

# Spain and Turkey during the Spanish EU-Presidency

CIDOB, TESEV & FES - 14th April 2010

## SEMINAR REPORT

### Introduction

In April 2010, the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB), the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Madrid (FES) held the seminar *Spain and Turkey during the Spanish EU-Presidency*. The seminar was organised with the aim of assessing the opportunity for regaining momentum in the Turkish-EU accession negotiations during the Spanish stewardship of the Rotating Presidency of the European Union. Bearing in mind Spain's consistent support for Turkey's bid, the two organisations aimed to seek out and articulate a means for Spain to take advantage of its Presidency to re-orientate negotiations in a more promising direction. The following report is a summary of the main points and submissions made by the guest speakers and other participants and highlights important findings such as the gap between expectations and probable outcomes in Spain's efforts to direct the discourse, the nature of opposition within Europe to Turkey's accession and the centrality of the Cyprus question.

### Opening Remarks

**Jordi Vaquer i Fanes**, Director of Barcelona Centre for International Affairs

In welcoming the participants to the conference, Mr Vaquer outlined CIDOB's commitment to empowering the individual with information on international relations as a means of enhancing democracy. With regard to this, he said that facilitating discussion on EU-Turkey relations was an important element to the accession process because public opinion remains central to this issue. Turkey's accession incorporates identity as well as politics and highlights the question as to what kind of Europe citizens want to see in the future. He also stated that over-stressing the question of Islam's compatibility with Europe is "out of step" with reality as there are already five million Muslims living within the EU and making important contributions to society.

He said that discussions about Turkey must not focus on religion or on the fact that it is a large country and what type of visa and travel rights its citizens would obtain joining the EU, but should focus on the grander questions such as the opportunity for civil society to control its own destiny.

He then reminded participants that, although there is much expectation from the Spanish presidency of the EU, this should be met with a touch of realism

considering the role of the rotating presidency is itself in a state of flux. As it moulds itself into its new role in the post-Lisbon era it gives Spain less freedom to influence the agenda on Turkey's accession.

Despite this he said there were reasons to be generally optimistic about the EU:

- Having finally ratified the Lisbon Treaty the EU is now exiting a phase of introversion with more institutional confidence to tackle bigger global issues like global warming;
- The programmes for Balkan candidates is very clear and each is making progress on reforms;
- An end to the phenomenon of enlargement fatigue is also in sight – France and Germany were not always anti-enlargement and they will not always be anti-enlargement.

**Mensur Akgün**, Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation

Mr Akgün outlined the work that TESEV does and how, as an independent think tank, it receives funding from private sources and while it does on occasion work with the Turkish Government, it never works for it.

He then invited the speakers to discuss, not just the problems involved in Turkey's accession process but also to discuss how to overcome obstacles, to focus on the real potential of the Spanish Presidency and on Spain-Turkey relations in general.

**Lothar Witte**, Director of Friedrich Ebert Foundation Madrid

Mr Witte welcomed the speakers and participants on behalf of FES and thanked CIDOB and TESEV for providing the opportunity to discuss the topics on the agenda. He said that the question of Turkey is a particularly important one for him personally, and for Germany. Today, he said, there are probably about 1,000 Turks registered in Barcelona; there were 1,000 Turks living on the street where he lived in Berlin.

## Panel 1: Turkey-EU Relations: Regaining Momentum

**Chair: Lothar Witte**, Friedrich Ebert Foundation Madrid

**Speaker: Eduard Soler i Lecha**, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs

Mr Soler began by pointing out that although he is currently working as an advisor to the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation his words would not represent any official government stance.

He then opened his contribution on Spain's EU Presidency with a note of caution; he said that EU-Turkey relations had not gained the momentum that was hoped for in the period running up to the Spanish Presidency. However, relations had not reached a depth of crisis that it would be impossible to break out of. On the one hand, there was an onus to respect old commitments made between the EU and Turkey, but in taking stock of the now 51-year-old relationship, it was worth asking if the same commitment to each other remained, or was there a new sense that either or both parties might want to embark on the future alone.

