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FEUTURE EU 28 Country Report

Poland

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1. History of EU-Turkey Relations¹

1.1. Supporting Turkish accession by default

The general orientation of Poland's European policy under all governments was to support further enlargement of the European Union (EU). This approach was well reflected in the Polish foreign policy priorities 2012-2016 (March 2012), where Poland's European policy was characterized with 3 notions: competitiveness, solidarity and openness, the latter understood as continuing the enlargement process. Support for Turkish membership in the EU has been consistently voiced as part of this general strategic orientation.

However, the top priority for Poland in terms of openness was Ukraine, which – contrary to Turkey – has not been granted official candidate status. Support for Turkish European integration had thus to be expressed somehow by default – it would be difficult to advocate for further enlargement to the East without supporting enlargement to the formally recognized candidates. This hierarchy was evident from the 2012 priorities, where Turkey was listed as the last country the EU should enlarge to – after Ukraine, Moldova, the Balkans and South Caucasus (!). Turkey was also only mentioned extremely rarely in the official foreign ministry documents and speeches of the last years.

Compared to Ukraine, Turkey is of secondary importance and EU-Turkey relations never figured prominently on the Polish foreign affairs agenda. This could have changed in 2014 with the eruption of the Russian-Ukrainian war. However, Turkey decided to keep a low profile on this conflict and thus failed to secure an increased standing as Polish foreign policy partner. This has only changed in 2015 with the eruption of the migration crisis and the key role that the EU agreement with Turkey played in taming the influx of Middle East migrants to Europe. As to the Turkish perspective, the marked lack of enthusiasm among the other EU member states led Turkish authorities to name Poland "one of the strongest supporters of Turkey's EU accession process geared towards full membership".

1.2. History and geopolitics

History plays a crucial role in Polish narratives on relations with Turkey. Polish decision-makers (especially right-wing) take pride in the 600-year-history of diplomatic bilateral relations, celebrated in 2014. Despite many wars led by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth against Ottoman Turkey in 16th-17th centuries, historical memory concentrates on the 19th century. Poles stress that Ottoman Turkey was the only country that did not recognize the partition of Poland between Russia, Prussia and Austria that lasted for 123 years until 1918. According to an anecdote, the sultans kept asking about the Polish ambassador during official ceremonies and the answer from court officials was always that the ambassador was on his way to Istanbul. Interestingly, the story was told on many occasions by Poland's representatives when they explained why their country supported Turkish accession to the EU. Ottoman Turkey had opposed Poland's partition as it feared Russia's empowerment and not because of special friendship for the fervently Christian Commonwealth. It

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.

was the common Russian enemy that made Turks and Poles allies. Many Poles emigrated from Russian to the Ottoman empire, converted to Islam and rose to high positions in the Ottoman court and army. For example, the greatest Polish romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz died in exile in Istanbul. It is also worth mentioning that Poland was also one of the first countries to recognize the Republic of Turkey in 1923.

The logic of Polish-Turkish alliance against a more powerful common enemy is still reflected in the contemporary debate, where Turkey is seen as a key NATO ally and Russia on the other hand as a key security challenge, both to Poland and NATO. This is why Turkish-Russian rapprochement in 2016 was vividly discussed as a possible game changer. The post-coup deterioration of Turkish relations with the West strengthened the position of Russia. The two biggest and historically rival players in the East and South-East Europe coming together is a serious cause for concern for Poland. Thus, EU-Turkey relations are discussed mostly in realist interest-based terms, whereas identity issues play a marginal role. Historical ties together with a traditional view of Turkey as a secular non-Arab state account for a largely positive image.

1.3. Security cornerstone and economic potential

Relations with Turkey are defined in Poland mostly in terms of security. Turkey is above all a NATO member and has the second largest army of the alliance. Cooperation priorities are thus located in the military field. This includes business opportunities for the Polish defence sector in providing equipment to the Turkish army and at the same time a strengthening of the capabilities of the Polish army resulting from a partnership with Turkish producers of military equipment.

