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# FEUTURE EU 28 Country Report

## Luxembourg

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## 1. History of EU-Turkey Relations<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1. Ambiguous stance on Turkish accession

The position of Luxembourg on Turkish accession to the EU is ambiguous. On the one hand, Luxembourg's governments have long defended the need to maintain a constructive dialogue between the EU and Turkey. This is a demand that was supported by the coalition governments of the Christian Social People's Party (CSV) and the Luxembourg Socialist Worker's Party (LSAP) under Jean Claude-Junker's leadership, and also under the coalition government of the Democratic Party (DP), the LSAP and the Greens under the leadership of Xavier Bettel. On the other hand, the population has been opposed to Turkish accession to the EU and there has not been much enthusiasm for Turkish EU membership among the Luxembourgish political elites either.

The political elite has been considerably more open to membership negotiations with Turkey than the public, but there has traditionally been an element of ambivalence in the positions of most political parties. This is best illustrated by a key debate in the parliament on 18 November 2004 following the European Commission's recommendation to open accession negotiations. The question was whether the parliament should support the government in its decision to agree to an opening of accession negotiations. In the end, only one party opposed the opening of accession negotiations – the right-wing ADR. As a result, the parliament voted with 55 to 5 votes for a motion supporting the start of negotiations. However, while the clear result of the vote might be interpreted as overwhelming support for membership, this would be a false conclusion. The preceding debate shows that several key parties made it clear that the opening of negotiations would not necessarily result in Turkish EU membership. The biggest party, the CSV, for instance, insisted that accession would only be possible if all of the conditions for membership were fulfilled and if the (sceptical) European public could be convinced of the merits of Turkish membership.

This ambivalence of the political elite has become even more pronounced over time, especially in the current context. On the one hand, Luxembourg pushes for the opening of new chapters in the accession negotiations. On the other hand, it repeatedly voiced concerns that made it clear that Turkey was fulfilling the conditions for membership less and less well (cf. section 2).

### 1.2. A conflict between economic interests and values

There is a clear tension between the government's willingness to continue – and indeed advance – negotiations on Turkish accession to the EU, and the unambiguously opposed public opinion in

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<sup>1</sup> The EU 28 Country Reports were completed before the Turkish Constitutional Referendum on 16 April 2017. Thus, the report does not take account of any potential changes in the national debate that might have occurred in the meantime.

Luxembourg. This tension seems to stem less from ideological positions than from a simple tension between interest and values and the dynamics of path dependency.

One important element in favour of close relations with Turkey seems to be path dependency. In the debate on the opening of accession negotiations with Turkey in 2004, for instance, those parties in favour of the negotiations (i.e. all except the ADR) all emphasized how Turkey had been a member of the Council of Europe since 1950, a NATO member and a close partner of the EU. Thus, and as long as Turkey fulfilled the conditions for accession negotiations, the EU should not refuse.

In addition, there are interest-based arguments for good EU-Turkey relations. Luxembourg has been trying to deepen the economic relations between the two countries for years. To this end, it opened an embassy in Ankara in 2011 and improved the transport links to Turkey. Thus, in 2012 a multi-modal link between Bettembourg, Trieste and Turkey was launched. In 2013, a direct flight between Istanbul and Luxembourg followed, facilitating the growth of tourism. Since 2013, the Turkish-Luxembourgish Joint Economic and Trade Commission (JETCO) met annually. A Luxembourg-Turkish Business Council was launched in 2014. On the whole, the economic relations between the two countries more than tripled since the early 2000s.

That said, while Luxembourg would like to strengthen trade, the Turkish economy is seen as too weak for EU membership. There are concerns that the low GDP per head would lead to a large migration movement towards other European states and that the Turkish economy and agricultural sector would need large transfers from the EU budget.

However, there are also a number of value-based arguments that negatively affect the relationship. For instance, Luxembourg had invested in better diplomatic and economic relations with Turkey and had opened an embassy in Ankara in 2011. These efforts suffered a reversal when, on 6 May 2015, the parliament adopted unanimously a resolution recognizing the Armenian genocide and encouraging the Turkish government to face its past. It was well-known that such a resolution would not be well received in Turkey. Indeed, Turkey promptly recalled its ambassador in response until September 2015. In the mid-2000s, Luxembourg also identified a need for further progress in the implementation of European values in the areas of justice and democracy. In addition, the current purges and political prosecutions in Turkey have reversed a lot of the progress that had been made in previous decades. Finally, Luxembourg is also critical of Turkey's fraught relationship with the existing EU member Cyprus.

