



EU-TURKEY RELATIONS

Mapping landmines and exploring alternative pathways

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Abstract

Turkey will be a persistent headache for EU leaders in the years to come. The deterioration of Turkey's political, economic and security dynamics will raise pressure. EU leaders will need to make decisions on the continuation of the accession negotiations, the modernisation of the Customs Union and visa liberalisation. The EU may need to react to crises and provocations. The most likely scenario for the future of EU–Turkey relations for the next five years is the continuation of some sort of fragile, conflictual or uneasy cooperation. There is a need to think about the best way to deal with this uncertainty, as EU–Turkey is a minefield. In order not to suffer an unwanted and mutually damaging accident we should know where those mines are laid and how to circumvent or disarm them. Different options and alternative pathways lie ahead of us.

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Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. WHERE ARE WE AND WHERE ARE WE COMING FROM?	4
4. THE KEY PLAYERS	8
4. THE LANDMINES	12
5. THREE SCENARIOS AND FIVE OPTIONS.....	16
6. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	19
FURTHER READING	22
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	23

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The relations between the European Union (EU) and Turkey have a long history. Institutional inertia, unmet expectations and accumulated frustrations all play their part. Relations have been at a low point since 2013.
- Many actors intervene in EU–Turkey relations. Inside Turkey, power is concentrated in the Turkish presidency. While the opposition does not influence Ankara’s decisions, it does shape the views and positioning towards Turkey of European political and social counterparts.
- In the EU, the European Commission has been pushing to maintain or even intensify the current level of cooperation. In contrast, the European Parliament has called for the suspension of the accession negotiations. Not all Member States are equally involved: larger countries, immediate neighbours and those hosting large Turkish, Kurdish and Armenian diasporas have a higher profile in the debates.
- The key players seem to be aware that there are some limits that should not be crossed. A strong network of mutual interest might provide a buffer for most episodes of tensions. However, precisely because the different players have got used to testing the limits without paying a price, they may wrongly assume that they can always go further.
- Relations may be negatively affected by: democratic backsliding, political opportunism, territorial disputes, the Kurdish and Armenian issues, a troubled North Atlantic alliance and the political sensitivities attached to technical cooperation (e.g. migration). Unexpected security or political crises in Turkey or Europe, exogenous factors and miscalculations could provoke an accident. These situations can be managed if there is some level of trust but trust is at an all-time low.
- In the coming years the EU will need to take decisions on the continuation of the accession negotiations, the modernisation of the Customs Union and visa liberalisation. The EU may need to react to crises and provocations of very different kinds.
- The report presents three scenarios (cooperation, conflict, convergence) arguing that the most likely scenario for the future of EU–Turkey relations for the next five years is the continuation of some sort of fragile, conflictual and uneasy cooperation.
- This report presents five options when dealing with Turkey: postponing decisions, opting for a purely transactional relationship, insisting on the idea of membership and the incentives-based approach, banging a fist on the table, and making candid but constructive criticism.
- It indicates seven concrete proposals through which the EU could further engage with Turkey despite the hostile political environment: (1) upgrading the mechanisms to reinforce people-to-people contact; (2) developing programmes to further associate Turkey’s municipalities in cooperation projects; (3) offering Turkey the possibility of setting up a consultative expert group; (4) leaving the veto in place on starting the negotiation of the upgraded Customs Union, reminding Turkey that in order to conclude these negotiations it will have to meet certain political criteria; (5) being specific and blunt in condemning human rights abuses and democratic backsliding; (6) assessing the security, environmental and economic aspects in which Turkey is most vulnerable and offering the EU’s full cooperation and support to address those potential risks before they materialise; and (7) being openly self-critical, accepting part of the responsibility for the current stalemate in relations.

1. INTRODUCTION

Turkey will keep the EU busy in the years to come. It is not just another neighbour with whom relations are complicated. It is not one among many partners. Turkey is more than that. Turkey is an issue that generates so much controversy in many European countries that it becomes part of electoral debates. Bilateral disputes with some EU members – including those over territory and sovereignty – are still to be resolved. Turkish cooperation (or the lack of it) significantly impacts Europe’s security. Its geographical position, as a sort of buffer zone between the EU and the hottest conflict scenarios in the Middle East, is no minor issue. The recent warming of Ankara’s relations with an assertive and defiant Russia, which many perceive as a threat to Europe’s security and a strategic rival, and the tensions in Eastern Mediterranean have added to an already complicated picture.

This report aims to provide the keys to understanding where we are coming from, who the key players are in these relations, what issues may lead towards more conflict and tension, and which alternative pathways can be taken in the years to come. Certainly, not everything depends on what the EU does or does not do. But while the EU is not in control of the decisions taken by the Turkish President, nothing prevents it from evaluating the strategy so far, the alternatives before it, and taking actions to move relations closer to a situation that may be advantageous to both parties.

2. WHERE ARE WE AND WHERE ARE WE COMING FROM?

One of the peculiarities of EU–Turkey relations is their long history. Perhaps inevitably, institutional inertia, unmet expectations and accumulated frustrations all play a part. It all started with the signing of the association agreement in 1963, which was already seen as a preparatory stage for full membership of the then European Economic Community. Critical moments were faced in 1974 (after Turkey’s invasion of Cyprus), 1980 (after Turkey’s brutal coup d’état and the subsequent wave of repression) and 1997 (when Turkey decided to unilaterally cancel the political dialogue with the EU because it was not granted the status of candidate for accession).

The current situation does not look like a temporary crisis from which relations will soon recover. The current period of backsliding started at least as far back as 2013. If we look at EU–Turkey relations since Turkey became a candidate country in December 1999 – that is, twenty years ago – we can identify three different phases separated by major turning points.

- **The golden years (1999–2006):** Two elements allowed Turkey to become a candidate for accession in the European Council of Helsinki in 1999: the victory red–green coalition in Germany one year earlier and the momentum behind Greek–Turkish reconciliation after the two consecutive earthquakes in Athens and Istanbul that triggered a sense of solidarity between the two societies. Helsinki marks the beginning of a virtuous circle: Turkish governments – before and after the victory of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) in 2002 – started focusing on the reforms needed for harmonisation with the EU criteria. The “EU anchor” was perceived as an element that contributed to Turkey’s political stability, creating incentives and giving energy and arguments to a loose coalition of pro-reform entrepreneurs that included members of parliament, civil society, the business sector and opinion-makers. All in all, reforms such



as the abolition of the death penalty and the authorisation to broadcast in languages other than Turkish enabled the country to start meeting the Copenhagen Criteria that are required to become a member (functional democratic governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights and protection of minorities, functioning market economy and harmonisation with the *acquis*). In the case of the political criteria, they are a pre-requisite for starting the negotiations, particularly if, as happened in the case of Turkey, EU Member States may ask the Commission to further assess its compliance. For a while, the Turkish government kept the pace of reforms high. The interplay of the EU's credibility and Turkey's willingness to incur the costs of adaptation to EU rules made political reforms possible. Although there were controversies, the constitutional reform packages that started in 2001 after Turkey's adoption of the "National Program for the Adoption of the *Acquis*" (NPAA) augured a more pragmatic, democratic and inclusive Turkey, closely integrated into the European order. Some of the visible changes of those constitutional reforms and other legal changes included the abolishment of the death penalty in peacetime or the permission to broadcast in languages other than Turkish. All those reforms allowed the European Commission to, albeit ambiguously, state that Turkey fulfilled the political criteria to start negotiations in the progress report of October 2004. The European Council also gave its green light in December that year and negotiations started in 2005. This was a moment of joy, particularly among reformist segments in Turkey, but hopes dissipated soon after.

