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EU–Turkey Accession Negotiations: Towards a Diplomatic Failure?

Abstract: *The ongoing EU–Turkey accession negotiations are probably the most complex talks related to the enlargement process in the EU’s history. Although they were initiated in 2005, so far both sides have managed to provisionally close only one out of 35 negotiation chapters. What’s more, the bilateral relations between the EU and Turkey are growing more and more tense. The most recent developments only prove that the talks may grind to a halt. It seems that both sides are tired of the endless negotiations and unexpected events, like the 2016 coup d’état in Turkey. The main aim of this article is to analyse the current political developments related to EU–Turkey negotiations in detail and find answers to two research questions. Will Turkey and the European Union face a diplomatic failure? What are the potential short-term scenarios?*

Keywords: European Union, European integration, EU enlargement, Turkey

Introduction

Nathalie Tocci was probably right in writing that *‘Turkey and the European Union are bound by a curious love affair. Both have always aimed at deepening relations, yet the precise interpretation of what this would entail has been highly contested. It is this odd mix between a shared commitment to each other and widely varying interpretations within (and between) both sides as to*

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what this should mean that explains Turkey's tortuous path to Europe'.¹ On one hand, the European Union continues accession talks with Turkey, but at the same time criticizes Turkish authorities, especially President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. On the other hand, Turks emphasize the fact that Turkey deserves its place in Europe, although according to the EU the government, dominated by the Justice and Development Party (AKP), undertakes many actions in breach of European law, including violations of fundamental rights and standards. As a result, the Turkish EU membership is still under negotiation, but everything indicates that the process is not leading towards any diplomatic success. To the contrary, it is a never-ending story of ebbs and flows in EU–Turkey relations.

The ongoing accession negotiations between Turkey and the European Union may result in one of the biggest political failures in the history of European integration. In December 2004, when the European Council decided to start talks with Turkish authorities, everything indicated that although the process could take a lot of time, it would ultimately lead to Turkey's membership. In 2005 Sedat Laçiner, Mehmet Özcan and Ihsal Bal wrote: '*Turks have always turned towards Europe, wanting to be a part of it. Even after the Crusades, Turks' motion towards Europe was not bent on destruction, but aimed at unification and contribution. In a process that lasted for centuries, Turkey has a peculiar experience between East and West. In a sense, it can be said that Turkey is a laboratory. This peculiar experience, combining the peoples of the East and West, their religions and civilizations on the lands of Anatolia harbour a very special secret, a very special prescription*'.² Supporters of EU membership for Turkey underlined its political, geopolitical, economic, and geostrategic importance from the European point of view. This idealistic approach, however, was soon confronted with hard political reality and disillusionment.

The most recent developments underscore the fact that the talks may grind to a halt. It seems that both sides are tired of the endless negotiations and unexpected events, like the 2016 *coup d'état* in Turkey. Moreover, lack of progress in talks on the Cyprus question, the migration crisis, jihadists operating nearby Turkish borders as well as the ongoing conflict in Syria make the situation even more complex and unpredictable. The main aim of this article is to analyse the current political developments related to EU–Turkey negotiations in detail and find answers to two re-

¹ N. Tocci, *Turkey and the European Union* in: *The Routledge Handbook of Modern Turkey*, M. Heper, S. Sayarı (eds.), New York 2012, p. 237.

² S. Laçiner, M. Özcan, I. Bal, *Preface* in: *European Union with Turkey: The Possible Impact of Turkey's Membership on the European Union*, S. Laçiner, M. Özcan, I. Bal (eds.), Ankara 2005, p. 14.

search questions. Will Turkey and the European Union face a diplomatic failure? What are the potential short-term scenarios?

1. EU–Turkey talks: a brief overview

Turkey's relations with the European Economic Community (EEC) date back to 1963 when both sides signed the Agreement establishing an association, also known as the Ankara Agreement. Its main aim was *'to promote the continuous and balanced strengthening of trade and economic relations between the Parties, while taking full account of the need to ensure an accelerated development of the Turkish economy and to improve the level of employment and the living conditions of the Turkish people'*.³ At the very beginning of the 1960s many facts indicated that Turkey might be able to join the EEC in a few decades. The Cold War and its course seemed to support the ambitious plans of the Turkish authorities. But the political reality proved to be more complex and complicated.

