ABOUT THE MEETING

Commemorating Amb. Suna Çökğür Ilıcak, Global Political Trends Center (GPoT Center) of Istanbul Kültür University in collaboration with the Center for Strategic Research (SAM) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, and the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences (FSES) of the Comenius University in Bratislava organized the second panel discussion held in her memory. Amb. Suna Çökğür Ilıcak, who had passed away while serving as Turkey’s Ambassador to Slovakia, played a pivotal role in strengthening relations between the two countries. The panel discussion entitled “Turkey and the EU: Turning Long-Term Relations into Effective Collaboration” took place on March 6, 2014 on the premises of the FSES with the participation of students, academics, local civil society and media representatives, experts and members of the diplomatic corps based in Bratislava. Following the event, participants commemorated Amb. Suna Çökğür Ilıcak by lying flowers at the tree planted in her memory in the garden of the FSES during the inaugural round in 2012. This report features contributions by panelists and guests from Turkey, Slovakia and Hungary, who took part in the event.

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WELCOMING REMARKS

Prof. PhDr. Silvia Miháliková, PhD
Dean, Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences of the Comenius University

Dear esteemed guests, dear colleagues, dear students, it is my great pleasure and honor to welcome you to the second panel discussion in the memory of Amb. Suna Çokgür İlıcak here on the premises of the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences of the Comenius University in Bratislava. The idea to organize this event was initiated by my friend and colleague Dr. Sylvia Tiryaki, Deputy Director of Global Political Trends Center of Istanbul Kültür University. We are very glad to have the opportunity to host such meaningful meeting for the second time already and also thankful for the privilege to take care of the tree planted in the memory of Amb. Suna Çokgür İlıcak in the garden of our faculty last year.

Our faculty was established in 2002 as the 13th and the youngest faculty of the Comenius University. Inspired by the large-scale social developments on the domestic and international levels, the faculty introduced brand-new academic majors to the education system of Slovakia. The main goal of the faculty is to gradually develop an inter-disciplinary study program and to shape its research in a way that would equip the graduates with knowledge and skills needed to meet the current criteria of the labor market at home and abroad. Since its establishment, the faculty has followed the fundamental principles of the Bologna process and has declared its aim to raise the quality of education, improve the mobility of students, academic staff and research officers, as well as to strengthen the European dimension in higher education.

The three-level education at the faculty is based on credit system and offers Bachelor’s, Master’s and Doctoral programs. The growing number of local as well as international students enrolled in the accredited study programs proves that the reputation of the faculty has been increasing not only at home, but also on the international scene.

The students who are here with us today are enrolled in the study program European studies and take the course entitled “Symbols and Myths of the European Integration”. I believe that the subject of this course, i.e. symbols, myths, images and stereotypes, is very relevant to the process of European integration. We could observe this in practice during the accession negotiations of Slovakia before it joined the EU ten years ago. In political, media and public discourses we were confronted with the symbolical way of interpretation of questions such as: What does it mean to be in the EU? What does it mean to enlarge the EU?

I am very happy to have with us students from Turkey who came within the framework of the Erasmus program, students from Turkey who have been studying here for a longer period, and also our former student Lenka Peťková who is now collaborating with GPoT Center in Istanbul.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our distinguished speakers from Turkey and Hungary for joining us today. Following the addresses of the representatives of the diplomatic corps, i.e. Amb. Lebibe Gülhan Ulutekin, Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to the Slovak Republic; Amb. Mehmet Hasan Gögüş, Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to Austria; and the Amb. Haluk İlicak, Undersecretary of the Ministry for EU Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, we will have the opportunity to engage in a frank discussion about the EU-Turkey relations and the current developments in the Middle East with Erzşebet Rózsa, PhD, Academic Director of the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs in Budapest; Doc. Dr. Mesut Özcan, Chairman of the Center for Strategic Research of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, and Mehmet Özkan, PhD, Researcher of the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research in Ankara.

I would like to wish all of us a fruitful discussion, an interesting exchange of opinions and inspiration for future work.

Amb. Lebibe Gülhan Ulutekin
Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to the Slovak Republic

Madam Dean, Excellences, distinguished guests, dear friends, students, ladies and gentlemen, a very warm welcome from my side. Thank you very much for coming to today’s event, which is held in the memory of our esteemed colleague, late Amb. Suna Çokgür İlıcak. This is the second time we are organizing this panel discussion and thus fulfilling our wish to make it a tradition. This year’s event is taking place in an extended format involving distinguished speakers not only from Turkey and Slovakia, but also from Hungary. Therefore, I believe that today’s meeting is truly regional and multilateral.

Slovakia’s support for Turkey’s EU accession process has been always declared not only behind the closed doors, but also publicly in front of the cameras. We very much appreciate Slovakia’s positive attitude.

– Amb. Lebibe Gülhan Ulutekin

Madam Dean, Excellences, distinguished guests, dear friends, students, ladies and gentlemen, a very warm welcome from my side. Thank you very much for coming to today’s event, which is held in the memory of our esteemed colleague, late Amb. Suna Çokgür İlıcak. This is the second time we are organizing this panel discussion and thus fulfilling our wish to make it a tradition. This year’s event is taking place in an extended format involving distinguished speakers not only from Turkey and Slovakia, but also from Hungary. Therefore, I believe that today’s meeting is truly regional and multilateral.

