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TURKEY AND THE EU: AN ENDLESS HURDLE-RACE*

JESUS A. NUÑEZ VILLAVERDE

Jesús A. Núñez Villaverde is a Researcher at the North African and Middle East Department of Ortheaga y Gasset University Institute, Madrid.

Since the beginning of the year, Turkey has once again hit the headlines of the Western media with the mass arrival of illegal Kurdish immigrants on Italian territory. This was a further episode of a bilateral crisis since the holding of the Luxembourg European Council (12-13 December 1997), when the Turkish authorities showed their disappointment and unhappiness over the EU decision to exclude Turkey from the list of candidates for membership of the European Union (EU) in the next expansion round. In the light of developments since negotiations for the accession of Cyprus began on 31 March 1998, this will not in all likelihood be the last time the parties are at variance.

Turkey is already a key country in the post-Cold War international scenario, a role that will be enhanced in the near future. Initially, after the crumbling of both the Soviet Union and the global confrontation between blocs, some analysts rushed to forecast Turkey would be automatically sidetracked as a result of a shrinking role as a military ally in charge of warding off the threat coming from the East. However, this same process of disintegration of the Soviet empire and, particularly, the analysis of the Gulf War, made it clear that Turkey's value as an ally on security matters, far from being eroded, was reinforced by new ones stemming from its region and with regard to the EU.

However, while Turkey's importance within the Western (and not only Europe's) security network has been fully reinstated—with the main backing of the United States within NATO and bilaterally—its quest to be admitted into the EU fold has been dashed. Although over previous decades Brussels has stuck to its basic approach of keeping alive the possibility of future integration, nothing could prevent Turkey's negative reaction at seeing itself displaced in Luxembourg by other candidates that, in its eyes, could not match its track record of relations dating back to 1963.

This relationship between Ankara and Brussels, which will be the main subject matter on which these pages will dwell, calls for some prior considerations on the definition and position of the two parties, considering the fact that no clear-cut responses have been found to the questions of what Europe stands for and whether Turkey fits with this concept. On the one hand, people, particularly in the EU member countries, often talk about Europe when they should in fact say the European Union, thus mistaking one of its parts for the whole. It is comparatively simple to define today what the EU is, although, perhaps, it may turn out not to be so simple in the future, depending on the way the enlargement process goes and on the lists of candidates drafted in any particular moment. However, this is not the case when trying to establish with accuracy what Europe should understand. The drawing of the boundaries of what is just a peninsula of the great Asian continent is not an easy task even from a geographical perspective.

This problem of definition becomes more complex when other components such as the cultural one

are taken into consideration. In this regard, Europe is understood by some as a Christian club, where there is no room for other sensibilities. (It is worth pointing out here the claim repeatedly made by the former President of the European Commission, Mr. Jacques Delors, and more recently, March 1997, by the leaders of the European People's Party.) It seems to be forgotten that European culture is the outcome of an experience of centuries-old living together and mutual influences among, at least, three fundamental elements: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. The construction of Europe cannot be understood if one of these basic pillars of its identity is removed.

It is also argued that Europe (or what is meant to be the same, the EU) has to be an association reserved for politically and economically developed countries. Every would-be candidate should, therefore, produce sufficient credentials on both matters to be eligible for accession. It is however overlooked at times that this high level of development, rather than a prerequisite, is the outcome of a process which often turns out to be a difficult one, as our own experience has shown. The existence in this process of a reference and a support from the outside world, from Brussels in this case, to channel the efforts and travails that are to be exerted, and to palliate, to the extent possible, the costs that may be incurred, is fundamental. Accession is not only a reward for the work done by the candidate, but primarily, a goal that serves the common interests of the member states in the economic as well as political and security fields.

