THE FUTURE OF TURKEY-EU RELATIONS IN A TIME OF GLOBAL UNCERTAINTY

Against the backdrop of an increasingly fractious international order, the importance of Turkey and the EU working together to address common regional and global problems is paramount. The EU is going through a period in which confidence in its model is eroding and internal challenges such as Brexit and the refugee crisis are sowing intra-Union divisions over its values and its role in the international system. As an inseparable part of Europe, Turkey can play a key role in overcoming some of the existential crises the Union faces. However, this hinges on repairing the state of relations, establishing mutual trust, and completing processes such as visa liberalization and the updating of the Customs Union.

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The most important element in the long history of Turkey-European Union relations is the determination that the parties have shown to continue the relationship in spite of its fickle nature and occasional crises. Turkey-EU relations are currently going through another challenging and critical period. However, there are no insurmountable structural problems between the parties. On the contrary, Turkey-EU cooperation is more strategically important now than it was in the past.

An examination of the historical course of Turkey-EU relations reveals that changes in European integration and the international system have a direct impact on the relationship, as Turkey is a large country and an important European state. One of the fundamental reasons for the fluctuating nature of the relationship is the exclusion of Turkey from regional or global development projects. Just as the Cold War and subsequent developments were a determining factor in the past, today it is impossible to consider Turkey-EU relations as separate from the increasingly multipolar nature of the international system, the latest developments in our region, and the crises being faced by the EU. Therefore, it is important to analyze changes in the international conjuncture and the integration challenges Europe is facing before addressing the fundamental dynamics of Turkey-EU relations and their future.

Increasing Uncertainty in the International System

The international system is facing significant challenges due to the fact that the balance of power established after World War II has been turned on its head and European integration is trying to redefine itself in a moment of existential crisis.

The system built by the Western world around liberal economic and political values after World War II, and the institutions and rules of this system, more or less were sufficient enough to ensure stability under the conditions of the Cold War. However, tremors began rocking this system in the 1990s after the end of the Cold War. It was during this time that globalization reached the most remote corners of the world, while terrorism, micro-nationalism, and politics based on ethnic and religious identity began to spread. The economic and political system based on nation states was

eroded from the top by the pressures of globalization and from the bottom by local-ization and regionalization. These developments have led to a state of affairs where the world is increasingly less "international," less "liberal," and less "orderly."

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This process of global transformation has given rise to new geopolitical realities, which have significantly challenged the West's central position as the leader of the world. The axis of power that was the fundamental determinant in international re-lationships is shifting from the West to the East—from the Atlantic alliance led by the US and EU to a Pacific access consisting of countries like Russia, China, and India. The fact that the international system is increasingly shifting its weight to the Asia-Pacific basin is also reshaping regional balances of power. In the past, China was viewed only as an economic rival, but today China is becoming a global center of political and military power that rivals Western civilization. In addition, Russia is expanding its influence over a large area that comprises the eastern flank of the EU and NATO, which is causing strategic, economic, and political concerns in the West.

It is not just the emergence of new centers of power that is challenging the status quo and unsettling the global system shaped by Western values. Another development is a "homegrown" threat from the West. The socio-economic problems and inequal-ities that have marked the last 30 years have resulted in the birth of a large group of people who could be called the "globalization losers." As people lost confidence in central governments due to their fears and concerns about their future, marginal parties on the right and the left gained momentum, which led to the erosion of liberal democracies. The "political center" is losing its sociological support and centrifugal forces are taking the lead.

European integration has not been immune to the shifting tides in the international system. Some of the major challenges facing the EU are the rise of the radical right in elections over the last few years, the change in policy introduced by the new US administration, a trend towards isolationism regarding economic, social, and cultur-al issues, the refugee problem, and in particular the deepening divisions within the EU over this issue. The US' waning commitment to multilateralism and the result-ing breakdown in transatlantic relations has forced the EU to reconsider how its role

in the international system should be defined and how it should shape its future by using its own resources, especially when it comes to security.

What Does the Future of the EU Look Like?

The EU was founded as a unique success story after World War II when all of the involved parties resolved to overcome their differences. As a result of its integration, Europe achieved a historical level of security, peace, and prosperity. The international political landscape of the day played a huge role in this success story. However, as was outlined above, just as the post-war international conjuncture forced the formation of the EU and made it the most important "soft power" of its time, the current political climate is forcing the EU to reposition itself within the international system.

