The sixth meeting of the Reform Action Group (RAG) was held under the chairmanship of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on 9 May Europe Day in Ankara. Minister of Justice Abdulhamit Gül, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chief Negotiator Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Treasury and Finance Dr. İletib Albayrak and Minister of Interior Süleyman Soylu were among the participants of the sixth RAG meeting which was coordinated by the Directorate for EU Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There was also high-level participation from relevant Grand National Assembly Committees as well as public institutions such as the Human Rights and Equality Institution, Personal Data Protection Authority.

RAG meetings have been monitoring the implementation of reforms on the way to EU accession on the basis of the political criteria and key chapters on judiciary, civil liberties, freedoms and security. To date, many vital steps regarding Turkey's EU accession process, such as reforming the judicial system, preparing proposals for political reforms were initiated just after the RAG meetings. The sixth RAG meeting was marked as the first of its kind that was chaired by President Erdoğan.

According to the Directorate for EU Affairs, main issues discussed were the remaining six benchmarks in the Visa Liberalisation Roadmap, recent developments and the reforms to be realised concerning Chapters 23 and 24 in Turkey's EU accession negotiations.

What is High on the Agenda?
The press statement, which was released just after the sixth RAG meeting, features the key attributes on how the Turkish government would be tackling critical issues related to justice, home affairs, rights and freedoms in the coming days. In this regard, according to the press statement, the RAG once again emphasised that Turkey remains committed to its objective of EU membership and continues its efforts in this respect. Yet, Turkish officials made the following criticism towards their interlocutors in the EU: "Our expectation from the EU is to treat Turkey on equal footing with other candidate countries and to remove political barriers on the way of negotiations which is supposed to be a technical process."

In regard to the reform steps to be taken, the RAG clearly pointed out that the finalisation of the Visa Liberalisation Dialogue was the top priority. To that end, the press statement reminded the ongoing negotiations for conclusion of the Agreement between the EU and Turkey on the Exchange of Personal Data between EUropol and the Turkish Competent Authorities for Fighting Serious Crime and Terrorism. Regarding fundamental rights and freedoms, the government would announce the Action Plan on Human Rights, which is being prepared in an inclusive manner, as the statement underlines.

Another significant issue has been the reform of the Turkish judicial system. The RAG ensured that the Judicial Reform Strategy would be announced in short notice. As the press statement indicates, the Reform Strategy will be in line with decisions taken during fourth and fifth RAG meetings and recommendations from stakeholders including the Council of Europe and the European Commission will be taken into consideration. The RAG also declared that on 14 March 2019 another one of the GRECO Recommendations was realised with the announcement of the Code of Judicial Ethics for Judges and Prosecutors. Moreover, the functioning of the Ombudsman Institution as well as steps to be taken with regard to action and cooperation plans concerning border management and organised crime were other significant issues that were elaborated.

20th Anniversary of Turkey's Candidacy
Speaking at the RAG meeting, President Erdoğan reminded that it has been 20 years since Turkey was officially declared as an EU candidate state in Helsinki. President Erdoğan explicitly emphasised the necessity of reviving the "Helsinki spirit." The same emphasis was made in the press statement with these words: "We anticipate support from the EU to revitalise the spirit of Helsinki." Then the statement outlined the Turkish side's expectations from the EU namely; the revitalisation of the accession negotiations, modernisation of the Customs Union, common fight against terrorist organisations, and maintaining Turkey-EU High Level Dialogues/Summits.
IKV CHAIRMAN ZEYTİNOĞLU: “TURKEY SHOULD TAKE ITS PLACE IN THE EU”

