

I. Accession negotiations to start with Turkey, other states in line

Everyone votes Evet!

There seems little doubt that EU heads of state and government will approve the Commission's recommendation that accession negotiations be opened with Turkey. The European Council meets on 17th December. There are said to be no obstacles left. One ambassador has said that the Turks are bound to receive what they want, namely the opening of accession negotiations and a prospective date for accession itself. Even the strongest opponents of Turkish accession, such as the Austrian Chancellor, Wolfgang Schüssel, who wants a "privileged partnership" with Turkey instead of full membership, is not threatening a veto. The French Foreign Minister, Michel Barnier, has suggested that negotiations could open in the second half of 2005, during the British presidency. London is, of course, a great supporter of Turkish EU accession. Diplomats are finessing the exact terms of the decision, which will be made at the European Council, in order to leave open the possibility of a "privileged partnership" without actually saying it outright. This would be regarded as a defeat for the Turks, who want nothing but full accession. The Cyprus issue is still outstanding but apparently no one believes that the Greek Cypriots will veto the opening of negotiations with Turkey. The Greek Cypriot Foreign Minister has said that Turkey has promised to normalise its relations with Cyprus before March 2005, i.e. that recognition is not a pre-condition for a positive decision this weekend. Greece itself has made rapprochement with Turkey one of its own strategic goals. [Arnaud Leportantier, *Le Monde*, 14th December 2004]

MEPs voted on 15th December in favour of EU accession, by 407 votes to 262 with 29 abstentions. The vote is symbolic, since the decision is taken by EU governments, but it gives a strong signal. The Yes vote was supported by a majority of liberals and conservatives, socialists and Greens. The No voters were mainly the right-wing French and German MEPs, as well as sovereignists and the extreme right. [*Le Monde*, 15th December 2004]

Geopolitical imperatives

For most supporters of Turkish EU membership, the main imperative is to "open a dialogue with the Islamic world" by bringing Turkey into European

structures. By admitting a Muslim state, the EU would be demonstrating its desire to avoid the "clash of civilisations". Supporters also believe that it would enable Europe to intervene in regional conflicts in the Middle East with more legitimacy. A Commission report into the matter made this clear when it concluded that, "The inclusion of Turkey into the EU would give the Muslim world proof that its religious beliefs are compatible with the values of the European Union." The report also said that Turkish accession would help stabilise the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and that "it would bring the EU into more direct contact with the difficult political and security problems in the region." Indeed, with Turkey in the EU, the borders of "Europe" would be with Armenia, Georgia, Syria, Iraq and Iran. Other commentators have said that the notion of effecting a rapprochement with the Muslim world via Turkey is nonsense. Louis Boursanges, a French MEP from the centre-right UDF party, says, "That is the stupidest thing I have ever heard. It would be a profound error to believe that the Arabs could feel themselves represented by the Turks. On the contrary, they will feel excluded, but for ethnic not religious reasons." Boursanges says that Europe would show that it is not a Christian club if it admitted Turkey, but that it would then appear to be "a colonial club" because it would have as members all the states which previously colonised the Arab world. [Thomas Ferenczi, *Le Monde*, 14th December 2004]

Leave your history at the door, please

The French Foreign Minister, Michel Barnier, has said that the issue of the Armenian genocide will be put on the table with Turkey. Barnier said that Turkish recognition of the Armenian genocide was not a pre-condition for negotiations, but his use of the word "genocide" was itself significant, since previously he had used only the word "tragedy" to describe what happened in 1915. Sources in the Elysée Palace have said that "only countries which have faced up to their past may enter the European Union." [*Le Figaro*, 15th December 2004]

Effect on finances

It is obvious that Turkish accession would put enormous strain on the EU's finances. According to the Commission's own report, published on 6th

October, Turkey would be entitled to €28 billion in 2025 if it joined in 2015. This would be one third of the current EU budget. Ankara would have to contribute some €5.6 billion. But people generally agree that these are extrapolations based on existing policies, which would have to be changed if Turkey joined. Given that the accession of Turkey would increase the agricultural surface of the EU by 23%, this presumably signals the end (or at least the fundamental reform) of the Common Agricultural Policy. [Philippe Ricard, *Le Monde*, 15th December 2004]

