

CPS

Corporate & Public Strategy
Advisory Group



EU Corridors

February
2008

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Editorial

EU Perspective on Headscarf

How does the European Union (EU) perceive the unabating headscarf dispute in Turkey? Despite the fact that European countries have reached common ground on religious issues and state affairs over the past fifty years, the Union has not been able to develop common standards on these issues. Religion and state affairs, therefore, are generally kept outside the confines of Brussels. For example, the headscarf ban in France three years ago, which resulted in fierce debates throughout the Union, was quietly observed by Brussels from a distance. Brussels has taken the same attitude towards the headscarf debate in Turkey and the European Commission was careful not to comment on issue in its Progress Reports in previous years. The AKP takes issue with Brussels' attitude because, it asserts, the EU is quick to comment on freedom of religion issues when minorities are affected, but remains stone silent on the headscarf issue, which affects many more people. If nothing else Brussels has maintained a consistent approach to the issue and may, above all, simply be confused about the headscarf issue.

The First Voting on Headscarf in the EP

The approval process of a recent report by the plenary of the European Parliament (EP) is significant in terms of reflecting the EU's perspective on the headscarf issue. The report, which generally covers "Children's Rights", contains an addendum which proposes a ban on headscarves in primary schools. Drafted by Roberta Angelili, an Italian MEP from the majority Group Christian Democrats, the report states that the wearing of headscarves interferes with the free will of young girls to make their own choices in the future. While any endorsement of the report is legally non-binding, the addendum on the headscarf was only noticed, and brought to light, one day prior to the general vote at the Plenary. Following this, the socialist and liberal groups in the EP, acting together, demanded a separate vote for the paragraph mentioning the headscarf ban. In a consecutive voting, 367 MEPs ensured the dismissal of the proposal by voting against the headscarf ban in primary schools. While 200 members voted in favour of the ban, 134 members abstained from voting. The most striking outcome is that none of the political groups in the EP could take a common position on the issue. Even within the Christian Democrats -- the group which proposed the ban in the first place -- turned out to be split on the issue. EP officials said the reason the ban was vetoed was 'This issue is outside the competence of the EU. Each EU country is free to adopt its own rules. If the EU starts to take sides, it will be difficult to settle the issue.' According to EU policy, every member state has the right to decide on the issue independently. While France solved the issue on a state-wide level, and serves as inspiration for the Turkish lawmakers, members such as Belgium and the Netherlands prefer the schools solve the issue independently. In this way, the state can exclude itself from a potentially seriously contentious issue. Although the EU is reluctant to intervene in the discussions about the headscarf issue in Turkey, the increasingly heated debate worries Brussels. Whether Turkey decides to lift the ban on the headscarf or not, it is essential to take the decision through general consensus. The gradual deepening of opinion differences and escalating partisanship between different groups in Turkey increase concerns. In addition, one-dimensional focus on freedoms, via headscarf discussion, despite the existence of further restrictions on other areas of fundamental rights and freedoms, confuse the minds in the EU.

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News

Controversy Surrounds Kosovo Independence

The recognition of Kosovo as an independent country is being marred by controversy within the EU. Romania and the Southern Cyprus declared openly that they will not recognize Kosovo under any circumstances. Spain, Greece and Slovakia have stated that independence of Kosovo will open Pandora's Box and will serve as an example for all stateless nations. Southern Cyprus' fear is that Kosovo will set a precedent and encourage the Republic of Northern Cyprus to seek independence as well. On the other hand, these attitudes in the EU worry the US. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice warned Europe not to delay the defining the status of Kosovo. Rice, who met with representatives of EU countries in Berlin, stated 'I do not think that there is a major difference in opinion with Europe concerning Kosovo. We are currently discussing whether it is possible to have a smooth transitional period'. On the other hand, the EU, while discussing the issue of opening the way to Serbia to accede to the EU in exchange for the independence of Kosovo, found itself in conflict on the issue. Twenty-five member states of the EU believe EU membership prospects can inhibit the rise of nationalism in Serbia. The Netherlands and Belgium, meanwhile, hold the view that 'unless General Ratko Mladić, the Serbian war criminal, is boarded a plane headed for The Hague Court, the accession of Serbia to the EU is not possible.' This split of the EU on the issue has led to a standstill in the signing of the Stability and Partnership Agreement between Brussels-Belgrade. Yet, the EU offered to conclude an interim partnership agreement with Serbia in order to demonstrate that its support for the country continues. The move is expected to smooth the way for Kosovo a bit.

