



**NEW DIRECTIONS FOR
EUROPEAN ASSISTANCE
IN TURKEY**

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INTRODUCTION

Recent political developments in Turkey and its surrounding region pose challenges for the kind of cooperation programs that European aid donors operate inside Turkey. This report examines how European donors are reacting to the evolving political and security context in and around Turkey and provides thoughts on how they should reorientate their aid programs.

Of course, much has been written on the recent macro-level shifts in EU-Turkey relations. Many articles and reports have examined the general impact of increased regional refugee and migration flows in 2015 and 2016 on EU-Turkey relations. It is well established that since the dramatic aborted coup attempt of July 2016, EU-Turkey relations have faced additional challenges. In high-level political debates, most focus has been on the question of whether the EU is likely to slow or interrupt accession talks with Turkey. And, the general situation regarding the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), Kurdish issues, and the Syrian conflict have also been high on the diplomatic agenda and exhaustively covered in the press and think tank analysis.

This report is not about these big, overarching political strands of EU-Turkey relations, and it does not attempt a general overview of the latter. Rather, we hone in very selectively on a number of aspects of EU-Turkey relations somewhat less covered in recent work. These are aspects related to European financial assistance and initiatives in Turkey. We look at four areas of such assistance: security; institution-building; civil society support; and refugee and migration management.

Moving down from the high-level political issues currently affecting EU-Turkey relations, we examine the less commented matter of how EU assistance programs on the ground in Turkey are

adjusting to the new circumstances. And, in line with broader developments in European foreign policy dynamics, we examine not only the initiatives run by the EU as such but also by some of the main member states—as these are today lead actors in many aspects of security and foreign policy.

We expressly look behind the high-politics agenda to report on how concrete EU cooperation programs are evolving. We assess how these programs are caught up in the altered strategic relationship between Turkey and the EU—and whether the EU and member states have begun to shift their priorities on the ground within Turkey. A key concern is to assess how far such positive cooperation is able to offset some of the high-politics tensions that have appeared in EU-Turkey relations.

This issue matters because EU aid continues to run at a relatively high level and in many areas represents the most tangible leading edge of European policy. The European Commission's Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) allocates Turkey a total of 4.45 billion euros for 2014-2020, averaging around 650 million euros a year. Democracy, governance, rule of law, and fundamental rights represents the largest sector at 1.58 billion euros for the period. The rest is spread between environment and climate action (644 million), transport (442 million), competitiveness and innovation (344 million), agriculture (922 million), and education, social policies, and employment (435 million).¹ The IPA is now set for a midterm review, presenting an opportunity for fine-tuning priorities and aid delivery mechanisms. Other sources of European aid have also made additional funds available for Turkey.

¹ "Instrument for Pre-Accession Indicative Strategy Paper for Turkey (2014-2040)," European Commission, August 26, 2014, http://www.ab.gov.tr/files/isp_turkey_2014_2020.pdf.

In terms of how these high levels of aid are actually being spent, we observe the following considerations:

- a growing focus on security cooperation, but masking differences between the EU and Turkey over the best way to enhance resilience against instability and terrorism;
- a more selective and limited EU institution-building agenda in Turkey;
- the emergence of new flexible and apolitical approaches to civil society support; and
- advances in aid targeted at migration management, but with longer-term capacity-building in this area still required.

We conclude by suggesting how more effective EU aid initiatives might grow out of these incipient trends—both harnessing their potential and correcting current shortcomings. While aid cooperation cannot entirely offset high-level diplomatic challenges, the EU and Turkey need to persevere in improving the four areas of aid initiatives identified in this report and in finding a judicious mix between political and practical approaches on the ground. Diplomats and analysts have been arguing for several years now that the EU and Turkey need to develop concrete areas of cooperation that have not been framed in terms of a pre-accession relationship; this report offers ideas for how such an injunction could and should be taken forward.

SECURITY COOPERATION

It goes without saying that security is now a top priority both for Turkey and for EU member state governments. Turkey and several EU states have suffered tragic loss of life; are seeking to tighten security and counterterrorism provisions in similar ways; and will naturally look to means of enhancing security cooperation.

