



İKVM NİTİMLİ



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TURKEY-EU JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE MET IN ADANA

On 20-21 February, the Turkey-EU Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) met for the 37th time in Adana.



Assoc. Prof. Çiğdem NAS,
IKV Secretary General

The Turkey-EU JCC, where representatives of Turkish employers and employee associations as well as NGOs are members, represents the social partners on both sides. On the Turkish side, they include the TOBB (Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey), TİSK (Turkish Employers Association), İKV and Banks Association of Turkey as representatives of the employers, Türk-İş, Memursen, Hak-İş, and Kamu-Sen as representatives of employees and workers, and TZOB (Union of Turkish Chambers of Agriculture), TESK (Confederation of Turkish Tradesmen and Craftsmen), KAGİDER (Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey) and Turkish International Industrial Relations Association as representatives of other organised civil society organisations.

On the EU side, they are comprised of members of the Economic and Social Committee (EESC) including Confederation of Employers and Industrialists in Bulgaria, Lithuanian Apparel and Textile Industry Association, National Confederation of Romanian Employers, Greek Tourism Confederation on the employers side, Italian Labour Union, Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria, Netherlands Trade

Union Confederation on the employee side, German Association of Consulting Engineers, Greek National Confederation of Disabled People, European Disability Forum and Farmer's Unions on the part of other organized civil society organizations.

The meeting was held in an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding. Turkey's Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator Ömer Çelik made the opening speech together with the Co-Chairs M. Rifat Hisarcıklıoğlu of TOBB and Annie van Wezel of the Netherlands Trade Union Confederation. It was Minister Çelik himself who first suggested that the meeting be held in Adana, his hometown. Minister Çelik especially praised the JCC for being the only joint Turkey-EU institution where a moment of silence was observed in memory of those killed while trying to oppose the coup plotters on 15 July 2016.

The moderation that characterised the JCC did not mean however that there were no criticisms or denouncements. The EU side in particular was critical of the political and human rights situation in Turkey and demanded an ending of the state of emergency as soon as possible. Turkish side on the other hand, tried to explain the situation in Turkey and the security threats facing the country. They also tried to provide a portrait of the civil society in Turkey, with a view to giving

an idea about the working conditions and roles and responsibilities of trades unions. Several presentations were made by representatives of the participant organisations about the current developments in Turkish economy, modernisation of the Turkey-EU Customs Union, Syrian refugees in Turkey, blue economy and developments with regard to social rights.

Relevance of the Social Partners for Turkey and EU Relations

In line with the role attributed to the social partners in the making of EU policies and decisions in the social sphere, the social partners were also given a prominent role in the conduct of Turkey and EU relations. Together with the Joint Parliamentary Committee, the JCC became one of the two organs that aimed to place Turkey and EU relations on a pluralistic platform and engage representatives of civil society for the enhancement of bilateral relations. The JCC reflects the organisational logic of the EESC including representation by three societal groups; employers, employees and workers and other organised interests. The JCC is set to meet every six months with a view to debating Turkey-EU relations, Turkey's progress towards the goal of membership, and progress in the political and social situation in the country. The Turkey-EU

JCC was able to come up with a joint communique after each meeting, hence providing for an impetus in the relations.

IKV Chairman at the JCC Meeting

IKV Chairman Ayhan Zeytinoğlu also participated at the JCC meeting upon the invitation of the TOBB President M. Rifat Hisarcıklıoğlu and made a presentation on the modernisation of the Turkey-EU Customs Union. IKV Chairman Zeytinoğlu outlined the expectations from a modernised Customs Union such as improved dispute settlement mechanisms, removal of non-tariff barriers such as transport quotas and visa requirements, Turkey's involvement in the trade policy organs of the EU, and negotiation of free trade agreements between the EU and third countries in parallel with Turkey. Zeytinoğlu also dwelled upon the opportunities associated with an expansion of the Turkey-EU trade relationship to new sectors including services, agriculture and public procurement. Citing economic impact analysis studies, IKV Chairman said that important welfare gains are expected from such an expansion of the Customs Union, on average 1.44 to 1.90 percent increase in Turkey's GDP. "While important gains are expected, adaptation costs are also quite considerable and should be taken into account especially in the

area of agriculture", Mr. Zeytinoğlu added. IKV Chairman also talked about the significance of the Customs Union modernisation process as a mechanism that can provide an impetus to Turkey's integration to the EU single market. He said that the process is at the moment on hold due to reservations by the EU regarding the political situation in Turkey. IKV Chairman said that if negotiations could be opened, it would provide for an improvement in the political situation in the country and bring Turkey closer to EU standards.