Secondly, Turkey is presently a key player in taming the migration pressure from the Middle East and Poland is ready to invest considerable political resources to make sure that the migration deal with Turkey is maintained and Turkey's merits in this area are recognized. Keeping migrants out of the EU and a compulsory relocation mechanism off the EU agenda is a top national security priority as Polish authorities embraced a securitization logic and linked the 2015-2016 terrorist attacks to the influx of migrants. The migration crisis is also considered a game changer in EU-Turkish relations as the asymmetric accession logic has been largely reversed, with the EU becoming dependent on Turkey in an area of strategic importance for the first time in history.

Beyond security, economic cooperation is a recurrent topic. Although all political forces in Poland agree that important economic benefits could be reaped, there is clear shortage of tangible results. Construction, infrastructure, energy and defence sectors are usually identified as particularly fruitful areas for bilateral cooperation. In 2014 Turkey was Poland's main economic partner in the Middle East, but ranked only 32th in terms of foreign investment. The potential impact of Turkey joining the single market (once a member) and in particular the question of free movement of people are not discussed. Poland continues to see itself as a relatively poor country of emigration and concerns about large numbers of Turkish migrant workers are not shared with Western European publics.

2. Future of EU-Turkey Relations

2.1. Engagement over discipline

Based on geostrategic calculations and the imperative of openness regarding EU enlargement, Poland has insisted on engaging with Turkey despite internal turmoil and creeping authoritarianism. The strategy was pursued both after the 2013 Gezi protests (by liberal centre-right Civic Platform government) and also with regard to the 2016 post-coup purges (by conservative right-wing Law & Justice government). Politicians and analysts widely agree that Turkey is not just another candidate country but a rising power with growing economy and regional influence. The 2015 EU-Turkey summit on migration was used by the new Polish government to press for a reinvigoration of the accession negotiations and visa liberalization. Despite concerns expressed in the EU post-coup, Poland insisted on intensifying the dialogue with Turkey, stressing that Turkey remains a credible NATO member and that the EU perspective must be kept open. Polish authorities declared understanding for Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's post-coup reaction and praised Turkey for welcoming over two million Syrian refugees.

On a continuum between engaging and disciplining Turkey, Law & Justice can be placed towards the engagement end, whereas the opposition (Civic Platform) has shifted towards the discipline end. With limited national debate the pattern can be seen in the European Parliament's vote on a temporary freeze of accession negotiations with Turkey that took place on 24 November 2016. Whereas EPP-affiliated Civic Platform voted in favour of the freeze, ECR-affiliated Law & Justice abstained. The split can be explained by diverging views on how the EU could best influence third countries, but it also has a profound rationale in Polish politics. Being itself accused by EU institutions of breaking basic rule of law standards, Law & Justice tends to downplay President Erdoğan's actions towards the opposition, independent media, NGOs and universities. On the other hand, Civic Platform is now more interested in stigmatizing Turkey, drawing a parallel between motivations and strategies of Turkish president Erdoğan and Law & Justice leader Jarosław Kaczyński. Accordingly, Kaczyński's goal would not only be "Budapest in Warsaw", following illiberal policies of Viktor Orbán, but also "Ankara in Warsaw".

As worrying as this reference may sound post-coup, it originally concerned the international position of Turkey that could be of inspiration to Poland. In 2014 Kaczyński said: "We need to do everything for Poland to become what Turkey is today. Turkey is considered a serious state. This type of grandeur can be achieved." In this perspective, Turkey is an example of interest-based non-clientelistic foreign policy that is able to change the asymmetry in relations with the West (EU) to its favour. Turkey constitutes both an example to follow for the Polish new assertive membership strategy within the EU and an important ally in building a "sub-regional centre from Gdansk to Istanbul that would be able to counter-balance the Berlin – Paris – Brussels triangle" (Waszczykowski, 2014). In this perspective, the future of EU-Turkey relations is thus contingent on a wider vision of European integration that is conducive to the realization of Polish national interest as defined by Law & Justice.

