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Turkey-EU Relations in a Time of Economic Crisis

Abstract

2007 and 2008 have been turbulent years even for Turkish standards. Mass demonstrations against a possible president Abdullah Gül, a great election victory by the AKP (Justice and Development Party) and the election of Gül to president in 2007 followed by a closure case against the AKP, investigation against the terrorist network Ergenekon and increased terrorist activities and military actions throughout 2008. The result was a paralysis of the political system, a near standstill of reforms, however, the economy still seemed to be on track.

The first months of 2009 were dominated by the regional elections, which were held on 29 March nation-wide. This was a major reason why the effects of the economic crisis were downplayed by the government, because after years of high economic growth, increasing unemployment and very modest growth would not have been the best election campaign slogans. It is therefore expected that after the elections there will be more debate on the extent of the economic crisis, which hit Turkey being more integrated into the world-market than ever and more and more export oriented. Parallely to these economic problems, the government announced that 2009 will be again an EU year with more commitment to EU-oriented reforms. Since 9 January 2009 Turkey finally has a chief negotiator and after the elections, work on the major reforms such as a new constitution was announced. What will be the impact that many European countries suffer from economic crisis on Turkey-EU relations in 2009 if there is an impact at all? And how will Turkey cope with the economic crisis after the regional elections when the whole impact will be visible?

Keywords: *Turkey, European Union, crises, economic, financial, elections.*

Introduction:

2009 marks the 10 year anniversary of Turkey's EU candidate status. During these 10 years Turkey has changed a lot, comparable only to changes conducted during the 1920s. Even if there are established relations between Turkey and the then EC since 1963 and Turkey's official application dates back already until 1987, it was the years following the 1999 Helsinki decision to trigger political reforms, a stronger integration into global economy, increasing exchange and involvement with many EU programs bringing also the people closer together.

Especially the years 2003 and 2004 are regarded as the "EU-years" with a reform of the Penal Code and the completion of in total 7 EU Reform packages. In December 2004 the European Union agrees to start negotiations, which finally happens on 3 October 2005. So far 10 chapters out of 35 have been opened, 8 are frozen because Turkey doesn't allow Cypriot ships to land in Turkish harbours and France blocks some chapters because they are directly linked towards full membership.

There is no common ground within the 27 EU member states about Turkey's full EU membership. Whereas there is overwhelming support among most of the 12 new member states, Sweden and the UK, there is especially voiced criticism to full membership in France prominently stated by president Sarkozy, Germany's centre-right parties CDU and CSU and Austrian political parties. Most of the far-right parties also oppose Turkey's EU membership such as the Lega Nord in Italy or Front National in France, the BNP in Britain or ATAKA in Bulgaria.

This makes Turkey a unique case that besides the opening of membership negotiations there is still a vivid debate about the possible future membership. The reasons against Turkey's membership vary. Some argue like the former German chancellor Schmidt (SPD) that the EU institutions wouldn't work with too many members and that Turkey's influence would be too big in these institutions. Another argument have

been human rights violations, minority policies, the situation of Christians, Kurds and women, others fear that with a member Turkey the EU would border unstable regions such as the Middle East and the Caucasus. And there are also economic arguments, in Germany centre-right politicians voice the fear that because of the economic differences, there would be a wave of immigration from Turkey towards richer EU countries and the fear of having an economically poor and unstable country among the member states.

A privileged partnership

The best known model as an alternative to full membership is the so-called privileged partnership formulated by the German conservatives. The German conservatives prefer the so-called privileged partnership. This concept was first mentioned in a motion to the Bundestag by CDU/CSU politicians (led by Wolfgang Schauble) on 2 December 2002. Before the European Council in Copenhagen that was to decide whether to give Turkey a date for the launch of membership talks, it requested the German Federal Government:

“to advocate among its partners in the EU that any negotiating offer to Turkey includes the perspective of a close ‘privileged partnership’ with the EU.”

