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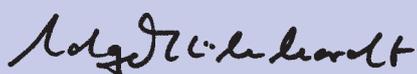
## Editorial

The War in Georgia has brought the Caucasus region to the center of global attention. The drama of new geopolitical conflicts in an unstable region bordering the European Union has changed many hopeful expectations regarding Russia's policy conduct. The 19th century has obviously not ended everywhere. This is depressing.

The Soccer Diplomacy between Armenia and Turkey has not found the same continuous public attention. Yet it is a most promising signal from the actors of a frozen conflict. Time has come to bring Turkey and Armenia as good neighbours and future partners into the mainstream of Europe's 21st century. Never were the chances better than now.

The return of the Black Sea and the Caucasus to the radar screen of EU politics requires more than temporary actions. The time has come to conceptualize a Black Sea or/and Caucasus Stability Pact, possibly modelled after the best experiences with the Stability Pact for South East Europe which the EU successfully initiated after the Kosovo War in 1999. This decade should not end before such a Stability Pact for the Black Sea region and the Caucasus will be born. Turkey could play an essential role as an anchor country. Together with the EU, the Black Sea region and the Caucasus should be helped to move from 19th century power politics and politics of identity toward multilateralism, cooperation and, eventually, integration. This is a huge challenge. It is also a huge opportunity for EU-Turkey relations.

We invite our readers to share with us their thoughts and ideas on this matter to which we come back to in more detail in our next edition.



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



Commission President José Manuel Barroso, Hosni Mubarak, President of Egypt, Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the French Republic, and Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the UN at the founding ceremony of the Union for the Mediterranean. Despite the French President's high expectations, many remain sceptical. © European Community

## ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK?

### The Paris Summit, the Union for the Mediterranean and Political Developments in the South

Tobias Schumacher

Every now and then the story seems to keep repeating itself: either for electoral purposes, for altered or newfound geopolitical reasons, or simply with a view to leave a personal mark in the long but somewhat unspectacular history book of Euro-Mediterranean relations, political actors, usually coming from the South of Europe, tend to rediscover the Mediterranean and, by invoking a sense of urgency or drama, force fellow governments of other EU member states and the Southern Mediterranean to join forces and elevate Euro-Mediterranean relations yet again onto another supposedly higher level. This tendency, as well as the perceived need to "revitalize" – a term that has been used by Euro-Med actors in an inflationary way throughout the last almost twenty years – Europe's relations with its southern neighbourhood in regular intervals is not, however, based on a serious assessment and quality check of past Euro-Med policies. It is rather grounded in an all

too often simplified belief that existing policies and frameworks underperformed and thus remained below expectations. The most cited reason for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's (EMP), to put it mildly, unspectacular performance has been the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the contaminating effects it presumably had on other areas of envisaged or potential cooperation. Undoubtedly, this critique is justified to the extent that it refers to the failure of advancing the political and security cooperation and any multilateral cooperation efforts that include Israel. To refer to the conflict as such, however, is insufficient to explain the lack of progress, in particular in areas, such as intra-Arab sub-regional cooperation political liberalization, good governance, civil liberties, as well as the growing tendency to securitize non-security issues.

The reason for the absence of progress in all these and, in fact, many other arenas is simply a lack of political will on the part of the incumbent regimes in the Southern Mediterranean, practising nowadays

▶ what can be coined neoliberal authoritarianism, to embark upon true and wide-ranging political reforms and to initiate a process of political enlightenment, at the end of which Arab Mediterranean societies would be sufficiently well-placed to confront, and benefit from, globalisation and post-modernism. Only very shortly after the EMP was inaugurated and for the first time confronted with the challenge of how to interpret those stipulations of the Barcelona Declaration that are of relevance to political development in the South, it seems as if a tacit understanding between the EU and Arab regimes was brokered according to which the latter provide the former with forms of stability and some degree of reliability and predictability in what regards their ways of governance and co-operation in exchange for non-interference by the latter. Nonetheless, not least due to domestic societal pressure and the (lately declining) pressure by the US, almost all of the EU's Arab Mediterranean partners in the last thirteen years initiated some limited reform measures and introduced or broadened electoral processes. Regularly praised by the EU as a major step toward greater political opening, these processes however say little about the real degree of political empowerment and participation, and they have not reduced the gap between the rulers and the ruled. Instead, they rather continue to be part of a wider strategy whose aim was and still is to temper social changes and to avoid introducing a mechanism whereby the state could be controlled by societal actors.

It is against this background that the recent Paris summit, inaugurating the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) has to be seen. With its emphasis on low politics over high politics and the exclusion of sensitive issues from the multilateral conference agenda, the summit is likely to be remembered for its enormous media frenzy and the celebrations of the 43 heads of states and governments over an initiative that is void of real substance. Clearly, the UfM's six areas for intensified cooperation, labelled as "key initiatives", i.e. the depollution of the Mediterranean, the development of maritime and land highways, the establishment of a joint civil protection programme, the development of a Mediterranean Solar Energy Plan, intensified cooperation in the field of higher education and research,

## ZEI Books

Ariane Kössler / Martin Zimmek (eds.): *Elements of Regional Integration. A Multidimensional Approach*, Baden-Baden: Nomos 2008. 278 pages, ISBN 978-3-8329-3503-0.

Ludger Kühnhardt: *European Union - The Second Founding: The Changing Rationale of European Integration*, Baden-Baden: Nomos 2008. 670 pages, ISBN 978-3-8329-3502-3.

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and the adoption of a Mediterranean Business Development Initiative aiming to support micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, as well as the decision to finally set up a rotating Joint Presidency, a Secretariat, a Joint Permanent Committee, and eventually scrap the Euro-Med Committee, are all sensible and will enrich the Barcelona *acquis*.

Yet, it did not need the Paris summit and undoubtedly not the creation of a project with such a misleading name either, raising all sorts of unjustified connotations, as all of these innovations could have been incorporated in a rather unspectacular fashion into the EMP's underpinning three-basket-structure. In other words: the UfM is unlikely to contribute neither to an upgrading of Euro-Mediterranean relations nor to a much overdue revitalization of both "Barcelona's" and the European Neighbourhood Policy's (ENP) reform dimension. Instead, it perpetuates the patterns of past practice of those that at the latest since 9/11, by referring to the alleged fight against terrorism, have embarked on repressive policies and the curtailment of civil and political liberties, garnished by the conclusion of bilateral agreements with individual EU member states in the field of migration and border control and repatriation.