- **Stagnation (2007–2013):** Political changes in both the EU and Turkey put the brakes on this virtuous circle, but it was a gradual process. A non-unified Cyprus became a full member of the EU after the rejection of the Annan Plan by Greek Cypriots in 2004. From then on Cyprus was able to impose its own conditions. The new conservative leaderships in Germany (Merkel) and France (Sarkozy) were far more reluctant about Turkey's EU membership than their predecessors (Schröder and Chirac). The EU Council blocked several chapters of the negotiation in December 2006 and afterwards Cyprus and France announced the veto on additional ones. In Turkey, political tensions were on the rise due to the AKP's political strategy of shunting aside social and political actors perceived to constitute a threat to the AKP's ideological project: the series of court cases (Ergenekon and Sledgehammer, among others) that followed its sweeping victory in the 2007 general elections were effective in changing the power balances in Turkey. The more the AKP consolidated its power in Turkey, the less it needed the EU anchor. In the past, the AKP resorted to the EU as an argument to justify reforms that, on some occasions, also helped them to weaken political or social rivals (e.g. the army). From 2007 onwards they did not feel the need to invoke the EU's requirements and this allowed Ankara to pursue reforms more selectively. Turkey's disillusionment with the EU also gave leverage to the AKP to gauge the benefits of the reform process for itself in a political climate increasingly captive to political tension and polarisation. Moreover, the EU's economic crises and the Arab Spring infused the idea that Turkey could try to play its own game and that the EU needed Turkey more than the other way around.
- **Backsliding (2013–present):** This new phase is mainly characterised by a degradation of the political situation in Turkey. The repression of the Gezi protests in 2013 and Erdoğan's victory in the first presidential election in 2014 by receiving more than 50

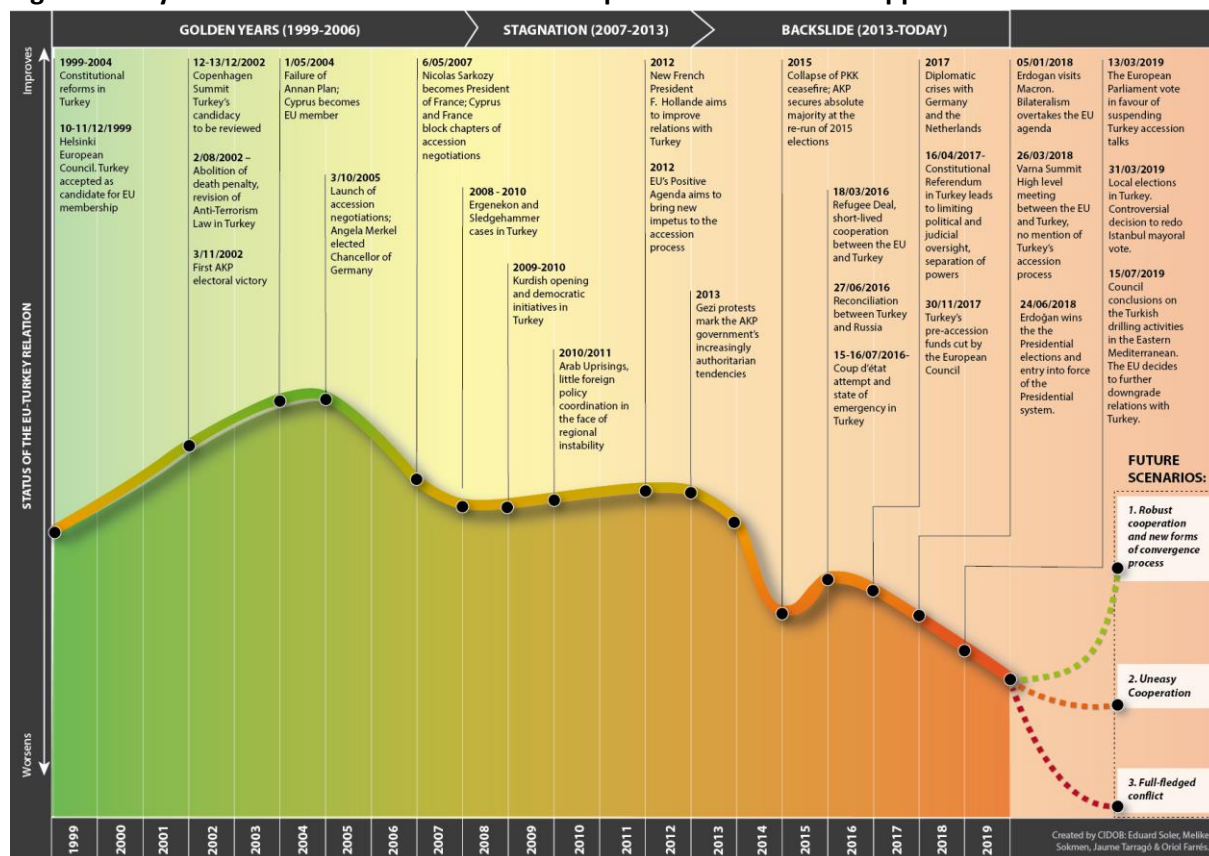


percent of the votes amplified the majoritarian rule and put Turkey under the spotlight. The EU voiced its criticisms in the areas of human rights, justice, and freedoms of speech, press and assembly, among others. However, as the accession process had already ground to a halt, the EU was left with little leverage over the Turkish government. The EU could therefore not prevent the Turkish government incrementally resorting to authoritarian practices. The repression of the Gezi protests, the purges and detention following the 15th July 2016 coup attempt, and the erosion of the separation of powers with the entry into force of the super-presidential system in 2017 were among the many elements that raised concerns among large segments of the population in Turkey and also in the EU. The EU also followed attentively the local elections in 2019 and questioned the reasons behind the repetition of the vote in Istanbul. In light of all those shortcomings, could the EU pretend to carry out the accession process as if nothing was happening? An increased number of voices started saying that the EU should do something. In November 2017 the European Council decided to cut Turkey’s pre-accession funds and in March 2019 the European Parliament (EP) urged to suspend the negotiation process. The decision of the Parliament is the result of a process in which part of the traditional supporters of the accession negotiation process had lost faith in the willingness of the current Turkish government to reform. It is worth noting that while the Socialists & Democrats (S&D) group supported the idea of suspension they also opposed an amendment backed by part of the European People’s Party (EPP) that advocated for termination. Although the decision of the EP is not binding at this stage, it was indicative of the state of mind among European mainstream parties. These kinds of decisions and statements are often instrumentalised by the Turkish President, who increasingly presents himself as a victim of an international-scale conspiracy and expresses his distrust of European and Western partners. On some occasions, he has also threatened to hold a referendum on putting an end to the accession process, though this has never materialised. Despite the generally negative turn since 2013 there have been very clear signs that Turkey and the EU realise that they need each other and that, when facing a risk of destabilisation, they have been able to leave political differences aside. The 2015/2016 migration crisis and Turkey’s currency crunch in 2018 are two examples. In such critical moments, reassuring messages become more frequent and pragmatism gained ground.

The 2019 Commission Report

In line with the report published one year before, rather than taking note of the progress towards accession, the Commission underlined areas where the political backsliding is manifest. The report acknowledged that “accession negotiations have effectively come to a standstill, no further chapters can be considered for opening or closing and no further work towards the modernisation of the Customs Union can be currently foreseen. The Turkish government’s repeated commitment to the objective of EU accession has not been matched by corresponding measures and reforms since then, and the EU’s serious concerns on continued negative developments in rule of law, fundamental rights and the Judiciary have not been addressed”. The report also touched on recent political developments. For instance, it mentioned that “the decisions by the Supreme Election Council to re-run elections in Istanbul as well as to grant the mayorship of individual municipalities in the south-east to second-placed candidates are a source of serious concern regarding the respect of the legality and integrity of the electoral process and the institution’s independence from political pressure”. The idea of Turkey’s backsliding was mentioned 29 times in the report.

