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TURKEY-EU LEADERS' MEETING: AN OPPORTUNITY TO MAINTAIN DIALOGUE

Although parties could not reach any concrete results, the Turkey-EU Summit in Varna was important for the parties to underline their joint commitment to maintain channels of dialogue.



The Turkey-EU leaders' meeting, which was held in the Bulgarian coastal city of Varna on 26 March 2018, brought Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of Turkey, Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission and Boyko Borrisov, Prime Minister of Bulgaria together in order to discuss Turkey-EU relations.

Although the parties could not reach any concrete results, the summit was important to underline their joint commitment to maintain channels of dialogue. Cooperation in energy, security, the fight against terrorism, the management of migration flows and EU's assistance for the refugees in Turkey were the main issues discussed in the leaders' meeting.

Speaking at the joint press conference, Council President Donald Tusk reminded that at the previous leaders' meeting in Brussels Turkey and EU had agreed to intensify dialogue at different levels. Since then a number of high-level meetings have taken place between the parties.

Tusk pointed out the fact that, EU and Turkey remained very close partners on migration and support for refugees. He expressed the EU's appreciation for the impressive work Turkey has been doing, and thanked the Turkish people for hosting more than 3 million Syrian refugees these past years. Tusk also mentioned that during the leaders' meeting, he and Commission President Juncker reaffirmed the EU's unwavering commitment to continuing their support to the Syrian refugees in Turkey. Donald Tusk also said: "We understand Turkey's need to deal effectively with its security after the attempted coup and the terrorist attacks it has suffered. But we are concerned that some of the methods used, undermine fundamental freedoms and the rule of law in Turkey. We encourage Turkey to work with the Council of Europe, of which Turkey has been a member longer than most EU Member States." Tusk added that Turkey committed to improving respect for the rule of

law and its relations with the Member States of the EU and underlined the importance of improving relations with Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration (GASC), reaffirming the European Council conclusions of 22-23 March 2018.

President Erdoğan's Call for Working Together

Following Tusk, President Erdoğan took the floor and said that during the leaders' meeting they discussed what steps might be taken in order to overcome certain deadlocks, stressing that they hope to have left a difficult period in Turkey-EU relations behind. President Erdoğan reminded that Turkey has been duly fulfilling its responsibilities especially with regard to the fight against irregular migration.

Visa liberalisation was one of the important items of Turkey's agenda during the meeting. President Erdoğan mentioned that Turkey has submitted its working paper to the Commission in early February and is still expecting a reply from the EU side.

Regarding the modernisation of the Turkey-EU Customs Union, President Erdoğan expressed Turkey's expectation that the necessary steps should be taken for the modernisation of the Customs Union. Erdoğan also emphasised that a technical process such as the modernisation of the Customs Union should not be treated as a political matter. Regarding the fight against terrorism, President Erdoğan underlined that Turkey's counter-terrorism operations contribute not only to its own security, but also the security of Europe.

On Turkey-EU relations, President Erdoğan warned that it would be a grave mistake for the EU, which claims to be a global power, to push Turkey out of its enlargement policy. Erdoğan emphasised that Turkey is a key player in the region, an ally of strategic importance, and a dynamic country with a young population.

The last speaker of the press conference, Commission President Juncker said that Turkey and EU should be talking about areas of mutual

interest and ambitions that unite them, rather than the ones that divide them. Juncker added: "We want Turkey to be a true strategic partner of the EU. And between strategic partners, we must know how to maintain an open dialogue at all times in order to deepen what brings us together and to resolve what divides us."

Although many of the problems in Turkey-EU relations remained unresolved and no concrete results came out of the leaders' meeting on 26 March, the efforts to maintain the dialogue and restore mutual confidence are worthwhile. As President Erdoğan underscored, "Let's join forces to establish stability and prosperity in the Balkans, our common geography. Let's deepen our cooperation on international issues such as Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Al-Quds, Yemen, the Rohingya and Africa. Let's build the strong and prosperous Europe which is an island of stability, together. We are sincere in these calls of ours today, as we were yesterday."



IKV PRESS RELEASE ON COMMISSION'S PROPOSALS REGARDING VISA POLICY

IKV Chairman Ayhan Zeytinoğlu, in a press statement, assessed the European Commission's proposals concerning visa policy, the mobilisation of the second 3 billion euro tranche under the Refugee Facility for Turkey and the visa liberalisation process. Zeytinoğlu stated:

"Although delayed, this is a positive development. However, as civil society we are concerned that it will take a very long time for these funds to become available and to be reflected on the improvement of the quality of life of the Syrian population under temporary protection. These funds must be transferred quickly and directly to projects to be carried out by or in cooperation with municipalities where Syrians are most concentrated."

