

HELSINKI, COPENHAGEN AND BEYOND: CHALLENGES TO THE NEW EUROPE AND THE TURKISH STATE

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Democratization and Challenges to the Turkish State in the Presence of a Powerful EU Anchor: The Post-Helsinki Era

By offering Turkey the possibility of full-Eu membership, the EU Council's Helsinki Decision of December 1999 provided a powerful impetus for change in Turkey's domestic politics and helped to instigate a series of radical reforms on the democratization front. The comparative literature on democratization suggests that external influences *per se* cannot generate democratic transition or consolidation within a single national space. Nevertheless, the literature also suggests that external dynamics can play a significantly positive role provided that the underlying conditions for such transformation are also favorable. Hence, to establish a balanced perspective on the impact of the Helsinki Summit, we need to take into account that in contrast to its Eastern European counterparts parliamentary democracy constituted the norm in Turkey in the post-War period in spite of its inherent limitations and

frequent, though short-lived, interruptions. Furthermore, Turkey enjoyed the beginnings of a vibrant civil society during the 1990s. Finally, we should recognize that the end of a fifteen year olds armed conflict with the PKK in the early part of 1999 also helped to provide a more congenial environment within which democratization reforms could proceed.

With this background in mind, the Helsinki Decision was nevertheless a crucial step in the difficult trajectory of Turkey's democratization experience. Previously, the main form of interaction between Turkey and the New Europe in the 1990s involved the signing of the Customs Union Agreement. The Customs Union in the absence of firm prospects for full-membership, however, provided few incentives for the Turkish political elites to undertake reforms designed to satisfy the EU's Copenhagen criteria. Following the Helsinki Decision, Turkey was confronted with a more balanced set of conditions and incentives to undertake the kind of reforms demanded by the EU for full-membership. Admittedly, the mix of conditions and incentives provided by the EU continued to be less favorable judged by the standards of Eastern European candidate countries. Financial assistance by the EU was extremely limited. Furthermore, Turkey was faced with asymmetric incentives in terms of its ability to resolve the Cyprus dispute. The fact that the EU was willing to admit Southern Cyprus as a full-member without any conditions attached towards the resolution of the conflict with the North, provided few incentives for an equitable solution to the dispute. It was only with the announcement of the UN Plan shortly before the Copenhagen Summit was there a serious possibility of a peaceful resolution to the dispute, with the prospect of eliminating a major hurdle on the path to Turkey's full-membership.

In retrospect, the process of institutionalized interaction with the EU initiated at Helsinki represented a powerful stimulus for change in Turkish politics. Post-Helsinki dynamics

clearly facilitated the development of a powerful “pro-EU coalition” in Turkey which was committed to EU membership not only as a vague ideal, but was prepared to push for the kinds of reforms needed to satisfy the basic conditions specified by the EU. Business-based civil society organizations, notably the organization which represented the community of big business in Turkey, TÜSİAD, emerged as the dominant components of this pro-EU coalition. This coalition, in turn, presented a major challenge to the Turkish state and notably the security and the foreign policy establishment. To be fair, the Turkish state elites were also committed to the notion of full EU membership, as a natural step in Turkey’s modernization drive which was synonymous with steady integration with the West. Nevertheless, such groups were not willing to relinquish autonomy and sovereignty on issues of what they considered to be major issues of national security. The mind-set of the security conscious state elites could not comprehend the kind of post-national state and the notion of pooling of sovereignty that had been associated with the emergence of the New Europe in the 1980s and the 1990s. In other words, the so called “ anti-EU coalition” in Turkey was characterized by its unwillingness to undertake the kinds of reforms necessary to graduate to EU membership on the grounds that such reforms would undermine autonomy and sovereignty of the nation state.

