



Institut du Bosphore “Turkey/Europe: Starting Over & Reconstructing Turkey – EU Relations”
Seminar
22 & 23 October 2009,
Main Highlights – Key verbatim

Roundtable I: “Economic Crisis Europe and the Role of Turkey” (22 October)

- **Turkey has succeeded “normalizing” its economy. It resisted to the crisis thanks to the reforms implemented and lessons learnt from the past**

Tayfun Bayazit, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Yapi Kredi Bank

“Acceptable current account deficits, a one digit inflation level, a one digit level of interest rates, a stable currency are evidence of normalization of the economy [...] Turkey has been hit hard in terms of contraction in GDP [...] The previous crisis has taught us a lot of lessons and that is why our financial system has been quite resilient, well supervised, well capitalized, liquid and much able and capable of managing risks”

- **But Turkey is facing a real sector crisis and efforts must be sustained**

Ahmet Dorduncu, CEO of Sabanci group

“We as the Sabanci Holding [...] are practically measuring the pulse of the consumer almost every day [...] if you would compare the numbers with the numbers of 2007; we have really a lot of way to go to reach the 2007 level again.

Every month and every quarter the indications and the forecast is getting better but we should not forget where we are coming from [...] we will be experiencing this year a 6% contraction of the economy [...] so say that we have brought everything behind ourselves is too early.”

Michel Rocard, Former French Prime Minister

“You had economic crisis in 2001 and you managed to put some order in your banking system and that really protected you from the financial shock in 2008, bravo for Turkey and congratulations. Then you had the shock of recession through the real economy, through exports stopping but you also came out of it. Congratulations but you have to be careful.”

- **Turkey still needs to improve its fundamentals (unemployment, low income per capita, structural saving problem)**

Umit Boyner, Member of Boyner Holding Executive board

“It seems we have some assets on one side and some liabilities on the other side. Yes we have a very intact financial system but we also have a growth problem; if we don’t sustain higher growth rates we’re adding to our unemployment numbers”



Ahmet Dorduncu, CEO of Sabanci group

“People need to go to the market, they have to buy cars, they have to buy tires, they have to construct their houses and they have to buy houses and they have to buy clothes so on and so forth.

We are expecting about 3% to 3.5% growth of the Turkish economy next year [...] 3.5% for Turkey is nothing even 5% is nothing. [...] We have to grow this country at least 7 or 7.5%”

- **What can Europe bring to Turkey?**

Alexandre Adler, Historian and Journalist

“Without any doubt the business community in Europe has been all the time more lucid and more candid about Turkish candidacy than the political side of the European decision makers [...] But what neither business community nor the political community in EU understands is how important Turkey is growing as a geopolitical and economic actor and how much Turkey needs certain specific help from Europeans which is very different from the past.”;

1. Market opportunities

Tayfun Bayazit, Chairman of the board of Yapi Kredi Bank

“The internal market in Turkey is very narrow and yes it is expanding but it is still narrow [...] so we can have growth with exportations”;

Alexandre Adler, Historian and Journalist

“Opening our markets [European markets] to Turkish products giving thus the Turkish industry level of stability; opening our financial system to Turkish banks to explore the most risky places. Combination of both is certainly achieving growth in a way that it is not achieved now and would allow of course the third part which is subsidizing infrastructure to give to Turkey what we have given to Check, Poles and Bulgarians even and make best of it which means also access for our businesses in that kind of fields and probably joint ventures.”

2. European structural funds

Alexandre Adler, Historian and Journalist

“European structural funds must be given to Turks. We have built the Check highways and telecom in Hungary and why should we not help Turkey to accelerate its infrastructures and especially the Eastern part of Turkey whose security is our objective, not only the Turkish but also the European objective.”

- **What can Turkey bring to Europe?**

1. Turkey as an export country, transit country and alternative to existing energy routes

Alexandre Adler, Historian and Journalist



“A common strategy needs to be defined between Europe and Turkey, a strategy of exploiting new resources of oil and gas in Russia, of oil and gas in Iran, of fostering cooperation in the Middle East and fostering exports”

2. Turkey as a mediator in the Middle East region

Michel Rocard, Former French Prime Minister

“Soft power in the case of Turkey is working”

3. Turkey can bring its industrial know-how

Alexandre Adler, Historian and Journalist

“If you go to Moscow you will see how Turks are building”. “Everyday Turkish trucks go to Syria”

