

Turkey-EU Relations: Forever Engaged, Never to be Married?

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Enlargement has been one of the EU's most successful foreign policy tools. Theoretically all Member States are committed to EU enlargement 'as an irreversible process', as declared at the 2001 Gothenburg European Council summit. However, history has shown that EU Member States, while committed to the general idea of enlargement, have demonstrated different levels of support for certain candidates', which is often determined by their self-interest.¹ Furthermore, according to the academic Piers Ludlow, 'despite its centrality to the life and operation of the EC/EU,

¹ A. Moravcsik, Negotiating the Single European Act: National Interests and Conventional Statecraft in the European Community. International Organization, 1991 pp. 651–88.

² N. Piers Ludlow, Hard-won but Vital: EU Enlargement in Historical Perspective, The Crisis of EU Enlargement,

enlargement has never been easy and has seldom been regarded wholly positively by those already inside'.²

Nevertheless, despite reservations enlargement has continued although the EU's appetite has reduced with the limitations of the EU's enlargement policy becoming increasingly obvious. These days, not only is the EU in an almost permanent state of 'enlargement fatigue', the protracted economic crisis which has enveloped the eurozone since 2008 has brought about a more inward looking EU and stymied its foreign policy outreach, which has impacted on the momentum in accession talks with a number of countries in the Western Balkans as well as Turkey. This fatigue was made crystal clear by the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, in his confirmation vote in the European Parliament when he said 'There will be no new enlargement in the next five years ...the EU needs to mark a pause in its enlargement process so that we can consolidate what has been done with 28.'

Historically Turkey has strong ties to the West, dating back to the days of the Ottoman Empire with Turkish history and identity inextricably intertwined with that of Europe. However, while the two have cooperated for centuries in numerous areas, according to Turkey expert Nathalie Tocci it is a relationship 'characterized by cooperation and convergence' and by 'cyclical ups and downs.' This remains the case today.³

Turkey's EU story began over fifty years ago in 1959 when the then Prime Minister, Adnan Menderes, applied for membership of the EEC. At that time the EEC was a group of six countries, Francisco Franco was the head of a totalitarian regime in Spain and the Berlin Wall had not yet been built. Half a decade later both the EU and Turkey have become very different animals. The EU has turned into the world's largest economic bloc, enlarging to 28 members. Meanwhile Turkey has gone from being labelled 'the sick man of Europe' to a dynamic and influence regional power with a booming economy. Yet despite Turkey having opened accession negotiations with the EU in 2005, the country is no nearer to joining the Club than it was half a decade ago. The accession negotiations are de facto frozen, while all opinion polls show how deeply divided the European public is over this issue, as are governments and parliaments across the continent. At the same time, as accession talks have run aground, democratic values and civil liberties in have been eroded as the ruling the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, have taken steps to centralise power and undermine the rule of law.

Looking beyond the membership process, Turkey remains a country of vital importance for the EU with a significant level of interdependence in many areas including trade, foreign and security policy, migration and energy. At a time when the EU faces crises in both its eastern and southern neighbourhoods, a reliable and predictable Turkey, with which it can cooperate in the Black Sea and Middle East neighbourhoods, is crucial.

² N. Piers Ludlow, *Hard-won but Vital: EU Enlargement in Historical Perspective*, The Crisis of EU Enlargement, London School of Economics, IDEAS, December 2014, pp 12.

³ N. Tocci, *Turkey and the European Union, A journey into the Unknown*, Center on the United States and Europe at Brookings, November 2014, pp 1 & pp 5.

The EU's policy of the last few years has proved counterproductive, eroding trust and cooperation rather than enhancing it and needs to be revised.

This paper looks at Turkey-EU relations over the past half a decade, analyses why Turkey's accession process has become derailed, and how Turkey's recent 7 June Parliamentary election offers a window of opportunity to revitalise ties.

