



CARNEGIE
EUROPE

Transcript

RECHARTING EU-TURKEY RELATIONS

January 27, 2015 | Brussels

SPEAKERS:

Marc Pierini, visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe

Kati Piri, member of the European Parliament
and rapporteur for Turkey

Sinan Ülgen, visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe

MODERATOR:

Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, journalist at the Turkish daily
Milliyet

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

CHRISTINE LYNCH: Hello, everyone. My name's Christine Lynch; I'm the Communications Director at Carnegie Europe. Welcome. This evening we're pleased to launch a new report that's been co-authored by Carnegie experts, Marc Pierini and Sinan Ülgen, titled *A Moment of Opportunity in the EU-Turkey Relationship*.

Against the backdrop of leadership change in Europe and heading towards parliamentary elections in Turkey, there's a number of key issues, from ongoing accession negotiations, [inaudible] counterterrorism and migration, that are key importance to both Europe and Turkey. Today's discussion on how to keep this vital relationship on track couldn't be more timely.

We're very pleased to welcome Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, a journalist at the Turkish daily *Milliyet*, who's travelled from Istanbul to moderate. We'd also like to thank Kati Piri, a member of the European Parliament and rapporteur, for taking the time to debate Marc and Sinan's report. I hope you all enjoy the conversation and join us afterwards for a small reception.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Thanks a lot. Hello, everybody and thanks for coming. Let me start with a quick admission. We, in Turkey, in Turkish media, have really not been paying much attention to Europe. Over the past few years it's been page 17 news for us, page 16, 17, 18, the reason being it just seemed very unreal.

Whenever we came to Brussels there was a bit of a pretension game going on, on every side, that everybody was involved with. It was clear that things were not moving, were not going anywhere, but there was an accession process. Basically, everyone felt the need to talk the talk and walk the walk while knowing that things were not going anywhere.

The reason I like this report is it's the first real, sobering report, not an alternative to the accession negotiations – they're not offering an alternative track – but it's the first real report as in: okay, we know things are not moving; what can we do? It's realistic, it's not ambitious, but it's also got tangible, deliverable recommendations that I think we need to discuss and talk about. I encourage everyone to go online and read it, if you haven't already done so. Even a sceptic like myself, not a euro-sceptic, a sceptic, when I read it, I was like, yes, there's stuff here that we can actually build a dialogue, a conversation and a cooperation around.

With that note, let me just tell you quickly a few of the highlights in the report. I think there's focus on trade. How can we, given the state of things in the accession process, given that it is stalled, in the wonderful phraseology they have used here: while Turkish Government is committed to the EU accession process and says it's central to its domestic agenda – here is the phraseology that I liked – a sharp regression in Turkey's rule of law architecture hampers the accession process. Given that this is the situation, they are recommendations that I think are tangible; it's: deepen trade and integration; consider pursuing an in-depth discussion on judiciary and rule of law issues; upgrade the level of dialogue on mobility, migration, visa, etc; talk about joint action on Syria, Iraq, ISIS, foreign policy issues; and improve counterterrorism.

As I said, these may not look ambitious, but I think they are very important. Before I move on to who our speakers are – of course they don't need introduction in this town – I want to say once again, this is not a report that says, here's an alternative approach. It is a report that actually is behind the accession process, but is very stark-eyed, realistic and sober.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

People on this panel do not need an introduction, particularly Marc, who has served as an ambassador. He's an old hand in Turkey, old Turkey hand; he's served as an ambassador in Turkey as well as Libya and Tunisia. He's been with Carnegie...

MARC PIERINI: And Syria...

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: And Syria.

MARC PIERINI: ...the country formerly known as Syria.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Libya and Syria. Sinan, of course, is with Carnegie. He's a visiting scholar at Carnegie. Sinan is too... you have a background in diplomacy; you were once with the Turkish Foreign Ministry; now you're running a think-tank, small but very effective think-tank, EDAM in Istanbul. Of course, Kati, perhaps you're the newcomer...

KATI PIRI: Yes.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: ...to the Turkey debate. You've just issued your first report, representing the S&D Group in... actually, you are part of the S&D Group, but you've just issued your first big Turkey report, which was much talked about in media in the last few weeks. We're going to really talk about what we can do, building also on your report here. Let's start with Marc.

MARC PIERINI: Thank you, Aslı. I'll start where you left off, i.e. we've tried with Sinan to produce an objective report outside the official channels. We didn't try to invent something, certainly not an alternative track, a second track, or whatever, not a privileged partnership, but look at the current situation and the current trends.

You have a triple paradox here; one, there is a huge amount of interaction, vastly increased joint interest between Turkey and the EU. That's the objective situation. It covers the Turkish Government, since the end of August, which is putting a lot of emphasis on the EU orientation of Turkey. Number Three, you have more divergence and substance than ever before. That's a weird situation, but that's where we are. That's our overall assessment.

We'll come back to the main topics Aslı just mentioned. You have trade; you have visa and readmission; you have education with Erasmus and other programmes; foreign policy; counterterrorism; the biggest financial programme in the world: 350 projects going on at times; so a massive amount of interaction. Yet we do not see much progress, especially if we're judged by the standard of the accession process.

Now, from an EU standpoint, you have basically two questions on the accession process. Number one: is Turkey, and that's the catchphrase, sufficiently meeting the accession criteria and the political criteria, in particular? The answer currently is no. Even though the Commission Progress Report didn't say no in that blunt way, but if you read between the lines it's clearly a no. Especially for the past 13, 14 months, we have seen a massive rollback of rule of law, judiciary, police, media and internet and so on.

The second question, from an EU point of view: is Turkey a liberal democracy in the EU sense, meaning not just free and fair elections, but a number of different devices that ensure that a diverse society as diverse as Turkey is can progress in the direction of a better democracy? There too the answer is not a positive one.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

At the same time, we have to see that we have bottom lines. The biggest bottom line is on the Turkish side. You have had a free and fair presidential election, so however unpleasant or pleasant or agreed the choices made by the Turkish president or his Government are to Europe, they are legitimate; there's no question about it. That is a very important bottom line. The question it raises in turn for the Europeans is that it seems that there is a sort of disconnect between the EU orientation of the Turkish Government and their requirement options statement on the domestic scene, in political terms. There is one big question-mark.

On the EU side, you have a very simple bottom line. We are, as you all know, using a set of criteria for accession countries. Sometimes you can read in the Turkish Press or some think tanks that Turkey is so important strategically, and the Middle East and this and that and the rest, that it deserves to get into the EU whatever the standards. No, there is no such standard in EU accession. That's the point. The difference, even if you take Norway, which is not a member, which has refused membership twice, as you all know, by referendum, there is no such standard. The political or economic standards are the same. The difference is in the institutions.

At the same time, you have a third bottom line, which is a joint bottom line common to EU and Turkey, which is that we are facing common economic constraints. Turkey needs the EU, the EU needs Turkey, and we can demonstrate that in a number of ways. Of course, we are facing joint security constraints, so there is something in common that we have to develop, in the sense that the regional geography has basically imposed its own agenda.

