

EU'S READMISSION AGREEMENT AND VISA LIBERALIZATION TALKS WITH TURKEY: BACKING UP TURKEY'S PROTRACTED WAY TO THE EU

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ABSTRACT European Union (EU) has been reluctant to start visa liberalization talks with Turkey until mid-2012 despite the fact that citizens of all other candidate countries have enjoyed visa-free travel to Schengen area since 2009. The Turkish diplomats had mastered to negotiate roadmap to visa-free travel in an exchange for the initial of the readmission agreement, implementation of which is considered key in securing EU's eastern borders. The issues of migration and visa policy are covered in the negotiating chapter *Justice, Freedom and Security*, which has been blocked by the Republic of Cyprus. Demonstrating that the said topics represent joint interest of Turkey and the EU, the chapter was added to the positive agenda launched this May with the aim to keep Turkey's accession process alive. Despite the fact that visa liberalization and readmission agreement will both be negotiated outside of Turkey's accession framework, reforms adopted in these areas are likely to ease Turkey's alignment with the provisions of the relevant chapter of the *acquis communautaire*. Visa liberalization and readmission agreement are thus important factors influencing Turkey's protracted journey to the EU.

Introduction

After the opening of the 13th negotiating chapter in Turkey's European Union (EU) accession framework in 2010, there was a gap of two years until the next major development in relations between the two parties occurred. "Our aim is to keep the accession process alive and put it properly back on track after a period of stagnation [. . .] The positive agenda is not only to

support but to go beyond the accession negotiations," (European Commission, 2012a) proclaimed the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy, Štefan Füle at the press conference held on the occasion of the initiation of the revitalization process between EU and Turkey in Ankara this May. The idea of positive agenda was first articulated by the European Commission (2011a) in its strategy paper on enlargement policy, which called for "a more

constructive and positive relationship” (p. 19) with Turkey and acknowledged that, “Turkey is a key country for the security and prosperity of the European Union” (p. 18).

According to Turkish Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator, Egemen Bağış (2011), eighteen out of thirty-five chapters in Turkey’s accession framework have been blocked for “purely political reasons.” This led him to proclaim that the latest initiative launched by Füle marked a “turning point” (Bağış, 2012a) in the protracted talks. Two of the frozen chapters together with other six ones were added to the positive agenda (Ministry for EU Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, 2012a, p. 1), thus enabling Turkey to align its laws with relevant EU legislation without having to wait for the stalled negotiation process¹ to unlock.

Presuming that the unresolved Cyprus problem will keep resonating in the EU-Turkey relations long after the Republic of Cyprus hands over the presidency to another member state, it might be rather difficult to imagine any substantive improvement in the long term, not to mention breakthrough, which would “go beyond the accession negotiations” as was confidently expressed by Štefan Füle.

However, the revival came at a time when Turkey signaled it would suspend its relations with the Council of the EU once the Republic of Cyprus assumes the presidency in July 2012. Turkey, one of the guarantors of the Republic of Cyprus, does not have any diplomatic relations with the Greek Cypriot government. After Turkish

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu announced that, “none of the ministries [and] institutions of Turkish Republic will be in contact with the EU presidency in any of the activities related to Greek Cypriot presidency” (Karadeniz & Cameron-Moore, 2012), Egemen Bağış confirmed that the Republic of Cyprus would be completely ignored and that

the Turkish Ministry for EU Affairs “[has already] begun the preparations for the presidency of Ireland” (Hürriyet Daily News, 2012a), which will take over at the beginning of 2013.

According to Najšlová and Weiss (2012), the role of the presidency even though limited is particularly essential when it comes to accession talks, because “the presidency chairs the meetings at the level of ministers – the Association Council and the intergovernmental conference that opens and closes the negotiating chapters” (p. 8). Given that it has been two years since the opening of the last chapter, it could be argued that Turkey’s stand-off attitude towards the presidency in the second half of 2012 will have symbolic implications rather than practical

approved by the Turkish Cypriots few days before the Republic of Cyprus joined the EU.