Atatürk: 'modernisation through westernisation'

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk founded the Republic of Turkey following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of the end of WWI and the subsequent independence war. He served as Turkey's first president from 1923 until his death in 1938, implementing reforms that rapidly secularised and westernised the country. Atatürk believed the only way that Turkey could modernise and prosper was by taking on Western values and technology or as he called it 'civilisation'.⁴ Atatürk launched a reform project that can be characterised as 'modernisation through westernisation'. This marked the entry of the term 'Kemalism' into Turkey's political vocabulary. Kemalism refers to the massive changes Turkey underwent in the course of two decades, aimed at bringing the country closer to the western nations which Atatürk viewed as models of success. Numerous far-reaching reforms were carried out: Men were banned from wearing the fez and turban; women were strongly discouraged from wearing the veil; the Latin alphabet replaced the Ottoman alphabet; Sundays replaced Fridays as the day of rest; a women's Union was formed to promote women's rights and school became compulsory.

For Atatürk Islam represented the past and the Ottoman Empire. Hence on 3 March 1924 Turkey's Grand National Assembly abolished the Caliphate. Given the Caliphate had been in power during some 400 years of Ottoman rule, this represented a colossal change. To reduce the influence of Islam religious schools were closed, Islamic courts were replaced by civic courts based on civic codes of European countries, Islamic jurists lost their authority and religious marriages and polygamy were banned; in 1928 the words: 'official religion of the country is Islam' were barred from the constitution. As Hugh and Nicole Pope write in their book *Turkey Unveiled*: 'With a few strokes of his pen, this conservative and religious country was ordered to become a modern Western state.'⁵ Clearly not everybody shared Atatürk's aspiration for Turkey to become westernised. It was an elite driven project and for Turkish society at that time, which was predominantly conservative and deeply loyal to the Sultan, it was a huge life change and one that many deeply resented.

Furthermore, despite Turkey's political elites desire to be a Western state, there was a deep-rooted mistrust vis-à-vis Europe. The roots of this contradiction date back to the period following WWI when the Western powers penned the Treaty of Sèvres. According to the Treaty, Turkey was to be more or less carved up among the allied

⁴ A. Mango, *Turkey: A Delicately Poised Ally* (London) The Washington Papers, SAGE Policy Paper, 1975, p3.

⁵ N & H Pope, *Turkey Unveiled: A History of Modern Turkey*, Overlook Press, 2004.

powers, while Armenians and Kurds were to receive autonomy. Sèvres was harsh and many in the then Ottoman Empire were left angered. While Sèvres never became legally binding due to the fact that it has never been ratified by any Turkish Parliament, it is important in demonstrating the intentions of Western countries concerning Turkey at that time and the lasting impact it had in Turkey.⁶

While Atatürk died in 1938, his vision for Turkey's future was carried on by his close friends including İsmet İnönü, prime minister during most of Atatürk's rule, who continued his policies of secularisation and westernisation. Only some 80 years later when the AKP came to power did Islam begin to re-emerge as a social and political force which had a profound impact on the country.

The long march toward candidate status

In the aftermath of WW II Turkey began to enter into Western institutions, joining the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1948, the Council of Europe in 1949 and, thanks to its geopolitical position and its opposition to communism, NATO in 1952. Throughout the Cold War period, Turkey's geostrategic location along with the size of its armed forces constituted an important contribution to NATO's strategy of deterrence. Washington understood that Turkey was the only country in the eastern Mediterranean able to resist the Soviets and therefore would be an important buffer zone. Furthermore, Turkey's inclusion in the Marshall Plan is an important indicator that Turkey is considered as a part of the Western camp. Turkey's economic and political integration into Western institutions was facilitated by the Cold War as during this period Turkey's foreign policy was fully anchored to a close alliance with the US and the West more broadly.

In 1959, during the premiership of Adnan Menderes, Turkey became the second country to apply for EEC membership after Greece. This culminated in an Association Agreement, more commonly known as the Ankara Agreement which was signed on 1 September 1963, and explicitly refers to membership as an eventual outcome. A key element of the agreement was the establishment of a Customs Union which would allow Turkey to trade goods and agricultural products with EEC countries without restrictions. An additional protocol entered into force in 1973 with the aim of establishing the free movement of goods, services and people.

While Turkey's military intervention in Cyprus in 1974 negatively impacted ties, some four years later, three years before Greece obtained full membership in 1981, the EEC suggested Turkey apply for full membership. This was part of a Cold War policy aimed at balancing, and equality towards Greece and Turkey. However, the then Prime Minister, Bulent Ecevit, rejected the offer stating 'we do not think to enter the EEC. For, if we enter the EEC we will become your market. Our economy cannot stand this

⁶ W Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy: 1774-2000*, London, Frank Cass Publishers, 2000, pp.45-46.

partnership.⁷ If Ecevit had responded differently, it is more than likely that today Turkey would be a full member of the EU.