Latest Developments in Turkey and EU Relations

2018 took off as a more moderate year in terms of Turkey-EU relations. A thawing of the tension in Turkey-EU ties was observed as dialogue mechanisms were re-opened and high-level exchanges were conducted such as President Erdoğan's visit to France, the meeting between the Turkish and German Foreign Ministers over a cup of Turkish tea, the re-opening of the "Iron Church" in Istanbul and the meeting between Prime Minister Yıldırım and Chancellor Merkel which also led to the release of the Turkish-German journalist Deniz Yücel. These meetings attested to a positive sign that silent diplomacy was replacing the megaphone diplomacy of 2017. **PAGE 2**



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FROM THE FIRST PAGE

However, Salih Muslim's European tour including Czechia and Germany and his release by the Czech authorities again created a bitter taste in the Turkish government's approach to the EU. In the face of pressing circumstances, such as ongoing conflict and violence in Syria, it becomes more difficult for the parties to find a common ground despite the urgency of international action.

While the EU is busy putting its own house into order following the Brexit decision, Turkey is also involved with a transition to a new executive presidency regime and a military operation in Syria. The state of emergency and problems in the sphere of rights and freedoms as well as rule of law create an obstacle in progress in Turkey's EU journey. The Summit meeting between President Erdoğan and Chairs of EU institutions set to take place on March 26 in Varna provides an opportunity where a new understanding may be reached between the parties. The stalemate in Turkey-EU relations can be overcome by the initiation of a new process such as the modernisation of the Turkey-EU Customs Union and visa liberalisation.

Turkey had already presented a position paper to the European Commission including measures to fulfil the remaining criteria for visa-free travel for Turkish citizens. It should be taken into account by EU authorities that it will not only be Turkey and Turkish citizens that will benefit from such a process but the EU Member States. By fulfilling all the criteria for visa liberalisation, Turkey will be in a much more prepared position to be able to cooperate with the EU institutions and Member States in such matters as control of irregular migration, fight against organised crime, return of illegal migrants, dismantling of migrant smuggling, anti-corruption, personal data protection and cooperation in police and judicial matters.

Regarding the Varna Summit, Chair of the European Council Donald Tusk announced that the decision whether or not to hold the Summit would be taken in the Council meeting on 22-23 March. Turkey's prevention of the Italian vessel travelling towards the island of Cyprus in order to carry out gas exploration was protested by the EU as an infringement of the sovereign rights of a Member State. It is the old Cyprus question again which is creating a problem in Turkey and EU relations. It is yet to be seen whether the Varna Summit meeting will actually take place. Keeping in mind that dialogue is the key to the resolution of problems, we hope that the meeting will take place and create an opportunity to carry bilateral relations to a new level.

IKV AGENDA

IKV DISCUSSED TURKEY-EU RELATIONS IN SOFIA

The IKV delegation led by IKV Chairman Ayhan Zeytinoğlu visited Bulgaria's capital city of Sofia on 26-27 February 2018. In the context of the visit, IKV Chairman Zeytinoğlu was accompanied by IKV Vice-Chairman Prof. Halûk Kabaaliçoğlu, Ankara University EU Research Center (ATAUM) Director Prof. Sanem Baykal, IKV Secretary General Assoc. Prof. Çiğdem Nas, Research Director Çisel İleri and Strategy and Resource Management Director Gökhan Kilit.

On the first day of the visit, the delegation was received by Turkey's Ambassador to Bulgaria Dr. Hasan Ulusoy at the Turkish Embassy in Sofia. During the visit, in which Bulgaria's EU Presidency priorities and Turkish-Bulgarian relations were discussed, IKV Chairman Zeytinoğlu briefed the Ambassador on the foundation's recent activities.

