The Future of Turkey - EU Relations

4 Scenarios for 2018

Report
Relations between Turkey and the EU are at a critical juncture. After a decade of steady diplomatic efforts, events in recent months have created a high level of uncertainty in terms of the future of these relations. While the refugee/visa deal between Turkey, Germany, and the EU appeared to be in line with building closer cooperation, recent political developments in both Turkey and the EU point towards a deterioration in ties. What will happen to the relationship between Turkey and the EU in this unstable environment? What are plausible scenarios we could find ourselves in at the end of 2018? What can be done today to ensure Turkey-EU relations are strengthened and developed into the future? These are the questions at the heart of this report.
To help find answers to these questions Stiftung Mercator invited 19 experts from Turkey and the EU to meet in Istanbul on October 7 & 8, 2016. Under the guidance of scenario planning experts, they developed four possible futures for EU-Turkey relations by the end of 2018. Recommendations for different actors were then devised based on these possible futures.

**SCENARIO 1**

*Cyprus – from obstacle to catalyst* paints a rosy future in which a solution to the Cyprus conflict has been reached, turning a former obstacle for Turkey-EU relations into a catalyst. Turkish citizens obtain visa-free travel to Europe and trade is at an all-time high. The refugee deal is well into implementation, while the domestic situation in Turkey has improved.

**SCENARIO 2**

*Triumph of nationalism and Turkey’s pivot towards Russia* is a doomsday scenario. Rising nationalism in Europe has spurred disintegration and put tremendous pressure on EU-Turkey relations. Turkey suffers a brain drain and pivots unexpectedly towards Russia. The result: a new Western-Eastern front.

**SCENARIO 3**

*Grim isolation of Turkey* is a worst-case scenario for Turkey. While right-wing tendencies in Europe spur anti-accession sentiment, Turkey becomes more entangled in Syria and Iraq following an escalation of the Kurdish conflict. As a result, ties are further strained between Turkey and the West as well as with Russia.

**SCENARIO 4**

*Adjusted membership a new opportunity for EU-Turkey relations?* describes a disintegrating Europe post-Brexit. Different types of membership are the norm. For Turkey, this offers a new portal into Europe.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

All actors should work towards Scenario 1. Turkey has to avoid Scenario 3 at all costs, while it could find unexpected opportunities in Scenarios 4 and 2. The EU should avoid Scenario 2. Further recommendations are given on page 14.
Scenario planning is a standard technique used for strategic planning and strategizing under ambiguity and uncertainty. At the heart of the technique lies the development of possible, plausible futures based on facts. Instead of defining what a good future would look like in a normative way, the process yields a set of very distinct yet plausible futures that span the space of potential development. As in the case of this report, the technique usually draws heavily on expert opinion, thus pooling knowledge from a group of experts with a diverse background.

A tailor-made version of scenario planning was used in this process. Given the very short time frame of a 1.5-day workshop, a pragmatic approach was applied whenever possible. At the same time, the goal was to provide the invited experts with a challenging and interactive process to inspire rigorous thinking that would lead to policy-relevant recommendations. Two external facilitators were hired to supervise the process, guide the expert participants, and coordinate preparatory work leading up to the workshop.

The scenario planning technique applied here followed five steps:

1. The roughly 30 factors were then assessed by the participants for their likely impact on Turkey-EU relations in the near future. In addition, participants estimated how uncertain an outcome of a given factor was. A factor with two different, yet equally likely, outcomes was marked as very uncertain, whereas a factor that was relatively predictable in its result was marked as less uncertain. This assessment was conducted through an online survey leading up to the workshop.

2. At the start of the workshop in Istanbul participants identified the key factors, i.e., those factors of high impact and high uncertainty. A logic model was developed according to these factors, showing their development over time. Based on different turning points, this model can produce various distinct future scenarios. Four scenarios were selected based on criteria of variability and plausibility and were discussed among subgroups of the workshop participants.

3. For each scenario, the future was described as seen from the end of 2018 together with the path that would lead to this future, including relevant turning points.