The 1980 military coup led to the Ankara Agreement being suspended in January 1982. Between 1982 and 1987 the European Parliament published 11 resolutions on the new regime established by the Constitution, qualifying it as oppressive and inadequate for guaranteeing fundamental human rights. When Turgut Özal submitted an application for full membership in 1987, it was unexpected, ignoring the advice given to Özal by the then German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, who had told him that neither Turkey nor the European Community was ready. The European Commission's response, which came two years later, while underlining Turkey's eligibility for membership, stated that the Turkish economy remained insufficiently developed to compete within the Community's emerging single market. Furthermore the fact that the application came just after the Community had enlarged to the south, including absorbing Spain and Portugal in 1986, and was also occupied with completing the common market, meant that the Club was focused on deepening rather than enlargement. However, this outcome led to the first serious concerns from Ankara over whether Turkey would ever be granted EU membership. It is also a first indication of the central role that Germany would play regarding Turkey's ties with the EU, with a clear pattern emerging. Turkey's EU ties get stuck whenever Germany is opposed to accession, yet quickly progress when Germany's leadership is supportive.⁸

Turkey signed its Customs Union with the EU on 6 March 1995, becoming the first country to conclude such an agreement with the EC without being a full member. However, two years later, Ankara failed to receive an enlargement perspective at the December 1997 Luxembourg European Council, while the EU agreed to open membership negotiations with the countries of central and eastern Europe, Malta and Cyprus. Turkey was put into a category of its own as an applicant for whom a special 'European strategy' should be designed to bring about later membership and asked to improve its human rights record and treatment of minorities as well as compromise on issues related to Greece and the decades old Cyprus problem.⁹ Turkey felt it was being pushed to the back of the queue as the post-Cold War Europe redefined itself. This outcome provoked a hostile reaction from Turkey's then Prime Minister, Mesut Yilmaz, who stated 'for those countries, including Cyprus, there is a very clear prospect of membership, and even a timetable. For Turkey there is none. We see this as very clear religious discrimination. If the EU persists in such discrimination, we will have no place in such an organization even if we meet all the conditions being put to us ...the most important decision in Luxembourg, I believe, is the construction of a new Berlin wall, a cultural Berlin wall'.¹⁰ Yilmaz immediately froze all political dialogue with the EU and

⁷ http://www.todayszaman.com/international_42-year-old-eu-journey-at-critical-crossroads-news-investigation_24766.html

⁸ G Knaus & C Altfuldisch, The Pivotal Relationship: German Doubts and the Turkish Accession Process, IAI, Commentary 7, March 2013, www.iai.it/sites/default/files/GTE_C_07_0.pdf

⁹ H Kramer, on, cit. in note 31, pp. 195-19.

¹⁰ S Kinzer, Turkey, Rejected, Will Freeze Ties to European Union, NYT, 15 December, 1997.

declined to participate in the European Conference convened in March 1998 for candidate countries.

However, the next two years brought a shift in the EU's policy and at the Helsinki Summit in December 1999 Turkey was given candidate country status, despite the fact there had been no significant improvement in the human rights situation or its policy towards Cyprus, and told that accession talks could begin once the Copenhagen Criteria were met. There were a number of reasons for the EU's change of heart: the fact that for many in the EU Turkey was viewed as a cornerstone of regional security and stability which raised concerns over the consequences of alienating Turkey permanently; a recognition that Turkey had legitimate complaints about unfair treatment; a critical change in Greek policy towards relations with Ankara with the tragic earthquake in Turkey in August 1999, resulting in a mass outpouring of sympathy for the country and the two foreign minister of that time. However, the most significant shift was related to Germany following a change of leadership. When Gerhard Schroeder came to power in 1998, one of his priorities was to improve relations with Turkey.

During a speech in the Bundestag he stated 'the decisions of Helsinki are important for the ability of everyone to live together in Germany, regardless of their origins. For the many people of Turkish origin living among us, it will be crucial to know whether the land of their fathers will be able to hope for a democratic future in Europe and as a part of Europe.'¹¹ Schroeder believed that in order to deal with the problems of immigration and minority rights at home, Turkey should be included in the larger EU structure.

