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FEUTURE EU 28 Country Report

Hungary

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1. History of EU-Turkey Relations¹

1.1. Traditional position: overwhelmingly positive

Hungary has supported Turkey's accession to the European Union (EU) since the country itself became a member in 2004. According to the official Hungarian position, the negotiations should be fair and, if Ankara manages to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria and implement the *acquis communautaire*, Turkey should become a full member. This stance was maintained by left- and right-wing governments alike, all of them saying that the dialogue needed to be continued regardless of any troubles between the EU and Turkey. Hungarian governments usually emphasized that despite their pro-accession views the issue of membership should be settled in the framework of the EU with the consensus of all member states.

The most controversial issue has certainly been whether Turkey is an integral part of Europe and its culture. According to a Eurobarometer poll in 2005, 51 percent of the Hungarian population was in favour of Turkey's accession (while the EU average was 39 percent) and some 75 percent of respondents said that Turkey was part of Europe. It is interesting to note that the share of those supporting Turkey's EU accession was the same on the right and left side of the political spectrum (50 percent each).

1.2. Major narratives: rather interest-based

Various narratives of the EU-Turkey negotiations have a very long tradition in Hungary that has developed over the decades. The generally positive stance of the Hungarian population is based on two major historical circumstances. First, although most of Hungary including Budapest was conquered by the Ottomans, these territories were retaken in 1699/1717, which means that this era rather appears in history books than current political debates. Even if the Ottoman conquest is viewed as a negative development by the majority of the Hungarian population, the government usually did not use it to boost anti-Turkey sentiments. Additionally, Hungary and the Ottoman Empire rather cooperated during the last centuries: the Ottoman Empire hosted several waves of Hungarian refugees and they fought together in World War I. In consequence, the Hungarian nation-building process of the 19-20th Century did not perceive Turks as a threat but rather as an ally against the neighbours.

The positive view was further strengthened by Turanism (an ideology advocating cooperation between the Turkic and Hungarian peoples on the basis of their alleged unity), which has gained a new impetus in Hungary after 1990 (and especially after 2008) and has motivated certain groups to view Turkey and the Turkic people in a very positive way.

¹ The EU 28 Country Reports were completed before the Turkish Constitutional Referendum on 16 April 2017. Thus, the report does not take account of any potential changes in the national debate that might have occurred in the meantime.

Secondly, Hungary does not have a great number of Turkish immigrants or a historical Turkish minority. Turkish Diaspora settled in Hungary after 1989 and their number is around 3,000-5,000, which makes this group practically marginal within a country of 10 million inhabitants. They seem to be integrated in the eyes of the society and no tensions have emerged. Even during the refugee crisis that led to growing anti-migrant and anti-Muslim sentiments in Hungary, the government's standpoint was to avoid the debate about Islam in order to preserve good relations with (among others) Turkey.

Although a positive sentiment can be detected towards Turkey, EU-Turkish relations and the enlargement process including the ongoing negotiations got very limited media coverage and do not feature prominently in the public debate in Hungary. Hungarian-Turkish relations are usually discussed on a bilateral – rather than European – level, which pushes the issue of accession into the background. The Hungarian EU Presidency in the first half of 2011 did not prioritize Turkey's membership negotiations, even though the Hungarian government expressed its support for the Turkish case.

After the violent downturn of the Gezi protests in 2013, Turkey and its actions were increasingly discussed in the public sphere. Most of the time, these debates focused on value-based issues like the treatment of the protesters or on the state of Turkish democracy. It was mainly the left-wing (opposition) political scene that criticized the developments concerning human rights and freedom of the media, pointing out that under these circumstances full EU membership was out of question.

Turkey's role in handling the 2015 migration refugee crisis and the following events in 2016 (failed coup attempt, Ankara's rapprochement to Russia and its military campaign in Syria) have also shaped the narratives: the country which had gotten limited attention in public debate reappeared as an important, Muslim country. However, Hungarian pro-government media and the official government position are both rather interest based about EU-Turkey relations, claiming that accession negotiations should be maintained in order to keep Turkey as a partner of the European Union and less focused on identity issues. Stability and security concerns, as well as the Turkey's geopolitical position also determine the policy areas where cooperation is needed, for example in the fields of migration/Syrian refugees living in Turkey, visa issues, or the fight against terrorism.

1.3. Policy areas: focus on economy and energy

After 2010, the Hungarian government made economy an increasingly important part of bilateral relations with Turkey. Turkey represents a large market and a great investment opportunity for Hungarian companies; for this reason, it has become one of the main destinations of the Hungarian government's "Eastward opening". The idea of collaboration in the field of energy transport, especially after Russia's decision to launch the Turkish Stream project in 2014 raised more attention among political and business circles in Hungary. The next

high-level bilateral meeting on economic cooperation will be held in spring 2017. The Hungarian government is eager to promote Hungarian economic interests in Turkey. However, Turkey's EU accession as a positive development in further economic cooperation rarely appears in the debate.