¹ Following Turkey's noncompliance with the provisions of the Additional Protocol (2005) to the Ankara Treaty, which made it mandatory for Turkey to extend its Customs Union to all new member states and thus open its ports and airports to the vessels and aircrafts of the Republic of Cyprus, the European Council decided in 2006 to provisionally suspended eight chapters in Turkey's negotiating framework. It ruled that no chapter could be closed until Turkey conforms to the requirements of the Additional Protocol. Turkey is unwilling to open its ports and airports unless EU enables direct trade for the Turkish Cypriot community as promised in the aftermath of the failed referenda on Annan Plan. The plan envisaging the reunification of the divided Cyprus was rejected by the Greek Cypriots and

consequences on the speed of its accession process. On the other hand, presuming that the unresolved Cyprus problem will keep resonating in the EU-Turkey relations long after the Republic of Cyprus hands over the office to another member state, it might be rather difficult to imagine any substantive improvement in the long term, not to mention breakthrough, which would “go beyond the accession negotiations” as was confidently expressed by Štefan Füle.

Putting the prospects of general progress in the membership talks aside, this paper will focus on the justice and home affairs portfolio and analyze the evolution of collaboration between Turkey and EU on the issue of immigration and visa liberalization outside of the accession framework. Even though blocked by the Republic of Cyprus, *Justice, Freedom and Security* chapter was added to the positive agenda (Ministry for EU Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, 2012a, p. 1), thus demonstrating that the topics of immigration and visa policy are regarded as “areas of joint interest” (European Commission, 2012a) for both sides. The Danish Presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2012 managed to deliver a long-awaited consensus on the text of the readmission agreement² between Turkey and EU. Being considered key in securing EU's eastern borders, the document represents one of the policy areas where EU needs Turkey's good political will and assistance in order to diminish the number of irregular immigrants entering its territory. The Turkish diplomats mastered to negotiate the initial in an exchange for

EU's promise to launch the process of visa liberalization for Turkish citizens, which has been demanded by Ankara for a couple of years. The following chapters explain the main features of EU's policy on readmission agreements and visa facilitation with third countries, and also address developments associated with EU-Turkey talks in these particular areas.

EU's policy on readmission agreements and visa facilitation

Given that “every year, national authorities in the EU apprehend more than 500,000 irregular migrants,” (Directorate General Home Affairs, 2012) member states with Germany taking the lead in the forefront (Moravcsik & Nicolaidis, 1999, p. 63), once reluctant to give up their sovereignty, started to recognize the need to create a common immigration policy in the late 1990s. EU did not have competence in the area of justice and home affairs until the entry into force of *Treaty of Amsterdam* (1999), which introduced community procedure. Countries such as United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark managed to negotiate exemption clause, thus enabling the other member states to adopt new laws and regulations by opting out rather than vetoing the process. Once the relevant legal prerequisites were laid down, development of an effective policy framework was made priority during the special meeting of the European Council in Tampere in 1999. Acknowledging that “justice and home affairs has become one of the most important EU policies” (Directorate General Justice and Home Affairs, 2002, p. 1), the leaders came up with over sixty points for action to be put in practice and underlined that creation of common European asylum, visa and immigration programs was “one of the milestones” (p. 2) of the summit.

² Readmission agreements enable countries to return illegal migrants residing in their territory to the country of the migrants' origin or to third country from which the migrants entered their territory. More information about readmission agreements is provided in the next chapter.

The *Treaty of Amsterdam* also authorized the European Commission to conduct negotiations on readmission agreements with third countries, provided that relevant mandate was given by Council of the EU. Readmission agreements are reciprocal instruments of immigration policy that enable countries to return unauthorized migrants (nationals of the contracting parties, third party nationals or stateless persons) residing in their territory to the country of origin or country from which the immigrants entered their territory. Even though negotiated by the European Commission, the agreements are “subsequently implemented at a bilateral level between each member state and the third country concerned” (Cassarino, 2010, p. 8). The readmission agreements conveyed by the EU are not standardized and are drafted specifically for the country in question.

Up to date, European Commission has been given mandate to negotiate readmission agreements with over twenty countries. Even though the agreements are reciprocal in theory, they usually introduce more duties for the third country than for the EU.

They “take precedence over the provisions of any bilateral agreement or arrangement on the readmission of persons” (European Union, 2011) concluded between member states and the third country. Up to date, European Commission has been given mandate to negotiate readmission agreements with over twenty countries. Even though the agreements are reciprocal in theory, they usually introduce more duties for the third country than for the EU.