IKV Chairman Ayhan Zeytinoğlu commented on the recently proposed changes to EU's visa policy by the Commission:

"We, as civil society representatives in Turkey, believe that the visas will be lifted in the near future as a result of the visa liberalisation dialogue. However, currently we are faced with the visa requirement and have to closely follow developments concerning EU's visa policy. Innovative measures such as the reduction of processing time for visa applications, validity of multiple-entry visas for a longer period and issuance of single-entry visas at EU borders can be perceived as positive developments. However, the rise in the visa fees is very thought-provoking. Visa application costs are not limited to the application fee. There are many additional items such as bank fee, notary fee and translation fee. That is why; it is advisable that the rise in the fees should be re-considered. Turkish citizens have paid a total of 317 million euros for Schengen visa applications in the past 7 years (2010-16). If we consider the additional costs as well, we know that the actual cost is much higher.

Beside this, there are some critical points among the proposed changes. It is stated that stricter conditions will apply to visa applications from countries that have not cooperated with the EU in case of readmission of irregular migrants. This shows that the visa policy will be used as a tool to force other countries to cooperate with the EU." Zeytinoğlu added: "The conclusion of the visa liberalisation process will contribute to Turkey-EU cooperation on migration and mobility matters and cooperation against trans-border crime. The completion of the visa liberalisation process in the near future and the realisation of visa-free travel to Europe are key objectives for us."

"WE VIEW VARNA SUMMIT'S RESULTS IN A POSITIVE LIGHT"

In a press statement, IKV Chairman Ayhan Zeytinoğlu evaluated the results of the Turkey-EU leaders' meeting in Varna on 26 March 2018. IKV Chairman Zeytinoğlu underlined that Turkey and the EU's common will to keep the dialogue channels open and to maintain cooperation is an important outcome and continued as follows:

"The meeting in Varna was a significant step for Turkey and the EU to understand each other better and to make an effort towards creating a common ground. President Erdoğan emphasised that this meeting was a crucial start to establish trust between Turkey and the EU, but also concrete steps in this direction are necessary. After having presented Turkey's claim for the EU's future, President Erdoğan mentioned that Turkey's exclusion from the EU's enlargement perspective would be a serious mistake. President Erdoğan



laid the base for a positive agenda by suggesting common action for constructing a strong, prosperous and stable Europe. Now, it is time to make this positive agenda real. Revitalising the EU reforms would also break the EU's mould."

IKV Chairman Ayhan Zeytinoğlu expressed that the meeting provided an important occasion for President Erdoğan to convey to the EU both verbally and in writing, Turkey's expectations regarding visa liberalisation, the Cyprus issue,

the fight against terrorism and the modernisation of the Customs Union. Zeytinoğlu also added that mutual understanding is a must for a sincere dialogue and said:

"Turkey and the EU sides exchanged their priorities and expectations in Varna. In order to come up with progress in any mutual relationship, both sides need to clarify their positions. This is an important step for the improvement of mutual dialogue. We could consider this summit as an important step for Turkey and the EU to understand each other better and to restore the relations. After this, it is necessary to rebuild relations step-by-step and to bring the negotiations back on track. Revitalisation of Turkey's EU perspective, ensuring progress in areas such as democracy, law as well as the rights and freedoms would create a positive momentum in all areas, from economy to politics."

IKV AND IPC DISCUSSED THE TURKEY-EU LEADERS' MEETING HELD IN VARNA

On 27 March 2018, Turkey-EU Leaders' Summit, which was held in Varna, was discussed by Turkey's leading academics, civil society representatives and EU experts at the panel organised by IKV in cooperation with the Istanbul Policy Center (IPC) Sabancı University- Mercator Foundation Initiative. IPC Director Prof. Fuat Keyman, IKV Secretary General Assoc. Prof. Çiğdem Nas, Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV) EU Studies Centre Director Nilgün Arisan Eralp and IPC Research and Academic Affairs Coordinator Assoc. Prof. Senem Aydın-Düzgüt participated in the panel as speakers in which IKV Chairman Ayhan Zeytinoğlu delivered the opening speech.

Referring to the interdependence between the EU and Turkey in numerous areas, IKV Chairman Ayhan Zeytinoğlu stressed that this interdependence made it vital for the Turkey-EU relationship to go on. IKV Chairman Zeytinoğlu listed the three areas in which Turkey-EU relations could move forward, despite the deadlock in the EU accession negotiations as visa liberalisation, refugee cooperation and the modernisation of the Customs Union. IKV Chairman Zeytinoğlu indicated that the Varna Summit could be seen as an important step for Turkey and the EU to better understand each other and fix the problems in the relations



and added: "Hereafter, the relations should be rebuilt step-by-step and brought to the point where it is possible to restart the negotiations. Revitalisation of Turkey's EU perspective, ensuring progress in areas such as democracy, law, rights and freedoms would create a positive momentum in all areas from economics to politics."

IKV Secretary General Assoc. Prof. Çiğdem Nas explained that Turkey and the EU have not given up on each other and were willing to try again, however concrete steps needed to be taken. IKV Secretary-General underscored the importance of the constructive messages voiced by the Turkish and EU sides expressing their joint intention to continue dialogue and working together. Assoc. Prof. Nas asserted that both sides had the chance to express their expectations from each other and state their positions at the summit.

