

**The Copenhagen Summit: A New Era or Another “Déjà Vu” for Turkey?**

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The historic Copenhagen Summit marked another milestone in the long history of relations between Turkey and the European Union (EU). Falling short of meeting Turkey’s expectations, the Copenhagen Conclusions will be decisive in devising new perspectives between Ankara and Brussels for at least a decade.

The process leading to the Summit has been one of the most exciting stories for a Turkish journalist with its ups and downs, victories, treasons, exchange of words, collapse of the DSP (Democratic Left Party)-MHP (Nationalist Movement Party) and ANAP (Motherland Party) coalition government and the new elections and finally the “real Europeans” call to Europe to return to its fundamentals pointing at the looming danger of Turkey as a potential member. Journalists of hard-working nature were more than happy to cover the story from its headquarters or epicenter, namely Brussels.

Covering Turkey while approaching Copenhagen was not only a challenging task for Turkish reporters but a constant source of thriller for foreign journalists as well. Turkey, without question, have been one of the most attractive piece of reporting for everyone in Brussels whether she or he be from print media or news channels or from diplomatic corps.

After all visits, promises, the U.S. lobbying on behalf of Turkey and the most important of all Ankara's strong will to revamp her system radically which was reflected to the reform packages, the Copenhagen Summit concluded:

“The Union encourages Turkey to pursue energetically its reform process. If the European Council in December 2004, on the basis of a report and a recommendation from the Commission, decides that Turkey fulfills the Copenhagen political criteria, the European Union will open accession negotiations with Turkey without delay.”<sup>1</sup>

Giving Turkey a conditional date to start accession talks in a bid to make Turkish candidacy meaningful, the EU made it clear that it did not bind itself or made no commitments at all concerning Turkey's EU bid by the Copenhagen conclusions.

This article aims to shed light on the developments that led to the above-referred Copenhagen Conclusions on Turkey from a perspective of a journalist who covered the story from inside, Brussels. Starting to cover the road to Copenhagen from the August 3<sup>rd</sup> reforms, the article will comment on the German elections, the Progress Report, the Turkish elections, the leader of AK Parti (Justice and Development Party) Recep Tayyip Erdogan's “tour de capitals”, the Chairman of European Convention Valery Giscard D'Estaing's interview to 4 big European news papers contending that a possible Turkish membership would mark the end of the Union and finally the Franco-German deal on the eve of the summit.

These events were all cardinal developments on the road to Copenhagen, each either contributing to the clarification of the formula that would be presented to Turkey or further complicating Ankara's precarious position.

It is also noteworthy to refer to the Cyprus problem as well. The EU decision to admit Greek Cypriots to the Club without mentioning the condition of a political settlement of the problem further added to the strains of Ankara. As the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan's plan was not endorsed by the President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) Rauf Denktas, EU leaders agreed on admitting only the Greek part of the island under the banner of Cyprus.

### **August 3<sup>rd</sup> Reforms**

I have to admit that like most of my colleagues, Turks and foreigners alike, I never expected the historic reform package to be passed on August 3<sup>rd</sup>. The reasons are several:

- 1- Despite the fact that MHP owned one of the three signatures beneath the National Program prepared in response to the Accession Partnership Document (APD) and presented to the European Union in March 2001, the party refused to endorse the reforms in the Parliament necessary to meet the Copenhagen political criteria.
- 2- There was already talk of early elections and the leaders of the coalition seemed to be on the brink of a compromise to hold the early general elections on Nov. 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2002. Leader of MHP, Devlet Bahçeli the owner of the proposal for Nov 3<sup>rd</sup> elections apparently put forward this date in a bid to block all the reform process. November 3<sup>rd</sup> was just in the middle of the Copenhagen Summit (12-13 December) and the publication of progress reports (9 October). Before the elections Turkey would not be able to pass the necessary legislation and after the elections the new government would not have enough time to pass and implement the new laws.
- 3- The leader of the coalition government Bülent Ecevit was ailing and despite rhetoric he did not push hard enough for the reforms since the Helsinki Summit of December 1999

by which Turkey was eventually declared a candidate. Bahçeli was against EU reforms as he saw Copenhagen criteria as a tool detrimental to the “indivisibility of the Turkish state”. Though Yılmaz, the leader of ANAP was the sole wholehearted European “missionary”, he was only the junior partner and the smallest portion of coalition government.

