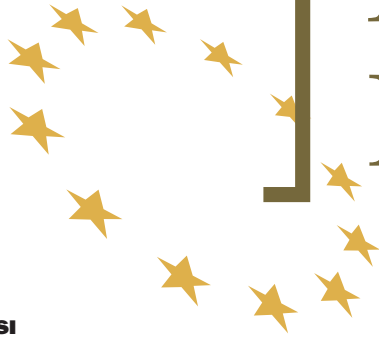


EU AND TURKEY



IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME

Bahadır Kaleağası

The debate on Turkey's EU accession process has persisted for such a long time that it risks melting like the clocks on Salvador Dali's famous painting. Thus, to start my analysis with its conclusions should not be considered too rushed:

- If negotiated well, Turkey's EU membership treaty may be ready to take effect by 2015.

This would be the corollary of a well implemented institutional process based on two essential official documents: the renewed version of the Accession Partnership for Turkey adopted in unanimity by the 27 EU member states in February 2008 and the National Program for the Adoption of the EU Law released by the Turkish government.

But the achievement of this goal by 2015 also implies that:

- If reformed expeditiously, Turkey may be ready for EU membership by 2014.
- If governed efficiently, the EU may be ready for an enlargement towards Turkey by 2012.
- If analyzed rationally, the international context already justifies such a historical move.

At present though, this process is still waiting to be re-launched. Following four years of passionate engagement, the EU-Turkey relations have been in a relative stalemate since the end of 2005. It is true that in the early hours of 4 October 2005, and officially still on 3 October, the EU Council of Ministers and the Turkish government had finally agreed on the terms for opening the negotiation process. The deal had involved a postponement of a "train crash" over the Cyprus question, an emphasis on the open-ended nature of the process ahead and a last minute revision of Croatia's war liabilities to let this country's accession process move forward in order to satisfy Austrian demands.

Since then a lot happened in Turkish politics with direct implications on the EU process. Almost immediately after negotiations were started, a so-called nationalist resurgence in public opinion surfaced. This was indeed a result of the government's lack of fortitude in pursuit of democratic reforms. Then came the imbroglio related to the legislative and presidential elections of 2007. Turkey's political agenda was distorted by political mismanagement, weak public communication, lost constitutional integrity, increased secular susceptibility, controversial cases before the Constitutional Court, ineffectual military meddling and uncontrolled political greed.

Brussels-Ankara axis

During the three years that followed the day of "3 and a half" October 2005, Ankara proved incapable of rapidly setting up an efficient system of relations with the EU. It inexplicably took several months to finally appoint a Chief-Negotiator, a responsibility which requires Europeanist credentials and credibility. Instead of going to a person who could devote his time fully and with full authority to the task at hand the job went to Mr. Ali Babacan as a supplementary responsibility. Mr. Babacan was then economy minister and now is in charge of foreign affairs. On the ground no other state reform, bureaucratic re-organization, the empowerment of the relevant authorities or a much-needed political mobilization were instigated since negotiations started.

Meanwhile, the relations were also severely hit because of some member countries' own political failures or pathological obsessions. The negative messages flowing from some member state capitals, the apparent appetite for double standards and the obvious reluctance to make a commitment to Turkish



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membership because of political expediency further broke the will of the government.

The negotiation process had thus been partly a victim of Ankara's lack of energy and commitment for the three "v"s: visionary, venturesome and vanguard-like. It is not yet time for "V" as in victory for Turkey's European struggle. The government did not show any forceful signs of leadership in producing, communicating and implementing tangible policies lately. The opposition parties have been inactive, generating no serious competition to the government and induce it to move forward. They failed to formulate better policy alternatives and thus to put pressure on the government for a more result-oriented EU membership strategy.

Indeed, the Turkish public administration had developed throughout the decades a significant experience and human capital dealing with the European files. Consequently, Turkey has today well elaborated roadmaps to lead the country in the institutional corridors that could help reach the membership target. Despite weak political leadership, the traffic between Ankara and Brussels has intensified to such an extent that Turkish Airlines finally found it expedient,

as well as profitable, to start direct flights between the two capitals avoiding a stop-over in Istanbul, literally as well as in figuratively.