A further key element in the shift of policy was pressure from Washington which viewed Turkey as a crucial transatlantic ally. After the Cold War, the importance of Turkey to the US did not diminish but rather increased with the outbreak of the Gulf War which was not the same in Europe. In the run-up to Helsinki, Washington made it clear that it was unhappy with the EU's treatment of this strategically important NATO member with then US President Bill Clinton, reportedly strongly lobbied EU leaders.¹²

Three developments of significant importance finally set Turkey on the road to opening accession talks: First, a crucial review of the Turkish Constitution in October 3, 2001 when almost one-fifth of the 177 articles of the Constitution were changed. In 2002, three more packages of constitutional reform were adopted. The most extensive was the one adopted on 2 August 2002 which included abolishing the death penalty in peacetime, revised the Anti-Terror Law, and allowed for broadcasting in languages other than Turkish. Third was the pledge from Recep Tayyip Erdogan, following the AKP's first election victory in November 2002, that opening accession talks was a priority. Elected as a single party government the AKP did not face the same difficulties in reaching agreement as its coalition predecessor. Lastly was the effort of Ankara to support a solution to the decades old Cyprus problem. Previously accused of having an intransigent approach, Ankara revolutionised its policy, strongly backing the United

¹¹ G Schroeder, Policy statement on the results of the European Council in Helsinki, Speech delivered German Bundestag on 16 December 1999.

¹² F.Stephen Larrabee and Ian O. Lesser, Turkish Foreign Policy in Age of Uncertainty, Rand Corporation, 2003, p.52.41.

Nations (UN) Annan Plan for the reunification of Cyprus. Unfortunately at a referendum in May 2004, while the 65 percent of Turkish Cypriot's voted 'yes', some 76 percent of Greek Cypriots voted 'no'. The consequence of this was a divided Cyprus entered the EU a few weeks later. In years to come this decision was to have a profound impact on the future of Turkey-EU relations. Indeed, the only major constraint that the AKP government faced was that the political elite in Turkey perceived its democratisation commitment as an attempt to weaken the secular, Kemalist aspects of the Turkish state and therefore as having a hidden agenda. Brushed off as ludicrous at the time, a decade later the fears of many back there proved to be in part rather accurate.

At the December 2002 Copenhagen Summit EU leaders agreed that 'if the European Council in December 2004, on the basis of a report and a recommendation from the Commission, decides that Turkey fulfils the Copenhagen political criteria, the European Union will open accession negotiations with Turkey without delay.'¹³

The rise of the AKP and the 2002 decision to give Turkey a date for beginning accessions led to the acceleration of the reform process during 2003 and 2004. It was unprecedented in depth and speed. The AKP passed a number of other reform packages including related to the role of the military in politics. The government was also fortunate to have inherited the economic reforms and packages of Kemal Dervis, economy minister in the previous government, in 2001. These packages significantly restructured the Turkish economy and their positive results were beneficial to the AKP government's performance.

At the 2004 Summit, EU Heads of State invited the Commission to present to the Council a proposal for a framework for negotiations with Turkey, with a view to opening negotiations on 3 October 2005. Negotiations were finally opened on 5 October but not without fierce resistance from Austria which threatened to block the process unless Croatia was not allowed to begin its accession talks the same day.¹⁴ In a last-minute deal, accession talks were opened simultaneously with Turkey and Croatia in what was generally seen as a quid pro quo between two different camps within the EU led, respectively, by the UK and Austria.

The beginning of the end

Paradoxically, the opening of accession negotiations was not the euphoric event many had hoped it would be. Austria's behaviour left a bad taste in Ankara's mouth, which was exacerbated by the then French President, Jacques Chirac, on the same day talks began declaring that 'Turkey would have to undergo a major cultural revolution in order to realize its dream of joining the EU.'¹⁵ Thereafter there was an almost immediate

¹³ Copenhagen European Council, 12 and 13 December 2002 Presidency Conclusions
http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/7384...