If you look at the visitors between Turkey and the EU, not what the spin doctors are saying, but what they actually do in the room, you will see that counterterrorism is the number one issue, by far. Syria, Iraq and ISIL are huge subjects; Russia is another one. Where we expect foreign policy convergence, we're not seeing it. Think of the Turkish position on Egypt, on Israel, on Assad, on ISIS, on Russia and Ukraine. There are different explanations for all this, but we're not seeing a convergence now.

At the same time, the current period is a period of very rough seas, and we're all in the same boat, so there's no jumping off. In essence, what we're saying in the report is that we have a very big table with a very large number of different devices, programmes, policies and agreements, and we have to make progress pragmatically, where we can. I'll stop here.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Marc, how do we know we're talking about a candidate country? In other words, these levels of cooperation you're talking about, how is that different from the level of cooperation you've been having with the Tunisian Government?

MARC PIERINI: I knew it was a bad idea to invite a journalist to moderate the debate! The fundamental difference is convergence. The Tunisian Government has a lot of discussions with EU institutions, but they don't have to align or even to converge with EU policies. That is what has become more and more difficult, especially with the current narrative in Turkish politics.

At times, you have the impression that one strand of the Turkish narrative is EU, EU, EU central policy and so on. Basically, I think it was three weeks after coming into office, the current Government had an EU strategy. In words, in symbolic moves, it's very important. At the same time, what we've heard on ISIS, what we've heard on the role of women in society, and many other things, independence of the judiciary, media and so on, it's all going in the opposite direction.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

That is why I think – but Kati will be better-placed than me to say that – European politicians are puzzled, to say the least.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Yes, today, I believe, Prime Minister Davutoğlu says, 12 years ago Europe was refusing Turkey because we were too weak and now they're refusing Turkey because we're too strong. There's this very popular and populist rhetoric about the strength, with quite noticeable anti-Western undertones that become quite apparent in the daily political cacophony in Turkey on all sides.

Sinan, let's turn to you. Perhaps you can also talk a little bit about the economic angle and the deliverables here that are real.

SINAN ÜLGEN: I'll first start with an anecdote, if you'll allow me, Aslı. We launched this paper just before the summit meeting last December; it was the 12th, I think, 12th of December, so we were in a bit of a rush to pull this paper out of our hat. In advance, we also had a number of meetings, private meetings with many people at the higher levels of EU decision-making.

After that meeting, we decided to call this paper A Moment of Opportunity in the Turkey-EU Relationship. As we launched the paper the day after Turkish President Erdoğan started saying a few quite incisive remarks about the EU, saying, basically, that we don't need the EU, that we don't care about EU membership, and things like that.

Instantly, we got this reaction of: how can you call this a moment of opportunity in the relationship if the day after you publish this there is yet another signal that there's not much interest in the EU process? If today we were relaunch this paper, I would like that we still name it A Moment of Opportunity. The reason why we would still name it A Moment of Opportunity is intricately linked to the objective that we had set out initially when we decided to work on this topic.

This is essentially the following: it is quite clear that what we had jointly set out to do in this relationship, with the start of the negotiations, have failed for the time being. When I say have failed, it's obvious that the accession track, which is, remains and, in our minds, has to be the main pillar of this relationship, is not advancing, the negotiations have stalled.

We're not going to go back into discussion about why that is so, but nonetheless that's an objective rendering of the situation. Therefore, we had to take stock of that phenomenon. We can at great length pontificate about the value of the accession track, but it doesn't really help us to cover new ground at the policy level.

The reason why we drafted this piece is essentially to do two things; one is to, first of all, map out what can be done in addition to the accession framework, understand the political feasibility of what we were suggesting – and I'll talk a little bit about that – also, try to overcome the current area or the current atmosphere of acrimony that's really built up in the relationship because the accession track has not really performed the way that it was supposed to.

Today there is a lot of acrimony, a lot of frustration. Aslı knows this, because she is rather shy to talk about the EU objective in Turkey because there is not much perhaps popular support for that. I experience this almost on a daily basis when I go out and deliver public speeches in universities, talk to Turkish youth; there is a lot of reaction. That reaction partially stems from the fact that Turkish people don't believe any more that accession will happen, but also because they see a number of impediments on the way to accession. Some of them feel betrayed – sometimes by their own

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

Government, sometimes by the EU, but nonetheless there is this degree of acrimony in the relationship.

What that acrimony does is it tends to poison the rest of the relationship instead of pushing two partners that should eventually share a common destiny towards areas where they can build trust, where they can build a common vision, where they can build the frameworks of cooperation in areas of mutual interest. That acrimony, because it poisons the relationship, has really pushed the two partners away. That's really the situation that we'd like to address, that we try to address in this paper.

How do we get rid of that acrimony? How do we rebuild a relationship based on common interest, still maintaining the accession prospect, but nonetheless building a new dynamic on top of the accession process? That's really been the objective, and that is why I would argue that the title is not a misnomer, that there is today still a moment of opportunity in the Turkey-EU relationship.

Secondly, I want to talk a little bit about the political feasibility of what we've proposed here, and that's really been the objective of our joint efforts. After the paper was published, we had events in Turkey, both in Istanbul and Ankara. We had a set of private meetings to discuss, basically, what we propose in this paper has a degree of political feasibility, whether this is something that could actually be taken on board by the policymakers against the backdrop that we see today in the relationship. I think our joint assessment is that, by and large, the answer is yes.

The main obstacle here had really been twofold. On the Turkish side, there is always, and to this day, really, the fear that whatever you propose outside of the accession relationship is construed as a ploy to drive Turkey towards this much-maligned, privileged partnership setup. There is that fear; whatever you do, that fear is there.

I think by now there is also realisation, and that was put bluntly by a member of the Foreign Ministry who participated in one of our events, that today the Turkish administration, the Turkish Government realises that there can be areas outside the accession track which need to be deepened because it serves the interests of both sides. One of them is trade – and I'll just illustrate this by giving you an example on trade. For a very long time the Turkish Government refused to negotiate to deepen the customs union, whereas it's now been 20 years. Ambassador Selim Küneralp was one of the people that negotiated that agreement 20 years ago.

It's been 20 years; it needs to be revised. The world economy is a very different economy. The demands of the Turkish industry are very different. The structure of world trade has enormously changed. There had been a lot of resistance on the Turkish side to address these phenomena. Again, linked to the fear that we'd be moving away from accession towards an indeterminate future that would be very close to this privileged partnership aspect.

Today the thinking is different. The thinking is, yes, we now know that the accession track should still be maintained, but we are now open to deepen the customs union, to reformulate and update it, also because of another phenomenon, which is Turkey's aspirations to become part of TTIP. If you really want to become part of TTIP, the things that you need to do on that front are exactly the same, or more or less, in terms of what you need to do on the customs union front.

