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**France, Germany, Turkey:
A New Triangle of Powers**

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Overview

Relations between Germany, France and Turkey have been strictly bilateral for a long time, with varying intensity, styles and areas of cooperation. The European perspective that is now part of these relations has introduced a three-way dynamic. Turkey's accession talks have stalled, and France and Germany are responsible to a large degree for the problems and delays that have affected the process. The economic crisis in Europe has altered the situation because it makes Turkey a more important player, introducing a form of competition between powers. The political crises in the Middle East, and the significant threats that have arisen from them, have opened the way to a partial reconciliation under the arbitration of the United States. However, the parties need to work together on the basis of their shared values in relation to Europe in order to maximise their individual assets.

Introduction

The three great nations of Germany, France and Turkey are now allies, with entire chapters of shared history, extremely close economic ties and apparently increasingly competitive relations.

Relations between the three countries have for a long time followed a pattern of bilateral isolation, with each pair excluding the third party. Traditionally, therefore, each party is part of a couple: the highly institutionalised and close political cooperation between France and Germany has been at the centre of Europe's recovery since the second half of the 20th century; France and Turkey engage in powerful republican dialogue, accompanied by endless political disagreements; and Germany and Turkey enjoy a complex, partly symbiotic relationship born out of cultural and economic interdependency, although this does not always prevent clashes.

However, a three-way dynamic has begun to emerge since the start of Turkey's EU accession talks in 2005. The European perspective creates shared interests across the board and necessitates the kind of cooperation in which each country has been unwilling to engage until now. The Turkish candidacy has put France and Germany in a position of responsibility as the driving force behind European integration, and yet the French and German populations are uneasy about the prospect of Turkish accession. The blockage in the accession process, which resulted from a series of technical and political issues, was acknowledged fairly quickly by the three countries. Indeed, there is a kind of Franco-German barrier that constantly frustrates the Turks.

However, the balance of power, which lay initially with the European countries, is evolving as Turkey establishes itself as a new global power while the economic crisis serves to highlight the EU's political and financial troubles. Will this rebalancing lead to effective cooperation between the three countries in areas of common interest, such as energy? This would require both a convergence of interests and an acceptance of the new hierarchy of power in order to bring together countries that nowadays can sometimes appear more like rivals than partners. The governance crisis in Turkey following the mass demonstrations of June 2013 has intensified the debate. With the Turkish authorities standing firm in the face of a considerable popular uprising, the reaction of EU member states - especially Germany, which urged the Turkish government to treat the protesters more leniently - has not been welcomed by Ankara. Trust always needs to be re-earned nowadays, but the crises in the Middle East provide an opportunity for the three countries to show they can work together.

Disjointed relations

The relationships between the various pairs in the Germany-France-Turkey triangle have become closer over time in different ways. The foundations of these relationships are very different, meaning that they remain broadly separate to this day. There is a parallel evolution of the three couples, marked by what is sometimes an almost theatrical mimicry.

Separate histories

Current relations between Germany, France and Turkey are the result of encounters going back centuries. However, precise identification of the periods of rapprochement between the countries is crucial for understanding the differences in how the relationships are structured and how they work. It also needs to be remembered that the countries interpret history in different ways. Perceptions vary, and the different historical periods do not merge to form a historical narrative common to all three countries.

Franco-Turkish relations are acknowledged to date back to the 16th century, with the alliance between Francis I and Suleiman the Magnificent paving the way for today's official talks and establishing the false impression of a balanced dialogue between powers¹. In this mainstream official perception, the Republic of Turkey is the direct descendant of the Ottoman Empire. Between the first Ottoman capitulation treaty and the reconciliation with Kemal Atatürk's Republic, which was idealised by several French politicians in the 20th century, a real cognitive distance emerged. Although French-speaking Turkish and French political leaders in the 20th century perpetuated the myth of twin republics - Kemalist ideals taking their inspiration from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, and Turkish political culture and institutions copied at least in part from France - the enduring rule of the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma partisi*, Justice and

¹ The "François 1er et Soliman le Magnifique - Les voies de la diplomatie à la Renaissance" ["Francis I and Suleiman the Magnificent - Renaissance Diplomacy"] exhibition, which took place in Ecoen between 18 November 2009 and 15 February 2010 as part of Turkish Season in France, showed the aesthetically ostentatious aspects of this political rapprochement.