In addition to their respective domestic concerns, Turkey and EU member states have also shifted positions in relation to the Syrian conflict, again in some similarly pragmatic directions. This does not mean that there is an absolute uniformity of views—either between Turkey and the EU, or between different EU members themselves—but it does appear to open the possibility for deeper cooperation on regional security. A new High Level Political Dialogue now in operation is designed expressly to explore the scope of cooperation on security issues.

The Turkish government obviously wants more meaningful security support, domestically and in light of the regional situation. The EU is also now preoccupied with security challenges above all else—the EU’s Global Strategy for foreign and security policy agreed in 2016 makes a point of promising more cooperation with key “security actors” like the Turkish military and intelligence services. So, how does this changing geopolitical context translate into tangible cooperation on the ground, beyond the standard efforts at diplomatic dialogue on security issues? What are European states doing, if anything, to influence security questions through cooperation initiatives in Turkey? Can EU and Turkish aims both be met through such initiatives?

The Turkish government is pressing hard for more security assistance from European governments and EU institutions. It tends to feel that the EU still underestimates the magnitude of security

challenges that Turkey currently confronts. Since the eruption of violence after the breakdown of the Kurdish peace process and in the aftermath of the July 2016 coup attempt, Turkey argues that it is fighting a range of very different groups at the same time, including ISIS, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and Democratic Union Party (PYD), along with the Gülenist Terror Organization (FETÖ). The Turkish government insists that EU governments are insufficiently aware of what this entails and lack solidarity with Turkey. European diplomats reject this charge and fear that the Turkish government is disingenuously conflating its political struggle against the secretive Gülenists with standard counterterrorist activities.

The history of EU-Turkish differences over the PKK is a long and complex one, and beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say here that these differences continue to hamper concrete security assistance programs in the current context. The Turkish government insists that the EU and its member states do not appreciate the extraordinary conditions the country is going through in the interplay of Kurdish, Syrian, and Iraqi issues. Turkish officials feel that despite European governments’ rhetorical offers of support in security issues, tangible support on the ground is thin. As Turkey’s complaints have intensified at what it sees as European indulgence of the PKK—seen in a recent Belgian court case and PKK protests allowed in front of the parliament in Brussels—so tentative ideas for concrete security cooperation are further held back.

Having said this, EU-Turkish cooperation over counterterrorism is being upgraded, especially in the area of surveillance. Many member states are increasingly cooperating with Turkish authorities on a range of security issues. European governments are increasingly putting under surveillance

those people whose names have been received from Turkey. Judicial cooperation between the EU and Turkey is also being stepped up, ostensibly with the aim of helping Turkish authorities compile better files meeting EU counterterrorism and extradition standards. These forms of cooperation are largely off-the-radar, with limited information publicly available.

Several member states have begun to develop security cooperation at a bilateral level. UK arms sales to Turkey have increased significantly since the coup attempt.² In January 2017, Theresa May became the first Western leader to visit Ankara since the coup and signed a 100 million GBP agreement under which BAE Systems will develop a new fighter jet for Turkey. Turkey's exclusion from the European Defence Agency, due to a Cypriot veto, impedes deeper cooperation at the EU level.

While European governments claim to be alert to the security threats that Turkey faces, they are also increasingly concerned about the nature of *security governance*. After the coup, the powers of civilian institutions over the military expanded decisively (more civilian politicians now sit on the Higher Military Council), strengthening civilian oversight over the military. For a few months, there seemed to be an opportunity for a major increase in civilian control over the security sector as the army and the people dovetailed around a common defense of the republic. However, the 2016 EU Progress Report on Turkey expresses concern over the government's move to increase legal protection for armed forces personnel involved in counterterrorism duties and the increasingly weak parliamentary accountability over the military and intelligence services.³ The

broader security fear is that the purge of Gülenists is leaving a lot of disaffected people excluded from employment and ripe for radicalization.