4. Triangulating between the scenarios, the participants developed recommendations for different actors in Turkey and the EU.
In the spirit of the experimental nature of the scenario planning technique, participants created a live workshop document. While participants built on a pre-structured document, all relevant content was written and edited during the workshop on October 7 & 8, 2016. The results were presented at a public event at Stiftung Mercator in Istanbul on October 8, 2016.
THE SITUATION IN LATE 2018

It is December 2018. For more than one and a half years Turkish citizens have been able to travel to the EU without a visa and EU-Turkey trade has reached an all-time high. The 2016 EU-Turkey refugee deal is still in place and there are hardly any refugee crossings from Turkey to the EU. The second tranche of the 6 billion euros promised to Turkey in 2016 for aiding refugees is disbursed. The trials of those responsible for the coup attempt in July 2016 are still ongoing but are conducted largely fairly and monitored by observers from the EU and the Council of Europe. Turkey just opened the tenth EU accession chapter in two years, bringing the number of open chapters to 26 (out of 34), and is working on meeting the requirements.

The domestic situation in Turkey has improved; there is open discussion of issues that were taboo a few years ago and political parties are cooperating together and engaging in constructive dialog. Turkey is expected to perform better in the upcoming period according to international indices, such as the Rule of Law Index, the Freedom in the World Index, the World Press Freedom Index, Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index, PISA, and the Global Peace Index. Fighting in southeastern Turkey has ended and negotiations for a solution to the Kurdish issue are underway.

Following the reunification of Cyprus, the former ghost town of Varosha-Maraş is being reconstructed by Greek, Turkish, and Cypriot companies. Eastern Mediterranean energy will be carried via Turkey to Europe following the signing of an agreement between Turkey, Israel, and Cyprus on the transmission of Israeli and Cypriot gas. The Cypriot ambassador to Ankara recently stated that Turkey is a reliable partner for Nicosia and that the recent energy deal forms a strong case to advocate Turkey’s accession to the EU. This statement came just after a NATO summit where NATO members approved a roadmap for Cyprus’ membership to the Atlantic alliance.

A solution in Cyprus can be a catalyst for improving EU-Turkey relations.

A transition process is underway in Syria and political negotiations have started following the announcement of a ceasefire agreement. It is expected that they will soon start drafting the constitution, which will be followed by parliamentary and presidential elections. An international donor conference has been held to support the reconstruction of the city of Aleppo.
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THE PATH FROM NOW UNTIL THEN

End-2016: a political solution to the Cyprus issue is reached. Spring 2017: Turkish and Greek Cypriots vote for reunification of the island.

The EU, Cyprus, and France lift their vetoes on moving forward with Turkey’s accession process. The process is restarted with vigor and the Turkish parliament passes several reform packages in 2018.

In 2017, Turkey allows the trials of the coup plotters to be monitored by the EU and the Council of Europe. Turkey sets up a review process for the dismissals and confiscations following the attempted coup in 2016. New media outlets contribute to a lively debate about the reform process.

The reforms attract more investors to Turkey and EU-Turkey trade flourishes.

The refugee deal is implemented in full. From May 1, 2017, Turkish citizens can enjoy visa-free travel to the EU.

Ankara, Nicosia, and Tel Aviv negotiate an agreement to transmit gas from the eastern Mediterranean to Turkey and the EU. Turkey approves Cyprus’ membership to NATO.

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS SCENARIO

The resolution of the Cyprus issue could revitalize Turkey’s accession process, which would bring Turkey back onto the reform path and boost EU-Turkey economic relations. It could also lead to energy and security cooperation in the eastern Mediterranean and Europe. A new cooperation built on trust would help the EU and Turkey implement the refugee deal in full.
In December 2018, Europe has become a divided continent made up of increasingly nationalistic states. Large numbers of asylum seekers are stranded in Greece. Turkey’s EU accession process has been suspended and the country has forged close economic and political ties with Russia. EU-Turkey relations have hit an historic low.