It was repeatedly and rightly argued by some in the months preceding the summit that Mr. Sarkozy's then unilateral plans to set up a Mediterranean Union of sorts would have undermined the already fragile intra-EU consensus as regards the needs to maintain a collective policy vis-à-vis Europe's different neighbourhoods and thus a need for collective burden-sharing. The silence of non-Mediterranean EU governments – with the notable exception of Germany, which in all cases was motivated by the determination to prevent a potential power shift within the EU – towards the French plans however point to an equally existing consensus, albeit as regards the subordination of the political under the non-political in the context of Euro-Mediterranean relations.

Some observers have praised French President Nicolas Sarkozy for having been able to gather in Paris almost all leaders of the 43 countries participating in the UfM, particularly Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad and the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. With respect to the participation of the former, the summit provided indeed a platform for the much-pressured Syrian President to take a step out of the year-long isolation and use this opportunity to enter personally into a dialogue with the recently elected Lebanese President Michel Suleiman. To attribute the two Arab leaders' announcement to open diplomatic missions solely to the mediation efforts of Mr. Sarkozy would, however, be a misinterpretation of the French and thus European role in the region and would not do justice to the skilful and refreshingly noiseless background diplomacy of the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, who was also present in Paris and who already brokered the Doha agreement of May 2008. Furthermore, such a reading would underestimate and misjudge the recent dynamics in

the Mashreq, both on the Syrian-Lebanese track and on the regional level.

In a way, the same assessment must be made in regard to Mr. Erdogan's participation, as his presence was only secured a few days before the summit, when he was finally assured that the UfM would not impede Turkey's full EU membership bid and hence once it was guaranteed that the text of the final conclusions would contain a reference that Turkey was participating in its capacity as a negotiating candidate country. It is only then that the Turkish government, of course fully aware that a no-show may be interpreted by other EU members as a protest against the French EU Presidency and thus the EU itself, accepted to attend the meeting and sign the Paris conclusions.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that the Joint Declaration mentions explicitly the principle of reinforced cooperation, thus allowing like-minded partners with shared objectives in some sectors to go ahead and cooperate. The inclusion of this provision is certainly a positive development, as it reiterates what has been debated in the relevant policy circles already since the Valencia Euro-Mediterranean Foreign Minister's meeting of 2002, and because it reduces their veto options, it precludes potential spoilers from holding the Partnership hostage to their diverging interests and positions. Yet, in order to make sure that the setting-in-motion of features characterised by variable geometry will not jeopardise the existing *acquis*, the next challenge will be to hammer out clear and well-defined rules as to the implementation and the scope of reinforced cooperation. For them to materialise, the guidance of one or several EU Presidencies that put the emphasis on substance rather than on spectacle is urgently needed.

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## ZEI PAPERS

Anna Niemann / Sonja Ana Luise Schröder / Meredith Catherine Tunick (eds.): *Recovering from the Constitutional Failure. An Analysis of the EU Reflection Period*, ZEI Discussion Paper, C 182/2008.

Yannis Tsantoulis: *Subregionalism in the Black Sea and the EU's Role. Incentives, Obstacles and a 'New Synergy'*, ZEI Discussion Paper, C 183/2008.

Ludger Kühnhardt: *African Regional Integration and the Role of the European Union*, ZEI Discussion Paper, C 184/2008.

Hans-Gert Pöttering: *New Impulses for the Decade Ahead*, ZEI Discussion Paper, C 185/2008.

# THE UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN

## A three-way evaluation

Haluk Özdemir

Sarkozy's Mediterranean project can be interpreted as either an initiative to cooperate for the common fate of the Mediterranean people or a plan for an alternative institutional structure to obstruct Turkey's EU membership. Neither of these extreme positions can be considered the whole truth. A closer look at the debate suggests that we can assess the French project from three different perspectives. These perspectives are expected to shape the tangible outcomes of the "Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)" as it has now been labeled.

### The French Perspective

Sarkozy's opposition to Turkish membership in the EU is not an unknown fact. He has made it clear several times that Turkey is not a European country and it has no place in the EU.<sup>1</sup> As a result, in the summit conclusions of December 10, 2007 the words "accession conference" were dropped as a result of French insistence; instead, only the formal label "intergovernmental conference" was used to define the process between Turkey and the EU.<sup>2</sup> Within that context, the Mediterranean could clearly be understood as an alternative to EU membership.

The Mediterranean offer can also be interpreted as a balancing act of France against Germany. The accession of Eastern European countries has shifted the balance within the EU in favor of Germany. An increase in the number and weight of the pro-German states in the Union led Sarkozy to turn to areas where French influence is traditionally greater, such as the Mediterranean, in order to re-balance Germany. It is not surprising that the Eastern European countries were more critical of this initiative.

Sarkozy wanted the Mediterranean Union (MU) to be as autonomous as possible from EU structures for two reasons. The first was to give France a more central role in Mediterranean politics, because integrating the MU into the EU structures would add new big players into the Mediterranean game such as Germany and the UK. The second reason was to design the MU initiative as a first step towards building an alternative membership for Turkey.

France has accepted the participation of all EU members in "the Union for the Mediterranean" especially after strong German reactions. This and the name change point to substantial changes in the initiative. The MU could therefore be regarded as an obsolete idea even before the inauguration of the UfM. However, if France's main concern is to block Turkey's accession, this project can still produce results. The fact that the Paris Summit conclusions declared that the initiatives toward the "Union for the Mediterranean will be independent from the EU enlargement policy, accession negotiations and the pre-accession process,"<sup>3</sup> as a consolation for Turkey, does not alter this situation. Now, instead of making a direct offer to Turkey for an alternative membership, Sarkozy hopes that this structure will turn, in time, by itself, into an alternative for Turkey. The hope is that Turkey itself will come to this conclusion without any outside pressure. This way, Turkey would be "fully anchored in the European structures through the strongest possible bond"<sup>4</sup> without

EU membership and without upsetting the Turks.

### The EU Perspective

The Union for the Mediterranean can help the EU with the security of its southern borders, which are highly vulnerable to illegal immigration. It is not surprising that all the southern countries have supported this initiative as they feel the primary impact of immigration. The developmental discrepancies between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean create economic pressures on the European economic system. The UfM is thought of as an instrument to mitigate economic and social problems around the Mediterranean so that the immigration pressure on Europe would be diminished. For that reason, the Mediterranean project is expected to focus on economic and social projects rather than political ones.

