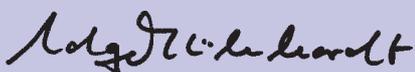


## EDITORIAL

Absorption capacity - a strange technical term describes the vexing problem in the current phase of European integration. More than ever the effects of European integration are felt in all member states, in their societies as well as in their political systems. In a way, this has always been the goal of integration. But now, as European integration is getting serious, people begin to have second thoughts. They express fear of losing autonomous powers to act, live and plan their future while politicians echo the same strange fear with a mixture of timidity, repetitious rhetoric and a certain helplessness in explaining the new rationale of European integration in a new century and in the world of globalization.

As a consequence, the search begins for clear-cut definitions of absorption capacities! These must remain futile efforts in view of the dynamic character of integration (and in fact of life itself). Measuring absorption capacities in view of a static notion of the current stage of European integration and the world around Europe is a strange, myopic effort. The world is moving faster than ever and does not wait for Europe to get its act together.

Europe is therefore well advised to go beyond the current period of conceptualizing and defining absorption capacities of European integration if the EU wants to remain (or wants to become again) a strong and serious actor on the world scene. But for the time being, absorption capacities of European integration seem to be a pet project of those who are afraid of the effects of their own deeds and curse European integration for things which in fact their own national governments and the leftovers of their respective sovereignty have caused. This is a sad, but hopefully only transitory stage of integration. It is a stage between two rationales of European integration: domestic reconciliation and global presence.



Prof. Dr. Ludger Kühnhardt  
Director at the Center for European Integration Studies (ZEI)



*Ursula Plassnik, Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, and José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, at the Spring European Council. Under the Austrian Presidency the first chapter, science and research, is opened for negotiations and closed provisionally the same day.*  
European Community

## THE ACTUAL BEGINNING OF NEGOTIATIONS

### Ahead of schedule, behind expectations?

Andreas Marchetti and Volkan Altintas

The Austrian Presidency has been criticised as well as acclaimed for its outstanding style. But the public focus on the classiness of the Presidency has somewhat veiled the look at the concrete accomplishments of the first half of 2006. Although the constitutional crisis has not yet been resolved, the EU has taken some other decisive steps. Among one of the most controversially discussed issues features the agreement on the Services Directive. It allows for a better implementation and development of the internal market. By no means less sensitive was the conclusion of the Financial Perspective 2007-2013. With the eventual approval by the European Parliament, the Union has determined its budget and projected priorities for the coming years. From a Turkish perspective, the actual start of

accession negotiations with the EU has certainly been the most important event.

From 3 October 2005 up to 12 June 2006, the negotiation process has only consisted of the screening of the *acquis communautaire*, subdivided into 35 distinct chapters. This screening process not only includes an examination and explanation of the Union's *acquis*. It also provides for a forum to already assess and address issues that will be likely to come up during the actual negotiations. This process, which will take approximately ten years, has been started on 12 June 2006 with the opening and provisional closure of the chapter on science and research. However, a closer look at the June meeting sheds light as well as shadows on this accomplishment.

From a Turkish perspective it can be positively noted that the start of actual

negotiations could already be realised under the Austrian presidency. After all, it was Austria that almost put at peril the beginning of the negotiation process in October 2005: In a game of traditional EU bargaining, Austria only agreed on the opening of negotiations with Turkey under the condition that negotiations were also started with Croatia. The initial schedule foresaw that screening would take about a year and actual negotiations could probably start in the second half of 2006. Although a vast majority of Austrians are very sceptical when it comes to Turkey's EU aspirations - a position widely shared by politicians - the government in its role as acting EU Presidency seemingly sped up the process so that the first chapter could already be opened and provisionally closed in the first half of 2006. This clearly indicates that the momentum is kept high by those responsible, trying to prevent a slowing down of the process.

Certainly, the opening and closure of the chapter on science and research was merely a symbolic act since there is no substantial EU legislation in this area. However, even this rather symbolic act was

not an easy task. The scheduled opening and closure of the chapter on 12 June was put into question by the Cypriot government. It first refused agreement because of the continuous non-recognition by Turkey. As a consequence, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Abdullah Gül, did not leave for Luxembourg until agreement from Nicosia was assured. The incident illustrates that the differences over Cyprus hang like the sword of Damocles over the entire process: Cyprus demands official recognition by Turkey and access to Turkish harbours and airports; Turkey demands putting an end to the isolation of Northern Cyprus and emphasises that it was the Greek side of the island that rejected the UN's plan in 2004.<sup>1</sup>

Cyprus will definitely be a decisive factor in the process: It will show how far Turkey is willing and able to go - with Turkish elections approaching and domestic support for an EU membership in constant decline, there seems to be less and less room for manoeuvre; It will also show how sincerely the EU wishes to solve the problem and to support Turkey in its quest for membership. After all, leaving the Cyprus question open

offers an exit option at any stage - an option, maybe *both* sides might want to retain. The decline of support in Turkey surely is one factor responsible for the fact that "the reform process has lost its momentum"<sup>2</sup> as assessed by the Commission. On the other hand, with the first chapter provisionally closed now, the Commission has emphasised that "expectations of Turkey have naturally increased." The Commission's progress report due to be published later this year will surely be quite critical. It can be taken for granted that Cyprus will be only one among various concerns mentioned.