Amb. Lebibe Gülhan Ulutekin
Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to the Slovak Republic
As Madam Dean has summarized, the main topic of today’s discussion will be the EU-Turkey relations. Our distinguished guests will elaborate on this subject in detail within the course of our program, but I would like to provide you with few remarks related on the bilateral relations between Turkey and Slovakia.

I believe that the correct word to describe the current status of the bilateral relations is: Excellent. The high-level visits that took place over the last years testify this. The visit of the Speaker of the Turkish Parliament to Slovakia in November 2012 was followed by the visit of the Turkish Prime Minister to Slovakia in February 2013 and the Slovak Prime Minister’s visit to Turkey. Both Prime Ministers were accompanied by large business delegations and large delegations of ministers. Afterwards, we had the honor of welcoming the Slovak President in Turkey last August. Last but not least, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Davutoğlu visited Slovakia last October. These visits demonstrate the current status of our very good relations. I am very happy to have seen a very positive attitude of our Slovak interlocutors during these visits.

Slovakia’s support for Turkey’s EU accession process has been always declared not only behind the closed doors, but also publicly in front of the cameras. We very much appreciate Slovakia’s positive attitude and we look forward to the continuation of this trend in a more vocal and stronger fashion in the EU forums.

I would like to thank the Comenius University and Madam Dean Mihálíková for hosting this event and also for taking care of the little tree that we had planted in the garden of the university during the inaugural round. Many thanks to the Global Political Trends Center of Istanbul Kültür University and the Center for Strategic Research of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which are the co-organizers of this event. Also, I would like to thank Amb. Mehmet Hasan Göğüş, Amb. Haluk Ilicak, dear friend Pavol Demeš, Doc. Olga Gýarfášová and everybody who had contributed to the realization of this event. Many thanks to our guests and young friends for their participation and interest. Šakujem pekne za pozornost.

Dr. Mesut Özcân
Chairman, Center for Strategic Research of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey

As the Center for Strategic Research we are very happy to be one of the partner organizations of this event held in the memory of Amb. Suna Çokgür Ilıcak. Today we will have a chance to discuss not only the bilateral relations between the EU and Turkey, but also the regional issues in a friendly environment at the university with the participation of experts, academics, diplomats and students. I hope this trend will continue and become a tradition in the relations between Turkey and Slovakia in general and also specifically in the relations between the academic and research institutions from the two countries. I wish the event a success. I would like to thank again to the Comenius University, GPoT Center, speakers and guests for their participation.

Dr. Sylvia Tiryaki
Deputy Director, Global Political Trends Center of Istanbul Kültür University

On behalf of GPoT Center, I would like to thank all of you for finding time and being here in this beautiful afternoon, which you could have spent in a different way. Speaking here, I am representing two of my colleagues, i.e. Director of GPoT Center, Mensur Akgün and Project Officer of GPoT Center, Lenka Petková. Perhaps it should be the Director of our Center speaking here, but because I am a Slovak and a Turk at the same time, my colleagues have chosen me as the middle way. It is needless to say that this event could not have happened without them.

I would like to thank my very good friend Prof. Silvia Mihálíková. A couple of years ago when we spoke about the possibility of organizing this event, it was only a friendly conversation about our very dear friend, late Amb. Suna Çokgür Ilicak. We discussed what could we do in order not to let her memory die and also to fulfill what she was standing for. She keenly supported collaboration between Slovakia and Turkey on the highest possible level and believed in the regional cooperation between peoples. Having said that, I am very happy that we have been able to carry on her dream for the second consecutive year and hope to expand it further.

I would like to thank the Turkish Embassy in Bratislava and especially Amb. Lebibe Gülhan Ulutekin, who has been with us for the second year and who has given us her full support.

I would like to extend our appreciation to Mr. Mesut Özcân, the head of the Center for Strategic Research of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey. This year, they are our partner for the first time, but we hope that our collaboration will sustain and that we will be able to organize this event together with them in the consecutive years.

Our keynote speaker, Amb. Haluk Ilicak, apart from being a very dear friend of mine, is the husband of late Amb. Suna Çokgür Ilicak. Of course, we would not have been able to organize this event without him. He has been with us since the very beginning. I believe this demonstration...
tes that this panel discussion in the memory of his late wife is something we had really wanted to do.

I am very happy to announce a new endeavor that we hope to initiate next year with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey and the Comenius University in Bratislava. We plan to launch a study program in the memory of Amb. Suna Çokgür Ilicak. Each year, we hope to see one of the Slovak students of international relations visiting Ankara and Istanbul on a study-professional basis.

I would like to thank all of us at this welcoming remarks panel.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Amb. Haluk Ilicak
Undersecretary, Ministry for EU Affairs of the Republic of Turkey

Mrs. Dean, Ambassadors, dear participants and guests, firstly I would like to express my gratitude to my friends Sylvia Tiryaki and Mensur Akgün and GPoT Center of Istanbul Kültür University, as well as Prof. Silvia Miháliková, Dean of the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences of the Comenius University for organizing and hosting the second panel discussion in the memory of my late wife, Ambassador Suna Çokgür Ilicak, who passed away when she was the Turkish Ambassador in Bratislava. I would also like to thank my friend, Ambassador Gülıhan Ulutekin for her support and assistance. My sincere thanks go to all participants, who will share their views and contribute to the panel discussion, and especially to Mesut Özcan of the Center of Strategic Research.