Fifty years ago the Association Agreement between the then EEC and Turkey saw eventual membership as the definite goal. Today, half a century later, the future is not so visible. The last six years have been marked by divisions within the EU on the subject of Turkey's accession as well as mounting frustration within Turkey.

Euro-scepticism has increased in Turkey as a direct result of the slow progress of the negotiations for membership and because of the current opposition of France, Germany and Austria on the Turkey's membership. Talk of Turkey and the EU establishing a so-called privileged partnership as an alternative to membership is not only coming from conservative circles but more recently from progressive circles also.

Despite all this, Mr Soler pointed out that the EU-Turkey relationship, has nonetheless managed to remain quite robust and has avoided any 'train crashes', with both parties learning to live in this permanent state of crisis. He also reminded participants that although there are countries like France and Germany in opposition to Turkish membership, there are still a majority of EU member-states in favour of Turkey's full accession, opponents may be vocal, but they are in a minority.

On the other side, Turkey is also pushing forward its own reform process and making positive policy choices - often independently of the EU especially - in trade and foreign policy. This, in turn, is making Turkey increasingly more attractive to specific groups of European elites.

Against this background, Mr Soler put forward suggestions on how official negotiations can now regain momentum:

- Turkish politicians should bear in mind that the reform process is good for Turkey despite the presence or not of a clear EU membership perspective and that they should continue to push to open chapters.
- Focussing on the sources of support within Europe rather than focusing too heavily on the voices of opposition would be more generally beneficial to Turkey.
- Regarding Germany, Mr Soler said that the government seems to be sticking to its discourse of privileged partnership, while the UK, currently in the midst of a national election, will probably not attempt to shift either Germany or France on their position for the time being.
- He then highlighted the seeds of possible change even within the most adamant opponent camps mentioning President Nicolas Sarkozy's upcoming visit to Ankara which he said will provide Turkey with a precious opportunity for persuasion and seduction and a chance to urge the French President to consider adding important nuances to his position.
- The visit would also represent a chance to woo French business and enterprise and convince them to act as a lobby in some way for Ankara in France.
- Mr Soler pointed out that Ankara remains of great interest to France in one very important policy area - Foreign Policy.
- Turkey is of great importance to France when it comes to dealing with Israel and Syria and France repeatedly seeks out Turkish support and guidance

when approaching the difficulties between these two countries. This is something that Ankara should continue to use to its advantage.

- There is a new and urgent incentive in Greece to reduce military spending and thus an incentive to make genuine progress in a trusting relationship with Turkey.
- Of course Spain is behind Turkey, however, observers should be realistic and recognise the limited space Spain has for pushing the agenda on Turkey as regards France and Turkey. Spain will need French and German support in so many other issues that it cannot isolate itself on this one question.
- One positive role for Spain is to take the opportunity of the Presidency to forward a language of reassurance on the irreversibility of previous agreements and negotiations.

**Speaker: Senem Aydın Düzgit, Istanbul Bilgi University**

Mrs Aydın Düzgit began by looking at the legitimacy of EU-led reform in Turkey. She said that there is no doubt that the legitimacy of the EU has declined drastically in Turkey, while the recent history of military coups and the tensions regarding the separation of the state and Islam all pose very serious problems for reform. EU-led reform and the prospect of membership was central to transformation in Turkey at least up until 2000, however she said, despite more recent reticence on the part of the EU, it still has a role to play.

The AKP party used to promote Turkey as a European country but now approaches foreign policy in a more pragmatic way, enhancing its capability in its own neighbourhood. This foreign policy approach is made up of three pillars:

- Having zero-problems with neighbours
- Being pro-active in its neighbourhood
- Using its Ottoman heritage as a point of reference

Today, Turkey is a much more proactive promoter of peace, its role as mediator between Israel and Syria and ending Israel's offensive in Gaza in 2009 being the most visible examples.

