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## **Slamming the *Sublime Porte* ? Challenges in French-Turkish Relations from Chirac to Sarkozy**

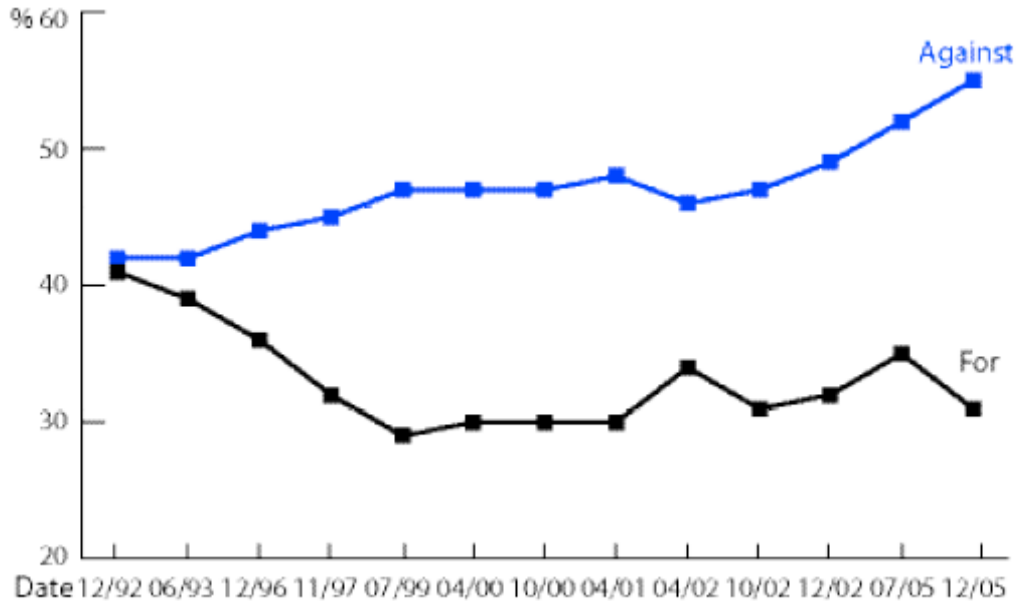
While former French President Jacques Chirac (1995-2007) was in favor of Turkey's entrance into the EU, the election, in May 2007, of Nicolas Sarkozy, who had long declared himself in favor of association rather than accession, led to renewed tension between France and Turkey. This came in the context of a bilateral relationship already strained by a number of substantial issues dating back to 2001 at least, that included the official recognition of the Armenian genocide, and the possible criminalization of its negation under French laws; the disagreement over the judicial treatment of PKK activists; the Cyprus dispute; and the ESDP (European Security and Defense Policy) issue. As a result, Ankara and Paris now face a multifaceted diplomatic challenge to get their relationship on a better track.

Trade is certainly one of the reasons many urge Paris and Ankara to improve their strained relationship. Exchanges between France and Turkey have grown by a factor of five in the last ten years and have reached almost 10 billion € (around 14.5 billion \$ at current exchange rates). France is now the 5<sup>th</sup> largest exporter to Turkey (with a market share of 4.8%), and the 4<sup>th</sup> largest investor in the country. Likewise, relative to other countries, in the last few years Turkey has rapidly gained market share in France, as it has moved from the 22<sup>nd</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> rank of largest exporters to France. This intense French-Turkish relationship is not limited to trade. For example, France ranks third among the destinations where young Turks go study abroad, and cultural exchanges are flourishing.

This paper will first explore in detail the various sources of opposition to Turkey's accession into the EU among the French public, followed by an analysis of Nicolas Sarkozy's position before and after his election. Ankara's reaction to the new French stance has been negative, as was to be expected. But this reaction cannot be understood separately from an older cause of dispute, the official recognition of the Armenian genocide by the French National Assembly, which has elicited reprisals from Turkey since 2001. The paper will then take a brief look at the other causes for dispute and will make sincere attempts to conclude on a positive note.

## 1. Why the French don't want Turkey in the EU

In the last fifteen years, general European public opinions have increasingly soured on the idea of getting Turkey in the EU, according to Eurobarometer polls<sup>1</sup>:



But only a few countries – Austria, Luxemburg, and sometimes Germany – seem more opposed to this idea than France. In poll after poll, French public opinion, which reached a new high point of 71% in a June 2007 Harris poll, remains among the most hostile to Turkey's accession in the EU<sup>2</sup>:

### "DO YOU THINK THAT TURKEY SHOULD BE INVITED TO JOIN THE EU?"

	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany	United States
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	23	16	31	26	21	32
No	46	71	55	46	66	13
Not Sure	31	13	14	28	13	55

