Turkey and the European Sclerosis

by Soli Özel

Europe’s Complacence

During a recent TV interview, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan jokingly referred to a conversation he had with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Following questions from Putin regarding Turkey’s desire to enter the EU, Erdoğan replied, “Include us in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, then we might give up on the EU.” A quip is a quip, but in the context of the EU’s declining appeal for and influence over Turkey it is worth noting.

Officially Turkey’s quest for EU membership continues. The Minister for EU Affairs, Egemen Bağış, spends a lot of time and energy to keep the flame alive even if, at times, he cannot conceal his exasperation with his European counterparts. The minister also has a hard time, like the rest of his cabinet colleagues, defending Turkey’s recent record on freedom of expression and freedom of the press as well as many of the outlandish, if not outrageous, court decisions that make a mockery of the concept of the “rule of law.” Rare are the moments these days when the possibility of EU membership provides the framework for debate on any big political issue. Apart from the die-hard integrationists, who have a difficult time finding an audience for the EU process, membership related issues are of little — if any — interest to the Turkish public.

Undoubtedly the deep political crisis of the EU, going beyond the euro-zone crisis, accounts for much of the sagging interest in becoming a member of a no-longer-so-attractive club. However, the disenchantment of the Turkish public with the EU preceded the severe economic crisis that shook the Union to its core. In Turkey’s view, the EU’s handling of Cyprus, coupled with the French determination to block the process at all costs, did not give the Turkish candidacy a fair shake. As the Turkish economy performed beyond expectations and the country prospered in new markets, the importance of the EU in Turkey’s economic growth seemed to recede.

On political matters, Turkey moved on some of its most pressing issues, such as the Kurdish problem, mainly independently of the accession process. In the meantime, with the EU’s complacence, Turkish democracy began to suffer setbacks, although the process of demilitarization/civilianization went forcefully ahead. Furthermore, the developments in the Middle East that culminated in the profound transformative turbulence of the Arab Spring greatly elevated Turkey’s profile as a consequential actor in the region’s developments. As geopolitical consid-
erations moved to the fore and Turkey had to rejuvenate its alliance relations following the failure of its high profile engagement with Iran, Turkish-American relations became closer.

The EU’s crisis arguably stemmed from the paradox of “economic integration/political fragmentation.” If and when it manages to finally overcome the crisis, the nature of the Union and its structure will be different and possibly will reflect a more flexible arrangement. Despite enviable economic performances and a rising geopolitical profile, the benefits that Turkey would draw from continuing integration with the EU are not exhausted. In particular, the developments of the past five years have shown that the aspirational force of EU membership, as well as the disciplining framework of the Copenhagen criteria (Hungary’s current politics notwithstanding) is essential for the deepening and further institutionalization of Turkish democracy.

Similarly, if the current crisis leads to a more flexible arrangement in the Union’s structure, absorbing a country the size of Turkey might be easier, giving an opportunity for EU members to reevaluate the Turkish file. The economic, political, and strategic benefits of further integration are there for all to see. In addition, EU-Turkey relations could easily move forward if they too reflected a more flexible arrangement, even if the member states’ politics do not inspire much confidence for such farsighted and imaginative openings on the part of the Union. Ultimately, the record of European history still allows one to hope for a breakthrough.

The European Challenge
In a review essay he wrote on the 20th anniversary of the 1989 revolutions in Europe, Timothy Garton Ash made these haunting observations: “The year 1989 was one of the best in European history…World history — using the term in a quasi-Hegelian sense — was made in the heart of the old continent… Twenty years later, I am tempted to speculate … that this may also have been the last occasion — at least for a very long time — when world history was made in Europe. Today, world history is being made elsewhere…


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Of Europe’s long, starring role on the world stage, future generations may yet say: nothing became her like the leaving of it.”

Ash spoke to the widely shared perception that Europe was unlikely to be one of the master builders of a new world order. The economic crisis of 2007-2008 made it all the more apparent that power shift from West to East and to other emerging, dynamic parts of the world in the economic realm was a firmly established reality. In a world where vibrant nations are increasingly more forthcoming in their demands to be heard in the discussion of global issues, Europe appears weak, incoherent, devoid of energy and unwilling to engage collectively with the pressing issues that were on its own agenda, let alone the world.

While at the turn of the century, some authors and analysts could speak of a new era when Europe would set the standard and be the frame of reference for the rest of the world, the realities of the crisis gave other, far more unpleasant messages. For one, the current integration model and the inflexibility that went with it is unlikely to continue. A new model would therefore be necessary to construct. The tense relationship between national policy and international (union-wide) cooperation would have to be recalibrated. So would the balance between the core and the periphery as well as the newly emerged division between north and south.

