

**How to Escape Normative Entrapment?**  
**Framing in the Discourse about Turkey's EU Membership Prospects**

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**Introduction**

Four years after the opening of accession talks Turkey's EU membership prospects still provoke great controversy. Turkey skeptics in Europe regularly utter their principled opposition to Turkey's EU accession. Enlargement fatigue has become a widespread phenomenon. In the Turkish discourse the opposition within the EU to Turkey's EU accession is predominant. A widespread perception is that the EU will never accept Turkey as a member state. As a consequence, the support rate for EU membership has steadily declined.

Given the current problems of EU-Turkey relations, the question arises as to whether the membership prospects of Turkey are reversible. The accession of Turkey can be stopped in two ways: Either the EU breaks up the accession talks (alternatively Turkey's entrance will be rejected in a referendum in a member state) or Turkey voluntarily gives up its membership ambitions. This article examines the likelihood of these two options. In order to explain the constraints of political action inside the EU I will use the concept of normative entrapment (Schimmelfennig 2008a). According to this approach, the decision to open EU accession negotiations with Turkey despite divergent member state preferences can be attributed to the impact of community norms. They constrained state interaction by obliging the EU to consider applications from European countries according to the standards of liberal democracy. Therefore, Turkey's application had to be evaluated on the basis of compliance with the Copenhagen criteria, the sufficient fulfillment of which the Commission confirmed. Member

states that were against Turkey's EU accession for socio-economic or cultural reasons could not legitimately veto the decision but were rhetorically entrapped.

How can the opponents of Turkey's EU accession react to their normative entrapment? Do they still have the potential to stop the EU accession of Turkey? Given that the rejection of Turkey based on cultural, geographical or socio-economic reasons could not prevent the opening of accession talks in 2005, it is unrealistic that these arguments could now change the official EU approach to Turkey. Deducted from the normative entrapment approach, two more promising strategies for the opponents of Turkey's EU membership are: (1) to frame Turkey's behavior as non-compliant with community norms and/or (2) to establish new norms which are accepted in the public discourse as an additional barrier to Turkey's EU entrance. My analysis of the public discourse of Turkey skeptics in Germany, France and Austria - the three countries in which the opposition of the (conservative) political elite is the highest - from the decision of 2005 until October 2009 reveals that both strategies were strongly applied: Deficits in the reform process and the Cyprus problem were framed as evidence that Turkey is not ready to accept EU standards. The absorption capacity of the EU was framed as a new barrier for Turkey's accession by constructing a contradiction between widening and deepening. European public opinion was framed as opposed to Turkey's membership and then taken as justification for the Turkey skeptics own dismissive position. But both strategies had only a limited impact on the ongoing accession talks. The opponents of Turkey's EU accession achieved a slowing down of the accession talks but no rupture with the official EU approach which still consistently links progress in the accession talks to compliance with basic democratic norms (Schimmelfennig 2008b).

In order to explain the constraints of political action in Turkey I applied the concept of cost-benefit calculations. Studies about the impact of EU conditionality in candidate countries have shown that candidate countries effectively comply with EU standards if the incentive of EU membership is higher than the necessary adaption cost (Schimmelfennig 2008b). In Turkey the political costs have grown. As public opinion is less supportive of EU membership than a couple of years ago, it has become more difficult for the government to push through policy changes which can easily be framed by the opposition and EU-skeptic voices as a betrayal of national interests. The incentive of EU membership has weakened because of new political and economical opportunities beyond the means of EU membership. Turkey seems to have much better alternatives to EU membership than a decade ago. Turkey has developed into a

regional power with attractive economic prospects and is increasingly becoming an important transit country for energy. But despite the changed opportunity structure there are no signs that Turkey might voluntarily give up its bid for EU membership.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the next section I present propositions and hypotheses stemming from the normative entrapment approach. In the following sections I analyze the strategies of the Turkey skeptics in Germany, France and Austria and their impact on the ongoing negotiation process. I use party programs, speeches and press coverage in order to assess their argumentation. Then I analyze the reactions of the supporters of Turkey and the key events in EU-Turkey relations from 2006 until fall 2009. Subsequently I analyze the discourse of the Turkish political elite regarding the desirability of EU membership and assess the attractiveness of alternatives to EU membership for Turkey.

### **Normative Entrapment and Escape Strategies**

The opening of accession negotiations with Turkey was a very controversial decision. Several governments preferred a close association with Turkey in place of the prospect of full membership. During the 1990s a substantive group of member state governments blocked giving Turkey a general prospect of membership similar to that of the Central and Eastern European countries. When the EU finally conferred Turkey candidate status at the Helsinki summit in 1999 the governments were still split over the desirability of Turkish accession. Many thought that the candidate status was not a strong commitment as Turkey would not be able to fulfill the necessary criteria for the opening of accession talks. In 2005, before the EU opened accession negotiations with Turkey, Austria and Cyprus threatened to veto the decision. In 2006, after Turkey had refused to extend the Customs Union to Cyprus, some member governments demanded a complete suspension of the accession talks instead of the freezing of eight negotiating chapters which the European Commission had suggested.

Given the fundamental reluctance among the governments to accept Turkey's EU membership bid, it is surprising that the EU finally opened accession talks in 2005. The common decision despite divergent preferences can be explained by the impact of dominant norms. Its repeated promises of the past obliged the EU to consider Turkey's application according to the same standards of liberal democracy as the EU applied to the Central and Eastern European countries. Especially the conferment of candidate status linked the opening of accession

negotiations to the fulfillment of liberal-democratic political criteria and thus established the normative criteria the EU had to respect. “Turkey’s application could not be dismissed by reference to socio-economic or cultural incompatibility. To the extent that Turkey complied with liberal-democratic norms, member states opposed to Turkey’s membership for economic or cultural reasons could not legitimately block the path to accession but were rhetorically entrapped. This entrapment process was supported by the fact that the Commission was in charge of preparing the progress reports on Turkey. By basing its assessments and conclusions on the liberal-democratic accession criteria, it set the agenda for the ensuing intergovernmental negotiations and framed them in favor of norm consistent decisions” (Schimmelfennig 2008a: 6). The supporters of Turkey could use the commitments of the past in order to exercise normative pressure on the opponents.

