

CPS

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Advisory Group



EU Corridors

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Editorial

Brussels' Anxious Watch

Following a long-awaited reestablishment of peace in Cyprus after Tassos Papadopoulos, leader of Southern Cyprus, failed at the ballot box last month, the European Union (EU) encountered an unwanted situation in Turkey this time. Brussels is confused by the Ergenekon investigation and the law suit filed for the closure of Justice and Development Party. The EU, which closely follows daily developments in Turkey, believes the country is facing a 'judicial coup' and that it is overshadowing 'impartiality of judiciary' in the country. The EU indicated that Turkey's accession process to the EU might be endangered if the outcome of the case is the closure of the party. For this reason, the European Commission is keeping a close eye on Turkey. The report of the European Parliament, to be published in May, seems to include severe language. Criticisms have been raised in Parliament lately. Even pro-Turkey parliamentarians complain "with whom will we negotiate if there is no government."

First Severe Criticism from Brussels

The opinion of the European Commission in this process is not a secret. Olli Rehn, European Commissioner for Enlargement, reiterated several times that he is against the closure case and based his argument on the party closure standards adopted by the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe. According to this, the party can only be shut down if it commits or supports violence. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) did not rule against closing the Welfare Party in Turkey on the basis of infringement of democracy in the 1990s. However, the case against the AK Party does not meet the criteria of the Venice Commission; the closure of AK Party would be considered an infringement of the law according to Rehn. The Commissioner made his first serious criticism recently, saying the EU may revise the negotiations if it is required. For this reason, the critical official visit by the President of the Commission Jose Manuel Barroso and Commissioner Rehn to Turkey on April 10-12 took the attention of world media. On a more cautious note, the President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso implied that the trial for closing a ruling party may jeopardize the country's EU bid at his first visit to Turkey. He stressed Turkey's EU membership as 'alternative' to radical Islam and called on Turkey to speed up the reform process. Barroso added EU does not want to take side and nobody should expect EU to set standards on the headscarf issue.

Although the EU took rather cautious stance during Ankara visit, voices raise in Brussels concerning the developments in Turkey. Rehn's remarks regarding the reconsideration of negotiations refer to the Negotiating Framework which sets the principles governing negotiations between Turkey and the EU and displays the position of the EU. In this agreement, it is stated in the case of serious and persistent breach of freedom, democracy, respect to human rights and fundamental rights and rule of law by Turkey, the negotiations shall be suspended. The Commission can propose suspending the negotiations as well as the criteria to resume it, as its own initiative or on the request of one third of the member states. The recommendation, on the other hand, can only be adopted by the European Council by a qualified majority. The situation in Turkey does not require such a proposal. Moreover, the developments in Ankara have not affected the negotiations at the technical level. Nevertheless, Brussels is watching Turkey carefully.

Duygu Leloglu
BRUSSELS

News

Opening of New Negotiation Chapters in Delayed

The plan of Slovenia - holding the EU Council Presidency - to open new negotiation chapters with Turkey on April 21 is expected to be delayed due to technical reasons. During the six month term of the Slovenian Presidency, negotiations on some chapters were planned to be opened at the undersecretary level in April, while others were expected to open in June at the Ministerial level. The three chapters, on which the negotiations were expected to open in April, included "corporate law", "intellectual property rights" and "the Free Movement of Capital". However, since Turkey could not fulfill the benchmarks on those chapters yet, starting the negotiations on time will not be possible. The President of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso stated they are willing to open two further chapters to negotiations with Turkey during the Slovenian Presidency.

"Education and culture" is another negotiation chapter expected to take a start in June. However, for the opening of this chapter, the conditions imposed by France and Southern Cyprus would need to be abolished. The former Greek Cypriot leader Tassos Papadopoulos, before leaving the office, had been opposing the opening of the chapter claiming that the Christian historical remains in the Turkish Republic of Cyprus have been ruined and that higher education in the North of the island was illegal. Now, the Greek Cypriot leader Christofias is expected to give the green light for the opening of the chapter in question.

Istanbul Centre in Brussels Opens

Istanbul Centre in Brussels (ICiB), aiming to promote dialogue between Istanbul and the EU, opened on April 8, 2008 with the presence of Kadir Topbaş, Mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and Olli Rehn, European Commissioner for Enlargement. Moreover, László Kovács, Member of the European Commission responsible for Taxation and Customs Union, and First Vice-President of Committee of the Regions Michel Delebarre, as well as Members of the European Parliament, permanent representatives of EU member states residing in Brussels, guests from Turkey and members of the press attended the opening.