On the second day of the visit, a conference entitled "Turkey-EU Relations and the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU"



was organised in cooperation with the University of National and World Economy. The conference was held in the context of "EU Presidencies and Turkey" project carried out by the IKV since 2010. During the conference,

following a brief introduction regarding the history of Turkey-EU relations, economic and trade relations between Turkey and the EU as well as the political and security dimension of Turkey-Bulgaria relations

were discussed. The need to modernise the Turkey-EU Customs Union and evaluate the current developments in the EU and Turkey-EU relations in accordance with what is aimed in the future were touched upon.

TURKEY-EU JPC VICE-CHAIR KYRKOS PAID A VISIT TO THE IKV



On 16 February 2018, Turkey-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) Vice-Chair, S&D MEP Miltiadis Kyrkos visited the IKV and met with IKV Chairman Ayhan Zeytinoğlu, members of IKV Board of Directors and IKV staff.

The state of play in Turkey-EU relations and prospects for the future, the visa liberalisation dialogue, refugee cooperation and the modernisation of Customs Union were among the issues covered during the meeting which took place at the IKV Office. IKV Chairman Ayhan Zeytinoğlu highlighted the importance of Turkey's EU membership bid during the meeting. MEP Kyrkos expressed the need to find ways to enhance Turkey-EU cooperation and underlined the need to take concrete steps for bringing the state of emergency in Turkey to an end.

DEPUTY MINISTER OF ECONOMY VISITED IKV'S BRUSSELS OFFICE

On 27 February 2018, Deputy Minister of Economy Fatih Metin paid a visit to IKV's Brussels Office and met with IKV Brussels Representative M. Haluk Nuray. During the meeting, Turkey-EU relations and issues

related to economy, including the modernisation of the Customs Union, were discussed. Deputy Minister also received information regarding IKV's activities for which he expressed his appreciation.



WE ARE DEEPLY SADDENED BY OUR LOSSES

We, as IKV, pray for the grace of Allah upon our soldiers who were martyred in Afrin and extend our condolences to our nation.

In this operation, which is being undertaken with legitimate reasons for Turkey's security, we expect the support of our allies within

NATO. While expressing our sorrow for the weapons distributed to PYD/YPG for being used against Turkish soldiers, we hope that the

necessary steps for those weapons to be collected and annihilated will be taken without further loss of time.

IKV AGENDA

BREXIT'S IMPLICATIONS FOR TURKEY DISCUSSED IN ANKARA AND ISTANBUL



IKV organised a round table debate and an international conference entitled "Impact of Brexit on the External Economic Relations of the EU and Implications for Turkey-EU Customs Union" in cooperation with ATAUM on 8-9 February 2018 in Ankara and Istanbul, respectively.

During the opening speeches of the conference and the debate, IKV Chairman Zeytinoğlu and ATAUM Director Prof. Sanem Baykal emphasised that the Brexit process will have a determining role in the future of the EU.

Following the opening speeches, Prof. Andrea Ott from Maastricht University and Ph. Dr. Narin Tezcan from TMC Asser Institute approached UK's withdrawal from EU membership from the angle

of commercial relations and free movement of people and goods.

In the next session, the economic implications of Brexit were also touched upon by Prof. Çınar Özen from Ankara University, Prof. Refik Erzan from Boğaziçi University, Prof. Jim Rollo from Sussex University and Prof. Arzu Akkoyunlu Wigley from Hacettepe University. Firstly, Prof. Erzan informed the participants regarding the transformation that has taken place in global trade. Afterwards, Prof. Rollo elaborated on the post-Brexit trade relations the UK will establish with countries that have preferential trade agreements with the EU. As the last speaker of the second session, Dr. Arzu Akkoyunlu Wigley shared her analysis on Brexit's

possible impacts on Turkey-EU trade relations.

Yaprak Alp, Deputy-Director General for EU Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Elif Gürsoy from the Ministry of Economy's Directorate General for EU, Lale Çelik, Director of Single Market and Competition at the Ministry for EU Affairs and British Embassy's Brexit Coordinator and Under-Secretary of Economy Nicholas Cannon participated in the last session of the conference in Ankara. The speakers shared their views in regard to the modernisation of Turkey-EU Customs Union and elaborated on the work carried out by their respective ministries, and highlighted Turkey's determination to become a full member of the EU.

JOINT IKV-IVM PANEL ON TAX LAW

The panel entitled "Problems and Solutions Related to the Law on the Collection Procedure of Public Receivables" was held in Istanbul by IKV in collaboration with Istanbul Tax Center (IVM) on 1 February 2018.