Provided that Turkey fulfils its obligations, what possibilities do the Turkey skeptics have to escape their normative entrapment? Given that the principled opposition did not manage to prevent the opening of accession talks, it can be assumed that these arguments will not manage to challenge the dominant norm of ‘pacta sunt servanda’ in the future either. Therefore, the impact of the Turkey skeptics depends on their ability to reframe the context of accession talks. Framing can be defined as the art of presenting a schema for interpretation by directing attention toward particular features and away from other features (Rein/Schön 1996, Ryan/Gamson 2006). The Turkey skeptics need to find a justification for their rejection of Turkey which is able to win support in the public discourse. Given the constraints of the decided accession criteria, possible communication strategies for the Turkey skeptics are (1) to frame Turkey’s behavior as non-compliant with the accession criteria and/or (2) find legitimate arguments for the establishment of new accession criteria. The probability that a new criterion is accepted as legitimate in the public discourse mainly depends on three aspects of the argumentation and the interaction process (Bürgin 2007: 69 – 70). (1) An argument has to be perceived in the public discourse as self-consistent. The central characteristic of an argument is that a position or claim is justified by a reason which can be further backed on empirical grounds. An argument is consistent if (a) the appropriateness of the justification principle of a position is not challenged and (b) the interrelation between justification and position is not challenged. (2) An argument has to be coherently applied in another context, otherwise the credibility of the argument and of its advocate are weakened. (3) An argument gains legitimacy if it can be presented as the logic consequence of the application of a shared norm and thus be put it in line with a “previous mutual consent” (Kohler-Koch 2000: 517).

## **Absorption capacity**

One main argument of the Turkey skeptics is to justify the rejection of Turkey with the lacking absorption capacity of the EU. The efficient functioning of the institutional architecture is a mutual consensus and therefore seems to be a promising argumentation strategy. Instead of blaming Turkey for not fulfilling the requirements, the Turkey skeptics try to find the obstacle within the EU. With the ratification problems of the Constitutional Treaty after the negative referendums in France and the Netherlands in 2005 and the rejection of the Lisbon Treaty in the Irish referendum in 2008 this argument won prominence in the public discourse. An exogenous event<sup>1</sup> apparently supported the efforts of the Turkey skeptics to establish a new barrier for Turkey's EU accession. Contrary to the past, when Germany was a supporter of widening and deepening at the same time, Chancellor Angela Merkel made a negative association between deepening and widening, attributing the failed referendums in France and the Netherlands to enlargement. As a consequence, she argued that the EU should focus on the definition of its final borders.<sup>2</sup> In the European Parliament election campaign Hans-Gert Pöttering (EPP), until July 2009 president of the European Parliament, said that "the EU now needs a breather - a phase of consolidation. Priority now is that the Lisbon Treaty enters into force and is filled with life."<sup>3</sup>

The absorption capacity is part of the negotiating framework<sup>4</sup> but is not further specified. There are several strategies of the Turkey skeptics in order to frame the absorption capacity for their benefit. First, they mask the fact that the EU must be able to absorb Turkey when Turkey finally joins the EU and not already today. The absorption capacity is not static and can change over the long-term horizon until the possible accession of Turkey (Emerson et al. 2006).

Second, they ignore that deepening and widening are not necessarily opposed to one another. Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn: "Widening versus deepening is another false dichotomy. History has proven that further political integration and rounds of enlargement have mostly gone in parallel. Since the 1908s, the number of EU members has more than doubled from 12 to 25, while the Union has simultaneously taken major steps towards deeper political

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1 For the interrelationship between endogenous and exogenous factors in the construction of dominant frames see Baumgartner/Mahoney 2008

2 European Policy Statement by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel in the German Bundestag, 11 May 2006; [www.bundesregierung.de](http://www.bundesregierung.de)

3 *Die Welt*, 03 June 09, in: [http://www.cdu.de/archiv/2370\\_27121.htm](http://www.cdu.de/archiv/2370_27121.htm), translation (A.B.)

4 [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/st20002\\_05\\_TR\\_framedoc\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/st20002_05_TR_framedoc_en.pdf)

and economic integration by establishing the single market, the single currency and reinforcing the common foreign and security policy.”<sup>5</sup> Ruiz-Jimenez and Torreblanca also show that the apparent contradiction between widening and deepening is an elite discourse which is not backed by citizens’ views. In order to measure citizen views on the compatibility of deepening and widening they selected the items ‘support for a constitution’ and ‘support for enlargement’ from Eurobarometer 62. “Contrary to widespread expectations, we do not observe a trade-off between deepening and widening. (...). Furthermore, it seems that in the public’s opinion the idea of a trade-off between deepening and widening did not have much relevance even in the case of Turkey. Although the elite repeatedly mentioned opposition to Turkey’s membership as a reason for constitutional opposition in France and Netherlands survey analyses do not confirm this” (Ruiz-Jimenez/Torreblanca 2008: 10). They conclude: “We see strong indicators suggesting that this (declining support for enlargement, A.B.) is a consequence of a parallel decline in support for integration, not necessary a cause of it” (Ibid: 29).

Third, Turkey skeptics argue on the grounds of the functioning of the institutions and decision making, but the real motive is to avoid a decline of their relative bargaining power. As Turkey has a population of 70 million and at the date of membership maybe more than Germany, Turkey will be a powerful actor in the Council and in the European Parliament. Especially among French politicians, there is a strong belief that their country's role in Europe has already been weakened by previous enlargements and Turkey's accession would only further dilute its influence.

Given these argumentative inconsistencies, the Turkey skeptics did not manage to establish the absorption capacity of the EU as a norm which would make it possible to move away from the EU’s enlargement decisions of the past. Although the risk of institutional stalemate is an accepted justification principle, the conclusion of the Turkey skeptics to break with the membership option for Turkey is not accepted. At its June 2006 meeting the European Council asked the Commission to prepare a report on enlargement that should take into account the perceptions of the citizens. On 8 November 2006 the Commission adopted a strategy for the EU’s enlargement policy which stressed that the EU’s integration capacity was determined by

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<sup>5</sup> “Deepening and widening can continue in parallel”, Lecture at Bilkent university, Ankara, 4 October 2006, Speech/06/561

the EU's own capacity to maintain the momentum of European integration and concluded that better communication on enlargement was also crucial for the perception of the citizens (European Commission 2006).

The European Parliament also discussed the absorption capacity and its implication for further enlargements. On 12 December 2006 the European Parliament adopted the Stubb report which argued that it is up to the EU to adapt its institutions in order to improve its absorption capacity. The Nice Treaty, says the report, does not provide "an adequate basis for further enlargements". Therefore, the report includes several reform proposals: the adoption of a new qualified majority voting system at the Council to simplify decision making; a clear definition of the EU's values, objectives and competences; more transparency in the Council's operations; increased powers of scrutiny for national parliaments and the adoption of a clause setting out how Member States could leave the EU (European Parliament 2006).

Now that the Lisbon Treaty has been ratified, the absorption capacity argument will be further weakened.