A powerful bloc represented not only by the security and foreign policy establishments but also by the political parties of the right and the left continued to provide serious resistance to EU-related reforms in the post-Helsinki era. It is fair to say that the two dominant parties of the coalition government formed in 1999, namely the left-wing DSP and the right-wing MHP were both characterized by a heavy nationalistic outlook. Both parties resisted the kind of controversial political reforms demanded by the EU such as the elimination of the death penalty altogether and the extension of cultural rights for minority groups. Only, ANAP, a

center-right party and a minor member of the coalition government appeared to be more supportive of the EU-related reform agenda. Even in the case of ANAP, a considerable rift could be identified between the leader and the rank and file of the party in terms of commitment to EU-related reforms. In retrospect, political parties in Turkey lagged behind civil society organizations in terms of the degree of support they provided for EU membership. Political parties in Turkey during the 2000-2002 period displayed a vague commitment to EU membership, but their agendas continued to be characterized by a heavily nationalistic outlook. Rather paradoxically, the AKP, in spite of its Islamist roots, emerged as the political party that appeared to display the type of commitment towards EU membership that was not visible in the case of any other political party on the right or the left of the political spectrum. The AKP, with a claim to establish itself as a moderate, center-right party as opposed to its predecessors the Welfare and the Virtue Parties (RP and FP respectively), gained a major victory in the November elections of 2002. The new AKP government proved to be particularly vigorous in its push for EU membership in the two months leading up to the Copenhagen Summit of December 2002.

In an article published in 1997, Buzan and Diez had claimed that EU membership would be detrimental for Turkey because it would help to repress or undermine its essential Islamic identity. Five years after the publication of this article, it was quite a paradox that a political party with explicit Islamist roots emerged as the most vocal element of support for EU membership in Turkey. The underlying motive for the party's active support for EU membership involved not only the material benefits associated with full-membership, but also the extension of religious freedoms that challenged the authoritarian secularism of the Turkish state. What Buzan and Diez had failed to see at the time was that the EU provided a certain protection for Islamists in Turkey and allowed them to press ahead their identity claims,

admittedly within well-defined limits, and, hence, clearly posed a challenge to the boundaries of democratic politics set by the Turkish state.

In spite of considerable resistance from various segments of the state and the party political spectrum, EU related reforms gained considerable momentum during the course of 2002. Clearly, the pro-EU coalitions led by civil society organization performed an instrumental role in this respect. We should also be careful in not treating the Turkish state as a monolithic entity in this respect. Certainly, important segments of Turkey's state bureaucracy adopted a liberal approach towards the EU-related reforms and consequently constituted an important segment of the emerging EU coalition. Looking back, one could argue that one of the important repercussions of the Helsinki decision was to create a rift not only between the state and business elites, but also between different components of the Turkish state itself.

The deep economic crisis that Turkey experienced in late 2000 and early 2001 was an important force that accelerated the momentum of reforms. The potential material benefits associated with EU membership looked all the more attractive at a time when the country experienced its deepest economic crisis of the post-War period. The economic crisis also had the effect of breaking down the resistance of the anti-EU coalition, a process which would have been far more difficult under normal circumstances. No doubt the impending Copenhagen Summit of the EU Council where Turkey's progress towards membership would be evaluated in line with the critical decisions involving enlargement in general, placed additional pressures on the domestic political actors in terms of accelerating the pace of legislative changes required by the EU. The way that the reform process picked up in the latter half of 2002 after a slow start in the immediate post-Helsinki phase clearly illustrates the power of the EU anchor.

To the surprise of most observers, Turkey experienced a series of rather path-breaking legislative changes on the democratization front in August 2002. A number of important reforms such as the abandonment of death penalty altogether and a radical extension of cultural rights for minority groups, with direct implications for the Kurdish segments of the population, reforms which would have been unimaginable only a few years ago, became a reality by the end of the summer of 2002. Given the pace whereby the reform process was accomplished, the impending Copenhagen Summit was greeted with considerable enthusiasm by wide segments of the Turkish public. The expectations concerning a favorable decision emerging at the Copenhagen Summit were raised considerably at a time when the anti-EU coalition clearly found itself in a defensive position. The UN Plan for Cyprus-the so called Annan Plan- announced during November 2002, shortly after the general elections in Turkey, also raised hopes concerning the possibility that the long-standing dispute over Cyprus could be resolved in a peaceful manner through diplomatic initiatives, removing yet another obstacle on the path to Turkey's EU membership in the process.

