

SEMINAR

Turkey and the ESDP: towards enhanced cooperation?

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Following a previous seminar organised in Ankara at the Centre for European Studies of the Middle East Technical University (METU) on 18 May 2009, this second seminar on Turkey and ESDP was held on 11 December 2009 at Bosphorus University, Istanbul, and co-organised by the EU Institute for Security Studies, METU's Center for European Studies and EDAM. This discussion was based on the following assumption (as developed for instance in the book *What ambitions for European defence in 2020?*, published by the EUISS in 2009): an open CSDP is not only a viable idea, but could also constitute a suitable framework for enhanced security cooperation with third countries in a multipolar world – specifically, this should include reinforced cooperation between Turkey and the EU.

In the decade since its formal launch in 1999, just after NATO's intervention in Kosovo, 23 operations have been organised through ESDP (now renamed CSDP) involving more than 24,000 people. CSDP has made much progress: operations have moved beyond the immediate neighbourhood, and today have a global reach (for example in Georgia, Chad, Somalia and Indonesia) that could barely have been imagined in 1999. On the one hand, ESDP operations still need better coherence between EU institutions, greater unity between Member States and more resources to become more effective; on the other hand, improvements have recently been achieved under the Swedish presidency on issues such as rapid response, qualified personnel, interoperability, financing – in close cooperation with the Commission – and good relations with NATO.



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The ongoing EUNAVFOR ATALANTA operation is a good example of an efficient military operation whose strong points include: the fact that it was deployed within six weeks, through efficient strategic communication; a comprehensive approach based on good civilian-military cooperation (the EU having the possibility, for instance, to set agreements with other countries for prosecution of suspected pirates, in this case Kenya); a new organisational model, which could be adapted to other low-intensity interventions, that does away with the element of command or hierarchy between the 35 participants in counter-piracy operations off Somalia which are coordinated by the EU (EU Member States, third countries and international organisations), on a 'face-to-face' basis.

Furthermore, the creation of the External Action Service (EAS) under the Lisbon Treaty, bringing together the Council and the Commission (and within it, the DGs), provides a dynamic favourable to European interventions capable, for instance, of combining the civilian and military dimensions of crisis management in a more efficient way.

Turkey already represents the third largest contributor of personnel among third countries in ESDP missions/operations. The EU has benefited from Turkish contributions in seven missions, including a very substantial one in the ongoing peacekeeping operation conducted under the 'Berlin Plus' arrangements, EUFOR *Althea* in BiH. According to several EU participants, there is much space for strengthened involvement of Turkey in ESDP operations, all the more so because the strategic interests of the EU and Turkey have already converged, namely:

- In the context of their common and respective neighbourhoods – from the Western Balkans (BiH, Kosovo) to the South Caucasus (especially Armenia – with the recent Turkish *rapprochement* policy – and Azerbaijan, and the Nagorno-Karabakh issue) and the Middle East (especially with the building of a strengthened relationship with Damascus), some participants valued positively the so-called 'zero problems with neighbours' dimension of Turkey's foreign policy, as well as its active role as a 'facilitator'. Turkey wants a region free of weapons of mass destruction; therefore there is no divergence regarding the EU's position towards Iran (even though Turkey will insist that all diplomatic options need to be exhausted). Other pending questions (Cyprus, the state of Turkish relations with Israel, the Kurdish question,) should be addressed in order that they do not hamper this trend towards convergence;

- Regarding the EU's energy security, Turkey plays an important role that converges with the EU's interests;

- ♦ On a broader stage, Turkey openly favours multilateral commitments, for instance by addressing issues such as international organised crime. Apart from its military capabilities and its engagement with NATO, Turkey has a commitment to 'soft power' actions at a global level that according to some participants complements the EU's foreign policy methodology and priorities.

Even if Turkey should be considered an international

actor whose influence is not limited to its neighbourhood, it has been suggested that priority could be given to the Middle East and South Caucasus for a reinforced cooperation between CFSP and Turkey.



For some Turkish participants, a strengthened cooperation between Turkey and CSDP cannot be considered prior to a resolution of the pending institutional issues between Turkey and the EU. Their main sources of discontent were articulated: CSDP has been presented since its initial phase as an open project; however, Turkey, though a major contributor among third country partners, is not associated with some of its decisions in areas where it should play a key role – for instance, with regard to Iraq and Georgia, despite those conflicts being located in Turkey's immediate neighbourhood, and Turkey being a NATO member for 50 years, as well as an EU candidate. In the same spirit, the Nice Implementation Document establishing a framework to involve non-EU allies in CSDP interventions has been interpreted in a restrictive way as concerning military operations only, thus excluding the civilian missions. Furthermore, Turkey has also participated from the start in the development of the European Defence Agency, but there is still no clear perspective on whether it will have a seat at the decision-making table, or at least closer association, in the future. Some participants argued that Turkey was not fully involved in the development of the European Security Strategy – even though it had been invited to participate in the different events and seminars in 2008 that led to the Implementation Report of the European Security Strategy. All these sources of frustration, along with the absence of a security agreement between the EU and Turkey, could lead to the conclusion that Turkey's relationship with CSDP will remain limited.



