

TURKEY: A SUCCESS IN MODERNIZATION, A FAILURE IN SELF-PROMOTION

In this piece based on his speech at ARI Movement's 10th Annual International Security Conference, Nirj Deva summarizes the successes of Turkey's modernization and democratization project, identifies the key areas which make Turkey indispensable to Europe, and finally points to Turkey's shortcomings in promoting its strengths. Mr Deva also emphasizes that European perception of Turkey is shaped more so by class-related issues than socio-cultural and religious factors.

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Turkey is a unique country in the Afro-Eurasia landmass. In terms of its sphere of influence, Turkey is a European, Middle Eastern, Balkan, Caucasian, Central Asian, Caspian, Mediterranean, Gulf, and Black Sea country all at the same time.

This article is about Turkey's role in international organizations. Turkey became a founding member of the UN in 1945 and joined the Council of Europe in 1949. As a result of the growing security threats in Europe, she joined NATO in 1952. In 1963, 45 years ago, Turkey signed an association agreement with the EEC – the forerunner of the EU. Turkey is a member of the OSCE, the OECD, the BSEC, the OIC and the ECO.

Turkey's diverse regional composition lends it the capability of maneuvering in several regions simultaneously. In this sense, it can and should appropriate to itself an area of influence and stability far greater than its size or economic might.

Since 9/11 Turkey has promoted a highly effective foreign policy and reinforced its internal stability through the reform of the democratic process. By proving to be a haven of peace and stability, Turkey has demonstrated its soft power to its neighbors and earned respect.

Turkey is geographically close to 70 percent of the world's oil and gas resources and thus a natural energy bridge between major oil producing areas in Russia, the Caspian Sea basin region and the Middle East on one hand, and European consumer markets on the other hand.

But does Turkey's energy policy influence its foreign policy and promote the interests of its allies and neighbors? Does Turkey's strategic location in terms of Europe's security make it more important to Europe? Has Turkey's relative stability and democratic foundation as a secular Muslim state led Europeans to believe that Turkey is essential to Europe and its future? The sad answer to all these questions is a big "no". Before I go into the reason for this, let me, as a great supporter of Turkey, elaborate on what I think Turkey has been doing to reinforce her position as a serious partner for Europe in the past six years.

Until the recent crisis in Georgia, Turkey adopted a "zero problem policy" towards its neighbors, yielding enormous dividends. Even in the most difficult area of Iraq and the tactics used by the PKK, Turkey gradually brought the Iraqi government, regional actors, the United States, the European Union and Sunni-Shiite and even the Syriac communities in Iraq closer to itself; making the impossible, possible. This was a tremendous achievement. Instead of isolating Turkey, the

PKK became the party being isolated. Compared to Turkey's bitter experience in the 1990s, when its military actions came under heavy international criticism, the recent developments indicate a remarkable success on Turkey's part. The last 18 months were marked by presidential elections, parliamentary elections, and a surge of PKK terror. In spite of these events, the reform process did not stop and progress was made despite the deceleration of the EU accession process – one of the significant low points here being the freezing of eight chapters of the *acquis* because of the Cyprus question. Turkey's critics were not expecting Turkey to overcome the crisis so easily. Yet Turkey's successful handling of the crisis ultimately served only to increase trust. So what are the misperceptions between the Turkish polity and the European decision-making mindset?

First, many Europeans believe that the enormous transformational modernization program that Turkey is undertaking is merely window dressing; Turkey is only doing it to satisfy the accession criteria. Of course this is nonsense, but the Turkish leadership has not been able to implant in the minds of Europeans that Turkish modernization is being done irrespective of whether or not she joins the EU as a full member.

What is happening today happened 80 years ago when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk modernized Turkey. No one in Europe had any idea of this transformation and they held on, for over 70 years, to their mythical fears of Turkish hordes at the gates of Vienna, about to overrun Europe. The same fear is stalking the subconscious minds of Europeans today.

Before we go into why there is always this unquestioned fear, let us quickly analyze what Turkey has achieved in the long and tumultuous path to satisfying the accession criteria.

The Helsinki European Council of December 1999 granted candidate country status to Turkey. Accession negotiations opened in October 2005. The EC-Turkey Customs Union agreement contributed to bilateral EU-Turkey trade, which reached 85 billion Euros in 2006, and it made Turkey the EU's seventh largest trading partner. The EU asked Turkey to remove all remaining restrictions on the free movement of goods. Still a number of Turkey's commitments on technical barriers to trade, import licenses, state aid and enforcement of intellectual property rights remain unfulfilled.

