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Cecilie Felicia Stokholm Banke and Jakob Lindgaard, Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS)



1. History of EU-Turkey Relations

1.1. Ambivalent debate on EU-Turkey relations

As with most European Union (EU)-related issues, the Danish attitude towards Turkey's membership of the European Union is characterized by ambivalence. As Dietrich Jung notes, Turkish membership is "not so much an issue of bureaucratic politics but first and foremost a topic of public debate among politicians, media pundits and a number of publicly known personalities". Thus, Turkey's candidacy has always had a "precarious" status in Danish politics, being directly linked to both political discourses on the EU and public debate about migration and Islam.

1.2. Turkey as the significant other - and economic partner

This "precarious" status of Turkey in Danish politics can be traced historically to Denmark's relations with the Ottoman Empire and the image of "the Turk" in Danish cultural life. For centuries the "Turk" represented the "significant other" in Danish cultural life, and Denmark's relations with the Ottoman Empire during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were tense and at times even belligerent. Thus, for decades, the Danish position towards the new Turkish Republic was characterized by scepticism and distance, and Turkey rarely appeared as a subject, in and of itself, in Danish foreign-policy analysis, underscoring its lack of relevance for Denmark until recently. One noteworthy exception, however, when Turkey did figure in Denmark's foreign-policy calculations, was during the negotiations concerning Turkish and Greek membership in NATO in 1951. Denmark and Norway were originally the only members to oppose Turkish membership, both for security reasons and because Danish politicians and diplomats considered Turkey and Greece to be socially, economically and culturally different from the other members of the alliance. Denmark feared that including Turkey in the alliance would increase the risk of small countries becoming involved in conflicts in the Middle East.

This attitude towards Turkey started to change in the mid-1970s, due to the influx of immigrants from Anatolia and because of Turkey's increased participation in international cooperation. Figures from Dansk Industri show an increase in Danish exports to Turkey, and Turkey was until recently generally described as a country characterized by growth, with opportunities for Danish companies in innovation and development. In 2013, the Danish government set an official goal to increase Danish exports to Turkey by 50 percent during the period 2012 to 2016. As a result, Turkey was considered in Danish business circles to be a dynamic economy with a fast-growing private sector and rich with new opportunities for Danish industries. In 2004, the then director of the Danish Industries' Association, Hans Skov Christensen, could claim that Turkey, like central and eastern European countries, should be invited to join the EU and that Turkish membership was the second biggest issue since the end of the Cold War. Adding to this, Turkey was also seen as representing a reservoir of labour for the EU.

However, concerns about whether Turkey would develop in a direction compatible with European standards continue to dominate the public debate. This attitude was already reflected in 2002, before the EU enlargement summit in Copenhagen. While some enthusiasm was expressed for Recep Tayyip

Erdoğan and the first Justice and Development Party (AKP) government when it was installed in 2002, this more positive attitude towards Turkey has changed during recent years. The Danish position towards Turkey is at present even more ambivalent and divided between wanting Turkey as a close ally and business partner, and worrying that Turkey might not only fail to meet the Copenhagen criteria as defined by the European Council in 1993, but also develop into a far more critical direction politically.

2. Future of EU-Turkey Relations

2.1. Danish demand for ‘fundamentals first’

Turkey’s wish for a boost in EU negotiations has generally been welcomed in Denmark. However, there also exists an attitude of “fundamentals first”, as represented in EU accession chapters 23 and 24, not least because the public debate in Denmark is concerned about the issues of freedom of expression, human rights and the rights of women and minorities in particular. In that sense, a certain ambivalence towards Turkey’s accession to the EU can be traced in the Danish debate, being divided between the fundamental need to retain Turkey as a close ally and cooperation partner on the one hand, and on meeting the public demand for Turkey to develop into an open democracy based on the rule of law and with respect for basic human rights on the other. Given that, the need for Turkey’s cooperation has only grown stronger in recent years for both economic and security reasons, Denmark until recently appeared to be keeping a low profile when it comes to pushing Turkey in the desired direction politically.

