

IN SEARCH OF EUROPEAN GEOSTRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE

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The age of artificial intelligence has begun. It is also time for Europe to enter a new age of intelligence, a geopolitical intelligence. Relations with Türkiye present in this respect an opportunity for the European Union to move forward and deserve therefore to be analyzed in the perspective of the European elections and beyond.

The AI revolution is not the only geopolitically game-changing show in town. Simultaneously, impressive progress is upon us in space technologies, quantum computing, renewable energy technologies, biotech health solutions...

China! Its financial, social, and ecological problems and its global competitiveness, its emerging global lead in solar power, electric cars, smart cities, and critical raw materials...

Democracy! Half of the planet's population vote in some way in 2024. India, the world's most populous democracy, continues its geopolitical rise; Indonesia, Taiwan, Bangladesh, Mexico, the UK, the European Parliament... Having elections does not exclude authoritarian tendencies and the erosion of democracies whereas the US presidential elections, in the oldest constitutional democracy, will have more than ever a global impact.

And wars! Ukrainians, Palestinians, Yemenis,

Syrians, many people in Africa are subjected to the murderous violence of war.

In the tangle of globalization and technology, the world is changing faster. The European Union is changing; naturally, Türkiye's global position and its course within Europe are on the move.

A more positive relationship between the European Union and Türkiye is a decades-long project of advocates from all over Europe and across the Atlantic. Drawing on history, witnesses see how this relationship can be an excellent win-win algorithm, as much as it can rapidly turn out to be a lose-lose situation or even a triple win-or-lose equation—with political, economic, and social resonance reaching far beyond the Continent. The challenge is to upload this historically well-tested algorithm into the twenty-first century: rebooting a new version of Türkiye's European integration with updates on democratic conditionality, foreign and defense policy cooperation, and an economic framework.

The Türkiye debate's focal point is "Europe's geostrategic sovereignty." Türkiye should evolve to be a net contributor to Europe's security and global competitiveness. No matter how significant today's drawbacks are, such as the definition of freedom of expression and

tensions like the Cyprus imbroglio, the guiding question for the EU ought to be: “how can Türkiye, in the near future, become a country that is progressively in convergence with the values and interests of European citizens?” This includes citizens of the Turkish Republic as well.

Ultimately, when it comes to relations with the EU, the key factors in the equation are tomorrow’s Europe, Türkiye, and the global environment: x_1 , x_2 , x_3 .

A “delightful” mathematical equation with three unknowns that we all “love”.

GLOBĀL OUTLOOK

Let us start with the “easiest” one. Global change. Yes, the geopolitical context is changing rapidly. One of the most important bets of these times is the increasingly complicated relationship between Washington and Beijing. The global financial system, trade and technology are at the heart of this rivalry: cybersecurity, hypersonic and cyber weapons, space rivalry, the search for substitutes to the US dollar in international trade, digital currency projects, social media tools... Two different visions of social life are in competition and interaction. At the same time, there is a fast-rising India moving slowly and partially closer to the wider Western world; a shrinking Russia, a changing Saudi Arabia, a young Africa...

Globalization prompts increased mobility and prosperity to human civilization, but also stimulates us to be more innovative to deal with global viruses of all kinds: biological, digital, and financial; the disinformation virus contaminating our democracies; and also, the viruses of terrorism, organized crime, corruption, and unemployment. Most importantly, the CO₂ virus endangers the human civilization⁽¹⁾.

Predictions are impossible, but a Europe with a strong strategic influence in a changing world is important. This requires a more effective institutional order and a wider geography of security, economic, legal, and regulatory standards.

TÜRKIYE’S EQUATION

Türkiye is the other unknown in the equation of EU-Türkiye relations. A Türkiye that abides by the legislation and jurisprudence of the Council of Europe, of which it is a member, and becomes a much stronger state of law and a society of freedoms, will be a significant added value in tomorrow’s Europe. Democracy is essential for a strong Türkiye not only in Europe but also in the world in the 21st century. The most important source of soft power for Türkiye in all areas such as diplomacy, security, counterterrorism, trade, investment, tourism, technology, science, culture, and visas should be a respected democracy. Of course, this soft power should also rely on the rule of law and human rights breakthroughs, reliable economic management, structural reforms, especially in the constitution, judiciary, education, taxation, employment, and agriculture...

