

## Just a Second Theatre of Conflict? – Countering the Narrative of ‘Turkish democracy’

May 29, 2017 by [Ludwig Schulz](#)

*Has Turkey’s EU accession bid finally come to ‘a dead end’? And will Ankara and Brussels therefore be willing and able to find a new common ground in order to ‘refashion the strategic partnership’ they are supposed to have?<sup>1</sup> Answers to questions like these remain unclear, unless Europe understands how Turkey’s leadership frames the country’s transition and its relations with Europe. Taking this understanding into consideration, a new strategy to shape the relations can be developed.*

In November 2016, the European Parliament tried to take a decisive step concerning the troubled Turkey-EU relations. Twelve years after it had voted in favour of the EU starting the negotiation process with Ankara, the EP by a substantial majority requested from the European Commission and the Council ‘to initiate a temporary freeze of the ongoing accession negotiations with Turkey.’<sup>2</sup> In their resolution, the Members of the Parliament (MEPs) criticised the massively deteriorating state of the rule of law before and in the wake of the averted military coup attempt of 15 July 2016 and under the subsequently proclaimed state of emergency. They slammed the large-scale arbitrariness and reported claims of torture and numerous violations of human rights, as well as the uncountable cases of lawmakers and representatives, officials, judges and human rights defenders, journalists, academics and civil society activists that had been discharged from office, detained or are standing trial. Since the resolution, leading MEPs have been repeating the Parliament’s request in public and to the EU institutions which are ultimately decisive on the matter, the European Commission, the General Affairs Council and the European Council.<sup>3</sup>

However, in April 2017, while proclaiming their commitment to keep their eyes open to the domestic situation in Turkey, the EU foreign ministers refrained from freezing the accession talks.<sup>4</sup> Neither they nor the EP in its resolution had been clear enough on what the future of Turkey-EU relations should look like.<sup>5</sup> Given the complexity and tenacity of the issue of Turkey’s EU bid, however, one may wonder how long the EU institutions will continue with their undecidedness regarding the future of the negotiation process

- although the talks have been stalled for years due to, beyond others, the unresolved Cyprus, Kurdish and Armenia questions, and the blockade of negotiation chapters because of some Member States’ national interests and reservations;

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<sup>1</sup> Sinan Ülgen, [How Turkey and Europe lost that loving feeling](#); Steven Blockmans; Sinem Yılmaz, [Why the EU should terminate accession negotiations with Turkey](#), respectively.

<sup>2</sup> [Resolution 2016/2993\(RSP\)](#), p. 2. The resolution was approved by 479 votes to 37, with 107 abstentions. See also European Parliament, [Freeze EU accession talks with Turkey until it halts repression, urge MEPs](#).

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. European Parliament, [New beginnings: reassessing EU-Turkey relations](#); Alexander Graf Lambsdorff; Renate Sommer; Guy Verhofstadt, Manfred Weber, [Rethinking Europe’s relationship with Turkey](#); S&D.eu, [Pittella: Turkey’s authoritarian drift under Erdogan is closing door to EU. CHP and HDP must stand united for democracy](#).

<sup>4</sup> See EEAS, [Remarks by High-Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini at the joint press conference with Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malta George Vella](#).

<sup>5</sup> The EP, for instance, by still being ‘committed to keeping Turkey anchored to the EU’ stated in its resolution that the suspension of talks could be reviewed ‘when the disproportionate measures under the state of emergency in Turkey are lifted.’ That means that after Turkey’s return to the ‘normal’, post-coup and state of emergency conditions of policy-making, the accession process with the EU could continue. See [Resolution 2016/2993\(RSP\)](#), p. 2.

- although for eleven years the Commission (as well as the EP) has published its annual reports<sup>6</sup> outlining the long list of mismanaged problems and gigantic tasks the Turkish authorities have to work on in order to adopt and implement the *acquis communautaire* and to meet the Copenhagen Criteria for accession countries as well as the terms of negotiations both sides mutually had agreed upon in 2005 (including fully implementing the additional protocol of the Ankara Agreement which Turkey continues to reject to do);
- although the complexity of relations has even increased in the wake of the refugee crisis of 2015/16, when both sides agreed to cooperate on refugee readmission and resettlement, aid transfer, visa liberalisation, and accession speed-up, each of which have become almost insurmountable obstacles at the respective home fronts;
- and although Turkey has been severing the conditions for EU accession severely, especially since the averted coup attempt of July 2016: as, firstly, in the post-coup period the government has uninterruptedly been ‘purging’ state institutions and the public from putschists, their alleged supporters and from many social forces that could suspiciously work against the executive power’s legitimacy and agenda; then, as President Erdoğan and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), supported by the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) held a highly controversial referendum, marked by and internationally criticised for systematic irregularities, on the introduction of presidentialism under the continuing state of emergency conditions;<sup>7</sup> and last but not least as President Erdoğan kept on threatening to reintroduce the death penalty which leading European decision-makers consider a ‘red line’ whose passing would definitely cause the suspension or break-off of the accession talks.<sup>8</sup>

