

Turkey in Relation to EU and Russia - Triangle of Partnership or Conflicts

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Abstract: EU-Turkey-Russia. In this research, the relationship between European Union and Turkey, an age long neighbour to the continent and an associate member of European Union since 1963, are examined and analysed. Turkey is an important ally of the union and the only Muslim country-member of NATO from the very beginning of the treaty, since it joined the organization in 1952, at the same year that Greece did. The relations between the Union and Turkey are examined from the aspect of security. The reactions of the European Union to the recent political changes in Republic of Turkey, after the 15 July 2016 failed coup-attempt, are also examined. The EU - Turkey relations after the failed coup attempt and the international impact of it are studied from the perspective of political and social influence it might have.

Russia is a vital energy supplier to the Union and Turkey is a geopolitical bridge between west and east, an energy corridor standing at the crossroad of important energy markets such as Iran, Iraq and Azerbaijan. The country has also relations with Cyprus, an upcoming gas supplier and an EU member. These topics are analysed from the economic perspective. Turkey's new relationship with Russia, a relationship reborn and reshaped due to the Syrian conflict and the effects of the new alliance to the EU's energy supply and to the policies in the neighbourhood are examined. For the research, the historical methodology is used and secondary sources are analysed. Examples are given for a substantial collaboration as a neighbour in context of different variations of the new political conjectures.

Keywords: Greece, Turkey, Politics, Trust, Institutions.

1. TURKEY IN RELATION TO EU AND RUSSIA – A BRIEF HISTORY

Turkey, an age long neighbour to the continent and an associate member of European Union since 1963, is an important ally of the union and the only Muslim country-member of NATO from the very beginning of the treaty, since it joined the organization in 1952, at the same year that Greece did. The relations between the Union and Turkey are examined from the aspect of security.

The European Union Committee Report (2003) indicates that security across Europe is of vital importance for the European Union. However even the term “security” is a controversial term by itself. Therefore it would be helpful to understand this concept of security by giving some explanatory information about it. Security may indicate a situation free from danger. This could be one of the simplest clarifications for the term. Security is not only to cover the meaning of being secure, but it also contains various factors that make security more comprehensive in today's society. Economical, political, social and even the environmental factors are associated with the term security. From the security perspective EU-Turkey are strongly linked to each other. The fact that security is also one of Turkey's major interests stands out in relief. It is because Turkey's geographical location is not like any other's European country, since all Europeans Countries are surrounded by friendly EU states. It is also a matter of providing domestic security inside the country. Turkey is also one of the countries tormented by terrorist attacks ever since terrorist organizations waged against Turkish state back in 1984, during the period when the neo-liberalization policy was implemented in Turkey (Alptekin, 2018).

Ankara, the capital of Turkey, where important official meetings are held with other countries' political leaders, is also the home of 5 million Turkish citizens. The Human Rights Association's report (2015) mentions that on 10th October, 2015 the capital would host a friendly demonstration of unions for "Labour, Peace and Democracy", a peace rally organised by the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey, the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB), the Turkish Medical Association, the Confederation of Public Workers' Union and the

People's Democratic Party. Abbas (2017) indicates that the main purpose of this protest was against the conflict between the Turkish Arm Forces and the separatist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Two suicide bombers, members of TAK Kurdish militant group which is a part of PKK, blasted near by the main railway station, where people were gathering for the peace march. 109 people¹ were killed in this bomb attack and hundreds of were injured. PKK has been declared as a terrorist group by the military alliance of NATO. European Union also lists the group as having "been involved in terrorist acts" and proscribes it as part of its Common Foreign and Security Policy (Eckes, 2009). However in March 18th, 2016 the organization's sympathizers were allowed to pitch a tent right behind the building of European Union Commission in Brussels during EU-Turkey summit, a fact that was considered as an EU betrayal of Turkey's trust, although all recognise that trust is as a core value of the partnership.

Dealing with such groups is one of the major obstacles for building socio-economic stability as well as security and to deliver public services to the citizens of a country. An example of such organization in Europe is EuskadiTa Askatasuna (ETA), a separatist group in the Basque country in northern Spain, which has declared a permanent ceasefire in 2011 and announced that they are disarmed from April, 2017 (Kolås&Güell, 2018). Maher (2018) demonstrate that in November 2016, the Colombian government and the revolutionary armed forces of Colombia (FARC), the largest rebel group, have also ended the conflict in between them with a peace agreement, after a conflict which had lasted for more than 50 years. Another peace deal has been signed by the Philippine government and Muslim rebels, Moro Islamic Liberation Front in 2014 (Gunaratna& Stefanie, 2016).