Political tensions between Türkiye and the EU are real and challenging. However, nonconstructive policies of engagement are also part of the problem. They have been stimulated by years of ever weaker partnership, deadlocks, prejudices, and policy errors from both sides. Thus, we cannot find in more negative policies—blocking, suspending, or sanctioning different aspects of the EU-Türkiye relationship—a relevant solution to contemporary problems. As Albert Einstein would have said: “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

Excluding Türkiye from Europe has been very costly for citizens of both the EU and Türkiye. If Türkiye had been deeply, skillfully engaged—on issues such as foreign and security policies, rule of law, refugees, economic growth, and energy policy—when the opened accession negotiations began in 2005, the sequel today would be much different. ►

(1) Bahadır Kaleağası, « Global Viruses and Goals », Analyses website, Institut des relations internationales et stratégiques (IRIS), 2020
www.iris-france.org/148215-global-viruses-and-goals.

- Including Türkiye would have strengthened the EU as a global power and would have contributed to the development of Türkiye as a European democracy in convergence with European values and interests.⁽²⁾

THE BRUSSELS EFFECT

The European Union is the global economic power with the most numerous and deepest economic agreements with other countries in the world, from Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam to Latin America. Meanwhile, the EU making progress towards a transatlantic economic area through the Trade and Technology Council with the United States. It also has strong economic ties with India and China, the world's most populous countries. In the 21st century, the EU continues to be influential as a powerhouse of standards in the international economy.

Europe emerged from the pandemic crisis by strengthening its policies on finance, trade, health, digital transformation, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and climate change. In the Russia and energy crisis, the EU has also managed to develop a more common foreign policy. In the face of Hamas' terrorist acts and the Israeli government's military violence against civilians, however, a common EU policy has not been effective, even though many governments and influential segments of the EU public opinion have taken a clear critical stance. Conflicting positions have emerged from many capitals.

On the other hand, the European Union ought to overcome very important challenges. While managing the energy crisis triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it is trying to increase new sources of energy supply and develop clean energy technologies. Inflation is down to around five percent but not yet under control. Policy coherence is lacking on immigration policy, the fight against terrorism, travel visas and many foreign policy files. Most importantly, the EU and Western democracies are facing a tough test in the 21st century. Income inequalities, social insecurities, disinformation, and extreme populist movements are in a spiral of mutual influence.

FLEXIBLE INTEGRATION CIRCLES

At the end of 2023, Jacques Delors, the legendary President of the European Commission, passed away. His leadership marked the history in crucial stages such as the revitalization of the European integration process in the 1980s with the "European single market", the establishment of the European Union after the Cold War's end, and the Euro project. Since those years, the debates on federation, confederation, variable geometry, multi-speed progress, concentric circles, enhanced cooperation and differentiated integration systems resulted in various treaty changes. The argumentation on "whether first to deepen institutionally or widen to new members" is also still relevant today.

A continental European design is gradually taking shape: the euro zone is at the core of a European Union, which is moving towards an increasingly federal structure. Beyond that is a circle of countries that are not full members of the Union but are closely integrated economically and in terms of regulatory convergence: Türkiye, Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, the UK, the Western Balkans, and the Black Sea countries... The rules of transitivity between the circles should become clear. It may even be possible to establish a special link with the Eurozone system without being a member of the EU. The largest circle is the broad European geography from the Atlantic to the Caspian Sea: a flexible confederal structure that will enhance the perspective of a Europe that will not shrink in a global environment that is expanding in every direction.

