

Beyond Enlargement Fatigue?

Part 1 The Dutch debate on Turkish accession

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ESI series:
Beyond Enlargement Fatigue?

Although the term is recent, the phenomenon of ‘enlargement fatigue’ is nearly as old as the European Union itself, dating back to France’s two vetoes of British accession in the 1960s. While the *Short History of Enlargement Fatigue* remains to be written, it is likely that it would reveal that both enlargement enthusiasm and enlargement fatigue are recurring positions in the pendulum swings of European opinion. Enlargement has always been hotly debated and subject to numerous political calculations.

In 1977, Francois Mitterrand, then the leading opposition politician in France, told the magazine *Nouvel Observateur*: “One has to be careful not to turn the common market into a mere free trade zone. Neither Greece nor Spain are in a position to join the Community. Accession is neither in their interest nor is it in our interest. Interim steps are desirable.”¹ Four years later, Francois Mitterrand was elected president of France. By the time he left the presidency in 1995, Greece, Spain and Portugal had been EU members for more than a decade, negotiations were completed with Austria, Finland and Sweden, and the first steps had been taken towards the admission of post-communist Central and Eastern Europe.

In 1996, a seasoned analyst of European affairs, Perry Anderson, noted that enlargement was posing a threat to the achievements of European integration. “The most immediate effect of any extension to the east, even of modest scope, would be a financial crisis of heroic proportions.”² Eastern enlargement would “cripple the existing institutions of the Union” and derail the introduction of a single European currency. A decade and ten new members later, the EU and its institutions continue to function and the Euro has been adopted. Debates on the budget are protracted and at times rancorous – but this has not precluded a recent agreement that settles all disputes over money until 2014.

Since the spring of 2005, when the proposed European Constitutional Treaty was rejected in referenda in France and the Netherlands, debate on the drawbacks of enlargement has gained in intensity. Senior politicians across Europe have called for a slow-down, freeze or even a permanent halt to enlargement.³ Voices opposing enlargement regularly make headlines, creating the impression that the future of enlargement is hanging in the balance.

Was 2005 a decisive break in a half century of European Union expansion, or just one of its periodic episodes of gloom and self-doubt? Could enlargement fatigue become a self-fulfilling prophecy, slowing down reforms and spreading instability among the candidates?

To explore these questions, ESI is carrying out a series of studies on current debates on enlargement in key EU member states, entitled *Beyond Enlargement Fatigue?* The series begins with one of Turkey’s traditional supporters, the Netherlands, and examines how Dutch attitudes have developed since 1999. It will continue with studies of the enlargement debates in Austria, Germany, France and other EU members.

¹ Quoted in Georg Kreis, *Europa und seine Grenzen*, 2004, p. 25.

² Anderson predicted that the cost of integrating Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland would “would mean an increase of 60 percent in the Union budget today ... there is no chance of the existing member states accepting such a burden.” Peter Gowan and Perry Anderson, *The Question of Europe*, 1997, p.126.

³ The German CSU leader, Edmund Stoiber, declared on 21 March 2006 that Turkish accession is “out of the question” and that commitments made to the Western Balkan countries should be revoked. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 22 March 2006.

The Dutch Debate on Turkish Accession

Executive Summary

The Netherlands, one of Turkey's traditional allies within Europe, has played a key role in recent European debates on Turkish EU accession. It was under a Dutch presidency in December 2004 that the EU agreed to open accession talks with Turkey.

The Dutch debate on Turkish accession takes place against a difficult background. The country's economic growth ground to a virtual halt in 2002. Recent years have brought rising unemployment and painful cuts in public spending. As the self-confidence of the 1990s has given way to uncertainty, there have been heated debates on immigration and the preservation of cultural values. The populist politician Pim Fortuyn rose to rapid prominence on an anti-immigration and anti-Islam platform, shattering many taboos before being assassinated in 2002. In November 2004, Dutch film maker Theo van Gogh was murdered in the streets of Amsterdam by an Islamist militant. In June 2005, the Dutch public rejected the proposed European Constitution by a large margin, despite the support of the country's political elite.

However, despite the political turmoil and the rise of anti-immigration sentiment, a political consensus in favour of Turkish membership has been developed and maintained. Across the political spectrum, politicians went to considerable lengths to inform themselves about the changes underway in Turkey and to make a serious assessment of the costs and benefits of accession. In anticipation of the EU's decision to open negotiations in December 2004, a series of studies were undertaken by Dutch institutes to examine different facets of the issue. Is Turkey's Islamic heritage compatible with European traditions? Is Turkey too poor to become an EU member? How much would it cost Dutch taxpayers? How many Turkish immigrants would arrive in the Netherlands following accession? These studies were cited extensively by politicians and the media, leading to a debate that was remarkably well informed.

According to Eurobarometer polls from autumn 2005, a majority of 55 percent of the Dutch population is opposed to Turkish accession, although the 41 percent in favour is also high, ranking 4th among EU members. Yet despite the polls, Dutch politicians in both government and opposition have endorsed a 'strict but fair' approach, actively making a case to the electorate in favour of Turkish accession once the country meets all European criteria. They have by and large rejected arguments based on religious or cultural identity, while stressing the importance of fair dealings and the positive signal which Turkish accession would send to the Islamic world.

The Netherlands is central to understanding the European debate on the future of enlargement. This study suggests that the language of Dutch politicians, however guarded, is not the language of enlargement fatigue. Dutch politicians from all the major parties have been willing to *lead* the debate, rather than blindly following opinion polls. The Dutch Labour party (currently in opposition) has also continued to embrace enlargement without any apparent electoral cost. This holds out the hope that a similarly intense and informed debate in other member states might swing the balance of opinion back towards a 'strict but fair' approach that leaves the door open to further successful enlargement on the basis of merit.

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I. Introduction

The Netherlands has been one of the most consistent supporters of European Union enlargement and Turkey's membership aspirations. In early 1999, when relations between the EU and Turkey reached a low point following the EU's refusal to grant the country candidate status, a Dutch fact-finding mission, led by former Christian Democrat Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers, went to Turkey and concluded:

“Although the question now facing the EU – namely whether a large country with a predominantly Muslim population can become part of it – is of a different order of magnitude, it does not differ in principle from the question posed by previous enlargements of the Union.”⁴

In July 2004, when the Netherlands took over the EU Presidency, Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende outlined his guiding principles regarding Turkey before the European Parliament:

“The decision [on Turkey] must be arrived at honestly, under the ground rules to which we previously, in 2002, firmly committed ourselves. That means strict application of the criteria laid down, but without inventing any new criteria.”⁵

By the end of the year, the Dutch Presidency had managed to secure an historic agreement on opening accession talks with Turkey.

Yet in recent times, there has been a series of heated debates within the Netherlands on Dutch national identity, Islam and the dangers of immigration. Public fears of Islamist fundamentalism have reached acute levels following September 11. In 2002, Pim Fortuyn, a sociology lecturer and columnist, rose to rapid prominence after declaring that Islam was a backward (‘retarded’) culture. He argued that European enlargement was to the detriment of the Netherlands and that immigration constituted a major threat to the Dutch way of life. Then, just weeks before his newly created party came second in national elections, Fortuyn was murdered. In November 2004, Dutch film maker Theo van Gogh was assassinated in the streets of Amsterdam by an Islamist militant.

The self-confidence of the 1990s, when U.S. President Clinton praised the Netherlands as a global model at the 1997 G-8 summit and when the “Dutch miracle” was discussed around the world, gave way to soul-searching, doubt and concern.⁶ Economic growth, which had reached around 4 percent during the 1990s, came to a virtual standstill by late 2002. Since then, the Netherlands has endured rising unemployment and painful cuts in public spending. Frustration with developments in the European Union has also risen sharply, fed by awareness that the Netherlands make proportionally the highest net contributions to the EU budget. In June 2005, the European draft constitution was rejected by a 61.6 percent majority vote, despite support from across the country's political elite.

⁴ Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV), *Towards calmer waters: a report on relations between Turkey and the EU*, 2 July 1999.

⁵ Speech to the European Parliament, 21 July 2004.

⁶ The “Dutch Miracle” referred to the fact that during the 1990s the Netherlands had the highest economic growth of all EU members except Ireland and a rate of employment growth second only to Ireland and Luxemburg.

On the face of it, these events might have been enough to swing the pendulum of public opinion firmly against Turkey. Yet through successive changes in government, the political consensus in favour of Turkish membership has remained solid. Today, only about 14 of the 150 members of the Dutch House of Commons (*Tweede Kamer*) belong to parties that rule out Turkish accession to the European Union. This consensus was reaffirmed in a parliamentary debate on 14 April this year. Despite a vigorous debate on the limits of enlargement, the prevailing view remains that existing commitments must be honoured.

Why have the upheavals in the Dutch political scene not had a greater impact on the debate? Why have Dutch politicians not succumbed to the populism seen in other parts of Europe, and turned against Turkey? To capture the dynamics involved, ESI talked to dozens of politicians, analysts, business leaders and civil society organisations across the Netherlands.

II. A process of ‘*overleg*’

The principle of compromise is fundamental to political life in the Netherlands. No party in living memory has held an absolute majority in the Dutch parliament. A strong form of proportional representation ensures a multiplicity of political voices. Government is always through coalition, and the Prime Minister cannot overrule his ministers. This gives rise to a political process which Dutch political scientists describe as ‘*stroperig*’, from *stroop*, the syrup poured over pancakes. Decisions are taken jointly, through elaborate consultations and the search for compromises. The Dutch term for this process of consensus-building is ‘*overleg*’.

