

The European Union in Turkey: aligning security perceptions?

ANDRÉ BARRINHA⁷⁶

Turkey is a military, demographic, geographical and potentially economic power, bordering complex countries such as Iran, Iraq and Syria and with a largely Muslim population (99%). In that sense, Ankara's accession process to the European Union (EU) involves questions and problems that go far beyond any of the previous enlargement processes, with the arguable exception of the United Kingdom's adhesion in 1973.

Although official relations between Turkey and the EU date back to 1963, this relationship has only been developed in recent years with the accession process. For Ankara, this process has been about changing policies and practices that had been consolidated for decades; for Brussels, it has been about defining its place in the region and in the world.

Since 2003, 'neighborhood' has become a high-security term for Europe. In the European Security Strategy (ESS), presented in December 2003, there were two main actions that the EU should pursue in order to guarantee its security: first, to develop effective multilateralism; and second, to reinforce stability in its

⁷⁶ PhD Candidate, University of Kent.

neighborhood. In that sense, the neighborhood is a security issue more than a social-economic problem for the EU. In addition, the EU policies for neighboring countries are nothing but the consequence of the EU 'securitisation'⁷⁷ of its neighborhood. Inadvertently or not, that process involves both the de-securitization of some issues for the neighboring countries in order to concentrate on other (or to re-securitize), more relevant issues to the EU (e.g. migration). For Brussels, conflicts must be solved, democracy developed, and market economy promoted all over its immediate vicinity in order to 'secure' itself. This is a 'fact', not open to discussion. As stated by Leonard (2004: 47), by helping to transform weak or autocratic states into well-governed allies, Europeans hope to be able to defend themselves from the greatest threats to their security.

Its neighbors must change both their structures and policies in order to see the world through more 'Europeanized' lenses.

The 2004 enlargement (not to mention Greece, Portugal and Spain's accession) was to a large extent done with this goal in mind: the stabilization of the neighborhood in order to guarantee its own security. The Central and Eastern European countries' adhesion was based on the need to consolidate those countries. If left outside for longer they could derail from the 'right' path; Cold War ghosts could return. As Higashino (2004: 364) concludes from his study on the connection between the Eastern European enlargement and security, "it was the power of security discourse which pushed the EU strongly in the direction of enlargement". It is the power of security that is also pushing the EU in the direction of Turkey. As the Enlargement Commissioner Oli Rehn stated in a recent speech at the NATO

⁷⁷ Securitization is a process in which an issue becomes 'a security issue'. In the same sense, de-securitisation is a process in which an issue stops being defined as a security issue (cf. Wæver 2000, and Buzan; Wæver; de Wilde, 1998).

Parliamentary Assembly (2006): “Turkey’s membership is in our strategic interest”.

Thus, this paper’s focus will be on the way Turkey has been aligning those perceptions with EU’s and how that harmonization process matters to the EU. Hence, we will start by an analysis of the scope of Ankara’s EU-conditioned reforms, with special emphasis on the security sector; the EU’s involvement in Turkey’s defined security issues will then be examined. We will then conclude with some remarks on the inter-play of these two dynamics.

A long relationship

12th September 1963. Turkey and the then European Economic Community (EEC) signed an Association Agreement with the goal of establishing a Customs Union and foreseeing the possibility of Turkish adhesion to the EEC. This document was the basis for the relationship between these two political units throughout the following decades, even though political instability in Turkey dictated that the relationship would only assume a relevant role from the late 1980s onwards⁷⁸. In 1987 Turkey applied for full membership but had to wait two years until it was given a negative response by the European Commission in 1989.

The 1990s saw further important developments in this relationship. In 1996, the Customs Union was finally activated and in 1999, at the Helsinki European Council, Turkey was finally given the status of ‘candidate to candidate’. This came two years after the huge setback of 1997 when Turkey saw its membership bid refused once more. In order to be accepted as a candidate, Tur-

⁷⁸Due to the 1980 military coup, relations between Turkey and Brussels were suspended from 1980 until 1983 when the Turkish military forces returned power to civilian control.

key would have to comply with the Copenhagen Criteria by undertaking deep and potentially painful reforms. By the end of 2004, progress would define whether Turkey could become an EU candidate member.

