



REPORT and POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Are Turkey's aspirations aligned with European interests ?

The basic consensus of the Webinar on the query posed "Are Turkish aspirations aligned with European interests?" was answered in the negative. It was the view of the three panelists that in spite of Turkey's long-term relationship with the European Union and its current status as an official candidate for admission, its behaviour in a number of areas was not in alignment with the interests of the EU. And that in fact those aspirations were contrary to the founding values and principles of the Union.

In this sense, it emerged that the behaviour of Ankara, both in substance and in terms of symbolism, poses serious challenges (a) to the soft power of the EU (b) to EU solidarity among members states, and (c) to the policies of Brussels affecting non-members in its neighbourhood.

The problematic aspects of the EU-Turkey relationship were identified in the areas of foreign policy, especially vis-a-vis EU members Cyprus and Greece, and in the domestic policies of the Turkish regime. The irredentism policies of Ankara, exemplified repeatedly by coercive diplomatic practices against the two EU member states, were identified as particularly challenging to what the EU stands for. At the very least they directly challenge the fundamental principle of EU solidarity.

One of the speakers, critical of EU policy towards Ankara, raised the question- not openly discussed in the official discourse - of the existence of "special interests" within the Union that seek to appease Ankara. This may well be the case, at least, with regards to EU efforts to obtain the cooperation of Ankara on the critical, for the EU, issue of the refugee problem. But it may not be confined to just that.

The other problematic area discussed centered on domestic issues within Turkey that are of direct interests to the EU. The consensus emerged that there exists a great gap between Brussels and Ankara that appears to be unbridgeable, when seen from the perspective of the candidacy of Turkey.

Whereas the founding philosophy of the EU aims at the supremacy of law, due process and securing fundamental rights and freedoms, recent developments in Turkey point to the opposite direction. Authoritarianism and arbitrariness are becoming the norm and secularism- a fundamental criterion for EU admission- is widely challenged by government policies. Additionally, international court decisions about Turkey, such for example decisions of the European Court of Human Rights, are contemptuously ignored by the Turkish authorities.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The behavior of the Turkish regime poses serious challenges to EU credibility. "Business as usual" is no winner for Brussels. Turkey's acknowledged NATO value cannot be allowed to railroad EU core values and principles, including the all-important solidarity principle.

- The EU needs to implement initiatives by using some of its most important assets, namely **the power of its institutions, the power of its attraction and the power of its purse**, to affect Ankara's behavior. This needs to be done intelligently and not confrontationally, if possible.
- In spite of its current travails, Turkish society has been displaying remarkable resilience and stamina in defending its political and human rights against arbitrariness and by refusing to give up the process of democratisation. And it is doing so at a great cost. The EU must find ways to **use its assets in supports of civil society movements within and outside Turkey**. One effective way of doing so, for example, is to **insist on the implementation of human rights decisions** taken by international courts affecting Turkish citizens. And, ultimately, **sanction specific Turkish officials responsible for the non-implementation** of such decisions.
- The EU needs to coordinate its actions in support of civil society by **propping influential EU members to move in that direction**. Germany in particular is one such member, known for its special bilateral relationship with Ankara.

The Turkish people are currently fighting for values the EU stands for. They should not be led down. On the issue of human and politics rights, Brussels cannot afford to lose the high moral ground and end up accused as an enabler of Ankara's authoritarianism and arbitrariness. This was made clear by the panelists. The EU does have the means and the power to stand and defend its foundation principles that make it stand out as a unique peace and security producing intergovernmental organisation. Nonetheless the panelists did also note that the efficacy of the EU, particularly in foreign policy and defence issues, may be reaching its limits due to horizontal expansion.

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