### **Privileged Partnership**

Similarly, the privileged partnership concept, introduced primarily by the German Christian Democratic parties, is mainly justified on the grounds of the lacking absorption capacity of the European Union. "Our goal is a privileged partnership, since Europe must not be overstretched," Edmund Stoiber, then CSU Chairman, declared.<sup>6</sup> In the European election campaign 2009 French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel emphasized their position in favor of a privileged partnership for Turkey instead of EU membership, "arguing that any misguided expansion might endanger its (*the EU's*; *A.B.*) operational effectiveness."<sup>7</sup>

The supporters of Turkey dismiss this idea. First, they argue that the privileged partnership is an empty concept as it includes no improvement to the status Turkey already has. The fact that the supporters of a privileged partnership with Turkey also suggest a privileged partner-

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<sup>6</sup> Reuters, 12 December 2004

<sup>7</sup> Eurasia Daily Monitor, vol. 6, issue 92, 13 May 2009

ship with Ukraine and Israel<sup>8</sup> points out that their concept is actually linked to the European Neighborhood Policy. Enlargement Commissioner Rehn: “In reality, no form of privileged partnership could exceed what EU-Turkey relations have already accomplished. Turkey already has a customs union with the EU, participates in many EU programs and is a member of NATO, which makes it far more than a privileged partner in terms of security policy. Moreover, the EU contributes to social and regional cohesion that amounts to half a billion euros per year. What more could the EU offer, apart from membership in institutions (...). Those who talk continuously about privileged partnership are creating a vicious circle of reversed commitment, weakened conditionality and stalled reforms.”<sup>9</sup>

Second, they point out that the proposal of a privileged partnership puts the EU’s credibility at stake. “Many European politicians have advocated the idea of a privileged partnership for Turkey rather than full membership. This takes place despite the fact that the EU and its leaders in the European Council unanimously decided to open accession negotiations (...). The regular talk on privileged partnership only erodes the EU’s credibility and weakens the conditionality in Turkey. Thus it reduces the political incentive for reforms and causes political backlash among ordinary Turks”, says enlargement commissioner Rehn in the same speech. Finland’s Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb also ruled out a privileged partnership and reaffirmed Helsinki’s commitment to bringing Turkey into the EU as a full member<sup>10</sup>. Martti Ahtisaari, former president of Finland, stated: “In 1999 we said that Turkey is a candidate state destined to join the union on the basis of the same criteria as apply to other candidate states. So it’s the credibility of the EU at stake.”<sup>11</sup>

Being in a weak argumentative position, French President Sarkozy tried to use his bargaining power to stop the progress of the accession talks. In June 2007 he prevented the opening of the chapter on economic and monetary policy, arguing it could clear the way for Turkey’s eventual membership in the euro and had particular political and symbolic resonance.<sup>12</sup> But only a couple of months later, in August, Sarkozy offered France’s EU partners an end to the blockade of the accession negotiations with Turkey. If the EU members agreed to set up a "committee of wise men" in order to clarify the frontiers of the EU, France would no longer

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8 Hans-Gert Pöttering, Interview with *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 2 June 2009, [http://www.cdu.de/archiv/2370\\_27125.htm](http://www.cdu.de/archiv/2370_27125.htm)

9 Lecture at Bilkent University, Ankara, 4 October 2006, Speech/06/561)

10 *Cihan Haber Ajansi*, 8 May 2009

11 *BBC news*, 7 September 2009, [www.news.bbc.co.uk](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk)

12 *New York Times*, 25 June 2007; <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/25/world/europe/25iht-union.5.6325879.html>

oppose the opening of new chapters of negotiations between the Union and Turkey in the coming months and years, said Sarkozy.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, he demanded that five chapters that he considers as incompatible with the alternative of a privileged partnership should be opened at the very end of the negotiation process.

The idea of a wise men committee can be interpreted as a face-saving measure. It did not turn out to be a tool to frame the public discourse according to Sarkozy's preferences. The idea of a 'reflection group of wise people' did not win much support. Commission President José Manuel Barroso and enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn warned against undermining legally binding agreements pertaining to accession negotiations and the Committee providing an excuse for leaving Turkey out. In December 2007 the idea was emptied of substance. The mandate of the High Level Reflection Group excluded an involvement in institutional reforms, the EU's financial framework or existing policies. Most importantly, the reflection group will have to present its findings in spring 2010, well after the 2009 European elections, and not beforehand, as the French President had originally hoped (European Council on Foreign Relations 2007).

Up to September 2009, eleven out of 35 chapters have been opened. Eight chapters are suspended because of Ankara's refusal to extend its customs to Cyprus. Five chapters are still blocked by France and the energy chapter by Cyprus. But without a justification which is acceptable for all member states, and with successive EU presidencies pushing for the opening of further negotiation chapters, the delaying strategy of Sarkozy and other governments will become more and more difficult to sustain.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has realized that the privileged partnership strategy is a blind alley. Although she still prefers a privileged partnership, she stands by the commitments of the EU: "There is a principle we follow in government: *pacta sunt servanda*. If a previous government and the EU decided to initiate accession negotiations with Turkey, then it is our duty to follow through on that."<sup>14</sup> The new conservative-liberal coalition has also decided to support 'open-ended' EU-Turkey negotiations and favor a 'privileged partnership' in case they fail.

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<sup>13</sup> *Deutsche Welle*, 27 August 2007, <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,2754247,00.html>

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/nn\\_704284/Content/EN/Artikel/2006/10/2006-10-05-eu-beitrittsverhandlungen-mit-der-tuerkei-fair-und-ergebnisoffen\\_\\_en.html](http://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/nn_704284/Content/EN/Artikel/2006/10/2006-10-05-eu-beitrittsverhandlungen-mit-der-tuerkei-fair-und-ergebnisoffen__en.html) 06 October 2006

## Public Opinion

The Turkey skeptics try to establish public opinion as new criteria against Turkey's EU membership. They argue that such an important decision cannot be taken without the consent of the people and as people are largely against Turkey's EU admission the country cannot become a member. Thus, they justify their rejection of Turkey with democratic principles. France and Austria announced that they would let their citizens decide on Turkey's EU membership in the future instead of a parliamentary ratification. Wolfgang Schüssel, Austrian Chancellor in 2006, argued that the absorption capacity of the EU will be tested in a referendum.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Alfred Gusenbauer, Austrian chancellor in 2008 and his successor Werner Fayman (both SPÖ) announced a referendum on Turkey's EU membership.<sup>16</sup> France's former president Jacques Chirac introduced an automatic referendum on future EU enlargements shortly before the 2005 referendum on the European constitution. He hoped that the French voters would be more supportive of the constitution if they knew they could vote separately on the unpopular issue of Turkish membership at a later stage.

The legitimacy of justifying one's own reluctant position by referring to the will of the people is challenged. First, it is argued that public opinion is to a large extent influenced by the discourse of the political elite – and a referendum therefore not necessarily a democratic tool. “However one could ask whether negative citizen views of enlargement are a consequence of negative elite assessment of enlargement rather than a cause of it” (Ruiz-Jimenez/Torreblanca 2008: 2). Kramer (2007: 4) demands that public support must not be exploited as a justification for a defensive approach to further enlargements.