1) See also Philip Gordon/Omer Taspinar: Turkey on the Brink, in: *The Washington Quarterly*, 29,3 (2006), pp. 63f.

2) For this and the following citation see Olli Rehn: "Turkey: state of play of the accession process", European Parliament, AFET Committee, SPEECH/06/392, Brussels 20 June 2006, available at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/06/392>.

Andreas Marchetti is Research Fellow at ZEI, Volkan Altintas is Junior Fellow at ZEI

## ZEI ACTIVITIES

The German *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* published an interview with ZEI Research Fellow Andreas Marchetti on the challenges for EU-Turkey relations. The interview is online at: [http://www.bpb.de/themen/1AP4XW,0,Beitrittsperspektive\\_stellt\\_zweifelhafte\\_EUPolitiken\\_in\\_Frage.html](http://www.bpb.de/themen/1AP4XW,0,Beitrittsperspektive_stellt_zweifelhafte_EUPolitiken_in_Frage.html).

In May ZEI Junior Fellow Volkan Altintas participated in this year's European Weekend School (EWS 2006): "The Future of European Union and Turkey's Accession Perspectives" at Bogazici University, Jean Monnet Center of Excellence, Istanbul.

In an article, entitled "Widening without Enlarging. The European Neighbourhood Policy and the South Caucasus", published in the Summer issue of *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, ZEI Research Fellow Andreas Marchetti argues that the South Caucasus - although it has only recently been included in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) - is of particular interest to the EU because of its geographic location and its energy resources. Since the ENP can be understood as a geopolitical policy intended to create a semi-periphery between the EU and its periphery, the EU seems determined to widen its scope yet at the same time excluding further enlargement. The South Caucasus fits well into this concept, however the approach needs to be clarified and incentives enhanced. The article is available at: [http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi\\_turkey\\_tpq\\_id\\_63.pdf](http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_turkey_tpq_id_63.pdf).

## CURRENT SCREENING STATUS

No.	Title of chapter	Explanatory Meeting	Detailed Meeting
1	Free movement of goods	●	●
2	Freedom of movement for workers	●	●
3	Right of establishment and freedom to provide services	●	●
4	Free movement of capital	●	●
5	Public procurement	●	●
6	Company law	●	●
7	Intellectual property law	●	●
8	Competition policy	●	●
9	Financial services	●	●
10	Information society and media	●	●
11	Agriculture and rural development	●	●
12	Food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy	●	●
13	Fisheries	●	●
14	Transport policy	●	●
15	Energy	●	●
16	Taxation	●	●
17	Economic and monetary policy	●	●
18	Statistics	●	●
19	Social policy and employment	●	●
20	Enterprise and industrial policy	●	●
21	Trans-European networks	●	●
22	Regional policy and coordination of structural instruments	●	●
23	Judiciary and fundamental rights	●	●
24	Justice, freedom and security	●	●
25	Science and research	●	●
26	Education and culture	●	●
27	Environment	●	●
28	Consumer and health protection	●	●
29	Customs union	●	●
30	External relations	●	●
31	Foreign, security and defence policy	●	●
32	Financial control	●	●
33	Financial and budgetary provisions	●	●
34	Institutions	●	●
35	Other issues	●	●

Legend: ● accomplished  
● not started

Data as of July 2006

# ABSORPTION CAPACITY AS CRITERION TO JOIN THE EU

## The Negotiations with Turkey

Elmar Brok

On 3 October 2005 the EU officially started accession negotiations with Turkey. By doing so, it started a process that can hardly be planned and that is unlikely to be straightforward. The result of the negotiations still remains open and it is doubtful whether the beginning of negotiations was well-prepared by either side. In this context, one accession criterion gains more and more relevance: the absorption capacity. Bearing this in mind, the author demands an option between full membership and European Neighbourhood Policy, which can also prove helpful for Turkey.