In his address at the 75th TOBB General Assembly, President Erdoğan highlighted the importance they attribute to the business world consultations in all subjects related to the future of the country, especially the economy. President Erdoğan stated that, by taking part in general assemblies, economy summits and award ceremonies of the private sector in Ankara and all cities, Turkey’s leading role in political reforms should continue in 2019. ToBB President M. Rifat Hisarcıklıoğlu has also underlined that the EU accessions would also support the economy. TOBB President Hisarcıklıoğlu underscored that the EU should lift the visa requirement for Turkish citizens and should start negotiations for the modernisation of the Customs Union without further delay. In regard to Turkey’s relationship with the EU, TOBB President said that revitalising the EU accession process would also support the economy. TOBB President Hisarcıklıoğlu stated that the RAG’s leading role in political reforms should be formed in order to provide and maintain peace and security in Europe. The master mind behind this proposal was Jean Monnet and when the French Minister of Foreign Affairs Robert Schuman made this proposal, he aimed for a Europe where peoples were connected to one another and where it was impossible to have another war by starting an economic integration. Today, we see that Europe, as a peace and cooperation project, has achieved most of its goals. However, the EU is still facing major issues and threats such as the rise of populism and far-right politics, erosion of liberal values, xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-migration feelings, waning of multilateralism in the global order, weakening of international organisations. These phenomena shake the very foundations of the EU. The EU will either submit to these challenges, or it will take action in order to preserve its values and reform its internal structure.

In a period when the EU should re-define itself, Turkey’s EU membership perspective holds great significance. The EU with Turkey as a member will undoubtedly be much more meaningful and powerful. There are valuable contributions that Turkey can offer the EU in terms of increasing its influence in the Middle East and Eurasia, and maintaining its role as a major player in the global system. The EU should take steps encouraging Turkey’s EU perspective instead of turning inwards and giving credit to biased and discriminatory discourses. For instance, it can take a truly visionary step by opening the currently blocked Chapter 23 on Judiciary and Fundamental Rights and Chapter 24 on Justice, Freedom and Security.

As Turkey, our share is to take the necessary steps to make our EU membership goal. Let us re-initiate reforms to meet the EU criteria, just like the period before 2004 leading to the decision on launching the EU accession negotiations. Let us do our homework and speed up the process of alignment with the EU. As we have done before, we can still revitalise the EU process today. Let us not please the anti-Turkey circles in Europe. Let us revive the EU agenda.”
IKV ORGANISED A PANEL ON THE FUTURE OF EU AND TURKEY

On the occasion of 9 May Europe Day, IKV and Turkey-EU European Union Association (TURABDER) hosted a panel entitled “Future of Europe and Turkey in a Turbulent World”. The opening speeches of the panel, in which various topics including the upcoming EP elections, rise of populism, future of Europe, EU-Turkey relations, refugee crisis, and economic relations were discussed, were delivered by IKV Chairman Ayhan Zeytinoglu and TURABDER President Prof. Güler Güner Turan. In her speech, TURABDER President Prof. Güler Güner Turan emphasized the importance of the upcoming EP elections set for 23-26 May and Istanbul municipal elections on 23 June in these critical times when universal values are challenged both in Europe and in Turkey.

In his opening speech, IKV Chairman Ayhan Zeytinoglu stated that in a world, in which trade wars are escalating and there is an arms race, norms of global order are weakening. Concerning Turkey-EU relations, IKV Chairman Zeytinoglu indicated that the process is in a deadlock because of political obstacles which have rendered the negotiation process di lethal dysfunctional. IKV Chairman went on to say that Turkey should keep making reforms in line with the acquis, and that the EU for its part should treat Turkey in an equitable manner regarding, for example, the Cyprus issue.

Following the opening speeches, the panel session moderated by TURABDER Vice President Assoc. Prof. Zeynep Almender from Döküman University began. Panellists included IKV Secretary General Assoc. Prof. Çiğdem Nas, Prof. Sanem Baykal from Ankara University, Assoc. Prof. Deniz Şenel Sert from the Özyeğin University, and Journalist Sezin Öney. In her intervention, Prof. Sanem Baykal stated that the European integration process, whose foundations were laid with the Schuman Declaration after World War II, has proved itself to be a successful peace and prosperity experiment. She expressed her belief that despite the universal values, norms and institutions, which constitute the basis of European integration, were being deeply challenged in Europe, the EU would come out of the current process stronger.