France announced as the central topic of its EU presidency "a more protective Europe," which refers not only to economic but also to social protection.<sup>5</sup> The UfM project can be seen as a structure to foster selective immigration. From this perspective, one purpose of this project is to stop the flow of less qualified immigrants while allowing qualified immigration to protect the European economy without neglecting the human potential of the Mediterranean. For this reason, the main issues of the UfM converge on the ones that will serve the EU's needs, such as immigration, education, trade, the prevention of terrorism, etc.

Another important point that needs to be emphasized is the sub-regional competition within Europe. This competition between several sub-regions in the EU, if it gets out of hand, is a potential threat for integration. For example, the Polish-Swedish idea of Eastern Partnership as a reaction to the French proposal is an indicator of sub-regional competition.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, Sarkozy's Mediterranean project has been transformed into an improved and upgraded version of the Barcelona Process, rather than an independent structure.

### The Turkish Perspective

At the moment, any alternative to EU membership is not an acceptable option for Turkey. However, as long as the alternative nature of the new proposal is not emphasized, Turkey does not want to stay out of any cooperation effort in the Mediterranean. The current developments show no indication or possibility for an emerging independent Mediterranean structure. It will constitute a protective belt around Europe and be a complementary project to the EU, which is structurally and financially dependent. Such a union in the Mediterranean is not considered a threat to Turkey's membership process in Turkey. Participation of not only Mediterranean countries but of all EU member states is another calming development and insurance for the Turks.

The French hope that the Union for the Mediterranean turns into the first building block of a more independent regional structure, which may be viewed by the Turks as an alternative to EU membership, can be deemed more or less realistic. The dropping approval rates for the

membership process in the Turkish public, and the growing opposition to the EU, might lead to a search for alternatives. In the long term, this will be contingent upon the success of the Mediterranean project. Then, the French offer to Turkey to play a more central role with France in the Mediterranean rather than an ordinary membership in the EU can be more attractive for the Turks. Nevertheless, this will all depend on the approval of other EU member states.

### Conclusion

The outcome of the Union for the Mediterranean will be shaped by the balance between French intentions and other relevant actors' reactions combined with the EU's internal dynamics. As long as her EU membership process is unquestioned, Turkey is certainly willing to participate in any kind of Mediterranean cooperation. The UfM is now set up as a dependent structure of the EU, and for Turkey, it cannot be an alternative to EU membership. Besides, there are other functions of the EU membership process such as the development of Turkish democracy that the UfM alone cannot fulfill.

A growing emphasis on sub-regions in Europe is an inevitable result of the increased membership of the EU. As the balance has shifted more towards Eastern and Northern Europe, it should not be too surprising if France, rather than trying to find membership alternatives for Turkey, starts supporting Turkish membership in the future in order to re-balance.

Aside from these evaluations, the Lisbon Treaty, rather than the Union for the Mediterranean, is now the first priority of the French presidency. After losing its first choice elements for France, it can be expected to be a side project in the shadow of the Lisbon Treaty debate. However, bringing the Mediterranean back to the EU agenda can be considered a success for France.

1) Dan Bilefsky, "Turkish Entry Into Europe Slowed by Sarkozy Move," *The New York Times*, June 25, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/25/world/europe/25cnd-turkey.html?ex=1340424000&en=12dfd353e108ba43&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>

2) Council of the European Union, General Affairs and External Relations, Press Release, 2839th Council Meeting, 16326/7 (Presse 288), Brussels, December 10, 2007, p. 8. [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/gena/97555.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/gena/97555.pdf)

3) Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean, Paris, July 13, 2008, [http://www.ue2008.fr/webdav/site/PFUE/shared/import/0713\\_declaration\\_de\\_paris/Joint\\_declaration\\_of\\_the\\_Paris\\_summit\\_for\\_the\\_Mediterranean-EN.pdf](http://www.ue2008.fr/webdav/site/PFUE/shared/import/0713_declaration_de_paris/Joint_declaration_of_the_Paris_summit_for_the_Mediterranean-EN.pdf)

4) This was the expression used in the EU's December 2004 summit conclusions deciding to open the accession negotiations with Turkey to describe what happens if Turkey fails to assume membership requirements. Council of the European Union, "Brussels European Council 16-17 December 2004 Presidency Conclusions," Brussels, February 1, 2005, p. 7. [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/83201.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/83201.pdf)

5) The French EU Presidency, "Euractiv, June 2, 2008, <http://www.euractiv.com/en/opinion/french-eu-presidency/article-168202>

6) Philippa Runner, "Poland and Sweden Pitch 'Eastern Partnership' Idea," *EUObserver*, May 22, 2008, <http://euobserver.com/24/26194>

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# TURKEY AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

## An ambiguous relationship

Dorothee Schmid

Shortly after his victory on 6 May 2007, the newly elected French President Nicolas Sarkozy reaffirmed his intention to found a “Mediterranean Union” (MU). The aim of his proposal was to reinforce the common identity of the riparian Mediterranean countries and to revive the spirit of cooperation between these countries that was perceived to be malfunctioning. Outside of France, even where the proposition generated more sympathy than questioning, the president’s call for a new Mediterranean project was perceived very diversely.

Between doubts and hesitations of certain European partners and the anticipation of most southern countries, Turkey seemed to be in a singular position. In one of his campaign speeches, Sarkozy had indeed pointed to Turkey as the natural pillar of his Mediterranean project. However, the trade-off explicitly proposed in his speech at Toulon in February 2007 did not at all sound seductive to Turkey: a central place within the Mediterranean Union for its place in Europe.<sup>1</sup> Being a rather hesitant partner in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and having started accession negotiations with the European Union (EU) in 2005 that soon turned out to be more turbulent and political than envisaged, by at the same time being regularly repelled to Asia Minor by a president that denies Turkey its place in Europe, Turkey had very good reasons to be wary of the new French initiative. Nicolas Sarkozy’s project could even be interpreted as the latest metamorphosis of a historical “Mediterranean plot”, an attempt of encirclement that had already accelerated the fall of the Ottoman Empire and regularly threatened the territorial integrity of the Turkish Republic since its foundation in 1923.

The Turks themselves do hardly consider themselves part of the culturalist Mediterranean substrate the French president regularly associates them with, although geographic and historical evidence seems to strongly link Turkey with the Mediterranean: the country’s coast line runs more than 4,000 km on the Mediterranean – 1,600 km in the Turkish interpretation if one excludes the Aegean and the Sea of Marmara. This certainly represents a much shorter coastline than at the height of the Ottoman Empire but it also accords the undeniable status of a riparian country upon Turkey.