Whereas Ankara is considered by many to be backsliding into (at least semi-) authoritarianism, stuck in the vicious circle of systemic power plays and systematic repression of liberal democracy and pluralism, the EU seems to muddle through the complex and troubled situation, rather than developing a strategy how to deal with it. In some way or another it seems that Turkey-EU relations are back to where they had once started. Or, to put it differently, now both sides may wonder what, if anything, they have achieved together since starting the accession process decades ago.<sup>9</sup>

However, there is another theatre of conflict to which the EU so far has not paid much attention: the theatre of political communication and building of strategic narratives.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Until recently, the reports were called ‘progress reports’ which had been criticised as euphemistic by observers who advocated successfully a restructuring of the reporting; see European Stability Initiative (ESI), [A reporting revolution? Towards a new generation of progress reports](#).

<sup>7</sup> The referendum led to the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly (PACE)’s decision to put Turkey again under monitoring status; on the decision with all relevant documents see Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, [PACE reopens monitoring procedure in respect of Turkey](#). The decision was influenced by the Venice Commission’s report that the constitutional amendments were “not based on the logic of separation of powers, which is characteristic for democratic presidential systems”, and “represent[] a dangerous step backwards in the constitutional democratic tradition of Turkey.” See Venice Commission, [Opinion No. 875/2017](#), adopted by the Venice Commission, 10/03/2017.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Hürriyet Daily News, [Introduction of death penalty in Turkey will break off EU negotiations: European Commission head](#).

<sup>9</sup> For a review of Turkey-EU relations see e.g. Çiğdem Nas, Yonca Özer, Turkey and EU Integration. Achievements and Obstacles.

<sup>10</sup> Political science literature defines strategic narratives as ‘representations of a sequence of events and identities, a communicative tool through which political actors – usually elites – attempt to give determined meaning to past, present, and future in order to achieve political objectives. Critically, strategic narratives

Nowadays, when listening to leading AKP policy makers or reading their statements one may wonder if the EU could have totally misunderstood what has been happening in Turkey since the party came to power – given, for example, the following recent statements by leading politicians on Turkey-EU relations and their country's ambitions and commitments:

'[...] What country was kept waiting for 54 years? What is the reason? There is no reason. We have fulfilled the Copenhagen Criteria fully and economically we are doing much better than many of the member states. [...]'<sup>11</sup> (President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, 29/04/2017)

'Turkey's accession negotiation is the backbone of Turkey-EU relations. [...] Turkey continues with determination its harmonisation process with the EU acquis under each chapter and is committed to do so. Turkey's Progress Report of 2016 underlined Turkey's commitment and confirmed that Turkey's alignment on 30 chapters out of 33 is at a good level.

Turkey is a functioning European democracy with its constitutional institutions and is established on a well-structured state apparatus which has a long tradition. [...] EU membership is a strategic objective for Turkey [...]'<sup>12</sup> (Minister for EU Affairs Ömer Çelik, 08/01/2017)

'Our country, which has been a part of Europe historically, geographically and culturally for centuries, desires to maintain its EU accession process, which it regards as a strategic goal, in an understanding of mutual respect and equality on a win-win basis.'<sup>13</sup> (President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, 09/05/2017)

With statements like these, the AKP leadership is obviously trying to construct a counter-narrative to the critical one that the EU has been propagating based on its assessments on whether or not Turkey meets the Copenhagen Criteria. This is crucial in terms of the following: what to European eyes and ears is obvious – the deterioration of democracy, rule of law, institutional political stability and socioeconomic progress based on the principles of a market economy – is neither true in the eyes and ears of a large segment of Turkey's society, namely the supporters of the AKP; nor is it relevant to them, as they only believe in what the AKP leadership and first and foremost President Erdoğan proclaims.<sup>14</sup> As a result, both sides' perceptions – the European one concerned with Turkey's growing authoritarianism vs. the Turkish or rather AKP's one regarding Turkey's defended and increasing democratisation – more and more diametrically oppose each other. A common language which is necessary for mutual understanding and cooperative partnership has been lost.