TEPAV EU Studies Centre Director Nilgün Arisan Eralp indicated that the main purpose of the Summit was to create the impression that the dialogue between the two sides continued. Indicating that bilateral relations were conducted on the basis of interests, Arisan Eralp explained Turkey's motivation for continuing the dialogue as mainly economic whereas the EU's motivation for continuing its relations with Turkey, she stated, was security-related namely to effectively deal with the refugee crisis and safeguard itself from the instability in the Middle East. IPC Research and Academic Relations Coordinator Assoc. Prof. Senem Aydın-Düzgüt indicated that Turkey-EU relations have come to be managed through bilateral agreements and that multilateralism has been abandoned. She also pointed to the fact that there was an impression that the window of

opportunity for visa liberalisation has closed. Lastly, IPC Director Prof. Fuat Keyman underlined that for the EU process to continue, along with meetings at the leaders' level, the civil society and the public on both sides should also be included in the process. Prof. Keyman pointed to the dilemma experienced in Turkey-EU relations whereby Turkey's prospective membership is not viewed in a positive light by key decision-makers while at the same time Turkey is regarded as an indispensable strategic partner in dealing with security risks. Prof. Keyman stressed that in order to overcome this dilemma steps should be taken in various areas from the modernisation of the Customs Union on the one hand, to visa liberalisation on the other. He pointed out that the success of the dialogue on the aforementioned areas would depend on the inclusion of the civil society and think-tanks along with leaders.

İKV AGENDA

İKV CHAIRMAN ASSESSED THE RESULTS OF ITALIAN GENERAL ELECTIONS

İKV Chairman Ayhan Zeytinoğlu in a written statement on the 4 March Italian general elections, pointed out that populist and Eurosceptic trends evident in 2017 have prevailed in Italy. İKV Chairman Zeytinoğlu stated that these trends are alarming with regards to relations with Turkey and the fact that a far-right party, the Northern League, has increased its vote along with the winner of the election, Five Star Movement (M5S), meant that opposition towards a united Europe has strengthened.

İKV Chairman Zeytinoğlu made the following remarks:

"The Northern League is currently the most likely coalition partner of the M5S. A party, which



will jeopardise both the future of European integration and Turkey's full membership process, taking place in the coalition poses a great danger. We hope that the coalition partner, which M5S will decide on, will be a party other than the Northern League; since policies regarding the EU and Turkey-EU

relations will vary depending on the established coalition. In this regard, we hope that Italy as a founding EU member, takes steps for further integration with the EU, which is in the process of shaping its post-Brexit future, and adopts a more moderate approach towards Turkey's EU membership process."

"EUROPE'S FUTURE SCENARIOS AND TURKEY" DISCUSSED IN IZMIR

The panel entitled "Europe's Future Scenarios and Turkey" organised by İKV in association with Yaşar University was held on 13 March 2018 in Izmir. Prominent academics and experts discussed Turkey-EU relations in light of the debate concerning the future of the EU.

During the panel İKV Vice-Chairman Prof. Halûk Kabaalioğlu underscored that European integration could not be considered complete without Turkey. Speaking at the panel, İKV Secretary General Assoc. Prof. Çiğdem Nas said that the future



of EU-Turkey relations was closely related to the ongoing efforts to reform the EU. Nas stated that Turkey's negotiations with the EU have not made a progress and some alternative models short of membership such as "privileged partnership" have been brought up by some circles.

İKV Secretary General reminded that such a formula could not be accepted by Turkey. Nas indicated that progress in processes such as visa liberalisation and modernisation of the Customs Union could help overcome the stagnation in the relations.

İKV DEBATED GENDER EQUALITY IN THE EU PROCESS



Leading academics and civil society representatives discussed women's rights and gender equality in Turkey at the panel organised by İKV in cooperation with Okan University on 28 March 2018. The two-session panel started with the opening remarks of İKV Strategy and Business Development Director Gökhan Kilit. During the first session

of the panel moderated by İKV Secretary General Assoc. Prof. Çiğdem Nas, Chair of Okan University's International Relations Department Assoc. Prof. Zeynep Alemdar, Dean of Koç University's Law School Prof. Bertil Emrah Oder and Assoc. Prof. Sevgi Uçan Çubukçu from Istanbul University discussed gender equality in the context of EU policies, legal

developments concerning women's rights in Turkey and the evolution of gender equality in the context of Turkey's EU accession process. In the second session of the panel, Ece Öztan from Social Democracy Foundation, Member of the Board of Women's Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey, İtir Aykut and Oxfam's Country Director for Turkey, Meryem Aslan approached the issue of gender equality from a socio-economic perspective and assessed women's participation in the labour market. The panel continued with a workshop session during which participants came up with policy recommendations.