If we look at how recent governments have positioned themselves publicly in relation to Turkey, we can trace a slight change towards a more pragmatic and Turkey-friendly attitude before July 2016. Even if the Copenhagen criteria continued to play a crucial role in public debates and in the Parliament, there was a tendency to focus more on the benefits of close cooperation with Turkey, both from an economic perspective and in relation to the contemporary situation in and around Syria. Fogh Rasmussen’s Liberal Conservative government (2001-2009) was in favour of Turkish membership in principle, but only if Turkey followed the Copenhagen criteria, an argument that would reappear in Danish debates on Turkey.

This argument was also reflected in the foreign policy vision presented by the government in 2003, *En Verden i Forandring*, which states that the government looks forward to “that moment when Turkey meets the Copenhagen criteria and negotiations about accession can begin” The Danish People’s Party (DF) was and is even more sceptical. DF is strictly against Turkey’s membership and sees Turkey as being fundamentally different from Europe. The positions of the Social Democrats (S) and the Socialist People’s Party (SF) are not that different from the Liberals’ and the Conservatives’, though the Social Democrats tend to stress economic conditions and the fact that Turkey has to develop an open and competitive market economy. The Red Green Alliance (EL) is anyway an anti-EU party, though it rejects any religious or ethnic discrimination of EU candidates. Only the Social Liberal Party (RV) has in recent years expressed a positive attitude towards what Turkey might bring to Europe by becoming a member

of the EU and is, in this sense, more aligned with the position of the Danish Industries' Association (DI). However, these more positive arguments have until recently played only a minor role in debates about Turkey and the EU.

The idea of having Turkey as a cooperation partner for pragmatic and practical reasons is widespread, as also described above. This has however changed since July 2016. Since then, cooperation with Turkey is increasingly being put into question both by members of Parliament and by the public.

2.2. No official Danish position on the Armenian genocide

The main issues occupying the debate about Turkey in 2015 were the refugee agreement between Turkey and the EU and the 1915-events/100th Years Armenian Genocide. For more than a decade, the question of official recognition of the persecution of Armenians in Ottoman Turkey before and during the First World War as a genocide has been an issue of concern in Danish political debates and thus also for relations between Denmark and Turkey. Unlike other EU countries, such as France and Germany, which have officially recognized the event as genocide, Denmark has not taken a stand concerning what happened to the Armenians in 1915. Several governments have explicitly taken the position of no position, expressed most explicitly in 2008 by Minister of Foreign Affairs, Per Stig Møller, who served in the Fogh administration from 2001-10 representing the Conservative Party (K): "The government believes that this is a historical question which should be up to historians to decide".

His follower Lene Espersen (K) repeated this position 2010, and again by the Thorning Schmidt government (2011-15), when the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Martin Lidegaard (R), was asked about his position in the spring of 2015. Even Holger K. Nielsen of the Socialist People's Party, who served as Minister of Foreign Affairs from December 2013 to February 2014, expressed a similar view in May 2015. Nielsen failed to see why this should be a question for the Parliament and government to address in official decisions. In 2016, the Parliament agreed to issue a statement on the "tragic and bloody events, which took place in Eastern Anatolia during the period 1915-1923", however repeating the previous approach that parliaments should not take a stand in matters of history.

Another theme that played, and still plays, a role in the Danish debate about Turkey is the Kurdish question. The Turkish immigrant community has a high percentage of Turks with Kurdish background. Several members of Parliament have Turkish-Kurdish background. In addition, Kobane received considerable coverage in July 2015, as does in general the war against ISIS. This of course was coupled with the war in Syria.

2.3. Concerns about whether Turkey is turning its back to the West

In 2016, the main theme affecting the debate about Turkey was not surprisingly the 15 July attempted coup, which received considerable media coverage. Several debates in Parliament during the fall were focused on the developments in Turkey following the attempted coup. Some Danish Parliamentarians became very outspoken about Turkey's relations with the EU, and suggested to freeze the accession talks, even before the decision by European Parliament. Danish media also covered the terror attacks at Atatürk airport, in Ankara, at the Istanbul Stadium and the Reina-attack during New Year's Eve very carefully. This coverage should partly be seen in relation to Turkey being a popular vacation destination

for Danes. Another theme being followed very carefully was the rapprochement with Russia in July 2016, mainly because of the role Russia increasingly plays in Danish security policy. The closer ties between Turkey and Russia are considered in Denmark as a sign of Turkey moving away from the West, and as a confirmation of the assumption among some that Turkey, as was also expressed during the 1950s, does not belong to the European circle of ideas and values. A certain concern can thus be observed in Denmark about the degree to which Turkey is turning its back to Europe and its NATO partners.

