
Turkey's « French Problem »

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Avant-propos

Depuis plusieurs années, la relation bilatérale franco-turque traverse une phase de crise et de réajustements. Le schéma traditionnel de relation, marqué par une histoire diplomatique très ancienne remontant aux belles heures de l'Empire ottoman, et verrouillé par la guerre froide dans la deuxième moitié du XX^e siècle, ne peut plus être maintenu sans tenir compte des mutations de fond qui affectent désormais les systèmes sociopolitiques des deux pays.

Semih Idiz donne dans cette note un point de vue turc sur l'évolution de la relation et décrit surtout l'ensemble des différends franco-turcs. En l'occurrence, on sait que la principale difficulté tient aujourd'hui à la position officielle de la France concernant la candidature européenne de la Turquie. Mais au-delà de ce problème factuel, l'auteur sent poindre une compétition pour la puissance, la Turquie gagnant progressivement du terrain comme acteur de poids sur la scène internationale.

Dorothee Schmid, responsable programme « Turquie contemporaine », Ifri

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Introduction

Turkish–French relations go back to Francois I and Suleyman the Magnificent, as diplomats on both sides like to remind us frequently¹. Yet the state of ties today hardly reflects such a historic involvement. Instead they are seriously strained over the seminal issues of European identity and religion, not to mention potentially poisonous historic topics.

Put another way, one would have expect two nations with such a historic legacy not to go down the road that Turkish-French ties have gone over these past few years, and yet they have, and there must be reasons for this. We will try to provide some answers for this from a Turkish perspective.

It is an undeniable fact that Turkey and France continue to share important economic and cultural ties, and are maintaining a diplomatic dialogue on a variety of issues. In this sense it is true that the proverbial glass is not “half empty.” Yet the current strains also affect all the areas, in one way or another, making it necessary for diplomats to work actively from time to time in order to prevent a serious breakdown in ties.

The bottom line for Turks is that President Nicolas Sarkozy’s France does not accept Turkey as a European country, and insists on making that point amply clear. Turks reject this attitude, which they do not understand given their country’s general European orientation since the 1856 Congress of Paris, when Ottoman Turkey was accepted as a member of the “Concert of Europe.”

The French position does not explain either why Turkey is a member of the Council of Europe, the OECD, and NATO for over half a century if indeed it belongs to another continent. There is also the fact that the Ankara Treaty, which opened Turkey’s EU perspective,

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¹ See for example www.ambafrance-tr.org/spip.php?article372

was concluded nearly 50 years ago, and nowhere along the line did France object to this openly, until a few years ago when this perspective showed serious signs of maturing at a time when the debate about a European Constitution was raging in France.

Turks are aware, of course, that their country is not the first in Europe whose EU path France tried to block for the sake of its own national interests. Because of this there is more than one member of the EU today that is exhorting Ankara not to be disillusioned by Paris' maneuvers, and to stay focused on full accession by doing its homework right. History suggests they may have a point.

De Gaulle's « Grand Non »

“The Common Market is a sort of prodigy. To introduce into it now new and massive elements, into the midst of those that have been fit together with such difficulty, would obviously be to jeopardize the whole and the details, and to raise the problem of an entirely different undertaking.”

At first glance this may appear to be a statement on Turkish membership in the EU. In fact these words were uttered by no less a Frenchman than the great President Charles de Gaulle, during a press conference in 1967, and the country he was referring to was Great Britain, whose membership in the Common Market Paris was vetoing for the second time in the space of a few years.

De Gaulle said the six countries that established the Common Market, “form through their territory a compact geographic and strategic unit,” while Britain was an island state removed from the continent, with a commonwealth and close ties to the US, which made it ineligible for membership.

The Common Market nevertheless evolved into today's EU, and Britain is a key member, despite President De Gaulle. From the Turkish perspective, therefore, France has shown historically that it is prepared to resist any expansion of the union if it fears its political and economic predominance is in danger.

Times have changed

No one can deny that times have changed for Europe and the world, and it is inevitable that each era should have its own political and economic specificities. It is equally clear that the French opposition to Turkey's EU membership reflects the political, economic and cultural fears prevalent in today's French society.

The fear about Islam is especially apparent at the moment, given the debate concerning Islamic garb and other Islamic practices in that country.

The heated debates prior to the referendum for a European Constitution in 2005, and the anti-Turkish line promoted at the time by ultra-right wing politicians such as Jean-Marie le Pen and Philippe de Villier - who bedecked Paris with "Non a la Turquie dan l'Europe" posters, also provided Turks with an opportunity to understand, though not condone, what French fears were about.