I am also very pleased to see the sapling we planted last year in the garden of the university in the memory of Suna growing. I consider this sapling the symbol of the friendship between Slovakia and Turkey and between our two nations.

This year the subject of the panel is “Turkey and the EU: Turning Long-Term Relations into Effective Collaboration”. This is an interesting but also a difficult subject to elaborate on.

Let me start with the situation in the EU. The global economic crisis has had deep repercussions on the EU. As the crisis hit and evolved, the Union has unfortunately found itself in the middle of a confidence and even an existential crisis. The imbalances that have built up in the periphery have spilled over other countries including the core ones.

In this context, for the last few years we have been discussing “the future of Europe” with the hope that the EU will recover from the current crisis with a new vision. Unfortunately, the EU could not redefine itself and became a center of attraction as it used to be. The problems stemming from the economic crisis, despite some positive signals of recovery, continued in 2013 along with the intensive debate on the future of the Union.

Today, the European integration process is at a turning point and we have to decide what kind of Europe we want. I hope that 2014 will be the year of EU’s irreversible recovery and that next year we will discuss EU’s contributions to the global welfare and peace.

Dear friends, the crisis the EU is facing has revealed structural weaknesses of the European project. The EU’s economic machine seems not to function as properly and efficiently. During most of its existence, the EU constituted an anchor of internal stability creating peace, democracy and a fair share of prosperity. Unfortunately, the crisis tends to put a shade on all these qualifications.

A failure in delivering employment, productivity and social cohesion may unfortunately result in failure of the European integration project as a whole. The EU losing its momentum and dynamism in the economic terms is quite likely to lose its attractiveness.

There is no doubt that the crisis in Europe is not only economic but also political. Some observers even go further to define the crisis in Europe as an existential crisis due to the increasing lack of trust of Europeans in the European integration project. The crisis has exposed the need for Europe to reform. If the structural transformation of the EU cannot be accomplished, the future of the EU would inevitably become questionable. However, the EU has the capacity to struggle against the crisis via its political culture and technical mechanisms. I believe in this. In fact, the EU has a proven history of growing stronger in difficult times.

Today, in order to overcome the existing profound crisis of the European integration, we have to redefine the EU according to the realities of our age. The world is changing quickly and dramatically while the economic and business axis is moving from one region to another. A new multi-polar world is emerging where power is more diffuse and international dynamics more complex. Last year, the proportion of the less-developed countries in the world trade and GDP passed the proportion of the developed ones for the first time in history. Thus we cannot solve the problems of our age with the remedies of the last century.

The challenges, which Europe faces today, stem as much from the developments outside its borders as they do from the EU’s reluctance to respond to them. If the Union is to secure its future, it will need to adjust its objectives and policies to cope with this fast-changing world. Thus instead of rigid institutional structures, the EU needs more flexibility. A multi-tier, multi-speed, à la carte or “flexible integration”, if you will, is a reality today. The EU members have crosscutting interests and different
countries cooperate in different areas. The Eurozone is smaller than the EU, whereas the internal market extends the European Economic Area. Moreover, the Schengen area excludes some member states and yet it includes several formal outsiders.

Flexibility used to be the most important feature of the European integration. However, the EU has been changing from a flexible and fluid entity into a more rigid structure. There is an increasing hierarchy among the member states. Unfortunately, the European Commission cannot act as a counterbalance anymore and stand up for the interests of smaller and newer member states as it used to.

There is no question that the EU needs a structure that can accommodate the diversity of its current and potential members. Today, Europe needs more flexibility, democratic accountability, legitimacy and fairness. We all need a flexible union, which will open the way for promoting the values of the European civilization in the world, advancing shared interests to open markets, and building a strong economic base across the whole of Europe.

One of the most important examples of the rigidity is the decision-making process of the EU. Because of the unanimity principle, the EU cannot move as quickly as it needs to. Indeed, the principle of unanimity is one of the most important reasons of EU’s inability to influence global politics. The enlargement policy is an important example, where unanimity voting system prevents the EU from wider and realistic foresights about its future and leads narrow-minded visions. It is obvious that there is a need to review the process and extend the scope of qualified majority system. It will strengthen the legitimacy of the EU and open a way for a more inclusive Union in the future.

Lastly, let me underline that although the institutional restructuring is very important, it is clear that no institutional fix would restore legitimacy of the EU as long as the Union has no convincing message to tell the people. Today, the EU needs a new, inclusive and contemporary narrative.

The EU has long been the biggest peace project of humanity and there is no question that the EU has helped to transform most of Europe from a continent of war to a continent of peace. However, the EU should try to produce more tangible results, for example by resolving “frozen conflicts” in the Caucasus, bringing stability to the Balkans and former USSR Republics and Ukraine in particular or acting more effectively in the Middle East.

Dear friends, the debate about Turkey is in essence a debate about the future of Europe in terms of its identity, its economy, its political and institutional structure, and its role in our globalizing world. Today, Turkey’s EU membership is a conflict “between the old national and the new cosmopolitan Europe”. There is no question that Turkey’s membership will change the EU. Yes, with Turkey, the EU will be economically competitive, socially peaceful, and geopolitically assertive. Unlike the new members or current candidates, Turkey is a regional player, an international actor with an expanding range of soft power and a resilient, sizable economy. The world has changed, Europe has changed and Turkey has changed since 2002, when the EU had taken the decision, in principle, to start negotiations with Turkey.

