

TURKEY'S EUROPEAN FOREIGN POLICY

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The choice made by Turkey, its leaders and its social forces to link its future to that of Europe is not a recent one, nor was it in 1963 when the Association Agreement was signed with the Europe of the Six. This vocation has a much longer history. It was during the formation of the Turkish Republic—born out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire—that the country decided to cast its lot with Europe. The radical reforms undertaken by Kemal Atatürk to modernise and westernise the country reflected a deliberate choice to link Turkey's destiny to those of the other European democracies and is a strong affirmation of shared values.

The full effects of this decision did not become apparent until after the Second World War, when Turkey seriously began to establish links with Western Europe. She was among the first countries to join the Council of Europe and was one of the founding members of the organisation which became the OECD before becoming a member of NATO and signing the 1963 Ankara Agreement with the Six. The presentation of Turkey's official bid to become a full member of the European Community on April 14, 1987 was thus only a new stage in this process inspired by a natural and deliberate affiliation with the process of restructuring and unification of the countries of Western Europe.

Turkey's European campaign is centred on the multidimensional thrust of her foreign policy. It is the product of her geo-strategic position as well as the uniqueness of her character, an alloy of the successive civilisations that have reigned in Anatolia down through the centuries. She is thus in perfect harmony with her deep historical links with the Muslim countries of the Middle East and with the Mediterranean, with which she is constantly developing more links in every field. The same is also true for her neighbours in the Balkans, and more recently with the newly emerged Turkic republics of Central Asia, with whom she has historical links going far back into history.

The affirmation of these special secular links and of Turkey's diversified cultural identity stand out even more markedly in this new decade.

The collapse of communism in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe as well as in the USSR itself, the determined undertaking by some of these states to follow a path of pluralist democracy and market economy, the dissolution of the Soviet Union into independent and sovereign republics, the end of the confrontation between East and West and the struggles to influence the Middle East and the Mediterranean, all reinforce rather than weaken Turkey's position as a geo-strategic crossroads for the countries of Europe.

As a key component of its 'European' foreign policy, Turkey reaffirms her primary role in European security and defence affairs. From the beginning of the Cold War, she has played a vital part in the West's defence structure thanks to her geographic position providing her with common borders with the the Balkans, Syria, Iraq and the former Soviet Union. Geopolitical analysis tends to confirm this continuing strategic importance. The Gulf conflict and more recent confrontations in northern Iraq have underlined this. The importance of this stalwart of the West has also been underlined by the uncertainty and potential for instability in the Caucasus.

At the dawn of this new era, which brings hope for a state of peace and for good neighbourly relations not only in Europe but in the North-South dimension as well, from Siberia to the Middle East and the Mediterranean, the key role of Turkey is not limited to collective security arrangements. It extends to the multidimensional co-operation which will necessarily develop between the countries of Western Europe, the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, the new republics of the old Soviet Union and the countries of the Near and Middle East and the Mediterranean Basin.

After over thirty-two years, Turkey's relations of association with the European Union have reached a turning point with the completion of Customs Union on 1 January 1996. The formation of a Customs Union between Turkey and the EU was foreseen in the Association Agreement of 1963. This agreement which created the association between Turkey and the then European Economic Community envisaged three stages before reaching the finality of the Agreement, namely full membership of Turkey in the EU.

As of 1 January 1996, Turkey has fulfilled what was legally a binding obligation incumbent upon her and it could almost be said that the two partners have now been performing in the same single market for the past twelve months. At this point, it should be recalled that on 6 March 1995, while deciding on the completion of the Customs Union, the Association Council, which is the decision making body of Turkish-EU partnership, agreed also on a supplementary list of areas where the two parties should cooperate, including political dialogue and institutional co-operation. At that same date, the European Union made a declaration that it would take financial measures to alleviate the initial hardships which Turkey would face as a result of fully opening up its economy to Europe.

Looking at the first twelve months of the Customs Union, one observes with satisfaction that it functions rather smoothly, without any major technical problems. This assessment was shared by the European Commission in its report of October last submitted to the European parliament. There has been an expected increase in Turkish imports, while exports have risen more modestly. However, the share of consumer goods in Turkey's imports has been around 12 per cent, while industrial machinery, spare parts, raw materials and intermediate goods constituted the remaining 88 per cent, thus suggesting that Turkish industry is engaged in a remarkable investment effort in order to adjust itself to the requirements of the new competitive environment. In sum, while Turkey's clothing, automobile, pulp and paper, oil refining and steel industries underwent a decline in 1996, most other sectors of the Turkish economy performed rather well due to robust growth.

Aren't there any problems? Of course there are. Turkey has, by and large, carried out its obligations towards the EU under the Customs Union decision and is about to complete one or two outstanding requirements. The EU in contrast, has not honoured its own undertakings. For instance, financial co-operation, which is an essential component of the Customs Union, is not being implemented. In this context, it is inadmissible that the EU hide behind one particular member state's obstruction. Turkey has not negotiated the Customs Union with a particular member state, but with the EU. It is therefore up to the EU to overcome the present obstacle which Turkey sees as a purely internal matter for the Union. If a single member can block action by the Union, if it can prevent the whole from honouring its commitments, this cannot but erode the EU's credibility.

