

TURKEY AND THE EUROPEAN UNION**HE SIR PETER WESTMACOTT KCMG LVO, BRITISH
AMBASSADOR TO FRANCE**

Notes from the Ambassador's presentation at the Dialogue Society's Round Table Discussion, 12th April 2010

The Ambassador noted that his perspective on the topic had been shaped by two diplomatic postings in Turkey, including nearly five years as the British Ambassador to Turkey (finishing in 2006). He was Ambassador in December 2004 when the European Council decided to start accession negotiations with Turkey and when those negotiations were symbolically opened in October 2005, during the UK's presidency of the EU.

The Ambassador sees a strong case for Turkey's accession to the EU. The existing European Union would benefit from a closer relationship with Turkey on a range of matters, from energy corridors to non-proliferation. Accession is in line with the European Union's existing commitment to Turkey as a country, itself strengthened by Turkey's contribution to EU security, notably during the Cold War. It is very much in the interests of the EU to support the best, if not the only functioning secular democracy in the Muslim world.

As in 2002, at the very beginning of discussions concerning accession, the current Turkish government sees EU accession talks as a political priority and an important means of helping to leverage reform and modernisation. It continues to seek an active place in the future of the European Union.

The situation has become more difficult since the positive beginnings of the negotiation process in 2005. Public support within Turkey for joining the EU has waned and some member states have become less enthusiastic.

Looking ahead, the Ambassador noted the EU's emerging trend towards inter-governmentalism and away from more comprehensive political integration. Some experts thought this might give scope for Turkey to negotiate particular relationships within Europe in accordance with its own particular situation, needs and characteristics.

In the Ambassador's view, the French Government is not seeking to block the accession process.

In the coming years Europe will need Turkey's contributions. Its economy is strong and Europe will need to look to it to augment the European workforce.

Progress has become a bit stuck in recent years in some areas including freedom of speech and religious freedom. Constitutional and judicial reforms were also now major priorities.

SUMMARY

EVENT TYPE

ROUNDTABLE

EVENT TITLE

TURKEY AND THE
EUROPEAN UNION**SPEAKER(S)**

HE SIR PETER
WESTMACOTT, KCMG, LVO,
BRITISH AMBASSADOR TO FRANCE**DATE & VENUE**

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There have been significant achievements since the beginning of accession negotiations, notably the elimination of the death penalty and breakthroughs in policy related to Cyprus.

Some admirable attempts have been made to address issues of Kurdish identity, although success in this area has been limited so far.

If the process continues for the next ten years current EU members may well feel more comfortable about Turkey's accession. Whether or not accession occurs, the negotiating process will have been useful as a means of promoting economic, political and social progress, and improving links between Turkey and the EU.

Much could be done to promote a more positive image of Turkey in Europe. France's recent series of exhibitions of Turkish art and culture is an example of one such initiative.

Attention could also be drawn to Turkey's history as a cradle of civilizations and its rich and diverse religious history. Eastern Turkey, for example, holds significant Christian sites that have been places of worship since the 4th Century. There are the remains of almost 200 Greek and Roman theatres in Turkey, and archaeological evidence of the first parliament of nations (Lycian League) at Patara. Public/private partnerships were a possible way of making more of the cultural, touristic and business potential of Turkey's extraordinarily diverse history, often in remote areas which currently attracted few visitors and little economic activity.