Overleg (pronounced: *over-leh*) is not an easy term to translate. The closest English expression is ‘consultation’ – a process which aims first and foremost at giving the parties involved the opportunity to exchange information. As Han van der Horst describes it,

“The Dutch spend many of their working hours in *overleg*... At the end of *overleg*, everyone has an idea of what the other wishes to achieve. This is very important if the system is to function correctly. After all the questions, comments and reactions, the limits of a generally acceptable consensus have become more or less clear. Often the chairman will conclude with satisfaction that *de neuzen weer in dezelfde richting wijzen*, all noses are pointing in the same direction.”⁷

Overleg is a painstaking process that ends, ideally, in *beleid* – a policy position. Because of the time and effort invested in achieving *beleid*, the agreed position is invested with great importance by the stakeholders, and becomes very difficult to change. “It is always possible to change *beleid* eventually, but it cannot be achieved overnight. Every single measure has, after all, been discussed at great length.”⁸

The Dutch debate on Turkey since 1998 is best understood as a process of *overleg*: debate across the political spectrum, collective learning and the gradual building of consensus. This has given Dutch political actors a measured view on Turkey and its EU aspirations: one which recognises Turkey’s achievements and the importance of EU commitments, but at the same time regards Turkey’s continuing progress with a critical eye.

⁷ Han Van der Horst, *The Low Sky*, Scriptum Publishers, 2001, p. 170.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

1. Diplomatic traditions

Peace, Profits and Principles is the catchy title of a book on Dutch foreign policy by Joris Voorhoeve.⁹ He characterises the Dutch foreign policy tradition as Atlanticist, pro-European, in favour of free trade and supportive of “internationalist idealism”. The belief in free trade has deep roots, dating back to the period when the United Provinces ruled a global trading empire. Today, the Netherlands has one of the most open economies in the world (with exports amounting to 60 percent of its GDP). But idealism also plays a role. As one Dutch expert notes, the national self-image rests upon ideals of justice, tolerance and fairness.¹⁰ Promoting human rights is an official goal of foreign policy and broadly supported. Recent Eurobarometer polls demonstrate that Dutch concerns over Turkey’s human rights record are much higher than in other EU countries.

Support for European integration has traditionally been high in the Netherlands, but has been tempered in recent times. Until 1990, the Netherlands were a net earner from the EU, receiving more in subsidies than it contributed. This changed as a result of reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy during the 1990s, turning the Netherlands into the largest net contributor as a percentage of GNP by the end of the decade. Finance Minister Gerrit Zalm in 1999 threatened to block enlargement unless this issue was addressed. This source of disgruntlement also contributed to the success of maverick politician Pim Fortuyn and his outspoken criticisms of EU enlargement in 2002.

Diplomatic relations between the Netherlands and Turkey date back to the early 17th century, when the founding father of the Netherlands, William of Orange, looked to the Ottoman Empire as an ally against the Spanish Habsburgs. The United Provinces was among the first European states to open an embassy in Constantinople in 1612. After World War Two, Turkey and the Netherlands became strategic allies within NATO. In the 1960s, Turks began arriving in the Netherlands as guest workers, giving the Netherlands today one of the largest Turkish communities in Europe, with 320,000-350,000 people. There are strong economic links: between 1980 and 2002, 16 percent of foreign direct investment in Turkey came from the Netherlands. In 2002/3, the Netherlands was the largest foreign investor in Turkey, ahead of Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States.¹¹

Dutch diplomacy has pursued close relations with Turkey. It was a Dutch foreign minister, Joseph Luns, who in 1963 signed the EC-Turkey Association Agreement on behalf of the European Economic Community. The current Foreign Minister, Ben Bot, was ambassador in Ankara from 1986 to 1989 and has retained strong ties with the country. Sjoerd Gosses, ambassador to Turkey from 1999 to 2005, explained to ESI that “the people who mattered in the foreign ministry have been supportive of Turkish democratisation and Europeanisation since World War II.”¹² For most of the foreign policy establishment, Turkish EU membership has only been a matter of time. Dutch provided €22 million in bilateral aid to Turkey to facilitate Europeanization between 2002 and early 2006.

At the diplomatic level, therefore, links between Turkey and the Netherlands are very strong. However, these are traditions of the foreign policy elites rather than the general public. They

⁹ Voorhoeve, J.J., *Peace, Profits and Principles: A Study of Dutch Foreign Policy*, 1979.

¹⁰ Wendy Asbeek Brusse, *The Netherlands and Turkey’s Bid For EU Membership*, 2005. Also at www.esiweb.org, see: Dutch debate on Turkey.

¹¹ Maastricht School of Management and Koç University, *Turkey and the EU – looking beyond prejudice*, 2004, Speech by L.J. Brinkhorst, Dutch Minister of Economic Affairs, p. 20.

¹² ESI Interview with Sjoerd Gosses, 3 February 2006.

have rarely been debated in public, or even among the political parties. This changed only recently, as the European Union and enlargement have become issues with immediate political currency.

2. Expert opinion and the public debate

Any modern system of government relies on experts to help politicians work their way through complex policy issues. Even more so, a system without majorities which depends on the art of compromise needs experts to help establish common ground and navigate ideological differences. Arguably, the Dutch debate on Turkey has been one of the best-informed in all of Europe. A series of detailed studies on Turkey were undertaken by Dutch institutes – think tanks, universities and government advisory boards – in anticipation of the European Council decision in December 2004. These studies were almost immediately referred to by policy makers and the national media.

The studies examined in a serious manner issues which in many European countries have been little more than rhetorical questions. Is Turkey too poor? How much would Turkish accession cost Dutch taxpayers? Is Turkey's Islamic heritage incompatible with European traditions? How many Turkish immigrants would arrive in the Netherlands following Turkish accession? This careful toting up of costs and benefits is reminiscent of the mercantile traditions of the Dutch elite: if the bookkeeping is faulty, the business will flounder.

a) A clash of civilisations?

One of the most influential of these reports appeared in June 2004, published by the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR): *The European Union, Turkey and Islam*.¹³ Turkey expert Eric Zürcher of Leiden University was one of the main authors. The report asks two specific questions:

- Does the fact that the majority of Turkey's population is Muslim form an impediment to Turkey's accession to the European Union?
- Is there a cultural fault-line between Turkey and Europe? What is the validity of Samuel Huntington's claim that "Europe ends where Western Christianity ends and Islam and Orthodoxy begin"?

The authors look first at current relations between state and religion in Europe. They conclude that there is "no unambiguous, fixed European standard against which the current situation in Turkey can be measured."¹⁴ In 2000, among 48 European states, no fewer than 30 were "states which promote (one) religion or religious institutions." The list includes England, with an official church led by the head of state, Greece and Finland. The remaining states are secular, i.e. "states which neither promote nor discourage religion", such as France, where, nonetheless, the Prime Minister "has the right to propose cardinals and bishops, though the final appointment is left to the Vatican."¹⁵

¹³ Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR), *The European Union, Turkey and Islam*, Amsterdam University Press, 2004 (includes survey, *Searching for the Fault-Line*, by E.J. Zürcher and H. van der Linden). WRR stands for *Wetenschappelijke Raad voor her Regeringsbeleid*.

¹⁴ WRR report, p. 38.

¹⁵ WRR report, p. 33.

The report then turns to the history of relations between Islam and the state in Turkey. It argues that “the oft-heard cliché that Islam has never known the separation of ‘church and state’ represents a huge distortion of reality.”

“In the case of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, the modernisation process of the last century and a half was paralleled by the adoption and gradual internationalisation of a system of values that has its origins in Renaissance, Humanism and Enlightenment. Already in 1839, liberal principles such as the inviolability of the individual and his possessions, were officially proclaimed by the sultan. Equality in the eyes of the law for all Ottoman citizens was official policy by 1856. A constitution was drawn up in 1876, a mere 28 years after the reform of the Dutch constitution by Thorbecke, who turned the Netherlands into a parliamentary democracy.”¹⁶

The Ottoman Empire, the authors argue, already had an extensive and codified practice of *de facto* secular government. In the 19th century, Turkish reformers defended liberal values using Islamic arguments and “tried to show, through reinterpretation of Koranic texts and Islamic traditions, that democracy was actually intrinsic to Islam.”¹⁷ According to the authors, Kemalism, the official ideology of the modern Turkish Republic, can be seen as “the epilogue to a century of secularisation of institutions.”¹⁸ It was therefore “nonsense to claim that ‘Western’ values of democracy and human rights are essentially foreign to Turkey”.¹⁹

The report also seeks to allay concern about contemporary Islamic movements in Turkey. It notes that, from the traditional Dervish orders to new movements such as the Nurcus, the common theme is the attempt to reconcile traditional standards and values with a belief in modern science and technology.²⁰ While there are some radical, fundamentalist elements in Turkey, they remain marginal.²¹ The report concludes that “Turkey’s alleged un-European character is a construction, based on a very shaky definition of a European or ‘Western’ civilisation and on a poor understanding of Turkish reality.”²²

The report called on the Dutch government to propagate the view, both at home and abroad, that Turkish Islam forms no impediment to EU membership. Many of its arguments were quickly picked up and quoted by Dutch politicians. On 21 July 2004, Prime Minister Balkenende informed the European Parliament:

“We must not allow ourselves to be guided by fear, for example, of Islam. The raising of barriers to any particular religion is not consistent with Europe’s shared values. Our opposition should be directed not against religions, but against people and groups misusing their religion to get their way by force. Islam is not the problem.”²³

In July 2004, Balkenende announced publicly: “Muslims, Christians and others are able to live with each other very well.”²⁴ The WRR analysis was also echoed by the Minister for European Affairs, Atzo Nicolai:

¹⁶ WRR report, p. 152.

¹⁷ WRR report, p. 99.

¹⁸ WRR report, p. 103.

¹⁹ WRR report, p. 152.

²⁰ Nurcus are a religious movement in modern Turkish Islam inspired by Said Nur.

²¹ WRR report, p. 169.

²² WRR report, p. 170.

²³ Speech to the European Parliament, 21 July 2004.

