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BULGARIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE EU: PRIORITIES AND PROSPECTS FOR TURKEY

Bulgaria, which will hold the Presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2018, announced its intention to convene a summit with a view to improving Turkey's relations with the EU.



On 1 January 2018, Bulgaria took over the Presidency of the Council of the EU from Estonia and will be succeeded by Austria in 1 July 2018. As it is known, the Presidency of the Council of the EU rotates every six months allowing member states to work closely in groups of three, called "trios". According to the official trio programme, which is made up of Estonia, Bulgaria and Austria, launched on 20 June 2017, the three countries agreed to work closely upon a positive agenda focusing on security, strengthening EU's external borders, economic growth and competitiveness.

Bulgaria emerged from communist rule on 10 November 1989, the day after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The country had been ruled by the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) from 1946 to 1990. Following the removal of Todor Zhivkov, who had served as head of the one-party state since 1954, Bulgaria has transitioned into a multi-party system and applied for EU membership in 1990 after

the end of Soviet influence. First democratic elections in the country were held on 10 and 17 June of the same year and Bulgaria entered into a process of democratisation which has continued for years. Bulgaria's democratic transformation has taken place within the context of its EU membership process. The country, which has maintained a peaceful democratisation process unlike several Balkan countries, joined NATO on 29 March 2004 and became an EU Member State on 1 January 2007. In this sense, despite socio-economic and political challenges, Bulgaria has proved its ability to quickly adapt to changing global dynamics.

"United We Stand Strong"

Bulgaria is in pursuit of taking efficient steps for the Union during its first ever EU Council Presidency. In this regard, identifying its historical and cultural heritage in line with European values, Bulgaria has chosen the motto for its EU Council Presidency as "United We Stay Strong". Underlining its commitment to the decisions taken

on the future of the EU27, Bulgaria has determined four priorities for its first ever Presidency of the EU Council namely; "Future of Europe and Young People"; "Security and Stability"; "Western Balkans" and "Digital Economy". Regarding its priorities, Bulgaria reveals clearly its ambition to take an active part in the process of shaping Europe's future. Initiatives which will be taken during the Bulgarian Presidency may bring a new point of view on overcoming challenges that the EU has been facing.

One of the youngest democracies in Europe, Bulgaria has joined neither the Eurozone nor the Schengen Area. 11 years into its EU membership, Bulgaria is a candidate to become the 20th member of the Eurozone in the coming years. Despite the progress made since 2007, sceptics note that the country is not ready to join the single currency zone, which is one of the most significant achievements of the European integration project. As a matter of fact, Bulgaria has to deal with corruption and organized

crime and is the poorest country within the EU. In this respect, allowing Bulgaria into the Eurozone is believed to contain risks for the EU which is currently in struggle with defiance of core European values by several of its members as in the case of Hungary and Poland.

Bulgarian EU Presidency: An Opportunity to Improve Turkey-EU Relations?

A prominent subject for Bulgaria's EU Presidency is whether it could help improve Turkey-EU relations which have been strained over the past year. Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on 7 January during the inauguration ceremony of the Bulgarian St. Stephen Church also known as the "Iron Church" in Istanbul. During the ceremony, referring to the strong ties between the two countries, PM Borissov pledged to be a mediator for normalizing relations between Turkey and the EU. Afterwards, Bulgarian Foreign Minister Ekaterina Zaharieva made a statement that a

summit, which would bring Turkish and European leaders together could take place, although not planned in the programme of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council. In this respect, Bulgaria holding the rotating presidency after a period of worsening ties between Turkey and the EU, may be considered as an opportunity for breathing fresh air into the relations.

Bulgaria emphasizes the critical importance of Turkey's partnership on many issues such as migration, counter-terrorism, economy and energy. Normalisation of relations between Turkey and the EU will surely play a crucial role particularly in achieving Turkey's short-term objectives such as obtaining visa liberalisation and launching negotiations for the modernisation of the Customs Union. Turkish leaders voice their ambition to get relations with the EU back on track. In this respect, President Erdoğan's visit to Paris to meet with his French counterpart Macron on 5 January is hailed as a big step showing Turkey's determination to improve relations with the EU.



RESULTS OF IKV'S EU PERCEPTIONS SURVEY WERE PRESENTED AT A PRESS CONFERENCE

IKV Chairman Ayhan Zeytinoğlu held a press conference to present the main findings of IKV's public opinion survey on perceptions on EU and support for EU membership.

IKV Chairman Ayhan Zeytinoğlu shared the findings of the IKV survey on perceptions on EU and Turkey's EU membership with journalists at a press conference organised by IKV on 8 January 2018. The survey commissioned by IKV was conducted on 18-19 November 2017 by the Realta Research Company in 18 cities with 1,311 respondents. The findings of the public opinion survey were first presented in December 2017 during the Turkey-EU High-Level Economic Dialogue meeting in Brussels.

