

Address given by Dr Ludger Volmer on Turkey-EU relations (Berlin, 13 April 2000)

Caption: On 13 April 2000, Ludger Volmer, Junior Minister in the Foreign Ministry of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), outlines the FRG's position on Turkey's accession to the European Union.

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Address given by Dr Ludger Volmer, Minister of State in the German Foreign Office, on 13 April 2000 at the Potsdam Spring Dialogues 2000 organised by the Development and Peace Foundation

When the current German Government came to power, EU-Turkey relations had been troubled for some time, which also put a severe strain on German-Turkish relations. This was because Turkey felt that it had been put at a disadvantage by the Luxembourg European Council's decisions on the other applicant countries — the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Cyprus. Although the same accession criteria were to apply to Turkey, the European strategy envisaged for Turkey's preparations for accession was not the same as the pre-accession strategy for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Turkey was not included in the accession process for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Cyprus. Thereupon, Turkey broke off the dialogue on sensitive subjects with the EU. The result was a certain loss of contact, which also led to a loss of understanding on both sides.

The Federal Government did not regard this situation, in which a separate, second-class waiting room had been set aside for Turkey, as being compatible with the EU's and Germany's interests in relation to Turkey. Given the undeniable importance of integrating Turkey into European structures, Turkey must be offered a strong incentive to move towards Europe on a permanent and irrevocable basis. Turkey can be expected to do so only if we offer it the same, fair chance as our eastern neighbours to qualify for EU membership.

Why does our country have such a unique and distinct interest in a partner country's internal conditions and strategic outlook? Looking at the subject of tonight's discussion, we could say without exaggeration that it is because Turkey is already part of Europe in many respects, although still 'at the gates' in terms of accession — regardless of how Europeans see it or what we want. Turkey:

- has been a factor in the European system of states for centuries;
- is very much in our midst, given that three and a half million of its citizens have settled permanently in EU states;
- forms part of our security system as a NATO partner;
- is committed to the European system of values as a founding member of the Council of Europe and the OSCE;
- while it is also, at present, still caught up in a nationalist canon of values dating back to early 20th-century perceptions of Europe at the time when the Republic was founded;
- and is a source of internal political friction and pressure as the country of origin of large numbers of asylum seekers (although there has recently been a sharp fall).

That explains why the tensions and conflicts, prospects and developments in this dynamic country are acted out right in our midst! Seen in those terms, objectively our sole choice is either to do nothing in the face of exported Turkish problems (you need only think of the repercussions of the Kurdish question in Germany during the Öcalan crisis) or to apply the only effective lever at the root of the problems. As became clear after the Luxembourg European Council, this is the European lever, to be more precise the Copenhagen accession criteria.

The Federal Government quickly drew the necessary conclusions and made vigorous efforts to ensure that Turkey was included in the accession process — i.e. was formally recognised as an applicant for accession — by the time the Cologne European Council was held under the German Presidency. The basis for this was an exchange of letters between the Federal Chancellor and Bülent Ecevit, the then Turkish Prime Minister who was about to be reappointed, in late May last year, in which Mr Ecevit committed himself to far-reaching political reforms, including in relation to south-eastern Anatolia.

This was the right track to follow. The Federal Government continued to take a consistent line vis-à-vis the Finnish Presidency and the hesitant Member States. At the Helsinki European Council, it finally achieved its goal. Turkey was included in the accession process as an applicant country. The European Council confirmed that the same accession criteria apply to Turkey as to the other applicants. Turkey will benefit from a pre-accession strategy, like the other applicant countries. Its main aspects are as follows:

- political dialogue, with emphasis on progressing towards fulfilling the political accession criteria, including

the issues of Cyprus and the Aegean conflict;

- accession partnership, which includes priorities and objectives for the fulfilment of the accession criteria, combined with a national programme for transposing EU law and legislative practice;
- preparations for the screening process, i.e. harmonisation of Turkish legislation with EU legislation and practice with a view to formulating negotiation objectives;
- participation in meetings with applicant countries and in Community programmes and agencies (e.g. research, education, environment, youth);
- single framework for coordinating all sources of EU financial assistance for pre-accession preparations.