2.2. Membership in union of sovereign states or transactional model of cooperation?

In April 2016, the Polish foreign minister asserted: “We want to see Turkey in the EU in the near future.” Meanwhile, Turkey is losing interest in accession negotiations, while simultaneously seeking to improve its position towards Brussels. If Poland recognizes and admires Turkish assertiveness as a new regional power, how can it expect Turkey to speed up the highly asymmetrical accession process? One explanation is that the Law & Justice government wishes to see Turkey as part of a new reformed union.

This Union – according to minister for European affairs Konrad Szymanski – would reestablish political consensus on European integration and the unity of the West. It cannot be a “little federal union” that excludes some of the current members. Weakening trust in the European project can only be restored by strengthening the position of member states and national parliaments. The European Commission should be reduced to an executive role and the EU’s legitimacy must be based on existing political communities –the European nations. The EU should focus on a limited agenda: security and single market.

This means taking a step back, abandoning the dream of a political union and fostering a loose but inclusive union of sovereign states. Both outgoing United Kingdom and assertive Turkey could relate to such a union. Moreover, moving away from a federal and back to a confederal logic invalidates the problem of differentiated integration. The latter is based on an exclusionary logic, where a closely integrated (federal) core is surrounded by circles/individual countries that are not able/willing/allowed to join given policy areas. The Polish determination to avoid differentiation is not surprising as in Poland the concept is associated with a relegation to a second-class membership. Yet the “union of sovereign states” is far from reality. Meanwhile, both EU and Turkey are losing interest in the accession negotiations’ format and the “convenient fiction” is becoming with time less convenient for both parties. Alternatively, the transactional/ functional model of cooperation on issues of mutual interest is an option. In fact, the deal on migration works here as a pilot project. Poland follows this path, trying to engage Turkey in various regional cooperation formats. The aim is twofold: a) to avoid Turkey being pushed away from the EU towards Russia; and b) to improve Poland's position within the EU towards the euro-zone core. One idea is the 3-Seas initiative – transport and energy infrastructure cooperation covering countries between Baltic, Black and Adriatic Sea, including Turkey and Ukraine – which aims at making “North and South closer to each other, forming new regional identity within the EU”. (Waszczykowski, 2016).

2.3. Turkey makes headlines with the migration crisis and failed coup

EU-Turkey relations only became an important concern for Poland in the context of the EU-Turkey migration deal. “Europe needs Turkey and Turkey needs Europe” (Waszczykowski, 2016) to effectively cope with migration pressure. Though Poland is not a destination country for migrants, reducing pressure on European borders helped to reduce pressure on adopting a compulsory relocation mechanism at the EU level that Poland fervently opposed. As a result, EU-Turkey relations became an important topic in the media. The emphasis – especially in the government-controlled

public media – was put on picturing the EU as being held hostage by gate-keeping Turkey. Whereas Turkey was portrayed in a rather neutral way as a strong and interest-driven player, the EU was viewed negatively as weak and ineffective.

Criticism of Turkey did not rise substantially due to the post-coup purges in 2016. The government saw “no revenge, just legitimate investigation and punishment of perpetrators” (Waszczykowski, 2016). Analysts underlined that measures taken by President Erdoğan, though far reaching, still cannot be compared to persecution undertaken by the victorious military after the 1980 coup. However, security experts noted that purges in the army are a serious cause for concern. The dismissal of West-educated officers with considerable experience in NATO structures, coupled with growing Turkey's mistrust towards the West, raised concerns as to whether the new Turkish military cadres would be more oriented towards Eurasia.