²⁴ Nederlands Dagblad, 22 July 2004, *Islam voor EU geen probleem* (Islam no problem for EU).

“It would be extremely inappropriate if (religious) arguments were to play a role in the discussions about Turkey’s accession to the EU... Turkey has organized the secular character of the state very clearly. In this respect only France could be compared to it. Other European states could even take it as an example.”²⁵

In the main parliamentary debate on Turkey in November 2004, Nicolai stressed:

“Tolerance for different religions is crucial and characteristic for Europe. The report *EU, Turkey and Islam* concluded that the secular character which is emphasized and pursued in Europe is also firmly rooted in Turkey, as is democratic constitutionalism.”²⁶

To conclude, Dutch politicians eagerly seized on the report to dismiss Samuel Huntington’s thesis about the cultural fault-line between Christianity and Islam. The point was not merely that religion should not stand in the way of Turkey’s membership aspirations; but also that the admission of Turkey to the EU would send a powerful signal to the world refuting this divisive thesis. As Jan Jacob van Dijk, Christian Democratic (CDA) spokesperson on Europe, informed ESI, “among all the reasons we have for our support of Turkey, the most important one is that we believe Turkey’s EU accession will disprove Huntington’s idea of a ‘clash of civilizations’.”²⁷

b) Too many Turkish peasants?

There were other influential studies appearing in 2004 which, unlike the WRR report, were commissioned by ministries to explore the economic significance of Turkish EU membership. *Turkey in the European Union. Consequences for Agriculture, Food, Rural Areas and Structural Policy*, was commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture.²⁸ This 254-page study by the agricultural university in Wageningen describes in detail Turkey’s agricultural, food and rural sectors.

The Netherlands is the largest agricultural exporter in Europe, and its food and drink industry is one of the largest in the world. At the same time, as a net contributor to the EU budget, the prospect of paying large sums for agricultural and structural support to Turkey raises genuine concerns.

The report explores the structural weaknesses of Turkish agriculture. Turkey is a major agricultural producer by world standards. The sector accounts for 12 per cent of Turkey’s GDP, 34 percent of employment and 11 percent of merchandise exports. About 7 million people work in Turkish agriculture – roughly the same number of agricultural workers as in the entire EU-15. Yet it is a low efficiency sector, with value added per worker only one eighth of the EU-15 level. Farms in Turkey are generally family-owned, small and fragmented. Although there has been some consolidation of land over the past decade, the average farm size in 2001 was only 6 ha, compared to 19 ha in the EU.²⁹ The report presents a sobering

²⁵ Nederlands Dagblad, 3 July 2004, *Geen religie in Turkijedebat* (No religion in debate on Turkey).

²⁶ Tweedekamer, 21st Session, Europe Debate, 10 November 2004.

²⁷ ESI Interview with Jan Jacob van Dijk, 2 February 2006.

²⁸ Ministry for Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, *Turkey in the European Union. Consequences for Agriculture, Food, Rural Areas and Structural Policy*, 1 December 2004 (research undertaken by the Agricultural Economics and Rural Policy Group, AEP, and the Agricultural Economics and Research Institute, LEI, at Wageningen University). Find at www.esiweb.org under Dutch Turkey Debate, background documents.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-4.

assessment: “Turkey’s accession would bring a new set of challenges that have not yet been confronted, on this scale and in this combination, in any previous enlargement.”³⁰

This means that painful adjustments lie ahead for Turkey. Nearly 40 percent of the population (27.3 million people) live in rural areas. Regional income inequalities are extremely high, and there is no social safety net. Tackling poverty in the rural areas requires major investments in improving the efficiency of agriculture, together with measures to absorb the excess agricultural labour which this would generate.

Traditionally, the Turkish state has performed poorly in agricultural policy. The national farm extension system has performed inadequately for several decades, and is partly responsible for the technological backwardness of Turkish farming. There was virtually no rural development policy in the latter part of the 20th century.

“For many years, the Turkish agricultural sector has been a political football in the competition to gain votes, rather than a sector benefiting from long-term policies to improve its efficiency and ability to adjust to the present and future needs of society.”

However, as the report notes, there has been a radical change of direction for Turkish agricultural policy over the past few years. Distorting price supports and input subsidies have been phased out, and Turkey has moved to a system of direct income support along the lines of the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy. Measures have been introduced to stimulate food processing industries and increase food quality. Within a short period of time, Turkey has begun to put in place the policy and institutional architecture that would enable it to make effective use of EU support.

The report concludes that Turkey has much to gain from EU structural policies. Although the structural challenges facing Turkish agriculture are severe, they are precisely the kind of problem that EU cohesion policies are designed to address. The costs of addressing them, however, will be high. The authors calculate that, if Turkey joins the EU in 2015, its net receipts from the EU budget will amount to €11 to €18 billion (at 2004 prices) *per annum* – mostly through structural and cohesion policies. However, there will also be ample opportunities for Dutch agro-industrial companies to participate in the modernisation of rural Turkey.

c) **Is Turkey too poor?**

Opportunities beyond the Bosphorus – Exploring Growth, FDI and Trade Flows in View of Turkey’s EU Accession was commissioned by the Ministry of Economic Affairs³¹ and published by ABN-Amro in May 2004. The report explores the economic consequences of the hypothesis that Turkey will be an EU member by 2014.

The report notes that major structural reforms in Turkey had already begun under an IMF programme, bringing inflation and interest rates under control. Assuming these reforms continue during the pre-accession process, the authors predict:

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

³¹ Charles Kalshoven, Serdar Küçükakin & Frank Vinke, *Opportunities Beyond the Bosphorus – Exploring growth, FDI and Trade Flows in View of Turkey’s EU Accession*, study commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, ABN-Amro, May 2004: www.abnamro.com.

“The decision to start negotiations is expected to have considerable short-term economic impact. The decision is sometimes referred to as a ‘letter of guarantee’ from the European Union. Business attitudes will swing towards the positive in what may be qualified as a credibility shock. Turkey will be seen as a different country.”³²

Foreign direct investment, which averaged around €600 million per annum in the ten years to 2003, is likely to receive an immediate boost – to €4 billion per annum from 2005 to 2014, increasing to €11 billion per annum after 2014.³³ The report predicts annual growth rates averaging 4.9 percent up to 2014, and accelerating up to 6.2 percent thereafter. If these growth rates are realised, the Turkish economy will have tripled in size by 2024.³⁴ The report spells out the positive implications for Dutch exports to Turkey, which could grow from €1.9 billion in 2003 to €5.2 billion in 2013, and to €11 billion a decade after accession.

The publication of the report coincided with a visit to Turkey of a large trade delegation, led by the Minister of Economy. Dutch business organisations strongly supported the opening of negotiations with Turkey. Antony Burgmans, chairman of Unilever and of the working group *Expansion of the European Union* of the European Round Table (a think tank of the fifty most important enterprises in Europe) presented the Dutch EU presidency with a list of action points in 2004. The first of his ten points had only five words: “Turkey to join the EU”.

d) Too many Turkish immigrants?

There are few issues currently more politically sensitive in the Netherlands – as indeed across Europe – than immigration. The widespread perception that the integration of immigrants in Dutch society has failed was central to the electoral success of Pim Fortuyn. Successive governments have moved to limit immigration and asylum by raising the legal barriers. It was thus inevitable that the question of Turkish EU accession would be viewed through the lens of immigration.

One study aiming to predict levels of Turkish migration to the Netherlands was produced by the *Central Planbureau* (CPB - Central Planning Office): *The Economic Implications of Turkish Accession* (March 2004).³⁵ CPB was established in 1945 at the government’s instigation by Nobel Prize-winner Jan Tinbergen. Tinbergen, who considered economics a branch of engineering and sought to make economic processes quantifiable, embodied the pragmatic, utilitarian approach of post-war policy making. The role of the CPB is to produce hard facts for policy makers and build macroeconomic models to predict the future.³⁶

The report noted that the macroeconomic implications for EU members of Turkish accessions were likely to be “small but positive”. It warned, however, that there was the potential for significant, long-term migration, continuing for 15 years after accession. While acknowledging the difficulties of making accurate predictions, the CPB authors concluded:

“Large income disparities between Turkey and the EU provide incentives for Turkish people to migrate to the EU. On the basis of existing studies on the migration potential

³² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁵ A.M. Lejour, R.A. de Mooij & C.H. Chapel, *The Economic Implications of Turkish Accession*, Netherlands Bureau of Economic Policy Analysis, CPB Nr. 56, March 2004.

³⁶ Tinbergen was also involved in setting up the Turkish State Planning Organisation, DPT, in the early 1960s.

for Central and Eastern European countries, we expect that 2.7 million people will permanently move from Turkey to the EU in the longer term.”

This would be equivalent to 4 percent of the current Turkish population, and 0.7 percent of the EU-15 population. CPB assumes that the new arrivals would settle where Turkish immigrants live today. This suggests that Germany would receive 76 percent (2 million people), France 8 percent (213,000), the Netherlands 4 percent (107,000), the UK 2 percent (53,000), and Italy 1 percent (27,000).³⁷

These figures quickly found their way into the public debate. In October 2004, *Elsevier* magazine, the largest of the three main political weeklies, drew on the CPB report and asserted:

“In 15 years it would be 108,000 people to migrate to the Netherlands. The *CPB* has to admit that if those people are all poorly educated, the income level of poorly educated people in the Netherlands could decrease.”³⁸

A similar report was published by the Economic and Social Council (SER)³⁹ in November 2004, entitled *The pending enlargement of the EU, with particular emphasis on the accession of Turkey*.⁴⁰ The Economic and Social Council is another central institution for Dutch policy making, bringing together business organisations and trade unions. Its report also assessed the implications of Turkish accession for growth and employment, the consequences of free movement of workers with Turkey, and the impact of Turkish accession on the EU budget. It stressed that there was no reason to fear mass immigration. It assessed the overall cost of Turkish accession to be in the order of 0.1 to 0.15 percent the EU’s GDP, and concluded that this was an acceptable cost that could be met within the available resource ceiling.