Figure 1: 20 years of EU-Turkish relations: from optimism to mutual disappointment



Source: CIDOB (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs)

In 2019 Turkey and Europe's vulnerabilities affect the way in which they perceive each other. The EU seems to have a formidable capacity to accumulate crises without really solving any of them and yet being resilient to their effects. However, its image and reputation are suffering from this state of permanent crisis. Signs of EU weakness – or even worse, desperation, as with the so-called “refugee crisis” in 2015/2016 – were interpreted in Ankara as an opportunity to change the terms of the relationship for its own benefit. The huge and visible differences between Member States also sends the signal to Turkey that exploring bilateral relations rather than following the EU track could be more advantageous.

Turkey's political deterioration and its economic weaknesses are also affecting the way in which the EU looks at Turkey. It is seen as an increasingly unpredictable and unreliable partner and as a container of risks that might spill over into the EU. In recent years many have referred to enlargement fatigue, but in this case an additional Turkey fatigue has grown up with a strong Erdoğan component. Moreover, the direct communication between Erdoğan and the top leadership of the EU became less frequent and more tense, particularly after 2016. Will the new appointments at the top of the Commission, the European Council and the Parliament reset the relations or will this trend persist?

4. THE KEY PLAYERS

The **Turkish Presidency** has more power than ever. Constitutional reform formalised a practice that had already been observed: Erdoğan makes all the important decisions. Some years ago, members of the cabinet with strong views on the EU had some impact on Turkey's European policy. This is no longer the case. Probably, the last time this plurality was visible in the decision-making process was with Erdoğan and the then Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's distinct approaches when negotiating the refugee deal with the EU in March 2016. Davutoğlu was more constructive and prone to compromise than the Turkish President, who was far more sceptical regarding the incentives offered by the EU in terms of reviving the accession process and visa-liberalisation. The entry into force of the hyper-presidential system, together with Erdoğan's strategy of ridding himself of critical and independent voices, explains why the situation in which different Turkish views manifest have become increasingly rare. Moreover, the formal and informal circle of advisors (sometimes referred to as the Pelican group) are often more decisive than the cabinet of ministers or the Parliament.

The **interest groups** able to influence decisions have also changed. Traditional business holdings (above all the members of the Turkish Industry and Business Association – TÜSIAD), liberal civil society and intellectuals have been increasingly sidelined but still benefit from robust international connections. Small and medium-sized companies, many of which are owned by pious Muslims politically aligned with the AKP, became more influential in the early 2000s but even they seem to have lost some clout. On the one hand, this is related to the fact that some of the members were also affiliated with the Gülen movement and its business organisations (e.g. TUSKON). This religious and social movement, now listed as a terrorist group by the Turkish government, forged an alliance with the AKP when the goal was to side-line the Kemalist political, economic and security establishment but their paths started to diverge in 2013 and the movement has been accused of being the driving force of the coup attempt in 2016. On the other hand, small and medium size businessmen have gradually been overshadowed by bigger holdings that are intimately connected with AKP circles. In fact, businessmen that have become richer and more powerful thanks to their proximity to the AKP – and even more so if they are close to Erdoğan himself – are those likely to be granted a greater say. But even in this case it is a very asymmetrical relationship. They need the support of the government more than the other way around.

Turkey's opposition forces do not influence governmental policy but are key to shaping the views of European political and social counterparts. In the last decade, the role of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP) has become even more influential than that of main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP). This is due to HDP activism in many European countries as well as Brussels, and amplified by the incarceration of its charismatic leader, Selahattin Demirtaş, along with other party leaders. However, the local elections in 2019 added a new factor to this equation: Ekrem İmamoğlu, the CHP mayor of Istanbul, who has the potential to shape international views on Turkey. The potential formation of new centre-right parties by Ali Babacan, Ahmet Davutoğlu or other politicians currently abandoning the AKP as well as a possible split between the AKP and the right-wing Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP) could alter opposition politics in Turkey and indirectly affect the relations with the EU.



The impact of the 2019 local elections: the opposition is back

On 31 March Turkey held municipal elections but there was much more at stake than municipal leadership. The pro-governmental coalition lost in most cities including the capital, Ankara, and Istanbul, home to 16 million people. The controversial decision of the Electoral Commission to rerun the Istanbul mayoral election indicated that there was a lot at stake. On June 2019 the citizens of Istanbul went back to the polls and the opposition candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu succeeded in widening the margin of its victory by more than 800,000 votes. He became the political surprise of the year, reenergising the opposition after successive electoral defeats and offering a political alternative to large segments of society. İmamoğlu presented himself as approachable, transparent, conciliatory, and attached to the diversity of this great metropolis. He successfully gained the trust of most Kurdish voters and also capitalised on his reputation as a good administrator, which he built up during his successful management as mayor of the middle-class district of Beylikdüzü. Above all, he stood out as an excellent orator who went out among the people and campaigned in the neighbourhoods, speaking with residents about local problems. The attention he has captured, in Turkey and abroad, is an unwelcome development by Erdoğan. He has not only lost Istanbul but gained a strong political rival. Speculations about whether the new mayor could dispute the presidency in the future intensified. What is certain is that Turkey no longer has one single political face.

The **European Commission's** technical decisions can have major political consequences. The Commission experiences this on daily basis when implementing the Instrument for Pre-Accession, the EU facility for refugees in Turkey, and when it has to prepare the annual reports on the progress (or lack of it) of candidate countries. Several voices and opinions coexist within the Commission. Those most directly involved in dealing with Turkey form part of the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR). Yet, due to the importance of Turkey and the intensity of the relations many other DGs play a significant role. The same can be said when it comes to political leadership. Turkey is one of the issues on which presidents of the European Commission tend to have an opinion. Moreover, in addition to the Commissioner in charge of accession negotiations, other members of the College deal directly with their Turkish counterparts on key topics (e.g. migration, trade and energy) and may voice their opinions on the future of relations. Although different opinions may coexist inside this institution, in general terms the Commission is an actor that pushes to keep or even intensify the current level of cooperation and is not supportive of the idea of putting an end to the accession process.

The **European External Action Service (EEAS)** has a fairly large team dedicated to Turkey. Ankara is a crucial and not always easy partner when it comes to foreign and security policy. Syria is the clearest example of this. The role of the EEAS in this constellation of European actors is to reinforce the strategic dimension of the EU's relations with Turkey and to enable decisions on Turkey to be read in light of their potential implications for EU interests in the Middle East, in the Balkans or in NATO. The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission is a figure with the capacity to lead EU policies on Turkey but also one that struggles to be recognised as a key interlocutor by the Turkish leadership.

The **European Parliament** proudly presents itself as the EU's democratic conscience and, indeed, it is the stage on which Turkey's political developments are discussed most vividly. However, it has also been a platform for right-wing populist parties to voice anti-Turkish narratives along identity and cultural lines. The European Parliament does not have the capacity to halt the accession process but it can shape the debate, and its positions and gestures from time to time provoke harsh reactions from Turkish officials. The European Parliament is where we can observe one of the key developments of the last decade: individual politicians and political groups that were once

supportive of Turkey's accession process because they saw it as the best way to consolidate Turkey's democratic consolidation but have become far more skeptical. In this hostile environment, the European Parliament Turkey Forum, a cross-party non-partisan platform, has remained one of the few channels to promote engagement with Turkey. It will be interesting to see the composition of the new Parliament after the May 2019 European election and which Members of the European Parliament (new and old) decide to focus on Turkey and from which angle.