Starting her remarks by quoting Charles Dickens’ “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times”, IKV Secretary General Assoc. Prof. Çiğdem Nas stated that this sentence captured the essence of today’s world with many positive developments in technology and in the health sector and many challenges such as terrorism and war going on at the same time. Pointing out that change has been happening too fast for human beings to be able to grasp, IKV Secretary General Nas indicated that social inequalities and economic problems were among the most serious challenges faced by Europe. IKV Secretary General maintained that Turkey could not move away from democracy or the EU and there was no realistic alternative for Turkey other than EU membership.

For her part, Assoc. Prof. Deniz Şenel Sert referred to five challenges concerning the EU-Turkey border; geographical location, discrepancies in information sharing between states and migrants, the thin line between being a regular or an irregular migrant, problems in asylum procedures of countries, and problems in the Readmission Agreement. As the last speaker of the panel, journalist Sezin Öney talked about the upcoming EP elections, what populism is or can be, and what we can expect from the upcoming elections. At the end of the panel, the speakers were able to interact with the audience during the Q&A session, which received many questions as well as comments from the audience.
IKV CHAIRMAN ZEYTİNOĞLU ASSESSED THE DRILLING ACTIVITIES IN THE EAST MED

IKV Chairman Ayhan Zeytinoğlu commented on the recent statements made by the US Department of State and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, Federica Mogherini concerning Turkey’s offshore drilling activities. IKV Chairman Zeytinoğlu indicated that it was only natural for Turkey to conduct oil and gas exploration activities in the areas licensed by the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and stated that the calls made by the US and the EU for termination of those activities were baseless, unfair, far from being constructive.

IKV Chairman made the following remarks: “It is only natural for Turkey to conduct hydrocarbon exploration activities in close cooperation and coordination with the TRNC. The Greek Cypriot Administration has been unilaterally concluding Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) delimitation agreements with regional states with no intention to include the TRNC in this process. Therefore, neither the delimitation agreements nor the EEZ is valid for Turkey. Such statements backing the Greek Cypriot Administration, which follows a policy based on rejecting the presence of the TRNC and isolating the Turkish Cypriots, apart from being far from reality portray an unfair approach. This approach based on isolating the Turkish Cypriot community, who have given strong support to a solution by saying “Yes” to the Annan Plan, and excluding them from the EEZ delimitation process, makes a solution more difficult. Such approaches that favour the Greek Cypriot Administration, which despite its rejection of the Annan Plan has been admitted to the EU in detriment to EU principles representing the whole island, and disregard the TRNC represent an extremely unfair perspective based on double-standards. I urge global actors such as the US and the EU which Turkey is aspiring to join, to see the issue with both its dimensions and portray a constructive approach.”

IKV CHAIRMAN ZEYTİNOĞLU ASSESSED THE DRILLING ACTIVITIES IN THE EAST MED

IKV SECRETARY GENERAL SPOKE AT BİLGİ UNIVERSITY’S EUROPE WEEK PANEL

On 8 May 2019, IKV Secretary General Assoc. Prof. Çiğdem Nas participated in the Europe Week Panel organised by Istanbul Bilgi University International Relations Club. Other panellists of the event entitled “Background of Europeanisation and Its Future” were Istanbul Bilgi University European Institute Director Professor Ayhan Kaya and Faculty Member Emre Gönen. During her speech, Assoc. Prof. Nas reflected on Turkey’s EU accession process and stated that despite all the challenges and crises in bilateral relations, starting with the realisation of the Customs Union in 1996, declaration of Turkey’s candidacy and the launch of the EU accession process, Turkey’s alignment with EU norms and standards has had significant influence on people’s daily lives.

