the way for Kosovo to get closer to the EU (GAEC conclusions of June 2013). Part of the reason may well have been the projection that the next round of enlargement is not a short distance away, with years for the candidate and potential candidate countries to be ready for accession. However, functional arguments as well as arguments of principle are also at play.

Member States noted that “at a time when the European Union faces major challenges, the enlargement process continues to reinforce peace, democracy and stability in Europe and allows the EU to be better positioned to address global challenges and pursue its strategic interests” (GAEC conclusions of December 2012).

Turkey's accession is certainly the most tricky in the enlargement context where all argumentation, functional and/or of principles, has so far failed to secure a clear and overarching commitment from the EU member states. However, while Europe is slowly making her way out of one of the worst systemic crisis ever facing the Union, the modalities being developed to cope with the crisis and the debate pioneered by key Member States such as the UK on multiple forms of membership (multi-tier, multi-layered, multi-speed, etc.) may well offer new and more flexible formulations for the membership of Turkey, leaving the debate over “privileged partnership” permanently behind. The current government of Turkey expressed its affinity to the UK thinking on EU membership, with Prime Minister Erdoğan noting that if and when Turkey joins the EU, it would most likely opt-out of some of the common schemes, e.g. the Euro⁷. There is a need for enhanced participation of Turkey, at the political and intellectual levels (academics, journalists, think-tanks, etc.), in the debate on a post crisis Europe and the place of Turkey in it.

Second, what began as the **Arab Spring** and the ensuing developments in Syria and Egypt are having a transformative effect well beyond the borders of the Middle East and North Africa, forcing global re-thinking on support for

6 Best exemplified with Turkish Minister of EU Affairs Egemen Bağış's famous remark: “Hold on Europe, Turkey is coming to rescue” (Today's Zaman), 10 December 2010.

7 Turkish PM support 'Turkish-Lira' alternative to Eurozone (Hürriyet Daily News), 31 October 2012, <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/Default.aspx?pageID=238&nid=33629>.

peaceful transitions to democracy and presenting a major foreign policy challenge for Turkey and the EU alike. The EU response to this rapidly changing environment has been initially dubbed slow and weak, in the absence of common political positions among Member States and a lack of credibility in the region stemming from long standing policies putting stability above democracy. The profoundness and speed of developments have pushed the EU to revisit traditional policies towards the neighbourhood, which is still in the making⁸. Looking at Turkey, the pro-activism injected into Turkey's foreign policy, aspiring for regional influence and a place among global powers, experienced a major set-back with the deterioration of Turkey's potential for mediation and facilitation among many actors in her conflict-rich neighbourhood, beginning with the rift with Israel followed by her sharp positioning in conflicts (violent or non-violent) in the neighbouring countries (starting with Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Palestine.) The Turkish government's reaction to the military intervention in Egypt cemented the impression at home and abroad that Turkey's foreign policy is increasingly based on ideology, rather than the pragmatism of the heydays of the "zero problems with neighbours" policy, even if the Turkish government officials insist that Turkey is taking "principled positions" in the regional crises. Turkey is no longer seen as a neutral force in the region just at a time when stability does not seem to be coming soon and there is a need for credible outside powers to come into play. Much to her chagrin, Turkey has been steadily losing regional leverage and facing isolation.

8 For a detailed discussion on the EU response to the "Arab Spring" see *Re-thinking Western Policies in Light of the Arab Uprisings* (Istituto Affari Internazionali -IAI), 2012: http://www.iai.it/pdf/Quaderni/iairp_04.pdf.

The challenges posed by what began as the Arab Spring, and the Syrian and Egyptian crises are impossible to face alone not only for Turkey but also for the EU. Developments have brought about a more difficult foreign policy environment for both in their common neighbourhood. Despite the mutual frustrations over seemingly diverging positions, both Turkey and the EU have an interest to nurture the fragile democratic gains of the Arab Spring