Such examples show that conflicts can end up with a peace agreement in between the rebels and countries. Turkey and the extreme groups could also look for a peace deal to bring stability to the region and a sustainable environment both in social and economic areas for all the inhabitants. To this direction, Turkey Justice and Development Party (AKP), the governing party, had attempted in 2009 some meetings with the representative of rebel group in Oslo, Norway within the framework of a democratic expansion period striving to find a solution that would satisfy both parts equations and inequalities' sentiments deriving from the Kurdish conflict in Turkey (Ensaroğlu Y., Ete H. et., ed, 2013).

From the political perspective Turkey, during its political history, has faced periods of being governed by unstable coalition governments. While Turkey was struggling with instability in politics, the necessary changes in economy and justice could not be implemented. That is why the country's development progress is falling behind for decades. Colossal changes took place in 2001, due to the economic crisis in Turkey. The country decided to waken up from black Wednesday to the hopeful Thursday. Since interest rates reached 3.000 % in the crisis (Marois, 2012), Turkish people had to make changes first in economic system with a stabilization programme and an agreement under the supervision of International Monetary Fund. These reforms were implemented successfully by Kemal Derviş, Minister of Economic Affairs, in March 2001. This stabilization programme and structural changes and reforms in banking sector, allowed Turkey to come out of the global economic crisis without a major harm in 2008. Of course it should not be forgotten that today's long lasting party Justice and Development Party (AKP),governing since after the crisis, continued to implement the same disciplines in Turkish economy. The other change right after the worst economic crisis in modern history of Turkey was in Politics. The Political parties that accepted the new reforms and changes could not enter the Parliament in the upcoming year 2002 elections. Previous deep economic crisis was a major factor for this fact. This could be a reason why voters were looking for a better alternative. It may also be due to mistrust between citizens to the public institutions in Turkey. It brought out the lack of confidence to the leading political actors in the country. The bottom line is that after such a tragic economic crisis, the citizens' trust to the public institutions was gradually restored again. Since then the ruling party AKP has governed the country as a single-party government. The success of Justice and Development Party can be witnessed in the five legislative elections; the party managed to come out as the first party in each of this elections.The constitutional referendum which allows the citizens, instead of the Parliament in Turkey, to choose the President was accepted with 69 % of the voters support in 2007. Another constitutional referendum, which was held in 2010, was about the judicial system in Turkey. The citizens also accepted the changes in this referendum with a majority of 58%. Turkish citizens' support on political changes within the elections

¹The World Almanac of Islamism (2017), American Foreign Policy Council, Lanham; Maryland, Rowman and Littlefield, p.725

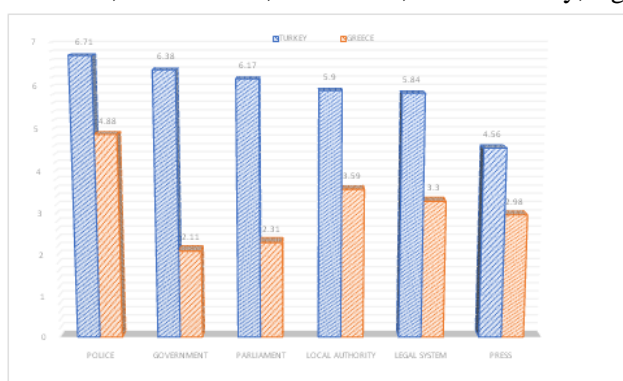
and referendum. Beside these essential constitutional changes, Turkish citizens went to the ballots once again on April, 2017. On this occasion citizens voted in favour of a change from the parliamentary system to the presidential system. The difference between positive and negative votes was very small. The votes in favour to the referendum were slightly above 51%. The stability and economic performance of the ruling party in the country was greeted by the Turkish citizens.