However, there is a problem with consistency. For example, Turkey cannot refer to human rights infringements in relation to Gaza while at the same time welcoming the Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir (wanted by the ICC for crimes against humanity in Darfur). Turkey has also criticised China for genocide in the Xinjiang region but will not accept the term do describe the 1915 organised massacre and forced deportation of Armenians in Turkey.

Another issue of contradiction for Turkey is the issue of universal values. For example, traditionally Turkey's relations with Israel are defined by two opposing forces:

1. The Arab-Israeli conflict
2. The Turkey-Arabic conflict

A shift in tendency has seen Turkey-Israeli relations sour since the latter's invasion of Gaza in 2009, but Mrs Aydın Düzgit warned that this situation must not be left to fall into crisis. However, for its foreign policy to work effectively it must be a

principled policy and for this to be credible Turkey must make transformation at home successful.

Thus, a renewed debate on Turkey-EU relations must take these points into account. It must be a rational debate combining identity issues with the factors that make up the interest-focussed aspects of the arguments on both sides.

## **Discussion**

During the discussion Mrs Aydin Düzgit highlighted a supplementary factor in the growing disillusionment in Turkey with regards to the EU. She said the disillusionment was not just a result of the mixed signals coming from Europe but also a result of a growing suspicion that entry into the EU may put constraints on Turkish society in terms of religious freedoms.

Mr Soler, in response to a question during the discussion, said that an important factor to remember when analysing Turkey's foreign policy and its potential effects on the Turkey-EU partnership is the fact that Ankara is making a concerted effort to normalise relations with Iran. A factor Mr Soler said the EU would see as a red line issue.

Also during the discussion, journalist for the Turkish *Milliyet* Newspaper, İpek Yezdani, reminded the participants of the existence of identity as a major issue and the fear among many European citizens of a potential flow of Turks across EU borders should it achieve membership.

Concluding the panel, Mr Witte highlighted that although debates on Turkish membership were ongoing the idea of a privileged or strategic partnership is still being looked at as a very serious alternative. To which Mrs Aydin Düzgit replied with the retort: "Can someone please define this partnership – doesn't the EU and Turkey already have a privileged partnership?"

## **Panel 2: The Spanish Presidency: Expectations from Spain and Turkey**

**Chair: Jonathan Levack**, Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation

**Speaker: William Chislett**, Real Instituto Elcano

Mr Chislett began by giving a brief overview of the Cyprus issue and the history of events since the Turkish military occupied the Northern part of the island in 1974 and the division of the island between North and South for the last 36 years. Under the banner "No agreement until everything is agreed", he said there had been little progress as both sides have engaged in decades of a blame game. When Northern Cyprus voted in favour of unification under the Annan Plan the Greek Cypriots rejected the same plan in a referendum. The island then joined the EU in 2004, but EU aquis and benefits do not apply in the northern part.

Mr Chislett denied that Spain or the EU as a whole have any leverage of Cyprus. The Spain-Turkey annual summit is a gesture of good will and raises the visibility of Spain's position, however, since 2005 only 12 of the 35 chapters regarding Turkey's accession to the EU have been opened and the only one due to open during Spain's Rotating Presidency is the Food and Safety Chapter. Energy is ready to be opened but is blocked by Cyprus.

He also pointed out a number of important differences between Spain and Turkey that he said are sometimes overlooked when comparing and assessing the

relationship between the two countries. He pointed out that Spain wrote a new constitution when it moved from military dictatorship to democracy, not so in Turkey. There are also different thresholds for allowing smaller parties entry into parliament where there is more space for representation of different opinions in Spain.

Mr Chislett maintained that it was a mistake to allow one part of Cyprus to join the EU and while he said he did not want to appear to be joining the blame game - much of the delay on negotiations on Turkey and on a North-South Cyprus plan have been the result of Greek-Cypriot filibustering.