This is just an illustration to demonstrate that today in Turkey there is a wider degree of evaluation, of assessment in what we're proposing than there was a year ago. One is trade, the other is foreign policy, so a number of domains here. We had resistance in the EU as well when we talked about this.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

One of the interesting sorts of criticisms was, okay, if we deliver all of this that we're championing in this paper, viz. deepen the customs union, do the visa liberalisation thing, cooperate in foreign policy, a number of these things, then the Turks won't be interested in accession any more. That was the argument. If we do all these things, then why should the rest of Turkey be interested in accession?

That's really been one of the criticisms that we had to overcome, basically saying that accession is actually a different sort of momentum; it's a different sort of vision, because the real handicap of what we're proposing here is that this framework will never have the transformational power that accession has. That, really, is why we believe accession should continue to remain the main dynamic of this relationship, however, strengthened with this framework of cooperation that we believe now is totally feasible politically.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Thank you, Sinan. On your earlier point about acrimony and how rhetoric actually poisons the relationship and the debate, it is the case, it is what it is, and it's not going to change. If only we could take our politicians from politics, it would be a smoother equation, but that's like: if only we could shut down schools and then I would love to run the Ministry of Education kind of thing. It's not going to get easier, for sure, in Europe or in Turkey.

On your other point, TIIP and deepening the customs union, not as an alternative or privileged partnership, but while things are... this is one thing you can do and there's a different position in Turkey, you're saying. Doesn't that really tie into the same debate? If things are stalled in the accession process, things will be difficult in the customs union track as well.

SINAN ÜLGEN: Not necessarily. I think you can separate the two. Our argument is that you can actually build trust, you can actually address areas where there is mutual interest for the time being, outside of the accession framework.

Now, that's not the best option. We would still prefer to address those within the accession framework, but nonetheless, given the political difficulties that we have, this is still a second-best scenario as opposed to where we stand today, which is: accession framework stalled; the acrimony that has been built around the accession framework poisons the other areas of potential collaboration. That's the situation today. I think, compared to that situation, it's still one step ahead.

The second thing which I think is not in the paper, but the more I talk about in Turkey, the more I realise that is the case, is if some of what we're proposing here is taken on board that will also allow the constituency in Turkey that is trying to grapple and find a positive agenda to speak about the EU.

It's become really difficult in Turkey to talk about the EU because of all this acrimony, but if we are able to move ahead in trade, in visas, in mobility, in foreign policy, then we can, at least for those of us who continued to be interested in accession and are pro-Europeans, we can continue to champion this type of narrative. That is the case for individuals, that's the case for civil society, but that's also the case for politics. If there is a political leadership in Turkey, be it in Government, be it in opposition, that wants to drive the EU agenda, here is the formula.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Thanks, Sinan. Kati Piri, you have inherited a tableau, a situation, which is very different from your predecessors, as in, as a rapporteur, you now have an audience which is deeply sceptical of Turkey, including people who were very committed to Turkey's EU accession, who feel somewhat betrayed over the last events in the last couple of years.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

How is that feeling of betrayal affecting the atmosphere? Tell us a little bit about your take on what Sinan and Marc had to say in this session.

KATI PIRI: Sure, I'll be pleased to. Thank you also to Carnegie for inviting me to this event. As you rightly said, I'm not only a newly-elected member of the European Parliament, but also new on the Turkey file as rapporteur, and not so much on behalf of the S&D Group but on behalf of the whole European Parliament.

It was a pleasure also for me to read the report that was written by you exactly because there is so much negativity and so much scepticism going on, and at least what you are trying to do is, like you also said, in a very realistic and concrete way come up with tools which we have not tried yet and which we should first try before giving up. There are many tools, as you have rightly explained in your paper.

As rapporteur on behalf of the European Parliament, the report is a reaction to the Commission Report, which is called the Progress Report, which, of course, deals specifically not just with EU-Turkey relations but with the accession process. Obviously, a core element of such a report is how it goes with the rule of law and the judiciary and the independence of the judiciary, exactly those issues where we have a lot of concerns about where Turkey is heading over the last two years or so.

The last tacks that the Parliament adopted on Turkey was united with seven groups in the Parliament expressing exactly the same analysis when it comes to the situation of the media, concerns about the freedom of expression, so these are issues which are at the core of the accession process, and because the report of the Parliament deals with this, this is also at the core of the report. We are concerned about what's happening on these issues in the Parliament, and this is a united concern.

Of course, the reasoning behind, from various political groups, is different, and how to move forward in that process is also different. The analysis, unfortunately, I have to say, is something that unites us in the Parliament.

Also, within the reform process, I do have to say that there are also some points of light. It's not just darkness. I think when it comes, for instance, to the Kurdish Settlement Process, this is something that, no matter how sceptic we can be about many things happening in Turkey, needs full support also of the European Union. We have seen a lot of concerns on the judiciary, on firing judges, policemen... you all know it much better even than me, following Turkey for many years.

On the other hand, the functioning of the Constitutional Court is something that still shows there is a resilience in the system itself on rule of law in Turkey; the Individual Complaints Procedure. There are always, of course, some sparkles of light to be found also in the darkness, say, when it comes to the core of the accession process.

What I said, and what your question also was, where I see a disagreement in the Parliament is where to head now. I see, broadly, three groups. There's one group who has never been very enthusiastic about the accession of Turkey. This group, of course, shares the analysis of what's happening now, will also now not become very enthusiastic about a Turkish membership. This has never been a majority in the Parliament, but that group has grown bigger after the last parliamentary elections, so those who in principle are against Turkey's accession to the EU.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

Then there is, I would say, a large group, which, I'm afraid, is starting to split into two: the people who have always been the so-called friends of Turkey, who do also see a great interest for the European Union and for Turkish people that this process is moving forward, but the disappointment is there.

Then where to move from that disappointment is... I hear now some of my colleagues saying that we have this positive agenda, and let's not forget the positive agenda was developed not because of bad developments in Turkey but because the accession process was also blocked from the EU side. Some people are saying, well, we have this positive agenda, we have great interest there; perhaps we could cooperate on that, and let's forget about the poisoning part where we have all this bickering back and forth, which is the access process.

Now, I belong to those people who don't believe there is a positive agenda without the accession process. Let's see where the split in the Parliament will end up, and that's why I very much welcome a Carnegie report which looks at all the tools available, and let's try to use these tools. It is, in a way, a very broad, positive agenda which you have formulated in your report. I've tried to do the same in the Parliament's report, the first draft. Tonight was the deadline for amendments, so let's see where we will be having this debate in the coming weeks.

The upgrade of the customs union – of course, this is something that is possible and it's realistic: a high-level, structured, political and economic dialogue on energy security, on foreign affairs, on the fight against terrorism. During my first work visit to Turkey, Prime Ministers Renzi and Cameron were there in the same week, not to talk about the concerns that these countries have about the rule of law in the country, but to talk about counterterrorism and about the foreign fighters and the joint approach they want with that.

What I kept saying is, as long as the European Parliament is speaking about the concerns it has on the rule of law, it means the accession process is on. As soon as we only start to talk about the trade relationship, counterterrorism and foreign affairs, it's a very bad sign, because it means a majority has given up on that process.

