

Towards an Inflection in Franco-Turkish Relations ?

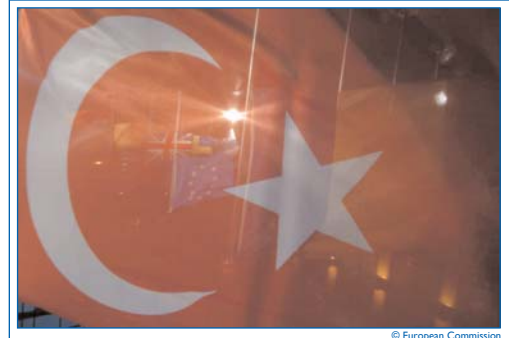
For many years, notably on the occasion of Election Day, the question of the admittance of Turkey into the European Union has been used to advantage by a diverse group of French and European political figures. This was most notably the case in 2005 at the time of the debate over the French referendum on the Treaty concerning the establishment of a European constitution, during which the extreme right and part of the center right did not hesitate in shaking up the fantastical fears concerning French identity. That the said extreme right, of which certain leaders consider the age of the Crusades not a thing of the past, opposes the integration of Turkey into Europe in the name of a demand for cultural essentialism, expresses the sum of a certain logic. That a part of the parliamentary right goes a step further in this vein for electoral reasons and to earn the votes of supporters of the Front National and the Movement for France is much more problematic, and in any case hardly at the height of the political stakes in European construction.

Thus Nicolas Sarkozy used this agenda in the framework of his preparation for candidacy for the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), and then for his presidential election campaign. Essentially, he clearly opposed Turkish membership in the European Union for the profit of a privileged partnership and certainly not cultural reasons, but with the pretext that in his point of view, Turkey was part of Asia and thus not European, and consequently had no place within the European Union. He gave the impression in later discussions that he would oppose negotiations between Ankara and Brussels. This apprehension in relations between the EU and Turkey unfortunately seems to do away with the long Turkish march towards inclusion in Western Europe and European engagements and in reality poses questions about what type of EU we want to construct: a Europe huddled within itself, incapable of getting past its institutional quarrels, or on the contrary, a European Union open to the world and capable of contributing to the stability of regions in its periphery through its propositions and initiatives.

His election won, Nicolas Sarkozy did not delay in initiating a de facto modification of the political functions of the 5th Republic. It is clearly the president who from now on directs the nation and leads government action at the expense of the Prime Minister, thus breaking with a long constitutional tradition.

The example of foreign policy is, from this point of view, particularly insightful. Traditionally, the president of the French Republic possesses a clear and decisive role in the direction and conduct of foreign relations, all the while depending on a powerful Minister of Foreign Affairs, both active and conscious of the president's prerogatives. Despite the surprise nominations of Bernard Kouchner and Jean-Pierre Joyet, members of the Left who are favorable to Turkish membership to the EU, to the posts of Minister of Foreign Affairs and Secretary of State for European Affairs, president Sarkozy clearly indicated his desire to both influence and direct questions pertaining to the French foreign policy. In order to have totally free range in this area, he decided to visibly reduce the initiatives of the Minister of Foreign Affairs beginning with the creation of a National Council of Security at the Elysée that would be in charge of questions pertaining to diplomacy, military issues, and Africa. This would be followed by the creation of a Minister of Ecology, Development, and Landscaping and a Minister of Immigration, Integration, National Identity, and Co-development that would manage visa services, and questions of cooperation and asylum. It is apparent that the control of the Elysée on diplomacy and foreign policy will be much more concentrated than in the past.

It has yet to be seen if this concentration of power dependent on a strong political and ideological substrate will worsen the deterioration of relations between France and Turkey. We know that one of the principle priorities of Nicolas Sarkozy is the resumption of European construction, in crisis since the "no" voted upon by the French in response to the referendum of May 2005 concerning the creation of a European constitution. To realize this objective, however, he needs to create and reinforce alliances and to accept compromises with European partners. One



TURKEY

Capital : **Ankara**
Area : **780 580 km²**
Population : **74 876 697 inhabitants**

Nature of Regime : **Parliamentary Republic - 81 departments**
International Organization participation : **BSEC, Council of Europe, OECD, ECO, UN, OSCE, NATO, UNESCO**

GDP : **\$ 363 300 million**
GDP per capita : **\$ 4852**
Growth in 2005 : **7,38%**

CHRONOLOGY OF TURKEY/EU RELATIONS

1963 : Ankara Accord creating the Turkey- EEC association whose objective was full entry of Turkey into the EEC

december 1999 : The European Union officially accepts Turkish candidacy at the time of the Helsinki summit, highlighting the "European vocation" of the country, but creates certain conditions for entry that Turkey accepts.

