

FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR

This issue of TPQ comes at a time when relations between Turkey and the EU are at a historical low point. The sources of tension are manifold, and have been compounded by a constellation of transformations in Turkey, Europe, and the international system. The global upswing in far-right populist movements, isolationism, the conflict in Syria and its humanitarian crisis, and the threat of ISIS have caused societies in both regions to turn inwards. Furthermore, nationalist-driven politics propagated by EU capitals and Ankara have played a large role in fueling prejudices and eroding common socio-cultural reference points.

Adding to the friction are clashing perceptions over Turkey's domestic situation in the aftermath of the 2016 failed coup attempt. For the political leadership in Ankara, the EU's lack of overt solidarity after the failed putsch and the failure to understand the severity of events was a disappointment. For Brussels, the prolongation of the state of emergency, sweeping arrests, strains on civil society and journalists, and the constitutional changes which expand presidential power, heightened concerns over the regression of democratic values and rule of law in the country. The decision of the European Parliament to suspend Turkey's accession talks and the European Commission's critical annual Turkey Report for 2018 reflect this prevailing sentiment.

For Ankara, opposition to Turkey's EU membership by France and Germany as early as 2004, calls for a "privileged partnership" as an alternative to membership, and the blocking of EU accession chapters by Cyprus, heightened deeply-rooted skepticism about Europe's intentions. Additionally, resilient questions in European capitals over Turkey's cultural identity further eroded Ankara's trust in EU sincerity.

Long-simmering frustrations peaked in 2017 when AKP ministers were barred from holding campaign rallies in several European cities ahead of the constitutional referendum, ensuing in a string of diplomatic spats between Ankara and EU member states Germany, the Netherlands, and Austria. For the political leadership in Ankara, the perceived interference in Turkey's internal affairs by preventing politicians from addressing the expat community was a prime example of unfair treatment by the EU. The fallout from the 2017 diplomatic disputes continues with campaign bans in place for Turkish politicians in Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands prior to the snap 24 June parliamentary and presidential elections.

Even under the circumstances of strained ties and a frozen accession process, geopolitical exigencies in the region, as well as economic integration, mean that Turkey

and the EU need each other. While there is a consensus on working together pragmatically, even cooperation in areas of mutual interest, including migration, counter-terrorism, and trade, is bedeviled by political tensions. The EU-Turkey refugee deal—in which Turkey committed to stemming the flow of refugees to Europe in return for visa-free travel to the EU for its citizens and financial assistance for the resettlement of refugees—has come to the brink of collapse on several occasions. Likewise, the initiative to upgrade the EU-Turkey Customs Union has not progressed beyond initial talks and is unlikely to in the current atmosphere. Meanwhile, stark discrepancies between Ankara and Brussels over what defines terrorism render deeper cooperation in this area a challenge.

In this issue, our authors reflect on the points of contention in the Turkey-EU relationship and offer visions for future engagement. Collectively, they convey that despite heated rhetoric from both sides, Turkey and the EU share common interests and challenges, which oblige them to build a new framework for cooperation. The fragility of the international system and the myriad of security risks that Turkey and the EU face add impetus to this priority.

As underlined by the Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator of the Republic of Turkey, Ömer Çelik, growing uncertainty in the international system has had a direct effect on the Turkey-EU relationship, which is experiencing a precarious period. The isolationist trend in world affairs, accelerated by Donald Trump's "America First" platform, waning multilateralism, and the rising influence of powers like China and Russia are reshaping global balances of power, asserts Çelik. Far from impervious to these trends, the author points out that the EU has been compelled to redefine its role in the international system and confront growing fractures in Union solidarity, particularly in light of challenges such as Brexit and the migration crisis. In this context, Turkey-EU cooperation is rendered even more important. While Minister Çelik expresses disappointment over the entanglement of the Cyprus problem in Turkey's EU accession process, he emphasizes the necessity of rebuilding a "fair, realistic, and sincere" partnership. The Varna Summit in late March 2018 was a positive step in that direction; where Turkey was able to constructively lay out its expectations concerning a range of issues including counter-terrorism, visa liberalization, and updating the Customs Union. Following the positive steps taken at the Varna Summit, Çelik contends the EU and Turkey must maintain momentum and dialogue at the highest levels to chart a way forward where accession is the primary goal.

