

Address given by Olli Rehn on future relations between the EU and Turkey (Istanbul, 20 October 2004)

Caption: On 20 October 2004, Olli Rehn, Commissioner for Enlargement, delivers an address in Istanbul in which he outlines the policy pursued by the European Commission with regard to future relations between the European Union and Turkey.

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Turkey and the EU: a Common Future?

Group meeting of the Greens/EFA of the European Parliament

Istanbul, 20 October 2004

Rt.Hon. Ministers of Foreign Affairs, MEPs, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very glad to be here in Istanbul today, before this engaged audience and in the distinguished panel.

I had the pleasure of meeting Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül earlier today; I am looking forward to a fruitful collaboration with you. Furthermore, I must say I owe some intellectual debt to Joschka Fischer, as I exploited his writings in my master's thesis, which I wrote sometime back in the 1980s on the transformation of the Greens from spontaneous alternative movements to a more or less new type of a party of citizen movements. Judging by the consolidation of the Green parties, my conclusion has held well, not least at the European level, where the Green group is one of the key forces in the Parliament.

It is usually not politically correct for a commissioner to refer to his or her own country, or "the member state I know best". But since I am not known for absolute political correctness, let me say how pleased I am, as a Finn, to be in the country of Kemal Atatürk, who is well-known in my country as the great European moderniser of Turkey.

There is actually an important historical bridge between the two countries, leading to significant similarities in the Finnish and Turkish political mythology, which carries us to today's theme.

It is well known that Atatürk made the book "The Land of White Lilies", which describes the rise of Finnish national consciousness through education and civic action, compulsory reading in the Turkish schools; the superhuman of the book is J.V.Snellman, the national philosopher. It is also known that Atatürk was an admirer of General Mannerheim, later the defender of Western democracy in the Winter War. The chain moves on though in the reverse direction as Urho Kekkonen, long-time President of Finland, studied Atatürk's reforms in his youth and pursued policies in Finland whose similarity to "kemalism" is obvious – a strong state based on national unity and equal opportunity. But while we in Finland hail Snellman as the philosopher, Mannerheim as the military leader and Kekkonen as the statesman, Turkey seems to have all three qualities in just one person, Kemal Atatürk!

However, as all human beings who have reached close to mythical status, Atatürk's legacy can be interpreted in a variety of ways, from a very static to a very dynamic perspective, and everything in between. Be that as it may, I am sure Kemal Atatürk, who turned Turkey towards Europe 80 years ago, would have rejoiced on the 6th of October, when the Commission adopted the regular report on Turkey with a recommendation to start accession negotiations with the country. It is another milestone of the European road of Turkey.

The accession of Turkey to the EU is one of the key issues of our future European agenda. I shall now outline for you the Commission's thinking on the matter, based on the "Turkey package" of 6 October.

Firstly, our Regular Report was prepared with the well-tested methods of the last five years. In preparing this year's Regular Report and Recommendation, the Commission strictly respected the mandate given by the European Council. This year we have also taken a longer time span by covering a period of five years from 1999 to 2004.

We have used information from a wide range of sources: our Delegation in Ankara, the Turkish government, several international organisations, such as the Council of Europe and the OSCE. There have been several meetings with leading NGOs in Brussels and in Turkey. This helped us to present a balanced and objective account.

As you are aware, significant legal reforms have been realised in Turkey through a series of constitutional and legislative changes over the last three years. There have been two major constitutional reforms, in 2001 and 2004, and eight legislative packages, adopted by Parliament between February 2002 and July 2004.

This has brought about a real change. For instance, who could have imagined even some months ago that Leyla Zana would address the European Parliament before collecting her Sakharov Prize?

To quote other striking examples: death penalty has been abolished, the civil-military relations have approached EU standards and practices, and broadcasting and teaching in Kurdish and minority languages is now allowed, although with restrictions.

The new Penal Code is a key component of the reforms as it modernises the penal system mostly into line with European standards. However, the new Penal Code and the Law on Intermediate Courts of Appeal have not yet entered into force; the same is true for the new law on Associations. These laws cannot yet be considered to be a reality **on the ground**; we will need to see how they are implemented. Other pending decisions include the Code of Criminal Procedure, which is crucial in establishing the judicial police, and the law on execution of punishments and measures.

Even though major progress has without doubt taken place, it is clear that the reforms and their implementation must be further consolidated and broadened. This applies in particular to:

- the reinforcement and full implementation of provisions related to the respect of fundamental freedoms and protection of human rights, including women's rights, trade union rights, minority rights and problems faced by non-Muslim religious communities;
- civilian control over the military;
- alignment of law enforcement and judicial practice with the spirit of the reforms;
- policy of zero tolerance towards torture at all levels;
- fight against corruption;
- normalisation of the situation in the Southeast by pursuing the return of displaced persons, a strategy for socio-economic development and guaranteeing full rights and freedoms for the Kurds and other minorities.

The changes to the Turkish political and legal system should be seen as part of a longer process of transformation. It will take time before the spirit of the reforms is fully reflected in the attitudes of executive and judicial bodies, at all levels and throughout the country – which would be the case in any country undergoing such profound changes.

In view of the overall progress of reforms, and provided that Turkey brings into force the outstanding legislation mentioned above, the Commission considers that Turkey sufficiently fulfils the political criteria and thus recommends that accession negotiations be opened.