In the scope of the inauguration; Kadir Topbaş, Olli Rehn, Joost Lagendijk, Co-Chairman of Turkey-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee, Egemen Bağış, Turkish Parliamentarian and Chairman of the Advisory Board of Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture Initiative (2005-2008) and Tulu Gümüştekin, Chairwoman of Joint Coordination and Management Board of ICiB gave a joint press conference. Mayor Topbaş emphasized that "Istanbul is a treasure that grows in value the more it is shared". Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has contributed to the opening with a message: "Istanbul Centre in Brussels is a 'centre of dialogue and discussion' and a place to discover that it is the common values that bind Turkey to Europe and not just the chapters of the Acquis Communautaire."

ICiB, opened in conjunction with the selection of the city as 2010 European Capital of Culture, will support the accession process of Turkey to the EU. The centre is a multi-platform cultural institution in the heart of the EU with a well appointed lecture theatre and cinema, Istanbul library and resource facility, and exhibition space. It will host an array of intellectual, cultural and artistic events throughout the year on the basis of an annual programme drafted according to opinion (conference hall), knowledge (library) and art (gallery) themes.

ICiB is established with the support Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and its wholly owned subsidiary, Kùltür A.Ş. ICiB's implementation has been entrusted to an independent board chaired by Tulu Gümüştèkin. The Board is composed of distinguished European and Turkish citizens including MEPs from the Netherlands, Austria, Sweden, Germany and the UK.

Countdown for Peace Negotiations in Cyprus

The President of the Republic of Northern Cyprus, Mehmet Ali Talat, and the Southern Greek Cypriot leader Christofias, in their meeting on March 31st, agreed to re-launch peace negotiations on the island. According to decision of the two leaders, the negotiations will start in the next three months within the arbitration of the United Nations following the completion of the preparations and the establishment of technical committees and study groups. Following the meeting, the Lokmaci border gate between the two sides of the island was opened with a ceremony. The European Union welcomed the new developments towards peace on the island. However, there are still disagreements between Northern and Southern Cyprus in terms of the basis of negotiations. The Turkish Cypriot side is in favor of founding the negotiations on the Annan Plan, which was accepted by the Turkish Cypriots, but rejected on the southern part of the island during the referendum held on 2004. On the other hand, the Greek Cypriot side insists on taking the set of principles - agreed upon at the 2006 meeting between Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders - as a basis for negotiations, claiming that the Annan Plan was a stillborn project.

EP Discussing the Turkey Report

European Parliament (EP) started to discuss the "Turkey Report", which will be adopted as a recommendation by the EP in May. Ria Oomen-Ruijten, the Turkey Rapporteur of the Parliament from the Christian Democrat Group, insisted the report send a strong message to the Turkish judiciary. The report, which calls upon Turkey to accelerate reforms, was debated at the Foreign Affairs Committee for the first time. During the debate, the Turkey Rapporteur said there are doubts about the impartiality of the Turkish judiciary. Most of the political groups in the Parliament are expected to give amendment proposals to include in the report that the closure of Justice and Development Party (AKP) would be against democracy and the rule of law. The draft report stresses the importance of the "Ergenekon" inquiry and urges the Turkish government to abolish article 301 from the criminal code, as it is considered an obstacle to freedom of speech. Moreover, according to the draft report, the law on foundations should be changed in conformity with the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), and the efforts on making "civil constitution" must be seen as an opportunity to enlarge the scope of freedoms and human rights. In addition to this, the report says that the judiciary must be impartial. Following the recent developments in Turkey, the wording of the report is expected to be more critical.

The EP Debates EU Enlargement Prospects

The European Parliament (EP) is preparing a report which suggests the European Union (EU) slow down its enlargement process during the upcoming term. The report, being drafted by MEP Elmar Brok of the Christian Democrat party -- which has the majority of seats in the EP -- and debated at the Committee on Foreign Affairs, urges that the continuation of the enlargement process could cause splits in the Union. Concerning the draft report to be adopted at the Plenary in May, Brok said if enlargement process continues without necessary preparations different structures may emerge within the Union. In this case, while the member states at the centre of the EU realize further integration, others may be marginalized, he added. The draft report is not in its final version yet and can be amended by other political groups at the EP.