2. Future of EU-Turkey Relations

2.1. Dominant views on the future of EU-Turkey relations: doubts

Even though the official Hungarian position is positive towards Turkey's EU accession, the current public debate about its prospects is rather negative. While identity-based narratives about Turkey's European identity and history were side-lined during the past few years (even if it appears from time to time in the right-wing, pro-government media), value-based and pragmatic discourse has gained strength. The value-based narratives about the state of democracy in Turkey, the Gezi events in 2013, the war on terror and the failed coup attempt in July 2016 have weakened Ankara's prospects to accede to the EU according to Hungarian public opinion. The slow negotiation process that started twelve years ago and resulted in limited concrete outcomes and the increasing worries about Turkish domestic politics led to increasing scepticism in the Hungarian public.

There is limited variation concerning the outcome of EU-Turkey accession between Hungarian political parties and this seems to be cemented for the upcoming years as well. Despite the criticism, a limited cooperation seems to find support in all parties. Regarding the EU context, government parties in line with the official position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasize the need to continue the negotiations in order to avoid a possible crisis and downturn in relations with Turkey that would entail unfortunate consequences for both Hungary and the EU, especially because of the migration crisis and the security challenges. Nevertheless, even if dialogue is supported by the government, there is no strong political will in Hungary to become an engine of the accession process, which suggests that Hungary favours an engagement without quick accession. Left-wing/liberal opposition parties expressed more criticism towards Turkey and they also criticized the EU for not being strong enough in criticising human rights violations in Turkey and for not putting more pressure on the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government. However, even pro-government Hungarian media criticized Turkey because of the same, democracy-related issues.

The Hungarian far-right party, Jobbik, traditionally has a pro-Turkey stance which separates it from its Western European counterparts. It means that the party's leadership sees Ankara as a potential strong partner. Jobbik's chairman even visited Turkey several times and made positive statements about Turkey and Islam and highlighted the good relations between Turks and Hungarians who are, according to these declarations, "brothers and grandsons of Attila, the famous Hun chieftain from the early Middle Ages". This statement is frequently used in

Hungarian and Turkish nationalist circles. However, Eurosceptic Jobbik did not make any official statements either in favour of or against Turkey's EU accession. Turkish-Hungarian relations in the party's discourse usually do not appear in the EU frame.

2.2. Possible alternatives: marginal

In Hungary, the debate about Turkey's EU prospects did not go as far as suggesting a partnership different from full membership, such as a "privileged" or "strategic" partnership. The government does not abandon its support for Turkey's full EU membership. There was no deep, detailed public discussion on possible alternatives in the country. Probably due to the limited concrete achievements of more than a decade of accession negotiations, the idea of Turkey's membership including this question or the idea of any kind of partnership between Turkey and the EU got little attention and was not part of the public debate even in expert circles. The events of 2015 and 2016 transformed this picture and turned the public's attention towards Ankara. However, the issue of Turkey-EU accession talks has remained marginal in the public sphere.

2.3. Refugee crisis as mind-set for the debate on EU-Turkey relations

The Hungarian Prime Minister's statement about illiberal democracies – including Turkey – at Tusnádfürdő in 2014 paved the way for the debate about the state of democracy in Turkey and drew the attention to the growing authoritarian tendencies. The media and public opinion began to focus on media freedom, free speech and restrictions of the internet and social media such as Twitter and Facebook. These developments received criticism from the left and the right alike, both interpreting it as an authoritarian turn in Turkish domestic politics that hindered the country's prospects of EU accession.

The migration/refugee crisis that started to dominate Hungarian domestic politics in the spring of 2015 brought Turkey into the limelight again. Especially after the EU-Turkey Summit of 29 November 2015, Hungarian media started to focus on Turkey and its commitment to hold back the Syrian refugees. The following months brought about a new wave of debates about Turkey. The main narrative of these debates was whether or not Ankara was a trustworthy partner. A number of pro-government media outlets declared that Turkey was blackmailing the EU to get more money without fulfilling its promises. This debate slowly faded after April 2016 as irregular migration to Greece sharply declined; nevertheless, migration as a possible threat re-emerged immediately after the failed coup attempt: some raised the question if Turkey would be able to fulfil its commitments.

The migrant/refugee crisis intensified the debate about Turkey's future in the European Union especially because during this period Ankara expressed its willingness to open new chapters of the accession talks. However, this newly intensified discussion focused primarily on security issues, while accession issues were less important.

After the failed coup attempt, the Hungarian government expressed several times its understanding for the steps that the Turkish government took, including mass detentions and the firing of tens of thousands of public employees. The narrative was based mainly on security and stability perspectives, claiming that the government had to re-establish stability in the country. According to the Hungarian government, Turkey's stability is indispensable for the security of the EU because of at least three major issues: the migration crisis, the war in Syria and the fight against terror. The official Hungarian foreign policy line maintained its support for stronger EU-Turkey relations after the European Parliament's decision to temporarily freeze the accession negotiations.

The promised acceleration of the Turkish visa liberalization process has also raised a debate in Hungary. It was discussed in the Hungarian Parliament, for example, where the primary focus were the possible security consequences of the decision (i.e. that terrorists from Syria might come more easily to Europe).