- 4- The government had already started to crumble amid talks that Ecevit was too ill to lead and there was a putsch in the making to topple him within his party.

Eurocrats were sure that Turkey would not be able to move on the path of reform let alone passing historic legislation from its Parliament. An aide of Mr. Günter Verheugen, the commissioner responsible for enlargement told Turkish reporters in late July, with a smile on his face, that everything was possible if the government could take the radical steps to abide by the Copenhagen criteria. He implied that Turkey could be given a date to start accession talks at the then-upcoming Copenhagen summit if the government was able to carry out the reforms and then implement them. For him, it was something as unconceivable as a Turkish spacecraft traveling to Mars. Folks in Brussels never had the slightest thought in their mind that Turkey would be able to take any meaningful steps in meeting the political criteria before they departed for their summer vacation in late July.

To everyone’s surprise, the coalition government managed to pass the August 3<sup>rd</sup> reforms after a prolonged and hotly debated session. By abolishing death penalty, granting the right of education and broadcasting in languages other than Turkish, paving the way for ethnic minorities to own property and amending the infamous article 312 of the Turkish penal code, the Turkish Parliament took a giant step in meeting Copenhagen political criteria sending waves of surprise to EU capitals in the middle of summer heat.

Turkey caught the European leaders off guard and the mood of astonishment was apparent from their statements. The Commission cautiously welcomed the development:

“The European Commission welcomes the adoption of the third EU Reform Package by the Turkish Parliament today as an important signal of the determination of the majority of Turkey's political leaders towards further alignment to the values and standards of the European Union (EU). The Turkish Parliament adopted these important decisions in record time and with an overwhelming majority. The Commission welcomes in particular the abolition of the death penalty; the allowance of broadcasting in different languages and dialects used traditionally by Turkish citizens in their daily lives and the improved education possibilities for minority languages. These reforms are significant steps towards better protection of human rights and the rights of minorities in Turkey.”<sup>2</sup>

Verheugen's statement was a bit awkward and irritating resonating the 19<sup>th</sup> century “white man's burden” approach to the African colonies. He was putting forward that without EU's lead Turkey would never be able to deliver the reforms.

“I welcome the courageous decision of the Turkish Parliament. This decision would not have been possible without a clear European perspective that the EU has developed for Turkey since the European Council of Helsinki in 1999. The Turkish decision also shows that the EU is right in being firm as regards human rights and the protection of minorities. Our position starts paying off. Not to give in on these issues makes our partners better understand why we so strongly defend our

values and that they are precious for us. As regards the abolition of death penalty, no doubt, Turkey is now on our side.”<sup>3</sup>

Top EU bureaucrats preferred to remind the Turks that it was the implementation that counted not the written laws instead of applauding the unprecedented step. They quickly switched to the position that they wanted to see the implementation before taking a firm decision on Turkey’s next stage of candidacy. The assessment of the implementation would be done in the Progress Report that would be out on October 9.

Though it is too early to place the August 3<sup>rd</sup> reforms in a historical perspective in terms of its significance and characterize it accordingly, it is fair to argue that these reforms will be remembered in the future as giant steps as historic as the Tanzimat Declaration (1839), Islahat Decree (1856) or even the first Constitution (1876). The history will eventually decide.

### **The German Elections: Schroeder vs. Stoiber**

Shots were fired as early as May in German elections making Turkey one of the basic “talking points” of the September elections. While the incumbent Gerhard Schroeder was clear in supporting Turkey’s vocation in the EU, his rival the leader of the Christian Democrats (CDU) Edmund Stoiber unequivocally declared that Turkey had no place in EU.<sup>4</sup> In early May in 2002, Stoiber while addressing a prominent audience in the German Embassy in London claimed that EU could never have borders either with Iraq or Iran pointing at the implausibility of a possible Turkish membership. Stoiber, instead, proposed a special partnership agreement with Turkey.

