

WHY IS PRESIDENT SARKOZY ACTUALLY AGAINST TURKISH ACCESSION TO THE EU? FACTS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The new French President Nicolas Sarkozy has been the focus of many discussions prior to and after the 2007 French Presidential elections due to his far-reaching political discourse in France, in the EU, and around the world. Undoubtedly, Turkey is not an exception. His views about full membership of Turkey to the EU also created reaction in Turkey and steered up the anti-EU sentiment to a considerable extent. There are several debates about the well-known anti-Turkish sentiment of President Sarkozy. This paper aims to bring a different approach to the ongoing debates by focusing on the political profile and priorities of Sarkozy. The paper argues whether French foreign policy will significantly change under President Sarkozy as he claimed his approach to be 'a rupture' during his election campaign, and what this 'rupture' really means for the EU in general and for Turkish EU accession process in particular. The essential argument of this article is that it is not Turkey itself per se, but domestic constraints and international priorities combined constitute the ground for the negative opinion about Turkish EU membership in France and that the difference between substance and style should be identified in evaluating Sarkozy's foreign policy. Following a thorough analysis of the issues involved, the paper concludes with future suggestions to overcome the present and possible future difficulties.

Key Words

French Foreign Policy, Nicholas Sarkozy, Domestic Politics, European Union, French EU Presidency, Turkey

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Introduction

The subsequent changes around the world in the aftermath of the Cold War and later after 9/11, as well as the normative changes simultaneously occurring, created problems for all the states and their foreign policy outlook. The shifting paradigms of security and geopolitics as well, as the parallel process of globalization, led to a period of self-questioning as well as self-identification. This was neither an easy transition nor was it free from domestic problems and political cleavages aligned to these developments. Therefore, the governments had to look for means of reconciling the external constraints with the internal ones in line with the emerging global political trends. Some states were quick to act and redefine their existence, and some were not. However, in any case ‘careful change’ was the dictum. This has also been true for France. France faced the same type of constraints and dilemmas. In addition to Europeanization and globalization process in France, its foreign policy has been an additional concern to be dealt with. France has seen a shift, together with the recent enlargement wave of the EU, as well as in the aftermath of the 2005 referendum, towards losing its central position in the European integration process. The effects of this shift within the EU will be even clearer in the decades to come. Consequently, there comes the urge for change since ‘business as usual’ does not seem to pay lucrative dividends, especially with reference to foreign policy. Therefore, the long-time Gaullist trend in French foreign policy needed to be reshaped.¹ The French people responded to this need for both domestic and international change by voting for a right wing politician Nicholas Sarkozy during the May 2007 elections, and soon after that by giving him the ability to govern with majority in the parliamentary elections. In essence, the French people were giving three main distinctive messages to Europe and the world as such. First, they wanted a radical change in line with domestic realities, especially concerning the increasing gap between haves and have nots in French society due to the globalization process. Second, they did not wish to see a melting influence of France within the EU, especially in the aftermath of the recent enlargement wave. Third, they wanted to see a France adapted to the realities of new world order and reinforcing the French presence in global politics, representing French values.

Former French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine, while commenting during a BBC interview just prior to French Presidential Elections of 2007

¹ The reshaping of French foreign policy began already before President Sarkozy, however; it remained almost unnoticed by the French people.

said that ‘France needs to find a balance between pretension and depression to be able to clarify its future foreign policy objectives’.² Indeed, the new French President Nicolas Sarkozy now has the difficult task of creating this balance for France. Since the French political system consolidates the foreign policy making power in the hands of the president, which is often criticized as being unaccountable by the French people, the individual political profile and priorities of President Sarkozy will clearly play a significant role in defining the foreign policy priorities of France in line with French political culture and foreign policy interests. Given that Sarkozy will be inclined to run for the Presidency for a second time; his task will not only be a balancing of foreign policy interests of France with the rest of the world, but reconciling these with domestic political concerns as well. This, in return, will be highly visible especially at the EU level as well as concerning the EU membership process of Turkey.

In this context, this paper aims to bring in a different perspective to analysis of Sarkozy era in France, through analyzing current French foreign policy outlook, while at the same time analyzing the difference between style and substance of Sarkozy’s policies building upon his political profile. In this way, the paper will answer the question why President Sarkozy is essentially against Turkish membership to the EU. The first section will begin with a brief analysis of the political profile of Nicholas Sarkozy and the state of France during the time of 2007 elections. Next, the foreign policy priorities of France under Sarkozy will be focused upon. Third, the new French foreign policy under Sarkozy will be discussed with special emphasis on the EU and the French EU Presidency of 2008. Then, the reasons behind the anti-Turkish sentiment of Sarkozy will be assessed. Finally, the paper will conclude with suggestions for both France and Turkey with a view to overcome present and possible future foreign policy difficulties.

Political profile of President Sarkozy and the state of France during 2007 elections

At the end of the Chirac era, often described as ‘immobilisme’ in France, the French public voted for change and elected the right wing politician Nicholas Sarkozy as the new French president in May 2007; and later in June 2007 also gave him the majority in the parliamentary elections. Thus Nicholas Sarkozy came to power with a full political mandate to realize

² This is a very important remark since it fully signifies the current reality of French foreign policy. Hubert Védrine, *BBC Interview*, 8 May 2007.

the change which the French people have been asking in parallel with the developments both in domestic and international fronts.