The Helsinki European Council clarified the situation. Turkey will now be treated like the other applicants for accession. It will have to submit to the same criteria. This means that, if Turkey fulfils the political criteria, accession negotiations can begin. We expect this to give a strong impetus for the continuation of the reform process in Turkey. Even now, Turkey's applicant status is fuelling the discussion on reform. The first steps towards comprehensive reforms look encouraging.

Germany and Turkey are talking openly again and with increasing trust on both sides. The recent state visit by Federal President Johannes Rau has shown that Turkey is willing to accept very blunt advice on its problems, provided it sees that this is meant constructively, i.e. to help Turkey to conform to its self-chosen status of applicant for accession by applying European values.

Let me point out here that we are talking about the EU as a community of values, not a community of religions, which the EU never was.

I would also suggest that the successful outcome of Helsinki results largely from the Federal Government's new Turkey policy.

What next? The Helsinki European Council offered Turkey a tangible accession prospect. However, both sides still have to make huge efforts if this prospect is to become reality.

The EU-Turkey Association Council that met again early this week for the first time for three years and the resumption of the political dialogue at ministerial level during the Association Council are important signs of the normalisation of EU-Turkey relations.

Furthermore, on a proposal from the Commission, the Association Council took an important decision on implementing the Helsinki conclusions. It set up a number of special committees which would analytically review the EU *acquis* with a view to intensifying the approximation of legislative systems — as had previously been done for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In accordance with the Helsinki European Council's recommendations, this will enable preparations for the screening process to be made. The first chapters are to be Community legislation, the internal market, agriculture and the environment, as a basis for the subsequent formal screening with a view to opening negotiations. At the same time, the committees will be responsible for monitoring and discussing the pre-accession process across the board.

The Association Council also decided to open negotiations on the liberalisation of services and public procurement markets between the EU and Turkey. This is a central aspect of economic *rapprochement*. Some of the difficult problems here include obstacles to market access for EU enterprises in Turkey in the telecommunications, post, construction and tourism industries; financial services provided by Turkish banks in the EU; cutting down the numbers of key personnel in subsidiaries and branches of Turkish undertakings; and the founding of one-man businesses by Turkish citizens in the EU.

Now it is once again up to the Commission to put forward proposals for the next steps in connection with the pre-accession strategy.

The Commission is expected to present its next annual regular report on Turkey's progress towards fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria in September this year. This report will form the basis of the Accession Partnership, the central aspect of the pre-accession process. It will set out the short- and medium-term priorities and

objectives for the adoption of the Community *acquis*, together with the planned financial resources. Turkey will be consulted on the Accession Partnership; however, the decision will be taken solely by the EU, and then by a qualified majority.

Prior to the Accession Partnership, the EU has to adopt a framework regulation as the legal basis for the overall pre-accession strategy, including financial assistance. This requires a unanimous decision, which means that it will serve as an important test case for the improvement in Greek-Turkish relations.

In regard to financial assistance, the EU will increase its aid for Turkey under the assistance programme for the Mediterranean countries (MEDA II) (EUR 127 million per year from 2000 to 2004). In addition, it will allocate EUR 50 million per year for the European strategy from 2000 to 2002.

In all, the EU will therefore be allocating from its budget almost EUR 180 million per year for pre-accession aid for Turkey for the next few years. This is about twice as much as in the past. To this must be added European Investment Bank loans from the Earthquake Fund (EUR 600 million) and the Mediterranean Partnership (EUR 6 400 million for the period 2000–2006 for all Mediterranean partners). The Commission is also endeavouring to make further EIB loans available.