In short, since the time Ash made his observations, the European Union of the world’s imagination appears to have foundered. One can understand the former Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva when he said, “the world does not have the right to allow the EU to end” because “what Europeans achieved after World War II is part of the democratic heritage of humanity.” Yet Europe either lacked or just couldn’t generate the energy or the imagination to own up to its own successes and achievements; let alone

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In fact, the European sclerosis revealed problems that went even deeper than the economic crisis that proved devastating for the countries in the periphery whether they were profligate or not prior to 2008. But perhaps far more ominously, the crisis brought forth latent social and political problems that eerily reminded observers of a dark era of European history some 80 years ago: eroding democratic consensus, inept or weak mainstream parties, class as well as generational divisions that harden, the opportunistic rise of racist or ultranationalist parties, and the scapegoating of immigrant communities both for the economic and social ills that affect societies.

The financial crisis created a rift within the Union that would be hard to fix. It divided the Union between those in the eurozone and those that are out. Given the importance of the financial and economic crises for the entire Union, the eurozone's ills and the need to attend to them immediately took precedence. Devising proper policies without having the political framework within which to carry them out, started to afflict the Union's capacities. Parallel structures have emerged.

Since its inception, the euro has at times been viewed as instrumental in the creation of a two-tier Europe, dividing the EU into core and peripheral members. Within the eurozone, the crisis created a second, geographic category of divisions: on one hand, states such as Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland, all situated at the periphery of Europe and suffering from economic fragility, were forced to redefine their relationship with the European establishment and their richer counterparts.

On the other hand, the delays and wide disagreements between partners made the adoption of a bailout plan a torturous and arguably not finalized affair. The eurozone's lack of consensus and political will became apparent as much as the absence of proper mechanisms to deal with a crisis of this magnitude. As Paul Krugman suggested, the current financial crisis reflected the EU's complete inflexibility. Krugman further argues that the German recipe of austerity, as the only possible policy for a crisis of this magnitude, has exacerbated both the economic and social-political malaise of the eurozone.

If historical experience is a reliable guide, then we should expect the full repercussions of the 2007-2008 crisis to reveal themselves over an extended period of time. Already the revolt against a German-promoted policy of “austerity and austerity alone” has begun. The Greek electorate appears radicalized. The French electorate makes its discontent clear, and in the Netherlands, the promise of more austerity broke the coalition government. In Spain, a government recently elected with strong popular support for its promise of austerity measures can no longer insist on policies that are responsible for 25 percent overall unemployment (50 percent among youth).

For societies that are uncertain of their future and feel threatened by a world in which Europe is unlikely to be a primary actor in its own right, such figures and realities could help undermine the liberal democratic order as well. The resort to technocratic governments in Greece and Italy raises doubts about the efficacy of democratic governance. However, the resentment that the public feels against strong economic actors over which they have no control intensifies.

This latter dynamic in turn makes the democratic systems and mainstream parties increasingly more vulnerable to attacks by radical right parties that are no friend of the post-war liberal/social-democratic order defining Europe. Given that the Union is having difficulty dealing with as vulnerable a country as Hungary, who’s current government has taken strides towards “electoral authoritarianism,” the project indeed seems to be under a lot of strains.
As Ivan Krastev recently put it in a brilliant essay, “the revolt against the elites flows from the fact that most ordinary citizens now see the political and social changes of the ‘neo-liberal decades’ as having advantaged the elites at everyone else’s expense… The result is that, at the fringes of European societies, at least, there are now deeply mistrustful, conspiracy-minded, uncomfortably intense, and significant minorities who are scared of the future. Fear in politics on such a scale has consequences we know all too well.” Under such circumstances and when all systems show alarm signals, it is difficult for the EU to set an example or continue to be a potent source of aspiration or attraction for countries in its vicinity.

Finally, the crisis and the way it was handled, which brought to light the deep fissures in issues of governance, priorities, proclivities, and propensities, exposed the Union as an amalgamation of disparate peoples rather than a people unified under a common European identity. The German question, or rather the fear of German domination of the continent, reemerged to the detriment of the need to find common solutions to aggravating problems.

What renders this predicament even more alarming than it needs to be is the fact that actually the reverse of those fears is true. At a time when leadership and a sense of direction are both necessary for the European Union to move forward, the most populous country in Europe, which produces about a third of the EU GDP and is situated at the geographic dead center of the continent, does not assume the role of leadership.

