

Will the EU quit its expansion Cold Turkey?

By Jens F. Laurson & George A. Pieler

Nikolas Sarkozy's impressive victory was driven by domestic concerns of French voters. But France is one of the most important voices within the EU and the resident in the *Palais de l'Élysée* has influence in European politics only equalled by the occupants of 10 Downing Street and the *Kanzleramt* in Berlin.

France's vote against the European Constitution sent that treaty into a several-years-long coma. If revived, that Constitution will change shape significantly, and France will give the signal- at the latest when the EU Presidency rotates from Bratislava to Paris in July of 2008.

Of most immediate importance for the EU is the Turkish Question. Ideals tempered by *Realpolitik* have driven the idea that Turkey ought to be a member of the EU. French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouché, in Ankara to smooth relations, seems to have won Sarkozy's no-veto pledge regarding Turkey's possible EU accession. In turn, Kouché backs Sarkozy's push for a more limited EU-Turkey relationship.

Idealism - married to pragmatism - has long dominated EU politics. A foreign policy elite largely isolated from the 'common people' offered them a weak parliament and asked them to be so good as to approve policies the professional politicians deemed to be for their benefit.

This philosophy of governance policy may not be particularly democratic, but it must be said it has largely worked for Europe, from Jean Monnet on. The real "Old Europe", war-loving, brutal, and violence-torn, has transformed into the "Venus" of international relations as the result of an unprecedented 60+ years of peace. We may think of this as a given - but this peace, more than economic integration and open borders, is the principle achievement of Europe's somewhat mandarin-like politics.

But past success have little predictive value. Europe's people no longer blindly follow their leaders on European matters. Idealism, essential for political motivation, is useless when people feel prodded along, rather than inspired.

Turkey's membership may, after the draft Constitution, be the second notable victim of this paradigm-shift in EU politics. The membership-application process will, for the first time, *not* lead quickly to a new EU member. Turkey will remain 'outside the gate' a while- because most Europeans do not feel ready to accept Turkey as the EU's largest member. Any politician reluctant to accept Turkey but unwilling to say so, need only ask for a referendum on the issue. An assured poison pill for Turkey's accession.

That 'don't ask, don't tell' posture was Jacques Chirac's approach. It is refreshing to hear Sarkozy speak about the topic with greater honesty. Perhaps he is sympathetic to Turkish membership, which would be a fine symbol of Europe's openness, a signal to our Anatolian

friends and to Muslims and Islamic states everywhere: Europe is no exclusive club of Christians (and secular decadence).

But Sarkozy understands that such a policy, against the fears and wishes of the majority of French or EU citizens, would be folly for Europe, as idea and as political reality. Xenophobic and anti-Brussels parties would be emboldened. Popular concerns are not based on ignorance--there are good reasons not to extend the internally-open EU's borders to Iran, Iraq and Syria.

Adding 85-90m people of a fundamentally different culture would not be a smooth and harmonious process, either. Current protests, military interference and political upheaval in Istanbul remind us Turkey is much more than its "white" Istanbul elite. The tensions that would arise from such a non-European perception of nationhood and *Weltanschauung* are foreseeable. Even if within the EU, Turkey would be treated differently: no free movement of labor, no inclusion in the Schengen-treaty of open borders among member countries.

The growth of non-theocratic government in the Islamic world is important to the West, and Turkey is the model that matters most. But Turkey's EU membership is not necessarily the (only) way to achieve the strongest possible alliance between NATO-member Turkey and the West.

The hypocrisy of second class EU membership could be much worse than an honest "privileged partnership". Economic opening, cooperation in security and intelligence services, and harmonization of laws and perceptions of justice can be addressed without official membership-status. The policy-pivot should be a stronger, sustainable working relation for Turkey and the EU, membership or no.

Nikolas Sarkozy dared say as much, though his language may yet become more [Angela] Merkel-like -- more diplomatic -- given his foreign policy ambitions. But the EU should start readying Turkey for the 'slow go', all the same.

No one need lose if Turkey's membership is postponed to a distant point in the future. Not opening the door now need not mean closing it. Instead, privileged partnership could ready both parties and their people for possible later accession.

In the long run, some offense to Turkey now is better than alienating Europe's citizens on the Turkish question. With Germany and France led by voter-responsive politicians inclined toward a privileged partnership for Turkey, further EU expansion is nowhere on the horizon.

Diplomacy and honesty will be essential in communicating this new reality to all those involved. Sarkozy's presidency of France and, in 2008, the EU offers the logical starting point for such a nuanced policy.

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