While there were several more elections around EU, the German elections became by far the most important for Turkey’s future EU vocation. First and foremost, Germany is the locomotive of the EU. Berlin has been providing one-third of the EU budget for years and in most cases has the final say on major decisions. After all, Turkey’s candidacy was made possible

only with the political demise of Helmut Kohl, the Christian Democrat leader and the undisputed German chancellor between 1982-1998. It was Kohl who strongly opposed granting Turkey the status of candidacy at the Luxembourg Summit in December 1997. Seeing another anti-Turkish right-wing German politician climbing the ladder of power would be yet another “déjà vu” type of nightmare for Turkey with the potential of dashing hopes of an eventual membership.

The fear among Turkish diplomats that Stoiber could be the next chancellor was certain. When asked what good another term of Schroeder could do to Turkey’s EU aspirations, a senior Turkish diplomat in Brussels said Turkey’s candidacy would be out of question as if the candidacy status granted in 1999 was a fake or questionable one.

Thanks to the floods that swept Central Europe including Germany in late summer of 2002 during which Schroeder rushed to the help victims personally and turned it into a public relations victory and the first wave of Turkish-origin German voters who largely cast their ballots for him, Schroeder came out of the September 22 elections as the victor.

There were speculations in Brussels that the outcome of the German elections would even influence the Progress Report on Turkey. If the Schroeder team would win, the speculation dictated, the Progress Report could be more attentive to the reforms in Turkey. Schroeder was reticent about the Turkish reforms apparently with the fear of giving his political rival Stoiber a chance to capitalize on before the elections.

By the time, Schroeder almost miraculously came out of the elections as the winner; Turkey was gearing up for the early general elections on the one hand and also struggling rather clumsily to implement the August 3<sup>rd</sup> reforms on the other.

## **The Progress Report and the Summit of Enlargement**

The Commission announced late September that progress reports would be published a week earlier than previously announced on October 9<sup>th</sup>. The reason was to give more time to leaders to assess the latest regarding ten candidate countries expected to be members by the end of the year 2002.

Now that Turkey had passed the historic August 3<sup>d</sup> reform package and the German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder won the September 22 elections, Turkey raised its expectations. Ankara declared on numerous occasions that she did her part and now it was EU's turn to respond. The type of the response was clear: to give a firm date to start accession talks. It was a fair request as Turkey was the only candidate country among the thirteen, which has not yet started the accession talks. A candidacy void of accession talks did not mean much as Turkey was singled out and discriminated on the basis of not having started accession negotiations. Former Spanish Foreign Minister Josep Pique I Camps bluntly set the score right during the summit in Seville in June 2002 and stressed that it was time to fill in Turkish candidacy.

When the EU leaders decided on the details on the next ten years of the Club in Nice in 2000, Turkey was once more excluded, as she had not yet started the talks!

The 2002 Progress Report, concisely, reported the positive developments in Turkey but it fell short of Ankara's expectations of recommending starting accession talks. The 147-page document gave an account of the reforms in detail and their implementation. However, it implied that Turkey had a long road ahead to go to start negotiations let alone a possible membership.

On October 9, the EU declared that 10 candidate countries, the Greek Cypriots being among them, were now ready for admission to the Club. Bulgaria and Romania were doing well and if they did their homework satisfactorily, they would be in by 2007. And finally on Turkey,



there was nothing concrete but fine words both from the Commission President Romano Prodi and the Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen.

The Report indicated that despite the “great leap forward” by Turkey to meet the Copenhagen criteria, she was far away from the target and thus did not deserve the date to start accession talks.

Putting salt on the wound, Verheugen elaborated on Turkey’s candidacy. While addressing the European Parliament on October 9, he underlined that until Bulgaria and Romania were in the Club by 2007, the enlargement would not have been complete. Again nothing concrete on Turkey. He continued his remarks in the Belgian *Le Soir*. In an interview with the daily, he argued that Turkey’s membership was still “a question mark.”