In the early years of its readmission policy, European Commission prepared a *Green Paper on a Community Return Policy on Illegal Residents* assessing various issues of the immigration agenda and admitted the limits of readmission negotiations by concluding the following: “Readmission agreements are solely in the interest of

the Community, their successful conclusion depends very much of the ‘leverage’ at the Commission’s disposal. In that context it is important to note that, in the field of JHA [Justice and Home Affairs], there is little that can be offered in return. In particular visa facilitation or the lifting of visa requirement can be a realistic option in exceptional cases only; e.g. Hong Kong, Macao; in most cases it is not” (European Commission, 2002). The definition provided by the Council of the EU (2005) implies that “Visa facilitation is simplification of visa issuing procedures for nationals of third countries who are under visa obligation” (p. 2). The opportunity to ease administrative processes related to visa can thus be considered a strong motivation factor for states to conduct talks on readmission agreements in good faith. However, the definition further stresses that, “Visa facilitation is a distinct

and separate issue from that of visa liberalization, which would entail the introduction of a visa free regime” (Council of the European Union, 2005, p. 2). Three years after the green paper was published, the European Council proposed a more liberal stance on EU’s visa facilitation policy. In the *Hague Program*, i.e. the five year plan on freedom, justice and security, it called on the Commission to take action and “[. . .] examine, with a view to developing a common approach, whether in the context of the EC readmission policy it would be opportune to facilitate, on a case by case basis, the issuance of short-stay visas to third-country nationals, where possible and on a basis of reciprocity, as part of a real partnership in external relations, including

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migration-related issues" (European Council, 2005, p. 7).

According to Trauner and Kruse (2008), one of the reasons, which caused this shift in position, was the intention to "mitigate the side effect of the Eastern enlargement" (p. 2). In 2001, EU adopted regulation no. 539/2001, which unified visa policies of EU member states by introducing a list of countries (the so-called negative list), whose citizens were required to have visa when entering EU in general and the Schengen area³ in particular. It was mandatory for the new member states of the fifth enlargement wave to introduce visa regime towards all states on the negative list, thus also affecting the bilateral economic and political relations with their neighbors. The accession of countries of the Central and Eastern Europe was often likened to "their way back to Europe" and the EU itself followed the same reasoning by claiming that the year of 2004 was a year of "reunification of a Europe that had been divided for half a century by the Iron Curtain and the Cold War" (European Union, 2007). However, Grabbe (2001) believes that the "visa wall" which was indirectly built by the negative list being implemented by the new member states had actually moved "the former Iron Curtain further east" (p. 50).

The situation got resolved once the ad-hoc approach proposed by European Council was slowly getting replaced with what could be called a common practice of

linking the negotiations on readmission agreements with visa facilitation. This liberal method was particularly visible in the case of Western Balkan countries. Upon the completion of the procedure, Ahmet Davutoğlu stated, "It's unacceptable that certain Balkan countries that are in the initial stages of the membership process and have not begun negotiations have been given the Schengen privilege, while Turkey, considering the level that Turkish-EU relations have reached, has not" (Reuters with Today's Zaman, 2009). As Table no. 1 shows, the option to negotiate visa facilitation alongside readmission agreement has been also given to states situated outside of the Western Balkan. In fact, citizens of all candidate countries except for Turkey have been enjoying visa-free travel to the Schengen area for a couple of years already. Egemen Bağış (2012b) criticized EU for applying "discriminatory and high-cost, low-value visa regime" towards Turkey, i.e. country that has been an official candidate since 1999. Talks on EU-Turkey readmission agreement started in 2005. However, due to opposition from some member states, EU was unable to link the process to visa liberalization until mid-2012.

EU-Turkey readmission agreement

The first health check of the Schengen system carried out by the European Commission between November 2011 and April 2012 revealed the need for a more intensive control on EU's external borders. The Greek-Turkish border was identified as the primary security threat and weakness of the Schengen zone. The report concluded the following: "The pressure at the Schengen external borders is focused on a limited number of hot spots, in particular the Eastern Mediterra-

³ In August 2012 the Schengen Area covered 26 countries including EU member states such as Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden; and countries which are not part of the EU such as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

Table no. 1	
Readmission agreement and visa facilitation	Albania (2006), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2008), FYROM (2008), Georgia (2011), Moldova (2008), Montenegro (2008), Russia (2007), Serbia (2008), Ukraine (2008)
Readmission agreement	Hong-Kong (2004), Macao (2004), Pakistan (2010), Sri Lanka (2005)
Mandate to conduct negotiations	Azerbaijan, Algeria, Armenia, Belarus, China, Cape Verde, Turkey, Morocco