¹⁴ D Donbey, Austrian resistance threatens Turkey's EU bid, Financial Times, 30 September 2005,
<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/fd4a90f0-31dd-11da-9c7f-00000e2511c8.html...>

¹⁵ R Ellis, Turkey's European Stalemate, The Guardian, 5 October 2005.

increase in 'concerns' from a number of Member States over what Turkish accession would mean for EU security, human rights, immigration and employment with increasing emphasis being placed on the 'open ended' nature of the process, meaning that membership may not be the only outcome. A further difficulty arose when Angela Merkel, took over Germany's leadership from Schroeder in November 2005. Merkel did not support Turkish accession and proposed a 'strategic partnership' instead. This was immediately rejected by Ankara. Ankara found its 'Europeaness' being increasingly questioned which came as rather a shock for many Turks given that for the entirety of the Cold War, European leaders had never questioned Turkey's Europeaness. Hence before Turkey had really gotten off the starting-blocks, its accession process was already in peril.

Cyprus' membership also created problems. With Ankara not recognising the government in Nicosia it refused to extend its Customs Union to the country and to open its ports and air ports to Greek Cypriot vessels and planes. While this contravened the commitment taken with the signature of the Ankara Protocol in 2005, Ankara insisted it would not budge on the issue until the EU delivered on the commitment it had made to the Turkish Cypriots in the aftermath of the 2004 referendum – to implement a direct trade regulation which would allow the Turkish Cypriots to trade with the EU directly from the port of Famagusta. The Greek Cypriots, which viewing the regulation as tantamount to recognition of the authorities in the North, blocked its implementation.

At Cyprus' request, in December 2006, the European Council froze eight negotiating chapters (free movement of goods (1), right of establishment and freedom to provide services (3), financial services (9), agriculture and rural development (13), fisheries (14), transport policy (14), Customs Union (29) and external relations (30)). Further chapters were blocked in 2009: (freedom of movement for workers (2), energy (15), judiciary and fundamental rights (23), justice, freedom and security (24), education and culture (26), foreign security and defence policy (31)).

A change of leadership in France in 2007, brought right wing politician Nicolas Sarkozy to power. Sarkozy strongly opposed Turkish membership, even making it part of his election campaign, declaring Turkey as part of Asia Minor, not Europe. Under Sarkozy, Turkey's relationship with France reached an all-time low both politically and economically, with Sarkozy blocking the opening of five chapters for 'political' reasons (economic and monetary union (17), regional policy and coordination of structural instruments (22), financial and budgetary provisions (33) and institutions (34)). This set him apart from Merkel, because despite Merkel's preference for a privileged partnership, unlike Sarkozy she refrained from blocking the process. While this may have been in part because of her coalition partners which supported Turkey's accession, at the same time Merkel is a pragmatic leader, well aware of the close economic ties between Turkey and Germany, not to mention the some three million Turks living in the country. Generally Merkel prefers a slow moving process, and is unwilling to use its political weight to change the status quo.

While in 2014, following the election of Francois Hollande, France unblocked chapter 22, to date only 14 of the 35 negotiating chapters have been opened and only one, research and development, has been provisionally closed. Unfortunately those Member States that have blocked negotiating chapters have removed key instruments to push for reform. The opening of a chapter is not a gift but rather a roadmap for progress. By creating obstacles, the EU's ability to push for change in Turkey has been undermined.

Five years in, the EU had undermined its commitment that Turkey would receive the same treatment as other candidate countries. Furthermore the EU had become openly polarised on the issue of Turkish membership. What should have been a technical process had become totally politicised with Turkish membership featuring in national election campaigns. This state of affairs led to significant resentment in Ankara, a slowing down of the reform process and reduction of support from Turkey's population for EU membership. While at the beginning of the process it had been some 74 percent, with a few years it had fallen to 49 and would drop further in the years to come.

The rise of the AKP and the erosion of democracy

When the AKP first came to power, the party was committed to an ambitious reform agenda. Back then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan was hailed by the West as a democrat and a reformer, becoming the darling of both Brussels and Washington. The party also adopted a new and bold 'zero problems with neighbours' foreign policy aimed at building bridges with countries with which Turkey had had acrimonious relations for years, including Syria.

However, when the AKP moved into its second and third terms there was a shift of approach. As the EU process died out – which happened almost at the same time the AKP was re-elected – democratic reform in Turkey slowed, then stopped and finally went into reverse gear with the AKP becoming increasingly authoritarian in its style of governance with a systematic erosion of the rule of law, civil liberties and freedoms, separation of powers and checks and balances. They also adopted an increasingly isolationist foreign policy, in particular in the Middle East, based more on ideology than its earlier principles of mutual gain through economic interdependence and close political ties. This approach reflects the then foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's foreign policy doctrine as described in his book, 'Strategic Depth' that Turkey needed to embrace its Ottoman imperial past and use its unique geography to expand its influence throughout the Balkans, the Middle East and Central Asia.