### The beginning of negotiations leads to a one-way street

The EU is strategically bound by the start of negotiations with Turkey. However, the process of negotiations reveals weaknesses that lead the EU as well as Turkey into a strategic one-way street. For Turkey to attain membership, the Council has to take 70 unanimous decisions in order to open and later close the 35 negotiating chapters. If only one vote of one country turns out to be negative, we will have a problem. The same applies to the already determined referenda like for example in France, the agreement of 25 or 27 governments and the approval of parliaments in the member states and Turkey. Following the current procedure, the EU may eventually have the choice between offending Turkey by saying "No" - or reluctantly saying "Yes" and ignore preconditions. It would have been better to create a third option - as an alternative or intermediate step below full membership but above the European Neighbourhood Policy. After all, it is far from certain that Turkey will be successful in taking over the entire *acquis communautaire*, implementing all chapters of the EU's legal system or agreeing on the necessary cutback of sovereignty.

It is in the interest of the EU and of Turkey to cooperate closely. This is especially important in case the accession should fail. The reasons for a close partnership are manifold. On the one hand, the past has continuously shown that a European perspective constitutes an enormous incentive for reforms and stability. On the other hand, the Union needs a strong partner in a region that will become geo-strategically and economically more and more important. Energy security - like access to energy resources in the Caspian Sea - is one side

of the equation. The other is Turkey's role as a bridge to the Muslim world.

### Absorption capacity - a "Copenhagen criterion"

On its way to Europe, Turkey has undoubtedly already made some progress. The problem, however, generally lies in implementing agreed reforms, which is often done inconsistently. Recently, the European Commission stated that the speed of reforms in Turkey has slowed down since 2005. But independently one "Copenhagen criterion" has yet to be fulfilled in a revisable way: the absorption capacity of the EU.

With Eastern enlargement in May 2004, the EU grew by 10 states and 74 million citizens. The enlargement round had not even been entirely concluded - with Rumania and Bulgaria set to join soon - when the EU decided already in October 2004 to invite Croatia and Turkey - soon with 80 million inhabitants - to join the EU. It would be naive to assume that people do not realise that such decisions lead too far too fast.

Every enlargement serves a certain aim. It shall guarantee peace and stability, prosperity as well as democracy and the rule of law within the EU and among its neighbours. But are the preconditions for these purposes given in Turkey? If doubts persist, could or should the EU abandon certain promises?

No one asks the EU to simply ignore existing agreements. The EU needs however to apply its own accession criteria more rigorously. With the ongoing tense economic situation and for institutional reasons, this is especially true for the enlargement capacity of the EU. This question needs to be addressed early in the process in order to avoid making promises that in the end cannot be fulfilled.

We are in need of a sincere policy. Everyone needs to be aware that the absorption capacity - just like the other Copenhagen criteria - can be decisive for accession. Although a candidate country might fulfil all requirements, it cannot join if this one criterion remains unfulfilled. This is the only way to ensure that the political project of the EU can be further developed. The EU as a mere free trade area does not have a perspective. It would not enable Europe to survive economically, culturally or politically. The Copenhagen European Council in 1993 therefore determined that absorption capacities of the Community are a necessary condition for the accession of new countries. To understand the concept of absorption capacity it is of utmost importance to determine the character of the European Union - including its geographic borders. This was behind the European Parliament demand for the Commission to clarify the principles of the absorption capacity by the end of 2006. Only then will the criterion be applicable.

The Austrian Presidency was successful in specifying a framework for the



Elmar Brok in the Committee on Constitutional Affairs.

European Parliament

accession negotiations with Turkey and the absorption capacity of the EU has been explicitly named. Furthermore, the European Commission has been given the task to monitor the absorption capacity of the EU and to define its absorption capacity. It has to report any upcoming difficulties during the accession process to the Council and to the European Parliament. In cooperation with the European Parliament, the Council will then decide whether the criterion has been fulfilled.

### **Before further enlargement we need the constitution to politically consolidate the EU**

With 25 member states, the EU for now has reached its institutional, socio-cultural and economic limits. In the EU of 25 the political and institutional problems are evident. The Council is frequently unable to take decisions due to the existing veto rights. The belated homework for the 2004 enlargement, the Constitutional Treaty, is not yet in force. However, only the constitution provides for a stable and durable framework for the future development of the EU. It assures the deepening of the EU and its ability to function properly. The constitution is essential in order to make the EU work. The European Parliament emphasised in its resolutions on the reflection period and on the enlargement strategy that it will be impossible - after the accession of Bulgaria and Romania - to enlarge the Union further within the framework of the Nice Treaty.

