

EU-Turkey relations 43 years on: train crash or temporary derailment?

EPC Issue Paper No.50

November 2006

By Amanda Akçakoca

EPC Issue Papers reflect the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the EPC.

Table of Contents

Foreword by Antonio Missiroli	5
Introduction	7
I. Background: EU-Turkey relations to 2006	8
II. Domestic perceptions and prospects	16
Conclusions	26
Endnotes	28
Executive summary	29

About the author

Amanda Akçakoca is a Policy Analyst at the European Policy Centre.

Foreword

By Antonio Missiroli

The history of EU-Turkey relations has been dogged by half-hearted commitments, recurrent second thoughts and frequent non-compliance – on both sides.

All this may now come to a head given the stalemate in the negotiations aimed at settling the row over Turkey's refusal to ratify the so-called Ankara Protocol, under which it is obliged to open its air and seaports to Greek Cypriot planes and ships. Or maybe not: the two sides may carry on as they have done in the past, thus postponing indefinitely a moment of truth which currently looks too challenging for both.

Shortly before the opening of formal accession negotiations in October 2005, it was not uncommon to hear jokes about a dream scenario in which the EU and Turkey would negotiate...forever. This would enable both Brussels and Ankara to extract the maximum possible benefit from the process without having to cope with the implications of its outcome. The EU would keep using conditionality (to varying degrees and speeds) to influence Turkish domestic and foreign policy, while reform-oriented Turks would keep using the prospect of EU membership as a tool to modernise the country.

Unfortunately, the enlargement process does not work like this. Sooner rather than later, deadlines are set, promises have to be kept and consequences drawn. Moreover, opponents of the process (on both sides) are already trying to undermine it by pre-judging its outcome or precipitating its downfall – hence the current crisis and its still uncertain solution.

Turkey's future accession to the Union is a highly controversial issue inside the EU: all opinion polls show how deeply split the European public is over this issue, as are governments and parliaments across the continent. Turkey represents, at one and the same time, a huge challenge and a huge opportunity – and it is either, according to what side of the argument you are on.

The sheer dimension of Turkey (its size, population, and level of economic and social development), its geopolitical location, and its cultural and religious identity can all be seen as strategic assets or structural liabilities. In other words, it is extremely difficult to base the debate on an objective assessment: to paraphrase a famous saying, where one stands depends on what one sees.

It is therefore useful, at this critical juncture, to revisit the record of EU-Turkey relations, evaluate the state of play, and assess possible scenarios for the immediate future. This is what Amanda Akçakoca's paper does, on the eve of a difficult decision for both Brussels and Ankara. It is published under the auspices of the European Policy Centre's Enlargement and Neighbourhood Europe programme, run in cooperation with the King Baudouin Foundation.

It would be very unfortunate if the whole process was now derailed because of Cyprus, an issue on which – Turkish misgivings notwithstanding – the EU and the entire international community did not do all that they could to solve the problem before the Republic of Cyprus entered the Union. Yet it would be wrong to assume that, were it not for this intractable issue, the process would proceed smoothly to an inevitable happy ending.

On the contrary, it would (and will) still be fraught with a number of difficulties, linked both to the merit of the negotiations – some chapters are likely to prove quite problematic anyway – and to the method itself.

As compared with other recent applicants, Turkey seems to have trouble accepting its position of *demandeur*: more often than not, Turkish officials give the impression of regarding negotiations with the EU as a bargaining process between equals, in which a compromise has to be found somewhere in the middle.

This is not, of course, the reality of the accession process, which is extremely uneven and intrusive. If this reality is not accepted and explained to the Turkish public, it is likely to lead to major setbacks and backlashes. This has already happened, at least in part, but it could get much worse.

Finally, there is broader problem raised by Turkey's application. The latest EU enlargements, including the one to Bulgaria and Romania, have largely dealt with the legacy of the Soviet Empire. The next one(s) will instead deal, in many ways, with the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, which raises a distinct set of problems and dilemmas.

The current candidate countries, however, include the former 'imperial' power – with some of its previous 'subjects' joining the queue, but with others already sitting on the other side of the negotiating table.

This is to say that, on top of the many difficult issues that have to be addressed by both sides, negotiations between the EU and Turkey are unlikely to follow an eminently functional and technocratic path, marked by a sequence of criteria and deadlines to be met. This approach is, in fact, already showing its limits in this context.

Turkey's accession process is highly political and requires strong and sustained political will on all sides if it is to continue and eventually succeed. Even its possible failure, or suspension, can only result from fundamentally political decisions – although preferably ones agreed upon by both parties, so that relations can continue to develop constructively, albeit on a different basis.

Right now, in late November 2006, such strong and sustained political will is not at hand, either in the EU or in Turkey: both are divided and uncertain over the future – over their own and their common future.

Antonio Missiroli is Chief Policy Analyst at the European Policy Centre.

EU-Turkey relations 43 years on: train crash or temporary derailment?

By Amanda Akçakoca

Introduction

Just over a year ago, after months of debate and controversy, the European Union opened accession talks with Turkey. It was a defining moment for both sides.

Thirteen months later, relations between the two have deteriorated to such an extent that Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn's much-quoted fears of a "train crash" could be on the brink of becoming a reality because of Turkey's refusal to open its ports and airspace to the Republic of Cyprus.

There is also mounting concern in the EU about the slowing pace of reform in Turkey, highlighted in the European Commission's recent annual progress report on the country, and clear signs that support for EU membership in Turkey is falling dramatically, with recent opinion polls suggesting it is now below 40%.

To make matters worse, all this is happening at a time when Turkish relations with the United States, Ankara's long-time friend and strategic partner, are going through a tumultuous patch as well.

The domestic situation in Turkey is also deteriorating, with the government and security forces struggling to keep the peace in the south-east of the country following a renewed bout of violence and terrorist attacks by the separatist Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) earlier this year; a rising wave of nationalism; and heightened tensions in the run-up to both presidential and parliamentary elections in 2007. The government is also coming under increasing scrutiny from the country's secular establishment, amid fears that it is attempting to re-orientate Turkey's foreign policy and undermine its secular values.

The combination of all these factors suggests that the coming months and years will be turbulent for Turkey – and for its relationship with the EU. This paper looks back at the history of that relationship, assesses the current situation and considers the challenges which lie ahead.

I. Background: EU-Turkey relations to 2006

World War I brought the Ottoman Empire to an end and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk set Turkey on a Western course. Echoing the views of Ziya Gökalp, one of the intellectual fathers of Turkish nationalism, Atatürk's reforms implicitly acknowledged that "there is only one road to salvation...to adapt ourselves to Western civilisation completely".

Atatürk abolished the Caliphate in 1922 and declared Turkey a secular republic a year later. As Hugh and Nicole Pope wrote in their book *Turkey Unveiled*: "With a few strokes of his pen, this conservative and religious country...was ordered to become a modern Western state"¹. More than 80 years later, the Turks are still struggling to digest the heavy burden of Atatürk's legacy.

After World War II, Turkey began seeking entry into Western institutions and, thanks to its geopolitical position and its opposition to communism, was admitted to NATO in 1952. Then, in September 1959, as the European integration project gathered pace following the signing of the Treaty of Rome, Ankara applied for Associate Membership of the European Economic Community (EEC).

Its application was successful and, four years later, in 1963, the Ankara Agreement put Turkey on the road towards a customs union with the EEC, with a view to eventual membership. The then European Commission President Walter Hallstein emphasised that Turkey was "part of Europe".

However, in September 1980, following a military *coup d'état* in Turkey, the Association Agreement was suspended for six years.

Then, in April 1987, disregarding the advice of German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who said neither Turkey nor the European Community were ready, Prime Minister Turgut Özal – who had begun to liberalise the Turkish economy and democratise the country – applied for full EC membership.