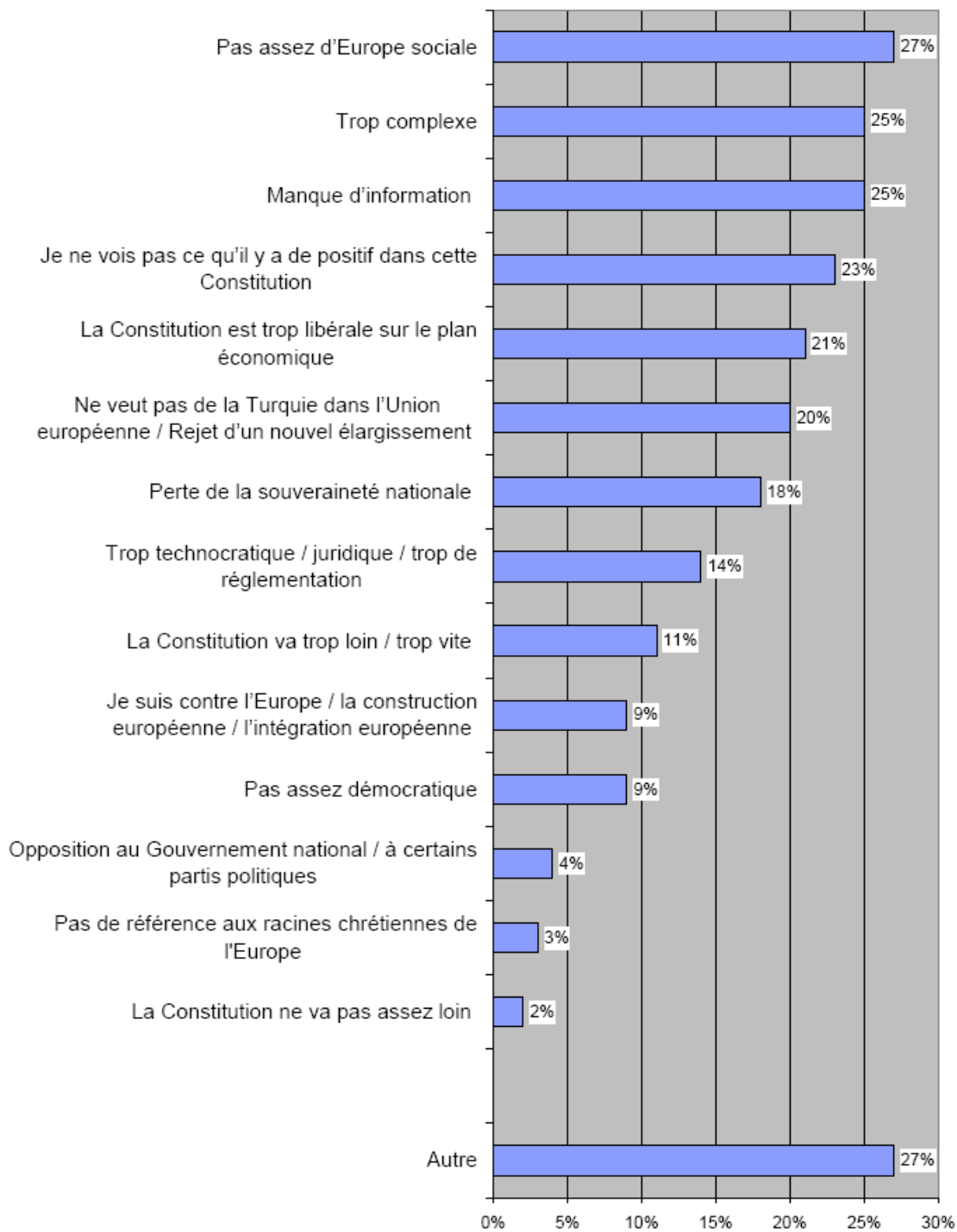
Indeed, a few weeks before the referendum on the EU Constitutional treaty in late May 2005, which resulted in a "No" vote, 20% of those to be polled mentioned "Refusal of Turkey in the EU – rejection of another enlargement" among the various reasons why they were about to vote no, even though the two issues were not technically related<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Source of the graph: Katinka Barysch, *What Europeans Think About Turkey and Why*, Briefing Note, Centre for European Reform, August 2007, available at [http://www.cer.org.uk/pdf/briefing\\_kb\\_turkey\\_24aug07.pdf](http://www.cer.org.uk/pdf/briefing_kb_turkey_24aug07.pdf) (December 14, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> "Many European Adults Believe that the European Union Should Not Take in New Members," The Harris Poll #59, June 20, 2007, available at [http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris\\_poll/index.asp?PID=775](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=775) (December 14, 2007).

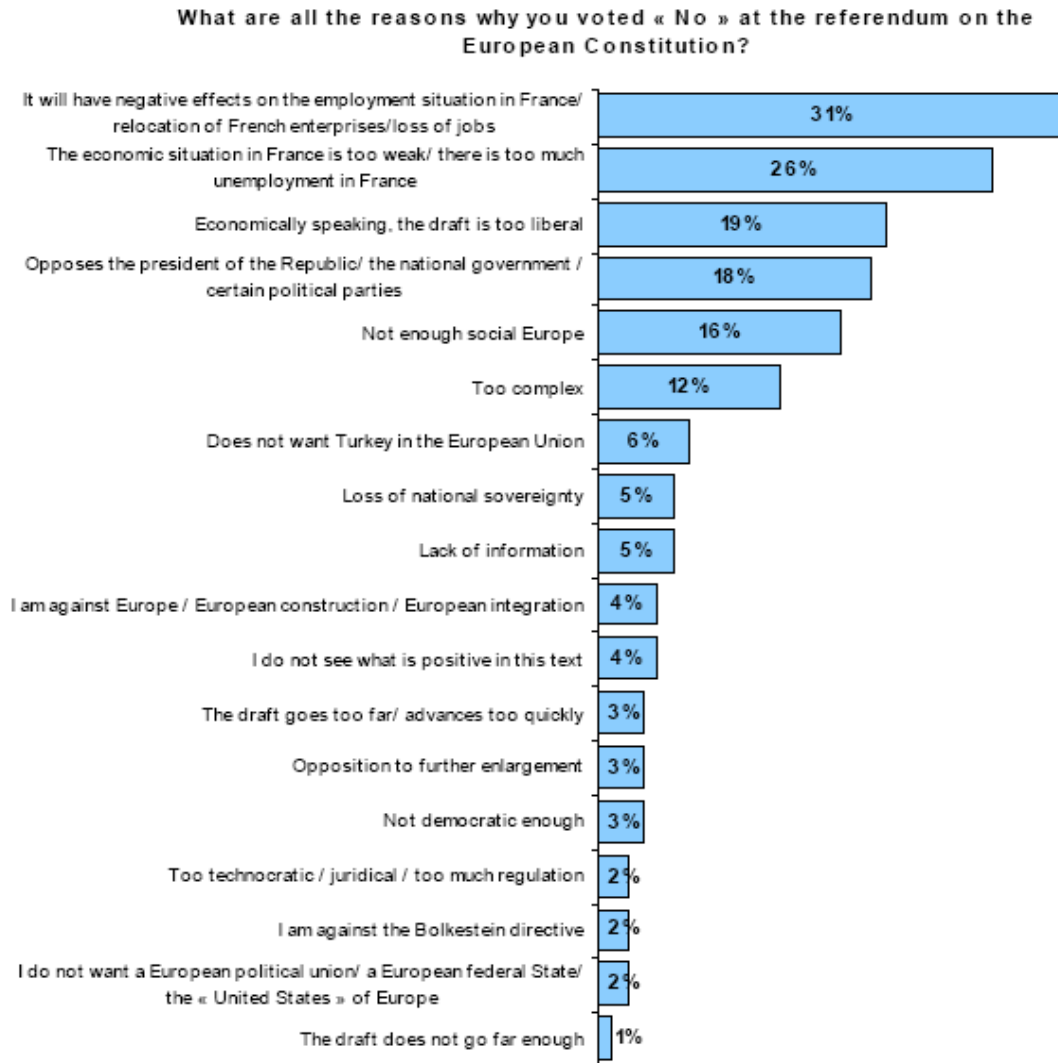
<sup>3</sup> Eurobarometer 63.4, "L'opinion publique dans l'union europeenne", Spring 2005 (interviews in May – June 2005), available at

**Quelles sont toutes les raisons pour lesquelles vous êtes opposé à la Constitution européenne (réponses spontanées) ?**



[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb63/eb63\\_nat\\_fr.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb63/eb63_nat_fr.pdf) (See in English  
[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb63/eb63\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb63/eb63_en.pdf))

However, after the vote on May 29, 2005, another Eurobarometer poll found that only 6% of French voters who had opposed the Constitution specifically mentioned their opposition to Turkey's accession as a factor. – still a somewhat significant number<sup>4</sup>.



It is difficult to sort out and prioritize the many reasons which explain this opposition, as they operate on different levels.