Germans against

In Germany, the issue of Turkish accession is a big bone of contention between the government and the opposition. Chancellor Schröder and the Dutch premier, Jan Peter Balkenende, have called for the EU to give a strong signal in favour of accession, the head of the CSU, Edmund Stoiber, and the Chairman of the CDU, Angela Merkel, have said that if they are elected to government in 2006 they will campaign against Turkish accession, proposing instead a “privileged partnership”. Mrs Merkel said that the issue of Turkey could well become a main issue in the electoral campaign. The General Secretary of the CSU, Markus Söder, said it would be an absolutely central issue: he accused the Chancellor of a lack of patriotism for going against the wishes of the majority of Germans. Although the Chancellor has said that the goal of the negotiations is full membership, and nothing less, he has admitted that they could last for ten or fifteen years. The Greens, who govern in coalition with the Social Democrats, reacted furiously when the Christian Democrats debated problems associated with Turkish accession, when it was said that there were significant security risks, and that there could be a rise in organised crime and Islamic terrorism in the EU. [Ansgar Graw & Carsten Fiedler, *Die Welt*, 14th December 2004] According to a poll, 67 per cent of French people, 55 per cent of Germans and 65 per cent of Spaniards are against Turkey joining the EU. In Italy and the United Kingdom there are majorities in favour. [*Le Figaro*, 13th December 2004]

In a debate in the German parliament (Bundestag), which ended in a vote in favour of Turkish accession, the opposition leader, Angela Merkel, said that Turkish membership of the EU would be “a catastrophe”. She said Turkey did not meet the criteria for opening negotiations. She said that there was no doubt that torture was still practised and that there was not religious freedom. She said that EU leaders were being dishonest in their dealings with Ankara and she attacked European leaders for not having a Plan B if the accession talks fail. (This is her way of trying to leave a door open for the “privileged partnership” she and her party want

instead.) [*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16th December 2004]

The former Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, echoed Mrs Merkel’s words when he said in an interview that Turkey would not fulfil the Copenhagen criteria for membership. He said it would take ten or fifteen years for this to happen. Kohl said it was “dishonest” of certain EU leaders to promise accession to the Turks at this stage when they knew full well that they would be unable to keep their promise and that they would not have the support of their own electorates. Kohl said he was referring to Jacques Chirac and to other EU leaders. Kohl also said that he thought it a mistake to bring Ukraine into the EU, since attention had to be paid to the strategic environment, especially Ukraine’s proximity to Russia. He also said that EU enlargement should cease with the accession of Bulgaria, Romania and certain Balkan states. “The political union cannot bear any more than that,” he said. Kohl also said he was against a “directorate” of the main EU states. Finally, Kohl reacted coldly to the latest attempt by the Schröder government to obtain a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. He said that Germany would receive a permanent seat only when the Americans backed them, and they would not do this now. [*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 15th December 2004]

Chirac goes on telly

The French president, Jacques Chirac, made a television address on the eve of the summit to explain his pro-Turkish position to the French people. He also wanted to reassure them that the issue would be put to a referendum. In other words, he was appealing to public opinion over the heads of his own party, which is against Turkey joining. He also wants to mollify public opinion, fearing that public hostility to Turkey might even make the French vote No to the EU Constitution. Chirac wanted to show that the opening of negotiations does not mean that they will succeed, and that Turkey will therefore necessarily join. [Béatrice Gurrey, *Le Monde*, 16th December 2004]

Croatia knocks on the door ...