If the European Council decides likewise, this is not the end of a chapter, but the beginning of a new one. First and foremost, it is important to reinforce the European perspective of Turkey to ensure that her legal and political reforms are sustainable and irreversible.

Based on the conclusions of the Regular Report and the Copenhagen political criteria, the Recommendation outlines a clear framework for the opening of accession negotiations with Turkey. It presents a strategy based on three pillars to guide and accompany the accession negotiations, if the European Council decides to go forward.

The **first** pillar would provide support for the reform process in Turkey. Our objective is to assure the irreversibility and the sustainability of the reforms, which will need to be made lasting everyday reality.

The Accession Partnership should be revised accordingly to include a monitoring mechanism. The pace of the reforms will largely determine the pace of the negotiations. Another mechanism, the so-called “emergency brake”, provides that, in case of a serious breach of the political criteria, negotiations could be

suspended. This provision is inspired by the EU's existing Treaty and the future Constitutional Treaty, which set up a similar mechanism for the Member States.

I believe that these clauses do offer sufficient guarantees that the process which is ahead of us will stay on the right track.

The **second** pillar outlines the approach for accession negotiations proper with Turkey, which will no doubt be complex. The Council must set clear benchmarks for the opening and closing of chapters. In some areas, such as structural policies or agriculture, specific arrangements might be needed. As regards free movement of workers, permanent safeguards could be considered in case serious disturbances occur in the labour market within the EU as a result of Turkey's accession. Finally, negotiations could only be concluded once the financial perspective of the EU starting from 2014 is defined.

We would not negotiate in a vacuum, but against the evolving social and economic reality of Turkey, and its impact on Europe, if Turkey becomes a member. We have done a preliminary impact assessment on Turkey's possible accession in the so-called "issues paper". It makes the rather obvious conclusion that as an EU member Turkey would offer both great opportunities and major challenges, both for the EU and Turkey. Our assessment suggests that the necessary preparations for accession could last well into the next decade.

The economic impact of Turkey's accession on the EU would be positive but relatively small. Much will depend on future economic developments in Turkey. The sheer launch of accession negotiations should help the continued efforts of Turkey to ensure macroeconomic stability and to promote investment, growth and social development.

Moreover, Turks constitute the largest group of third-country nationals in today's EU. Available studies give very different figures of expected migration following Turkey's accession. Thus transitional provisions and a safeguard clause could be considered to avoid serious disturbances in the EU labour market. However, the population dynamics of Turkey could help to offset the ageing of EU societies.

The budgetary impact of Turkish EU membership is obviously related to the parameters of the financial perspectives and key spending policies from 2014 onwards. Transfers to Turkey, and thus the net budgetary cost for the EU, would depend on a number of variables, such as the EU agricultural and regional policies, as well as the arrangements agreed with Turkey in the negotiations. I want to underline that there is no automatic extrapolation of costs on the basis of current budget figures. The outcome is largely in our own hands.

The prospect of Turkish EU membership raises legitimate questions. There is a lively public debate both in the EU and in Turkey, which is a sign of a healthy democratic environment, so fundamental to the open society. We must address the concerns of our citizens by facilitating a dialogue with the various interlocutors of the civil society.

According to an opinion survey (June 2004) in 9 EU member states, in Germany and especially in France there is a majority on the no-side. Yet, on a positive note, by and large the European public does not seem to have an entrenched view on the matter. In the same survey, 30% of the respondents were in favour and 20% against Turkey's EU membership, while 40% regarded it as neither a good nor a bad thing, and 10% answered "don't know". This means that half of the European public seems to carry an open and reflective view, which provides us with a sound setting for a rational debate.

This is precisely why we propose a **third** pillar in our approach to Turkey, which will be geared to strengthen the political and cultural dialogue between EU and Turkish citizens. EU citizens need to know more about Turkey, and Turkish citizens more about the EU.

Civil society should play the key role in this dialogue, which will to a large extent be facilitated by the EU. We shall shortly present proposals on how to support such a dialogue in the years to come.

The civic dialogue must be carried out in the widest strata of society, not to be monopolized by the political class. Hence I highly appreciate the initiative of the Green group to organise this seminar, which brings together politicians, intellectuals, journalists, scholars, etc. I am sure that what has been said in your seminar yesterday and today will advance a well-informed and analytic debate around Europe.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are on the threshold of opening a new chapter of the European integration process. Accession negotiations with Turkey, if launched, will be lengthy and complex, requiring skill, stamina and imagination.

If we undertake this journey together, the potential benefits at the end of the road would be highly significant. The European Union would include a strong, stable and democratic Turkey, thus contributing to its own security and stability.

Turkey would enjoy the strongest possible support to pursue its process of modernisation and democratisation.

Let me refer to the conclusion of the Independent Commission on Turkey, chaired by the former President of Finland, Martti Ahtisaari:

“Turkey’s accession would offer considerable benefits both to the European Union and to Turkey. For the Union, the unique geopolitical position of Turkey at the crossroads of the Balkans, the wider Middle East, South Caucasus, Central Asia and beyond, its importance for the security of Europe’s energy supplies and its political, economic and military weight would be great assets. Moreover, as a large Muslim country firmly embedded in the European Union, Turkey could play a significant role in Europe’s relations with the Islamic world.”

That is a worthy agenda for the European Council on the 17th of December. I am confident that the political leaders of the European Union will have the foresight and courage to seize the opportunity.