It is in no one's interest to create an EU that is unable to act and which consequently would start to disintegrate. We need the institutional reforms as foreseen in the Constitutional Treaty without delay in order

to make the EU capable to act again. The need for the Constitution to increase the efficiency and the effectiveness of the EU in different areas is obvious. The constitution abolishes the complicated pillar structure of the European Union and confers upon the Union a coherent legal personality. It reduces and simplifies the decision-making instruments. The creation of a European Foreign Minister and of a European diplomatic service will enhance and clarify the European Union's international representation. Economically the constitution binds all European institutions to the principles of the social market economy and price stability. European citizens need to feel closer to the EU again by an increase of transparency and public participation. Only the constitution strengthens civil rights, democratic legitimacy and subsidiarity - also by strengthening the role of national parliaments. In addition it gives mandatory status to the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

People are even more aware of the economic limits than of the institutional borders. High unemployment rates and economic stagnation in many EU countries leave hardly any room for a coherent explanation for the economic burdens of future enlargements. Whereas the 25 EU member states generated an average gross domestic product of 22,300 Euro per capita in 2003, Turkey's GDP was 6,300 Euro per capita, according to the European Commission. Especially because of this huge difference, the Copenhagen criterion of absorption capacity needs to be taken into account. Applying the existing rules, the difference in average GDP per capita would mean that a Turkish EU-membership is likely to - for example - double Germany's net contribution to the EU (additional costs between 6 to 8 billion Euro), according to figures of the European Commission.

According to the mandate of the Council, negotiations on chapters with financial implications of enlargement can only start after 2013, when the financial perspective 2013-2020 will be agreed upon.

I do not want to be misunderstood: Europe needs Turkey as partner. A reform-oriented, European perspective for Turkey must be supported. Nonetheless, this has to be based on clarity and truth if it is to be viable. People need to be assured that there is no automatism in the process. Further enlargements can only be undertaken if they are reasonable. In every new case the established criteria will have to be respected.

### **The third option**

This is exactly why full membership cannot remain the only perspective to promote reforms and progress in European countries. There must be another credible option between full membership and the European Neighbourhood Policy. Here the European Economic Area (EEA) could serve as a model. In a sort of EEA+ European countries could take on between 40 to 60 percent of European legislation and participate for example in the Common Market, Schengen and security policy. Thereby they could construct a sustainable link of interests with the EU. This concept can be lasting (as in the case of Norway) or an intermediate step (as in the cases of Austria, Finland and Sweden), according to the will and the ability of the EU and the respective country.

*Elmar Brok, MEP, is chairman of the EP Committee on Foreign Affairs and member of the federal board of the CDU.*

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<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/omk/sipade3?PUBREF=-//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A6-2006-0025+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN>

Brussels European Council of 15/16 June 2006, Presidency Conclusions (10633/1/06 REV1).  
[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/90111.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/90111.pdf)

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# EU'S ABSORPTION CAPACITY

## A Condition by the Candidate Countries to the EU?

Vural Öger

At the European Parliament, the future of Europe as a strong and efficient political unit has become the general framework for all the topics in our crowded agenda. The governments, institutions and the public opinion leaders of the European Union have been divided over the wording on the EU's absorption, functioning, assimilation or institutional efficiency capacity to accept new member countries. This has been part of EU's almost eternal debate dealing with the dilemma of deepening versus enlargement.

Under the Article 49 of the EU's treaties, any European country that respects and applies European values (democracy, human rights, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms) may apply for membership of the EU. While this does not mean automatic acceptance, it clearly leaves the right of initiative with the interested states. At the end of a negotiations period, the candidate country accedes to membership following a positive report by the European Commission on the accomplishment of the legislative harmonization process and on the basis of an accession treaty to be ratified by the member states and the European Parliament.

However, in the recent European context of 2005-2006, some circles leading this debate appeared to formulate a new criterion to be imposed to candidate countries, especially to Turkey. The more or less implicit objective of these initiatives was interpreted as a populist message to domestic public opinions, emphasizing some political circles' efforts to avoid Turkey's progress towards EU membership. When, in a rational approach, such progress means that Turkey evolves to become a country fully in compliance with the European values politics and law, and thus contributing to the re-enforcement of Europe as a global actor, it is hard to justify such rhetoric.

According to many media reports in June 2006, acting in its capacity of the EU Presidency, Austria has listened to reservations to make the wording much more non-binding in the final draft of the European Council conclusions. EU's institutional and political ability to absorb new members is already mentioned as an element of the rules by which EU hopefuls are judged. But moves to new wording reflect the divisions over further enlargements, particularly in France, Austria, Netherlands and Germany.