In fact, a German analyst concludes a recent paper with the following statements: “Germany is not becoming Europe’s hegemon. But the euro crisis has revealed a leadership vacuum at the top of the EU that Germany has tried momentarily to fill, after much hesitation and with a lot of unease. This leadership by default has been circumspect and there is no sign that it will extend beyond economic policy, especially not to foreign policy. Germany has gained more influence in Europe, but it has little will to lead. The entire setting of Germany’s postwar institutions and of its political culture is opposed to moving the country into a position of exerting power over others.”

Germany in the end may have no choice but be engaged and begin to change what some observers call its “Lutheran approach” to hopefully be more empathetic to the plight of others in economic matters. Already there are signs that the Bundesrepublik is moving in the direction of a fiscal union. If France can finally compromise on its cherished sovereignty and Germany can muster the political courage to show more solidarity with other members and loosen its purse, the political crisis may finally be overcome. Should that be the case, and a preference for growth-oriented policies are finally adopted, the Union ought to be able to ride this storm and restructure itself painfully and slowly within a decade.

After all according to the Global Competitiveness Report, three of the top five, or six of the world’s top ten most competitive countries are in Europe (Switzerland, which is not a member of the EU, is one of them). Of the top 100 companies in the world, one-third are from Europe. France, the iconic anti-globalization nation is number four in drawing global investment after the United States, China, and Hong Kong, and its transnational companies are globally competitive. In short, if it can handle the social and political fallout from the economic crisis and heed Krastev’s advice that “the only way to save the European project, then, is to reinvent it,” the Union’s economic future can still inspire optimism.

Yet Germany’s — and more globally the Union’s — reluctance or inability to be engaged collectively in strategic matters is unlikely to change, creating problems of a different order. Defense budgets are being slashed everywhere. At a time of gradual U.S. disengagement from
Europe, the Europeans cannot count on Washington’s attention or largesse. When it comes to security issues in their own neighborhood, the Europeans will mainly have to fend for themselves. A new and fresh approach to political and strategic matters is arguably the precondition for the EU to maintain a position of influence in the emerging global order. The countries that make up the wealthiest economy in the world cannot continue to be helpless bystanders when to their south a transformation of historic proportions is taking place. Nor could they afford not to manage relations with a seemingly robust yet vulnerable Russia and ensure that it remains true to its European as opposed to Asian calling.

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In these circumstances, it is in the interests of all of Europe’s major powers to build a solid foundation from which to engage with the rest of the world. The European Council on Foreign Relations in their report last year argued that it is certain that the new European order cannot simply be a return to a “concert of powers” in which the EU, Russia, and Turkey draw territorial red lines around the states in their respective neighborhoods in an attempt to avoid conflict between major powers.5

Instead, the report suggests, the new European order should aim to develop a “concert of projects”: a way of developing multilateral arrangements for discussing and managing the continent’s security in the interests of all. The best way for the EU to achieve these goals is through initiating an informal security trialogue between the EU, Turkey, and Russia.

Although there are bilateral channels established with both Russia and Turkey (after all, there is massive overlap between NATO and EU membership), these would not be enough to re-legitimize the European order. The authors of the report underline that such a choice would encourage Turkey’s post-Kemalist ambition to be a regional power but would also integrate it into a common framework. Paraphrasing Lord Ismay, they opt for a new institutional order in the continent that keeps the EU united, Russia post-imperial, and Turkey European.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, on the other hand, calls for a cooperative “larger West,” extending from North America and Europe and by eventually embracing Russia and Turkey through Eurasia all the way to Japan and South Korea.6 This would enhance the appeal of the West’s core principles for other cultures, thus encouraging the gradual emergence of a universal democratic political culture.

In this scheme, the United States must play the dual role of being the promoter and guarantor of greater and broader unity in the West, and Turkey is called upon explicitly to play a critical role since it is one of the pivotal states on the new world order. Brzezinski’s argument forcefully brings forth the necessity of treating the case of Turkey and Turkey-EU relations primarily in the context of the trilateral relationship.