Turkey has made considerable progress towards meeting the Copenhagen Political Criteria. This requires stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities and respect for international obligations and regional cooperation. Overall, through free and fair

parliamentary elections, Turkey resolved the political and constitutional crisis, which followed the presidential elections. The elections were fully in line with the rule of law and international democratic standards. Participation was high and the new Parliament is highly representative of Turkish political diversity. Elections of the President in August last year took place smoothly and in accordance with the Constitution. A new government was formed and presented an EU-oriented reform agenda.

As a result of the anti-corruption drive, the Military Court of the General Staff, for the first time, sentenced a serving lieutenant general to imprisonment for corruption. Eight officers were also sentenced. The High Tribunal gave a suspended prison sentence to a former energy minister for irregularities in the awarding of a contract. On the observance of international human rights law, Turkey has ratified important parts of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) as well as the First Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), giving the UN the right to investigate human rights abuses. The legislative safeguards introduced by the zero tolerance policy on torture continue to have positive effects.

As regards to freedom of expression, including the media, open debate continued in the Turkish media on a wide range of issues, including those perceived to be sensitive by Turkish society. Concerning women's rights, amendments have extended the Law on Protection of the Family to all individuals in the family, including family members living separately. Attempts to combat honor killings and domestic violence against women are also being made.

Macroeconomic stability has been largely preserved. Recent financial market turbulence added some uncertainty to the business environment, but at the same time underlined the economy's improved shock resilience. The authorities have improved the investment climate through a number of measures. However, certain features remained, which distort the functioning of markets, such as low transparency regarding state aid and market exit.

In several areas Turkey has maintained a high level of alignment with the EC common commercial policy. The EU remained Turkey's largest trading partner, although other markets are increasing in importance. In 2006, FDI-inflows from the EU amounted to 82 percent of total FDI, compared to 58 percent a year earlier.

There has been regular political dialogue and synergy between the EU and Turkey on foreign policy issues. Concerning Iraq, Turkey continued to support efforts towards achieving national reconciliation, security and peace. Turkey has

offered to train Iraqi security forces and has organized seminars for Iraqi political parties, diplomats, media representatives and health personnel. Turkey hosted an enlarged meeting of Iraq's neighboring countries aimed at achieving national reconciliation and stabilization in the country. Moreover, Turkey has supported all EU statements related to the Iran nuclear program. In the context of talks with high-level Iranian officials, Turkey encouraged compliance with international requirements; Turkey hosted meetings between High Representative Solana and Iranian Chief Negotiator. Regarding relations with the South Caucasus, Turkey signed the framework agreement on the Baku-Akhalkalaki-Kars railway with Azerbaijan and Georgia. As for relations with Armenia, meetings between high-level Armenian and Turkish officials took place. Furthermore, Turkey took the symbolic steps of inviting Armenian representatives to the funeral of the assassinated Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink in January 2007 and to the inauguration of the restored Akdamar Armenian Church of the Holy Cross in March.

Turkey supported the Middle East Peace Process and the formation of a National Unity Government. Relations with Syria developed positively and Syria was encouraged to play a constructive role in the region. Last year, Turkey assumed the Chairmanship-in-Office of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). Turkey has reiterated its continuing effort aimed at revitalizing BSEC. Furthermore, Turkey hosted a meeting between the Presidents of Pakistan and Afghanistan and hosted a joint Working Group between the two countries. Turkey maintains its strong support for the "Bonn process" and took on a regional command mission in Kabul for a second term.

At the end of 2001, a gas pipeline from Iran to Turkey came into operation. The Blue Stream Gas Pipeline from Russia to Turkey and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline from the Caspian basin to Turkey are currently under construction. With the development of new oil and gas routes to bring Caspian and Middle Eastern supplies to world markets, Turkey is, at the same time, emerging as a key energy distributor, especially for Europe.

In short, Turkey has gone a long way to become compatible with the European experience, norms and aspirations and cooperate with Europe's wishes. These are not the acts of a mere passerby. These are the acts of a potential long-term partner, as serious a partner as Turkey was at the height of the Cold War when Turkey was the NATO's front line to contain the Soviet Union.

Opinion leaders in Turkey may be extremely puzzled by European perceptions about Turkey. Turkey has done much to become a modern European country and commands the key strategic distributor networks that provide Europe with

energy security. Yet, Europeans seem to believe that the Turkish state and its people are not European, that it should not, in the foreseeable future, join the EU as a full member, while at the same time demand that Turkey's geography and strategic location be freely open to European use. When it was convenient Turkey was the sick man of Europe; today Turkey appears not be in Europe.

