



TURKEY AND THE EU: THE WAY AHEAD

By Rosmarie Carotti

The Institute Pierre Werner of Luxembourg in collaboration with the Turkish Embassy invited to a Conference with Minister of State Egemen Bagis, Chief Negotiator with the European Union on behalf of the Republic of Turkey, on 23 March at the Abbey of Neumünster in Luxembourg



Photo: IPW

Minister Egemen Bagis:
Age: 44
Party: AKP; elected in 2002
Member of Government since 2009

Mr Mario Hirsch, director of the Institute Pierre Werner warmly welcomed the audience and introduced Minister Egemen Bagis. Since the visit of the Turkish Prime Minister Ali Babacan to Luxembourg about one year ago, an event he had had the honour to host as well, the Turkish cause, Mr Hirsch said, had not made striking progress. The Turkish case was still problematic for many people in Europe for two reasons: the size of the country and its strategic options. Europe needed to make sure that Turkey does not make use of this tool.

Minister Bagis said that was a privilege for him to speak at the Pierre Werner Institute, named after the father of the European currency, but above all it was meaningful to him to come back to Luxembourg, the city where it all began, where the negotiations for Turkey's membership in the EU started in 2004. He thanked Luxembourg for being a country that supports Turkey's ambitions without being ashamed to admit it.

The Minister of State called the EU the grandest peace project in the history of mankind, but also a project which would not be complete without Turkey's accession. There were many benefits for Turkey in this process since 1959. The process had helped the country to become more democratic, more prosperous and more transparent but at the same time it had also ensured Europe to have a strong ally, now the largest military in Europe and the second largest military in NATO.

Today as the sixth largest economy in Europe with the fifth largest market in Europe and the fourth largest work-force of Europe, Turkey was a very important economic player. At a moment, when the social security systems in Europe were facing difficult times, Turkey's dynamic young population could solve some of Europe's problems. The medium age of the population was in fact 28 against a medium age in Europe of 42-43 years.

Countering the argument used against Turkey's accession regarding the size of the country, the Chief Negotiator stressed the importance of consensus among Member countries, with which even the most difficult technical problems could be handled in a smooth manner. Turkey's size would be an advantage in the long run rather than a disadvantage.

In the old days people would have argued that Turkey was poor, but that argument was no longer valid. Only seven years ago Turkey was the 26th largest economy of the world, today it was the 16th largest economy. According the OECD, Turkey was the third largest growing country after China and India. This was one of the reasons why Turkey should join the EU, because the EU needed Turkey as much as Turkey needed the EU.

Turkey was also a country that exported culture, ideas and values. Turkish TV industry was slowly taking over Hollywood. Turkish soap operas were very closely viewed in Middle Eastern countries and Turkey was playing a

bridge there. Turkey, with its European living standards could play a very important role in establishing an alliance of civilizations. That's why Turkey was able to mediate between Russia and Georgia, Bosnia and Serbia, Afghanistan and Pakistan, Israel and Syria, Iraq and Syria even between the US, Europe and Iran.

The Turkish economy was doing pretty well. As a Member of the European Customs Union, 60% of Turkey's trade was with European companies and countries. This was integration in the making. And Turkey was a full member of every European institution except for the European Union.

Turkey was a bridge between East and West, between Islam and Christianity, between Europe and Asia, between energy resources and consumers, but most importantly a bridge between civilisations. Turkey was the most Eastern part of the West and the most Western part of the East. That's why 151 of the 192 nations of the United Nations had supported Turkey's bid to become a member of the Security Council. Luxembourg had been one of those and Turkey was now willing and able to support Luxembourg's bid to become a Member of the Security Council in 2013/2014.

Many European companies had today important and profitable investments in Turkey, to name some car builders: Renault, Mercedes, Peugeot and Fiat. This was an indication that Turkey was playing a crucial role in European economy as well.

Of course, Europe also had an integration problem. There were approximately 5.5 million Turks already living in EU Member countries, 600 of them living in Luxembourg. Almost 3 million Turks lived in Germany. The total number of Turks living in the EU was larger than the population of most of the EU Member States. But exactly this was proof of the ongoing integration.

In Turkey the culture of Islam and the culture of democracy have been coexisting for more than 200 years and lessons could be drawn from this historical accomplishment. Turkey was signalling important messages to the rest of the world.



Minister Egemen Bagis and Mr Mario Hirsch, Director of the IPW

Photo: IPW

Of course there were also impediments, for example the Cyprus issue which had not been a pre-condition for the membership of Cyprus but was now for the membership of Turkey. Minister of State Bagis assured that Turkey had and would continue to do its utmost to reach a permanent and sustainable solution.

Turkey had also been a very important contributor to the European Security and Defence Operations in the Balkans, in Africa and elsewhere and would continue to be an important player in all these international programmes.

As a member of the G-20 Turkey was now trying to help the economic issue and as a hub for energy it was trying to solve some of Europe's energy disputes. 70% of all the energy resources that Europe needed were either to the South, the North or the East of Turkey. That's why Turkey believed that Nabucco, where Turkey was one of six partners, was a very important project.

Minister Bagis recalled how in history, when the Ottoman Empire was breaking apart, the Turks were called "sick men of Europe"; no one ever called them "sick men of Asia". If the Turks could be Europeans at the worst time of their history, they definitely were Europeans today at the best time of their history.