During his election campaign, Sarkozy used the word 'rupture', a concept which appealed highly to the French people for several reasons; the most important being the new political cleavage arising in French political culture, that of Europeanization and globalization, in addition to the conventional domestic political cleavages.³ The campaign strategy of Sarkozy was to appeal to all segments of the society equally in a populist way while at the same time using a communication style resembling that of his American counterparts. Through appealing to both 'haves' and 'have nots' in French society; promise of a dynamic and pragmatic presidential policy making style; and promise of reinforcing the role of France in world politics; Sarkozy was articulating long time expectations of the French electorate. He also contributed to this wave of change by articulating that 'France is in decline for the past twenty years' thus directly attempting to break taboos of French society, at least psychologically. When he was elected, he revealed his difference by the composition of his cabinet ministers and the prime minister. Despite his radical political discourse throughout the elections, he tried to give top jobs to people from all segments of the political spectrum. For example, he chose as his foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner, a long time leftist, who also is known to be in favour of Turkish accession to the EU. Beyond doubt, the selection of Mr. Kouchner as foreign minister signifies the normative pillar of French foreign policy to be pursued by President Sarkozy in the years to come.

According to some political analysts Sarkozy has been a Bonapartist presidential candidate and a president, for some others he is a pragmatic neo-Gaullist. Some observers claim that Sarkozy's election victory and political style bear a resemblance to that of former British prime minister Tony Blair back ten years ago. There are others who call him 'French Berlusconi' and some others call him as 'Sarkozy the American'.⁴ All these, and similar

³ Sophie Meunier, 'Globalization and Europeanization: A Challenge to French Politics' *French Politics*, 2004, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 125-150.

⁴ For a variety of comments and discussions about the personal and political profile of Sarkozy and French politics see Henri Astier, 'What now for Nicholas Sarkozy?' *BBC News*, 16 May 2007; CSS ETH Zurich, 'Sarkozy to set a new course for French Foreign Policy' *Centre for Security Studies*, Vol. 2 No.17, July 2007; PNR, 'France's Ambitious Sarkozy Faces Huge Challenges' *Intelligence Brief*, 8 May 2007; Isis Europe, 'Sarkozy's brave new world: France's foreign security and defence policy' *European Security Review*, No.35, October 2007; Philip Gordon, 'The Hyper President', *Polls & Polls*, November/December 2007; Philip Gordon, 'French President Sarkozy's First 100 days' *Time*, 7 September 2007; A Doland, 'Sarkozy vs. Chirac: Tougher on Russia, Friendlier to Israel and United States' *Associated Press*, 28 August 2007; Nick Hewlitt, 'Nicholas Sarkozy and the Legacy of Bonapartisme. The French Presidential Elections of 2007' *Modern and Contemporary France*, Vol.15, No.4, pp.405-22; Helen Drake, 'All Change Here? The French Presidential and Parliamentary Elections of 2007' *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol.12, No.3, pp.423-29; Nicholas Sauger, 'The French Legislative and Presidential Elections of 2007' *West European Politics*, Vol.30, No.5, pp.1166-75; Tim King, 'Nicholas Sarkozy' *Prospect*, No.100, July 2004; Sophie Pedder, 'Atypically French: Sarkozy's Bid To Be Different Kind of President' *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2007.

comments, naturally lead to the question who really is Sarkozy? What are his primary objectives? What kind of a role does he envisage for France in the EU and the world? These and many other questions are asked, and almost everyday another answer emerges. These questions are obviously quite complex to answer entirely at the time of writing, but it is still possible to analyze his political profile and priorities through his own book and his overall performance as the president of France since the elections.

In his book entitled *Testimony*, written shortly before the French presidential elections, Sarkozy not only writes about his private life but also about his political views. Sarkozy clearly explains his vision about France and the direction of future reforms; why he is against the Turkish membership to the EU; and why he supported the law on the Armenian issue; while at the same time he warns that the EU should be honest towards Turkey regarding its membership prospects. Thus the book is claimed to be more of a political manifesto than a mere autobiography.⁵

Sarkozy is considered as one of the new generation of politicians in France, and this is partially why he can be unpredictable at times, because it is not always possible to identify him with conventional analysis of French political style. He is young, energetic, and pragmatic. He established his election strategy on 'have nots' in French society through emphasizing his migrant origin. He has a contradictory approach in terms of domestic reforms related to the economy which became more emphasized at the end of his first year of the presidency. On the one hand, he talks about the need for reforms and embraces liberalism; on the other he advocates protection of companies and jobs, as well as the significance of national champions.⁶ When he displayed openly a pro-American view during the elections and its aftermath, he took a deliberate political risk on the domestic front given the long-time anti-American sentiments in France. However, he was welcomed by his American counterparts, and the risk he took began to pay him off following the elections. Many other examples can be given about his political approach. Sarkozy reads the political scene well, and has created an optimal strategy by promising the French people dynamism and change during the elections. He is a shrewd politician who can easily mobilize public opinion,

⁵ Nicholas Sarkozy, *İtirafımlarım*, Istanbul: Karakutu Yayınları 124 (translated by Hasret Banu Bulut) [Temioğnage / *Testimony: France, Europe and the World in 21st Century* (translated from French by Philip Gordon)], 2007, p.10.

⁶ 'Sarkozy's Difficult Year' *The Economist*, 1 May 2008, see also 'Sarkozy's France: The Presidency as Theatre' *The Economist*, 1 May 2008. See also Philip Whyte 'Sarkonomics- a user's guide' *CER*, 8 November 2007.

albeit sometimes in a negative fashion. Nevertheless, he is able to turn unfavourable circumstances to his favour eventually.

