

‘The decision on opening membership talks with Turkey does not answer several key questions’ from the Europe Daily Bulletin (4 January 2005)

Caption: On 4 January 2005, Ferdinando Riccardi, Editor-in-Chief of Agence Europe in Brussels, identifies the grey areas which, in his view, surround the decision to open negotiations with Turkey for its accession to the European Union.

Source: Bulletin Quotidien Europe. 04.01.2005, n° 8858. Brussels: Agence Europe.

Copyright: (c) Agence Europe S.A.

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_decision_on_opening_membership_talks_with_turkey_does_not_answer_several_key_questions_from_the_europe_daily_bulletin_4_january_2005-en-b670c90a-b52f-44b2-abb8-6c771bd50dec.html

Publication date: 18/09/2012

The decision on opening membership talks with Turkey does not answer several key questions

Ambiguities. The decision to open membership negotiations with Turkey is partially ambiguous and is not completely satisfactory for anyone. This is the opinion that I expressed in my rapid assessment of the results of the last Summit (see this column of 21 December 2004). The EU was so afraid of being called a "*Christian club*", that it agreed to set a date for opening talks although the Turkish authorities have not as yet recognised one of the Member States and has not pledged to put an end to military occupation of part of this State. On the other hand, Mr Erdogan reluctantly accepted the hypothesis of permanent safeguard clauses in three essential fields such as the free movement of persons, structural policy (hence regional aid), and agriculture. Ambiguities, however, are more plentiful. The European Council text states that, if a candidate country is not able to fully assume all the obligations linked to the quality of EU Member State, "*it is appropriate to ensure that the candidate State concerned is fully and as firmly as possible anchored in European structures*". It is the idea of "privileged partnership" which, thrown out of the door as an alternative solution, thus creeps back in through the window. And the procedure which provides for Member States to be unanimous when it comes to making talks move forward (an explicit decision is needed not only for closure but also for opening each chapter) makes it possible for Cyprus, like other Member States, to block work at any moment.

At an apparently more technical level, what can one say about the provision specifying that negotiations with Turkey "*cannot be concluded until after the establishment of the financial framework for the period beginning 2014?*" As far as one can see, this clause is linked to the fact that Commission services have calculated it would cost an astronomically large amount to apply the current rules concerning agricultural policy and the functioning of Structural Funds to Turkey. A number of Member States and some currents in the European Parliament play down this problem saying that, at any rate, not only the CAP but also structural policy will be very different in 2014 from what they are today - hinting that they will cost far less. This one can interpret as meaning that not very much will remain of the CAP or of cohesion policy, the two pillars which - together with CFSP and ESDP and the common project for an area of freedom, security and justice - make the EU something more than just a free trade area. Should one deduct from this that the price to be paid for Turkey's membership will be the abandonment of the Union's current ambitions? This is the main point of interrogation, and it is known that the answers to this are not all the same. Some feel the EU with Turkey will never achieve a degree of integration likely to make it an autonomous player on the global scene, while others consider Turkey's membership would help toward this.

Enthusiastic welcome by some. In addition to all the appropriate congratulations made in such circumstances - which are too predictable to mean much (Council of Europe, World Bank, etc.) - the decision to open talks was enthusiastically welcomed by two entities: an overwhelming majority of the Turkish citizens and the US authorities. The latter base their assessment on their country's global strategy and on national interests - what can be more natural? But the interests of the United States and of Europe do not always coincide. Washington's support is not therefore a determining element from the point of view of European interests. The Turkish people's enthusiasm, expressed in explosions of joy and street demonstrations, confirms the extent to which EU membership is considered a positive element for the future. This is a spontaneous reaction which ignores some of the results of accession and which does not take account of all the obligations that would arise from membership. Some parts of the population - the Kurds especially - expect direct advantages for their specific situation (which, moreover, gives other players cause for concern about the reality of the situation in the country). Popular jubilation is sometimes caused for contradictory reasons and aspirations.

The reactions of the European Parliament's political groups must be assessed with caution bearing in mind the resolution that this Parliament had voted by a large majority several days earlier (the full text of which was published in issue number 2389 of our EUROPE/Documents series, in supplement to our bulletin of 18 December). With this resolution, the EP set many conditions for Turkey's membership, some of which are not to the liking of the Ankara authorities to say the least.

As one can see, the Council's decision leaves many key questions unanswered. All is yet possible. I do not

believe there is just one predetermined scenario. I shall explain what I mean tomorrow.

(Ferdinando Riccardi)