A sober assessment would indicate, however, that in spite of the path-breaking legislative changes outlined, progress achieved fell rather short of EU expectations in several key respects. From the EU point of view, a vital consideration involved the ability to translate major legislative changes into effective implementation. The privileged position of the army and the nature of civil-military relations continued to be a cause of serious concern. Political changes, in themselves, were not sufficient if they were not accompanied by fundamental economic reforms which would help to overcome the low-growth-high inequality that the Turkish economy appeared to be trapped in recent years. In the presence of limited economic progress, the task of accommodating Turkey from the EU standpoint would appear to be

insurmountable. Finally, the Cyprus dispute, in spite of a certain rapprochement between the key actors involved, had not been resolved. Clearly, a balanced assessment of all these considerations rendered an exceptionally favorable decision emerging from the Copenhagen Summit from a Turkish perspective appeared rather unlikely in spite of the high hopes generated in the immediate prelude to this historic Summit.

The Significance of the Copenhagen Summit from a Turkish Perspective: A Disappointment or a Natural Step Forward

Considerable pressure was brought to bear upon the EU authorities not only on the part of the Turkish government and civil society organizations but also by the United States to generate a favorable outcome for Turkey from the Copenhagen Summit. A favorable outcome essentially meant an early date to start off the accession negotiations for full-membership. Considerable pressure placed by the US on the EU leadership reflected an underlying strategic concern to tie Turkey firmly to the Western camp. In immediate terms, however, the overriding concern was to secure Turkey's co-operation in the context of the impending war on Iraq. The Copenhagen Summit was also interesting in the sense that the question of how to deal with Turkey appeared to produce a considerable rift among the EU members themselves. The core of the EU represented by the Franco-German alliance was not receptive to idea of early negotiations with Turkey. Britain and southern European countries such as Spain, Italy and Greece, on the other hand, displayed greater readiness to accommodate Turkey by offering the possibility of an early date to initiate the negotiation process. At the end of the day, the

position of the core alliance dominated and Turkey was offered a firm date of December 2004, where progress with respect to reform implementation would be subjected to a comprehensive review. If the outcome of the negotiation process was deemed to be favorable, then accession negotiations would be initiated without any further delay.

The decision reached at Copenhagen could be interpreted as a double-edged decision from the Turkish point of view. In certain respects, it represented a definitive step forward. At Helsinki Turkey had been offered the possibility of full membership but no date had been specified. Three years later, in the aftermath of the Copenhagen Summit, Turkey was now faced with a clear time-table and a firm commitment on EU's part that substantial progress in terms of satisfying EU conditionality would be rewarded by opening up accession negotiations. A formal assessment would suggest that the position adapted by the EU was understandable considering the remaining deficiencies of Turkish democracy emphasized earlier. The fact that significant progress was accomplished over the interim period did not mean that the reform was completed. The EU clearly wanted to monitor the implementation of the key legislative changes before committing itself fully to the process of opening up accession negotiations.

In addition to the concerns raised earlier, the EU officials were undoubtedly apprehensive about the true meaning of the November 2002 elections that brought the AKP to power. Although the AKP presented itself as a moderate political force, the EU elites were clearly concerned about the possibility of future clashes between the governing party and the state establishment over basic constitutional issues such as the secular character of the Turkish state. At this point, we need to reiterate a fundamental feature of the EU's approach to democratization with its fundamental dislike of religious fundamentalism. Given this

background, it was not surprising that the EU approached the AKP's electoral success with a certain degree of suspicion. At one level, it was critical of the decision to ban the leader of a mass political party from active political participation, a decision which was announced shortly prior to a major general election. Yet, at the same time, the EU was also suspicious of the moderate credentials of the party, given its Islamist heritage. The EU authorities clearly feared the possibility, although they were careful not to state this openly, that the AKP's position would sooner or later degenerate into radical stance on religious or identity issues, as symbolized by the headscarf dispute, constituting the basis of a heads on clash with the Turkish state. Taking into consideration the uncertainty surrounding the state-AKP relationship, it made sense to postpone negotiations with Turkey in order to be able to determine the ability of the Turkish state to accommodate an apparently moderate Islamic party which promised to remain within the boundaries of a secular constitutional order and yet would sooner or later push for the extension of what it considered to be essential religious freedoms at the same time.

