

# Common European values and interests are the basis of Turkey's EU membership process

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The European debate on Turkey's EU membership deviates often from its two main axes - European values and the EU's future - towards a web of emotional or secondary argumentation based on identity, geography or religion.

Article 6 of the Treaty establishing the EU stipulates that the "...Union (is) founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, principles which are common to the Member States".

Article 49 stipulates the procedure for the accession of new members: "Any European State which respects the principles set out in Article 6 may apply to become a member of the Union. It shall address its application to the Council, which shall act unanimously after consulting the Commission and after receiving the assent of the European Parliament, which shall act by an absolute majority of its component members."

## A matter of European principles

Turkey has already gone through this procedure. Its membership application was received confirming its qualification as a European State, with the unambiguous reference to its membership of the Council of Europe. Then all the competent EU institutions approved this candidacy. Following several turbulences on the way, this membership process has finally reached the stage of accession negotiations in 2005. At this point, it has also become clear that this would still be a "long and narrow road" as the popular Turkish poet Aşık Veysel would put it.

Nevertheless, a new approach emerged in Europe questioning the legitimacy of this membership road itself and provoked a public hostility against Turkey in many EU countries. Yet the EU's commitments vis-à-vis Turkey, or any other country, should not depend on shifting political moods following an election victory in a member state. *Pacta sunt servanda* is a

principle of European law and a matter of credibility and honor for the EU's positioning as a global actor.

## Public mood

In recent months many leading European politicians from Tony Blair to Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero and from Romano Prodi to Günter Verheugen, Carl Bildt and Javier Solana have repeatedly stressed how important Turkey's contribution will be to European Union's evolution as a global actor. Many other politicians including Nicholas Sarkozy expressed views hostile not only to Turkey's European perspectives, but also provoking a certain Turcophobia in their country.

Back in Turkey, the public ears have been more sensitive to negative voices than the positive ones. An increasingly euro-skeptic mood with nationalist emissions has been the corollary of this trend. The Turkish public's deep disappointment because of the EU's inability to keep its promises on Cyprus had already severely damaged the commanding presence of the pro-European trends in Turkey.

The EU first asked explicitly that Turkey adapt its own policy in support of the UN peace initiative in Cyprus, or else. Turkey did support this plan; Cypriots Turks voted "yes" to peace, to reunification and to Europe. But the opposition of the Greek Cypriot government produced a "no" vote in the southern part of the island and led to the accession of a divided country. Brussels then asked Ankara to treat Cyprus as a EU member. It also promised a law that was on preparation to put an end to the isolation of this community that had done nothing wrong other than taking for granted the EU's capacity to respect its commitments. However, once again the EU failed to keep its promises because of the veto by the Greek Cypriot government on this EU draft regulation.

Consequently, Turkey found itself in a trap, which benefited



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anti-European or anti-democratic currents in Turkey whose best friends have been Mr. Papadopoulos and the promoters of demagoguery against Turkey's European vocation. It is yet premature though to pass final judgments since history teaches us that politicians change their minds quite frequently as do public opinions.

**Accession equation**

The legitimate efforts to escape emotional outbursts and to increase the degree of rationality in Europe's "Turkey debate" were probably best expressed by Jacques Chirac in one of his last statements as the President of the French Republic: "A Turkey which will be fulfilling the criteria of membership will bring to the EU the critical size that it needs to face the global challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century".

In deconstructing this statement we find three major elements of the equation that will allow the enlargement of the EU's economic, regulatory, political and security areas to Turkey:

- Firstly the candidate country, Turkey itself has to be ready. This means broadly more democracy, economic growth, social development and legislative harmonization and less problems resulting from accession. The Turkish government's detailed action plan adopted in April 2007 offers a realistic road map in this respect. It requires the enhanced implementation of the democratic reforms, an extensive mobilization of the bureaucracy, openness to consultation of the major stakeholders from the civic society, business and social life and a sustained communication strategy both at the national and European levels.

- Secondly, the EU itself ought to be ready to attain a better degree of economic competitiveness and growth, succeed in institutional reforms, enhance political cohesion among members and preserve the universalism and the credibility of the European democratic ideals. These are Turkey's conditions for opting to become a full EU member.