Turkey’s Case

Most everything that happens in the European Union affects Turkey. The current cooling of relations does not change this essential fact. It is also true that the lure of the European Union today is much weaker given its economic predicament. Turkey by itself created more private sector jobs in the past five years than all the EU states put together.7 The Turkish public undoubtedly has a strong feeling of Schadenfreude but still it is remarkable that support for EU membership does not fall below 40 percent. This is particularly true in light of the fact that the EU reneged on promises given to the Turkish part of Cyprus,

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5 Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard, with Jana Kobzova, Dimiter Bechev, and Andrew Wilson, The Spectre of a Multipolar Europe, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2010


7 According to Eurostat figures, EU-27 employed nearly 212 million people in the first quarter of 2007. The figure dropped to about 210.5 million in the first quarter of 2012. The respective figures for Turkey are 19.191 million and 22.730 million.
and that some EU members have been crass and behaved improperly towards Turkey.

Less visible but no less true is the fact that what happens in Turkey bears upon the prospects of the Union, mostly, but not exclusively, in political and strategic terms. In fact, given the anemic economic conditions in the Union, Turkey’s energetic and resourceful economy coupled with its young population proves to be an important engine of growth for the European economy. The EU provides in principle the necessary framework within which Turkey can actualize and complete its modern transformation. Turkey, in turn, offers the Union a number of advantages as a market, robust strategic player, and mediator between Europe and its own neighborhood. In short, it presents itself as a source of rejuvenation for an aging and weary Union.

Even if, as Ian Bremmer argues, Turkey’s relations with the European Union are frozen, “Ankara is actively expanding its international influence. NATO membership gives Turkey a voice in Europe and influence in Washington. Its … per capita income [is] nearly double that of China and four times that of India. Many in the Arab world look to Turkey as a dynamic, modern Muslim state. Add to this its position at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and the former Soviet Union, and Turkey is the very model of a modern major pivot state.”

For all these reasons, the current crisis and the future shape, institutional arrangements, and inclinations of the European Union are of primary concern for Turkey. Not only is Turkey a candidate for membership but it has been in a Customs Union with the EU since 1996 (the only country so far to be in the customs union without being a member), enjoys strong economic ties with member countries, and is an integral part of the EU’s economic and human landscape. Whatever government is in power, Turkey’s economy is and will remain anchored in Europe for the foreseeable future. Though its share has dropped, the EU is still overwhelmingly Turkey’s largest trade partner. Trade between the two is €120.3 billion, making Turkey the EU’s sixth largest trading partner as of 2011, ahead of Japan. What’s more, over two-thirds of foreign direct investment in Turkey originates from EU member states.

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Although the customs union with the EU is much maligned by certain circles in Turkey, the record of the past 16 years shows a positive balance in terms of trade creation, improved quality standards, and economic development. It is thanks to the customs union that many Turkish producers reached European, and therefore world, standards in industrial goods, and it is thanks to the customs union that the composition of Turkey’s exports changed drastically, moving automotive, white, and brown consumer durables to the top of the export lists. The prospect of EU membership helped accelerate the process of democratization in Turkey as well. Long delayed reforms aiming at demilitarizing the Turkish polity were enacted. There was a marked improvement in human rights abuses and torture, minority rights, and freedom of speech and the press. Overall harmonization with the Union acquis reached 65 to 70 percent. In foreign policy as well there was close to complete overlap until recently. In some way Turkey’s seemingly idiosyncratic policies towards its neighboring regions were of kindred spirit with the approaches associated with the EU’s neighborhood policy. In fact, one of the side effects of the slowly deteriorating relations between the EU and Turkey, apart from the latter’s worsening performance in keeping up with the Union’s democratic criteria, has been the weakening of that accord in foreign policy.

The Ebbs and Flows of Turkey-EU Relations

As major EU member states became less enthusiastic about enlargement and blocked accession negotiations with Turkey while hiding behind the Cyprus problem, they have inadvertently nudged Turkey towards a more independent foreign policy. It must also be said though that AKP’s Ankara was more than ready to move in that direction both by force of circumstance and by the force of its own geopolitical ambitions. In the wake of the ill-fated U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, Turkey was already being drawn toward
its immediate neighborhood. The Middle East, particularly the regional Arab state system, was traumatized as a result of the U.S. war. Turkey could not ignore this development or remain aloof to this predicament. Therefore by force of geography, history, and, increasingly, economic interests, it intensified its engagement with the region. Ankara still remained committed to EU accession and continues to be a staunch NATO ally, speculative commentary to the contrary notwithstanding.