On the other hand, Turkey, which under no circumstances can be denied being a European country, is also plunged into a crisis trying to define its own identity. Integration into the EU is regarded as the culmination of a process of modernisation and secularisation that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk undertook. For Turkish society and, above all its elites, this is the soundest geo-political option. And so it is for the USA, which acts as Turkey's main champion in Brussels, to attempt to bind Turkey to the West, not only by way of membership of Western security institutions (NATO), but also through economic and political memberships (the EU). However, this EU vocation is not unanimously endorsed in today's Turkey. One may recall that the former Prime Minister, Mr. Necmettin Erbakan, used to threaten to denounce the Customs Union Agreement as he regarded it to be against Turkey's national interests. This is not only due to the emergence of other socio-political tendencies—such as the Islamic ideology represented by the Welfare Party—but also, and to a large extent, by the perception that Brussels has been behaving lately in a disappointing manner in response to Turkish petitions and aspirations.

It can thus be understood that, apart from the EU option, Turkey tried to explore other strategic avenues: to become the hub of a community of Turkish peoples stretching from the Mediterranean to the Chinese border, or to fully integrate in an Islamic alliance with Arab countries of the region. In the first instance, however, it seems clear that the country lacks the economic and political muscle to undertake the role of regional leader. Beyond the existing common links (language, culture, history, religion) Turkey cannot provide its would-be partners with the resources that these countries require in the amounts needed to meet the challenges posed by what is a thorough process of transition and modernisation. As regards the second option, everything seems to point to the fact that, far from a rapprochement, Turkey has turned its back on its Arab neighbours, as revealed by the escalation of tension with Syria and Iraq, among others. In this regard, the interest Turkish authorities attach to the development of their security relations with Israel—through an agreement signed in February 1996—is particularly interesting. It comes at a time when the Middle East peace process has ground to a halt to Arab countries' general protest. Aloof from this sentiment, last January Turkey conducted a joint military exercise in Mediterranean waters with both the USA and Israel and this prompted the protest of the Arab League, which denounced the emergence of a new Turkish-Israeli axis

jeopardising the already delicate balance in the zone.¹

All in all, it seems as though there is no real alternative other than for Turkey to reaffirm its European vocation and for its full membership of the EU club. From this perspective, Turkish public opinion, and more emphatically its political and economic elites, need to determine whether the EU is moved by the same purpose, even though full integration was scheduled for a longer span of time than Ankara would have wished.

There exists a psychological element that Brussels should reckon with at the time of developing its relations with Turkey. It concerns a sense of belonging, similar to the one shown by Spain when initiating its transition to democracy and its reintegration into the international scene in the late seventies. Membership of the EU, though it cannot be materialised straight away, has to be a target, the attainment of which Brussels not only has to acknowledge but also encourage. This is needed to provide a well-defined horizon for the efforts of the Turkish authorities and Turkish society as a whole, both at a national and an international level. This recognition would undoubtedly serve Turkish interests (the culmination of the process initiated by Atatürk) and also the EU's interests, which cannot disregard the development of events in a European country of Turkey's significance.

MUTUAL INTERESTS

When examining relations between Brussels and Ankara, it is advisable to identify first the main points of common interest between the parties. From an economic point of view, it is self-evident that the position of Turkey on the EU agenda is not as high as the one it enjoys in the domain of security matters. The implementation of the Ankara Agreement (1964), the Additional Protocol (1974) and the far-reaching Customs Union Agreement (1996) has yielded a growing trade surplus in favour of the EU with its tenth trade partner worldwide.

The need for development and the size of the population, which already numbers 62 million, as well as its growth trend, provide numerous and important opportunities for EU producers and traders. Although temporarily subjected to restrictions, the existence of large oil pipelines which convey Gulf oil to Turkish shores in the Mediterranean and the immediate prospects for the exploitation of oil fields in the Caspian Sea, equally constitute a valuable assets for the EU economies to reckon with.

But, so far, the most significant element that accounts for the importance that the EU attaches to Turkey falls within the domain of security. The EU openly acknowledged Turkey as a loyal and valuable ally, first during the Cold War, as a bulwark against the threat posed by Soviet expansionism on the southeastern European front, and later, in the second Gulf War, as a rearguard logistic base and launching-pad for military operations. Turkey is also in a position to undertake new tasks in defence of Western interests in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, to stand as a reference point of moderation and laicism for other countries in the region and to actively participate in the configuration of a regional order in the Balkans and the Caucasus.