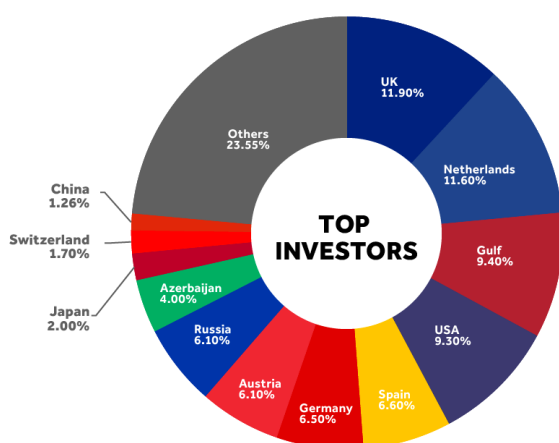
The 2018 report on Turkey approved by the European Parliament in March 2019

Point 21 of this report is the most critical one. 370 MEPs voted in favour of the decision to suspend Turkey's EU negotiations while 109 voted against and 143 abstained. The report "recommends that the Commission and the Council of the European Union, in accordance with the Negotiating Framework, formally suspend the accession negotiations with Turkey; remains, however, committed to democratic and political dialogue with Turkey; asks the Commission to use the funds currently allocated under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II and the future IPA III) to support, through a dedicated envelope directly managed by the EU, Turkey's civil society, human rights defenders and journalists and to increase opportunities for people-to-people contacts, academic dialogue, access for Turkish students to European universities, and media platforms for journalists with the objective of protecting and promoting democratic values and principles, human rights and the rule of law; without prejudice to Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union, expects the relationship between Turkey and the EU to be redefined in terms of an effective partnership; underlines that any political engagement between the EU and Turkey should be built on conditionality provisions concerning respect for democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights".

The **Member States** that play a major role in shaping EU relations with Turkey are determined by a range of factors. A country's weight in EU discussions as a whole, the presence of a large Turkish, Kurdish or Armenian diaspora population and sharing a border are all significant. The United Kingdom was the only large country to consistently support Turkey's integration into the EU, but since the Brexit debate started it has ceased to be an actor in this field. The positions of France and Germany have changed over time and have been largely influenced by domestic political dynamics. Changes of government and elections are key factors in explaining the changing attitudes of Germany while in France, particularly from 2002 to 2007, Turkey became a key topic in the public debate and was weaponised in intra-party quarrels, both in left and right wing parties. At the same time both Paris and Berlin have proved to be highly pragmatic, particularly when it comes to bilateral relations with Ankara. For instance, France managed to preserve and even intensify the economic and security cooperation with Turkey. Counter-terrorism became particularly central from 2015 onwards. Due to the other criteria mentioned above, a few smaller countries play significant roles, such as the Netherlands, Sweden, Austria, Greece, Cyprus and Bulgaria. The Bulgarian government is one of the few voices advocating for the revitalisation of the accession process, largely due to the willingness to preserve or even intensify already good neighbouring relations. For Greece and Cyprus these relations are more conflictual but both believe that keeping the membership gives them leverage and fear that an eventual termination of the negotiations could trigger more aggressive moves by Turkey. The Austrian government is the one voicing its opposition to Turkey's EU membership more vocally. Sweden is known for combining its support to the accession negotiations and a human rights agenda. In the case of the Netherlands, relations with Turkey have become tenser, but the economic ties have prevented an escalation.

Europe’s interest groups play a role both in Brussels and in the Member States, generally pushing to maintain Turkey anchored in the EU and avoiding a train wreck in its relations with the EU which could compromise long-term investments in Turkey. A quick look at the ranking of foreign direct investment in Turkey by country reveals the intensity of EU–Turkey relations. As shown in Figure 2, two EU countries top the list (the Netherlands and United Kingdom with 11% of the total each), and five out of the 10 largest investors are EU countries. Austria invests as much as Russia and Spain’s investment is five times that of China. Moreover, most are long-term investments in strategic sectors such as banking or the car industry. Many corporations in Europe therefore have a key interest in Turkey’s stability and prosperity and are likely to push their national governments to keep or reinforce these relations, for example via the negotiation of a modernised Customs Union.

Figure 2: FDI Inflows to Turkey by Country



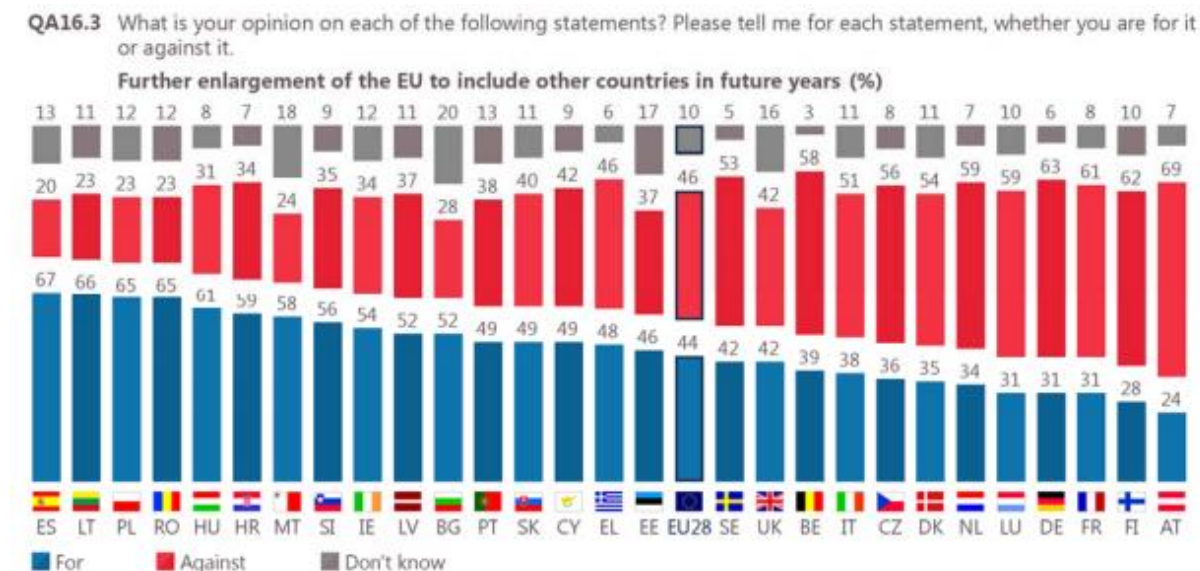
Source: Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey.

Public opinion in most European countries is not particularly keen on further enlarging the EU. According to the Eurobarometer data, this opposition is particularly high among the six founding members as well as in Austria and Denmark. Unfortunately, the Eurobarometer no longer asks the question about Turkey but those surveys that did so show that the level of opposition is even higher and growing. In Turkey this question has been frequently asked by several polling companies. When looking at the evolution since 2004 we observe Turkey’s public opinion to be very volatile (levels of support reached more than 70% in the golden years and have fallen below 50% at the most critical moments). What is relevant is that despite the deterioration of the relations and the fact that hopes for membership faded away, a significant part of Turkey’s population is still supportive of the idea of becoming part of the EU. While public opinion in Turkey tends to reflect rather than explain the state of the relationship, the strong opposition to Turkey’s membership in some EU countries is a factor that national policy makers have taken into account when defining the position of their countries. The case of Austria, whose government opposes any progress in the accession track and qualifies it as a “diplomatic fiction”, is one of the best examples.