Variable geo-strategy

Whereas progress in the institutional dimension of Turkey's EU accession process was negligible, the geo-strategic dimension of Turkey's European journey was brought to light in multiple ways:

- Even Nicholas Sarkozy, as the EU President for the second half of 2008, had the "pleasure" to emphasize Turkey's constructive role as an exporter of European security policies towards the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the Caucasus and the Middle East. In the consolidation of the Union for the Mediterranean project, pacification of the Russo-Georgian conflict, mediation of talks between Israel and Syria and the Lebanese-Syrian confidence-building initiatives, Turkey was actively engaged as a regional and European power. President Gül's historic visit to Armenia has also opened a wider room for maneuver for Turkey's external relations in a region marked not only by military

confrontation, but also considerable economic interests. Another success of the Turkish diplomacy is highlighted by the 151 votes, out of 193, that Turkey received in support of its bid to serve in the UN Security Council for 2009-



2010. Turkey won its seat from the contingent allocated to the European continent. Turkish diplomacy will almost be fully integrated to EU's foreign policy sphere with the eventual political deal between Greek and Turkish communities in Cyprus, a development cautiously expected within a few years.

- If Turkey plays increasingly a positive role in Europe's neighborhood, this is not only thanks to its military capacities, legacy of its NATO membership or Euro-Asian geography, but also on the basis of its sophisticated pluralistic identity. According to many European leaders such as Barroso, Zapatero, Bildt, Steinmeier, Brown and Karamanlis, Turkey's EU membership will obviously mean the most significant extension of Europe's cultural geo-strategic reach. From the

Turkey are among BUSINESSEUROPE's priorities for a globally more competitive EU. Increasingly economic and political leaders see beyond the EU's actual borders, a larger and better organized single market and political unity. Not only Turkey and the EU, but also the global economy needs that.

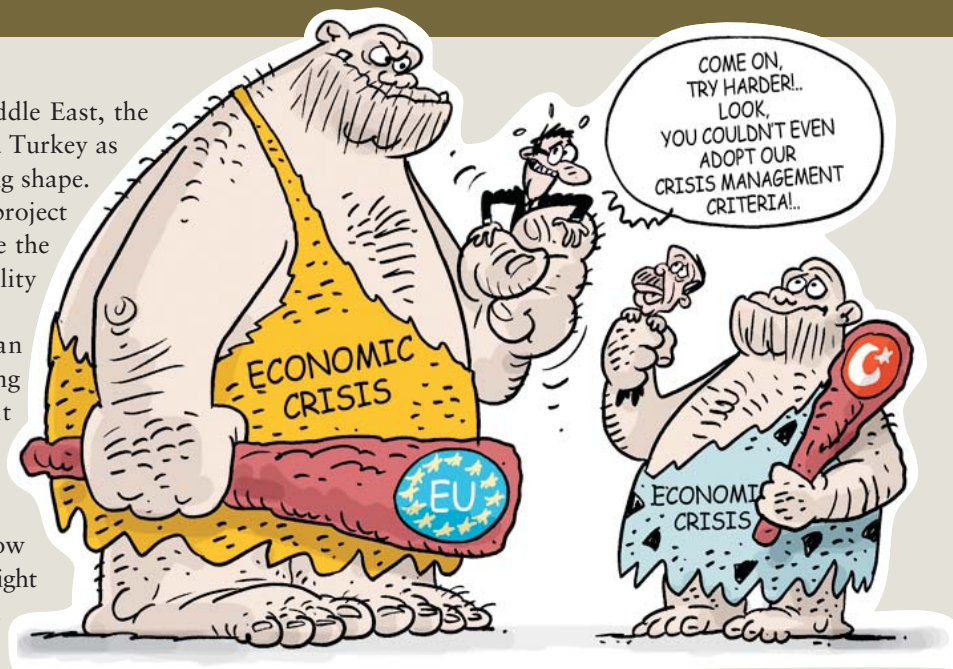
The economy strikes back

The existing customs union with the EU offers a solid ground on which it is easier for Turkey to build the economic dimension of the accession process. A recent report from Deutsche Bank pleads to rid the Turkey debate of dogma and to conduct a reasoned debate about the costs and benefits of the Turkish EU accession. "The most common economic argument against Turkish membership is the following: Turkey is too poor to join the EU. According to the World Bank data, per capita income is higher in Turkey than in Bulgaria and Romania, while Romania's agricultural sector is even larger than Turkey's as a share of GDP. On the other hand, Turkey has by far the largest share of its workforce deployed in agriculture (25% versus Poland's

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Balkans to the Caucasus and the Middle East, the perspective of a successfully integrated Turkey as a secular European democracy is taking shape. This is the anchor that the European project needs in order to enhance and radiate the universalism of its values and credibility of its soft power.