Despite the renewal of the Turkish role, no noticeable change has taken place in Brussels' approach. Since the beginning of their relationship, the EU has pursued the same particular approach, which can be summarised as the idea of protecting its interests in the zone with the help of Turkey at the minimum cost possible in terms of political or economic commitments. Turkish frustration in the face of the EU's lack of enthusiasm is coupled with the inclination, given its reliance on the EU in many fields, to put pressure on Brussels to agree to a speedier pace and more compromise in their

bilateral relations, though this will hardly prove possible.

Turkey's security interests constitute the prime element accounting for the significance Turkey has attached to its Western vocation. With the end of the Second World War, Turkey soon joined Western security structures, seeking to obtain higher guarantees vis-a-vis the Soviet Union that was perceived as its major threat. This choice, which was sealed with its NATO membership (from 1952) and the search for a closer relationship with the USA, has been drifting over the last few years towards an attempt to be regarded as a European member of the Western security structures. (Hence, its bid for integration into the Western European Union, of which it is an associate member.)

From an economic point of view, EU countries constitute Turkey's major market for its agricultural and industrial exports, accounting for more than 50 per cent of its overall exports since early this decade. However the trade deficit resulting from unequal exchanges reached \$5.8bn in 1995. (This figure for 1992 stood at \$2.2bn.) As a result of the implementation of the Customs Union Agreement in January 1996, this imbalance soared to the level of \$11bn; in spite of a change for the better seems to have been recorded in 1997. The final figures have not been released yet but although Turkish exports to the EU have increased at a higher pace than its imports, the trade imbalance is against it.

It is the EU that is the main source of direct foreign investment in the country, accounting for more than 70 per cent of the total. And equally significant is the flow of financial aid coming from Brussels, despite the difficulties and obstacles put up by Greece since its accession in 1981. Between 1963 and 1980, Ankara received some ecu705m coming from different batches of financial protocols, within the framework of the comprehensive Mediterranean policy.

Last but not least, there are some three million Turkish citizens living and working in the EU (particularly in Germany), which also accounts for the importance that Turkey attaches to the EU. Its significance arises not only from the fact that this generates a considerable inflow of hard-currency remittances, but also because these Turks' absence from the national territory relieves to some extent social problems (education, housing, health, jobs) which, otherwise, should be provided by the Turkish authorities.

Only in the domain of security can a certain convergence of interests between the parties be identified to develop a balanced relationship. Conversely, there exists a clear divergence in all other areas that can partially account for the frequent difficulties that the relationship between Brussels and Ankara encounters. The confrontation between the mutual interests so far underlined and the attitudes traditionally shown by the two parties allows us to ascertain a two-fold miscalculation. As regards the Turkish side, one can easily verify that its situation of reliance, unable to produce a single asset which may be deemed vital for Brussels, does not lead it, as it is often the case, to threats (like vetoing enlargement of NATO or reformatting of the military structure, rendering the division of Cyprus permanent, withdrawing its candidature to the EU, boycotting imports from the EU) which bring no benefit, but only serves to deteriorate its image internationally.

As regards Brussels, a vision commensurate with the challenges in the zone is not in sight. Nor is Brussels in accordance with what should be the interests of an entity called to be one of the protagonists in the world order that is taking shape. It will not suffice to make a vague promise or to continue the traditional flow of trade exchanges, from which quick benefits can be derived, while failing to understand that Turkey has to be helped for it to become irrevocably hooked on the process of EU integration. EU integration is the best way of preventing the country from opting for other

choices, less favourable to European schemes, that could steer the country in the opposite direction. Recognition of the existing obstacles and problems can under no circumstances be a sufficient justification for inaction, waiting for a more favourable future. The construction of this future is Brussels' main task and should be assumed without delay, in the heat of the renewed enlargement drive set in motion in Luxembourg.

As a first step, the analysis of the different obstacles that publicly or privately thwart the ability to move relations ahead of their present stage should be squarely tackled. Unless the cobweb so finely knitted over the already long history of relations between Brussels and Ankara is unravelled through dialogue, a formula leading to a future decision on the admission of Turkey into the EU fold cannot possibly be found.