The development of public opinion in Austria points out the interplay of elite discourse and public attitudes. Up to 2002 there was very little difference between Austrian views towards Turkey and any other EU candidate according to a report of the European Stability Initiative (ESI). “The current public mood does not have its roots in the distant past. Rather, it is a reflection of the recent behavior of the Austrian political elite, and the direction in which they have chosen to take the public debate” (ESI 2008: 1). According to the report, the turning point was the 2004 decision of the SPÖ (Austrian Social Democrats), at the time in opposition, to attack both the Freedom Party (then led by Jörg Haider) and the ÖVP (Austrian Peo-

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<sup>15</sup> *Der Spiegel*, 12/2006:132

<sup>16</sup> *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28 June 2008

ple's Party) for 'going soft' on Turkey by failing to block the opening of accession talks. This was followed in December 2004 by the decision of the ÖVP chancellor to promise a referendum. "Until then, all the major political players had supported a sober discussion of the pros and cons for Austria of each individual enlargement decision. With these two steps, that consensus was destroyed. A new, cross-party consensus emerged in favor of deferring any serious debate in favor of an eventual referendum" (Ibid: 1).

As public opinion is to a large extent the result of elite discourse, the democratic merits of the proposed referendum in France and Austria are contested. Michel Rocard, a former prime minister of France and member of the Independent Commission on Turkey, a group of senior European politicians and academics, denied that a referendum in this question is a democratic tool: "A referendum is an opportunity for the media to manipulate symbols. That's absolutely not democracy (...). Before posing questions like that, one has to be sure that the facts are well understood; the differences, the quirks, it's about replacing the 'I don't know it so I don't trust it' attitude, with better information."<sup>17</sup> The European Parliament also stressed in a report about the enlargement capacity the responsibility of Europe's political leaders in explaining to the public the goals and mutual advantages of enlargement (European Parliament 2006).

Second, the credibility of the advocates of a referendum is questioned by the incoherence and inconsistency of their argumentation. Austrian supporters of a referendum on Turkey do not demand the same for the candidate state Croatia. Instead the political elite in Austria strongly supports the accession of Croatia despite a reluctant public opinion. In spring 2007 only 28 percent of Austrians supported further enlargement of the EU (in comparison to 49% in the EU-25). Opinion polls from 2002 showed that opposition to Croatian accession was almost as large as it was for Turkey. But the firm and continuous support of Croatia by Austria's political elite positively impacted on public opinion. "By 2005, the weight of opinion had completely reversed, with a solid majority supporting Croatia, combined with a hardening of opposition for Turkey" (ESI 2008: 5).

The fact that a referendum on the accession of a new member state is not primarily considered as a democratic tool but as a tool to avoid the accession of Turkey is shown by the debate about the constitutional reform in France. Under former President Chirac an amendment was introduced to the French Constitution requiring that a referendum be held prior to a country's

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<sup>17</sup> *Euractiv*, 8 September 2009; [www.euractiv.com](http://www.euractiv.com)

EU accession. In spring 2008 the French government backed by President Sarkozy drafted a reform proposal that would have made referenda no longer compulsory. It would have given the president the right to decide if the parliament or the citizens decide over the accession of a candidate state. This move was interpreted primarily as an attempt to guarantee the EU accession of Croatia.<sup>18</sup>

The Turkey skeptics in the National Assembly demanded the maintenance of an automatic referendum for countries that represent more than 5% of the overall EU population. That position was rejected by the French Senate.<sup>19</sup> The final compromise envisages that a referendum on EU enlargement can be prevented by the Parliament. If the members of both chambers vote with a three-fifths majority for or against a candidate, a referendum is no longer necessary. President Sarkozy would have liked to put at his discretion whether the people will be asked to decide, but he could not enforce his demand.<sup>20</sup>

The Turkey skeptics did not manage to frame a referendum on Turkey's EU accession as a democratic tool because they could not credibly communicate that the democratic aspect is their priority. Additionally, the failed referendum in France and the Netherlands on the constitutional treaty and in Ireland on the Lisbon treaty showed the democratic limits of a referendum in complex issues. It also seems improbable that France will use the referendum after a long period of negotiation and an agreement among a huge majority of states in favor of Turkey's EU accession. To play such a wrecking role would weaken the French position in Europe. It is more probable that France will use its diplomatic skills in order to exercise its influence in EU negotiations instead of referring to a referendum as a last resort. The experience with the failed referenda on the constitutional treaty also shows that a negative vote (especially in a small country) cannot prevent the continuation of the European integration process if the vast majority of the political elite favor a certain outcome. Therefore, the removal of the automatic referendum in France will also have an impact on Austria, which could become the only country applying a referendum. But adding a second 'no' is different to being the only (and a small) country that rejects the membership of Turkey.

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18 *Euractiv*, 3 April 2008

19 *LeMonde*, 4 July 2008

20 *Der Spiegel*, 28 July 2008

## Armenia

Armenia claims that the Ottoman army killed 1.5 million Armenians during World War I and labels these killings as genocide. The Republic of Turkey denies that the deaths of Armenians during the deportation between 1915 and 1917 can be called genocide as the killings were not governmentally orchestrated. Turkey justifies the deportation by arguing that Armenians cooperated with its wartime enemy Russia. Many countries classified the killings as genocide - defined by the UN as 'harmful acts ... committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group'. In 2005 Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan suggested setting up a commission of international experts to explore the events of the past. The accession criteria do not mention the Armenian question.

Opponents of Turkey's EU accession tried to establish the recognition of genocide by Turkey as an accession criterion. French President Sarkozy and former President Jacques Chirac insisted that if Turkey wants to join the European Union, it should accept the genocide.<sup>21</sup> Chirac compared the killings to Nazi Germany's holocaust.<sup>22</sup>

Supporters of Turkey did not accept the claims of Chirac and Sarkozy. Louis Michel, European Commissioner for development and humanitarian aid, replied that no new conditions for Turkey's membership in the Union can be brought in: "There are some people who want to change the rules of the game during the game."<sup>23</sup> The German Foreign Ministry, led by the Social Democrat Frank Walter Steinmeier in 2008, stated "the Government welcomes all initiatives aimed at the further processing of the historical events of 1915-16. An evaluation of the results of this research should be undertaken by historians"<sup>24</sup>.