Ankara was right to respond positively to French president Macron's the European Political Community initiative, a step toward a broad circle of membership with forty-seven member states on the continent. The first summits were held in Prague in October 2022, Moldova in June 2023, and Grenada in October 2023; United and Kingdom are next in line. Türkiye can take at least three initiatives in this regard: top-level participation; a proposal to host a summit in 2024; and most importantly, building on this new political framework with concrete policy and harmonized legislative proposals in areas such as

energy, green finance, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, defense industry and migration.

The future of Europe debate has a detailed legal and technical depth. Many scenarios are possible. Some of them require the reform of existing EU treaties. It is a challenging process triggering very sophisticated balance of power calculations among the European states and their domestic priorities. In an EU with an increasing number of members, the unanimity rule at the EU Council of Ministers is still the most problematic issue for decision-making in many areas such as the common foreign and security policy (with the exception of certain clearly defined cases which require qualified majority, e.g. appointment of a special representative), citizenship (the granting of new rights to EU citizens), EU membership, harmonization of national legislation on indirect taxation, EU finances (own resources, the multiannual financial framework), certain provisions in the field of justice and home affairs (the European prosecutor, family law, operational police cooperation, etc.) and the harmonization of national legislation in the field of social security and social protection. All are related to the notion of statehood.

The “unanimity vs qualified majority” debate’s intensity has gone through various ups and downs since the early years of the European integration process. The rule encourages tougher negotiations and according to its defenders, enhances the democratic legitimacy, strengthens unity, improves implementation, and offers small states a shield against the demands pushed by the largest countries. However, the arguments to abandon it are also strong: unanimity hinders decision-making, fosters a lowest-common-denominator mindset, and prevents the EU

from achieving its full potential on the global stage. Kyiv experienced several episodes of EU’s policy uncertainties in its defense against the Russian invasion, as did Ankara when it firmly supported, together with all the EU capitals, the UN peace plan on Cyprus only to see the island’s Southern part to reject it and yet becoming an EU member, resulting in the blocking of many advancements in the EU’s policies vis-à-vis Türkiye.

ROADMAP

Türkiye is unlikely to give-up its status of EU accession country. Nor would it negotiate a tailor-made special status under the current circumstances. Ankara should wait until there is a better institutionalized European differentiated integration system to re-define its European orbit. This may not necessarily be a full membership to the EU as we know today. Once again, this is a complicated equation with many variable factors in 21st century’s space-time continuum.

Meanwhile, on the more tangible and practical level, a successful modernization of the EU-Türkiye customs union also is an important asset for the EU. Progress on the customs union would involve the extension of the model to include services, agriculture, public procurement, and dispute settlement mechanisms. This needs to be a twenty-first century version partnership which also covers the European digital single market,⁽³⁾ the European Green Deal,⁽⁴⁾ and more broadly Türkiye’s commitment to converge with the EU’s Sustainable Development Goals policies. Concurrently, the pandemic-triggered changes that are worth reemphasizing in the global supply and value chains in trade, services, logistics, tourism, finance, technology, and data mobility highlight the importance of the ►

(2) Bahadır Kaleağası, « EU and Türkiye: Time to Act, » Euractiv, 2016 www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/opinion/eu-and-türkiye-time-to-act.

(3) European Commission, « Shaping Europe’s Digital Future: The European Digital Strategy, » Commission webpage, accessed in March 2021 <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/content/european-digital-strategy>.

(4) European Commission, « A European Green Deal: Striving to Be the First Carbon-neutral Continent » Commission webpage, accessed in March 2021 https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en.