Like I say, I'm from the Netherlands, where we have a very tough debate, perhaps even tougher than in the European Parliament, when it comes to Turkish accession, and I keep saying, why not first use the tools we have in order to see what we can achieve with that? I think in this report there are clear and many ways where we can move forwards. While, on the other hand, you hear people already calling for freezing the negotiations, cutting the IPA fund, that's not the way that I think the accession process can be reinvigorated.

Perhaps as a last point on that, Turkey is a candidate country and, strategically, also a very important country, so when there are problems in the relationship, the reaction should not be to walk away, to freeze, to isolate the country. It should actually be to engage further. It's not helping. I think at this moment, you would have a counter-reaction which would not be positive for the friends of Turkey, in case we start pushing Turkey away.

Of course, it would help – let me put that as a last remark – if there would be a bit more diplomatic language coming from the Turkish Government. That would really help the politicians also here in Brussels to remain constructive. Thank you.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Thanks, Kati. What I'm hearing on the panel is that it's a very hard balancing act. On the one hand, the way to energise this is perhaps to talk about customs union, to talk about counterterrorism and this and that, but there's a danger with that, as in it replaces the

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

accession process slowly, but slowly it can have that impact. It's a very fine balancing act we're talking about.

KATI PIRI: I wouldn't even say that. Perhaps I didn't express myself clearly on that. I believe the one thing doesn't exist without the other. It's also clear in your report. Also, the Carnegie report doesn't say that this is a sidetrack, and, also, in your presentations, you made very clear this accession process needs new impetus. How to get that new impetus might be to move outside of the accession process in order to bring life back.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Sure. It does not replace that, but as the concern Sinan raised earlier, meaning if your officials are mostly talking about counterterrorism and mostly talking about economic impetus and customs union and this and that, before you know, you will realise that that's occupied 80%, 90% of the dialogue, given that things are stalled otherwise.

MARC PIERINI: You have, actually, a hypothesis under which both sides could, in theory, declare: let's quit the accession process. You can see that the Turkish president has a dream of a Turkey very powerful in the middle of all things, affiliated with nobody, and a self-standing power, except that, in security terms, the anchor of Turkey is NATO - you can see it with the Patriot missile deployment - and in economic terms, it is the EU. You can see that in exports, imports, technology, short-term money, foreign direct investment, and there is just no alternative to that. You can look to Russia, you can look to the Gulf, to India, to China – it doesn't work.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Marc, you're describing a transactional alliance, not a partnership process.

MARC PIERINI: No, in the EU you have a number of politicians who would happily do away with the accession process, except that you have not one single government which is ready to say, I propose to quit. Unless you think that the National Front is going to come to power in France in two and a half years' time, this hypothesis doesn't exist, because they all have their interests.

Walk down any street in Istanbul or anywhere else in Turkey and you will see all the big names of European finance, regional trade, everything – Zara, Marks & Spencer, Carrefour, everybody is there. Why? Because this is a big, dynamic market and this is a pocket of growth. If you go to the industrial side, you'll see Renault, for example: 18 production plants around the world. Two are profitable: one in Romania, one in Turkey. What do you do? You walk away? Certainly not.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Great. Before I open the floor to questions, let me just remind people that reminding to a recent GMF survey, Transatlantic Trends, support for Turkey's EU accession in Turkey has jumped from 45% to 53% over this last year. I think in your report, I think you point out that this could have something to do with the fact that Turks are now feeling: okay, we tried the Middle East; it doesn't look really nice; let's go back to Europe. There definitely is a popular sentiment in that regard. Let's open the floor to questions.

MARC PIERINI: Free coffee for the first question!

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Then let me continue with my questions. Counterterrorism – there already is a good deal of that happening...

MARC PIERINI: Yes.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: ...but the Charlie Hebdo incident has shown that it's not really working as smoothly as it should.

MARC PIERINI: I would say it's not as seamless as it is between EU member states, simply because the mechanisms were not there, number one. Number two, because there is a reluctance in Turkey to be told what to do, especially with this long history of the Turkish Government requesting extraditions of PKK operatives from Europe and getting a very small proportion because the requests were not fulfilling EU criteria. The depth of the dossiers wasn't there.

Now you're talking of a different world. You're talking of not one organisation that you're trying to track down in Belgium or the Netherlands or Germany; you're talking of individuals, and these are 3,500 European citizens that are moving freely between Europe, Turkey and Syria.

That's one part of the difficulty; you can travel for virtually no money; you can go from anywhere in Europe to Hatay or Gaziantep for about €150 one-way, so everybody can do it. There are big networks, as we have seen. One hotel in Kadıköy in Istanbul is serving as a sort of transit platform...

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: The girlfriend of one of the attackers in Paris travelled to Turkey from Madrid and then crossed into Syria, ISIS territories.

MARC PIERINI: Yes, and that is also raising a new issue, which has been addressed only in June last year, not before, which is the blindness of the Schengen information system to a number of citizens. If you are not signalled, you cannot be tracked. That raises the issue of the passenger name record and so on and so forth.

At the same time, you have an issue on the Turkish side. You have to look at the map and where ISIS is. ISIS has only one gateway to the world, which is Turkey. ISIS cannot go to Kurdistan, directly to Kurdistan, cannot go to Iran, cannot go to the rest of Iraq, cannot go to Jordan and cannot go to Assad, so it crosses the border for fighters, resupplies and oil smuggling – only one border: Turkey.

It's an immensely complex border; it's 950 km long and most of it is flat, so very difficult to control, it's true, but there is no escape. That is now a homeland security threat to Europe as well as to Turkey, despite the fact that for a long time the Turkish Government didn't want to admit that.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Let's not forget that cooperation on counterterrorism or homeland security does not necessarily translate into coordinating foreign policies. Turkey's foreign policy on ISIS and issues like Kobani is very much freelancing and different even from their American allies. The truth is Turkey does not want to confront ISIS.

MARC PIERINI: Yes, and Turkey does not want to align on EU policy.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: This is not to say they support ISIS, but they do not want to confront ISIS, therefore their reluctance to join the Coalition, etc. Even this morning I was reading President Erdoğan's comments to a group of reports travelling with him; he very open says he was against the US bombing in Kobani to help the Kurdish forces. He says that he had warned Obama not to do this.

MARC PIERINI: Yes, there is a collision between the domestic political interest, the religious conservative constituency, which has a rather positive view of the anti-Western narrative of ISIS, and the ally obligations of Turkey. You have the same collision with Morsi versus Sisi in Egypt, and other

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

situations like this. You have a distinct trend in Turkish foreign policy which is not going towards the EU and elsewhere. I'm not sure where exactly, but elsewhere.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: We have now talked about elections in Greece; we have actually now talked about the fundamental mechanism of the accession process and whether or not something could happen on Cyprus. Now that there's a new Government in Greece, should we tune into news on the Cyprus front?