Some countries wanted several dimensions to be included: democratic, institutional, political and financial. The European Commission opted for a much more institutional concept, focused on the EU Treaty

provisions for seats in the institutions, votes and budget. But over half of EU capitals were unhappy with creating new criterion for membership beyond EU reform requirements applied equally to all applicants. Finally, the absorption capacity has not yet become a full-fledged set of new conditions for EU membership, but the question has remained open.

While the EU's internal debate has been evolving as usual, with a permanent succession of interlinked processes of searches for compromise, we have been observing the Turkish public becoming partly cooler, partly more skeptical on the EU as a credible pole of attraction. For example, the views of the Turkish business community,<sup>j</sup> reflects quite well a strategic Turkish perspective on the debate on the EU's absorption capacity:

"We have been hearing a lot in the last months on the EU's absorption capacity for further enlargements. This is very important and closely linked with the EU's future as a global actor. We see at least four conditions for the EU to be able to enlarge in the next decade:

1. Economic growth and competitiveness generating a more positive social atmosphere.
2. More political coherence among the EU member states.
3. As a consequence of these two conditions, more efficient European institutions and decision-making system in the EU.
4. And finally the preservation of Europe's credibility as a model of democracy and society.

A candidate country becomes ready for accession when it solves its main problems and fulfils the conditions of this membership following a radical transformation of its legal, political and social system. Meanwhile, we will increasingly be in a world where Europe should become a larger and better functioning single market, social space and political unity. A scenario in which a candidate country is ready for membership and the EU finds itself in the position of lacking the so-called the capacity of absorption is a very pessimist one. In such case, the EU will anyway no longer be attractive for any candidate country, let alone for its current members. The enlargement should be a win-win-win case: for the candidate country, for the EU and for the world."

Another rational approach in this respect was formulated by the Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn who said in his contribution to the debate at the European Parliament that "we have to avoid making enlargement hostage to a theological deba-

te on the final borders of Europe." While admitting that the pace of the EU's enlargement "must take into consideration the EU's absorption capacity," Rehn said that "it would be utterly irresponsible to disrupt a valuable process that is helping to build stable and effective partners in the most unstable parts of Europe. For the sake of Europe, let us not shake this foundation," he concluded.

As a member of the European Parliament from Germany and being part of the Socialist Group, I believe in the EU's future as a powerful actor on the World scene. The world needs Europe not only as generator of economic wealth and security, but also as a source of democracy, social responsibility and ecologic sensitiveness. This is why the debate on the absorption capacity goes beyond the scope of the enlargement and touches upon the core of the debate on Europe's future.

1) [www.tusiad.org](http://www.tusiad.org) , [www.abhaber.com](http://www.abhaber.com).

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EP Office of Vural Öger MEP

# ABSORPTION CAPACITY AND THE ONGOING SCREENING PROCESS

Hamit Ersoy

Turkey's willingness to create a state based on a European model dates back to Ottoman times. The creation of modern Turkey and the ensuing political developments were all aimed at achieving this objective in the long run. The transition to a multi-party system in 1946, membership in NATO in 1952 and in many other western organizations, application to the EEC in July 1959 and participation in the Customs Union recently can be seen as some of the milestones on the way to full membership to the present EU. Without this perspective, the political elite in Turkey would not have taken the risk to take all the steps taken so far, as they had and have serious implications for Turkey.

The political atmosphere during the Cold War was so different from today's uni-polar atmosphere so that nobody questioned whether Turkey was geographically within Europe or not. Having regard to the political commitment and determination of the government, it seems likely that all obstacles in the way to full membership, either in politico-religious or socio-economical matters, will eventually be overcome. This is quite evident in economic matters as well as in the Community Programs. Turkey's success story in the field of education and training programs is in fact recognized in the regular progress report prepared by the European Commission in 2005. The recent political developments such as the Parliamentary Decree of 1

March 2003 refusing the use of the Turkish army in Iraq, the alliance of civilization project led by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero and the intermediary role between Europe and the Muslim World during the cartoon crisis in 2006 are some examples to consider Turkey-EU relations from a clear win-win perspective. The decision for Turkey's accession therefore will be a political and strategic one rather than a technical matter of absorption capacity.

Due to the successful development of Turkey, the EU opened accession talks on 3 October 2005. It is widely believed that the screening process as well as accession negotiations will be painstaking but remarkably successful in the end, because the overwhelming majority of the Turkish society as well as the government are convinced that the negotiations will definitely change the state as well as the society for better not worse. This belief alone is already sufficient for the government and the society to remain in favor of the EU, unless, however, anti-Turkish sentiments and activities in Europe would rise to a level that could no longer be tolerated. As the head of Socrates Programs and as a member of the Turkish delegation responsible for the Education and Culture chapter, my recent personal observation in Brussels during both explanatory and bilateral screening meetings on the chapter shows that every word the Commission representatives use and the way they treat their counterpart at the negotiating table is carefully

examined and taken very seriously. What is more important is how it is said seems to matter more than what is said during the negotiations due to the delicacy of political context. It is widely believed in Turkey that the number of EU supporters is declining every passing day, among others, due to uncontrolled if not heedless statements made by some eurocrats and/or EU authorities.