During the first session of the panel, issues of guarantees, liens and the problems related to the Law on the Collection Procedure of Public Receivables were addressed within the framework of the current tax legislation.

During the second session of the panel, necessity of some alterations for solving injustices



in taxation was addressed. Information regarding electronic distraint execution, problems concerning payment order and declaration of property-related

provisions were also given. Finally, issues such as legal and criminal liabilities of shareholders and legal representatives of companies were discussed.

IKV SECRETARY GENERAL DELIVERED A SPEECH AT "TURKEY AND TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS" SYMPOSIUM

On 7 February 2018, IKV Secretary General Assoc. Prof. Çiğdem Nas delivered a speech on the modernisation of Turkey-EU Customs Union at the "Turkey and Transatlantic Relations Symposium" organised by the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA).

During her speech, IKV Secretary General Nas discussed the reasons underlying the need for the

modernisation of the Customs Union. IKV Secretary General Nas explained the scope of the modernisation of the Turkey-EU Customs Union and elaborated that its modernisation will be aimed at both addressing the problematic aspects concerning the implementation of the Association Council Decision establishing the Customs Union and expanding its scope to areas such as agriculture,

services and public procurement.

IKV Secretary General highlighted that the modernisation of the Customs Union is one of the phenomenal areas which could bring the much-needed dynamism to Turkey-EU relations in the current context in which accession talks have ground to a halt and relations with some member states have become strained.

TIMELINE FEBRUARY 2018

- 1 The panel entitled "Problems and Solutions Related to the Law on the Collection Procedure of Public Receivables" was organised by IKV in collaboration with IVM.
- 2
- 3 Turkish President Erdoğan paid a two-day visit to the Vatican and Rome (4-5 February).
- 4
- 5 Presidents Tusk and Juncker invited President Erdoğan to a Turkey-EU Summit which would be held in Varna on 26 March.
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- 7 IKV organised an international conference on Brexit and its impact on the EU and Turkey in cooperation with Ankara University's EU Research Centre.
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- 9 The roundtable debate entitled "Impact of Brexit on the External Economic Relations of the EU and Implications for Turkey-EU Customs Union" was held in Istanbul.
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- 15 Turkish Prime Minister Yıldırım came together with German Chancellor Merkel.
- 16 Turkey-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee Vice-Chair MEP Miltiadis Kyrkos visited IKV.
- 17 EU Affairs Minister Çelik attended the Gymnich meeting (15-16 February).
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- 20 IKV published a brief note on the G20 Presidency of Argentina.
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- 23 37th meeting of the Turkey-EU Joint Consultative Committee was held in Adana (20-21 February).
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- 26 IKV published a new brief note on the future of the social dimension of Europe.
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- 28 EU27 leaders met for the informal meeting of the European Council.
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TURKEY-EU SUMMIT TO BE CONVENED ON 26 MARCH

The much-anticipated Turkey-EU Summit, which will be hosted by Bulgaria, is set to be convened on 26 March 2018 in the port city of Varna.

The EU-Turkey leaders' meeting, which is scheduled to take place on 26 March 2018 in Varna, will be attended by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of the European Council Donald Tusk, President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker and Prime Minister of Bulgaria Boyko Borissov.

As stated in the invitation letter addressed to President Erdoğan, the agenda of the meeting will cover issues of mutual interest and recent developments in Turkey, including the rule of law and fundamental freedoms and prospects for EU-Turkey relations, as well as regional and international issues. The leaders will also discuss the means of

moving the EU-Turkey relationship forward on the basis of mutual respect and common interests.

President of the European Council Donald Tusk announced at the Informal European Council meeting on 23 February that they are ready to cooperate with Turkey and explained that they would assess at the March European Council whether the conditions are ready to hold the Leaders' Meeting with Turkey in Varna on 26 March. He also sent an invitation letter to the President Erdoğan proposing to hold an EU-Turkey leaders' meeting in Varna on 26 March.

The meeting will build on the previous leaders' meeting of 25 May 2017. Intensified exchanges on various areas of EU-Turkey relations



have taken place since then; such as high-level dialogues between the EU and Turkey on transport, economic

cooperation, counter-terrorism and foreign policy. At the meeting which took place on 25 May, leaders agreed

to structure an open dialogue, at all levels, through a process of engagement in areas of common interest.

