TURKEY'S EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE: THE GERMAN VIEW

The author argues that the German Government has given its unrelenting support for accession negotiations if Turkey meets the Copenhagen political criteria. According to the author both Turkey and the EU are already reaping the benefits of Turkey's EU perspective. He cites three reasons as to why he believes it to be in the political interest of the EU member states, especially Germany, to continue this process: Firstly, because prospective membership has acted as a catalyst, causing Turkey to embark upon far-reaching constitutional and legislative reforms in a very short period. Secondly, because Turkey is of strategic importance to Europe's security given the paradigm shift in world politics. Thirdly, because Turkey is already an important economic partner for Germany and other member states and will even gain in importance once accession negotiations have begun. The author elaborates on the three reasons and concludes by stating that Turkey's fulfilment of the reform goals should be met by the fulfilment of the EU's pledges.

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On 1 May 2004, the European Union embraced ten new member states. The arrival of the newcomers increased the number of members from 15 to 25, with a total population of over 450 million. The 2004 enlargement was the largest and most ambitious in the history of the European Union and involved many years of preparation by the EU and the new member states. In preparing for accession, the new member states undertook enormous reform efforts. Their accession was the realization of our shared hope that the successful EU model, underpinned by the values of democracy, the rule of law, the protection of human rights and minorities, could be transferred to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, thus ensuring lasting peace, freedom, security and political stability.

Important decisions on Turkey will be taken by the EU in December 2004 with far-reaching implications for both sides, when the European Council will, on the basis of a report and recommendation from the EU Commission, decide whether to open accession negotiations with Turkey. If the European Council decides in favour, negotiations should start immediately.

The process of bringing Turkey closer to the European Union has been mapped out in political terms for a long time. Starting with the 1963 Association Agreement between the EEC and Turkey, followed by the establishment of a Customs Union, the landmark decisions of the 1997 European Council confirming "Turkey's eligibility for accession to the European Union" to 1999 when Turkey was granted candidate status, Turkey, with the support of consecutive German Governments, has been brought ever closer to the European Union. In December 2002, the Copenhagen European Council provided a clear political roadmap: "If the European Council in December 2004, on the basis of a report and a recommendation from the Commission, decides that Turkey fulfils the Copenhagen political criteria, the European Union will open accession negotiations with Turkey without delay."

The German Government has time and again expressed its unrelenting support for accession negotiations if Turkey meets the Copenhagen political criteria. Our optimism regarding the European Commission's next progress report is based on the continuing efforts of the Turkish Government to comply with the political criteria.

The ties between Germany and Turkey, whether historical, economic, social, interpersonal or political, are exceptionally close. There are now approximately 2.5 million people of Turkish descent living in Germany of whom some 600,000 have German citizenship. Turkish citizens are by far the largest group of foreigners in Germany. Of course Turks in Germany and Germans of Turkish descent are a key factor in bilateral relations impacting both directions. Entrepreneurs like Kemal Sahin and Vural Öger, writers like Emine S. Özdamar, Zafer Senocak and Feridun Zaimoglu, directors like Ayse Polat and Fatih Akin with his prize-winning and extremely popular film "Head On" (*Gegen die Wand*) are making a decisive contribution to Germany's cultural wealth and economic well-being. No other EU member state has a

Turkish community of a comparable size and visibility with integration being a key issue. I am not alone in thinking that this is one of the main reasons why the debate about Turkey's accession is more intensive and complex in Germany than in most other EU member states. Not all participants in this very vocal debate seem to realize that Turkey's accession is not imminent. Should negotiations commence, the road to accession will be long and laborious, requiring a process of comprehensive modernization throughout Turkey. As I have said in the past, Turkey's EU compatibility is put to the test in Diyarbakir and Erzurum, not in Izmir and Istanbul. The Turkey which one day accedes will certainly be a different country than it is today. It is in the midst of radical political, social and economic change and needs to continue along this path.

We, however, are firmly convinced that both Turkey and the EU are already reaping the benefits of Turkey's EU perspective. There are three reasons why we believe it to be in the political interest of the EU member states, especially Germany, to continue this process: Firstly, because prospective membership has acted as a catalyst, causing Turkey to embark upon far-reaching constitutional and legislative reforms in a very short period. Secondly, because Turkey is of strategic importance to Europe's security given the paradigm shift in world politics. Thirdly, because Turkey is already an important economic partner for Germany and other member states and will even gain in importance once accession negotiations have begun.

Prospective EU Membership: an Engine for Turkey's Reform Policy

The German Government and other member states welcome the fact that the prospect of accession to the European Union has greatly fostered the Turkish Government's determination to carry out reforms and strengthened the forces of reform in both state and society. It has enhanced the Turkish Government's political lever meaning it can stress the necessity of continued reform and swift implementation with a view to meeting the Copenhagen political criteria. EU accession as a political project enjoys overwhelmingly broad public support in Turkey. By resolutely pursuing its reform course, Turkey has moved towards the EU as a political community of shared values at a surprisingly rapid pace and to an extent that many academics and myself regarded as almost inconceivable not all that long ago. Crucial legislative reforms have been introduced, such as reforms to grant cultural rights to minorities, reforms to transform civil society, reforms to broaden freedom of expression. Turkey has abolished the death penalty and the state security courts; it has ratified several key international conventions such as the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; only recently a civilian has for the first time been appointed head of the National Security Council.