At a summit two years later, Turkey's application was turned down by EC leaders, who concluded that "at the present time, Turkey and the Community cannot be easily integrated". However, they promised to re-examine Ankara's request for membership at unspecified intervals.

In January 1996, the customs union between Turkey and EU entered into force and, at the Luxembourg Summit in December 1997, EU leaders decided that Turkey was finally eligible to apply for membership – although not ready to be given 'candidate country' status.

The summit's conclusions stated that Turkey would "be judged on the basis of the same criteria as the other applicant states. While the political and economic conditions allowing accession negotiations to be envisaged are not satisfied, the European Council considers that it is nevertheless important for a strategy to be drawn up to prepare Turkey for accession by bringing it closer to the European Union in every field."

This decision angered Turkey, which felt it was being discriminated against, since post-communist states (including some with weak economic and political records, such as Romania) were put ahead of it in the membership queue, even though Ankara had a longer relationship with the EU than all the other applicants. As a result, Turkey decided to suspend political dialogue with the EU.

Three years later, at the Helsinki Summit in December 1999, EU leaders finally decided to grant Turkey candidate country status. This was, in effect, a reversal of the 1997 decision, with the EU agreeing to treat Turkey in the same way as the post-communist states. However, EU leaders insisted that Turkey still fell short of meeting the conditions set out in the 'Copenhagen criteria' for starting membership talks and thus was not eligible for immediate accession negotiations.

The Helsinki decision was nevertheless hailed by the Turks as a major victory and an affirmation of their European aspirations.

There were numerous reasons for the EU's change of heart: its fears of alienating Turkey permanently; its recognition that Turkey had legitimate complaints about unfair treatment; a change of government in Germany, where the Christian Democrats, who had vigorously opposed Turkish membership, were voted out of office; and a critical change in Greek policy towards relations with Ankara. The tragic earthquake in Turkey in August 1999 also resulted in a mass outpouring of sympathy for the country.

Moreover, the EU had seen its strategy of attaching political conditions to the start of entry talks work elsewhere, and hoped a similar logic would propel the reform process in Turkey.

In 2002, there were three significant developments which finally set Turkey on the road to opening accession negotiations.

The first was the Turkish Parliament decision in August to approve a package of 14 reforms, including abolition of the death penalty. Three months later, former Istanbul Mayor Recep Tayyip Erdogan pledged to open membership talks with the EU following his Justice and Development Party's (AKP) landslide victory in the parliamentary elections. Then, at the December 2002 Copenhagen Summit, EU leaders decided not only to open the Union's doors to ten new Member States, but also to ask the European Commission to produce a report on whether or not to open accession talks with Turkey.

In this report, published in October 2004, the Commission recommended starting negotiations – and EU leaders endorsed this decision at their summit two months later.

On 3 October 2005, official entry talks were finally launched, but not without fierce resistance from Austria. In a last-minute deal, accession negotiations were opened simultaneously with Turkey and Croatia, in what was then seen as a *quid pro quo* between two different camps within the EU led, respectively, by the UK and Austria.

The Cyprus issue

Although Turkey's relations with the EU have been dogged by recurrent crises, on each of these occasions the two sides have managed to muddle through.

The seriousness of the current impasse should not, however, be underestimated. Ever since Turkey signed the Additional Protocol in 2005, which extended its existing customs union with the EU to the new Member States (including the Republic of Cyprus), the EU has insisted that Turkey must open its sea and airports to Greek Cypriot vessels. However, the Turkish government has not yet submitted this Protocol to parliament for ratification.

Ankara is refusing to move on this issue until the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots in Northern Cyprus is ended – something the EU committed itself to doing in the aftermath of the two referenda on the United Nations' Annan Plan for the reunification of the island in April 2004. With all the elements of Turkish society united in supporting a tough stance, any move away from the official line now would almost certainly be an act of political suicide.

Turkey's decision to link these two issues is understandable, but, as former UK Special Representative to Cyprus Lord David Hannay warned in a recent report,² it is "unwise", because the first is an "inescapable" legal obligation while the second is a quite separate political pledge. Lord Hannay added that it was "even more unwise because it ignored the iron rules of Cyprus diplomacy, which, to adapt one of Newton's law's of physics, means that any proposal by one party immediately provokes an equal and contrary reaction from the other".

By blocking an end to the Turkish Cypriots' international isolation, the Greek Cypriots may find themselves in breach of an article in their EU Accession Treaty, which proscribes hindering the Turkish Cypriots' economic development. However, all 25 EU Member States agree that Turkey is in breach of its obligations regarding the Additional Protocol.

The issue has brought the two sides to a dangerous crossroads in a relationship into which both are locked. Unless there is a last-minute deal to avert the crisis, which now seems very unlikely, Foreign Ministers will meet on 11 December to decide whether to accept the Commission’s 29 November recommendations on what sanctions should be imposed on Ankara for its non-compliance. If they fail to reach agreement, the issue could be passed on to the 14-15 December summit.

EU-Cyprus time line	
24 April 2004	UN referendum in Cyprus – Turkish Cypriots vote ‘Yes’ to the Annan Plan, Greek Cypriots vote ‘No’.
26 April 2004	The conclusions of the EU’s General Affairs Council state that “the Council is determined to put an end to the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot Community and to facilitate the reunification of Cyprus by encouraging the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot Community”. The Council asks the Commission to draw up proposals to this end.
May 2004	Republic of Cyprus accedes to EU.
November 2006	After more than two years of fruitless negotiations, the EU has yet to make any substantial headway on trade other than small measures to facilitate trade across the ‘Green Line’ and a reduced package of financial aid.

Compromise solution – just a dream?

The EU was always going to face an uphill struggle to resolve this issue.

The most widely-discussed proposal has been to open up the Turkish Cypriot port of Famagusta under either EU or UN control, in return for Turkey agreeing to open its ports and airports to Greek Cypriot ships and planes.

However, there is a sting in the tail: to get the Greek Cypriots on board, the fenced-off ghost town of Varosha – which has been controlled by the Turkish Military since 1974 and is seen as a key bargaining chip in any future peace deal – would have to be handed back to the Republic of Cyprus.

The Finnish Presidency of the EU recently attempted to refine this proposal by proposing that Turkish troops should withdraw from Varosha and hand over administration of the town to the UN for two years (rather than returning it directly to the Greek Cypriots). Both Greek and Turkish Cypriots could be involved in the redevelopment of the area.

During this two-year period, Famagusta Port would also be opened for trade under EU supervision; the EU’s regulation on direct trade with the Turkish Cypriots would enter into force; and Turkey would only need to open a number of designated ports. However, it is not clear what would happen after this two-year period elapsed or who would pay for redeveloping Varosha.

Although all the parties involved have expressed a willingness to discuss these proposals in a constructive manner, a deal along these lines appears unlikely because the Turkish Cypriots insist that Ercan International Airport must also be opened to their planes. This would give a significant boost to their economy as the current lack of direct flights is hampering the development of their tourism industry. By contrast, the opening of Famagusta port to international trade would be less economically significant to the Greek Cypriots in the short to medium term.

However, the Greek Cypriots oppose opening up Ercan airport, on the grounds that this would, among other things, undermine their own tourist industry. Foreign Minister Yiorgos Lillikas declared recently

that “the idea of opening some airports in the occupied part of Cyprus cannot be accepted by either the Cypriot government or the Cypriot people”.³

It is also unlikely that either the Greek Cypriots or Turkey would agree to a deal which involves opening a specified number of ports. For Turkey, the opening of one port is the same as opening them all; for the Greek Cypriots, it has to be all or nothing and they would also probably insist on Varosha being handed back to them entirely.