The survey shows that support for EU membership among the Turkish public is around 79 percent whereas belief that Turkey will join the bloc in the near future stands much lower at 31.2 percent.

Commenting on the results of the survey, IKV Chairman stated: "Despite all the challenges and obstacles, a large majority of

respondents (78.9 percent) continue to support Turkey's EU membership. It is of great importance that despite all the problems experienced throughout 2017, there is still a high level of support for EU membership in Turkey. This is a message to the government that people have a will towards a rapprochement with the EU and that the necessary reform steps should be taken."

"At the same time, it is a warning to the EU. The results not only reveal that policies aimed at excluding Turkey lack vision and common sense, but also that it is morally and strategically wrong to exclude a country which overwhelmingly supports EU membership", IKV Chairman added.

On the survey's findings regarding belief in Turkey's EU membership in the short run, IKV Chairman said: "These results reveal that the developments, which have taken place



throughout Turkey's negotiation process, with the negotiations coming to a freezing point, the negative approach adopted by some Member States towards Turkey as well as the slowdown in reforms in Turkey, have resulted in a decline

in the belief in Turkey's prospective membership in the EU."

IKV Chairman Zeytinoğlu indicated that when asked about the reasons underlying their support for Turkey's EU membership respondents cited expectations related to free

movement, democratisation and prosperity whereas economic reasons, double standards applied to Turkey by the EU and prejudice along with the cultural differences were cited as main obstacles to Turkey's EU membership goal.

IKV DEBATED THE MODERNISATION OF THE CUSTOMS UNION AT A PANEL HELD IN BERLIN



The panel entitled "What is Next for Turkey and Its Relations with the EU? The Modernization of Turkey-EU Customs Union" was organised by IKV in cooperation with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation and Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik in Berlin on 30-31 January 2018. The two-day panel commenced with a dinner reception hosted by Turkey's Ambassador to

Germany Ali Kemal Aydın. During the panel sessions held under the Chatham House rule on the second day of the event, experts, academics and bureaucrats from Turkey and Germany reviewed the balance sheet of the Turkey-EU Customs Union and held in depth discussions on its re-negotiation in the context of the broader Turkey-EU relationship.

CONSUL GENERAL OF THE NETHERLANDS PAID A VISIT TO IKV

On 26 January 2018, Consul General of the Netherlands in Istanbul Bart van Bolhuis visited IKV and met with IKV Vice-Chairman Halûk Kabaaloğlu. During the meeting, current developments in Turkey-EU relations and the ongoing debate on the future of EU integration were discussed. The Consul General obtained information regarding IKV's latest public opinion survey on EU perception and support for EU membership. He evaluated the 78.9 percent support rate for Turkey's EU membership as a positive outcome. After having



indicated that the Netherlands backs Turkey's EU membership, van Bolhuis expressed his hope that the relations

will improve on the main issues such as the modernisation of the Customs Union.

IKV DISCUSSED THE MODERNISATION OF THE CUSTOMS UNION IN KÜTAHYA

On 24 January 2018, IKV organised a panel entitled "The Effects of the Modernised Customs Union on the Business World" in Kütahya. The panel, which was hosted by the Kütahya Chamber of Commerce and Industry, aimed to raise awareness on the possible effects of the modernisation of Turkey-EU Customs Union on the business community.

During the panel, IKV Secretary General Assoc. Prof. Çiğdem Nas gave information about the modernisation process of the Customs Union. Afterwards, IKV Strategy and Business



Development Director delivered a speech on the modernisation of the Customs Union and its impact on Turkish agriculture. Lastly, IKV Research Director Çișel İleri gave information regarding the EU funds that the business community can benefit from.

İKv AGENDA

İKv ATTENDED BULGARIAN EU PRESIDENCY'S RECEPTION IN ANKARA

On 9 January 2018, İKV Chairman Ayhan Zeytinoğlu attended the reception hosted by Bulgaria's Ambassador to Turkey Nadezhda Neynsky at Erimtan Museum in Ankara on the occasion of Bulgaria's EU Council Presidency.



In her opening speech, Ambassador Neynsky outlined Bulgaria's EU Presidency priorities. After stating that Turkey is a close neighbour and a key NATO ally alongside being an EU candidate, Ambassador Neynsky indicated Bulgaria would work for keeping all communication channels open with Turkey during its EU Presidency. Ambassador Neynsky continued her words by stressing that the refugee crisis and terrorist attacks revealed the EU's vulnerability to threats. She went on to say that these challenges could only be solved through joint efforts and emphasized that a common political vision, commitment and courage was needed.