Sarkozy is both an insider and an outsider to the conventional French political elite depending on where one stands. He is an outsider since he comes from essentially a migrant family, and is not educated in the well-known schools that educate the French political elite. However, he is an insider since he has a long time career in French politics. He became the mayor of a rich Paris suburb at the age of 28, later he became a member of the Parliament. He was also Minister of Interior and Minister of Finance previously. Sarkozy rejects the elitist view of French politics and politicians. He claims that politics should be `for` the people, `not against` them. He is a risk-taker and a closer, at least in style which he needs to reflect in substance in the coming years as well.⁷ He explains his political approach clearly in his book, and says for example that `During the first evening I became the Minister of Interior; I went to the police stations and other security posts of Paris area. Since then, I never gave up going to people and directly talking to them about the regulations we make and investigating how people receive them`.⁸

As a former minister and an experienced politician, Sarkozy has a tendency to look for pragmatic and lasting solutions to existing problems. Following his election victory, it is possible to observe that he has abandoned his far-reaching political discourse on a variety of issues and has a tendency to follow a relatively moderate policy concerning several policy issues; including the accession of Turkey to the EU, if not in style but in substance. He did not block the opening of negotiation chapters with Turkey per se, as he was expected to do, and he also made a special effort to send diplomatic envoys to Ankara, and still continues to do that in order to clarify his intentions as well as to sustain bilateral relations.

Conversely, however, he resumed the position which he highly criticized during the presidential term of Chirac, that is, too much power being concentrated in the hands of the president, or in other words the unaccountability of French presidents; especially in terms of foreign policy. He is working exactly as Chirac, consolidating his presidential power even more.

⁷ Dominique Moisi, `Certain Ideas of Europe`, *The Economist*, 11 March 2008.

⁸ Nicholas Sarkozy, *Testimony: France, Europe and the World in 21st Century*, p.41

Following a year in the presidency, the popular votes of Sarkozy fell down to all time low levels and the political opposition regained ground during 2008 local elections. While some commentators define Sarkozy as a typical French politician,⁹ they also point out to a difference. When he became president of France, Sarkozy deliberately set out to break many taboos in French society through his discourse and behaviour. He behaved like a movie star, his private life occupying the headlines for a long time. This was unconventional presidential behaviour for French people. He tried to indicate to the French people that he is one of them, with all the strengths and weaknesses. He has been trying to convince the French people for an overall change. However, the change of mindset among the French citizens is not likely to happen in the short run, which is also clear through opinion polls. Thus, the imbalance of style and substance is a clear obstacle for Sarkozy, both domestically and internationally.

Next to the political profile of Nicholas Sarkozy, the state of affairs in France at the time of his election is also important in order to be able to assess the direction of current and future foreign policy priorities of Sarkozy and that of France. As it is also emphasized by Sarkozy in his book, the main reason behind this relates to 'the complexity of ensuing an optimum point between strengths and weaknesses of France', and the expectations of the French people vis-à-vis offsetting the negative effects of globalization process, thus decreasing the gap between 'haves' and 'have nots' in the society. France, as Sarkozy took it over from Chirac, is a country where unemployment and the gap in income distribution are increasing; the problem of migration leads to social outbursts in big cities; and it is a country where the political elite and the people increasingly become alienated.

In terms of its foreign policy, Sarkozy took over a Gaullist France, which has been largely isolated and marginalized from the EU, following the 'non' to the EU Constitution referendum back in 2005. France is well-known with its opposition to the USA since the years of De Gaulle, but gradual alignment was nevertheless sustained since then. However, especially during the recent Iraq intervention of the USA realized without the explicit UN mandate; Chirac's opposition to the US military intervention not only divided the EU member states, but also created a crisis between France and the USA. Chirac's infamous severe criticism of the then EU candidate countries that sided with the USA still echoes today. On the other hand, France was silent during the Tutsi mass destruction in Africa.

⁹ Philip Manière, 'Certain Ideas of Europe', *The Economist*, 2 May 2008.

On the defence and security policy front, Sarkozy has taken over a France which is almost unable to finance modernization of its army and nuclear power. Sarkozy has to comply with a budget amounting to the 2.0 - 2.5 % of the total GDP in order to realize the necessary improvements.¹⁰ He set out to renew the 1994 French Defence White Paper in 2008 according to which he will position France in the coming decade. It is, for example, stated that 'The European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance are complementary: France's ambition with regard to making the European Union a major player in the field of international security is inseparable from France's will to play a full role in all NATO's structures'.¹¹ Consequently, it is not a big revelation to see Sarkozy enhancing cooperation with the USA and the NATO up until now on one hand, while simultaneously making calls to the EU for strengthening a common European defence and security policy in line with French interests, on the other. In brief, Sarkozy took over a France in search of its very soul both domestically and internationally.

Main pillars of French foreign policy and Sarkozy era

Clearly, the change in political leadership does not necessarily transform into a total overhaul of the main pillars of French foreign policy. There are several reasons for this. First, geopolitically France has been in between Germany and the UK. Geographically, France is also open to security threats and migration from the south due to its being a Mediterranean country.

The second reason relates to economic structure of France that affects the French position in global affairs to a considerable extent. However, the initial Gaullist ideal of self-sufficient economic power has been largely turned into an utopic world view since the 1980s when the economic globalization process introduced increased global interdependence, and France has

¹⁰ For different views on French security and defence policy, see John Keiger, 'Foreign and Defence Policy: Constraints and Continuity' *Developments in French Politics* 3, Alistair Cole, Patrick le Galés and Johan Levy (Eds), London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005; Paul Gallis, *France: Factors Shaping Foreign Policy, and Issues in U.S. – French Relations*, CRS Report for U.S. Congress, 3 January 2006; Pernille Rieker, 'From Common Defence to Comprehensive Security: Towards Europeanization of French Foreign and Security Policy', *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 37, No.4, December 2006; Philip Gordon, 'France Learns How to Say Yes' *Newsweek*, 30 September 2007; Justin Vaisse, 'Nicolas Sarkozy's Foreign Policy: Gaullist by Any Other Name' *Survival*, June / July, 2008; Emiliano Grossman, 'France and the EU. From Opportunity to Constraint', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol.14, No.7, October, 2007, pp.983-991; Craig Parsons, 'Puzzling out the EU role in national politics', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol.14, No.7, October, 2007, pp.1136-1149.