It is striking that despite these concerns, the EU and member states have not been able—or willing—to develop the kind of security sector reform (SSR) programs they operate in dozens of partner countries around the world facing the kind of challenges that Turkey now confronts. These kinds of cooperation initiatives have not been contemplated to any significant magnitude—not least because they are seen as being anathema to the Turkish government. Positive cooperation on security capacity-building in line with European SSR standards seems even more unlikely since the coup attempt.


The EU says that it is necessary not only to return to a peace process with the Kurds but also to address the way that PKK and government security operations in the Southeast have destroyed core service provisions and infringed upon basic human rights. Government purges against Kurds were already underway before the 2016 coup attempt; the government now justifies rights restrictions as necessary to combat ISIS, the PKK, and Gülenists all at the same time.⁴ While the EU and member states talk of the need to correct such developments, few European initiatives now operate to strengthen governance capacities in Kurdish areas.

There is little evidence of EU engagement on the ground here, other than a focus on the very generic desirability of reviving the peace process. European donors are virtually unable now to run generic capacity-building initiatives in Kurdish areas as access to outside actors has become increasingly limited. This matters because Kurdish perceptions of institutional exclusion are deepening and represent a source of current political tensions. Even in rebel-held areas of Syria, EU donors have

2 Jamie Doward, "Britain 'putting arms sales to Turkey above human rights,'" *The Guardian*, January 22, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/22/uk-arms-sales-turkey-rights-abuse>.

3 "Turkey 2016 Report," European Commission, November 9, 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2016/20161109_report_turkey.pdf.

4 *Ibid.*, 28.



developed more governance-building initiatives than they have in Kurdish areas of Turkey—due to impediments raised by Turkish authorities. More generally, a deeper security partnership is difficult while some member states’ special forces are rumored to be supporting Syrian Kurdish groups that Ankara sees as enemies of the Turkish state.

Despite the new cooperation on extradition, Turkey complains that EU member states are still slow in responding to Turkey’s request for terrorist suspects to be extradited or for what it claims are terror-linked individuals, groups, and foundations within the EU to be closed. Greece’s refusal to extradite eight military personnel involved in the coup attempt has engendered particular tension. EU member states reply that the files Turkey has sent regarding suspected individuals are of poor quality and do not meet EU extradition criteria. They fear that Turkey is using detention as a preemptive measure. The most sensitive difference in this area relates to the PYD and the Gülenists, which the EU does not define as terrorist organizations, incurring considerable frustration from Turkey.

INSTITUTION-BUILDING

It is well known that for many years most EU aid has been channeled through so-called institution-building initiatives linked to preparations for meeting the accession criteria. These are designed to strengthen the capacity of Turkish institutions in particular to advance harmonization with EU laws and norms.

The attempted coup has added urgency to the institution-building agenda and also shifted its focus. The key aim of the Turkish government since summer 2016 has been to strengthen the country's core public institutions against the prospect of further challenges to state power.

Ostensibly, this resonates with the key concept of “resilience” that sits at the heart of the EU's new Global Strategy. The notion of helping other states to become more “resilient” is now set to drive the way that EU foreign policy operates. The pertinent question lies in the question of how such “resilience” is defined: do the EU and Turkey interpret this concept in similar or radically different ways in the current context?

Given the government's determination to create stronger institutions in the aftermath of the attempted coup, can European donors help in a way that meets Turkish aims? Is there enough common ground in how Turkey and the EU interpret “resilience” to spur a new phase of cooperation initiatives? How far is the EU changing the nature of its long-standing institution-building programs as a result of events on the ground in Turkey?

Although both Turkey and the EU talk of the need for state resilience, the current context is not propitious for many elements of reform-oriented institutional cooperation. Cooperation on institutional strengthening has become more imperative but also more

difficult to implement. The Turkish government's mode of pursuing state-strengthening is experienced by the EU as a creeping institutional-weakening.