Conceding that Turkey has taken huge reform steps, EU nevertheless concluded that Turkey did not fully meet the political criteria. Brussels summarized why Turkey was away from meeting the criteria in three points:

“First, the reforms contain a number of significant limitations, which are set out in this report, on the full enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms. Important restrictions remain, notably, to freedom of expression, including in particular the written press and broadcasting, freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of association, freedom of religion and the right to legal redress.

Secondly, many of the reforms require the adoption of regulations or other administrative Measures, which should be in line with European standards. Some of these measures have already been introduced and others are being drawn up. To be effective, the reforms will need to be

implemented in practice by executive and judicial bodies at different levels throughout the country. The Commission considers that the decision of the High Electoral Board to prevent the leader of a major political party from participating in the November 3 General Elections does not reflect the spirit of the reforms.

Thirdly, a number of important issues arising under the political criteria have yet to be adequately addressed. These include the fight against torture and ill treatment, civilian control of the military, the situation of persons imprisoned for expressing non-violent opinions, and compliance with the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights. In the light of the noticeable progress made in recent years and of the remaining areas requiring further attention, Turkey is encouraged to pursue the reform process to strengthen democracy and the protection of human rights, in law and in practice. This will enable Turkey to overcome the remaining obstacles to full compliance with the political criteria.”<sup>5</sup>

...

“The Report was particularly interested in the military influence in Turkish politics and was not satisfied with the recent amendments. “ The constitutional amendment introducing changes to the composition and role of the National Security Council has been put into practice. Nonetheless, these changes do not appear to have modified the way in which the National Security Council operates in practice.» noted the Commission.<sup>6</sup>

Turks' reaction to Report was, in one word, disappointment. They rued Brussels for not being fair with Turkey. The dominant argument was that EU chose to turn a blind eye to developments in Turkey in its Progress Report despite the groundbreaking August 3 reforms. President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, the then Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit and the then deputy Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz, who was dubbed as the Champion of EU cause in Turkey, all criticized the Report as far away from responding Turkey's expectations. Former Foreign Minister Sükrü Sina Gürel went further and warned Brussels that Ankara could cut her relations with Brussels if there was no accession date from the upcoming Copenhagen Summit.

Despite heavy U.S. lobbying on behalf of Turkey, Ankara woefully could not get what she hoped for. The period between the publication of the progress report and the enlargement summit on 24-24 October summit, the prospects to start talks at the upcoming Copenhagen summit was grim. However, as the date for enlargement summit approached a change of mood was felt all across Europe on Turkey's possible membership. Most argues it was basically due to the enormous American pressure particularly on the Germans on behalf of Turkey.

Eventually, the enlargement summit ended with a quite positive paragraph on Turkey raising the prospects for a possible date at the Copenhagen. The summit said in its 6<sup>th</sup> paragraph:

“The Union welcomes the important steps taken by Turkey towards meeting the Copenhagen political criteria and the fact that Turkey has moved forward on the economic criteria and alignment with the *acquis*, as registered in the Commission's Regular Report. This has brought forward the opening of accession negotiations with Turkey. The Union encourages Turkey to pursue its reform process and to take further concrete steps in the direction of implementation, which will advance Turkey's accession in

accordance with the same principles and criteria as are applied to the other candidate States. The Council is invited to prepare in time for the Copenhagen European Council the elements for deciding on the next stage of Turkey's candidature, on the basis of the Commission's Strategy Paper and in accordance with the conclusions of the European Councils in Helsinki, Laeken and Seville.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Elections and D’Estaing’s offensive**

Meanwhile, Turkey went to elections amid the intense debate of Turkey’s EU vocation all around Europe. As a result, AK Parti (Justice and Development Party) got an unexpected percent of 34 % of the votes and came to power as a single party majority for the first time in the last 11 years. Despite very pro-EU statements of both Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the leader of the party and the senior figures of AKP, EU cautiously welcomed the election results. Bearing in the mind the Islamic roots of AK Parti, the reception of the election across Europe results was somewhat confused. The Commission declared that it was ready to work with the new government on 4 November 2002.