KATI PIRI: This is a difficult question. I will see tomorrow morning, but the Cyprus issue is, I think... half of the amendments of the European Parliament will be on this, but probably that's no change from previous years. In that respect, we remain respect.

Of course, this is a big blockage, especially for those chapters which both the European Commission and the European Parliament have always called for the opening, the so-called chapters 23, 24 also mentioned in your report. It's almost becoming a boring routine. That would be so useful in order to have a dialogue on those issues which we are concerned about and which we know are blocked because of the Cyprus question.

At this moment, I find difficulties in being positive, that in the coming few months it will be possible to have the two sides back at the table again. Of course, that would be something that we would all welcome. At the end of December it looked like it would happen again in January; unfortunately, it failed. When looking at the UN special envoy, Mr. Eide, and his latest statement, it's also not something that gives us the view that in a couple of weeks there are negotiations back on the table.

Elections coming up, both in the northern part of Cyprus, as in Turkey itself, is, of course, never a moment when these difficult issues... there is no window of opportunity that I see, unfortunately, happening in the coming months, but I was happy to hear from you, as you had been in Greece...

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: In Athens, for the election.

KATI PIRI: ...for the elections, that this might be a perspective to look at it, of course, from the Greek side and what has happened there. Although we see again there are two elements; one very positive player, the winner of the election, who might play a positive role; and the coalition partner, which has, of course, much more the national rhetoric.

To be honest, I would very much welcome it. I think everyone in this room would welcome it. For the coming months, I don't see the positive developments yet.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: One of the main topics of discussion in Turkey, in the Turkish debate internally, is Islamophobia. This word gets repeated a zillion times on a daily basis in media and by Government officials, particularly since the Charlie Hebdo thing. For a moment, if you didn't know the dictionary meaning of the word, you would think that there's a terrorist group called Islamophobia that attacked a newspaper in France. It's just been the main message coming from Turkey.

I want to know from either Sinan or Marc whether Turkey's own somewhat peculiar concepts at this point, like Islamophobia, like... I don't want to write them off entirely, but it is true that Turkey's debate on Islamophobia, the parallel state and the coup discussions are very uniquely Turkish - coup meaning the Government actually arguing that the corruption investigations of last December were a coup effort – and also making a point overseas, in America, in Africa, here in Brussels, that the parallel

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

state is the biggest threat in Turkish democracy - parallel state meaning the Gülen movement. Now, what I want to ask is whether or not these arguments resonate here.

MARC PIERINI: I would say that there is objectively an upward trend in Islamophobia in the EU, as well as anti-Semitism, and lots of efforts are being made in a number of countries. These trends are not just linked to the Paris attack; it was there before, and you can see that in the elections as well. There is a bottom-line there, which is that freedom of expression is one of the pillars of the European construction and European politicians, either in European Parliament or in National Parliament, are not going to accept that limits to the freedoms are set by terrorist groups. That's the bottom-line.

On the Gülen movement, of course this is a huge thing in Turkish politics. It's a very small thing here, I would say, one, because we've not been...

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: You're not discussing parallel state all the time?

MARC PIERINI: No, we're discussing a lot of parallel things, but not parallel states. Conspiracy theories have no big appeal to politicians in Europe, Number One. Number Two, European institutions cannot understand the Gülen movement, simply because it's not an animal that is shaped like a political party.

It has no charter, no transparency; you don't know the financing, and you know general objectives, you know a lot of people are working very actively in Brussels, in Washington and elsewhere, but what else? What do you do with them? The institutions are not equipped to cope with them. As much as this is a popular argument in Turkish politics, it's not much here, frankly.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Kati, can I ask you to... Sinan, do you want to [overtalking]?

SINAN ÜLGEN: Let me say a few words about Islamophobia. Now, when I was young, one of the arguments that we were using all the time in our relationship with the EU was: look, the EU cannot only demonstrate the validity of its value being universal if it's ready to accept Turkey, because that would demonstrate to the outside world that the EU is not a Christian club by admitting a predominantly Muslim country like Turkey.

That didn't buy us much traction for a host of reasons. Now, actually, we hear the same argument made, now under the banner of Islamophobia. Yesterday or today even, President Erdoğan was arguing that the only way that Europe can combat Islamophobia would be bringing in Turkey; it would demonstrate the sincerity of Europe if it wants to combat Islamophobia. If it says no to Turkey, then Europe has no hope of combating Islamophobia – this sort of argument.

To tell you the truth, I think there is certainly a degree of truth in this. Imagine a world where, for instance, Prime Minister Davutoğlu went and participated in the big demonstrations in Paris after the tragedy at Charlie Hebdo, imagine a world where Prime Minister Davutoğlu was not only a prime minister of a candidate country but he was the prime minister of a Turkey Member of the EU. His participation in that event would have had a different resonance.

I think there is a degree of truth in this argument, but I think what then falls on Turkey to really make a stronger argument is to demonstrate that Turkey has actually been able to marry democracy, the rule of law, within the context of a predominantly Muslim society. Unfortunately, the latest developments are that we are not seeing from the outside that it's walking in the right direction for combining all these values. On the contrary; some of the latest developments are generally interpreted as Turkey

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

walking back on what it purports to achieve on the aspirations of being a secular republic that's able to combine Islam, modernity and democracy.

I think there is a degree of truth in this argument, but that degree of truth will become even stronger if Turkey can demonstrate its real ability to combine this, because then it really would help in the fight against Islamophobia. It would help by creating a model where it would demonstrate – and Turkey, despite all its drawbacks, is, in a way, the most advanced state, the most advanced society that can aspire to do that. It would be a big tragedy if we fail at it. It would be a tragedy for us, but it will be a tragedy for Europe because it would make the fight against Islamophobia even more difficult, I would argue.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Really, how central is this business of Islamophobia in European politics? Is that really a top agenda here in Europe? I'm worried that the Turkish debate and rhetoric has become a little bit self-serving and insular, as in like, say, we are thinking the entire world is trying to find a solution to Islamophobia, whereas that's not the feeling I get when I pick up any newspaper in English.

SINAN ÜLGEN: Yes, of course, it's not the dominant narrative, it's not the main issue when you're in Europe; there are so many other questions: economy, jobs, [overtalking], but...

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: The Jihadist threat seems to be much higher.

SINAN ÜLGEN: Yes, but, again, the Jihadist threat also has, possibly, a connection to Islamophobia, at least, because these attacks do create a downward spiral of more disenfranchised Muslim populations in Western societies that could automatically lead to more extremism among these populations. There is a connection there.

It doesn't have the political priority in European societies, but, certainly, it has moved up quite a bit since the attacks, since Charlie Hebdo. Now we are seeing even leaders like Hollande, like Merkel, trying to address this issue, so I think it is in a different place in the European political spectrum. Obviously, if you look at it only from a Turkish perspective, you would be deluded that it has the highest or the utmost priority, which it may not have.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Kati, I saw somebody, but I want you to answer the same question too, as in when you go as the rapporteur to Turkish officials, you hear their complaints about parallel state and a coup effort, while it might be difficult for you to translate that language here in Brussels, on the other hand, there is an element of what they're saying which resonates in Turkey.