After the failed coup attempt in Ankara in July 2016 the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs reacted very quickly to the developments, expressing his support for the democratically elected Turkish government and condemning the military's attempt to seize power. The Hungarian government saw these strong declarations in favour of the Turkish government as an opportunity to deepen bilateral relations with Ankara, and this process culminated in the visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Péter Szijjártó, to the Turkish capital in August 2016. He was the first EU minister to meet with his Turkish counterpart in Turkey after the failed coup attempt and this further demonstrated Hungary's strong support for the Turkish government.

3. EU-Turkey Relations and the Neighbourhood/Global scene

3.1. East first

Since the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy, Hungary has been more interested in its Eastern than Southern dimension, due to geographical and historical reasons. Accordingly, Hungary has always been in favour of a separate treatment of the two dimensions. However, while fully supportive of the EU's enlargement to the Western Balkans, Hungary had been somewhat sceptical towards a possible EU enlargement to the Eastern Neighbourhood even before the beginning of the Ukraine crisis in 2014. Hence, the breakout of this crisis and the subsequent war only added to the existing reluctance and scepticism of Hungarian elites and public about whether countries of Eastern Europe should ever be admitted to the European Union.

Budapest was traditionally interested in the deepening of EU-Ukrainian relations (partly due to the presence of ethnic Hungarians in Ukraine), and has recently been relatively active in EU-Moldavian relations within the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative. At the same time, Azerbaijan, Georgia and recently Belarus are perceived as important (potential) economic partners within

the Hungarian foreign policy approach of "Eastward opening". However, relations with Armenia, the sixth EaP country, are still frozen (due to the Safarov affair). These country "priorities" are partly shared by Turkey, although rather on an ideological base.

Hungarians strategy of "Eastward opening" affects also its position on the question of visa-liberalization for Turkey. At a Visegrad 4-EaP meeting in May 2016, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Péter Szijjártó, strongly criticized its linkage to the refugee deal stating that while it was acceptable to grant visa liberalization to countries who fulfilled the requirements, "it would be an unacceptable situation from our perspective that Georgia and Ukraine would receive visa-free regime later than Turkey".

The Mediterranean region has never been a priority in Hungarian foreign policy over the past decades, and was especially side-lined prior to Hungary's EU membership. Thus, the Hungarian national attitude towards the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the Mediterranean as a whole has evolved in the context of the country's EU integration process. The political crisis in Mediterranean countries after the Arab Spring, however, and especially the war in Syria, raised the interest of the Hungarian public towards the region.

Although the eminent role of Turkey in dealing both with the political crisis and with the refugee crisis as a consequence are well known and widely accepted, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was criticizing the EU-Turkey statement on migration (refugee deal) in March 2016. As an argument in favour of strengthening the EU's external border forces, he stated that the EU should not base its security on a third country, namely Turkey. The European Union should be able and ready to defend its borders instead in order to avoid additional billions of euros that would be added to the 3 billion euros paid for Turkey without reaching any satisfying solution.

The Turkey-Russia reset of relations in the summer of 2016 also raised some concerns. This move was largely perceived as a signal of Turkey's shift from its Western allies towards Moscow. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's statement about joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation also got some attention in Hungary. These developments gave a fresh impetus to the discussions about Ankara's commitment to the EU and its willingness to continue the accession negotiations, but also on its potential stance in dealing with political issues in the neighbourhood.

3.2. Buffer state and energy hub

Despite sceptical views regarding the refugee deal, Hungary considers cooperation on migration policy with Turkey as a key area of EU-Turkey relations. Hungarian official statements are in favour of refugee camps situated outside the European Union, and in this respect Turkey is the most important buffer state between the troubled neighbouring regions and the EU.

Though less in the spotlight than in previous years, cooperation in the energy sector is another area, where Turkey as a hub and as a transit region is going to have an increasing role in the relations between the EU and its neighbourhood.

3.3. Hybrid regimes of Europe, united?

A core concept of the current governing forces in Hungary, several times emphasized by Prime Minister Orbán as well, is that we can witness nowadays a decline of the Western dominance and of the Western model alike. Therefore, attention must be turned towards the East, by accepting alternative political approaches and by cooperating with emerging economic powers. Turkey, as one of the closest to Europe of such powers, has an eminent role in this, both as a partner and as a transit route towards the East, manifested in the new Silk Road plans of China. As a consequence, EU-Turkey relations should be more based on the economic benefits of such cooperation for Europe, than on the inward-looking, accession-policy-focused and value-based approach followed by the EU.

The similarities in the political trends of Russia, Turkey and Hungary are also often discussed in the Hungarian media. Despite differences in the historical, cultural, political and other frameworks and circumstances, the similarities of national-populistic rhetoric, the weakening of checks and balances, the growing role of the “leader” and clientelism, limitations to civil society, etc. are clearly visible. This also raises the question of possible political systems fitting the European Union – a core question of EU-Turkey relations as well.

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