Today, Europe is in disarray and going through a serious crisis, while Turkey has been putting its imprint on the global stage with its remarkable economic development and, despite some actual domestic troubles, 11 years of political stability. Currently, Turkey is the sixth largest economy in Europe and the seventeenth in the world. Turkey, with industrial goods amounting to over 90% of its exports, is the seventh largest trade partner of the EU. According to OECD forecasts, Turkey will be the second-largest economy in Europe by 2050 and it will become the “engine of growth” for the EU. At the end of 2012, the unemployment rate in Turkey was lower than in many European countries. In this respect, the argument that Turkey will constitute a huge burden when it becomes a member is groundless in the face of the evidence that it has already completed an advanced economic and commercial integration process with the EU without placing any burden on it. The Customs Union exhibits the strength and the high level of competitiveness of our industry. Thus Turkey will not be a burden for the EU. Indeed, we can share the potential costs of recovery that will be needed for the effects of the Eurozone crisis.

Today’s Turkey is better than yesterday’s Turkey and tomorrow’s Turkey will be better than today’s.

We are talking of a country that has tripled its roads, its universities and its hospitals in the last decade. We are talking of a country that produces Europe’s buses, steel, tiles and white products. With a conservative estimate, at least one European out of three uses a Turkish product once in his daily life.

We are talking of a country that has tripled its roads, its universities and its hospitals in the last decade. We are talking of a country that produces Europe’s buses, steel, tiles and white products. With a conservative estimate, at least one European out of three uses a Turkish product once in his daily life.

~ Amb. Haluk Ilıcak
driving force for reforms in Turkey. Therefore, it is a win-win relationship and Turkey’s membership would be an indispensable aspect of the EU’s new narrative.

The European Union is not a club for Christians and should not be. And as we have already realized, thinking about Europe in national terms fails to understand not only today’s reality but also the future. Europe’s geopolitical significance in the global world mostly depends on its ability to go beyond a culturally sealed and essentialist understanding.

In the 21st century, multiculturalism is an integral part of Europe’s geopolitical strength and that will be fortified with Turkey’s EU membership.

The EU can be and even must be an agent of change in the world, a trend-setter, not just a passive witness, and in this respect Turkey’s membership offers great opportunity.

PANEL 1: The Current State of Affairs in EU-Turkey Relations: What Can Be Done to Bring the Accession Negotiations to a Successful End?

Dr. Pavol Demeš
Transatlantic Fellow, The German Marshall Fund of the United States

It is a great honor to be here and moderate this panel after such inspiring keynote address by the husband of late Amb. Suna Çokgür Ilıcak. Since this is a very unusual gathering filled with emotions, I need to echo this tune while moderating the discussion with Amb. Mehmet Hasan Göğüş and Doc. Dr. Mesut Özcan, who will be addressing the issue of the EU-Turkey relations.

Amb. Suna Çokgür Ilıcak was almost a member of my family. When she served as the Turkish Ambassador to Slovakia we regularly met to speak about foreign policy and human issues. This friendship was one of the very important moments in my professional life. My brother, a doctor at the Kramáre Hospital, called me once and said: “There is a friend of yours at my department. Even if it is forbidden for visitors to come, we will make an exception and let you see her.” Few days later, Suna was transferred to Turkey where she passed away. Because of this, Suna is more than a name and more than a distinguished diplomat for me. I am very happy that the youngest faculty of the Comenius University and the best faculty in humanities in Slovakia is engaged in a project aiming to keep her name alive and inspire students, some of whom will become diplomats or work in the field of international relations. We should thank both Silvias (Silvia Miháliková and Sylvia Tiryaki) for developing this project.

This is my second performance at the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences of the Comenius University. Last year, Jozef Bátora invited me to speak to the students of European studies because I am a passionate photographer. I have photographed Turkey for many years and believe that it is one of the most photogenic countries. Jozef invited me to speak about Cyril and Methodius, the saint patrons of Europe, as we celebrated the 150th anniversary of their arrival to our territory, the then Great Moravia. I mention this because they came to our ancestors from Constantinople, today’s Istanbul. Moreover, Cyril invented the Glagolitic script while on the territory of today’s Turkey. Thus, whenever we speak about Turkey and Europe, the relations and links to the present days can be tracked back to long time ago.

Before we celebrate the 10th anniversary of Slovakia’s membership in the EU and NATO this year, we are privileged to host two distinguished guests from Turkey, who will elaborate on the EU-Turkey relations.

Amb. Mehmet Hasan Göğüş
Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to Austria

I would like to start by giving tribute to Amb. Suna Çokgür Ilıcak, who was a dear colleague and a friend of mine. This event is a very good tradition and a great way of keeping her memory alive. I am proud to be part of this endeavor this year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have contributed to the organization of today’s meeting.

The last post I held was the post of the Deputy Undersecretary responsible for the European affairs in Ankara. I left the post three months ago, so the information might be a little bit outdated, but maybe not so because nothing is changing easily when it comes to EU-Turkey relations.

Turkey is a European country. It has been a European country throughout the history. Regardless of the end result of the accession process, it will stay a European country. My question is: Is it possible to write the European history without entering the Ottoman and the Turkish archives? I believe the answer is simple.