The two most comprehensive elaborations of this idea were presented both in 2004:

the first by CDU MP Matthias Wissmann and the second by CSU MP Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg (currently minister of the economy), who published his ideas for a privileged partnership in a 25 page analysis for the CSU’s Hanns-Seidel Foundation:

The major elements of their proposals are:

- development of the customs union into a Comprehensive Free Trade Area
- enhancement of EU assistance programmes
- support to the establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area
- dialogue and consultations within the Common Foreign and Security Policy
- intensification of the cooperation concerning the European Security and Defence Policy and Home and Justice Affairs.

Since in government again (since 2005), the CDU has adopted a pragmatic approach. Angela Merkel told Recep Tayyip Erdogan at the EU-Mediterranean summit in Barcelona in November 2005:

“We talked about it that “pacta sunt servanda” (treaties have to be respected) and that everything is developing well.”

Turkey EU economic relations: Custom’s Union

Turkish economy was a rather closed system until the mid 1980s when through reforms of the Özal government the economy opened up step by step. Turkey is the only candidate country that has a customs union with the EU. Therefore at least with respect to trade in goods, Turkey is almost part of the Single Market. The customs union has helped the transformation of Turkish industry by introducing stronger competition, which led to improvements in productivity. It has also assisted in the rationalisation of the industrial structure, whereby domestic industries sought ways to integrate with global webs of production and distribution. It has further contributed to the modernisation of Turkey’s economic legislation and therefore to its business environment.

The EU established a Customs Union with Turkey in 1995. Trade between the EU and Turkey in agriculture and steel products is regulated by separate preferential agreements. The Customs Union has significantly increased the volume of trade between Turkey and EU member states. Today, more than half of Turkey's trade is with the EU. Turkey’s trade with the EU is almost balanced, the deficit being less than € 8.3 billion, and having a share of 13% in Turkey’s total trade deficit.

EU foreign direct investments (FDI) in Turkey have reached almost € 9 billion in 2007. They account for about two thirds of total FDI inflows in Turkey and they amount to 3.5% of Turkey's GDP.

Year	Exports	Annual % Change	Imports	Annual % Change	Volume of Trade	Annual % Change
2004	34,5	40,7	45,4	43,3	79,9	42,2
2005	38,4	11,4	49,2	8,3	87,6	9,7
2006	43,9	14,5	54,0	9,8	97,9	11,8

2007	60,3	37,3	68,5	24,6	128,9	30,2
2008	63,3	5	74,7	9	138,1	7,1

Table. Turkey's Exports to and Imports from the EC

Source:

<http://www.dtm.gov.tr/dtmweb/index.cfm?action=detayrk&yayinID=470&icerikID=481&dil=EN>

In 2008, the EC accounted for 48 % of total exports and 37 % of total imports of Turkey. Turkey is an important trade partner of the EC as well. The foreign trade statistics of the EC for the year 2008 demonstrate that Turkey ranks seventh at imports and fifth at exports of the EC with shares of 3 % and 4 % respectively. The Customs Union has also strengthened the traditionally comprehensive trade relations. The volume of trade between Turkey and the EC reached to US\$ 138.1 billion in 2008 from US\$ 27.9 billion in 1995.

In the period of 1995-2008, Turkey's exports to EC increased by 472 %, while its imports increased by 343 %. The openness rate of Turkey, which is the share of total trade volume in GNP, increased considerably to 56.1 % in 2006 from 30.6 % in 1994.

Developments experienced so far indicate that the Customs Union, while exposing Turkish industry to intense international competition, has launched a challenging process, which facilitated the integration of Turkey with the EU.

Turkey's economy is no longer dominated by traditional agricultural activities in the rural areas, but more so by a highly dynamic industrial complex in the major cities, mostly concentrated in the Western provinces of the country, along with a developed services sector. In 2007, the agricultural sector accounted for 8.9% of the GDP, while the industrial sector accounted for 30.8% and the services sector accounted for 59.3%. One of the booming sectors is tourism, which has an important part of the economy. In 2008, there were almost 31 million visitors to the country, who spent 21.9 billion USD to Turkey's revenues.

In 2008, Turkey's exports reached 132 billion USD (main export partners: Germany 11.2%, UK 8%, Italy 6.95%, France 5.6%, Spain 4.3%, USA 3.88%; total EU exports 56.5%.) However, larger imports amounting to about 201.8 billion USD threaten the balance of trade (main import partners: Russia 13.8%, Germany 10.3%, China 7.8%, Italy 6%, USA 4.8%,

France 4.6%, Iran 3.9%, UK 3.2%; total EU imports 40.4%; total Asia imports 27%).