Finally, Luxembourg is concerned about the geopolitical implications of Turkish EU membership, as this would move the EU's external borders to unstable areas in the Middle East. At the same time, Luxembourg sees Turkey's ability to act as a bridge between different cultures as an opportunity for close cooperation on a number of issues.

### 1.3. Migration and economic cooperation as key policy areas

Overall, one of the key policy areas of interest to Luxembourg is economic cooperation. Another policy area of interest is asylum and refugee policy. Luxembourg is traditionally one of the EU's most generous donors of development aid as a proportion of the country's gross national income, but due to its small size its ability to impact events directly is limited. With regard to the EU's refugee crisis, Luxembourg takes an interest in the EU's wider policy. It is also aware of the strategic importance of Turkey and the impact of Turkish policies on the migratory pressures on the EU. Turkey hosts a great number of refugees including, for instance, two out of four million Syrian refugees. Its policies in this area affect the migratory flow towards the European Union. Thus, in October 2015, the Luxembourgish foreign minister informed parliament that around 80 percent of migrants arriving in the EU via Greece were Syrians or Iraqis who had passed through Turkey. The view of the Luxembourgish government at the time was that the EU could neither stop the war in Syria nor influence the situation of refugees in Turkey, and that it would not be possible to solve the migration crisis without Turkey.

Overall, and unlike the debate in other member states, economic cooperation, asylum and refugee policy are areas the areas mostly discussed as key to EU-Turkey relations from a Luxembourgish perspective, while security issues are rarely mentioned.

## 2. Future of EU-Turkey Relations

### 2.1. Torn between hope and doubt

Whereas the public opinion in Luxembourg is predominantly sceptical as regards future EU-Turkey relations, the government is trying to maintain a constructive dialogue.

Among the Luxembourgish population, there is very little appetite for EU enlargement to Turkey. According to Eurobarometer 63 (from 2005), only 33 percent of Luxembourgers supported further enlargement, making Luxembourg the third least favourable country in the EU, after Austria and France. When Europeans were asked more specifically about enlargement to Turkey, the public opinion was even more hostile, with only 35 percent of Europeans supporting such a decision. With regard to Turkish accession, Luxembourg was the fifth least favourable country out of 25 member states at the time: only 22 percent supported Turkish accession. While we have no recent data on Luxembourg's public opinion specifically on Turkish EU membership, the public perception of Turkey is unlikely to have improved since the failed military coup and the subsequent mass purges of suspected opponents of the regime.

On the one hand, Prime Minister Xavier Bettel argued in 2013 that it would be an important step forward if negotiations on Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental rights) were opened. The assumption is that it would be easier to encourage reforms in Turkey in those crucial areas once they are officially part of the negotiations. Similarly, the Luxembourgish government regarded it as an achievement that the dialogue with Turkey was relaunched in late 2015 under its

presidency of the Council of Ministers, and that new chapters were finally opened – albeit on economic and monetary policy rather than justice and fundamental rights. Even after the turbulent summer of 2016, the Luxembourgish government still officially supports the accession negotiations. Thus, following an informal summit of foreign ministers in Bratislava in September 2016, it informed the Luxembourgish parliament that only the Austrian foreign minister was in favour of breaking off the accession negotiations.

On the other hand, the agreement on refugees with Turkey of March 2016 is seen as necessary but not ideal. In that context, the government supported a visa liberalization agreement with Turkey in return for Turkey's help with the refugee crisis. But it also repeatedly told the parliament that the visa requirement for Turkey could only be waved once all the conditions were fulfilled by Turkey. Yet, it thought that it was unlikely that the Turkey would meet the requirements by June 2016 (the point at which Turkey wanted to obtain visa-free travel), as Turkey still failed to fulfill a number of conditions. Finally, in the context of the purges in Turkey since 2015, the foreign minister, Jean Asselborn, is zigzagging between positions. After comparing the Turkish purges to Nazi methods, he then argued for the need to continue enlargement negotiations with Turkey.

In contrast to the continued ambivalence of the government parties, the opposition parties CSV and ADR are particularly critical of the negotiations to wave the visa obligations for Turkish citizens and the continuation of enlargement talks. The CSV called for a suspension of accession negotiations in November 2016 as mere calls to end the violations of the freedom of the press and human rights were ineffective. The ADR even demanded that the negotiations be terminated permanently.

