

EU-28 WATCH



No. 10
July 2014

ISSN 1610-6458

www.EU-28Watch.org

EU-28 Watch

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On the project

Euroscepticism and the European Parliament elections in 2014, the EU's Neighbourhood in light of the Ukraine crisis and power relations in the EU: The EU-28 Watch project is mapping out discourses on these issues in European policies all over Europe. Research institutes from all 28 member states as well as Iceland, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey give overviews on the discourses in their respective countries.

This survey was conducted on the basis of a questionnaire that has been elaborated in March 2014. Most of the 33 reports were delivered in June 2014. This issue and all previous issues are available on the EU-28 Watch website: www.EU-28Watch.org.

The EU-28 Watch No. 10 receives significant funding from the **Otto Wolff-Foundation, Cologne**, in the framework of the *"Dialog Europa der Otto Wolff-Stiftung"*, and financial support from the **European Commission**. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

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Turkey

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1. Euroscepticism and European Parliament election

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Interest in Turkey-EU relations and worries about negative developments in the EU

Turkey's interest in the 2014 European elections was mostly focused on Turkey-EU relations, Turkey's membership bid and the future of accession negotiations. Debates in the Turkish newspapers and comments on euroscepticism emphasised the role of the economic and financial crisis that the EU member states have been going through. In the newspapers, there have been commentators stressing the need for a transformation of the market-oriented capitalist system into a more individual-oriented system in Europe. It is also argued that the crisis created a serious threat to the foundations of the EU, namely the four freedoms. From an EU perspective, this has been perceived as a negative development due to the possibility of an increase in the decision-making role of the member states rather than a more EU-oriented Commission and Parliament role. One also encounters worries about the multi-cultural Europe and the EU as a peace project in the Turkish media.

Rise of extreme right in the EU could lead to abandonment of accession negotiations

The election results' possible effects on Turkey-EU relations have been discussed in the media and it has been observed that Europeans are inclined to be more receptive to xenophobic policies and attitudes. Given the Justice and Development Party government's loss of enthusiasm towards the EU since the mid-2000s and its increasingly critical rhetoric, the election results could provide the government with further impetus for the blame game for the lack of progress in the accession negotiations. It has been suggested by anti-government commentators that the EU's xenophobic election results would make it easier for the Turkish government to criticise the EU and abandon Turkey's membership bid. This is coupled with the belief that a conservative Christian Democratic and extreme right majority may hinder Turkey's accession prospects. This is largely based on the fact that Turkey and its eligibility for EU membership were part of the debate and the campaign in the run-up to the elections. However, there are some commentators who also stressed the low turnout in the elections and therefore, the rise of the extreme-right wing parties in EP elections would not constitute a threat to Turkey's accession negotiations. Another debated issue has been the possibility of a two-tier structure for the Union in the future and in the long-run prospect of Turkey finding a place to itself together with the UK in the 2nd tier.

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- M. Aydın, Hürriyet Daily News, [Alarm sounds for multicultural Europe](#), 05 June 2014
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2. The EU's Neighbourhood

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Strong interest in the European Neighbourhood Policy

Turkey has been interested in EU Neighbourhood policy since the mid-1990s, and in 2004, when the ENP was created and both the Mediterranean and the Black Sea regions were included in the policy, Turkish interest in the policy increased. Turkey has welcomed the EU's strategy paper, Black Sea Synergy (BSS), due to its inclusiveness regarding the policies and the geographic orientation. However, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) was not welcomed as much as BSS, since it excluded most of the regional countries and emphasised only few countries and policy themes. In the south, Sarkozy's Mediterranean Union offer was rejected by the Turkish officials, since it was perceived as an attempt to substitute Turkey's EU full membership. Nevertheless, after it was included as a part of the ENP under the Barcelona Process, Turkey stated its willingness to participate in the regional cooperation efforts. This has been a difficult policy choice for Turkey, since it is both a Mediterranean country as well as an EU candidate. It has been evident that, especially after the inclusion of the Black Sea as a neighbouring region by the EU in its policies, Turkish and EU neighbouring countries, as well as issues raised in these regions started to overlap. Therefore, Turkey emphasised the importance of cooperation between Turkey and the EU, to tackle not only regional conflicts but also economic, social and political issues. Davutoğlu argues that Turkey is uniquely positioned to play a constructive role in international politics, straddling the geopolitical lines that unite Euro-Asia and having a cultural affinity with the EU's eastern and southern neighbours as well as with the EU itself.

EU not perceived as an effective foreign policy actor

In the last years, the EU's neighbourhood witnessed several social movements, changes of governments, changes of borders and civil and armed conflicts. Regarding Turkish perspective on the Union's neighbourhood policies; conflicts in Ukraine, Egypt and Syria were the hot topics that were debated in the academic circles as well as the media. Regarding the conflict in Ukraine, debates generally focused on the country's role as a transit for energy resources and its strategic importance for the EU and Russia. In this region, the Union is perceived as a wannabe actor lacking credibility due to its inability to be a single voiced political actor. The EU's offer for Ukraine, although it was a very attractive offer regarding economic and trade relations, does not include a membership carrot. This is seen as a shortfall of the EU's policy. The Union's rhetoric in this crisis has been a product of the lowest common denominator of the individual member states' interests. The main issue can be summarised as the gap between the EU's interests and values when assessing the Union's policies in the Black Sea region in general. The energy needs of the EU prevent the Union from strengthening its value-based external relations, which in return decreases the credibility of the Union as a strong regional policy maker. On the other hand, the Turkish position on, and reaction to, the role of Russia in the Ukrainian crisis has been decidedly quiet, despite the annexation of Crimea. This is largely because Russia is an important partner for Turkey in trade, energy and tourism and an important destination for investments by Turkish businessmen.