TIMELINE MARCH 2018

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3	İKV Secretary General Nas spoke at a conference on the German federal elections.
4	New İKV brief (in Turkish): "Modernisation of the Customs Union and Its Possible Impact on Turkish Agriculture"
5	Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu visited Germany and met with the Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs Gabriel.
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7	Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu paid a visit to Austria and came together with his Austrian counterpart Kneissl.
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9	New İKV publication: "Perception of Europe and Support for EU Membership in Turkish Public Opinion 2017"
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13	The İKV panel entitled "Europe's Future Scenarios and Turkey" was held in association with Yaşar University in Izmir.
14	The European Commission proposed to mobilise the second 3 billion euro tranche of the Turkey-EU refugee deal.
15	İKV Istanbul EU Information Centre opened an information stand at AÇI Schools.
16	EIB approved 932 million euro in financing for the Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline Project.
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20	İKV discussed the modernisation of the Turkey-EU Customs Union at a panel organised in Kırklareli University.
21	Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu came together with TRNC Foreign Minister Özersay.
22	New İKV brief: "EU Competences on Trade Policy: Opinion 2/15 and Prospects for Future EU Trade Agreements"
23	European Council conclusions on the recent developments concerning the East Med hydrocarbons attracted criticism from Turkey.
24	İKV Secretary General spoke at the panel on "Turkey-EU Relations in Light of the Latest Geopolitical Developments."
25	
26	Turkey-EU Leaders' Meeting was held in the Bulgarian coastal city of Varna.
27	İKV assessed the Varna Turkey-EU Leaders' Meeting at a panel organised in association with IPC.
28	The panel entitled "Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Turkey's EU Accession Process" was organised by İKV in cooperation with Okan University.
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IKV AGENDA

“OUR EXPECTATION FROM THE GRAND COALITION IS IMPROVEMENT IN THE RELATIONS WITH TURKEY”

On 5 March 2018, IKV Chairman Ayhan Zeytinoğlu made a written statement on the Social Democrats' (SPD) vote in favour of a grand coalition with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). IKV Chairman Zeytinoğlu underscored that the five-month deadlock following the September 2017 elections in Germany, whose leadership is crucial for the ongoing reform of the EU, affected the processes of the Union. Indicating that a busy agenda awaited the CDU-SDP coalition, IKV Chairman Zeytinoğlu highlighted the need to improve Turkish-German relations and continued:

“At the beginning of the coalition negotiations, the two

parties agreed on a draft agreement which also touched upon relations with Turkey. It was indicated that Germany did not support the opening of new chapters in Turkey's EU accession talks and that green light should not be given for modernisation of the Turkey-EU Customs Union and visa liberalisation. This approach undermines Turkey-EU relations. The coalition should take fresh steps to strengthen relations with Turkey. We hope that Mrs. Merkel, who is going to begin her fourth term as Chancellor, would act cautiously on this issue and would take steps to revitalise relations with Turkey during this period in which close relations between the EU and Turkey are needed more than ever.”



IKV DISCUSSED THE MODERNISATION OF THE CUSTOMS UNION IN KIRKLARELİ

The panel entitled “The Effects of the Modernised Customs Union on the Business World” was organised on 20 March 2018 by IKV at Kırklareli University. During the panel, IKV Secretary

General Assoc. Prof. Çiğdem Nas gave information on the modernisation of the Customs Union. IKV Strategy and Business Development Director Gökhan Kilit delivered a speech on the potential impact of

the modernisation of the Customs Union on Turkish agriculture. Lastly, IKV Research Director Çișel İleri informed the participants about EU funding opportunities available for the business community.

IKV SECRETARY GENERAL ATTENDED THE PANEL ON GERMAN ELECTIONS

IKV Secretary General Assoc. Prof. Çiğdem Nas spoke at the panel entitled “2017 German Federal Elections and the Future of EU-Turkey Relations” which was held in cooperation with *Euro Politika* Journal and Friedrich Naumann Foundation on 3 March 2018. During the panel, the political

landscape, which has emerged in the aftermath of the September 2017 general elections in Germany, and the results of coalition talks between Chancellor Merkel's CDU and SPD were discussed. It was emphasised that the increase in the votes of the far-right *Alternative für Deutschland* party posed a threat

for mainstream parties and that this situation could have a negative impact on the future of Turkey-EU relations. During the panel, panellists stressed that the form, which the EU will take following the post-Brexit referendum reform of the EU, will also have an impact on Turkey-EU relations.



IKV SECRETARY GENERAL ASSESSED TURKEY-EU RELATIONS IN LIGHT OF GEOPOLITICAL TRENDS



On 24 March 2018, IKV Secretary General Assoc. Prof. Çiğdem Nas spoke at the panel on Turkey-EU relations in light of the latest geopolitical developments organised by the Turkey-EU Association (TURABDER) in Sakarya. IKV Secretary General evaluated the impact recent developments in Turkey-EU relations have had on the economy. While touching upon the transformative role the Customs Union has played in the Turkish economy and industry, Assoc. Prof. Nas underscored the potential benefits the modernisation of the Customs Union would bring. Lastly, Assoc. Prof. Nas highlighted that economic transformation cannot be handled independently from the political reform process.

IKV EU INFORMATION CENTRE'S ACTIVITIES



IKV Istanbul EU Information Centre opened an information stand on 15-17 March 2018, on the margins of the 4th “Açılı Model Government Europe (ACIMGE)” conference held at AÇI Schools. While informing the participants on the “Support to the EU Information Centres Network Project”, Information Centre distributed brochures and publications.