Along with Neynsky, Deputy Minister for EU Affairs Ali Şahin and Head of EU Delegation to Turkey Ambassador Christian Berger also delivered opening speeches. Deputy Minister for EU Affairs Şahin expressed Turkey's expectation for concrete and constructive steps regarding its EU membership bid. Highlighting that Turkey and EU have a shared future in a common region, Şahin said that organising a Turkey-EU summit under Bulgaria's

EU Presidency for the purpose of discussing current problems and re-establishing mutual trust would be a positive step.

Head of the EU Delegation to Turkey Ambassador Christian Berger underlined the Bulgarian Presidency's aim of "continuing to improve the EU dream" and the aim to sustain welfare and stability in Europe. He indicated that the EU Delegation to Turkey would be working in collaboration with Bulgaria.

İKv CHAIRMAN HAD MEETINGS AT THE MINISTRY FOR EU AFFAIRS AND THE EU DELEGATION TO TURKEY

İKv Chairman Ayhan Zeytinoğlu met with the Undersecretary of Ministry of EU Affairs Ambassador Selim Yenel and the Head of the EU Delegation to Turkey Ambassador Christian Berger in Ankara on 9 January 2018.

During the meetings at the Ministry for EU Affairs and the EU Delegation in Ankara, recent developments in Turkey-EU relations were on the agenda. İKV Chairman

Zeytinoğlu informed his interlocutors on İKV's recent activities and publications.

During his exchanges, while admitting that Turkey's accession negotiation process is in a stalemate, İKV Chairman Zeytinoğlu underscored that the revitalisation of the process would result in a win-win situation for both Turkey and the EU. İKV Chairman Zeytinoğlu

highlighted that progress in the modernisation of Turkey-EU Customs Union, visa liberalisation dialogue and cooperation on refugees could trigger cooperation and integration between Turkey and EU, and added that İKV would continue monitoring these processes closely. During the meetings, İKV Chairman Zeytinoğlu was accompanied by İKV Secretary General Assoc. Prof. Çiğdem Nas.

NEW PUBLICATIONS FROM İKV

Towards a Sustainable World: Global Agenda and Turkey

The publication titled "Towards a Sustainable World: Global Agenda and Turkey" (in Turkish) focuses on the global developments and trends in sustainability. In the İKV report, countries are evaluated in terms of sustainability and competitiveness indexes. Moreover, the report deals with the effects of greenhouse gases on the environment, the latest trends in sustainable energy and recent developments regarding the transition to low carbon economy.



The G20 and an Assessment of the German Presidency

The new İKV Brief entitled "The G20 and an Assessment of the German Presidency" written by Junior Researcher Merve Özcan aims to provide information on G20's history, structure and working procedures. Moreover, the brief attempts to assess the global political context ahead of the 12th G20 Summit organised in Hamburg under Germany's Presidency of G20 and the summit's agenda. Furthermore, the most profound output of the summit, the Leaders' Declaration, is analysed in detail to provide comprehensive information regarding the German Presidency.



TIMELINE JANUARY 2018

1	Bulgaria assumed the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU.
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4	President Erdoğan made his first visit abroad in 2018 to France.
5	FM Çavuşoğlu came together with his German counterpart Gabriel.
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7	The historic Iron Church was re-opened in the presence of President Erdoğan and Bulgarian PM Borissov.
8	İKv Chairman held a press conference on İKV's public opinion survey on perceptions on EU.
9	İKv attended the reception organised on the occasion of the Bulgarian EU Presidency in Ankara.
10	Croatian President Grabar-Kitarović paid an official visit to Turkey.
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19	Turkey's Treasury and EBRD signed a donor fund agreement.
20	Turkey launched "Operation Olive Branch" in Afrin, Syria.
21	
22	The new İKV Brief entitled "The G20 and an Assessment of the German Presidency" was published.
23	The global business elite gathered in Davos for the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum.
24	İKv discussed the modernisation of the Customs Union in Kütahya.
25	EU Affairs Minister Çelik met with senior EU officials in Brussels.
26	
27	
28	İKv published a brief note on data protection in the EU and Turkey on the occasion of Data Protection Day.
29	
30	İKv organised a panel entitled "What is Next for Turkey and Its Relations with the EU? The Modernization of Turkey-EU Customs Union" in Berlin.
31	

TURKEY&EU WATCH

MINISTER FOR EU AFFAIRS ÖMER ÇELİK GAVE AN INTERVIEW TO REUTERS NEWS AGENCY

In an interview published in Reuters on 19 January 2018, Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator Ömer Çelik commented on the latest developments in Turkey-EU relations.

Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator Ömer Çelik answered the questions of Reuters' representatives concerning expectations from Turkey-EU relations in 2018. Regarding proposals for an alternative relationship model with Turkey, Minister for EU Affairs Ömer Çelik stressed that Turkey would reject any offer of partnership with the EU which falls short of membership. Minister Çelik stated that such a proposal will not be considered by Ankara and underscored that Turkey has never left the negotiation table thanks to its strong belief in the full membership objective.