The high expectations were not accompanied by any significant steps towards any form of membership. And Turkey faced many internal as well as external problems. The internal political situation became very complex after two successful military coups, in 1971 and 1980. Turkey's economic situation was also divergent from its commitments envisaged by the Ankara Agreement. Last but not least, Turkey engaged militarily in the Cyprus conflict in 1974.⁴ Obviously, the continued presence of Turkish troops on the island, as well as Ankara's political and financial support for the Turkish Cypriot authorities, met with strong opposition from EEC members.

In this context Philip Robins points out that *'from the outset Turkey's ambitions in Europe have owed at least as much to the ideological orientation of the ruling elite as to more material motivations. [...] The original application for an Association Agreement with the EEC, as it was then, was in part prompted by the need for economic aid, in response to the poor conditions prevailing in the country. The EEC was minded to supply that assistance and even contemplate the admission of Turkey, for fear that the Soviet Union would otherwise seek to fill the gap'*.⁵ Were such fears justified? According to Didem Buhari Gülmez, *'the litera-*

³ Agreement establishing an Association between the European Economic Community and Turkey, 12 September 1963, „Official Journal of the European Communities”, L 361/5.

⁴ E.F. Keyman, Z. Öniş, *Turkish Politics in a Changing World: Global Dynamics and Domestic Transformations*, Istanbul 2007, p. 83.

⁵ P. Robins, *Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War*, London 2003, pp. 139–140.

ture dealing with Turkish politics in the Cold War era tends to overemphasize Turkey's strategic location, and it often avoids an analysis of socio-economic, political and cultural differences between Turkey and the West. However, with the end of the Cold War era, both assumptions have been deeply challenged, problematizing Turkey's relations with the West in general and with Europe in particular'.⁶

In 1987 Turkey submitted its first membership application. Turkish authorities claimed that every European state was entitled to apply for a full membership. Yet contrary to expectations of the Turkish political elites, the application was turned down two years later.⁷ The Commission stated as follows: 'It would be inappropriate for the Community – which is itself undergoing major changes while the whole of Europe is in a state of flux – to become involved in new accession negotiations at this stage'.⁸ Yet at the same time Commissioners declared: 'The Community should pursue its cooperation with Turkey, given that country's general opening towards Europe. The Community has a fundamental interest in intensifying its relations with Turkey and helping it to complete as soon as possible its process of political and economic modernization'.⁹ Such a declaration opened the door for future dialogue, although everything indicated that it was impossible before the reform of the EEC and the formal establishment of the European Union.

In the opinion of Imad Mansour, 'with the gradual decline of the USSR, Turkey's orientation towards Europe changed, and it strove to achieve inclusion in a modern, developed and strong Europe without sacrificing its Turkish heritage. Relations with Europe, and later with the European Union were important not principally because of the legal status gained or agreements reached, but because they provided an ideational model for what Turkey aspired to be'.¹⁰ Scholars both in the EEC/EU and in Turkey paid a lot of attention to the potential 'Europeanization' of Turkey and its political, economic as well as social consequences. Turkish elites perceived the process of European integration as a great civilizational opportunity. As a result expectations were high, although there were no clear declarations from EU officials.

⁶ D.B. Gülmez, *Europeanization in a Global Context: Integrating Turkey Into the World Polity*, London 2017, p. 26.

⁷ For more, see: J. Wódka, *Polityka zagraniczna „nowej” Turcji. Implikacje dla partnerstwa transatlantyckiego (Foreign policy of the "new" Turkey. Implications for the transatlantic partnership)*, Warszawa 2013, pp. 25–27.

⁸ Commission Opinion on Turkey's Request for Accession to the Community, Brussels, 20 December 1989, SEC(89) 2290 final, <http://aei.pitt.edu/4475/1/4475.pdf> (last visited 18.09.2017).