Development Party) in Turkey is in contrast to this idealist vision². The electoral successes of the AKP, which was cast from an ideological Islamist mould and has very few influences from francophone culture, have marginalised the traditional Kemalist party (CHP, *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*). Something of a political enigma, the AKP's appetite for reform has dislodged conventional opinion over the last decade. French analysts are unsure where to place the party on the political spectrum and how to deal with it.

The strong relationship between Germany and Turkey, on the other hand, was built on shared interests that developed between the end of the 19th century and the second half of the 20th century. From the 1880s onwards, the German Empire was heavily involved in the modernisation of what was at the time a disintegrating Ottoman Empire. The Turks are still proud of the close cooperation between Kaiser Wilhelm II, who visited Constantinople, as it was then, on three separate occasions (1889, 1898 and 1917), and the last Ottoman sultans. They know that they are indebted to Germany for the modernisation of their army, in doctrine and in practice³. German engineers also designed the railway that was intended to link Constantinople to Baghdad. It was never built, but the beautiful stations at Sirkeci and Haydarpaşa are among several examples of German architecture that remain in modern-day Istanbul⁴. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey focused first of all on its internal problems, shutting itself off to grow on the periphery of European history. Turkey remained neutral throughout most of World War II, thereby respecting a history as recent as June 1941 when it signed a non-aggression pact with Berlin, before finally declaring war on Nazi Germany in February 1945. The second major event that shaped Turkish-German relations began in the latter part of the 20th century, when Turkish immigrants took part in Germany's rapid post-war economic recovery (known as the *Wirtschaftswunder*). An official bilateral agreement governing the flow of workers from Turkey to Germany was signed in 1961, and the 50-year anniversary of the agreement was commemorated with due magnitude on both sides⁵. The agreement added a completely different dimension to economic and social relations between Turkey and Germany.

As far as Franco-German history is concerned since the latter part of the 19th century, it is structured around three major wars before being shaped by the key stages of European reconstruction. We should remember above all that the Franco-German partnership

² For more information on the end of the 'twin republics' myth, see Dorothée Schmid, *The Franco-Turkish Relationship in Turmoil*, EDAM Report, 2007.

³ The cadres of the Young Turks revolution were themselves trained in Germany; Levent Ünsaldi, "Le système de valeurs de l'armée turque", CERI study, Nov. 2004.

⁴ Matthias von Kummer, *Deutsche Präsenz am Bosphorus / Boğaziçi'ndeki Almanya*, Generalkonsulat der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Istanbul, 2009.

⁵ Luc André, "Immigration turque: 50 ans qui ont changé l'Allemagne", *Le Figaro*, 31/10/2011

we see today was born out of a series of tragic events from which Turkey was largely absent: with the Ottoman Empire dissolved, Kemalist Turkey kept away from the drama that unfolded in Europe during the first half of the 20th century. Turkey re-entered European history during the Cold War between East and West. Actively supported by the US, Ankara was in charge of guarding the West's eastern border within the NATO system, a role that is now evolving from a shield against communism to a bridge towards the Islamic world⁶.

Closeness and major bilateral issues

To a large degree, the basics of history shape today's major bilateral issues. These issues are more or less the same for all three countries, although each country has its own priorities and deals with the issues in its own way.

The quality of Turkish-German relations is currently dictated by three major issues: a community of between 3 and 5 million Turkish nationals or people of Turkish origin living in Germany; steadily closer economic ties between the two countries; and Turkey's candidacy to join the EU, which is also a key factor in its relations with France.

The economic dynamism of Turkish immigrants has played a big part in the prosperity of modern-day Germany, and these people are now driving their own growth: in 2008, there were more than 72,000 small and medium-sized Turkish businesses in Germany, employing more than 350,000 people (of whom one third are Germans) across all service and industrial sectors⁷. However, the Turkish community still does not feel fully part of the German system. One in three Turks has become a German national to date, but the rate of naturalisation has slowed since the German government banned dual nationality in 1997. In fact, encouraged by the rapid growth of the Turkish economy, some Turks are even moving back to their homeland⁸. Having said that, the emergence of a particular Turkish-German culture has established an important link between the societies of the two countries⁹.