KEY TURKISH OFFICIALS ATTENDED THE MUNICH SECURITY CONFERENCE

Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım gave a speech on Turkey's security perspective and its conception of fight against terrorism at the 54th Munich Security Conference.

The 54th Munich Security Conference was held on 16-18 February 2018. The agenda of the conference included pressing global and regional security issues, such as the conflict in Syria, refugee crisis, deteriorating relations between the Gulf States, political developments in the Sahel region, North Korea's nuclear and missile programs and the EU's role in the future. Since 1963, the Munich Security Conference has been a key annual gathering for world leaders, political and military decision-makers to discuss global and regional security challenges. The conference is also considered to be one of the most representative and authoritative international platforms on conflicts, threats, and challenges to contemporary world politics.

This year's conference gathered over 500 participants from many countries of the world, including more than 20 heads of state and government, over 40 ministers of foreign affairs and ministers of defence.

Turkey was represented at the Conference by Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım as well as Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and National Defence Minister Nurettin Canikli. On the second day of the Conference, Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım gave a speech on Turkey's security perspective and its conception of fight against terrorism. Prime Minister Yıldırım spoke of the successes Turkey had in the fight against ISIS, how Turkey was able to successfully prevent the mass flow of refugees to Europe and the justifications for the ongoing counter-terrorism operation in Afrin. Yıldırım said that Turkey is not just protecting its own borders, but those of NATO and Europe, as well. On the sidelines of the conference, Yıldırım held separate closed-door meetings with leaders, including European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili, Polish Premier Mateusz Morawiecki, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the Chair of Greece's New Democracy Party and his Iraqi counterpart Haider al-Abadi.

At the conference during a panel on Middle Eastern issues, entitled "Widening Gulf", Foreign Minister



Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu evaluated the current situation in the region and the period ahead and underlined the importance of joint efforts and mediation for peace, stability and prosperity. Within the margins of

the conference, Minister Çavuşoğlu also had bilateral meetings with his counterparts, including Foreign Minister Erlan Abyldaev of Kyrgyzstan, Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel of Germany and Foreign

Minister Ditmir Bushati of Albania. Furthermore, Minister Çavuşoğlu met with UN Special envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, and reiterated Turkey's commitment to the political solution for Syria.

DUTCH PARLIAMENT TOOK A CONTROVERSIAL DECISION REGARDING THE 1915 EVENTS

On 22 February 2018, the lower house of the Dutch Parliament – the Dutch House of Representatives adopted two motions regarding the Armenian allegations concerning the 1915 events. The first motion has recognised the 1915 events as “genocide”. However, to date the Dutch government has been going for the word “issue” to describe the 1915 events. Additionally, the second motion calls for the participation of a high-ranking Dutch official such as a minister or state secretary in the commemoration ceremony that is organised in the capital of Armenia, Yerevan, every 24 April. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the opinions of the lower house have no binding effect on the Dutch government which has already declared that it “only recognises events as ‘genocide’ if that description is supported by a binding UN Security Council resolution or a verdict from an international court”. On the other hand, the motions are likely to strain further the already tense relations between Turkey and the Netherlands. As it can be recalled, the bilateral relations between the countries soured ahead of the Dutch general elections on 14 March 2017 due to the Dutch government’s controversial decisions refusing granting a landing permit to a plane carrying Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and barring Turkish Minister of Family and Social Policy Fatma Betül Sayan Kaya from entering the Turkish Consulate in Rotterdam.

The Turkish Ministry of



Foreign Affairs issued a press release strongly condemning the decision of the Dutch House of Representatives. Commenting on the controversial motions adopted by the Dutch House of Representatives, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu

stated that the motions were neither legally binding nor have any validity. Having stated that the mentioned baseless decision has a place neither in history nor in justice, the press release by Ministry of Foreign Affairs underlined that there were casualties on both sides during the

First World War. Furthermore, it was expressed that the jurisprudence in European law and the decisions of European Court of Human Rights confirm Turkey’s stance regarding the Armenian issue. In the press release, Ankara took note of Amsterdam’s decision not to follow

the lower house of the parliament in its assessment recognising the 1915 events as “genocide” and its clarification that being present at the commemoration ceremony in Yerevan would not imply as an affirmation of Armenian allegations regarding the 1915 events.

