

From the Desk of the Editor – Fall 2006

Since the end of the Cold War, and more acutely, in the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001, transatlantic relations have become unfocused and strained. Although U.S.-European relations have begun to mend in the last year, challenges remain in developing a common agenda and suitable mechanisms to overcome global problems. With this issue of TPQ the authors explore transatlantic relations today and weave Turkey and its neighborhood into the picture when analyzing the path ahead.

Ambassador Nabi Şensoy assures us that the transatlantic partners will inevitably find common ground based on mutual interests and that questioning the partnership is inherently a healthy exercise. He also reflects confidence in Turkey's orientation towards the West, which is challenged by a number of articles in the issue - some critical of Turkey, the others of Europe and the United States.

The last year has not been an encouraging one for Turkey's Euro-Atlantic relations. Joseph Yackley points out that public support in EU member states' for Turkey's membership is falling; in parallel, the sentiment among Turks that Turkey will never be granted membership in the European club is rising. Reforms have stalled in Turkey while increasing skepticism towards the western world is leading politicians in the country to adopt a more nationalistic and 'irresponsible' rhetoric in this year of upcoming elections. On the other hand, Turkish-U.S. relations suffered serious blows in the past few years and mistrust prevails on both sides. While Şensoy argues that relations with the United States are back on track claiming transatlantic bonds can remain strong as long as "Turkey's interests are respected", other authors question if the sum of shared values between Turkey and the West is enough to sustain the relationship through difficult circumstances. Lowering mutual expectations is one way to prevent tensions; however, in the case of relations with the EU this might foment a loss of momentum and motivation that is necessary to drive the integration process forward.

International opinion leaders, in numerous articles and in leading newspapers, have recently voiced concern that Turkey is slipping away from the West. As European and American *threat perceptions* are somewhat re-aligning, Turkey's seem to be further diverging. What the depth of the divergence is and whether political will alone could reverse this downward trend has not been duly analyzed. As Burak Bekdil points out,, this reactionary shift is indicative of a loss of direction, but does not imply that this course is unalterable.

Selin Nasi reviews policies the U.S. has pursued in the Middle East that have alienated countries like Turkey and Aylin Alpagut outlines European reactions to U.S. policies since September 11th 2001. Is Turkey's divergence from many U.S. positions in the Middle East merely an extension of a much wider trend of global skepticism towards U.S. policies? Or is there something particularly different about the strong anti-American sentiments in Turkey? Yola H. Johnston argues that there is something different and points to the political leadership in Turkey as an agent provocateur for Turkish society's drift from the United States.

One important challenge for the transatlantic community is dealing with threats emanating from the Islamic world. In this issue of TPQ, P.W. Singer gives a comprehensive overview of the divide between America and the Islamic world; "driven by themes of hurt, fear, and suspicion." European countries are also under great strain as they try to find a balance

between how much space should be granted for Islamic practices in their own democratic societies while attempting not to infringe on their citizens liberties and sense of multiculturalism. All the while, trying to synchronize these practices with effective policies in the Middle East and beyond. As the 50th anniversary of the Rome Treaty establishing the European Community approaches, it is timely to take stock of where the European continent stands facing current global realities. As the article of Minister Artis Pabriks indicates, the EU is not unitary in nature, and the recent accession of new members has brought a dynamism and fresh outlook to the bloc, which may eventually play a stronger role in the Union's institutional reflexes.

Doubts in both the U.S. and Europe about the compatibility of Islam with democracy and the fear of Islamic fundamentalism feed the perception in Turkey that they are being excluded. Where there is eagerness to better understand the Muslim world, such as the recent initiatives in Germany, Turkey should not shy away from participating in the debate and discussing the multiple approaches and challenges that existed (and some that still exist) in its own journey coming to terms with Islam, as a secular country governed by the rule of law. Such a contribution can only be made by Turkey if it feels comfortable with the differences it harbors within its own borders. Both Murat Somer and Geoffrey Gresh delve into the sensitive issues which dominate Turkey's agenda; political Islam and the Kurdish question, and analyze the possibilities and limitations the EU and U.S. face in aiding Turkey with these challenges.

For the most part, there is consensus among the authors of this issue that Euro-Atlantic cooperation is crucial for global stability and peace; at least until an alternative comparable bloc is in sight. Turkey has a choice of how actively engaged to be in the construction of a rejuvenated transatlantic alliance. It is a critical time for Turkey to demonstrate its vision for the future; unfortunately, Turks once again seem preoccupied by problems that in the larger scale of affairs are quite trivial.

Turkey-EU relations are indeed experiencing a rough period, however, with dedication and diligent action, Turkish politicians and intellectuals can reverse the trend if they choose to. With a clearly understood and communicated message of how the European Union will lead to the rationalization of policymaking in Turkey, and without letting the fact that past enlargements have been painful, Turkey's policy elite can and should drive the negotiation period forward. Turkey's experience campaigning for its causes abroad has not necessarily been success stories in the past. However, Turkey has the expertise and experience to design and carry out systematic and targeted exchanges with its European counterparts on all levels. Turkey must utilize this exchange to overcome negative images in European minds and discover common interests, as well as to re-introduce the current Turkey and more importantly the Turkey-to-be. EU membership is still a realistic option for Turkey. If Turks do not believe this, however, it will become a self-fulfilling prophecy; which would be a shameful miscalculation of a catastrophic nature.

As David Barchard notes, making progress in granting rights to religious minorities is one important, self-evident step that there is no credible reason to neglect. The upcoming visit of the Pope to Turkey will bring this debate to the fore.

The Kurdish question is another challenge that Turkey needs to overcome both for its own sake and for the fruits that will be born in terms of EU political criteria, healthy relations with northern Iraq and the United States. The security dimension to this paradigm complicates the

'rights' argument; however, the progress Turkey has made in this realm is underlined by some of our authors in this issue.

As the Riga Summit nears, NATO, the foremost forum for transatlantic policy coordination is also under the microscope. As Jamie Shea underlines, some of the shortcomings which hinder NATO from realizing its potential are caused by the insufficient will of civilian bodies to align their decisions of where and how to expend resources with NATO's, as well as burden sharing issues among its members. Geoffrey Van Orden attributes much of the problem to Europeans' misled ambition to establish a parallel European security mechanism.

There is currently not sufficient statesmanship in either Europe or the United States. And Turkey has its own leadership deficit. Responsible and visionary initiatives are needed to restore the values the transatlantic alliance was built upon; and more than ever, civil society needs to play a role in overcoming biases and building bridges. Trying to understand how people of different countries perceive and are affected by global developments is of utmost importance. One of the oft heard criticisms of U.S. policy was and is a disregard of the sensitivities of other cultures and histories. However there is also an important process of acknowledgement and serious work to overcome weaknesses that takes place. In this context, organizations such as *Terror Free Tomorrow* are noteworthy, contributing to the understanding among American policymakers of the reasons underlying the fluctuations in anti-American sentiments worldwide.

The upcoming issue of TPQ will address the topic from where we leave off - covering the role of values, emotions, and religion on politics and policies. The subject matter is exciting, with many new ideas and avenues to explore.

We would like to congratulate our advisory board member Carl Bildt on his appointment as Foreign Minister of Sweden; and we are delighted to welcome Lord Anthony Giddens to our board of advisors.

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