Source: European Commission (2012b), European Union (2005).

nean route via Turkey to Greece. In the last three months of 2011, nearly 30,000 irregular border crossings were detected at the external borders and about 75 percent of these were on the Eastern Mediterranean route” (European Union, 2012). Greece has faced harsh criticism from officials of member states for its negligent approach to border security. The Austrian Minister for Home Affairs, Johanna Mikl-Leitner stated, “The [Greek-Turkish] border is as open as a barn door” (EurActiv.com, 2012a). In his response to former French President Nicolas Sarkozy’s threat to exclude Greece from Schengen zone, Greek Minister for Citizen Protection, Michalis Chrisochoidis held government in Ankara responsible by saying that the influx of illegal immigrants has occurred because “Turkey does not guard its borders” (EurActiv.com, 2012b).

According to information from the House of Lords: European Union Committee (2008) “Greece with its 3,000 islands has the longest maritime border of any member state” (p. 18). The length of the border makes it challenging for the Greek authorities to patrol it properly even with the assistance and help from Frontex (European Agency for the Management of

Operational Cooperation at the External Borders). In order to diminish the number of illegal immigrants, Greece announced this February that it would build a 12 km long fence to guard the border areas south of the river Evros and sought financial support from the European Commission to cover the cost of the 5 million euro project. In her negative response to the quest, European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Cecilia Malmström said that “it [the fence] would not effectively discourage immigrants or smugglers who would simply seek alternative routes into the European Union, either via another section of Greece’s porous border with Turkey or through the border of another EU member state” (Ekathimerini, 2011). Kadioğlu (2011) criticized the decision of the Greek government for starting a new Iron Curtain era: “The downfall of the Berlin Wall garnered hopes in many people that the twenty first century would be a century of ‘no walls.’ [. . .] Today, in 2011, a new fence, if not a wall, is in the making. This is a fence that will be built by the Greek authorities along the Greek-Turkish border” (p. 24). The fence is to be finished by autumn 2012, but its effectiveness is

doubted not only by the Commissioner, but also by some of the member states.

The governments of Germany and Austria have been putting pressure on EU by announcing that they would seek to abolish one of the fundamental Schengen rules and introduce visa control “if Athens does not act” (EurActiv.com, 2012a). The issue of insufficient security at external borders created major crisis between EU institutions in June 2012, when Justice and Home Affairs Council adopted amendments to *Schengen Borders Code* and made it possible for member states to introduce checks at internal borders of the Schengen zone in exceptional circumstances. The Danish presidency was condemned by MEPs for bypassing the European Parliament, i.e. institution that enjoys co-legislative power, when enacting the amendment. The leaders of the political groups consequently decided to “suspend its [European Parliament’s] cooperation with the Council on [. . .] five dossiers” (European Parliament, 2012) related to justice and home affairs portfolio.

Basing on these developments, it can be claimed that enforcement of the readmission agreement between EU and Turkey, which would, among other things, strengthen control on the problematic Greek-Turkish border, is of great interest to the EU. On the other hand, the document, if ratified, will increase the burden to be carried by Turkey, which “will be obliged to take back immigrants who cannot be sent to the countries of their origin because of the unstable situation there” (Bürgin, 2011, p. 1). Because of its geopolitical position, Turkey has become home to a large population of irregular

migrants. In January 2012 the total number of refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons and persons who do not fall into the earlier categories, but to whom the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) extends protection and/or assistance in Turkey, was 35,785 (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2012). The statistics of the UNHCR (2012) further reveal that, “since the beginning of 2011, an overall increase of 60 percent in new arrivals [to Turkey] was observed” mostly due to political struggle in Syria,

Given that approximately 22,500 illegal migrants crossed to the Schengen area from Turkey in just last three months of 2011, it can be assumed that the number of persons to be returned to Turkey once the readmission agreement is in force, will be significant.

which continues to this day. It has been estimated that the number of Syrian refugees, who fled to Turkey since the beginning of the civil war, has reached 70,000 (Hürriyet Daily News, 2012b). Given that approximately 22,500

illegal migrants crossed to the Schengen area from Turkey in just last three months of 2011, it can be assumed that the number of persons to be returned to Turkey once the readmission agreement is in force, will be significant.