Ahmet Dorduncu, CEO of Sabanci group

“There are actually very important niches that we can position ourselves really in a very competitive situation in supplying Europe with those products”

- **Europe should fear Turkey’s own “European fatigue”**

Alexandre Adler, Historian and Journalist

“When he [Mustafa Kemal] was invited by the British who were occupying Istanbul, he simply said ‘I’ll be very willing to honor your invitation but in the present situation I cannot accept your invitation but I would be very happy to invite you once we are an independent country again and discuss with you all matters’. Well, Turkey is an independent country again in all ways. It is of course a staunch member of NATO we must remind that Special Forces of Turkish army is playing a very important part in defending Afghanistan today. But Turkey is independent and if we miss the opportunity to be invited there will be no other invitation ; and for that of course, Europe that has to stabilize its borders and to find new markets of expansion. [...] And I think perhaps the crisis that we now face is directing us in the good direction because the public debate is yet to be made and the battle has yet to be fought. We are not yet there but very soon.

You can establish a common strategy by establishing an overall confidence and becoming strong allies meaning that Turkey is part of a general European political process and the decisions are made together. There is no way to put the Turks in a special place and expect that we will abide by it.”

I am extremely concerned to see that there are temptations both on the secular and Islamic side to do away with Europe because after all you are fed up”

- **Economic common interests are obvious but how does this economic reality can become support for progress in the field of policies when Europe’s attitude towards Turkey is not rational?**

1. When politics are blocking economic rapprochement

Haluk Tukel, President of Institut du Bosphore



« Everytime we meet with the French government they say don't worry about politics and advance on the economic dimension and politics will follow...But some chapters are not open because France is vetoing though they could increase the growth rate of the Turkish economy and expand the Turkish market.

In the meantime we read that the French government is using a strategy linked to the economic expansion of emerging countries, European country and the US are looking at countries like China, Brazil, India which have very high growth rates but that is also the case of Turkey. Turkey is a neighbor, we have a developing market and we have political relations... but we cannot advance on reforms because these chapters are closed.”

2. Europe's attitude towards Turkey is not rational because blockages come from public opinion

Olivier Ferrand, President of Terra Nova

“We are not in the field of rational idea. If all was based on the economy of course Turkey would have been a member of the EU if only for the economic dimension and French and German governments would have led the fan club of Turkey within the EU. This is not the case unfortunately, why?

For a reason which is very simple, the candidature of Turkey is not accepted by the public opinion. You may develop as many rational arguments as you want. [Politicians] have to listen to the voters and Turkey is not accepted! Why?

This is problem of Europe not of Turkey. If there is such blockage to the idea of accession of Turkey it is because people don't know where the EU is going and also because people don't know about EU institutions.”

Pierre Moscovici, member of the French parliament, socialist party

“I talk as a deputy, for a politician it is more complicated, it is not the state of Europe that causes a problem to public opinion. For the public opinion there is a Turkish problem. French public opinion was favorable to Check Republic; to the Polish Republic before the referendum [...] there is the difference in the minds of public opinion because Turkey is a Muslim country.

If you can find good defenders you can win this battle but you have to tackle this problem and if you hide it behind another mechanism it will be a very difficult battle.”

- **The battle of the public opinion has to start and “warriors” need to be found**

Pierre Moscovici

“I do not enough politicians in France today who would defend Turkey. The battle is not fought and Turkey has no defenders. The day Turkey will find its defenders I would not be as fatalistic as you are. This is part of the interest of meetings like this”.

Jean-Michel Ferrand, member of the French parliament, UMP party

“I share the analysis of Pierre Moscovici on the political reality in France. There is a lack of communication and French don't know Turkey, they don't know what the Turkish economy is and they don't know Turkish modernity. The second point is that there is an Armenian community in France which is very active, very powerful



I believe that this French-Turkish friendship should really be strengthened and you must make an effort in communication and I also think that this contact with the Armenians will probably have a positive impact.”

Roundtable II: “What are the strategic common interests of the EU and Turkey?” (23 October)

Sirin Payzun:

“The timing of this seminar is historical because just in the middle of transformation and a transition in Turkey”

Michel Rocard

“When I was given the date selected for the first meeting of the Institute du Bosphore I must say I was very pessimistic about what to say; I was wondering how I would tell you that I had buried my hopes, that the situation was blocked but we are today living a very unbelievable period.