So Turkey’s activism with the Middle East accelerated just as EU accession lost its immediacy due to the waning interest of both parties, and the effects of the economic crisis were felt more clearly. At the same time, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) began to devise a foreign policy to create a wider space for autonomous or independent action for Turkey in surrounding regions. From 2004 to 2011, Turkey aspired to pursue an independent foreign policy, sought to be a leader for the countries of the wider region, and challenged the United States and the EU on a number of strategically important issues. The new strategy evolved with Turkey acting as what Philip Robins aptly terms “a double-gravity state” that relates both to the Euro-Atlantic community and to its Middle Eastern neighborhood.

Nothing illustrates the trend more vividly than Turkey’s growing economic ties with its Middle Eastern neighbors. In 2011, nearly 26 percent of Turkey’s exports went to the Middle East and North Africa, compared with 13 percent in 2000, while total exports have risen nearly five-fold. The regional context changed drastically once more in 2011 with the Arab Spring and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. Since then, Turkey has scaled down its perceived ability to act unilaterally in the neighborhood, recognizing that, when faced with historic change and instability all around, partnering with its allies is essential. The Arab Spring has pushed Turkey back into the Western fold and away from alternative alliance patterns, which it seemed to be in the making only a few years earlier, be it in the Middle East or in the sovereigntist “global south.”

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The U.S.-Turkey dimension of the partnership is already functional. A retrenching United States needs reliable regional allies. After the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, Turkey fits that bill, and the two allies are in constant consultation about Iran, Iraq, Syria, and the future of the states where regime change has already taken place. In turn, Ankara needs the support of the United States to deal with an environment that has radically changed, that holds many surprises for the future, and where Iran and Russia are forcefully reasserting themselves into the regional power game.

While Turkish-U.S. relations are going through a period of renewal and chumminess, there is a great need to reinvent the security and strategic alliance between Turkey and the EU. The revitalization of this partnership is important with regard to Turkey’s perceived power and status in the region. Turkey’s EU membership prospects, no matter how distant and even impossible they might look today, makes her an attractive example for reform in the Arab world. Turkey’s added value to the region’s stability and economic and political development is intimately tied to the health of Turkey’s EU relationship.

It is not just Turkey that would benefit from a revitalized relationship either. Ankara’s foreign-policy capacities are real, despite the setbacks registered in the wake of the Arab revolts. These setbacks also brought about a much needed correction to Turkey’s assessment of the relationship between her ambitions and her capacities. The security partnership of the kind desired by Krastev and Leonard et al. or by Brzezinski would necessitate a new way of engaging with Ankara in parallel with accession negotiations, that the EU must devise. Tocci suggests a return to the old days of frequent meetings and discussion of foreign policy matter between the Union and Turkey. She goes further and argues that “not only should these talks be
intensified and be conducted under the CFSP accession chapter. They should also be brought up to heads of state level — i.e. through annual summits — and above all down to sectoral levels.”

Furthermore, Turkey’s accession would greatly contribute to the Union’s global relevance. Europeans increasingly fear that they are becoming marginalized as power shifts away from the West. This is the first time in 400 years that European security has been a regional rather than a global question. Europe is now neither the central problem nor the seat of the central solution in the global order. Almost all member states are interested in what William Walker has called “positional security,” that is, “where they stand in the world, who they stand with, and how to improve or regain their standing.”

The EU should find ways to engage Turkey more fully in the EU’s common security and defense policy. Already, more Turkish soldiers and officials participate in EU-led military and civilian missions than from many EU member states. As a regional power with one of the few economies enjoying vibrant growth, Turkey could contribute even more if practical measures allowed for deeper co-operation. This parallel track would also help to overcome the current deadlock in NATO-EU co-operation, which is caused in large part by the division of Cyprus and to which EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton and Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO’s secretary-general, have separately been mandated to seek a solution.

Turkey’s active inclusion in the future of Europe will have influence on the future shape of Europe itself. This is particularly true in relation to pertinent but touchy questions such as whether Europe will have the ability to establish a genuinely multi-cultural society and whether it will be able to play the role of a global actor, influencing developments in the Middle East, and in other parts of the world.

Hence, if the accession process resumes and its credibility is restored, this would not only give Turkey and its Western allies a strong hand in dealing with the surrounding insta-

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bility and uncertainty, but it would also enhance Turkey’s credentials in dealing with the region and facilitate Turkey’s acting as an economic, cultural, political, and social hub in its neighborhood, benefiting the EU, the neighborhood, and itself.

The first task at hand is to free Turkey-EU relations from the shackles of moribund accession negotiations. The trick is not to allow this search to lead to the trap of “privileged partnership” or the path of an alternative formula of relations with Turkey. Even though a clear definition for it has not been found yet, the “privileged partnership” formula aims to restrict the EU-Turkish relations to a few areas such as an extended customs union and common foreign and security policy and to permanently keep Turkey’s status as an “associate member” or partner. The accession process should still follow its own path or stay in coma.