Being aware of the consequences, the Turkish government refused to initial the readmission agreement without explicit promise from the EU to link the negotiations with visa liberalization talks. When the text of the agreement was finalized and endorsed by the Justice and Home Affairs Council in February 2011, Ahmet Davutoğlu explained Turkey’s dismissive position in the following way: “Today’s reports are talking about a visa dialogue without a clear target for visa exemption. Our stance is clear. Turkey in no way accepts a treatment different than that of any other country” (Hürriyet Daily News, 2011). Paul (2012) indicates that EU was

unable to meet Ankara's request due to disagreement among member states: "Germany, Austria, Cyprus and the Netherlands in particular have been opposed to giving Turkey a visa-free regime" (p. 29). Following consent among all countries, EU finally managed to have Turkey initial the document in June 2012. While some believe (Gültaşlı, 2012) that the visa liberalization initiative was formulated in a very vague way thus making it possible for the process to be open-ended, the Turkish diplomats are determined to achieve their goal and enable visa free travel for Turkish citizens. Unlike in the open-ended process of membership talks, where EU enjoys an incomparable leverage, the talks on visa facilitation and readmission agreement provide enough space for Turkey to maneuver in order to deliver the targeted outcome. The press release from the 26th reform monitoring group meeting of the Turkish Ministry for EU Affairs unveils the non-comprising conditional strategy to be pursued by the Turkish government: "Turkey will sign the Agreement when the detailed action plan with the ultimate aim of visa free regime is prepared and submitted. Finally, the Readmission Agreement will enter into force simultaneously when Schengen visas for Turkish citizens are lifted" (Ministry for EU Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, 2012b, p. 3). The delegation of the Republic of Cyprus has already expressed "serious misgivings regarding Turkey's intentions to implement the agreement with Cyprus" (Council of the European Union, 2011, p. 2). However because the visa-free travel will have to be approved by qualified majority vote rather than unanimous, it is possible to presume that

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a stalemate similar to the one, which occurred as a consequence of pending solution of the Cyprus problem and requirements introduced by the provisions of the Additional Protocol, will be avoided this time.

Visa policies between Turkey and EU

Following its general practice on visa facilitation/liberalization talks, European Commission prepared the first draft of Turkey's roadmap to visa-free travel in June 2012. The document entitled *Dialogue and Cooperation Framework on Justice and Home Affairs between the EU and Turkey: Action Plan Towards Visa Liberalization* is to be revised in the light of feedback given by the EU member

states as well as relevant Directorate Generals of the European Commission and is expected to be finalized by autumn 2012. According to interviews conducted by Gültaşlı (2012), Turkish officials expect that, "input by member countries could result in the text being longer and stronger in terms of its conditions."

The roadmap requires Turkey to meet all listed conditions and implement extensive reforms related to issues such as border control, passport security, migration management, organized crime, human trafficking and other. The process, to be closely monitored by the European Commission, is expected to last for a couple of years.

Turkish diplomats and statesmen believe that the talks represent an important milestone in the chronicle of EU-Turkey relations. Ahmet Davutoğlu said that the

day, when the readmission agreement was initiated in an exchange for the visa liberalization negotiations, was “a historic moment” (Hürriyet Daily News, 2012c). However, professor at Yeditepe University, Haluk Kabaalioglu believes that Turkey does not need to undergo the process, because its citizens are already legally entitled to visa-free travel. He bases his argument on the ruling of the European Court of Justice in the Soysal case⁴ in 2009, which implied that “visas were not required for the Turkish citizens [entering the territory of a member state in order to provide services], for whom such a restriction did not apply at the time of the entry into force of the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement, concluded between the EEC [European Economic Community] and Turkey on 23 November 1970” (EurActiv.com, 2009a). Kabaalioglu further claims that despite the fact that the decisions of the European Court of Justice are binding, member states have been reluctant to comply with the ruling. He identifies two grey areas in the decision of the Court, which make it possible for EU countries to argue in support of continuation of their hitherto visa practice towards Turkey: “One of them is whether ‘freedom to provide services’ covers service recipients and the other one is which EU member states are encompassed” (EurActiv.com, 2009b). In his opinion, however, reference to “service”

The total number of arriving EU citizens (excluding Republic of Cyprus and Malta) in 2011 was 16,968,791 thus constituting more than one half of the sum of all visitors to Turkey during the year. The top five EU countries having the greatest share were Germany, United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Netherlands and France.

covers also the following categories of travelers: “businessmen, lawyers, sportspeople, doctors and academics, as well as Turkish citizens who wish to travel to EU countries for touristic, study-related or medical purposes” (EurActiv.com, 2009b).