IKV SECRETARY GENERAL ADDRESSED THE 13TH BOĞAZICI MEETING

IKV Secretary-General Assoc. Prof. Çiğdem Nas participated in the 13th Boğaziçi Meeting organised by Boğaziçi University European Studies Center Student Forum on 5 May 2019. The event was held under the theme “Reviewing Turkey-EU Relations: Missed Opportunities and Recommendations for the Future.” The opening speeches were delivered by the Director of the European Studies Center at Boğaziçi University, Prof. Hakan Yılmaz and Director of the TEPAV EU Institute, Nilgün Arısan Eralp. IKV Secretary General Assoc. Prof. Nas spoke at the panel session on political integration in EU-Turkey relations. In her speech, Assoc. Prof. Nas mentioned the common values which lie at the core of the European integration project and the importance of Turkey’s adoption of these values. She also indicated that it has become increasingly important to protect values such as democracy, human rights, freedom and the rule of law as these values have come under attack in today’s world.
KEY TURKISH OFFICIALS ISSUED STATEMENTS ON THE OCCASION OF EUROPE DAY

In their messages on the occasion of 9 May Europe Day, key Turkish officials highlighted the significance of EU integration and the future of Turkey’s place within the EU.

As a candidate country, celebrating 9 May Europe Day since 1999, key Turkish officials issued celebratory messages highlighting the significance of EU integration and shared their views on the future of Turkey’s place within the EU.

In his message on the occasion of Europe Day, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan highlighted Turkey’s determination to become a Member State as a strategic goal despite all double standards. Turkey has been facing in its EU accession negotiations. President Erdoğan also underlined the importance of Turkey’s integration with the EU by saying that besides its economic, political and social benefits, Turkey’s full membership will provide the Union the greatest opportunity for addressing threats to its core values such as cultural racism, discrimination and anti-immigration tendencies, in particular Islamophobia.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, started his message by stating that Turkey has contributed to Europe’s security, stability and prosperity and continues to make the necessary efforts towards EU membership. “However, Turkey’s genuine contribution to Europe will be possible through its full membership to the EU. The EU needs to look at Turkey and the values that it will contribute to the EU from a wider perspective and respond appropriately,” Çavuşoğlu added.

DECISION TO RE-RUN THE ISTANBUL ELECTIONS AND REFLECTIONS

The Turkish Supreme Election Council accepted the extraordinary appeal for the repeat of the elections and ordered the annulment and re-run of the mayoral election in Istanbul.

Following the local elections held on 31 March 2019, a decision on the objection process regarding the election results of some districts in Istanbul and that of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality has been made on 6 May 2019. 37 days after the elections, the Turkish Supreme Election Council (YSK) decided to cancel and re-run elections in Istanbul following Justice and Development Party’s extraordinary appeal. YSK justifies its decision stating that “there were around 225 illicit heads of balloting committee and 5,500 balloting committee members that were not civil servants”.

“Since some balloting committees were constituted by district election boards contrary to the law, having affected the election results, it is decided by the majority of votes that the 31 March 2019 Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality election is to be cancelled and re-run, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Certificate of Election is to be revoked, the new Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality election is to be held on 23 June 2019, and allegations are to be made against those who carried out appointments of balloting committee members unlawfully.”

In line with this decision, Republican Peoples Party and Good Party’s candidate Ekrem Imamoglu’s certificate of election is now invalid and the elections will be held again on 23 June 2019. Until this date, the Governor of Istanbul Ali Yerlikaya will be acting as the Mayor of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality.

International Response

YSK’s decision also echoed in the international arena. Both the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini and the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn stated that YSK’s decision should be open to public oversight and that ensuring a free, fair and transparent election process is crucial not only for Turkey-EU relations, but also for all democracies. YSK’s decision is a victory for Turkish democracy, and called for the necessary measures to be taken to prevent any problems in the election to be held on 23 June.