The challenges posed by what began as the Arab Spring, and the Syrian and Egyptian crises are impossible to face alone not only for Turkey but also for the EU. Developments have brought about a more difficult foreign policy environment for both in their common neighbourhood. Despite the mutual frustrations over seemingly diverging positions, both Turkey and the EU have an interest to nurture the fragile democratic gains of the Arab Spring, beginning with the awakening in the minds of many that will no longer tolerate the repressive regimes of the past. It is evident that this will be a long process that would require to look beyond the turmoil and the democratic setbacks of today⁹. Turkey also has immediate security concerns over a long border shared with the conflict torn Syria, which could be expected to augment in the case of an outside military intervention. Just as developments in Syria forced Turkey to rediscover the virtues of cooperating with its traditional allies within the NATO framework, it appears that working closely with the West is the only option left for Turkey in terms of exercising any political influence it might have on Egypt. At the same time, in the past couple of years, the "model

9 *The Arab Spring: Has it failed?* (The Economist), 13 July 2013 <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21581734-despite-chaos-blood-and-democratic-setbacks-long-process-do-not-give-up>.

The discovery of natural resources in the Eastern Mediterranean need not be a liability but an opportunity for a comprehensive settlement. This was also stressed by the President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy during his visit to Cyprus in May 2012, where he pointed out that just as European integration was initiated with cooperation on coal and steel, the common interest of the two sides in exploiting natural resources could be funnelled into cooperation.

narrative” around a democratic Turkey with a consolidating economy setting an example for a region in transformation had been most compelling in forcing a renewed thinking on Turkey’s strategic importance among EU member states and pushed for the revitalization of the accession negotiations. This has been called into serious question with the increasing regional isolation of Turkey¹⁰, and more so after the ‘Gezi Park’ protests. However, Turkey still has resonance in the region, if not with the regimes, with the people¹¹. The strong economic development of Turkey and the achievements in the civilian control over the military continue to stand out. Developments in its immediate neighbourhood put not only Turkey’s security and political ties but also economic ties with Europe, Turkey’s largest trading partner, once again to the forefront with the setback in economic relations with the neighbours. The consolidation of political reforms and economic progress at home would re-boost Turkey’s potential to inspire others. This is most likely if Turkey demonstrates a firm commitment to full membership to the EU.

¹⁰ Semih Idiz, *Egypt Upheaval Deepens Turkey’s Regional Isolation* (Al-Monitor), 9 July 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/07/turkey-isolated-over-egypt.html#ixzz2fur5RjZ7>.

¹¹ Nora Fisher Onar, *From Model to Bystander and How to Bounce Back* (The German Marshall Fund of the United States, Foreign Policy Papers), July 2013.

Finally, developments in relation to the **Cyprus** issue, the major stumbling block in Turkey’s accession process, also offer new challenges and opportunities concurrently for EU-Turkey relations. The election to Cypriot presidency of Nicos Anastasiades was welcomed by Turkey for his “yes” vote to the Annan Plan in 2004 and his stated support for a loose federation. Despite more recent criticism over the delay in the resumption of settlement talks on the island (President Anastasiades asking for time to tackle the heavy economic crisis in Cyprus) and the escalation of tensions over the exploitation of the newly discovered natural resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Turkish government continues to hold a positive opinion of President Anastasiades¹². A new round of talks for a comprehensive settlement is expected to be launched before the end of 2013. The Turkish and Greek foreign ministers have endorsed the idea of chief negotiators of the two sides on the island visiting the two guarantor powers respectively (if realized, this would be the first official direct contact between Turkey and the Greek Cypriot community)¹³. The discovery of natural resources in the Eastern Mediterranean need not be a liability but an opportunity for a comprehensive settlement. This was also stressed by the President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy during his visit to Cyprus in May 2012, where he pointed out that

¹² Most recently Minister for EU Affairs Egemen Bağış welcomed the “brave messages of Greek Cypriot leader” Nicos Anastasiades who said his father had been brought up by the Turks, commenting that Anastasiades demonstrated “loyalty and courage despite the fact that he could have incurred strong reactions at home”. *We Are Aware Of His Brave Positions* (Milliyet daily), 24 July 2013.