“Assuming that Turkey is consistent in pursuing the package of structural reforms, there are no serious objections from a socio-economic perspective to the country’s eventual accession to the EU.”⁴¹

e) The media debate

This succession of studies has contributed to what is, comparatively speaking, a very well-informed debate on Turkey in Dutch society.⁴² As Hans van den Broek, former foreign minister and member of the Independent Turkey Commission, noted in September 2004, “the flood of reports is a blessing, if it provides a more ‘informed and objective’ public debate.”⁴³

The media helped to bring expert opinion into the public discourse. There were debates within the print media and influential editorials at decisive moments. The centrist-liberal newspaper

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 35 & 36.

³⁸ Elsevier, *Turkije: liever buitenlid* (Turkey preferably an outside member), 3 July 2004.

³⁹ SER stands for *Sociaal-Economische Raad*.

⁴⁰ Sociaal-Economische Raad (SER), *De komende uitbreiding van de EU, in het bijzonder de toetreding an Turkije*, 8 November 2004.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² The reports were analysed and discussed by the many students of contemporary Turkey working in Dutch universities. Among the leading experts are: Jan-Erik Zürcher from Leiden University, whose book, *Turkey: A Modern History* (1993) is widely consulted; Martin Van Bruinessen, a Dutch expert on the Kurds whose book, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (1992) is still seen as a classic on the social organization of the Kurds; and Rinus Penninx, head of the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies at the University of Amsterdam, who has directed interdisciplinary, multi-country studies on migration, and published extensively on Islam in Europe.

⁴³ *NRC Handelsblad*, “Turkish accession divides”, 9 September 2004.

NRC Handelsblad held a special editorial meeting in September 2004 to formulate a position on Turkish accession.

“We invited Minister Laurens Jan Brinkhorst and Turkey specialist Erik Jan Zürcher for a background discussion. The editor-in-chief remained ambivalent. The only one opposed to the prospect of Turkish EU accession was the economics editor. Eventually, our decisive editorial came out pro-Turkey.”⁴⁴

Some days after the meeting, the *Handelsblad* editorial announced: “Turkish EU membership will be a signal to the world that the most important achievements of the EU – peace and prosperity – are also within reach for a Muslim state.”⁴⁵ *De Volkskrant*, a quality left-of-centre paper, took a similar position. The paper’s foreign editor, Eric Outshoorn, explained,

“Turkey emerged as a process rather than a single debate. In 1998, I realized, Turkey is a really big country and no one really knows much. I started going to Turkey, and have been back 3 or 4 times a year since then. The paper’s position is that Turkey should become an EU member if the Copenhagen criteria are fulfilled.”⁴⁶

The daily *Trouw* declared that Islam was no obstacle to EU membership and that “cultural pluralism is an important characteristic of the Union. Turkey can only reinforce that diversity.”⁴⁷ It noted that Turkey is almost the only Islamic country with a functioning democracy. It stressed that the Copenhagen political criteria for EU membership would help to reinforce the democratisation of Turkey, setting an important example for the Islamic world.⁴⁸

Not all media supported the goal of Turkish accession. The weekly magazine *HP/DeTijd* published many critical comments on Turkey.⁴⁹ In January 2004, *Elsevier*, the leading weekly magazine, listed seven arguments against Turkish accession. In July 2004, it explored the potential costs of the project:

“That extra contribution will cost the Dutch tax payers between 0.8 and 1.6 billion euros per year. A high price, especially if you combine it with the small increase in trade and the supposedly large and unprofitable immigration wave that would be generated by EU membership.”⁵⁰

Overall, the Dutch took a remarkably measured view of the costs and benefits of Turkish EU accession. Without downplaying the challenges it posed, there was recognition that a strategic investment in Turkey’s development had much to offer the EU.

⁴⁴ ESI interview with Mark Kranenburg, *NRC Handelsblad*, 21 November 2005.

⁴⁵ *NRC Handelsblad*, *Vreemdgaan in Turkije* (Cheating in Turkey), 23 September 2004.

⁴⁶ ESI interview with Eric Outshoorn, 30 November 2005.

⁴⁷ *Trouw*, *Islam maakt Turkije niet minder Europees* (Islam doesn’t make Turkey less European), 10 February 2004.

⁴⁸ *Trouw*, *Populisme Verhagen is CDA'er onwaardig* (Verhagen’s populism is unworthy of CDA member), 12 October 2004.

⁴⁹ Already in 2002 Dirk Jan van Baar, regular columnist with the weekly magazine *HP/DeTijd*, wrote that “everybody feels that Turkey is different” and that “in reality, the Kemalists admit themselves that Islam is an obstacle on the way to modernisation.” *Turkse paradoxen* (Turkish Paradoxes), *HP/DeTijd*, 14 December 2002.

Elsevier, *Turkije: liever buitenlid* (Turkey preferably an outside member), 3 July 2004 and *Elsevier*, *Tegen Turks lidmaatschap* (Against Turkish membership), 31 January 2004.

3. Party politics

The *Binnenhof* in The Hague is the home of the Dutch parliament. It has two chambers: a *Tweede Kamer* as a ‘House of Commons’ and an *Eerste Kamer* originally reserved for the nobility, but today an elected upper house. In the past years, three parties have dominated Dutch parliament: the Christian Democrats (CDA⁵¹); Labour (PvdA⁵²); and the Liberals (VVD⁵³).

CDA was formed in 1980 with the merger of two Calvinist parties and the Katholieke Volkspartij. Until the early 1990s, it could count on the votes of a third of the electorate. Since 2002, the CDA has been in government again; since 2003 in coalition with the Liberals and D66. The VVD, which peaked in the 1990s under the leadership of Frits Bolkestein, is a liberal-conservative party which embraces free-market capitalism and liberal internationalism. The Labour party (PvdA) was the party of government until 2002 under the long-serving Prime Minister Wim Kok.

After a cabinet meeting on 29 January 2004, divisions on Turkey spilled into the open and were analysed at length in the press. As *NRC Handelsblad* reported,

“Yesterday it became clear that a couple of ministers, including Veerman (agriculture, CDA) and Remkes (interior, VVD), have principal complaints about Turkish membership. They think that the country doesn’t fit into the EU due to its religion.”⁵⁴

According to another report,

“the ministers for the Interior and Agriculture argue that Turkey as an Islamic country should not be allowed to form part of the EU. Other, mainly liberal, ministers have political rather than cultural objections to Turkish EU membership. Finance minister Gerrit Zalm predicts a sum of around 1 billion euro to be paid by Dutch taxpayers on EU subsidies to the Turks.”⁵⁵

The media quoted Prime Minister Balkenende’s conclusion from the meeting: “What matters to me is fair play.”⁵⁶ Despite this characteristically Dutch sentiment, the disagreements were not resolved. One minister commented that the prospects of success at a subsequent cabinet discussion in February 2004 looked “hopeless”, since the cabinet was “completely divided.”⁵⁷

Reaching compromise within a coalition government is always a difficult process. In the case of Turkish EU accession, however, the most intensive debates happened less *between* parties, but rather, *within* each of the main parties.

a) The Christian-Democrats (CDA)

As a governing party, the key individuals setting Turkey policy in CDA were Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende and foreign minister Bernard (Ben) Bot. However, to understand why

⁵¹ CDA stands for *Christen Democratisch Appèl*.

⁵² PvdA stands for *Partij van de Arbeid*.

⁵³ VVD stands for *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*.

⁵⁴ *NRC Handelsblad*, 30 January 2004.

⁵⁵ EU Observer, *Dutch cabinet at odds over Turkish EU membership*, 2 February 2004.

⁵⁶ *Algemeen Dagblad*, January 31, 2004, *Balkenende laat bezwaren tegen Turken vallen* (Balkenende gives up resistance against Turkey).

⁵⁷ EU Observer, *Dutch cabinet at odds over Turkish EU membership*, 2 February 2004.

Dutch Christian Democrats developed a position that set them apart from Christian Democrats in Germany, France and Austria, it is useful to explore the impact of Arie Oostlander, a senior CDA member of the European Parliament until 2004.

Arie Oostlander had been rapporteur on Turkey in the European Parliament from 2002 to 2004. He had previously been director of the CDA's Scientific Council, a party think-tank, where current Prime Minister Balkenende had also worked. During his travels to and work on Turkey, he did not shy away from controversy. He was particularly known for his outspoken views on why Turkey had failed for decades to meet the EU's political criteria.

“The problems we have with Turkey are political. Mostly these appear as an endless series of complaints concerning disrespect for human rights and citizens' freedoms and the functioning of the democracy... We prefer to analyse the background, the political culture behind all these complaints. The relationship between state and citizen is determined by a deep-rooted and implicit philosophy of the state, sometimes called Kemalism... [T]he transformation of a state based on Kemalist ideas into an EU member state, accepting and sharing the political values we set so much store by in the Union, will be a lengthy task.”

Oostlander objected to the illiberal nature of what he first called “Kemalism”, and then, following protests from Turkey, “the philosophy underlying the Turkish state”. He also saw fundamental problems with the military-inspired constitution of 1982, with its various limitations on the democratic process.

“It comprises elements such as extreme nationalism, centralism, a dominant role for the army, priority of collective interests over individual human rights, little room for civil society, heavy emphasis on the unity of the state, and a rigid attitude towards religion, which are hard to reconcile with the founding values of the European Union.”⁵⁸

Like other Dutch observers, Oostlander welcomed the arrival in office of the Turkish AKP government in 2002 as an opportunity to break with this illiberal tradition.⁵⁹ He was nonetheless aware of the risk that the AKP democratisation agenda would stall in the face of conflicting interests, and was quick to point to the slow implementation of reforms.⁶⁰ On the other hand, Oostlander saw religious arguments as entirely irrelevant to the debate.