Regarding the Turkey-EU Statement of 18 March 2016, Minister Çelik stressed that as the EU has failed to fulfil its part of the statement such as the opening of new chapters or starting negotiations for the modernisation

of the Customs Union, there was no reason for Turkey to go on with this statement. Minister Çelik continued his words by criticizing the EU's failure to honour the 3+3 billion euro deal for refugees in Turkey. Moreover, Minister for EU Affairs Çelik emphasised the need to organise a Turkey-EU summit at the level of heads of state and government. Indicating that the Bulgarian Presidency of the EU Council viewed such a summit in a positive light, Minister Çelik expressed his concerns on Austrian EU Council Presidency's possibly negative approach vis-à-vis Turkey throughout the second half of the year.

With reference to the modernisation of the Turkey-EU Customs Union, Minister for EU Affairs Çelik criticized the approach adopted by the EU and Germany in particular by stating that upgrading



the Customs Union, which is merely a technical process, should not be interrupted by political disagreements. Furthermore, Minister for EU Affairs Çelik

expressed optimism about the visa liberalisation process and explained that the proposal prepared by Turkey needs to be approved by Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım and President

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan before being submitted to the EU. Lastly, Minister Çelik reiterated that Turkey awaited support from the EU in its fight against terrorism.

TURKEY LAUNCHED OPERATION OLIVE BRANCH AGAINST TERRORIST GROUPS IN AFRIN

Turkey launched "Operation Olive Branch" in order to clear Syria's Afrin region from YPG/PKK and ISIS.

On 20 January 2018, Turkey launched "Operation Olive Branch" to remove YPG/PKD/PKK and ISIS terrorist groups from Afrin, north-western Syria. Since July 2012, when the Assad regime in Syria left the region, Afrin has been a major hideout for the YPG/PKD/PKK which Turkey considers to be a threat to its national security. The operation aims to establish security and stability along Turkish borders and the region as well as protect Syrians from terrorist oppression and cruelty. The operation is being carried out under the framework of Turkey's rights based on international law. The operation was launched within the scope of legitimate defence as described by Article 51 of the UN Charter and UN Security Council resolutions 1624, 2170 and 2178. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that Turkish troops would continue to carry out Operation Olive



Branch until it reached its aims. In order to voice their support for Turkey's ongoing military operation leading representatives from the business world in Turkey gathered at a news conference at the headquarters of Union

of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) in Ankara on 23 January. Sixteen business-oriented organisations, including the Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (TURK-IS), HAK-IS Trade Union Confederation, the Confederation of

Turkish Tradesmen and Craftsmen (TESK), the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TUSIAD) and the Confederation of Public Servants Trade Unions (MEMUR-SEN) participated in the news conference. Speaking at the news conference,

TOBB President M. Rifat Hisarcıkloğlu expressed the Turkish business community's support with the words "We defend, and side with, our government's decision to protect our national security". Furthermore TOBB President Hisarcıkloğlu underscored that Turkey has used its rights arising from international norms and therefore this operation is rightful and suits international law. Lastly, Hisarcıkloğlu stressed that the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political unity of Syria is respected and the operation is supported by both Syrian immigrants and Syrian local residents.

As IKV, we desire that the Operation Olive Branch initiated by the Turkish Armed Forces in order to ensure the border security of our country, will succeed in a lossless manner. We are also delighted for the support that our allies have offered us. We want to draw attention to the need for all stakeholders to carry out good faith cooperation for the future of Syria in terms of clearing terrorist organizations and ensuring the integrity of the country.

TURKEY&EU WATCH

TURKEY'S TREASURY AND EBRD SIGNED A DONOR FUND AGREEMENT

On 19 January 2018, Turkey's Treasury and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) signed in Istanbul a donor fund agreement to support socially important projects. The agreement was signed by Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Şimşek on behalf of Turkey and EBRD President Suma Chakrabarti in the presence of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

During the ceremony, President Erdoğan praised EBRD's work and its successful model of sustainable and inclusive development led by the private sector. President Erdoğan expressed that Turkey had an active cooperation with EBRD which has moved to a new phase with the donor agreement. Furthermore, EBRD President Chakrabarti highlighted that Turkey had been a "star performer" ever since EBRD began investing in the country. He indicated that the signature of the agreement marked a new chapter in the relationship between Turkey and the EBRD. He also stressed that Turkey, in addition to being a founding member and a major investment destination for the Bank, is now making an important donor contribution to EBRD projects.