In recent years, conflicts in the Middle East were to be found on the top of the EU's foreign policy agenda. In discussions on the so-called "Arab Spring", it has been argued that the social movements in the region were a surprise for the EU, which it could not react to as a unified organization. Instead, policies of individual member states stood out more. It has been realised that the EU via its neighbourhood policy could be an important actor in promotion of democratic institutions in the region, only if the Union policies could be freed from the priorities of the individual member states and could be established on the principles of democratic transition together with economic and social transition. However, the Justice and Development Party government perceives the EU as failing to take up this challenge. Ashton's, Barosso's and Füle's visits in the region (i.e. Libya and Egypt) were seen as positive steps to create a credible and EU based policy in the region, yet it was realised that these steps were too small. The Syrian case has been perceived as a test for the Union to act as a foreign policy actor at a global level. Yet, the commentators focused on the member states' perspectives (i.e. France, the UK and Germany) rather than the Union's one. Thus, it has been argued that the conflict in Syria opened up a critical discussion on the Union's effectiveness as a civilian and normative power.

How is Turkey's EU membership perspective currently evaluated in your country?

Turkey-EU relations were at a stage of stalemate in the last 10 years and this situation continues to be the case. After the dispute over the extension of Ankara Agreement to the new members of the EU following the 2004 enlargement, the EU suspended negotiations on 8 of the chapters in December 2006 until the extension of the Additional Protocol and in 2007 France had declared that it will not allow the opening of negotiations on 5 more chapters. Since 13 out of 35 chapters could not be opened, Turkey's enthusiasm in continuing the negotiations diminished. The public opinion on the membership demonstrated this lack of enthusiasm. According to Eurobarometer surveys, public support for the EU membership was 62 per cent in 2004 whereas in 2010 it was down to 42 per cent and in 2013 and 2014 the support further decreased to 38 per cent. The recently released findings of the Transatlantic Trends which present a 53 per cent support for Turkey's EU membership, "an eight percentage point increase from 2013 and the first majority in five years", could be pointing out to a change in public opinion given the relative stability the EU represents vis-à-vis the turbulent neighbourhood around Turkey.

One of the recent main hot topics in the relations between Turkey and the EU has been the issue of visa liberalisation and visa free travel to the EU countries. In this regard, the Readmission Agreement that was signed in December 2013 has been widely debated in the media, among the politicians and the academics. The agreement, on the one hand, has been perceived as a step forward for the visa-free travel for the Turkish citizens in EU countries, but on the other, it was criticised for reflecting EU problems of illegal migration upon Turkey, that may prove to be too costly, and for not foreseeing visa free travel but visa liberalization. After the agreement was signed, Prime Minister Erdoğan, now the President, defined the era as a "new start in Turkish-EU ties". In January 2014, Erdoğan visited Brussels and this visit has been perceived as a step towards revitalization of the stagnating accession talks.

In 2014, however, Turkish politics went through a rocky road and in the run up to the local elections in March and Presidential election in August political debates were mainly focused on domestic issues rather than external affairs. Therefore, it has been almost impossible to see any detailed discussions on Turkey-EU relations.

Also, the developments in the neighbourhood, i.e. the Middle East, stood out in relation to Turkish foreign policy. Starting with the Arab uprisings and continuing with the Syrian civil war and the bloodshed in the Middle East, the EU has been seen as a very ineffective actor. EU's ineffectiveness once again decreased the credibility of the Union in the region. Relations with Russia and the USA

have become more visible while the EU's neighbourhood policies were not perceived as effective tools dealing with the issues at hand in the region.

During the Presidential elections in August 2014, the EU was not considered as a main topic in presidential candidates' campaigns. Selahattin Demirtaş, presidential candidate and co-chair of the Peoples' Democratic Party (*HDP - Halkların Demokratik Partisi*) in several of his speeches did emphasize that their ideas about the rule of law, human rights, and values were in line with the EU's values and democratic rules. However, in the speeches of Prime Minister and Justice and Development Party's presidential candidate R.Tayyip Erdoğan and joint Republican People's Party and Nationalist Movement Party presidential candidate Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu references to the EU and the membership process were very general indeed.

However, it can be argued that the EU continues to be a subject in Turkish politics, although not at the top of the priority list. After the establishment of the new government in August 2014, just after the election of R.Tayyip Erdoğan as the president, the new Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator, Volkan Bozkır, an experienced diplomat who has been working on EU-Turkey relations for over a decade gave a statement emphasizing the importance of EU membership for Turkey, since it has been seen as Turkey's biggest modernisation process, and defining EU membership process as a strategic target.

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3. Power relations in the EU

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No interest in the EU's institutional and domestic affairs, but in its foreign policies

Turkey is primarily interested in the EU's and its member states' foreign policies and relations. Especially regarding the neighbourhood policies the interests of the individual member states, embargoes on Syrian and Russian politicians and bureaucrats, member states' visions (i.e. supranational vs. intergovernmental) of the EU focusing on the UK, France and Germany have been discussed in academic circles. However, power relations among the EU institutions or on domestic policy matters have not been part of the debates in Turkey.

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