



EU'S PROCRASTINATION OVER TURKEY'S MEMBERSHIP

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



The European Commission published its report on Turkey on April 17, 2018 titled '*The 2018 Turkey Country Report and the Enlargement Strategy Paper*' with inauspicious speculations. The report reasserts that, "Turkey should lift the state of emergency without delay".¹ According to the report, the un-proportionate measures taken since the attempted coup under the state of emergency for instance, widespread dismissals, arrests, and detentions are the cause of unease. So far, over 150, 000 people were taken into custody, 78 000 were arrested and over 110 000 civil servants were dismissed whilst, according to the authorities, some 40 000 were reinstated of which some 3 600 by decree.²

Key recommendations of the Council of Europe and its bodies are yet to be inscribed by Turkey. The report further argues that allegations of wrongdoings need to be established by transparent procedures and on an individual basis. The procedure is standard to outline how candidate countries have advanced in aligning with the European Union's (EU) political and technical criteria for accession and to chart their paths forward.

Turkey's rule of law has been constantly questioned by the EU in the recent years while making it difficult to concede any progress in their relationship. There is a sharp divide on Turkey in the West between those who think Turkey is getting closer to the Middle East and Islamic orientation, and thus moving away from the West. Already, during the AKP government, Turkey's influence had

¹ European Commission Press Release Database, March 17, 2018. <http://europa.eu>

² Ibid.

grown in the Middle East historically as it was based on the strategic depth doctrine and was called as Neo-Ottomanism. Nonetheless, the other school of thought takes Ankara's improved ties with its Islamic neighbors as a natural sequence towards balance and diversification.³ The report has illustrated a substantial regression in EU-Turkey relationship due to disappointing compliance of Turkey with the political criteria, administrative and judicial system, human and fundamental rights and fight against corruption and crime. Though, Turkey's commitment to migration and asylum policies is fairly acclaimed, yet, the membership of Turkey in EU seems more and more strenuous.

Turkey is one of the EU's main partners in the Middle East. From trade to NATO, EU and Turkey have enjoyed a productive relationship in many domains for decades. Known as the Ankara Agreement or the "Association Agreement", signed on September 12, 1963, both Turkey and the EU are members of the European Union-Turkey Customs Union. Turkey can trade goods and agricultural products with European Economic Community (EEC) countries without restrictions after having joined the Customs Union in 1996.⁴ In fact, EU is by far Turkey's largest export market (44.5%), while Turkey is the EU's fourth largest export market (4.4%).⁵

They also work together on issues such as migration. In March 2016, they concluded an agreement to tackle the migration crisis, which led to significantly fewer migrants reaching Europe illegally. The agreement reconfirmed their shared commitment to break the business model of smugglers and offered migrants an alternative to putting their lives at risk in their joint statement of March 18, 2016.⁶ It was an implementation of their joint action plan which was activated on November 29, 2015 as much progress was already achieved by then. Turkey had opened its labor market to Syrians under temporary protection. It had introduced new visa requirements for Syrians and other nationalities, stepped up security efforts by the Turkish coast guard and police and enhanced information sharing. On the other hand, the EU had also begun disbursing the 3 billion euro of the Facility for Refugees in Turkey for concrete projects and work has advanced on visa liberalization and in the accession talks, including the opening of Chapter 17 which illustrates the economic and monetary policy. On March 7, 2016, Turkey further agreed to accept the rapid return of all migrants not in need of international protection crossing from Turkey into Greece and to take back all irregular migrants intercepted in Turkish waters. Turkey and the EU also agreed to continue stepping

³ Leonnis N. Grigoriadis, "Islam and Democratization in Turkey: Secularism and Trust in a Divided Society", *Democratization*, Volume 16, 2009. www.tandfonline.com

⁴⁴ "EEC-Turkey Association Agreement An Protocols and Other Basic Texts", *Council of the European Committees*, Brussels, 1992, p.25. www.ab.gov.tr

⁵ "EU-Turkey: Anatomy of Difficult Relations", *News European Parliament*, March 3, 2017. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu>

⁶ "EU-Turkey statement 18 March, 2016", *European Council, Council of the European Union*, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu>

up measures against migrant smugglers and welcomed the establishment of the NATO activity in the Aegean Sea.⁷

Turkey has been an applicant to accede to the EU since 1987, and became an EU candidate country in Helsinki in 1999. The year 2005 was probably the most important turning point as it finally allowed Turkish citizens to see EU membership as a realistic goal since accession negotiations commenced the same year.⁸