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It was also noted that YSK’s actions invalidating some mayoralities and municipality council members and giving certificates of election to candidates, who came in second place, were contradictory to the primary goal of democratic election process. Secretary General of the Council of Europe, of which Turkey is a member, Thordur Jörgen’s spokesman also released a brief statement via Twitter and stated: “The necessary conditions for free and fair elections must be verified prior to the Election Day – and not afterwards. The decision of the Supreme Election Council has the potential to severely damage the trust of the Turkish voters in the electoral authorities.”

Statements regarding Reactions from Europe

Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement in response to the international reactions. The statement called for respect for the decision of YSK and stated the following: “The 31 March local elections were observed by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the delegation expressed that they were impressed by the competence of the Supreme Election Council. The same Supreme Election Council assessed and resolved the objections, which were raised by means of legal rights, related to various provinces and districts. While the Supreme Election Council rejected some of these objections, decided to re-run elections in Istanbul. Everyone should respect this decision taken in accordance with the law. We do not accept political criticisms made by some foreign interlocutors regarding the decision and the Supreme Election Council.”

Turkey is a country that has proved its democratic maturity, the decision of the independent Supreme Election Council is intended to ensure the unravelling manifestation of the will of voters.”

Presidential Communication Director Fahrettin Altun also made a statement on the subject. In his statement, Altun indicated that YSK’s decision was a victory for Turkish democracy, and called for the necessary measures to be taken to prevent any problems in the election to be held on 23 June.

“The decision of the Board on the re-run of the Istanbul elections should be seen as an effort to make the election results reflect the national will accurately. The decision given in this framework is a victory for our democracy. In addition, we are also confident that our justice system will hold accountable all individuals and organisations that violated electoral laws during this process. All parties should take the necessary measures to ensure that similar problems do not occur in the 23 June elections. Regardless of the result, elections must be conducted in line with our laws and procedure. In case of a departure from the rules, there will be question marks about the legitimacy of the elected people and the foundations of our democracy will be weakened. The Republic of Turkey, which has held fair and free elections for seventy years, will continue to complete the process in a transparent and proper way.”
THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION PUBLISHED THE SPRING EUROPEAN ECONOMIC FORECAST REPORT

The European Commission published its "Spring 2019 European Economic Forecast Report" on 7 May 2019. The report evaluates the economies of member and candidate states and presents projections on the main indicators of the countries. According to the report, the EU economy continues to expand but with less speed in 2019 due to the recent slowdown in global economic growth and international trade. Growth is expected to continue in all EU Member States and gather pace again in 2020, supported by robust domestic demand, steady employment gains and low financing costs. Global uncertainties and slowdown in global growth and international trade lead the growth in the EU to be driven mainly by domestic demand. On the external side, tensions and uncertainties caused by trade conflicts in the world, particularly between the US and China along with the main trading countries have negative impact on EU’s growth in 2019 and 2020. On the internal side, the continued weakness of the manufacturing sector also plays a role in growth, especially in those countries with specific problems in the automotive industry.

In line with the European Commission’s projections, the GDP growth rate in 2019 is expected to be 1.4 percent in the EU and 1.2 percent in the Euro Area. In 2020, as the adverse domestic factors are expected to fade, economic activity outside the EU is expected to gain strength supported by easing global financial conditions and policy stimulus in some emerging economies. The GDP growth is expected to increase slightly to 1.6 percent in the EU and 1.5 percent in the Euro Area.

Risks to the economic outlook for the EU are cited as the protectionist measures worldwide and the current slowdown in global GDP growth and trade in Europe, "a 'no-deal' Brexit and more enduring disruptions on the manufacturing sector in EU. Besides, it is stated that rise in political uncertainty and less growth-friendly policies could result in a pull-back in private investment.