¹¹ The White Paper has been publicized on 17 June 2008 and it constitutes a major overhaul of French defence and security policy since the last White Paper in 1994. The 2008 White Paper embarks on a path to more modern, compact and reactive security and defence forces by 2025. See for further details; http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/New-French-White-Paper-on-defence.html#sommaire_3.

not been an exception. Thus, France felt the need to counterbalance these developments with different domestic and foreign policy outcomes.¹²

Third, France has always seen itself as a 'grand nation' which symbolises ultimate civilization through its normative legacy stemming from history. This is often referred to as the 'French exception'.¹³ Distinct French identity, interwoven with the historical normative legacy, constitutes a strong component of French foreign policy. Although this type of a normative standing is significant for several countries, this is an especially important part of French foreign policy. In essence, French foreign policy, as created by De Gaulle, has been shaped by two interwoven factors: how France is perceived by other nations, and how French perceive themselves or want to be perceived by others.¹⁴ This, in return, has been shaped by the idea that France should be an important actor in world politics. Consequently, France perceives itself as the global representative of the values stemming from French Revolution. This self-perception has so far been pursued in order to be transformed into a reality.

The fourth pillar is the constitutional system and political culture of France. Accordingly, the French president has been the foreign policy executive during the Third Republic and eventually this has become the tradition of the Fifth Republic. Sarkozy is also aware of the new domestic cleavage in French political culture which emerged in the decades following the 1980s when neo-liberalism and globalization began to accelerate. This new trend is a trade-off between globalization and Europeanization, which will occupy the political agenda of France in the years to come.

Finally, another important pillar of French foreign policy is the evolution of the international system. As all actors of the global system, France has developed its own variety of approaches, priorities, policies and opted for realizing these in line with the ideal of 'grand nation' created by De Gaulle. When all the components of French foreign policy are taken into account through time, it is possible to say that regardless of the leadership, France can only do adjustments, but is not likely to change its main policy interests. Despite the 'rupture' style and discourse of President Sarkozy, an overall far-reaching change is rather unlikely to happen in French foreign policy.

¹² It is also interesting to note here that despite the French claims of negative consequences of globalization, the international economic institutions are mainly directed by people of French origin.

¹³ Sophie Meunier, 'The French Exception' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 79, No.4, July/August 2000, pp. 104-116.

¹⁴ Dominique Moisi, 'Certain Ideas of Europe', *The Economist*, 11 March 2008.

French foreign policy as outlined by Sarkozy during several occasions,¹⁵ is policy aiming at both reconciling domestic and foreign policy interests and restoring the role of France in global politics. This is especially true vis-à-vis the EU policy. He confirms this by saying ‘France is back’.¹⁶ However, France will face a lot of difficulties and has to follow a variety of strategies while ‘coming back’, especially to Europe. There are several reasons for this. First, Sarkozy needs to create a balanced political platform between domestic and international domains in order to solve current economic and political problems of France. Second, Sarkozy needs to restore the position of France within the EU in a way that would offset the hindrance created by French ‘non’ to the EU Constitution in 2005; while simultaneously strengthening the partnership between France and UK, as well as between France and Germany. Consequently, France will be restoring its founding key member state position within the EU – in other words, restoring the so-called Franco-German-British trilateralism in the EU.¹⁷ Third, once bringing France back in the EU, the way he claims, Sarkozy plans to influence the EU with the aim of strengthening the place of France in world politics. Fourth, Sarkozy aims to increase the efficiency of the EU institutions with pragmatic solutions such as the simplified Lisbon Treaty, while advocating for the deepening of EU integration. Obviously, a new enlargement wave including a big country like Turkey will only hinder the future French foreign policy interests within the EU.¹⁸

On the transatlantic front, an accelerated rapprochement with the USA will provide France a stronger position through returning to the command structure of NATO, while at the same time, at least in rhetoric, France is likely to continue criticizing the USA on issues like Kyoto and global warming, etc. In a policy speech, Sarkozy stated his approach towards the USA as: ‘Allied does not mean aligned and I feel perfectly free to express our agreements as well as our disagreements, without politeness or taboo’.¹⁹ Such an approach means that simultaneous efforts of France will continue progressively for a European defence identity (the ESDP). There is a dilemma in this context, given that for the first time the USA is argued to be ‘ready to listen a common European defence identity plan, but its European counterparts are not ready

¹⁵ See further Nicholas Sarkozy, *Speech at the Opening of the Fifteenth Ambassadors Conference*, 27 August 2007, Paris; and see also several speeches, including those during state visits, 2007-2008.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Charlemagne, ‘The perils of three-legged races’, *The Economist*, 3 April 2008.

¹⁸ This view is once again affirmed by the French National Assembly that approved a bill making referenda obligatory for accepting new EU member countries with populations over 5% of the bloc’s entire size on May 29th, 2008. The bill was later turned down by the French Senate.

¹⁹ Nicholas Sarkozy, *Speech at the Opening of the Fifteenth Ambassadors Conference*, 27 August 2007, Paris, p.3; available on the official website of French President.

to speak with one voice'.²⁰ Thus the aim of Sarkozy is to pursue the creation of a common European defence policy or, in other words, Europe speaking with one voice. As an indicator of a new era of France - USA relations, Sarkozy agreed to further military engagement in Afghanistan as well as the Gulf region.²¹ The conventional pro-Arab policy of France is also to be transformed by Sarkozy, who openly declared that his sympathies are with Israel in the Middle East, in parallel with the USA policy.