It is because of this that the opposition of Paris to Turkey's EU membership tells us more about a prevailing sense of insecurity in France than it does about Turkey. This is what inquiring Turks are also told, sometimes as a whisper in the ear, and at other times more boldly and openly, by Frenchmen and women who are not against Turkey's EU membership in principle.

The basic assumption of this article is therefore that the seminal problem with regard to Turkey's EU perspective is on the French side, and not the Turkish side. This does not mean that Turkey has no problems with the EU on other issues, or that Ankara has fulfilled its obligations for full membership.

Objectively speaking, getting Turkey to fulfil the EU's political and economic criteria will take at least a decade, and most likely more. Even Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu has pronounced the date 2023 for full membership². But the problems that exist in this respect are technical ones that can be overcome provided Turkey carries out the necessary reforms and adopts fully the "acquis communautaire."

What the French position points to, however, is a monolithic cultural and religious divergence, suggesting a "never the twain shall

² Foreign Minister Davutoglu made this observation during a collective meeting with Turkey's ambassadors abroad on January 6, 2010 in Ankara.

meet” attitude. Thus, as far as today’s France is concerned, its “Turkish problem” can only be overcome by offering Ankara no more than a “special,” or a “privileged partnership,” in place of full membership in the EU.

Few in Turkey understand what this means in real terms, however, given that Turkey is already in a “special,” if not “privileged,” partnership being the only non-member that has a customs union with the EU.

Needless to say Paris has influential supporters within the Union with regard to its position on Turkey. Some like German Chancellor Angela Merkel and her CDU are more bold and vocal in reflecting this support, while others are more reticent. It is equally true; however, that there are important EU members such as Sweden, Britain, Spain and much of “New Europe” who do not oppose Turkish membership in principle provided Ankara fulfils its obligations.

Paris Obstructs Talks

Despite the support France has within the EU, no member state has to date done what Paris has done by unilaterally blocking Turkey's EU path with concrete steps. Paris has done this by vetoing negotiations in five chapters of the 35 to be negotiated with Ankara, on the grounds that these chapters open a full membership perspective

Even German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is known to oppose Turkey's EU membership, has not gone so far. All she has said is that the negotiation process is "open ended," suggesting that it may not result in membership. In the meantime she cites the "pacta sunt servanda" dictum in terms of the process started with Turkey, as she did during her recent visit to Ankara.

"Economic and Monetary Policy" is one of the chapters blocked by France. The other four are "Agriculture and Rural Development," "Institutions and Regional Policy" and "Financial and Budgetary Provisions." Paris has not created a problem, however, on chapters that it says do not point to full membership, and are compatible with its notion of a "privileged partnership."

French officials also made it clear, prior to France's EU term presidency in 2008, that Paris would be "fair, neutral and objective toward Turkey." In order to give body to this contention, Paris even ensured that the chapters on "Information Society and Media" and on the "Free Flow of Capital" were opened for negotiation.³

For Turks, however, pursuing a policy of "fairness, neutrality and objectivity" toward Ankara during its term presidency was a "low-cost attempt" by Paris not to appear "the total spoiler," given that France has large economic interests in Turkey.

At any rate there are quite a few French observers, one notable example being IFRI's own Turkey expert, Dorothee Schmid, who have maintained in the past that the chapters opened during the French presidency do not point to a change in heart on the part of President Sarkozy.

³ On the bilateral climate prevailing during the French Presidency of the EU, see *La Turquie et l'Europe après la Présidence française de l'Union européenne*, report of the conference organized at the French Senate, IFRI, Paris, December 2008, on http://ifri.org/?page=detail-contribution&id=5774&id_provenance=88&provenance_context_id=17 .

Turkish cynics for their part argue that if eight of the 35 chapters to be negotiated had not been blocked by the EU for technical reasons – due to Ankara's refusal to open its ports to Greek Cypriots ships until the Cyprus issue is resolved - then the number of chapters blocked by France would have been higher.

Whatever the case may be, the manner in which Paris behaved during its presidency was not enough to change the current Turkish perception that France is unfaithful to its word. Most Turks believe that Paris' unilateral blockage of the five chapters is in violation of the EU's unanimous decision to start membership talks with Turkey.

Critics also point to the fact that even Germany is honoring the "pacta sunt servanda" principle regardless of the fact that Chancellor Angela Merkel is in agreement with President Sarkozy on Turkey.