The EU's fears that the principle of freedom of movement of people could worsen the current level of more than 18 million unemployed, looms as one of the main obstacles to Turkey's admittance. According to the most pessimistic estimates, hundreds of thousands would be added to the more than two million Turkish citizens already settled within the EU, which would worsen the social and economic situation of countries such as Germany where most of this population is located. This sort of analysis is based on the assumption that the wage and income differentials will, inevitably, encourage a great number of Turks to move to the most developed places, while it disregards the fact that this would not be the only consideration contemplated by a would-be immigrant, particularly if there existed prospects of improving their lot at home. The accession of Turkey to the EU would have a positive impact in terms of Turkey. It would also have a positive impact to the EU in terms of the development which would help to moor the population to their native places. It should not be categorically stated that a migration flow would continue in the future as if the integration process itself would not bear any deterrent effects, to the extent that the income and development gaps would be abridged.

To a large extent, this accounts for Brussels' halting of the provision in the Additional Protocol whereby freedom of movement of people would come into force "any time between the end of the 12th (1976) and the end of 22nd year (1986) after the enforcement of the Association Agreement", something which obviously failed to materialise.

This type of fear triggered the German reaction, contrary to the understanding shown by Italy in dealing with the already mentioned crisis brought about by the arrival of some 1200 Kurdish refugees-illegal immigrants on Italian shores early this year. The police attempt to check this inflow², within the framework of the Schengen agreement, failed to draw the commitment of the Turkish authorities, thus showing a lack of sensitivity over an issue which needed the Turks' help. Turkey should refrain from creating problems for those who could be its future partners in retaliation for Brussels' rebuff, and understand that its cooperation in controlling the present migration flow will be beneficial for both its image as well as its interests.

Brussels continues to regard the Islamic nature of Turkey (despite its secular structure) although seems to be at times a formal, reiterative and void of real content declaration as an element of separation if not of rejection. It seems clear that in the twenty-first century, which will be unquestionably multicultural, this matter will not be decisive when it comes to deciding on Turkey's integration or exclusion. However, one cannot overlook the existence in our societies of deep-rooted social stereotypes which keep alive the image of centuries-long confrontations, and which has to be overcome through the promotion of mutual understanding and exchanges at all levels.

The permanent state of tension between Greece and Turkey greatly affects the development of relations between the EU and the government of Ankara. Although they began their relations with Brussels almost simultaneously, the accession of Greece in 1981 while Turkey remained plunged in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup, turned into a clear advantage for the former. Ever since that time, Greece has exercised, often in an abusive manner, its veto to thwart every attempt by Brussels to tighten its links with Ankara. Clearly, Turkey is at a disadvantage with regard to Greece, both in facing the resolution of their bilateral disputes and fulfilling its aspiration for full membership of the EU.

As long as the EU decision-making process remains unaltered, Greece will hold the key to facilitating or hindering Turkish aspirations. However irrational Greece's moves may be in the light of the EU's policy on Turkey, it ultimately serves Greek interests. From this point of view, and bearing in mind the existing bilateral disputes between the two countries, it is no surprise that the Greek authorities keep exploiting this state of affairs to gain an advantage in their claims vis-à-vis Ankara, both with regard to the dispute over the control of the Aegean and in connection with the division of Cyprus. Athens tries, and will continue to do so, to gain some sort of compensation for lifting its permanent veto on its neighbour.

The socio-political problems wielded by EU representatives to justify the slow pace of the integration process are also manifold. Human rights allegations, which are often admonitory statements of the European Parliament, and the tension arising from the curtailment of fundamental freedoms are Brussels' topmost concerns in this field. Many things need to be improved in Turkey to turn its political system into a full-fledged EU-style democracy. The detention of members of parliament, the military-induced ousting of the government and the banning of political leaders and a party such as Refah, which gained more votes than any other party in the last elections, help little to change the image of the Turkish political system. Although the initial impetus of Atatürk from 1923 has brought about substantial progress in relative terms—in comparison with many of its neighbours—social and political modernisation of the country has not been concluded yet.