Since torpedoing Turkey’s EU accession process, French President Marine Le Pen has put her country on a course towards “FREXIT”. Her Eurosceptic and nationalist orientation is shared by the government in the UK, which is expected to leave the EU within the next year. The German and Austrian governments are resorting to increasingly Eurosceptic and anti-immigrant rhetoric.

After the collapse of the EU-Turkey refugee deal, the fences at the Macedonian and Bulgarian borders have been reinforced. More than 200,000 asylum seekers are stranded in appalling conditions in Greece.

In Turkey, the AKP government under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan remains firmly in power. Almost no independent media exist. Thousands of journalists and political activists are being prosecuted on terrorism charges. The executive has monopolized its power over state institutions. The amount of Western foreign direct investment to Turkey has decreased drastically. Although this is partially offset by the large number of Russian tourists and cheap Russian energy imports that result from increasingly close ties between Turkey and Russia, the Turkish economy is in recession.

In Syria, Turkish forces support a proxy administration of Sunni and Turkmen groups, which control large swathes of territory along Turkey's southern border. Turkish troops and their allies are increasingly advancing into territory controlled by Kurdish groups. Russia and the Syrian government turn a blind eye to these moves and concentrate on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's core territories, a strategy widely believed to be based on an agreement about spheres of influence. The Baltic States and Poland question whether Turkey can be considered a reliable NATO ally.

There are reports of indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas, torture, and other grave human rights violations in Turkey's southeast, where security forces are cracking down on PKK militants. Although the EU Commission and Parliament, as well as some EU governments, criticize what they view as an erosion of Turkish democracy and commitments to human rights and the rule of law, their influence with the Turkish government is virtually non-existent.

If nationalism leads to anti-Turkish actions in Europe, Turkey could pivot towards Russia.
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THE PATH FROM NOW UNTIL THEN

In December 2016, the far-right candidate Norbert Hofer is elected President of Austria. After terrorist attacks in France, Belgium, and Germany, Le Pen becomes president of France in April 2017. The far right wins 19% of the vote in the German federal elections. Subsequently, in line with the French position, the German government starts to oppose Turkey's EU accession process, which is eventually suspended. Visa liberalization for Turkish citizens and the resettlement of refugees to the EU are off the table. Turkey consequently annuls the refugee deal. Macedonia and Bulgaria enforce their border fences.

The Turkish government engages in fierce anti-EU rhetoric and continues its crackdown on certain segments of society. A presidential system is established in Turkey and the death penalty is reintroduced. Throughout 2017, a massive brain drain occurs. In connection with the perceived political risks and legal insecurity, this causes foreign investors to leave the country. The lira plummets.

Turkey starts turning to Russia for strategic partnerships on security, energy, and economic matters. A picture of Turkish President Erdoğan and Russian President Vladimir Putin on a hunting trip in Crimea spooks EU and US governments. The TurkStream pipeline project is expanded, allowing Russian gas to be transferred directly to Turkey.

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS SCENARIO

EU leaders must build a strong alliance against populism, nationalism, and Islamophobia in the EU and invest in a partnership with Turkey. They need to address social inequality by investing in integration measures and by creating jobs in southeastern Europe and structurally weak regions. Populism must be countered with reason.

The Turkish government should refrain from unilateralism and the introduction of a presidential system and instead, foster democratic values, such as freedom of speech and the press. Turning away from the EU should not be an option.

If nationalism leads to anti-Turkish actions in Europe, Turkey could pivot towards Russia.
THE SITUATION IN LATE 2018

Turkey, the bridge between East and West, has transformed into an island with neighboring lands drifting ever further away. In late 2018, Turkey stands isolated. Relations with an increasingly uncompromising EU are at an all-time low; cooperation has stalled. While the refugee deal has not entirely collapsed, Turkey’s EU accession process has lost meaning. Turkey’s commitment to NATO is even being questioned by other alliance members.

