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Turkish EU membership quest is in trouble

Turkey has been striving to become an EU member for more than 40 years. During the last five years, the Turkish government led by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) took considerable steps to comply with the "acquis communautaire" (the body of rules, laws and general approach). Yet the EU has still not given Turkey a clear membership timetable.

There remains considerable scepticism about Turkey's entry.

Statements opposing Turkey's membership used to come from European politicians such as Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, former French President. However, now the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel have openly declared their opposition to Turkey's EU membership. They claim that Turkey is not a European country. France introduced a Constitutional amendment in 2005 to conduct a referendum concerning the EU enlargement. Therefore, even if a candidate state complies with the "acquis communautaire", it won't become an EU member if there is a "Non" in a French referendum. It is no secret that this amendment was passed with Turkey's membership in particular in mind.

Moreover, the European Commission and the Council put forward previously unheard expressions and terms in respect of Turkey such as open-ended process, absorption capacity and permanent safeguard clauses. The phrase "open-ended process" suggests that the accession negotiation process does not guarantee automatic membership for Turkey. The "absorption capacity" of the EU argues the membership might not be possible for Turkey even if it fulfils the "acquis communautaire", since the EU's social, economic and political climate might not be ripe for Turkey's membership. Finally the phrase; "long transition periods, derogations, specific arrangements or permanent safeguard clauses", implies that freedom of movement of persons, structural policies and agriculture might be permanently barred to Turkey even if it becomes an EU member.

This reflects public opinion. The 2006-2007 Eurobarometer results show 59% of EU citizens are against Turkish entry to the EU while only 28% showed willingness to accept Turkey as an EU member. Austria, where the far right recently made gains, is the state to oppose Turkish membership the most with 81%. Romania is the most eager country to see Turkey as a member with 66% support.

The main reasons behind the unwillingness for Turkey are said to be: Turkey is a Muslim country, a neighbour to the conflicting regions such as Middle East, overpopulated and poor.

Concerns over the borders and population of Turkey have some validity. Turkey is located on the crossroads of conflict areas – the Balkans, Middle East and Caucasus. Hence, providing stability to these areas could not only fall on Turkey's shoulders but also on the EU. The EU

might have to harden its immigration policy to deal with a potential massive flow of refugees from these regions.

With more than 70 million, Turkey would have the second largest population in the EU after Germany. Moreover, Turkish population will reach 80 million in the near future, while the EU's population will continue to decrease. This would certainly have repercussions for the EU in future. Turkey would directly affect the decision-making mechanism of the EU having most of the seats in the European Parliament and more representatives in the Commission. Besides. More employment for Turkish citizens in the EU states could mean higher unemployment for the nationals of current member states in difficult economic times (as well as a source of cheaper labour in better times).

In addition to the above arguments, Turkey has its own troubles. A highly volatile political agenda in Turkey hampers political stability in the country. The "closure case" of the Turkey's ruling party described previously in Defence Viewpoints, and corruption allegations against some of its officials, overshadow the credibility of the government, while the historically strong influence of the top army officials in politics damages the smooth functioning of Turkish democracy.

Finally, the Cyprus problem continues to bar Turkish hopes of EU membership. By failing to open its airspace and harbours to Cyprus, an EU member; Turkey faces problems in accession negotiations in eight chapters. The Cyprus problem also affects transatlantic cooperation negatively. Cyprus is a non-NATO EU member and Turkey is a non-EU NATO member; and the ongoing Cyprus problem prompts both states to deny recognition of each other. Therefore, both states tend to block important negotiations between the EU and NATO by preventing each other from taking part in crucial security meetings.

Taking into account all these factors, it is obvious that there are significant issues with Turkey within the EU and to some extent these are reasonable. Nevertheless, from a different perspective, the EU might find Turkey as a member to be an invaluable asset.

The ESDP: quest for political Union for the EU?

The European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) has been one of the most important steps taken by the EU in order to become a Union as a whole. Free from Communist threat, the post-Cold War era gave Europeans more impetus to establish an efficient military capacity independent of the United States. In particular, France and Germany aspired to a political union and in this respect, the role of security and defence was crucial. Sticking to its historical notion of being a bridge between the two sides of Atlantic, the UK consented to this idea but remained sceptical about its potential to undermine NATO.

The ESDP however is far from reaching "a capacity for autonomous action" outlined in St Malo, 1998. As the Kosovo crisis indicated, the EU lacks the capability to prevent a large scale security crisis. In financial terms, most of the ESDP operations are implemented with recourse to NATO assets. Only in Congo, led by France, has the EU not resorted to NATO resources to conduct operations. Apart from physical capacity, the EU also lacks the political capability since

there is no unified voice within the EU to take critical or urgent decisions.

As a remedy to concerns about potential political damage to NATO, non-military measures called "Petersberg tasks" such as humanitarian and peacekeeping operations and crisis management were added to the functions of the ESDP. Although some might claim that this enabled the ESDP to survive; in fact non-military functions endanger the military identity of the ESDP. Only 4 out of 14 ESDP operations to date have been of a military nature, which mostly have been peace keeping duties handed over by either NATO or the UN. When it comes to much bigger military issues, the EU avoids taking strategic responsibility and still depends on the NATO to do its "dirty work".

Failing to develop physical and political capabilities to satisfy the high expectations, the EU can hardly be defined as a political actor in world politics.

Turkey as a remedy for EU's military capability problem?

Having more than 1 million troops (including reserves), Turkey has the 8th biggest army in the world and 2nd biggest in NATO (the biggest in Europe). Planning a massive upgrade of its inventories since 1998, Turkey has to date invested more than US\$30 billion in modernization programmes. It is one of the major contributors to the Joint Strike Fighter programme spearheaded by the US. In 2008, Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) spent more than US\$3 billion on equipment purchases in Europe.

Turkey has the capability to deploy troops outside its borders. It has participated in numerous military missions under the command of the UN and NATO, such as Somalia, Afghanistan, Lebanon and former Yugoslavia. At present only the UK and France stand out as the only EU member states having the capability to conduct military operations outside Europe; the deployable capability of the TSK might greatly contribute to the EU.

Fighting against PKK terrorism in South-eastern Anatolia since early 1980s, Turkey has been able to develop a very experienced and well-trained army. This could assist the EU to improve its capability to fight against terrorism.

Given its military capability, Turkey would be an invaluable asset for the EU to fill the capability-expectations gap in its security and defence policy. Aspirations for the achievement of a "capacity for autonomous action" could be realized and the international political influence of the EU thus increase. As the member of both NATO and the EU, Turkey would definitely play a major role in healthy transatlantic relations.

But Turkey would obviously be a challenge to the dominance of the UK and France in the EU security structure. However, member states favouring soft power rather than hard power of the EU such as Sweden and Finland could be concerned about an increase in the military capability with this magnitude. The rather apt cliché about Turkey; "the Trojan Horse of the US" might be revived under the pretext that Turkey would change the EU's understanding of security and use of force, and render them closer to that of the US.

Nevertheless, Turkey's contribution to the EU capability in security and defence would add significantly to the political might of the EU, which it has been striving to achieve for years. To achieve this, Turkey must work hard to render the scepticism irrelevant, firstly by developing its economy and achieving political stability. It must also develop its tourism sector in order to enable more EU nationals to visit, learn and enjoy Turkey. It should even provide scholarships to EU nationals at Turkish universities.

On the other hand, the EU should wake up to the advantages of Turkish membership rather than focusing on the disadvantages. Despite all its drawbacks, Turkey might constitute the major component to enable the EU to become a political power which "punches its weight".