“The Commission takes note of the outcome of the democratic elections that took place in Turkey and is ready to co-operate with the new government. It also takes note that the two parties that will be represented in the Grand National Assembly have clearly indicated that they want to pursue a pro-European policy. The Commission expects Turkey to confirm its commitments to reforms in order to comply with the EU-accession criteria.

As with previous governments in Turkey and in the same way as with all the other candidate countries, the Commission will continue to monitor closely the progress made, with particular attention to action taken in practice.”<sup>8</sup>

While AK Parti was gearing up its preparations to start a European wide “tour de capitals”, the Chairman of European Convention D’Estaing unleashed his offensive against Turkey on November 8. The timing could not have been more convenient: the election has just concluded with no government in sight yet and the undisputed winner of the elections had a strong Islamic background.

The former French President is well known for his anti-Turkish opinions. As a leading European Christian Democrat D’Estaing has on numerous occasions openly criticized European leaders who took the decision of Turkey’s candidacy at the Helsinki Summit in 1999. On November 8, D’Estaing’s interview published on 4 European prestigious newspapers triggered an unprecedented wave of discussions on a possible Turkish membership.<sup>9</sup>

In the interview, D’Estaing argued that Turkey’s membership would be the end of the Club as Turkey was a non-European country with its vast majority of territory and her capital being in Asia rather than Europe. He also accused those who supported Turkey’s bid as being anti-EU, implicitly fingerpointing at Washington.

D’Estaing’s interview quickly stirred a heated debate on Turkey. From November 8 until the Copenhagen summit, it was possible to see an article on Turkey in one or several of the major European papers on a daily basis. Though D’Estaing’s remarks were dismissed by the Commission and the Council, nevertheless he received strong backing from Christian

Democrats. It also helped galvanize the mostly silent pro-Turkish circles. They came out and condemned D'Estaing's remarks as racist and discriminatory.

Verheugen slammed D'Estaing's interview and accused him of damaging EU's credibility. Those who supported D'Estaing argued that the decision on Turkey's candidacy at the Helsinki Summit was a sort of "fait accompli" of the leaders pointing at the lack of public debate on Turkey's prospects. To them, to prevent another 'fait accompli' on Turkey by EU leaders, D'Estaing had unleashed a preemptive strike. The debate surfaced the deep-rooted anti-Turkish sentiments among the European people, particularly in the right-wing groups.

### **Erdogan's "tour de capitals" and the Franco-German deal**

On the eve of the enlargement summit, Abdullah Gül, the future prime minister but the right-hand man of Erdogan at the time delivered a speech at the prestigious Center For European Policy Studies (CEPS) in Brussels. Challenging the conventional opinion of European ideas on his party, a self confident Gül declared that they would quickly move to pass laws and implement them to comply with the Copenhagen criteria if they would come to power as a single party majority. In that meeting, Gül assured his European audience that their priority would be relations with EU and their first visit abroad would be to Europe rather than the Islamic world unlike their predecessor, the former Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan.

Sticking to their promises, Erdogan began his 14-country 'tour de capitals' (except Austria as they had general elections) in the wake of their electoral victory and on the eve of the Copenhagen summit. Encouraged by the latest positive signals from EU leaders, Erdogan firstly wanted to further push Turkey's agenda for a possible firm date and secondly worked hard to convince EU leaders that AK Parti was not an Islamic party let alone a fundamentalist one.

His press meeting in Brussels late November highlighted AK Parti's attitude to Islam. Stressing that Islam could not bear any "taints", Erdogan strongly argued that a name of a great religion could not be the title of a political party.

Erdogan's balanced reaction to D'Estaing's eerie interview, pausing his fasting during his visit to Italy, his non-conventional and pro-solution approach to many ossified foreign affairs issues left positive residues in European capitals. His 'speedy' visits were also a sort of relief for laymen Turks to see such a dynamic political leader after so many years of an ailing prime minister in the office.