One important factor to bear in mind is the gap between elites and the general public. "*For most people, writes Katinka Barysch, enlargement-related fears are immediate and personal: the loss of jobs, the threat of terrorism, the weakening of national culture. The benefits, meanwhile, are strategic, long-term and rather abstract: future economic growth, a stronger EU foreign policy, energy security. As a result, the supporters of Turkish accession and its opponents often talk past each other.*"<sup>5</sup> But it

<sup>4</sup> Eurobarometer poll 171, "The European Constitution: Post-referendum survey in France" June 2005 available at [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/flash/fl171\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl171_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Katinka Barysch, op. cit.

would be wrong to assume that French elites, being somehow more "enlightened", are uniformly in favor of Turkey's accession, as they have reasons of their own to oppose it – reasons not necessarily shared by the majority of public opinion. These include concerns about the decline of French influence in enlarged EU institutions, a weakening of EU political cohesion ("*Europe puissance*") and a drag on the EU operating budget, which included the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy), etc. In other words, writes Anne-Marie Le Gloanec<sup>6</sup>, "*the elites distrust an enlarged Europe which is less and less amenable to French influence compared to the smaller Europe of the past. The public dread a larger Europe which will not protect them against what they perceive as the nefarious consequences of globalization.*"

Another factor of complexity is the existence of different, partially overlapping, lines of argumentation. Some are about Turkey itself: is the country economically advanced enough? Is it democratic enough? "How Muslim" is it exactly? Others are centered on European identity and future: will the EU benefit or lose from any new enlargement? Will it benefit or lose from Turkey's accession specifically? But is Muslim Turkey part of what Europe really is about? This means that some opponents to Turkey's entrance reject a country they see as backward potential drag on the EU, but would reverse their opinion if convinced that Turkey has changed for the better, while others would remain opposed to Turkey's entrance into the EU because the issue, in their eyes, is European identity determined by history and geography rather than performances. And yet another group would be immune to arguments centered on Turkey's progress as well: the "Europeists" who consider that the ideal of a politically cohesive – and ultimately federal – EU would be threatened by this new behemoth member. Consider the same June 2007 Harris poll, taken only among respondents who answered "No" or "Not sure" to the first question on Turkey's accession:

**"IF TURKEY WERE TO IMPLEMENT REFORMS DESIRED BY SOME EU MEMBER STATES, SHOULD IT BE INVITED TO JOIN THE EU?"**

Base: Adults who were not sure or did not think Turkey should be invited to join the EU

	Great Britain	<b>France</b>	Italy	Spain	Germany	United States
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	21	<b>21</b>	32	36	38	27
No	43	<b>64</b>	54	36	49	7
Not Sure	36	<b>15</b>	14	27	14	66

This poll shows that only 21% of the French who oppose Turkey's accession feel this way because they think Turkey has not yet met EU standards. 64% oppose membership for reasons which are unlikely to change and have to do primarily with the future of the EU and their view of a European identity that they see as incompatible with Turkey, a Muslim country mostly located in Asia.

<sup>6</sup> Anne-Marie Le Gloanec, "Conditionality, Impact and Prejudice in EU-Turkey Relations: A View from France" in *Conditionality, Impact and Prejudice in EU-Turkey Relations*, a IAI-Tepav report edited by Nathalie Tocci, English Series No. 9, July 2007, available at <http://www.iss-lj.si/pdf/2007-10-02-IAI-Tepav.pdf> (December 17, 2007).

More than a year prior to the Harris poll, in the Spring of 2006, Turkey's accession into the EU had received more positive results from a special Eurobarometer poll.<sup>7</sup>

**QD16.5 Once Turkey complies with all the conditions set by the European Union, would you be... to the accession of Turkey to the European Union?**

	Turkey	
	In favour	Opposed
EU25	39%	48%
EU15	38%	49%
NMS	44%	40%
2 AC	61%	12%
BE	43%	55%
CZ	32%	61%
DK	50%	44%
DE	27%	69%
EE	35%	49%
EL	33%	67%
ES	47%	23%
FR	39%	54%
IE	40%	32%
IT	36%	49%
CY	26%	68%
LV	35%	47%
LT	33%	42%
LU	24%	69%
HU	44%	46%
MT	35%	31%
NL	55%	42%
AT	13%	81%
PL	51%	31%
PT	37%	30%
SI	53%	41%
SK	33%	55%
FI	42%	55%
SE	60%	33%
UK	42%	39%
CY (TCC)	67%	15%
BG	47%	26%
RO	66%	7%
HR	58%	28%
TR	54%	22%

<sup>7</sup> Special Eurobarometer, "Attitudes towards European Union Enlargement", Fieldwork March-May 2006, Publication July 2006, available at [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_255\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_255_en.pdf) (December 17, 2007).

Even if methodological reasons, such as the wording of the question, contributed to the 8 percentage point gap (16% in favor + 21% of 71% who would change their mind = 31% in the Harris poll, versus 39% in this Eurobarometer) a downward trend probably exists, which, among other factors, can be partly explained by the impact of the new French President's position on the subject, which in turn encourages public opinion in its reluctance.

A review of the various types of arguments presented by opponents of Turkey's accession shows that these arguments, as explained above, are neither mutually exclusive, nor necessarily compatible.

### **a) Concerns about French and European identity**

The first type of argument centers around cultural and "civilizational" considerations, namely, the incompatibility of Muslim Turkey with Europe. Islamophobia plays a role here, even though the purely religious component of this argument is probably less important than the negative image of Islam as a foreign culture and a civilization gone awry. While a few French believe Europe should indeed be a Christian club (Jacques Delors made comments along these lines in the 1980's), most, on the contrary, believe that Europe should be a-religious and strictly *laïc*, and they see Turkey as threatened by an Islamist takeover – and that is a reason to oppose its membership. (Ironically, as is well known, the official *laïc* Kemalist doctrine of Turkey was largely inspired by France).

There is actually a wide spectrum of opinions that range from pure and simple xenophobia – the defense of French and European ethnic-religious identity – to more mainstream considerations based on culture and history. At one end of the spectrum, extreme-right politicians like Jean-Marie le Pen or Philippe de Villiers have campaigned against Turkey's accession during recent votes, sending anti-Islam and anti-immigrant signals (and getting limited results). At the other end of the spectrum, racism and religious considerations aside, many French consider that Turkey is simply too different by its history, geographic position and culture to be considered part of Europe.

When asked the reasons for their opposition to Turkey's entrance in the Fall of 2006, French answers differed only slightly from those of other EU countries. 65% of the French, versus 61% of Europeans in general, agree with the sentence: "The cultural differences between Turkey and the EU Member States are too significant to allow for this accession"<sup>8</sup>. French answers tend to differ more on the question of geography and history: only 47% and 30% of the French, respectively, agree with the assertion that "Turkey partly belongs to Europe" by its geography or by its history, versus 56% and 40% of Europeans<sup>9</sup>.

