



WEBINAR OUTLINE

Are Turkey's aspirations aligned with European interests ?

The concept outlined is framed by the major question posed: "Are Turkey's aspirations aligned with European interests?" By European we presume European Union.

EU Founding Values

The EU is an Intergovernmental Organisation whose founding values and principles, which are prerequisites for aspiring new members (and are expressed in the Preamble and in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union) are based on democratic governance, the rule of law and its derivatives, namely respect for human and political rights and unity and solidarity amongst its members.

The EU is basically a peace and security producing organisation and this takes us back to the original rationale for its founding. Enlargement must not and cannot deviate from this, otherwise, it is self cancelling.

This fundamental attribute constitutes the biggest attraction of the EU ("soft" power, some call it) and an "invitation" for outsiders to join. But the road to membership is long and arduous and fundamentally different from joining other organisations such as NATO, for example, which at times has had a dishonourable record by tolerating dictatorships and inviting authoritarian regimes to join, even to this very day.

Turkey is a case in point. No one denies the basic strategic importance of Turkey. And Ankara counts on that, basically, to "cancel" out core EU principles. But strategic importance is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for EU membership.

The fact that Turkey has been trying to become a member of the European Union, has had a Custom Union agreement with Brussels since 1995, has been recognised as a candidate for admission in 1999 and started negotiations for full membership in 2005, leads to the presumption that yes, indeed, Turkish aspirations are aligned with those of the European Union.

But are they? If they are not why have negotiations stalled since 2015?

It is true that EU expansion may be reaching its limits. But since Turkey has been officially accepted as a candidate, it cannot be denied membership provided it meets the EU core criteria.

In two major areas that are of critical importance to the EU with regards to Turkey, the core EU principles are not met. So the presumption that Turkey's aspirations align with EU ones appear not to hold. In foreign and domestic policies the Turkish official record speaks to the contrary.



FOREIGN POLICY

Under the Erdogan government in particular Turkey's declaratory policies and foreign policy record and practices, especially towards EU members Greece and Cyprus, are two prominent cases in point.

Another problematic area is Turkey's active involvement in hostilities in the wider Middle East (Syria, Iraq, Libya, Caucasus) to say nothing about the treatment of Turkey's citizens of Kurdish origin or non Sunni affiliated citizens. In the latter cases violations of fundamental human rights and political freedoms are widespread and frequent and must be confronted frontally by EU governments and institutions. Otherwise what does the EU stand for?

Cyprus and Greece

With regards to Cyprus a truly oxymoronic situation exists. A candidate state for admission to the EU stubbornly refuses to acknowledge the existence of an EU member and one that holds the right to withhold consent on various stages of the admission process and, ultimately, veto Ankara's admission. What is more, Turkey implements coercive measures against Cyprus, threatens violence against it and practices gunboat diplomacy in its territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone. This is a case where the circle cannot be squared however one may try.

An analogous situation of sorts exists with regards to Greece as well. Greece's territorial integrity is openly questioned, gunboat diplomacy is practised and Athens is threatened with war, were she to exercise treaty rights acknowledged by international conventions. Unlike with Cyprus, which cannot balance Turkey militarily, in the case of Greece the danger is real for war to break out.

In both cases Turkey's behaviour is incompatible with the most basic and fundamental norms of the European Union. What are the implications of this is a question that needs to be addressed and answered by Brussels- and certainly should be by this Webinar.

Wider Middle East issues especially the wars in Syria, Iraq, Libya must also be raised and addressed in the Webinar. For one it is my view that it is the unrestrained and western tolerated behaviour of Turkey that exacerbates the problem of the refugees and prevents its eventual resolution. What we are in fact witnessing is another practice of coercive diplomacy- call it blackmail- by Ankara, this time against the EU.

DOMESTIC POLICIES

Domestic policy is another major problematic area that raises serious questions about the compatibility of Turkey's aspirations and those of the EU. Democratic governance is a sine qua non when it comes to the core values and principles of the EU. The whole idea of enlargement and the specifics of the admission process, is compliance to the basic norms of the EU.

Under Erdogan Turkey exhibits democratic governance through the instrumentality of democratic elections. But that is where it basically stops. In

all other areas it suffers from a democratic deficit that starts from the top and pervades the whole polity. Due process of law is basically absent. More and more frequently this deficit becomes particularly offensive.

Three areas are dramatically affected. They are:

a) arbitrary arrests and imprisonments of democratically elected officials in state and local government without due process

b) arbitrary closure of mass media, suppression and imprisonment of journalists and political dissenters without due process and refusal to implement decisions of international institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights that are contrary to its political decisions. In fact Turkey holds a very dubious record as a human rights violator. And what makes this worse is that the country is an EU admission candidate.

c) the arbitrary and widespread use of the term "terrorism" and "terrorist" to suppress, silence, and even imprison all those that disagree with the official government line on domestic and foreign policy issues.

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