NEW FOUR-PARTY COALITION GOVERNMENT FORMED IN TRNC

Following the parliamentary elections in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) on 7 January 2018, four political parties have struck a deal paving the way for a new coalition government to be formed under the leadership of the left-wing Republican Turkish Party (CTP) Tufan Erhürman.

Although the ruling National Unity Party (UBP) led by Hüseyin Özgürgün had come first in the elections winning 35.6 percent of the votes and taking 21 seats in the parliament – five short from obtaining absolute majority in the 50-seat parliament, Özgürgün was unable to form a government and the mandate to form a government was passed on to Erhürman leader of CTP which came second in the elections

winning 17 percent of the votes and getting 12 seats in the parliament.

On 2 February, the agreement among CTP, People’s Party (HP), Democrat Party (DP) and the Communal Democracy Party (TDP) was formalised and the new government was approved by TRNC President Mustafa Akıncı. The four parties have 27 seats in the parliament and were collectively backed by 55 percent of the Turkish Cypriot electorate in the 7 January elections.

In the new government which will be led by Prime Minister Tufan Erhürman, HP leader Kudret Özersay will serve as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, DP leader Serdar Denktaş as Finance Minister, and former Chief Negotiator Özdil Nami as Minister of Economy and Energy.



HIGH-LEVEL EXCHANGES

PRESIDENT RECEP TAYYİP ERDOĞAN PAID AN OFFICIAL VISIT TO ITALY AND THE VATICAN



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan paid a two-day visit to Rome on 4-5 February 2018 during which he also visited the Vatican. Erdoğan's official visit marks the first visit to the Vatican by a Turkish head of state since 1959. During the visit, President Erdoğan met with Pope Francis, Italian President Sergio Mattarella and Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni. The meetings covered cooperation in the fight against terrorism, irregular migration and the latest developments in the Middle East focusing on Turkey's "Operation Olive Branch" in Afrin, Syria in particular.

Besides, the United States' decision to officially recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital was at the core of the bilateral discussion between Erdoğan and Pope Francis. As it is known, along with the UN, the EU and

Turkey, Pope Francis was one of the prominent leaders who criticised the US's Jerusalem decision drawing attention to the danger of new tensions between Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Holy City. "I cannot remain silent about my deep concern for the situation that has developed in recent days", the Pope said. President Erdoğan expressed in an interview published by Italian newspaper *La Stampa* that "no nation in the world has a right to take unilateral steps on a city which is dear to billions of people, ignoring international law." Also during the meeting which was held in a moderate and sincere atmosphere, Pope Francis presented an "angel of peace" figurine to President Erdoğan which is a symbol of a world based on justice and peace.

TURKISH PRIME MINISTER BİNALİ YILDIRIM MET WITH GERMAN CHANCELLOR ANGELA MERKEL

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım, who visited Germany to attend the 54th Munich Security Conference, came together with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin on 15 February 2018. Following the meeting, the two leaders organised a joint press conference where they underlined the importance of restoring Turkish-German relations after months-long tensions.

Prime Minister Yıldırım commented that Turkey and Germany will continue their bilateral relations at full capacity after the German coalition government takes power. He also mentioned that problems like Deniz Yücel's case, which was one of the main reasons for the tension between Turkey and Germany, shall not overshadow bilateral relations.

During their meeting both

leaders discussed Turkey-EU relations, bilateral trade and anti-Islam and ultra-nationalist movements in Europe. Prime Minister Yıldırım stated that the 3.5 million Turkish nationals living in Germany acted as an "important bridge" between the two countries. He also praised Germany's "firm stance" against the activities of the PKK terrorist organisation.

At the joint press conference, German Chancellor Angela Merkel emphasised the common interests that Turkey and Germany share and the need to normalise bilateral relations despite the remaining obstacles. She also expressed her gratitude to Turkey for sheltering more than 3 million Syrian refugees and underlined that the EU funding for Syrian refugees should be paid to Turkey as soon as possible.



PROPOSAL FOR FULFILMENT OF VISA LIBERALISATION CRITERIA SUBMITTED TO EU

On 7 February 2018, Turkey's Permanent Representative to the EU Ambassador Faruk Kaymakcı presented European Commission First Vice-President Frans Timmermans a paper detailing Turkey's roadmap for the fulfilment of the remaining benchmarks for visa liberalisation.