2. THE 2016 FAILED COUP IN TURKEY

On 15th July 2016, a coup was attempted in Turkey and failed. The attempt was executed by a group of military officers within the Turkish Armed Forces. Turkish Government accused the leaders of the coup that they were linked to the Gülen Movement, an organization proscribed as a terrorist organization by the Republic of Turkey (Tee, 2016). Turkish government claims that Gülen movement is behind the failed coup-attempt. This movement is an Islamic religious and social movement founded and led by the Turkish preacher FetullahGülen, who lives in United State of America since 1999. The movement, also known as Hizmet (Service), generally focuses on education and business organizations in the countries where it exists. It has foundations, associations, media organisations and schools, embodied to its own structure, in 180 countries around the world and in Turkey (Stonehem, 2016). The leader of the sect Gülen, as an abstinent Muslim leader, has met with Pope John Paul II in the Vatican in 1990s. He has also met with rabbis and Christian priests in Turkey. Hizmet, the Gulen movement, was described in The New York Times as a “*moderate, pro-Western brand of Sunni Islam that appeals to many well-educated and professional Turks*”. The Gulenists, the people who follow the doctrines and principles of Hizmet movement, describe their leader as “*the modern face of the Sufi Ottoman tradition*”. The relations in between the coup-attempt leaders and Gülen movement urged the government to focus on the organization structure and to its follower’s right after the attempt. During the coup-attempt soldiers and tanks took positions in the streets of big cities. A number of explosions were in the capital city of the country, Ankara. The fighter jets bombed the parliament building in Ankara. The investigation of the coup-attempt showed that some of the fighter jets and refuelling aircrafts took off from NATO airbase (Ataman, 2016). As a result of the failed coup-attempt around 300 civilians were killed and over 2000 people were injured (Abbas, 2017). Thousands of people gathered in the streets and squares across the country protesting against the coup-attempt, which could result to be the fourth military coup in the country’s history. Country’s president Erdoğan called his supporters to come outside and collect together against any further attempts. This call was reckoned among the people in big cities in Anatolia. This failed coup-attempt shows the strength of trust on political institutions that Turkish citizens have. A comparison between Greece and Turkey allows us to understand that why Turkish citizens supported to their government in such a coup-attempt.

3. CONSEQUENCES AND CHANGES AFTER FAILED COUP

As it can be seen in the scheme 1, Turkish people trust more than Greeks all political institutions. All differences between the two countries are statistically significant ($p < 0, 05$). It may be also argued that people in Turkey are more conservative, adhering to traditional values. Turkish people trust Police more. It should be also noted that during the failed coup attempt the Police authorities did not give support to coup forces. In the results showing that Turkish people trust the government, is apparent the importance of democracy in the country as the trust in the parliament take the third place in the research. The order trust in Turkey is: Police, Government, Parliament, local authority, legal system, and press.



Scheme1. Trust in Public Institutions

Source: Own work

The failed coup brought also a rare common reaction of the political parties. All opposition parties declared publicly their opposition to the coup. International reactions to the failed coup attempt were broad but steady. A report compiled by the EU Intelligence and Situation Centre states that the Gülen movement was not behind the coup attempt. One of the first supporters of the Turkish government was the president of Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. He called the Turkish president Erdoğan expressing solidarity. His unflagging support against the coup, expressed before other allies of Turkey and even before all NATO member countries' head, has turned over a new leaf on Russia-Turkish relations. The reaction to the failed coup attempt from European Union institutions and its member-states was perceived as apathetic and slow by the Turkish authorities. The prompt Russian reaction could make a giant leave turning in the relations between the two countries, Russia and Turkey.

Turkey's internal security passed successfully from a serious trauma, though it is still recovering. After the failed coup attempt Turkish government announced a state of emergency, which lasted for three months. From then on till now the martial law is still continuing. 94.352 people were fired from their posts across the state institutions and only 584 of them returned back to their jobs. The highest portions of dismissed people from public institutions were working in Ministry of Education, where 30.480 people were fired. Next comes the police department, where 20.292 people were dismissed. Apart from these two public institutions, thousands of people were dismissed from their jobs in Ministry of health; 6.315 doctors and government clerks. From the universities across the country 5.525 teachers, professors and the others clerks were dismissed, from the Ministry of Defence 4.699 people, including the higher officers, and from the Ministry of Justice 4.233 judges, public prosecutors and lawyers. Besides all those, tens of thousands of people were arrested or suspected.