In Africa, Sarkozy has been trying to intensify relations, while at the same time he tries to hand on the problem of migration and other concerns to an international multilateral policy platform. This will benefit France in many ways. As such, France will come to terms with its colonial and post-colonial past and the setbacks stemming from such an existence on one hand, and France will share the financial burden with other international actors and particularly with the EU member states, on the other. Within the EU, the French proposal of creating a Mediterranean Union is a component of this policy. Germany's opposition to the original Sarkozy plan²² and the final decision to create a 'Union for the Mediterranean' in a different way than what Sarkozy was originally envisaging have not hindered the French enthusiasm. Sarkozy initially had the intention to develop this new initiative with a view to offer Turkey a privileged partnership, however this is unlikely to happen as it is explicitly stated in the Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit that 'While complementing activities concerning its regional dimension, the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean will be independent from the EU enlargement policy, accession negotiations and the pre-accession process'.²³

The French exceptionalism concerning culture and language constitutes another dimension requiring attention on part of Sarkozy who intends to have a pragmatic policy in this context. But it still remains to be seen what kind of policies he will pursue during his term in the presidency.²⁴

²⁰ Dominique Moisi, 'Certain Ideas of Europe', *The Economist*, 11 March 2008.

²¹ Joachim Fritz-Vannahme, 'The Sarkozy Mystery', *Spotlight Europe 2008/02*, Bertelsmann Stiftung, February 2008.

²² Originally Sarkozy's idea was to create a Mediterranean Union including only Mediterranean countries and the EU Mediterranean member states, but Chancellor Merkel challenged this as division within Europe, thus the plan is changed to cover all the EU member states. This is in a way surprising given that Germany itself established the Council of Baltic States excluding others. Euractive 'Sarkozy's Mediterranean Union plans irk Merkel' <http://www.euractiv.com/en/future-eu/sarkozy-mediterranean-union-plans-irk-merkel/article-169080>, 13 December 2007.

²³ *Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean*, Paris, 13 July 2008.

²⁴ French exceptionalism is an extensive topic and it remains largely outside the scope of the present paper. However, for several discussions on the topic see, for example: Emmanuel Godin and Tony Chafer, Eds. *The French Exception*, New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005; Jill Lovecy, 'The End of French Exceptionalism?' *West European Politics*, Volume 22, Issue 4, 1999, Pages 205 – 224; Sophie Meunier, 'The French Exception' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 79, No.4, July/August 2000, pp. 104-116, among many other publications.

If all these issues constituting the foreign policy agenda of President Sarkozy are taken into account, it is clear that he will not be able to pursue them all during his presidential term; however, he will still try to cover most of this agenda, his main priority being to bring France back into Europe. This is discussed further in the next section.²⁵

The French EU policy under President Sarkozy and the French EU Presidency of 2008

The idea of Europe and the EU integration has always been paradoxical for France. Europe, for France, has been and still is the core space between the nation state and the world, where the globalization process can be effectively accommodated. The conventional French idea of Europe is ‘une Europe puissance’, Europe as a power bloc, in which French interests are well-represented, or in other words where France leads.²⁶ While the EU helps France to exert more political power than it can individually have, the more integrated France becomes to the EU, the less influence it can have especially in a Union of 27 member states.²⁷ This is paradoxical for France. France has been influential throughout the EU’s major path breaking decisions towards reaching the current state as a founding member; i.e. creation of Single Market in 1992. Since the 1950s, the French pursued a French Europe instead of Europeanized France, and therefore the deepening of the EU has been closer to French interests instead of the widening of the EU. However, the current state of affairs within the EU points to a paradigm shift against the French interests, which are unlikely to be contained as they have been in the past.

Following the ‘non’ of French people in 2005, together with the European divide on the USA intervention to Iraq, France became increasingly alienated and even marginalized in the EU politics. The so-called ‘immobilisme’ of the Chirac’s last term also added to this existence. French opposition to the EU Constitution was a reaction on part of the French public against the negative effects of globalization which they sometimes

²⁵ Nicholas Sarkozy, *İtraflarım / Testimony: France, Europe and the World in 21st Century*, p.25.

²⁶ ‘Une Europe puissance’ is widely used political term to explain a particular French attitude towards Europe, where the power relationship between Europe and France are interwoven in a way to sustain French foreign policy interests. See further for example: Helen Drake (Ed), *French Relations with European Union*, London: Routledge, 2005, p.11; Maxime Lefebvre ‘France and Europe: An Ambivalent Relationship’ *U.S. - Europe Analysis Number 5*, Brookings Institution, September 2004; Jean-Pierre Maury ‘L’Europe puissance. À propos d’une illusion politique’ <http://mjp.univ-perp.fr/m/europuissance.pdf>; N. Piers Ludlow ‘Foreign Policy and Security in Early European Integration: A Survey of Recent Work’ *EUSA Review*, Summer 2008, pp.7-9 among many others on the meaning and usage of this specific political term.

²⁷ Justin Vaisse, ‘Nicolas Sarkozy at the Helm: What to Expect from the French Presidency of the European Union, July-December 2008’, Brookings Institution, June 2008.

perceive as synonymous with Europeanization. The perception of, at least a part of, French society is that the EU is accelerating these negative effects and increasing the gap between ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ in the society. In this context, Sarkozy needs to create a balance between domestic political cleavages and restoring the place of France in the EU.²⁸ However, this will not be an easy task. His political style has created a variety of tensions in 2007, especially with Germany when he tried to pursue his idea of a Mediterranean Union among other issues. If the overall initiatives taken by Sarkozy vis-à-vis French European policy are to be summarized, the results are mixed. The rejection of Turkish full membership to the EU on part of Sarkozy has been met with opposition among the EU member states and by the EU Commission. He shows an effort for the strengthening of the ESDP – European Defence and Security Policy. He has also been busy with the creation of a common immigration policy.²⁹ On the economic front, he advocated for protection of European champions which can also be read as protection of French champions; a clear step towards reconciling domestic and international interests of France.³⁰ However, Sarkozy’s constructive move regarding the Lisbon Treaty has gained him ground, while simultaneously he has been accused of stealing the show from German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Therefore, during the French EU Presidency and in its aftermath, he will probably be pursuing a relatively more subtle and diplomatic style while balancing European and French interests.³¹