In order to fully understand this complex issue, one must get an idea of the strategic narrative the AKP leadership has been constructing, and what its – in fact cynical – intentions are.

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integrate interests and goals – they articulate end states and suggest how to get there.' Alister Miskimmon et al., *Strategic narratives. Communication power and the new world order*, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> WION, [Global Leadership Series: Exclusive interview with Turkish President Erdogan](#) (quoted from subtitles at min. 31:10).

<sup>12</sup> Ömer Çelik, [Time for EU member states to reflect on the strategic significance of Turkey](#).

<sup>13</sup> T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı, [Europe Day Message by President Erdoğan](#).

<sup>14</sup> Jan-Werner Müller puts the simple logic of populism, which contemporary politicians like Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Donald Trump and others incorporate, in a nutshell: 'We – and no one else – represent the people.' This moral claim for exclusive agency is the populists' utmost concern.' Jan-Werner Müller, *Schatten der Repräsentation: Der Aufstieg des Populismus*, p. 72.

## The AKP and the ‘New Turkey’: strong and free

At the core of the AKP’s strategic narrative lies an image of Turkey that is clearly on a path towards modernity, democracy and civilianisation (and regarding the statements mentioned above obviously also towards a sort of Europeanisation). The major agent who will make this narrative come true is the people of Turkey, or more precisely the majority that supports the AKP in its duty to make ‘the dream of a ‘New Turkey’ become reality. The narrative, as based on the last one and a half decade of AKP rule, can be outlined as follows.

In its own view, the AKP government has continued the course of reformist policies and has intensified efforts not just during the first years in office, for its entire tenure: ‘Since its foundation AK Party has worked to make Turkey a country where the conditions for democratic life are put in place.’<sup>15</sup> The AKP has not only been pushing reforms and incentives to liberalise the economy, it has also opened its doors to global investors, and it has been modernising administrative, business and social sectors for the sake of Turkey’s increasingly skilled population. More than that, it has kept on introducing major reforms to foster citizens’ rights in general and the rights of Kurds and minorities in various ‘democracy packages’ in particular, and more recently promoted the rights and potential of three million refugees. By submitting several amendments submitted to the public in referenda it has supported the democratisation of the constitutional and political system of the country, has raised the independence of the judiciary, the compliance of the legislation and judgment, has created and strengthened institutions to serve the rule of law, transparency and accountability of policy-making, liberal market economy, and has vitalised civil society. Furthermore, it has broken long-standing taboos concerning the Cyprus, Kurdish, Armenian or Alevi issue, has sought reconciliation with neighbours and has activated new potentials in Turkey’s foreign policy in order to create international stability and constellations of socio-economic win-win relations.

In its self-perception, the AKP has been strengthening the civilian framework in Turkey’s political system and policy-making since the very beginning. In 2004 it has reformed the National Security Council in line with EU provisions, in the 2007 presidential election it has courageously defended its legitimate candidate against Kemalist resistance as well as its own legitimacy before the Constitutional Court in 2008, and it advocated its security policy agenda during the Supreme Military Council session in 2011 (when all high-ranking military members except Necdet Özel stepped down in protest) thus confronting the ‘self-proclaimed guardians of the ancient regime’.<sup>16</sup> Most important, for each proceeding step, the AKP has been entrusted by the majority of the electorate in all subsequent elections since 2002, making Turkey an example and a model for democratising countries and emerging economies world-wide, as well as a respected and ‘conscientious’<sup>17</sup> member of the international community, the United Nations, the G20, the OIC, the Council of Europe. In numerous other organisations, and in its foreign affairs, the AKP has followed both Atatürk’s ideal of ‘Peace at home, peace in the world’ as well as its ambition to make Turkey a ‘central power’ of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>15</sup> On the following see e.g. AK Party, *‘We are one, we are together, all together we are Turkey’*, booklet to the 5<sup>th</sup> party congress, 12/09/2015; see also AK Parti, *Türkiye Genel İcraat Kitabı 2017*.