⁶ Jean-Sylvestre Mongrenier, "L'État turc, son armée et l'Otan : ami, allié, non aligné ?", *Hérodote* n°148, Q1 2013, special edition "Géopolitique de la Turquie", pp. 47-67.

⁷ Michel Verrier "L'Allemagne et 'ses' Turcs", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 01/09/2008.

⁸ "45 % des Turcs vivant en Allemagne veulent rentrer en Turquie et 15 % d'entre eux considèrent l'Allemagne comme leur patrie", *L'Est républicain*, 18/08/2012; "Viele Deutschtürken planen Rückkehr in Türkei", *Zeit Online*, 17/08/2012.

⁹ For a comparative look at the fate of migrants, see Ingrid Tucci, "Les descendants de migrants maghrébins en France et turcs en Allemagne : deux types de mise à distance sociale ? ", *Revue française de sociologie* n°51, Jan.-Mar 2010, pp. 3-38.

There are far fewer Turkish immigrants in France - between 400,000 and 500,000 - and they are generally considered to be poorly integrated into French society¹⁰. On official visits to Germany and France, Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has notably criticised assimilation on several occasions - comparing it to a "crime against humanity" - and encouraged Turkish communities in those countries to retain their national identity¹¹. Turks in France and Germany are also perceived as Muslims, which is hardly a neutral label in Europe post 9/11. The Turkish authorities are well aware of the rising social malaise in Europe in this regard, and the AKP has regularly denounced the rampant Islamophobia in European societies.

In terms of economic relations, Germany was once again Turkey's biggest trading partner in 2012 (main receiver of exports and second-biggest source of imports) as well as investing the second-largest amount in the country. Trade and economic ties between France and Turkey is also significant, although not on the same scale: France is Turkey's fifth-biggest receiver of exports, seventh-biggest source of imports and seventh-biggest investor¹². French companies now envisage Turkey as a leading emerging market with its specific range of political and legal risks, while Germans see it as an essential everyday partner with which mutual investment and trade is a direct source of competitiveness for the German economy.

Shared Franco-Turkish and German-Turkish bilateral issues also include cooperation in the fight against terrorism, which in Turkey's view essentially involves surveillance of PKK (in Kurdish, *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, Kurdistan Workers' Party, a separatist Kurdish guerrilla movement) militants exiled in Europe. In light of a surge in PKK operations in Turkey, and of attempts by the Turkish governments to find a political solution to the Kurdish question, this issue is becoming increasingly important. The French government generally sees this area of cooperation, which was thrust into the spotlight following the unsolved murder of three PKK militants in the middle of Paris in January 2013, as a way of offsetting the other

On Turkish-German culture in literature, Leslie A. Adelson, *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

¹⁰ Gaye Petek, "Les immigrés originaires de Turquie en France : dynamismes et paradoxes", in "Les Turcs et la France : le regard de deux communautés", *Note franco-turque* n°1, Ifri, December 2009.

¹¹ On 10 February 2008, Mr Erdoğan told more than 15,000 members of the Turkish community in Cologne that "assimilation is a crime against humanity". On 7 April, 2010 in Paris, at the end of Turkish Season in France, he encouraged Turks to integrate without losing their culture of origin; in Düsseldorf in February 2011, he again urged them not to assimilate and strongly condemned xenophobia in Europe.

¹² Sources: Franco-Turkish Chamber of Commerce and Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey.

complex bilateral issues¹³. Turkey often calls on Germany, which harbours more citizens of Kurdish origin than France, to take more responsibility¹⁴.