In 15 days crucial and symbolic events took place:

- A protocol has been signed between Armenia and Turkey
- Three days ago about 30 PKK militants came back to Turkey benefiting from amnesty, this is an important symbol because such a decision is taken by diplomatic services, it is therefore, the Turkish Republic that took the decision to start to speak again with PKK”

- **Remains the Cyprus issue, which relies on Turkey for ones and is Europe’s responsibility for others**

Michel Rocard

“Do not worry about France. There will be a silence from France as long as Mr. Sarkozy will remain there but the main thing is done. I would suggest using this period when France is not a leading partner, to go beyond with Cyprus. Turkey should make a step, it is just symbolic and it will destabilize the Greek Cypriots who are blocking the 5 – 6 chapters.”

Pierre Moscovici

“What is progressing is the Kurdish problem, the return of the PKK. What is progressing is Turkey’s energy policy and strategic environment which give Turkey a positive role in the region and the agreement with Armenia is very important. [...] But on the other hand we still have worries about Cyprus, Turkey has to solve this problem.”

Soli Ozel

“On Cyprus I really think that the EU utterly mismanaged the Cyprus issue and now to say that it is Turkey’s responsibility to pick up the chestnuts out of fire is unjust and unfair”

- **Common interests of Turkey and European countries for Turkey’s accession in the EU**

-Regional stability

Michel Rocard



“Turkish diplomacy is active in the Balkans, in Caucasus, in the Middle East and the EU could be more influential if Turkey was a member. The relationship of Turkey with its neighbors can only benefit to the EU. [...] Turkey can talk directly with some countries much better than most of the members of the EU”

Alexandre Adler

“It is a hard time for us with Ahmedinejad in Iran, negotiations will not be easy on the nuclear field and we need Turkey on our side. Turkey can be a moderator. This is a big region which is slowly heading towards democracy with blood and tears, the only single point of reference is Turkey. “

-Economic interests

Alexandre Adler

“Ankara can become energy partner of the EU starting from Ankara energy sources could be delivered to Europe without going through Russia”

-Turkey could help facilitate dialogue between the Western and the Islamic world

Michel Rocard

“The integration of Turkey can help the discussions between the Western world and Islamic world. [...] Reconciliation and peace is something that Europe knows how to do, what was possible yesterday between France and Germany could also be accepted between Turkey and Europe.”

Alexandre Adler

“No other country than Turkey can export a model of secular and modern democracy which would be an example for all the Islamic countries”

- **Issue of the accession date**

-Partisans of the decompression process

Michel Rocard

“In my book *Yes to Turkey* I gave the accession date as 2023, why? Because we need time for the decompression process; Turkish, Armenian, European negotiators should not be pressed in order to be able to treat complex and serious problems, they can only advance step by step.

-Europe cannot wait that long and take the risk to loose Turkey

Pierre Moscovici

“I do not agree with the decompression process. If you wait too long we are going to lose the momentum and it might be too late.”

Soli Ozel



“Economically, the most striking figures for 2008 is that only 40% of Turkey’s trade was with EU in contrast with about 57% in 2001 or in 2002. It means that the economic weight of Europe is shifting, Turks are looking towards the East towards the Gulf and Turkey can have commercial relations with those places even its economic ties with Europe are not reinforced by political integration.”

Alexandre Adler

“I believe that this Turkish question will appear much earlier and more radically than what we think because I believe that we are at the heart of double movement:

- 1) US strategy is to retreat from this part of the world, the real partners of Turkey are Russia and Europe
- 2) There is a crisis in the Islamic world

France and Germany have very special responsibilities in the EU; in the coming crisis they need Turkey not only as a far away spectator but as a strategic partner.

The enlargement will continue, Croatia will be part of the EU and looking at the situation in Bosnia we shall have all the ex-Yugoslavian republic in the EU; Norway and Switzerland are *de facto* members and we are going to increase the number of actors.”

-The Turkish new generation won’t be ready to wait that long

Soli Özel

“Those of us from Turkey who are around this table have not only had Westernized education but most of us are Western oriented and Europhiles. The elites that are emerging in Turkey may also be products of Westernized education system but they do not share our values, our views, and our approach either to the West or to Europe.

You will not find behind us another generation that comes and that can be as passionate about Turkey’s accession to EU and see it as a mutually beneficial project.”

