

THE “D”S IN TURKEY- EU RELATIONS: SOME REFLECTIONS

Turkey's relations with the EU date back to 1958. In this article, 60 years of relations have been classified into seven periods whose defining characteristics and themes can be resumed as Period of Delving into Different Designs (1958-1962); Period of Decisions: The Ankara Agreement (1963-1979); Period of Degradation, Distancing, and then Democratization (1980-1986); Period of Disequilibrating Conditions and New Drives (1987-1998), Period of Durable Determination (1999-2005); Period of Dissonance, Discouragement, and Deception (2006-2017); Period of Doubts and New Debates (2018-...). Finally, the question of where doubts and debates faced today may lead to is discussed. The changing faces of Turkey and the EU, the growing divides, and the ideological and political changes occurring within both render it difficult to assess what the future holds for all.

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What is there to be said about Turkey's relations with the EU that has not already been said? We are in 2018, celebrating the 60th year of the start of Turkey's relations with the EU. We have witnessed 60 years of highs and lows in this relationship, which can be classified into seven periods whose defining characteristics and themes will be briefly described below before answering the question related to where doubts and debates faced today may lead to tomorrow.

Period of Delving into Different Designs (1958-1962)

With the signing of the treaties of Rome in 1957 by the six founding members, the Common Market, that is the European Economic Communities (EEC), came into being. Turkey's attention turned to exploring whether it should be a part of this new process and if yes, to search for ways to achieve it. During the same period, the UK was trying to put together another integration project which was less ambitious. A choice had to be made by Turkey between the two projects.

The period when the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Fatin Rüştü Zorlu attended various meetings organized by the UK in Paris to form a European free trade area as an alternative to the Common Market, is not well known. Neither is the time when various meetings were held by Zorlu and his team with the members of the EEC that led to the application of Turkey to the EEC on 31 July 1959, nor are the meetings held afterwards between 28-29 September and between 2-4 December 1959 with the EEC delegations headed by Günter Seeliger, Director-General of the External Relations DG of the Commission of the EEC. Later on in 1963, Seeliger was one of the signatories of the Association Agreement, the famous Ankara Agreement. The minutes of the two meetings, each of which are about 40 pages long are worth analyzing but should constitute the topic of another article. The military coup of 1960 stopped the process which was resumed only after a return to electoral politics.

Period of Decisions: The Ankara Agreement (1963-1979)

In 1967 the EEC, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), and Euratom were fully merged and renamed the European Community (EC). After lengthy discussions, both the EC and Turkey finally reached an agreement granting associate membership to Turkey. A three-phase model was put together. The intended goal of the preparatory first phase was to reduce the economic differences between the EC member countries and Turkey as much as possible. The next phase, a transitional one, got a start with the signing of the Additional Protocol on 1 January 1973, which envisaged how a customs union agreement could be reached later on. This implied abolishing quantitative barriers and tariffs and assuring that there would be a harmonization of

Turkish legislation concerning economic matters with those of the EC. The last, the completion phase, came to life only years later in 1995 with the establishment of a Customs Union between the EC and Turkey.

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This period was difficult for the world economic system, the EC, and Turkey. The collapse of the Bretton Woods system in 1971 forced the EC to collaborate more intensely with one another and led to the formation of the European Monetary System in 1979. In making Europeans freer and richer, promoting economic interdependence was of utmost importance. Turkey, on the other hand, was going through political turmoil which led, finally, to a military coup in 1980.

For the EC, this period was the beginning of enlargement. Denmark, Ireland, and the UK joined the EC in 1973.

Period of Degradation, Distancing, and Then Democratization (1980-1986)

Due to the military coup of 1980, EU-Turkey relations deteriorated. It was only after military leaders allowed a return to democracy and the holding of free elections, which brought Turgut Özal's Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*, ANAP) to power in 1983, that relations were normalized. In the meantime, the EC continued its enlargement process: Greece (1981), Spain and Portugal (1986) became members.