The opponents did not manage to establish the Armenian question as a new barrier for Turkey. Although the EP discussed the inclusion of the recognition of genocide in its progress report 2006, it finally opted to cut out a clause calling for recognition of the Armenian genocide.<sup>25</sup> Joost Lagendik (Greens/EFA, NL) criticized a draft of the Eurlings report because it included a clause in which the recognition of the Armenian genocide by Turkey was de-

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21 *BBC news*, 12 October 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/6043730.stm>

22 *EU Observer*, 2 October 2006, <http://euobserver.com/9/22543>

23 *Turkish Weekly*, 3 October 2006; <http://www.turkishweekly.net/news/394821>

24 Insist on reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia 08/08/2008; [http://www.bundestag.de/presse/hib/2008\\_08/2008\\_227/02.html](http://www.bundestag.de/presse/hib/2008_08/2008_227/02.html)

25 *BBC News*, 12.10.2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/6043730.stm>

scribed as a precondition for Turkey to join. He stressed the importance of being “critical but fair” towards Turkey.<sup>26</sup>

The recent efforts between Turkey and Armenia to restore their diplomatic ties will further weaken the argument of the opponents. On 1 September 2009 Turkey and Armenia issued a joint declaration, agreeing common steps to overcome the animosities of the past. The aim is to open borders by the end of the year under a protocol to establish diplomatic ties.<sup>27</sup> The diplomatic efforts are also praised in the new progress report of the European Commission, which states that “diplomatic efforts to normalize relations with Armenia have moved forward significantly.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Reform Process**

Every fall, the European Commission publishes a progress report on the candidate countries in which it scrutinizes the progress in the application of the accession criteria, the so-called Copenhagen criteria. Membership requires that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union. Membership presupposes the candidate's ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

After the opening of accession negotiations in 2005 the Commission stated a slowing down of the reform process in Turkey. The progress reports pointed out deficits as well as achievements. The most recent progress report of 2009 also mentions deficits but is more optimistic in its assessment than the previous ones: “Turkey continues to sufficiently fulfill the political criteria, and has made further progress during the last year, notably as regards the reform of the judiciary, civil-military relations, and cultural rights. As concerns the latter, the opening of a public TV channel broadcasting 24-hour in Kurdish nation-wide was a very positive step forward. Furthermore, the government has begun a process of broad consultation with political parties and civil society with a view to addressing comprehensively the Kurdish issue. (...). Turkey has further improved its ability to take on the obligations of membership. Turkey

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<sup>26</sup> Press Release, European Parliament critical of slowdown in Turkey's reform process, 27 September 2006

<sup>27</sup> *The Guardian*, 23 September 2009 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/feedarticle/8720082>

<sup>28</sup> Press Release IP/09/1519, 14 October 2009

has made progress in aligning with the EU's legal order in a number of areas, in particular in Trans-European networks, energy and science and research. The overall level of alignment is advanced in areas such as free movement of goods, intellectual property rights, enterprise and industrial policy, anti-trust policy, consumer and health protection, science and research, energy.”<sup>29</sup> Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn concluded: “Turkey has shown renewed political reform efforts (...). I am encouraged by the historic steps Turkey and Armenia have just taken towards normalizing their relations. This process should now lead to full normalization as soon as possible.”<sup>30</sup>

Despite the mixed picture of the progress reports, the Turkey skeptics regularly ignored the achievements and focused only on the deficits mentioned in the progress reports in order to demand a breakup of the negotiations. In 2009 the Turkey skeptics once again used the publication of the report for statements against Turkey's EU membership. Manfred Weber, CSU European parliamentarian and deputy leader of the European People's Party (EPP) called for a stop of the accession negotiations. “If the Commission itself is skeptical in its assessment of the accession talks with Turkey that means that there is disillusionment and stagnation.”<sup>31</sup> Andreas Mölzer, Head of the Austrian FPÖ delegation in the European Parliament, argued “that the only correct conclusion which can be drawn from the so-called progress report is the immediate termination of the accession negotiations with Ankara. The continuation of accession negotiations is a waste of time and money because Turkey is apparently immune to reform”. Instead he called for negotiations on a privileged partnership.<sup>32</sup> Christine Muttonen, Europe spokesperson of the SPÖ, argues that “given the now documented facts in the report, the privileged partnership is the more realistic and better target.”<sup>33</sup> According to the Austrian Ernst Strasser (EPP) “there is absolutely no progress. With this catalog of shortcomings the EU membership of Turkey is not imaginable.”<sup>34</sup>

The supporters of Turkey reject the argument that deficits in the fulfillment of the political criteria and the slowing of the reform process demonstrate Turkey's unwillingness to comply

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29 Key findings of the progress reports on the candidate countries: Croatia, Turkey and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, MEMO/09/449, Brussels, 14 October 2009

30 The EU Enlargement Process: A Year of Progress in the Western Balkans and Turkey, Press Release IP/09/1519 Brussels, 14 October 2009

31 Spiegel Online, 14 October 2009 <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,655115,00.html>

32 Press Declaration, 9 October 2009 [http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20091009\\_OTS0133/channel/politik](http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20091009_OTS0133/channel/politik), Translation AB

33 Pres Declaration 14 October 2009, [http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20091014\\_OTS0211](http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20091014_OTS0211), Translation AB

34 Pres Declaration 14 October 2009, [http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20091014\\_OTS0188](http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20091014_OTS0188), Translation AB

with EU standards. First, they argue that the slowing down has to be seen in the context of the impressive reform packages in recent years and the domestic problems in Turkey. Second, a slowing down does not mean a break with the reform process. According to the negotiation framework,<sup>35</sup> only such a “serious and persistent breach in Turkey of the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law on which the Union is founded would allow the Commission – on its own initiative or on the request of one third of the member states – to recommend the suspension of negotiations and propose the conditions for eventual resumption.” Enlargement Commissioner Rehn points out that Turkey has not departed from the reform process: “In the public debate, one may get the impression that Turkey has been backtracking. This is not the case. As shown in our latest progress report adopted on 8 November (2006, AB), Turkey has continued political reforms, even though their pace has slowed down during the last year.”<sup>36</sup> Turkey’s EU minister and chief negotiator Egemen Bagis frames the existing deficits as something normal and to be expected during the negotiation period: “Of course, in Turkey, not everything runs one hundred percent. If it did, we would have long since been an EU member.”<sup>37</sup>

Third, deficits in the accession criteria can also be seen as an inducement to improve the situation by supporting the reformers in Turkey. Conditionality has worked in Central and Eastern Europe. It can also work in Turkey. The supporters of Turkey agree that the country should only become an EU member once the criteria are completely met – but the EU should help Turkey to fulfill its obligation and decide over Turkey’s eligibility at the end of the negotiations. Rehn recalled the EU’s impact on the ongoing democratization of Turkey: “We have to respect existing commitments. Conditionality means that the countries have to respect the criteria to the letter. But conditionality only works if the countries can trust in the EU’s commitment to eventual membership, even if that is many years away.”<sup>38</sup> Martti Ahtisaari, former president of Finland, argued that the decision about membership is a question for the future and not for the present: “Let us respect the agreement and the obligations we have made and let us go through the process and see how long it takes. It will take years anyway, and each national government will decide in the end, whether the outcome of the negotiations is ac-

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35 [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/st20002\\_05\\_TR\\_framedoc\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/st20002_05_TR_framedoc_en.pdf)

36 Lecture at Helsinki University 2006; Speech/06/747

37 *Der Tagesspiegel*, 15 October 2009

38 Lecture at the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy, Athens, 9 March 2006, Speech/06/163

ceptable. Many things can change until then.”<sup>39</sup> Commission President Barroso traced the same logic: “Turkey is not ready for accession now, but it should not be concluded that the situation will be same in ten years.”<sup>40</sup> Therefore he demanded that the decision about Turkey’s membership should be taken at the end of the negotiation process and not at the beginning.<sup>41</sup>

As Turkey has not departed from the reform path it is not possible for the Turkey skeptics to frame Turkey’s behavior as being in contradiction with its obligation. A slowing down is not a legitimate justification for breaking up the accession talks. The recent positive developments concerning Armenia and the Kurdish question will make it even more difficult for the Turkey skeptics to change the official EU policy.