Though Erdogan was not able to enlist the support of majority of European leaders, he accelerated the debates on Turkey. When he got back home, only Britain, Italy, Spain and Greece's support were guaranteed out of 15. The two big shots were reluctant to give Turkey a firm date. While Germans offered a 'date for date', the French did not show their hands.

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and French President Jacques Chirac met on December 4 in a town near Berlin and spelled out their formula for Turkey: in December 2004, with the agreement and recommendation of the Commission, it could be considered whether Turkey has "completely respected" the Copenhagen criteria. If this is the case, then negotiations could begin "from July 2005".<sup>10</sup> The Franco-German deal was by far short of Turkey's expectations, which was seeking a date in 2003. The bottom-line for Ankara to start talks was May 1, 2004 as after that date the new ten members including the Greek Cypriots would take their seat in the decision-making mechanisms of EU institutions. In this case, Turkey would have to negotiate with a club of 25 instead of 15 to start accessions talks. Most probably, the new members who are all less prosper than the current members would be reluctant to share their portion of the pie.

The government reacted strongly to the Franco-German deal and declared that it would be a double standard if the European Council would endorse it at the summit. At his last stop in his 'tour de capitals' in Copenhagen, the holder of the EU presidency, Erdogan warned that EU would bear the consequences if there was no date. Backing Turkey's position, the British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw announced that if Turkey was not given a date, that would be perceived as a religious discrimination. U.S. backing was stronger than ever leading to reactions from some EU leaders. It was clear that Turkey had played her hand as strongly as she can on the eve of the summit.

### **The Fateful Copenhagen Summit**

EU was expected to crystallize and seal its decision on Turkey in its General Affairs Council held 2 days ago before the Summit in Brussels. Though the Franco-German deal seemed to be gaining momentum, the Brits and Italians stayed firm on their position that Turkey should be given a date to start accession talks either in late 2003 or early 2004. Foreign ministers could not get the compromise they strived for and gave the floor to their leaders to give the verdict on Turkey.

It was clear that Turkey would be one of the two top stories of the summit, the other one being the financing of the enlargement. In a last effort, both Erdogan and Gül held a series of meetings with EU leaders, namely the Greek PM Costas Simitis, the Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi, the British PM Tony Blair, the German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and the French President Jacques Chirac on the first date of the summit. Both Gül and the top diplomats were hopeful that Turkey would get what she deserved.

However, when the Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen started his press meeting very lately, he declared that EU would consider starting accession talks in December



2004 on the basis of the Progress Report of 2004. Uproar echoed in the press room and Turkish journalists without being pointed at by the spokesperson raised their voice and asked the PM “but when?” Rasmussen retorted; “the answer is simple, as soon as Turkey is ready”.

Almost 200 Turkish journalists, the largest group of press corps covering the event, were deeply disappointed. When the draft conclusions were out on December 13<sup>th</sup>, Turkish journalists were divided into two: those who were arguing that paragraph on Turkey was something positive and the others indicating that there was nothing concrete in the part on Turkey’s candidacy. Gül made a strong statement in the morning and declared the conclusions as “unacceptable”.

While eyes were turned to Gül’s press meeting, Turkish diplomats were trying to better the wording as their EU counterparts were doing their best to avert a crisis between Turkey and EU that would certainly and seriously shadow the success of the summit. The possibility of a dispute between Turkey and the EU could lead to another Luxembourg process during which Turkey cut off her political dialogue with Brussels reacting to EU leaders decision in Luxembourg in 1997 to exclude Turkey from candidacy.

However, Gül toned down his reaction in the press meeting and played down his earlier strong statement in a clear bid to limit the damage. He said he was not content with the conclusion but worked hard not to use any word like “double-standards” even “disappointment”. It became apparent that the government was ready to swallow the result with minor amendments.

