

Report Strategy Seminar: New Dynamics for EU-Turkey Relations

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Friedrich Ebert Stiftung EU Office, Rue du Taciturne 38, 1000 Bruxelles*

Background

The negotiations about a possible EU-membership of Turkey stalled since 2010 and led to a situation where doubts on the desirability of such a full membership were expressed by both sides. But since 2015, the direct and indirect consequences of the Syrian civil war set up a whole new political environment for the EU-Turkey cooperation and thus triggered new dynamics of EU-Turkey relations in general and the accession process in particular. The European political crisis, caused by the steeply rising numbers of refugees entering the EU via Turkey in 2015, underlined the strategic position of Turkey to the EU. At the same time, the instability in Syria and the recent tensions between Russia and Turkey pointed the importance of reliable allies out to the Turkish government.

Recognizing the necessity of a deeper cooperation between Turkey and Europe and thereby reconsidering the potential benefits of a Turkish EU-membership, the European member states agreed on providing €3 billion of financial assistance for Turkey, in order to meet the needs of the large number of refugees living within the country, and unfroze the negotiations on chapter 17 of the Turkish accession process. Simultaneously, talks about a solution to the division of Cyprus are progressing and, in doing so, raise optimistic outlooks for the prospect of surmounting one of the most serious obstacles to a Turkish EU-membership.

Against this background, the EU office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) invited H. E. Selim Yenel, Ambassador of Turkey to the EU,

Ms Kader Sevinç, European Representative of the CHP, and Eyyüp Doru, European Representative of the HDP, as well as professionals and experts working with the EU institutions or related organizations from civil society and the private sector to discuss the 'New Dynamics of EU-Turkey Relations'.

Turkey's EU accession – are we back on track?



H. E. Ambassador Selim Yenel

After a short introduction, given by Felix Schmidt, director of FES Turkey, and Uwe Optenhögel, director of the FES EU office, Ambassador Yenel opened the first session, giving an input on the current state of EU-Turkey relations.

Ambassador Yenel welcomed the recent revitalisation of the accession negotiations as well as the progress made with regard to the visa liberalisation agreement between Turkey and the EU. Regarding these positive developments, he concluded that Turkey and the EU "are getting back on track" for Turkey's EU accession.

During the succeeding discussion, he stressed the ability and willingness of the Turkish government to cope with the current influx of migrants, thus solving objections about Turkey's capability to reduce the numbers of refugees coming to the EU, which were raised by some participants. Concerning the accession process, all participants agreed on the fact that overcoming the political division of Cyprus would be a great step for both sides and could boost the recent rapprochement of Turkey and the EU. The current progress regarding this issue allowed the experts present to take an optimistic attitude on the possibility for a future reunification and thus on the prospect of a Turkish EU membership on the whole.

Turkey's internal turmoil – stumbling block on the path to the EU?

The second part of the discussion began with Mr Eyyüp Doru, European representative of the HDP, giving a statement on the current conflict between the Turkish government and Kurdish militias in Eastern Turkey. Mr Doru underlined the brisance of this domestic conflict and the need for a stronger association of Turkey and the EU advocated by the HDP. He suggested that progress in the accession negotiations include the chance of strengthening the democratic structures and the civil society in Turkey which the HDP currently sees endangered by the conflict between the Kurdish minority and the government and by the debate about reforms of Turkey's constitution.

Mr Doru's address was followed by Ms Kader Sevinç, European Representative of the CHP, outlining the CHP's position in respect to the domestic tensions in Turkey. Ms Sevinç also expressed CHP's strong support for an EU membership of Turkey. She advocated the opening of negotiations on further chapters of the accession process and an open dialogue between both sides. These steps, she argued, would not only underline the EU's commitment

to a re-energized accession process, but would also benefit the private sector and civil society, thus consolidating the democratic structures in Turkey. In this respect, Ms Sevinç agreed with Mr Doru on the positive effects of ongoing accession talks for the Turkish democracy.

A solution to Cyprus – the Turkish Cypriot perspective

Finally, Lale Shener, member of the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce, gave some insights into the current state of the negotiations on a reunification of Cyprus. Highlighting the importance of this issue to EU-Turkey-relations in general, she called for an even stronger dedication all parties involved to find an agreement on the state of Cyprus.

The following discussion raised questions about the future of the Turkish-Kurdish peace process, possible development paths of the Turkish political system and further cooperation between the Turkish and the European Parliament. Concerning the inner-Turkish tensions, the tenor of the discussion varied between contributions emphasizing the need for a resumption of peace talks and those pointing out the positive effects of the EU-accession process could have on the domestic tensions. With regard to the latter and once again, the assertion, that the reunification of Cyprus would be an important step towards an EU membership of Turkey, found wide approval. It was emphasized by many discussants, that the current change of the relations between Turkey and the EU offers a great chance for deepened cooperation that would benefit both sides.

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