The European Commission's 2016 Progress Report on Turkey expressed concerns over backsliding with regard to the independence of the judiciary; the frequent use of government decrees; more draconian political control over the civil service and the media; and new restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, and the internet. It also criticized Turkey's anti-terror law for raising “serious fundamental rights concerns.” Crucially for EU aid initiatives, all this means that even on technical alignment, progress was halting before the coup and since then has been even more limited—with backsliding in particular in crucial elements of public administrative and governance reforms.⁵

Counterbalancing these criticisms, from the European perspective the need for support in institution-building has intensified since July 2016. Immediately after July 15, some in the EU hoped that the government's extensive purges of people affiliated with the Gülenist movement might be used as a platform from which to build more merit-based and professionalized state institutions and restructure the whole state apparatus on the basis of competence and ability—indeed, people around the president talked in such terms.

However, this optimism did not last long, and the EU has found it increasingly difficult to operate its traditional types of institution-building programs effectively in Turkey. Diplomats insist that in some very technical ministries, such cooperation has continued relatively unaffected. For instance, it is hoped that a program for modernizing the Customs

⁵ Ibid.

Union, agreed in December 2016, may open the way towards additional technical, economic cooperation. However, in those ministries most affected by the government's purging of officials, the situation is more challenging—especially in the Ministry of Justice.

More recently, the EU has expressed concerns that the operational capacities of the state and public institutions are weakening. Some of those officials with the highest degree of capacity and experience in EU regulations have been caught up in the purges. Of particular concern has been the approximately one-third of Ministry of Justice officials that have been forced to leave—seriously complicating the running of the EU's crucial rule of law initiatives. As such officials have been replaced with non-experienced staff, momentum has been lost in cooperation between Turkish institutions and EU capacity-building programs.

Indeed, there is a growing concern that in some areas effective institution-strengthening cooperation may be grinding to a halt. The apparent hollowing out of much human capital within state institutions is a risk to the longevity of many EU initiatives. While European policy-makers express support for the government's stated aim to strengthen state institutions so as to reduce the risk of another coup attempt, they increasingly differ on how such institution strengthening should best be pursued.

The European concern is that the government's moves to tighten political control over state institutions are making the latter less, not more efficient and resilient. There is no sign that the government is focusing on the kind of institutional infrastructure that the EU seeks to build through its aid programs. Since July 2016, much of the Turkish state has been in panic mode. State institutions function increasingly slowly. Few officials want to take any initiative, rather waiting for approval from the very top—the presidency. This has slowed down cooperation with EU bodies.

New staff that replaced the purged officials are generally cautious towards working with EU institutes. Turkey was relatively cool towards twinning initiatives anyway; since the coup attempt, Turkish sensitivities over hosting EU or member state officials within state bodies have become even stronger. Currently, there are discussions within the EU to delegate institution-building funds to civil society in the short run as the EU does not want to support a process of state-restructuring that appears to be so uncertain at present.

The main focus of political debate is currently on the forthcoming referendum over government proposals to move to a presidential system of government. This move would involve a huge program of legal and regulatory change that would leave the fate of EU initiatives in this area extremely uncertain.

Bridging initiatives between cooperation on technocratic harmonization and civil society support are largely absent. In most countries the EU has made steps towards opening its institution-building initiatives to civil society participation and scrutiny; this reflects a general consensus among democracy support experts and practitioners that it is necessary to break down the walls between top-down and bottom-up approaches and build broader networks of reformers. In Turkey this is proving very difficult to do, and the EU harmonization agenda has a less participative flavor than in most other states around the EU neighborhood.

In sum, the risk is that in this sense EU aid policy may become increasingly imbalanced: the temptation will be for the EU to focus institution-building funds on the less controversial sectors where harmonization with the Union's *acquis* still has some traction, even though the overall political situation regarding accession looks increasingly uncertain. In a sense, aid policy and diplomacy may be pulled apart.

CIVIL SOCIETY COOPERATION

Civil society cooperation is a long established component of EU cooperation in Turkey. For a long time, Turkish authorities broadly welcomed or certainly enabled most elements of this cooperation. This strand of EU-Turkish cooperation is now facing more significant hurdles. It is well documented that the Turkish government has introduced measures aimed at more tightly controlling civil society organizations. This has produced uncertainty over what kind of civil society linkages Turkey now wants or will accept.

