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From the Editors

Dear Friends,

The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies is proud to present the May 2017 issue of our monthly publication, *Turkeyscope*. In this issue, Egemen Bezci, from Stockholm University's Institute of Turkish Studies, analyzes the deteriorating Turkish-EU relations. The second article, written by Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak, discusses President Erdoğan's recent statements on Jerusalem and their possible ramifications on Israeli - Turkish relations.

Sarah Jacobs contributed to this issue as assistant editor.

Special thanks go to Ben Mendales for translating Mr. Cohen Yanarocak's article from Hebrew into English.

Interregnum in Turkey-EU Relations

Egemen Bezci

Turkey's three decade dream of European Union membership is on the brink. Turkey's EU accession is dying, but neither side has officially called for termination. This deteriorating situation can also be referred to as an interregnum that has placed precarious Turkey-EU relations in limbo. Never before in the history of the modern Turkey have Turkish decision-makers and European leaders made critical public statements about each other, expressing uneasiness over the current state of relations. The only way out of this impasse is the renewal of committed EU accession talks for Turkey.

After Germany and the Netherlands prohibited Turkish politicians from campaigning in their countries for the recent referendum, Turkey's President Erdoğan accused German and Dutch leaders of following "Nazi practices," and called the EU "fascist" and "cruel," accusing it of engaging in a crusade against the Islam.¹ Meanwhile, European leaders were not idle as in the face of belligerent rhetoric from Turkish politicians. For instance, Volker Bouffier, Vice-Chairman of Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union, harshly responded, "Mr. Erdoğan and his government are not welcome in our country, and that must be now be understood".²

Some of these public statements can be explained by domestic pressure on leaders, who were using the foreign policy card in their election campaigns. For example, President Erdoğan reaped the rewards of anti-Western sentiment in the constitutional referendum of April 16, 2017, gaining expanded executive powers.³ Additionally, over the past decade, under the country's ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP), Turkish politics has become more authoritarian and the rule of law has been largely violated. Following the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016, the Council of Europe put Turkey on the watchlist, due to the country's deteriorating human rights record.⁴ However, the general trend of Turkish-EU relations reflects a structural change that is not fully explained by domestic political considerations or Turkey's shift towards authoritarian politics that undermine the rule of law.

Recent statements from Turkey and European countries show that their focus has strayed from Turkey's EU accession. In the aftermath of his narrow victory in the referendum, President Erdoğan continued to use anti-EU rhetoric, saying that Turkey might hold a referendum to reinstate the death penalty and withdraw its EU accession bid.⁵ President Erdoğan's desire to reinstate capital punishment elicited a strong reaction from Brussels. President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker responded to the Turkish President by saying that the death penalty "would be the reddest of all red lines."⁶

There are some in Ankara who argue that President Erdoğan is deliberately provoking Brussels into terminating Turkey's EU membership bid in order to be released from

the legal and political requirements imposed by the accession process.⁷ However, as veteran journalist Murat Yetkin observed, termination would be a nightmare scenario. Not only would it damage Turkey's economic and political conditions, but it would also eliminate the EU's normative power – and an unstable Turkey represents a major security risk to the EU. Indeed, Hans-Georg Maassen, the head of the German domestic intelligence agency, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz – BfV), recently warned that the spillover effect of the conflicts in Turkey and Syria are highly threatening to Europe.⁸

Without accession talks, Brussels would not hold the leverage necessary to prevent Turkey from destabilizing further. Dr. Paul T. Levin, an expert on Turkish-EU relations at Stockholm University, explained, “The promise of full membership was the carrot that once arguably propelled reform. With that promise gone, so is the leverage that the EU once held over Turkey. Other inducements, like visa liberalization and the 'modernization' of the Customs Union, do not have the same power of attraction. But the EU is still by far Turkey's biggest trading partner, so there should reasonably be limits to how much Ankara will want the relationship to deteriorate.”⁹

Following the EU-Turkey refugee deal of March 2016, the transactional dimension of the relations has been tested. Although both sides have incentives to develop “wise relations,” without the emphasis on accession, Turkey-EU relations continue to deteriorate. Lucia Najslova, an assistant professor of EU affairs at Charles University in Prague, explains that “regardless of Turkey's attitude to EU accession, the expectation that a candidate will do more than members simply violates and contradicts the logic of accession process.”¹⁰

Therefore, in order to endure the interregnum in Turkish-EU relations without further harm to both sides, Ankara and Brussels should realize that their mutual dependency is deeply rooted and multilayered. Thus, instead of openly hostile remarks in public, wise politics should be implemented immediately to return to “a committed” accession process. Otherwise, a fragile, transactional Turkish-EU relationship will inevitably deteriorate further.

A familiar tune, but new tactics: Erdoğan goes on the defensive with Jerusalem as his objective

Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak

Normalization of fragile relations between Jerusalem and Ankara, which was achieved in June 2016 following considerable diplomatic efforts, brought about a period of reduced tension between the two countries. This period ended on May 8, when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called for Turkish citizens to visit Jerusalem and strongly criticized Israel's proposed "Muezzin Law" at the "Jerusalem Foundations" summit in Turkey. The timing of Erdoğan's comments was not a coincidence; the proposed legislation in Israel has inflamed sentiments in Turkey, as it fueled public debate in Israel.