## **Cyprus**

Cyprus has been divided since the Turkish military intervention in 1974. Turkey justified the intervention as a response to the Greek military junta-backed coup in Cyprus which aimed to annex the island to Greece. Since gaining independence from Britain in 1960 the Greek and Turkish Communities had not managed to establish a stable political structure. In 1983, the Turkish-controlled northern part of the island declared itself the ‘Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus’ (TRNC), which is only recognized by Turkey.

Repeated efforts to reunite the island under the auspices of the UN failed. The most comprehensive attempt to resolve the conflict was the Annan Plan in 2002. The plan of the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan was elaborated with the involvement of the leaders of the Greek and the Turkish Cypriot communities, as well as representatives of the guarantor states Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom. It aimed to bring the island’s two communities into a loose confederation of two equal constituent states based largely on the Swiss model.

However, in April 2004, the Greek Cypriots rejected the plan in a referendum while the Turkish Cypriots approved it. In May 2004, the Greek-Cypriot-controlled ‘Republic of Cyprus’ became a full member of the EU. The EU obliged Turkey to extend the customs union to the Union’s ten new member states including Cyprus as a condition to opening accession talks

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<sup>39</sup> *Der Standard*, 10 September 2009, <http://derstandard.at/>

<sup>40</sup> *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 October 2006

<sup>41</sup> *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25 September 2007

with Turkey. In July 2005, Turkey signed an additional protocol to the Ankara Agreement extending its customs union to the EU-10 states, but at the same time Ankara issued a declaration saying that its signature did not indicate its recognition of the Republic of Cyprus.

In order to honor the yes-vote of the Turkish Northern part of the island, the Council of Foreign Ministers decided in April 2004 to provide financial aid and to open trade with the isolated Northern part. Until today Cyprus has blocked direct trade between the EU and Northern Cyprus. The delivery of the 259 million euro financial aid package decided upon on 27 February 2006<sup>42</sup>, intended to encourage the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot Community, is also being carried out very slowly. Up to April 2009, contracts have been signed for about 30% of the 259 million euros available.<sup>43</sup>

In December 2006 the European Council agreed to follow a Commission recommendation to sanction Turkey and suspend talks on eight out of 35 negotiation chapters because of Turkey's refusal to implement the Additional Protocol. Additionally they decided to review the fate of the eight negotiation chapters at the end of 2009. Turkey justifies its refusal to open its ports and airports to Cyprus on the grounds of the EU's broken promises to open direct trade with Northern Cyprus.

The Turkey skeptics use Turkey's refusal to fulfill its obligation of the Additional Protocol in order to justify their rejection of Turkey's accession. Thus, they (1) mask the historical background of the conflict and frame Cyprus as a normal EU member state. (2) They conceal the role of the EU in the conflict: it accepted the membership of Cyprus despite the unresolved conflict. German chancellor Merkel tried to convince the member state governments in September 2005 that the opening of accession negotiations with Turkey should depend on its recognition of the Republic of Cyprus<sup>44</sup>. When Turkey let the December 2006 deadline for the implementation of the Additional Protocol pass, Cyprus threatened to veto the continuation of the accession talks.<sup>45</sup> Sarkozy<sup>46</sup> and Stoiber demanded a complete suspension of the negotiations. Stoiber argued that it is not possible that Turkey wants to become member of the EU

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42 Council Regulation EC 389/2006

43 European Commission, [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/turkish\\_cypriot\\_community/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/turkish_cypriot_community/index_en.htm) (02 December 2009)

44 [www.cdu.de/doc/pdf/05\\_08\\_26\\_Brief\\_Tuerkei.pdf](http://www.cdu.de/doc/pdf/05_08_26_Brief_Tuerkei.pdf)

45 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2 October 2006

46 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2 December 2006

family and does not respect the family member Cyprus.<sup>47</sup> French Prime Minister Francois Filon argued in 2008 that “it is not possible that a country could want to join the European Union while its army is occupying the territory of another EU country.” However, in the same press conference his justification of the privileged partnership on the grounds of Turkey’s size reveals that Cyprus is a pretext argument.<sup>48</sup> The Austrian members of the liberal Delegation to the European Parliament, Andreas Mölzer and Franz Obermayr, demanded an immediate cancellation of the accession talks because of Turkey’s stubborn refusal to implement the Ankara protocol and to recognize the EU member Cyprus.<sup>49</sup>

The supporters of Turkey also stress the need to implement the Additional Protocol but show greater comprehension for Turkey’s position. They show a greater willingness to accept the Turkish demand to link the opening of Turkish ports and airports with a settlement of the Cyprus issue. First, they point out that the EU has not fulfilled its promises to facilitate trade with Northern Cyprus as promised after the referendum in April 2004. Joschka Fischer, then German Foreign Minister: “Ankara and not the EU have a legitimate claim here.”<sup>50</sup> To punish Turkey despite its crucial role in the positive referendum in the Turkish part of the island would be extremely unfair, Fischer argued. Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn: “I also encourage the member states to take the next step and adopt our proposal from 2004 on direct trade between the EU and the Turkish Cypriot community.”<sup>51</sup> Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan used this argument to justify his position that “first the EU should fulfill its pledges before asking Turkey to honor its commitments”. Abdullah Gul, Turkey’s Foreign Minister in 2006, said that “the genuine step Turkey expects is direct trade along with financial aid.”<sup>52</sup> Ali Babacan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey in 2008, points out that in a Customs Union there should be no impediment to free circulation of products from all the EU member states<sup>53</sup>. The new chief negotiator Egemen Bagis repeated the same argument in the forefront of the EU’s review of the eight suspended chapters: “Until EU countries begin direct

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47 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30 November 2006

48 *Ansamed*, 9 May 2008

49 Pres Declaration 15 October 2009 [http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20091015\\_OTS0197](http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20091015_OTS0197)

50 *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 27. September 2006

51 Pres Declaration IP/06/1489

52 *Euractiv*, 27 February 2006

53 EC-Turkey Association Council, Statement by Ali Babacan, CE-TR 105/08 10 June 2008

trade with Turkish Cyprus and land their planes at [its] airport, I don't find it sincere that Greek Cypriot planes and ships can use our airports and harbors.”<sup>54</sup>