Right-wing populist parties dominate the European public sphere, loudly demanding an immediate stop to any further engagement with Turkey. It is increasingly difficult for proponents of EU-Turkey cooperation to argue their case. Russia has ceased being a geopolitical alternative for Turkey. Instead, distrust reigns. Front pages of Turkish newspapers are sadly reporting about another all-time high in Turkish casualties in Syria and Iraq, while ongoing regional violence continues to affect the lives of many ordinary citizens.

The scenario might lead to a new beginning in EU-Turkey negotiations, however, Turkey would engage from a position of weakness.

Intervention in Syria could lead to a downward spiral

Turkey shifts to a presidential system and the state of emergency persists. In spite of this, violence is increasingly spilling over into Turkey. An increasing number of voices within Turkey call for a change of course in favor of strengthening ties with the West.

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS SCENARIO

Turkey ends up isolated after taking a strong stance in the Middle East. This results in increased anti-Turkish sentiments in Europe, renewed geopolitical tensions with Russia, and increased domestic unrest. In order to avoid this downward spiral, solving the Kurdish conflict in Turkey’s southeast through peaceful, instead of military means, is key.
Political partners drifting apart

THE PATH FROM NOW UNTIL THEN

X In early 2017, the major parties in the Syrian civil war edge towards a settlement and Kurdish hopes for autonomy flourish. After Kurdish celebrations in Turkey turn violent, the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq intervenes diplomatically, and bilateral relations quickly deteriorate. In March, Turkey steps up military activity in the Middle East “in the defense of national integrity”.

X Trying to prevent the conflict from spilling into Turkey, the ruling cadre tightens their grip on the country. However, under a continuing state of emergency, attacks on police stations skyrocket in Istanbul, Ankara, and the southeast.

X As official and paramilitary forces in Iraq and Syria start to retaliate against Turkish forces, the humanitarian situation in the region worsens.

X Fears of a renewed refugee crisis intensify in Europe, further emboldening right-wing European parties. With major elections throughout 2017, many European governments are forced to toughen their stance against Turkey.

X Turkey’s accession process stalls, visa liberalization is cancelled and the EU-Turkey refugee deal is at risk.

X After continuous fighting in Syria, scattered violent incidents occur between Turkish and Russian forces in the spring of 2018. Turkey’s diplomatic relations deteriorate significantly. The United Nations Security Council is summoned to restrain Turkey. NATO decides to suspend Turkey’s membership for two years in order not to implement Article 5 of the NATO treaty.

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THE SITUATION IN LATE 2018

October 2018. The EU and the UK have been negotiating a Brexit deal for almost one and a half years. President of the European Council Donald Tusk announces that the UK and the EU-27 have agreed on the introduction of a new type of EU membership following lengthy debates.

This new type of membership, entitled “Adjusted Membership”, allows full access to the European single market, a visa-free regime, and full cooperation in CSDP (Common Security and Defense Policy) matters. The UK government agrees to grant the four freedoms of the single market, including the freedom of movement of workers. In return, the UK demands inclusion in the relevant decision-making processes. Therefore, the “Adjusted Membership” includes observer status in the Council of Ministers, with voting – but no veto – rights within the agreed policy areas.

British members of the European Parliament are fully involved in the relevant committees and have voting rights on the respective legislative acts. In all other areas they have observer status only. The UK loses its commissioner as well as its seat in the European Council. There will be EU-UK summits and the European Commission will include British officials in its consultative procedures.

In light of increasing dissent on various fields of European integration, the leaders of Hungary, the Netherlands, and Denmark are considering calling for referenda in their countries based on the British example. In an official statement, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Denmark announce that this new type of membership forms a milestone in meeting European citizens’ demands for more national sovereignty.

The prime minister of Turkey announces in Ankara that the “Adjusted Membership” may be a possible route for future EU-Turkey relations. He states that since an influential and important member state like the UK has found this new membership framework suitable for its needs, the pretentious full membership rhetoric of the EU and Turkey could also come to an end. The prime minister underlines that his vision for an “Adjusted Membership” for Turkey would include Turkey’s inclusion in the single market and visa-free travel regime, Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), European migration policy based on a flexible solidarity, while staying out of the Eurozone area.