In 2004, the EU promised an “unconditional lifting” of the Turkish Cypriots’ isolation, but it is now clear that the Union underestimated just how difficult this would be. The Greek Cypriots still maintain that Turkish Cypriot isolation is a “myth” and that allowing direct trade would be tantamount to political recognition of the north of the island.

In the current climate, it is not that surprising that the Finnish proposals have so far failed to bear fruit, despite the Finns’ efforts to pull a ‘rabbit out of the hat’ in the final few weeks before the summit, reformulating their proposals and engaging in an intensive round of shuttle diplomacy to try to break the deadlock.

However, it is just as unlikely that any of the parties involved (Turkey, the Greek Cypriots or the Turkish Cypriots) will reject the Finnish proposals outright. Instead, they will probably play for time, calling for an extension of the deadline for resolving the issue.

The European Commission’s progress report

The Commission’s annual progress report on Turkey, published on 8 November, contained no great surprises.

In a critical but objective and rigorous analysis of the situation, it voices concern that the reform process had slowed down, but underlines that there has been no back-peddalling on the reforms introduced to date. As Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn said at the press conference following publication of the report: “In the public debate, one may get the impression that Turkey is backtracking on the reforms...This is not the case. Turkey has continued political reforms, even though their pace has slowed down during the past year.”

However, the report stresses the need for “determined efforts to broaden the reform momentum throughout Turkey” during 2007. It also emphasises the need to ensure freedom of expression “without delay” by repealing or amending the highly controversial article in Turkey’s penal code which makes “denigrating Turkishness” an offence; and to bring Turkish legislation into line with European standards.

There was some surprise that the Commission delayed making a recommendation as to what action should be taken in response to the country’s continuing refusal to open its air and sea ports. This was, however, a wise decision in the circumstances and gave the Finnish Presidency a few more weeks to try to avert a serious crisis.

The most stinging criticism in the Commission’s report is directed not only at Turkey’s performance in relation to freedom of expression, but also freedom of religion, minority rights, the situation in the south-east of the country, trade union rights and civil-military relations.

The report points out that the armed forces continue to exercise significant political influence, with senior military staff speaking out on domestic and foreign policy issues including Cyprus, secularism and the Kurdish issue. Once again, the Commission stresses that members of the military should only make statements with the government’s permission.

It also emphasises that, although the overall number of cases of torture and ill-treatment is decreasing, further efforts are needed in line with the declared policy of ‘zero-tolerance’. It states that “implementing the

legislative reforms undertaken in previous years remains a challenge. Cases of torture and ill-treatment are still being reported, in particular outside detention centres.”

On Cyprus, the report confirms that no progress has been made in normalising relations between the two sides of the island. It also points out that Turkey has not fully implemented the Additional Protocol extending the EU-Turkey customs union to the ten new Member States, and continues to deny vessels flying the Republic of Cyprus flag access to its ports.

In conclusion, the Enlargement Strategy Paper attached to the progress report states that “the EU expects Turkey to ensure full, non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol to the Ankara Agreement and the removal of all obstacles to the free movement of goods, including restrictions on means of transport. Failure to implement its obligations in full will affect the overall progress of negotiations.”

The report adds: “It is also essential that, as stated in the Accession Partnership, Turkey takes concrete steps for the normalisation of bilateral relations with all EU Member States as soon as possible.”

Accession negotiations: the next steps

On a technical level, the screening process, which constitutes the first stage of the accession negotiations and ended on 13 October 2006, has gone reasonably smoothly.

Ankara has taken it seriously, sending large delegations of government officials to Brussels to attend these meetings. While the row over access to sea and airports has been capturing international headlines, Turkish and EU civil servants have been quietly reviewing the 33 ‘chapters’ of Turkish legislation which will have to be brought into line with EU law.

So far, only one chapter (on science and research) has been provisionally closed (meaning that agreement has been reached) – and even that was not without a struggle. In the face of Greek Cypriot threats to veto the move, a statement was included in the final text warning that failure by Turkey to implement its obligations in full “will affect the overall progress in the negotiations”.

It has so far proved impossible to open a further five chapters – on agriculture and rural development, social policy and employment, economic and monetary policy, financial control, and enterprise and industrial policy – mainly because the Greek Cypriots are blocking the process.

The opening and closing of chapters requires the agreement of all 25 EU Member States and, formally speaking, no single chapter can be ‘closed’ until all of them are.

Where progress is possible

If, as it now appears, Turkey has no intention of backing down over Cyprus, it will have to demonstrate its commitment to the EU process in some other way to try to avert the much-feared “train crash”. It will therefore need to make significant progress on other issues which are causing serious concern in the Union, such as human rights and freedoms.

Given the looming deadline, Turkey will need to act quickly. This would be well received in the EU and could help tip the balance when Member States meet to decide whether to continue or suspend the accession negotiations in December.

Ninth reform package

The ninth reform package is a bold set of measures which includes some important provisions, such as reforms to increase the accountability of government officials; enhance the independence of the

Human Rights Presidency (a government directorate); further reduce the role of the military; create an ombudsman to settle disputes between individuals and the state; and improve the status of foundations which hold property on behalf of the Jewish, Greek, and Armenian minority communities. However, the parliament has yet to approve some of the elements of this package.

Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code (TCK)

This remains a key sticking point, as underlined in the Commission's progress report. This provision has led to numerous writers, poets and academics being questioned and charged for expressing opinions that might be seen as an insult to "Turkishness" – a vague term which covers a wide range of potential offences.

High-profile cases over the past 12 months have included those against the author and Nobel Prize laureate Orhan Pamuk, the Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink and, more recently, the novelist Elif Safak, who was prosecuted for a statement made by a 'fictional' character in her recent book, *The bastard of Istanbul* about the killing of Armenians during World War I. Although the cases against Pamuk and Safak were eventually dropped, Dink received a six-month suspended sentence in July which was upheld by the Appeal Court.

As long as Article 301 remains on the statute book, it will be exploited by nationalist elements in Turkish society and by the state apparatus. Although the passage of the ninth reform package would be viewed positively, repealing Article 301 of the Penal Code would give the greatest boost to the process, not least because freedom of expression is one of the EU's founding principles.

Prime Minister Erdogan recently asked civil society to come up with ideas as to how this Article could best be revised. However, the Turkish government is split over this issue, with some fearing that repealing the article now would undermine the party's electoral campaign.

Recent developments in France – where a bill has been passed making it illegal to deny the Armenian genocide, liable to a one-year prison sentence and a fine of €45,000 – have also angered the Turks, who argue that the EU is guilty of double standards as the new French law clearly violates the right to freedom of expression. Similar developments in the Netherlands, where MPs of Turkish origin have been asked to leave their political parties if they continue to deny there was an Armenian genocide, have further exacerbated tensions.

All of this risks giving ammunition to right-wing nationalists and anti-EU factions in Turkey.

Possible scenarios

Unless there is an eleventh-hour breakthrough in the Cyprus ports' row, there are three possible outcomes when EU Member States meet to discuss what to do next – all of which will set EU-Turkey relations on a bleak and unpredictable course.

The first is a total suspension of the negotiations. However, many people fear that if the talks are halted, they may never start again, with very serious consequences for the relationship. Champions of Turkey's EU bid point out that the prospect of membership has already had a significant impact on the country. Although progress is slow, Turkey *is* changing and beginning to open up, with issues such as the Armenian question now being openly debated. The EU also wants a stable, peaceful and prosperous Turkey to foster stability in the region, not least because of its concerns over the future supply and transit of energy to meet its own demands. Most people believe that the best way to achieve this is to keep Turkey engaged in the process.

Last but not least, many fear that if the membership negotiations are halted now, Cyprus may remain divided forever.

For all these reasons – and given the fact that all 25 EU Member States would have to agree unanimously to suspend the negotiations – this seems unlikely.