While thousands of people in many institutions were considered as suspicious, why there was not yet any political actors linked to this terrorist organization? This question, emerged in Turkish media, remains unanswered. An elaborate investigation might be conducted regarding this topic in near future in Turkish political scene. The dismissal of people from the public institutions and the fact that many people were arrested in Turkey is because they were suspected of having a connection with the Gülen movement.

Pressure on media in the country was a crucial point for European Parliament to make a decision to freeze EU accession talks with Turkey until the repression is halted. The European parliament voted to a temporary halt of the access negotiations with Turkey because of issues regarding human rights and rule of law concerns. On November, 2016 471 MEPs voted to suspend the access negotiations, 37 MEPs voted against and there were 107 abstentions. Though the vote result was for suspending the accession, the parliament's vote is non-binding. But this critical decision is a pressure on Turkey. Prime Minister of Turkey dismissed the vote as being of no importance. Other authorities as well claimed that European Parliament with this decision takes itself out of constructive dialogue with Turkey. After this decision was made by the European Parliament members, in the European Council meeting that took place at the end of the year 2016, the leaders reiterated their commitment to a full implementation of EU-Turkey agreement on migration. While the tension was that high in between the authorities of Union and Turkey, the country held a very important referendum for constitutional changes in April 16th 2017. The current constitution was written in 1982 by generals, and generals carried out a military coup. That constitution was the basis of Turkey's political system.

Almost 50 million people went to the polls out of 58 million eligible registered voters, representing the 85 % of the total amount of voters, a fact indicating the importance of the results and how much citizens care for the major changes in their country's constitution. In the referendum 51 % of voters said Yes to the change and 49 % voters said No. Though the difference is narrow, Turkish citizens voted for approval of the 18 proposed amendments.

4. CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN TURKEY – A NEW ERA

The major change in the constitution is about abandoning the parliamentary system for an executive presidency. It is a critical change since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. One of the arguments for this change was the failure on the parliamentary system. In 95 years of Turkish Republic's history there have been changes in government 65 times, when in a normal parliamentary democracy system, in which elections are held every four or five years, there would be about 20 governments over all. This instability of governments formed by unstable coalitions gave opportunities for military coups.

The doubts on the results and some allegations of fraud in the referendum, discomforts the European Union. One week after the referendum took over, there were more than a thousand people detained and over 9000 policemen were suspended in a crackdown. The people were arrested because of suspicions of being linked with Gulen organization, which was behind the failed coup-attempt against the Turkish government. Because of all these happenings in the country which is striving to become a member of the European Union, The Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly has put Turkey on a monitoring watch list over serious concerns about democracy and human rights. In this watching list there are also the countries; Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldavia, Russia, Serbia and Ukraine. Although the council is a separate institution from European Union, the decisions which are taken by the council are essential for European Union. This means there will be often visits to Turkey by human right officials and debates regularly in the chamber at Strasbourg. The relation in between European Union and Turkey was not strained that much ever before. This high tension from both sides has to be cooled down, so the two parties can focus on mutual interests and on improvements in any aspects, as Turkey tries to join the Union and Europe tries to get benefits from this partnership. From both parts there have been sharp opinions delivered to the public; from the Union's side the opinion is mostly about to stop the negotiations with Turkey and from Turkish side it is also pessimistic and the opinion is contravening. The constrictive solution has to be an aim and target to reach for both contours.

5. RECENT EVENTS INFLUENCE THE TURKEY-RUSSIA RELATIONS

While the relation with European Union goes back and forth, Turkey had good political and economical relations with its neighbour Russia and a progressing mutual understanding was developing. But the good relations created with Russia after the failed coup-attempt, did not last long. In November, 2015 Turkish warplanes shot down a Russian military aircraft on the border with Syria - the first time in its history a NATO member shot a Russian plane since after 1950. This was a turning point in the relations between Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey. Russia responded to the historic mistake of Turkish military forces with a number of economic sanctions. The Russian government suspended visa-free travel to Russia for Turkish citizens and Russian tour operators were not allowed to sell holidays in Turkey to Russian citizens. Another crucial sanction was restrictions on imports of Turkish products. Charter flights were banned from operating between Russia and Turkey.