¹³ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/consecutive-meetings-planned-in-greece-and-turkey-for-political-solution-in-cyprus.aspx?pageID=238&nID=55026&NewsCatID=338>.

just as European integration was initiated with cooperation on coal and steel, the common interest of the two sides in exploiting natural resources could be funnelled into cooperation. Economic as well as security considerations for regional developments weigh on the cost-benefit analysis over the exploitation of the gas reserves off the coasts of Cyprus, with Turkish-Cypriot-Israeli cooperation standing out as the optimal option both for its economic viability and political desirability (not only for the three parties, but also for the EU)¹⁴. Although long-time observers of the Cyprus issue have a hard time to be optimistic, current circumstances do have the potential to transform the moribund dynamics over a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus issue and help normalize the relations between Turkey and Cyprus. The lifting of the Cyprus' unilateral veto over some negotiating chapters with Turkey, following the change in the position of France, (notably on Chapter 15 on Energy, Chapter 23 on Judiciary and Fundamental Rights and Chapter 24 on Justice, Freedom and Security, that are mutually very important for the EU and Turkey) would help sustain the momentum in Turkey's accession to the EU. This would in turn only help facilitate a comprehensive settlement to the Cyprus issue.

THE AFTERMATH OF "GEZI PARK" PROTESTS

Is the revived flirtation between Turkey and the EU of Spring 2013 already a memory of the past? Will the fresh impetus injected to the EU-Turkey relations be short lived? These are the questions that occupy both European and

In fact, the political class in Turkey at large, including the opposition, is yet to capitalize on the lessons offered by the Gezi Park protests to push for the consolidation of democracy and freedoms for all in Turkey.

Turkish circles following the Gezi Park protests that shook Turkey end of May through July.

The heavy-handed government response to the Gezi Park protests, which began as a local environmental action turning into countrywide anti-government demonstrations, cast a major shadow over Turkey's image and put its hard-won economic stability achieved over a decade of political stability, thanks in part to the EU process, at risk. Turkey's track record of respect for and guaranteeing of fundamental rights and freedoms, already under scrutiny due to concerns over the freedom of expression and the press and shortcomings in the judicial system, has been put into question perhaps more strongly than ever since the launch of the accession negotiations in 2005. The protests displayed similarities both with the 'Occupy' movement and with the 'Arab Spring' in demands for active participation in decision making and for more democracy. The government in Turkey failed (chose) to comprehend the social opening that the protests brought about, instead formulating a reaction around threat perception. The government associated the protests with domestic and foreign (EU included) actors, envious of Turkey's economic and political rise (and an "interest rate lobby"), aiming to challenge the government and the leadership of Prime Minister Erdoğan. Hence, it ruled out the legality of protests and the legitimacy of the demands of protestors, endorsing excessive use of force by the security forces against the protestors. In fact, the political class in Turkey at large, including the

¹⁴ For a comprehensive discussion on Cypriot gas and the possibility of transforming this into a turning point towards the resolution of the Cyprus conflict see Michael Emerson, *Fishing for Gas and More in Cypriot Waters* (Insight Turkey), Vol. 15, No. 1, 2013.

offered by the Gezi Park protests to push for the consolidation of democracy and freedoms for all in Turkey. The continuing inability to forge consensus on a new constitution is a prime example of this failure.

At the same time, many economic analysts agree that while the Gezi Park protests did not shake the Turkish economy, it nevertheless further exposed the external vulnerability of the country¹⁵, with the plummeting of the Istanbul stock exchange by up to 10% and the depreciation of the Turkish lira by around 7% in the initial days of the spreading of protests across Turkey. Despite strong economic growth in the last decade, the Turkish economy suffers from persisting risks: a large and structural current account deficit, heavy reliance on short-term capital inflows and a private sector with large foreign currency liabilities¹⁶. The Gezi Park protests and the government's targeting of the domestic and foreign economic actors (the "interest rate lobby") dealt some blow to investor confidence (the medium to longer term impact on levels of foreign direct investment to be monitored.) The protests served to exacerbate the negative impact of the expected winding up of stimulus policies by the US Federal Reserve, pulling investors away from emerging markets such as Turkey.¹⁷

The immediate repercussions of the Gezi Park protests on EU-Turkey relations have been negative for Turkey's accession negotiations.