The first seven years of Turkey's talks with the EU Commission remained unruffled. However, in 2012, when Cyprus assumed the Presidency of the EU from July to December, the downward trend in Turkey's overall relations with the EU was discernable. Already, the EU's acceptance of Cyprus as a member had created a bad taste, though it was not openly admitted. Turkey views that its people are already a part of the European family since it has more territory and citizens on European soil than several other EU countries such as, Cyprus which lies farther east than most of Turkey. The government of Cyprus, with its entirely Greek Cypriot administration failed to represent Cypriot Turks living on the island. It also hampered Turkey's accession by blocking 6 of the 35 accession chapters due to be discussed in membership talks.

Since 2016, accession negotiations have stalled. It is difficult to judge now whether future observers will still consider Turkey as a potential member for two very fundamental reasons: First, the EU is beginning to embark upon a fundamental transformation as to its own future. The Europeans are faced with two competing options: cooperating within the EU or outside of it. Second, Turkey's accession negotiations will take time in regaining momentum it had at the beginning of the accession negotiations in October 2005. In fact, not much progress was ever made. Only 16 out of 35 chapters have been opened and only one closed.

Besides, relations have turned even frostier since the recent past. Concerns have mounted over the rule of law and the state of democracy in Turkey with media outlets being closed and journalists being jailed. Distress is widely expressed about Turkey's military intervention in Syria. On the other hand, Turkey has hit out at Germany and The Netherlands for not allowing a campaign on Erdogan's referendum. The EU Parliament President Antonio Tajani tweeted that: "It is unacceptable that the President of Turkey referred to Nazism in relation to a democratic country. Germany fully

⁷ "EU-Turkey statement", 18 March, 2016, *European Council, council of the European Union*, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu>

⁸ Patrick R. Hugg, "Accession Aspirations Degenerate: A New Chapter for Turkey and the EU", *Washington University's Global Studies Law Review*", Volume 9, Issue 2. P. 229

guarantees all fundamental freedoms and with these comments, Erdogan offends all Europeans.”⁹ Earlier, Germany has for some time talked about alternative formulae such as "privileged partnership" and underlined the fact that accession negotiations did not guarantee full membership.¹⁰

Similarly, during the Presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy, France also opposed the accession. The EU has throughout accused and criticized Turkey for human rights violations and deficits in rule of law. After the Turkish government's crackdown following the failed coup d'état on July 15, 2016, negotiations effectively ended and no new chapters have been opened since then. MEP's had also adopted a resolution asking for the negotiations to be suspended till the time repression continues in Turkey. In 2017, EU officials said that planned Turkish policies violate the Copenhagen criteria of eligibility for an EU membership. They repeated their call for suspension in a resolution adopted in July 2017 due to continuing concerns about the human rights situation.¹¹ Although these resolutions are not binding, yet they send out an important signal.

The long and strained history of relationship between Turkey and the EU is defined by the Turkish expert Meltem Ahiska, "as an object of desire, as well as a source of frustration".¹² Kamal Atatürk, during his time of rule implemented a series of reforms in order to integrate the 'sick man of Europe' from the 19th and 20th century into the secularization and industrialization of the West, while realizing the common land border through the EU member states of Bulgaria and Greece. The post-Cold War period has seen a diversification of relations. Turkey is seeking to strengthen its regional presence in the Balkans, the Middle East and the Caucasus, as well as its historical goal of EU membership. The country took part in the Marshall Plan of 1947, became a member of the Council of Europe in 1949, and a member of NATO in 1952. Their formal relationship was established in 1959 and the institutional framework was shaped since the 1963 Ankara Agreement.

Although the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Paris in January 2018 to meet his French counterpart, Emmanuel Macron, yet the main discussion remained on Syria and America's move and recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital. The accession process remains as ambiguous due to the changing paradigms within EU ever since the Brexit and an evident preference towards populism and democratic illiberalism. Lack of common foreign and defense policies and the redefining role for the core countries, such as Germany, Italy and France, and the fragility of EU-US

⁹ "EU-Turkey: anatomy of difficult relations", *News European Parliament*, March 3, 2017.
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² "Accession of Turkey to the European Union", <https://ipfs.io>

relations have further complicated the situation to take any definite decision on Turkey's accession into the EU.