



TURKISH POLICY
QUARTERLY

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The Black Sea Trust
for Regional Cooperation

A PROJECT OF THE GERMAN MARSHALL FUND

On 24 March 2011, Turkish Policy Quarterly held a roundtable discussion in the European Parliament building in Brussels titled '**Developments in Turkey's Democracy and Regional Ambitions**'. The roundtable discussion was organized jointly with the office of Marietje Schaake, with support from the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation.

The event took place at an interesting juncture. The roundtable was held a few days after a critical European Parliament report on Turkey, in the midst of ongoing outcry about the arrest of journalists on allegations of being part of a terrorist organization, and during a month that otherwise was characterized by upbeat debate about Turkey's strategic value for the West in the wake of the Arab Spring and the potential for Turkey to be a model for Muslim nations of the Middle East and North Africa seeking a better future. Discussions, featuring Columnist of *Milliyet* daily Kadri Gürsel, Senior Transatlantic Fellow for GMF Ian Lesser, and Member of the European Parliament representing the Democrats 66 (ALDE), Marietje Schaake and Editor in Chief of Turkish Policy Quarterly, Nigar Göksel, focused on these themes and the interplay between them.

Nigar Göksel, *Editor in Chief of Turkish Policy Quarterly*



Five years ago, empowering democrats meant something different from what it does today.

Five years ago, there was a so-called judicial coup against the government. There was the issue of weeding the military out of civilian affairs on agenda. The support of the EU was needed for such challenges. Whereastoday, democrats in Turkey are trying to protect media independence and judicial independence from government interference in many cases and we face the challenge of trying to get the progressive laws that have been passed actuallyimplemented ,and initiatives put into action.

Marietje Schaake, *Member of the European Parliament representing Democrats 66 (ALDE)*



I, myself, as well as my political party and political group are strong advocates of Turkey's accession. We believe the EU would benefit greatly. It would be able to act more as a global player with Turkey among its member states. This has become more urgent and important given the recent developments. I believe we are all searching for our way in the dynamics that are confronting us as are people on the ground in North Africa and the Middle East. But more than anything, I think that for the people in Turkey, their freedoms and their opportunities would be increased if Turkey would become an EU member state. In the European Parliament, there is not much agreement on Turkey. But I would say that there are two subjects on which there is consensus: one is the importance of the partnership, also the strategic partnership with Turkey. Everybody from right to left, from progressive to conservative acknowledges that Turkey is an immensely important country, an increasingly important country, especially for the EU in its relation to Middle East but also generally. Another shared concern is the erosion of fundamental freedoms in Turkey today. Both of these subjects as well as lots of others have been discussed in the Turkey progress report of 2010, voted on in our last parliamentary session in Strasbourg.

Ian Lesser, *Senior Transatlantic Fellow, German Marshall Fund of the U.S*



There is one American perspective that I can give you. If any of you are familiar with the very vocal Turkey debate in Washington, you will know that there are a lot of different views you can find. Some probably would differ substantially from mine. So I would just say that at the outset. Let me just make three points to you about the scene from the other side of the Atlantic. The first point I would make is that we now had, not recently but a decade ago, change in Turkish foreign policy. When I look at the scene, I see a lot of different reasons for this and I find them durable. I think that is important because much of what we are seeing from Turkey in terms of positive behavior I believe is not going to change any time soon. I think there are real reasons for this. It is not tactical. It is in some ways strategic and based on

what is happening in the society, which links to the other part of debate: Turkey's domestic scene. There are a couple of dimensions here: One is that Turkey is now much more focused in its neighborhood, broadly defined not just the immediate neighbors but the neighborhood in general, and whether it is about zero problems or other things. When you look at this from Washington, some parts look very problematic: the relationship with Iran, Syria, the deteriorated relationship with Israel, the dealings with Hamas, etc. Some of it is quite positive. I served in Clinton administration some time ago and dealt with these issues and everyday we worried that there would be a war between Turkey and Greece in the mid-1990s.

Kadri Gürsel, *Columnist of Milliyet daily Newspaper:*



I was reading the Economist weekly magazine, the issue of 19th February, and I saw a title about Turkey's election. The headline was Muslim Democracy in Action. The following sub-headline was clear enough to summarize and depict the logic and purpose behind it. It was summarized in one phrase: 'Popular uprisings in the Arab world are drawing new attention to the example of Turkey's democracy.' But there was something that was not correct with the headline because Turkey was labeled as a Muslim democracy. And here again I thought we are facing the same attempts of sacrificing the precious Turkish experiment of secular democracy by deforming it to a degree in order to make it perceptible to the Middle Eastern ears.