EBRD, which is one of the biggest investors in Turkey, has invested 10 billion euros since 2009 in various sectors in the Turkish economy. EBRD's investments are combined with support for policies

which help modernise the country's economy and build up its resilience. Turkey is a founding shareholder and the Bank's largest country of operations by investment volume. The donor fund agreement is aimed

to establish the creation of a fund with an amount of 25 million euros through which Turkey will co-finance socially important EBRD-led projects to boost economic growth and living conditions in the country

and the wider region. It is worth mentioning that Turkey signed for the first time a bilateral donor agreement with an international financial institution and became benefactor to the EBRD.

TURKISH GOVERNMENT EXTENDED STATE OF EMERGENCY



Turkey extended the state of emergency for three more months effective as of 19 January 2018. The Prime Ministry motion aiming to extend the state of emergency has been ratified by the Turkish Grand National Assembly on 18 January upon the recommendation of the Turkish National Security Council.

Turkey, first declared the state of emergency on 20 July 2016 just after the failed deadly coup attempt of the clandestine network orchestrated by Fethullah Terrorist Organisation (FETO) which caused loss of 250 lives and injury of 2,200 Turkish citizens. According to the Turkish Constitution, when the government foresees serious

indications of widespread violence interfering with the democratic environment or basic constitutional rights and freedom of its citizens, state of emergency could be declared. As reflected in the Turkish press, government sources emphasized that the state of emergency would be necessary in overcoming recent security threats.

TURKISH CYPRIOTS VOTED IN SNAP PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

On 7 January 2018, Turkish Cypriots went to the polls for snap parliamentary elections. The general elections, which were originally planned for July 2018, were moved forward to January after the parliament passed a motion last November.

Six of the eight political parties competing in the elections managed to pass the 5 percent threshold required for representation in the 50-seat parliament. None of the parties however won enough votes to emerge as the ruling party.

The centre-right National Unity Party (UBP), led by current Prime Minister Hüseyin Özgürgün came first winning 35.57 percent of the votes. The Republican Turkish Party (CTP) came second with 20.97 percent and was followed by the Peoples' Party (HP) which won 17.10 percent of the votes. These were followed by the Communal Liberation Party-New Forces (TKP-YG), the Nationalist Democracy Party (MDP) and the Rebirth Party (YDP). The centre-right UBP increased its share by

7 percent compared to the 2013 general elections and won 21 seats. The CTP on the other hand, lost around 17 percent and won 12 seats in the 50-seat parliament.

On 24 January, President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Mustafa Akıncı assigned UBP leader Özgürgün with the task of forming a government. UBP leader Özgürgün is currently carrying out coalition talks with representatives of other parties and has 15 days to form a new government.



HIGH-LEVEL EXCHANGES

PRESIDENT ERDOĞAN MADE THE FIRST STATE VISIT OF THE YEAR TO FRANCE



President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan paid his first official visit of 2018 on 5 January to France upon the invitation of French President Emmanuel Macron. The visit was interpreted by many, as a sign of Ankara's efforts to improve the relations between Turkey and the EU. During the meeting at the Élysée Palace, the two heads of states discussed bilateral relations, coordination in the fight against terrorism, cooperation in defense industry and furthering business ties between Turkey and France.

Concerning Turkey's EU bid, French President Macron underscored that it was crucial for Turkey to remain part of the European Convention on Human Rights, European Court of Human Rights and the Council of Europe and underscored the importance of maintaining the dialogue with Turkey. Macron also underlined the need to create a new

formulation of partnership to preserve Turkey's integration to the EU.

The two leaders exchanged views on various joint problems, from ongoing efforts to find a political settlement to the Syrian civil war, to the tensions created by the US administration's recognition of Jerusalem as the "undivided" capital of Israel. The fight against terrorism especially against PKK and ISIS was the topic that the two heads of states had as a common priority. In this respect, President Erdoğan and President Macron signed key agreements on defence (between ASELSAN, ROKETSAN and Franco-Italian EUROSSAM defence consortium), banking (Eximbank and Bpifrance) and aircraft sales (Turkish Airlines and Airbus), and agreed to boost the bilateral trade volume from the current level of 13.5 billion euros to 20 billion euros and to strengthen the ties between Turkey and France.

PRESIDENT ERDOĞAN AND BULGARIAN PM BORISSOV RE-OPENED THE IRON CHURCH

On 7 January 2018, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov re-opened the Bulgarian St. Stephen Church following a seven-year-long period of restoration which was co-funded by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and the Bulgarian government. Being located in the historic Balat neighbourhood on the shore of the Golden Horn, the re-opening of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church made of cast iron and thereby known as the "Iron Church" was highly anticipated. During his speech at the ceremony, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan remarked that bringing the famous Iron Church into use was a crucial development

for multi-faith and international world. Likewise, Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım evaluated the re-opening of the Iron Church as one of the most prominent examples of Turkey's tolerance towards other religions. Furthermore, Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov expressed his gratitude towards Turkey and appreciation of the representation of Christianity beside the Golden Horn.