The second option is a partial suspension of the talks. The EU could decide to freeze a number of the chapters linked to the customs union, as proposed by the Commission on 29 November, and/or to slow down the process by, for example, opening negotiations on a particular chapter but not closing them. It could also decide to set initial benchmarks without proceeding with negotiations, and set a new date to review the issue again.

However, once again, this would require the unanimous support of all 25 EU Member States, and some have already clearly stated that they do not support this option. Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik, for example, recently called for “time out” from the negotiations.

The Commission’s proposal to freeze eight chapters goes further than Turkey had hoped, but Ankara is unlikely to walk away from the talks, as this would almost certainly be fiercely criticised by the public despite the falling popularity of the EU, raise concerns over the AKP government’s agenda and play into the hands of the secularists who portray the AKP as an Islamic party.

The third option is a *de facto* suspension of the talks if the Member States fail to reach agreement on what should happen next. This would mean that a single country or group of countries could block the opening and closing of individual chapters, and thus effectively suspend negotiations unilaterally.

Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn has said that despite Turkey’s refusal to back down, there will be no train crash, insisting: “There is a slowing down because of works further down the tracks, however the train continues to move.” But there is no guarantee that the Member States will follow the Commission’s advice, particularly given the increasing number which oppose Turkish membership. And even if they do agree to endorse the Commission’s approach, there are no guarantees that individual countries will not continue to block the process.

Attempts to find a way out of the crisis are not being helped by the current mood in Ankara, where nobody thinks the negotiating process will be halted. This optimism is based on a belief that the consequences would be so severe for the EU that it would not dare to take this step.

As Turkey’s Chief Negotiator Ali Babacan put it in September: “In any kind of train crash, it is not only the ones on the trains getting hurt. It could cause huge damage to the European project itself...Can you imagine what the perception of the situation will be in the Middle East, in North Africa, in Central Asia, in the Caucasus? In all these regions, the immediate understanding will be that, well, Cyprus is just an excuse.”⁴

This overconfident approach prompted Commissioner Rehn to warn recently that Turkey should “not overestimate its importance”, and to stress that difficulties in Turkey’s bid to become a member of the EU would not be brushed aside.

What happens next?

If the current climate prevails, it is very unlikely that any new chapters will be opened with Turkey for some time to come, irrespective of the outcome of the current crisis. This means that, in effect, the negotiations would, to all intents and purposes, come to an end and a ‘holding operation’ would begin. How long this could go on for would depend very much on each side’s political interests.

It is clear that as long as the Cyprus problem remains unresolved, it risks, in the words of Lord Hannay, “bringing a premature end” to the accession talks. However, with Turkey facing both presidential and parliamentary elections in 2007, and with the Greek Cypriots gearing up for presidential elections in 2008, neither side wants to be seen as making concessions to the other at this stage.

The fact that the Republic of Cyprus is now a member of the EU limits the Union's room for manoeuvre and makes it virtually impossible for it to play the role of 'honest broker' on issues related to the island.

Furthermore, as long as the EU fails to send clear messages to Turkey and to speak with one voice, and Ankara dissects every single statement from anyone in the EU in minute detail for signs of 'bad faith', it will be very difficult to get the relationship back onto an even keel.

II. Domestic perceptions and prospects

The Turkish public is becoming increasingly resentful towards the EU because of a perception that, while the country is negotiating membership, the EU itself is still debating whether or not it should be allowed in.

This unease has clearly had an impact on the reform process. For as European Commission Vice-President Günter Verheugen warned recently: “Europe is sending Turkey almost exclusively negative signals...We are focusing on the weaknesses of the country, while not encouraging them to change”. He concluded that a “dangerous spiral” of negative signals could undermine the key geostrategic goal of future Turkey membership.⁵

However, with the EU still debating its future enlargement policy, a huge question mark still hanging over the future of the Constitutional Treaty and French presidential elections on the horizon – all of which have implications for Turkey – there is unlikely to be any significant change in the EU’s approach in the near future.

The reform process

Turkey’s reform process is a two-phase operation – and the first phase was always going to be easier than the second for two reasons.

The first is the time factor. Between 1999 and 2004, there were a whole string of target dates which Turkey had to meet to get the green light to start membership talks, and this gave the process vital momentum. However, now that those talks have begun, it has become harder to maintain the pressure for swift action.

Secondly, as a single-party government, the AKP was able to push through reforms quickly without the infighting that had plagued previous coalition governments. It established a national consensus around EU accession, helped by warm words of praise from the EU’s institutions and political elites on the progress Turkey was making. All of this contributed to a high level of support among Turks – over 70% – for the country’s membership bid.

However, public opinion began to shift as Turkey entered phase two of the process from the December 2004 EU summit onwards, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, even though the country was given a date for opening accession negotiations, the ensuing ‘war of words’ over how the European Council’s conclusions should be interpreted – and the continued talk in some EU quarters of a “privileged partnership” as an alternative to membership, open-ended talks or eventual “safeguard clauses” restricting free movement of labour – came as a shock to many Turks.

This was compounded by a barrage of attacks in the media in existing EU Member States on the prospect of Turkish membership in the wake of the controversy over the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed; and, more recently, a report from the European Parliament which insisted that Turkey must recognise the Armenian ‘genocide’ as a pre-condition for membership. The apparent unwillingness of EU Member States to assist Turkey in its fight against the PKK, which has a big network in the Union, has also contributed to declining public support for the accession process.

Nationalists in Turkey have been quick to capitalise on this growing public disenchantment with the EU, and some political parties which previously saw EU integration as a crucial part of Turkey’s democratisation process have joined the Eurosceptic camp. The national consensus on Europe is fading away, with every reform being portrayed as a concession to the Union.

The government is caught in a vicious circle: Turkey needs the carrot of EU membership to maintain the momentum for reforms, but the government also needs public support to implement them. If public opinion turns against the EU, it makes everybody’s job much more difficult.

Although Turkey has continued to make progress in several important areas, including in the fight against torture and the promotion of women's rights (as underlined in the Commission's progress report), there can be no doubt that the pace of reform has slowed.

Although nobody expected Turkey to maintain the pace it set prior to December 2004, many in the EU have nevertheless been disappointed at Ankara's performance – especially since the accession talks began last year.

There had been hopes that the decision to start negotiations would breathe new life into the reform process. In fact, domestic issues have been uppermost in Turkish politicians' minds since then, given the re-emergence of the PKK, the presidential elections in April 2007 and the parliamentary elections seven months later.

Is Turkey still committed to the EU?

All of this has prompted growing questions about the Turkish government's commitment to the EU process.

As well as serious worries about freedom of expression, there are also concerns about the new anti-terror law, which has expanded the scope of crimes punishable as terrorist acts and includes restrictions on the media.

Moreover, while human rights organisations, remain positive overall about the changes that Turkey is making, they are worried about the uneven and slow implementation of judicial reforms. A recent Amnesty International report argued that despite these reforms, unfair trials are still taking place on a regular basis, particularly in the new Heavy Penalty Courts which replaced the State Security Courts.

All this was compounded early this autumn by questions about why Turkey's Chief Negotiator Ali Babacan was such an infrequent visitor to Brussels. This may in part be explained by the fact that he has two jobs – he is also his country's Economy Minister – but some interpreted it as a sign that Turkey was not taking the negotiations as seriously as it should. However, Mr Babacan has been visiting Brussels more often since then, as well as touring EU capitals in the run-up to the European summit this December. His message to politicians across Europe has been the same: Turkey remains committed to the EU process.

However, to some extent, Ankara has only itself to blame for the recent rise in anti-Turkish sentiment. The bad press that it has received in EU Member States on a range of issues, from the criminal cases brought under Article 301 to the absurd decision to ban the Winnie the Pooh movie because of the presence of a 'piglet', has done nothing to help its cause. The government also lacks a proper communications strategy to inform the public about developments in its negotiations with the EU, leaving it to the mass media to report on what is happening.