In the face of this state of affairs, the Turkish authorities cannot claim that the situation in some of the countries invited to join the EU is no better or that, ultimately, these concerns are all excuses to gain time and evade a final response to its calls for integration. Even if this were the case, which in most instances it is not, it would be no excuse for Turkey to disregard the need to improve its record and adjust itself to the surrounding circumstances. Had there not been a real base for adversely judging Turkey's human right record, the European Parliament would have sought another argument to bring the ratification of the Customs Union Agreement to a standstill, as it did from 6 March to 13 December 1995. If it wishes for a better hearing and treatment, Turkey should lay emphasis on the substantial improvement of its records both locally and abroad, rather than on portraying itself as the victim of what it regards as discrimination based on unwarranted prejudices.

ECONOMIC RELATIONS

From an economic perspective, relations throughout these decades seem to have developed in a more favourable climate, although this does not necessarily mean that they have been free of problems since the enactment of the Ankara Agreement of 1964.

The signing of the Customs Union Agreement, which is currently in effect, is the last step in the transitional period towards full integration, as mentioned in the Additional Protocol (1974), which

was, in turn, the last stage of the preparatory period agreed in the Association Agreement (1964). For the Turkish authorities, as they put it at the time, “customs union with the EU is an important qualitative step forward for the gradual integration of Turkey in Europe. This is a process in motion”. On the other side, Brussels has not rejected this assumption, although this gradualism is clearly measured by a different yardstick.

While wrongly considering that economic reforms are the only thing that matters to eventually pass Brussels' demanding exam, the Turkish authorities have tried, particularly since the reforms of 1980, to adjust the national economy to the new rules established in the agreements. Moved by this idea, and by the results reaped ever since, the Ankara government formally applied on 14 April 1987 for membership of the European Community, a move that failed to raise any enthusiasm in any of the EC institutions. In fact, Brussels' response, in the form of an opinion of the European Commission, to the Turkish application for accession (18 December 1989), was a further example of double-standard diplomatic language. While the principle of eligibility already envisaged in the 1964 agreement was reasserted, it stated the idea that it was not the appropriate time for integration.

In the Commission's argumentation no reference was made to any of the obstacles previously mentioned, nor was the fear expressed that with its accession Turkey would become the largest and one of the most populous countries of the Community, with the economic and political implications that would entail. Conversely, the recommendation to wait for a more timely opportunity was fundamentally based on economic matters directly linked to the existence of important structural disparities, very acute macroeconomic imbalances, a high-level of protectionism in the industrial sector and a low level of social protection.

Simultaneously, in an attempt upon the request of the Commission (with the later approval, on 5 February 1990, of the European Council) to assuage Turkish frustration, a series of measures were adopted that aimed to: complete the Customs Union, resume the provision of financial aid, promote industrial and technological cooperation and strengthen political and cultural ties. All these ideas, which were to a large extent already included in the Ankara Agreement, were taken up at different levels in the “Matutes' package” (12 June 1990). At any rate, the blocking stance adopted by Greece prevented, once again, its effective development, denying Turkey, among other things, the possibility of profiting from the ecu600m withheld since the 1989 Financial Protocols. (Turkey could only be included as a recipient of the horizontal actions promoted by Brussels within the framework of the renewed Mediterranean policy, put into effect in 1990).

However, this situation did not prevent the Turkish authorities from pursuing the process of reforms and adjusting the economy to the conditions imposed by Brussels: a necessary and burdensome effort for many production sectors, which were subsequently exposed to high levels of competition, and for the national accounts, which recorded a sizeable increase of the trade deficit with EU member countries. In 1993, facing the imminent implementation of the Customs Union, estimates reckoned that the removal of taxes would cut revenues to the tune of \$50bn by the year 2000.