German policy as part of the Helsinki follow-up draws directly on the Federal Government's new Turkey policy. We see it as our task to ensure that the Commission and the Presidency, which are responsible for the procedure, rapidly implement the Helsinki decisions. At the same time, the Federal Government can take diplomatic steps to support the individual measures taken vis-à-vis other Member States, which might still be hesitant, and the European Parliament. The mood in the European Parliament, which is traditionally critical of Turkey, must be kept in mind not only because the European Parliament will continue to play an important role in relation to decisions on Turkey but also because a positive EP approach to Turkey's accession will encourage the general European public to accept it.

At the same time as the EU gives practical form to, and implements, its pre-accession strategy, Turkey itself must prepare a national programme for the adoption of the Community *acquis*. This means it must plan to adopt all EU regulations in all areas. Here, Turkey has the great advantage of having already embarked on many of the adjustments required for accession in connection with the completion of the Customs Union. We do not, therefore, see the adoption of the economic *acquis* as a bottleneck in the pre-accession process. Nor, however, should the problems be underestimated, given, for example, that 42 % of the Turkish labour force is still employed in agriculture. The percentage is far lower in all the other applicants for accession, with the exception of Romania.

A more difficult issue is certainly the political reforms that are necessary to fulfil what are known as the political Copenhagen criteria. They are, of course, the precondition for the opening of accession negotiations. This also means that Turkey can largely determine for itself, from its pace of reform, when accession negotiations will actually begin.

In its autumn 1999 regular report, the Commission notes, with regard to the political criteria, that the situation in Turkey has improved, while also pointing to the following shortcomings:

- serious shortcomings in terms of respect for human rights and the protection of minorities — with special reference to the Kurdish issue;
- widespread use of torture in police detention, together with restriction of freedom of expression by the authorities;
- major role of the National Security Council in political life; and
- continued existence of the system of State Security Courts — even though only civilians are now appointed as judges to these courts.

There is agreement within the EU that, although this is not explicitly mentioned in the Copenhagen criteria, the peaceful settlement by applicant countries of conflicts with neighbours is one of the political accession criteria. The Helsinki European Council emphasised this once again. Indeed, given Greece's membership of the EU, it would be unrealistic to assume that developments in the Aegean conflict will play no role in terms of the

opening of accession negotiations. The same applies to the issue of Cyprus, in the event that it has not yet been resolved when accession negotiations begin. Here, however, we must make sure that, in an EU context, the burden of entering into bilateral compromises with Greece does not seem to fall only on Turkey. It would be more effective to provide a positive motivation by offering the incentive of tangible progress in the accession process.

Over and above the bilateral disputes with Greece, Turkey must be made aware of the wider security concept of today's — and, even more, tomorrow's — Europe. Just as Turkey has always formed part of the Western defence system, in future, as it progresses towards EU accession, it will become more and more integrated in the European security and defence identity and policy.

It is not only in relation to Turkey's *rapprochement* with Europe that it is in Germany's interest for Turkey to comply as quickly as possible with the political criteria that it has not yet managed to fulfil. It is in Germany's interest because of its close ties with Turkey, given the number of Turkish residents in Germany, i.e. both ethnic Turks, and ethnic Kurds of Turkish nationality. We therefore regard it as an important task for the Federal Government closely to follow Turkey's endeavours to adopt the *acquis* and to introduce the necessary political reforms bilaterally, too, and, wherever possible, to give support. The time will soon come for an institutionalised dialogue on human rights, based now on cooperation rather than the megaphone diplomacy of the past.

The 'homework' that the EU has to do with a view to Turkey's accession is not restricted only to implementing Helsinki. The EU still has much work to do to prepare for the accession of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Cyprus, Malta and Turkey. The EU itself must ensure that it is ready for enlargement. This question will not arise only with Turkey's accession; it has already arisen with a view to the next wave of accessions. It involves no more and no less than a reform of EU institutions and procedures so that the EU can continue to function and take decisions in a Union of 25 or 30 Member States. Even if not all the accession countries will join at the same time, the EU must bear in mind, and take a broad view of, the overall accession process during its reforms. The current Intergovernmental Conference, which is expected to conclude at the end of the year, will probably not be the last one before Turkey's accession. Nevertheless, this IGC will set a course that will also have a bearing on Turkey's ultimate accession.