In the post-war era, the EU's role in the world order—founded on the liberal consensus—was economic, political, and cultural, rather than being based on military strength. It was essential to secure peace and prosperity for itself, based on universal human rights, and make this model attractive so that the new order would be sustainable. However, today the various crises facing European integration have weakened the EU as a model. What's more, even though the economy has begun to recover after the European debt crisis, the EU's claim to be a leader in global problems has been seriously compromised by challenges such Brexit and the irregular migration crisis.

These fractures in the image that Europe presents to the world are compounded by critical internal developments. For instance, the Euro crisis resulted in economic disputes among Mediterranean countries, primarily Greece and Italy, which suffered a significant decline in welfare, whereas countries like Germany and France, remained stable economies. Furthermore, the EU's relocation decision, which stipulates the redistribution of refugees in Italy and Greece to other EU countries, has been rejected by the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. Similarly, several EU countries have developed policies intended to prevent refugees from entering their countries. The refugee crisis has turned into a modern-day resurgence of the Migration Period and has dealt a severe blow to the integrity of the European Union. Even though progress has been made on preventing irregular migration, European politics continue to be impacted by typical problems that arise from irregular migration such as shelter, nutrition, and asylum procedures as well as the artificial consequences of Islamophobia, xenophobia, and populism.

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However, the biggest blow to European integration was undoubtedly Brexit. For the first time in the history of the Union, a member state has taken steps to secede, which has severely damaged the perception of integration being an irreversible process. When we consider the contribution that the United Kingdom has made to Europe militarily, economically and politically, the obvious questions are what kind of Union the EU will be without the United Kingdom and how the internal balance of power will be affected.

On the other hand, the social pushback against the inequalities and socio-economic problems that neoliberal policies have created only exacerbate the risks and uncertainty surrounding the EU's future. The radical right-wing in Europe has become increasingly mainstream as it repeatedly defeats center right and left parties in elections. In the past, racist and xenophobic parties were defined as marginal movements that did not have broad appeal, but today extremist right-wing parties are characterized as "good populism" that appeal to a significant voting constituency. It is not just a rise of radical right-wing extremism that should be of concern either. Europe is experiencing a "period of extremism" in which universal values, in general, are being eroded because the parties that claim to represent the moderate position are engaging in politics that use xenophobic, Islamophobic, and isolationist rhetoric. The fact that differing party policies have come to resemble each other so closely

poses a greater threat to representative democracy and makes radical alternatives more appealing. Consequently, "ideological Berlin Walls" have begun to spring up across Europe.

As detailed above, the international conjuncture is also forcing the EU to redefine its role in the international system, especially in terms of security. In particular, the fact that the US is no longer a guarantor of European security has prompted the EU to take the initiative when it comes to building its own future. The importance of close defense cooperation in the EU was solidified with the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) initiative, recently established by 25 member states and prompted in part by the Brexit process. These developments paved the way for deeper cooperation on defense and demonstrate that the EU is aware that its strength and global leadership are being questioned. This is why the EU is trying to determine its own political direction for the first time since the Treaty of Lisbon. The White Paper published by the European Commission and the recommendations of French President Macron have pushed the EU into a new period of reform. While countries like France approach this process with a renewed sense of activism, some member countries, especially Eastern European countries, are becoming increasingly suspicious of more involvement. Germany, on the other hand, has largely been a bystander in this process due to its own domestic issues. As a result, the political and regional fault lines in Europe will play a critical role in the realization of the reforms being considered. After 2019, when elections are held for the European Parliament and the Presidents of the Council and Commission, the EU plans to review the Treaties related to organizational structure and operations and launch a new era of reform. However, if the Union does not implement balanced, realistic, and comprehensive policies, this reform process could possibly deepen the divisions within the EU and exacerbate the disputes between member countries.