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ I. Mansour, *Statecraft in the Middle East: Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics and Security*, New York 2016, p. 143.

A real breakthrough took place in 1995, when Turkey signed a customs union agreement with the European Union. The United States was one of the biggest supporters of closer cooperation between Western European states and Turkey. Many analysts and observers saw the agreement as the first step towards a full membership. Yet it is highly controversial whether the document is really beneficial for Turkey. In the opinion of Funda Keskin Ata, *‘Turkey is going to be affected by the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership agreement since goods from the USA will enter the Turkish market without any tariff, while the same will not be applicable for goods exported from Turkey’*.¹¹

The political reality appeared to be even much more complex. During the 1997 summit in Luxembourg, the European Council underlined the fact that Turkey did not fulfil democratic requirements. Nevertheless, in the Presidency conclusions European leaders declared: *‘The Council confirms Turkey’s eligibility for accession to the European Union. Turkey will be judged on the basis of the same criteria as the other applicant States. While the political and economic conditions allowing accession negotiations to be envisaged are not satisfied, the European Council considers that it is nevertheless important for a strategy to be drawn up to prepare Turkey for accession by bringing it closer to the European Union in every field’*.¹²

Another breakthrough came about, however, thanks to a series of coincidences, like the political changes in Greece and devastating earthquakes in both Greece and Turkey in 1999, which resulted in the so-called ‘seismic diplomacy’ between Ankara and Athens. As a result, at the European Council summit in Helsinki in 1999, Germany, Austria and Greece decided not to block Turkey anymore. The EU accepted Turkey’s candidacy, provided it complied with the Copenhagen criteria. On this basis Turkey had become a candidate country seeking full membership in the European Union.¹³ According to Bill Park, *‘encouraged by the real prospect of accession signalled by the Helsinki decision, Ankara published a 1000-page National Programme in 2001, laying out the steps it intended to take in order to align Turkey with EU acquis. [...] Reform activity intensified still further after the AKP’s election victory in November 2002, although it slowed again once the actual EU accession negotiations began in October 2005’*.¹⁴

¹¹ Ata F.K., *EU–Turkey Relations (1999–2016): Conditionality at Work?* in: *Turkish Foreign Policy: International Relations, Legality and Reach*, P.G. Ercan (ed.), Cham 2017, p. 106.

¹² Luxembourg European Council Presidency Conclusions 12–13 December 1997, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lux1_en.htm (last visited 14.09.2017).

¹³ E. Faucompret, J. Konings, *Turkish Accession to the EU: Satisfying the Copenhagen Criteria*, Abingdon 2008, p. 38.

¹⁴ B. Park, *Modern Turkey: People, state and foreign policy in a globalized world*, Abingdon 2012, pp. 47–48.

Enver Gülseven quite rightly points out that *'the EU clearly defined the objective of the talks as accession, while emphasizing that negotiations are an open-ended process, the outcome of which cannot be guaranteed beforehand. The EU's emphasis on the open-ended nature of the talks and the strong opposition of some member states for Turkey's accession damaged the EU's credibility in the eyes of some circles in Turkey'*.¹⁵ Mehmet Ugur adds that *'open-ended accession is a new commitment mechanism designed to realize the ultimate aim of integrating a candidate country. Unlike previous enlargements, however, it does not specify the target time for accession and the latter may be granted with significant exemptions that restrict the membership entitlements of new members'*.¹⁶

For this reason Turkish authorities accused some EU politicians of a lack of good will and paying lip service. For instance, they quoted German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who came up with the idea of a 'privileged partnership' instead of a full membership for Turkey. In her opinion such form of integration would be less controversial and more acceptable for most of the EU member states. Yet the Turks perceived this initiative, as well as other similar proposals, as examples of political discrimination. The relatively quick accession of most of post-communist countries from Central Eastern Europe in 2004 and 2007 only worsened the situation and added to the frustration in Ankara.