- **Blockages to Turkey’s accession to the UE : elites or public opinion responsibility ?**

Thierry Mariani

“To understand difficulties of accession we have to remember two important facts:

First, both parties have identity crisis and institution crisis. It is difficult to define the future of Europe by adding Turkish problems to the European problems. Turkey is an exceptional country; it is the only Muslim state which is a secular democratic state. But some in Europe have doubts regarding the moderate Muslim party AKP.

Second, the EU is union of states but also of people, it has expanded until 2007 with diplomatic negotiations and the people did not have a word to say. Elites and European people do not have the same vision

- the elites think of institutional and financial integration, economic development
- people think of social integration, people want the acceptance of new members not to put a threat to their life.”

- **Privileged partnership issue**



-Pros

Thierry Mariani:

“The definition of the borders of the EU is linked to the European project; it is a question of the best choice to organize Europe which can be a global actor in the 21st Century. France is the co-founder of the European integration project that it is a secular state; it is not defending a Christian Club but project of political and economic integration of Europe.

The return of France into NATO was decided by Nicolas Sarkozy. The USA wants a stable partner within NATO. Turkey appears as a strategic trump card for Europe, the crisis in Caucasus and crisis in the Middle East have underlined the importance of Turkey in the region. Turkey has also engaged a policy of reconciliations with its neighboring countries to end difficult relationship with Greece and now with Armenia and Iraq.

Turkey has diversified its diplomacy and energy options as a defender of the Muslims in the world and some countries are worried about the change of its strategic alliances. It proposed a creation of a platform of stability of Caucasus without consulting its alliances. Concerning energy, proximity with Iran also pushed Turkey to oppose new sanctions and the relations with Israel have deteriorated after the Gaza conflict. The question is to know what is the most appropriate framework to organize the convergence of foreign policy and security to the advantage of parties, accession or close partnership?

The interest and influence of Turkey could reinforce foreign policy in Europe but it should be to the interest of Europe. In the case of accession, Turkey in order to defend national interests can block European foreign policy. That might stop the EU of intervening in certain crisis. In 2003 regarding Iraq, Turkey did not agree with the EU when it concerned its own interest. No one knows how Iraq and Kurdistan will evolve after 2010 and 11 and that might pose a problem for Turkish national interest. In the framework of a partnership both parties try to converge in their positions but if they do not agree everyone will keep its freedom of decision. The partnership allows the organization and the flexibility without constraint.

-Cons

Soli Ozel:

“Mr Mariani mentioned the fact that Turkey could defend its own interests instead that of EU. Well, there is no European foreign policy position and you are not going to have one for the foreseeable future. You have evoked the example of March 1st when Turkey’s national interest or the Parliament decided to go against the Americans well Europe itself was divided”

Pierre Moscovici



“I do not believe in privileged partnership. Turkey participates with all the links of the Europe, OECD, Council of Europe, NATO, UEFA Cup, Eurovision song contest and so what would a privileged partnership give more?”

Pekin Baran

“We are losing time. Some are talking about privileged partnership, where is the privilege? It is easy we are either inside or outside, it is like a wedding you are either married or you are not, we are now engaged because we expect a wedding in the future”

- **Image of Turkey in Europe has to be improved and image of Europe in Turkey has to be improved too**

Pierre Moscovici

“We have to know about the modern Turkey in France and we have to restore the image of the EU in Turkey. Economically we have to think to improve the image of France in Turkey through its companies, its culture, and intellectuals”

Bernard Guetta

“The problem does not come from the public opinion but from the elites. If you look at those who are against the idea that Turkey should not enter into the EU, you have Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, Hubert Vedrine, Robert Badalier, Jacques Julliard. None of them are racist or Islamo phobic or hostile or have irrational fear of Islam. No, each of these persons are leading a political battle and against accession of Turkey and they do it in a correct way although I do not agree with them. Where is the problem for these people? Well they think that new expansion to big country like Turkey would be the end of all projects of political Europe because in their eyes such expanded Europe would not be able to have a political project and no common policy.

On the contrary, my conviction is that accession of Turkey to the EU would strengthen, would recreate the political ambition of the EU. I believe that if there is a struggle to be made by the Institut du Bosphore it is addressed to these French elites.”

Roundtable III: “Fostering cultural dialogue” (23 October)

- **The cultural issue is key in the accession of Turkey’s analysis but shouldn’t be used as a pretext to avoid political issues**

Tulin Bumin:

“The question of cultural identity is closely linked to the accession of Turkey. But the cultural identity issue is a pretext to avoid asking political questions.