Before EU added Turkey to its negative list in 2001, individual visa policies towards Turkey differed from country to country.

In most cases, bilateral visa regimes were introduced approximately three decades ago. Aktar (2012) explains that the decision was a direct consequence of domestic developments in Turkey: “EU countries began to require visas from citizens of Turkey due to the asylum pressure

following the September 12, 1980 military coup in Turkey. Greece had started visa requirements earlier, after Turkish citizens of Greek origin were expelled from Istanbul in 1964” (p. 38). Despite the existence of the negative list, significant number of Turkish citizens has been entitled to visa-free travel thanks to the so-called green/special passports, which automatically grant their holders right to enter EU territory without obtaining visa. The Turkish Ministry of Interior issued 1,065,000 green/special passports⁵ (General Directorate of Mint and Printing Office, 2012) between 2007 and April 2012. However, given that the number of normal passports issues during the same

⁴ For more information see: European Court of Justice. (2009, February 19). Judgement of the Court (First Chamber). Mehmet Soysal and Ibrahim Savatli v Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Case C-228/06.

⁵ Special/green passports are issued to former members of the Grand National Assembly of the Republic of Turkey; former ministers; first, second and third grade public servants and other government officials; mayors; heads of metropolitan provinces as well as to their spouses and children (e-Pasaport: Bilgi ve Randevu Merkezi, 2012).

Table no. 2	
Up to 90 days without visa	Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden
Up to 30 days without visa	Latvia
3-month multiple entry visa	Austria, Belgium, Hungary, Ireland, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom
1-month multiple entry visa	Slovakia
1-month single entry visa	Republic of Cyprus

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey (2012b).

period has been seven times larger, most Turkish citizens are still required to undergo a rather lengthy application process in order to travel to EU. According to the results presented in the study of the European Stability Initiative (2012), “In 2011, Schengen states issued 591,950 short-term visas to Turkish citizens. In total, they issued 12.64 million short-stay visas to applicants from across the world, which means that the Turkish share was 4.7 percent” (p. 3). The application for Schengen visa, which cost 60 euro, must not be submitted sooner than three months before the starting date of the journey and must include the following documents: filled in application form, colorful photograph, valid travel document, documents testifying purpose of the visit, return ticket, proof of accommodation, proof of sufficient funds/financial means, and international travel medical insurance. If necessary, the issuing institution can request additional documents. The period of the administrative processing of the visa application can last from 15 up to 60 days (Migration Information Center, 2012).

In its *Turkey 2011 Progress Report*, European Commission (2011b) criticized Turkey for not applying “a uniform policy towards all EU citizens as regards the visa obligation” (p. 92). However, compared to the application process to obtain Schengen visa, Turkey’s visa policy, even though not unified (see Table no. 2), is rather liberal. Citizens of those EU countries, who are required to have visa, can easily obtain them upon their arrival at the Turkish border. No additional documentation except for a valid return ticket is required. The visa fee is 15 euro⁶ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, 2012a). The approach applied by Turkey is motivated by cost-effective factors. According to a report assessing the role of tourism industry, “Turkish tourism sector has been one of the most important drivers behind Turkey’s economic development over recent decades. In 2009, combined with the travel sector, the

⁶ The only exception is Malta. Citizens of Malta entitled to 3-month multiple entry visa are free from the visa fee (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, 2012a).

industry generated 95.3 TL [Turkish lira] billion of economic activity – approximately 10.2 percent of Turkey's GDP [gross domestic product]" (Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry, 2010, p. 3). Data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (2012) show that the total number of arriving EU citizens (excluding Republic of Cyprus and Malta) in 2011 was 16,968,791 thus constituting more than one half of the sum of all visitors to Turkey during the year. The top five EU countries having the greatest share were Germany, United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Netherlands and France. Basing on the large number of tourists, it can be argued that EU citizens do not face any significant technical obstacles when traveling to Turkey. Reciprocally, Turkish citizens, as citizens of one of the candidate countries, should be entitled to a simplified visa application process with prospects for gradual abolition of EU's visa regime. In this respect, EU's decision to start visa liberalization talks with Turkey, even though delayed, has been a critical development.

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