- Thirdly, and probably most importantly, the international context should continue to justify an enlarged European single market and effective political unity on the world scene. Turkey, which will be ready for EU membership, is expected to contribute to the future success of the European project on several dimensions:

- Turkey's young, vibrant, rapidly emerging and geo-strategically well-located market will strengthen the European single market's global competitiveness in the face of emerging Asia-Pacific economic zone. It will also help revitalize the transatlantic relationship.

- As in the case of the EU-Turkey customs union, further integration will be a net generator of jobs in the EU's largest national economies such as Germany and France.

- The strategic location of Turkey will secure alternative European energy sources and supply routes and will be an asset for the Union's common foreign policy.

- A rapidly emerging entrepreneurial market and information society in Turkey will benefit Europe and its Lisbon agenda.

- The vacuity of the "clash of civilizations" scenarios will be highlighted, as the Pope's recent visit to Turkey illustrated how

relevant Turkey's constructive role might be in the post 9/11 world.

- Turkey's cooperation will greatly enhance the EU system of internal security against organized crime, illegal immigration and terrorism as well as Europe's security policies in the Middle East, Russia, Central Asia and beyond.

#### Economic road ahead

It is not yet the "economy stupid" momentum in Europe's Turkey debate. But assuming that within a few years we will have a EU that is economically, and thus socially more self-confident and institutionally more efficient, rationality may eventually and sufficiently prevail. In this respect, today's major economic trends will shape the framework of the accession negotiations. Over the next decade, Turkish governments' major challenges will be to maintain the high rate of economic growth, to reduce the size of the informal economy, to boost agricultural productivity, promote rural development and to introduce a comprehensive reform of the educational system.

When in April 2007 Turkey has entered into a phase of political turmoil over the election of the President of the Republic, the Turkish economy had the chance to prove its stability and relative independence from the political crises in Ankara. Over the past four years Turkey has scored a cumulative growth of about 30%. Most of this phenomenal growth is attributable to productivity increases. Turkey has generated 1 million 200 thousand jobs in 2006-2007. The speedy integration of the Turkish economy with European as well as global markets also put tremendous pressure on inefficient firms, small retailers and uncompetitive businesses. But as was predicted by many analyses of the Turkish economy published in 2004, the industrial sector successfully carried the burden of growth with modernization and capital investment.

Privatization revenues in 2006 exceeded 20 billion euros and the mess in the financial sector has been almost thoroughly cleaned. Turkey's exports grew by 54% over the same period. Imports have similarly grown by about 104%. Needless to say as a major trading partner of the EU, this growth performance means more trade and jobs in EU member countries. In 2006 the share of the industrial products in Turkey's exports have reached the level of 90%. These are mostly automotive, electronics, household



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These are the basic data that most of the political decision-makers in Europe do not know about Turkey let alone a common European citizen. Much of the economy is not agriculture based

anymore but there are still structural problems in rural areas. The size of Turkey's workforce engaged in agriculture is no longer above 50 per cent, as it was in 1989, but less than 30 per cent. The agriculture's share in the GDP is below 10% and, let's re-emphasize, more than 90% of the Turkish exports are industrial goods. The rural workforce of over 10 million people is larger than the population of several EU member states and its income levels are far below even the average for Turkey. Shifting it out of traditional agriculture and into modern economic activity requires enormous and prolonged structural reforms, but also it represents a window of new market opportunities for the EU.

With more than 60 percent of the population under the age of 35, the domestic market has a great potential for growth; the labor force is hard working and cost-effective; and its unique location gives it

access to Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East. More than 6.000 foreign companies have invested in Turkey. The government has, among other measures, decided to cut income and corporate taxes in order to attract more than 12 billion euro as foreign investment over the next three years. The Turkish economy is clearly modernizing much faster than anyone expected a generation ago. It has now attained a scale where it is a very significant trading partner for other European countries. The accession process is expected to increase the foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows to Turkey. Meanwhile the boom in tourism continues with over 20 million visitors per year.

Another good news of the year has been a spectacular increase in the registration of patents, designs and trademarks. As a result of the accession process to the European Union, Turkey has made major advances in intellectual property law. The representatives of the Turkish ICT sector claim to transform Turkey into a European technology production and services hub.

Turkey is expected to attain fifty percent of the EU's average per capita income by 2014. This is also now a target date to complete the journey in the orbit of membership.

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