### From Expansion to Discomfort

From the moment of Turks’ arrival at the shore of the Aegean in the 11th century to the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 20th century, the Mediterranean constituted a natural space for Turkish expansion. The Sublime Porte integrated the “white sea” (*Akdeniz*) in its general strategy, leading even to a theorisation of maritime warfare and the

development of a powerful navy.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the Ottoman Empire even remained the biggest maritime power in the Mediterranean after its defeat at the Battle of Lepanto (1571). Two thirds of the Mediterranean remained under Ottoman domination until the Egyptian expedition of Napoleon in 1798.

The Mediterranean space has therefore been substantially shaped by the historic presence of the Turks. In his seminal work, Fernand Braudel has depicted the fundamental effects of the *Pax Turcica* and the *Pax Ottomana* in the Mediterranean: Despite its wars that led to successive annexations, the Empire was always relatively regardful of different cultures and local arrangements, contributing to the development of the Mediterranean basin as a space of co-existence and miscegenation as we know it.<sup>3</sup> The Ottoman cultural heritage is practically present in all riparian countries today even if its presence is further diminishing.

It is only in the 20th century that the Turkish approach to the Mediterranean changed fundamentally with the First World War initiating the accelerated Turkish retreat from the region. Punishing Turkey after the Ottoman defeat, the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) conceded no Mediterranean shore to Turkey, reducing its maritime access to the Black Sea. Having been reduced to the smallest possible entity, Turks immediately saw themselves threatened from the Mediterranean itself with the Greek disembarkation in Smyrna (Izmir) in 1919. It is only with its “war of independence” that Turkey could again stabilise its territory and regain access to the Mediterranean with the Treaty of Lausanne also conceding eastern Thrace to Turkey.

Ever since, the Mediterranean is associated with the image of defeat and the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 marks the beginning of a refocus on the Anatolian hinterland. This territorial anchorage pursued by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk moved the centre of gravity of Turkish geopolitical thought to the east; at the same time, Europe remained a political counterpoint at the horizon of a political ambition that perceived the Mediterranean as interface with the west.<sup>4</sup> The Mediterranean was therefore not only, as has been underlined by Jean-François Pérouse, a “new frontier” for Turkey but it had frequently rather been regarded as an unstable and even threatening border: apart from the finical question of Alexandretta (Iskenderun)/Hatay, a territorial dispute with Syria, multiple disputes with Greece (Cyprus, continental shelf) continued to disturb Turkey during the Cold War.<sup>5</sup>

### Contemporary Turkish Perceptions of the Mediterranean

In the continuity of its successive traumas the only consensual conception of the Mediterranean within Turkey today is a strategic vision based on a feeling of threat. The Turkish

military therefore reacts strongly to any major development in the Mediterranean and naturally the navy is most sensitive in this respect. The military’s vision mainly reduces the Mediterranean to its eastern part, perceived as fundamentally conflictual. In addition, this vision is particularly focusing on the immediate neighbourhood: despite the diplomatic rapprochement in recent years, the Greek-Turkish rivalry continues to structure reflections on the Mediterranean, in which the issue of Cyprus still dominates the agenda. In addition, the Middle East is considered a zone for diplomatic or even military projection, whereas the riparian countries of Africa remain practically *terra incognita*.<sup>6</sup>

From an economic point of view, the Mediterranean is not considered a space for consistent and stable development.<sup>7</sup> Public as well as private economic actors systematically doubt the economic coherence and development potential in the Mediterranean space: weak growth, political isolation and conflictuality, and incapacity to agree on common trade rules are among the most cited reasons.<sup>8</sup> A priority evidently is given to integrating Turkey into the European Union, especially since the inauguration of the customs union in 1997. This perspective, however, constitutes a major constraint to the development of Turkish economic activities in the Mediterranean. The customs union obliges Turkey to open its market to products from Mediterranean partner countries, without any reciprocity being guaranteed. In order to correct this anomaly, Turkey needs to sign bilateral free trade agreements with each partner, a task that is not always easy to accomplish.

Nonetheless, Turkey is – outside the EU – the most dynamic country of the region and Turkish businessmen are well engaged in some riparian markets because of sectorial interests (construction, textiles), or particular political opportunities (Israel-Palestinian Territories, Syria). The Mediterranean dimension also gains attractiveness in the energy sector: with Turkey fortifying its position as major transit country for Russian and Caspian resources to Europe, the Mediterranean becomes an increasingly important natural market area. The growing interior tensions on the Turkish energy market also force the rapprochement with hydro carbonate producing countries like Algeria or Egypt. But in matters of energy as well as on other dossiers, the national strategic reflection is rather focussing on Central Asia, which is often seen as a much more natural zone of Turkish influence.<sup>9</sup>

From a political viewpoint, many interlocutors generally admit to have a rather negative culturalist perception of the Arab Mediterranean world, formerly dominated by Turkey and today considered as basically strange.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, the Mediterranean rather recalls stagnation and confrontation than a fertile field of new political and cultural models. The accession to power of the Justice and Devel- ►

► opment Party (AKP), pretending to convey a Muslim cultural synthesis beyond the Turkish borders, did not really change the European's approach to their own Mediterranean project: the space for diplomatic experiments of the AKP might include a part of the Mediterranean basin, but this space mainly stretches from the east of the Mediterranean, over the Middle East to Central Asia.<sup>11</sup>

### The Continuity of Ambivalence

In fact, the Mediterranean remains quite ambivalent in the collective Turkish consciousness, because it is a symbol of past greatness by at the same time being at the origin of many non healed historic wounds. The official cartography reaffirms a reflex of evasion: sometimes presented as an area of European influence, the Mediterranean space does not have a proper image in Turkey; in addition, Turkey never seems to be a substantial part of this space.<sup>12</sup> Turkey is not really defined by any sort of "Mediterraneanism" that is rather present in France; Europe constitutes a much stronger object for identification. What disturbs Turkish minds today is not related to geographic proximity or the cultural Mediterranean heritage but to the focalisation on the Mediterranean as the central concept that surrounds and inspires specific policies.