On 6th October 2004, the European Commission released its recommendation stating that Turkey 'satisfactorily' fulfilled the Copenhagen Criteria. Two months later, on 17th December, the European Council set 3rd October 2005 as the date for the beginning of the accession negotiations. Since then the negotiations have advanced under strong political instability, with several negotiation dossiers frozen during the Finnish Presidency due to EU demands on Turkey regarding the opening of its ports to Cyprus.

1999-2007: time to reform

Independently of the recent course of the negotiations, Turkey has undertaken a series of reforms since 1999 in order to accommodate the EU demands on the fulfilment of the Copenhagen Criteria. On March 19th 2001, the Turkish government launched its National Programme where it detailed the necessary steps towards Turkey's reform, according to EU standards (Dorrnsoro, 2004: 53). Seven months later, the Turkish Constitution had 34 articles revised: prevention of torture, freedom of speech, freedom of association, and equality between men and women were among the individual rights introduced or underlined in the revision (idem: 53-54). These and other reforms were implemented in the years to follow, essentially through 'harmonization packages' elaborated by the government and approved by Parliament.

A large bulk of those reforms also affected the security sector, essential for the re-definition of Turkey's security perception. To

that end, important measures were taken especially regarding the composition of the National Security Council (NSC). Although it had existed before with different names and less powers, after the 1960s coup, the NSC became a major institution, arguably the institution, within the Turkish political system. Within the NSC, the military usually had the last say on a whole set of issues, the ones they defined as relevant. Regarding security, it is this body that has been responsible for defining the Turkish National Security Policy Document (NSPD), a secret document to which only a few have access.

In an amendment to Article 118, the number of civilian representatives in the NSC changed from five to nine and its usually forgotten advisory status highlighted. Henceforth, the NSC would consist of: President, Prime Minister, the Chief of General Staff, Deputy Prime Ministers, Ministers of Justice, National Defense, Internal Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Land, Naval and Air Forces Commander Generals and the General Commander of Gendarmerie.

In 2003, more measures were adopted with the goal of diminishing the role of the Turkish Armed Forces in the political sphere. With the 7th Harmonization Package, the military exclusivity for the post of NSC Secretary General (SG) was abrogated, as were its extended executive and supervisory powers, e.g. the provision empowering the SG to follow up the implementation of any recommendation made by the NSC on behalf of the President and the Prime Minister. Also, the frequency of NSC's meetings was modified from monthly to every two months. In addition, the military were excluded from the Council of Higher Education and Higher Council of Radio and Television, as the provision that allowed unlimited access of the NSC to any civilian agency was also abrogated.

Further measures were taken in order to curb the military political power. For instance, the transparency of defense expenditures was enhanced and the Court of Auditors was given albeit

limited authorization to audit accounts and transactions of all types of organizations including state properties owned by the Turkish Armed Forces. Additionally, following the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights against Turkey, State Security Courts (Devlet Güvenlik Mahkemeleri, DGM) were abolished in 2004.

These measures have obviously not produced immediate results in terms of military involvement in Turkish politics⁷⁹ or in Turkish security perceptions, but they have prepared the ground for a structural change in the Turkish security sector.

Turkey's security challenges and the EU involvement

Security, as defined by Turkish authorities, is a broad and ambivalent concept. According to Article 2 of Law No. 2945 on NSC and the NSC General Secretariat, "national security" means (apud Arslan, 2006: 26):

[the] preservation and protection against the collective internal and external threats to the constitutional order of the state, its national existence, integrity, all of its political, social, cultural and economic interests and contractual rights in the international arena.

Such a security conception could therefore be applied to almost any issue, in almost any context. This definition is materialized in the above mentioned National Security Policy Document (NSPD). This document is prepared by the General Staff with the help of the NSC's Secretary General and discussed in the NSC

⁷⁹ As shown by the recent political crisis (May-July 2007) which led to the disablement of the Parliament and the call for early elections.

meetings. The document is classified as top secret and its content is not subject to public scrutiny. Despite the secrecy, all the recent versions of the document have eventually been leaked to the press (idem: 28).