Our relations with the EU are the longest. They are probably longer than the individual relations between the EU and most of its member states. We boarded the train in 1959. In 1963 we signed the Ankara Agreement, the final aim of which was a full membership.

Throughout the two years when I was in charge of the European affairs in Ankara, I hold many consultations with my European counterparts. The objections which have been raised against our membership in the EU can be summarized in five main categories: 1) Turkey is too big, 2) Turkey is too crowded, 3) The EU is facing the enlargement fatigue, 4) Europe is in the midst of an economic crisis, 5) Turkey is Muslim. The question of religion may not be pronounced openly, but it is usually present in the back of the minds. There is nothing Turkey can possibly do to change any of the mentioned concerns. We cannot get rid of our population, we cannot make our territory smaller,
change our religion, solve the economic crisis in Europe or help to overcome the enlargement fatigue.

When Turkey was accepted as a candidate country in 1999, it was situated in the very same territory as today. We did not invade any country. We did not expand. In 2004, when we started the accession talks, the size of our population was around 65 million. These days, our population is around 75 million, so there has not been a big boom. We were Muslim at that time as much as we are today. We have difficulties understanding why have these

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~ Amb. Mehmet Hasan Göğüş

objections not been pronounced earlier. It comes across as if we were told: “I do not like your face. Change your face.”

Economically speaking, Turkey is better off than most of the EU member states. We meet most of the Maastricht criteria. Last year our national public debt was around 36 percent of GDP. The limit set out by the Maastricht criteria is 60 percent. Maybe half of the EU member states are not able to cope with this benchmark.

One of the most critic developments that Turkey is concerned about is the public opinion. If you asked people in the street whether they supported our membership in the EU, you would receive a 60 percent yes. However, if you asked them whether they believed that Turkey would join the EU, only 14 percent of replies would be positive. People lose their hope because of the unfulfilled promises by the EU. In the middle of the football match, the rules of the game are being changed. We do not have any assurances about what is there for Turkey.

The accession process is in a stalemate. We have been able to open 14 chapters so far and only one of them is provisionally closed. 17 chapters are blocked, but this is not because of technical but rather political reasons. It is very difficult for us to understand this. We managed to open Chapter 22 at the end of last year, but there are no more chapters to be opened. There are three chapters, which are not blocked at the moment, but these chapters are usually addressed at the very end of the accession talks. This is yet another double standard applied to Turkey.

Chapter 23 and Chapter 24 are directly related to the question of law, human rights and humanitarian issues, and thus the new candidate countries usually start the accession process with these chapters. However, when it comes to Turkey, we do not even know what is our homework in these areas. Both chapters are blocked by one of the EU member states. If they were opened so that we can engage in a dialogue with the EU, we would be able to improve.

In addition, Turkey lies in the center of energy roads, but we cannot engage in a dialogue with the EU because the relevant chapter is blocked. This results in frustration on our side.

I would like to share with you few words about the visa issue. We finally managed to sign the Readmission Agreement in mid-December last year. We had a lot of difficulties with the roadmap, but at the end a solution was found. We hope to be able to finalize this dialogue shortly so that the Turkish citizens are allowed to travel to the countries of the EU without visa. In fact, even this development was a late step. Citizens of several Balkan countries and countries situated in the Latin America benefit from a visa-free travel to the EU. Yet the Turkish citizens have to queue in front of the foreign embassies to apply for Schengen visa, fill in numerous forms and provide necessary documentation. The argument implying that if visa is lifted, Turkish workers will flood Europe, is not true anymore. Today, Turkey is not the same Turkey it was few years ago.

These days, the biggest challenge of any Turkish Ambassador is to find a cook because nobody wants to go abroad anymore. The workers are paid better in Turkey. For example 42 Greek pilots and 400 foreigners from 39 different countries work for the Turkish Airlines. Approximately 240,000 Europeans look for jobs in Turkey via Internet. Turkey itself has become the center of attraction.

Doc. Dr. Mesut Özcan
Chairman, Center for Strategic Research of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey

It is my pleasure to be here and share with you some of my ideas about Turkey’s EU accession process.

Turkey was declared a candidate country in 1999. This was an important historical milestone because Turkey applied for the membership in the EU already in 1987. However, there were various difficulties at that time and the EU was transforming itself after the Cold War. From the point when Turkey became a candidate country in 1999, the impact of the EU on Turkish foreign and domestic policy has been significant. The public support for the EU was very high back then. Even though the public may have not believed in the membership itself, it did support the process. Thanks to the EU, several reforms have been implemented and this transformed the political life in Turkey as well as its economy.

Another turning point came in 2005 when Turkey started the accession negotiations with the EU. At that time the public support for the talks was around 75-80 percent. Most people thought that at the end of the process, Turkey would have a real chance to become a member of the EU. However, it was not easy for the member states to agree on the conditions under which Turkey’s accession process would start. As a consequence, the British Foreign Secretary had to intervene. This period has been the highest peak of the EU-Turkey relations. The public support was very high, there was general optimism and the Turkish government was implementing reforms aiming to fulfill the criteria of full membership.