In a special sitting on the situation in Turkey on June 13, the European Parliament (EP) adopted a strongly worded resolution¹⁸, expressing deep concern at the disproportionate and excessive use of force by the Turkish police and other violations of the fundamental rights of citizens, "deploring" the reaction of the Turkish government-- naming Prime Minister Erdoğan in person for "contribution to further polarisation" by rejecting reconciliation. Prime Minister Erdoğan's response to the EP, cultivated on accumulated frustrations with the EU and domestic considerations, has been harsh. Pointing the finger at the "double standards" of the EU for not reacting to police conduct during recent demonstrations in some Member States, Erdoğan declared that he would not recognize a decision by the EP. At the same time, Prime Minister Erdoğan questioned the position of the EP to judge Turkey who is not a member state (but only a candidate!), missing the conditionality and intrusive nature of the accession process. At the June 2013 EU General Affairs Council Germany, backed by Austria and the Netherlands, pushed to suspend the opening of a new chapter (Chapter 22 on Regional Policies and Coordination of Structural Instruments), a step of very symbolic importance for the formal resumption of accession negotiations with Turkey. Part of the German motivation seems to have stemmed from domestic considerations before the federal elections in Germany on September 22. Normative objections were also at play, with the German Chancellor Angela Merkel's clear statement in her address to the Bundestag on June 27 that European values-- the freedom to demonstrate, the freedom of speech, the rule of law, the freedom of religion" are "non-negotiable".

¹⁵ According to the international rating agency Moody's, which granted Turkey "investment grade" status on 16 May 2013, Turkey has "some of the highest external vulnerabilities" among its peers.

¹⁶ *The Turkish economy Strong but vulnerable: Turkey remains highly exposed to loss of confidence by foreign investors* (Economist), 15 June 2013.

¹⁷ For more detailed analysis on the impact of Gezi protests on the Turkish economy see Economists Intelligence Unit – Turkey country reports, World Bank Turkey country forecasts.

¹⁸ *Situation in Turkey*: PE509.939 European Parliament resolution of 13 June 2013 on the situation in Turkey (2013/2664(RSP), Ref: P7-TA-PROV(2013)0277.

Regardless of the motivations, however, the attempt underestimated the level of frustration already prevailing inside Turkey around the stalemate in the accession process and could have had a fatal impact on the public support for the EU. The suspension was avoided, somewhat artificially, following a tacit compromise that the intergovernmental conference to kick off the actual work for the opening of Chapter 22 will only be convened following the European Commission's 2013 progress report on Turkey (just released on 16 October). Chancellor Merkel told the Bundestag that the outcome "makes clear that Turkey is an important partner".

On medium to long-term, however, the impact of the Gezi Park protests on EU-Turkey relations may not be all negative. The episodes following the Gezi Park protests (over the EP resolution and the opening of a new chapter) further fed the paranoia between policy makers on either side, in the case of Turkey the paranoia around the double standards and insincerity of the EU and in the case of the EU the paranoia around Turkey not having a real commitment to or meriting EU accession. The greatest concern in EU circles was the Turkish government's expressed understanding of democracy limiting political participation to elections¹⁹. At the same time, many voices inside the EU advocating a constructive re-engagement with Turkey for normative and pragmatic reasons, including for the EU to retain any leverage on Turkey, came out vocal in the aftermath of the Gezi Park protests. These voices were heard during the Turkey debate at the EP and the suspension of the opening of Chapter 22 could not have been overcome in the absence of the counter push by several Member States stressing the vitality

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of (re-)engaging with Turkey at such an important juncture for Turkish democracy, notwithstanding constructive criticism.

European observers stress that the Gezi Park protests have also been instrumental in changing the cliché perception of Turkey among the wider European public opinion²⁰. Turkey was a major topic of discussion among social media users in Europe, interacting with the Turkish counterparts in an unprecedented scale. Ordinary Europeans have been exposed to a new generation of urban Turks and a vibrant Turkish civil society, articulating demands for more democracy, freedoms and respect in ways that resonate particularly with young Europeans. The major political and societal transformation of the past two decades in Turkey, which have also enabled the Gezi Park protests, was all of a sudden more evident to European voters.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Developments at home as well as the unprecedented transformation going on in the common neighbourhood call for a constructive re-engagement between the EU and Turkey, one that rests on pragmatism and mutuality. Normative and functional arguments in favour of the re-vitalization of Turkey's accession to the EU are manifold. A clearer commitment from both sides is indispensable, while there is a balance of obligations, as repeatedly put by

¹⁹ Marc Pierini, *The International Fallout from the Gezi Crisis* (Carnegie Europe), 21 June 2013.