The slow progress or, to be more precise the lack of progress during the talks best reflects this worsening situation. Since 2005, both sides have managed to open 16 and close only 1 out of 35 negotiation chapters. Eight of them have been frozen since 2006 due to the unsettled Cyprus dispute.¹⁷ As long as Turkey does not agree to apply the Additional Protocol of the Ankara Agreement to Cyprus, these negotiation chapters will not be opened and no other chapter will be provisionally closed. Such an approach has resulted in a diplomatic stalemate. Simon A. Waldman and Emre Caliskan add that *'for its part, Cyprus helped block another six chapters in 2009. Not only did this scupper the negotiation process, according to foreign policy experts Philip Gordon and Omer Taspinar, it left Ankara with a sense of betrayal'*.¹⁸

¹⁵ E. Gülseven, *Turkey–EU Relations in: Turkish Foreign Policy in the New Millennium*, H. Işıkşal, O. Örmeci (eds.), Frankfurt am Main 2015, p. 249.

¹⁶ M. Ugur, *Open-Ended Membership Prospect and Commitment Credibility: Explaining the Deadlock in EU–Turkey Accession Negotiations*, "Journal of Common Market Studies", Vol. 48, No. 4/2010, p. 968.

¹⁷ For more on this matter, see: A. Adamczyk, *Cypriot Presidency in the Context of the Cyprus Question and EU–Turkey Relations*, "Yearbook of Polish European Studies", Vol. 15/2012.

¹⁸ S.A. Waldman, E. Caliskan, *The 'New Turkey' and Its Discontents*, New York 2017, p. 199.

But this was not the biggest stumbling block in the negotiations. Mirela Bogdani divided all the obstacles into three main categories, namely:

- formal obstacles: domestic political and economic factors, the Cyprus question, the Kurdish issue, the Armenian issue;
- semi-formal obstacles: geography, demography, security factors, institutional factors;
- informal obstacles: religious and cultural factors.¹⁹

All above mentioned factors still play a decisive role in the process of Turkey's accession. Yet the situation became even more complex after the failed coup d'état of July 2016.

2. Accession negotiations with Turkey revisited

In 2013 Bogdan Góralczyk quite rightly wrote that *'in the light of the recent events which – especially in the eyes of the West – weakened the positive image of the state, Ankara seems to face a serious dilemma: whether to be no more than just a trading country and an emerging market, thus giving up at least some of its audacious ambitions or to ignore the odds and consequently further persist on building national state and regional power status'*.²⁰ In this context, Aaron Stein suggests that *'Ankara's actions suggest that Turkish policy-makers remain committed to their post-2011 foreign policy, as well as to the conception of inevitable change to the regional order and the return to a more religiously conservative style of democratic governance. In turn, this means Turkey is certain to continue to promote its preferred policies even in the face of extreme pressure from its Western allies to change them'*.²¹

Undoubtedly, the Syrian conflict, the rise of the so-called Islamic state and the refugee crisis of 2015 created a new context for EU–Turkey relations. Thousands of immigrants and refugees from the Middle East managed to get to Greece and some other member states through the Turkish territory in the summer of 2015, causing one of the biggest crises in the Union's history. EU institutions as well as member states began consultations on how to deal with this new humanitarian challenge. All sides agreed that Turkey could play a key role in the stabilization process. As a result, the EU began bilateral negotiations with the Turkish authorities.

¹⁹ M. Bogdani, *Turkey and the Dilemma of EU Accession: When Religion Meets Politics*, London 2011, pp. 26–48.

²⁰ B. Góralczyk, *The Role of Turkey in the International Arena: Emerging Regional Power or Just an Emerging Market?* in: *Poland and Turkey in Europe: Social, Economic and Political Experiences and Challenges*, A. Adamczyk, P. Dubel (eds.), Warszawa 2014, p. 350.

²¹ A. Stein, *Turkey's New Foreign Policy: Davutoglu, the AKP and the Pursuit of Regional Order*, Whitehall Paper 83, Abingdon 2014, p. 95.