Part of the problem is that Turkey has a reactive rather than a proactive communications culture. As a result, most Turks are totally unaware of how the EU process works and how the country would benefit from EU membership. Many believe that joining the EU is the same as joining NATO or, at any rate, requires a relatively simple administrative procedure. The government has yet to explain clearly why the process is so different.

Turning domestic public opinion back on to Europe

Managing public opinion will be a delicate part of the ever-fragile EU-Turkey relationship.

Usually, the first step in turning public opinion back on is to identify what turned it off in the first place. In Turkey's case, this is going to be difficult given that the debate on membership is set to continue for many years. However, all is not lost. The majority of Turks still believe that EU membership would be a good thing. The problem is rather that they do not believe that the EU will ever let Turkey join.

The Turkish government needs to adopt a two-pronged strategy to tackle this problem: it will have to work to minimise the significance of opposition to its membership bid in certain EU Member States, while ensuring that it establishes and maintains good contacts with those Member States where there is a serious risk that opposition might increase in the coming months and years.

It also needs to continue building solid foundations for its relationship with the EU to help it weather the political storms which lie ahead.

Its efforts to do this are being helped by continued support from the European Commission. On a recent visit to Ankara, Olli Rehn indirectly criticised EU leaders – such as French Interior Minister and presidential-hopeful Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel – who continually talk of a “privileged partnership” as an alternative to full membership.

Commissioner Rehn warned that those who advocate a privileged partnership were turning Turks against Europe and eroding the credibility of the EU, adding that their comments “reduced the political incentive for reforms and caused a political backlash among ordinary Turks”.⁶

EU leaders must also resist the temptation to apply double standards when it comes to dealing with Turkey, whether in relation to freedom of speech (as is the case in the Netherlands, France and Austria) or the question of minority rights (in Estonia for example, Russian minorities do not have the same rights as ordinary citizens).

Above all, Ankara needs to stress again and again to Turkish citizens that the reforms which are being introduced are first and foremost for the benefit of Turkey – and not concessions to the EU.

Turkey also need to be realistic. It is, after all, not the first country to face difficulties in joining the EU: Spanish accession was delayed (particularly by the French) and the UK’s first bid for membership was vetoed, also by France.

Winning over EU citizens

EU public opinion remains sceptical towards Turkish membership, with varying degrees of intensity.

According to the March-May 2006 Eurobarometer survey, 48% of EU-25 citizens are against Turkey joining the EU, with about 39% in favour. Turkish membership is more popular among citizens from the new EU Member States (44% in favour) than among those in the old EU-15 (38%). The Austrians are the most strongly opposed to admitting Turkey (81%), while the Swedes notch up the highest levels of support (61%) – although soon-to-be member Romania registered even higher levels, at 66%.

The issues fuelling public opposition to Turkish membership can be split into three categories: those relating to the country’s domestic situation; those concerning human rights, democracy and related matters; and those pertaining to Turkey’s continuing disputes with its neighbours.

Many people also have misgivings about admitting a large Muslim state to the EU, particularly given the difficulties which many existing Member States are currently facing in integrating their Muslim communities. Over-arching all this is the fact that many EU citizens simply do not see Turkey as a ‘European’ country. However, EU supporters of Turkey’s membership bid argue that much of the wariness in Europe about its entry into the club is the result of misconceptions and prejudice. What is more, accession is still a long way off and opposition could fall as the negotiating process continues – assuming Turkey continues down the path of reform to bring itself into line with EU standards.

An effective communications strategy will, however, also be needed to reassure EU voters – something which can only be done by patiently but consistently explaining why having Turkey in the Union is infinitely better than leaving it outside.

Turkey must, of course, also play its part by convincing EU citizens that it is part of Europe and that it has an important role to play in the Union's future.

All this means that, as part of the negotiating process, the EU and Turkey will have to engage in an intensive political and civil society dialogue to prepare European public opinion. After all, in France and Austria at least, it is the voters who will have the final say in whether Turkey joins or not, as all candidates for EU membership (after Croatia) will be subject to referenda in both countries once they have completed their accession negotiations.

Is Turkey turning away from the West?

A number of recent opinion polls, including the Transatlantic Trends⁷ and the Pew Global Attitudes Project⁸ have underlined growing Turkish public mistrust of both the EU and US. This has prompted fears that Turkey's increasing sympathies with countries such as Iran may signal that it is planning to turn its back on the West, and demonstrate the growing divide between the West and the Muslim world.

US-Turkish relations are strained on almost all issues relating to the Middle East, ranging from attitudes towards terrorist groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah to how best to deal with Iran and even Syria.

There are two main reasons for Turkey's apparent dislike of the US today: the American-led war in Iraq and, more generally, US policies in the Middle East; and Washington's reluctance (until recently) to play a major role in helping the Turks to clear Northern Iraq of the many PKK elements operating out of the mountains between the two countries – even though the PKK has been declared a terrorist group by both the EU and the US. In contrast, Iran and Syria have both given Turkey a great deal of support in its fight against the PKK.

The Turkish government's continued efforts to boost its economic and political ties with its neighbours – not only in the Middle East but also with Russia and Central Asia – have also heightened concern that Turkey is re-orientating its foreign policy priorities.

Ankara believes that it is in Turkey's interest to develop better relations with its neighbours, not least to foster regional stability. Improved relations may also enable Turkey to help the international community when dealing with these countries, which are often more open to suggestions coming from Ankara than from Washington, London or Paris.

Furthermore, given that Turkey's future as an EU member is by no means guaranteed, Ankara is determined to seize every opportunity to develop other relationships which could be beneficial.

In recent years, the evolution of Turkish foreign policy has allowed it to play a much stronger role in promoting stability and security in its own backyard. It has taken the lead in a number of major initiatives designed to promote peace, stability and prosperity in the region, including the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation, the BLACKSEAFOR, the Multinational Peace Force South East Europe, the Economic Cooperation Organisation and the Islamic D8. It is also playing a key role in the Organisation of Islamic Conferences (OIC) which in 2004 chose a Turk, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, as its Secretary General for the first time.

However, some analysts take a pessimistic view of these developments. Soner Çagaptay, from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, believes that the AKP's strategy of orienting its foreign policy towards its Muslim neighbours could have serious long-term consequences. He has warned that "if the Turks think of themselves as Muslims first in the foreign-policy arena, then one day they will think of themselves as Muslims first in the domestic one".⁹

Historically speaking, Turkey has been looking to the West since before the days of Atatürk. His approach to 'Westernising' the nation was revolutionary; but this orientation in itself was not new.

Turkey is already deeply anchored in Western institutions (NATO, the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), and its recent decision to send troops to the Lebanon – despite opposition from both the public and a majority (if not all) of the political parties – demonstrated Ankara's continued commitment to play its part.

Turkey is trying to demonstrate to the world that, as a predominantly Muslim NATO member with a secular constitutional system and good ties with Israel and most Arab states, it has a unique role to play in the international community.

Many Turks now also believe that the country made the wrong decision in 2003 when its parliament decided not to allow US troops to cross its border to enter Northern Iraq. As a result, Turkey was left out of the decision-making process on Iraq – and does not want to make the same mistake again. Ankara is also acutely aware that it needs US support in the fight against the PKK.

The concern voiced by some that Turkey is on the road to becoming the new Iran is far-fetched. The Turkish people may feel sympathy towards their Muslim neighbours, but, for most people, adopting a similar type of political regime is unthinkable. Once President George W. Bush leaves office, relations between Turkey and the US are likely to become warmer again.

Is Turkey becoming more religiously conservative?