According to reports,

Ambassador Kaymakcı underscored the European Commission's support for the successful completion of the process and stated that Turkey will undertake the necessary steps in line with the positive signal it would get from the Commission. Commission Vice-President Timmermans stated that experts will immediately commence working

on the documents. Commenting on the roadmap in a televised interview, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu indicated that Turkey has accomplished all necessary work for the fulfilment of the remaining criteria for visa-free travel. Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu stated that following the submission of the documents the ball was in the EU's court.



HIGH-LEVEL EXCHANGES

EU AFFAIRS MINISTER ÇELİK ATTENDED THE GYMNICH MEETING IN SOFIA



Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator Ömer Çelik attended the informal meeting of the EU foreign ministers (Gymnich) in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia on 15-16 February 2018. The meeting took place in Sofia's National Palace of Culture, as a signal of support for the European Year of Cultural

Heritage and was chaired by EU High for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini.

At the joint press conference held with the Bulgarian Foreign Minister Ekaterina Zaharieva, Mogherini said that a consensus was achieved for ensuring the closest possible degree of cooperation with

the Western Balkan states in regard to security, the migrant crisis, the energy sphere and also to strengthen the European perspective of the region prior to the summit in May. The agenda of the Gymnich meeting included the ongoing security concerns regarding North Korea where the EU has targeted to engage

on the diplomatic track, and the increasing turmoil in Syria, where the Ministers aimed to prepare for the second Brussels Conference intended for mobilising humanitarian and political flagship initiatives.

EU Affairs Minister Çelik participated in the session entitled "Cooperation in the fields of

Security and Defense" which was also attended by ministers from other candidate states. During his exchanges in the margins of the meeting, Minister Çelik informed his EU counterparts about the latest situation concerning Turkey's fight against terrorism and Operation Olive Branch in Afrin.

SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE THORBJØRN JAGLAND VISITED TURKEY

On 15 February 2018, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu met with Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe (CoE). At the meeting, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu underlined the importance of Turkey's fight against terrorist organisations and reiterated Turkey's expectations from CoE and its member states. Turkey-CoE common agenda was also discussed during the meeting. Afterwards, Jagland came together with nine leaders including President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister for EU Affairs Ömer Çelik and Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gül. Following the meetings, Jagland gave

an interview to daily *Hürriyet* newspaper. In his interview, he highlighted Turkey's importance for the EU and stated that Turkey's EU accession talks are very important for both parties and supported his view with the following sentence: "Turkey belongs to Europe, and if Turkey were ever to be pushed away from Europe, the continent would suffer many more problems than it experiences today". However, Jagland also mentioned the problems concerning the violations of the European Convention on Human Rights, media freedom and underlined the need to bring the judicial processes in line with the Convention.



FOREIGN MINISTER ÇAVUŞOĞLU MET WITH TURKISH-BRITISH TATLIDİL FORUM CO-CHAIRS

Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu met with Turkish-British Tatlıdil Forum Co-Chairmen of the British side, former Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and Julian Horn-Smith on 21 February 2018. During the meeting, the activities of the Forum in the period ahead were evaluated.

The Turkish-British Tatlıdil Forum, which was established as an unofficial platform in 2011, aims to contribute

to further enhancing bilateral relations between Turkey and the UK in all areas through civil dialogue. The 6th meeting of the Forum, which was held on 24-26 March 2017 in Antalya, focused on regional and international issues such as Brexit, energy cooperation, the situation in the Middle East and defence. The 7th meeting of the Turkish-British Tatlıdil Forum is set to take place on 11-13 May 2018, in the UK.

EXPERT VIEW

TURKEY-EU SUMMIT, VISA LIBERALISATION AND THE EP: A VERY AMBITIOUS TRIANGLE

Some critical developments in February falsified the claims that Turkey-EU relations have come to a halt and revived hopes for a possible acceleration in 2018.



Ahmet CERAN,
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Within a week, the prospect of a Turkey-EU Summit in Varna during the Bulgarian EU Presidency has been brought to the agenda; Turkish authorities delivered the position paper containing possible steps to fulfil the remaining visa liberalisation criteria; while MEPs debated the human rights situation in Turkey at the EP plenary session. Such a busy agenda falsified the claims that Turkey-EU relations have been coming to a halt and showed the signs of a possible acceleration in 2018.