The 1997 NSPD, for example, listed Greece and the neighboring South as the main foreign threats, while fundamentalism, separatism and organized crime were defined as the main challenges to internal security. In the latest version of the document, the 2005 edition, fundamentalism and separatism were once again at the top of internal priorities, while the Greek “tendency to extend the limits of its territorial waters was a *casus belli*” (idem: 29).

As we can see, although the focus has officially been on the internal threats, Turkey’s neighborhood remains an issue of concern. In practice, the unstable geopolitical context has not allowed Turkey to de-securitize some of its most prominent security issues, as the EU would prefer. The PKK dramatically increased its activities, taking Turkey to the brink of a Northern Iraq intervention; Cyprus became a complex issue in Ankara’s relationship with Brussels; Iran, a neighbor with whom Turkey has an ambivalent relationship, is globally accused of trying to acquire nuclear military capabilities; Iraq is completely unstable; and Lebanon, Israel and Palestine are producing increasing levels of instability to the whole Middle East. Still, and despite this context, there are noticeable changes regarding Turkey’s policy to the region.

In effect, Turkey has been developing an image of stabilizing actor in the Middle East. Relations with Syria have improved and Iran is now a partner in fighting the Kurdish insurgency movements, even if Ankara is absolutely against the Iranian position on the nuclear issue. Even so, more than once Turkey has offered to act as mediator between Teheran and the West. Besides, Turkey is heavily involved in the UN’s Mission in Lebanon contributing with 500 soldiers, after having been

strongly considered as a possible leader of the mission during the creation of the force.

Turkey is also developing stronger links with its Black Sea neighbors. Ankara is now part of a confidence-building plan, jointly with Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, and Ukraine, with the goal of creating a standing naval force with a permanent headquarters, replacing the current Black Sea Naval Co-operation Task Group (Sariibrahimođlu, 2005: 29).

Nevertheless, while Turkey's stabilizing role in the Middle East has been developing it has also been considering intervening in Northern Iraq in order to eliminate the PKK safe-heaven, a security priority, thus potentially contributing to the further destabilization of Iraq and consequently the whole region. As such, this positive international attitude is embraced by Turkey inasmuch as it does not consider itself threatened. In fact, Turkey remains extremely suspicious of some of its neighbors and even maintains open disputes with some of them — like Cyprus or Armenia. Internally, it still links its own security to the maintenance of a certain cultural homogeneity and territorial unity.

Such an attitude and behavior towards security starkly contrasts with that of the European Union. Indeed, Brussels identifies less territorialized and nationalized threats. As Matlary (2006: 108) argues,

[s]ecurity policy in Europe is both de-territorialized and de-nationalized. Most use of European military power takes place far from national borders and does not involve territorial expansion, occupation or conquest.

The single security issue on which Turkey is totally aligned with the EU perception is regarding peace operations. Turkey has been very active in this field; this activism is not only related to UN and NATO led missions, but also to ESDP operations. For

instance, Ankara participated in missions in Bosnia, Macedonia, and Congo, and has demonstrated the will to be an ever-present partner in this kind of operation.

But in what way has the EU directly⁸⁰ contributed to a change in Turkey's security perceptions?

Just by focusing on the arguably three main security issues — Kurdish conflict, Cyprus, and secularism — we would reach the conclusion that EU's behaviour can be seen as ambivalent at best, and in some cases even counter productive. Cyprus has become a paramount issue in the Brussels-Ankara negotiations, largely due to Brussels. The decision to assure Cyprus of its membership independently of the UN-sponsored referendum led the Greek Cypriots to vote 'No' (76%) to the island's re-unity according to the Comprehensive Settlement Plan proposed by the UN. On the contrary, due to strong pressures from Ankara the Turkish Cypriots largely voted in favour (65%) of the Plan that would eventually lead to the island's reunification (Eralp and Beriker, 2005). As a result the problem is yet to be solved and became a major issue in the talks between Brussels and Ankara and the negotiations were almost entirely suspended due to Turkey's insistence in not open its port to Cyprus.