**Speaker: Sylvia Tiriyaki**, Global Political Trends Center

On opening her contribution, Ms Tiriyaki took the opportunity to thank Spain for not "identifying itself on the construction of 'the other'", in reference to its openness with Turkey and non-fluctuating position on Turkey's EU accession bid. She said that some countries such as Germany, France, Austria and Cyprus continue to block progress however and this will prove a difficult hurdle for Spain in any attempts to advance in Turkey's negotiation process.

She went on to outline the unnecessary isolation the northern part of Cyprus is experiencing as a result of the disproportionate leverage Greek-Cyprus is wielding over its fellow EU members. Greek-Cyprus continues to pressure other EU members not to trade with Northern Cyprus, while it is itself trading with its northern neighbour. There is not official ban on trading with the Turkish-Cypriot community but their isolation is evident. This she believes, is unnecessary and represents a distortion in the process of what would otherwise be bilateral negotiations for a power-sharing solution that did not entail Turkey opening its ports to Greek-Cypriot shipping as a condition, pointing out that in normal conflict negotiations that did not entail the presence of the EU, this requirement would simply be an outcome of reaching a solution, not the condition of reaching a solution.

## **Discussion**

**İrem Köker**, Hürriyet Newspaper

Ms Köker said that she believed that the people on the island wanted a solution but they differ on how they want to see this come about. She also expressed her surprise that the Turkish-Cypriots voted in favour of unification while the Greek-Cypriots voted against, yet they are the ones permitted to join the EU. Thus, the EU must take responsibility for much of the problems with current negotiations.

## **Panel 3: Turkey and its Neighbourhood: The Caucasus and the Middle East**

**Chair: Lluís Foix, La Vanguardia**

**Speakers: Deniz Devrim**, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs

Ms Devrim outlined her brief for the seminar as an overview of Turkey's foreign policy and its relative shift in direction in recent years. She then gave three of the many characteristics of Turkey's approach:

1. Turkey has shifted its foreign policy in many areas from hard security concerns to soft power and commercial interests

2. Turkey is a more independent player than it used to be and its leaders aim to cement Turkey's role as a strong regional actor
3. Religion does not explain Turkish foreign policy

Economic interests as one important focus of Turkey's foreign policy illustrated by Turkey's recent lifting of visa requirements with a number of its southern and eastern neighbours including Syria, Qatar, Jordan, Libya and Lebanon (some of which are on the EU Schengen black list). Russia, Ukraine, Saudi Arabia and Egypt could soon be added to the list.

Meanwhile, EU visa-liberalisation policies towards Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia that came into force in December 2009 and allow citizens of these countries to travel freely into the EU have provoked strong reactions in Turkey. The fact that visa liberalisation was granted to countries not yet negotiating EU membership but is being denied to Turkey, a country that has been an EU candidate for ten years and conducting membership talks for four years, is simply unacceptable to many Turkish citizens and was therefore a problematic signal from the EU.

On the other hand, Turkey-Western relations seem to have entered a more mature phase. Turkey no longer unquestioningly supports Western policies in the Middle East. However, she underlined that taking Islam as an explanatory parameter for Turkey's foreign policy would fail to explain why the AKP government has also improved relations with Russia, and with Armenia, at the expense of "Muslim" Azerbaijan, as well as Erdogan's close friendship with President al-Assad, who represents a symbol of secularism in Syria.

#### **Piotr Zalewski, European Stability Initiative**

Mr Zalewski said he would focus on what he considers the Achilles' heel of Turkey's foreign policy. He said that one major exception to the zero-problems approach towards its neighbours was Turkey's relations with Armenia, and the two major factors hampering a normalisation of relations between the two neighbours are:

- The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and;
- Turkey's efforts to forestall the recognition of the Armenian Genocide of 1915.

Mr Zalewski underlined that Turkey viewed the second factor as a matter of national pride and international prestige but it was, in fact, Turkey's forestalling tactics that were causing its pride and prestige much damage abroad. Mr Zalewski said that a move such as the recent condemnation by Serbia concerning the Srebrenica massacre was still inconceivable in Turkey.