The timing of the re-opening of the Iron Church was symbolic as an encounter between Turkey and EU for Bulgaria has assumed the Presidency of the EU Council on 1 January for a six month period. During his speech at the ceremony, Bulgarian Prime Minister Borissov

indicated that Turkey is the biggest neighbour of the EU and thereby underlined the need to normalise Turkey-EU relations in 2018. Besides, Borissov's statement on Bulgaria's willingness to contribute to Turkey's EU membership process was promising for Turkey-EU relations under the Bulgarian Presidency of the EU Council. Following the ceremony, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan hosted Borissov in the Presidential Pavilion at the Yıldız Palace. Deputy Prime Minister Hakan Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Berat Albayrak along with Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator Ömer Çelik also participated in the meeting.



CROATIAN PRESIDENT GRABAR-KITAROVIĆ VISITED TURKEY

On 9 January 2018, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan met with Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović who was on a one-day state visit to Turkey. During the meeting, President Erdoğan and his Croatian counterpart discussed all aspects of Turkey-Croatia relations and cooperation opportunities regarding regional and international issues. Economy, trade, culture, politics, the fight against terrorism as well

as regional and international issues including Syria and Iraq were the main items on the agenda of the meeting.

Speaking at the joint press conference after the meeting, President Erdoğan indicated that he and his Croatian counterpart agreed to further reinforce cooperation between the two countries in the international arena. Erdoğan told reporters that during the meeting

they also exchanged views on how to enhance cooperation on EU-related matters. In a reply to a question on Turkey's EU membership, Croatian President Grabar-Kitarović, shared her insights as a former member of Croatia's negotiating team and stated that although it was up to Turkey to define the future context of its relations with the EU, Turkey staying on its European course was of vital importance to the EU.

HIGH-LEVEL EXCHANGES

FOREIGN MINISTER ÇAVUŞOĞLU MET GERMAN COUNTERPART IN GOSLAR



Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu paid a visit to Germany on 6 January 2018 to meet with his German counterpart, Sigmar Gabriel. Germany's acting Foreign Minister hosted his counterpart at the Kaiserpfalz Imperial Palace in his hometown of Goslar, where the two parties have signalled cooperation to improve and overcome the ongoing tension in the bilateral relations between Turkey and Germany.

Speaking at the joint press conference following the meeting, both foreign ministers exchanged reconciliatory messages. Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu expressed his belief that the disagreements between Ankara and Berlin would be overcome through dialogue.

Pointing to the historic links between Turkey and Germany, German Foreign Minister Gabriel stressed that despite their differences of opinion, it was their duty to overcome all difficulties in bilateral relations.

The strained relations between the two NATO allies and trade partners seem to ease and improve following Turkey's decision to release the sixth German citizen from jail and Germany's sign of commitment to Turkey's fight against terrorism. With a 3 million-strong Turkish community residing in Germany, Turkey's role in curbing migration to EU and the trade volume between two countries, which reached 174 billion euros in the last five years, in mind improving bilateral relations between the two countries will definitely be mutually beneficial.

AUSTRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER KNEISSL VISITED TURKEY

On 25 January 2018, Austrian Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs Karin Kneissl visited Turkey. In the context of the visit, the Austrian Foreign Minister met with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu. According to a statement by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, during the meeting the two foreign ministers voiced their common desire to open a new page in Turkish-Austrian relations. The meeting was hailed as a positive step for the normalisation

of the strained relations between the two countries.

During the joint press conference following the meeting, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu announced that Ankara and Vienna agreed to normalize their relations and underscored the importance of speaking to each other directly rather than communicating through the press. Austrian Foreign Minister Kneissl while acknowledging the presence of disagreements on certain issues, highlighted the fact

that there were numerous issues on which Vienna and Ankara could negotiate.

As might be recalled, the relations between the two countries have been strained since 2016 due to the restrictions imposed by the Austrian authorities on Turkish politicians who wanted to campaign in the country ahead of the constitutional referendum in Turkey. Moreover, Turkey has criticized the Austrian government over its populist rhetoric.



MINISTER FOR EU AFFAIRS ÇELİK HAD MEETINGS WITH KEY EU OFFICIALS IN BRUSSELS



On 25 January 2018, Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator Ömer Çelik visited Brussels for exchanges with key EU officials. During his visit, Minister Çelik met with EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini and First Vice-President of the European Commission Frans Timmermans.

During the meetings, Turkey's EU accession process and the latest developments in Turkey-EU relations were discussed in detail, and EU Affairs Minister Çelik informed his European interlocutors about Turkey's Operation Olive Branch against terrorist organisations in Afrin.

According to a statement by the European External Action Service, "EU's commitment to open and direct channels of communication with Turkey was once again re-confirmed

with the meeting and will continue high-level political dialogues, including on foreign policy and sectoral cooperation."