The enthusiasts of EU membership for Turkey perceived this as an opportunity for a real diplomatic breakthrough in the framework of EU–Turkey accession talks.

In May 2016, everything indicated that both sides found a common ground when the European Union and the Republic of Turkey signed the Agreement on the readmission of persons residing without permission. According to Article 3, *‘Turkey shall readmit, upon application by a Member State and without further formalities to be undertaken by that Member State other than those provided for in this agreement, all persons who do not or who no longer, fulfil the conditions in force under the law of that Member State or under the law of the Union for entry to, presence in, or residence on, the territory of the requesting Member State’*.²² At the same time Brussels established the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey. Between 2016–2017 the European Union allocated more than three billion euro to the facility and is helping Syrian refugees living in Turkey. *‘The flagship humanitarian programme funded by the EU in 2017 is the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), a debit card based social assistance scheme that will allow up to 1.3 million of the most vulnerable refugees to meet their most pressing basic needs’*.²³ Thanks to such initiatives Turkey receives financial assistance for Syrian refugees, and in return protects EU borders from illegal immigration. Yet even such a fruitful and mutually beneficial cooperation does not change the fact that the EU is not willing to make any concessions to Turkey insofar as human rights violations and democratic values are concerned. And the situation became much more complex after July 2016.

The aftermath of the unsuccessful coup d’état in Turkey of July 2016 dramatically changed bilateral relations between Ankara and Brussels. The Commission reacted immediately and roundly. According to the official position, repeated in the 2016 Turkey Report published in November 2016, *‘the EU strongly and immediately condemned the attempted coup of 15 July 2016, which represented a direct attack on democracy in Turkey, and expressed its solidarity to the Turkish democratic institutions’*.²⁴ Yet the failed coup and the subsequent extensive purges of the Turkish military, acad-

²² Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Turkey on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation, Official Journal of the European Union, 7.05.2014, OJ L 134/5.

²³ *Turkey: Refugee Crisis: Echo Factsheet*, July 2017, http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/turkey_syrian_crisis_en.pdf (last visited 8.09.2017).

²⁴ Commission Staff Working Document Turkey 2016 Report Accompanying the document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 2016 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, 9.11.2016, COM(2016) 715 final.

emicians, journalists, and civil service have further complicated the situation.

As a result, the European Commission in the same document pointed out that *'given the subsequent scale and collective nature of measures taken since the coup attempt, the EU called on the authorities to observe the highest standards in respecting the rule of law and fundamental rights, in line with Turkey's international commitments and status as a candidate country'*.²⁵ EU officials criticized the Turkish government for its arrests of opposition politicians, journalists, and scholars. Moreover, in November 2016 the European Parliament voted in favour of the suspension of the accession negotiations with Turkey. Although this vote was not binding, it had its political impact on the final decision of the European Council in December. The European leaders decided that the EU will not suspend the talks, but at the same time they declared that the Union will not open any new negotiation chapters.

In 2017 the situation deteriorated to such an extent that the Commission President openly criticized Turkish authorities and stated that Turkey will not be accepted as a full member during the mandate of his commission. On 13 September 2017, during his speech on the State of the Union, Jean Claude Juncker said: *'It is clear that there will be no further enlargement during the mandate of this Commission and this Parliament. No candidate is ready. But thereafter the European Union will be greater than 27 in number. Accession candidates must give the rule of law, justice and fundamental rights utmost priority in the negotiations. This rules out EU membership for Turkey for the foreseeable future. Turkey has been taking giant strides away from the European Union for some time. [...] Europe is a continent of mature democracies. But deliberate insults create roadblocks. Sometimes I get the feeling Turkey is deliberately placing these roadblocks so that it can blame Europe for any breakdown in accession talks'*.²⁶ This marked the first time since 1999 that any EU official addressed such harsh words of criticism to the Turkish authorities. President Juncker left no doubt that neither Turkey nor any other candidate state will join the EU during his presidency. What's more, it was a clear message that the Commission will not tolerate any anti-opposition actions undertaken by President Erdoğan and the AKP-dominated government.