However, since 2006 there have been difficulties in the accession negotiations. Generally speaking, academics
agree that whenever a country engages in the accession process with the EU, it has to implement reforms and face challenges. As a consequence, the public support for membership is likely to drop. However, in the case of Turkey the reasons for the decline were different. The accession process should be technical. Yet, it became increasingly political in the case of Turkey. Some of the EU member states have been blocking the negotiations for political, cultural, and economic reasons. Over the years, this has proved to have a very negative impact on the bilateral relations between Turkey and the EU.

Turkey has developed dramatically over the last decade. Its economy has performed better than the economies of many of the EU member states. Because of the difficulties in the accession process, the public support for the EU membership in Turkey has been declining. Some of the arguments that have been frequently raised include Turkey’s European identity, the question of migration and the Cyprus issue.

The size of the population of Turkish origin living in Germany and Austria and in other European countries and the number of Turks traveling to Europe for family reunions has declined in the past years. By contrast, the number of Turks who migrate from Germany back to Turkey has been increasing. This indicates that the migration trend is now reversed and thus the claim that following Turkey’s EU membership there will be large numbers of people migrating to Europe is not valid anymore.

Besides the political difficulties, the bilateral relations have been affected by the changes that have taken place in Turkey as well as in Europe. Throughout the economic crisis, Turkey has performed better than the EU member states. The public support for the EU membership has decreased in Turkey because people are no longer convinced about its economic benefits.

The Turkish decision makers still support the accession process but the public desire for the EU membership has weakened. For example, when I was a Master’s student, the EU was one of the hottest topics and there were numerous Master’s programs available. However, these days the departments focusing on European studies face serious difficulties finding students to enroll. Over the years, Turkey has developed relations with countries in the Middle East, Africa, Asia and the Latin America. This development, hand in hand with the negative signals sent by some of the EU member states, has reduced the interest of students and academics in the EU politics and university programs focusing on European affairs.

Despite that, there is still a sizable amount of people who are in favor of the EU-Turkey relations and believe in Turkey’s EU agenda. Even though there have been difficulties with the opening of chapters throughout the accession process, we did open one chapter last year. In addition, a positive agenda aiming to revive the negotiations was adopted and Turkey initiated the visa agreement with the EU. These developments can boost the bilateral relations.

Because the EU is currently going through a transformation process, there is an internal discussion about its various policies including the enlargement policy. As a consequence, new scenarios about the future of the EU might emerge and affect Turkey’s negotiation process.

What can be done to strengthen the relations between Turkey and the EU and thus lead the accession negotiations to a successful end? The political leaders in Europe should eliminate their negative arguments about Turkey’s EU membership. Instead, they should focus on communicating supportive and convincing messages. With the changing political landscape in Europe, there might be some positive developments in this regard.

Because of the economic difficulties all over Europe, xenophobic arguments have been on rise and this has had a negative effect on the relations between Turkey and the EU.

Thanks to Turkey’s remarkable progress, the arguments about economic difficulties are no longer valid. Therefore, we should stress the positive sides of Turkey’s EU membership and what it could bring the EU as a whole.

In order to lead this process to a successful end, the opening of additional chapters should be supported and the existing political barriers that prevent steps in this direction should be lifted. All in all, the accession process needs to be technical rather than political.

One of the most crucial points is the view of the public. In order to encourage the public support for Turkey’s EU membership, exchanges like this one should take place. Cultural and social activities can help to change people’s perspectives on Turkey’s membership in the EU.

Lastly, in order to bring the accession negotiations to a successful end, political difficulties such as the Cyprus issue need to be handled in a fair manner. Recently, Turkey and Greece have tried to overcome this problem following the
resumption of negotiations on the island. For the first time in the 50 years of the conflict’s history, representatives of the Turkish Cypriot and the Greek Cypriot side visited Athens and Ankara. There is a renewed interest in achieving a lasting settlement, which would consequently increase Turkey’s chances for a successful accession to the EU.

In order to achieve all of this, there needs to be a positive engagement from the side of the EU member states. Over the years, there have been difficult times in the EU-Turkey relations. Some of the negotiation chapters are currently blocked, but with the change of the government in France, there have been positive signals in terms of moving forward. This has happened despite the fact that the attitude of Germany and Austria has not changed much.

A political solution in Cyprus, the opening of additional negotiation chapters and an increased support for the public opinion can give a positive boost to Turkey’s accession negotiations with the EU.

PANEL 2: Challenges Posed by the Turbulent Middle East: How Can Turkey and the EU Collaborate to Support Stability in the Region?

Doc. PhDr. Oľga Gyárffášová, PhD
Lecturer, Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences of the Comenius University

I would like to welcome the Ambassadors, speakers, guests and our students, some of whom come from Turkey. I am really glad that this panel discussion held in the memory of Amb. Suna Çökşur ılicak is taking place for the second time. This means that we have already established a tradition. I would like to thank Sylvia Tiryaki for initiating this event. I am privileged to moderate the second panel with two excellent speakers from leading think-tanks in Hungary and Turkey, who will share their thoughts about the challenges in the Middle East and areas of possible collaboration between Turkey and the EU.

Mehmet Özkan, PhD
Researcher, Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research

I would like to thank the organizers for giving me the opportunity to be here, meet with interesting people and exchange ideas.

In order to discuss the prospects of cooperation between the EU and Turkey in the Middle East, we need to have a look at what has been happening in the region. Since the events of December 2010 in Tunisia and the developments of February 2011 in Egypt, there have been structural changes in the Middle East. The nature of these changes is very important because of the opportunities they present and problems they create.