I hope and wish that when you ask the question of accession of Turkey we should ask the question politically. And when I say politically I do not mean geo-strategic dimension or real politics because the real politic, the national policies have become unrealistic.”

“The question is: will Turkey make Europe more European by accession? I believe that Europe cannot be European by refusing accession of Turkey.”

- **The EU project pushed Turkey to begin its democratization process**

Soli Ozel

“Turks didn’t want to democratize the country. They tried to square a circle and all the while pretending to be Western and aspiring to become a member of the EU, they wanted to continue with the existing power structures. The EU project pushed for more democratization.”

“The EU project helped a shift of power in Turkey institutionally from military to the civilians, socially from established elites to the emerging ones and demographically from center to the periphery.”

- **Refusing the accession to Turkey will have dramatic consequences for democracy in Turkey**

Soli Ozel

“In all his works Orhan Pamuk reflects on the Turkish ordeal of Westernization, in Istanbul he notes that ‘with the drive to Westernize and the concurrent rise of Turkish nationalism the love-hate relationship with Western gaze became all the more convoluted.’ [...] Today I think European counterparts ought to pay attention to just to appreciate the complexity of the situation. The nationalist reflexes of Ataturk’s heirs, the secularist Republican elites, the universities; the bureaucratic classes arguably play as a larger role in the blossoming anti-Western sentiment as the Islamist political parties and the more religious segment of the population.”

“The cosmopolitan city of different ethnicities and religious affiliations and many languages that Pamuk knew is indeed and unfortunately long gone. A new cosmopolitanism that of financial services, multi-national corporations, advertisers and artists, real estate agents is rapidly feeling the gap. Individuals of all colors, secular or Islamic, are unlikely to be content with little; they will want to take on the world. And for that to happen I believe Turkey needs the EU project. A refusal by the EU to acknowledge this dynamism and the potential would be dramatic in terms of its negative consequences both for democratic Turkey and for Europe that I would like to believe that still has a lot to offer to the world.”

- **The fear of Turkey lies on prejudices**

-Prejudices linked to religion

Gilles Martin-Chauffier

“We said that hostility of Turkey was not rational and I think it is based on preconceived ideas”
[...] The real problem is fear. The fear of Turkey is the fear of Islam.”



“We, French people are not fascinated by Islam and we do not know Islam closely, so fight against prejudices is an important theme to tackle to assist the accession of Turkey.”

Tulin Bumin

“Turks do not see any religious inconvenience joining the EU although they are Muslims and Europeans are in majority Christian. They do not consider Europe as a Christian Club. But when it comes to the European public opinion we see more reticence and they have hard time imagining Muslims in Europe.”

“Last year a journalist from Le Soir asked me the following question: is Turkey sufficiently secular to join the Union, well my answer was: is the European Union secular enough to admit Turkey?”

-Prejudices linked to failed immigration and integration policies

Catherine Tasca

“The integration politics are weak. Objective difficulties of foreign people’s integration add the intolerance towards different cultures”.

- **To fight prejudices Turkey should communicate on its history and heritage**

Gilles Martin-Chauffier

“Everybody says Turkey can access to Europe because Atatürk has made Turkey European but in reality when you look at the Ottoman history we see that the Ottoman Empire has always been dreaming of the West. [...] I think one of the most important duties of Turkey is to communicate on its Ottoman heritage. Ataturk has erased part of the Ottoman history which would be very important to legitimate and tell the French people that Europe is not only Paris, Madrid and London but also it is Eastern Europe and the country which was strongest was the Ottoman Empire.”

“I believe that you should one day try to finance this kind of films about Mehmet II for instance”

“Europe without Istanbul does not make sense. Before Istanbul there was Constantinopolis. Without Constantiopolis there would be nothing left of great religious orders; the fact that this city should not be in the Europe of tomorrow is unacceptable”

Bahadır Kaleagasi

“Don’t forget that we are all the children of the Byzantium”

“I was very happy to listen to a very important personality from the Vatican saying that the Vatican should support the accession of Turkey to the EU because this is how we can guarantee the security of the Christian heritage which is essentially in Turkey more than in other countries”



- **Europeans and Turks need to share a common project to fight cultural issues**

Catherine Tasca

“We need to encourage identity expression in order to create a common project. As for Turkey there is a vital need to contribute to bring positive responses for the cultural issues.”