“It is not honourable to follow a hidden suggestion that a state with a mainly Islamic society would not be able to fulfil the demands of a peaceful, democratic and constitutional state.”⁶¹

Oostlander summed up his approach to Turkey as “strict, fair and open ... I really believe that people can change. It is very Christian to believe that.”⁶²

Oostlander's successor as director of the CDA's Scientific Council, Ab Klink, also stressed that Turkey's Islamic tradition was no barrier to EU membership. In fact, he argued that Turkish

⁵⁸ Arie Oostlander at the symposium, *Turkey and the EU – looking beyond prejudice*, Maastricht School of Management, April 4 & 5, 2004.

⁵⁹ AKP (Justice and Development Party) is the governing party in Turkey following the 2002 elections. It was set up in 2001.

⁶⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Turkey and the EU – From Association to Accession. Record of the High-level Round Table Conference*, 6-7 November 2003, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. The Hague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Forward Strategy Unit, 2003, p. 49.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁶² ESI Interview with Arie Oostlander, 18 November 2005.

accession represented an opportunity for democratising Islam and its institutions, both at home and abroad.

“Democratic countries should in my opinion welcome religiously motivated institutions like political parties and schools, as long as they support the education of people in the values of democracy and basic human rights... For me, this is a major argument in favour of the entry of Turkey into the European Union... The entry in the EU might be of major importance for the development of an Islamic democratic tradition, and so, in the longer run, for peace in this world community.”⁶³

Klink informed ESI that, talking to conservative businessmen in the Central Anatolian town of Konya, he was reminded of his father and the world of Dutch Calvinism in the 1950s. He admitted that this perspective was not universally shared within the CDA in early 2004. There were widespread concerns among CDA members that Turkey and Islam were alien to the European tradition – a view linked at an emotional level to a sense that integration had not worked out as hoped in Dutch cities. However, as Klink stressed, “Most of us felt an anxiety in our stomach. Yet we all knew we had to make the Turkey decision with our brain.”⁶⁴

Other influential elder statesmen among the CDA have echoed this positive approach to Turkey. René van der Linden, since 2005 President of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, had initiated the AKP’s entry into the European People’s Party caucus in the CoE Assembly in 2002. Hans van den Broek, former foreign minister and former EU commissioner on external relations, argued for Turkey’s accession in his role as member of the “Independent Turkey Commission” headed by Maarti Ahtisaari.

Scepticism was stronger among CDA parliamentarians, including faction leader Maxime Verhagen and Europe spokesperson Jan Jacob Van Dijk. On 6 October 2004, after the European Commission had released its report on Turkey, the CDA held an internal debate on the issue in which strong opinions were advanced. “Some party members were completely against, arguing that Turkey was not a Christian country,” recalls van Dijk.⁶⁵ Following this tumultuous debate, former CDA chairman Marnix van Rij warned his party publicly of the dangers of populism.⁶⁶

In October 2004, Verhagen and van Dijk undertook a fact-finding mission to Turkey. As van Dijk told ESI, this was a turning-point. The mission found that the AKP government had an identity and ideology not dissimilar to the CDA. It welcomed the positive reforms underway in Turkey, but stressed the need for pressure to resolve the remaining problems.⁶⁷

What finally emerged within the CDA was a compromise along the lines of Arie Oostlander’s ‘strict, fair and open’ approach. The party’s Foreign Policy Commission published a booklet in August 2004 entitled “Turkey and the EU”, which concluded cautiously:

“It is clear that the EU would run a risk to open negotiations with Turkey. The question is whether the EU can allow itself not to run that risk.”⁶⁸

⁶³ Ab Klink at the symposium, *Turkey and the EU – looking beyond prejudice*, Maastricht School of Management, April 4 & 5, 2004.

⁶⁴ ESI Interview with Ab Klink, 2 December 2005.

⁶⁵ ESI Interview with Jan Jacob van Dijk, 2 February 2006.

⁶⁶ Trouw, 12 October 2004, Marnix van Rij, *Populisme Verhagen is CDA’er onwaardig* (Verhagen’s populism is unworthy of CDA member).

⁶⁷ ESI interview with Jan Jacob van Dijk, 2 February 2006.

⁶⁸ CDA discussienotitie Commissie Buitenland, *Turkije en de Europese Unie*, August 2004, p. 34.

The party rejected cultural and religious arguments in favour of close scrutiny of Turkey's records on human rights, democratisation and economic reforms. It acknowledged the potential for Turkish membership, while stressing the imperative effort that was required on Turkey's part.

b) The Liberals (VVD)

The most visible member of the Dutch Liberal party (VVD) in the European press in the autumn of 2004 was neither a Dutch parliamentarian nor a member of the Dutch government, but the EU commissioner responsible for the Internal Market, Frits Bolkestein. Bolkestein had worked for decades for Royal Dutch Shell before becoming party leader of the VVD and Minister of Defence in the 1990s. In the European press, he was associated both with the proposed (and controversial) EU directive to open up the European service sector, and with strong opposition to the possibility of Turkey joining the EU.

Bolkestein employed a whole series of historical metaphors to warn of the dangers ahead. In his 2004 book *The Limits of Europe*, he cautioned that the EU could collapse from imperial overstretch just like the Austro-Hungarian Empire did.

“In ten to fifteen years' time, Turkey's population could be the largest in the EU. It would have a significant impact on both the European Council and the European Parliament. Turkey would also be one of the poorest Member States. In the past, Europe has often made the mistake of promising too much too soon. If Turkey is accepted as a member, the Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova will also have to be accepted. At the end of this road lies a European Union that will be little more than a glorified customs union.”

He declared that, if Turkey were to join the EU, “the liberation of Vienna in 1683 would have been in vain.”⁶⁹ In a speech at Leiden University in September 2004, he warned that the EU would “implode” if Turkey joined, leaving Europe in danger of becoming ‘Islamicised’.

Despite the attention his warnings attracted, Bolkestein never succeeded in influencing his colleagues in the European Commission, the Dutch government or the Liberal party leadership. He was the only EU commissioner to reject the Commission's October 2004 “Recommendation on Turkey”,⁷⁰ and his view remained isolated within the VVD.

Turkey policy in the VVD was rather shaped by the Minister of Finance Gerrit Zalm, State Secretary for Europe, Atzo Nicolai, and the parliamentary leader of the VVD, Jozias van Aartsen, who had been foreign minister of the Netherlands during the 1999 Helsinki summit. (Van Aartsen stepped down as VVD leader on 8 March 2006). While the VVD had voted against setting a date for negotiations with Turkey in 2002, arguing that Turkish politics lacked transparency and failed to respect human rights, by 2004 it had come to support the ‘strict but fair’ approach of the government.

Atzo Nicolai, Dutch minister on European affairs, told ESI that the most concrete concern within the VVD was immigration. In July 2004, Nicolai queried “whether a wave of Turkish workers will flood the labour market.”⁷¹ He called for transitional arrangements to limit the

⁶⁹ The Independent, Comment by Adrian Hamilton, *Europe must not reject Turkey now*, 9 September 2004.

⁷⁰ ESI Interview with Franz Fischler, former EU Commissioner for Agriculture, 11 August 2005.

⁷¹ Nederlands Dagblad, July 3, 2004, ‘*Geen religie in Turkijedebat*’ („No Religion in Debate on Turkey“)

movement of labour. VVD members rallied around the demand for a safeguard clause on freedom of movement, enabling them to square the concerns of their domestic constituency with the prospects of Turkish accession.⁷²

Differences of religion and culture, on the other hand, were set aside by the VVD leadership. In March 2004, Jules Maaten, a Dutch MEP, was quoted as saying: “It is not important whether we are in love with Turkey. Since Turkey has been accepted as a candidate state, it is part of Europe.”⁷³ Even one of the most critical voices on Islam within Dutch society concurred in keeping the challenges of cultural integration separate from the debate on Turkey. In April 2004, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Liberal MP of Somali descent known as an outspoken critic of Islamic cultural practices, stated:

“I am optimistic about the changes taking place in Turkey. I am sure that like Europe, Turkey will one day move away from gender discrimination and a culture that oppresses women. Until then, it is necessary for the Turkish government to see to it that any obstacles which limit the fundamental rights and freedom of the individuals are removed.”⁷⁴

In September 2004, Jozias van Aartsen, then VVD faction leader, reiterated the party line:

“We all feel that in principle there is no obstacle to Turkish membership of the Union. However, we link it to a set of strict conditions. That is to say, we want to exert influence on the process of the negotiations. To say ‘never’ is to remain powerless on the side.”⁷⁵

Despite opinion polls in August 2004 suggesting that up to two-thirds of VVD voters were opposed to Turkish accession, in September all 27 VVD members of parliament voted in favour of opening negotiations.⁷⁶

c) The Labour Party (PvdA)

In December 2005, despite the failed constitutional referendum and endless talk of ‘enlargement fatigue’, Labour leader Wouter Bos published a book announcing his continued, on-principle support for EU enlargement.

“Europe is becoming larger. As long as the criteria are being strictly applied, this is a good thing. It forces countries to transform into democracies and constitutional states. It opens up markets for our economy.”⁷⁷

In electoral terms, this commitment did not appear to hurt the Labour party, which went on to win the municipal elections in early 2006. As Frans Timmermans, chair of the foreign affairs committee of the Dutch parliament, explained to ESI in January 2006:

“In 2004, I spoke to our party members in about seven discussion evenings all over the country... I have always said Turkey deserves a chance. I truly believe it is not set but

⁷² ESI Interview with Atzo Nicolai, 2 December 2005.

⁷³ NRC Handelsblad, 15 March 2004, *De VVD stelt religie over EU ter discussie* (VVD discusses religion in EU).