One could remember the chequered tone of Turkey-EU relations in the second half of 2017. Some extraordinary diplomatic conflicts were at one side, yet some valuable reconciliation steps such as refugee cooperation was apparent on the other side. This unprecedented pace caused confusions among both experts and the public opinion in Turkey and the EU. Despite the entire blur, at this stage it is fair to assert that the dialogue between Turkey and the EU leans on much stronger foundations which would overcome "everyday politics" and instant conflicts. Therefore, to be able to put some

prospects regarding the near future that is open to several possibilities, we should be analysing the state of the recent developments mentioned above.

Recipe for a Result-Oriented Turkey-EU Summit

For sure, gathering and togetherness of the leaders from two sides appears as a fundamental need to ensure a revitalisation. To this end, President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker and the Council President Donald Tusk invited Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan with a letter for a leaders' meeting in Varna which will be hosted by Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov. The meeting would be extremely timely as the visa liberalisation issue is back at the top of the agenda once again and a genuinely positive pace is required. Yet, as we learnt from "ghosts of the past", establishment of mechanisms for dialogue is not sufficient to strengthen the relations and to obtain the desired results. This opportunity for constructive dialogue must be accompanied by substantial content and efficient policies.

If both sides plan to chase constructive results during the leaders' meeting; ensuring two

factors becomes prominent. Firstly, establishing bilateral communication strategies that would set up a constructive dialogue environment is a must. All sides must be fully aware of the red lines, expectations and position of the other while putting their cooperation perspectives and demands. Lately, many crises between Turkish officials and their European counterparts have arisen because of misunderstandings. Bulgaria symbolically might be considered as a well-suited location to establish such ties both historically and culturally.

Secondly, the leaders' meeting must deliver results. Recently, organising large-scale, high-level meetings with various global actors seems like a primary foreign and neighbourhood policy tool the EU institutions are keen to use. These attempts mostly result in good will expressions rather than deliver concrete outcomes. Yet, there is a critical point that all sides must be fully aware of: Turkey-EU relations cannot lose time with a high-level meeting without concrete outcomes and efficient frameworks. The content of the invitation letter signed by Presidents Juncker and Tusk sends a clear signal that there is a serious and determining summit ahead

of us. Together with the accession negotiations, developments regarding two other critical processes namely; modernisation of the Customs Union and the visa liberalisation will also be expected during the event. Acceleration concerning visa liberalisation dialogue is vital since Turkish authorities have just presented the position paper to their counterparts in Brussels.

Visa Liberalisation is Hot Again and Again

Just at the end of 2017, related ministries in Turkey compiled a position paper detailing the steps to be taken to fulfil remaining criteria of Turkey-EU Visa Liberalisation Roadmap. President Erdoğan approved the document just after the so-called UN Jerusalem voting which both Turkey and the EU institutionally presented similar positions. In other words, the position paper was delivered to Brussels while the political climate was moderate. Thus, visa liberalisation became a hot topic among experts and journalists once again. Content of the position paper hasn't been publicly revealed yet; so there remains an uncertainty whether the prospective steps would be enough to finalise the technical process. Yet,

the visa liberalisation issue is multi-dimensional, and technical alignment is not the biggest problem that exists.

When the Commission approves that Turkey has fulfilled all seventy two technical criteria, the topic would be discussed at the EP and the Council. Within this framework, the EP's position seems extremely critical since its approval is required for a visa-free regime. However the current tone of the rhetoric defining the Turkey-EP interaction is strongly harsh as reflected in the debate concerning the human rights situation in Turkey at the EP plenary session on 8 February.

During the EP session that MEPs criticised the human rights situation in Turkey with a very fierce manner, the main message to Turkey was clear: lift the ongoing state of emergency and normalise the criminal procedures. On the other hand, the response from the Turkish authorities was equally sharp and solid; the tension was extremely high. Such rhetoric actually points out an anomaly. Putting the visa liberalisation dialogue, a technical process between Turkey and the EU on the EP's official agenda in the future might open up a window of opportunity for a calmer, technical dialogue and for ending this anomaly.