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

3.1. Turkey, Russia and Russian-Ukrainian war

For Poland there were reasons to expect Turkey to play a substantial role in the unfolding of the crisis in Ukraine. The security threats posed to Turkey, its historical ties with Crimea and the Tatar community, its earlier prominent reaction to developments in Syria and Egypt, and the country's ambition to become a regional leader are just a few examples. Although Russian annexation of Crimea has changed the delicate strategic balance in the Black Sea region, Ankara has not emerged as an important player in this crisis. Polish analysts noted that Turkey readily supported the new Ukrainian government in 2014 but then got distracted by domestic affairs (elections, fight against Kurds) and the war in Syria. In 2015, growing tensions between Turkey and Russia led to more instability in Southern Caucasus, fuelling border clashes between Turkey-backed Azerbaijan and Russia-backed Armenia. However, these issues were mainly discussed in expert circles and did not have much impact on the Polish perspective on EU-Turkey relations.

More attention was given to the Turkish-Russian rapprochement after the failed coup in July 2016. The question of whether Turkey is turning its back on the West and forging an alliance with Russia was widely discussed in the media. However, the debate was more focused on NATO (is Turkey's commitment credible? Will Turkey leave NATO?) than on EU-Turkey relations. Most analysts agreed that Turkish-Russian partnership is tactical, whereas strategic divergences persist. It was argued that by heavily criticizing the West and courting Russia, Turkey seeks to enlarge its room for manoeuvre in the hope to gain more leverage in relations with the EU and USA. According to the Polish foreign minister, the rapprochement only meant that good relations were restored after months of deterioration. Moreover, better relations between Turkey and Russia do not automatically mean that Turkey's relations with EU or NATO would suffer.

3.2. Southern and Eastern neighbourhood: areas of cooperation

The Southern neighbourhood has rarely been of interest for Poland and if this was the case, it was discussed in the context of the Arab Spring, in the sense that it led to a diverting of EU and member states' political resources and funding from the East to the South; or Russia's policies, namely its strategy of using Syria to gain leverage in Ukraine. This has changed with the migration crisis – now interest in the Middle East and Southern Mediterranean has grown considerably, with the region becoming an important security concern. This has also changed the perspective on Turkey as an indispensable partner for Europe and for Poland. Previously, it was argued that Europe needed Turkey in order to build its superpower status. With the migration crisis, it is now argued that Europe needs Turkey in order to survive.

Despite failed expectations as to Turkish engagement in the Black Sea region following the Russian aggression, opportunities for EU-Turkey cooperation with regard to Eastern Partnership countries still exist. Polish experts point out that the interests of both parties converge in South-East Europe (Western Balkans) and in the South Caucasus (Georgia and Azerbaijan), while opportunities for policy coordination remain underexplored. Ultimately, the degree of cooperation in the Eastern neighbourhood depends on developments both in the EU and Turkey. In the EU, the situation depends on the possibly evolving constellation of power and interests with regard to maintaining a “privileged partnership” with Ukraine and sanctions against Russia. As to Turkey, it remains to be seen how president Erdoğan navigates between the EU, Trump's USA and Putin's Russia and how he will integrate his foreign policy options into his strategy of internal power consolidation.

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3.3. Turkey as a rising power in a multi-polar world

In recent years, Turkey has embraced the more flexible and fluid international context that makes more than one strategic option possible. Polish analysts underline that the West has been progressively losing its “sacred” place in Turkish strategic thinking, which translates into a more independent, assertive, “non-aligned”, “multi-vector” or “gaullist” foreign policy. It is noted that the EU and USA will find it more difficult to manage relations with emerging and largely unpredictable powers like Turkey. The changing global balance of power makes EU relations with Turkey more *à la carte* and *ad hoc*. As a result, Europe can no longer rely on a taken for granted geopolitical and civilization choice of Turkey, but will have to accept the interest-based case by case bargaining on issues of common interest.

Moreover, it seems that after the 2016 presidential elections in the USA, the European Union can no longer rely on an *a priori* unified Western front towards Turkey. Not only EU-Turkey relations but also EU-USA relations may evolve according to a transaction model. Donald Trump's initial statements suggest that the USA may deviate from its traditional policy of keeping Europe united and pushing Turkey on the European track. This will further reduce EU leverage in Turkey.

Links & Further Readings:

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