The Union for Mediterranean to be a Continuation of the “Barcelona Process”

“The Union for Mediterranean”, which French President Nicolas Sarkozy insisted upon, was accepted in principal by the heads of member states during the EU summit in March. Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Jansa described the agreement as a progress at the “Barcelona Process” started in 1995 and which involves Turkey. In other words, the EU has confirmed the formation of the new union as part of an existing process rather than a new initiative. Sarkozy had initially proposed the Mediterranean Union as an alternative solution in terms of Turkey to become a privileged partner of the union, instead of being a member. Turkey was against the proposal, claiming that it would water down its full membership process to the European Union. However, following the objections from other member states, the project was taken into a different context. Slovenian Prime Minister Jansa stressed that, during the summit, Sarkozy did not make any statement about the new union becoming an alternative to Turkish membership. Although “The Union for Mediterranean” has a similar institutional structure to the EU, different from the European Union, it will have an intergovernmental decision-making mechanism. The first summit of the Mediterranean Union will take place on July 13, 2008 during the French presidency of the European Council. “The Union for Mediterranean”, which will be administered by a secretariat of 20 people, is going to be ruled by a two year presidency collectively held by northern and southern countries. Although the proposal of Sarkozy included only the countries that have a Mediterranean Sea coast, according to the final agreement all EU 27 can join the union.

EU Gives Green Light to Croatia

The European Union has given Croatia - which started accession negotiations at the same time with Turkey - the membership signal. After his bilateral meeting with the Croat Prime Minister Ivo Sander in Brussels last month, Jose Manuel Barroso, the President of European Commission, said that the accession negotiations with Croatia will be completed in 2009. Thus, the membership signal was mentioned from an official channel for the first time. However, for the country to become the 28th member of the Union, the Lisbon Treaty, which brings internal structural reforms to the EU, needs to be ratified by all the member states. In this case, Croatian membership would be possible at the end of 2010 or early 2011. Due to the problems on ports, the European Union has suspended negotiations with Turkey on eight chapters. On the other hand, negotiations with Croatia are expected to be opened on all 36 chapters this year. Until now, the EU has opened negotiations with Croatia on 16 chapters, two of which are already completed. Turkey, meanwhile, has only been able to start negotiations on six chapters thus far and has completed only one.

The EU’s Marie Curie Award Given to a Turkish Scientist for the First Time

Molecular biologist Professor Dr. Batu Erman from Sabancı University is the first Turk to receive the prestigious annual Marie Curie award which is given by the EU to five scientists each year. Erman was granted the award based on his groundbreaking research on AIDS and cancer. The award was presented to Professor Dr. Batu Erman in Brussels on March 12 by Janes Potocnik, the Commissioner responsible for Science and Research. The EU has given the Marie Curie award to 25 scientists since 1993.

EU Summit Decides on Growth and Employment

Heads of EU states and governments took several decisions concerning the economic growth and employment policy of the Union during their summit on March 13 and 14. Accordingly, the leaders endorsed growth and employment policies designed for each member state per se for 2008-2010. In addition, the social aspect of the Lisbon Strategy, which aims to make the EU the most competitive knowledge economy by 2010, is highlighted. In their efforts to combat global climate change, EU leaders have adopted a commitment to reduce CO₂ by 30%. The final provisions of EU's climate and energy package are to take effect by mid-2009. Other initiatives of the package include increasing R&D investments to 3% of Gross National Product (GNP) and to focus on reducing unemployment.

Enlargement Process of the Schengen Area Completed

As of March 30, nine new EU countries will be included in the enlargement of the Schengen area, removing internal borders within the EU and creating a single external border. The nine countries who joined the Union in 2004: Poland, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Hungary, Estonia, Slovakia and Slovenia will be lifting air border control and fully joining the Schengen process which started on January 20. The Schengen area now includes 24 countries allowing 400 million people to free move from the Union's west to its eastern borders. Next year Cyprus' Greek section and Switzerland will join as well. England and Switzerland did not join the process in order to protect their own borders, while Romania and Bulgaria eagerly await to join the Schengen area.

EU-US Air Transport Agreement takes Effect

The EU-US Air Transport Agreement took effect at the end of last month. European airlines will now be able to fly without restrictions to any point in the US. This agreement is the most ambitious project among air services. The two biggest aviation markets which hold 60% of world traffic have decided to closely cooperate with one another in all fields of aviation policy. The European Commission will engage in second stage negotiation with the US in May.

European Retailers Agree on Reducing Energy Consumption

European retailers signed an agreement aiming to reduce energy consumption per square meter by 20% by 2020 and later move above the 20% goal. European Energy Commissioner Andris Piebalgs welcomed the decision, saying the EU's commitments don't only apply to national governments. EU officials stated that in order to reach the Unions objectives civil society and market actors need to join such initiatives.