The most recent failure of the Cyprus peace talks only added a new dimension to the current stalemate in EU–Turkey relations. Some analysts,

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ J.C. Juncker, *The State of the Union 2017*, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-17-3165_en.htm (last visited 5.11.2017).

for instance Marcel Bazin and Stephan de Tapia, point out that Turkey is the only country in the world which occupies a part of territory belonging to an EU member state.²⁷ This refers to the Turkish support for the authorities of the unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), although the EU claims that these areas belong to and should be administered by the Republic of Cyprus. Yet both the Turks and the Turkish Cypriots blame the Greek Cypriots for the failure of negotiations. On 4 October 2017, the President of TRNC Mustafa Akıncı stated: *'Although the negotiations on the Cyprus problem have failed in Crans Montana, the need for a mutually acceptable solution is still present. As long as the problem continues, the need for a solution and seeking will continue. In all circumstances, it is our common responsibility to find ways of living peacefully between the two communities on this island. [...] The outdated approaches by the Greek Cypriot people, which underestimate, disdain and describe the Turkish Cypriot people as a minority, are escalating'*.²⁸

Last but not least, on both sides the lack of public support for the Turkish accession is becoming ever more clear. According to public surveys of May 2017, *'resistance was highest in Germany, at 86 percent, followed by the Netherlands at 84 percent. The lowest resistance was recorded in Spain, where 60 percent of respondents said they would not support a Turkish EU bid'*.²⁹

Turkish membership issue even an issue debated during the 2017 election campaign in Germany. On 3 September 2017, during a televised debate with SPD's leader Martin Schulz, German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared: *'The fact is clear that Turkey should not become a member of the EU. Apart from this, I'll speak to my colleagues to see if we can reach a joint position on this so that we can end these accession talks'*.³⁰ Her comment was a response to the previous declaration of Martin Schulz. The former President of the European Parliament called for an end to the EU membership talks and promised to end the negotiation process if he became the next German chancellor. Such declarations proved that no matter who would come to power, Germany would be not supportive of the Turkish membership. In the past Turks could count on

²⁷ M. Bazin, S. de Tapia, *Turcja. Geografia wschodzącej potęgi* (Turkey. Geography of rising power), Warszawa 2014, p. 303.

²⁸ M. Akıncı, *The Statement of President*, <https://kktcb.org/en/the-statement-of-president-akinci-6148> (last visited 5.11.2017).

²⁹ C. Kroet, *Resistance against Turkish EU membership highest in Germany: Poll*, "Politico", 19.05.2017, <http://www.politico.eu/article/resistance-against-turkish-eu-membership-highest-in-germany-poll/> (last visited 13.09.2017).

³⁰ L. Pasha-Robinson, *Turkey will never become EU member, says Angela Merkel: Comments are likely to worsen already strained ties between the two NATO allies*, "The Independent", <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/turkey-german-chancellor-angela-merkel-eu-member-president-recep-erdogan-nato-a7927861.html> (last visited 5.09.2017).

social democrats, but not anymore. And such developments will have a clear impact on European politics. Although some EU member states do not recognize the leading role of Germany, it is hard to imagine any progress in the negotiations without prior German acceptance.

The strong reaction of Turkish authorities was easy to predict. Turkish Presidential Spokesman Ibrahim Kalin commented on Schulz and Merkel's declarations as follows: *'It is not a coincidence that our president, Erdoğan, was a main topic of the debate. Germany and Europe's attacks on Turkey/Erdoğan, in ignoring necessary and pressing problems, are reflections of the narrowing of their horizons. We hope the problematic atmosphere that made Turkish-German relations the victim of this narrow political horizon will end'*.³¹

All in all, as of 13 November 2017 Turkey has managed to close provisionally only one negotiation chapter, dedicated to science and research. An additional 15 more chapters have been open since 2005. Among them are chapters on free movement of capital, intellectual property law, taxation, statistics, environment, financial control, economic and monetary policy as well as regional policy and coordination of structural instruments.³² How great is the likelihood that the European Commission will decide to open new chapters and continue constructive talks aimed at accepting Turkey as a new member state in the nearest future?