Turkey's economic situation 2009

For political reasons and the 29 March regional elections, the economic crisis was downplayed by the government during the first three months of the year, in sharp contrast to other countries. That's why there was and is a lot less talk in the press about the effects of the global financial and economic crisis. However, even if PM Erdogan stressed several times that Turkey is among the least affected countries by the global crisis, the Turkish economy contracted by 6.2% in the last quarter of 2008, due to falling private investments, declining personal consumption, falling inventories and exports, which was partly compensated by a positive contribution from public spending (EU Commission March 2009).

The unemployment rate increased by 3%, from 10.3% in December 2007 to 13.6% in December 2008, the highest unemployment rate ever published by the TurkStat. Turkey experienced a negative quarterly growth figure for the first time since the last quarter of 2001.

Real GDP growth in 2008 was 1.1%, which was significantly below the government's initial target of 5.5. Meanwhile, the labour force participation rate increased from 46.2% to 47.7%, as more people started to look for a job. The number of unemployed reached 3,274,000. The economic downturn leads to more negative impact on sectors other than agriculture, since the unemployment rate for the non-agriculture workforce increased from 13.0% to 17.3% TurkStat figures, on the other hand, show that more than half a million people (533,000) lost their jobs between December 2007 and 2008.

The share of agriculture sector in total employment increased from 24% to 24.7%, the share of service sector increased from 49.5% to 50.2% while the share of industrial sector decreased from 21% to 19.7%.

Table: Labour market statistics (in thousand)

	Dec. 2007	Dec. 2008	Change
Population	69,246	70,005	759
Population aged 15 and above	49,575	50,339	764
Labour force	22,879	24,009	1,130
Employed	20,443	20,736	293
Unemployed	2,436	3,274	838
Participation in workforce	46.2	47.7	1.5%
Unemployment rate	10.6	13.6	3%
Employment rate	41.2	41.2	0%
Youth unemployment	20.6	25.7	5.1%
Participation rate (men)	70.2%	71.3%	1.1%
Participation rate (women)	22.6%	24.6%	2.0%

Source: Türkstat

Politicians 2009 on Turkey EU

There have been many so-called “decisive” years for Turkey-EU relations, a catchword, which can also be heard for 2009 as the title of the ICG report of 15 December 2008 underlines: “Turkey and Europe – The decisive year ahead”.

Turkey has been criticised many years for not having an EU chief negotiator. Until the beginning of the year the negotiations were led by foreign minister Ali Babacan. It has been clear that this double assignment was unsustainable, as it became increasingly difficult for Babacan to fulfill his responsibilities as chief negotiator. At the beginning of 2008, Babacan said “2008 will be the year of the EU; you will be surprised [by our reforms]” (*Sabah*, February 3, 2008). By the end of 2008 however, Turkish-EU relations hit a low point, with no major reform recorded on critical issues. For reformists, 2008 was a lost year (*Taraf*, December 31, 2008).

This formally changed on 9 January 2009 when Istanbul MP Egemen Bagis was appointed EU chief negotiator in the rank of a minister. (see Kardas 2009) “Better late than never,” said Cengiz Aktar, an analyst at Bahcesehir University. “After four years of negotiations, the prime minister has done the right thing by appointing a sole minister to run EU affairs in this country” (Guardian, 19 January 2009).

Turkish politicians

On 13 January Bagis gave one of his first speeches at the meeting on “EU-Turkey Civil Society Dialogue on the Contribution of Chambers: Turkey-EU Chamber Forum Project”. Bagis said:

“Currently Turkey is in the process being transformed from being “a sick man of Europe” to a respected member of the EU. We will experience some problems in the course of the full membership process, however we are decisive and determined in this respect. We also know that there is no single country that started negotiations but was not able to finish them. Turkey has never been an exception and will not be so now. Turkey will be a very different Turkey when the negotiations are over. The EU will also be a different Europe. Instead of imagining that day now, let's focus on today, negotiations and our business” (Bagis, 13 January 2009).