- proximity factor: being closer to the EU is important. Another “Brussels effect” enters the picture at this point: business. Europe’s most representative and influential voice of the private economy. The BusinessEurope, The Confederation of European Business, lists the EU-Türkiye customs union’s modernization among its key proposals to EU institutions and governments in view of a post pandemic economic recovery and global competitiveness.⁽⁵⁾

Symmetrically, for Türkiye as well the relations with the EU are a matter of global competitiveness. They are therefore a matter of republican values, democratic standards, national security, economic prosperity, and social progress. More than Europe, this is all about Türkiye’s Western anchor. In this respect, the “West” is a trans-geographical concept: North America, Europe, Japan, South Korea, Australia... Recent definitions like “global South” and BRICS are also important but vague. Countries such as Brazil, India, China, and Indonesia do not have the geostrategic priority alignment to become a unified political or economic bloc. Moreover, China and other countries have deep relations with the “West” in many areas. Türkiye needs to strengthen itself within the Western world and at the same time become a country that is more open to the East and the South, to every global direction on the strategic compass.

In this perspective, a chain of positive developments supports each other. On the one hand, progress in the European Union process. To be respected, trusted and influential in the world with high democratic, economic, and social standards, a smart investment climate, advances in science and technology, and in all areas of social life, especially women’s rights. To rapidly increase its attractiveness not only in the West but also in the East and around the world in all dimensions, from diplomacy to investment, finance to cultural relations. On the other hand, as Türkiye’s relations with the rest of the world deepen, the country plays a more influential and constructive role, this time in Europe. This formula is very clear. Dilemmas such as “Europe or Eurasia?” are irrelevant to Ankara. Türkiye’s rise in world politics and economy depends on its ability to emerge as Europe’s Eurasian gateway.

In the European Union institutions’ new term, reengaging with Türkiye also would propel convergence on various foreign policy topics such as Cyprus, the Eastern Mediterranean, Black Sea, Caucasus, the fight against terrorism, and management of the refugee crisis. In a nutshell, “bringing the modernization of the customs union to the negotiation table provides the EU with the opportunity to capitalize on Türkiye’s continued interest in the matter. It will help Europe to establish a rules-based communicative space where the EU and Türkiye can negotiate their positions. As such, the EU can contribute to the de-escalation of the present conflicts with Türkiye without jeopardizing Ankara’s cooperation. Moreover, resocializing Türkiye back into diplomatic circles may help Europe convince Türkiye to abide by agreements.”⁽⁶⁾

IT IS DEMOCRACY...⁽⁷⁾

Europe’s future is marked by existential questions. Shall European states ultimately commit to a prerequisite level of coherence and solidarity to craft the EU’s new global role? Will there be agreement to transfer more effective economic policy competences from member states to the EU’s supranational level? How can Europe continue to generate soft power for a more democratic, greener, human-

(5) « Business Europe, Proposals for a European Economic Recovery Plan », April 30, 2020, www.buseneseurope.eu/sites/buseur/files/media/position_papers/buseneseurope_recovery_plan_final_30_04_2020_v2.pdf.

(6) Sinem Adar, Nicola Bilotta, Aurélien Denizeau, Sinan Ekim, Dorothee Schmid, Günter Seufert, Ilke Toygür, and Karol Wasilewski, « Customs Union: Old Instrument, New Function in EU-Türkiye Relations », Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP Comment, 48 (October 2020), www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2020C48_CustomsUnionEU_Türkiye.pdf.

(7) Bahadır Kaleağası, « Europe’s geostrategic sovereignty and Türkiye », The Atlantic Council, 2021 www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/europes-geostrategic-sovereignty-and-Türkiye

centric, and safer world? Türkiye can be a part of the answer to these questions. The only realistic strategy for Türkiye's global competitiveness is to reposition itself as the West's Eurasian gateway of democracy, economic dynamism, and social progress.

The EU's capitals, including Athens and Nicosia, can either be idealistic or realistic. However, both ways of thinking point toward more benefits from reengaging Türkiye in the European integration process, including conditionalities on concluding, not initiating, different phases such as a modernized customs union. Maybe there also is a third way: extreme and short-sighted populism. There is enough historical evidence to argue that the more Türkiye will be excluded from the EU's sphere of influence, the more it will become part of the problems which in turn nourish populist demagoguery and threats to Western democracy. In the end, the main purpose of all these thoughts and recommendations is the search for a better twenty-first century democracy. ■

For more information:

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