3. Future scenarios

Given this current trajectory, it is possible that EU–Turkey accession will be brought to a halt in 2018. On July 16, 2017 Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared his intention to bring back the death penalty. His main motivation is revenge against those involved in the unsuccessful *coup d'état* of July 2016. Such a decision, if accepted by the Turkish parliament, would violate key EU values and regulations, adding further strain to an already tense relationship.

The European Commission is due to present its annual report on Turkey's progress towards EU membership, and all the indications are that this report is going to be extremely critical. The Commission may even recommend that the European Council suspend talks completely. Indeed, if President Erdoğan does not change his political approach towards internal affairs, the European Union will have no choice but to suspend or

³¹ K. Connolly, J. Rankin, *Turkey hits back after Merkel says EU should scrap accession talks*, "The Guardian", <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/04/turkey-hits-back-angela-merkel-eu-axe-accession-talks> (last visited 4.09.2017).

³² *Turkey*, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/turkey_en (last visited 5.11.2017).

even break off the talks. Needless to say, such a decision would have very serious implications for both the EU and Turkey.

Although some member states like Germany are very critical of further enlargement processes, the EU still holds high hopes for integration with Turkey in the long-term and this position is reflected in some key documents. If the Union accepted Turks, the EU including Turkey would not be seen as a Christian bloc of states in the Middle East anymore, and Turks could significantly help to promote European interests in the region. According to the European Union Global Strategy of 2016, *'within the scope of the current enlargement policy, the challenges of migration, energy security, terrorism and organised crime are shared between the EU, the Western Balkans and Turkey'*.³³ For this reason the failure of accession talks may seriously undermine the current EU policies related to the above issues, or even pose a real threat to European security. For instance, without any political motivation Turks may not be willing to stop new waves of migration from the Middle East to Europe.

Sedat Laçiner once suggested that accepting Turkey as a new member *'the EU will reflect a radical change in its outlook towards the world. It will prove that it has consolidated its self-identity on constructive principles rather than on threats and "others". In this manner, Turks who do not separate themselves from other cultures will significantly embellish the EU'*.³⁴ Yet in this case it should be underlined that ultimate success depends on the will of both sides. Turkish authorities should also adopt a more constructive position and pay more attention to EU standards related to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

Moreover, for a long time the EU hoped that the so-called 'Turkish model', namely a modern, moderate Muslim state, could serve as an example for other Middle Eastern and North African countries. This is why Europeans supported political and economic changes in Turkey. They also financed a number of Turkish NGOs dealing with civil society. Yet recent developments in this country clearly demonstrate that democracy is fading and Turkey is becoming more and more authoritarian. As the whole, EU strategy is based on the promotion of democratic values, rule of law, and human rights; thus the current political and social situation in Turkey is unacceptable and damages the Union's image.

³³ *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, Brussels, June 2016, http://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/regions/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf (last visited 5.09.2017).

³⁴ S. Laçiner, *Possible Impacts of Turkey's Full Membership to EU's Foreign Policy* in: *European Union with Turkey: The Possible Impact of Turkey's Membership on the European Union*, S. Laçiner, M. Özcan, I. Bal (eds.), Ankara 2005, p. 24.

Failure of the EU–Turkey accession negotiations would also be good news for Russia. An EU including Turkey could pose a serious regional challenge to Russia, as Europeans try to counterbalance the Russian influence in the Middle East and the Caucasus. A Turkey outside of the EU may be more willing to chart its own course in its relations with Russia, potentially at the expense of EU interests. Turks have already taken a few decisions that would validate such claim. Turkey, together with Iran, has already joined the so-called Astana peace process aimed at ending the conflict in Syria and sponsored by Russia. That move was criticized by both the EU and the United States. Moreover, the Turkish authorities decided to purchase the Russian S400 missile system, which would have a detrimental impact on Turkey’s military cooperation with its European allies within the framework of the Common Defense and Security Policy. Lack of progress in EU–Turkey negotiations will certainly affect the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in general, and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in particular. If Turkey does not become an EU member state, it will be almost impossible to imagine Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia joining the bloc, which still seems to be a long-term aim. Such a scenario would be in line with Putin’s expectations, as Moscow still perceives the Caucasus as part of its sphere of influence.