Another interesting case in point here is Greece's support for Turkey's EU bid - even if Greek public opinion is divided on this issue - provided Ankara fulfils its obligations, which of course include issues that concern Cyprus.

It is clear that Athens believes a Turkey which is firmly in the European fold, and subject to EU criteria, will be a better neighbor, than it would be otherwise. Thus even a bitter historic rival of Turkey's such as Greece has not done what Paris has.

Turkey has, at any rate, made it amply clear that it will not accept "second class membership" in the EU under any name or form, and will settle for nothing short of full membership. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has openly said that if the EU does not want Turkey, it has to openly say so⁴. Otherwise Turkey will continue aiming for full membership.

⁴ Prime Minister Erdogan first said this in an interview with the German *Der Spiegel* magazine in April 2007 and has been repeating it since. Annette Grossbongardt and Joachim Preuss, "Interview with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan", *Der Spiegel*, 16 April 2007.

Perceptions and Facts

There are mutual perceptions nations have developed over time, even if these are not always justified by facts. This is nowhere more apparent than in Turkish-French relations. In the case of Turks, this perception, at least until recently, was on the whole a very positive one.

French culture was admired more than British culture by the Ottoman elite. This peaked after Turkey modeled its republic to a large extent on France, adopting French principles of sovereignty, centralism, etatism, and laicism.

It was inevitable in this climate that a growing Turkish republican bourgeoisie should adopt French modes of behavior. Thus, for a whole generation of Turks, France and all things French were the subject of deep admiration. Often this was no more than affectation, of course, but this predominant class nevertheless considered that everything worth aspiring to was in France.

Naturally there were times when the darker side of the perception about the French came to the surface. “French perfidy in Eastern Anatolia,” as “agitators of Christian minorities against the Sublime Port” during and after the World War One, is also part of the historic subconscious of Turks, especially in cities such as Gaziantep, Antakya and Iskenderun.

It is no wonder then that the one thing that still has the potential to instantly poison Turkish-French relations is the Armenian issue. This complex topic has already left a cloud over ties for four decades now, since the topic was revived in the 1970s, after a period of calm that lasted for nearly half a century.

But this historic memory, embedded in the Turkish psyche, was not allowed for a long time to tarnish the image of France in Turkey - given the admiration for all things French. Today, however, it casts a dark cloud over ties as a result of the successful intervention of France’s influential Armenian community, and the apparent need of some French politicians to use this issue against Ankara⁵.

Even determined Turkish Francophiles, such as the influential columnists Ertugrul Ozkok from *Hurriyet*, have now started turning

⁵ One notable case being the UMP’s Patrick Devedjian, who is of Armenian descent and enjoys very close relations with President Sarkozy.

against France because of this and President Sarkozy's insistence that Turkey has no place in Europe, which has, inevitably, revived negative historic memories among Turks concerning the French.

In the meantime ultra right-wing French politicians like Jean-Marie Le Pen and Philippe de Villiers have done their best to stir the cauldron further by increasing anti-French sentiments among Turks.

Turkish View of French Behavior

Looked at from a Turkish perspective, French notions about Turkey are often colored by ingrained and instinctive patterns of perception that go back to the time of the Crusades, and are marked more by animosity than amity. Voltaire, for example, openly expressed his “fervent wish” that “Turkish barbarians be chased away immediately out of the country of Xenophon, Socrates, Plato, Sophocles and Euripides.”

The fact that the same Voltaire argues in his *“Toleration and Other Essays”* that “The Sultan governs in peace twenty million people of different religions; two hundred thousand Greeks live in security at Constantinople” is a revealing contradiction of course⁶.

Thus for the “Christian Frank” in history the “Mohammedan Turk” was the hated “infidel.” Many Turks believe this basic instinct is embedded in the French collective subconscious, and it is this that is manifesting itself in today’s attitudes on Turkey.

There were many occasions in Turkish-French history when interests overlapped, of course. But these, more often than not, resulted in “state-to-state” relations, and not “people-to-people” ones. This is also evident from the fact that few in France are aware of the better moments of this shared history; let alone having any knowledge about Turkey and the Turks.

Few know, for example, that Turkey actually supported France at the UN General Assembly during the Algerian crisis (causing Ankara to apologize to Algeria years later). Similarly, many Frenchmen and women that this writer talked to in Paris over the years knew hardly anything about the fact that France was the first Western European country to establish ties with “Kemalist rebels” in Ankara during Turkey’s war of liberation.