Under normal times, the Copenhagen Decision would have an understandable outcome given the fact that Turkey clearly needed to establish further progress in terms of satisfying fundamental EU criteria. What is critical for our purposes, however, is that the Copenhagen Decision was not reached under normal circumstances. Indeed, it was reached in an extraordinary period when several important developments have been taking place simultaneously. One ought to remember that the Copenhagen Summit was also the occasion at which the decision to admit the Republic of Cyprus as well as several Eastern European states were ratified. Clearly, the early incorporation of the Republic of Cyprus to the Union, with no conditions attached in terms of resolving the dispute with the North, and the tight deadlines facing the various actors involved in the presence of asymmetric incentives hardly provided

the kind of environment needed to comply with the broad contours of the UN initiative. Yet another crucial consideration is that the Copenhagen Decision was taken at a time when the United States was preparing to verge a war on Iraq.

Given the extra-ordinary global context in which the Copenhagen Summit was concluded, we argue that the decision was somewhat short-sighted and displayed a certain lack of vision on the part of the EU policy-making elites. A more favorable signal provided by the EU at a time of massive uncertainty concerning the future of the international society would have been of crucial significance. The decision itself has clearly been interpreted as unfavorable by wide segments of the Turkish society, taking the extra-ordinary changes that had taken place in the nature of the domestic political environment in the post-Helsinki era. The Copenhagen Decision in a sense resulted in certain loss of enthusiasm regarding the implementation of EU-related reforms and a re-vitalization of the anti-EU coalition which manifested itself, in particular, in the form of a vigorous opposition to the Annan Plan. Although it would be too early to make a prediction on this issue, the ability to resolve the Cyprus dispute along the lines of the Annan Plan, involving the re-unification of the island on the basis of two essentially sovereign states, encountered a major setback at the Copenhagen Summit. Arguably, with a better mix of conditions and incentives, meaning concrete terms an earlier date to start of the process of negotiations with Turkey such as December 2003, would help to strengthen the position of the pro-EU coalition considerably. The optimistic mood that such a decision would help to generate would help to sustain the momentum of the reform process and would also strengthen the hand of the AKP government to proceed with the resolution of the Cyprus dispute along the lines of the UN plan by a considerable margin.

Finally, the Copenhagen decision embodied two additional negative ramifications from a Turkish perspective that deserve some emphasis. Firstly, Turkey was effectively pushed into a state of isolation at a time when the country faced a crucial decision with the impending war on Iraq. Arguably, more powerful signals transmitted by the EU in a positive direction would have enhanced the ability of Turkey to reduce its overdependence on the United States for its security interests. This, in turn, would have enabled Turkey to tie itself explicitly to the core EU position in opposing the war and American unilateralism at the same time. Secondly, the Copenhagen Decision helped to bring about a rift between the majority of the Turkish Cypriots on the north of the island, on the one hand, and key segments of the Turkish state, on the other regarding the future of the island. The former appeared to favor a peaceful resolution of the Cyprus dispute along the lines of the UN Plan, hoping to capitalize on the benefits of future EU membership for the island as a whole. Key elements of the Turkish state, however, voiced concerns about the plan on the grounds it would not be consistent with Turkey's security interests. Possibly, if the Copenhagen decision was more favorable to Turkey, a rift of this nature would not have materialized.

The Copenhagen Decision Viewed from a Global Perspective: Turkey's Isolation in the Light of the EU's Inherent Inward Bias

At a deeper level, the EU's Copenhagen Summit raised some fundamental questions concerning the nature of European identity and the very meaning of the notion of "Europeanization" itself. Turkey's aspirations to become a full member of the EU had raised questions concerning the precise boundaries of Europe right from the outset. Indeed, a clear dividing line had emerged within the EU between the social democratic and the Christian

democrat perspectives. The former within its broad vision of a multi-cultural Europe proved to be more receptive to Turkey's eventual accession provided that the country adopted all the necessary steps to satisfy the Copenhagen criteria. Christian democrats, in contrast, found it more difficult to come to terms with Turkey's eventual membership given their narrow conception of European identity. The problems posed by Turkey for the EU on identity grounds have no doubt influenced EU policy towards Turkey over time and clearly constitutes one of the important influences that might account for the relatively unfavorable mix of condition and incentives faced by Turkey in comparison with other candidate countries.