Second, supporters of Turkey refer to the Helsinki decision of 1999 in order to point out the ambiguous role the EU played in the Cyprus conflict. Initially Cyprus was asked – in line with the accession criteria – to overcome its internal division before joining the EU. But when Simitis, then prime minister of Greece, threatened to block the whole Eastern Enlargement, the member states decided to give up this precondition.<sup>55</sup>

Third, the supporters of Turkey argue that imposing deadlines on one side is not a helpful way of resolving conflict. Martti Ahtisaari: “If there are difficult situations, then it might be appropriate to find an interim solution and to see how things develop.”<sup>56</sup>

The Turkey skeptics were not able to make the recognition of Cyprus by Turkey a precondition for the opening of accession talks. They also failed with their demand to completely suspend the accession talks in December 2006 and achieved only a suspension of eight chapters. It seems unlikely that the EU will agree on further sanctions at the end of 2009 as a response to the ongoing refusal of Turkey to open its ports. It may be deducted from the 2009 progress report that the European Commission does not define 2009 as the last year developments are to be followed up. The Commission says that it is *urgent* that Turkey fulfils its obligation of full non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol; instead of saying it is *necessary*.<sup>57</sup>

The position of the Turkey skeptics is weakened by the EU's ambiguous role in the conflict, the restart of peace talks in Cyprus and the strategic interest in a settlement of the decade-old conflict which would be jeopardized by a breakup of the accession talks with Turkey. Peace talks resumed in September 2008 after the election of Demetris Christofias as president of Cyprus in February 2008. Mehmet Ali Talat, president of the Turkish Cypriot community, and Christofias have been meeting regularly for one year in a constructive atmosphere. Turkish newspapers also interpreted the change of government in Greece in October 2009 as a

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54 *Today's Zaman*, 5 September 2009

55 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 January 2008

56 *Der Standard*, 10 September 2009, <http://derstandard.at>, translation A.B.

57 *The Journal of Turkish Weekly*, 20 October 2009

positive stimulus for the peace talks. The new Prime Minister George Papandreou was the Greek foreign minister from 1999 to 2004. During these five years the relationship between the two countries improved significantly.<sup>58</sup> However, without significant progress toward a solution by spring 2010, “the Turkish Cypriots will likely elect a more hard-line candidate in the place of their pro-settlement leader, Mehmet Ali Talat”.<sup>59</sup>

A break-up or complete suspension of the accession talks is also unlikely because it would damage the EU’s ambitions in Foreign and Security policies. Turkey would probably continue to use its veto power in NATO to block NATO-EU cooperation. At the moment the EU and NATO cannot share counterterrorism information due to an internal political conflict between Cyprus and Turkey. Until 1998 Turkey was a member of the Armament Group of the Western European Union (WEU) and was promised that it would be associated with what was seen as its successor, the European Defence Agency (EDA). But Turkey was later blocked from the EDA as it is not an EU member and it now feels unjustly treated because other non-WEU Armament Group partners such as Norway have been granted association status. Therefore Turkey “now prevents NATO from exchanging information with the EU on the grounds that Cyprus is not a member of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) – a NATO program seen as the anti-chamber for accession to the alliance”.<sup>60</sup> It is also in the interest of the Greek Cypriots to continue to negotiate with the Turkish part of the island and not to break with Turkey’s membership bid because in both cases a two-state solution will become more probable with a further presence of Turkish armed forces, greater insecurity and a much-reduced chance of compensation for property.<sup>61</sup>

### **Declining EU enthusiasm in Turkey**

The Turkey skeptics did not succeed in changing the rules of the game. They could neither frame Turkey’s performance in the reform process or in the Cyprus issue as a reason to legitimize a rupture of the accession negotiations, nor introduce new barriers. The official position of the EU has not changed. It can be concluded that the normative entrapment will also

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58 *Hürriyet Daily News*, 21 October 2009; <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=papandreou-to-announce-new-8216road-map8217-for-turkey-relations-2009-10-21>

59 Reunification or Partition? Think Tank International Crisis group <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=6320&l=1&m=1>, 30 September 2009

60 *Euractiv*, 18 September 2009

61 Cyprus: Reunification or Partition? Think Tank International Crisis group, see FN59

bind the EU to its commitments in the future, provided that Turkey fulfil its part of the obligations. Therefore it lies with Turkey to decide whether or not the country becomes an EU member.

But the discourse of the Turkey skeptics has a negative impact on the Turkish discourse about the desirability of EU membership. Every statement of a Turkey skeptic politician makes headline news. The media rarely mention the fact that these actors are entrapped by the EU commitments of the past and that 22 of the 27 member states - including states such as Great Britain, Spain, Italy, Poland – advocate Turkey’s EU accession. Proposals such as the privileged partnership, the Mediterranean Union or the one-sided approach to the Cyprus issue are perceived as a provocation and an insult. Many Turks feel rebuffed because of their Muslim identity. As a consequence, public support has declined dramatically in recent years from 75% after the opening of accession talks in October 2005 to less than 50%. EU-skepticism has grown in the party system. Opposition parties are increasingly criticizing the membership accession process (Başkan 2009).

This context has increased the political costs for the government of compromising on issues which can easily be exploited by political opponents as a sellout of national interests. Statements of the AKP government confirm the negative impact of the discourse of the Turkey skeptics on the constraints of political action. “However, certain statements made by the EU side and certain attitudes opened the way for a serious erosion in public enthusiasm and agreement,”<sup>62</sup> warned Prime Minister Erdoğan. “The negative voices that we keep hearing from some countries in the EU just spread doubt among our citizens and impede our efforts to continue reforms,” said Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu.<sup>63</sup> His precursor Ali Babacan commented on the ongoing refusal of some member states to open further negotiation chapters: “All these developments have not only led to further frustration in our public but have also led to the decline of public support to EU accession.”<sup>64</sup>

This aspect is also not helpful in terms of pushing through costly reforms. For example, the EU demands the opening of Turkey’s public-procurement market to European firms. That market is worth around 60 billion euros a year according to Professor Cengiz Aktar. Further,

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<sup>62</sup> *Hürriyet Daily News*, 22 June 2009

<sup>63</sup> *AFP*, 6 September 2009

<sup>64</sup> EC-Turkey Association Council, Statement by Ali Babacan, CE-TR 105/08 10 June 2008

Cengiz calculates that the adoption of EU environmental law could cost 140 billion euros. He concludes: “No country would spend that without a clear path to membership.”<sup>65</sup>

### **Turkey’s new strategic options**

In addition to high political and economical adaption costs, partly caused by the ongoing principled opposition to Turkey from some key actors within the EU, the benefits of EU membership also seem to be less obvious. Financial transfers will probably be smaller than for the other new member states, the free movement of persons will probably be restricted for a long time or even permanently. Finally, Turkey has become a confident and economically prosperous regional power in recent years. This opens up new economic and strategic opportunities to Turkey besides the EU. “The Turkey that Europe and America are likely to deal with in the foreseeable future is a different kind of geopolitical animal – one that the Western allies appear to find difficult to get used to. Unlike in the 1960s or even in the 1980s, when Turkey was a lackluster developing country and a supplicant of the West, depending on its rich patrons both economically and strategically, the present-day Turkey is the 17th largest global economy, a member of the G20 and, as of late, a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. In short, the Turkey of today is more self-assured, assertive and strategically independent than during the whole of its republican history” (Ojanen/Torbakov 2009). US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recognized this development, calling Turkey an “emerging global power” (Cagatay 2009).