Croatia is first EU Candidate to Join 'Media 2007'

Croatia became the first candidate country to join 'Media 2007' programme of the EU. 'Media 2007,' having a budget of 755 Euro for 2007-2013 aims to encourage competitiveness of the audiovisual industry in Europe. Participation of Croatia to the programme will provide necessary resources to the country to advance audiovisual projects, facilitate distribution and dissemination, promote digital technology and encourage competitiveness. Croatia's implementation of Television without Frontiers Directive facilitates its accession to Media 2007. With Croatia, the number of European countries taking part in the programme increased to 32.

Social Summit of the EU Brings Social Partners Together

At the Social Summit entitled 'Growth and Employment' in the EU, the representatives of employers and employees came together with the European Commission and the Council as they do each year. At the Summit, the representatives discussed the social impact of climate change, energy dependency and the agenda of social dialogue scheduled for coming months. The President of European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso emphasized the social dialogue has a significant role to meet the Lisbon Strategy targets and is a key actor concerning climate change and energy issues. At the Summit, Vladimir Spidla, Member of the European Commission for Employment and Social Policies, discussed the compromise with the employers and trade unions in 1995 concerning parental leave, which shall be revised to meet contemporary realities and conditions. The social partners committed to put the issue on their agenda.

The European Commission Wants to Amend VAT Rules

The European Commission made an exhaustive proposal to effectively combat VAT (Value Added Tax) fraud within the union. The proposal suggests amending VAT Directive and VAT Administrative Cooperation Regulation to accelerate intra-Community information collection and exchange as of 2010. The proposal includes several provisions: to include the goods and services transactions to the declaration made by buyers accountable to VAT, to harmonize community standards, to reduce the time limit from three months to one month for inter-state information exchange, to collect the information concerning the goods and services transactions of suppliers and buyers on a monthly basis. The new amendments aim to encourage more rapid detection of VAT fraud and advance administrative cooperation between member states.

New Commission Proposal against Environmental Pollution

The European Commission adopted a proposal to strengthen the measures against ships polluting the environment. If the proposal is adopted by the Council it will replace the directive adopted in 2005. The new proposal clarifies the crimes relating to environmental pollution and defines concerned penalties. European Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security Franco Frattini said the new proposal will enhance the measures against marine pollution and damage to natural resources.

Agenda

4 April

- COREPER I
- Informal Meeting of EU Ministers for Economic and Financial Affairs
- NATO Summit (Romania)

5 April

- EU Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) – Ministerial Meeting
- NATO Summit (Romania)

7 April

- EU Political and Security Committee (PSC)
- Committee Meetings in European Parliament
- EU Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council (Luxembourg)

8 April

- Bureau Meeting of the Committee of the Regions
- Committee Meetings in European Parliament
- "Cities of the Future" Forum (April 8-10)
- EU Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council (Luxembourg)

9 April

- Committee of the Regions Plenary Session
- COREPER I
- COREPER II
- European Parliament Group Meetings and Plenary Session (April 9-10)
- European Commission's Weekly Meeting

10 April

- The Governing Council of the European Central Bank

11 April

- COREPER I
- Informal Meeting of the EU Environment Ministers (April 11-12)
- EU Political and Security Committee (PSC)

14 April

- EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council (April 14-15)
- Informal Meeting of EU Ministers for Competitiveness (Brdo, April 14-16)
- Committee Meetings in European Parliament

15 April

- Group Meetings in European Parliament (April 15-16)
- EU Political and Security Committee (PSC)

16 April

- COREPER I
- COREPER II
- European Commission's Weekly Meeting

17 April

- Committee Meetings in European Parliament
- Informal Meeting of EU Ministers for Health (Brdo, April 17-18)
- EU Justice and Home Affairs Council (Luxembourg, April 17-18)

18 April

- COREPER I
- EU Political and Security Committee (PSC)

21 April

- European Parliament Plenary Session (21-24 Nisan)

22 April

- European Economic and Social Committee

23 April

- EU Political and Security Committee (PSC)

24 April

- COREPER II
- The Governing Council of the European Central Bank

25 April

- COREPER I

28 April

- EU General Affairs and External Relations Council (April 28-29)

29 April

- EU Political and Security Committee (PSC) (April 29-30)

30 April

- COREPER I
- European Commission's Weekly Meeting

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