HIGH-LEVEL EXCHANGES

FOREIGN MINISTER ÇAVUŞOĞLU VISITED GERMANY

Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu visited Germany on 6-7 March 2018 to meet with German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel, to attend the Berlin Tourism Fair (ITB) and to participate in the activities organised by the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA) and Körber Foundations.

Following his request on reviewing Germany's travel warning for Turkey, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu came together with his German counterpart Sigmar Gabriel on 6 March. During the meeting, Çavuşoğlu expressed Turkey's expectations from Germany namely, to act in solidarity in its fight against terrorism by demanding Germany to prevent rallies in the country by the PKK terrorist organisation, and asking the extradition of suspected PKK members and suspects in

cases related to the 15 July coup attempt. In return, Minister Gabriel stated that German Justice Ministry will examine Turkey's request for the extradition of Salih Müslim, the former co-chair of terrorist organisation PYD and that they would arrive to a decision based on constitutional principles. Çavuşoğlu also touched upon the recent UN Security Council resolution for a ceasefire in Syria, and reiterated Ankara's official position that the decision does not cover Turkey's ongoing "Operation Olive Branch" in Afrin, as it is carried out for the sake of security and territorial integrity.

Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu also stated that Ankara welcomed the recent SPD vote in favour of establishing a coalition with Chancellor Merkel's CDU. For this fact, he emphasised that

cooperation between Berlin and Ankara is crucial, and that with the establishment of a new government, talks between the two parties as to how to strengthen the relations and open a new page would start. This meeting was seen as a means of mending ties with Germany, a NATO ally and a key trade partner.

Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu also met with Mario Ohaven, President of the German Association for Small and Medium-Sized Businesses. During the meeting, the importance attached to cooperation between SMEs in Turkey and Germany for developing bilateral economic and trade relations was underlined. Finally, on the same day, Çavuşoğlu addressed journalists, businessmen, NGO representatives



and politicians at a meeting organised by SETA Foundation in Berlin. On March 7, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu attended the "Political

Breakfast" organised by Körber Foundation and gave a speech. Afterwards, he visited the ITB Berlin Tourism Fair.

FOREIGN MINISTER ÇAVUŞOĞLU CAME TOGETHER WITH TURKISH CYPRIOT FOREIGN MINISTER ÖZERSAY

Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu came together with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) Kudret Özersay who was on an official visit in Ankara on 20 March 2018. During the meeting, close cooperation between Turkey and the TRNC as well as the latest developments concerning the Cyprus question were discussed.

Following the meeting, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu and his Turkish Cypriot counterpart held a joint press conference. Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu indicated that they discussed the ways to strengthen the relations between the two countries as well as what can be done on GASC's unilateral actions concerning the hydrocarbon resources around the island and under which parameters the Cyprus talks could be resumed.

Pointing out that during the Conference on Cyprus, the Greek



Cypriot side's unwillingness to reach a solution based on the existing parameters was revealed, Çavuşoğlu said that as the election period in both TRNC and GASC was over, the issue would soon come to the agenda of the both the EU and the UN, therefore the Turkish Cypriot side and Turkey should first decide on what they were going to do.

Indicating that the position to be adopted by GASC and Greece would be important, Çavuşoğlu signalled that Ankara would be in dialogue with Athens on the issue. Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu stated that Ankara has always supported a permanent, sustainable and just solution to the Cyprus question and underscored the importance

attached to ensuring the political equality of the Turkish Cypriots. Furthermore, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu stressed the protection of the rights of the TRNC and the Turkish Cypriot people as an important criterion for Ankara and went on to say that both Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots would maintain this stance in the period ahead.

Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu indicated that GASC should stop its unilateral hydrocarbon drilling and research activities. Çavuşoğlu stated that the rights of the TRNC and Turkish people on the off shore reserves around the island should be guaranteed. Çavuşoğlu reiterated that they would not allow the Greek Cypriot side's unilateral activities concerning these resources.

Speaking at the joint press conference, TRNC Foreign Minister Özersay expressed the Turkish Cypriots' gratitude for having a

guarantor and a strategic partner like Turkey. Moreover, Turkish Cypriot Foreign Minister underscored that Turkey and the TRNC were in full consensus on the future of the Cyprus question as well as on maritime jurisdiction and the issue of hydrocarbons. Regarding the Greek Cypriot side's unilateral actions concerning the hydrocarbons around the island, Özersay stated that the Greek Cypriot side should show its readiness to share the wealth associated with these resources with the Turkish Cypriot side. While indicating that there is a possibility of diplomatic solution concerning the hydrocarbons, Özersay said that the Turkish Cypriot side together with Turkey will not hesitate to protect its rights and will maintain a firm stance in the period ahead.

Özersay stated that if GASC insisted on unilateral actions, TRNC in consultation with Turkey would start drilling activities.

FOREIGN MINISTER MEVLÜT ÇAVUŞOĞLU VISITED AUSTRIA

On 7-8 March 2018, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu visited Austria to meet with Karin Kneissl, Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria, to attend the official opening ceremony of the Yunus Emre Institute in Vienna and to meet with representatives of the Turkish community in Austria.