Willingly or unwillingly, **external players** also have an impact on EU–Turkey relations. The way they line up on this issue is not a determining factor but, under certain circumstances, they can play a

role. For instance, when Turkey’s relations with the US and Russia deteriorate, the EU anchor becomes more attractive. However, if relations with the US deteriorate to the extent that it is perceived as a wider crisis between Turkey and all of its Western allies, this indirectly affects the EU track negatively.

Figure 3: European public opinion position vis-à-vis enlargement



Source: Standard Eurobarometer 89, Spring 2018

When it comes to Russia, there is no doubt that Moscow is consistently working to weaken the cohesion of the Western alliance and that the warming of relations with Turkey since summer 2016 is part of this project. Specific decisions regarding the anti-missile S-400 (see below) or the development of energy infrastructure have to be analysed from that particular angle. Turkey-EU relations are, thus, interconnected with Turkey-NATO, Turkey-US, NATO-Russia, and EU-Russia relations. In this phase, Russia is exploiting Turkey’s mistrust and frustration towards the EU and NATO to bring Ankara closer to its positions. In other words, Moscow benefits and tries to take advantage from the stalemate in EU–Turkey relations.

4. THE LANDMINES

Turkey–EU relations have been on a very long and tortuous journey and there is no reason to think that the pathway will get any easier in the years to come. This will be a process that is full of obstacles and landmines. Until now, neither of the two parties has seemed willing to put a halt to the accession process and bear the responsibility for the damage that it may inflict on both parties. That being the case, it is crucial to know where the landmines may be planted so that they may be circumvented or, even better, disarmed.

Democracy and human rights make up one of the most evident landmines. The continued abuse of the rule of law and the number of cases opened against dissident voices – including journalists, civil

society activists and members of the political opposition – raise many concerns in the EU. When EU nationals are affected – as has been the case with several journalists – the alarm is greater still. This has often been depicted as Ankara resorting to hostage diplomacy to put more pressure on its EU interlocutors. The EU has channelled its disapproval through a number of political declarations or specific decisions such as cutting pre-accession funds. And yet, the democratic backsliding has not been a strong enough factor to put an end to the relationship. In other words, the political situation remains an obstacle to moving forward but does not seem to prevent a certain level of cooperation. The European Commission stated in its 2018 enlargement report that “Turkey has been moving away from the EU” but did not present any alternative framework of relations in case it moves too far. For its part, Turkey’s authorities seem interested in constantly checking where the limits are. For instance, when President Erdoğan claimed victory after winning the constitutional referendum, he mentioned that he would review Turkey’s suspension of the death penalty. Voicing the position of the EU leaders, Jean Claude Juncker repeatedly mentioned in May 2017 that this would imply crossing the “the reddest of all lines” (see, for instance, Politico, 8 May 2017). The fact that despite some rhetorical escalation the death penalty has not been reintroduced proves that both parties know that there are some limits that should not be overstepped. On the same token, the EU’s awareness that it needs Turkey’s cooperation in fields such as migration or counter-terrorism has cooled down tensions relating to human rights issues despite the constant pressure of advocacy groups.

Politicisation and electoral opportunism are a major concern. In the last two decades there have been many episodes of acute politicisation of Turkey in elections in Europe and of relations with the EU and/or specific Member States in Turkey’s elections. Elections are often periods when those dynamics become more visible and salient. One of the clearest examples was in 2017 when Turkey’s constitutional referendum coincided with a crowded electoral cycle in Europe (Netherlands, France, Germany and Austria, among others). Tensions reached a peak when several European countries banned the organisation of rallies in favour of a yes vote to Turkey’s constitutional reform and in the Netherlands the Dutch police stopped a Turkish minister, Betül Sayan Kaya, when she tried to reach Rotterdam. This triggered riots by pro-Erdoğan protesters. The Turkish leadership compared the position of Mark Rutte’s government with the Nazi period and this also forced many EU countries to express solidarity with the Dutch government. Yet, this case is illustrative that rhetorical escalations do not necessarily lead to full-fledged confrontation: the depth and breadth of interests, particularly at bilateral level, have preserved the existing cooperation. Moreover, once the elections are over, gestures are often made to bring the relations back on track. But the risk in the future is that one of the parties could, at some point, cross an invisible threshold from which turning back would be far more difficult. The tricky thing here is that it is impossible to know where this threshold is until it is being crossed.

Territorial disputes and problematic neighbourhood relations have been a major obstacle for many decades, particularly when it comes to Greece and Cyprus. Both governments claim that it is in their interests for Turkey to remain associated with the EU project. They are afraid that without the EU anchor, Turkey could become more aggressive. Despite the good words, in practice these neighbouring relations have become a major burden for EU–Turkey relations and beyond. Turkey being a NATO member while Cyprus is not further complicates this picture by affecting EU–NATO cooperation as a whole. When it comes to Greece, the main issues to be resolved concern the extension of maritime and air spaces, the delimitation of the Aegean continental shelf, the sovereignty of several islets and rocks and the controversies regarding the range of application of the

Montreux Convention on demilitarisation. Since 1999, Turkey and Greece have been exploring ways to settle all these disputes but they are still far from finding them. The case of Cyprus is of a different magnitude. The presence of Turkish military troops in the north of the island and the fact that Turkey does not recognise the government of the Republic of Cyprus is a major obstacle for EU–Turkey relations. Recently, drilling in the eastern Mediterranean has been added to the list of contentious issues and triggered a series of retaliation measures by the EU (see box below). This connects with a broader geopolitical rivalry in the eastern Mediterranean. Greece and Cyprus have formed closer ties with Egypt and Israel, leaving Turkey feeling increasingly cornered. Energy is a key factor in these diplomatic realignments, but the consequences go much further. In fact, through Athens and Nicosia the EU is becoming part of a game of alliances in the Middle East in which Turkey is on the opposite side.

The Council conclusions on the Turkish drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean (15th July 2019)

The EU decided to downgrade, once more, its relations with Turkey. “In light of Turkey’s continued and new illegal drilling activities, the Council decides to suspend negotiations on the Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement and agrees not to hold the Association Council and further meetings of the EU-Turkey high-level dialogues for the time being. The Council endorses the Commission’s proposal to reduce the pre-accession assistance to Turkey for 2020 and invites the European Investment Bank to review its lending activities in Turkey, notably with regard to sovereign-backed lending”. The timing of this catalogue of measures is significant as it came right after the first shipment of S-400 to Turkey and the increased risk of US sanctions.

The Kurdish issue and the war in Syria. These two issues are increasingly connected. The idea of the Kurdish issue encapsulates the idea that this is a multi-layered factor. Locally, the way Turkey has dealt with its domestic Kurdish affairs (human rights, cultural and linguistic diversity and political expression) has been watched attentively by the European institutions and by certain individual politicians. Coinciding with the collapse of the peace process in 2015 this issue gained prominence once again. The fact that the HDP is an associated member of the Party of European Socialists should also be taken into consideration. It is worth noting that the EU’s statement after the announcement of the electoral rerun in Istanbul also contained criticism of the decision by the Supreme Election Council to declare some elected mayors and members of municipal councils ineligible to take office in south-eastern Turkey. The Kurdish issue is also a domestic concern in many EU countries. Kurdish diasporas are politically and socially very active and the Turkish government constantly puts pressure on European counterparts to stop activities that they argue support or exalt terrorism. In addition, there is a regional dimension to the Kurdish issue that affects the positioning of Turkey and some EU Member States vis-à-vis northern Syria. Some EU governments have backed the Kurdish militias in Northern Syria in the fight against ISIS, in the case of France with a military presence on the ground. Turkey claims that those groups are just an offshoot of the PKK and thus that this support implies backing a terrorist organisation. The three layers (Kurds in Turkey, Kurds in the EU and Kurds in Syria) are interlinked and a clash between the EU and Turkey on any one of them is likely to affect the rest.