According to Turkey expert, Sertaç Aktan, 'when the party first came to power they needed "air to breathe" and so made links with liberals, Kurds, religious groups, the EU and the US; Aktan calls this the apprentice phase of AKP's rule. They then moved on to the AKP's "master phase": the master does not need help from anyone else, the master just does as he pleases ... the apprentice AKP engaged with western democracy not to

learn how to better implement it but to learn of its weaknesses and to twistedly exploit them.¹⁶

When the AKP was re-elected in 2007 with a 47 percent majority it began to pay more attention to consolidating its own domestic power than reform. This continued following its 2011 victory when the party took 49.9 percent. The AKP's success can be attributed to several factors including large investments into infrastructure and social services that significantly improved the lives of a large segment of society, the fact that the AKP remains the only right-wing party, weak opposition and rapid economic development during the first 10 years of their rule despite the recent slowdown and rising economic problems.

By 2015 the government's commitment to Western values and democracy has become little more than lip service. Turkey had shifted from being seen as a reliable and predictable partner and regional role model to an unreliable and unpredictable illiberal democracy with sectarian tendencies. Furthermore, Turkish politics has become increasingly polarised with deep political divisions. The AKP's majoritarian understanding of democracy – that democracy begins and ends at the ballot box - and Erdogan's increasing disdain for dissent produced significant discontent in that part of Turkish society that does not share the same views and ideology the government and its main supporters. The Gezi Park protests of May 2013 were a catalyst for the built up discontentment from many different social and political groups. Furthermore, when Erdogan won the country's first direct presidential election in 2014 taking more than 50 percent in the first round, he claimed that as he was elected by the people he had the right to rule the country even though according to the Turkish constitution, the Presidency is mainly a symbolic post. Since his elections he has acted well beyond his mandate, including openly campaigning for the AKP in the 7 June elections. In an interview for the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) he stated 'It is difficult to govern freely under the present system,' stating, "...I should be the one determining who I work with, but I can't do this under the present system because there are those – the judiciary, for example – who prevent it.' Viewing checks and balance as an annoying inconvenience. It came as no surprise that Erdogan made changing Turkey into a presidential system of governance a top priority.

A European Parliament Resolution from 14 January 2015 'Expresses its concern over backsliding in democratic reforms, and in particular the government's diminishing tolerance of public protest and critical media; notes, in this regard, that the arrests on 14 December 2014 fall into a deplorable pattern of increased pressure and restrictions on press and media outlets, including Internet-based social media and fora; notes that website bans are of disproportionate scope in Turkey; deplores the number of journalists in pre-trial detention, effectively punishing them and calls on Turkey's judicial authorities to review and address these cases as soon as possible.' Growing restrictions on internet freedom has also been a significant concern including tens of thousands of Turkish and international websites have been banned over the last few years including YouTube, Twitter, Blogspot and Vimeo. Political influence is clear in most cases. For

¹⁶ S Aktan, Turkey's 7 June Parliamentary Elections, European Policy Centre Event Report.

example, the 2014 Twitter ban followed Erdogan's famous statement 'we'll eradicate Twitter.' Because of the frozen accession process the EU has found itself with little leverage over Ankara. Calls of concern have fallen on deaf ears as Turkey's leadership has become increasingly belligerent, with its EU related narrative overflowing with resentment accusing the EU of double standards related not only to the accession but also on other issues such as the failure of the EU to grant Turkey a visa free regime, as stipulated in the Ankara Agreement.

Because there is no consensus in the EU over Turkey, rather than taking steps to unblock the talks, the EU has tried to draw attention away from the frozen process by opening what could be called a track two relationship. This began with the creation of a Positive Agenda – the brainchild of former European Commissioner for Enlargement, Stefan Füle – which aimed to find the way to strengthen cooperation on not only joint strategic interests but also make progress on issues of importance to Turkey. Hence visa free talks were launched in November 2013, while more recently steps to upgrade the Customs Union have been kicked off. Greater dialogue and cooperation in area such as counter-terrorism, and energy, with Turkey an important component in the EU's Southern Corridor are also underway. While these are initiatives are to be welcomed, they are clearly a short-term distraction from the blocked membership talks. Furthermore they have not prevented the consistent democratic backtracking.

