

# **Turkey EU talks could be heading for breakdown, says report**

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**EUOBSERVER / BRUSSELS - EU negotiations with Turkey are heading for a major crisis this autumn, predicts a new report, with only the political will of the main players able to keep relations on track.**

The 52-page report by the Brussels-based *Friends of Europe* think tank suggests that there are four possible scenarios awaiting Turkey – that talks will get fully back on track; that there is only a partial derailment of talks; that there is a significant slowing down in talks or that talks stop altogether.

Of the four, the author indicates that the last two scenarios are the most likely as Turkey, facing elections next year, has backed itself into a corner on the Cyprus issue and the EU has four member states prepared to play brinkmanship with the state of negotiations.

The immediate cause of a possible crash in Turkey's EU talks is because of Ankara's refusal to open its ports and airports to Greek Cypriot ships although it extended a 1963 customs agreement to cover all member states.

Last year the EU gave an ultimatum that Turkey open its ports by the end of 2006 but prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan continues to insist that it will not make a move until the isolation of Turkish Cypriots is ended – something the EU promised in 2004.

“Even sympathetic EU observers believe that Erdogan has boxed himself into a corner on this, even if he has a political point,” notes the report.

But other more general points are contributing to what the report calls a “plummeting” in relations between the two sides.

“On the Turkish side, there are growing doubts as to whether the EU is serious about the ultimate goal of Turkish membership of the EU....On the EU side, there are concerns at the slowdown of reforms in Turkey, combined with the EU's own loss of momentum over its stalled constitution.”

“Those politicians who on both sides remain genuinely committed to the negotiations will need to have the political strength and strategic skill to take a strong lead at this point if the process is to recover,” the report states.

## **EU started the chain of events**

However, the report is also strongly critical of the EU's role in the situation accusing it of sowing the seeds of destruction by allowing a divided Cyprus into the EU in 2004.

As early as 1999, the EU promised that Cyprus could join the bloc even if there was no settlement which “undercut any leverage especially on the Greek Cypriot side to agree to a deal.”

A week before Cyprus joined the EU, Greek Cypriots overwhelmingly rejected a UN settlement plan for the island.

“The Cyprus problem had become an internal EU problem” said the report suggesting that the EU set up the looming “train crash” between Brussels and Ankara.

### **A possible solution**

The report suggests that talks could be kept on track either by a compromise being found between the Greek and the Turkish Cypriots on opening the Famagusta port under EU or UN supervision or for the EU to find an end to the political isolation of northern Cyprus.

Ways of doing this would be to make Turkish an official language of the EU and giving Turkish Cypriots observer status in both the European Parliament and the bloc’s decision-making body, the council.

“The EU needs to recognise that that the Turkish Cypriots are being denied democratic representation in the EU” a situation the report likens to the English negotiating on behalf of the Scottish or the Flemish on behalf of Belgium.

Such moves would then make it difficult for Turkey to continue to refuse to open ports, suggests the report.

### **No one wins if Turkey talks fail**

The report says that no one would win if either the EU suspended talks or Turkey walked away from them.

“No-one gains from an outcome where EU-Turkey relations are seriously damaged, even if not completely ruptured – apart from nationalists on all sides.”

With the European Commission’s progress report on Turkey coming out in October, the EU leaders’ December summit will likely be the deciding point for Turkey.

At this stage negotiations could either be broken off or the bloc “in typical European fashion, will muddle through to a partial derailment rather than a major train crash, but even a partial derailment risks considerable damage to EU-Turkey relations that could worsen over time,” says the report.