26 february 2000 : The Council of the European Union adopts a partnership for membership that identifies, with a unique framework, the domains of priority action relative to the progress that Turkey must accomplish in order to be accepted into the EU.

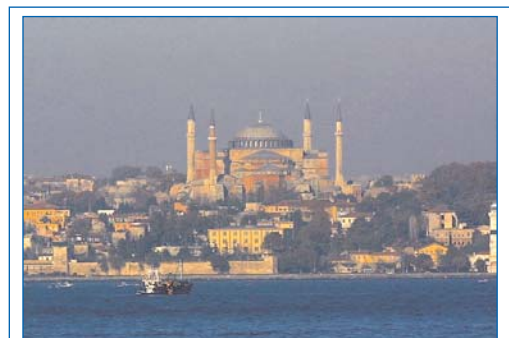
14-15 december 2001 : The European Council of Laeken recognizes that "Turkey has made progress with respect to the political criteria set forth by the EU for future membership" and that "the prospective opening of negotiations with Turkey are fast approaching".

2001-2003 : Turkey puts in place a series of reforms that responds to the partnership for membership criteria, most notably with the modification of the country's constitution.

6 october 2004 : The Commission presents its recommendation concerning Turkey. It "considers Turkey sufficiently satisfies the political criteria (of Copenhagen) and recommends the opening of membership negotiations".

december 2004 : The European Council decides to open membership negotiations with Turkey.

october 2005 : Beginning of negotiations for European Union membership.



Istanbul

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cannot imagine relations between Paris and Ankara becoming harmonious by magic, so it is thus a question of the French president using a different language towards Turkey than he used during his candidacy. Fixing as a priority finding a solution to the institutional crisis of the European Union, the Turkish question must not interfere with the necessary debate concerning the simplified Treaty and cannot bring into question the previously undertaken engagements by the country it now engages in debate. On this point, as on others, the new president cannot perform a sweeping modification of French foreign policy.

Admitting that the Turkish agenda possesses incontestable specifics, let us also recall that for better or worse; France is only one country amongst 27, which explains the feeling of obligation felt by Nicolas Sarkozy to stick to what he had said for months concerning Turkey. It is notably at the time of the conference of ambassadors traditionally held at the end of August that Nicolas Sarkozy gave his first presidential discourse on foreign policy, during which he discussed an ensemble of international issues. Concerning Turkey he explained: " France will not be opposed to the opening of new chapters in the negotiations between the EU and Turkey in the coming months and years, on the condition that these negotiations are compatible with two visions of the future: either membership or very close association without membership." His support of the discussions is at the same time conditioned by the creation of a committee of high level advisors with the task of reflecting upon the following essentials: "What kind of Europe in 2020-2030 and with what missions?" The question of borders and thus the place of Turkey within the European Union will undoubtedly be posed at the time of the committee's reunion.

This change in tone was analyzed and assessed by European decision makers who were worried about an eventual blockage in the negotiations for Turkish membership in 2005, who gave the least slender results. Nevertheless Nicolas Sarkozy draws upon a tactful rationale because he considers it necessary to distinguish thirty chapters that pose no problems by the way of a hypothetical privileged partnership from five chapters that, according to him presuppose membership in the EU, namely agriculture, regional politics, European citizenship, institutions, and monetary union.

Since these declarations another element has confirmed the French angle. On September 11, Jean-Pierre Jouyet proposed the elimination of the obligation to submit every new extension of the EU to referendum at the time of a séance with the Balladur committee on institutional reform. Certainly for the instant, Sarkozy has stayed very wise and even explained to the newspaper Le Monde, that he would not shelter himself behind the referendum refusing membership to Turkey. The obligation of having a referendum for each successive enlargement of the EU conceded by Jacques Chirac in an attempt at preserving the chances of a "yes" vote in the referendum of May 2005, considered menaced by the irruption of the Turkish question at the time of the electoral campaign, is nevertheless from now on judged as counter-productive by those closest to Sarkozy. They explain, with good reason and by additional means that this obligation to referendum does not exist in other member-states of the EU and that it will be overwhelming and costly if a referendum must be held with each Balkan candidate hoping to gain entry to the European Union.

In conclusion, it is still too early to consider president Sarkozy's position has fundamentally changed concerning relations with Turkey and membership to the EU, but he has been careful not to jeopardize the future that has yet to be written between the two countries.

By Didier BILLION, Deputy Director, IRIS

USEFUL RESOURCES

Internet Site for Turkish Government :

www.basbakanlik.gov.tr

Site for the European Commission, Relations with Turkey :

http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/turkey/index_fr.htm

Site for the Minister of French Foreign Affairs :

http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/pays-zones-geo_833/turquie_242/france-turquie_2969/index.html

Site of the French Embassy in Turkey :

<http://www.ambafrance-tr.org/>