Often, opponents argue that Turkey is indeed a remarkable country, which has transformed itself quite thoroughly, but that it belongs more to Asia and the Middle East than to Europe. Maybe the Ottoman empire was "the sick man of Europe" in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, they say, but before that, it was a threat to European countries, and then it became

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<sup>8</sup> Eurobarometer 66, "Public Opinion in the European Union", Fieldwork: September-October 2006  
Publication: September 2007, available at [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb66/eb66\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb66/eb66_en.pdf)  
(December 17, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

their prey rather than their peer (a sick man *for* Europe, in other words). They point out that Turkey has an influence of its own in Central Asia, which EU members do not share, and that because of Turkey's geographical situation and history, Turks themselves often oppose EU positions on external issues – not to speak of their nationalism and probable resistance to sharing sovereignty. In other words, Turkey, by virtue of its history and geography, is a neighbor for Europe, not a part of it.

One of the important background issues is Islam, as it is linked to the historical argument about a difference in civilization. Of course 15 million or so Muslims already live in the EU, but this current Muslim population in itself does not necessarily ease the case for integrating Turkey. In fact, for some observers, this Muslim population does quite the opposite.

France, with around 5 million people of Muslim background (8 to 8.5% of the population) houses the largest Muslim minority in Europe. While the religious and cultural integration of this French Muslim population fairs better than what is usually portrayed, the social and economic situation of migrants coming from outside of Europe – and their French children and grand-children – is not good, and sometimes very worrying, as urban violence in November 2005 demonstrated<sup>10</sup>. Negative stereotypes on Muslims that stem from ancient times (Crusades, Ottoman Empire) and major historical events (the bloody Algerian war), have evolved to include the more recent images of bearded religious fanatics and Islamist terrorists worldwide. The end product, mixed with the issue of urban violence (which was not religious or cultural in nature) and the difficulty to integrate immigrants of Muslim background into French society, is a decidedly negative image of Muslims as "others". Turkey's bid is certainly suffering from this association, as the issue of its accession in the EU collides with the issue of integration and the questions it raises about French – and European – identity.

Interestingly, Nicolas Sarkozy himself, as a candidate in 2006, made it clear that he saw a link between the integration of Muslims at home and the integration of Muslim Turkey into the EU. "[...] Because we do have a problem of integration, which points to the question of Islam in Europe. To pretend that it is not a problem would be to hide reality. If you take in 100 million [sic] Muslim Turks, what will happen?"<sup>11</sup> He even used this line, as Minister of the Interior, as an argument to counter US pressures to let Ankara join the EU, when visiting Washington in September 2006, saying in substance that Americans knew it was crucial but very hard to integrate Muslims already present in Europe – and they asked him to take Turkey in on top of that<sup>12</sup>?

A culturalist view exists, which holds all Muslims – whether the grand-son of an Algerian immigrant, born and raised in France like his parents and French by any official definition, or a peasant in Anatolia, or a Pakistani computer engineer, or any other Muslim from anywhere in the world – to be the same and to be "hard to integrate" into France or

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<sup>10</sup> See our book (with Jonathan Laurence), *Integrating Islam. Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France*, Brookings Press, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with *Le Meilleur des mondes* n° 2, Fall 2006 ("Parce que l'on a quand même un problème d'intégration des musulmans qui pose la question de l'islam en Europe. Dire que ce n'est pas un problème, c'est se masquer la réalité. Si vous faites rentrer cent millions de Turcs musulmans, qu'est-ce qu'il en sera ?").

<sup>12</sup> Speech at the Daughters of the American Revolution, September 12, 2006.



Europe. This view, which combines mostly negative representations of Muslims and of non-European immigrants in general, whatever their ethnicity, is certainly playing against the admission of Turkey in the EU.

Some have suggested that Turkish immigrants, their children and their grandchildren who live in France might influence the debate in one way or the other. This is probably not the case. Only about 400,000 persons of Turkish origin live in France (0,65% of the population, and 8% of all persons of Muslim background), and they are concentrated in the Eastern part of the country. As such, their contact with the general population is minimal. It is true, however, that Turkish immigrants and their children remain more of a closed community (fewer mixed marriages, fewer social contacts outside of the community, etc.) and tend to not integrate as well as Arab immigrants from North Africa<sup>13</sup>. But it is still doubtful that this would have a significant impact on Turkey's prospects. The Armenian community, however, is usually estimated at 400,000 persons, it is politically active, as will be seen below, and not favorably disposed vis-à-vis Turkey.

### **b) Economic fears**

*"In 2004, writes Katinka Barysch, more than 60 per cent of West Europeans thought that enlargement would threaten their job. No wonder that opposition to enlargement is correlated with a country's economic performance and its unemployment rate. As the EU economy started to recover in 2006, enlargement fears abated: in the spring of 2007, the share of those in favour of further enlargement rose to 49 per cent (from 45 per cent a year earlier), while the share of opponents dropped to 39 per cent (from 42 per cent)."*<sup>14</sup>

In the French context of high unemployment (generally between 8 and 10% in the last decade), there is a particular fear of the effects of globalization and free market, and Europe is accused of serving as a Trojan horse for further liberalization rather than shielding French workers from unfair competition – as the above polls about the EU Constitution demonstrate. The 2003 – 2005 campaign against the Bolkenstein directive project (aiming at creating a single market for services in the EU, thereby putting different social models in competition with one another) and the 2005 scare figure of the "Polish plumber" (who would purportedly come to work in France under the Polish social system) is a reminder of the sensitivity of this issue.

Even if the impact of the 2004 (EU-15 to EU-25) and 2007 (EU-25 to EU-27) enlargements on the French job market has not been noticeable – temporary restrictive measures have been taken but don't seem to have played a major role – the French have the most overall negative assessment of the 2004 enlargement (see graph below<sup>15</sup>). So the idea of Turkish workers freely coming to France in search for better jobs is indeed a factor which explains reluctance, among the French public, to admit Turkey to the EU.

