



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Meeting with Afif Demirkiran, Turkish Deputy for Siirt, Co-Chairman of the Turkish-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee, Member of the EU Committee in the Turkish Parliament, 27 May 2014

1. A Foreign Office official spoke to Mr Demirkiran on 27 May. The focus of the discussion was how EU Enlargement is perceived within Turkey, including an assessment of what needs to be done in order for Turkey to take up membership.

Turkey's EU membership as a strategic objective

2. Mr Demirkiran began by noting that Turkey had seen membership of the EU as a political objective for several decades. All the main political parties in Turkey were supportive, to varying degrees, of eventual membership of the EU, and it remained a strategic objective of the country.
3. There were, he thought, clear benefits to Turkey joining the EU – both for Turkey and the other Member States. Adding a large and young population to the EU and increasing the size of the single market would help promote economic growth throughout the region. Energy security would also benefit through the pipeline terminal at Ceyhan.
4. However, Mr Demirkiran stressed that the EU was not just about economics, but is also a union of values, democracy and freedom. Turkish membership in the EU would therefore promote wider security and stability objectives, and help to spread democracy in the region. The EU would also be better positioned to address regional areas of concern, including Syria and Egypt where, Mr Demirkiran felt, EU influence could be enhanced. EU membership could also help build better cross-border cooperation, particularly on international terrorism and foreign fighters. Mr Demirkiran believed that Turkish EU membership would help the EU remain a global player on these issues.

Turkish progress on EU membership

5. Despite the advantages that Turkish EU membership would bring, the accession process was not a smooth one. Whilst a series of military coups in previous decades had not helped Turkey's cause, Mr Demirkiran emphasised the significant progress Turkey had made. Turkey was making great progress in order to meet the Copenhagen criteria and to address the requirements as set out in the 35 chapters of the *acquis* to bring Turkish legislation into line with European law.

6. However, the EU, and some of its Member States, had not made the accession process easy. The EU Commission had blocked eight chapters, claiming that Turkey was not meeting its obligations under the Additional Protocol of the Ankara Agreement (relating to Turkey's position towards Cyprus). A further five chapters had been blocked by France; in total, 18 chapters had been blocked. In the period 2006-2013, only 14 chapters had been agreed. Blockages in the process were also exacerbated by bilateral difficulties between Member States and aspirant Member States. The bilateral situation with Cyprus, in particular, complicated negotiations.

Turkish enthusiasm for the EU and the Customs Union

7. In the context of these open-ended negotiations, Mr Demirkiran observed that it was not surprising that enthusiasm for the EU had declined steeply in polls conducted in Turkey. From previous highs of 70% positive ratings, support for the EU had now slumped below 50%.
8. Given the slow pace of progress in the negotiations, there was evidence of growing frustration amongst some sectors in Turkey, particularly business. While the Customs Union benefited the Turkish economy, representatives from Turkish businesses were having difficulty travelling in the EU because of visa restrictions. In addition, Turkey was in danger of losing its competitiveness as part of the Customs Union because goods were allowed into Turkey with no customs duty, but this arrangement was not reciprocated. There was also a fear that the TTIP Free Trade Agreement with the US could also have unforeseen adverse affects on the Turkish economy.
9. Mr Demirkiran felt that part of the solution was to ensure Turkey was represented on the technical committees on EU Free Trade Agreements. However, Turkish interests would be best served by becoming a full and active member of the EU. Turkey needed to continue to demonstrate the progress being made, and show how their membership could benefit other Member States.