A disintegrating Europe could open a new door for Turkey to join the EU.
THE PATH FROM NOW UNTIL THEN

Joint efforts under the supervision of the United Nations resulted in an agreement on the reunification of Cyprus – the so-called Guterres-Plan – but referenda on both sides in 2017 rejected its ratification. As a consequence, Turkey and Cyprus decided to maintain their firm stance: Turkey will not open its harbors and airports to Cypriot vessels and Cyprus will continue blocking six crucial chapters in Turkey’s EU accession negotiations.

The deadlock in these negotiations is exacerbated by the European Council, as it continues to block the opening of additional chapters. Support for EU membership is declining among Turkish decision makers and the Turkish population: a poll on this question shows that an all-time low of 15% of Turks favor full EU membership.

Despite tension between Turkey and the EU regarding the Turkish accession process, firm cooperation between both parties continues in strategic areas such as the EU-Turkey “refugee deal”, including the readmission agreement and the visa liberalization dialogue; security of energy supply in Europe following Turkey’s inclusion in the European Energy Community in early 2018; trade and investments; as well as in the fight against international terrorism.

This picture encourages both parties to continue bilateral talks in order to foster cooperation within the framework of the biannual EU-Turkey summits and the political dialog at the level of ministers, commissioners, and the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security.

In 2018, the EU and Turkey start discussing a possible “Adjusted Membership” for Turkey during bilateral summits.

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS SCENARIO

The EU and Turkey should be open to considering alternative types of membership given the deadlock in the accession process and the evolution of the institutional architecture of the EU.

Both parties should promote this new type of membership to their public in order to raise awareness of the advantages stemming from a prospective deal.

The EU and Turkey should make better use of established institutional frameworks such as summits and high level economic and energy dialogs etc.

A disintegrating Europe could open a new door for Turkey to join the EU.
Taken together, the scenarios elaborate on a range of potential developments. Scenario 2 (Turkey’s pivot towards Russia) and Scenario 3 (Grim isolation) foreshadow a substantial worsening of Turkey-EU ties. Actors interested in strengthening Turkey-EU relations will have a strong incentive to find ways to avoid the downward spiral described in these scenarios.

Scenarios 1 and 4 reveal more positive outcomes for Turkey-EU relations. Scenario 1, while painting a rosy picture of the future, is only possible if the Cyprus situation is resolved quickly, which should inform all relevant actors. Scenario 4 offers a new perspective on a disintegrating Europe. New opportunities arising from “Adjusted Memberships” should be seized upon to improve ties between Turkey and the EU.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE TURKISH GOVERNMENT

To avoid Scenario 3, which would leave it completely isolated and in internal turmoil, Turkey should refrain from escalating violence in northern Iraq and Syria. Strengthening ties with neighboring governments and working towards a sustainable future order of the region is paramount.

While Scenario 2 shows that Russia could become a fallback ally if ties with the West disintegrate, Scenario 3 implies that this becomes less realistic in the event of extended Turkish military activity in the Middle East.

Assuming Turkey still wants to pursue an orientation towards Europe, contributing to a solution of the Cyprus situation could be essential. This would open a new field of cooperation aside from the refugee deal.

An interesting implication from the scenario analysis is that Turkey could actually benefit from a disintegrating Europe. If Brexit goes ahead and other countries choose to pursue an “Adjusted Membership”, Turkey could follow suit, thus entering a more fragmented Europe through a newly-opened door.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EU GOVERNMENTS

To avoid the implications of Scenario 2 (Turkey’s pivot towards Russia), EU governments should recognize the danger of rising nationalism and act effectively to counter it.

Scenario 3 (Isolation of Turkey) highlights that EU governments should work towards an inclusive solution in the Middle East, promoting regional stability, democratic principles, and the interests of Turkey, or risk a Turkey sliding into isolation.