Bagis's first travel to Brussels was together with PM Erdogan on 19 January 2009. This was Erdogan's first visit to the EU headquarters since membership negotiations began in October 2005, which could also signal a shift in his government's European policies, following two years of power struggles at home and a souring of relations with the EU. Erdogan said at a press conference with EU Commission president Barroso that the EU accession remained “a top priority” for Turkey. “I hope there will be a leap in 2009. We don't ask for privileges, what we ask for is equal and fair treatment” (BBC, 19 January 2009).

President Gül also stressed the importance of the EU for Turkey during an official visit to Prague in May 2009: “The year 2009 is a year of opportunity for the resolution of problems. We need to resolve problems with the momentum we have gathered,” Gül told journalists on a plane en route to Prague on Thursday. “If we fail to seize the opportunity, it will be very hard for the process to restart.” (Today's Zaman, 9 May 2009).

And Turkey's new foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu, in office since 1 May 2009 told EU journalists on 8 May 2009 in Ankara: “In my term the first priority of our foreign policy will continue to be the EU” (Pop, May 2009).

On 14 May 2009 Davutoglu called on all European Union member states not to make Ankara's application to join the 27-member bloc a “domestic issue”: “Please do not make the Turkish EU integration process a domestic issue of discussion.” (Eubusiness, 14 May 2009).

EU Commission, EU Institutions

The EU commission has been one of the strong promoters of EU enlargement. The current EU Commissioner for Enlargement Olli Rehn already on 21 December 2008 stressed the importance of 2009 for the Turkey-EU relations: “Next year will be an important litmus test of whether Turkey is serious about its EU accession perspective. After one or two years of domestic difficulties, we would expect Turkey now to put up a new gear and seriously start to pursue the reforms again. There is too much energy used on internal tensions which could be used for pursuing legal and economic reforms that are required for EU membership.” (javno, 21 December 2008). Rehn also spoke at the European Business summit on 26 March 2009 in Brussels. Talking on “EU and Turkey – Tackling economic downturn through partnership” Rehn said about the economic crisis stresses the importance of further cooperation:

“So far the Turkish economy has shown remarkable resilience thanks to bold reforms in particular of its financial and banking sectors. However, both the EU and the Turkish economy are expected to contract in 2009. Strong and coordinated policy action – including in the context of the G-20 – is indispensable in order to prevent the global economy from sliding to recession.

We also need to avoid any form of protectionism. Our joint priority should now be to coordinate efforts in order to stabilise the economy and financial markets.” (Rehn, 26 March 2009).

And on 19 May Rehn met with Turkey’s foreign minister in Brussels to affirm the Commission’s commitment to Turkey’s accession: “The European Commission is committed to the EU accession process of Turkey ... on the basis of the negotiating framework that was adopted by unanimity by all [EU] member states and Turkey in October 2005. Turkish membership is in the fundamental interest of the EU.”

EU member states politicians Pro Turkey's EU accession

In 2009 the EU presidencies are the Czech Republic (January to June) and Sweden (July to December). Both countries are known to be in favour of further enlargement including Turkey. Czech foreign minister Jan Kohout said at a press conference in Brussels on 19 May 2009 that he was still confident at least one more chapter could be opened before the end of June, when the Czech EU presidency ends. "The ambition of the [Czech] presidency is still to open at least one chapter, the one on taxation. "This is in the range of our possibilities." (Vuceva, 20 May 2009). And even EU critical president Václav Klaus spoke in favour of Turkish accession. After a meeting with Turkish president Abdullah Gül on 29 April 2009, Klaus said the political will was decisive. "I have this will" (Radio Praha, 29 April 2009). Sweden's foreign minister Carl Bildt was also at the press conference on 19 May in Brussels: "We are committed jointly ... [to] fulfill that European programme of the accession process that was agreed." (Vuceva, 20 May 2009).

The Swedish government and also the main opposition parties currently seem to be among the strongest supporters of Turkey's EU accession. On 8 May Maria Asenius, State Secretary for the European Union at the Swedish Prime Minister's Office met with Turkish journalists. Commenting on Turkey's EU membership process, Asenius said that Turkey was a strategically important country for the Union, however, it should carry on with implementing reforms. A solution of the Cyprus issue would also be a remarkable progress in Turkey's ongoing negotiation process with EU. (Today's Zaman, 8 May 2009).