Following the meetings, Minister Çelik held a press conference at the Permanent Delegation of Turkey to the EU. Concerning his exchanges with EU officials on the fight against terrorism, Minister Çelik expressed Turkey's expectation that European allies back its legitimate initiative in Afrin. On Turkey-EU relations, Minister Çelik stated that his main message to his European counterparts was that the EU should not discriminate between perspectives on Turkey and the Balkans. He also expressed the need for a Turkey-EU summit to be convened as soon as possible. On visa liberalisation, Çelik confirmed that Turkey was in the last phase of the process.

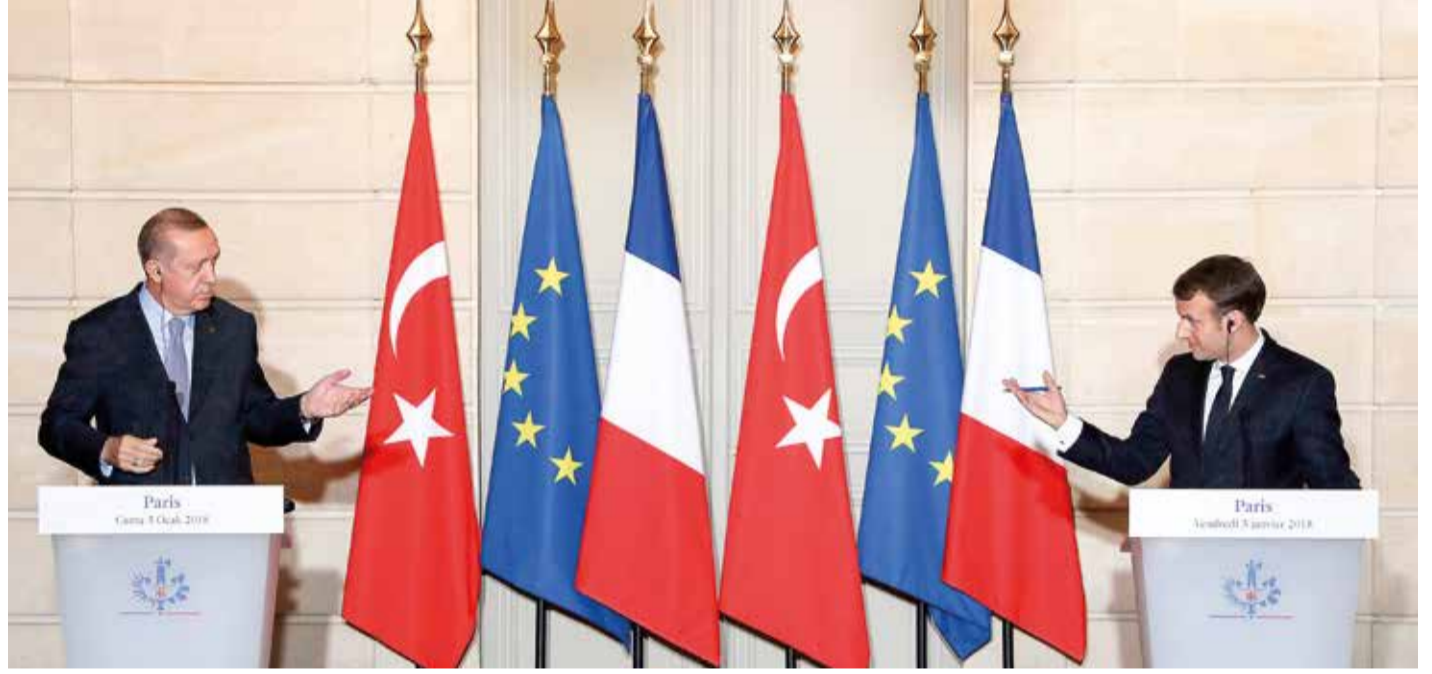
TURKEY TAKES STEPS TO NORMALISE TIES WITH KEY EU MEMBER STATES

Thanks to high-level visits, we witness a political thaw in Turkey-EU relations following one of the tensest periods.

Çisel İLERİ,
IKV Research Director

If the famous author Charles Dickens were to witness Turkey-EU relations in 2017, he probably would have defined it as "it was tensest of times". Traditionally, we started 2017 with the hope to make progress in Turkey's EU accession process, which has been stagnant since the opening of the Chapter 33 on Financial and Budgetary Provisions on 30 June 2016. However, there were important breaking points in Turkey-EU relations in 2017, such as the 16 April referendum in Turkey, where 51.41 percent of voters voted in favour of the 18-item constitutional amendment package. Apart from that, rising criticism on part of the EU regarding the backsliding in complying with political criteria as it had been highlighted in the last Progress Report, the tension in the relations with leading Member States such as the Netherlands and Germany led to perhaps the tensest period since the beginning of accession negotiations.