New Turkish Judge selected for ECHR

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, during its General Council meetings in the last month selected Prof. Dr. Işıl Karakaş as the new Turkish judge for the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). As in the first voting Karakaş took 136 votes out of 178, more than half of the total votes. The two other candidates, Prof. Dr. Ruşen Ergeç, took 27 votes, while Prof. Dr. Ali Ulusoy took 15 votes. From Turkey, Karakaş will take the duty for the next six years in the ECHR. Meanwhile, Rıza Türmen, who served as the Turkish judge for nine years in the ECHR and whose term of office expired in May, will continue his duty in Strasbourg for about two and a half years until the cases which started in his term are concluded.

New Treaty of the EU to be Ratified

The EU Member States commenced the ratification procedure of the Lisbon Treaty, which was approved in the Heads of State Summit held in December 2007. While the first approval for the Lisbon Treaty, whose ratification procedure is expected to be finalized by the beginning of the year 2009, was ratified by the Hungarian Parliament, this was followed by the Parliaments of Slovenia and Malta which passed the Treaty with majority. Meanwhile, the fact that only Ireland among the EU Member States will hold a referendum for the approval of the Treaty worries the other EU countries. According to the results of the recent public poll conducted in Ireland, only 37 % of the Irish people stated that they are going to approve the Treaty. For now, the majority of the population retains their ambivalence concerning the issue.

European Commission Energy and Climate Package

Last month, the European Commission presented a proposal package related to "energy and climate change" in order to take measures against the challenge of global warming. The purpose of the package is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% and to increase the share of renewable energies to 20% as well as to raise energy efficiency 20% by 2020. In this regard, the current EU Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) will be tightened up by monitoring the carbon market on an EU-wide scale instead of by each individual Member State. Between the period of 2012-2020, the system will be broadened to include several industrial sectors. In sectors not covered by the system, such as agriculture, waste, construction and transport, legally binding national emissions targets will be determined. The Package also includes the target of increasing the use of renewable energy. In this regard, the European Commission specified a target for each EU Member State concerning renewable energy production. In the framework of the Package, the European Commission remarked on the importance of the new technology related to carbon emissions mitigation (known as "carbon capture and storage") which detains carbon dioxide from power plants and stores it in subsurfaces or in deep oceans instead of releasing it directly into the atmosphere. In this framework, the Package aims at assessing the carbon capture and storage technology in the context of the Regulation on State aid for environmental protection.

Renewable Energy Levels Are Determined for EU Member States

The European Commission determined the usage level of renewable energy for 2020 for each EU Member State. The levels which were determined by the executive body of the EU, will be obligatory for the members. According to this determination, Sweden (49%), Lithuania (42%) and Finland (38%) are demanded to use renewable energy in high levels. While France (23%), Germany (18%), Italy (17%) and Poland (15%) are situated in the middle of the list; Luxembourg (11%) and Malta (10%) are going to use the renewable energy in low levels.

Pharmaceutical Sector Inquiry from the Commission

The European Commission commenced inquiring leading pharmaceutical companies whether they adopted anti-competitive practices, which would hinder innovation and access of generic companies to the market. The investigation resulted due to a decrease in new pharmaceuticals and the entry delay of many generic pharmaceuticals. The decision taken on January 15th has resulted in the inquiry of conglomerates such as GlaxoSmithKline, AstraZeneca, Sanofi-Aventis, Pfizer and Novartis AG. Concerning Generic producers, the offices of Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd and Wyeth were also questioned. The reason for such occasional inquiries result as the Commission wishes to become more informed about the functioning of different sectors and supervise over companies who do not adhere to anti-trust regulations. To protect available data and evidence, this was the first time the Commission entered an entire sector inquiry without warning.

Russia Sticks Out in EU Gas Market

The Russian gas company Gazprom, which had signed individual energy agreements with EU Member States, keeps trying to preserve its position as "principal energy supplier" and to frustrate the European Union hopes of securing alternative routes for ensuring the transfer of energy resources. Gazprom, which plans to increase its presence in the British gas market by dominating 15% of the market by 2011 is a hindrance to the EU's goal of presenting a single

voice on energy issues. Evident in its move to supply gas directly to British consumers, is the fact that Gazprom intends to become a powerful actor in the EU energy market instead of an external supplier. Gazprom also signed a major energy deal with Serbia on January 25 that further boosted Russian dominance in the natural gas and oil sectors of Serbia. Additionally, Gazprom included Serbia in the North Stream project. The signing of a deal with Austrian energy company OMV and its acquisition of a 50% share of the European Gas Distribution Commercial Hub brings the company ever closer to realizing the North Stream Project, the rival of the Nabucco project.