However, some other Turkish participants in the seminar regarded the prospect of strengthened cooperation with ESDP favourably. This would correspond with Turkey's strong historical commitment to multilateralism, which recently entered a new phase with its participation in the G20; its position as a

'net contributor' to international security both through hard and soft power; its commitment to sustainable development, and its recent status of non-permanent Member of the UN Security Council. Moving forward with such a strengthened cooperation, however, would mean that some contentious issues would first of all have to be addressed:

- ♦ Some argued that the legitimacy of the EU as a civilian power was potentially threatened by the fact that xenophobia and islamophobia are perceived in Turkey as informing mainstream arguments and discourses in Europe. While these tendencies within the EU should not be overstated, they still represent an image issue for the EU for some of its partners.
- ♦ According to some Turkish participants, the harmonisation of the European Security Strategy with NATO's Strategic Concept is the only way to cope with the change of paradigm in global security issues currently taking place – as made visible between the 2003 ESS document and the 2008 Implementation Report. The heyday of territorial defence is over, and priority is now given to asymmetric threats: failing states, frozen conflicts, global warming, energy security, non-proliferation. If the military dimension of CSDP is to be maintained, the EU should not take NATO for granted in advance of any mission or operation. Moreover, in a time of acute financial constraints, avoiding duplication should be a priority.
- ♦ For some others, Turkey needs to get more involved in the different frameworks of cooperation with the EU, including CSDP, since Turkey has a lot to offer in terms of capability and its industrial capacity – independently of the accession process, which will be pursued provided that the government has popular support for this. However, the EU should be more open-minded and realistic in its way of envisaging the involvement of non-EU partners. The creation of a EU-Turkey Summit as an official discussion framework would represent a step forward in this direction – though, according to some others, the institutionalisation of a Turkey-EU strategic dialogue would in a way be tantamount to giving up on the principle of accession.
- ♦ According to some EU participants, Turkey, on its side, should take visible steps towards a normalisation of political-military relations in accordance with the practice of all democratic States.

Moreover, Turkey's security strategy – through what can be discerned from public statements, since its documents are not public – does not seem to give equal weight to the civil and military dimensions, and still relies on a narrow definition of national interest. At a more general level, it should give a stronger commitment to guarantee greater transparency to its strategic priorities. Turkey needs to strengthen the 'soft power' dimension of its action – particularly in the way it addresses pending issues in its neighbourhood. Its current initiative towards Armenia seems to indicate such a dynamic.

Some speakers warned that if the accession process were to stall, there could at some point be a strong divergence about CSDP if Turkey had in the meantime been more strongly associated with CSDP missions/operations. A visible discrepancy between active 'underground' forms of cooperation and an unsatisfactory political cooperation on the other hand could have a high cost on both sides, especially in relation to Turkish public opinion. To prevent such an outcome requires strong confidence-building efforts between the EU and Turkey from both sides, in order to give reinforced cooperation its full potential.

Turkey should develop a more flexible approach to EU-NATO relations in order to guarantee the full cooperation between the two institutions in different operational theatres.



Considering the variety of opinions presented during the meeting on how to strengthen cooperation between Turkey and CSDP, some thematic propositions have been made with a view to making some progress at the next meeting:

- ◆ To get more clarity in the debate, the session on 'lessons learned' should be divided into two

separate parts. One session should deal specifically with the lessons learned by Turkish experts and officials from their country's participation in CSDP operations on the basis of the experience of Turkish personnel in previous missions – for this, participation of Turkish military and civilian personnel in the seminar would be an asset; the other should take into account a Turkish vision of CSDP in general, independently of Turkish participation.

- ◆ Does the Lisbon Treaty represent a way of improving comprehensive EU-Turkey cooperation? Should a more precise EU position on NATO's Strategic Concept be considered as facilitating such cooperation?
- ◆ What benefits does the EU expect to gain from Turkey's participation in CSDP operations?

Finally, it was also mentioned that inviting other non-EU contributors to attend the next seminar on CSDP would help improve the discussion and give it a comparative dimension.

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