On matters regarding legal reforms efforts at adaptation can be currently considered over or in the course of implementation. However, it is a different story with regard to the economic situation, whose indicators have clearly moved away from the convergence criteria set forth at Maastricht. Although the major effects of the 1994 economic crisis—when GNP fell well below 6 per cent, though it grew at an annual rate of 6-8 per cent in the following years—seems to be over, inflation is hovering around 80 per cent and serious trade and current account deficits are lingering, while the

tax revenue shortage gives no signs of improvement. A foreign debt of over \$66bn, over 50 per cent of export revenues earmarked for servicing debt and a per capita income barely over \$2,200 are, likewise, unattractive features of the Turkish economic situation.

On top of these problems, which are by themselves argument enough for Brussels to dampen Turkish enthusiasm for integration, come those stemming from a difficult internal and external political situation, on which successive Turkish governments have not acted with the same determination on economic issues. Unable at an internal level to get rid of the saddle which hampers full development into a democracy governed by the rule of law—a fundamental base for overcoming the above-mentioned obstacles—and, in the outside world, entrenched in a maximalist position which renders negotiation extremely difficult, Turkey is at a disadvantage. A change of attitude, together with economic efforts, should constitute the most important task. This would be with a view, not only to improving its image in Brussels, but also locating Turkey among the developed countries, thus completing the process initiated by Atatürk. Only after its internal socio-political problems have been resolved and more positive results in the economic domain have been attained, and by having a more open attitude to dialogue abroad, will progress be made toward the ultimate goal of integration into the EU.

From the EU perspective it seems clear that the accession of Turkey as a full member is not viable in the short- or medium-term. This is a conviction that Turkish society and leaders should accept, not with the idea of forgetting the goal, but, on the contrary, as the starting point of a strategy of rapprochement which seeks to overcome all the current disadvantages. It is not a matter of wielding as many historical, and even legal, reasons to support a position that will fail to yield positive results, but of accommodating to the present circumstances and to the existing relationships of forces.

As for Brussels, it cannot remain undecided while shifting the burden of rapprochement to Ankara's shoulders. Brussels should, in the first place, actively assume provision of Article 28 of the Association Agreement on the future integration of Turkey into the EU and pledge its commitment that the Customs Union will not be the last stage of their relations. It is necessary to show strong political will for the implementation of the provision envisaged in the 1996 Agreement. The scheme designed at that time did not limit itself to the implementation of the Customs Union, as it went hand-in-hand with two other elements of similar scope: the regular entertainment of political dialogue at different levels and an important package of financial aid.

Although it is too early to make a final judgment on the impact of the Customs Union and the ability of the Turkish economy to meet such a challenge, it is evident that early results indicate a direction; important costs will be born in some production sectors (particularly the industrial sector) and in social terms (bankruptcies and workers redundancies). Aimed precisely at ameliorating this possible cost, an important financial package was approved. However, the Greek veto and the attitude of the European Parliament have unfortunately prevented the implementation of this package. The amount of aid totals no more and no less than ecu2bn, to be apportioned from 1996 over five years. It is broken down into 375 items earmarked in the EU ordinary budget: ecu1000m-1150m in loans from the European Investment Bank (EIB) and little more than ecu400m from the MEDA funds, as established within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Association.

The Turkish Government has rightly portrayed the denial of these funds as a failure by Brussels to fulfil its commitments. It cannot be accepted that the EU had to assume this situation just because one of its members holds on, against the grain, to a blocking stance that damages the credibility of

Brussels and jeopardises the implementation of a decision which was agreed upon by the other EU member states. The effort Turkey is putting into adapting itself to the conditions of free competition prevailing in EU territory gains full sense only when considered in the perspective of a later stage of integration. It would be even more difficult to justify to the public the hardship involved without the EU making clear its level of commitment to the accomplishment of this goal, which should be shared by the two.

This does not mean that Brussels should render a deaf ear to all irregularities, or that it has to surrender to all Turkish pressures for the sole purpose of keeping a strategic ally. On the contrary, the EU should continue putting pressure on Turkey in this field, as the European Parliament does. This will enable Ankara to gain acquaintance with the behavioural criteria by which it should act and assist it in mobilising the countless resources at its disposal, above all the economic ones, to encourage the process of socio-political and economic modernisation.

