

1- TURKEY FEARS ANTI TURKISH CAMPAIGN BEFORE EU-ELECTIONS 2009

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Turkey has several concerns regarding the EP elections in 2009. First of all, Turkey fears that its EU membership bid will become one of the topics of the campaign in some of the leading EU member states. There are already signs that some Christian Democrat politicians are planning to make their opposition to Turkey's EU membership a central theme of their election campaign.

According to Turkish politicians, this is not fair and in fact such a move is counter to the interests of the EU and Turkey.

Olli Rehn: A liberal, democratic and modern Turkey is in the interests of the EU

First of all, Turkey's accession is not immediate and it is not an automatic process. It will be a long and sometimes difficult journey, which will generate an important transformation of the country. Turkey can only join once it has fulfilled the conditions and thus complies with European principles and laws. This is the Turkey that the European citizens will have to look at when deciding about their support.

So what some European politicians are doing now, provoking the fears European citizens on Turkey is a major concern for the Turkish government. Turkey says that its accession process should not become "hostage" to domestic politics in "some EU states".

2- THE REFERENDUM IN FRANCE FAILED BECAUSE OF ECONOMIC CONCERNS

In fact when we look at the failed referendum on the EU Constitution in France in 2005, some politicians criticized Turkey's EU membership bid for creating a controversy.

But the public polls show that people cared less about Turkey's accession process than they do about rising prices and unemployment.

When 'No' voters were asked about their main reasons, 46% stated 'fear of unemployment and a decline in the socio-economic situation through the constitution' as their principle reason, 40% stated 'an overall weariness concerning the current situation', 35% wished the constitution to be renegotiated, and 34% found the constitution to be too liberal. The possible accession of Turkey to the Union was of only a minor priority in the decision making process.

One may argue that, this picture has not changed much today.

EU's Autumn 2007 Eurobarometer 68 public poll shows that major concern of the EU citizens are now not enlargement in general or Turkey in particular, but the economic situation in their country and notably inflation.

3- TURKEY HOPES FOR RE-ELECTION OF DEPUTIES WITH EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT TURKEY'S EU-POLICY

European Parliament is increasingly playing an important role in Turkey's EU's process. Ten years ago, EP was mainly a discussion platform, but now, with recent institutional reforms, its decisions and resolutions are increasingly taken into consideration by the Council and the Commission: And EP's Turkey reports are also taken more serious by Turkey. Therefore Turkey also expects some key European politicians, who have in dept information on Turkey and supporting the reform process to be re-elected in these elections:

4- TURKEY HOPES FOR LESS PREJUDICE

Turkey's EU membership perspective attracts considerable attention and raises many legitimate questions amongst European citizens. Turkey's best asset to gain support in public opinion in the EU will be to show commitment to democratic transformation and European values. It is in Turkey and EU's mutual interest that this process is framed into clear and rigorous principles based on the values of the EU. This is the best guarantee for success.

5- EUROPEANS REJECT TURKEY BECAUSE THEY THINK TURKEY IS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

Perceived cultural differences are the main reasons for the lack of popular support for Turkish membership in the EU. In a 2006 Eurobarometer survey, 61 percent of EU citizens stated that these differences were "too significant," and in countries where popular support for Turkey's accession was the lowest, this perception was particularly high: 74 percent in Germany and 79 percent in Greece.

6- TURKS SHARE NEARLY SAME VALUES WITH EUROPEANS

Despite the opposition, Turks share many values with Europeans. In the same 2006 survey, Eurobarometer asked citizens in EU member and candidate states to choose their three most important societal values from the following list: rule of law, respect for human life, respect for human rights, individual freedom, democracy, peace, equality, solidarity, tolerance, religion, self-fulfillment, and respect for other cultures. A comparison of their responses shows that Turkey is not so different from the EU.

7- EUROPEANS ARE AGAINST TURKEY BECAUSE OF THEIR FEARS CONCERNING ISLAM

Given these shared values, Europeans' perception of "cultural difference" seems to be rooted in their fear of Muslim -- not necessarily Turkish -- immigration into their countries. In fact, 85 percent of Europeans who believe the cultural differences between Turkey and the EU are "too significant" also fear that Turkey's accession will bring more Muslim immigrants.

The Pew Center's 2005 and 2006 Global Attitudes Polls suggest that EU member states with high percentages of Muslim immigrants hold negative attitudes toward people practicing Islam. For example, 20 percent of British, 35 percent of French, 54 percent of German, and

62 percent of Spanish citizens have such views towards Muslim immigrants. These Europeans believe that Muslims are unwilling to assimilate and will cling to their Islamic identity -- tendencies that Europeans consider foreboding for their nations' futures.