There's an element that's also real, as in... this is not to say corruption investigations cannot happen or should not happen – of course they should happen, and the Government is wrong to actually try to bury the investigations. On the other hand, they do feel a concerted effort against an elected Government. In terms of your work, where do you strike the balance when you write the report?

KATI PIRI: This is, of course, something that you are confronted with also in Brussels. There are also clear lobby groups, from all sides, within Turkish society also lobbying members of European Parliament, of course also me as rapporteur, to make certain statements on it.

Perhaps you might not like the answer, but my... When it comes to judging Turkey on the accession process, that's, in the end, the job that I'm doing on behalf of the European Parliament. It comes to very clear rules and benchmarks for what we are looking at: is there an independent judiciary? Is there

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

freedom of media? We are not looking at: is there a parallel structure or not in Turkish society? That's not one of the benchmarks that I'm looking at.

The only way to deal with this from the European Parliament side is looking at the very clear benchmarks we have set, and judge Turkey on that. In my report, and I hope, also, in the end version, you don't find anything about the either so-called parallel state or the internal struggle. We have clear benchmarks, and those are the benchmarks that we are looking at.

Now, it's interesting when it comes to Islamophobia. Of course, whenever I think, after the attacks in Paris, what you saw is some populist statements coming, of course, from the Turkish Governments. As is the case with populist statements, there is always some bit of truth in it, but it's the way you twist it, of course, which makes it a populist statement in itself.

In Holland, when I now speak to Dutch citizens of Turkish origin, in many countries there are political forces which are very big, which are very clear also on their agenda, which is anti-Muslim, anti-Islam, also in the Netherlands. Why am I saying this as well [unclear]. Linking the EU and Turkey's negotiation process, if that would come to a halt, it's the same people in Holland, of Turkish origin, who are very critical about what's happening in Turkey now, who say: if this process frees us, I have the feeling that I'm not accepted in the EU society, in Dutch society. Whether we like it or not - this is how they experience it - they would see it as rejecting them as being Turkish or as being Muslim. It depends on how you frame it.

It is a serious concern. In the Netherlands it's still the case, whether you have a higher-educated, originally Dutch person, or someone with a Turkish background with exactly the same level of education, it is more difficult to find a job. That is something that needs to be addressed also within the European Union.

On the other hand, and there's no doubt about that also on this podium, we have those values of freedom of expression even if it's insulting, which are freedoms we have fought for and freedoms we really want to keep. I think, for my party, the Mayor of Rotterdam caused some upheaval with his remark by saying, if you don't like this type of society, then there is no place for you. When it comes to this radical extremist, there is no place for that in a democratic society, but, obviously, those people, who are the majority, who want to live in the freedom we have in Europe should not be discriminated against because they have other ethnic or religious backgrounds.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Yes, a question from the back...?

IANA DREYER: Thank you. I'm Iana Dreyer, editor of a website that focuses on EU trade policy, Borderlex. We've been in touch, Sinan, thank you. Very interesting. I have two questions - one for the authors of the report. What do you see in terms of chances that there can be a formal mandate to negotiate the customs union?

Obviously, there's been a meeting earlier this year, and the Commission and the Turkish Government have agreed to start talking about upgrading the customs union. What's your feeling during the conversations you had with this report that there is any chance that there will be a formal mandate, because probably such a mandate will be necessary.

I have a question to our MEP here on the readiness for the Parliament to talk about mobility seriously with Turkey. I don't follow AFET and foreign affairs issues, but I was very struck by remarks by the rapporteur on the Trade in Services Agreement that the Parliament, Mrs. Reding, who... Turkey and

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

the EU are negotiating also in this TiSA agreement for a lateral deal and Turkey is demanding liberalised temporary movement for construction workers and for truck drivers.

Mrs. Reding's remarks, although they're generally pro-trade, were very harsh on this. She said, these are our red lines; we don't want any mobility here. She said - she didn't mention Turkey, but who else would she have in mind? – more of those drivers would be a danger on our roads. I was really shocked by those...

How is the Parliament ready to move on that? I think this is really a key issue for Turkey and also the symbolism of this, in terms of making the EU attractive to Turkey and to other neighbours in the south, is important. I wanted to hear your views on what's your feeling about this. Thank you.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Let's take a few more questions. Jesper?

JESPER PEDERSEN: Hi! Jesper Pedersen; I'm a fellow with the German Marshall Fund. If each of our panellists was magically given the ability to lift one or two chapters that are currently blocked or not opened, are there any of them that you feel would be particularly interesting and just scream out for constructive engagement from both the EU and Turkey, in terms of just sequencing a path forward?

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: The gentleman on the right?

ALAIN SERVANTIE: Alain Servantie; I'm a former official of the Commission. I have a question for Sinan. He said that if he would rename the report the same way now. Following the question that Asli was asking, I'm afraid, after the demonstration in Paris, what Davutoğlu and Erdoğan said, that, after all, they were killed because there was Islamophobia in France...

It's just as Kati said, there is this freedom of expression and freedom of criticising any religion, all the religions. In Turkey, it's not accepted. Turkey is not a secular country; it's becoming less and less secular now. There have been reports, actually, by satirical newspapers' editors in Turkey saying it's impossible criticise religion in Turkey - Islam at least.

My question to Kati: is not the EU a completely secular organisation where countries are becoming more and more secular and less and less interested in religion, and Turkey is going the other way? After all, giving weapons to the ISIS in Syria, as Erdoğan did, just supporting a new caliphate... Sorry.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: One more question here, the lady in front...?

SEDA GÜRKAN: Thank you. Seda Gürkan, Université Libre de Bruxelles. Thank you very much for this report. It was very a timely contribution to the EU-Turkey debate. I have two questions, actually; one is the prospect of democratisation in Turkey. Given the upcoming elections, the corruption case and the fight against the parallel state that we have been talking a little bit about, do you see any room for democratisation in Turkey in the medium-term?

My second question is on the role of the main opposition party, CHP's role, in taking forward Turkey-EU relations. Maybe it would be interesting hearing a little bit Kati Piri's views on your sister party's performance in Turkey-EU relations. Thank you very much.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Thank you. The last question, please.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

UMUR AKANSEL: Thanks a lot. My name is Umur Akansel. I'm from a consultancy called KDC Conseil. To Messieurs Peirini and Ülgen I have two very small questions; the first is, I haven't – I guess it would be an update – your comments on the Turkish Stream: do you see it as a bit of a kick in the face in EU energy policy?

The second short question would be: TTIP or other FTA agreements – how much of a leverage do you see from the Turkish side to actually have an effect on these negotiations? How many bullets does Turkey have to fire on this?