Islam is probably the issue which causes the deepest divisions within Turkish society.

The Kemalist reforms which imposed secularism on the country were deeply resented by ordinary people, who could not understand why their age-old traditions were being dismissed in a nation which had traditionally taken a pragmatic approach towards Islam.

Over time, small steps were taken to reverse this trend: the Arabic call to prayer was reintroduced to replace its Turkish equivalent, which had never really been accepted, and the fasting month of Ramadan was again celebrated widely.

Then, when Turgut Özal – a devout Muslim – became prime minister in the 1980s, 'political' Islam quietly spread through the political establishment. Many of the concerns voiced today by Turkey's secularists about the AKP's agenda are almost identical to those expressed when Özal was in office, with heated debates then and now over issues such as the length of schoolgirls' skirts, the sale of beer in corner shops, Arabic courses in schools, and the rapid construction of new mosques.

Since the 1980s, authoritarian rule has gradually loosened, although the headscarf ban was enforced again after the 'soft' military coup in 1997, when the then-Islamist Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan and his REFAH Party were forced out of office. This followed a long campaign led by the Turkish military, which believed that Erbakan was leading Turkey down an overly religious, conservative road.

With a political party with Islamic roots now in power, some Turks have felt more confident recently about demonstrating their religious, conservative side. This has prompted a backlash from those who regard this as a move towards potentially dangerous fundamentalism.

At the same time, however, some in the AKP are calling for changes which could undermine the state's secular character of the state. Some municipalities have, for example, attempted to ban the drinking of alcohol in parks and other public areas, and in certain areas of Istanbul, leaflets have been circulated encouraging women to wear the headscarf.

There are no real signs that Islamic fundamentalism is about to take hold in Turkey. But 80 years after Atatürk's secular revolution, Turkish Islam has neither been marginalised nor cast aside. It is deep-rooted and continues to influence society.

Turks do not see why they should have to choose between religion and the secular state. The real choice is between a new democratic Turkey and the freedoms that go hand in hand with this, or the old centralised system of state control.

As Chris Morris concludes in his book *The New Turkey*: “For 26 years, the Turkish establishment has been haunted by memories of the Khomeini revolution across the border in Iran, and however over-sensitive it may seem to outsiders, they have laid down the law clearly: some things are politically unacceptable.”¹⁰

The impact of election fever

In the months leading up to next year’s presidential and parliamentary elections, the AKP is likely to take a populist stance and will avoid taking risks by acting on issues which could cost it votes. As a consequence, the government’s policies will probably be as nationalist as those of the nationalists themselves.

This means that although both Prime Minister Erdogan and Foreign Minister Gül insist that Turkey remains committed to the EU, the Union’s patience may be sorely tested in 2007.

There is mounting speculation in Turkey over who will succeed Ahmet Necdet Sezer when his term as president ends in May – and, above all, whether Erdogan himself will run.

The position of President is symbolically important and, moreover, the President alone has the constitutional right to appoint judges to the high courts as well as naming the peer members of the Higher Council of Judges and Public Prosecutors (HSYK). ‘Secularist’ segments of Turkish society are therefore anxious for the job to go to someone they deem to be ‘suitable’ – and Tayyip Erdogan and his headscarf-wearing wife Emine do not fit the bill.

Normally, it is the parliament which decides on a new president, but doubts have already been raised over whether this parliament should do so because of questions over its legitimacy. These doubts have arisen because the two parties in the current parliament – the AKP and the Republic People’s Party (CHP) – only won 55% of the vote between them in the 2002 election, with the high threshold set for winning any seats at all (10%) meaning that 45% of the votes were effectively discounted.

Whether or not this argument will have an impact remains to be seen. But whoever chooses the new president, it would be prudent to select somebody acceptable to – and representative of – all Turkey’s institutions, in the interests of stability.

Mr Erdogan has so far remained silent on this question, refusing to say whether he will put himself forward for the job or not. There are several reasons why this might not be a good idea. First, the stability of the economy must be his first priority, and this could be put at risk if he changes jobs. Second, the move could spark a backlash against his party in the forthcoming parliamentary elections. Third, there is a serious risk that, without Erdogan at the helm, the AKP would split into rival factions (as happened to the ANAP when Turgut Özal became president) because of a lack of other charismatic personalities in the party.

For all these reasons, it would be better from the AKP’s point of view to put forward a more ‘ordinary’ candidate who would be acceptable to all the institutions.

When the AKP was elected to office in 2002, it sought to avoid the fate of its Islamist predecessor (the REFAH Party) by aggressively pursuing EU membership and stressing that it would not challenge the country’s secular system or undo its pro-Western foreign policy.

For much of the next two years, harmony prevailed, but it has waned since then. The AKP’s decision to invite Hamas to Ankara, Turkey’s rapprochement with Syria, criticism of Israel and the Iraq War, its enhanced dialogue with Iran and its application for membership of the Arab League have all contributed to growing tensions.

Since October 2005, the renewed focus on domestic issues has also put the spotlight firmly on the AKP.

As Soner Çagaptay argues: “In evolving away from the Islamist Welfare Party, the AKP has become a modernist Islamist movement that supports democracy but also challenges Turkey’s Western orientation. In this regard, the AKP’s latest departure from its 2002 rhetoric has been on secularism. For instance, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has questioned the Council of State’s decision to uphold secular values, and AKP leaders have attacked Turkey’s constitutional definition of secularism.”¹¹

These developments have led to a surge in political tensions, prompting heated exchanges between the AKP and the secularist press, opposition political parties and the courts.

The military, in particular, has become much more vocal in recent weeks, declaring that fundamentalism in Turkey is reaching dangerous levels and that “the values established by Atatürk are under threat”. Chief of General Staff Yasar Büyükanit went even further in a speech to the Turkish War Academies in October, stating that “the future of the regime is my responsibility”.

Opinion polls show that the AKP remains the most popular political party in Turkey – with the support of around 25% of voters – especially among the working classes, not least because it has introduced policies designed to help the poorer sections of society (for example, providing families with free coal in the winter months). The party has also pledged to ensure that one-third of its candidates will be women in an attempt to boost their representation in parliament.

Despite this, the AKP is expected to lose around 5% of the 34.3% share of the vote it won in 2002, with some supporters who had expected it to pursue a more Islamic agenda in office likely to vote for a more pro-Islamic party this time around.

Other parties which are expected to pass the 10% threshold are the current opposition party – the CHP led by Deniz Baykal; the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) led by Devlet Bahçeli; and the True Path Party (DYP) led by Mehmet Agar. All three leaders are elderly political ‘dinosaurs’. Both Baykal and Bahçeli have been very vocal in their opposition to the EU reform process, and the return of such nationalistic hardliners to office would risk a further slowdown in the pace of change.

The AKP hopes to remain in government with a full parliamentary majority, but this is far from certain. Even if it manages to win a majority, it will almost certainly be with many fewer seats than in 2002.

Historically, coalition governments have proved disastrous for Turkey, but if the AKP performs badly in the polls, the country may have no option but to go down this path once more. It is also very unlikely that any of the other major parties would be willing to form a government with the AKP. It could therefore be forced out into the cold, even if it wins the highest percentage of the vote.

Erdogan may therefore decide to take a risk and amend the law to lower the threshold for winning seats, which would allow a number of other, smaller parties into parliament. Still, it remains very difficult to predict what lies ahead for the EU-Turkey relationship until after these elections – not least because, once in office, parties which have been very vocal in their opposition to the EU could well decide to take a more pragmatic approach.

The PKK and the Kurdish issue

One of the decisive issues in the election campaign will be how the government deals with the PKK and the recent upsurge in terrorist attacks in Turkey.