⁷⁴ Ayaan Hirsi Ali at the symposium, *Turkey and the EU – looking beyond prejudice*, Maastricht School of Management, April 4 & 5, 2004.

⁷⁵ NRC Handelsblad, 10 September 2004, *De Veerlui en de Bosporus* (The Ferryman and the Bosporus) by Jozias van Aartsen.

⁷⁶ Maurice de Hond, *Turkije in de EU*, 23 August 2004. www.peil.nl.

⁷⁷ Wouter Bos in his December 2005 book: *Dit land kan zoveel beter* (This country can do so much better).

we have to give Turkey the opportunity to comply with the criteria... Our position is firm.”⁷⁸

Traditionally, the Labour Party has been second in support to the Christian Democrats in Dutch politics. In the 2002 elections, however, after winning only 23 of 150 parliamentary seats, its electoral fortunes hit their lowest point since the Second World War. The party has recovered rapidly since. In 2003, it gained 42 seats in national elections, and in 2006 it won the municipal elections.

This recovery was achieved without changing the consistently positive attitude towards Turkey. Already in January 2004, Frans Timmermans was quoted in *de Volkskrant*: “If we reject Turkey because of Islam, we say to millions of Muslims living here: You do not belong here.”⁷⁹ On 18 March 2004, party leader Wouter Bos wrote in *de Volkskrant*:

“Turkey belongs to the European Union... A Turkey that is focused on Europe is a support for sustainable peace and security on our continent.”⁸⁰

There was concern at the time among leading members of his party that these statements might trigger a hostile reaction from the public. Yet the position was accepted without great controversy.

In the parliamentary debate on Turkey in November 2004, Labour supported the government’s stance of ‘strict but fair’. Frans Timmermans submitted a joint motion with the VVD’s Hans Van Baalen, recognising the political economic advantages of Turkish accession both to Turkey and the EU, but setting out strict conditions on negotiations.

“A positive decision concerning the commencement of the accession negotiations is only conceivable if:

1. negotiations are immediately suspended if Turkey does not comply with the agreements in the field of human rights;
2. free movement of individuals is not automatic with the accession, but requires a separate and unanimous decision about the free movement and transition periods, including with a safeguard clause;
3. the Union drastically reforms its agricultural and structural policy and finances, in order to be able to admit Turkey, during the accession.”⁸¹

On the eve of the 2004 EU summit on Turkey, Timmermans wrote in *de Volkskrant*:

“If Turkey continues to reform and if in fifteen years it can meet the demands which Europe puts forward, what would speak against Turkish membership?... The EU cannot remain the small, cosy Western European club of friends from former times. What do we get from our self-sufficient internal stability if instability keeps knocking on our doors and manifests itself more and more within our own society? In order to fulfil her task, the EU must remain open for European countries, which are ready and able to meet her criteria.”⁸²

⁷⁸ ESI Interview with Frans Timmermans, 31 January 2006.

⁷⁹ De Volkskrant, 31 January 2004, *Toetreden Turkije stuit op twijfels* (Doubts about Turkish accession).

⁸⁰ De Volkskrant, *Wouter Bos over Turkije* (Wouter Bos on Turkey), 18 March 2004.

⁸¹ Motion 13, 10 November 2004, 21st Session, Tweedekamer.

⁸² De Volkskrant, 10 December 2004, *Bolkestijn is tegen Turkije in de EU. De geschiedenis herhaalt zich*,

Opinion polls in 2004 suggested that a smaller proportion of Labour supporters were sceptical about Turkish accession than was the case for the CDA or VVD. Labour also has strong support within the Dutch Turkish community. Nebahat Albayrak, born in Sivas (Central Anatolia) and now chairperson of the Defence Committee in parliament, was the first Dutch MP of Turkish descent in 1998. She told ESI that the Turkish community took the view that a ‘no’ to Turkey would represent a ‘no’ to their own presence in the Netherlands.⁸³

The Labour party has also steered away from arguments occasionally heard on the left that EU enlargement serves a neo-liberal agenda to secure cheap labour and lower the social protection of workers. As Timmermans told ESI,

“It is ridiculous to argue that workers lose. The premise of that argument is that you can keep globalization out. The French left has been hypocritical on this... We have been portraying the EU as something we have to defend ourselves against. We do not have a progressive, forward-looking strategy. Left-wing intellectuals are nowhere to be found.”⁸⁴

Labour politicians have also defended their position in the European Parliament. One Dutch member of the European Parliament, also a woman of Turkish origin, Emine Bozkurt, is the Parliament’s rapporteur for the position of women in Turkey. Another vocal supporter is Jan Marinus Wiersma, Vice-President of the Socialist Group and member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European parliament.⁸⁵ As he explained to ESI, the Labour party’s support for Turkey has not entailed any electoral cost.

“After the referendum on the European constitution, I faced a tough debate on Turkey in my constituency in South Holland. My party is now in a re-assessment period. One conclusion about EU enlargement is that it should not be a casualty of our problems with our own electorate. Turkey is not a hard issue to communicate to people, and it does not really influence people’s voting behaviour. The fact that we are pro-Turkey does not affect our voters.”⁸⁶

d) Smaller parties

Outside the big three, there are a number of smaller parties which together hold 37 of the 150 seats in the Dutch Lower House. Most of them have taken clear positions on Turkey.⁸⁷

The smaller right-wing parties all oppose Turkish accession. This includes Geert Wilders who, since his defection from the VVD in 2004, has argued for a referendum on the issue. His position is supported by the rump of Pim Fortuyn’s LPF. There are also two conservative Christian parties which opposed the EU constitution because it failed to acknowledge God in the preamble: the Political Reformed Party (SGP or *Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij*) and the

Betoogt Frans Timmermans (Bolkenstein is against Turkey in the EU. History is repeating itself, states Frans Timmermans).

⁸³ ESI Interview with Nebahat Albayrak, 2 February 2006.

⁸⁴ ESI Interview with Frans Timmermans, 31 January 2006.

⁸⁵ Wiersma is also author, with fellow MEP Joost Lagendijk, of *Brussels, Waarschau, Kiev: Op zoek naar de grenzen van de Europese Unie* (Brussels, Warsaw, Kiev; Looking for the borders of the European Union).

⁸⁶ ESI Interview with Jan Marinus Wiersma, 22 November 2005.

⁸⁷ The smallest parties are three one-man parties, formed by MPs who all defected from their lists in the course of the past three years. The SP lost one seat; so did the LPF and the VVD.

Christian Union (*ChristenUnie*). The SGP is the Netherlands' oldest party, represented in parliament since 1922. It does not permit women to stand for parliament.

Geert Wilders, a former VVD parliamentarian and speechwriter to Frits Bolkenstein, broke with the VVD in September 2004 to create the "GroepWilders", styling himself as political heir to Pim Fortuyn. He had already been a dissenting voice within the VVD, demanding a more conservative-liberal direction for the party, including a tough stance against immigration, further EU enlargement and, specifically, Turkey. Wilders insists that he would "never in his lifetime vote for Turkey in the EU".

According to Wilders' senior political adviser, Bart Jan Spruyt, "Turkey was an element in Geert Wilders' departure; but not the only reason for it. The split would have happened with or without Turkey."⁸⁸ Spruyt told ESI that the party opposes any further EU enlargement, and especially Turkish accession, because it would "bring more Muslims into Europe."⁸⁹ Wilders argued that "Islam and democracy will never be compatible."⁹⁰ In autumn 2006, the Dutch parliament will vote on a proposal by Geert Wilders for a referendum on Turkish accession. Although his aides assume that this proposal will not gain a majority in parliament, they argue that it will at least "demonstrate that the gap between the political elite and the population needs to be taken seriously."

The three parties of the centre-left, with 23 seats total – the Socialist Party, GroenLinks and D66 – are supporters of Turkish accession. The SP, founded as a Maoist organisation in 1972, has widened its electoral base from 0.29 percent in 1977 to close to 6.3 percent in 2003. The SP is tacitly pro-Turkey, but has not been very public on the issue. D66 is part of the governing coalition and holds the ministry of economics. Together with GroenLinks, it has expressed the view that the EU should actively assist Turkey in achieving the Copenhagen criteria.

The D66 has had a volatile history since its creation by a group of Amsterdam intellectuals in 1966. It reached electoral peaks of 15 percent in 1994 and fell to a low point of 4 percent in 2003. While it is a supporter of more direct participation in Dutch democracy, an internal debate on holding a referendum on Turkish accession was temporarily settled with a consensus against. Laurens Jan Brinkhorst, Dutch minister for Economic Affairs, helped to dismiss concerns about immigration, arguing that:

"After the accession of Spain and Portugal, we were surprised to see the large-scale remigration of Spanish and Portuguese workers who were working in countries such as the Netherlands and Germany. Is it unlikely that Turks now living in Germany and the Netherlands consider a return to Turkey?"⁹¹

He also told ESI how his views on Turkey had evolved.

"Firstly, I realised the importance and permanence of the Muslim community here. Secondly, Europe's society should be open and no fortress, and the question is whether you can say 'no' to Turkey. Thirdly, the region surrounding Turkey is strategically

⁸⁸ ESI Interview with Bart van Spruyt, 31 January 2006.

⁸⁹ ESI Interview with Bart van Spruyt, 31 January 2006.

⁹⁰ Washington Post, February 1, 2005.