In 2009 politicians of several EU member states have voiced their support for Turkey's full EU membership. To put it into a chronological order, Malta presented on 14 February 2009 a position paper on EU enlargement. The document declares:

"Turkey could play a crucial role in trade and European economic policy. There are several criteria, however, that Turkey must fulfill before its accession is possible. Firstly, Turkey has yet to fully develop "stable institutions guaranteeing democracy" as mandated by the Copenhagen Criteria. Before accession is attainable, Turkey must allow for the equal existence of political parties and equal representation for men and women. In addition, Malta encourages the Turkish government to ensure freedom of the press by relieving pressure on the media. The last of the Copenhagen Criteria, "A functioning market economy and the ability to take on the

obligations of EU law” also poses critical challenges that may still be overcome. While Malta does see several challenges to Turkish accession, it is willing to open up discourse and the possibility of Turkey joining the EU.” (Republic of Malta, 13 February 2009).

Malta is surely not a major player within the EU and it is questionable how trustworthy it is that a country with 10 percent women in parliament asks for “equal representation”, but it is noteworthy that this conservative Catholic country where religion still has its influence on laws and regulation regarding e.g. divorce, does not put forth cultural arguments, but is in general in favour of Turkey’s EU accession.

A traditionally strong ally of Turkey is Italy. The prime ministers Berlusconi and Erdogan have close personal relations, the economic activities between the two countries increased every year with Italy being involved in some of the major constructions such as the Bolu tunnel. On 4 May 2009 the Italian ambassador in Ankara, Carlo Marsili spoke at a conference in Ankara. Marsili said that if Turkey met all the conditions asked by the EU in the end of membership negotiations, then there would not be any obstacle before Turkey’s membership. Expressing belief that there would be a “successful marriage” between Turkey and the EU, Marsili said that he believed the artificial obstacles before the membership negotiations would be eliminated. ... Marsili said that Turkey, in all aspects, was a European country, and it was important as a secular and democratic country. Noting that Turkey had one of the most dynamic economies of Europe, Marsili pointed out the economic growth of Turkey despite the global economic crisis. (See, haber.turk, 4 May 2009)

Rather unusual in comparison with the Italian support is that the Government Spokesman Stephanos Stephanou of Cyprus said on 13 May 2009 that his country supported the prospect of Turkey’s full EU membership. Stephanou said that Turkey has to meet its EU obligations and make the necessary steps towards solving the Cyprus problem. “Our position is that we support the prospect of Turkey’s full EU membership, but this is not a *carte blanche*.” (Famagusta Gazette, 13 May 2009).

The same day, on 13 May, two more member states spoke in favour of Turkish EU membership. Greek deputy foreign minister Yiannis Vallinakis said in Madrid that Greece supported full membership for Turkey. “condition for a positive attitude of Greece is of course the compliance with the respective criteria by the candidate country.” (Griechenland Zeitung, 13 May 2009).

And Portugal's president Anibal Cavaco Silva underlined during a state visit to Ankara the similarities between the two countries taking place in western and eastern tips of the continent. Referring to Turkey's EU membership process, Silva extended his countries support, saying that the EU needed Turkey to reach its future targets and strengthen its foreign policy and security. (Xinhuanet, 13 May 2009).

The following day it was Poland to come up with a statement on Turkey. Poland reaffirmed its support for Turkey's bid to join the European Union and said the bloc should not try to attach additional conditions for its membership. (Today's Zaman, 14 May 2009).

And on 26 May British foreign secretary David Miliband reaffirmed the British position during a visit to Ankara:

"Britain is more convinced than it has ever been that the strategic decision to support Turkey's accession to the European Union is the right one. ...It is good for Europe as well as for Turkey. ... Turkey has a combination of a Muslim majority population and a proud democratic heritage. I think you can balance those things. Turkey will bring significant economic dynamism into the bloc. I think the debate of the Turkish economy will change in the next few years." (The Star, 27 May 2009).