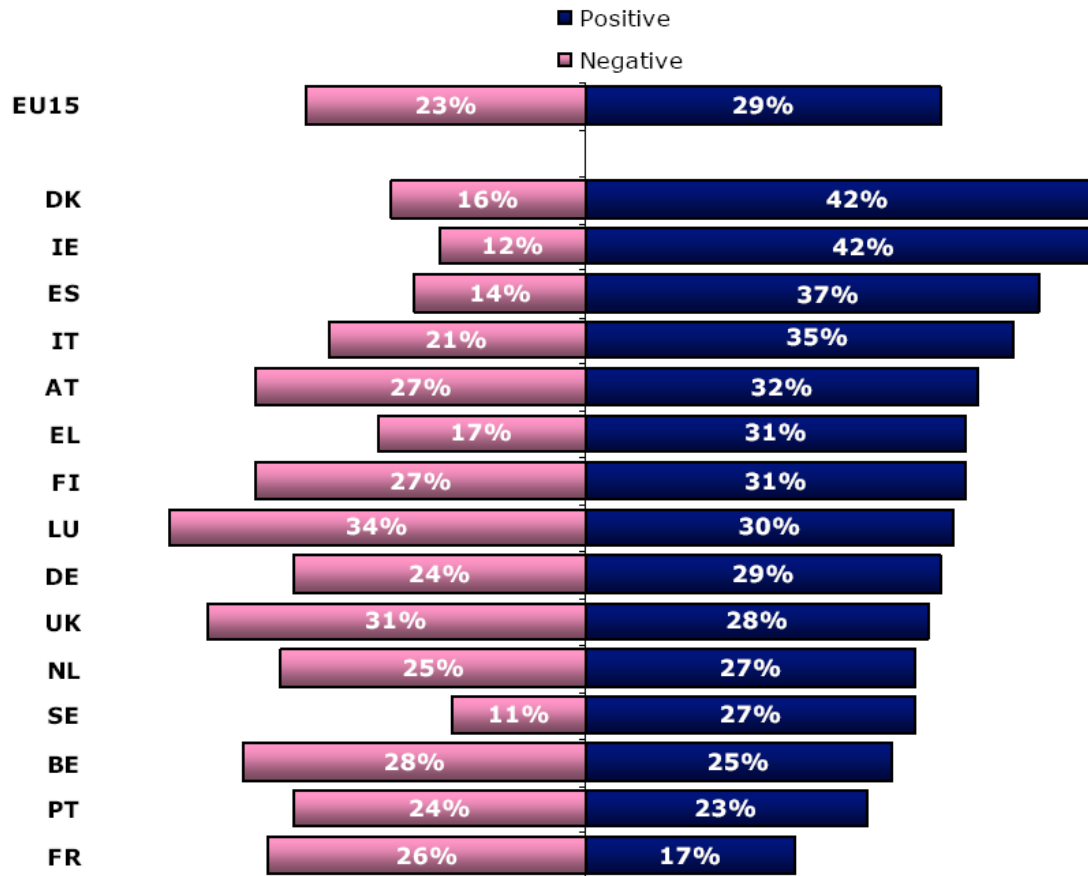
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<sup>13</sup> Michèle Tribalat, *Faire France : une grande enquête sur les immigrés et leurs enfants*, Paris: La Découverte, 1995.

<sup>14</sup> Katinka Barysch, *op. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> Eurobarometer 67, "Public Opinion in the European Union", Fieldwork: April - May 2007, Publication: November 2007, available at [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb67/eb67\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb67/eb67_en.htm) (December 17, 2007).

**QA26a 10 new Member States joined the European Union in May 2004.  
Regarding the impact of this enlargement on the European Union,  
which of the following comes closest to your view?  
-% EU15**



It is probable, moreover, that some specific French economic branches see their interests threatened by the possible inclusion of a big Mediterranean country in the EU. Integrating Turkey in the current Common Agricultural Policy framework without any change, would mechanically result in the drying up of resources for other major agricultural countries. This explains why rural constituencies are not eagerly awaiting Turkey's entrance to the EU.

Ironically, if the ambitious structural reforms of the French economy undertaken by Nicolas Sarkozy reach their objectives, France could become more favorably disposed vis-à-vis Turkish accession, as economic fears start easing.

**c) Is Turkey politically ready?**

As mentioned in the June 2007 Harris poll above, 21% of the French who oppose Turkish accession would be ready to change their mind "if Turkey were to implement reforms". What is hiding behind this call for "reforms" is not a thorough knowledge of the

current social, political and economic Turkish situation, but rather a negative image or "brand". Some see Turkey as an incomplete democracy, where a powerful military establishment still calls the shots, and where the Kurdish problem is far from being settled. Others, on the contrary, see it as a country on the verge of a rampant takeover by Islamists. In spite of a more subtle coverage in the press (in *Le Monde* for example), demonstrations by the secularists in the Summer 2007 have been portrayed in the French mass media as a last-ditch defense of *laïcité* against Islamism, in an implicit – and inaccurate – parallel with the French landscape.

In other words, the Turkish "brand" does not enjoy a very high rating these days, and this has been reinforced, in the French case, by the discussions surrounding the Armenian genocide, especially in 2001 and 2006, and by the firm reactions of Ankara against French decisions (see below). The end result is a negative view of the Turkish – and Western Balkans, though they are probably less important in the overall results – record on human and minority rights, as this poll shows.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Special Eurobarometer, "Attitudes towards European Union Enlargement", Fieldwork March-May 2006, Publication July 2006, available at [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_255\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_255_en.pdf) (January 2, 2008).

**QD13 In your opinion, which are the main challenges facing the Western Balkan countries and Turkey on their road to the European Union?**

	<b>Respect for human and minority rights</b>	<b>Reconciliation/ co-operation with neighbouring countries</b>	<b>Democracy</b>
<b>EU25</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>FR</b>	<b>62%</b>	36%	41%
<b>LU</b>	<b>62%</b>	32%	27%
<b>SE</b>	60%	<b>48%</b>	37%
<b>CY</b>	59%	<b>52%</b>	27%
<b>FI</b>	59%	41%	25%
<b>EL</b>	57%	<b>50%</b>	30%
<b>BE</b>	55%	32%	37%
<b>DK</b>	53%	36%	<b>51%</b>
<b>SK</b>	49%	33%	25%
<b>NL</b>	48%	32%	34%
<b>DE</b>	47%	35%	36%
<b>CZ</b>	44%	39%	20%
<b>SI</b>	42%	47%	32%
<b>AT</b>	40%	27%	24%
<b>UK</b>	38%	25%	23%
<b>IT</b>	37%	23%	24%
<b>HU</b>	37%	41%	30%
<b>PL</b>	36%	43%	29%
<b>EE</b>	35%	33%	19%
<b>IE</b>	35%	28%	23%
<b>LV</b>	32%	15%	16%
<b>MT</b>	28%	17%	32%
<b>PT</b>	27%	16%	25%
<b>ES</b>	26%	17%	26%
<b>LT</b>	18%	23%	19%
<b>CY (TCC)</b>	28%	22%	25%
<b>HR</b>	37%	33%	24%
<b>RO</b>	32%	22%	22%
<b>BG</b>	26%	28%	18%
<b>TR</b>	25%	14%	27%

**d) A threat to a united and politically cohesive Europe**

The last type of argument has less to do with Turkey than with the European Union project. A sizeable group of French observers and politicians consider that integrating Turkey would deal a final blow to their dream of a cohesive, politically assertive European Union – an EU that could make rapid and forceful decisions and speak assertively with one voice on world affairs. Decision-making, they point out, would become terribly difficult, even with the new Lisbon Treaty arrangements. But, as Nathalie Tocci notes, *"the worries of many in France and in particular of French liberals go well beyond the concern that Turkey's accession would complicate the EU's institutional functioning. The fear – coupled with a strong sense of nostalgia for the past – is that Turkey's accession and ongoing enlargements will ring the death bell of the Union's federalist aspirations. More generally it would seal the end of the political project as conceived by the Community's*