With the start of the New Year, we can say that there has been an effort from both sides to restore Turkey-EU relations. For that purpose, Member States like Germany and the Netherlands, the ones which Turkey had tensions with last year, started to exchange reconciliatory messages. President Erdoğan's visit to France, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu's meeting with his German counterpart Gabriel and Austrian Foreign Minister Knesissl, friendly remarks by the Dutch Prime Minister Rutte regarding Turkey, were perceived as ice breakers in Turkey-EU relations. Moreover, an important external development that brought Turkey and EU countries on the same page was US President Trump's decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Turkey together with Yemen, initiated a draft resolution which called on all countries to refrain from establishing diplomatic missions in Jerusalem. This draft resolution was accepted in UN General Assembly with the support of many EU countries. Following that, President Erdoğan mentioned that Turkey had no problems with



Germany or the Netherlands, referred to the Dutch and German leaders as "old friends," and shared Ankara's willingness to have good ties with the EU.

President Erdoğan's Visit to France

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan paid an official visit to France on the first days of the New Year with an agenda consisting of Turkey-EU relations, the fight against terrorism, refugee crisis, the situation in Syria, the status of Jerusalem and bilateral relations between Turkey and France.

At the joint press conference with French President Emmanuel Macron, Erdoğan mentioned that Turkey and France enjoy a 500-year-old friendship, which has now been strengthened by the steps both parties have taken and deals that they had made. Regarding Turkey-EU relations, he underlined the unique status of Turkey, which has been kept waiting at the EU's door for 54 years. He criticized EU's disingenuous approach towards Turkey and talked about how fed up Turkish citizens have become.

President Macron, who is seen as a strong influencer in the EU, on the other hand stated that under the current circumstances, it was not possible to open new chapters in

Turkey's accession talks. It turned out that both parties embraced a realistic approach towards Turkey-EU relations and agreed on the importance of "anchoring" Turkey to Europe.

Of course the Erdoğan-Macron meeting was not just about Turkey-EU relations, both parties also discussed regional issues such as the situation in Iraq, Syria, Libya and Egypt as well as Israeli-Palestinian relations and Al-Quds. President Erdoğan stated that: "It is my belief that our close cooperation is of paramount importance in terms of regional and global peace. The current trade volume is not an amount that can satisfy Turkey or France. There is a trade volume of 13.5 billion euros. We desire this amount to go up and I believe that if we can manage to do so, Turkey and France can start walking towards 20 billion euros in bilateral trade volume, a target we have formerly set."

As it is well known, France is the fifth biggest economic power in the world and the second biggest in Europe. Turkey, on the other hand, is the 13th biggest economy in the world and the fifth biggest in Europe in terms of purchasing power parity.

Small Steps towards Repairing Turkey-EU Relations

The day following President Erdoğan's official visit to France, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu met with his

German counterpart Sigmar Gabriel in Germany. The unofficial visit of Çavuşoğlu to Goslar, the hometown of Sigmar Gabriel, showed the willingness of both parties to overcome the differences in their bilateral relations through dialogue. At the joint news conference with Gabriel, Çavuşoğlu told reporters that although Turkey and Germany do not need to agree on Turkey's EU membership process; both sides needed to overcome disagreements on issues such as the modernisation of the Customs Union. Despite not being an EU Member State, Turkey has been part of the Customs Union since 1996. However, the Turkey-EU Customs Union does not cover agriculture, services or public procurement.

In fact, reducing the tension between Turkey and the key EU Member States and fostering a positive agenda is a necessity for all parties, considering the risks which have arisen in global politics. Turkey and EU countries have to face an increasing number of issues like the fight against radical terrorism, refugees, the Israeli-Palestinian question and the Syrian War or even maintaining the nuclear deal with Iran. Acting on these areas of common interest in cooperation requires open dialogue channels.

On the other side of the coin stand the economic ties between Turkey and EU. Key EU Member States like the Netherlands and Germany, with which the relations were strained in 2017, are also the largest investors in Turkey and provide the largest markets for Turkish goods. In order to improve the economic ties between Turkey and EU Member States, the modernisation of the Turkey-EU Customs Union provides a unique opportunity for both parties.

The visit of President Erdoğan to France was evaluated by experts as "a new era of realism in Turkey-EU relations". If this realism means identifying and acting on areas of common interest, then delaying the opening of the negotiations on the modernisation of the Customs Union will definitely not serve it. Lately, it was announced the Bulgarian Presidency of the EU intends to organise a Turkey-EU summit, the date of which is yet to be confirmed. Although bringing both parties together and signalling rapprochement in the relations is clearly important, remembering that Turkey is an accession country and part of EU's enlargement agenda like other candidate states in the Western Balkans is vital. Therefore, Turkey should also be part of the special summit on enlargement which is going to be organised in Sofia under the Bulgarian EU Presidency.