8- EUROPE NEEDS PROGRESSIV POLITICIANS

To promote cultural understanding, EU elites (Eurocrats, national politicians, academics, journalists) should educate European citizens about the shared values between Turkey and the EU. Such a strategy should also emphasize that Turkey remains a secular state to overcome at least some European fears of a "religious" state entering the union.

In this regard, EU elites have an important role to play. They can help disentangle the question of Turkey's accession from the fear of Muslim immigration, which would help Turkey's accession prospects. The language of the debate on Turkey's accession should focus on Turks, not Muslims. Many Turks in Germany complain, for instance, that whereas before the September 11 attacks they were referred to as "Turks" by German opinion makers and media, after September 11, they suddenly became "Muslims." Turkish and European elites should also work with Turkish organizations in the EU to promote associations that reassure Turkish Muslims about the compatibility of Islam and national loyalty to European governments, while promoting civic obligation and national attachments. In addition, the history of EU enlargement should be recounted; the anticipated mass migrations from large and relatively poor countries, such as Spain and Poland, never materialized because employment opportunities and incomes increased as they entered the EU, creating reasons for their citizens to stay at home.

9- ABOUT EU-TURKEY ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS

The EU-Turkey accession negotiations started in 2005, based on a decision taken by unanimity by all EU Member States. This was made possible by the substantial democratic reforms undertaken by Turkey, and the commitment of successive Turkish governments to pursue them.

Since 2005 Turkey has made progress in the accession negotiations. Six chapters have been opened so far. Two more chapters will be opened during the Slovenian Presidency, namely Company Law and Intellectual Property.

Olli Rehn: Further progress depends on Turkey's ability to carry out further reforms. The 2008 Accession Partnership adopted in March provides Turkey with the necessary roadmap both on the political criteria and the alignment with the EU legislation. It is essential that Turkey works towards fulfilling these priorities and the benchmarks for the opening of new negotiating chapters. Concretely, seven chapters could be opened if Turkey met technical opening benchmarks. These chapters are free movement of capital, public procurement, competition, food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary issues, taxation, social policy and employment, and environment.

10- WHICH POLICY WILL FRANCE REALIZE AFTER TAKING OVER THE EU PRESIDENCY AFTER JULY THIS YEAR?

France says that it does not want to block Turkey's accession talks during its EU Presidency. "Negotiations will go on," French officials confirm indicating that two or three chapters could

be opened in the second half of the year. However, they immediately add that only those negotiating areas which are not "directly related to accession" will receive a green light under the six-month French Presidency.

If Paris succeeds, five new chapters, covering financial and institutional matters, could be officially added to the list of areas which are currently blocked due to Ankara's failure to fully comply with certain obligations towards Cyprus. One of these five areas has already been frozen due to the French veto. Last year, Paris said that talks on economic and monetary policy should commence only after the EU defines its future borders.

Ankara strongly protests, underlining more vocally than ever is significant and still growing "contribution to Europe's stability".

Speaking recently in front of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the European Parliament, Turkey's Foreign Minister Ali Babacan emphasised his country's strong involvement in the Middle East peace process (mediatory role in talks between Syria and Israel), in the dialogue with Iran and Lebanon, as well as its active engagement in the stabilisation process of Afghanistan and Iraq. He also underlined Turkey's strong involvement in the EU ESDP missions and its willingness to become a member of the European Defence Agency.

Paris, however, seems to remain unconvinced by Ankara's arguments. According to French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Turkey - a predominantly Muslim country - is not eligible for full membership of the EU, as a majority of its territory is located in Asia rather than in Europe. An enhanced or so called 'privileged' partnership is therefore suggested by the Elysée Palace as the best form of future relations between Turkey and the EU. Ankara clearly says, however, that nothing less than full membership is acceptable.

To soften Paris' stance, Turkey is trying to play (the Union for) the Mediterranean card. Without Ankara, which is perceived as a key element of Sarkozy's proposal, the initiative is bound to lose its political weight and structural consistency. Turkey is aware of this and is trying to use the situation to its own benefit. It has not yet given Paris a clear answer on whether it would take part at all in the project, saying it is still "assessing" the contents of the proposal. Some possible retaliatory economic moves, like keeping Gaz de France out of the consortium of the Nabucco pipeline project designed to bring Caspian gas to Europe, have also been taken by Turkey against France. On top of this, Ankara is creating some difficulties about the use of Turkish air space for French warplanes on mission in Afghanistan. In the meantime, deteriorating military relations with Turkey, a member of NATO, pose a threat to Paris' plans to reinforce relations between the alliance and the EU.

To counterbalance France's opposition and to win over other member states, Ankara has recently made some positive moves towards Cyprus and Armenia. It gave the green light for the relaunch of talks between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities on reunification and has said it "is ready for a dialogue with Armenia".