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Burak Ünveren

Political Scientist and Journalist

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

www.ikv.org.tr



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Since it is a long-term project, the EU needs to communicate its enlargement policy thoroughly and proactively. With regards to Türkiye, it is in the EU's interest to start seeing the glass half full instead of half empty.

The European Union (EU) is, first and foremost, an idea. An idea which will probably never be ultimately complete but will be constantly built upon, constructed, re-constructed and fought for.

In order to sustain an idea, one needs others who think alike: In order to sustain the supranational idea of Europe, for instance, one needs like-minded people not only within their existing borders, but also in their immediate proximity – at the very least.

In June, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced that Georgia, Moldova, Western Balkan countries and Ukraine all need a better perspective in terms of their prospective EU membership. “Germany is on their side,” he said. The German parliamentarians clapped in response. He also said that he would advocate for giving Ukraine an official candidate status the next day at the European Council, which he did. Not only the chancellor but also his political opponents, the Christian Democrats, who constitute the biggest opposition party in the German *Bundestag*, have submitted a motion aiming at “renewing the EU perspective for the states of the Western Balkans with a committed policy.”

“The EU must recognize the European future of its neighbourhood,” Scholz says. But aren't we forgetting another country? The recently demonstrated European solidarity with EU's neighbours has somehow left out Türkiye.

Turks, who consider themselves Europeans, feel left alone, or at least forgotten, as the EU enthusiastically opens or widens its doors to multiple countries at the same time. Countries, where a significant number of people see their future in Europe, feel themselves European, have their faces turned towards Europe. At the same time, it is evident that all these countries are fighting against corruption, or at least say they do. Countries which still have a lot to do to reach EU standards in terms of the Copenhagen criteria just as Türkiye: A country, where not all but a remarkable majority see Europe as their future.

Especially the European Commission recommending Ukraine to receive an official candidate status has caused a shattering among Turks, who have been waiting for EU membership for a long time. Enthusiasm and support given by many European politicians and citizens for Georgia, located in Caucasia to accede to the EU, has been the cherry on top.



The circumstances are obviously different. It is understandable and, in my humble opinion, very much necessary, that Brussels, Berlin, Paris and others show such solidarity with Kyiv and send out a message. The general euphoria about the future membership of as many Eastern and South-eastern European countries as possible can be explained by the West's quest for preventive measures to curb Putin's imperial ambitions. The now tangible, aggressive aspirations of the Kremlin have understandably motivated European decision-makers to move fast in order to proactively push back the Russian influence and secure the European future in its immediate neighbourhood.

Besides, Ukraine is currently at war, which has been aggressively waged against them, mainly or partially because of their pro-European sentiments, and that is why it is only fair that European capitals choose to act in solidarity. Other than that, with regard to Ukraine, we are merely talking about candidate status, which Türkiye already has. So, it does not imply that Ukraine is going to be an EU member in the near future, while Türkiye will not.

Despite all the facts, the frustration among Turks is understandable. Over the past few years, one of the ongoing discourses among Turks, who express displeasure with the EU policies towards Türkiye, has been the following argument: "We have been waiting way too long at their door. Maybe we should not anymore." The recent "quick invitation to all" except for Türkiye has only increased that sentiment.

It is evident that things have been going south -increasingly- since 2016 between Brussels and Ankara. Some European foreign ministers' statements just a few years ago were revolving around the argument that the Balkans "should not be left over to countries like Russia, China and Türkiye." It is evident that Türkiye has been pursuing an agenda to expand its sphere of influence – but not even slightly comparable to that of Russia and China in size. Still, Türkiye was put into the gang of rogue states. The fact is though: Both European and Turkish peoples are more than the current decision-makers in their capitals – and that is what is important in a long-term perspective.

At the end of the day, politics is about communication and perception. So, what matters in politics is what individuals and peoples of the world receive, understand, think and perceive about you. Even if you have the best political programme in the history of everything, you will be nothing, if you fail to successfully communicate your message. That is why the EU has to recognize Turks' frustration with regards to the "fast track" or at least "seemingly fast track" membership sprint of another country.

It is only in the EU's interest to maintain and implement a sustainable communication policy for its neighbourhood. A policy, which is built upon pre-determined, elaborate strategic goals, should be supported by professional public diplomacy efforts on a daily basis, rather than relying on solely reactive responses to everyday politics. By making sure of that, the EU can manage public opinion in accordance with its interests in its



immediate neighbourhood – regardless of whether the neighbour is a candidate, a potential candidate, a future privileged partner or just some country next door.

The EU must pay particular attention to not giving the impression that it is forgetting those who have had Europe in their hearts and identities for a long time. The citizens of an (everlasting) candidate country should not be left asking themselves the question: “What about us?” If the EU insists on its reactive trajectory-shaping policy, it might be Serbs, Georgians, Macedonians or someone else who are asking the very same question tomorrow. In the end, it would be Europe which loses.

With regards to Türkiye, the EU respectfully needs to start to see the glass half full instead of half empty – otherwise the glass might get emptier. There is still a vast number of people in Türkiye, who identify with European values. Moreover, it is not about doing Turks a favour but acting as such would also be in EU’s interest in the long-term perspective. The Christian Democrats seem to have understood this already: As Jürgen Hardt, the foreign policy speaker of the Christian Democrats, said on 1 July in reaction to the Turkish ban of the international broadcaster of Germany: “The future of Türkiye lies on the side of the West, in the rule of law, freedom, democracy and international solidarity.”