In conclusion, if one day the full membership of Turkey is achieved, this will be a victory for upholders of democracy and international human rights standards, because the full membership will irreversibly establish a fully functioning democracy in Turkey. If, on the other hand, this objective is somehow failed to achieve, it will strengthen the enemies of democracy and human rights both in Turkey (and the Middle East) and in the West, because the new political atmosphere would justify the arguments of anti-EU circles in Turkey who claim that the EU is concerned more with particular interests rather than the well being of "all humans" and human rights outside the EU. By creating new obstacles every day and using some unjustifiable arguments to slow down the pace of negotiations, the EU supporters in Turkey are constantly losing ground. This is certainly not in the interest of both the EU and the EU supporters in Turkey.

*Dr. Hamit Ersoy is Socrates Program General Coordinator and member of the Turkish delegation.*



*Actual negotiations with Turkey were started under the Austrian Presidency in June 2006.*  
European Community

## CHRONOLOGY

compiled by Volkan Altintas

**2006 23 January:** Council Decision on the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the Accession Partnership with Turkey.

**2006 16 March:** The European Parliament adopts a resolution based on a report by Elmar Brok on the Commission's enlargement strategy paper. The resolution is approved by 397 parliamentarians. 95 vote against it and 37 abstain.

**2006 12 April:** The Selection Panel for the European Capital of Culture 2010 recommends that Istanbul, along with Essen and Pécs, host the European Capital of Culture in 2010.

**2006 12 June:** The EU starts concrete accession negotiations with Turkey as well as with Croatia. The Council agrees on the

opening and the provisional closure of the chapter on science and research.

**2006 15/16 June:** The Brussels European Council reviews progress made in the screening process and "welcomes the start of substantive accession negotiations with Turkey."

**2006 12/27 July:** The court rulings in the cases of Hrant Dink and Perihan Magden send ambivalent signals to Brussels as to the freedom of expression in Turkey.

**2006 31 July:** Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer appoints General Yasar Büyükanit to become new chief of the Turkish military. He will replace General Hilmi Özkök.

Sources: [www.abgs.gov.tr](http://www.abgs.gov.tr), [www.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu), [www.euractiv.com](http://www.euractiv.com), [www.deltur.cec.eu.int](http://www.deltur.cec.eu.int), [www.abinfoturk.net](http://www.abinfoturk.net), [www.ec.europa.eu](http://www.ec.europa.eu).

