

From the Desk of the Editor

This issue of TPQ spans a broad range of topics concerning both Turkey's domestic affairs and neighborhood dynamics. Diverse views are voiced on the course of change in a number of Turkey's relationships that can be regarded to be "in flux" – Israel and Greece, Armenia and the United States. The respective capacity and influence of the U.S. and the EU in the regions of the Mediterranean, Middle East, and Eurasia are analyzed, in conjunction with an effort to better understand Turkey's comparative soft power in these regions.

Turkey's EU accession process has been seen to be "ailing" in the past couple of years. Meanwhile Turkey's "multi-faceted active foreign policy" geared at minimizing the negative fallout from regional hostilities has been high on the agenda. While talk about the shift of power away from the Western sphere proliferates, confidence that Turkey no longer needs the EU anchor gains traction in Turkey.

Meanwhile, the fashion in which Ankara has tailored its outreach towards neighbors such as Iran and Russia has raised questions among Western counterparts. In light of these debates, opposing perspectives about the course of Turkey-U.S. relations find strong representation within this issue of TPQ. This debate has recently been further fuelled by both the NATO Summit in Lisbon in November and the fallout from WikiLeaks.

Turkey's economic success, legislative improvements, and regional soft power in the course of the past decade are largely a factor of its credentials gained through commitment to a European vocation, and the conditionality attached to this belonging. From the inflow of ideas, benchmarks, support of NGO's, and foreign direct investment, European engagement has arguably transformed Turkey into a center of gravity for its neighbors to the East.

It is true that Turkey's improving relations with neighbors can potentially serve both Turkish interests and the interests of Turkey's Western allies. Liberal visa regimes and free trade policies pursued by Ankara, as well as the positive atmosphere struck with many of its past adversaries is certainly good for Turkish soft power. However, none of this is without reservations, nor can it be taken for granted.

While many of Turkey's ongoing foreign policy initiatives have yet to produce concrete results, Turkey also has limited influence over the dynamics of at least a few conflicts with potential to erupt among its neighbors. Moreover, Turkey's using its pivotal position in favor of its neighbors at critical junctures can have "unintended consequences," hampering both Turkey's and its long time Western allies' influence in the longer term.

Economically, as well, open questions remain. Though the Turkish economy is booming, this can be expected to fluctuate. Turkey still needs to raise the educational profile of its workforce, reduce major regional development gaps, provide employment for a large number of women and youth, solve the ever-draining Kurdish problem, increase

accountability in public procurement, and more. Doing so with a society ridden by deep divides, as it is, will be particularly challenging. In short, Turkey still needs the predictability, structural change, and institutional development that EU integration imposes.

Though it may appeal to the wider public, the projection of overconfidence –and borderline defiance– by Turkish political authorities towards the EU may very well be irresponsible. Ultimately, when arduous steps need to be taken in line with European integration targets, the Turkish leadership will need a constituency that still believes in the value of EU accession. Arguments that Turkey does not need Europe or that the EU is unfair, stir resentment among the Turkish society and narrow the maneuver space of the decision makers down the line.

The conviction that Turkey does not need the EU has partially been driven by the widespread Turkish prediction that it will never be allowed to join as a full member. A recently released ESI report “A Very Special Relationship” argues that “there are only two ways for the talks to end or be suspended: one is for Turkey to give up and walk away from the negotiating table; the other is for the EU member states to decide on a suspension” – both of which would be difficult politically and technically.

The report also argues that the oft-heard accusation of the EU as being “unfair to Turkey” is misfounded. Arguing that Turkey is “not the first country to face difficulties in its EU accession process,” the report states that Turkey has in fact been given the benefit of the doubt. An exception to fairness by the EU, according to the published report, is the matter of visa, referred to as “viagra for the accession process.” The EU needs to give Turkish citizens a clear road forward towards visa free travel to Europe, in light of the EU’s previous commitments. Certainly from a widespread Turkish perspective, the Cyprus ordeal is another exception to European fairness.

Another related topic covered in this issue of TPQ is the rights of the Greek Orthodox minority in Turkey, which is intertwined with Greece-Turkey bilateral relations. As a dimension of Turkey’s democratic credentials, the changing and unchanging realities of the Greek minority in Turkey are attributed importance to within the framework of Turkey’s EU accession process. This topic also sheds light on the conflicting identity conceptions in the country.

Enshrined in the Turkish education system, the dominant perception of the Orthodox community in the country as a “threat” is a stubborn remnant of a past era. During the pre-Republic years and Turkey’s War of Independence, Greek state irredentism and the Ottoman Greek minority were closely associated. For decades after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, “instruments” such as discriminating wealth tax, outbreaks of violence, and property restrictions were employed by the state, motivating many non-Muslims to leave the country. Particularly between 2005-2008, the seemingly orchestrated wave of violence against Turkey’s Christians highlighted the vulnerability of this small minority.

Though progress has been made recently towards ending the status of Christian minorities as second-class citizens, expectations for concrete steps such as the opening of the Orthodox Theological Seminary on the island of Halki have not yet been met. It is high time that the Turkish government, opposition and civil society put forth a united front of “zero tolerance” against rhetoric and action that discriminates Turkey’s Christians.

Various authors of this issue of TPQ examine the the dialectic between Greek nationalism and Turkish nationalism as it relates to “reciprocity” in dealing with their respective minorities. Moving beyond past paradigms with relation to their respective minorities can be expected to further fuel improvement of Greece-Turkey relations, and perhaps encourage Greece to play a more prominent role on behalf of Turkey’s EU accession process.

Articles of TPQ are also available for reader comments at www.turkishpolicy.com, along with updated news and analysis of recent developments in Turkey and the neighborhood. Besides our print copy and online platform, we continue to hold roundtable discussions, featuring contrasting views on timely questions. In the month of November two TPQ roundtables took place with the support of the Black Sea Trust Fund for Regional Cooperation (BST) – one in Istanbul and the other, jointly with TEPAV, in Ankara.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the institutional sponsor of this issue of TPQ: Petrol Ofisi. We also appreciate the continuing support of Ford, TAV, Akbank, BP Turkey, Finansbank, and Garanti Bankası.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of Turkish Policy Quarterly and, as always, look forward to your feedback.

Diba Nigar Göksel