*founding fathers, as well as the role that France played in that project. As European federalists would argue, it is only those who abhor the prospect of a federal Europe (e.g., British conservatives) or those who have lost all hope in it (e.g., German Christian Democrats or the Italian center-left), who may be prepared to accept Turkey in the European fold.*"<sup>17</sup>

These "Europeists" have already suffered several defeats in the 1990's and early 2000's. In particular, they were advocating "deepening before enlarging" – that is, streamlining European institutions to form a more cohesive and better functioning Union before new members were invited to join. They lost this battle for all practical purposes. The rival euroskeptic British conception of the European Union, favoring a politically weak vast zone of free trade rather than a strong and cohesive quasi-federal entity, has largely prevailed. Taking Turkey in would be a second defeat, as this would ensure, in their eyes, the impossibility of making progress in terms of political cohesiveness, because of decision-making issues, and more importantly historical and geopolitical considerations (Turkey would probably not be a great supporter of deeper European integration and would not add to the cohesiveness on common foreign policy).

In that sense, for those who still believe in the political project of European unity, the question of Turkey's entrance is not seen as a foreign policy issue, but rather as an internal issue – and a democratic issue as well (public opinion has not had much of a say in the history of European construction, and Turkey's entrance should not be forced down its throat lest Europe become even more unpopular)<sup>18</sup>. Indeed, for those who, on the contrary, see the EU more as an international organization or a loose alliance, taking Turkey in would seem like a smart idea to increase EU's reach in terms of geographical location, resources and capabilities – and also as a way to reinforce their euroskeptic camp and prevent increased sharing of sovereignty in the future.

In spite of France's sometimes mixed performance in demonstrating its "*esprit communautaire*", the first school of thought maintains a real force in that country, just as it does in Germany. A good representative of this school is Sylvie Goulard, a former diplomat specialized on German and European affairs, political adviser (2001-2004) to Romano Prodi when he was President of the European Commission, and now President of the French branch of the European Movement (a pan-European organization born in 1948 to promote the cause in increased European unity). She wrote an influential book, *Le Grand Turc et la République de Venise*<sup>19</sup> in 2004 making a strong case against Turkey's entrance on various grounds, but principally because it would deal the traditional European construction project a fatal blow – and because public opinions reject it. Sylvie Goulard also wrote a pamphlet, along with other European authors, published in late 2006, that tried to flesh out the possible content of a "privileged partnership" between Turkey and the EU, the alternative favored by both Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Nathalie Tocci, "Report – Unpacking European discourses: Conditionality, Impact and Prejudice in EU-Turkey Relations" in *Conditionality, Impact and Prejudice in EU-Turkey Relations*, *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> Nathalie Tocci, *Ibidem*, and Katinka Barysch, *op. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> Sylvie Goulard, *Le Grand Turc et la République de Venise*, Paris: Fayard, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Carlo Altomonte, Pierre Defraigne, Lucas Delattre, Karl-Theodor Freiherr zu Guttenberg, Sylvie Goulard (ed.), Rudolf Scharping, "Le Partenariat privilégié, alternative à l'adhésion" *Note bleue* n° 38, Fondation Schuman, December 6, 2006.

## 2 – Nicolas Sarkozy's opposition to Turkey's entrance into the EU

Favoring a privileged partnership with Turkey over membership is not a new position for Nicolas Sarkozy. It is one he has held for several years. What changes everything, of course, is his election to the Presidency of the French Republic in May 2007.

### a) Sarkzoy's opposition before the 2007 election

The issue of Turkey's entrance to the EU was one over which Nicolas Sarkozy broke early with Jacques Chirac, most vocally in the Fall of 2004, when he was elected President of the UMP, the conservative party Chirac had created two years before (and where a majority of members opposed Turkey's accession anyway).

Based on his numerous declarations since then, his personal opposition on Turkey rests on three main considerations:

1. *Geography*. Exhibit A, for Nicolas Sarkozy, is geographical "self-evidence": most of Turkey's territory is not located in Europe, and the capital the country chose for itself is in the middle of Asia Minor. If Turkey is accepted in the EU, asks Sarkozy, then how can one justify preventing a country like Morocco from joining?

2. *The importance of a powerful Europe* ("Europe puissance"). Nicolas Sarkozy describes himself as a supporter of a more powerful European Union, able to assert itself on the world stage, and Turkey's entrance would not only hinder decision-making, but weaken Europe's cohesion. "*I am fighting for a Europe that is politically powerful because it is integrated. The more solidarity and integration there is in Europe, the stronger she will be . . . Can you propose at the same time further integration and further enlargement? I don't think so.*"<sup>21</sup>

3. *Religion, culture, values*. Although Sarkozy sometimes denies it, Islam does play a role in his vision. This is evidenced by his talking point on the difficulty of integrating Muslims in Europe, which would be amplified by the admission of Turkey (see above). This is also evidenced by references like "community of values", in this sentence for example: "*the European construction is not only what our American friends think it is, namely a large free market, it is also a community of values to build a power.*"<sup>22</sup>

During the 2006-2007 presidential campaign, Sarkozy announced he would put an end to the accession negotiations and reorient Turkey-EU relations towards a "strategic partnership" which, he said, could be far-reaching, and go as far as to include participation in the common market, in some EU policies like trade, education or research, and in EU common defense and collective security. This kind of strategic partnership could be extended to other countries like Ukraine or Georgia.

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted by Lara Marlowe, "Sarkozy again challenges Chirac on foreign and immigrant policy", *Financial Times*, January 14, 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Speech by Sarkozy on December 19, 2005, see excerpts available at <http://sarkozyblog.free.fr/index.php?2004/12/19/21-sarkozy-si-la-turquie-etait-europeenne-ca-se-saurait> (January 7, 2008).

There was certainly a dose of electoral calculations in Sarkozy's stance, given that a majority of voters from the right – and an overwhelming majority of voters from the extreme-right, a constituency he was trying to capture (and largely succeeded, dealing a blow to Jean-Marie Le Pen) opposed Turkey membership. President Jacques Chirac himself has been presented as a strong supporter of Turkey and as a more courageous leader, going against the will of his own UMP party in order to defend France's larger international interest. The truth, however, is that Chirac had it both ways. On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005, taking advantage of a Constitutional revision to allow for the future adoption of the EU Treaty (the one that ended up being rejected on May 29), he inserted new wording in articles 88-5 and 60 mandating the President of the Republic to put any new enlargement of the EU to a vote, through a referendum<sup>23</sup>. His aim was to decouple the adoption of the treaty from the divisive question of Turkey. But this amounts to a time bomb, or we should say a time nuke, since it means that a referendum could force the French President to block the accession of a new country in the EU after all its negotiations have been successfully completed. The potential damage of that article is so great that Nicolas Sarkozy has laid out plans to scrap it altogether in a future revision of the Constitution, to be adopted in early 2008.