Those sanctions had sharp effects on Turkish economy. The tourism sector in Turkey reached the point of stopping. Agriculture producers in Turkey could not find other markets around the world to sell their products. Turkish companies were limited to do business in Russia. The fact is that relations were frozen until the Turkish President Erdoğan wrote a letter to the Russian leader Vladimir Putin apologizing for shooting down the Russian jet by Turkish military forces. This apologizing letter was written some weeks after Turkey faced the failed coup-attempt. Turkish president claimed that the two Turkish pilots who shot down the Russian aircraft were from the Gülen sect organization. After the letter reached the Russian President Putin, the way opened for Moscow to lift the economic sanctions.

Unfortunately at the end of 2016 the Russian Ambassador to Turkey was shot dead by a police officer in the capital city Ankara. This brought another obstacle for building relations again with Russia. Later, after the investigations, it was found that the policeman, who shot the Russian ambassador, was also linked with the Gülen movement. 2016 was a struggling year for Turkey, as it had to deal with: the stormy relations with European Union, with several internal and external terrorist attacks, the economic sanctions by Russia, with economic and security problems in neighbouring countries in which there was a civil war. There were 26 terrorist attacks across the country in 2016. There was an explosion in one of the most historical areas and a place of great touristic attraction, the Sultan Ahmet (Blue Mosque) square in Istanbul. The terrorist attack was made by a suicide bomber who detonated herself and killed 13 tourists. The terrorist organisation Islamic State (ISIS) group took the responsibility of the bomb attack. In summer 2016 another open fire terrorist attack done by three ISIS militants, who opened fire in the International Atatürk Airport, led to the death of 45 people from all around the world. The city Gaziantep in South-eastern Anatolia Region also faced a terrorist attack by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. This time a suicide bomber went into a Kurdish wedding ceremony, where there were more than 200 guests. 57 innocent people were killed. These attacks are just some of those undertaken by ISIS against Turkish Republic. Another attack on a very popular night club was carried out by a gunman terrorist, who fired at the people in the club who were

celebrating the New Year's Eve. The terrorist, who killed 39 people, was captured by Turkish authorities after 17 days, but the event had catastrophic consequences on the citizens moral.

It is apparent by examples that the aim of these attacks is to create instability and insecurity in the country, as well as to create social fear. These tragic events had a huge effect on Turkish society.

After the terrorist attack at the international airport in Istanbul, Russian President called Turkish president expressing his condolences. The relations with Russia have started from then on and took a steady move forward. The conflict in Syria and the interest of other countries in civil war after "Arab Spring" in the region made Turkey to focus on its 911 kilometres border with its neighbour Syria. Several terrorists groups which are seen as danger by Turkey, Western countries, USA, Russia and other countries take action in Syria. One of these terrorist groups, ISIS, made several terrorist attacks in continental Europe. Belgium, France, Germany, Denmark, and Turkey dramatically suffered by ISIS terrorist attack. Beyond the continent Europe the terrorist group also made attacks in USA, Australia, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Tunisia, Yemen, Kuwait, Egypt, Lebanon, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Malaysia and Afghanistan. These terrorist attacks were linked to ISIL since 2013 to the present. The involvement of many countries from all around the world to the region creates some other problems too. The meeting of Russian, Turkish and US generals from each country's military force in Antalya could be a hope for the end with the conflict in Syria.

At the beginning of 2017 a tragic incident also occurred and the Russian Military forces were responsible this time. During a Russian Air strike three Turkish soldiers were killed accidentally.