France also has another controversial issue with Turkey: recognition of the Armenian genocide. Since the French parliament passed a law on 29 January 2001 formally recognising the genocide, political dialogue between France and Turkey has experienced highs and lows, with relations deteriorating sharply on occasions. The debate has highlighted grey areas in Turkey's collective memory of the 20th century and also the universalist complex of French people, who are criticised in return by Turks over their own dark chapters of history¹⁵. In 2012, the passing of a new law punishing denial of the genocide, which was eventually overturned by the French Constitutional Council, fuelled animosity among Turks. The Turkish government remains extremely sensitive over the issue, in spite of real progress at the level of civil society. As a result, any French initiative linked to the Armenian matter is met with a string of threats of varying actual impact¹⁶.

Lastly, Turkey's candidacy to join the EU is one of its bilateral issues with France, as it is with Germany. The accession question includes a series of important and potentially controversial subjects in terms of inter-governmental relations, such as the issuance of Schengen visas. We will come back to the accession question later, but first it would be helpful to touch on the channels and tone of dialogue between the three countries.

Channels of dialogue and rules of conduct: replicated isolation

The Armenian issue is a good example of the differences between German-Turkish and Franco-Turkish relations. The latter, which are largely symbolic and based on principles, are often politicised to excess and give rise to lively exchanges. Behind a more bureaucratic exterior, the relationship with Germany is in fact also hugely political,

¹³ Cooperation should strengthen in the wake of a new law passed by the French parliament in spring 2013. For a critical assessment of the bill, see the analysis of Etienne Copeaux on his blog at <http://www.susam-sokak.fr/>

¹⁴ German Kurds were largely responsible for policing the demonstrations in Paris that followed the murder of the militants in January.

¹⁵ As a counter, Turkey automatically evokes the Algerian 'genocide' perpetrated by France, with the Algerian authorities also having their say to make it a three-way dispute.

¹⁶ In 2001, French arms exporters were struck off the list of Turkish suppliers as a protest against the genocide recognition law; in 2008, GDF-Suez was prevented from joining the Nabucco gas pipeline project, supposedly for similar reasons; in 2012 and 2013, official cultural cooperation between France and Turkey was effectively suspended for several months.

but the critical mass of economic and immigration issues demands greater self-control, and the personality of Germany's current chancellor also tends to play a calming role.

Moreover, the importance of the issues shared by Turkey and Germany demands greater day-to-day administrative cooperation, on similar levels to certain aspects of Franco-German relations¹⁷. State visits are more frequent and varied in the German-Turkish relationship than the Franco-Turkish one. The German-Turkish friendship group in the German parliament is extremely active and contains several MPs of Turkish origin; there are also cross-party relationships, including between the CDU and the AKP, which share a focus on religious values¹⁸. There are many examples of twinned Turkish and German local authorities, while decentralised cooperation between Turkey and France is developing more slowly. German political foundations also have a strong presence in Turkey, whereas no French institution does comparable work there. On the other hand, France benefits from a remarkable French-speaking education network in Turkey, including the Franco-Turkish Galatasaray University in Istanbul; a similar German-Turkish university initiative, which was launched in 2008, is still struggling to get off the ground.

Whether at government or civil-society level, there are therefore many more channels of exchange between Germany and Turkey. This definitely helps to avoid some of the misunderstandings that blight Franco-Turkish relations, which often involve the two sides talking at cross purposes, even when the French are communicating with French-speaking Turks¹⁹.

The French tend to deal in debates on sensitive topics, such as EU accession, secularity, history or the treatment of minorities, while the Germans simply deal with the facts. This implicit division of roles essentially creates the distinction between an enemy and a friend, one which Turkey is happy to uphold by way of its official rhetoric. Faced with an AKP administration growing in confidence, Nicolas Sarkozy's France waded more easily into controversy, while Germany kept things calm. However, German-Turkish relations are not exempt from everyday tensions; the subject of immigration, for example, is especially sensitive. While the Turkish press regularly reports on and criticises actions taken by the French government -

¹⁷ Berlin has benefited from the institutionalisation of exchanges between certain German and Turkish ministers; the exchange of diplomats was ratified in January 2011.