He said that Turkey has continually stoked anxieties among its own population about the possible consequences of a recognition in America, conveying the idea that the relationship with its most important ally is premised on whether US President, Barack Obama recognises the Armenian Genocide.

Mr Zalewski reminded the audience that the EU and most international governmental organisations have openly recognised that present-day Turkey cannot be held accountable for any legal or territorial claims as a result of the recognition of the 1915 genocide.

At the same time, the US cannot afford to offend Turkey as one of its most important allies in Afghanistan and Iraq, and will probably not recognise the genocide fearing the strategic fallout it could precipitate. Furthermore, and despite

the pro-active Armenian lobby in the US, the Armenian government does not have the leverage to force the US on the issue. He finished by underlining that with its campaign of non-recognition Turkey was risking losing its credibility and antagonizing important partners such as Sweden, whose Parliament had voted on a resolution describing the killings of Armenians in 1915 as genocide.

### **Gökçe Perçinoğlu**, Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation

Ms Perçinoğlu introduced her topic for discussion as Turkey and the Middle East. As part of its new more self-asserted foreign policy Turkey wants to be seen as a stable and reliable actor in the solving of problems in its own region. This shift has also been recognised by countries in its neighbourhood. In 2009, TESEV conducted a survey in seven Arab countries in the Middle East testing the perceptions of 2,006 citizens regarding their neighbour, Turkey. The study was carried out in 2009 and covered 7 Arab countries in the Middle East. There were 15 questions in total, the first seven regarding the regional in general and the rest on public opinion towards Turkey. Support for Turkey was as high as 89% in Palestine where respondents want Turkey to assume the role of mediator in the Israel-Palestine conflict. When asked if Turkey was a good example of a model of governance, 67% of respondents agreed. In general, support, sense of closeness and sympathy for Turkey in the Middle East is very strong.

### **Discussion**

During the discussion speakers and participants warned against high expectations for Spain in its attempts to advance Turkey's accession process and in its strength to change the attitude towards northern Cyprus among its fellow member-states. With regards to the upcoming elections in Southern Cyprus Mr Chislett, said that although the right-wing politician Mr Dervis Eroglu is likely to win, there should be no expectation for a withdrawal from negotiations, but rather further stagnation.

On the question of Turkey's stance on the use of the term genocide, Mr Akgün reminded the participants that for a long time there was an obligation on journalists and academics in Turkey to use the term "so-called" when referring to it. He said that while before the Turkish government rejected any talk on the issue, it today took the position that the real facts are still unknown.

### **Concluding Remarks**

#### **Jordi Vaquer**, Director of Barcelona Centre for International Affairs

In his conclusion, Mr Vaquer highlighted some of the key questions that the discussions had thrown up, and asked whether Turkey's visa diplomacy with its eastern and EU-black listed neighbours doesn't, in fact, preclude visa liberalisation with the EU. If Turkey wants visa liberalisation with the EU than it simply cannot abolish its visa requirements for Egyptians, for example. On the topic of the Armenian Genocide, Mr Vaquer highlighted the importance of a fair and factual treatment of history - positive and negative realities alike - in all countries and cultures. Pointing to Spain's own historical treatment of its Jewish population he stressed the necessity for a full recognition of historical fact as a fundamental premise in international relations.



**Rosa Massagué, El Periódico**

Ms Massagué highlighted the most pertinent and urgent questions to be dealt with regarding Turkey's EU accession negotiations. She said that France and Germany's opposition is a major stumbling block while Cyprus also wields important influence over the tempo of the whole process. She said that the debates recognised that Turkey has been moved more recently by interests and pragmatism than by values, but she asked, is this not also the case for the EU. She said the high expectations of some observers, seeing an unflinching ally in Spain, meant that disappointment would be more intense, given Spain's relatively restricted room for manoeuvre and the considerable obstacles the Turkish bed faces.