That happened at a time when Turks were accused by the French over the mass expulsion and execution of Armenians in 1915 (The term genocide had not yet been invented then). Neither were the Frenchmen and women we talked to aware of the conditions surrounding the return of the French mandated territory of Alexandrette (today’s Hatay) to Turkey in 1939, which was also disastrous for Armenians, of course.

⁶ Voltaire, *A Treatise on Toleration and Other Essays*, Prometheus Books (May 1994).

As an aside here, Turks have also cynically noted President Sarkozy's response to Algeria's demands for an apology from France for colonial crimes, when he said "such things should be left to historians." Inevitably this is taken as a clear indication of "French double standards."

This is, after all, the argument Turkey has been using against France, which has been trying to force Ankara to officially admit culpability in the Armenian tragedy of 1915. Even Turkish intellectuals who support Armenian genocide claims maintain today that if France apologized to Algeria, then its backing of the Armenian cause would be much more convincing morally.

Looking back, then, it seems that much of the negative perceptions on the French side concerning Turkey remained dormant for a long time after World War II. Thus France did not object in 1963 to the signing of the Ankara Treaty that placed Turkey, which was already a NATO and Council of Europe member, on the path to EU membership.

It is nevertheless clear that there are tangible fears that are stoked among the French today when the topic of Turkey comes up. These fears can not be brushed aside, especially in a world where France is only one power among many now, and has to share the international space with new rivals in a way it did not have to before. So what are these fears?

A Flood of Anatolians

One fear is clearly that unemployed Muslim Anatolians will flood France if Turkey is admitted into the EU, and not only take jobs away from the French, but also provide a pool of cheap labor for French industry, thus lowering the general standard of living the French have managed to secure for themselves through their advantageous position in the EU⁷.

One can understand this fear given the economic difficulties of France, and the fact that bitter pills have to be swallowed now if the French economy is to retain its competitiveness on world markets. It is also true that if Turkey were to be admitted into the EU tomorrow, with its current level of unemployment, there would be a rush of the kind the French fear.

But no one expects Turks to get full access to European labor markets - which even citizens of some EU member states such as Bulgaria and Romania do not enjoy today - unless there is a tangible need for it.

It can also be assumed that Turkey will not be given the political advantages some Eastern European countries were given in becoming members, even if they did not meet the requirements fully. This means Turkey's economy will have to be on par with stringent EU criteria prior to full membership. When that day comes, it is highly unlikely that the rush by unemployed Turks towards Europe will take place as feared. The opposite is more likely, as more and more Turks come to feel that they have all the benefits they need in Turkey, and decide to return to the home country.

This trend of reverse migration was also seen in the case of a number of the present members of the EU when they first acceded to the union. It seems, therefore, that the "Anatolians flooding the market" is as questionable an argument as the "Polish Plumber" one was, even if it provides good material for right-wing political demagoguery. The argument that cheap Turkish labor will undermine the high living standard of the French if Turkey joins the EU is equally fallacious. The effort by President Sarkozy, by using threats and enticements, to ensure that Renault does not manufacture its Clio-4 model in Turkey underlines a key point in this context.

⁷ The same fear manifested itself in the "Polish Plumber" debate in France.

If Turkey provides a secure and reliable environment, as well as a disciplined, trained and competent workforce, it will still attract French investment, even if it is not a member of the EU. As it turns out, Clio-4 will not be fully manufactured in France due to the natural laws of business, whatever the needs of populist French politicians may be.

Turkey at Every Turn

There is of course a political corollary to all this. Looked at through Turkish eyes, the French appear to be finding it difficult to digest the loss of bygone days, when their country was so predominant a player that it could alter the international balance of power almost at will.

France remains an important player, of course, but is only one of many such players that also include Turkey, which is diplomatically very active in parts of the world that Paris is also interested in today, including the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East.

Turkey's political and economic influence in this part of the world is increasing to the extent that Ankara can now play an active role in efforts to bring about a rapprochement between seriously estranged and warring parties.

Countries in the region are also responding warmly to Turkey in this regard. Damascus, to cite one case, considers Turkey - and not France - as a key arbiter in any talks with Israel, as President Assad has declared on a number of occasions recently, even during a visit to Paris⁸.

Given that Syria was once mandated to France - which also has a similar interest in Lebanon, another Francophone country that Turkey has been successfully courting⁹ - Ankara's increasing regional influence can not be all that pleasing for Paris.