The tightening control over civil society reflects a worldwide trend and is not specific to Turkey. As it is such a widespread trend today, the EU has introduced a battery of policy instruments and funding initiatives designed to address the problem of increased repression against civil society organizations—what is referred to now as the “shrinking space” problem amongst civil society activists and experts. The question is how relevant these are to Turkey in the current context.

The scope for civil society activities has been shrinking in Turkey for a number of years. Civil society organizations (CSOs) began to face difficulties after the Gezi Park protests in 2013. These difficulties have increased under the state of emergency imposed after the July 15 events. Around 1,500 CSOs have been closed down since the attempted coup. The government even targeted environmental and other ostensibly non-political groups for not condemning the coup with sufficient clarity.

The Ministry of Interior claims that it has moved to shut down NGOs that are linked to the Gülenists, the PKK, ISIS, and the leftist Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party-Front (DHKP-C). In the latest sweep, 153 NGOs have been charged with Gülenist

connections, while 190 are accused of having links to the PKK and its affiliates. The DHKP-C has had 19 of its NGOs shut down. Some NGOs are either limiting their activities or closing down of their own volition to avoid the risk of being targeted by the state.

This new, constricted space has changed the context for what had become one of the most dynamic and apparently effective areas of EU support on the ground in Turkey. In 2010, there were around 80,000 CSOs in Turkey. This number has since risen to over 100,000. The EU played a significant role in nourishing this growing spirit of civic activism. In particular, in 2005 and 2006 the EU helped the government develop a new legal framework that was highly beneficial to CSOs.

Before the current crackdown the EU had increased its focus on civil society and tried to correct some of the shortcomings of its CSO funding. In 2010 and 2011, the EU held advisory meetings with 730 CSO representatives in 11 cities, where the needs of civil society were discussed and addressed through a plethora of support programs. Civil society representatives pressed the EU for more funding for core capacity-building, less heavy bureaucratic processes, and help to build collaborative networks between different CSOs. As a result of these consultations, and in an attempt to address CSO concerns, the EU delegation designed a new *Sivil Düşün* (Think Civil) program.

In 2012, under the rubric of this initiative, the EU made funding procedures lighter and easier, small grants were made available, and the focus shifted towards supporting individual activists and “active citizenship”—understood as a much broader concept than traditional NGO advocacy. *Sivil Düşün* was conceived as an attempt to better address the needs

not only of CSOs and CSO networks but also of individual activists. It did this through what EU officials conceived as a progressive, flexible, and inclusive structure. Crucially, the initiative is open to all types of civil society, whether legal entities or not. Active since early 2013, the *Sivil Düşün* initiative has two major components: the Active Citizenship Mechanism (Aktivist) and a Networks and Platforms Program.

There are nine projects operational under the Networks and Platforms Program. The EU has supported a much higher number of projects under the Aktivist Support Program, which has become the most popular element of European civil society support. As evident through its name, this program welcomes applications from everyone engaged (or hoping to engage) in rights-based work, even if they operate through extremely small or informal bodies or even as individuals without the institutional structures of a formally registered NGO. *Sivil Düşün* funds individual activists, associations, foundations, networks, loosely organized platforms, unions, and city councils. The EU has expressly oriented the initiative towards small, quick, and short-term grants because the unpredictable and fraught political situation increasingly militates against large, high profile, and multi-annual grants.

The application process is easy, with the application form containing only ten questions. The EU now accepts applications in different languages, and officials can even help applicants fill out the form over the telephone. Applicants are not expected to be advanced computer users or have experience in project writing. Almost half of the applications have come from individual activists—a figure that diplomats see as a testimony to the success of the program as the aim is to ensure that funds reach those individuals whose NGOs have been banned and can no longer apply as part of a formally registered association. The Aktivist Support Program's first round of funding supported a wide range of

civil society work, including on peace initiatives, local government, labor rights, the environment, senior citizens' rights, and migration.