6. THE IMMIGRATION CRISIS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

This civil war in Syria, and other countries' influences, force people to flee from their homeland, from the land where they were born. Since the civil war began, 13.5 million Syrians are in need humanitarian assistance, 6 million are internally displaced within Syria and 4.8 million Syrians are refugees outside their country. Turkey welcomed almost 3 million Syrian refugees, who are registered in the country. Germany is hosting just 600.000 Syrian refugees, the highest number in between European countries. Poland is one of the European Union countries which refuse to take any refugees because of security reasons. Turkey has to be aware of the fact that these three millions refugees may affect the country's demographic structure. Some examples of Turkish cities that receive large numbers of refugees are given; Sanliurfa is hosting around 401.000 Syrian refugees, after it Istanbul is hosting 395.000 refugees, Hatay 386.000 and Gaziantep 325.000 people. The migration topic still keeps its importance between Turkey and the Union. European Council discussed the issue of migration and security in December 2016. The leaders reiterated their commitments to a full implementation of EU-Turkey statement on migration. The council declared several factors to deal with migration problem for quick and constructive acts. Turkish leaders claim that EU does not follow the taken decisions in EU-Turkey Refugee Deal, especially regarding the Joint Action Plan announcement that 3 billion Euros should be given to Turkey for the refugee facility. The EU has also been committed to provide immediate and continuous humanitarian assistance in Turkey. The paradox in between the Union and Turkey makes the migration crisis more complicated. The refugees are still in need and it seems that the refugees are continuing to be a part of the conflict in both political sides. These economic ties on Turkey and geographical situation in the region bring more responsibilities on Turkish politicians. The existence of Islamic State in Iraq, where there are important oil resources, and its remaining in Syria, a location that has a critical prominence for energy sources, holds dangers for the people in the region and the neighbourhood. The other political parties in Syria also play a major role in the conflict such as Democratic Union Party (PYD), which Turkey claims to be rebels prolongating the PKK terrorist group. Free Syrian Army had managed to get some victories against ISIS. Of course Syrian regime forces are always in tension to protect their territory. Although it seems so complicated and unsolvable conflict, some progress goes on in the conflict area. The major actors in the region Iran, Russia, and Turkey agreed to create safe zones in Syria. After all these years this agreement will keep a hope for the regional stability that the civilians will be able to live without being targeted in Syrian war. This successful agreement is managed after the peace talks in Astana. A sustainable security will let the countries around the neighbourhood to develop economically.

One more important expansion for Russia-Turkish relations was the meeting of two leaders in Sochi, in the Russian Black Sea resort. Russian president Putin mentioned that the relations between Russia and Turkey are fully recovered. The Russian president also mentioned that his country will help Turkey to improve the security measures. This agreement may be continued by the lifting of the

sanctions on trade between Russia and Turkey. Relations on energy sources are also important, since Turkey is the second largest buyer of Russian natural gas after Germany. Russian natural gas is in high demand in European Union and Turkey.

7. TOMORROW CAN BE A BETTER DAY FOR ALL

The conflict in between Russia and Ukraine was the cause of sanctions to Russia by European Union. The alternative road for Russian's South Stream pipeline is Turk Stream pipeline project from Russia across the Black Sea to Turkey, which will exclude Ukraine, and will transfer the Russian natural gas. This project which will develop the Turkish economy and the region is now ongoing. The deal between Russia and Turkey on S400 air defence missile system agreement could have consequences for NATO allies. The tension is in highest level since the end of Cold War. Unfortunately the relations between EU and Turkey are not proceeding as well, as the relations between Russia and Turkey. The progress is too slow. The negotiations for the full membership of Turkey in EU lasts for over 10 years; only 16 out of 35 chapters have been opened, and just the Science and Research chapter has been provisionally closed. Political expediencies of some European Union member countries are used as a tool against Turkey preventing the opening of chapters in negotiations. Turkey's opinion is that Cyprus, as a member state of the Union, should be more constructive and not wave its concerns about Turkey. Since the newly found natural sources in Cyprus has to be put into the market across Turkey, the economic benefits for both sides can be a reason for developing a peaceful atmosphere and to communicate with each other.

Turkey is the only country which has got the Custom Union agreement, but it is not a member of European Union. The agreement with European Union need to be reviewed and has to be revised. Political instability has a direct impact on economic instability. Therefore a politically strong neighbourhood in the area with a sustainable economy will be more beneficial for both parties. Turkey's last experiences, caused by internal and external factors in political arena, and all the terrorist attacks across the country, should be taken into consideration while making a decision about the country. Young and vibrant workforce in Turkey is an advantage for EU's economic performance. The European Union's border security cannot be set apart from Turkey. The Union's security is dependent on the stability and security of the neighbouring countries. Turkey's strategic position can be a shield to protect the Union. The changes in the new political system should be observed closely and give to Turkey a chance to make progress with reforms. The dialogue between the Union and Turkey has to be accelerated once again for the future vision of the EU. Those mutual interests on security in between EU, Russia and Turkey make the two neighbours to take steps together towards a sustainable area. Therefore to be in partnership and to walk a line of respect as allies should be the aim of all countries in the region for a more secure, stable, united and more prosperous world.

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