¹⁸ German Christian democracy is sometimes thought to have been the inspiration behind the AKP. Certain members of the CDU, which as a party actually tends to support the 'civilisational' argument that excludes Turkey from Europe, have spoken of their possible closeness to AKP values. For example, in 2008, Wolfgang Schäuble, who was then Germany's interior minister, said he saw Mr Erdoğan not as an Islamist but as a "muslim believer" for whom he had "in this regard, the utmost respect"; Michel Verrier, *art. cit.*

¹⁹ Nicole Pope, *Turquie-France: dialogue de sourds*, EDAM report, Istanbul, October 2010.

this was particularly the case for Nicolas Sarkozy, who commentators portrayed as Turkey's public enemy number one - Angela Merkel's official visits to Turkey and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's to Germany also give rise to difficult exchanges and scenarios²⁰. The Turkish authorities also often exaggerate the differences and put on a show for neighbouring countries.

Finally, the natural Franco-German alliance does not apply where Turkey is concerned. In fact, when interviewed, French and German diplomats will often use the other nation as an example of how not to conduct relations with Turkey, while extolling the virtues of their own country's approach to dealing with Ankara. The Turks tend to play on the isolation, dissymmetry and rivalry between the European partners. The Germans are often drawn into squabbles between France and Turkey, such as during the preparation of the joint NATO operation in Libya in spring 2011 - an operation which was initiated by the French and which Turkey only supported at a later stage²¹.

²⁰ For French diplomats, official German visits are a natural point of comparison, both in terms of quantity and quality; interviews, French embassy in Ankara, autumn 2010. Even the German government has paid the price of Mr Erdoğan's legendary straight-talking: see Anna Reimann, "Besuch in Berlin : Erdogan verschärft Kritik an Deutschland", *Spiegel Online*, 02/11/2011; or, concerning Angela Merkel's visit in the spring of 2013, Nathalie Versieux for RFI, "Relations germano-turques : 'Ich liebe dich, aber...'", RFI, 24/02/2013. In terms of the French, talk of France being unfriendly, and in particular of Sarkozy being an enemy of Turkey, peaked during the controversy surrounding the second law on Armenian genocide, with Turkish civil society demonstrating a flair for critical creativity: see this piece on the website *Armenews*, "Un papier toilette et des couches au nom de Sarkozy", 07/01/2012; also, the hashtag #sickmansarkozy appeared on Twitter.

²¹ "Alman basını: Türkiye, Fransa'ya karşı yeni haber", *Sabah*, 23/03/2011 ("*German press: Turkey against France*")

A system revolving around Europe

If Turkey did not wish to accede to the European Union, it would be a stretch to describe relations between the three countries as a 'system'. However, the European angle has created a new dynamic in these relations, with Germany and France the implicit arbitrators of a process that has stalled against the background of an EU in crisis. This crisis is currently helping Turkey to dispel the European myth that stands in its way.

Blockage to Turkish accession

The possibility of Turkey joining the European integration programme (known then as the European Economic Community) was first raised in the Ankara Agreement of 1963. It took more than 40 years for accession talks to actually begin. During that time, Europe expanded considerably, from six to 25 (now 27) member states, and Turkey experienced no fewer than three (strictly speaking) military coups. When accession talks began in 2005, they were governed by a strict framework defining the negotiations as "an open process, whose outcome cannot be guaranteed in advance", depending on the capacity of the EU to accept new members and on Turkey's ability to fulfil its obligations²².

Problems quickly arose. Several legal (failure to recognise the Republic of Cyprus) and technical (blocked reforms in Turkey) issues effectively put a stop to negotiations, but they all had a political significance. Above all, the final hurdle to Turkish accession remains the position of the EU member states, who decide collectively on when to open the negotiation chapters. As founder members and the engine room of the European Union, but also as the main partners of Turkey in every sense, France and Germany are particularly important. The two countries are thus in a position of responsibility with regard to Turkey's candidacy, and yet they are reluctant to work together over the issue.

In this case, France and Germany are united by their own significant individual reservations over Turkish accession. We will

²² "L'Union européenne et la Turquie", <<http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/turquie/l-union-europeenne-et-la-turquie/>>

look at both public and government opinion. Opinion polls, particularly Eurobarometer, frequently show that the European public is uneasy about the enlargement of the EU in general and about Turkish accession in particular; indeed, the Germans have more reservations than the French²³. In a survey published by *Bild am Sonntag* during Angela Merkel's visit to Turkey in March 2013, 60% of Germans said they were opposed to Turkey joining the EU; 57% said they were concerned by Turkey's economic growth and military development.