The road ahead

Through the policies of the AKP Turkey has practically been reinvented, both in terms of its domestic and foreign policy. This came about based on the following three elements: the neutering of the Turkish army in terms of its role in politics, the empowerment of devout Muslims and the related issue of the renegotiation of Turkey's national identity.¹⁷

The AKP had won nine back-to-back elections since it came to power in 2002 when Turks went to the polls on 7 June. The election was a pivotal moment for Turkey's future not least because of Erdogan's goal of creating a presidential system of governance. Despite the fact that the party took the largest part of the vote (40.7%), it failed to win enough seats to continue as a single party government. Furthermore, the result was 9% less than in 2011 and far from their 55% target. The AKP's loss of votes was a consequence of its increasingly authoritarian governing style and isolationist foreign policy. It also reflected many Turks' opposition to the idea of an executive presidency with more powers for Erdogan. This change in mentality began with the Gezi protests and has become widespread among the youth and the middle class, breaking down old stereotypes.

Three other parties also entered parliament: the Republican People's Party (CHP), the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), and the Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP). The new Turkish Parliament will be the most diverse yet. Furthermore the result

¹⁷ T. Alaranta, Turkey under the AKP, A critical evaluation from the perspective of Turkey's EU negotiations", the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, February 2015, pp 6.

demonstrated that Turkey is still a democracy where elections can change governments, despite the significant back-peddalling in terms of democracy over the past few years.

Turkey is presently in the process of forming a new coalition government. This is proving to be a far from easy task because of significant differences between the parties. If these cannot be overcome, early elections will take place. The outcome of a new election would be very unpredictable (particularly for the HDP, which took many votes from other parties and which may not happen again), and possibly only beneficial to Erdogan who will claim the oppositions failure to create a coalition underlines their incompetence and the only way Turkey have achieve stability, in particular economic instability is by returning to an AKP single party government.

Nevertheless, the election result represents an opportunity for the EU to demonstrate its support for pro-democracy forces in the country by finding ways to reengage, rebuild trust and open a new chapter in this important relationship. As stated by the European Parliament's Turkey Rapporteur Kati Piri, 'Turkish voters have indicated that they want change. Our reaction should not be to shut the door'¹⁸ (...) more not less, engagement with Turkey at all levels.' Furthermore, according to the most recent German Marshall Fund Transatlantic Trends Survey, Turkish public opinion still perceives the EU as an anchor of stability, despite its internal problems. Moreover it shows that support for the EU has increased to some 53 percent which is almost certainly a reflection of both the internal and external (Syria) threats that Turkey is facing.¹⁹

While today Turkey's membership continues to remain a distant prospect, and it may be that the EU and Turkey will never marry, this relationship is clearly going to remain one of considerable importance. Despite being engulfed by crises the EU needs to show that it is also ready to take some steps and show greater strategic thinking in terms of its Turkey policy than it has done in the past. The European Commission should review the conduct of the EU accession negotiations with Turkey and reflect how EU-Turkey relations could be strengthened. At least one new negotiating chapter should be opened in the soonest possible time, in particular chapter 23 dealing with basic EU values, fundamental rights and freedoms. Further cooperation on issues of mutual interest, ranging from TTIP and the updating of Turkey's Customs Union to illegal immigration and Syrian refugees is also crucial. While nobody is expecting a significant change of approach from those Member States that are opposed to Turkish membership, such a step would help rebuild trust.

Furthermore there are currently many unknowns that will influence the future shape of relations. While the shape of the new government in Ankara will be important, other issues including the outcome of the Cyprus peace talks and the future shape of the EU, post-crisis could also be significant game changers. For example, in the future there could be differentiated integration which would allow new members such as Turkey to

¹⁸ Today's Zaman, 10 June 2015 http://www.todayszaman.com/anasayfa_european-parliament-highlights-disma...

¹⁹ German Marshall, Transatlantic Trends Key Findings 2014
http://trends.gmfus.org/files/2012/09/Trends_2014_complete.pdf

enter the EU but with some restrictions on federal elements. Furthermore, the UK's referendum on EU membership could create a new type of relationship between the EU and UK which may open up a new opportunity for Turkey too.