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# TURKEY AND THE *FINALITÉ GÉOGRAPHIQUE* OF THE EU

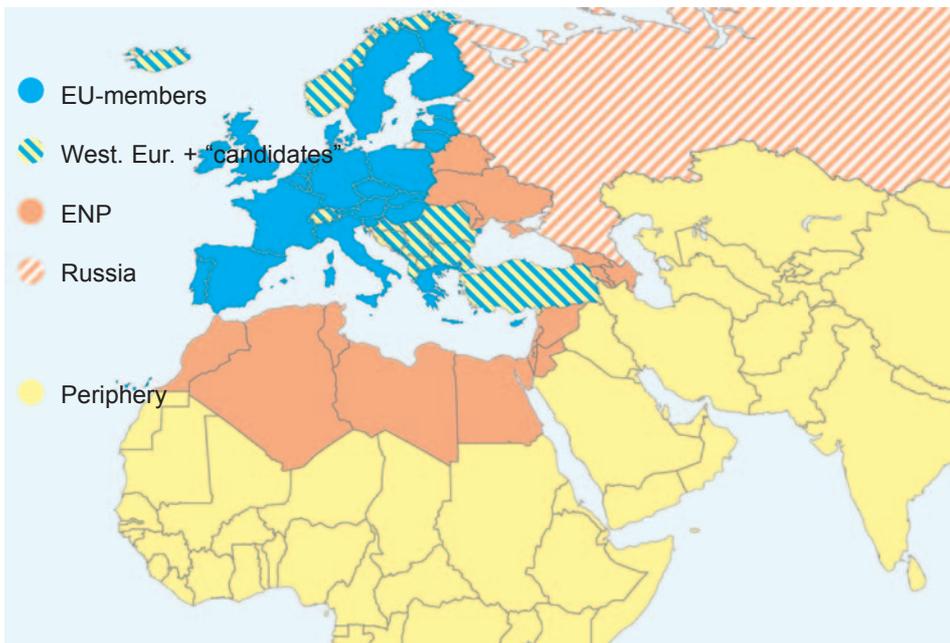
Andreas Marchetti

The question of absorption capacity comprises very different aspects. It touches on the institutional and - even more importantly - decisional arrangements of the Union: The enlarged EU already needs to facilitate its decision-making procedures in order to remain capable of acting. The upset about the severe constitutional crisis is owed to the conviction that the arrangements of the Treaty of Nice are no longer effective. Another aspect that plays a role when thinking about the absorption capacity of the Union is the financial implications of any future enlargement. The struggle over the Financial Perspective 2007-2013 highligh-

sed, this gives way to the more or less explicit fear that a more ambitious *finalité géographique* might prevent a more ambitious *finalité politique*. Especially with Turkey joining, it is widely believed that the EU would become de-bordered and anyone could join an eventually politically powerless Union. However, this perspective seems to be somewhat flawed since it does not take into account other contexts of European politics. With the increasingly pronounced enlargement fatigue within the EU and the not yet resolved constitutional crisis, there already seems to emerge a clear definition of Europe's *finalité géographique*, formulated mostly beyond public attention. Evidence for this interpretation can be gathered if the focus of interest does not only comprise the

pendent states in the east<sup>2</sup> and since 1995 it supported southern partners by the means of the MEDA-programme. With the merger of TACIS and MEDA into the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), the EU has once and for all excluded the central Asian countries<sup>3</sup> from the ENP and shifted them to the realm of development policy. The remaining ring of neighbours is now clearly designed *around* the EU and its potential members. The ring so far established can therefore serve as a sort of "buffer" between the - still expanding - EU as "regional centre and the actual periphery."<sup>4</sup>

However, some neighbours regard the ENP just as first step towards EU-membership. Nonetheless, the recognition of "European aspirations" by the EU in individual Action Plans can be considered diplomatic rhetoric without really committing the EU and rather being part of delaying tactics. Although Turkey is the only country that interrupts the ring around the EU, it has to be borne in mind that regarding Turkey as potential member in contrast to any ENP-country is perfectly in line with the Union's former decisions: Turkey has been offered a membership perspective as early as 1963 whereas the application of Morocco, taking part in the ENP, was rejected in 1987. The active construction of the "ring of friends" began long after Turkey had been granted an accession perspective. Therefore Turkey is an exception and not symptomatic for an ever more expanding and de-bordering Union.<sup>5</sup> This does not imply, however, a free ride for Turkey - it just underlines that Turkey is eligible to be given a sincere chance, a chance Turkey only can translate into eventual success by meeting the criteria as defined by the EU.



ted the sensitivity of the issue. In general discussions, the question of absorption capacity is often reduced to the question of the European Union's geographic extent: A frequent argument against Turkish EU-membership stresses that with the accession of Turkey, the Union would get a common border with states like Iraq or Iran. After all, the Constitutional Treaty provides for a clause of mutual assistance in the case of an armed attack on any member of the EU (Art. I-41.7). The sensitivity of this clause is however strongly put into perspective if one considers that such an obligation towards Turkey is already given for most EU-members by the North Atlantic Treaty (Art. 5). For the EU, which is much less a security institution than NATO, Turkish membership would therefore not change much in this respect.

A more serious aspect, however, is also linked to the question of the EU's geographic extent: Many fear that with further enlargements, the political project of the EU would eventually be watered down to a mere economic project. As the ideal ratio between widening and deepening can only be gues-

EU and Turkey but the entire neighbourhood of the EU. In the whole area no signs of de-bordering can be detected - to the contrary: The EU admittedly seems determined to *widen* its scope but not to *enlarge* beyond today's candidates. This approach is translated into concrete policies by the means of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Its particular concept is to extend special relations with southern and eastern neighbours, by at the same time excluding them from a membership perspective for the time being.<sup>1</sup>

The EU is willing and determined to invest more into the relations with its neighbours than before and even invites them to eventually participate in some EU policies such as the internal market. This is done because growing interdependencies necessitate a stronger and more ambitious foreign policy in the near abroad. The EU responds to this need by the creation of a "ring of friends" that runs from the Maghreb over the Middle East and the South Caucasus up to Belarus. At the beginning of the nineties, the EU already created the TACIS programme as a special contribution to assist the newly inde-

1) See Commission of the European Communities, *Wider Europe - Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, COM(2003)104 final, p. 5; Commission of the European Communities: *European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper*, COM (2004)373 final, p. 3.