These fundamentals, combined with recent French-Turkish tensions, explain quite well the initial difficulty of the Turkish government to respond positively to the project of a Medi-

terranean Union. Nonetheless, it has to be borne in mind that Turkey knows quite well to get engaged in the Mediterranean if this is considered necessary to pursue – sometimes quite complex – interests. However, Turkey does not have any real "Mediterranean policy" in its own right, which explains its cautiousness if it comes to any dominant focalisation on the Mediterranean. This, however, does not prevent Turkey from at least periodically participating in Mediterranean projects proposed by others. This regional engagement relies on a cost-benefit-analysis taking particularly into account any possible diplomatic, security or even financial gains. Turkey's eventual adherence to the Union of the Mediterranean as it has finally been baptised and inaugurated in July 2008 has to be seen in this perspective – not more, but also not less.

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*This contribution is a shortened version of an article published earlier this year: D. Schmid, "La Turquie et l'Union pour la Méditerranée: un partenariat calculé", Politique étrangère, vol. 73, n°1, printemps 2008, p. 65-76. ZEI is grateful to Ifri for granting permission to reprint parts of it here.*

1) Sarkozy's speeches on the "Mediterranean Union" and subsequently on the "Union for the Mediterranean" are available on the site of the *Union pour un mouvement populaire* (UMP) <[www.u-m-p.org](http://www.u-m-p.org)> and of the *Elysée* <[www.elysee.fr](http://www.elysee.fr)>.

2) Cf. O. Kologlu, "The 'Mediterraneite' of the Turks", *Turkish Review of Middle East Studies*, 13, 2002, pp. 187-211.

3) The ideas of an expansionist movement, of fallback and miscegenation follow the picturesque description of Fernand Braudel, *La méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, Paris: Armand Colin 1990.

4) Cf. F. Çiçekoglu/E. Eldern, *La Méditerranée turque*, Paris: Maisonneuve Larousse 2000.

5) Cf. J.-F. Pérouse, "La 'mer blanche' des Turcs, en quoi la Turquie est-elle aussi méditerranéenne?", *Hérodote*, 90, 1998, p. 165.

6) Interviews with researchers of the think tank ASAM, all of them former militaries, Ankara, May 2007.

7) This is not opposing the rapid growth in riparian areas of Turkey, because their model of development based on tourism remains marginal in the national economic dynamic, cf. J.-F. Pérouse, "La Turquie et la Méditerranée: une appartenance en voie de (re)construction," in: V. Moriniaux (ed.), *La Méditerranée en questions*, Paris: Editions du Temps, 2001, pp. 343-376.

8) Interview with Altay Cengizer, director at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ankara, Mai 2007; Binhan Oguz, president director of STRTEKO.

9) Interviews at the State Secretariat on Energy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ankara, December 2007.

10) Cf. S. Yerasimos, "Les Arabes et les Turcs", *Hérodote*, 60-61, 1991, pp. 169-193.

11) This argument follows the concept of "strategic deepness" developed by Ahmet Davutoglu, Chief Advisor to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, that – applied to Turkish foreign policy – is considered as an expression of neo-Ottomanism.

12) See in particular E. Copeaux, *Une vision torquée du monde à travers les cartes: de 1931 à nos jours*, Paris: CNRS éditions, 2000.

## CHRONOLOGY

compiled by Deniz Özgür

**14 March 2008:** Abdurrahman Yalçinkaya, Turkey's chief prosecutor, files a suit to outlaw the ruling AK Party and to ban several of its members from politics, including Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

**31 March 2008:** Turkey's constitutional court decides to hear a case accusing the ruling AK party of being a "centre of anti-secular activities". Chief Prosecutor Abdurrahman Yalçinkaya seeks a verdict to outlaw the AKP and to ban 71 of its members from politics for a minimum period of five years.

**29 April 2008:** Turkey's Grand National Assembly enacts a long-awaited reform of article 301 of the penal code, which criminalizes 'insults to the Turkish national identity'.

**5 June 2008:** On the basis of constitutional secularism, Turkey's highest court repeals a recent government-led reform lifting a ban to wear headscarves at universities that dates back to 1986.

**12 June 2008:** With a participation of 53.13 percent of the Irish population, the Lisbon Treaty is rejected in a popular referendum counting 53.4 percent of votes against and 46.6 percent of votes in favour of the so-called reform treaty.

**17 June 2008:** Chapter 6 on company law and chapter 7 on intellectual property law are opened in the process of accession negotiations between the EU and Turkey.

**1 July 2008:** France takes over the EU Presidency from Slovenia.

**13 July 2008:** Inaugural ceremony of the "Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean" intended to reinvigorate the 13-year-old Euro-Mediterranean Partnership/Barcelona Process.

**14 July 2008:** Turkish prosecutors indict 86 people for alleged involvement with the ultranationalist Ergenekon group bent on overthrowing the AKP government.

**21 July 2008:** France passes a constitutional reform, which abandons a 2005 clause on "obligatory referenda to be held on every EU enlargement after Croatia".

**27 July 2008:** Two bomb explosions in Istanbul kill 17 people and leave more than 150 wounded.

**28 July 2008:** Turkey's Constitutional Court begins its deliberations on the AKP "closure case".

**30 July 2008:** Turkey's highest court narrowly decides not to ban the AKP but issues a "serious warning" by cutting off public funds to the party by 50 %.

**12 August 2008:** After five days of violent conflict, French President and EU Presidency holder Nicolas Sarkozy brokers a cease-fire agreement ("Six-Point Plan") between Russia and Georgia over the autonomous Georgian provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

**13 August 2008:** In the Russia-Georgia post-war climate Turkey's Prime Minister Recep

Tayyip Erdoğan and President Abdullah Gül propose the creation of a "Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform" as a means of fostering stability and peace in the region.

**30 August 2008:** General Ilker Başbuğ replaces General Yaşar Büyükanit as chief of general staff of the Turkish army. General Işık Koşaner takes over from Başbuğ the post of land forces commander.

**1 September 2008:** Turkey launches its "Third National Programme on EU Reform".

**1 September 2008:** An EU extraordinary summit comes to a decision to freeze talks on a new EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) until Russia fully complies with the EU brokered peace plan for South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

**3 September 2008:** Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders symbolically launch talks on the reunification of the island with UN-mediated negotiations on a practicable power-sharing scheme to begin on 11 September.

**6 September 2008:** Attending a 2010 World Cup qualifying football match between Turkey and Armenia in Yerevan, Turkish President Abdullah Gül is the first Turkish head of state to visit Armenia.

Sources: [www.euobserver.com](http://www.euobserver.com), [www.euractiv.com](http://www.euractiv.com), [www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com), [www.turkishdailynews.com.tr](http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr), [www.todayszaman.com](http://www.todayszaman.com).