<sup>16</sup> Last but not least, the Presidency, the government and the AKP majority in the Parliament have used the chance of the state of emergency to fully and ultimately subordinate the Turkish Armed Forces and the security sector under civilian control. On the developments in civil-military relations since the averted coup attempt see e.g. Megan Gisclon, Metin Gürcan, *From Autonomy to Full-fledged Civilian Control: The Changing Nature of Turkish Civil-Military Relations after July 15*.

<sup>17</sup> AK Parti, *Türkiye Genel İcraat Kitabı 2017*, p. 10.

Last, but not least: in the proclaimed narrative of the AKP leadership, it is now the Turkish people's will to erect a 'New Turkey' on the grounds of the old Republic.<sup>18</sup> In its majoritarian support to the party and its leader since 2002 in general, but even more after defending the country from falling into the hands of putschists in the bloody night of 15 July 2016, and now, by accepting the constitutional changes for the introduction of 'Turkish presidentialism' in the referendum of 16 April 2017, the Turkish people has been expressing its decisiveness to leave the old Turkey behind, to establish and strengthen a 'New Turkey' which is (seemingly) democratically led by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his AKP and guided by them towards a bright future.<sup>19</sup> As such, in the AKP's propagated discourse, the 'New Turkey', if accepted to join, would be an added value to the EU. Only by including Turkey, the Union could consider itself to be truly liberal, pluralist and a global power.

However, even for the AKP the picture is not just rosy – however not with respect to reflection and self-criticism, but concerning the role the Europeans used to play in the years since accession negotiations started.<sup>20</sup> The AKP government not only has been criticising the EU for its lack of vision, for acknowledging neither the potentials of Turkey as a rising economic and political power, nor for cherishing enough all the positive results of continued reforms as well as the risks that the AKP has been taking while struggling for a better Turkey. Even worse, the EU has created a uniquely cumbersome framework for the accession negotiations with constantly raising the bar higher; it has been biased towards the problems and deficits instead of focussing on achievements and misguided in its critical reports and assessments by the insinuating opponents, grudgers and enemies to the rising nation of Turkey. Finally, in the AKP's view, the EU has been increasingly incredible throughout the years for not standing to its commitments and promises – from advancing Turkey's accession by opening chapters bit by bit over reforming the Customs Union and integrating Turkey into EU policy-making processes, to matters of joint interests such as visa liberalisation and the implementation of the agreed approach to handle the 'refugee issue'.

In addition, according to the AKP leadership, EU Member States, especially France, Austria and Germany as well as Greece and the 'Greek Cypriot administration' on Cyprus have ever since been pursuing short-sighted policies simply based on national interests serving for domestic power politics, instead of attempting to find sustainable win-win solutions for the sake of all of Europe. And, even more than that, recently, in the heat of the post-coup and pre-referendum period, the AKP leadership and its supporters in media and public even claimed that Europeans have been joining forces against Turkey.<sup>21</sup> They have accused Europeans of fuelling and exploiting the rise of anti-Turkish, and/or anti-Muslim sentiments; Europe has supported Turkey's terrorist enemies (such as the PKK and other extremist and separatist organisations, the Gülen movement or the so called Islamic State or DAESH), and by not sparing any efforts (e.g. launching protests to supporting terrorists and protecting putschists) and guided by their intention to prevent Turkey's rise to becoming a regional and global power, Europeans have been 'starting a crusade-like mobilisation against Turkey'<sup>22</sup> in order to harm Turkey and its people at home and abroad.

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<sup>18</sup> AK Parti, [The New Turkey Contract 2023](#).

<sup>19</sup> See e.g. Daily Sabah Editorial Board, [In Turkey, a victory for democracy and stability](#); Yasin Aktay, [Turkey has democracy](#).

<sup>20</sup> On the following see again e.g. President Erdogan's recent interview to WION, or his message on Europe Day 2016, as well as the messages by EU Minister Çelik or Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu. See also numerous comments in pro-government newspapers and online news outline such as TRT, Daily Sabah, Yeni Şafak etc.

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. İbrahim Kalın, [Turkey, Europe and a narrowing horizon](#); *ibid.*, [Does Europe see Turkey as its 'other'?](#); Yasin Aktay, [The spectres of Islam haunt Europe](#); Daily Sabah Editorial Board, [In Turkey, a victory for democracy and stability](#).

<sup>22</sup> İbrahim Karağül, [Why a crusader attack? They know Anatolia, this last fort, is going to spoil the game](#).