On the first day of the visit Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu officially opened the Yunus Emre Institute in Vienna and came together with

Turkish citizens and representatives of Turkish associations in Austria.

On the second day of the visit, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu met with his Austrian counterpart Karin Kneissl. Following cases such as Austria's restrictions on Turkish politicians, who wanted to campaign in the country ahead of the Turkish constitutional referendum in 2017, Austria's policy paper for its EU Presidency, which stated that Turkey should never become a part of the EU, as well as Austrian Chancellor

Sebastian Kurz's known opposition to Turkey's EU membership bid, relations between Ankara and Vienna have been strained. However, following his meeting with Austrian Foreign Minister Kneissl, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu announced from his Twitter account that the two had productive negotiations and decided to increase the level of relations and cooperation to overcome the issues between the two countries. Following the meetings, Çavuşoğlu and Kneissl visited the Spanish Riding School in Vienna.



TURKEY-EU WATCH

EU UNLOCKED THE 3 BILLION EURO SECOND TRANCHE OF FUNDING UNDER THE REFUGEE DEAL

The European Commission announced on 14 March 2018 the mobilisation of the second tranche of funding for refugees in Turkey.

It has been two years since the deal, also known as the Turkey-EU Statement, was signed between Turkey and the EU in order to regulate the flow of migrants which caused Europe's worst refugee crisis after World War II. The 18 March Turkey-EU Statement has sharply reduced the number of refugees crossing to Europe thereby providing a decline of migrants dying while trying to reach their destination through unsafe and illegal paths. Under the deal, the EU accepted to provide 6 billion euros to Turkey in two tranches which were to be used in projects aimed at delivering efficient support to Syrians refugees. The first tranche of the aid was provided by the EU and its Member States covering 2016

and 2017, over a period of 21 months.

European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris Avramopoulos said the sourcing of the second tranche would be as before, the first tranche of the Facility was made up of 1 billion euros from the EU and 2 billion euros from Member States. The first 3 billion euros delivered have been used in 72 projects which aim to improve progress in humanitarian assistance and education, health and socio-economic support. Proposing the second tranche of 3 billion euros, the Commission highlighted the positive results achieved so far in supporting the most vulnerable refugees and their host communities in Turkey.



EUROPEAN COURT OF AUDITORS PUBLISHED A REPORT ASSESING EU FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO TURKEY

According to the report published on 14 March 2018, the EU financial assistance provided to Turkey for its alignment with the EU *acquis* and for boosting its administrative capacity had "limited effect".

The auditors, in their report on EU financial assistance to Turkey, stressed that although the assistance was designed in a proper way, funding failed to sufficiently address some fundamental needs in the rule of law and governance sectors. They pointed out that some critical reforms were overdue. They advised the European Commission to target funding better in line with the set objectives and to focus more

on areas such as independence and impartiality of the judicial system, fighting large-scale corruption and organised crime, freedom of the press and strengthening civil society. Within the scope of the report, the Court of Auditors evaluated 15 projects, totalling 112 million euros considering the rule of law, governance and human resources including education, employment and social policies.

In the report it is pointed out that in areas, where there was more political will, such as customs, employment and taxation, projects helped bring Turkey in line with the EU *acquis*. On the other hand, it is stated that the results may not be sustainable due to the difficulties in spending the funds and backsliding on reforms. According to the report, the situation was aggravated by the large-scale dismissals and

suspensions of public officials and restrictions on civil society.

The financial assistance allocated by the EU for the current multiannual financial framework from 2014 to 2020 through the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) amounts to 4.49 billion euros. The amount for the previous period was 4.58 billion euros. The total financial assistance between 2007 and 2020 has reached 9 billion euros.



EUROPEAN COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS CRITICISED BY TURKEY

The hydrocarbon standoff between the Greek Cypriot Administration (GASC) and Turkey was brought to the agenda of the EU leaders during the European Council just days before the much-anticipated Varna Summit. As might be recalled, tension in the East Med has risen last month due to the unilateral actions taken by GASC concerning the hydrocarbon resources around the island. GASC has lately intensified its unilateral actions to explore hydrocarbons off the shores of the island. On 11 February 2018, Turkish military vessels blocked a drillship, contracted by Italian energy company ENI unilaterally licensed by GASC, which was on its way to

start exploratory drilling in Block 3 of GASC's so-called Exclusive Economic Zone. Turkey is opposed to such unilateral steps as they totally disregard the rights of the Turkish Cypriots over the natural resources on the island and because some areas unilaterally declared by GASC fall in Turkey's continental shelf.

During the European Council meeting on 22 March, EU leaders adopted conclusions on the matter. The Council conclusions, which echoed the position displayed by GASC and Greece, strongly condemned Turkey's efforts to stop hydrocarbon drilling and underlined the EU's full solidarity with GASC and Greece. In the conclusions, the European Council called on Turkey

to normalise its relations with GASC. Moreover, the Council called for the release of the two Greek soldiers, who were detained in Edirne earlier this month for breaking into a military zone.