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# THE CONTINUING POWER STRUGGLE IN TURKEY

## Interpretations in European Union media

Andreas Marchetti

There is no single picture of Turkey within the European Union. There exist rather several images. These vary from Turkey constituting an essential part of European heritage, going back to Greco-Roman times and early Christianity, to the perception of fundamental strangeness, evidenced by past hostilities that form part of a negative but nonetheless common experience. According to these preconceived images, the interpretation of current phenomena varies considerably. However, the interior developments in Turkey since early 2007 have strongly increased the awareness in the European Union that Turkey does not really correspond to only one of the more or less popular images, but that the country is characterised by various political, societal and cultural currents (xvii).<sup>1</sup> Ever since the presidential elections of 2007, the media is more and more becoming aware of these differences within Turkey. Accordingly, to a certain extent there has been an amalgamation of images, giving way to more shades of grey where initially media coverage had been dominated by black and white – and considerably more black, for that matter, as has been highlighted in an article by Ellen Svendsen two years ago, pointing to the general negativity of media coverage if it comes to Turkey, combined with an underlying fear of Islam.<sup>2</sup> This article explores the interpretations of the latest developments offered in German, French and English language media in order to highlight the central aspects of this phenomenon.

Domestic developments in Turkey have widely been interpreted by European media as a fundamental power struggle, starting with the controversies surrounding the presidential elections of 2007, continuing over the first concrete measures to reform Art. 301 of the Turkish penal code and the government's decision to no longer ban headscarves from universities, up to the abolishment of the latter by the constitutional court in June 2008. Media have identified the closure case against the AKP on the one hand and the official charges against a group labelled "Ergenekon" on the other hand as the latest and most extreme manifestations of this struggle. The charge against the AKP to be a "centre of anti-secularism" did not only threaten the existence of the governing party but was combined with an attempt to forbid the continuous political engagement of more than 70 of its members, including Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and President Abdullah Gül. Only by one vote did the constitutional court decide on 30 July 2008 to not close down the party but nonetheless deprived it of a considerable part of its public financing. Just as the possible closure of the ruling party would have been a unique case in Turkish history (vi), the charges filed against numerous personalities believed to aim at turning over the present government,

were also regarded as unprecedented actions against the so-called "deep state" (iii, xviii).

In very general terms, the continuing power struggle is considered to have led to a strong polarisation within Turkey between the "new" Anatolian middle class, with the AKP being in power since 2002, and the "traditional" Kemalist establishment, mainly represented by the CHP and the military (ii, v, viii, xv, xviii, xxi, xxvii). The acceptance of such a polarisation no longer leaves room for a monolithic image of Turkey. Its deconstruction constitutes the central prerequisite to question traditional stereotypes.

If it comes to the concrete interpretation of either side's actions, a rather unexpected realisation seems to take place. The habitual sympa-

seen less positively in Europe as one might guess from the habitual attributes pinned to secularism. This does not imply a turning away from a positive image of the secular nature of these elites but the rejection of a strong nationalism that goes with it and that is regarded as outdated (x, xiv). Besides, the CHP as *the* Kemalist party is considered to have turned from a socialist, pro-European stance in the past to a nationalist, anti-European position in recent years (x, xi), leaving very little space for positive identification. Despite the continuing fear of Islam referred to earlier and the detection of "authoritarian" temptations on both sides (ix, xx), sympathies do not automatically lie with the Kemalist elite but rather seem to be with the AKP – however, it is not the foundations of the AKP that make European Union media voice this sympathy, but rather the policy output of the AKP that is responsible for its appreciation. The ruling of the constitutional court not to close the AKP has therefore been widely applauded as if not strengthening Turkish democracy in the first place at least as preventing any severe damage (ii, v, vii, xii, xiv, xviii, xix, xxi, xxiii, xxvi). With traditional connotations of religiosity on the one hand and secularism on the other hand being challenged, Europeans increasingly have to question their images of today's transforming Turkey.



Olli Rehn, Commissioner for Enlargement, José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, and Marc Pierini, Head of the EC delegation to Turkey, in Istanbul in April 2008. © European Community

ties of many commentators in the European Union seem to be with secular forces, because of the widely shared perception that secularism is linked to liberalism and liberalism is related to progress, whereas religiously grounded positions are often regarded as conservative and are therefore frequently linked to standstill (xiv). However, these general attributes to secularism on the one hand and religion on the other hand just do no longer seem to smoothly fit when it comes to Turkey. Whereas the opponents of the AKP in Turkey accuse Erdogan and Gül of striving for an Islamisation of the country, this view is evidently not shared by the media, even if they tend to be sceptical to consider Turkey as a future member of the EU (xii). Although the Islamist roots of Erdogan and Gül are generally acknowledged (v, xvii, xxvii), their policies and the AKP in general are rather considered Islamo-conservative (i, ix, xi, xxv, xxvi, xxx, xxxi), drawing explicit analogies to Christian Democrat parties in Europe (vii, xi). In addition, it is this conservative party with a strong religious background that is regarded as the driving force behind – pro-EU – reforms, countering the general image of conservatism as a preserving rather than a transforming force. Only few commentators still stick to interpreting AKP as (moderately) Islamist (xvi, xxiv, xxviii, xxix).

Consequently, the secular Kemalist elite are

1) Roman numbers in the text identify specific press articles listed at the end.

2) Cf. Ellen Svendsen: "The Turks arrive!" European media and public perceptions of Turkey, in: *ZEI EU-Turkey-Monitor*, 2(3), p. 3f.