By outlining the AKP's view on the 'New Turkey's' transition and on the ambiguous, or even hostile role Europe plays in it, the rational in the AKP leadership's communication strategy gets clearer. But it is not only that by drawing a dark image of Europe that the 'New Turkey' would shine in brighter colours. Even more, it is the AKP and, notably, President Erdoğan who must be recognised as the ultimate leader to defend the country against all its opponents and enemies, be they within or outside the country. Only by choosing a strong leadership, Turks could make sure that their country, their interests, and 'their democratic achievements' would be secured. It is, thus, not the EU which sets the standards for Turkey's 'democratisation', but it is Turkey itself – or, rather, President Erdoğan who came to power and has consolidated his rule by majoritarian, but unfair elections and, recently, a referendum full of irregularities.

### **Need for a counter-narrative and reflection**

Daily news and reports about 'purges', detentions and arbitrary practices run counter the AKP's cynical image of 'Turkish democracy unfolding'.<sup>23</sup> Many observers go even further and draw the picture of a Turkey in which an unprecedented form of despotism of Sunni-Islamist providence might be on the way to be constitutionalised.<sup>24</sup> This scenario can be considered the other, extreme narrative on today's Turkey – opposing the AKP's one of 'New Turkey's democratisation and liberalisation'.

What becomes clear from the above is that the global phenomenon of 'fake news' and 'fake narratives', produced by demagogic policy makers and opinion shapers aiming to manipulate public discourses and people's identities, also has a strong hold on Turkey. Throughout the years, independent observers and international bodies such as the EU have been trying to criticise the rising level of illiberalism and authoritarianism in their regular assessments and comments on Turkish politics. However, the AKP leadership is largely clear in its position that it does not take the EU's critique into account. Instead, it is now opting for the construction of the 'alternative fact' of a 'New Turkey'. Large segments of the Turkish society (potentially one half of it) share the AKP leadership's (selective) perception and listen to the (manipulating) narrative of a new-born strong, free and democratic Turkey that could easily become an EU member rather today than tomorrow, if only the EU stopped blocking negotiations, hiding behind unsolid concerns (and the Cyprus issue), manipulating European public opinion on Turkey, Turks and Islam, and supporting all opponents and enemies of 'the rise of New Turkey'.

The consequential question and challenge is how the EU (if it is willing to) will be able to design an effective communicational strategy (and thus its own narrative on Turkey and Turkey-EU relations) that counters the AKP'S and may convince both the Turkish leadership and the majority of the Turkish people that the path towards EU standards, values, norms and practices is the better option. Such a strategy should be both

- a) in line with assessments about the realities of the gradually deteriorating state of liberal democracy on the ground, and, thus, not harming the EU's credibility as a benchmarking actor; and at the same time

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<sup>23</sup> See e.g. Article 19, [State of Emergency in Turkey. The Impact on Freedom of the Media](#); Amnesty International, [No end in sight. Purged public sector workers denied a future in Turkey](#).

<sup>24</sup> See e.g. Daniel Steinvoth, [Die Stunde des grossen Spalters](#); Rainer Hermann, [Die Türkei vor dunklen Jahren](#), FAZ.net, 17/04/2017; Steven A. Cook, [RIP Turkey, 1921 – 2017](#). Ironically, opponents of Turkey's EU bid argued in the early 2000's that by granting accession the EU would border the autocrat and unstable region of the Middle East. Following the narrative above, this is what would be the case now, without Turkey's accession.

- b) must offer points of connection to the ‘New Turkey’ narration of the AKP leadership and its supporters in Turkey’s public life and society, as without those connections the Turkish side will not be convinced to change minds and to (re)turn to an EU-approaching, liberal-reformist path in policy-making.

For constructing such a counter-narrative effectively, at first the claim of Turkey’s democratisation must be critically verified (or rather falsified) by objective data: In order to reject the manipulative power of the post-factual, debates of public policy – including issues such as Turkey’s democratisation and EU bid – must be based on qualified, reliable and comprehensive information presented in an unemotional, yet clear and convincing manner.<sup>25</sup> But more than that, a critical reflection on EU integration and enlargement is a must. Without a critical examination and reflection of achievements and failures of the EU’s enlargement policy not only,<sup>26</sup> but specifically concerning Turkey, an effective strategy and a convincing counter-narrative cannot be designed.