However, since the attempted coup, EU civil society support has been facing severe difficulties. The IPA strategy for 2014-2020 recognizes the challenge of the closing civic space and states, "EU support for legislative reforms to improve the enabling environment for civil society and to encourage more inclusive governance will be provided mainly through institution-building measures (technical assistance and twinning) or the TAIEX instrument."⁶ Yet, in practice the EU is struggling to deal with this challenge.

The EU supported the preparation of a "code of conduct" for civil society involvement in decision-making, in particular related to the EU harmonization agenda; implementation of this code was blocked. Some 20 of the groups funded by *Sivil Düşün* were shut down by government decree. These groups were the ones who had developed a significant institutional capacity in their respected fields over the last several years. The number of applicants to the program has decreased. The most affected groups are those working on human rights. The applications have shifted towards less sensitive types of work—meetings, networking, information sharing, and generic training programs. In the area of peace, discrimination, and violence—which comprises ten percent of applications—the focus has shifted towards less sensitive issues like culture, children and peace, or women and peace instead of directly confronting specific human rights violations. Many CSO staff are moving into humanitarian organizations as international aid flows into this sector, weakening capacity for rights-related work.

6 "Instrument for Pre-Accession Indicative Strategy," 19.

The list of EU civil society projects reveals very few overtly political initiatives. Nearly all are moving toward generic dialogues and work with refugees, along with fairly general rights aims—like gender, environment, non-discrimination—somewhat divorced from the current political situation. The traditionally influential German party foundations are working on regional matters, polling, and exchanges between Germans and Turks but avoiding thorny political questions like the current revision of the constitution (towards a more presidential system). Many local officials insist it is not clear today which civic actors are really the likely agents of democratic change.

Mapping and documentation in the form of documentary films have become the main format of CSO project designs. A symbolic demonstration of how tense relations have become is that the Turkish government has raised objections even to the Erasmus program on the grounds that followers of the Gülenist movement could benefit from its funding. That such an anodyne and clearly non-political EU initiative should be targeted reveals how sensitive cooperation in the civil society sphere has become.


Diplomats talk of a wait-and-see transition period as donors wait to assess the government's reform plans before seeking to commit large amounts of new money. As indicated, in principle the EU is considering the possibility of allocating more money to civil society out of its institution-building programs. Whether effective support with civil society is any more possible than with state institutions remains to be seen, however.

This uncertainty is seen in the current planning for 2017. General EU civil society support still requires the involvement of Turkish state institutions. The Central Finance and Contracts Unit (CFCU) is responsible for the overall budgeting, tendering, contracting, payments, accounting, and financial reporting related to all EU-funded programs. The

CFCU is situated between the EU and the Turkish administration as an autonomous body; it is administratively linked to the Treasury unit responsible for the financial management of EU-funded programs. Many complain that the CFCU is not fair or inclusive, repeatedly denying support to some types of civil society, and has gradually stifled civil society funding.

As a result the EU has been contemplating recentralizing control over a part of the civil society budget to enable the delegation more directly to identify potential CSO partners. While the EU has commenced a new phase of its standard technical capacity-building support to CSOs linked to civic participation in the EU harmonization process, it is now considering making *Sivil Düşün*—which runs outside these standard processes—its main facility for civil society funding. It is set to increase this program's budget. The first phase of the Activist Support Program lasted from November 2012 to November 2016 with a total budget of 1 million euros. The second phase started in March 2016 and will end in 2018 with a hugely increased budget of 3 million euros.

The EU is seeking to look beyond the well-known, professional human rights NGOs that are under closest scrutiny from the government and instead explore the possibility of partnering with smaller CSOs on advocacy in sectors like transport, social policy, and agriculture—linked, that is, to the pre-accession program of funding. In order to open alternative pathways to rights-focused projects, there is also talk of further using the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) to explore more flexible finding modalities. Because of the well-structured funding frameworks linked to accession, the EED has not focused on Turkey as much as on other states in the neighborhood. This is a situation that may be revised as the political situation in Turkey becomes more challenging.