Sources: [www.sueddeutsche.de](http://www.sueddeutsche.de): i Verbot der AKP schon bald erwartet, 7 June 2008; ii Ein Land vor Gericht, 2 July 2008; iii Die Generäle und die graue Wölfin, 3. July 2008; iv Terroranklage gegen 86 Verdächtige, 14 July 2008; v Nah am Abgrund, 22. July 2008; vi Lange Tradition der Parteiverbote, 30 July 2008; vii Ein Mann wie ein Magnet, 31 July 2008; [www.faz.net](http://www.faz.net): viii Türkische Tradition, 14 April 2008; ix Die Juristokratie greift nach der Macht, 9 June 2008; x "Rettet den Laizismus", 27 June 2008; xi Auf der Suche nach sich selbst, 12 July 2008; xii Türkische Turbulenzen, 14 July 2008; xiii Erdogan: "Ein Sieg der Demokratie", 30 July 2008; xiv Das Kopftuch der Präsidentengattin war zu viel, 31 July 2008; [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk): xv Democracy and the law, 2 July 2008; xvi Turkish coup plot awakens fear of violent nationalism, 6 July 2008; xvii Turkey turns westwards, 19 July 2008; xviii Turkish society on trial, 29 July 2008; xix Act now AKP, for the good of Turkey, 31 July 2008; [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk): xx The Big Question: Why is tension rising in Turkey, and is the country turning Islamist?, 8 July 2008; xxi A bitter power struggle for the soul of democracy, 29 July 2008; xxii Collision course in Turkey, 29 July 2008; xxiii One battle has ended but the war will go on, 31 July 2008; [www.timeonline.co.uk](http://www.timeonline.co.uk): xxiv By a Whisker, 31 July 2008; [www.lefigaro.fr](http://www.lefigaro.fr): xxv La justice turque tentée d'interdire le parti au pouvoir, 28 July 2008; xxvi Turquie: l'AKP échappe de peu à l'interdiction, 30 July 2008; xxvii Les Turcs veulent que l'AKP revienne à la ligne politique, 31 July 2008; [www.lemonde.fr](http://www.lemonde.fr): xxviii La justice turque ouvre la voie à une possible interdiction de l'AKP, 2 April 2008; xxix L'islamisme turc face à ses juges, 4 April 2008; xxx Les hussards de la Turquie kémaliste, 3 July 2008; xxxi En Turquie, l'AKP est sanctionné mais pas dissous, 1 August 2008.

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# TURKEY AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

## The limits of the EU strategy

Kivanc Ulusoy/Arzu Ulusoy-Shipstone

Aiming to show the decisiveness of his government to democratize Turkey, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan once stated that the 'Copenhagen criteria' would be turned into 'Ankara criteria' and implemented in Turkey whether the prospect for the EU membership exists or not.<sup>1</sup> However, although the government of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) engaged in a serious reform process and issued a series of reform packages significantly transforming the legal and political system after coming to power in October 2002, recent experience shows that the process of democratization in Turkey is still not sustainable. It is in danger of sliding backwards, as the democratic forces, including the AKP government, are far from strong enough to govern it. On 22 July 2007, the general elections were held in Turkey. The Justice and Development Party was able to win the elections for the second time and formed the new government. Following the formation of the new government, the new President of the Republic was elected. Both elections took place under the pressure of a tense political struggle, generally seen by external observers as an expression of the century-old conflict between secularists (or Kemalists) and Islamists. The tension continued as the new government moved towards resolving the long lasting problems of Turkish democracy such as headscarf issue, the status of Alevites, the rights of non-Muslim minorities or the Kurdish problem in the aftermath of the elections.

However, in the post-2004 period, the process of democratization in Turkey has been hampered particularly by its unstable relations with the EU. Although the accession negotiations started in October 2005, the framing of negotiations without a clear timetable and membership perspective, coupled with the emergence of discourses offering alternatives to membership for Turkey such as the privileged partnership, have contributed to a sharp decline of popular support for EU membership. The decline of support became even sharper as the public perceived that some of the leading EU members are against Turkey's membership. Even though the accession negotiations started, doubts existed regarding the EU's sincerity towards Turkey. Soon after, one of the most serious crisis of Turkey-EU relations came when the Council in Brussels suspended eight chapters of accession negotiations in December 2006 as a result of the Greek Cypriot veto and when journalist Hrant Dink, one of the most prominent figures of Turkey's Armenian community, was assassinated in Istanbul in January 2007 amidst heated debates on the controversial Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, accepting „insulting Turkishness“ a crime punishable by up to three years in prison.<sup>2</sup> The impasse in the Cyprus problem significantly contributed to declining EU credibility. The negative climate dominating Turkey-EU relations since the failed referendum for the Annan Plan brought the suspension of eight chapters of the negotiations at the Council meeting in De-

cember 2006. A danger of a real "train crash" in Turkey-EU relations was partly averted.<sup>3</sup>

In the post 2006 period, paralysis in negotiations led to worries in Europe regarding where Turkey's reform process is heading.<sup>4</sup> Disappointed by the AKP's hesitancy to overcome the problems related to article 301 even after a landslide victory in the last elections,<sup>5</sup> Europeans started to question its sincerity in the EU cause.<sup>6</sup> The liberal, pro-European circles in Turkey also started to pressurize the government by instigating a campaign labelled "don't forget the EU".<sup>7</sup> The main criticism was directed towards AKP's way of handling the negotiations by assigning the chief negotiator and the foreign minister posts to the same person, Ali Babacan.<sup>8</sup> Babacan, overwhelmed by the jobs of carrying out the multi-faceted foreign relations of Turkey, intensified as a result of post-September 11 developments, was rather weak in taking necessary steps to create a specific institutional structure, coordinate various ministries and appoint relevant cadres for

the highly complex EU negotiation tasks.<sup>9</sup>

However, less than a year after the elections in March 2007, the Turkish political scene was shaken when the chief prosecutor of the Court of Appeals asked the Constitutional Court to close the AKP because of its activities against the secular character of the state on 14 March 2008. Interpreting this challenge as a strategic maneuver of the established circles to pressurize the AKP, Erdogan saw the EU again as a savior option.<sup>10</sup> However, European criticisms, while considering the move of the judges as extremely narrowing the political space in the country and unacceptable in the context of EU values and principles, were mainly addressing the government because of its policy of permanently postponing the necessary democratic reforms.<sup>11</sup> The closure case was concluded on 30 July 2008. The Constitutional Court decided not to close the AKP but agreed to fine the party off 50% of its state aid. The President of the Court while announcing the verdict, underlined that the Court cannot remain

### CURRENT NEGOTIATING STATUS

No.	Title of Chapter	Status
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: ● not yet opened (●) suspended  
 ● opened  
 ● provisionally closed

Data as of September 2008

▶ indifferent to Turkey's current problems and undertake the burden of pushing the country into deep political and economic chaos which might come with the closure of the AKP. Furthermore, the members of the Court could not remain indifferent to the international opposition mainly coming from the EU side, initially accused of being naïve to the sensitivities of Turkey by some circles defending the closure case on the basis of the judiciary's independence.<sup>12</sup>

