

From the Desk of the Editor

This issue of TPQ finds the Turkey-European Union relationship at a crossroads. While there is widespread recognition that some form of progress is necessary to salvage the current low in relations between the two entities, different perspectives exist on how to go about it. Some see Turkey's eventual EU membership as inevitable, but dwell on how and when this will take place, others debate alternative forms of mutually beneficial integration. As always, from every perspective and especially on controversial questions, we try to present a wide range of views from influential players in the field.

From TPQ's inception ten years ago, we have consistently underlined the EU accession process as a win-win formula for the widest possible spectrum of Turkish society, the EU, and the neighborhood at large. Mobilization around this vision could help reduce long-term risks that today's populism and polarization bring about.

Turkey's EU accession negotiations have come to a standstill. While the steep challenges of public opinion in EU member states demotivate Turkey, the question of Cyprus is the leading reason for the current stall of accession negotiations. This question even blocks Turkey's participation, as a strategic neighboring partner, in various EU initiatives that are not related to accession. The most recent round of negotiations towards unification of the Island as a bizonal, bicomunal federation with political equality has failed to provide a solution.

On the eve of the upcoming six-month EU Presidency by the Republic of Cyprus –unrecognized as such by Turkey– His Excellency Demetris Christofias shares his views in an exclusive interview for TPQ. President Christofias not only highlights the challenges the EU faces (including the current economic crisis and upheaval in Europe's southern neighborhood) but also analyzes the prospects of reaching a solution to the Cyprus problem. Christofias argues that the current Turkish Cypriot administration has unrolled some basic commitments and convergences which had been reached during his negotiations with the previous Turkish Cypriot administration. He also reiterates the Greek Cypriot administration's proposal for the opening of Famagusta and its port which will give the chance to both Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities to use it for residential and commercial purposes. The prospect of unblocking some negotiation chapters for Turkey's EU membership is part of this proposal.

The linking of Turkey's EU accession process to a Turkish compromise for the resolution of the Cyprus problem has caused significant disillusionment in Ankara.

Turkey expects the EU to lift the isolation of Turkish Cypriots unconditionally as it promised to in April 2004. Although, Christofias underlines the intent of his administration to approach all candidate countries, including Turkey, with objectivity and neutrality when it takes over the EU Presidency, Turkey remains skeptical.

In his contribution to TPQ's current issue, Turkey's Minister of Customs and Trade, Hayati Yazıcı, highlights several reasons for Turkish frustration towards the EU. He argues that the EU's acceptance of 'South Cyprus' as an EU member before the resolution of the Cyprus problem, revealed its double standards concerning the principle of friendly neighborly relations. While pointing out that the Customs Union between Turkey and the EU has led to significant structural improvements on the Turkish side, Minister Yazıcı raises questions about how far reaching its impact on Turkish economic growth has really been. He also focuses on the EU's "unfulfilled obligations", including the "unfair visa requirements" that Turkish citizens who want to enter the Schengen zone are subject to.

Former Turkish diplomat, Ahmet Funda Tezok takes up the current troubled reality of the Balkans, noting that, regardless of their troubles, the European future of the Balkans is not questioned. Providing an overview of the integration policy of Brussels towards the Balkans, Tezok points out that the EU extends privileges to nationals of the Western Balkan states which are denied to citizens of Turkey, such as visa-free travel.

The freedom of movement debate is further elaborated on by Alexandra Stigmayer and Zeynep Özler. Visa-free travel is widely seen as the most realistic way to salvage Turkey-EU relations, motivate Turkish citizens in favor of Europeanization, and reinvigorate EU leverage in Turkey. While Turkey plays a key role in the protection of the EU's external borders, it has not been offered a roadmap for visa liberalization, which other neighboring countries received even before they had EU accession prospects pronounced, let alone formal candidacy. Stigmayer, a senior analyst for the European Stability Initiative (ESI) who is leading the institution's research on (and advocacy for) the EU visa liberalization process, also underlines Turkish frustration caused by the EU's refusal to offer Turkey a visa liberalization prospect. Stigmayer critically analyzes the reasons behind the EU reluctance, and offers practical solutions in order to overcome the current deadlock.

IKV's (Economic Development Foundation) Senior Researcher Zeynep Özler elaborates on various recent court decisions in EU countries which have confirmed that visa requirements towards Turkish citizens are illegal on the basis of the Association Agreement (1963) and its Additional Protocol (1970) between Turkey and the EU. Özler argues that the indifference of EU member states to this reality

discredits the EU claim of giving priority to the rule of law. Özler also describes the cumbersome bureaucratic procedures required for Turkish national to obtain a Schengen visa.

Turkey's positive economic and political transformation is frequently cited as a reason why it is particularly unfair that EU accession is not proceeding rapid and smoothly. In this issue, various dimensions of Turkey's democratization agenda, intricately related to Turkey-EU relations, are examined by a number of authors. (The macroeconomic front will be examined more closely in the upcoming Summer TPQ issue). As a journal that advocates freedom of expression and dissent, this dimension is particularly central to our coverage.