Yet, we need to build up and take a side road that guides the relations to the final goal of membership nonetheless. Such a script necessitates that the Union as a whole be more determined to overcome the Cyprus debacle, which, in turn means that core members must make up their minds about Turkey’s membership once and for all. Arguably, Turkish membership would be an easier development to handle if the Union’s potential new structures are looser and more decentralized. Until the future EU structure and institutional arrangements are put in place, it is imperative to keep the vitality of the relations. Since Turkey’s strategic orientation as a Western country has been reconfirmed in the wake of the Arab revolts, it behooves the European Union, provided that it remains true to its own values, promises, and goals, to ensure that Turkey’s socio-political Westernness is also secured. That prospect should not be sacrificed at the altar of a fear-driven politics of bigotry particularly at the historical juncture of the Arab revolts and all the consequences these entail.

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12 Ibid.
Developing bilateral relations with separate European countries can be one of the main pillars of this new strategy. President Abdullah Gul’s four-day visit to Germany and three-day visit to Britain last year, and another three-day visit to the Netherlands in May signal the intention and efforts of Turkey towards enhancing the bilateral relations with these EU members. Similarly, some EU member states, primarily Britain and Sweden, continue to push for Turkey’s accession and make great efforts to enhance their relations with Turkey. As recently as April 2012, the aim to strengthen their relations with Turkey was also expressed by the minister of foreign affairs of Portugal, by the foreign minister of Belgium, and by the prime minister of Finland during their respective visits to Turkey. On June 16, EU foreign ministers, including the Germany’s Guido Westerwelle but with France’s Laurent Fabius conspicuously absent, signed a joint declaration calling for a revitalization of Turkey’s membership process. They made that call in reference to the Union’s economic and strategic interests.

Similarly, the economic cooperation between Turkey and the EU countries need to also be enhanced within the institutional framework. Although 17 years have passed since Ankara signed a customs union agreement with the EU, Turkey remains outside of its decision-making mechanism. One of the major drawbacks of this is that Turkey fails to take part in the Union’s free trade agreements with other countries. It would only be fair that Turkey be involved in the decision-making mechanism. Otherwise, what had been a beneficial arrangement for both parties cannot be sustained into the future.

Özış and Kutlay believe that the future architecture of the EU will be an “a la carte” architecture that would make the Union a more flexible entity. Calling for a fresh look by Turkey at the EU’s own internal dynamics, they believe “the EU and Turkey can develop zones of cooperation without letting their relations be hostage to the accession process.”

Turkey’s geography and history make it a special case. As a historian of the Ottoman Empire, Paul Wittek, once wrote, “the power that controls the Anatolian peninsula must be Janus-faced.” So Turkey’s politics, economy, identity, and strategic inclinations must take into account this imperative of being Janus-faced. Currently Europe’s sclerosis produces a strategic vacuum. Instead of generating energy, a self-doubting, introverted, and fearful Europe sucks it up. What Ash bemoaned 23 years ago need not come true exactly as he depicted. There can and must be more juice left in the old continent to move forward, albeit in a secondary role in a wider West.

Finally Europe’s crisis and its withdrawal syndromes should not be allowed to damage Turkey’s well-calibrated equilibrium in its geographical and cultural setting. That equilibrium depends on the wise management of the country’s multifaceted interests and its links to the surrounding neighborhoods. To succeed in maintaining this equilibrium is a big challenge, and it is not merely Turkey’s to handle.

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About The EuroFuture Project
The German Marshall Fund of the United States understands the twin crisis in Europe and the United States to be a defining moment that will shape the transatlantic partnership and its interactions with the wider world for the long term. GMF’s EuroFuture Project therefore aims to understand and explore the economic, governance and geo-strategic dimensions of the EuroCrisis from a transatlantic perspective. The Project addresses the impact, implications, and ripple effects of the crisis — in Europe, for the United States and the world.

GMF does this through a combination of initiatives on both sides of the Atlantic, including large and small convening, regional seminars, study tours, paper series, polling, briefings, and media interviews. The Project also integrates its work on the EuroCrisis into several of GMF’s existing programs. The Project is led by Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff, Senior Transatlantic Fellow and Senior Director for Strategy. The group of GMF experts involved in the project consists of several Transatlantic Fellows as well as program staff on both sides of the Atlantic.