In the past, all political and social structures used to be controlled mostly by dictatorial regimes. However, we have entered a new period, in which social dynamics play a bigger role in policy making. As we have seen in the cases of Syria or Egypt following the military coup, the structural change has led to political partition and social and political transformation. The political transformation will be a long-term process, but the psychological change has already taken place, i.e. people no longer fear the political authority and want their voices to be heard.

Turkey has pursued a policy that tries to shape the structural change in a way, which would not only create social and economic opportunities for Turkey but also for the region as a whole. The international collaboration has not been very helpful in Egypt. We have expected the EU to do something in this respect, but it has been extremely reluctant to act in the last three years. This has created space for the implementation of tools of soft power and other indirect influences. When it comes to Middle East, the EU can pursue the following three models:

1) The EU was hesitant to accept new actors in the region in the 1990s. However, the time has come to introduce a new dimension to its policies because of the new social dynamics and the emergence of new political actors such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Adjustments need to be done in all aspects. The EU and Turkey can and should cooperate in this area. Such collaboration can be very effective.

2) If the political and economic problems in the Middle East are solved, we can expect a reversed immigration as in the case of Turkey. Many Turkish migrants living in Europe are now returning back to Turkey. The creation of a politically stable and economically developed zone in the region could in great extent help to solve the migration issue in Europe. The EU-Turkey collaboration in this area would indirectly help to shape the domestic politics within the EU and some of the countries of the region.

3) We tend to look at the EU-Turkey relations from the bilateral point of view, but they go much beyond that. The security cooperation between EU and Turkey has the potential to go beyond their individual interests and collaboration on the so-called stuck issues. Turkey has been very active in Africa in the last ten years and especially during the crisis in Somalia. Likewise, the EU has tried to support the resolution of the conflict that emerged in the Central African Republic in December 2013. It has financed various peacekeeping operations in Africa and contributed with its troops, but its help has been rather limited in the case of the Central African Republic where the EU has sent only around 600 troops. Because of the increased involvement of
France in Ivory Coast, Mali and the Central African Republic during the last six years, we can expect increased conflict between Turkey and France on the bilateral level. On the other hand, the French leadership in the European affairs might create opportunities for the strengthening of collaboration with Turkey at the European level especially in the security area in North Africa and beyond.

When discussing the possibilities for collaboration between the EU and Turkey, we need to take into account where do the EU-Turkey relations fit in the changing structure of the Middle East. I believe that Turkey can become a member of the EU only if there is a structural change. Otherwise, everyone is well aware of the current limits, which have been discussed at numerous conferences without any change. The Arab Spring, Russia’s involvement in Crimea, the recent developments in Turkey and the economic crisis have pushed both sides to adjust their positions in a radical way. I only outlined three areas of prospective collaboration, which can widen our horizon and discussion.

Erzsébet Rózsa, PhD
Academic Director, Hungarian Institute of International Affairs

I would like to thank the organizers, some of whom are my old friends. I have had the pleasure of enjoying the hospitality of the Comenius University and GPoT Center of Istanbul Kültür University on several occasions. Thank you very much for inviting me to share my thoughts.

The previous panel raised the question: Why Turkey in the EU? I would like to ask: Why not Turkey? The EU and Turkey, or most of the EU member states and Turkey, are already together in structures such as NATO, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership launched in 1995, the Customs Union existing since in 1996, the Union for the Mediterranean etc. Even though Turkey has not joined the European Neighborhood policy, it has been engaged in integration process with the EU.

The European history could not have been written without Turkey. I always ask my students: Where does the Turkish national team play football? And what about the singing contest Eurovision? When talking about the Turkish communities in Europe, we need to take into account many aspects ranging from politics to culture, and from security to sociology.

The EU and Turkey have been involved in their respective neighborhoods and especially in the turbulent Middle East because of the same reasons, i.e. support of peace and stability, regional security, social, economic and sustainable development, shared prosperity, and human resources. Therefore, it is possible to say that Turkey and the EU share the same concerns and aim for a commonly peaceful neighborhood.

In the last decade, Turkey has developed economically and has performed economic expansion to the Middle East. According to the polls conducted in the Middle Eastern countries between 2010-2012, Turkey is the most popular country among the Arabs. This is a development unheard of ever since the end of the Ottoman Empire. It was also a surprise that the Turkish Prime Minister was invited to the Arab League Summit as a guest.

When it comes to Turkey’s accession negotiations with the EU, there is a group of questions, which are usually raised as obstacles or rather as issues of contention. They address concerns on both sides. For example, one of the questions on the side of the EU is: Where are the borders of Europe? No one can tell us where the borders of Europe are. The EU has yet to answer this question. Another myth is the absorption capacity of Europe. The questions on the side of Turkey include domestic developments. And yet another segment of these questions is related to our topic today, i.e. Turkish foreign and neighborhood policy.

When we focus on the Turkish foreign policy of the last decade, i.e. the pursuit of zero problems with neighbors and strong mediation efforts, it may look like as if Turkey had started a neighborhood policy of its own. Turkey has become a regional power. For many years, one of the biggest complaints has been that Turkey’s accession would bring a highly problematic neighborhood closer to the EU. Turkish political leaders and diplomatic corps are very active in Hungary. The Prime Minister and President of Turkey have visited Budapest recently. I was at the meeting in Budapest when the Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan said: “When we join [the EU], we can turn the Arab peace project into a global one. So far it has been only continental.” This is what Turkey can offer. Before the Arab Spring started, there may have been complaints about the neighborhood in the vicinity of Turkey, but during the Arab Spring, Europe was very happy to have Turkey in the neighborhood. Turkey has tried to solve the problems emerging in the region and can help the EU to do the same.