The conclusions adopted by EU leaders were strongly criticised by Turkey. On 23 March, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a written statement, expressed regret over the wording of the Council conclusions indicating that such wording, which was solely based on Greek Cypriot and Greek claims, was unacceptable and created an opportunity for some other countries to hide behind them as well. Furthermore, Ankara criticised the Council's expression



of unconditional solidarity with GASC based solely on membership and stated that it revealed the EU's incapacity to remain objective in the Cyprus question. "As long as this stance continues, it will not be possible to accept the EU even as merely a third party in the Cyprus issue", the statement read. Lastly,

the statement recognised that adopting such conclusions under pressure from some member states would not contribute to the improvement of the cooperation between Turkey and the EU at a time in which Turkey was working to create a positive agenda in its relations with the EU.

TURKEY-EU WATCH

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S RESOLUTION ON SYRIA ATTRACTED CRITICISM FROM TURKEY

On 15 March 2018, EP adopted a resolution on the situation in Syria calling for the cessation of hostilities throughout the country. The non-binding resolution also urges Turkey to remove its troops from Afrin.

In January 2018, Turkey launched "Operation Olive Branch" in order to clear Syria's Afrin region from terrorist groups. Since July 2012, when the Assad regime in Syria left the region, Afrin has been a major hideout for terrorist groups which Turkey considers to be a threat to its national security. The offensive was mainly against the Kurdish-led Democratic Union Party in Syria (PYD) and its armed-wing People's Protection Units (YPG) controlling the city of Afrin. Turkey considers the PYD/YPG a terrorist organisation that is an offshoot of the

outlawed PKK, which has waged a three-decade attack against the Turkish state and is included on EU's list of terrorist organisations. Turkey has framed its military offensive on Afrin as a counter-terror operation based on Article 51 of the UN Charter, as well as relevant UN Security Council resolutions on the fight against terrorism.

In this manner, EP's Syria resolution attracted criticism from Turkey at highest level including President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım as well as Minister for EU Affairs

and Chief Negotiator Ömer Çelik. President Erdoğan said that the resolution has no significance and that Turkey will continue its fight against various terrorist organisations inside Syria. On 15 March, Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs also issued a written statement underscoring the claims over civilian casualties as groundless. The statement reiterated Turkey's efforts to end humane tragedies in Eastern Ghouta and to de-escalate tension in the Idlib province of Syria and elsewhere in the war-torn country.



EUROPEAN INVESTMENT BANK APPROVED 932 MILLION EUROS FUNDING FOR TANAP



On 15 March 2018, the European Investment Bank (EIB) approved giving Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) 932 million euros in funding (1.15 billion dollars). According to the written statement by the EIB, the Bank would support TANAP which constitutes part of three-part pipeline project called the "Southern Gas Corridor". The Southern Gas Corridor is expected to bring 10 billion cubic meters of gas per year to Europe and 6 billion cubic meters of gas per year to Turkey from Shah Deniz 2 field in Azerbaijan by 2020. In the statement, which expressed that TANAP constituted the most

significant part of the project, it was also reminded that the European Commission and the EP considered the project to have a strategic importance for the EU's energy policy.

For the construction of TANAP, international financial institutions such as European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the World Bank and Asian Development Bank have already given financial support amounting to 2 billion dollars. According to the latest calculations, TANAP is expected to cost 8 billion dollars. To summarise, the Southern Gas Corridor has the length of 3,500

km, passes through six countries -Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, Greece, Albania and Italy- and consists of three pipelines: the South Caucasus Pipeline which passes through Azerbaijan and Georgia, TANAP which passes through Turkey and Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) through Greece, Albania and Italy. The Southern Gas Corridor is worth 40 billion dollars and 850 km of it accounts for TANAP which will connect to TAP at the Turkish-Greek border. Following the planned completion of the first part of TANAP around mid-2018, it is anticipated that TAP would be made ready in the first quarter of 2020.

IMF REVISED UP TURKEY'S GROWTH ESTIMATES FOR 2018 AND 2019



IMF, which is an institution with crucial impact on the foreign direct investment flows, has revised Turkey's growth estimates by 0.8 percent for 2018 and 2019. According to the "Global Prospects and Policy Challenges" report, aimed at briefing finance ministers and central bank authorities at the G20 meetings on 19-20 March 2018 in Argentina, the Turkish economy is estimated to grow 4.3 percent in 2018 and 2019. The growth update arrived days after the OECD released its revision of 0.4 percent for Turkey's economic growth in its global economic outlook on 13 March. According to the OECD, driven by strong fiscal stimulus and an export market

recovery, Turkey is expected to grow 5.3 percent in 2018 and 5.1 percent in 2019.

The IMF reported that the increase in economic growth was spurred by the support of state-backed credits and fiscal policies in a time of decreasing local demand and by the recovery of the export markets, with the increase in external demand and the depreciation of the Turkish lira. In order to improve the sustainability of this recovery and to increase the stability of the economy to overcome any potential negative impact of a possible high inflation or current account deficit, the institution suggested that the national economy should be

further strengthened by monetary and fiscal austerity policies.