The French EU Presidency of 2008 had a motivated agenda,³² and many observers asked the question whether France would become more European, or would the EU policymaking become more French?³³ French EU presidency priorities have had contradictions and their implementation results can provide the answers to these questions. The priorities can be listed as follows. First, the creation of a European defence identity that is rather paradoxical in substance, both for France itself and the EU. On the EU front, several member states are neither willing to pay for the defence initiatives, nor willing to alienate the USA. For France, the problems are twofold, since it is unable to spend more on defence and also unable to modernize its military on its own, France seeks to share the financial burden with fellow EU member states. However, it also seeks a return to the command structure of NATO,

²⁸ In an interview with the Austrian daily *Kurier* published 30 May 2008, Sarkozy said he wanted to press for a ‘concrete’ Europe that allows its citizens to ‘benefit from the advantages of globalization while protecting them from its excesses.’

²⁹ Joachim Fritz-Vannahme, ‘The Sarkozy Mystery’ *Spotlight Europe 2008/02*, Bertelsmann Stiftung, February 2008.

³⁰ For further analysis of Sarkozy’s economic views, see Philip Whyte, ‘Sarkonomics- a user’s guide’ *CER*, 8 November 2007.

³¹ See further Vaisse, ‘Nicolas Sarkozy at the Helm’.

³² For detailed analysis, see *ibid.*

³³ This also reflects the critical thinking of the EU member states like Germany concerning Sarkozy’s political style.

thus counterbalancing the USA. ESDP will prove to be a difficult matter for France, because defence issues get even more complicated given that it has to persuade the UK, whose army is the strongest in Europe, for an agreement in this context.

The next agenda item concerns the immigration policy, or in other words setting the scene for a common immigration policy among the EU member states. This is likely to receive a positive backing from the EU member states, but there is one sensitive issue. That is, setting a six month time limit concerning the detention of 'irregular aliens'. Sarkozy is known to be tough about the immigration policy, so it still remains to be seen how persuasive he can be during the French EU presidency and beyond.³⁴ The current state of affairs in the EU indicates that the approach of Sarkozy for a common immigration policy is supported by other member states.

Another issue is agriculture. For many years, the EU attempted to modernize the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and decrease its burden on the EU budget. However, France is among the biggest beneficiaries of CAP, and it is against the French domestic interests to cut down agricultural subsidies. Thus, this item is also paradoxical for France. Then, creating an agreement for a climate package, which is to reduce the carbon dioxide emissions by at least 20% by 2020, constitutes a further item in the agenda. This is also a controversial issue because it will create a competitive disadvantage for EU industry and a lot of criticisms arise in this context.

There are also other agenda items such as the external relations of the EU, the most significant being the Union for the Mediterranean, which reflects both French and overall EU priorities. The Joint Declaration of the Union for the Mediterranean clearly points out that:

The Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean, building on the Barcelona Declaration and its objectives of achieving peace, stability and security, as well as the *acquis* of the Barcelona Process, is a multilateral partnership with a view to increasing the potential for regional integration and cohesion. Heads of State and Government also reassert the central importance of the Mediterranean on the political agenda of all countries. They stress the need for better co-ownership by all participants and for more relevance and visibility for the citizens. They share the conviction that this initiative can

³⁴ At the time of writing, the French EU Presidency has been finalising a *European Immigration Pact* aiming to integrate the EU efforts to form a common European approach to both legal and illegal migration.

play an important role in addressing common challenges facing the Euro-Mediterranean region, such as economic and social development; world food security crisis; degradation of the environment, including climate change and desertification, with the view of promoting sustainable development; energy; migration; terrorism and extremism; as well as promoting dialogue between cultures.³⁵

Leaving aside the principles setting up the Union for the Mediterranean, and also political and diplomatic difficulties, the EU needs to invest billions in cooperation projects with non-EU Mediterranean countries. The budget being limited, the ambitious agenda will take years to be fulfilled.³⁶ Then, the institutional structures need to be set, for the overall success of this initiative. Despite all the obstacles, the Union for the Mediterranean initiative is likely to serve French interests relative to its absence. However, at least concerning Turkey, France will not be able to use the Union for the Mediterranean as a pretext for privileged membership option for Turkey.

Assessing the reasons behind the anti-Turkish sentiment of President Sarkozy

In addition to the general priorities of France and its new foreign policy outlook, the EU and the transatlantic policies are particularly important factors that need to be closely followed and assessed by Turkey in its EU accession process among other issues. This is important not only due to President Sarkozy's openly declared opposition to Turkish EU membership, but also because France will try to shape the EU in a way which will make further enlargements highly unfeasible, even if the full membership prospects of Turkey range over Sarkozy's presidency. The six month EU presidency of France between July-December 2008 can be considered as a litmus test in this direction.

Although his discourse might not be as straight as it is in his book *Testimony*, Sarkozy's opposition to Turkish membership is likely to be observed during the overall Sarkozy presidency in substance. In *Testimony*, partially echoing the former French President Giscard d'Estaing, Sarkozy defines his view about Turkey as follows:

³⁵ *Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean*, Paris, 13 July 2008.

³⁶ See further Vaisse, 'Nicolas Sarkozy at the Helm'.

I oppose the views regarding the entry of Turkey to the EU. I fully understand the strategic expectations. However, these expectations can be fulfilled through a strategic partnership agreement. However, entry of a country, whose 98% land is outside European continent, who will be the most populous country of the Union in the coming 20 years, and moreover whose culture mainly carries several aspects of Islam into the EU, will create an overall transformation within the EU, thus will weaken the initial idea of founding fathers of the EU in terms of a political union eventually leading to a chaos... However, if we are late to tell the Turks that they cannot be members; this will be a very impolite behaviour.³⁷

Then again, he explains his views regarding the Armenian issue as: I cannot understand why Turkey cannot be asked to fulfil its historical responsibility towards Armenia. Chirac, who had the courage to accept the French involvement with the Nazi regime regarding the Jews, should be able to do and should have done so.