EU’s neighborhood was unstable even before the Arab Spring and the events of the past few years have only intensified the overall instability. As soon as Turkey tried to mediate and bring peace and security to its own neighborhood, some Europeans started to stay that it was
turning away from the EU. It is not for me to decide whether this is true or not, but I prefer to see Turkey’s effort in the Middle East as the diversification of its foreign policy. Lying on the intersection of several problematic regions, Turkey cannot listen to one side only.

Turkey started to pursue an ambitious program. It has been so successful that observers presented it as one of the models following the eruption of the Arab Spring. The models considered included:

1) Iranian model: I do not think this model was relevant in the context of the Arab Spring.
2) Turkish model: Many of my Turkish colleagues were painfully trying to explain Turkey’s position on this. Finally, Prime Minister Erdoğan said that Turkey never wanted to become a model, but rather a mere source of inspiration. Then the discourse about the Turkish model disappeared quietly. Turkey has had a great economic, cultural and soft-power influence on the Middle East. Eventually, the EU and Turkey found common grounds during the turbulent times of the Arab Spring. They are finally on the same platform supporting peace, stability, democratization, and economic development. However, the question is: Is it enough to be on the same platform?

I am absolutely convinced about the possibilities of collaboration between the EU and Turkey, and Slovakia and Hungary’s support for Turkey’s membership in the EU. Yet, I am very pessimistic about what can be done on the ground right now at this decisive moment because there are numerous problems:

Domestic developments in the Middle East: The Arab world has changed. The countries in the region have become nation states, meaning that they are engaged with their own national transition periods. It is not sure whether either Turkey or the EU have sufficient influence on these domestic political developments.

1) Regional developments: The conflict in Syria presents a huge difficulty. I think that no one can solve the crisis at the moment. Turkey and the EU can jointly try to help, but I am not sure if they can do more than to try to bring the parties to the negotiating table.
2) Security cooperation: NATO was not much of use during the Arab Spring with the only exception being its intervention in Libya. The case of Libya was an exception rather than a rule though.
3) Soft security: So far the migration of the Turkish citizens and of the population of Turkish origin to and from the EU was mentioned. However, the dimension of migration goes beyond that. What about those who arrive to Turkey only to migrate further to the EU? Bulgaria has a lot to say on this. I have heard complaints about Turkey being an open road accessible to anyone. I am not sure whether this is really the case, but I wanted to draw your attention to the fact that the question of migration encompasses much more than just the citizens of one country going to another. Turkey can become a transit route. Frankly speaking, Hungary and Slovakia are also transit routes even though they are in the EU.
4) Economy and finances: The EU has been slowly recovering from the economic and financial crisis. According to the figures, Turkey’s economic development has been slowing down when compared to the previous two to four years. Neither Turkey nor the EU have the capacity to change this.

5) Cultural, social, and religious issues: The question of the Muslim minorities within the EU, and the question of the Turkish community in Germany are high on the agenda. A couple of years ago I was surprised to see election posters in the streets of France arguing against Turkey’s EU accession. I could not understand why this was the case. At that time there were only some 250,000 Turks living in France, which is nothing when compared to France’s total population. I listened with great curiosity to the information about various visits taking place between Slovakia and Turkey. The same is happening between Hungary and Turkey. We have a very ambitious ambassador in Ankara who is a Turcologist. He actively organizes cultural, economic, educational, business, and political events. Hungary’s relations with Turkey are now the most developed bilateral relations we have with countries that are within a two hours reach to the East. Turkey is high on the agenda of the Hungarian government, which has launched a new foreign policy program focusing on the East.

As a consequence of the turbulent developments, the Middle East has changed. Turkey and the EU can cooperate on the following issues in the region:

1) Syria: The Syrian society has been one of the finest peoples living in the region. My heart is breaking for them, but it is impossible to resolve the crisis at the moment.
2) Iran: Turkey has special relations with Iran. It tried to mediate between Iran and the great powers in 2010. Whatever the tension between Iran and Turkey, the countries are always very cautious about not antagonizing each other. I had the opportunity to see Ahmet Davutoğlu and Javad Zarif speaking at one panel. Despite giving diametrically opposing lectures, they were friendly to each other. Such relationship is considered a great treasure in the Middle East.
3) Israel: There is a cautious rapprochement between Turkey and Israel. We need to wait for the result. The EU could support this rapprochement.
4) Kurdish question: It is interesting that the Kurdish question was not mentioned today. The peace process in Turkey is going on and I hope to see positive developments in this area. What can Turkey and the EU do together in the Middle East? They can show their commitment and support to end turbulent developments and instability.

When we focus on the Turkish foreign policy of the last decade, i.e. the pursuit of zero problems with neighbors and strong mediation efforts, it may look like as if Turkey had started a neighborhood policy of its own. I prefer to see Turkey’s effort in the Middle East as the diversification of its foreign policy.

~ Erzsébet Rózsa, PhD