⁹¹ Laurens Jan Brinkhorst at the symposium, *Turkey and the EU, looking beyond prejudice*, Maastricht School of Management, Maastricht, 4-5 April 2004.

significant. The impact of a Muslim country within the EU on democracy in the Middle East would be huge.”⁹²

Brinkhorst’s view has been supported in parliament by the new (since 3 February 2006) D66 faction leader Louisewies van der Laan. Van der Laan told ESI: “We need the Turks precisely because they are Muslim.”⁹³

GroenLinks, comparable to the Greens in Germany, had peaked in electoral performance in the early 1970s, and still commanded 7.27 percent of the vote in 1998, before coming down to 5.1 percent in the last elections. GroenLinks is well known in Brussels thanks to the expertise and efforts of Joost Lagendijk, an MEP since 1998 and Chairman of the Delegation of the Turkey-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee. Lagendijk wrote on his website on 11 October 2005: “There is no alternative to full membership.” He argued:

“The arguments of advocates for a ‘membership lite’... are rather inconsistent. On the one hand, they rightly emphasize that in Turkey many things are not working well when it comes to matters such as respect for human rights and the constitutional state. At the same time, they propose to neglect these things with a further rapprochement between Turkey and the EU, and make do with one common market and the adjustment of foreign policy. This would mean that the EU will not interfere in the reforms in Turkey any more. And all of this while pressure on cooperation with Turkey – which during the last years has led to the abolishment of the death penalty, the curbing of the role of the military in politics, the decrease of torture – can be rightly called one of the greatest achievements of the EU’s foreign policy.”

III. The people and the polls

Across Europe, one of the most common attacks on the pro-Turkish position has been that it is an undemocratic, elite view, divorced from the concerns of ordinary people. This view has also been advanced in the Netherlands, in particular by René Cuperus, an author and fellow at the *Wiardi Beckman Stichting*,⁹⁴ a policy foundation affiliated with the Labour party. Cuperus declared in a speech on Turkey and the EU in Brussels that

“the disturbing and alarming news is: there is no debate in the Netherlands about Turkey. None whatsoever. The only thing there is, is a fracture line between the political elites – the world of policy makers and decision makers on the one hand – and the general public on the other.”⁹⁵

For Cuperus, the problem is the undemocratic nature of the political process. The large number of reports on Turkey produced by the ‘elites’ are “killing emotions and politics” by a “technocratic overload”, as they imply that people should first overcome their lack of knowledge.⁹⁶

⁹² ESI Interview with Laurens Jan Brinkhorst, 26 January 2006.

⁹³ ESI Interview with Louisewies van der Laan, 29 November 2005.

⁹⁴ “Our party institute is of a different opinion than the political factions in the parliament and the European parliament,” says Jan Marinus Wiersma, a social democratic MEP (ESI Interview with Jan Marinus Wiersma, 22 November 2005).

Turkey’s EU accession process: Public opinion in Turkey and in the EU. – “Not the Copenhagen criteria, but the Berlin-Kreuzberg criteria”. Speech by René Cuperus, Brussels, 5 October 2005.

⁹⁶ ESI Interview with René Cuperus, 2 February 2006.

“The world of debating is by its very nature monopolized by the chattering class, the political and intellectual elites and experts, which are almost all in favour of Turkish entry... The population has been against Turkey joining, and the only bridge to the population has been Geert Wilders. Yet his bridge to the Turkey topic is a dangerous one.”⁹⁷

Cuperus acknowledges that the Dutch public is not well informed on Turkish history or politics, and cares little for issues such as Cyprus, the Armenian genocide or Turkey’s human rights record. He believes people’s opposition to Turkish accession reflects their views on Muslim communities inside Europe.

“In Holland, the Turks are the ethnic group the least integrated into Dutch society. By forming parallel societies, by non-integration, by high unemployment and crime rates, they are frustrating support for accession instead of stimulating it. Recent research shows that 50 percent of the native Dutch think that the Muslim way of life is not compatible with the western-Dutch way of life.”⁹⁸

Cuperus also attributes popular opposition to Turkey to a deep crisis within the EU, following the French and Dutch referenda results on the constitution issue.

“Ordinary people feel betrayed by the EU... Europe has not been a protective shield against globalisation and liberalisation, but instead has acted as the neo-liberal transmitter of these processes. Enlargement is a source of cheap labour and overall ‘delocation’ of people.”⁹⁹

Following our research, we find Cuperus’ view that there was “no debate on Turkey” in the Netherlands to be unconvincing. Right across the political spectrum, Dutch politicians went to considerable lengths to find out more about Turkey and carry out a serious assessment of the costs and benefits of possible accession. All large parties and most ministries established contacts with Turkish institutions and sent delegations on fact-finding missions to Turkey. There were numerous and controversial debates in the mainstream media, and many discussions in other fora around the country. Opponents of Turkish accession, from Frits Bolkestein to Geert Wilders, from Catholic Bishop Frans Wiertz to cultural pessimists like René Cuperus, had ample space to advance their arguments. There were large conferences (in Amsterdam in 2003, in Maastricht in 2004) and many dozens public seminars and panel discussions in 2004 alone.

The quality of events at the local level, organised by associations, universities or branches of the chamber of commerce or trade unions, also points to an unusually focused debate for a foreign policy issue. Debating houses such as the *Rode Hoed*, the *Felix Meritis Foundation* or *De Balie* in Amsterdam held events on Turkey and the EU, covering the role of Islam, the Kurdish and the Armenian question. *Politiek Café* organised face-to-face debates with politicians on Turkey.

And yet, could Cuperus nonetheless be correct in asserting that the elite consensus has left ordinary people behind? He cites “devastating opinion polls” as evidence that the public is strongly opposed, viewing Turkey as fundamentally non-European in nature. A detailed examination of polls in 2004 and 2005 reveals quite a mixed picture, however.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ René Cuperus speech in Brussels, October 2005.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

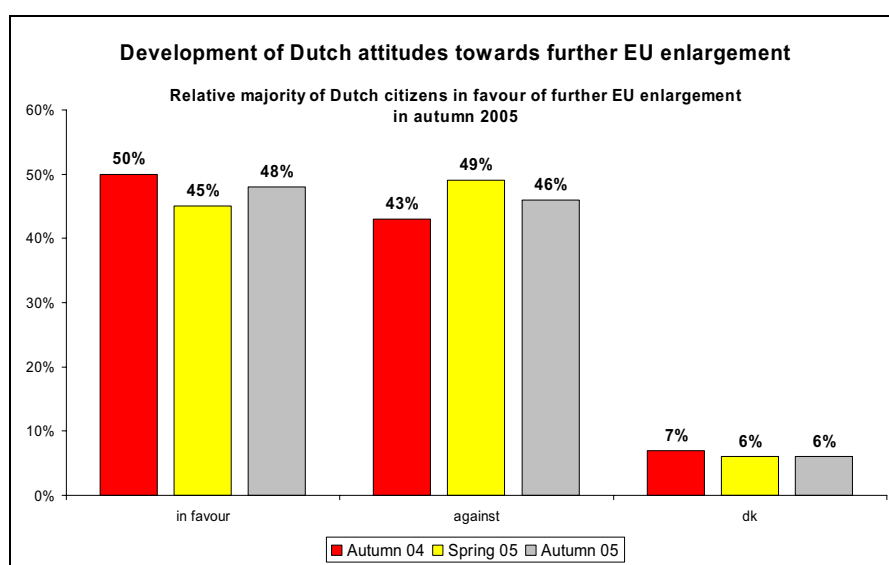
⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ See also: ESI, *Strict but fair? Dutch views on Turkish accession, 2004-2005 Eurobarometer Surveys*. www.esiweb.org, Dutch Turkey Debate. Cuperus suggested to ESI that the Eurobarometer polls are

According to *Eurobarometer* polls in 2004 and 2005, a majority of Dutch were indeed opposed to Turkish accession (55 percent in autumn 2005). Sixty-one percent of Dutch citizens were concerned that Turkey's accession could boost immigration. However, Dutch support for Turkish accession was comparatively high at 41 percent (compared to an EU average of 31 percent), ranking the Netherlands fourth among all EU member states after Slovenia, Sweden and Poland. The strongest support came from Dutch youth, while opposition increased with age.

Eurobarometer also found that a relative majority of Dutch citizens (48 percent) was in favour of "further EU enlargement". As the table below shows, the most recent trend (from spring to autumn 2005) is upwards and support for enlargement among young Dutch citizens (59 percent) is significantly above the average.

Public opposition to enlargement and Turkish accession played only a minor role in the electorate's rejection of the proposed EU constitution, according to *Eurobarometer*. Only 3 percent of all 'No'-voters mention Turkey as one of their reasons for rejecting the EU constitution. Opposition to enlargement in general is mentioned by only 6 percent. The dominant reason for voting against the EU constitution appears to have been the lack of information, mentioned by 32 percent of 'No'-voters.



Sources: Eurobarometer 62, autumn 2004; Eurobarometer 63.4, spring 2005; Eurobarometer 64, autumn 2005

A majority of respondents who named their political orientation as 'left' supported Turkey's EU accession (which supports the positions of the Dutch Labour party and other left parties). Only 37 percent of the "political centre" and 33 percent of the "political right" are in favour of Turkey joining the European Union.

painting a too rosy picture. However, the same polls showed opposition to Turkish accession in Austria at 80 percent in 2005.