As Scenario 1 shows, a solution to the Cyprus issue may lead to many positive outcomes, including a vibrant security establishment in Europe and revival of the frozen Turkish integration process. EU governments should look for ways to promote a political solution on the island.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TURKISH CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

Civil society actors in Turkey can provide general support by fostering cooperation and by creating more awareness on the importance of relations with Europe.

In light of Scenario 1, Cyprus must not be allowed to become a forgotten issue. Actors should initiate a debate in Turkey and engage with civil society actors in northern Cyprus.

In order to avoid Scenario 3 from happening, Turkish civil society should invest more in the democratization of Turkey by promoting checks and balances.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EU CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

European civil society actors should invest in relationships with Turkish civil society to demonstrate the importance of mutual relationships. Turning their backs on Turkey at this stage would be a step towards Scenario 3 (Isolation of Turkey).

In particular, they should raise awareness among the European public of the significance of Turkey-EU relations and they should help counter nationalism and populism.

They should also carefully push for a Turkish democratization process by means of close dialog between both sides to avoid Scenario 3, and promote Scenarios 1 and 4.

Promoting Scenario 1, civil society actors should advocate in Europe for a solution to the Cyprus issue and raise awareness of the turbulent history of the island.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EU INSTITUTIONS

All scenarios show that it is important for the EU to remain open and constructive towards Turkey. Therefore, EU institutions should enforce member states to speak with one voice on Turkey and refrain from unhelpful declarations, such as there being no place for Turkey in the EU.

Based on Scenario 1, which shows the importance of a resolution of the Cyprus issue, initiate a discussion and decision on providing financial help to Cyprus for issues such as property restitution/compensation and the reconstruction of destroyed towns such as Varosha-Maraş.

Again, based on Scenario 1, if the Cyprus issue is resolved, push for energy deals in the eastern Mediterranean involving Turkey, Cyprus, and EU-member states. This would reduce EU member states’ energy dependence on Russia. Common gas deals in the eastern Mediterranean basin should also include Israel and would help avoid Scenario 3 from becoming a reality.
Make concrete proposals to move the relationship with Turkey forward and regain Turkey’s trust. This includes adopting a flexible stance on Turkey’s visa liberalization roadmap, such as finding a way to lift the visa conditions even if not all requirements are met. This would promote the realization of Scenarios 1 and 4.

Proposals may also include member states recognizing Turkey’s problems with the military and offering advice on how to bring the military fully and permanently under civilian control.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

A resolution of the Cyprus conflict (Scenario 1) could be a nucleus for change in the Mediterranean and an opportunity to encourage countries at odds, such as Turkey, Israel, and Egypt to push for peace in the region. Here, a key role could be played by the new UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

To avoid Scenario 3 and an increase in turmoil in the Middle East, international institutions should get more actively involved in peacebuilding in addition to managing the refugee crisis. The involvement of international organizations would be key to eliminating regional rivalries and to minimizing conflicts.
This document was produced by a group of 19 experts at a workshop on October 7 & 8, 2016, hosted by Stiftung Mercator. The experts were selected for their deep understanding of Turkey-EU relations. The group combined Turkish and EU nationals from a highly diverse set of backgrounds in academia, civil society, and also the private and government sectors.

The content of this report was compiled from workshop discussions and was edited by the facilitators. While workshop participants may take stances on individual issues the group itself remains non-partisan. This is also a reminder that individual participants may not agree with every aspect of this report.

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Stiftung Mercator is a private foundation, which fosters science and the humanities, education, and international understanding. It specifically initiates, develops and funds projects and partner organizations in the thematic fields to which it is committed: it wants to strengthen Europe, improve integration through equal educational opportunities for everyone, drive forward the energy transition as a trigger for global climate change mitigation, and firmly anchor cultural education in schools. Stiftung Mercator feels a strong sense of loyalty to the Ruhr region, the home of the founding family and the foundation’s headquarters.

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