- The Confederation of European Business keeps encouraging and guiding the EU governments to implement reforms for a more entrepreneurial, innovative, energy-efficient, job-creating and growth-generating Europe. The global financial crisis re-emphasizes how the European business community was right in seeking more political leadership and vision. The enlargement to Croatia and



15%). Add to this the fact that Turkey's economy is larger in terms of GDP and population and it is clear that an unreformed EU agricultural policy could come under strain following the Turkish accession. (The same applies more generally to EU financial policies.) Should this not provide the EU with an incentive to reform what is in obvious need of reform? Will Turkey not have a much more modern and developed economy by the time it joins, making integration much more manageable?"

In fact, the combined effects of Turkey's customs union with the EU, its slowly but persistently progressing accession negotiations, its adherence to EU's co-operation programs in various fields from the scientific research to environmental protection and its society's self-determined European orientation create a triple advantage stimulating Turkey's integration to Europe:

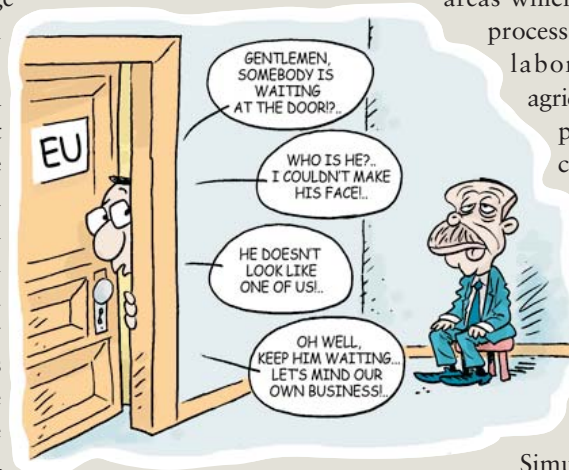
- First of all, the customs union involves not only the free movement of industrial goods but also the alignment of Turkey with several EU policies such as the external commercial policy, competition legislation, standards and certification, intellectual property rights ... All are among the domains traditionally at the origin of the toughest difficulties for the candidate countries. Moreover, Turkish companies exporting or operating worldwide are overwhelmingly acting as European companies in the way they function, produce and keep their accounts. As for the Turkish customers, they are increasingly demanding European standards.

- Secondly, being in a customs union with the EU has transformed the Turkish business landscape into a more transparent, predictable, resilient and competitive European field. Turkey has forged its status as the most dynamic and largest emerging market in and around Europe with an average growth rate of 7 percent in the last seven years. More than 90 percent of Turkey's exports are now industrial goods and it now ranks among the top five European countries in the sectors of automotive and parts, textile, household electronics, telecommunications, glass, cement, steel, ceramic tile, jewelry and private boat construction. From tourism to banking, the Turkish services sectors have also become globally competitive, the ICT sector has marked a yearly growth rate of 12 percent and the foreign direct investment flows to Turkey have jumped from 1.2 billion euros in 2001 to 16 billion euros in 2007. By 2008, Turkey demonstrated impressive resilience compared with the European average in facing the shock waves of the international financial crises.

- Last but not least, Turkey's economic integration to the EU highlights also an important political message: "all eventual scenarios other than full-membership are already part of the present situation and irrelevant for the future". The status quo is not sustainable in the EU-Turkey relationship. Just like the European integration process itself, Turkey's EU accession process is like a bicycle. You need to keep pedaling otherwise you would fall.

Timely challenges

A new momentum is crucially necessary in the EU-Turkey relationship. This will require a Turkey that is better focused to its European homework. Not only for the legislative alignment, but also in dealing with all other major reform areas which ought to support the integration process: public administration, education, labor market, informal economy, agriculture, regional development. On its part, the EU just needs to act more coherently, refrain from harming its credibility further, thus avoiding Turco-phobic political discourses for domestic consumption that manipulate public opinion. Turkey should expect the EU to proceed with the opening of all negotiation chapters once the reasonably formulated benchmarks are met.



Simultaneously, more attention should be paid to the task of better communicating the truth about the real meaning of enlarging the EU to the European public: "Turkey will be an EU member only when it will solve its problems in relation with the fulfillment of the conditions of membership and the contributions of this membership to Europe will have become evident". Presenting to the Turkish public a more rational and balanced view of a European future is also essential. As the Turkish Nobel literature laureate Orhan Pamuk warns, "fomenting hostility towards Turkey in Europe unfortunately leads to the development of a stifling, anti-European nationalism in Turkey."

The French novelist Marcel Proust had devoted his life to unraveling the mystery of time. He sought some permanence in a world where things, people, ideas, and feelings seemed ephemeral. Both for the EU and Turkey, extracting the permanent and the significant from the transitory and the trivial is the great challenge of the 21st century.

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