In the afternoon of December 13, journalists were informed about “the minor amendment”. EU leaders agreed to insert “without delay” phrase to the Turkish paragraph, which meant that if the EU Council in December 2004 would decide to start accession talks, that would be done immediately. As a result, accession talks could start in January 2005. Meanwhile EU

unanimously agreed on admitting only the Greek part of Cyprus against all the warnings from Ankara.

### **Conclusion: What Next?**

Turkey clearly could not get what she asked for from the Copenhagen Summit, plus Greek Cypriots are now a member. Copenhagen conclusions pose several serious questions to be answered for a fruitful future of Ankara-Brussels relations.

First and foremost Turkey has now to face, bargain and negotiate with 25 countries, the new 10 being hungry for EU funds. The newcomers will be most probably willing to delay as long as possible the others candidates entry to the Club.

In case of an impasse on Cyprus, the Greek Cypriots could wield extremely strong power to block everything pertaining to Turkey with its veto. Greek Cypriots would start contributing to EU decision-making as a full member starting from May 1, 2004. That was why Turkey insisted to get a date before May 2004.

According to the Helsinki Conclusions, Turkey and Greece have to take their border disputes to the International Court of Justice, if they cannot sort out them bilaterally until 2004. It is a strong possibility that Aegean disputes could be put to Turkey as a new condition. By the most optimistic estimate, the date to start accession talks in 2005 will play into the hands of Greeks. Athens will now prefer to solve her problems with Turkey through EU rather than by bilateral means.

Last but not the least, if Turkey could finally start accession talks in early 2005, it would have taken 6 years just to start talks and God knows how many years will it take for an eventual membership. Considering the ever-changing nature of EU institutions, EU would be a very different club if Turkey could be a member one day.

Nevertheless, European perspective is extremely important for countries like Turkey whose internal dynamics have been so futile for the last several centuries to revamp herself. EU goal has certainly become an undisputed motive for radical reform Turkey has dreamed for so long. That is why I think Ankara did a good thing by not reacting too strongly and damage her relations with Brussels in the wake of the tantalizing Copenhagen conclusions.

Turkey, now, has to focus on her reform program to catch up with the Copenhagen criteria not only by passing laws but implementing them as well not to miss her rendezvous with EU once again in December 2005. If EU again opts for ways and means to delay Turkey's membership, then Brussels will register that EU is an exclusively Christian Club and Muslims have no vocation in it.

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## NOTES<sup>11</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> Presidency Conclusions, Copenhagen European Council, (Copenhagen, 12 & 13 December 2002), p. 5, accessible via: <http://ue.eu.int/newsroom/makeFrame.asp?MAX=&BID=76&DID=73774&LANG=1&File=/pressData/en/ec/73774.pdf&Picture=0>

<sup>2</sup> Commission welcomes package of reforms in Turkey, (Brussels, 4 August 2002), accessible via [http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p\\_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/02/1197|0|AGED&lg=EN&display=](http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/02/1197|0|AGED&lg=EN&display=)

<sup>3</sup> op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> See Financial Times, 17 May 2002

<sup>5</sup> Strategy Paper, (Brussels, 9 October 2002), p. 84-85, accessible via: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report2002/strategy\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report2002/strategy_en.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> op. cit. p. 84

<sup>7</sup> Presidency Conclusions, Brussels European Council, (Brussels, 24&25 October 2002), p. 3, accessible via: <http://ue.eu.int/en/Info/eurocouncil/index.htm>

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<sup>8</sup> Commission Reaction After Elections in Turkey, (Brussels, 4 November 2002), accessible via: [http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p\\_action.gettxt=gt&doc=P/02/1604|0|RAPID &lg=EN](http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=P/02/1604|0|RAPID &lg=EN);

<sup>9</sup> See EU Observer, accessible via : <http://www.euobserver.com/index.phtml?aid=8315>

<sup>10</sup> See EU Observer, accessible via: <http://www.euobserver.com/index.phtml?aid=8658>

<sup>11</sup> All internet sites have been gone through between December 29, 2002 and January, 05 2003.