One should also point to another problem in this respect, which is the EU's conduct in matters which are not hindered by obstruction of any member state. Assistance to Turkey under the MEDA programme is a case in point. The MEDA programme is meant to provide development assistance to Mediterranean non-member countries and Turkey is the only recipient country that is subjected to an unacceptable discriminatory attitude, as a consequence of which the assistance provided to Turkey is far below the sums given to many other Mediterranean countries. And this lack of financial co-operation harms in the first place those Turkish small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) which face the formidable task of structural adjustment in order to cope with competition resulting from the Customs Union. So it is those SMEs and the workers they employ which suffer most from the non-implementation of the financial co-operation which was meant primarily to provide them with the assistance they so desperately need.

Institutional co-operation in various sectors that were also agreed upon has not been implemented either. Can there be any logic in the fact that the Association Council has not convened even once since the entry into force of the Customs Union, which requires ever deeper and sophisticated dialogue and co-operation between the partners it has linked with such strong bonds of interdependence?

The two issues that are frequently put forth as problems hindering Turkey's relations with the EU are Turkish-Greek relations and human rights. Concerning our relations with Greece, we are trying to help our neighbour realise that Turkish-Greek friendship and co-operation are to its benefit as well. But this requires the same will from both sides. Should Greece be able to show the courage to

refrain from fait accompli and engage in a constructive dialogue with Turkey and address all bilateral issues in order to seek solutions in conformity with international agreements, I don't see why we should not reach a compromise.

The same goes for Cyprus. What we lack in Cyprus is a will by the Greek Cypriot side to find a just and honourable solution to this protracted problem. How can a solution be reached if one side refuses dialogue? Another dimension of the Cyprus problem concerns its full membership of the EU.

As we have repeated time and again, there are two major conditions for this full membership to come true, Firstly, the Cyprus problem must be solved in a fashion acceptable to both communities. Secondly, according to the international agreements that established the Republic of Cyprus, this country cannot join the EU as long as Turkey is not a member as well.

As to human rights, it is one of our priorities in Turkey. We are steadily developing our standards in Turkey and we are determined to hoist these standards to the level of those in the EU. Turkey has modernised its legal system in recent years and the result is remarkable. The positive thing is that, all political parties in parliament are equally determined to continue the process of entrenching human rights and democracy in Turkey.

Some of Turkey's real friends who prefer to talk straightforwardly have started to confess recently that the real obstacles before Turkey's full integration with the European Union lie elsewhere. The real obstacle, they say, is the double fear that if and when Turkey becomes a full member, it would drain all the funds available to the EU, and that the free circulation of people that full membership entails would cause mass exoduses from Turkey to other member states.

Both fears are unjustified. First of all, a quick glance at the development of the Turkish economy during the last decade and a half shows that it has achieved an unequalled performance in terms of growth, in terms of exports, in terms of domestic demand, in terms of savings and most importantly in terms of employment. It is no wonder that the US Administration has designated Turkey as one of the ten Big Emerging Markets. And this remarkable achievement has been possible despite the fact that Turkey has not received any significant financial assistance from the EU since 1980. Turkey does not intend to make the EU meet the whole cost of its development and will adopt a realistic approach in this respect.

As far as free circulation of people is concerned, one must remember that one of Europe's biggest problems in the 1960's was the Italian worker. The creation of the Europe of the Six resolved the Italian problem and turned Italy into an economic power. The same thing has happened with Spain. So why not with Turkey, who already through her economic development and the explosion in her service sector has brought home many workers, a large number of whom are becoming employers in the service sector. Many Turkish workers in Germany for instance, are also becoming employers and even employing Germans from the East. Furthermore, free circulation can be regulated according to transition periods the length of which can be agreed on mutually. Spain has acquired this right only recently and nobody fears exodus from Spain.

Upon examining the eleven other applicants for EU membership, one sees that Turkey is the only candidate country that is also a NATO member; it is the only candidate country with a special economic relationship with the EU through the Customs Union, Turkey has the longest pending application and the oldest association agreement with the EU which has full membership as its ultimate objective.

Based on these facts, no country can have a stronger claim to accession to the EU.

For nearly half a century, Turkey and Western Europe have fought together for democracy, for freedom, for free markets. It is now time that we share the hard-won fruits of our common victory.

This a fateful decision for Europe and for Turkey.

The Turkish Republic has made its decision. Its citizens want to continue the 74 year old process that has moved the country towards the West. Now Europe must make its decision. When the list of candidates is issued and the map of Europe is drawn, Turkey must be included.

Any summary of the present stage of Turkish-EU relations points to the undeniable and unfortunate fact that our relations are totally weighed down by artificial issues. At the dawn of a new century, we cannot permit this to be so. We must all assume our responsibilities towards our future generations, for they shall be the ones to bear the consequences of our actions. Reducing relations between two of the most important actors on the global scene to a few minor issues, and letting the opportunity to build a Europe of stability, prosperity and peace slip through our hands will certainly be a mistake not to be forgiven by our grandchildren.