The Prime Minister of Croatia, Ivo Sanader, has called on the European Union not to link his country’s accession to the EU with the issue of its cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague. He said that this would represent a step backwards, because it is not currently listed as a condition. In June, the EU had decided to open negotiations with Croatia at the beginning of 2005, without conditions, but EU Foreign Ministers meeting on 13th December said informally that the negotiations would start “around April 2005” providing that Croatia cooperated fully with the ICTY. The ICTY is demanding the

extradition of General Ante Gotovina, who is in hiding. [*Le Monde*, 14th December 2004]

... and Romania too

The newly elected centre-right President of Romania, Traian Basescu, has indicated that he may be dissatisfied with the terms agreed by his predecessor, Ion Iliescu, a few days before the presidential election on 12th December. The “technical” aspects of the 31-chapter negotiation process were agreed, and the European Council is supposed to sign off on the principle of accession for Romania and Bulgaria this weekend. Both the new and the outgoing Romanian presidents will attend the summit. Basescu has indicated that he might ask for the reopening of the chapters on energy and competition, attacking his rival in the presidential race, Adrian Nastase, for having negotiated “on his knees” and without taking into account Romania’s needs. The Commission has reacted coolly to Mr. Basescu’s statement, saying that any reopening of the negotiations might only make things worse for Romania. The conditions imposed on Romania are, by common agreement, the harshest

ever imposed on an accession candidate. For Romania, unlike for any other candidate state, the so-called security clause can be activated, by means of which accession would be delayed by one year, if two-thirds of the present member states vote in favour of it. In the case of Bulgaria, a unanimous vote is needed to activate the security clause, which is intended as a safeguard against the non-implementation of obligations. [*Profil*, Vienna, 14th December 2004]

Basescu celebrated his victory by promising to fight against corruption in Romania and “to put an end to the time when politics controlled the police and judicial systems”. Basescu, who is often referred to as “a former sailor” but who has also been accused of being a former Securitate agent, says that he hopes Romania will join the EU on 1st January 2007. He is now struggling to find a parliamentary majority (the parliament remains unchanged) and rumours are circulating in Bucharest that he may even have to ask his defeated rival, the present Prime Minister, Adrian Nastase, to form a government. [Mirel Bran, *Le Monde*, 15th December 2004; *România libera*, 15th December 2004]

II. Other European news

Brussels will not sue Berlin and Paris on deficits

The German Finance Minister has welcomed the decision by the European Commission not to proceed with its excessive deficit procedure against France and Germany. The two countries, whose borrowing greatly exceeds the permitted amounts laid down in the Stability Pact, have thereby escaped being fined billions of euros. The Christian Democrat opposition has attacked the decision, saying that it means that the Stability pact has now been totally buried. “The Stability Pact is dead,” said one member of the Bundestag. The Commission said that it had concluded that it was not necessary to take any further measures against the two countries, because they had promised to get their borrowing down under 3 per cent of GDP next year. Hans Eichel said the decision showed that the Commission had approved Germany’s decision to take prudential measures under very difficult economic circumstances. He said the decision showed that the German economy was on the right track. [*Die Welt*, 14th December 2004]

ICJ refuses to hear Serbia-Montenegro

The government of Serbia-Montenegro suffered a defeat when the International Court of Justice ruled that it was not competent to hear a suit for genocide against eight NATO member states, given that they refuse to recognise its jurisdiction over the matter. Serbia-Montenegro (the former Yugoslavia) had

brought the suit in 1999 over NATO’s decision to attack the country. But the fifteen ICJ judges decided unanimously to throw the case out, thereby finding in favour of the governments, including the British, who have said that they refuse to recognise the court’s right to rule on the matter. But the ICJ has also said that it will hear a suit about genocide *against* Serbia and Montenegro, submitted by Bosnia & Herzegovina. [*Agence France Presse*, 15th December 2004; <http://www.icj-cij.org/>]

Racism on the rise in the Netherlands

A report published by the University of Leiden and the Amsterdam Anne Frank Foundation has found that 174 violent racially motivated acts were committed in the Netherlands in November alone. This compares with a figure of 260 for the whole of 2003. This outbreak of violence follows the sharp deterioration in inter-ethnic relations following the murder by a Muslim extremist of the film director Theo van Gogh on 2nd November. In 60 per cent of the reported cases, Muslims and Muslim institutions were the target of the attacks. 47 mosques were attacked, but also 13 churches. [*Handelsblatt*, 15th December 2004]

