

As Sarkozy pushes Turkey away...

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The general belief was that he would grow more flexible after the election. What happened is just the opposite, however. The French president's harsh attitude toward Turkey continues. In fact, his efforts to block Turkey's EU membership resume their former intensity.

If this tendency doesn't change, it will be impossible to develop the relations between Turkey and France. France couldn't possibly keep its place in our hearts as long as Sarkozy continues to block Turkey's way to the EU.

French President Sarkozy is causing increasing disappointment for people, who care as much as I do about Turkey's relations with France.

When he opposed Turkey's full European Union membership during his presidential campaign against Chirac, we found this "normal" under the circumstances. We said, "This is politics. Campaign slogans are usually dropped after the elections and reality takes over."

Sarkozy won the elections, but nothing changed.

Then we said, "Well, he can't be expected to make a complete turnabout this soon, we've to wait a little." We even got a little bit excited when he displayed a brief tendency to soften his attitude. At that time, I also praised Sarkozy in this column, saying that he had initiated a fine political manoeuvre.

Now, I think that I may have been wrong.

When I review the things he's said and the newspaper reports of the conversations he's held with EU leaders and put them together, I see that Sarkozy's trying to apply a new and even finer policy on Turkey. In other words, he's trying to impose on the EU that "Turkey should be made a privileged partner, and not a full member."

He wants the EU to avoid using the words 'Turkey' and 'full membership' together in official documents or statements. Maybe he didn't get all he wanted out of the foreign ministers' meeting held in Brussels the other day, but he succeeded in changing the objective of the negotiations with Turkey to include the possibility of a privileged partnership besides that of full membership. Actually, he either blocks or freezes all negotiations on all chapters that indicate full membership. He's trying to erode and eliminate the idea of full membership.

He's not very subtle about it either. He's shouting it from the rooftops. If he tried to manage Turkey a little bit, it might be more difficult to detect this policy. However, the French president repeats at every chance that he's determined to block Turkey's way to full membership, and that he doesn't want to see Turkey as a full member; and the EU falls for this blackmail by taking more and more little steps in that direction.

The Elysée Palace openly shows that "It doesn't want to see Turkey as a full member, and that it will do everything in its power to head off the negotiations from that target."

The attitude that Paris adopts in this issue puts a significant handicap in Turkey's way, for France is the engine that pulls the European train. It's very hard to get Europe to do anything that France says "NO" to.

I don't want to discuss the reasons behind Sarkozy's attitude in this article. He must have some grounds for adopting it.

However, we must not bow to France's will.

We have to increase our efforts to get Paris to change its policy, instead of getting mad and withdrawing into our corner. To react against Sarkozy will not solve our problem either. It will only serve to increase his determination.

However, he must be warned not to expect a lot from our bilateral relations as long as he keeps up this attitude to exclude Turkey from the EU.

The EU project is of vital importance to Turkey. No one should have the right to say, "Never mind, let's continue the bilateral relations."

The government's general attitude concerning international tenders on items like nuclear plants, satellites and military equipment can be summarised as, "If anybody is to profit from Turkey, it will not be Sarkozy, who blocks the EU project, but other countries that support Turkey's membership." Pro-Turkey EU countries are also trying to influence Ankara in that direction.

The new French Ambassador Bernard Emié is a very valuable diplomat. It's a pity that his arrival in Turkey coincides with this unfortunate period. During discussions, he says that the bilateral relations should be developed despite the Sarkozy handicap. Actually, he's right from his point of view.

In Turkey, there are 250 French companies with around 5000 employers. Their total investment amounts 10 billion euros. I wish there were more, for this situation benefits Turkey as much as France.

However, the EU project is much more important for Turkey's long-term future. Therefore, it will be extremely difficult to further our relations with France as long as Sarkozy continues to cast his shadow.

I think that this statement takes on an extra meaning, when it is said, with so much sorrow, by someone like me, who values these relations a great deal.