

# Has Turkey's EU-accession process become counterproductive?

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A basic explanation, just to determine what I'm talking about: Essentially the European Union is about sovereignty-sharing between sovereign nations -meaning collective sovereigns of states- in Europe. The implicated core values are freedom (stands for sovereign) and equality (for collective); the structural implications/requirements are known as rule of law and democratic system/procedures. About these values and structures a national consent (agreement, compromise) is required. (In terms of the French Revolution the latter is addressed with "fraternité", complementing the core values of "liberté" and "égalité": Still a valuable orientation mark.)

There is consent among all EU nations and governments that democracy in Turkey is a desirable target, irrespective of whether EU membership of Turkey is desired or not. But there seems to be no such consent in Turkey. The Turkish equivalent has been declared with the title of the "Ankara criteria" (of democratization) by the AKP government, but it turned out to be an almost empty term containing just a little piece of tissue, the headscarf. Actually, this little piece of substance caused even more mistrust and dissent than the general democratic emptiness.

What the EU acquis and/or individual member states can provide is the technical side, the tools for almost any problem that may arise on the way to democracy or in an already working democracy. Along with this expertise there may also be financial support. But successful application requires that there is consent about the goal. This consent however is lacking.

Since some years, the ruling AK Party, but also most opposition parties, present core issues of democracy as a gift for the EU, as a necessary or unnecessary or even an unbearable concession, as a matter of bargaining with the EU. The debates about the famous "301", concerning freedom of speech, was exemplary, but we might pick any core issue like the Kurdish or the Alevi question, the rights of labor unions or of the Orthodox Patriarchate. The AKP's approach to gender equality betrays roughly the same reluctance, although their rhetoric is not very explicit in that matter. Moreover, the ethnically Turkish parties refuse to negotiate a national agreement with the Kurdish DTP, while the CHP refuses to negotiate with the AKP. Meanwhile, the AKP is busily establishing a client system in the administration, which effectively undermines the road to a democratic system (as other ruling parties have done before). The opposition, in particular the CHP and the DSP, appeal to state institutions -the military and/or the high courts- to interrupt the democratic process. In sum, all those parties betray the Turkish electorate by ascribing basic requirements of democracy -notably of democracy in Turkey- to the EU, and rejecting them as a foreign imposition.

Originally, the EU accession process was meant as a catalyst of democratization. Indeed, it did work so at least from 1996 to 2003. But now we see that the interests of Turkey's prospective sovereign nation in democratization are shelved. So it seems that a central purpose of the EU accession process, completion of the way to democracy, is not achievable under these conditions. However, this completion is the first priority, because it is a priority goal in itself as well as the main precondition of an actual EU accession.

The picture is quite ironic: The four biggest parties in the Turkish parliament, to various degrees, reject democratic reforms, yet pretend to negotiate about such reforms with the EU. However, the place to discuss these matters is in the Turkish parliament (or possibly a separate constitutional assembly), and unfortunately the EU has not even a single seat in this parliament.

Sometimes the problem itself may hint towards a solution. Obviously, what we need may be an EU-Party in Turkey's parliament. But democracy is in first instance an issue of the nation. Hence, Turkey's prospective sovereign, the people, should be asked whether they want such a party.