However, it is the position of governments that is the primary concern of the Turks. Having encouraged Turkish candidacy during the presidency of Jacques Chirac, France became its strongest opponent under Nicolas Sarkozy, and reservations have remained under François Hollande. Nicolas Sarkozy, who made clear his opposition to accession, called for a "privileged partnership", which was never fully defined but appealed to Angela Merkel in its principle, riling the Turks as much as possible²⁴. The French president ensured that France blocked five of the 35 negotiation chapters - those concerning economic and monetary union - as he believed they would open the final door to accession. The official German position is harder to pin down because it results from a coalition pact between government parties with different views on the subject. As things stand, Angela Merkel's CDU is opposed to accession, while the Free Democratic Party, to which Mrs Merkel's foreign minister belongs, is in favour. Angela Merkel has repeatedly stated (and continues to state) that accession is an "open process"; for his part, back in 2011, Guido Westerwelle enthusiastically declared that "we should open the doors of Europe wide to Turkey (...) before Turkey turns away from us"²⁵. The result is that, during the Sarkozy years, the German position appeared to be much more flexible than the French one. On the other hand, the Turks tend to see the subtlety of the German position as ambiguous, which is almost as problematic as the open opposition of the French.

The gatecrasher versus the gatekeepers

France very quickly set out its stall as the leading opponent of Turkish accession; in the background, the German position has led to a kind of moratorium that is effectively a flat refusal in the short term. During the Sarkozy years, Germany refrained from calling France to order when it made negative statements about accession. This means the

²³ Jürgen Gerhards and Hans Silke, "Why not Turkey? Attitudes towards Turkish Membership in the EU among Citizens in 27 European Countries", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 49, no. 4, July 2011, pp. 741–766.

²⁴ Seyfettin Gürsel, "Merkel Hayal Görüyor" ("*Merkel dreams*"), *Euractiv Turquie*, 30/03/2010.

²⁵ Anna Reiman, *art. cit.*

two countries are presenting something of a united front concerning Turkish candidacy for EU membership. France and Germany are the gatekeepers of Europe, with Turkey in the role of gatecrasher.

Staying close to its principles, Sarkozy-led France insisted that Turkey was neither geographically nor culturally European, making it clear that it wanted Islam to remain on the outside of the EU. The French left, led by François Hollande, will be more 'conditionalist', believing that Turkey, if it brings itself into line with European values, is entitled to join the Union. However, although less essentialist, this Europe of values remains hugely demanding. The French left is also traditionally sensitive to human rights issues, especially the fate of minority groups (the Kurds since the presidency of François Mitterrand; the Armenians as much as the French right) but also the treatment of women and freedom of speech - topics that could once again become Turkey's Achilles' heel²⁶. In this regard, the Turkish government's handling of the Gezi Park protests in 2013 disturbed French politicians, even if they made few public comments about the situation. The mass demonstrations against the destruction of this tiny green space in the heart of Istanbul brought a heavy-handed response from the police, which received widespread coverage in the French media, and even resulted in the deportation of a female French student²⁷.

Germany's position is the result of a string of internal political compromises rather than a principle of opposition. This means the Turks see it as a more favourable position that is at least in keeping with the spirit of the European promise. Germany likes to evoke the *pacta sunt servanda* concept, which Turkish legal experts also often cite to defend the inevitability of accession. This principle actually serves a dual purpose: it highlights the commitment to the European project on one hand, while reminding Turkey of its responsibility to reform on the other.

In practice, France has firmly taken charge of criticising Turkey and keeping it out of Europe for the last seven years, at least until the Gezi Park protests, and none of the other member states is sufficiently strongly opposed to its position. The UK, for example, is a supporter of accession but avoids taking the argument to the French government.