As the closure case shows, the delicate process of democratic transition that is currently underway in Turkey is facing a serious danger of spill back from its original targets. The EU's negotiation strategy significantly contributes to this situation and seriously hampers the present transformation. The accession process challenges the cores of state power in Turkey as it pressurizes the country to adapt itself to the EU standards on key matters of domestic politics and to share its sovereign power on crucial issues of foreign policy. However, the process faces dramatic resistance in this period. The closure case shows that even the commencement of the EU accession negotiations in October 2005 did not make the expected impact in boosting the reform process which is not sustainable unless the EU anchor operates effectively. However, losing its place as a center of attraction for the country's political forces including the AKP government, the EU is still handicapped in playing a coherent role as a catalyst of democratization in Turkey. Even though the membership negotiations started, the European credibility becomes extremely low in instigating deeper democratization. Recent developments show the limitations of the EU strategy to push Turkey to further reforms as it expands Eurosceptical feelings and seriously weakens the pro-reform coalition of forces. The perception that the democratization process is driven by an external actor – the EU – already makes the democratic forces extremely vulnerable to pressures of the hardliners prioritizing security threats and fears of disintegration over democracy. However, the extremely shaky nature of the rewards promised in the end of the negotiation process contributes to the sharp decline of the EU's credibility within the governing elite and the larger public in terms of the prospect of implementing the already issued reform packages. The EU, once a significant external leverage of reform, is in danger of turning into a counter instrument to offset the deepening of democracy as a result of its negotiation strategy.

Time constraints constituted the main variable for the effectiveness of the EU leverage over Turkish politics. Increasing momentum of Turkey's democratization between 2002-2004

shows both the operational power of the EU strategy of 'reinforcement by reward', and the time constraints together with the low political cost of compliance as the crucial variables in explaining transformation. To have a start-date for accession negotiations between 2002 and 2004 was the chief motive for the AKP government to push for reforms. The challenges to the cores of state power particularly in the case of civil-military relations and the minority issues remained to be seen throughout the implementation process. However, negative input from the Cyprus issue combined with less credible EU commitments, revealed by the EU leaders' assertions offering a privileged partnership to Turkey instead of full membership and the high accent on the open-ended nature of the negotiations, seriously contributed to the decline of incentives for further democracy by abandoning the time constraint of the reforms. In other words, the EU started to pressure the AKP government into making fundamental changes in its Cyprus policy and altering the domestic power structure through redrawing the boundaries between civil-military relations in the name of an accession process which the European side seemed to be calling into question. Credible commitments became particularly significant when the EU seemed unable to provide them. Turkey, apparently moving closer to the 'European' values and principles in the 2002-2004 period, started to slide back to its traditional political reflexes both in domestic politics and foreign policy in the post-2004 era.

The accession negotiations so far are a litmus test for Turkish democracy. As the recent experience shows, the reform process is not an irreversible process at all. Using Erdogan's famous dictum "turning the Copenhagen criteria into Ankara criteria" does not seem to be an easy task. Turkey's democracy is still fragile and far from being consolidated. The EU strategy of negotiations exacerbated this already fragile situation. While the accession negotiations were crucial to sustain the process of democratization, the ambiguity in Turkey-EU relations seriously affected its momentum. Inhibiting the domestic societal aspects by excessively tying its dynamics to the prospect of EU membership, the reform process becomes extremely vulnerable to the ambiguous European attitude towards Turkey. The closure case is expected to open a new era in Turkey-EU relations for two principal reasons. First of all, the AKP government seems to have understood that furthering the democratization process is crucial for its survival and any serious step backwards in this process would jeopardize its political supremacy. Secondly, it also became clear for the government that the EU accession negotiations play a key role in

sustaining the process of democratization and for this reason some serious steps should be taken in areas like the resolution of the Cyprus issue and minority rights.

The main challenge in this context emerges whether the EU would respond in positive ways to the willingness and courage that can be put forward by the AKP government. This is the other side of the coin. The official visit of the European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso just after the closure case was opened became particularly important to show the continuing interest of the EU on the future of Turkish democracy. Barroso's visit was also meaningful in terms of reiterating the EU's commitments towards Turkey in the accession negotiations. The leading circles in Turkey, puzzled by the EU's ambiguous strategy of negotiations, expected this kind of reiteration of commitments from the European side for so long. As the negotiation experience of the past three years shows, in the present period the messages coming from the EU turn out to be rather problematic not only in terms of regaining credibility in the eyes of leading circles and the larger public, but also in terms of really supporting the reform process in Turkey and progressing in the accession negotiations.

- 1) "Başbakan Erdogan: Kopenhag kriterleri Ankara Kriterleri olacak", *Yeni Safak* (Turkish daily), 14.12.2003.
- 2) For reflections of Article 301 and the assassination of Hrant Dink, see, *Nokta* (Turkish weekly), 25-31 January 2007.
- 3) K. Hughes, *Turkey and the EU: four scenarios from train crash to full steam ahead*, Friends of Europe, September 2006, www.friendsofeurope.org.
- 4) "Turkey and Europe: Coming apart?" and "Turkey: Flying in the wrong direction", *The Economist*, 6 May 2006.
- 5) "AKP'de soru: 301 iznini kim versin", *Radikal* (Turkish daily), 4 January 2008.
- 6) "Erdogan'ın AB'ye bağlılığı sorgulanıyor", *Milliyet* (Turkish daily), 16 February, 2008.
- 7) "Aydınlarдан AKP Hükümetine AB Muhtırası", *Milliyet* (Turkish daily), 2 March 2008.
- 8) C. Aktar "İnsanlar AB'yi unuttu ya düşman oldu", *Milliyet* (Turkish daily), 3 March 2008.
- 9) S. İdiz "Babacan ya müzakereciliği ya da bakanlığı tercih etsin", *Milliyet* (Turkish daily), 15 March 2008.
- 10) "AKP rotayı AB'ye çeviriyor", *Milliyet* (Turkish Daily) 3 April 2008; "AKP yeniden AB'ye sarıldı", *Cumhuriyet* (Turkish daily), 4 April 2008.
- 11) "AB hem kapatma davasını hem hükümeti eleştiriyor", *Radikal* (Turkish daily), 2 April 2008.
- 12) These circles interpreted the assertions of the EU leaders against the closure of the AKP as unjustified external interventions to the judiciary's independence in Turkey. See, "Avrupa ve Biz", *Cumhuriyet* (Turkish daily), 2 April 2008; M. Soysal, "Alafranga Avanaklık", *Cumhuriyet* (Turkish daily) 2 April 2008; H. Bila, "Olli Rehn'e de Sağduyu", *Milliyet* (Turkish daily), 2 April 2008.

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