Against Turkey's EU accession

Opposition to Turkey's full EU membership is most openly voiced by France's president Sarkozy, the German CSU party, which is a coalition partner and the Austrian FPÖ, which received 17.5 percent in the general elections in 2008 and is the third strongest party. Also most of the extreme-right wing parties are opposed to Turkey's EU membership.

Exemplary some recent quotes by politicians of these parties, most were linked to the European Parliament election campaign. On 12 March 2009 the Italian Lega Nord criticized the accession of Turkey and Croatia. MEP Borghezio said in the Strasbourg plenary:

"How can you think of make join to the EU a country that opposes already the nomination of the General Secretary of NATO only because he represents Denmark "guilty" of

having accepted the publication of the Mohammed caricatures?" (Lega Nord, 12 March 2009).

Besides the election campaign some statements were a direct response to US president Obama's call to have Turkey as an EU member. Obama said during the EU-US summit in Prague on 5 April 2009: "Moving forward towards Turkish membership in the EU would be an important signal of your commitment to this agenda and ensure that we continue to anchor Turkey firmly in Europe." (Deutsche Welle, 5 April 2009)

The same day as Obama made his statements, French President Nicolas Sarkozy reasserted his opposition to Turkey's entry into the European Union:

"When it comes to the European Union, it's up to member states of the European Union to decide, I have always been opposed to this entry and I remain opposed." (eubusiness, 5 April 2009)

Two days later France's Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, who had previously been in favour of Turkey's EU accession had turned against the idea because of Ankara's behaviour at the NATO summit in early April 2009 opposing Danish former PM Rasmussen as new NATO general secretary:

"Turkey's evolution in, let's say, a more religious direction, towards a less robust secularism, worries me." (eubusiness, 7 April 2009).

And on 8 May 2009 when officially starting the election campaign again Sarkozy spoke against Turkey's EU accession, a theme which has become central to his UMP party campaign. Turkey "is not intended to become an EU member. Turkey and Russia should establish an economic and security common area with the EU. In this way, the bloc could create an area of 800 million people who share the same prosperity and security." (euractiv, 8 May 2009).

These statements are criticized by French Socialist spokesman Benoit Hamon who has accused centre-right President Nicolas Sarkozy of "lying" about his stance on Turkey's EU entry. "Mr Sarkozy claims he is

opposed to Turkey's EU membership, but "systematically agrees on continuing the [EU] accession process." (EUobserver, 21 May 2009).

In Germany the conservative Union parties CDU and CSU presented their political program for the EP elections in May 2009. The program looked more conservative than the general party programs with an explicit stress on religion and the inclusion of a reference to God in the EU treaties. Explicitly also Turkey is mentioned:

"We believe that a privileged partnership instead of full membership of Turkey is the right solution for the EU. Candidate countries have to guarantee especially freedom of opinion, the equality of men and women, minority protection and freedom of religion. Turkey does not meet these conditions." (ntv, 21 May 2009).

The CSU made its clear position public on 9 May 2009 when presenting their program in Munich: "The EU member states have common cultural and historic roots, which Turkey doesn't share." (tagesschau, 9 May 2009)

The most colourful election campaign targeting Turkey's EU membership was run by Austria's FPÖ (Freedom Party of Austria), which started a petition entitled "Save Europe – Stop Turkey's Accession" (FPÖ and Mölzer, 2009). The text reads: "Turkey is not a European state! It can and shall never become a full member of the European Union!" In the election campaign two posters and flyers directly targeted Turkey's EU membership. One poster read "FPÖ veto against Turkey's and Israel's EU membership", the text on the poster/flyer reads: "The FPÖ is the only party which is fully opposed to Turkey's and Israel's EU membership, because the FPÖ does not want the spreading of radical Islamism, no mass immigration from Turkey to Austria, no costs of billions for Austria, no EU-borders with Iraq and no Austrian involvement into the bloody war in the Middle East." The second poster targeting Turkey does focus on religious and cultural aspects. It reads "Occident in Christian Hands", one of the slogans against Turkey's membership is "because we want to protect our tradition molded by Christian and Enlightenment." (see FPÖ election homepage).