The report also included labour market recommendations to smooth the existing skill gap that risks undermining Turkey's demographic advantage and to enhance female labour participation, for using these untapped resources. Lastly, IMF thanked for the country's generosity in hosting temporary protected Syrians and appreciated the introduction of work permits to curb the informal sector. Further reforms in tertiary education, vocational training, part-time work, and severance pay system and child care facilities were also recommended.

THE HOTTEST TOPIC ON THE AGENDA OF TURKEY-EU RELATIONS: HUMAN MOBILITY

In view of recent developments concerning EU's visa policy and Turkey-EU migration cooperation, the necessity to take a snapshot of EU-Turkey relations from a "human mobility" perspective has become more obvious than ever.

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Lately, Turkey-EU Visa Liberalisation Dialogue gained a strong momentum and Turkey's position paper, which was prepared by relevant Turkish ministries, was delivered to the Commission as a result. Since then, every single "mobility-related" development in the EU circles has been closely and eagerly monitored by all Turkish stakeholders. Therefore, the necessity to take a snapshot and read between the lines in terms of highly swift migration and visa policy agenda has become more obvious than ever.

Since March 2018 marks the second anniversary of Turkey-EU refugee deal, it stands as a symbolic and significant date on which we should be putting a special emphasis. Two vital dimensions of the Turkey-EU refugee deal have been at the top of the agenda for some time: first, the state of play concerning the so-called 3 billion euros for 2018-2019, which has been designed to help overcome the refugee crisis and provide basic services to the Syrians in Turkey, and second the recent developments ensured by the Commission to accelerate the visa liberalisation dialogue. Even though this first dimension mentioned above has witnessed some big news, the second dimension has mostly been brought to the agenda and has come to be associated with vague promises. Yet, another development that took place on 14 March just confused the minds further: the Commission's amendment proposal regarding the EU visa policy.

The So-Called 3 Billion Euros, Revisited

The Commission greenlighted the allocation of further 3 billion euros for Syrians in Turkey for the period of 2018-2019. The news of additional funding was conveyed with great excitement and pride. Thus, even though it seems crystal clear; the Commission is extremely proud of with the first 3 billion euro tranche allocated in the period of 2016-2017.



Therefore, it is important to remember the flagship projects, which were committed in 2016-2017 in close cooperation with relevant Turkish public authorities and international organisations.

Under the humanitarian strand of the Facility, 1.38 billion euros have been allocated to 19 partners covering basic needs, protection, education and health. The Emergency Social Safety Net, which has been benefitting 1.2 million vulnerable refugees in Turkey, is the biggest ever humanitarian project of the EU. Also, according to the latest data shared by the Commission, as of February 2018, over 266,000 children attended school and their families received financial support through the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education programme. Moreover, direct health, language, vocational training, basic services support projects were also the key target of the total aid allocated.

At this point, the Commission underlined the importance of Turkey-EU refugee cooperation through its press release and agreed on mobilising up to 1 billion euros from the EU budget

and 2 billion euros from Member States' contributions for 2018-2019. Even though, because of the swift and flexible nature of the related funding mechanism, some criticism and arguments have risen related to its auditability and accountability; it cannot be denied that the whole funding structure is an effective instrument. Yet, calling on the Commission to focus on more result-oriented and long-term projects during this new term might provide sound advice. Especially, projects that directly relate to the integration of the Syrians to the Turkish labour market could be made a priority.

EU Visa Policies: Securitisation-Facilitation Dilemma

Despite all, the most critical dimension of Turkey-EU human mobility relations is undoubtedly the visa liberalisation issue. Although every layer of Turkish society with a great desire have been in a dire expectation towards visa liberalisation;

the Commission added a "visa policies-related" agenda item to its priorities that is completely irrelevant to Turkey-EU visa dialogue. The prospective amendment aims to enhance security measures and facilitate some dimensions in regard to EU's visa policies. These policies, for a great extent would be directly affecting third countries, including Turkey.

The proposed updates, which aim to facilitate the process for issuing visas and modernising the common EU visa rules, include reducing the decision-making time of the visa applications from 15 to 10 days; making it possible for travellers to submit their application up to 6 months in advance of the planned trip, and introducing the opportunity to fill and sign the visa applications electronically. Also it would be possible to issue single-entry visas directly at external land and sea borders to facilitate tourism if the proposal gets approved.

Despite all these possible facilitation steps, some other

prospective amendments are expected to be more security-oriented and would be causing an additional burden on third-country citizens. These steps are the increase of the visa fee from 60 euros to 80 euros; a new mechanism to trigger stricter conditions for processing visas when a partner country does not cooperate sufficiently on the readmission of irregular migrants; revision of the Visa Information System, the database where applications and the biographical data of applicants are registered.

Nonetheless, citizens of 105 third-countries currently have to get through the visa barrier to be able to enter the EU. According to the ideal scenario, the closest partner of the EU in terms of migration management - a vital dimension of human mobility- Turkey, should not be treated the same way as the other 104 countries. Given Turkey's status as a candidate country and a key Customs Union partner, the visa requirement, which Turkish citizens are subject to, is clearly an irrational practice.