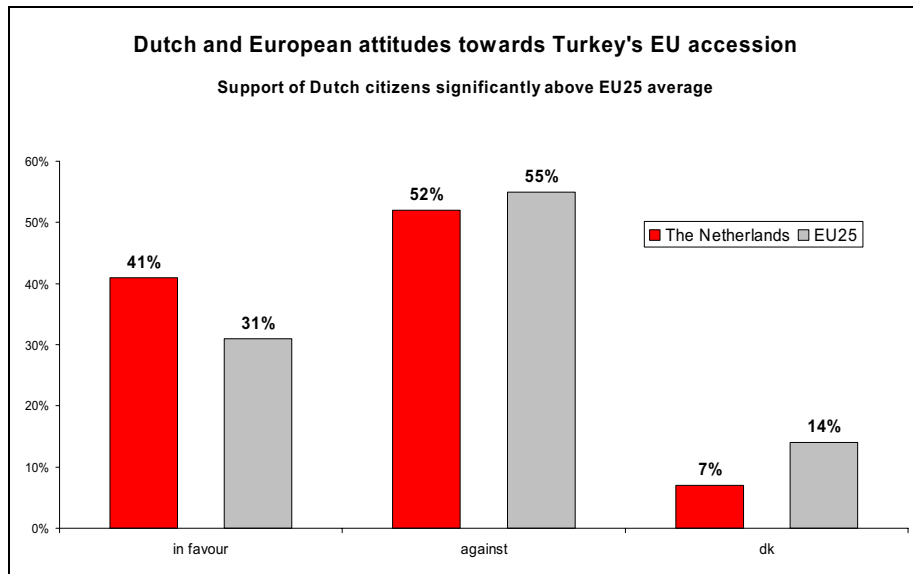


Diagram 5, Source: Eurobarometer 64, autumn 2005

In general, Dutch citizens display a more open but also more demanding set of opinions towards Turkey's accession than the European average. They appear to demand the strict application of conditions. While 83 percent of EU respondents expect Turkey to respect human rights systematically before joining, this condition is supported by 95 percent of Dutch respondents.

On the other hand, the Dutch share a number of concerns with the European public. Forty-six percent of Dutch respondents worry that cultural differences between Turkey and the EU are too significant (compared to 55 percent in the EU). Sixty-one percent of Dutch citizens are concerned that Turkey's accession could boost immigration.

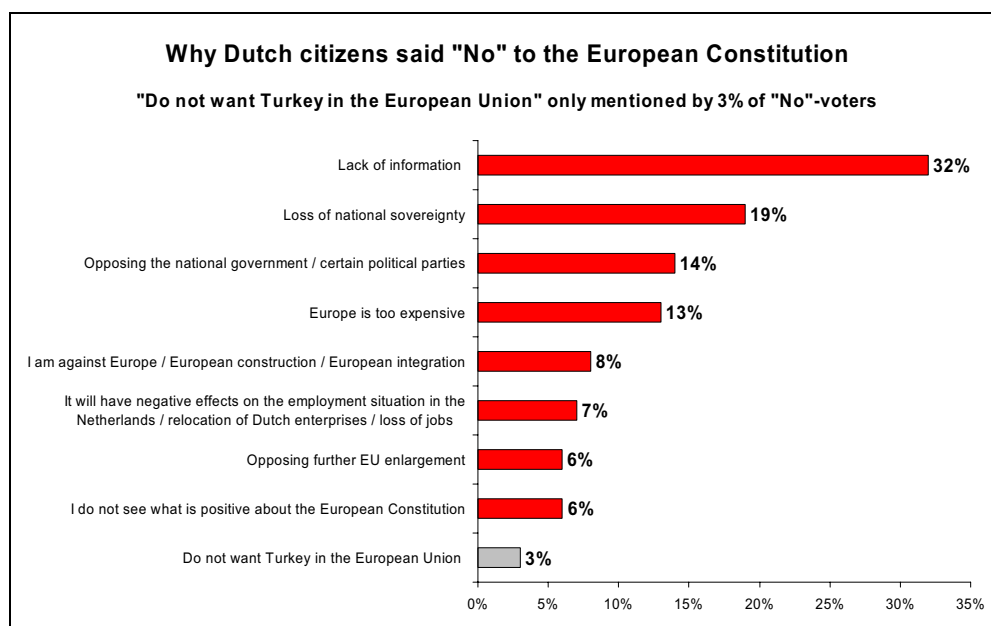


Diagram 11, Source: Eurobarometer 64, autumn 2005

IV. The future of ‘strict but fair’

The Dutch debate on Turkey since 1999 has been a mirror of the wider European debate. All the questions, concerns and doubts raised across Europe were also raised in the Netherlands. All of the arguments rehearsed elsewhere, from the most populist to the most academic, have also been aired here.

In October 2005, René Cuperus warned that the enlarging EU was seen by most Dutch as a train “blindly gathering speed”:

“Not long ago, ten new carriages were coupled to the train. It is uncertain whether more new carriages will be added and if so, how many... It is time for a break. It is time to stop and take stock of the speed, direction and length of the train.”

In fact, what stands out about the Dutch debate is the intensity with which many European concerns about Turkey have been explored. Until today, Dutch politicians from all of the major parties have *led* the debate, rather than blindly followed opinion polls. They have taken clear positions on potentially divisive issues, such as the potential for further immigration. They have articulated a set of conditions, based not on immutable, cultural elements or the appearance of Turkish migrants in Rotterdam but on concrete policy and institutional changes that are within Turkey’s power to deliver. Although these positions have drawn fire from populist voices from time to time, the debate has been influenced more by evidence than prejudice.

Tacan Ildem, Turkey’s ambassador to the Netherlands since 2003, told ESI in December 2005 that:

“Dutch policy makers and civil actors are better informed about the Turkey dossier than others in Europe... In the cabinet, critical voices on Turkey had been numerous. But these critics and their anxieties have been addressed. Now, the cabinet is united around the consensus on Turkey”.¹⁰¹

The maintenance of a solid political consensus on Turkey despite the difficult political environment suggests that Dutch consensus politics is alive and well. In this policy-making tradition, parties arrive at decisions on the basis of evidence and debate. Decisions that emerge are accorded high legitimacy, and dissent tends to evaporate once a decision is taken. This creates continuity, produces government from the centre and reduces the space for radical policy changes. It reflects the historical experience of “a country of minorities which entertain no hope of becoming majorities.”¹⁰²

While this makes Dutch policy on Turkey and enlargement fairly predictable, it also poses challenges for Turkey. The common position of many observers in the Netherlands is that the biggest threats to Turkish EU aspirations are negative incidents within Turkey. Concerns about freedom of expression, freedom of religion and the position of women in Turkish society are strong in the Netherlands. News about trials of journalists and cultural figures resonate immediately with Dutch observers concerned about freedom of speech in their own society. The prosecution of Orhan Pamuk received many headlines in the Netherlands. Dutch observers note that “people are watching Turkey closely. They are interested in the outcomes of such

¹⁰¹ ESI Interview with Tacan Ildem, 1 December 2005.

¹⁰² Rudy B. Andeweg and Galen A. Irwin, *Governance and Politics of the Netherlands*, 2002, p. 42.

incidents.”¹⁰³ Hans van den Broek, former minister of foreign affairs and the Dutch member of the “Independent Turkey Commission”, cautions that,

“Any incident in Turkey might challenge things here in the Netherlands and other EU member states. I would say to our friends in Turkey: you need a lot of perseverance.”¹⁰⁴

Dutch politicians continue to assist on the strict application of accession criteria.¹⁰⁵ Dutch appeals for Turkey to honour its commitments were reiterated soon after the official start of negotiations. In November 2005, Dutch Labour MEP Jan Marinus Wiersma warned that:

“We insist that the Turkish government return to the dynamism we witnessed in the reform process in earlier years. After the screening period, we want concrete negotiations to begin in a context in which we see real progress in the Turkish reform process.”¹⁰⁶

Dutch support for Turkish accession is built on the notion that Turkey is able to and firmly committed to changing fundamentally before eventual accession. As CDA politician and current Turkey rapporteur of the European parliament, Camiel Eurlings, put it:

“A Turkey must arise in which it is just as easy to establish a Christian church as it is to build a mosque in Rotterdam. I say this in favour of the Turks. But I am also convinced that this new reality would make people think differently about the accession of Turkey.”¹⁰⁷

In a parliamentary debate on 11 April 2006, the Dutch government again rejected the notion of different forms of “privileged partnerships” as alternative to membership. While the eyes of South East Europeans nervously turned to The Hague, and European newspaper headlines proclaimed that the “Dutch want a brake on EU enlargement”, both Atzo Nicolai (Liberal Minister for European Affairs) and Ben Bot (Christian Democratic Minister of Foreign Affairs) underlined the need to keep existing commitments.

In a speech in Zagreb a few days earlier, Minister for European Affairs Nicolai underlined that steps needed to be taken by governments “to ensure that European citizens again feel attached to the European Union”. But he also suggested that, at least in the Netherlands, enlargement fatigue has not been strong enough to change the basic direction of Dutch foreign policy:

“I want to stress very strongly that the Union should honour all its commitments, including agreements on membership prospects with the current candidate countries and the countries of the Western Balkans. We must keep our promises... I firmly believe that we can make future enlargements the tremendous success that it has been in the past.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ ESI interview with Paul Scheffer, 1 December 2005; ESI interview with Bram Boxhoorn, 27 January 2006.

¹⁰⁴ ESI Interview with Hans van den Broek, 30 November 2005.

¹⁰⁵ Atzo Nicolai, *Meeting the Requirements of Full EU Membership*, Crans Montana Forum, Zagreb, 6 April 2006.

¹⁰⁶ Jan Marinus Wiersma on his website as vice president of the European Socialists on 9 November 2005, speaking on behalf of this whole group in the European parliament.

¹⁰⁷ Camiel Eurlings as visiting MEP in the Dutch Parliament, Second Chamber, 21st Session, 10 November 2004.

¹⁰⁸ Atzo Nicolai, *Meeting the Requirements of Full EU Membership*, Crans Montana Forum, Zagreb, 6 April 2006.

This is not the language of enlargement fatigue. Rather, the Netherlands holds out the hope that a similarly intense and balanced debate on enlargement in other European Union member states might lead to a similar convergence of opinion around a policy of being 'strict but fair' with Turkey and other potential candidates.

About ESI

ESI is an independent non-profit research and policy institute, created in recognition of the need for independent, in-depth analysis of the complex issues involved in promoting stability and prosperity in Europe. ESI was founded in July 1999 by a multi-national group of practitioners and analysts with extensive experience in the regions it studied.

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