²⁰ Heather Grabbe, *Turkey's Twitter generation is its European future* (Centre for European Reform), 19 June 2013.

the European Commission Enlargement Commissioner Stephane Füle, to advance this relationship. Hence, the sustainability of momentum in Turkey's accession negotiations is as much about Turkey delivering on its reform commitments, as about the EU honouring its own commitments.

The Turkish government needs to grasp the moment to consolidate democracy at home and reciprocate the many voices in the EU supportive of her accession with an acceleration of reforms. The democratization package announced on 30 September is a promising step. The opposition, which has been equally frustrated with the long stalemate in the accession negotiations, also has a key role to play in keeping the government accountable for the slow pace of reforms and actively pushing the EU agenda ahead. Beyond the well-known frustrations over the political obstacles to Turkey's EU accession, societal polarization and a persistent lack of dialogue among political parties at home have been major impediments to a grand consensus on EU accession in Turkey. Yet, it is also the prospect of EU accession that stands to help Turkey overcome these symptoms. The on-going peace process in conjunction with the Kurdish Issue and the work on a new constitution offer a major opportunity for Turkey to consolidate its democracy and to foster its EU bid, hence expand its regional and global influence. The accession framework in turn would facilitate some of the more difficult reforms, as in the past, easing the pressure on the government and the opposition alike, while offering good practice and inspiration. The accession framework would also continue to serve for Turkey to preserve investor confidence, keep up the growth path and strengthen its competitiveness in the global markets, while Turkey would contribute to EU's

competitiveness. The busy election calendar of 2014-2015 need not jeopardize the strategic goals over the typically narrow interests pursued in Turkey's party politics in the run up to elections. A Turkey firmly anchored to a reform path and to EU accession remains Turkey's best bid to consolidate its democracy, economic development and its weight in international relations.

Despite the position of some Member States that still leave Turkey's membership to the EU in the limbo (the results of the latest election in Germany not expected to lead to a tangible change in the German position on Turkey's accession)²¹, last December's European Council clearly acknowledged the importance of "active and credible accession" negotiations with Turkey, as a country of key importance for the EU with its dynamic economy, strategic location and important regional role. The expressed motivation is to achieve the full potential (political and economic) of the EU-Turkey relationship and to ensure that the EU remains the benchmark for reforms in Turkey. The Member State's confirmation to proceed with the negotiations on Chapter 22 at the General Affairs Council of 22 October is a promising, important step. Opening of more chapters would unquestionably reaffirm the EU commitment to Turkey's accession. It is to the benefit of both the EU and Turkey, if Chapter 23 on Judiciary and Fundamental Rights and Chapter 24 on Justice, Freedom and Security follow, in line with the EU decision to tackle these chapters first in all accession negotiations. Equally important is to build on the already noteworthy achievements of the Positive Agenda, among others on visa free

²¹ For a discussion on the German position, see Gerhald Knaus and Christian Altfuldish, *The Pivotal Relationship: German Doubts and Turkish-EU Accession Process* (Istituto Affari Internazionali) No. 7, 14 March 2013.

travel for Turkish citizens, the improvement of the Customs Union for the good of both sides and cooperation on energy, issues which offer highly visible tangible benefits to build popular support for the EU-Turkey relationship. Overcoming the political and institutional barriers to more comprehensive foreign policy

cooperation is more pressing than ever given the profound transformation in the common neighbourhood of the EU and Turkey. Finally, sustaining a momentum in Turkey's accession to the EU would only help facilitate a long overdue comprehensive settlement to the Cyprus issue.



TESEV

Bankalar Cad.
Minerva Han, No: 2 Kat: 3
34420 Karaköy İstanbul
T +90 212 292 89 03
F +90 212 292 90 46
www.tesev.org.tr

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