In her article, Marietje Schaake, a member of the European Parliament from the Netherlands, stresses the importance of conditionality in the area of human rights

and rule of law vis-à-vis Turkey's EU accession. Citing stagnation in reforms after 2005 and the erosion of democratic values after the failed coup attempt in 2016, Schaake argues that Turkey is moving farther and farther away from the standards necessary to join the Union. The author points out that the package of constitutional amendments—which will go into effect after the 24 June elections—is incompatible with the Copenhagen criteria, therefore, placing Turkey's accession process in limbo. Cumulatively, domestic developments in Turkey are leading to mounting opposition to accession within the EU, yet Schaake argues that the EU-Turkey refugee deal has effectively “tied the hands” of the European Commission and Council. In Schaake's view, with this deal—which trades visa-free travel for refugees—EU leaders have undermined their credibility and given Ankara considerable leverage. Lastly, the author underlines that cooperation outside of the accession framework must be conditional on democratic values, and that the complexity of the current crisis should not come at the expense of person-to-person exchanges, Erasmus+ participation, and civil society engagement between both societies.

In his article, Ayhan Zeytinoğlu, the Chairman of the Economic Development Foundation (*İktisadi Kalkınma Vakfı*) explores areas of dynamism in Turkey-EU relations—refugee cooperation, visa liberalization dialogue, and the prospects for a modernized Customs Union—while underscoring the importance of rekindling Turkey's EU membership prospects. According to Zeytinoğlu, the EU-Turkey refugee deal has been effective in stemming the influx of refugees crossing from Turkey to Europe and setting up a cooperative framework between Ankara and Brussels; however, the author contends that concluding the visa liberalization process for Turkish citizens is a crucial step for revitalizing relations. While the EU-Turkey Customs Union has facilitated elevating the quality, capacity, and competitiveness of Turkish industrial production, Zeytinoğlu maintains that it is in urgent need of modernization due to its asymmetrical and outdated conditions. A strengthened Customs Union would advance Turkey's efforts to harmonize to the EU acquis, help boost foreign direct investment, and could engender political conditions for Turkey's EU accession process to get back on track, argues Zeytinoğlu.

Dr. Gül Günver Turan, President of the Turkey European Union Association (TURABDER) and European Movement Turkey, reflects on the evolution of Turkey-EU relations through the lens of seven defining periods, beginning with the “Period of Delving into Different Designs” (1958-1962). Dr. Turan defines the current state of the relationship as a period of “doubts and new debates,” which is characterized by identity crises in both societies with profound implications for the future of Turkey-EU relations. In Turkey, Turan notes that AKP leaders represent a counter-elite that are trying to transform society in the same way staunch secularists

attempted to shape Turkey in the past, resulting in a clash between the country's secular and religious forces. Meanwhile, the EU is contending with multiple crises ranging from Brexit to the Greek debt crisis to the rise of far-right populist parties, all of which are fueling debates over European identity and the direction of the Union. Against this backdrop, it is hard to expect Turkey's accession talks to achieve momentum in the coming years, posits Turan. In the interest of not isolating Turkey completely, Turan concludes that relations will increasingly revolve around core priorities such as cooperation on terrorism, the refugee crisis, and the Customs Union—with accession taking a backseat.

In his article, Dr. Josef Janning, a senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, asserts that “in the realm of international affairs, transaction-based relations are neither new nor unusual.” Keeping this in mind, the author argues that given the aberrant nature of the relationship between Turkey and the EU, the two parties should opt for a transactional relationship instead of being locked in the accession paradigm which is increasingly losing its rationale and purpose for both sides. Dr. Janning points out that both the EU and Turkey will continue to have a strategic interest in areas of security and economic cooperation, however, the refugee deal will be less a priority, necessary as long as it serves the interests of both sides. This new interest-based relationship by no means implies less interaction between Brussels and Ankara, posits Janning. Instead, a new framework will encourage cooperation and lead to improved relations as Turkey and the EU face common challenges in their shared neighborhood.

Jan Marinus Wiersma, Senior Visiting Fellow at the Clingendael Institute and a former Member of the European Parliament, notes that 2017 was a particularly difficult year for Turkey-EU relations, marked by bilateral diplomatic spats between Turkey and the EU, inflammatory rhetoric from Ankara, and controversial changes to the Turkish constitution which raised alarm bells in Brussels. Against this backdrop, Wiersma advocates a “muddle through” scenario in which relations are stabilized, the accession process exists in name only, and cooperation continues in areas of mutual interest. The other two viable scenarios—a transactional relationship instead of an integrationist one or the complete suspension of talks—is deemed less desirable by the author. Although none of these approaches alone can bridge political differences between Turkey and the EU, Wiersma sees little room for optimism until Brussels perceives an improvement in the condition of human rights and rule of law in Turkey.