Italian cribs without baby Jesus

In Northern Italy, schools have assembled cribs without any figure representing the infant Jesus. A school head master in Vicenza said this was to show

respect for non-Christian pupils. In a primary school in Treviso, instead of reading out the story of Christ's birth, children were treated instead to a reading of the fairy tale, "Little Red Riding Hood". At a school on Lake Como, the word *Gesù* (Jesus) was taken out of a school song, *Buon Natale in allegria* ("Happy Christmas"), and replaced with the word *virtù* ("virtue") instead. These events come as a ruling is awaited from the Italian constitutional court on whether it is legal for there to be crucifixes in school classrooms. The ruling follows a national outcry after a court in Abruzzo forbade crucifixes to be placed in classrooms. This followed a complaint by a Muslim father that his son could not be expected to look at a crucifix. [*Corriere della sera*, 13th December 2004]

Mr Bush goes to Berlin

President George W. Bush is to visit Germany during his next visit to Europe, in February 2005. He will attend a meeting with the leaders of Nato and EU states on 22nd February and go on to Berlin to meet Chancellor Schröder after that. It has also been reported that Chancellor Schröder has been invited to the United States, although the German government has not yet confirmed this. Bush last visited Germany in May 2002. [*Die Welt*, 16th December 2004]

Germany's deposit bottles

The Bundesrat, the upper chamber of the German government, is to vote on a new system for deposit bottles after the European Commission ruled the old one incompatible with the EU's free market policies. The European Court of Justice in Luxembourg ruled that Germany's requirement that bottles be returnable for re-use disadvantaged foreign suppliers of mineral water, who could not operate the return system in Germany. Thus German law was in conflict with EU law on the single market. [*Die Welt*, 14th December 2004]

Zapatero accuses Aznar of trickery

The new Spanish Prime minister, José Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, spent an entire day testifying before the parliamentary committee which is investigating the terrorist attack in Spain of 11th March, two weeks after his predecessor, José Maria Aznar, appeared. Zapatero spent hours refuting point by point what Aznar had said. Zapatero insisted repeatedly that Islamic extremists had carried out the attack, and not the Basque group ETA as his predecessor had initially claimed. He insisted that the authors of the attacks belonged to the same terrorist network which was guilty of 9-11, the discotheque bombing in Bali in October 2002, and the ones in Casablanca and Istanbul in 2003. Zapatero also virulently rejected the

notion, suggested by Aznar and the American government, that the Spanish people had given in to terrorism by electing him and the Socialists to power after the attacks. [*Diane Cambon, Le Figaro*, 14th December 2004]

No agreement on EU finances

The attempt by the Dutch presidency of the EU to reach agreement on the EDU budget for 2007 to 2013 has failed. The positions of the six net contributors and the other states remain irreconcilable. Germany and five other net contributors are demanding that their contribution be capped to 1 per cent of GDP. That would mean a budget of some €700 billion over seven years. The other states want more money: €1050 billion, or 1.14 per cent of GDP. The Commission and the Parliament also want higher spending. The Luxembourg presidency, which starts in January, will have to try to reach agreement. The Luxembourg Prime Minister, Jean-Claude Juncker, will probably suggest a compromise of 1.05 per cent of GDP. The British rebate is also being hotly debated. The Luxembourgers are therefore believed to have only a few weeks in which to reach agreement, because a British general election is expected in May 2005. Most diplomats think that this goal is extremely ambitious. The difficulties have been compounded by the attempt of some states to reopen the agricultural dossier. A compromise reached in 2002 provided that spending on the CAP would remain unchanged until 2006. After that, it would shrink to about one third of the total budget by 2013. But some states have called for the CAP to be cut even further. France and Germany have firmly rejected any new negotiations on this and the Commission president, José Manuel Barroso, has also said that this issue cannot now be revisited. But the Dutch presidency had tried to include it in the overall budget negotiations. [*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 12th December 2004]

Anti-corruption MEP accused of fraud

The EU's anti-corruption unit OLAF has confirmed that it has requested the assistance of the Austrian authorities in its investigations into Hans-Peter Martin, who earlier in the year accused his fellow MEPs of systematic fraud. Martin has confirmed that his lawyers have received allegations but says they are extremely vague and in any case unfounded. Martin has denounced the move as an attempt to discredit him and his campaign against MEPs' practice of fiddling their travel expenses.

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