The EU should focus on resolving the existing problems as soon as possible and renew confidence in the Union rather than deepen relations. This critical period that the Union is going through suggests that it is moving towards a more flexible integration rather than a monolithic EU architecture. If the EU can muster the necessary political will, this existential crisis can be turned into an opportunity. To accomplish this, the EU needs to strengthen existing partnerships and create new mechanisms of cooperation and dialogue more than ever before. The EU has begun the process of reviewing its existing policies, especially its expansion and neighbor policies. In this context, the EU has made its policy on the Western Balkans a priority agenda item. The instability emerging in the Western Balkan countries due to the increasing influence of Russia and China in the region has made it essential that the EU establish closer relations with countries in this region. In February, the EU published its Western Balkan Strategy,

providing Western Balkan countries with clear prospects for membership and a tentative date (2025) even though it is non-binding. Furthermore, the EU organized a Western Balkan Summit on 17 May 2018 for the purpose of strengthening its relations with these countries. Turkey supports EU and NATO memberships of Western Balkan countries, so it is delighted with these constructive steps. However, it is impossible to make sense of how the Western Balkans are being given prospects for membership while Turkey remains excluded.

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In truth, Turkey's EU membership is more important than ever given the new dynamics and changes in the world order. It is obvious that the international system needs Turkey-EU cooperation in order to solve a number of global problems, ranging from the economy and energy to foreign policy, as well as discrimination and terrorism within the context of our common values. Therefore, it is essential that Turkey-EU relations reach a certain level of strength and the EU develop a fair and principled approach towards Turkey.

Turkey's Expectations of the EU: A Fair, Realistic, and Sincere Relationship

At every point in our partner relationship, which began in 1959 when Turkey applied to what was then the European Economic Community, the attitude of the EU towards Turkey has been ambivalent, even when our accession process started in 1999. To be honest, the EU's approach in its relations with Turkey has generally been shaped by its need for security and its own interests in the EU's political framework.

Although the partnership that was initially established with the Ankara Agreement appears to be based on trade and economic considerations, its actual purpose was security in the context of the Cold War. The preamble to the agreement refers to the objective of protecting and strengthening peace and freedom. Upon examining Turkey's memberships in the European Council, OECD, and NATO throughout the 1950s, it is easily seen that Turkey was always committed to European structures as an important ally against the Soviet threat.

In the 10 years from the end of the Cold War in 1989 to Turkey's candidacy

announcement, Europe kept the focus on political issues, especially fundamental rights and freedoms, in response to Turkey's request for membership, which was a result of changing regional parameters. The conflicts in the Balkans, the Customs Union between Turkey and the EU, and the candidacy that followed a few years later were clearly related to Europe's geopolitical interests and its need for security.

Today, it is unclear what the EU wants or what its goals are in its relations with Turkey. After all, Turkey has still not been able to achieve the progress it deserves and wants from the accession negotiations in spite of the fact that they began more than a decade ago. It was unfair of the EU to lay the Cyprus problem at Turkey's feet and to ignore the political obstacles from member countries, which is what turned Turkey's accession process into a dead-end just a short time after the negotiations had begun. Even when relations were at their best, half of the chapters were blocked for purely political reasons. 14 chapters are still blocked due to the Cyprus problem, and for the same reason, no chapter can be temporarily closed. Despite the unfair treatment, various EU agencies highlighting how new chapters cannot be opened in the accession negotiations at every opportunity demonstrates just how "sincere and constructive" the EU has been in its relationship with Turkey.

However, the EU's approach to relations with Turkey in the last few years cannot be considered separately from the aforementioned crises in the Union and the changes in the international system. The issue is the EU's failure to properly interpret developments both within the Union and outside of it on a global level. However, there are numerous EU leaders who recognize the key role that Turkey will play in overcoming the existential crises that the EU is facing. One example of this is the Turkey-EU Summit that our President had with EU Council President Donald Tusk, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, and Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov in Varna on 26 March 2018.

The Varna Summit was beneficial in that it renewed trust in Turkey-EU relations, which is currently going through a difficult phase. The leaders' affirmation of the importance of Turkey-EU cooperation and the emphasis on Turkey's candidacy at the highest levels, especially as the EU has once again put expansion back on the agenda, is another positive sign that the prospect of membership still valid. At the Summit, Turkey outlined its expectations concerning counter-terrorism, visa liberalization, voluntary resettlement of migrants, the Cyprus problem, the Refugee Facility for Turkey, and updating the Customs Union, thus reminding the EU that it must fulfill its obligations within the scope of the March 18th Agreement. Turkey also provided the EU with a draft roadmap that outlines concrete steps for the future of the relationship.