Germany continues to actively support this process. We have been highly impressed by the rate of change, yet we recognize that there is still work to be done. Changes have to become as visible and impressive in practice as they are on paper. However, one has also to bear in mind that implementation

of legislation inevitably takes time in all countries. We are closely observing how hard the Turkish Government and the Turkish Parliament are working to overcome lingering shortfalls concerning, for example, the rights of religious minorities, the prevention of torture and maltreatment, and cultural rights for ethnic minorities.

Germany is not alone in thinking the reform measures implemented in the hope of EU accession have strengthened Turkish democracy and the rule of law. Above all, there is more respect for human and minority rights. Given the close ties between German and Turkish society, this has a direct impact on Germany. Democracy, the rule of law and internal stability are valuable assets in a close partner and neighbour. We, the European Union and Turkey, have much to gain from the continuation of Turkey's transformation process. Therefore, the political momentum of the reform process should not be put at risk.

Turkey as a Cornerstone of the EU's Strategic Dimension

Turkey has been a reliable security partner for more than 50 years. It has been a member of NATO since 1952 and is a founding member of the Council of Europe (1949) and of the CSCE/OSCE (1975). Needless to say, Turkey has always been of strategic importance to Europe's security due to its geography and history. Given the end of the Cold War and the new global threats, its importance is greater now than it was in past decades. Turkey's role and our perception of it need to be redefined. Turkey no longer lies on the periphery in strategic terms, rather at an intersection. It is located at the crossroads between three crisis-prone regions: the Balkans, the southern Caucasus and the Middle East and at the crossroads of important energy, transportation and communication networks.

Since the attacks of 11 September 2001, it has become obvious for all of us that security in the 21st century can no longer be defined using the traditional categories of the 20th century. A new totalitarianism, a terrorism which professes to be religiously motivated, poses a threat to peace and stability, at both regional and global level. This new threat is comprehensive. It is no longer a question of opposing systems. Rather, we face an even greater danger: its aim is a religious and cultural clash of civilizations between the Islamic Arab world and the West. Our response must be equally comprehensive. Our security depends on the globalization of fundamental values, such as human rights, respect for life, religious and cultural tolerance, the equality of all human beings, of men and women, the rule of law and democracy and a share of the blessings of education, progress and social security.

Given this paradigm shift after 11 September, the historic project of creating a new European order has to my mind three dimensions: a historical dimension, a pragmatic dimension and finally a strategic dimension. This is the context in which we see the question of Turkey's possible accession to the EU.

The reasons for Germany's strong backing for Turkey's pre-accession process are not least of a global strategic nature.

We believe that a Turkey that is engaging in a process of renewal and meeting European standards is vital for the EU's common foreign and security policy. If the modernization process in Turkey is successful, Turkey's much-cited function as a bridge towards the Central Asian states and to the Middle East could become a reality. As a functioning democracy in a predominantly Muslim society, it could inspire neighbouring countries and thus increase the prospect of democratic reforms being implemented there. This would be the best response to the new challenges we are facing. Moreover, the accession of Turkey would demonstrate that the EU sees itself as a union of democratic commitment and shared values and not as an exclusive club of a single religion. Europe is a power in the making. We as Europeans have to act as a unified continent with all its diversity of cultural backgrounds and common history. This should include Turkey.

Turkey as a Key Economic Partner

Turkey's integration into the EU is also in the EU's and especially in Germany's economic interest. Germany is Turkey's most important trading partner by far and has been for many years now. One third of Turkish foreign trade is received by Germany. Some 13,3 percent of Turkish imports are delivered by German companies to the tune of EUR 8,85 billion. Since 1980, German investment in Turkey has totalled more than EUR 3,5 billion. German companies are currently involved in almost 1,200 joint ventures in Turkey. The reasons behind the high level of activity of German companies in Turkey include, in addition to the large domestic market, Turkey's function as a gateway to countries in the Caucasus, Central Asia and the entire Middle East region. German industry and unions are therefore in favour of Turkey's accession to the EU.

Over the last two years Turkey has experienced an economic recovery. Once accession negotiations are launched, its economy will thrive even more. Foreign direct investment will improve because of the necessary implementation of EU standards and the further consolidation of Turkey's political and economic stability.

Conclusion

Forging closer ties between the EU and Turkey has been a constant feature of Germany's foreign policy. Turkey's promising internal development and the EU's credibility, security and prosperity are powerful arguments in favour of embracing Turkey. The European Council will decide at the end of the year whether accession negotiations should be opened with Turkey. If so, the process of forming closer ties

with the EU, which has already provided the modernization process in Turkey with considerable impetus, would be even further intensified.

Turkish membership could one day offer tremendous opportunities. The EU will benefit as it will have an opportunity to better integrate other cultures, it will gain in external stability, it will have a bridge to the countries of the Middle East. I am convinced that Turkey as a politically stable and modern democracy will be a valuable asset for the European Union. Thus Turkey's fulfilment of the reform goals should be met by the fulfilment of the EU's pledges.