Founded in 1978, the PKK is a Marxist-Leninist terrorist group primarily composed of Turkish Kurds. It is an ethnic secessionist organisation which attacks both civilian and military targets in pursuit of its

political goal: to create an independent Kurdish state in a territory consisting of South-east Turkey, North-east Iraq, North-east Syria and North-west Iran. The PKK has approximately 4,000-5,000 guerrillas, most of whom are currently said to be located in Northern Iraq, and thousands of sympathisers in Turkey and the rest of Europe.

Turkey's relationship with its Kurds is long and complex, and finding a solution to the problem is one of the country's toughest challenges.

From 1984 to 1999, Turkey was confronted with a violent Kurdish revolt in South-east Anatolia led by the PKK. Its sometimes brutal repression cost Ankara dear in political, economic and foreign policy terms. Overall military spending was estimated at around \$150 billion, casualties numbered around 37,000 and a further 370,000 people were displaced.

In 1998, PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan was captured and the organisation was largely defeated. However, the ceasefire which was announced a year later was broken by the PKK in 2005, with the organisation claiming that the cultural reforms promised by the government had been no more than a token gesture aimed at pleasing the EU, and that Ankara had made no serious efforts to resettle the displaced Kurds.

According to Human Rights Watch, the government's 'Return to Village and Rehabilitation Project' "has failed to provide even the most basic infrastructure, and villagers are unwilling to return to settlements that do not have electricity, telephone service, or a school. Implementation of a 2004 law to compensate the displaced has been uneven, with some villagers receiving appropriate sums while others' claims were unfairly dismissed."¹²

A new terror campaign was launched in 2005 and, while responsibility for attacks in Istanbul in November 2004 has not been firmly established, the latest attacks were carried out by the TAK (Liberation Falcons of Kurdistan) and specifically targeted at Turkey's tourist region.

The TAK's origins are cloudy, and its relationship with the older and more influential PKK disputed. The official Turkish position, shared by the US administration, is that the TAK is an off-shoot of the PKK.

At the end of September this year, incarcerated PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan announced a ceasefire as from 1 October, stating that the organisation's fighters would not use weapons unless fired upon. He expressed the hope that this decision would lead to renewed dialogue with the Turkish authorities. However, Erdogan rejected the unilateral ceasefire proposal, saying he would not accept anything less than disarmament and insisting that the government would not negotiate with terrorists.

Both Iraq and the US have said that the ceasefire has provided a new diplomatic opportunity, but Turkey remains suspicious that it is just a publicity stunt. The government has always refused to have any type of dialogue with the PKK and these latest terrorist attacks have only strengthened its resolve not to give ground, particularly in the light of the looming electoral campaigns and the recent change in personnel at the top of the Turkish General Staff.

From Özkök to Büyükanit: the military in Turkey

On 30 August this year, Yasar Büyükanit, former head of the Turkish Land Forces, took over from Hilmi Özkök as Chief of the General Staff. Mr Büyükanit is a staunch Kemalist who holds nationalist and secular views. He is outspoken, hawkish, tough on terrorism, sensitive to anti-secular political currents and staunchly pro-American – and his tough stance, particularly on the role of Islam in Turkish politics, made him a controversial choice.

In his four years at the helm of the military, General Özkök maintained good relations with the AKP and agreed to EU-requested reforms which curtailed the military's extensive influence and saw new measures to increase its transparency.

Büyükanit may press for a more restrictive and obstructive line on EU reforms. Many in the Turkish Armed Forces believe that the Union's criticisms of the military's role in state affairs are excessive and argue that EU demands that its influence be curtailed ignore the reality of the situation in Turkey.

The new Chief of General Staff is also likely to adopt a harder line than Özkök on threats to Turkey's secular traditions, and this may lead to tensions between the military and the AKP government. In a recent speech, the military chief said there was "a growing reactionary threat in Turkey" and "every kind of measures should be taken against this menace"¹³ – remarks which many people interpreted as a direct reference to the AKP.

Prime Minister Erdogan is keen to avoid a clash with Büyükanit ahead of the elections and has already said that he is prepared to discuss military leaders' complaints about the alleged rise in religious fundamentalism and come to a common conclusion.

Role of the US

The US has a key role to play in Turkey's efforts to capture PKK guerrillas and cut off their arms' supply, but Turkey has repeatedly complained about a lack of US cooperation in bringing this about. This has fuelled anti-American sentiment among the public, who feel betrayed by the Americans. Ankara has signalled that it could take unilateral military action against the PKK in Northern Iraq if necessary and, with this in mind, significant numbers of Turkish military assets and troops have been massed on the Iraqi/Turkish border.

Both the EU and the US remain firmly opposed to any such intervention, although there have been some positive developments recently. The US is now making greater efforts to address Ankara's concerns and has appointed a retired US Air Force General, Joseph Ralston, to work with the Turkish and Iraqi governments. Turkey has responded by appointing Edip Baser, a retired Land Forces Commander, to cooperate with Ralston.

This does not mean, however, that US soldiers will be seen any time soon rooting out terrorists in the mountains in Northern Iraq: Washington has made it clear that it sees a military solution as the last resort. This probably reflects, in part, the fact that the US is already overstretched in Iraq. It is also reluctant to risk destabilising the most stable region inside Iraq, where it has a long-time alliance with Kurdish leaders and which has seen an influx of migrants from other parts of Iraq.

The security vacuum in Iraq has allowed the PKK to get its hands on arms which should be under Iraqi government control. The Americans' first task is therefore to prevent the PKK from obtaining arms and logistic support as well as blocking money transfers.

The Iraqi government has also been playing a positive role in this, with President Jalal Talabani (who is also the founder and Secretary General of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) calling for all PKK offices in Iraq to be closed. Talabani said his country wanted to give Ankara concrete and extensive support, and prevent the PKK from using Northern Iraq as a base for its activities.

He also claims credit for persuading the PKK to declare the ceasefire, thus becoming the first official to confess to holding direct talks with the terrorist organisation – much to Ankara's dismay. More recently, in a speech to the International Relations Institution in Paris, he said that the 'Kurdish problem' could only be solved if Ankara declares an amnesty for the PKK in Turkey.

Talabani and Kurdistan Democratic Party leader Massoud Bazarni have the power to deal the PKK a serious blow. However, it remains to be seen how far they are willing to go.

Economic and social problems

Military action alone will not be enough to achieve a long-term solution to the problem. Ankara also needs to address the broader problems in South-east Turkey.

The ceasefire in 1999 provided an opportunity to match the new security environment with measures to improve the economic and social situation. However, few social reforms have been introduced and no significant investments have been made anywhere in the region – despite several government initiatives in 2003 aimed at attracting investors (including lower social security payments and tax-free opportunities) and the fact that the Euphrates River is home to the Eastern Anatolia Project (GAP), one of the world's largest hydroelectric and irrigation projects.

At the same time, with half of the Kurds in the region currently out of work, there cannot be a lasting settlement without a substantial programme of aid and development to reduce unemployment.

The Kurds have been among the strongest supporters of EU membership and some changes have been introduced as part of the EU reform process. Kurds can now watch television broadcasts in Kurdish (but only for 45 minutes a day) and study in their own language. But for many, these steps are little more than a token gesture designed to please Brussels. Without significant changes to improve their lot, a growing number of Kurds will become increasingly disillusioned with Ankara. Turkey therefore needs to find ways to embrace them.

One step which could make a real difference would be to change the electoral system to ensure the presence of Kurds in the national parliament. This would give them a real voice and a role in political life. True Path Party (DYP) leader Mehmet Agar recently declared that it was “time to lift the barriers to politics”. He proposed granting an amnesty to those PKK members who had not been involved in killings and allowing them to enter politics – the first time a Turkish politician has made such a suggestion.