The Armenian issue has lost prominence, but may resurface. Despite some progress in Turkey when it comes to critically revisiting its own history, the official position of the Turkish authorities is that the forced displacement and the mass killings of Armenians during the First World War was not genocide. Armenian groups, in response, have been actively engaged in positioning this issue in

parliamentary debates abroad, generally by asking parliaments to formally recognise the events as genocide. France – home of the largest Armenian diaspora – is the country where this issue has gained most prominence and which has served as the example for similar lobbying activities in other countries. In the case of Germany, the almost unanimous vote in the Bundestag in June 2016, recognising the Armenian genocide, pushed Turkey to recall its ambassador and Erdogan also qualifies as traitors those MPs with Turkish heritage who had backed the vote. Despite some political victories, the Armenian lobby has been unable to transform the recognition into a prerequisite for Turkey to become a member of the EU or to implement legislation condemning genocide denial. In recent years, this issue has lost some visibility in national and European debates but it may resurface again. The fact that the AKP government needs the support of the right wing Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP) in the Turkish Parliament is not a good sign in terms of favouring reconciliation.

The Western alliance has seen better days. A valid statement in general, but even more so when it comes to Turkey. Turkey's grievances relate to what it perceives to be a disloyal attitude among several NATO members, including the US, when it comes to northern Syria, but also regarding the lack of support when the country suffered a coup attempt in 2016 that involved Turkish officials posted in NATO. Turkey's determination to complete the purchase of the Russian-made S-400 air missile defence system is likely to irritate relations even further. It is worth mentioning that many central and eastern European countries – some of which are fairly supportive of Turkey's accession process – see Russia as a major security threat. The perceived rapprochement between Ankara and Moscow therefore risks eroding some of the remaining support for Turkey in the EU. Until recently, Turkey's membership of NATO was able to buffer tensions between Turkey and some of its members. In the months to come we will see whether this is still the case or whether frictions in the alliance spill over to the EU.

S-400: What's next?

Frustrated by the lack of success in purchasing an air defence system from the US, Ankara decided in 2017 to opt for the Russian alternative. Despite repeated warnings from the US, Turkey seems determined to deploy the Russian-made S-400 missile defence system. NATO and US officials warned against such a move, explaining that this would be incompatible with the NATO system. As a result, Turkey shall be excluded from the F-35 stealth fighter program. This may be just the first consequence of the deal and further sanctions are not excluded. A spokesperson of the State department said that Turkey could be exposed to sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). Turkey seems to believe that at the end this can be resolved at the highest level by Erdogan and Trump themselves. This was the message conveyed after the G-20 meeting in Osaka. Time will tell if Ankara miscalculated and underestimated the animosity of members of the US administration and the Congress that may seize this opportunity to send a strong message to Turkey's leadership. If this happens, this is likely to further irritate Turkey-NATO relations and this may negatively affect EU-Turkey relations as well.

Customs Union, visas and refugees: technical cooperation can also be politically sensitive. At a time when the accession process is not likely to be revitalised, the efforts to safeguard and eventually strengthen EU–Turkey cooperation on technical issues of common interest are continuing. Yet, technical cooperation is not immune to political turbulence. The clearest example is the upgrading of the Customs Union's suspension for political reasons. Although experts seem to agree that this upgrade would benefit both economies, some EU countries have refused to start the negotiations

pointing at political rather than technical obstacles. After the European Parliament elections there may be attempts to revamp this initiative but many politicians interpret this as a “gift to Erdoğan” and oppose any step in this direction. Those voices do not take into consideration that the modernisation of the Customs Union would mean Turkey needed to tackle public procurement and other sectors that require meaningful governance reforms. They do not seem attracted by the potential benefits of this for the economies of both Turkey and the EU. The other concrete cooperation that is significantly suffering from political pollution is visa liberalisation, which faces opposition on both sides. Turkish politics do not favour compliance with some of the conditions imposed by the EU (mainly reform of the anti-terrorism legislation), and in Europe the rise of populist and xenophobic movements may push several European countries and perhaps the European Parliament to object even if Turkey fulfils the prerequisites. Finally, a third leg of this politically sensitive cooperation concerns refugees as well as border and maritime surveillance. Unilateral moves from Turkey or the EU to review the terms of the current cooperation could trigger spiralling tension.

These seven issues are known landmines. The EU, Turkey or both may move towards them but, being fully aware of the consequences of stepping on them, they are able to stop before it is too late. The real danger may arise from hidden landmines that remain unidentified. In other words, unexpected security or political crises in Turkey or Europe, exogenous factors and miscalculations could provoke an accident. These situations can still be managed if there is some level of trust. The problem here is that trust is at an all-time low.

5. THREE SCENARIOS AND FIVE OPTIONS

As we have seen in the first pages of this report, there have been ups and downs in EU–Turkey relations and the changes of cycle may be the result of decisions taken on either side. So far, relations have proved to be quite resilient due to two factors: the key players seem aware that there are some limits they should not overstep, and a solid net of mutual interest exists that is able to buffer those episodes of tensions. However, precisely because the different players have got used to testing the limits, they may wrongly assume that they could always go further. In order to avoid miscalculations and be fully aware of the consequences of the decisions to be made we should know what is at stake, what the game-changing situations are and what the different scenarios look like. In this section, three different scenarios are outlined while envisaging five different options for the EU when dealing with Turkey in the years to come.

Before outlining those scenarios and options, it is worth remembering that the EU did reflect on the future of this relationship in the European Union’s Global Strategy from 2016. This document conveyed four clear messages: challenges such as migration and terrorism are to be addressed together; the resilience of Turkey cannot be taken for granted; the EU’s influence is unique; and it is in the EU’s interest to promote political reform, the rule of law, economic convergence and good neighbourly relations. The fact that the strategy elaborates on this particular country is indicative that Turkey is not an ordinary neighbour. Its size (82 million people, the world’s 17th largest economy), location (at the crossroads of Europe, the Black Sea, the Caucasus and the Middle East) and the intensity of already existing relations in terms of trade, investment, security and people-to-people contacts, explain why decisions on Turkey are particularly important and why crises in EU–Turkey relations attract so much attention. Previous research (see for instance the FEUTURE project

and the recommended readings at the end of this report) has outlined three alternative futures for EU-Turkey relations and identified the key drivers that could push relations in one direction or another. This could be simplified in three ideal-type scenarios:

- **Convergence:** this implies Turkey becoming a member of the EU or getting closer to it;
- **Cooperation:** Turkey and the EU would work together in different sectors and with different intensity but independent from the accession negotiations;
- **Conflict:** understood as a situation in which Turkey and the EU would not only compete but would actively work to undermine each other's interests.

For the next five years, convergence is off the agenda – mainly due to political reasons – and the choices made by the EU and Turkey will largely determine whether cooperation or conflict prevails. The most likely scenario is one in which cooperation coexists with episodes of tension that do not escalate to a situation of full-fledged conflict. Both parties might normalise an easy, conflictual and fragile cooperation. There seems to be a consensus that Turkey's geopolitical and strategic importance, given its large population, the intensity of its economic and investment links with the EU, and their common interests in issues such as security, mobility and energy, particularly in the shared neighbourhood, are likely to continue buffering the risks of relations completely breaking down.