Period of Disequilibrating Conditions and New Drives (1987-1998)

Realizing the importance of being included in the club of 12 members, Turkey formally applied for full membership in 1987. This period is characterized by radical events for the EU. The two Germanys were unified in 1990. The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. The completion of the “single market” allowing for the free movement of goods, services, people and money, and the entry in force of the Maastricht treaty in 1993 was realized. Finally, the European Community was renamed as the European Union. Austria, Finland, and Sweden became new members, and the European Central Bank was formed. While integration was intensifying among the EU members, Turkey was once more going through a period of political instability with parties forming coalition governments that remained in power for only short periods. 11 governments were formed and collapsed in the span of 11 years, making

it impossible to pursue consistent policies. The economy was in turmoil, yet Turkey was able to complete the establishment of a Customs Union in 1995.

Period of Durable Determination (1999 -2005)

The Amsterdam and Nice treaties that entered into force respectively in 1999 and 2003 reorganized the EU, leading to the admission of 10 new members (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia) into the Union. In 1999, Croatia, Macedonia, and Turkey became candidate countries in 2005, accession negotiations with Turkey began. It was, therefore, a shock to all that when more unification was in the making the much-awaited EU constitution was not ratified in 2005.

Turkey at that time was recovering from the economic and financial crisis of 2001, which was overcome thanks to growth enhancing and inflation fighting reforms. This positive turn allowed for the screening process in compliance with the *acquis communautaire*, and comprising 35 chapters, to commence.

Period of Dissonance, Discouragement and Deception (2006-2017)

During a time when enlargement fatigue was taking hold, Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in 2007, and Croatia in 2013, expanding the EU to 28 members. It was also during this time that the 2008 global recession was starting to take its toll on European countries, hitting Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, and Spain particularly hard. In spite of all these upheavals, the Lisbon Treaty which, in a sense, constituted a replacement for the constitutional treaty, was ratified in 2009, bringing institutional and external policy changes to the EU's operations. While the EU was undergoing troubled times, Turkey's relations with the EU were also undergoing radical changes. The causes are manifold: the non-settlement of the Cyprus issues, not extending the customs union to Cyprus, the anti-Turkish accession platform led by Sarkozy and others, and delays in realizing the various legal and human rights reforms in Turkey. The 2016 failed military coup and what followed afterwards moved Turkey further away from the EU. Finally, in 2016, EU-Turkey relations stalled completely.

Period of Doubts and New Debates (2018-...)

Observing Turkey's politics and economics over time, certain traits never seem to change regardless of the government in power. We have always lived through periods of contractions and expansions in our economy, usually described as a liberal economy with a somewhat free market for goods, services, and capital. Our

democracy has always swung back and forth between the more authoritarian and the more democratic, leading us nowadays to be labeled, with some exaggeration, as an authoritarian democracy with the traits of a rogue state, a look alike of Russia and China. Democratic expansions which have been succeeded by a narrowing of our social life, our rights, our freedoms, our faith in our judicial system, have ended up having important repercussions in our relations with the EU.

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What the future holds for Turkey is a question asked by many. Will it remain a country where authoritarianism and ultra-nationalism have become irredeemably deeply-rooted in its political arrangement? The answer is complicated as Turkey is living through an identity crisis of its own where modernization and secularization is being questioned by the current administration, which represents, in many ways, a counter-elite to those that have ruled Turkey until the turn of this century. Stemming from the same social religious roots and background as their conservative and religious electors, it is not clear that this new elite shares the same vision for society as their predecessors. A new elitist authoritarianism is on the rise and so far seems to not be rejected by those who vote for the governing party. These new elites are able to maintain and expand their supporters and enlarge their electoral base to different segments of the society by mobilizing the support of those who were previously the “others” through nationalist rhetoric and by promises of a modernized liberal economy integrated into the global economy. In a way, the past is being reconstructed, but in a new form. The secularists wanted to change society and reform the “other.” Today it is this “other Turkey” which now wishes to return the favor to those they view as being “not one of them.” The “us” and the “them” confront one another, and similar but more reinforced authoritarian methods are now utilized to harness all oppositions.