#### **a) After the 2007 election: softening the blow**

To the dismay of some of his constituents, and to the relief of many supporters of Turkish membership, President Nicolas Sarkozy did not put an abrupt end to accession negotiations as promised. Instead, he decided to temporize and allow for negotiations to continue on two conditions, set forth on August 27, 2007, at the opening of the fifteenth Ambassadors' Conference<sup>24</sup>. First, that a "Committee of Wise Men" (10-12 of them), comparable to past committees chaired by Werner, Davignon and Westendorp or by Jacques Delors, be gathered, to make recommendations about the future of the EU in 2020-2030 – its nature and its missions. Then there was a second, more logical condition:

*"If the 27 undertake this crucial discussion about the future of our Union, France will not object to new chapters in the negotiations between the Union and Turkey being opened in coming months and years, provided these chapters are compatible with both possible visions of the future of their relations: either accession, or a very close association that stops short of accession. I'm not going to be hypocritical. Everyone knows that I'm only in favor of association. It's what I advocated throughout my election campaign. It's an idea I've championed for years. I think this idea of association will one day be recognized by everyone as the more reasonable one. Meanwhile, like Prime Minister Erdogan, I hope that Turkey and France will restore the special relations they established over a long shared history.*

*I didn't want to raise this issue before that of the simplified treaty, because it would have created a total deadlock. You can't resolve problems by creating a total deadlock. You resolve them by finding solutions. Of the 35 chapters that remain to be*

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<sup>23</sup> See detail on the French Senate website, at [http://www.senat.fr/evenement/revision/revision\\_constitution.html](http://www.senat.fr/evenement/revision/revision_constitution.html) (January 10, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> See full text at [http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/anglais/speeches\\_and\\_documents/2007/speech\\_at\\_the\\_opening\\_of\\_the\\_fifteenth\\_ambassadors\\_conference.79296.html](http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/anglais/speeches_and_documents/2007/speech_at_the_opening_of_the_fifteenth_ambassadors_conference.79296.html) (January 11, 2008).

*opened, 30 are compatible with association. Five are compatible only with accession. I told the Turkish Prime Minister: let's deal with the thirty that are compatible with association and then we'll see."*

And that is more or less what happened in the following months. On December 14, 2007, the European Council established an independent "Reflection Group," which was invited to "identify the key issues and developments which the Union is likely to face and to analyze how these might be addressed."<sup>25</sup> These issues were many (enhancing the competitiveness of the EU, the rule of law, sustainable development, global stability, migration, energy and climate protection, etc.) – but the frontiers of Europe was not one of them, at the insistence of pro-Turkish member states like the UK or Sweden. All the "Wise Men", chaired by Felipe González and two Vice-Chairs, Vaira Viée-Freiberga and Jorma Ollila, can do in this regard, is "take into account likely developments within and outside Europe and examine in particular how the stability and prosperity of both the Union and of the wider region might best be served in the longer term." The setting up of the group opened the way for the Portuguese Presidency of the EU to open two new chapters compatible with both accession and partnership – one related to trans-European networks, the other to consumer and health protection – on December 20, 2007.

What does the future hold? There seems to be two options here. On the one hand, Nicolas Sarkozy may keep softening his stance and renounce antagonizing some of his EU partners, America and Turkey by making a brutal decision, which could hurt French interests and standing (France will hold the EU presidency from July to December 2008). In this case, he could hope that the terms of the debate would gradually improve – that a different Turkey could be more easily welcomed into a different EU by a different French public opinion later in the game... or on the contrary that the Turkish government itself, out of national pride or impatience, would decide to renounce membership at some point, thus facilitating his decision. Another option, however, would be for president Sarkozy to await the German 2009 general elections, which current Chancellor Angela Merkel could win. If this is the case, and if the CDU is not forced into another national union government with the SPD – a situation which has resulted in preventing her from advocating the reorientation of Turkey accession talks towards partnership, her preferred option – then a new situation would be created where two major EU nations favor "strategic association" with Turkey over membership, and this could change the game. It should be recalled that as early as January 2005, Sarkozy and Merkel met as opposition leaders of the UMP and the CDU, respectively, and agreed that a European perspective should be given to Turkey – but just not a membership perspective<sup>26</sup>.

Then there is a third option which is now off the table, but which should be mentioned for the record: offering Turkey to be the main pillar of a new organization, the "Mediterranean Union", which Sarkozy has suggested creating during the 2006-2007 presidential campaign.

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<sup>25</sup> Brussels European Council, 14 December 2007 - Presidency Conclusions, available at [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/97669.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/97669.pdf) (January 11, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> See "Sarkozy Blog" post of January 11, 2005, "UMP et CDU renforcent leur coopération," available at <http://sarkozyblog.free.fr/index.php?2005/01/11/37-ump-et-cdu-renforcent-leur-cooperation> (January 11, 2008).



*"It is for France – a country both Mediterranean and European – to take the initiative along with Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece and Cyprus to create a Mediterranean Union like she once took the initiative of building the European Union. This Mediterranean Union will have to work closely with the European Union. It will have to create shared institutions with the EU because the Mediterranean and Europe will have to realize that their destinies are intertwined.*

*It is in this perspective that we should see the relations between Europe and Turkey. For Europe cannot spread indefinitely. If it wants to have an identity, Europe has to have frontiers and hence, to have limits. [...] Turkey doesn't fit in Europe because it is not a European country. But Turkey is a great Mediterranean state with which Mediterranean Europe can further the unity of the Mediterranean. That is the great common challenge that I want to propose to Turkey."*<sup>27</sup>

Needless to say, this idea of substituting eventual membership into the EU for a role in the non-existing Mediterranean Union was not welcomed in Ankara. But in Nicolas Sarkozy's foreign policy vision, the Mediterranean Union was far more than just a way to deal with the Turkish question, and he was ready to separate the two issues. Soon after the elections, Paris was quick to clarify its stance and officially disconnect the two issues. Fully reassured that the Mediterranean Union was not a substitute for the European Union, Turkey warmed up to the idea, which was officially aired by President Sarkozy in Tangiers on October 23, 2007, then – with slight modifications – launched by Romano Prodi, José Luis Zapatero and Nicolas Sarkozy on December 20, 2007, and should see its founding conference take place in July 2008.

While Nicolas Sarkozy has not sparked a crisis in EU-Turkey relations by putting an abrupt end to accession negotiations, he has not been shy to state his preference for partnership rather than membership. Supporters of Sarkozy point out that he is simply saying out loud what most Europeans – and now many Turks – think in private: that membership is not the right way to associate Turkey. Still, this position, and France's delaying tactics, has elicited a negative reaction from Ankara, and France has been "punished" by Turkey for reprisal. But in order to understand the dynamic of this relationship, it is necessary to look at another issue for which Paris has been targeted: the Armenian genocide.