The main reason that France and Germany have an implicit understanding on the issue is that Franco-German relations remain

²⁶ These main principles remain intact in spite of the left/right division on Turkey becoming less clear; Dorothee Schmid, *Les élites françaises et la Turquie, une relation dans l'attente*, EDAM report, 2010, pp. 33-37 ; and "Prospects for France-Turkey Ties Improve Under Hollande", Interview with Dorothee Schmid, August 2012, *World Politics Review*, p. 1. The freedom of the press in Turkey has been the subject of a great deal of attention over the last two years, and the OECD regularly questions the Turkish government about it.

²⁷ AFP, "Turquie: une étudiante française expulsée après les manifestations", 25 June 2013.

dictated by their belonging to the EU, with their instinct to protect the Union growing significantly stronger over several years. The severe financial and institutional crisis afflicting the EU has dictated that priorities be drawn up. Both Paris and Berlin believe that not only is Turkish accession not a way to save Europe in the short term, it could also be even more costly from both a financial and institutional perspective.

The blockage of the Turkish accession process brings with it another advantage: it allows France and Germany to retain bilateral relations with Turkey rather than overlapping subject areas too soon. This scenario seems to be politically advantageous in a time of national introspection, huge sensitivity around immigration and religious issues, and a soft economic war. To date, as a result, we have seen a surprising and persistent subsidiarity in Euro-Turkish relations, with national issues taking precedence: France and Germany are still trying to disassociate the overall accession question from the bilateral issues, in spite of attempts by the Turkish government to link the two; there is no debate on accession at a European level; and European topics such as visas, an area where Turkey feels it is discriminated against compared with other candidate countries, are not discussed further at a Franco-German level.

Europe in crisis, Turkish perceptions

France and Germany are the gatekeepers of the EU, and their stance has sometimes frustrated Turkey to such a degree as to prompt official responses²⁸. At civil society level, some Turkish analysts believe France and Germany are opposed to accession because it would signify the end of their system of domination over Europe²⁹. The Turks have sometimes dreamed of an equal-footing summit between German, French and Turkish political leaders with a view to laying the foundations for a high-level, regular background dialogue³⁰. However, the most common wish expressed in Turkey is for a separation, or at the very least a serious falling-out, between France and Germany. Such a scenario could see new European alliances

²⁸ "Turkey Shocked by Franco-German Election Rhetoric", *Euractiv*, 11/05/2009; "France, Germany Accused of 'Black Campaign' Against Turkey's EU bid", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 5/12/2011.

²⁹ Hakan Yilmaz, "Turkish Identity on the Road to the EU: Basic Elements of French and German Oppositional Discourses", *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, Vol. 9, Number 3, December 2007, pp. 293-305.

³⁰ Semih Idiz, "Is the Erdoğan-Sarkozy-Merkel Summit a Trap?", *Milliyet*, 22/01/2008 (on talk of a three-way summit that never took place).

formed, potentially paving the way for Turkey to finally take its place at the table³¹.

More generally, the Turkish position has evolved considerably since 2005 in the face of European reluctance. In response to what it sees as exclusively political and identity-based rebuttals, Turkey has attempted since 2005, without much success, to play on its economic assets as an emerging nation full of potential and to make itself diplomatically indispensable. The economic, financial and finally political crisis that has swept through Europe over the last five years or so is quickly changing people's perceptions. Although it is suffering the effects of stagnation in Europe, the Turkish economy has stood up to the global financial crisis fairly well. An oasis of relative stability compared with a seemingly disintegrating southern Europe, Turkey can now present itself as a growth hub and potential saviour with the miracle economic recipe for permanent growth. The political unrest in the Middle East also gives Turkey a pivotal role in the security of the region and strengthens its strategic partnership with the US.

On the other hand, the crisis has made the EU seem much less attractive to the Turkish people. In fact, it has sometimes made the Europeans look ridiculous in the eyes of the Turkish people, an image that the government in Ankara is only too happy to reinforce by mocking the EU's economic difficulties on a regular basis, albeit while remaining concerned about the rise of nationalist political parties³². For historical reasons, the crises afflicting Greece and Cyprus are among the favourite topics of discussion for Turkish analysts³³. While Europe quietly loses itself among seemingly endless chatter, Turkey is painting itself in a good light and highlighting its good health, to the point of inventing a parallel accession process. Indeed, in 2012, the Turkish government produced its first ever progress report on the accession negotiations, as a contrast to the one drawn up each year by the European Commission. The 270-page Turkish report describes the country's government as the "most reforming in Europe". Turkey's European minister, chief negotiator and commissioner of the report, Egemen Bağış, says he is ready to open and close the as-yet-untouched negotiation chapters in record time³⁴.