Taking into consideration that this is the most likely scenario, the report suggests five different ways in which the EU could approach Turkey. In other words, there are different ways to advance in this minefield and the incoming EU leadership will need to decide – and perhaps test – which of these five options is able to produce the best results:

Option 1. Comfort zone: keep pretending. The easiest of all options is not to make major decisions, to stay the course and see how things evolve. The probabilities of taking this path are quite high because of institutional inertia and because with so many positions to reconcile making no decision may be the minimum common denominator. Those advocating for this attitude may also believe that time can solve almost everything and that it is better if others are the ones to make the difficult decisions. One of those difficult decisions relates to the continuation or suspension of the negotiation process. From this standpoint, it would be unwise to assume responsibility for a decision that may provoke satisfaction in the short term but could severely damage cooperation with Turkey. It is not in the EU's interest to see the economic collapse of Turkey and a decision to suspend the accession negotiation process would only add uncertainty to an already fragile situation. This passive attitude has been the dominant one in the EU and may not change in the years to come. When important decisions are approaching, EU leaders may opt to delay or circumvent them, asking for additional assessments and transferring the responsibility to technical bodies. However, this attitude entails a major risk. Turkey is likely to react to European passivity by continuously testing its limits and the pressures on the EU to act are likely to increase.

Option 2. Resignation: a purely transactional relationship: This position has many similarities in terms of results to the previous option but there is a major difference: it implies that the EU and its institutions should stop pretending Turkey is an ordinary candidate and that the goals of the accession process are to transform the country and converge with the EU. It involves what may be called “ending the hypocrisy” or “putting an end to the fiction”. Eventually this may not necessarily mean withdrawing from the accession negotiation process but rather forgetting that it exists. While in the previous option the EU is still required to voice its criticisms of Turkish government actions

that go against the Copenhagen Criteria, in this case those criticisms would be kept at a minimum or used as a bargaining chip. This attitude does not exclude cooperation but it would be a very particular kind of cooperation: a purely transactional one, with no normative dimension attached to it. In practice, this would mean entering negotiations on a modernised Customs Union or a new refugee deal with them emptied of politically sensitive conditions. In fact, this is a development Turkey may welcome and some in the EU and its Member States may silently approve. Before adopting this stance, the EU should also calibrate the costs it would entail. The EU would lose all credibility among the sectors of Turkish society that have been the major supporters of strengthened relations. In addition, the EU would be setting a precedent for other candidate countries, its neighbours and other global partners. Precisely because Turkey is a topic that raises so much interest worldwide, any step in that direction will be duly noted inside and outside Europe.

Option 3. Idealism: keep hoping. This is the exact opposite of the previous option. Many of those who could have identified themselves with the idea that the EU could positively transform Turkey have lost hope about the willingness of the Turkish authorities to reform or about the effectiveness of EU incentives. However, some resist giving up, among other reasons, because disengagement means abandoning those segments of society that suffer the consequences of democratic backsliding, which would give Erdoğan an even freer hand. The results of the Istanbul elections could reinforce those claims. This position is often reinforced by strong emotional ties with Turkey and also by the idea that accepting defeat would mean all past efforts have been useless. This is why those positions tend to be more frequent among people and institutions that have invested lots of energy in Turkey. Their ideas may not resonate strongly at the very top of the decision-making process but they are still heard in the EU circles where Turkey is being discussed. When it comes to concrete suggestions, these voices are likely to suggest that the EU must put more incentives on the table and regain the trust of both the Turkish authorities and even more important, Turkish society. If the EU decides to again explore an incentive-based strategy, it should look very carefully at two elements: substance and timing. The incentives offered should meet the expectations of the counterpart; otherwise mistrust and frustration will only grow. The EU should avoid offering these incentives immediately after a round of threats from Turkey as this could be misinterpreted as a sign of weakness and the whole exercise would be counterproductive. Instead, the right moment to offer them – if there is ever the consensus to do so – is when Turkey is in a delicate situation and even more so if other allies are not offering Ankara the help it needs. In the future some occasions may arise to give this a try.

Option 4. Testosterone: banging a fist on the table. This may be the natural reflex if Turkish authorities keep testing where the EU's limits lie. Enough is enough, some voices may say, time to send a strong message, to strike back and be taken seriously. This attitude is likely to gain traction after an escalation of tension with Turkey, either with the EU as a whole or with some of its Member States. The EU could unilaterally decide to terminate the negotiation process. Some may even go further and call for sanctions. The EU should be prepared to face this kind of situation, to identify in advance the elements that could prompt such a reaction and to be fully aware of the consequences of entering a conflict zone. The risks are of a very different kind. The purpose of these punitive actions is not self-satisfaction but rather to force a change of attitude in Turkey. Yet, Erdoğan is unlikely to publicly backtrack. What is more, he may try to take advantage of the situation. He will blame the EU for any problem Turkey faces (starting with the economic crisis) and will say that this confirms that some in the EU have been conspiring to get rid of him and weaken Turkey. He will appeal to the nationalist sentiment and will build on the long-term frustration with the EU and the

West. He may retaliate, remembering that refugees have become Europe's Achilles heel. The position of the Turkish diasporas in Europe, some of which are politically aligned with Erdoğan, is another sensitive issue. The other risk is the lack of unity and solidarity in the EU. Any action of this kind may end up being a flash in the pan and the threat of termination may not materialise. The costs of an abrupt divorce are very high – this would not only be about accession as it could even affect the viability of the Customs Union – and lengthy bureaucratic processes may be another major deterrent factor in the face of a decision to institutionally detach from one another, particularly if the two parties are not able to agree on the alternative framework of relations.

Option 5. Candid but constructive criticism: the art of the possible. There is always a middle ground between doing nothing and full escalation, between pure idealism and blunt cynicism. This is an option for those who have lost faith in Erdoğan but not in Turkey; those who believe the EU can have an impact on Turkey but are aware that this impact will be limited and that timing will be crucial for it to be effective. Assuming that the game is not over also means conveying the message in Europe that the EU should keep engaging with as many actors as possible in Turkey and, above all, treat Turkey differently from other neighbours. This may mean being more vocal in expressing criticism about political developments or legislation in Turkey. When Turkish authorities react by saying that the EU has double standards, Europe could reply that indeed its standards on Turkey are different from those on, say, Egypt or China because the EU considers Turkey part of the family and many in Turkey see Europe as family too. European leaders may convey the message to the Turkish authorities and the population that they are willing to listen to their criticisms of the EU and to tackle those deficiencies together. For the EU to be credible on this, it will have to overcome internal resistance and approve the start of a modernised Customs Union and review the issue of visa facilitation. It should also increase funding for civil society and people-to-people exchanges to convey the message that it cares about Turkey. One of the things Turkey's current leadership cares about most is recognition. It is well-known that the Turkish President misses the times he was invited to join the family picture after EU summits. There is room to think up imaginative solutions to make Turkey feel included in discussions of issues that affect it directly. In fact, these platforms may be the best place for this constructive criticism to be convened. As with the previous options, this one comes with risks attached: if Turkey receives candid messages from the EU institutions and softer or contradictory ones from some Member States there is a risk to EU consistency, and patience may run out when immediate results are not produced. Constructive criticism is a long-term investment aimed at preserving some bridges while not losing credit.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

When it comes to Turkey, the European Parliament constituted after the 2019 elections and Von der Leyen's Commission will inherit a long story of frustration and missed opportunities. EU–Turkey relations are strained and will not improve any time soon. It is therefore crucial to prevent it from getting worse and that any damage caused by this deterioration is not irreversible. EU decision-makers should be reminded that Turkey is more than Erdoğan, that breaking a long and intense relationship is obviously more difficult and harmful than a superficial or recent affair and that a sustained conflict would be costly for both Turkey and the EU.