Ankara’s recent foreign policy activities demonstrate this new international identity and these claims. Turkey plays a crucial role in the stabilization efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Turkey mediated the opening of a dialogue between Washington and Tehran, mediated between Syria and Saudi Arabia and Egypt on the one hand and Israel on the other. Ankara talked to Hamas despite international criticism and mediated in ending Israel’s military offensive in Gaza in January 2009. After the Georgian war Ankara proposed the Caucasus Security and Cooperation with the aim of establishing a regional security regime in partnership with Russia. Under the new foreign policy paradigm, the ‘zero problem policy’ Turkey has significantly improved its relations with its neighbors.

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65 *The Economist*, 3 September 2009

These developments were facilitated by the economic strength of Turkey and its attractiveness as a business partner. Bilateral trade with Syria increased to a volume of 1.1 billion dollars in 2008. This represents a 40 percent increase in comparison to 2007. Turkey aims to increase the volume of bilateral trade with Iraq from 5 billion dollars to 20 billion dollars in a short time. The trade volume between Iran and Turkey has reached 10 billion dollars. One decade ago this figure was only around 350 million dollars. The intensified trade relations with its neighbors in the Near and Middle East have allowed Turkey's exports to grow from 13.22 percent to 20 percent. At the same time the proportion of Turkey's trade with the EU in its total trade decreased from 55 percent in 2003 to 41 percent at the end of 2008. During the same period, Turkish trade boomed from 116.5 billion dollars (in 2003) to 334 billion dollars (in 2008) (Kutlay 2009).

The positive economic development of Turkey in recent years was interrelated with the EU accession process. But even without membership in the end, Turkey's economic prospects are positive, assuming the political stability continues. Turkey represents a huge market with a young population and is an economic hub for the Near and Middle East which cannot be ignored by international investors. The Turkish economy is more robust and more diversified than it was some years ago. Between 2002 and 2006 the growth rate was 6 percent on average. The per capita income tripled between 2005 and 2009 to the current level of 10,500 US dollars.

Turkey plays a special role in Europe's energy security. In order to reduce its dependence on Russian gas and oil, the EU is looking for alternative sources in the Caspian region. The Nabucco pipeline project could one day transport Caspian resources via Turkey to Europe. Turkey recently signed the EU-backed Nabucco pipeline project, but at the same time signed an agreement on the Russian-backed South Stream pipeline project. According to Fatih Birol, chief economist at the International Energy Agency, Turkey's growing role as an energy transit country is at least as important as EU membership. "Turkey will have a growing role with the Nabucco project, which is of great importance for the European Union. Being a bridge in energy is at least as important as being an EU member for Turkey. With its role in energy transportation, Turkey may become one of the leading five countries."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Hürriyet*, 14 August 2009, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=turkey-may-become-a-rising-star-in-energy-2009-08-14>

### **Voluntary breakup of EU ambitions – an unrealistic scenario**

The high political and economic adaptation costs and the new strength and reputation as a regional actor have an impact on the government's perception about the importance of EU membership. The EU is no longer a prominent issue on the political or public agenda.. Babacan, Turkey's Foreign Minister in 2008, declared: "We are not a country which can only maintain its existence by joining a group or becoming a member [of a group]. Turkey is already a very important country on its own with its history and culture."<sup>67</sup> President Abdullah Gül mentioned the possibility that Turkey will hold a referendum at the end of the negotiation process and that the result could be the same as in Norway, where the citizens rejected the accession.<sup>68</sup> Turkey's dispute with Israel on the one hand, and its close relationship with Iran on the other, raised the question as to whether Turkey is moving away from its Western orientation towards the Middle East and the Muslim World. According to Öniş, the foreign policy of the AKP has shifted in the middle of its first term in government from a commitment to deep Europeanization to loose Europeanization along with a parallel shift to a soft Euro-Asianism (Öniş 2009:7). And Ojanen/Torbakov 2009 conclude that the new foreign policy approach has led "on the one hand to a relative weakening of the 'Western dimension' of Ankara's international strategy (including relations with the U.S., accession to the EU and membership of NATO) and, on the other hand, a relative strengthening of the 'regional vector' (including Turkey's ties with its Middle-Eastern neighbors and the countries of the post-Soviet Eurasia)".

But despite the changed opportunity structure of high political and economic adaptation costs plus the new opportunities as a regional actor, a breakup of the accession talks is an unrealistic scenario. First, Turkey would be strategically ill-advised to take the responsibility for the failure. Second, a breakup would jeopardize the stability of Turkey's political system. Existing conflicts between drivers and opponents of the democratic consolidation in Turkey would become more intense. Political instability would be a drain on investors' confidence. Without being anchored in the EU, Turkey's importance as a regional player would be weaker than it is today. The government and the CHP opposition cannot have an interest in the economic and geostrategic implications of a breakdown of the accession talks. The Turkish government has not altered its commitment to EU integration and stresses that its deep engagement with

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<sup>67</sup> *Today's Zaman*, 5 December 2008, [www.todayszaman.com](http://www.todayszaman.com)

<sup>68</sup> *Hürriyet*, 10 October 2009

its Eastern neighbors does not detract from Turkey's determination to join the EU.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, the transformation of Turkish foreign policy is compatible with Turkey's commitment to EU membership (Düzgit/Tocci 2009).

## **Conclusion**

Turkey's membership prospects are much better than the public discourse in the EU and Turkey lead one to believe. The failed attempts of the Turkey skeptics to stop the accession negotiations show the constraining weight of past policy choices. Even resolute opponents of Turkey's membership such as French president Sarkozy or German chancellor Angela Merkel accept the principle of 'pacta sunt servanda'. If the political elite in Turkey communicated the in fact weak position of the Turkey skeptics inside the EU more effectively, it could help to boost support for EU accession in Turkey again. Even though the rhetoric of the Turkey skeptics influences the political constraints in Turkey, a break with the accession process from the Turkish side is an unrealistic scenario. The most realistic scenario is the continuation of slow progress. But the day will come when the EU can no longer delay the final decision on Turkey's membership. And if Turkey does not depart from its ongoing process of democratization, the EU will have no choice but to accept Turkey as one of its members.

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<sup>69</sup> *The Economist*, 25 July 2009, vol 393, page 49

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