Search for a New EU President

Following recent EU reforms, the debate is now in full swing on who is going to be appointed to the new position of 'EU President,' to take effect at the beginning of next year. While the former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, who is unofficially supported by the French President Nicolas Sarkozy, was seen as the closest candidate for the Presidency, there is a split in the EU on this issue. Though Blair is generally considered the 'the most European among the British', Sarkozy's party, UMP as well as French leftist groups, still objected. The justification for these objections is explained by the previous French Prime Minister, from right front, Eduard Balladur as 'Blair is charismatic but unfortunately he is British'; by the previous President of France Valery Giscard D'Estaing as 'The new EU President should be from a member state which abides by the rules of the EU'. In addition to the objections from French politicians, the member states headed by Italy and Spain, do not think the Presidency of Blair favorable due to his attitude during the Iraq war. Sarkozy, who has not officially declared his support for Blair, has started nevertheless begun campaigning for Blair and making an effort to convince German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Although the candidacy of Blair created objections, none of the other candidates for the EU Presidency are as popular. According to the results of a public poll; 64 % of Germans, 60 % of British and 53 % of the French population stated that they want to see Blair as the head of the EU. The EU devised the seat of EU Presidency in order to ensure the external representation of the EU as a single voice and to increase credibility of Brussels in the world. Following the implementation of the new Lisbon Treaty of the EU in 27 Member States, the six-month rotation of EU Presidency among the Member States will come to an end. The elected EU President will serve a term of two and a half years and be based in Brussels and is charged with acting as chair of the Council, the decision-making body of the EU.

US Economic Crisis Distresses EU

The US economic crisis is of major concern to the EU not only because of threats to EU exports to the US, but according to the most recent analysis, concerns were also raised about potential negative repercussions throughout the Euro-zone. The Economy and Finance Ministers came together last month and evaluated the possible impacts of the crisis on the EU. Although the President of Euro-zone, Jean Claude Juncker accepted that a potential recession in the US economy could influence the Euro-zone, he reassured the market by emphasizing that the European economy has a solid base. Also, Juncker, stating that there is no need for excessive pessimism, said that the recent surge in the stock exchanges should not be exaggerated. In its report related to economic forecasts that was presented last year, the European Commission pointed out that the crisis which occurred in the US loan market could affect Europe globally in the second term of 2007.

Agenda

4 February

- EU Troika – Azerbaijan Meeting

5 February

- EU Troika – Georgia Meeting
- EU Political and Security Committee

6 February

- COREPER I
- COREPER II
- EU Troika- Armenia Meeting
- The Weekly Meeting of the European Commission
- Committee of Regions General Council Meetings (6 – 7 February)

7 February

- European Central Bank Governing Council
- CEPS holds a seminar on “Individual Banking in Europe: New technologies – New Opportunities”
www.ceps.be
- Informal meeting of NATO Defense Ministers, Vilnius, Latvia. (7–8 February)

8 February

- COREPER I
- European Council Political and Security Committee

11 February

- Committee meetings at the European Parliament
- Informal Meeting of Eurozone Finance Ministers

12 February

- EU Economic and Financial Affairs Council
- European Parliament Group Meetings (12-14 February)
- European Council Political and Security Committee (12–13 February)

13 February

- COREPER I
- European Economic and Social Committee Plenary (13–14 February)
- EU Troika – Russia Meeting
- Weekly meeting of the European Commission

14 February

- COREPER II
- Black Sea Region and EU Foreign Ministers Meeting. www.eu2008.si
- EU Troika – Russia Meeting

15 February

- COREPER I

17 February

- Presidential elections in Southern Cyprus

18 February

- EU General Affairs and External Relations Council. (18-19 February)
- European Council Political and Security Committee (18-19 February)
- EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council
- Plenary Sessions of European Parliament (18-21 February)

20 February

- COREPER I
- COREPER II
- Weekly meeting of the European Commission

21 February

- Informal Meeting of EU Defense Ministers, Brdo, Slovenia' (24-26 February)
- European Central Bank Governing Council
- European Business Summit will be held in Brussels (21-22 February) www.ebsummit.org/

22 February

- COREPER I

25 February

- EU Competition Council (25-26 February)
- Committee meetings at the European Parliament (25-28 February)
- Friends of Europe holds a seminar on 'Does the Lisbon Treaty contain new promises as regards EU's development aids?' www.friendsofeurope.org

26 February

- European Council Political and Security Committee

27 February

- COREPER I
- COREPER II
- Weekly meeting of the European Commission

28 February

- EU Justice and Home Affairs Council

29 February

- European Council Political and Security Committee

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The information in this document was compiled from various EU information sources.