The reality on the ground is that the construction of the Turkey-Greece gas interconnector is finalized. "Shah Deniz", a natural gas project that will connect the energy routes of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey with Greece, will create a new East-West belt. With the Nabucco gas pipeline project, the Turkish energy corridor stretching from East to West will be expanded. Another route that could become important in the future is a potential South-North route that would carry Arab natural gas through Egypt-Syria-Jordan. The optimum transit corridor for oil and natural gas for Iraq energy resources would be a route over Anatolia to the East Mediterranean. Now Turkey is patiently waiting for the penny to drop, waiting for the EU to appreciate its indispensable position with regard to energy security, cultural politics and transit routes and embrace it as an equal partner.

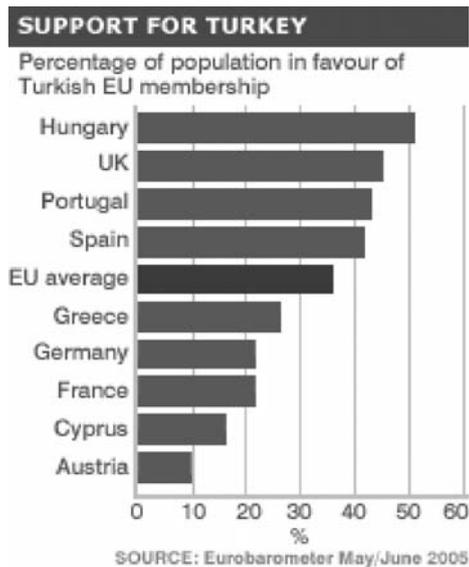
Well, I fear it is going to be a long wait for this particular penny to drop unless the Turkish state and those who support joining the EU understand and develop a completely new strategy to gain acceptance in Europe.

The crisis in Georgia, the resurgence of Russia, the instability in the Caucasus are all factors which should reinforce and accelerate the need for Europe to embrace Turkey as an equal EU partner to protect European geopolitical and strategic energy interest. But it will not, unless a new perception of the problem is understood in Ankara. Unless we act now, the future direction will not be an inevitable road map drawn from the experience of the 20th century of an ever-expanding Europe. The direction points instead, to a roadmap drawn after the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Everything that happened between 1815, the Treaty of Paris of 1852 and the Great War of 1914, will happen again unless we take command of our common destiny and change it to suit 21st century purposes.

In the 19th century, France, Austria and Britain weakened Turkey and made it a client state to contain Russian expansion into the Baltic and Mediterranean. Now unless Turkey becomes a full member of the EU, the same will happen again, with the EU demanding Turkey's geographical and economic space, and giving little in return in order to contain and bargain with Russia and so protect her energy supplies.

Turkey must not become a weak buffer; it must become a strong partner. In other words, if Turkey does not quickly become a full EU member state, she will

inevitably end up as a weak buffer as it did before. What must Turkey do now to evolve this new strategy to gain acceptance and membership quickly? The primary obstruction to Turkey's accession is not the elites of Europe but rather the peoples of Europe and this distinction is blurred in the Turkish mind. In an authoritative recent survey by the BBC¹ they found that:



What are the elites of Istanbul and Ankara doing to engage with the peoples of Europe and not the European elites? The answer is nothing.

I represent the South East of England, over eight million English people in the richest part of the world, the Home Counties of England, in the European Parliament. Despite me being a Sri Lankan born curry-eater, they have trusted me to protect their interest in the EU. If I can persuade them that I am their man and that they should vote for me, not even having been born in England, the collective Turkish intelligentsia can surely persuade the peoples of Europe

that Turkey is essential to their well being and security.

What does an ordinary Englishman in Hampshire know of Turkey? Very little other than meeting the occasional kebab seller. What does a well-heeled Surrey family know of Turkey? Again very little other than knowing the marina workers who look after their boat in Marmaris and provide food and drink to their friends when cruising. The issue is not about nationality; it is about class. The middle classes of Europe are terrified of the working classes of Turkey. In 1831, the middle classes of England were terrified of the working classes of England and refused to give them the right to vote. This resembles the "Anatolian peasant" stereotypes in Europe. The middle classes of Europe who by and large only go to Church on Christmas day suddenly become Christians when contemplating the Muslim hordes who will arrive on their shores. Again it is not purely about religion, it is about class and style.

¹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4307700.stm>