Is it possible that both Turkey and the EU could change this unsatisfactory situation? In the opinion of Kader Sevinç, on the one hand *‘Turkey needs to confirm its determination for this target, dedicate its democratic, economic and social progress capacities to this aim, devise a concrete plan for settlement of the Cyprus issue, develop a full-fledged diplomatic strategy, and finally implement a comprehensive communication strategy’*. On the other hand, *‘the EU leaders will have to face the moment of truth: will they become good negotiators in re-generating the process with Turkey? Or will they continue to damage the EU’s credibility and interests as a global power?’*³⁵

Selcen Öner may be right in saying that *‘a shift in the western orientation of Turkish foreign policy is highly unlikely. Firstly, if Turkey will go on in its democratization process, secondly if it will maintain a balanced approach between its western institutional ties and pro-activism in its neighbouring regions, and lastly if it will act consistently on the basis of universal values, Turkey can make important contributions to security and peace, especially in its neighbouring regions and in the world in the twenty-first century’*.³⁶

³⁵ K. Sevinç, *How to Negotiate With the EU?* in: *Turkish Foreign Policy in the New Millennium*, H. Işıksal, O. Örmeci (eds.), Frankfurt am Main 2015, pp. 255–256.

³⁶ S. Öner, *Continuity and Changes in Turkish Foreign and Security Policy in the Twenty-first Century and the EU* in: *Debating Security in Turkey: Challenges and Changes in the Twenty-first Century*, E. Canan-Sokullu (ed.), Lanham 2013, p. 69.

Conclusions

All in all, if the European Council decided to suspend accession negotiations with Turkey, it may be very harmful for the EU's grand strategy and seriously undermine its future position in the Middle East and the Caucasus. It would be very hard to re-start the talks again. As far as geopolitical reality is concerned, the EU needs Turkey more than Turkey needs the EU. Yet, given that President Erdoğan does his best to challenge the European Union, openly criticizes some European leaders, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and undertakes numerous actions in breach of EU regulations, a 'train crash' scenario in EU–Turkey relations in 2018 is certainly more likely than it was a few years ago. Would both sides lose in this case? Not necessarily. It seems that the EU may lose much more in this case.

Soner Cagaptay may be right saying that *'the result could be a new Turkey: a twenty-first century Muslim power that is bound to promote stability, yet less restrained by a regional, European rubric. In other words, Turkey's age-old game of catch-up with Europe may be nearing its end, making way for a new Turkey that stands as a Muslim power with a place in the West'*.³⁷ Graham E. Fuller adds that *'it is an irony, but it is an independent-minded Turkey, no longer willing to define itself as just a western ally, that commands more respect and attention than at any time in history. [...] It is the first country that recreated its historical identity and reshaped public views and goals via a democratic process against the weight of decades – even centuries – of a European- or American-based global order dominating the Middle East'*.³⁸ In this regard, Turkey may find its place in regional politics both in the Middle East and Central Asia, and thus compensate some for losses in the case of failure of the negotiations. The question is, however, whether the European Union could afford to lose such an ally? Although there are quite many arguments against Turkish membership, Turkey's potential and its geographical location make it very important from the geopolitical and geostrategic points of view. The decision to suspend the talks is of strategic importance and should not be limited to criticism of the current Turkish authorities. It is the Turkish nation, not its authorities, that is to join the EU.

³⁷ S. Cagaptay, *The Rise of Turkey: The Twenty-First Century's First Muslim Power*, Lincoln 2014, p. 13.

³⁸ G.E. Fuller, *Turkey and the Arab Spring: Leadership in the Middle East*, 2014, p. 11.

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