The Kurdish issue has re-emerged as a major security threat to the country, since the end of the cease-fire declared by the Kurdish guerrilla movement, PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) in 2004. The EU has been consistently criticized by Ankara for allowing large fluxes of money and arms to reach the guerrillas, even though Brussels included the movement in its list of terrorist organizations list in 2002 (Mango, 2005). Greece prior support to the movement, Italy's ambiguous position regarding Abdullah Ocalan's (the PKK leader) capture, and other countries' loose

⁸⁰ By 'directly' we mean the use of policies or actions directly linked to a problem's solution, rather than an attempt to change the whole structure.

stance on the organization, have led Turkish officials to accuse the EU and more broadly, the European countries, of not helping Turkey. According to Ismail Cem, a former Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs (*apud* Mango, 2005: 87),

I believe that West Europeans have a share in the responsibility for the ethnic and separatist terrorism that Turkey faced in the 1980's and in the 1990's. This does not relieve Turkey's political leadership of its own responsibility, due to mismanagement. Nevertheless, the Western political elite and media by their misunderstandings and prejudices, sometimes by their animosity, contributed fully to the tragedies that Turkey went through.

The 'religious threat' has acquired an ambiguous stance since November 2002, when AKP (Justice and Development Party) won the Parliament majority in Turkey. On the one hand, the more secular sectors of Turkish society have become less nervous about the prospects of a political party that is strongly identified with Islam ruling the country; on the other, they are still very sensitive to any policy that wishes to further the role of religion in the country. In the recent political crisis in Turkey, the EU took a very neutral position arguing for the peaceful and democratic unfolding of the crisis, and harshly criticizing the military for their threats of a military coup.

In short, and regarding Turkey, the central focus of the EU is not necessarily on the direct contribution to the resolution of this country's perceived security problems, but instead on the structural aspects of the security policy-making sector. In that sense, it could be argued that the EU's goal is not to de-securitize, but instead to re-securitize Turkey in a structural way. It is not only about making them have the same security priorities; it is about making them follow the same processes when

approaching those priorities. Whether or not it is possible to achieve this without considering and effectively approaching the current perceptions is an open question with an a priori negative answer. Indeed, it seems difficult to change a security structure when the ‘threats’ for which that structure was built are still ‘out there’.

Conclusion

As already seen in previous chapter, and made perfectly clear in the ESS, the EU global actorness is linked with the stabilization of its neighborhood (whether or not potential member states). The way to accomplish it is not only to make them more democratic and market oriented but also to align their security perceptions with the EU’s own security perceptions.

Basically, the EU prefers that its neighboring countries securitize issues that go according to the EU priorities, instead of focusing on other security issues that are irrelevant to Brussels. The EU has, as Wæver (2000: 260) says, a “silent disciplining power on ‘the near abroad’”. Even if they are not eligible for membership, the EU tries to make those countries “look more like the EU itself” (Rynning, 2003: 483).

In the Turkish case, those perceptions are still far from being aligned, even though structural reforms are being undertaken and Turkey is an important international actor when it comes to peace operations. Efforts have been focused mainly on changing its civil-military relations, on changing the structure of Turkish security. Oddly enough, that has been done without deep considerations for the current outcomes of that structure, i.e. the way Turkey defines and approaches its threats. This mismatch may lead to the EU’s failure in re-securitizing Turkey along its own lines, which would be a harsh blow to Brussels’ aspirations of

harmonizing its neighborhood security perceptions, and eventually in enhancing its international role: “[a] failure of Turkey would be a failure for the European Union, while a successful Turkey will give the European Union the chance to become a true world player, a force for stability, democracy and prosperity” (Rehn, 2005).