Turkey's increasing political and economic influence is also apparent in other parts of the world that France wants to play an active role in. Turkish diplomacy aimed at the Southern Caucasus and Ankara's latest successes in the Balkans, most notably in bringing Serbia and Bosnia together, provide just two examples. Paris must also be noting how Turkey is moving into Africa now, and establishing new links with South America.

These developments point to another reason why Turks think France is trying to block Ankara's EU path. It is felt that such a large and predominantly Islamic country will add to its already increasing

⁸ www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1128017.html

⁹ Turkey and Lebanon lifted the visa requirement for each others citizens recently, and have started holding joint cabinet meetings with a view to deepening their economic, political and cultural ties. It has been also that Ankara successfully mediated between Lebanon and Syria securing a normalization of their diplomatic relations (when, how?).

influence by means of EU membership, and come to a position where it has an equal say with France over the fate of Europe. This, it is felt, is too much to digest for the average Frenchman or woman.

Analysts, as well as a number of EU officials we talked to at the time, suggested that President Sarkozy's "Mediterranean Union" proposal in fact aimed to provide an alternative to EU membership for Turkey. According to this idea, Ankara was going to be enticed away from the EU by being offered "leadership of the Mediterranean."

If this was indeed the initial intention of this project and France has argued vehemently that it never was, and then Turkey did not take the bait. At any rate the essential nature of Sarkozy's Mediterranean Union project was changed, primarily due to Germany's intervention, and converted into an EU project named "Union for the Mediterranean." It still remains to be seen if this project will get anywhere.

Racism and Islamophobia

Finally, the “immigrant element,” mainly from North Africa, appears to be changing the appearance of France and leading to a national crisis over identity. Anomalous phenomena such as the establishment of a ministry that is trying to regulate national identity, and the current debate raging in France on this topic, are taken as outward expressions of the insecurity that has taken over the French in this respect.

This is not that strange a debate for Turks, however, given that another thing they share with the French is a strong sense of a unified national identity. Nevertheless today’s Turkey is trying to leave this orientation behind - an effort that is most visible in the so called “Kurdish” or “Alevi openings” - and to open up to “multiculturalism.”

France, on the other hand, appears to be moving in the opposite direction. Turks also believe that there is more than a tinge of racism and "cultural suprematism" involved here, as far as the French are concerned, and that the negative attitudes being cultivated in today’s France are predominantly aimed at Islamic people.

It is inevitable, therefore, that when right-wing Frenchmen and women hand out free pork soup in winter to the public, knowing full well that Moslems – not to mention Jews – will not touch it, these stories are picked up by the Turkish media, and used to fuel anti-French sentiment¹⁰.

Many Turks feel therefore that the elemental reason why France opposes Turkey’s EU membership is racism and Islamophobia, and not geography. If it were geography, they argue, and then Cyprus, which is also not in Europe geographically, should not have been admitted as a member.

¹⁰ Groups across France associated with a rightwing organization called “Bloc Identitaire” have been handing out “soupe au cochon” or pork soup since 2004. Police had shut down food distributions by the organization SDF (Solidarité des Français) because of alleged xenophobia and fears of protests. But a judge in Paris decided in 2007 that there was no evidence the SDF had refused to serve Jews and Muslims, who do not eat pork for religious reasons, it could not be accused of discriminating against them. Islamic groups, as might be expected rejected this ruling. Read the full story on www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/jan/02/france.

France blocked from key projects

Turkey has been determined, in view of all this, to show Paris that its position on Ankara's EU bid will not go unchallenged, and without retaliation, to the extent that this is logically possible. This is most noticeable in the manner that French companies have been blocked out of multi-billion dollar projects in such job generating strategic fields as transportation, energy, and military industry.

French officials are quick to point out that, for all the problems, including periodic calls to boycott French goods, Turkish-French trade has steadily increased over the years. Official figures corroborate this as the bilateral trade figure hit 11 billions Euros in 2008.

France is also the second largest investor in Turkey, and has a key position in the automotive sector where Renault and Peugeot have large concerns. Other French companies in Turkey include Schneider, Areva, St Gobain, Lafarge, Danone, l'Oréal, Carrefour, Total, BNP Paribas, TEB, AXA, Groupama International, Dexia etc.

It is also true; therefore, that Ankara has done nothing to downsize the existing French economic engagement in Turkey. Given the deep roots that some of these companies have in the country, doing so would be self-defeating and harmful to the interests of the Turkish consumer.