More broadly, the EU has introduced a battery of instruments designed to address the shrinking space problem worldwide. These instruments are not specific to Turkey and fall outside the standard pre-accession framework of EU-Turkey cooperation. But the question will be how far the EU seeks to use them in Turkey if the plight of civil society continues to worsen. These instruments include Human Rights Defenders Guidelines; a human rights defenders protection mechanism funded from the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights; a new series of Civil Society Roadmaps; and new flexible funding rules under several EU budget lines, including a dedicated Civil Society Facility.

The EU has thus far been hesitant in using these mechanisms in Turkey—the policy tools have to date been more relevant to other countries like Egypt and Azerbaijan. If the situation continues to deteriorate for Turkish civil society, the EU will need to consider how to make its array of “closing space” policy instruments of practical help to those under threat in Turkey. This should involve integrating the civil society context into the highest level of EU strategic dialogue with Turkey. The EU will also need to intensify efforts to raise the profile of the Human Rights Defenders Guidelines as CSOs’ awareness of these remains relatively low in Turkey. The EU should aim to build a more positive narrative to highlight that civil society can be a valuable ally—rather than foe—to the government in creating a robust approach to security.

MIGRATION

Perhaps the highest profile element of EU-Turkey relations over the last year has been the issue of migration cooperation—and more specifically the March 2016 Joint Statement that included the Union’s allocation of 3 billion euros to Turkey to help control the outflow of refugees and migrants.

This agreement has been controversial in both the EU and Turkey. Some in the EU feel the agreement was a masterstroke that has contained the refugee surge and kick-started an overdue reset in relations with Turkey. Critics feel the deal gives too much away without providing a long-term solution to the refugee surge and that it is problematic from a human rights point of view. Inside Turkey, some feel the deal underpins a new, more equally balanced security partnership with the EU, while critics feel that Turkey is being asked to do Europe’s “dirty work” in controlling migration.

While much has been said and written about the high politics and strategic implications of this issue, a more specific set of questions flows from the actual implementation of the 3 billion euro financial assistance package. The deal is controversial in Europe inter alia because of the human rights consequences of gaining Turkey’s cooperation. This makes it all the more important, from the EU’s perspective, that the aid is spent effectively and produces significant results. Are EU and Turkish priorities the same on the precise purposes towards which this aid will be devoted? What are the remaining obstacles to the funds being distributed towards effective projects? Is the right balance being struck between short- and medium-term priorities?

Both the EU and Turkey insist that the refugee deal is working at the technical level and that the aid component is advancing well. The number of refugees crossing to Greece has declined, both

because Turkish local security forces and gendarme have become better at controlling coastal areas and because refugees can see how those fleeing Turkey are getting stranded on the Greek islands and unable to make onward journeys to northern Europe. There are currently an average of 86 crossings daily. The number of people that have been returned from Greece to Turkey is gradually increasing, as is the number of refugees that have been legally resettled from Turkey to Europe.

The EU’s assistance will help manage basic services for over 3 million refugees in Turkey. The EU’s 2016 Humanitarian Implementation Plan for Turkey is its largest humanitarian intervention ever. It includes the novel direct disbursement of cash through debit cards to the most vulnerable refugee families. Most of the money goes to humanitarian assistance—shelter, food, and clothing. The second biggest portion goes to education; the EU is funding international humanitarian NGOs and state institutes such as the Ministry of Education to build schools and fund education for refugees and the host communities. A third portion goes to Turkish NGOs supporting integration and dialogue programs for Syrians.

So far, 37 projects have been contracted worth 1.45 billion euros, out of which 748 million euros have been disbursed. As of February 2017, 2.2 billion of the 3 billion euro package have been allocated for implementation. Most officials stress that cooperation over migration is smoother than cooperation in other fields. Many Turkish NGOs have applied for funding and they express that working in that field is seen as less sensitive than their activities in other areas. The EU has shown some notable flexibility: in December 2015, 140 million euros from the IPA budget were transferred to the EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis to finance

environmental and social infrastructures, support to entrepreneurship, education, and access to labor market. There is some support for municipal institutions and socio-economic infrastructure included in the core EU package that go beyond immediate stop-gap measures.⁷

Not all is smooth sailing, however. Turkey would prefer more of the new aid to be channeled in the form of direct budget support. The EU insists, among other points, that Turkish public procurement rules are insufficiently transparent for this to happen. In a second phase of this aid, Turkish authorities are likely to press harder for more direct control over European funding. Turkish officials still feel the 3 billion euros is not a huge amount and feel aggrieved that the EU has backed away from providing the full 6 billions euros that it had at one stage indicated might be available.