As it is generally the rule, self-identification and self-positioning demands 'others' to exist. In the case of President Sarkozy and France, it is possible to state that Turkey is one of these 'others' if not the only one. France cannot afford and does not wish to see another EU enlargement as voluminous as Turkey that would hamper its own place in the EU through accelerating the ongoing struggle between the centre and periphery among the EU member states. Thus, it is quite comprehensible that new French foreign policy under Sarkozy is shaped around these immediate priorities. Undoubtedly, this is what foreign policy is about. In this context, French foreign policy towards Turkey will continue to be a challenging one for Turkey and its European ambitions. Turkey will face among, other things as Sarkozy already began to enlist, hurdles over EU official documents and when possible on negotiation chapters, moves towards an alternative partnership option, reheated debates about the Armenian issue, etc.

During a policy speech he delivered on 27 August 2007 to ambassadors,³⁸ Sarkozy clearly stated his views concerning Turkish full membership as:

³⁷ Nicholas Sarkozy, *İtirafımlar / Testimony: France, Europe and the World in 21st Century, (s.192-193)*. Author's translation.

³⁸ See further Nicholas Sarkozy, *Speech at the Opening of the Fifteenth Ambassadors Conference, 27 August 2007, Paris, p.4*; and see also several speeches, including those during state visits, 2007-2008, available on the official website of French President.

...France will not oppose the opening of new chapters of negotiations between the European Union and Turkey in the months and in the years ahead, on condition that these chapters are compatible with the two possible visions of the future of their relations: either membership, or as close an association as possible without going as far as membership... I do not want to be a hypocrite. Everybody knows I am only favourable to an association.

Undeniably, this type of an approach towards Turkey has its contradictions on part of French foreign policy itself. For instance, one of these significant contradictions relates to NATO. France is currently strengthening its ties with NATO and preparing to return to NATO command structure as a 60th year birthday present to NATO. However, it simultaneously attempts to exclude Turkey, a dominant actor of NATO out of the European scene politically. Another contradiction concerns the referendum issue. Sarkozy sends mixed messages in this context. Sarkozy supported a clean-up of a constitutional amendment requiring France to hold a referendum for every new EU membership; a measure introduced by former President Jacques Chirac in 2005. However, he states that he would organize the referendum in any case, if he is still president at the time of Turkish membership, which, of course, is very unlikely. Nevertheless, this indicates the way Sarkozy thinks.³⁹ These contradictions will continue to exist until President Sarkozy faces further realities of foreign policy. This will probably occur if he runs for the presidency for a second term, not during the first term. A thorough look in *Testimony* and his policy speeches provide sufficient proofs in that direction. It remains to be seen, as commented by former French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedriné, whether France and Sarkozy will 'find a balance between pretension and depression to be able to clarify future foreign policy objectives' or not. It is also commented by some observers that 'Sarkozy's contradictions may also be a reason for hope. As the European debate continues, the Colbertist could once again become a liberal, the protectionist a proponent of free trade, and France's social therapist a respected leading politician in the EU'.⁴⁰

The question, then, arises as to what Turkey could do in its bilateral relations with France? The answer to this question requires taking into account several complex issues. First, the foreign policies to be pursued by France and Turkey will be important. Second, the effectiveness of bilateral relations

³⁹ FRANCE 24, *The Turkish question*, <http://www.france24.com/en/20080429-sarkozy-president-europe-french-rotating-presidency-eu-analysis>.

⁴⁰ Joachim Fritz-Vannahme, 'The Sarkozy Mystery' *Spotlight Europe 2008/02*, Bertelsmann Stiftung, February 2008.

of Turkey with individual EU member states will have significant impact in preparing the future of Turkey in the EU. Third, the USA factor should be taken into account parallel to the foreign policy strategies to be pursued. Finally, unknown external shocks in global context should be accounted for.

Conclusion

The political profile of Sarkozy, the French foreign policy priorities and the French EU policy as well as the EU presidency term have so far been assessed in order to present an answer to the initial question of why Sarkozy is actually against Turkish full membership to the EU. In essence, the analysis refers to an equation between the French realities - that is substance - and the style of President Sarkozy, which requires a further assessment for policy makers.

France needs to reassert itself in world politics, but clearly the equation of substance and style is disproportional. France's ambition to be global player is curbed to a certain extent with its domestic policy priorities and budgetary restraints. France has also demanding goals such as becoming a normative global power reflecting upon its historical legacy; focusing on human rights, democracy, climate change, energy, etc. France sees its future in a strong Europe which has sustainable partnerships with neighbouring regions and countries. Consequently, France needs to re-establish its position as a key player in the EU; however, each and every enlargement increases the tension between the centre and periphery within the EU. This in return results in a decreasing influence of France.

From the view point of defence and security, France is not capable of renewing its defence policy on its own financially. Thus, it supports a strong EU defence identity through which the burden could be shared, while keeping the USA anchored to European defence without involving the USA within this new EU architecture. The Mediterranean Union idea of France is not new per se. France was among the leading EU members to support the EMP - the Barcelona Process - and after ten years France could see, like other member states, that the process did not deliver the expected results. The increase in migration from the south is of growing concern. In this context, France is exploring a workable instrument in order to continue a sustainable cooperation with the southern Mediterranean countries, while the financial burden could be shared among the EU member states. The 2008 EU Presidency priorities of France contain clear indications of overall French

foreign policy in the Sarkozy era, and it can be considered as signifying future French initiatives within the EU and across the globe to a considerable extent.