It is clear, however, that Ankara's indirect vetoing of French companies in terms of strategic investments are hurting France, as was made apparent to this writer during meetings with French officials in Paris and Ankara over the past two years.

This trend appears unlikely to change, given that signing new contracts with French companies in such areas of nuclear energy, major oil pipelines, or military industry projects are politically risky at home due to views emanating from Paris concerning Turkey's EU bid.

One can not, of course, talk of an official boycott against France, which is not possible given Turkey's Customs Union with the EU, and for other legal and objective reasons. As it is Turkish officials have always said, in an effort to appear "politically correct," that France can submit offers for major strategic tenders.

There is, nevertheless, nothing preventing Ankara from "preferring not to prefer French companies" in these tenders. "Why contribute more than is necessary to the economy of a country that is trying to block Turkey's development?" appears to sum up the attitude.

One has to mention here that there was some speculation in the Turkish media recently, during a visit by Anne-Marie Idrac, Frances minister in charge of foreign trade, that Ankara had given Paris a “wink” over the much talked about international tender for a nuclear power plant in Turkey.

Positive remarks by Zafer Caglayan, Turkey's state minister overseeing foreign trade, also pointed to a warmer atmosphere in economic ties during the visit by the French minister. It is too early to say, however, if this points to the opening up of a fresh chapter in the cooperation between the two countries in new and economically strategic fields.

The situation remains volatile since just one negative statement from President Sarkozy, or any other influential French politician, on Turkey can reverse any progress made instantly due to a Turkish public opinion that is highly sensitized against France currently.

This is also reflected in the fact that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan never misses an opportunity to take a swipe at President Sarkozy, by openly accusing him of being “prejudiced against Turkey.”¹¹

Erdogan also sent cold shivers down the spines of the organizers of the “Turkish Season” in France last year, when he said he did not see any point, given the French position on Turkey, to holding such a cultural festival. As it was the season went ahead, and it was good that it did since it showed interested Frenchmen and women many things about Turkish culture they were clearly unaware of.

¹¹ www.nytimes.com/2007/05/15/news/15iht-turkey.5.5724393.html.

Burning Bridges

Needless to say this is no way to proceed for two strategically important countries that trace the lineage of their ties back centuries, and are facing common problems in an unpredictable, and rapidly changing world.

It must be understood in France that Turkey is not going to be an EU member for another 10 to 15 years at best, because of her own problems, let alone any blockage coming from Europe. If and when that day of accession arrives, it is clear Europe will be dealing with a very different and much more important Turkey in terms of political and economic concerns.

Whether Turkey becomes a member or not when that day arrives will also be decided by a host of objective factors governing the state of the world at the time. Neither can it be discounted that Turks may opt out of EU membership themselves in the end, having attained the economic, social, and political standards required for this membership.

And finally, it is not exactly clear what shape the EU will take over the next five years, let alone 10 or 15, especially since its own problems appear to be increasing. EU officials like to remind us that Turkey's EU membership talks are "open-ended," with no promise of full membership.

One can argue, by virtue of the same token, that the EU project itself is "open-ended" one, and no one is in a position to predict the shape the union will take eventually. That may be a shape that requires Turkey's membership, as was the case after the Second World War for NATO and the Council of Europe. On the other hand developments in Europe may take such a turn that Turks would not want to join it.

There is no science of "futurology." It took one morning of totally unexpected attacks on September 11, 2001 to alter the international equation overnight. Because of this simple fact of life, it is not clear to Turks why France is prepared to burn bridges with Ankara today, when it may need them in the future.

Particularly since the question of Turkey's EU membership will be decided by another generation of politicians, who will mostly likely be facing a different set of circumstances at home and abroad.

In the meantime Turkey has already attained critical mass in the economic, political and strategic fields. This writer met Belgians in

Brussels who were shocked to learn that their iconic brand “Godiva” was own by a Turkish company today. This is a paradigmatic example demonstrating what is really going on.

Needless to say, Turks have also started leaving a serious cultural mark on Europe with their literature, music, films, paintings, sculptures etc.; a fact that will no doubt contribute over time to a better and less prejudicial view of Turkey in France, and other countries in Europe.

Given this general picture, the future indicates two courses for Ankara and Paris. Either they come to an understanding about a joint vision for the future, based on treaties signed and promises made, or they increasingly become economic and political rivals, thus squandering energy which could be better utilized for the sake of international stability.