Samuel Doveri Vesterbye, Managing Director of the European Neighborhood Council, proposes a new blueprint for the future of EU-Turkey relations in light of

the highly politicized accession process, which has been riddled by unfilled promises, political roadblocks, and an erosion of trust on both sides. The EU shares responsibility in the negative tone relations took: France's decision to freeze chapters in 2007 and the blocking of chapters by Cyprus undermined European commitment to Turkish accession, not to mention engendering what Vesterbye refers to as a "populist incentive mechanism." The latest iteration of this mechanism is the propensity for leaders in both Turkey and the EU to stoke nationalist sentiment through the mobilization of constituencies that are generally opposed to one another. Reinvigorating trust, therefore, must be pursued through cooperation in areas such as foreign policy, energy, and trade, argues Vesterbye. Additionally, the author suggests that a wider scope is necessary to address the deteriorating relationship between Ankara and Brussels, in which a reformed Customs Union, energy cooperation, and coordination on foreign policy are key.

Dr. Meltem Müftüler-Baç, who wrote for TPQ's maiden issue in 2002, laments the loss of the "European anchor" on Turkish political reforms which has resulted in uncertainty over the future of Turkish accession into the EU. Keeping this in mind, Müftüler-Baç, a Professor of International Relations and Jean Monnet Chair at Sabancı University, examines the EU-Turkey relationship from a functional cooperation angle and argues that despite accession no longer being a credible option, Ankara and Brussels should try to remold their relationship. The author explains the nature of a potential new relationship should have a different notion of integration where accession is not the primary goal. Dr. Müftüler-Baç cites the growing examples of the EU pursuing different degrees of integration not only with member states but also with "countries either unwilling or unfit for EU membership." However, the author exercises cautious optimism about remolding the Turkey-EU relationship along these lines given the unlikelihood of Turkey accepting an alternative track to accession. Furthermore, divergences among EU leaders over how to engage Turkey, if at all, complicates the process of restructuring the relationship down the line.

Evaluating the EU-Turkey relationship from an economic angle, Dr. Kamala Dawar, Dr. Christopher Hartwell, and Dr. Sübidey Togan provide an overview of the necessary steps to upgrade the EU-Turkey Customs Union. The authors argue that in its current form, the agreement is outdated and no longer meets the requirements of a 21st century trade agreement. The Customs Union should be strengthened by signing a free trade agreement covering agriculture, services, public procurement, investment protection, dispute settlement, and sustainable development, stress the authors. For Turkey, the authors point out that the challenge lies in aligning with the relevant EU acquis—particularly in agricultural and "food safety, animal and plant health" (SPS) measures. This will require Turkey to adjust its policies and liberalize

the agriculture, services, and public procurement sectors. The authors recommend extending the Customs Union to these areas, which will accrue economic benefits for both sides, deepen interdependence, and facilitate a buttressed institutional framework for Turkey-EU relations moving forward.

While the transactionalist trend in EU-Turkey relations is gaining currency, it is important to remember that the EU's normative influence was a driving force in Turkey's democratic evolution, and an incentive for political reform during the mid-2000s. In an article originally published in the *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Dr. Senem Aydın-Düzgit, evaluates the EU's capability to project its normative power in the current environment. Drawing upon qualitative data from focus group interviews, Aydın-Düzgit, an Associate Professor at Sabancı University and the Research and Academic Affairs Coordinator at the Istanbul Policy Center, determines that a certain segment of the Turkish public still perceive the EU as a force for good in the areas of rule of law and fundamental freedoms. Dr. Aydın-Düzgit explains that this sentiment is split along political lines: Participants who identified themselves as supportive of the ruling government were more critical of the EU, while those who identified with the opposition considered the EU's normative power in a positive light. Given the high levels of domestic polarization on the issue and the negative state of relations on the macro level, the author concludes that the EU needs to find new mechanisms on the micro level to engage with the Turkish public and civil society if it wants to strengthen its position as a normative force.

Shifting the focus from Western to Central Europe, Tamás Kozma and Dr. Péter Dobrowiecki expound on the benefits of further engagement between Turkey and the Visegrad Group (V4), which includes the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. Kozma, an international relations manager and research fellow at the Antall József Knowledge Centre and Dr. Dobrowiecki, head of the Visegrad-European Union office at the same institution, argue that the environment is ripe for coordinated initiatives due to the convergence of interests between Turkey and V4 countries on economic and security matters, as well as energy diversification. Furthermore, the growing discrepancy between Turkey and Western European countries and the V4's supportive stance on Turkey's EU membership has helped to cement the V4-Turkey partnership. Other factors include increased foreign trade relations, the common goal of diversifying energy sources away from Russia, and deepening cultural ties. While multilateral engagement between the V4 and Turkey is growing, the authors also note that the endurance of bilateral relations between Turkey and individual countries within the V4 pose a challenge to engaging Turkey as a unified bloc.

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As always, we are indebted to the authors of this issue for sharing their expertise and opinions. As our readers, please share your feedback.

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