Last year, Prime Minister Erdogan made a ground-breaking speech in Diyarbakir in which he admitted – for the first time in Turkish history – that there was a ‘Kurdish problem’ and that the only way out was through a democratic solution. However, he did not follow this up with any concrete proposals.

Kurdish elites also need to play their part by denouncing violence and telling the PKK that it must lay down its weapons and reject terrorism and violence.

Dialogue is crucial to achieve a genuine, fair and lasting solution to the Kurdish problem. Experience in other parts of the world – including Europe (for example, in Northern Ireland, the Basque region in Spain, Montenegro and Kosovo) – has shown that ‘top-down’ solutions to ethnic, nationalistic and religious conflicts do not work. The people most involved in the problem must contribute to finding the solution, and this can only come about through peaceful dialogue and negotiations, not through violence.

In the case of Turkey, the EU could play an important role in establishing the parameters of such a dialogue and in seeing it through to a successful conclusion. The EU also needs to do all it can to crackdown on the PKK in its own Member States.

However, in the run-up to the elections, the Turkish government will be anxious to avoid being accused by the nationalist opposition of making concessions and so is unlikely to make any major efforts to improve the climate in the region. The traditional ‘military approach’ will therefore almost certainly prevail, with the tough-talking Büyükanit insisting recently that the military would not delegate the responsibility for fighting terrorism to anyone else.

Conclusions

Turkey's relations with the EU are in crisis and the run-up to the December European Council will be particularly gruelling.

However, it seems highly unlikely that negotiations will come to an 'official' standstill, with Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn insisting that the talks will continue, but at a slower pace. It is more probable that the EU and Turkey will find a way to muddle through yet again. But the relationship may effectively remain in limbo for at least the next year – and it is highly unlikely that any new negotiating chapters will be opened.

Barring a last-minute climbdown by Turkey in the ports' row, EU governments should base their decision on how to respond on the Commission's recommendations. At the same time, they need to send a strong message to Ankara that accession remains the end-goal of the negotiations and that, as part of the process, Turkey needs to abide by its commitments. This would give reformers in Ankara some much-needed support.

Both sides will continue to face significant problems in the months – and years – to come. For Ankara, the biggest issues will continue to be Cyprus and the stream of negative signals coming from the EU over Turkey's membership aspirations. It is currently caught in a potentially vicious circle which needs to be turned into virtuous circle.

If it were possible to remove Cyprus from the equation, the situation would be very different but, as things stand, this decades-old problem will continue to cast a long shadow over Ankara's relations with the EU.

It is therefore crucial for the Union – and the international community as a whole – to put more emphasis and effort into finding a long-term solution to the Cyprus problem, rather than just 'supporting the good offices' of the UN. This issue cannot simply be put on the back-burner for another decade or more, not least because a long-lasting solution to the problem would undoubtedly greatly improve the atmosphere in which Turkey's accession talks are being conducted.

Given that the Cypriot presidential elections in 2008 will limit what the UN is able to do in the next year, the incoming German Presidency of the EU and the two guarantor states – the UK and Greece – should continue where the Finns left off. Progress will, however, be impossible unless both sides take a more flexible approach. Turkey is legally obliged to open its ports and airspace to the Republic of Cyprus, and the Greek Cypriots need to be less intransigent about ending the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots. All three parties – Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots and Turkey – need to stop playing the current zero-sum or even negative-sum game.

At the same time, both sides need to put Turkish membership of the EU into perspective. It will not happen tomorrow, next month or next year. It is almost two decades away, and much will have changed by then – not only the governments and leaders in both the EU and Ankara, but also the challenges facing them both.

It is essential for the Turkish government to underline to its citizens that the reforms which are being introduced are first and foremost for Turkey's benefit and are not concessions to the EU. The Turks have to own this process and be proud of it.

While Turkey is in 'election mode', its relationship with the EU will not feature prominently in the domestic debate, as the government is unlikely to introduce any radical changes in sensitive areas over the next 12 months which could be portrayed by the nationalists and others as concessions to the Union. However, Turkey should still be able to make further progress in less sensitive areas.

Back-tracking on the reforms which have already been introduced would be disastrous. There can be no

return to Turkey's 'black decades' of torture, corruption and economic crisis. Nor should the AKP give the impression that it is allowing the military a greater voice in the running of state affairs, as has appeared to be the case in recent weeks.

Turkey needs to continue to come to terms with its past, and should be supported in doing this. For example, continued and enhanced dialogue over the Armenian and the Kurdish issues should be encouraged. At the same time, the EU must avoid the impression that it is applying double standards in its relations with Turkey.

Greater dialogue and debate is needed both within the EU and in Turkey to discuss Turkish membership, and how this would change both the EU and Turkey. The trust that has been eroded needs to be rebuilt.

Domestically, the government faces a difficult year as the AKP decides who to nominate as the next president and wrestles with the dilemma of how to respond to the PKK ceasefire. It may also have some difficult choices to make in foreign policy – for example, regarding Iran, if some form of sanctions are introduced.

The November 2007 parliamentary elections will be a defining moment for Turkey. The formation and priorities of the next government will be crucial for the country's continued stability and prosperity. A weak and fractious coalition government would be disastrous both domestically and for Turkey's relationship with the EU.

Endnotes

1. Nicole & Hugh Pope (2004) *Turkey Unveiled: A History of Modern Turkey*, Overlook Press.
2. Lord David Hannay (Former Special Representative of the British Government for Cyprus) *Turkey and the EU: Time for a sense of proportion and compromise*, Centre for European Reform, July 2006.
3. EUobserver, 16 October 2006.
4. *European Voice*, 16 September 2006.
5. EUobserver, 9 October 2006.
6. *Financial Times*, 4 October 2006.
7. www.transatlantictrends.org
8. www.pewglobal.org
9. Soner Çağaptay *Is There a Clash of Civilizations? Islam, Democracy, and U.S.-Middle East Policy*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 14 September 2006.
10. Chris Morris (Former BBC Correspondent in Ankara) (2005) *The New Turkey: The Quiet Revolution on the Edge of Europe*, Granta Press.
11. Soner Çağaptay *Rising Tensions Between Turkey's AKP and the Courts*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 30 2006.
12. Human Rights Watch. http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/01/18/turkey12220_txt.htm
13. General Yasar Büyükanit (Commander of the Turkish Armed Forces), speech to Turkish Military Academy, 2 October 2006.

Executive summary

When the European Union opened accession talks with Turkey, it was a defining moment for both sides. Just 13 months later, the negotiations appear to be on the brink of the “train crash” which Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn warned against earlier this autumn.

This Issue Paper charts the history of EU-Turkey relations, assesses the progress made in the first year of the accession negotiations and the Union’s current concerns about the slowing pace of reform in Turkey, and provides a clear analysis of the cause of the current crisis - the stand-off between Turkey and Cyprus.

The Paper also assesses public attitudes towards the EU in Turkey, and attempts to explain the reasons for the recent decline in Turkish support for EU membership. In particular, it highlights the public’s sense that while Turkey is negotiating accession terms with the EU in good faith, the EU is applying double standards to Turkey.

There are also growing questions about Ankara’s commitment to the EU process. While the government insists that it remains as committed as ever, the Paper suggests that it may now be too preoccupied with the forthcoming national elections and dealing with the ‘Kurdish problem’ to focus on European issues. All this means that the EU’s patience may be sorely tested in 2007.

In the light of the stalemate in the row over Turkey’s refusal to give Greek Cypriot planes and ships access to its air and sea ports, EU Member States now have to decide what sanctions should be imposed on Ankara for refusing to abide by its commitments.

The Paper concludes that it is unlikely that negotiations will come to an ‘official’ standstill. It is more probable that the EU and Turkey will find a way to muddle through yet again. But the relationship may effectively remain in limbo for at least the next year.