In fact, a different scenario is contemplated, and Brussels finally agreed to reject Turkish aspirations. But even in this case, which would be a strategic mistake in the history of the EU, a more resolute attitude should be shown and the decision publicised straight away. Only by doing so, however disappointing, can work begin on redefining a new model for the future, which would not necessarily have Brussels as its sole reference. The present state of indefiniteness is, in this regard, the worst of all possible options.

Although the Turkish media and the present government of Mesut Yılmaz could have at times conveyed the impression that they really thought integration was at hand, they were aware that existing problems prevented such a decision at Luxembourg. Ankara's campaign over the last few months had been centred on preventing Turkey from being discarded from the group of candidates that was being drafted. Nothing would have compelled the EU to alter its stance with regard to Turkey, which is sheltered under the cover of its repeatedly acknowledged eligibility, had it not been for the enlargement process officially agreed in Luxembourg. It is a hard pill to swallow for Turkey to witness how it is displaced by countries it considers newcomers, without being even accorded the symbolic recognition of being among the candidates. Although it is no justification, it perhaps accounts for the hasty public reactions following the latest European Council meeting, made without giving the necessary thought to the implications of the EU decision.

Brussels, led by France and the Commission attempted to refrain from rebuffing Ankara, and summoned a Permanent European Conference, whose first session was held in London on 12 March and which Turkey finally decided not to attend in protest for what it considered to be an EU rebuff. The inclusion of Turkey, together with the Fifteen and the eleven new candidates, was attained at the last minute after overcoming the German objections last November. No concrete and quick results are expected from this meeting, which is a forum of debate on foreign policy, crime and immigration, as it is in fact a signal specifically conveyed to Turkey, in the face of the inability to progress resolutely toward integration.

It can be rightly said that this is a very faint signal, although one has to bear in mind that two other promises or decisions were also part of the package: to further the Customs Union and the effective implementation of financial aid. Attached to this three-fold decision was a series of conditions that Turkey should fulfil to be entitled to participate in London: full respect for human rights, a commitment to resort to the International Court in the Hague for arbitration of its dispute with Greece over the Eastern Aegean islands, and some visible signs that the Turkish-Cypriot community

will not oppose the negotiating process for the accession of Cyprus to the EU.

All in all, the EU decision represents a move ahead, as it is a common position of the Fifteen, this time without the Greek exception, and shows a path of action to the Turkish authorities. Moreover, the above-mentioned conditions constitute a resolution equally binding to all countries invited to the European Conference, and therefore Ankara cannot portray them as specifically aimed against it. However, there are no guarantees that the promises to further the Customs Union and to effective implementation the aid package, will not be hampered by Greece. Apart from national interests opposed to Turkish integration, it cannot be understood clearly why Turkey is not at least included in the second group of candidates (with Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Latvia and Lithuania). If it is claimed that the same conditions are applied to all the candidates and Turkey's eligibility is accepted, this effective discrimination is politically incoherent. This discrimination, with all the symbolic weight that it bears, can easily be avoided, given the fact that the commitment to initiate the talks for integration does not presuppose the establishment of a date for their conclusion.

As for Turkey, in the eyes of its opponents, its failure to attend the Conference would confirm its reluctance to commit itself to the search for solutions to the existing bilateral disputes and its unwillingness to improve substantially its record in the field of fundamental freedoms. This is not an approach that will persuade Brussels that Turkey's aspirations for integration should be heeded. Instead of doing this, Turkey has to focus, above all, on improving both its economic situation—to bring its economic indicators closer to the convergence criteria required by Economic and Monetary Union—as well as its socio-political record, without neglecting relations with its neighbours, redrawn under new parameters. As for Brussels, it should understand that no runner can face a race, and much less one fraught with obstacles, without knowing in advance if it will be considered a participant at the finishing line.

1 Exercises on rescuing fishing boats in danger, five warships and four helicopters participated and to which Jordan sent an observer and Egypt refused the invitation.

2 Through an agreement signed in 8 January 1998 between Germany, Austria, Belgium, France, Greece, the Netherlands and Italy.