The FPÖ was not the only Austrian party making Turkey's membership a topic of the election campaign. Also the BZÖ (Union for the future of Austria) asked in its election program "Do you want Turkey in the EU?", answering: "The BZÖ says: Turkey does not belong to Europe. In Turkey often radical Muslims are in charge, human rights are still neglected,

women discriminated against and democratic rights such as freedom of opinion spurnt.” (BZÖ election campaign).

In the UK it was the right-wing British National Party which targeted Turkey’s EU membership in an election flyer speaking of a Muslim invasion of the British job market. Against this flyer Turkey’s embassy in London protested, which the BNP again answered on its homepage:

“The demand by the Muslim country of Turkey for the withdrawal of British National Party leaflets objecting to that nation’s inclusion into the European Union is proof that the BNP’s position on the matter is correct. ... The real lesson to be learned from all of this is just how perilous the European Union is, and why adding another 80 million Muslims to that organisation will be the first step towards creating Eurabia. This will mean the extinction of Europe itself under a tidal wave of ‘freedom of movement’ EU nationals.” (BNP, 25 May 2009).

The influence of these parties in their respective countries is very different. Whereas the CSU is a party in the governing coalition and holds the prime minister of Bavaria, the BNP is a rather small party with little election successes so far. In all the argumentation it becomes clear though that the current economic and financial crisis is not an issue for the opponents, the dominant issues are that Turkey is not European, has a majoritarian Muslim population and doesn’t share the same values concerning human rights, women rights and freedom of speech. These positions have not changed either since the beginning of the global crisis these parties have been opposing Turkey’s EU membership for many years.

Scenarios for 2009 and beyond

However theoretically an economic crisis could have effects on the Turkey-EU relations, but the direction is not yet clear. There is both the possibility that this could be used against and in favor of Turkey’s membership. In a negative scenario the current discourse could open the ground to make the argument that Turkey as a problematic, economically unstable country and relatively poor is not wanted. The rising unemployment in Turkey could lead to more immigration to Europe, where mostly unskilled workers would try to find jobs. From Turkey’s point of

view this could lead to an orientation towards the East, Iraq, the Gulf states, India and China as the emerging big markets, whereas Europe with little or even negative growth and a largely satisfied market does not offer any more big export and investment possibilities.

But the opposite argument can also be made. The EU could see especially in a time of recession the necessity to integrate more with a big, young market within their borders to help overcome economic problems in the future. And Turkey's economy might orient even more towards the EU, because it offers more stability and security than the Eastern volatile markets. When visiting the marble sector in March 2009 in Diyarbakir, exactly this was the given picture. Whereas 4 to 5 years ago the majority of the exports went to China, they now go to Western Europe, mainly to Italy, because these states seem more trustworthy (ESI interviews in Diyarbakir between 9-13 March 2009).

Given these two possibilities, the future of Turkey-EU relations will as it had in the past mostly depend on political reforms, the solution of the Cyprus question, the passing of a new civil constitution, the broadening of rights for Kurds and non-Muslims and the further reduction of the influence of the Armed Forces in politics etc..

Both, in the argumentation of the supporters and of the opponents of Turkish EU membership the economic argument currently only plays a minor role.

After the EP elections of June 2009

The June 4-7 2009 European Parliament elections delivered gains for center-right and right-wing parties across the continent. This can be interpreted that the EP has become more sceptical about further integration and enlargement including the enlargement towards Turkey. Those parties having made opposition to Turkey's accession a central theme of their campaign in general succeeded in the elections, however what influence the opposition to Turkey for the vote had is hard to measure. The most outspoken parties against Turkey's EU membership such as the French UMP gained 24 seats in the EP, the German CSU has 8 mandates, the FPÖ 2, the BNP 2, the Dutch Party of Freedom led by Geert Wilders has 4 mandates, the Lega Nord 9, the Belgian Vlaams Belang 2 and the Bulgarian ATAKA 2, in total these parties have 52 seats out of 736, which is around 7 percent. Even if some more parliamentarians of other

parties might strongly oppose Turkey's accession, there is still a broad majority in favour of full membership.

It is therefore unlikely that this election result will have an influence on the accession negotiations, which will much more depend on progress in Turkey and on the result of certain national elections such as the ones in Germany in September 2009.

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