The most important thing about the Varna Summit will be turning the positive atmosphere into concrete policies and practices. In every aspect of the decisions that were made in previous summits, Turkey has acted in accordance with the principle of *pacta sunt servanda* and kept its end of the deal. However, the EU's failure in fulfilling its own commitments has resulted in a profound sense of mistrust in the EU among the Turkish people.

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For Turkey, the most important priority is opening the way to accession negotiations. However, the EU has not fulfilled its commitment to complete preparations for beginning negotiations on the chapters blocked by Cyprus. The accession negotiations are the backbone of Turkey-EU relations. It is impossible to realize the full potential of the relationship until there is progress in this area. A definitive membership plan with a timeline must be provided for our country as was outlined in the Western Balkan Strategy.

The other two fundamental issues required to maintain the constructive atmosphere established at the Varna Summit is completing the visa liberalization talks, granting Turkish citizens visa exemption, and updating the Customs Union. The basic issue regarding the Customs Union, which will serve the interests of both parties, is to remember that updating it is entirely a technical trade process and should not be hindered by political issues. Additionally, on visa liberalization, Turkey shared its position on the criteria that require additional work with the European Commission on 7 February 2018 in its Visa Liberalization Road Map. At this point, we would expect no politically-motivated obstacles in the process of visa liberalization and that a visa regime will be provided for our citizens as quickly as possible. In this era of globalization, the "visa" issue should be one that the EU and a powerful European state like Turkey can resolve.

Thanks to the 1 for 1 Compromise in the March 18th Turkey-EU Agreement, our country has fulfilled its commitments, closed the Aegean Sea route, and stemmed the tide of migration towards the EU. More importantly, it has helped prevent the loss of life among refugees. According to the March 18th Agreement, EU countries

are required to admit Syrians on a voluntary basis provided that irregular migration was reduced significantly and continuously. Although migration has declined, there has been no concrete progress in technical work in two years. Not only has the Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme not been put into practice, but to date, only 12,966 Syrians have been sent to EU member countries as part of the 1 for 1 Compromise since March 2016. It is time for concrete developments and more comprehensive progress in these areas.

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On the other hand, it is critical to build trust by accelerating the transfer of funds for Syrians in Turkey as part of the Refugee Facility for Turkey. Based on experience from the initial start-up period, resources will be used more effectively and quickly if the three billion Euros are transferred directly to different Turkish agencies, especially the Ministries of National Education and Health instead of to international organizations.

One of the most important issues in the Turkey-EU relationship is cooperation in counter-terrorism. In this regard, Turkey's sensitivity on the issue of Europe treating all terrorist organizations equally is a justified and legitimate demand. Combating the PKK with the same tenacity as was demonstrated with ISIS is an essential part of the cooperation we have developed with the EU against terrorism. Moreover, Europe's stance against the PKK as a terrorist organization should go beyond mere words on paper and actually be put into practice. Furthermore, in light of the events that have transpired in Turkey recently, it is also crucial that the EU show the same sensitivity to the FETÖ terrorist organization.

The momentum generated in Turkey-EU relations by the Summit is obvious. These summits play a key role when it comes to maintaining our relationships at a certain level, overcoming difficulties, and rebuilding mutual trust. Therefore, it is important to hold these summits, which serve to foster the Turkey-EU dialogue at the highest levels, not only when there is a pressing need but also on a regular basis.

Conclusion

It is clear that overcoming the problems in the Turkey-EU relationship will have significant benefits not only for Turkey and the EU but also for our region, the

international system, and global peace. The importance of Turkey and the EU developing joint and simultaneous responses to common regional and global problems is self-evident.

The most important thing to remember when examining relations between Turkey and the EU is that Turkey is an inseparable part of Europe. To put it a different way: Europe begins in Turkey. Turkey has not only played an important role in shaping European history but also made a significant contribution to the EU, functioning as a peace project during the Cold War in the second half of the 20th century.

Turkey has been pursuing EU membership for more than half a century, and this pursuit reflects the history of how Europe became the "Europe" of today. Turkey has played a critical role in Europe's political, economic, and cultural development and has integrated with Europe in fields ranging from security, economy, sports, culture, and art, and it will continue to be a "key country" for the stability and prosperity of Europe and the world in the future.