In a nutshell, this strategy should focus

- for the short term and in priority, on matters of the rule of law and human and citizens’ rights due to their tightened status under the continuing state of emergency conditions; once the state of emergency in Turkey is lifted, the EU should start debating the opening of negotiation chapters no. 23 on judiciary and fundamental rights, and no. 25 on justice, freedom and security, as both parties must have mutual interest in re-establishing sustainability and credibility in Turkey’s judiciary; in addition, the opening should be linked to a structured dialogue with the Turkish leadership and stakeholders from the civil society on issues of common concern (such as extremism, terrorism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, human, citizens and minority rights etc.) in order to create a common perspective and mutual understanding,<sup>27</sup>
- for the medium term, starting from the super election year 2019 onward,<sup>28</sup> a roadmap for the year 2023, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Turkish Republic, the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Ankara Agreement, and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first border opening on Cyprus, should be designed; this roadmap should encompass not only topics such as reforming the Customs Union or implementing the promised visa liberalisation, but also answers to the question of what would be Turkey’s contributions to the EU’s future in terms of security and defence, demography and social affairs, digitalisation, energy, or fighting climate change; this may lead to a joint understanding that Turkey’s EU accession could give an added value to the EU, whereas on the other hand, the EU has to make clear that progress in the various fields can be only

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<sup>25</sup> One possible point of reference can be the long-term quantified and qualified data on political transformation, i.e. the dynamic assessments on Turkey’s deficient democracy and functioning market economy provided by the Bertelsmann Foundation’s Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI). For a brief assessment see Ludwig Schulz, Countering ‘Turkish democracy’ (to be published soon at <https://blog.bti-project.org>).

<sup>26</sup> Other critical cases for liberal democracy, the rule of law, market economy, or the life of journalists and civil society activists in Europe are not just the prominent cases of Turkey, Hungary, or Poland, but also the accession candidates of the Balkan, or the Eastern European neighbours, which by some analysts is considered a structural problem of the EU enlargement or neighbourhood policy. On the case of the deteriorating status of the rule of law in EU accession countries see e.g. Martin Mendelski, The EU’s Pathological Power: The Failure of External Rule of Law Promotion in South Eastern Europe; on the EU and the conditions for media see e.g. Petra Guasti, Democracy, rule of law and media in Central and Eastern Europe; or in general Vedran Džihic, Neue Formen autoritärer Gouvernementalität – Serbien, Mazedonien und die Türkei als Beispiele.

<sup>27</sup> For a partly opposing, yet in substance likeminded position on the ‘chapters’ question’ see European Stability Initiative, The chapter illusion.

<sup>28</sup> 2019 will see European elections as well as local, presidential and parliamentary elections in Turkey.

achieved if Turkey fulfils its obligations in terms of rule of law and liberal democracy. Whether or not the roadmap leads towards membership or an alternative form of association, eventually designed in the wake of the Brexit negotiations, depends on both sides' progress.<sup>29</sup>

- for the long term, to reconsider EU integration and enlargement in terms of internal institutionalisation and external stabilisation, regarding the EU's neighbourhood in eastern Europe and the Southern Mediterranean. In order to regain strength and capability to influence developments in its environment the EU must re-recognise its interregional and even global importance that is widely acknowledged abroad. What matters now and then is to create a common understanding of an inclusive 'Next Europe', a common narrative with shared perceptions of problems and potentials for policy coordination and cooperation.<sup>30</sup>

Without a clear counterstrategy and -narrative, the EU will most likely see Turkey drifting further towards authoritarianism – which 51 percent of the people in Turkey may misunderstand as 'Turkish democracy' or 'New Turkey'.<sup>31</sup> It might then be the moment when the EU will be prompted to officially admit that for the first time in its history an enlargement process has failed – ironically the one of its 'strategic partner' Turkey. It remains to be seen whether the EU will be willing and able to start a learning process out of that failure or not.

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<sup>29</sup> See e.g. scenario no. 4 in Stiftung Mercator, The Future of Turkey - EU Relations. 4 Scenarios for 2018, pp. 12-16, and Sinan Ülgen, Negotiating Brexit. The Prospect of a UK-Turkey Partnership.

<sup>30</sup> See e.g. European Academy of Sciences and Arts, Next Europe. In search of its narrative; Rainer Bauböck, Rainer, The State of the Union 2017: Building a People's Europe. Still United in Diversity?.

<sup>31</sup> See e.g. Alexander Knipperts, Ludwig Schulz, Turning tables.



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