In the coming years the discussion on whether the EU should suspend the accession negotiations will resurface. The modernisation of the Customs Union and the visa liberalisation issue will also be

waiting on the table. And the EU may need to react to crises and provocations of very different kinds. Gas drilling, for instance, has become the most immediate challenge. EU leaders will be asked to make decisions and, certainly, one possibility is to postpone them. Sometimes this will not be possible and events in Turkey or in the EU may increase pressure to be more explicit. Democracy and human rights will be a recurrent topic. Concerns about Turkey's economy may intensify, with Europeans increasingly aware that a collapse would be very bad news for the EU. And let us not forget the regional situation. It is important to remember who Turkey's southern neighbours are: Syria (the war is not over and we could see a new humanitarian crisis), Iran (the US sanctions and the mounting tension in the Gulf are very bad news for both Turkey and the EU) and Iraq (a country that seems to be recovering but which is squeezed by destructive regional and global rivalries).

This report argues that the most likely scenario for the future of EU–Turkey relations for the next five years is the continuation of a cooperative environment in areas of common interest amidst political drivers that will have a high and mostly negative impact on the relations. This situation may be referred to as a fragile, conflictual or uneasy cooperation. EU–Turkey relations have a long history behind them and in the next five years they are sure to face critical moments. Independently of how things evolve in Turkey, this report proposes seven concrete actions that could improve the EU's capacity to engage in more productive terms with the Turkish authorities and with Turkish society as a whole.

(1) Upgrade the mechanisms to reinforce people-to-people contact. This is easier said than done but the EU should appreciate the fact that Turkey is a very diverse society and that despite the hostile circumstances, a significant part of its citizens are still willing to preserve or even upgrade the links with the EU. The EU should capitalise on the resilience of those ties. From the EU side this will require a more robust budgetary line and specific visa-facilitation mechanisms for people involved in these cooperation mechanisms. The EU could also ask the European Union delegation in Ankara to identify mechanisms to reach out to segments of the population or the civil society that have been less exposed to the EU and should make an additional effort to connect with younger generations.

(2) Develop programmes to further associate Turkey's municipalities with the EU. Although local governments have already taken part in decentralised cooperation efforts there is room to go further. The new political scenario, with the opposition governing most cities, may increase the attractiveness of such cooperation programmes in the eyes of some EU policy-makers. However, these efforts could be counterproductive if they are perceived by the Turkish leadership as an attack. This is why the EU should make additional efforts to persuade municipalities that are governed with the AKP (Gaziantep, a city that has made a tremendous effort in hosting Syrian refugees, is a good candidate) to engage in this endeavour. This cooperation should start focusing on urban issues but could include a broader political dialogue on the future of EU-Turkey relations and it should also involve EU municipalities as equal partners in this new agenda for cooperation.

(3) Offer Turkey the possibility to set up a consultative expert group to provide continuous advice to both parties. Both the EU and the Turkish government rely on their own technical expertise and they have well-trained specialists working for them. What would be new and ground-breaking would be the creation of a joint body made up of Turkish and EU experts ready to support either Turkey or the EU (or both of them) by proposing technical solutions, conducting studies or coming up with new ideas. This expert group could be asked to suggest ways to bring the two parties closer when positions differ greatly and to come up with constructive proposals. An example could be the controversy on territorial waters in Cyprus and drilling rights. The studies produced by this

consultative expert group could focus on very technical issues on specific sectors but they could be asked to look at the broader picture. For instance, they could be asked to quantify the benefits of EU-Turkey relations, the potential impact of the entry into force of an upgraded customs union or, why not, estimate the costs of a rupture. This new platform could also be tasked to propose modalities to better anchor Turkey in the institutional mechanisms where issues that directly affect Turkey are discussed, which is a long unresolved issue that created grievances in Ankara.

(4) Lift the veto in place on starting the negotiation of the upgraded Customs Union. The General Affairs Council of 26 June 2018 stated that “no further work towards the modernisation of the EU-Turkey Customs Union is foreseen”. In light of ongoing tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, reviewing this stance has become even more difficult. Timing matters but, in any case, the option should remain on the table. There are compelling arguments to initiate the negotiations or express the willingness to do so. One of them is that this is something on which those who want to suspend the accession process and those who want to revamp it could eventually agree. A second powerful idea is that if this Customs Union 2.0 ever comes to force, it will benefit both economies in a moment in which both also need a perspective of growth and will be a powerful message directed to those that advocate for protectionism and trade wars. A third key argument is that for this upgrade to happen, Turkey will have to make politically-meaningful reforms, among others, on judicial reform and public procurement. In a moment in which the accession incentives have lost their appeal, the Customs Union negotiations could be the basis (the only one left) to recuperate part of the leverage lost after years of paralysis and mistrust and to reenergise the relations in a constructive manner. Finally, the EU should think that it has little to lose. If once the negotiations start Turkey does not reform, or adopts a more conciliatory attitude, the upgrade would not happen and the negotiations could be stopped.

(5) Be specific and vocal in condemning human rights abuses and democratic backsliding. Some may be tempted to soften the criticism as a sign of good will. This would send the wrong message. On the contrary, the new EU leaders and institutions should denounce abuses and ask Turkey to address them, while acknowledging that the bar is higher for Turkey than for other neighbours because it is treated as part of the European family and because it already proved not so long ago that progress is possible. In that sense, if there are some positive developments, they should also be praised and encouraged.

(6) Assess the security, environmental and economic areas in which Turkey is most vulnerable and offer the EU’s cooperation and full support to address potential risks before they materialise. It is important to convey the message that it is not in the EU’s interest to see a politically unstable, economically weakened and socially polarised Turkey. This assessment should be done in cooperation with the Turkish government and it could be one of the tasks assigned to the consultative expert group proposed above. The goal is to jointly assess the vulnerabilities and design mechanisms of support to increase Turkey’s resilience. Some of the issues on the immediate agenda include the humanitarian situation in Idlib, the long-term challenge of integration of Syrian citizens, the impact of the US sanctions on Iran (and eventually on Turkey itself) or Turkey’s energy dependence.

(7) Being openly self-critical. Last but not least, the EU should accept part of the responsibility for the current stalemate in relations and be specific about what it can do better. For instance, if the EU institutions were more vocal in denouncing human rights violations and the deterioration of democratic conditions inside the union, its criticisms of Turkey would be far more legitimate. It

should also acknowledge that Turkey may have felt abandoned by the EU at critical moments such as the attempted coup.

EU–Turkey relations are a minefield. Tension may increase because of different views on democracy and human rights, political opportunism, territorial disputes, the Kurdish and Armenian issues, a troubled North Atlantic alliance and the political sensitivities attached to technical cooperation as it happens with the upgrading of the customs union, visa facilitation or cooperation on refugees and border surveillance. One of the assets of this old and well-researched relationship is that we know where the landmines are and, to a certain extent, key players have learnt to avoid them. But this may not be satisfactory. Both parties should work to jointly disarm those landmines or at least some of them. There is a need to regain trust and come up with ideas to increase the resilience of the relationship. The risk of some sort of accident is apparent and trust is at an all-time low. The EU and Turkey are already surrounded by too many problems. Adding a new one to the list does not seem to be a wise option.

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