Israeli supporters of the law assert that the law is not anti-Islamic, referring to Egypt's laws that prohibit the use of amplifying devices in mosques during hours of rest. Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of Turkish media view the story in an entirely different light.

In almost every case, the Turkish media does not engage with the issue of amplification devices in mosques, instead arguing that Israel is violating Muslims' freedom of religion and worship by banning morning prayers altogether. In light of a trend of increasing Turkish religiosity, it is not surprising that the Israeli Knesset's proposed legislation has seized headlines and become a subject of discussion on social media in Turkey.

Beyond playing on the heartstrings of religious sentiment, Erdoğan's sharp rhetoric against Israel provides him with leverage in internal politics and foreign policy. Erdoğan's approach has remained consistent since the diplomatic incident at the Davos Summit of 2009. Then, against the backdrop of Israeli "Operation Cast Lead," Erdoğan railed against the late former Israeli President Shimon Peres by shouting, "You know very well how to kill people," and stormed off the stage following Peres' subsequent defense of Israel's position.

This rhetoric paid off for Erdoğan at the ballot box and beyond; at the time of the Davos Summit, Erdoğan was considered by the Arab public to be one of the most popular leaders in the Muslim world.

Erdoğan identified and understood the instrumental value of religion in managing his country, and began his campaign to Islamicize secular Turkey through the Turkish Religious Affairs Authority, known as "Diyanet." In 2002, the budget of this governmental body was approximately 550 million Turkish liras. Today, its five-year allocation stands at approximately 40 billion Turkish liras. For Erdoğan, 8 billion a year is a bargain.

With the help of this generous budget, the Religious Affairs Authority provides religious services to Sunni citizens. Beyond this, the Authority is also responsible for

building mosques worldwide, from Maryland, United States to Cologne, Germany. Additionally, the Authority has begun to influence the daily lives of ordinary Turkish citizens by distributing nonbinding religious rulings through television, radio, the Internet, and social media.

This Islamicization quickly percolated, and soon produced a revolution of the Turkish public consciousness, affecting tourism and pilgrimage to the holy cities of Islam. In 2014, Jerusalem was added to the list of destinations for Turkish pilgrims, namely those intending to visit Mecca and Medina. With this important step, the Authority declared unequivocally that it planned to return Jerusalem to the Turkish-Islamic consciousness. Against the backdrop of these developments, the head of the Religious Affairs Authority Mehmet Görmez visited Jerusalem in 2015 and prayed at the Temple Mount.

When taking into account the unfolding events in Turkey, Erdoğan's recent call for Turkish citizens to visit Jerusalem should surprise no one. Erdoğan's Islamist worldview determines Turkey's position regarding the the potential decision to move the United States Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem – a scenario which Turkey is working through all available channels to prevent. Turkey has warned U.S President Trump not to move "one stone" in the Holy Land, lest it provoke an immediate escalation in the region.

Unlike the period that preceded the normalization of relations between Israel and Turkey, Erdoğan is now undertaking preventive measures. In contrast to the past, he is not simply attacking Israel for its own sake. With this, the Turkish president has proven once again that the end of President Obama's administration – which knew how to show Netanyahu the cold shoulder – and the beginning of President Trump's administration – which has been embraced warmly by Israeli leadership – has elicited a redesign of Turkish foreign policy toward Israel.

Turkey aims to protect its important ties with the United States, and because of this, refrains from instigating direct conflict with Israel. However, Erdoğan's incendiary speech at the Jerusalem Summit in Turkey on May 8 showed that when he feels conflict has been imposed upon him by Israel, and when he feels he must take preventive measures, the Turkish president has no intention of sitting in silence.

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פזמון מוכר, טקטיקה חדשה: ארדואן יורד להגנה - ומסמן את ירושלים

***** This article was first published by Walla News on May 9, 2017, in Hebrew *****

Notes

¹ “Recep Tayyip Erdoğan slams 'fascist and cruel' Europe and says Turkey may review ties after powers referendum,” *The Independent*, 21 March 2017; “Erdoğan accuses EU of 'crusade' against Islam,” 17 March 2017.

² “Merkel Ally: Turkey's Erdoğan 'Not Welcome' in Germany,” *VOA*, 21 March 2017.

³ Ishaan Tharoor, “The spat between Turkey and the Netherlands is all about winning votes,” *Washington Post*, 13 March 2017.

⁴ “Turkey Put on Council of Europe Watchlist Over Rights Record,” *Bloomberg*, 25 April 2017.

⁵ “Erdoğan: Turkey to hold referendum on EU membership,” *ABC News*, 1 May 2017.

⁶ Cynthia Kroet, “Jean-Claude Juncker: Turkey’s death penalty a ‘red line’ in EU talks,” *Politico*, 8 May 2017.

⁷ Murat Yetkin, “A Nightmare Scenerio,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, 27 April 2017.

⁸ “German intelligence boss: Threat level remains high,” *DW*, 08 March 2017.

⁹ Interview with Dr. Paul Levin, Stockholm, Sweden, 8 May 2017.

¹⁰ Interview with Dr. Lucia Najslava, Stockholm, Sweden, 8 May 2017.