### **3 – The French official recognition of the Armenian genocide and its consequences**

On January 29, 2001, after years of efforts by members of the Armenian community in France, a bill adopted three years earlier, in May 1998, by a unanimous French National Assembly, became the law of the land. It was made up of just one sentence, which read: "France publicly recognizes the Armenian genocide of 1915."<sup>28</sup> No author or perpetrator was mentioned, but it immediately created an uproar in Turkey. Several tense years in French-Turkish relations followed, with sanctions taken against Paris, especially a ban on

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<sup>27</sup> Campaign speech by Nicolas Sarkozy in Toulon, February 9, 2007, available at [http://www.u-m-p.org/site/index.php/ump/s\\_informer/discours/nicolas\\_sarkozy\\_a\\_toulon](http://www.u-m-p.org/site/index.php/ump/s_informer/discours/nicolas_sarkozy_a_toulon) (January 14, 2008).

<sup>28</sup> See <http://www.senat.fr/leg/pp199-206.html> (January 14, 2008).

weapons sales. The Executive branch tried to distance itself from the law as much as it could, and President Chirac even more firmly supported Turkish membership to balance the disastrous effect of the bill. To some extent, after a few years, the bilateral relationship was largely mended.

Then on October 12, 2006, the French National Assembly reopened the issue and, over renewed Turkish threats, voted in favor of a bill making it a criminal offence to deny the existence of the Armenian genocide (much the way the negation of the Shoah constitutes a criminal offense in France)<sup>29</sup>. President Chirac, then President Sarkozy, said they would block the transfer of the bill to the Senate, which means that it won't become law in the near future. Still, France was targeted by Ankara, as will be seen in greater detail below, if only – many observers say – to send a clear message to other countries considering official recognition, including the United States. Indeed, the French example was used in the heated debate which took place in the House of Representatives in the fall of 2007 to stress the potentially damaging consequences which could flow from a public recognition of the genocide. And it could be argued that it worked in demonstrating seriousness on the part of the Turks – and this sent a powerful message to other countries, especially Germany.

So sanctions have been applied to France, officially over the Armenian genocide issue, but certainly with some background consideration for its recent stance on EU membership as well. More precisely, a mix of official and unofficial sanctions were taken:

- Military relations have been completely suspended, including port visits, weapons sales, and overflight rights. The latter decision creates operational problems for the French Air Force participation in NATO operations in Afghanistan (with transport and fighter planes in Kandahar, Douchanbé and Manas). Ali Babacan, the Turkish foreign Minister, has promised Bernard Kouchner full overflight rights would be restored, but as of mid-January 2008, that was not yet the case.

- While no official decision has been announced, French investment in a number of public contracts and privatization projects has been blocked for all practical purposes. For example, in the ongoing Marmaray project (to build public transportation in a tunnel under the Bosphorus), French firm ALSTOM, which has been a contractor for years, has not been confirmed for continuing participation in the project.

- In the multinational Nabucco project (a pipeline to transport Central Asia and Middle-East natural gas from Turkey to Austria), supported by the EU, there are rumors that the French company GDF is being blacklisted by one member of the consortium – Turkey – on political grounds. More generally, many negative decisions affecting French interests have not been made public and result from informal decisions – even if they are clearly political sanctions.

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<sup>29</sup> See <http://www.assembleenationale.fr/12/propositions/pion3030.asp> (January 14, 2008).

#### **4 – Other difficult issues in French-Turkish relations**

As if these two contentious issues – EU membership and the Armenian genocide – were not enough, Paris and Ankara have to deal with other irritants which have made the patching of their bilateral relationship difficult.

##### **a) The PKK question**

France and the EU consider the PKK a terrorist organization, and Paris always strongly condemns violent acts by the PKK. The French have also arrested members of the PKK based in France, where they raise funds legally or illegally (through the racket of Turkish shops). The disagreement comes from the fact that their extradition, demanded by Ankara, is still denied by French judges, on grounds of insufficient protection of their legal rights in Turkey. The abolition of the death penalty in all circumstances in 2004 and the improvement of the Turkish judicial system have not changed this stance. In the recent months, however, cooperation had improved, as Turkish officials have been invited to interrogate suspects in France.

##### **b) Cyprus**

The question of Cyprus is not specifically about French-Turkish relations, but it adds a chapter to the list of disagreements between the two countries. Ankara is refusing to extend the Customs Union negotiated with the EU to the Cypriot government, and refuses to allow in its airports and ports Cypriot ships and planes or even ships which have last stopped in Cyprus. As a consequence, the EU has frozen discussions on eight chapters of the negotiation relating to this issue, like transportation, customs union, fishing, etc. (If one adds the 5 chapters which are compatible only with full membership, and which Nicolas Sarkozy does not want to see discussed, as explained above, it means that 13 chapters out of 35 are currently off limits.) The Turks, on their part, have criticized the EU's inability to show flexibility in rewarding the Turkish Cypriot side for their support of the Annan Plan in the 2004 referendum, while the Greek Cypriots have suffered no consequences from their rejection of that Plan and have entered the EU as scheduled.

##### **c) ESDP... and possibly NATO**

Like Norway and Iceland, Turkey is part of NATO but it is not part of the EU. Paris, on its part, has been a prime supporter of European defense (ESDP), which by definition excludes Ankara, and this creates a structural cause for dispute between France and Turkey. Ankara has been angered by the Berlin Plus agreement (1996) which makes it possible for the EU to use NATO military assets when it conducts its own operations. Having a veto in NATO, Turkey has been able to block EU-NATO relations on several occasions since 1996, whether to obtain more influence over the EU, or to voice its displeasure on the Cyprus question. In the coming years, Ankara could also use its veto in NATO to block a possible return of France into the integrated military command – a move Sarkozy said he was contemplating.

## Conclusion

While it is hard to be wildly optimistic about the future of France - Turkey relations, there seems to be a few reasons for hope. First, diplomatic relations date back to 1484, and the first French-Ottoman treaty dates back to 1536. Since then, there certainly have been moments of crisis and even war, but this relationship has proved resilient. In the few months following Nicolas Sarkozy's election in 2007, in spite of the crisis, there have been many bilateral meetings and no less three high-level visits to try to make progress on pending issues. Paris is also organizing a "Turkish cultural season" starting in 2009 in appreciation for the "French cultural season" held in Turkey in 2006. And in spite of the political climate, French – Turkish bilateral trade and investment continue to grow..

More importantly, the renewed doubts brought by Nicolas Sarkozy's election and his stance on Turkish membership, with the accompanying confusion and ambiguity it has sown, might not be as uncomfortable for Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan as it may sound. In the recent months and years, Turkish public opinion has been increasingly divided over the interest of joining the EU and accepting to cede a very significant part of its sovereignty in the process. The current situation allows the leadership in Ankara to keep reforming the country with a clearly stated national objective – joining the EU – while not having to make any crucial decision too soon on this front. This situation will probably continue until late 2009, when German elections may change the political context. But in the meantime, the French, Turkish and European scene will probably be very different from what it is now.