Umut Oran, parliament member of the Republican People's Party (CHP), currently the country's main opposition party, paints a worrisome picture about Turkey's trajectory. He refers to the "autocratic pressure" of the AKP government on the media, unions, and civil society, and points out the Prime Minister's expressed objective to 'raise a religious youth.' Oran argues that the political system needs to be revamped and reiterates concerns on judiciary independence and individual freedoms. The risk, he argues, is that "the government becomes increasingly oppressive in response to the pressure from changing demographics and changes both at home and in the region."

Özgür Aşık, a practicing lawyer in France and Turkey, zooms into the particular dimension judicial practice, pointing out deficiencies concerning the independence of the judiciary and judicial quality in Turkey. Aşık points out concerns about the excessive executive control over the judiciary and the real motivation behind some of the legislative changes in this sphere. Aşık claims that despite the government's claims to involve citizens in decision making process, in reality, it has made fundamental changes without listening to civil society- thus continuing the tradition of ruling the society in a top-down way. He also points out the cultural resistance which has negatively affected the implementation of progressive laws, in particular, concerning women's rights.

The rights and empowerment of women is an issue that TPQ has always given utmost importance to and which is widely seen as a litmus test of Turkey's progress. As such, the contribution of Fatma Şahin, Minister of Family and Social Policies, is illuminating. Highlighting achievements in areas such as reducing infant mortality and increasing girls' educational enrollment, the Minister also outlines challenges in areas such as combatting domestic violence and women's participation in the labor market and local politics. For progressive laws to translate into reality, the engagement of women's organizations remains crucial.

Dr. Sami Faltas, of the Netherlands-based Groningen University, brings the power struggle between the Turkish government and the Military General Staff to this issue of TPQ. In his article, he expresses satisfaction with the establishment of civilian control over the military. However his article suggests that the system needs to be reformed holistically for confidence in the rule of law to be established.

Another area of focus for this issue of TPQ is the ‘strategic dialogue’ between Turkey and the EU, which aims to find synergy in steering transnational developments in their (shared) eastern and southern neighborhoods.

As a German Member of the European Parliament representing the Liberals, Alexander Graf Lambsdorff comments that the “historic transformation currently taking place in the Middle East and North Africa” which has made the prospect of a joint Turkey and the EU strategy, “more desirable and feasible.”

Given the heightened Turkey-skepticism carried by Nicolas Sarkozy, the recent elections in France –won by his opponent– offer an opportunity to stimulate Turkey-EU relations. French-Turkish relations are also important in terms of synergy in policies towards the Middle East and North Africa at this critical stage for this region. Marc Pierini, recently retired from a career of EU diplomacy and having been posted last in Ankara, shares with TPQ audiences an expanded version of an article he wrote for Carnegie Europe, laying out the pressing foreign policy agenda of the newly elected French President, François Hollande.

Also in this issue, Carlo Casini, President of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament makes a case for Turkey’s membership on the basis of economic interests and geopolitics. Casini emphasizes what Turkey’s accession means for European identity and the relationship between enlargement and deeper integration. In response to fears that Turkey’s accession would spoil the ‘European soul’ which is rooted in Christian culture, he explains that the current European identity is defined by an evolving legal and political structure.

Concerns about the absorption capacity of the EU, increasingly due to Turkey’s ambitions to be a regional power by itself, have rendered the discussion of alternatives to Turkey’s membership increasingly mainstream.

Francesco Bongiovanni, author of the book “The Decline and Fall of Europe” relates various perspectives about where the frontiers of the ‘European project’ lie, what identity parameters define this union and whether political legitimacy and economic crises threaten the viability of the EU. Dr. Bongiovanni proposes that a ‘third way’ be considered to define Turkey-EU relations. Without being constrained

by having to define where the relationship with Turkey will formally lead to, the two sides should pragmatically explore collaboration opportunities, he argues.

At a standstill with its relations to the EU, Turkey has attempted to revitalize trade relations and tourism with its regional neighbors. Turkey has lifted visa requirements for the nationals of Syria, Yemen, Libya, Jordan, Lebanon and others. These actions, however, have raised concerns and questions in European circles as to whether Turkey is drifting away from EU norms since it has lifted visas for countries that belong to the EU's "blacklist".

Sergiy Korsunsky, Ukraine's Ambassador to Turkey, writes about Russia's growing weight as the EU's main energy supplier on the EU's geopolitical and economic stability. He argues that in order to offset Russia's inflated influence on the EU, Turkey and Ukraine should be considered important partners in the EU's energy policy.

David Janssen, presents an overview of the transformation of EU foreign policy and soft power in its neighborhood, detailing the case of the relatively weak impact of the EU on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Janssen speculates that this was due to factors such as the competing interests of third actors and the contradictory ambitions of EU member states.

We are grateful for the partnership and support of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty.

A special thanks goes out to Finansbank, the institutional sponsor of this issue of TPQ. We also appreciate the continued support of Ford, Garanti Bankası, TAV, İş Bankası, Akbank and BP Turkey.

Diba Nigar Göksel