Whilst the EU made a firm commitment towards Turkey at the Helsinki Summit, Turkish membership at the time appeared to be an issue which could safely be relegated into distant future. Considering the tough conditions that Turkey had to satisfy rapid progress towards full-membership appeared to be a rather remote possibility. Perhaps what the European elites implicitly hoped for was that Turkey would fail to satisfy a number of the key conditions specified which would mean that the difficult decisions concerning Turkey's incorporation would be postponed indefinitely. The hope that Turkey could be safely kept on the sidelines for a long time, however, experienced a major setback with the unexpected pace of reforms in the months leading to the Copenhagen Summit. Clearly, the radical steps taken towards extending the boundaries of democratic politics in Turkey in August 2002 as well as the ability of a political party of explicit Islamist origin to transform itself into a moderate political force within a relatively short space of time constitute developments which have generated considerable among observers within the EU. In retrospect, it is fair to say that most Europeans would not have expected progress on this scale in the immediate aftermath of the Helsinki Summit.

Hence, the fact that Turkey had accomplished considerable progress in terms of satisfying EU conditions meant that the question of accommodating a large country like Turkey with a predominantly Muslim population within the EU became a serious practical question in itself which could no longer be pushed into the background. In this respect, the Copenhagen Summit, effectively for the first time, initiated a serious debate concerning the future of how Europe would like in the future with a country like Turkey included in its orbit. It also highlighted the limitations project that was intrinsically concerned with integration as an inward-oriented process. We propose that the inward-oriented nature of the EU has clearly limited its prospects of playing the role of a genuinely global actor, the kind of actor seriously interested in pursuing a multilateral agenda and shaping the process of globalization as a counterweight to the role of the superpower, the United States.

Given the inward-oriented nature of the European integration project, a perspective broadly shared, or least not seriously challenged, by political parties on either end of the political spectrum, the eventual incorporation of Turkey clearly posed problems in a number of important respects. An inward-oriented vision meant that Turkey would be considered as more of a security liability than an asset stemming from its location in a problematic region of the world. It also meant that the incorporation of a large entity like Turkey would pose special problems for the future of Europe in terms of its impact on the community's decision making structure and employment prospects within the Union in the presence of mass migration. The Copenhagen Summit clearly represented the start of a rethinking process within Europe of how a country like Turkey could be effectively accommodated within the framework of existing EU institutions and orientations.

Stated somewhat differently, the EU's ability to accommodate Turkey, or a relatively large Eastern European country like Poland for that matter, rest on the vision of what "Europeanization" actually means. Clearly, if the EU is seriously interested in becoming a genuinely global actor with a multi-cultural orientation, the incorporation of Turkey which managed to transform its domestic politics in line with the EU's democratic credentials, makes considerable sense. If on the other hand, Europeanization essentially means an inward-oriented integration project which is insensitive to broader regional or global issues beyond the EU's immediate borders, the incorporation of a country like Turkey would constitute more of a liability. At the present stage of its evolution, the EU has accomplished significant steps of economic integration, democratization and establishing peace within its boundaries. Nevertheless, it falls considerably short of assuming the role of a genuinely pro-active global actor. This deficit, in turn, is clearly influencing the direction of EU policy towards Turkey.

Looking back, a striking contrast may be identified between the Helsinki and the Copenhagen Summits. The principal issue at stake at Helsinki concerned the ability of Turkey to transform its own state and democratic institutions in line with the European norms, on the assumption that the norms of the New Europe and its future direction had been firmly established. At Copenhagen, however, there was a realization that the issue at stake involved not only the ability of Turkey to transform itself but also the future direction of the European project and the very meaning of the term "Europeanization" itself.