In this respect, the EU is facing marked changes to its decision-making structures, which may put it to a crucial test. It must resolve such central issues as extending the scope of majority decisions, the number of individual Member State votes in the Council of Ministers and the size and composition of the Commission. Many decision-making processes are already blocked because of delays caused by individual Member States. The unanimity requirement gives each Member State far greater scope to make its approval of decisions dependent on the concessions made by other Member States in other areas. Even in an EU of 15 Member States, this often leads to stalemates. Under such conditions, an EU of 25 to 30 Member States would no longer be able to function.

The same applies to the reform of individual policies, such as agricultural policy, structural policy and the financial framework. The extraordinary European Council held in Berlin in March 1999 set out the key figures for the period up to 2006. They do not yet take account of Turkey. That is no cause for concern, however. Experience has shown that the EU is able to undertake reforms only under direct pressure. In that respect, however, the accession of Turkey is not yet enough of a tangible prospect.

We cannot yet count on solutions being found in every area which are already appropriate to Turkey's accession. The next reform measures will, however, to some extent map out the course that we shall also have to pursue with a view to Turkey's accession.

Germany's role in the internal EU reforms derives from Germany's direct interest in enlargement. That is why, in the debate on reform, Germany takes a pro-integration line on principle. It is, of course, possible that, in individual cases, we might find it very difficult, because of practical German interests, to support certain integration measures. This is a quite normal occurrence in the EU. At all events, Turkey can rely on us to remain a driving force in preparing the EU for further enlargement.

German foreign policy with a view to Turkey's accession is not confined to the part that it plays in the EU's Turkey policy. Our national policy towards Turkey must also take account of the prospects of EU membership. We must endeavour to establish coherence between our policy as an EU Member State and our bilateral policy. This applies to the following areas in particular:

- human rights policy/policy on minorities, especially the Kurdish issue;
- economic policy;
- development policy.

I would even go so far as to suggest that not only are there strong interrelations between our foreign policy towards Turkey and Turkey's *rapprochement* with the EU but also that our policy towards Turks in Germany, i.e. our policy towards foreigners, which of course affects Turkish nationals most, given that they constitute the largest group of foreigners in Germany, plays an important role in terms of Turkey's accession prospects. Many of the fears among the German public about Turkish accession result from the fact that it judges Turkey's ability to integrate in the EU on the basis of the existing situation of Turks in Germany.

We have already achieved notable successes in integrating our Turkish fellow-citizens in Germany, as shown, for example, by the large number of Turkish businessmen and their investment in Germany. This is one way that we can, for instance, counter the mistaken conclusion that Turkish immigration costs German jobs. Yet much remains to be done. While Turkish citizens suffer higher unemployment than German nationals, while the percentage of Turks in academically oriented secondary schools and universities does not match their percentage of the population, we shall not be able to speak of successful integration. Successful integration, however, automatically makes EU public opinion more receptive to the idea of Turkey's accession. This, in turn, makes it easier for governments to pursue an active pre-accession and integration policy.

With the reform of its nationality law, the Federal Government has already taken the biggest step towards making it easier for the many immigrants in Germany who hold a foreign passport to begin the often difficult job of integrating. For the rest, the closer their country of origin, to which they are often devoted as the 'mother country', moves towards Europe, the easier it will be for them to regard Germany as their second home rather than as a 'golden exile'.

I have tried to give you an overview of the various fields of action of German foreign and European policy that are relevant to Turkey's prospects for accession. On balance, I would say: it is not that we are on threshold of a new Turkey policy; we are already pursuing it consistently.