My third very brief question to Rapporteur Ms. Piri: in June 2013 the Turkish now president, then prime minister, said that he does not recognise the decision of the European Parliament. Then it was a resolution. In the headlines, this was quoted as: I do not recognise the European Parliament. Now, you said yesterday on Twitter that – I don't speak Dutch, but you said, Meest kritisch EP rapport in jaren. It should be, most probably: most critical EP report in years. Do you think that the Turkish authorities or the Turkish president will recognise the report? Thank you.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Thank you. I think that we'll go in order like this. Sinan, I also want you to, if possible, address whether or not in 2015 we should expect any surprises from Ankara on the Armenian issue, given this is the centennial of the 1915 event.

SINAN ÜLGEN: You really want me to talk about it?

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Marc?

MARC PIERINI: I'll select the questions I like, okay? That's the privilege of being here! If there was a magic wand and we would pick the chapters to be opened, obviously 23 and 24, basically, the governance chapters...

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Because you love government procurement as a topic?

MARC PIERINI: No, no...

SINAN ÜLGEN: That was my chapter!

MARC PIERINI: We have a strong interest in discussing the rule of law architecture with Turkey, and the vehicles are chapters 23 and 24. Unfortunately, the rule being what it is, these chapters are blocked by Cyprus unilaterally, which I think is not in the interests of Cyprus itself. First and foremost, Cyprus needs a more democratic Turkey. That is where the workings of the Council, the mechanism by which you attain a certain decision within the Council and you respect national interests of member states, is, of course, at odds with the strategic interests of the EU.

Is there room for more democracy in Turkey? We hope there is. When you've worked in EU institutions for such a long time, as I have, the very strange paradox here is that, look in the years ahead of the 2004 enlargement and you will see in Poland, in Hungary, in Czechoslovakia, at the time, both the opposition and the governing party - and they were taking turns, of course - would use the accession process. It's not the case in Turkey. Although the main opposition party is supposed to be very close to social democracy here, they never raised a finger.

If you go back to 2010, the Constitutional Reform Package in Turkey, there was a Government proposal in March and there was, of course, the 1982 Constitution inherited from the 1980 military

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

coup. The Commission took opposition at the end of March, saying, well, the methodology was not inclusive; it was an AKP proposal that became a Government proposal; other stakeholders were not consulted; but it is a first step in the right direction.

What was CHP's reaction? Said, oh, the Commission once again is aligned with the AKP, which is not the case, because in diplomatic language a first step in the right direction is not an approval. Never mind. When you asked CHP why they didn't propose anything, there was no answer.

Had they proposed an alternative to the Government Reform Package, the Commission would have had the obligation, because they are a legitimate party in parliament, to analyse their... You can say the same about trade union law, or public procurement policy, or anything else. It's all up for grabs: if they want to, they can use it, but it's not in the tradition. That's very unfortunate, I think.

One word about Turkish Stream, which is very much used by the Turkish Government; as you said, a punch in the face to the EU – to me, number one, you have to see it in actual fact, which is not the case, by far. Secondly, it would increase Turkey's dependency on Russia. My numbers, which I take from Sinan, is that Turkey depends on Russia for 58% of its gas. The prime minister, to [unclear] due the other day, he said 65%. It's around 60%.

If you add the Russian nuclear plant and Turkish Stream, it would become much bigger. It doesn't bring any bargaining power to Turkey on the international gas market. We can see the logic of the Russian game there, which is to prevent any alternative source from the Caspian to challenge Russian gas, but I don't see much of a bargain for Turkey there.

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: You actually point this out in your report, the ambivalence it creates in Turkey, that if... vis-à-vis Russia. Sinan?

SINAN ÜLGEN: Let me answer a question that wasn't posed, but sort of. Let me start with that because I think it's important to get that out. It's really how Turkey deals with religion. Alain, it is true that the freedom of expression, especially as it relates to religion, is gradually being constrained in Turkey.

What I hope is going to happen is, especially which was... I thought about this just after Charlie Hebdo, when one of the Turkish newspapers did print excerpts of Charlie Hebdo and distributed that in Turkey, which proves my point that Turkey is still far ahead of all the other countries in the Muslim world, because this can happen in Turkey. A Turkish newspaper did print Charlie Hebdo in a sanitised version.

Then there were two authors...

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Sinan, it faced investigation.

SINAN ÜLGEN: That would be my point. There were two authors in that newspaper, who within their column replicated the cover of Charlie Hebdo. In a funny incident, the police, in a totally illegal way, went at 1 am to the front of that newspaper, checked the newspapers to see whether the cover page was included in the annex of the newspaper. It wasn't, so they allowed the distribution of those newspapers, but somehow they forgot to check the whole paper, because in two parts of that paper, the cover page of Charlie Hebdo was included in the editorial space, in the columnist space.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

The Public Prosecutor started an investigation against the Cumhuriyet Daily. I really hope that that investigation turns into a prosecution and goes to court. What that will do is it will really help society understand the limits of blasphemy according to European law, because if Cumhuriyet is taken to court on the basis that it is denigrating religion, which is the argument here, which is the claim, it will end up at the European Court of Human Rights. Turkey is really the only country that can actually be the origin of such a case, blasphemy against a religion of Islam, and really help the European Court of Human rights address this issue.

The way that European Court of Human Rights will address this issue in this particular case is quite clear. It will find this to be within the scope of freedom of expression, and that will necessarily have an impact on how Turkish society views this. Turkey will have to understand and it will have to agree, in a way, which is what I hope, with a lot of debate that religion in itself is not protected and it's not somewhere where it is totally beyond the freedom of expression.

That's the reason why I hope that the prosecution against Cumhuriyet will become a court case. The Turkish courts will probably rule against Cumhuriyet. We have seen that in past cases, especially against Fazıl Say when he retweeted one of Ömer Hayyam's 12th century poems. It will end up in court, and then it will go up to the European Court of Human Rights. Turkey is bound by the decision of the European Court of Human Rights; that's what we accepted back in 1987.

We will have to face this limit of what is blasphemy and what is legally allowed? Right now, and I agree there with Alain, that is somewhat nebulous and certainly the freedom of expression is constrained.

Now, turning to more mundane topics, trade, there will be a mandate; that's the only way to go forward. That's basically what's been insinuated by the Council conclusions of the 12th December. The Council basically asked the Commission to come up with a mandate, and that is also pretty much the understanding on the Turkish side – they're also getting ready for this.

The question mark there is – I haven't really explored this – basically, whether the Commission could easily get that mandate in a situation where a member state, let's say Cyprus, is unsatisfied with the implementation of the customs union as is. That's the question mark, but trade policy is not by unanimity, so there is leverage there.

On TTIP accession, what is Turkey's leverage, Turkey is the only country that, by nature of its trade regime and customs union, will be more affected. That's really a big, strong argument for making Turkey part of this deal. The problem is that so far Brussels and Washington have not really come to the point of agreeing that TTIP can eventually be multilateralised. I think it should be, and there is certainly an ongoing work and growing recognition that it would have to be.

They have not publicly stated this fact. This is as a matter of principle; they have not yet stated that TTIP will be multilateralised, multilateralised to which countries, to likeminded countries that already are in a preferential trading arrangement. In a way, Turkey is not in the same boat; it's not in a different boat, but in the same boat as countries like Canada, Mexico and Norway.