References

- A Secure Europe in a Better World. European Union Security Strategy*, Brussels, 13 December 2003.
- Arslan, Zühtü (2006), “Government” in Cizre, Ümit (ed.), *Almanac Turkey 2005. Security Sector Democratic Oversight*, TESEV/DCAF: Istanbul, pp. 26-35.
- Buzan, Barry; Wæver, Ole; de Wilde, Jaap (1998), *Security. A New Framework for Analysis*, London: Lynne Rienner.
- Dorronsoro, Gilles (2004), “The EU and Turkey: between geopolitics and social engineering” in Dannreuther, Roland (ed.), *European Union Foreign and Security Policy. Towards a Neighbourhood Strategy*, Routledge: London, pp. 48-61.
- Eralp, Doga Ulas and Beriker, Nimet (2005), “Assessing the Conflict Resolution Potential of the EU: The Cyprus Conflict and Accession Negotiations”, *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 36 (2), pp. 175-192.
- European Commission (2005), *Turkey: 2005 Progress Report*. Brussels.
- European Commission’s Delegation in Turkey (2004), *National Report: Turkey*, Eurobarometer 62, Autumn 2004.
- Higashino, Atsuko (2004), “For the Sake of ‘Peace and Security’? The Role of Security in the European Union Enlargement Eastwards”. *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol 39 (4), pp. 347-368.
- Konijnenbelt, Bastiaan (2006), “The Role of the Military in Turkish Politics: An Analysis of Public Statements Made by the

- Turkish General Staff” in Faltas, Sami and Jansen, Sander (eds.), *Governance and the Military: Perspectives for change in Turkey*. CEES: Groningen, pp. 155-195.
- Leonard, Mark (2005), *Why Europe will run the 21st century*, Londres: Fourth State.
- Mango, Andrew (2005), *Turkey and the War on Terror. For Forty Years We Fought Alone*, London, Routledge.
- Matlary, Janne Haaland (2006), “When Soft Power Turns Head: Is an EU Strategic Culture Possible?”, *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 37 (1), pp. 105-121.
- Noutcheva, Gergana; Tocci, Nathalie; Coppieters, Bruno; Kovziridze, Tamara; Emerson, Michael and Huysseune, Michel (2004), “Europeanization and Secessionist Conflicts: Concepts and Theories” in Gergana Noutcheva et.al., *Europeanization and Conflict Resolution: Case Studies from the European Periphery*, Brussels: Academia Press/Centre for European Policy Studies/ULB, pp. 1-35.
- Olsen, Johan (2001), “The Many Faces of Europeanization”, *ARENA Working Papers*, WP 01/02.
- Rehn, Olli (2005), “The European Union and Turkey: Beginning the Common Journey”, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Fall 2005.
- Rehn, Olli (2006a), “The EU accession process, an effective tool of the European foreign and security policy”, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 21 February.
- Rehn, Olli (2006b), “Exporting Stability”, *EuroFuture*, Spring 2006, pp. 38-39.
- Rynning, Sten (2003), “The European Union: Towards a Strategic Culture?”, *Security Dialogue*, vol 34(4), pp. 479-496.
- Sariibrahimodlu, Lale (2006), “The Turkish Armed Forces” in Cizre, Ümit (ed.), *Almanac Turkey 2005. Security Sector Democratic Oversight*, TESEV/DCAF: Istanbul, pp. 56-85.
- Smith, Karen E. (2005), “The outsiders: the European neighbourhood policy”, *International Affairs*, vol. 81, n.º 4, pp. 757-773.

- Tassirani, Fabrizio (2005), "On the Perils of Europe's 'Difference'. Security, Integration and the Case for Regionalism in the EU Neighbourhood Strategy", *Working Paper*.
- THE NEW ANATOLIAN (2006), "Duff: MEPs ignorant of Turkey's geopolitical importance", September 28, 2006.
- WÆVER, Ole (2000), "The EU as a Security Actor: Reflections from a Pessimistic Constructivist on Post-Sovereign Orders" in Kelstrup, Morten and Williams, Michael (eds.), *International Relations Theory and the Politics of European Integration: Power, Security and Community*. London: Routledge, pp. 250-294.