## **2.2. In favour of a partnership**

Despite the ambivalence of the political elite towards Turkish EU membership, there is widespread support for a close partnership. However, the precise terminology – “strategic partnership” or “privileged partnership” – does not generate much interest in the political debates or the media. The term “privileged partnership” is occasionally used, in the sense that Turkey is already a privileged partner, but there is no discussion about possible differences between the two concepts and their respective advantages. Thus, the main debate is about whether there should be a close partnership rather than an EU membership. The public (and currently the ADR and CSV) seem to be in favour of the former, whereas the remaining parties still seem to advocate a continuation of accession negotiations, but with only limited hope of success.

## **2.3. Reactions to the refugee crisis and failed military coup in Turkey**

The two key events that marked the relations between Luxembourg and Turkey are the peak of the refugee crisis and the events following the failed military coup in summer 2016.

The migratory pressures on the European Union that peaked in 2015 after a sharp increase of numbers already in 2014 led to an increased interest in Turkey on the part of the Luxembourgish government. In addition to the economic benefits of cooperation, Turkey had the potential to relieve the migratory pressures on the European Union. Thus, despite the fact that Turkey made little progress on the reforms that are a condition for EU accession, the refugee crisis kept many EU member states (including Luxembourg) interested.

However, the potentially positive impact of this shared concern on relations between the EU (and Luxembourg) and Turkey were offset by the negative impact of the failed military coup on Turkish politics. The Turkish government was seen to move away from European values such as a free press and judiciary independence already before the coup, but the failed coup led to an acceleration of these developments. The censorship of websites and mass purges as well as a debate on the reintroduction of the death penalty complicated the diplomatic relations between Turkey and Luxembourg. Luxembourg's Foreign Minister, Jean Asselborn (LSAP), famously compared the Turkish purges after the failed coup with methods that were used in Nazi Germany.

Yet, the government told the parliament on 5 September 2016 that the EU should continue to negotiate Turkish accession, despite the fact that the wave of arrests after the failed military coup in Turkey and the intention to reintroduce the death penalty made accession unlikely in the near future. The argument of the governing parties, which is also advanced by Marc Angel (LSAP), is that the accession negotiations allow the EU to have at least some influence on how political values are handled in Turkey. That said, the opposition (ADR, CSV) argue that so far negotiations have failed to stop a deterioration of human rights and the freedom of the press in Turkey.

In addition, a resolution by the Luxembourgish parliament in May 2015 recognizing the Armenian genocide led to a diplomatic row between the two countries. However, meetings between ministers continued in the following months, even though the Turkish ambassador had been officially recalled.

Finally, the increasing restrictions on the freedom of the press led to a mobilization of the *Syndicat des Journalistes Luxembourg*. After the arrest of the editor of the opposition newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, the *Syndicat* demanded that the Luxembourgish government should request his release.

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

In 2015-2016, the main issue in the neighbourhood that had an impact on Luxembourg's discussion of EU-Turkey relations was the migration crisis. Luxembourgish politicians acknowledged the impact of Turkey's policies towards refugees on migratory pressures on the EU.

Beyond that, however, global events or the situation in the neighbourhood did not have an impact on Luxembourg's position on EU-Turkey relations. The media and government have on occasions reported on the role of Turkey in the Syrian war, for instance, but rarely as an issue that affects relations between the two countries. As a fairly small country, Luxembourg's ambitions in terms of security policy and influence in the European neighbourhood are quite limited. It tends to focus on opportunities for trade and development aid. In addition, Luxembourg does not have a border with a non-EU country. Events in the neighbourhood (and beyond) were thus reported on by the media, but they do not constitute a major factor in the relations between the Luxembourgish and the Turkish governments. As an EU member state, Luxembourg is likely to follow the European consensus in these matters in the coming years.

### Links & Further Readings:

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- Chambre des Députés (2015): Commission des Affaires étrangères et européennes, de la Défense, de la Coopération et de l'Immigration, Procès-verbal de la réunion du 27 octobre 2015
- Chambre des Députés (2016): Réponse de Monsieur le Ministre des Affaires étrangères et européennes à la question parlementaire N°2058 déposée par les honorables Députés Messieurs Laurent Mosar (CSV) et Serge Wilmes (CSV), 13 June 2016
- <http://www.wort.lu/de/politik/nach-armenien-votum-tuerkei-ruft-botschafter-aus-luxemburg-zurueck-554b8d090c88b46a8ce58d16>
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- Luxemburger Wort (2016): "Junker und CSV sind unterschiedlicher Meinung", 5 August 2016, <http://www.wort.lu/de/politik/debatte-ueber-tuerkeifrage-juncker-und-csv-sind-unterschiedlicher-meinung-57a48fc3ac730ff4e7f64925>
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