The next question one needs to raise is the following: In the current situation, what can we expect from Turkey’s relations with the European Union? If one reads the speech French President Emmanuel Macron gave to the European Court of Human Rights in October 2017, we see that he speaks of a Europe which “reaches far beyond the borders of the EU;” it is a Europe “which extends to its confines, such as Turkey.”¹ This answers all doubts about Turkey’s place in Europe. He also puts

¹ Speech by Emmanuel Macron, President of the French Republic at the European Court of Human Rights, 31 October 2017, https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Speech_20171031_Macron_ENG.pdf

forward the following: “I am firmly convinced that the fate of Russia and Turkey will not be improved by turning their backs on Europe, since these two great nations are anchored in Europe, since their history, geography, their literature, and their political consciousness have developed through close contact with Europe.” Macron speaks of “criticizing without engaging in a closed-door policy,” and emphasizes that Europe “should not exclude them from everything, nor, furthermore allow them to exclude themselves.” Macron says that we must hold the line, and so must we.

“At this point in time many European leaders agree that isolating Turkey and cutting ties with it is not the solution.”

This brings us to the fundamental question: Will this engagement which has lasted for 60 years be concluded with a marriage, even if a forced one? Turkey is in a new crisis with the EU and certainly a very serious one with Germany since July 2016. Add to this the unexpected military operation conducted by Turkey in northwest Syria, which elicited disapproval from France and other members of the EU.

The policy of polarization conducted at the domestic and international level by the government has resulted in isolating Turkey from its former allies inside and outside the EU. Accession talks are frozen and will probably remain so in the coming years but the membership process will not be closed by Turkey. Playing the membership card to the Turkish public, though not of vital importance, still needs to be taken into consideration. The latest polls dating November 2017 and conducted by the Economic Development Foundation (İKV) demonstrate that 78.2 percent of the Turkish population still wishes for the continuation of the accession negotiations. Since opinion polls of Eurobarometer show low approval rates for Turkey’s candidacy, one can expect membership talks to remain frozen while official and unofficial meetings concerning subjects such as terrorism, the refugee crisis, illegal immigration, the renewal of the Custom’s Union Agreement, visa issues, and Permanent Structured Cooperation talks to continue. Security and economic issues will always play an important role in the softening of these relations. Positive externalities and spillover benefits can still occur for all.

Since Iceland’s decision to stop negotiations with the EU, Brexit, the rise of populism, and the undemocratic strategies and policies implemented by some EU members discussions on the future of democracy and the Union, have entered the EU agenda. The political institutionalization of the EU is in question, and the identity crisis that had been perceived for some time now seems to have deepened. The question of

whether the EU wishes to be multicultural or be defined by cultural and religious traditions is also up for discussion. A choice will have to be made. The White Paper presented by Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, in 2017 and the program proposed by President Macron aim to construct new visions for the future of the EU. However, their visions are different. Juncker seems to favor the unity of the Union, while Macron speaks of a divided EU, a different one which necessitates institutional reform as well as changes in the Treaty of Lisbon. Though Turkey is not party to these developments, it is concerned by these issues of tension which will need to be resolved one way or another by the EU.

At this point in time, many European leaders agree that isolating Turkey and cutting ties with it is not the solution. The EU needs to support civil society in Turkey, the business circles should continue to work together, and the member states, as well as the commission, should collaborate on subjects related to security, economy and culture until Turkey’s democracy hopefully reverts to accepted norms. Avoiding clashes and looking for synergies are critical elements of a positive approach. Conditions may change in such a way that Turkey’s accession to the EU may regain currency in the future.