Post-Copenhagen Developments: A Fragmented EU Confronting American Unilateralism and Its Significance for the Future of Turkey-EU Relations

The discussions surrounding the appropriate strategy to be followed towards Turkish accession clearly illustrated the fact that, in spite of the steps taken towards establishing a supra-national state in Europe, the nation states were very much alive. It became manifestly clear that individual states had rather different visions concerning the future of Europe. For example, Britain a country proud of its special transatlantic links favored a looser form of integration and consequently adopted a more favorable stance towards potential Turkish membership in the context of the Copenhagen Summit. Clearly a country like Turkey seemed a natural place in a looser process of integration a vision integration that contrasts sharply with the emphasis on uniformity and deepening associated with the dominant Franco-German alliance. Similarly, the differing visions of the countries that made up the Mediterranean belt of the EU and their concerns over the excessive dominance of the core alliance came to the surface at the time of the Copenhagen Summit.

Hence, the central point to emphasize is that an evaluation of the Copenhagen Summit cannot be undertaken in isolation from the broader regional and international developments that have been taking place at the same time. Prior to Copenhagen, parallel to the increase in the possibility of a US-led war with Iraq, a major rift had started to emerge within the Transatlantic alliance, with the EU clearly deviating from the American position by emphasizing multilateral and diplomatic initiatives to combat terrorism on a global scale. The dominant US position, on the other hand, clearly favored an approach based on unilateralism and the use of force. The growing transatlantic divide had already generated a certain rift within the EU itself well before the Copenhagen Summit. Britain, in line with its historic outlier position, adopted a position that was increasingly close to that of the United States. Whilst, the individual stance of Britain was not that surprising, what was surprising was the

pronounced divisions that the impending Iraq War created within the broad ranks of the New Europe itself. In a rather paradoxical manner, the core Franco-German alliance was subjected to a growing challenge by a number of EU members including Spain, Portugal and the new Eastern European entrants who adopted a strong pro-EU position in relation to terrorism and the necessity of a war in Iraq. Thus, in the post-Copenhagen context, the EU appeared to be a fragmented entity facing a serious identity crisis compared to its earlier posture that projected an image of a unified Europe progressing steadily towards the goal of establishing a genuine supra-national state.

The growing rift within the EU itself set in the context of the broader rift within the transatlantic alliance will undoubtedly have a significant bearing over the future of Turkey-EU relations. One possible line of interpretation one may adopt, what we call term as a rather long-term benign scenario, is that the EU will not be able to overcome this fragmentation and restore the vitality of the European integration project once again without effectively transforming itself from an inward-oriented entity to a genuinely global actor. If such a transformation were to occur, this would naturally exert a positive influence over Turkey's prospects of incorporation into the EU. As we have tried to suggest earlier, the incorporation of a democratic Turkey makes much more sense in the context of a truly multi-cultural and outward-oriented EU which is concerned not only with its internal dynamics but also takes an active interest in developments that occur beyond its existing borders.

From a short-term perspective, however, the increasingly fragmented nature of the EU renders the future trajectory of Turkey-EU relations even more uncertain than before from the Turkish standpoint. The failure of the EU and notably the Franco-German alliance within the EU to send sufficiently powerful signals to Turkey at the Copenhagen Summit has clearly left

Turkey in a state of isolation. In such an environment, Turkey does not face the kind of incentives that would render a deviation from the American line a viable option. The lack of sensitivity that the EU has so far displayed with respect to Turkey's security concerns also means that the Turkish policy-making elite would be in a position to withdraw from a situation of overdependence on the United States.

Added to this is the perspective that is very much in the minds of the Turkish political elites that without active American support EU membership would not be realized in any case. To a certain extent this constitutes an exaggerated vision and clearly the Copenhagen illustrated the limits of American power and influence in this respect. Nevertheless, one should not underestimate the role that the United States have played in recent years in terms of shaping the outcomes of both the Helsinki and Copenhagen Summits. One should also emphasize that the Annan Plan which may prove to be a crucial step in helping to ease Turkey's way into the EU by helping to resolve the long-standing Cyprus dispute, very much emerged under American and British pressure. The core Franco-German alliance performed an essentially passive role in this respect. All these considerations suggest that an independent line for Turkey from the dominant US position is likely unlikely in the current conjuncture. These considerations also highlight once again the unfortunate and short-sighted outcome of the Copenhagen Summit in terms of effectively eliminating the possibility of Turkey taking an independent anti-war position in line with the core EU stance.