3. EU-Turkey Relations and the Neighbourhood/Global scene

3.1. From clash on values to pragmatism

There is no question that the war in Syria and the Arab Spring have had an impact on the views in Denmark on Turkey. As Turkey has become more and more involved within the regional conflict, the positions towards Turkey as a collaboration partner have become increasingly more critical. The developments in North Africa play a minor role in this regard as also do the Crimea Crisis and Ukraine. Few would know about Turkey's position on Ukraine and the special relationship between Turkey and Crimea because of the Crimean Tatars. Ankara supports the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, but Turkey's position on Crimea is considered less strict than those of Europe and the United States (US).

The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has established a Neighbourhood Programme for EU neighbouring countries. The objective of the programme is creating peace and prosperity in Europe through domestically encouraging civil society and the private and public sectors to promote democracy and rule of law. Initiated in 2004 and with an amount of 730 mill. DKK, the program includes Turkey, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, the Caucasus, Romania, Bulgaria and the Western Balkans. Areas most often mentioned in public and political debates are migration, security, intelligence, and trade and innovation, as also confirmed in the agreement signed in 2014 between Denmark and Turkey. In addition, a strategic sector cooperation (SSC) project was signed between Turkey and Denmark in February 2017.

Not surprisingly, 9/11, had a massive impact in Denmark on the debate on Islam, Muslims and Europe, which was only emphasized with the Cartoon Crisis in 2004-2005, later revitalized with PM Anders Fogh Rasmussen's candidacy for becoming General Secretary for NATO in 2008-2009. In 2005, Fogh Rasmussen clashed with Erdoğan in public, when the Turkish Prime Minister visited Denmark and refused to be part of a press briefing where also representatives from the Kurdish ROJ TV were present. Fogh Rasmussen did not cancel the meeting nor denied the Kurdish TV to be present, but used the occasion to highlight his support for freedom of speech. The Arab Spring also had an impact, making Turkey to be seen as a role model for the Muslim world. An attitude that however changed because of the political developments inside Turkey. Shifting positions of the US and Russia towards Turkey also have an impact on how Turkey is seen in Denmark. In addition, Germany plays an important role as well. Not that Denmark would follow Germany's lead, but what Merkel and Germany say on Turkey

has become increasingly important during recent years. On a more general level, we may conclude that the relationship between Denmark and Turkey since 2002 and the first AKP government has moved from a focus on liberal values, democracy and rule of law to pragmatism.

Links & Further Readings

- Banke, Cecilie Felicia Stokholm (2016): “Danish-Turkish Relations during the AKP Government: From Value Clash to Pragmatism”, *Danish Foreign Policy Yearbook 2016*, Edited by Nanna Hvidt and Hans Mouritzen, København: DIIS, Danish Institute for International Studies.
- Holm, Bent (2010): *Tyrk kan tæmmes: Osmannerne på den danske scene 1596-1896*. København: Forlaget Multivers
- Jung, Dietrich (2008): “Danish Stakeholders in the EU-Turkey Debate”, in Tocci, N. (ed.). *Talking Turkey in Europe: Towards a Differentiated Communication Strategy*. Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali.
- Villaume, Poul (1995): *Allieret med forbehold. Danmark, NATO og den kolde krig: en studie i dansk sikkerhedspolitik 1949-1961*, København: Eirene.
- *En verden i forandring*, June 2003, København: Udenrigsministeriet
- Per Stig Møller (K) to members of the Foreign Affairs Committee in 2008. Spørgsmål fra Udenrigsudvalget til udenrigsministeren af 30. november 2007. URU alm. del – spørgsmål 13, <http://www.ft.dk/samling/20072/almdel/uru/spm/13/svar/515697/516241.pdf>