Assessment on Turkey’s Economy:
Rebalancing in Progress

The section about the assessment on Turkey’s economy notes that the economy is in the rebalancing process following last year’s rapid depreciation of the Lira. As the correction of external imbalances and of the high credit growth leads to a contraction of domestic demand, the return to growth is expected for the second half of 2019. It is pointed out that Turkey would be the country showing the lowest growth among the emerging economies in 2019 due to the large negative carry-over effect from 2018 and the fact that the recovery would only pace in the second half of 2019. The GDP growth for Turkey is forecast to be -2.3 percent in 2019 and 3.9 percent in 2020.

FOUR-PARTY COALITION GOVERNMENT COLLAPSED IN THE TRNC

The four-party coalition government in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), which has been in power for 15 months, resigned on 9 May 2019. The four-party coalition consisting of the Republican Turkish Party (CTP), People’s Party (HP), Democratic Party (DP) and the Communal Democracy Party (TDP) had come to power on 16 February 2018 following the snap election on 7 January 2018.

Prime Minister and CTP leader Tufan Erhürman submitted the government’s resignation to TRNC President Mustafa Akıncı after the Minister of Finance and the DP leader Serdar Denktaş resigned and the HP decided to withdraw from government.

On 14 May 2019, TRNC President Akıncı assigned the mandate of forming a new government to the leader of the National Unity Party (UBP) Ersin Tatar. With 21 seats, UBP has the largest number of seats in the 50-seat TRNC parliament. UBP has started coalition talks with other political parties.
FOREIGN MINISTER ÇAVUŞOĞLU VISITED FINLAND FOR THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE MINISTERIAL MEETING

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu visited Finland on 16-17 May 2019 to participate in the 129th Session of the Committee of Ministers of Council of Europe. On the first day of his visit, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu stated that the Council of Europe takes its strength from its ability to unite Europe around shared values and underscored that the world needs a Europe without double standards. On the same day, Minister Çavuşoğlu came together with OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger and voiced the need for the OSCE to tackle diverse challenges.

Minister Çavuşoğlu also came together with Foreign Minister Timo Soini of Finland. Referring to the important role played by Finland regarding Turkey’s EU bid in 1999, Minister Çavuşoğlu expressed his belief that Finland’s support would continue during its upcoming EU Council Presidency.

On the second day of his visit, Minister Çavuşoğlu participated in the 129th Session of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. In his address to the Committee of Ministers, Minister Çavuşoğlu stated that the Council of Europe needed to avoid new dividing lines in Europe and should prevent politicisation of expert mechanisms that only undermine their credibility. Çavuşoğlu also underscored that the member states of the Council of Europe should fight against rising xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, hate speech and populism together.

Lastly, Minister Çavuşoğlu met with German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and announced that the Strategic Dialogue Mechanism meeting between the Ministers and the Intergovernmental Consultations with Germany would be held soon.

FOREIGN MINISTER ÇAVUŞOĞLU VISITED HUNGARY AND LATVIA

On 3 May 2019, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu paid an official visit to Hungary. Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu firstly met with Deputy Speaker of Hungary’s National Assembly István Jakab and expressed the need for further strengthening the ties between Turkey and Hungary by developing inter-parliamentary relations. Later, Minister Çavuşoğlu came together with his Hungarian counterpart Péter Szijjártó.

During the meeting, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu pointed out the potential to increase the bilateral trade volume with Hungary to 6 billion dollars and the room for developing the cooperation between the two countries in many areas from energy to defence industry. After the meeting, the Memorandum of Understanding for Cooperation between the Centre for Strategic Research of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey and the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary was signed. On the same day, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu was received by Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán.

On 16 May, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu paid an official visit to Latvia. In the context of his visit, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu was received by President Raimonds Vējonis. During the meeting, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu highlighted that Latvia acknowledged the importance of Turkey’s EU membership process. Later, Çavuşoğlu came together with his Latvian counterpart Edgars Rinkūšs and emphasised that the trade relations between the two countries doubled in the last decade and that the first Joint Economic and Trade Commission meeting to be held in autumn this year would further develop bilateral economic relations. After the meeting, Minister Çavuşoğlu met with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence Artis Pabriks and he underscored the importance of bilateral strategic cooperation in defence industry as NATO allies. Çavuşoğlu lastly met with Latvian Parliament Speaker Ilāra Mūrmiece, and expressed their determination to further develop relations between Turkish and Latvian parliaments in a spirit of solidarity and friendship.