My argument in a previous paper has been that Turkey would need to establish a political caucus with those countries and basically lobby Brussels and Washington so that they agree as a matter of principle that once they have concluded – I'm not saying now – but once they have concluded their negotiations, that TTIP can be multilateralised, it will be open to conditionally fulfilling the economic

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

criteria and open to the accession of third countries. There, I think there is enough argument to move this discussion forward.

Finally, Aslı, on whether to expect anything on Armenia this year, yes, I think the Turkish Government has certainly been moving, especially last year. The statement on the 23rd April did incorporate some quite novel elements. It did lead to a positive feedback from most of the countries around the world, starting with Washington, and there's going to be more of that this year.

That's already been the path and one of the, I would say, positive dynamics that we have seen in foreign policy, the willingness of the Government to move ahead, to empathise with the feelings of the Armenians, and to use rhetoric but also implement a number of actions to demonstrate that this is a genuine empathy.

Of course, Turkey, in my belief, would never go to the point of using the terminology that Armenians want...

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Apologising.

SINAN ÜLGEN: ...neither apologising nor calling it genocide. What Turkey will do is, basically, is use this empathetic rhetoric, regret what has happened, accept the size of the tragedy, recognise the cultural diversity of Anatolia, including the contributions of Armenians, a number of cultural initiatives - all of that will happen, but I don't think that the Turkish Government is willing to go beyond that.

Yet another point, which has been certainly one of the positive momentums, is that, unlike in many other areas where the freedom of expression is being constrained, in this particular area, Turkey has reached a level of maturity in terms of its domestic debate. Today many Turks can look at this, say it was genocide; others argue it wasn't; but that discussion is much freer today in Turkey, unlike in Armenia, for instance.

MARC PIERINI: With a bit of luck we're going to have Armenia invited to the G20 in parallel with Azerbaijan – who knows?

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: Kati, for the final.

KATI PIRI: Yes, I'll try to be brief on that, although I do answer all the questions put to me. I am still very democratic on that.

On visa facilitation, I think one of the positive things that's happened is the entry into force of a readmission agreement last October, and, of course, attached to that, and a way to do that, was also the visa liberalisation roadmap. On the one hand, I think this roadmap will have to be developed in the coming three years. It's a positive thing. I think people-to-people contact is always the best way in order to really understand and to have a frank dialogue.

When it comes to visa facilitation of students, businessmen, etc, in the coming three years, this continues to be very important. We happened to speak about it this afternoon with Marc Pierini on importance of programmes like Erasmus, how important these programmes are both for people here and for people in Turkey; these are crucial issues.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

When it comes to visa liberalisation roadmap, of course there will be some hiccups, which I hope we can overcome. We spoke about the borders; you need to control your border if you want a visa liberalisation roadmap in the end. We saw the recent phenomena of ghost-ships. This is again a signal that there needs to be much more border control from the Turkish side in order to make sure in three years... of course, the Cyprus issue is also there on visa liberalisation.

The positive thing is this is a way to have a concrete dialogue about rule of law. Because it's part of the visa liberalisation roadmap, which is also part of those chapters 23 and 24, actually we are negotiating on aspects of that within the visa liberalisation roadmap.

Opening chapters – this is something that, of course, I hope for, but will probably not all stay in my final report, because in my report for the Parliament chapters 23 and 24 are constant factors. This has always been the position both of the European Commission and the Parliament for the very same reasons that have been explained here.

There are three chapters which Turkey could open, which are not blocked by us. There, as a social democrat, when it comes to social policy and employment, I think there would be a big need for that chapter for the Turkish people and workers and their security at work. It would be very crucial for Turkey to have negotiations on that.

Chapter 31 is, of course, a chapter I also mention when it comes to foreign affairs. 17, on economy and monetary policy, has been unblocked by the French, and it looks like that will be the next chapter which actually will be negotiated on.

Europe more secular, Turkey more religious – perhaps because I am from Holland, which has been very secular for many years, you see, actually, religion growing. Perhaps it also has something to do with immigration policy, but Holland is, in a way, becoming less secular and more religious.

Everyone, of course, always has their own example of the country they have been raised in. I was born in Hungary, so I say the country I was raised in was the Netherlands. As long as you can have, on the one hand, expression of religion – a headscarf in a school in Holland is fine – as long as, on the other hand, you can also have your freedom to express, and what we spoke about also, when it comes to cartoons depicting the Prophet. As long as both are possible in a society, there is no problem. The problem occurs when one of the two is no longer possible, in my opinion, in society.

Democratisation in Turkey – let me say it very clearly: in the end it's only Turkey, the Turkish Government and the Turkish political elite which can move forward. There is no opposition in Europe which can push the Turkish Government. We can give incentives. In the end, it's up to Turkey and the Turkish people who go to elections and to vote to decide which party they want, which party for them represents the interests best.

CHP, yes, it's a sister party, of course, of the S&D Group. I think as rapporteur of the Parliament, I really try to be... Before becoming a politician, I actually worked for an institute representing seven Dutch political parties, helping political parties in young democracies, so I'm a true believer in the fact that when it comes to reform processes like you will have in Turkey, on the constitutional reform, for instance, coming up, it's crucial that there is constructive cooperation, and both bear a responsibility, both the Government and the opposition parties, which, unfortunately, when looking at other candidate countries, in the Balkans, where you see that the opposition or the ruling party is more and more adopting this winner-takes-all mentality, which is still very strong, walking out, not wanting this constructive dialogue, is something which in the end is detrimental to the Turkish people.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

I really hope also that CHP as the biggest opposition party... I believe the Government will have to reach out and I also believe that the opposition will have to want to enter into a constructive dialogue.

As a social democrat, I do think, when looking at Turkey over the last 12 years, there has been the creation of a middle-class. This, in a way, is something that any social democrat can welcome, and perhaps any democrat can welcome, that no matter what the developments are, there has been a growing middle-class development in Turkey.

The last question, on President Erdoğan not recognising the European Parliament, and Twitter messages – then perhaps should I also say it bluntly in less diplomatic words? – in the end, it's up to him what his reaction is. We, as European Parliament, are a democratic institution, representing – not elected, because a lot of people don't go to the elections – representing 500 people, citizens of Europe, so I would take seriously what is coming out of the European Parliament. Of course, in the end it's up to any government to give the reaction they are willing to give.

I'm not proud of the fact that I think that my draft report is the most critical in years; I'm not proud of that. I would have wanted it to be different. Unfortunately, its developments in Turkey which make it that when judging the core of the accession process, we have to be honest and we have to recognise what's happening. On the other hand, I do try to be constructive in using those tools; that's why we are sitting here. How can we reinvigorate that process?

ASLI AYDINTAŞBAŞ: On that note, I'd like to thank everybody for coming here to discuss Turkey on a gloomy January evening, and a quick round of applause for our discussants here. Thank you for coming.