The EU is, for its part, concerned at the apparently limited absorption capacity of local actors to incorporate the aid in a short period of time. Determining what the most pressing needs of Syrians and returnees actually are will need to be addressed in a second stage of the program. The purge of state officials since the coup is another factor holding back a more rapid disbursement of the funds, according to EU officials. While there is some recognition on both EU and Turkish sides of the need to move gradually beyond emergency response measures, a consensus is still to be formed on a longer-term program of aid initiatives aimed at building inclusive institutional processes for the large number of refugees that will almost certainly be in Turkey for a considerable period of time.

A key question is what happens to aid projects on the ground if the overarching EU-Turkey migration deal falls apart. This remains a possibility if

the EU does not grant visa-free travel and Turkey consequently pulls out of the deal. EU officials have become less optimistic that Turkey will now meet the preconditions for visa liberalization due to the general direction of domestic political changes. Turkish officials argue that the EU is stalling and using the preconditions disingenuously. As most of the envelope is now contracted, and getting on for the half actually spent already, a concern in some national capitals is that the EU spends the money and then Turkey pulls back from its commitments under the accord. Another is that vital support for vulnerable refugees is not rolled out.

⁷ “The Facility for Refugees in Turkey: Factsheet,” European Commission, updated February 22, 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/frit_factsheet.pdf.

WAYS FORWARD

There are common threads that run through these four areas of cooperation. Practical aid cooperation between the EU and Turkey is making some headway in extremely difficult and discordant circumstances. But, it is also being hindered by political obstacles and is in danger of ignoring important questions that need to be addressed. The evidence suggests that European aid is worth continuing but cannot get round today's overarching political problems. The EU can and should be more creative in the way it runs funding initiatives in the four sectors identified in this report; but innovation in aid support cannot substitute for a more concerted and rethought geopolitical approach. Dialogue and pragmatic aid programs are important but are beginning to look too excessively apolitical—too desperate to avoid political topics. Micro-level cooperation cannot completely shut out or eschew macro-level tensions and problems.

Challenges remain in each of the four areas of cooperation. The EU and Turkey need to do more to build longer-term resilience into new security cooperation. The EU needs to modify its policy instruments to retain a broad and participative approach to institution-building. The EU and European governments need to deploy a fuller range of EU instruments to protect Turkish civil society and develop a new narrative to help build bridges between civil society and the government to find points of commonality on security challenges. And Turkey and the EU need to build on emergency relief initiatives in the area of refugee and migration management to enhance longer-term institutional capacity and accountability to deal with these challenges in a more sustainable fashion.

An unresolved question is how far the EU's aid needs to move beyond the accession paradigm. As we have demonstrated, most EU aid is still linked to an

accession process that few people now see as practically relevant. Some feel that if Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan were to accept recalibrating the relationship away from the accession prism this could open the door to more effective security and regional geostrategic cooperation.

For the moment, European support on the ground needs to be attentive to a growing sense of polarization and not concern itself quite so much with EU harmonization processes. After the coup attempt, the prospect opened up of a new unity and consensus between government and opposition around a defense of the Turkish state's integrity. This spirit is now giving way to a greater sense of polarization. The EU urgently needs to employ some of its conflict mitigation policy tools to Turkey and look for a wider range of strategic cooperation well beyond the standard pre-accession framework.

Many in the EU express hope that if president Erdoğan obtains the constitutional changes he seeks then he will feel more secure and lean back towards a deeper strategic partnership with the EU and select European governments. Offsetting this, however, if the move to a presidential system is approved by the forthcoming referendum, political pluralism is likely to come under renewed assault, engendering further challenges for EU-Turkish relations.

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