NATO SECRETARY GENERAL STOLTENBERG VISITED TURKEY

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg paid an official visit to Turkey on 6-7 May 2019 in order to chair the North Atlantic Council on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Mediterranean Dialogue. In the context of the visit, NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg had separate meetings with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu.

Security issues in the region, NATO-EU relations and Turkey’s S-400 purchase were the main issues discussed during the meetings.

Following the North Atlantic Council-Mediterranean Dialogue Meeting, NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg and Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu held a joint press conference. Having underlined Turkey’s significance for NATO, Stoltenberg drew attention to Turkey’s role in NATO’s missions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo.

Acknowledging that Turkey is the NATO ally with the most exposure to violence and turmoil from the Middle East, NATO Secretary General reiterated NATO allies’ solidarity with Turkey. Stoltenberg highlighted NATO’s investments worth more than 5 billion dollars in military facilities including airfields and naval bases in Turkey to eliminate security risks Turkey may encounter.

At the joint press conference, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu highlighted the importance of the Mediterranean Dialogue which brings together 25 NATO allies with seven countries from the Mediterranean region as a solid example of Turkey’s special relationships acquired through its historical ties and geostategic location. Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu indicated that Turkey has been willing to give the countries of Mediterranean Dialogue more training and cooperation opportunities in the areas of security and defence.

TURKEY REACTED TO STATEMENTS ON EAST MED DRILLING ACTIVITIES

Turkey’s first drilling fast started drilling its second well in the Eastern Mediterranean on 3 May 2019. The drilling is set continue operations until 3 September. Some regional states as well as the EU, US and France have issued statements concerning Ankara’s move and backing the Greek Cypriot Administration’s territorial claims which regard the area as its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The statement on behalf of the EU was made by High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini. Turkey has rejected the statements as groundless saying that the drilling activities that are conducted within the boundaries of its continental shelf are in line with its legitimate rights emanating from international law.

In multiple statements issued in response to the statements made by international and regional actors, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticised the Greek Cypriot Administration for signing EL2 delimitation agreements with regional states on the grounds that they ignored the rights of the Turkish Cypriots, who are the co-owners of the natural resources on the island, and one of them overlaps with Turkey’s continental shelf.

In the statements, it was indicated that it would be a reasonable approach preventing further instability in the region that external actors acknowledged the fact that Turkey and the TRNC could no longer be excluded from the energy equation in the Eastern Mediterranean and they should stop providing unconditional support to the Greek Cypriot Administration.

It was underscored that the drilling and seismic vessels would resolutely continue their activities in Turkey’s continental shelf.

Moreover, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, expressed Turkey’s determination to protect the continental shelf rights of Turkish Cypriots, unless the Greek-Cypriot Administration included the Turkish Cypriots into the decision-making mechanisms regarding hydrocarbon resources as the equal partners of the Island or ceased their unilateral hydrocarbon activities.

Greek-Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades brought up the issue at the Informal European Council meeting held in Sibiu on 9 May 2019. Speaking at the press conference after the meeting, President of the European Council Donald Tusk stated that the EU stood united behind the Greek-Cypriot Administration.

Referring to the hydrocarbon issue during his speech atambassador at an iftar dinner, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that stability in the region was only possible if the interests of Turkey and the TRNC were protected. Indicating that Turkey would not allow a fait accompli in the region, President Erdoğan underscored that Turkey wanted to solve the issue through reciprocal talks, dialogue and cooperation.
On 9 May, leaders of EU27 gathered in Sibiu, Romania to celebrate Europe Day and to spread the message of solidarity ahead of EP elections, despite all the disagreements in place.