All these issues outlined until now also provide clues how the anti-Turkish sentiment of Sarkozy can be contained. It is the French political culture and foreign policy priorities - actual equation of substance and style - which define the answer. Sarkozy is against full Turkish membership to the EU because it is against the current global French foreign policy interests to enlarge the EU further and include a big country like Turkey. France wants to be 'back to Europe' because the presence and the future of France require a strong EU. Turkish full membership to the EU means a weakened EU for France.

Another fundamental issue concerning Sarkozy's opposition to Turkish EU membership other than his strategy for a strong Europe, refers to his way of thinking. He seems to perceive Turkey like any other state in the Middle East. Nor does he seem to entirely grasp the different interpretations of Islam as a religion. In other words, he does not seem to have a differential concept of Islam. This aspect accelerates the 'otherness' of Turkey for Sarkozy. Thus, Turkey needs to highlight its tradition of secularism and its values as a democratic state further. Moreover, Turkey should avoid sending mixed political and cultural messages. These have so far destroyed the image of Turkey and accelerated its perception as the 'other'. This is true not only for France and Sarkozy, but also for other EU member states.

President Sarkozy will continue to be against Turkish membership as long as it serves the French interests, similar to the political leaders of other member states that are against Turkish membership. In this context, President Sarkozy and other European policy makers have a choice to make. If they choose to exclude Turkey from the EU, the way they currently do, it will be not just Turkey who loses from this, but also France and Europe.⁴¹ There are several reasons for this. From the view point of France, perhaps the very first is the French belief to stand as representative of values in the world

⁴¹ This reasoning has been repeatedly underlined during a variety of occasions by high level EU officials and global opinion leaders. They have also been warning the leaders of EU member states to avoid populist discourse about Turkey. This is also true for Sarkozy's discourse on Turkey. See, for example: 'Turkey belongs to Europe' - Speech by EU Commissioner Dr. Günter Verheugen, Ankara, 19 January 2007, http://www.europa-eu-un.org/articles/en/article_6707_en.htm; 'Turkey membership 'vital' for the EU', Interview with the EU Commissioner responsible from Enlargement Dr. Olli Rehn, Brussels, 23 October 2007, <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/olli-rehn-turkey-membership-vital-eu/article-167807>; additionally, a number of global opinion leaders like the famous strategist Kenichi Ohmae are also sharing the view that EU needs Turkey as much as Turkey needs the EU for several economic, political and strategic reasons.

stage. Sarkozy clearly gives a considerable weight to a normative foreign policy highlighting the values that France stands for. Although this could be highly debatable by others, this is at least the very essence of French perception. Thus, excluding Turkey is against the fundamental pillars of this policy and creates a dilemma. Similarly, the EU represents a value system, which is highlighted through its infamous Copenhagen criteria and also its motto known as 'unity in diversity' among others. The exclusion of Turkey will also send diverse messages to the neighbouring countries and the world regarding the credibility of the EU. When the EU and its member states are searching for their own soul, they are also alienating the Turkish people who increasingly question the validity of the EU process.⁴² Thus, currently, the EU has already lost its credibility substantially for Turkey. Briefly, excluding Turkey would mean refuting their value system for both France and the EU, besides the well-known strategic, economic and political factors that are equally important.

At present, Europe is going through a transformation in many ways. The conventional political spectrum has to redefine itself in line with the contemporary realities, and populist trends are not going to pay lucrative dividends in the medium and long term. Similar to the conventional political spectrum in individual EU member states, the EU itself is also in search of its soul. This period is a critical juncture for Turkey who is simultaneously in search of its soul as well. This can have important political consequences for both sides. While the EU is identifying itself, Turkey might find itself completely marginalized within the new definitions of the EU. In this context, the French policy under Sarkozy might create negative outcomes for Turkey. So this trade-off should be settled.

Turkish policy makers also have a choice to make. They can either read the political cultures and policy priorities of the EU member states well, and create an overall strategy to overcome the existing difficulties, or follow a short term policy and only react to developments when necessary, or pursue different foreign policy outcomes. Certainly, the third option is a critical choice in itself.⁴³

Turkey clearly needs to cover the normative gap it has failed to recognize in world politics in the aftermath of Cold War. The reconciliation

⁴² Esra LaGro & Knud Erik Jorgensen (eds.), *Turkey and the EU: Prospects for a Difficult Encounter*, EU Politics Series, London: Palgrave-Macmillan, p. 231.

⁴³ Ibid, p.230.

of this issue with domestic political cleavages will still be one of the serious challenges in foreign policy in the years to come. Pragmatism and analysis-driven policy should prevail in international relations while paying attention to continuity of the main pillars of traditional careful diplomacy. This is a challenge for Turkey both in bilateral and multilateral diplomacy.

On the EU front, Turkey should not lose time by the political rhetoric of France or President Sarkozy. France needs to cooperate with other member states in order to pursue its own European and global agenda; thus it will need all the support and cooperation in the coming years. If Turkey can further enhance bilateral relations with individual EU member states by using effective diplomacy tools, it can counterbalance the possible negative outcomes of French policies within the EU. Neither Germany nor the UK, for example, will comply with an EU geared totally to French interests. This is clear.

Consequently, Turkey needs to pay decisive attention to bilateral relations with individual member states and win the hearts of as many as possible in order to protect and further enhance its European project. This would also create a counter balance for Turco-sceptics in Europe. Naturally, winning the hearts does not necessarily mean overall compliance with the demands of EU member states, but a rational, analysis-driven, cautious and long-term approach is likely to be a winner in the medium and long term. Turkey also needs to use public diplomacy tools effectively in countries like France, Austria and other EU member states respectively. Equally, Turkey should be able to identify the political paradigm shifts within the EU and create alternative strategies as well. In brief, depending on the foreign policy strategy Turkish policy makers will choose, Turkey - France relations could serve as a litmus test for the future of bilateral relations with EU member states, and also for the overall EU membership prospect of Turkey.