2) Up to 2003 even Mongolia was benefiting from TACIS.

3) Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.

4) For supporting evidence see Andreas Marchetti: *The European Neighbourhood Policy. Foreign Policy at the EU's Periphery*, Discussion Paper C 158, Bonn: ZEI 2006, pp. 18-23.

5) Certainly, cases like Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova and - to a lesser extent - Georgia, will still be discussed as their joining the EU would not necessarily undermine the ENP's ring-building-logic.

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# THREE QUESTIONS

## to Graham Avery

*Graham Avery has been one of the architects of the EU's expansion. He took part in Britain's accession negotiations in 1969-72, and contributed to successive phases of enlargement during his career in the European Commission, from which he retired in 2006.*

In its resolution adopted in March, the European Parliament stressed that the "absorption capacity" of the EU constitutes an important criterion for further enlargement. It therefore called on the Commission to "submit a report by 31 December 2006 setting out the principles which underpin this concept." If one looks at former enlargements, the conditions of accession have continuously changed with the EC/EU evolving. Bearing this in mind, is there a possibility to define the "absorption capacity" of the EU once and for all?

Since the EU is in constant evolution, it is difficult to define its 'absorption capacity' once and for all. In fact, I think this concept is so vague that it would be difficult to reach consensus on it at any time. In the present discussion, enlargement of the EU tends to be attached to a series of problems and fears, real or imagined, some of which have nothing to do with enlargement. At any rate, the recent expansion from 15 to 25 was a success, not a failure - the expansion from 15 to 25 has not paralysed or weakened the EU - and the question of 'absorption capacity' seems to me to arise more from a loss of confidence resulting from the failure of the Constitution than from enlargement.

Naturally the future aims of the EU - its *finalités* as they say in French - are a vital topic of debate, which divides political groups and member states. But let us not take enlargement as a kind of hostage in a 'war by proxy'.

Perhaps one should look at the question in a different way. What conditions need to be fulfilled for the member states and the people of Europe to have confidence to relaunch the European project, including progress with the next stages of enlargement? Here I believe that a practical demonstration of the EU's capacity to provide what its citizens want in terms of jobs, growth and security would be more convin-

cing than another set of institutional reforms.

For example, a more effective implementation of the Lisbon Strategy, so that the EU really becomes the world's most competitive information-based economy; a coherent European energy policy, for security of supply; and a better cooperation between the EU's institutions and member states in foreign affairs, to give the EU's citizens the influence in the world which they deserve.

Partners in the EU and Turkey alike agree that facilitating Turkish accession will not be an easy task for the EU. What are the major challenges the EU faces at this point in time?



The EU's challenge now is to make a success of its policies and its instruments, without the Constitution and therefore in the framework of the existing Treaties. That will require perseverance and courage on the part of Europeans in accepting the social and economic changes needed to handle globalisation and the changing world environment. Personally I am not pessimistic. If we look at the experience of the new EU members in Central Europe since 1990, we see that their acceptance of change has yielded positive results.

The challenge for Turkey, in adapting to European norms and rules in the coming years, will be even bigger. Here I can only repeat what I have said in the past to other applicant countries: the pace of your progress on the path to membership of the EU will depend largely on the progress of your preparation at home. Success will not come through high-profile meetings in Brussels, but by hard work on the ground in your country in satisfying the political, economic and administrative conditions for membership.

If one takes a broader view at the question of Turkey's membership prospect, it seems not only a question of "absorption capacity", but also of mutual capacity building. Which are the unique features and capabilities a country like Turkey could positively contribute to the EU in this respect?

As a prospective member Turkey has much to contribute to the EU's capacities. It has a dynamic fast-growing economy and a young labour-force, and its integration into the European market would have positive results both for Turkey and the other members. Its geographic situation gives it strategic significance for Europe, and in geo-political terms its resources - including its military assets - are of real importance for Europe's security.

On the other hand, its accession would extend the EU's external frontiers to Syria, Iraq, Iran, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and involve the EU more directly in the affairs of a difficult and unstable region. It is argued that Turkey's accession to the EU would give a positive signal to other countries in the region with Muslim populations, but I believe this 'symbolic' aspect is less important than the actual conduct of Turkey in foreign affairs. The EU's ten new members effectively joined Europe's common foreign and security policy in the mid-1990s, long before their accession in 2004. Likewise the EU's assessment of what Turkey can contribute in geo-strategic terms will depend on the positions which it takes and the role which it plays in the coming years.

*The interview was conducted by Andreas Marchetti, Research Fellow at ZEI*



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