

EU Turkey Report: Who cares for the bitter or the truth

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“EU’s criticisms of Turkey in its 2022 observation report on the contentious issues of Cyprus, Aegean Islands and the East Mediterranean are flatly unjust simply because the EU omits its own failures to observe the international law.”

European Commission’s 2022 **Turkey observation report** entered Turkey’s agenda and exited almost at the same time it was published, mainly because it carves the contentious issues in the EU’s favour and the righteous determinations and criticism of the report get to be officially ignored. While the penultimate statement in the report that “Turkey is a key partner of the EU” is certainly correct it is considered insincere a statement as it is inaccurate to say, “it is a candidate for full membership” while contradicting it a few lines below by saying “Turkey’s accession negotiations have effectively come to a standstill, no further chapters can be considered for opening and closing.”

Opportunities, rights and wrongs

However, it remains the fact that Turkey is a strong future partner that the EU cannot avoid accepting as a full member and if it did avoid it would be the wasting of history’s biggest opportunity. Together covering the whole north and east of the Mediterranean there are immense synergies between Turkey and the EU in cultural, geostrategic, political, economic and security fields. However, they seem to have agreed to not progress as they neither terminate or adapt either the 1964 Partnership Agreement and the 1994 Customs Union agreement. The two parties not having already united to realise the huge potential in these fields can be explained only by imprudence and short-sightedness.

Dirty-handedness

EU’s criticisms of Turkey in the report on **the contentious issues** of Cyprus, Aegean Islands and the East Mediterranean are flatly unjust simply because the EU omits its own failures to observe the international law. Cyprus is an issue between the three guarantor countries the UK, Turkey and Greece. The EU wriggled to become a part of the conflict by hastily accepting it as full member. Despite it postures as if it were a champion for the rule of law, the EU ignored the very basic fact that the Greek administration in the south of Cyprus did not legitimately represent the Turkish population in the North, thus did not have the authority to accede the whole of Cyprus to the EU. The EU, should have, at least, acknowledged its own culpability in making the solution of the dispute even more difficult and failure to help unite Cyprus missing a historical opportunity for peace and stability in the region. The EU adopts a similar stance on the issues between Turkey and Greece in relation to Aegean Sea, militarisation of islands contrary to international law and claims of ownership of derelict rock formations. As if “mighty is always right.” Turkish general public perceives the situation is “the EU has an ulterior agenda, and not sincere.”

Judiciary is the most important issue

If not for the EU, it is utmost valuable for Turkey that EU report speaks out the bitter truth because it validates the criticism also voiced by majority of Turkish opinion leaders. How rightly bitter they may be, the EU's criticism and determinations are invaluable for solution of Turkey's democracy, judiciary, rule of law and anti-corruption woes.

Most serious of them relate to chapters 23 and 24 on judiciary and fundamental rights. These two areas are key for improvements in the rest of the chapters. Moving the two to the beginning of the report also indicate the same. Decision makers both in Turkey and the EU should treat these two chapters as the ones that will help Turkey to become an equal part to negotiate partnership with the EU rather than pre-conditions to EU full membership. Turkey needs to advance its democracy and the rule of law, secure and strengthen fundamental rights for its own economy and prosperity of its own people, not for the EU.

All it takes to becoming an advance democracy is establishing judicial independence and strengthening separation of powers. Among these objectives the judiciary is the most important issue. Solving this issue will solve justice and fundamental rights issues automatically and will improve economic and political problems bringing Turkey to a suitable level for full membership. Therefore, solving the judiciary issue Turkey may bring itself to a sought-after partner level instead of knocking EU's doors in vain.

Why backpedalling?

Instead of improving relations and recouping enormous potential of synergies both the EU and Turkey are backpedalling.

The EU has been avoiding modernisation of the 1994 Customs Union despite it is unfair, constantly feeding imbalances and worsening the relations between parties. It is a weak because it was enacted without having regard to equilibrium. It was made in 1994 when internet was new borne, the social media phenomenon was unknown, China and India had not become players in world trade and the EU had not signed new generation free trade agreements.

Although Customs Union improved trade relations considerably it is unjustly functioning against Turkey, causing adverse feelings against the EU to flourish in all sections of the society.

On its part Turkey has backslid in Democracy, judiciary, rule of law and fundamental rights plummeting in international indexes to hybrid democracy and lowest levels respectively, ringing alarm bells in the EU circles. Thus, the full membership negotiations came to a standstill, each day worsening relations even more.

The way to restore path

Concerns for supply chain sustainability after the Covid-19 pandemic, and peace and stability issues as well as the need to revise Europe's security and energy architecture after the war in Ukraine has reminded the EU of Turkey's importance to Europe, existing synergies between the two and reminded the need to improve relations.

Both the EU and Turkey have important homework to do. The first of the two urgent tasks is to move quickly to modernise the Customs Union addressing the injustices and imbalances. The second is to open and quickly close chapters 23 and 24 resolving the areas of rightful criticisms. There is no reason and explanation as to why the EU does not attend to both of these areas despite Turkey have shown resilient willingness and there is no harm or cost on the part of EU, rather it will benefit greatly.

However, there is no reason or explanation for Turkey not to address criticisms about the 23rd and 24th chapters other than the oligarchy in Turkey not seeing it to beneficial to their interests.

Wishing that the EU and Turkey's leaders seizes these opportunities that will open new doors in their relations and to reach to higher levels of co-operation and integration.