The minister also describes the accession process as a "mutual transformation" between Turkey and the EU³⁵. At a time

³¹ Abdullah Bozkürt, "Will Turkey Align with Germany or France?", *Today's Zaman*, 28/10/2011.

³² İbrahim Kalın, "Turkey and EU in 2013", *Today's Zaman*, 12/12/2012; "Babacan Underlines Structural Problems in Euro Zone", *TRT English*, 19/04/2013

³³ For the crisis in southern Europe and its impact on Turkey, see Eduard Soler, "Crise et affaiblissement de l'Europe du Sud: implications pour la Turquie", *Note franco-turque* no. 8, Ifri, July 2013.

³⁴ Markus Bernat, "Ankara juge les évaluations de la Commission 'partisanes'", *Europolitique*, 03/01/2013.

³⁵ Speech by Egemen Bağış at the "La Turquie pour une nouvelle Europe" [Turkey for a new Europe] conference, Ifri, Paris, 21/02/2013; online at www.ifri.org.

when Europe is weak, it seems that Turkey sees, experiences and forecasts a Union that is different to the one it is actually being offered. A break-up of Europe is not being ruled out, and Turkey hopes to eventually secure a place in a considerably reconstituted Europe that no longer revolves around the Franco-German axis.

A triangle of powers

The removal of the French veto on a negotiation chapter at the start of 2013 was a major step forward, particularly as it was initially followed by encouraging statements from the German chancellor. This progress is proof of the change in context of the negotiations, which has rebalanced relations between the parties. Moreover, new external threats provide an opportunity for the three players to work together on a more equal footing. The European issue is becoming an adjustment variable for the Germany-France-Turkey mimetic triangle, which is gradually evolving into a power struggle.

The Franco-German barrier removed

The rapid deterioration of the European situation has led to France and Germany softening their position on accession, at least for the time being. In fact, the blockage of negotiations, combined with the critical state of the EU, puts the prospect of Turkish accession further away, making it a question of if rather than when. The Turkish prime minister continues to show impatience, raising the possibility of Turkey joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation³⁶ (which is described as an "alternative to the European Union"), and re-opening the eternal debate on Turkey's true geopolitical position³⁷. At the same time, some Turkish intellectuals are beginning to acknowledge Europe's structural problems, and the idea of Turkey having a stronger relationship with the EU (albeit not through accession) is taking hold as the prospect of a different-shaped Europe emerges³⁸.

The conditions for a paradoxical détente therefore appear to be in place. Political changes in France, where François Hollande has been elected as president and is more flexible than Nicolas Sarkozy on Turkish issues, are smoothing the transition. On 12 February

³⁶ Regional Asian cooperation organisation comprising Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, with a view to bringing these countries closer together and establishing a shared strategic, economic and political vision.

³⁷ Daniel Pipes, "Is Turkey Leaving the West? ", *The Washington Times*, 06/02/2013.

³⁸ Dorothee Schmid, "De l'élargissement à l'éloignement : la Turquie veut-elle toujours adhérer à l'Union européenne ? ", *Politique étrangère* no. 1, Spring 2010, pp. 13-24; "La Turquie peut changer sa manière de voir le processus d'adhésion", interview with Kemal Derviş, former Turkish finance minister, *Europolitique*, 12/02/2013.

2013, French foreign minister Laurent Fabius told his Turkish counterpart Ahmet Davutoğlu that France would allow one of the five negotiation chapters it had blocked up to that point - the "Regional policy and coordination of structural instruments" chapter - to be opened. This partial but hugely symbolic gesture has set the wheels in motion. A few days later, during her official visit to Turkey, Angela Merkel spoke of the "relaunch of negotiations" and confirmed she was in favour of a new chapter being opened - again, little by way of commitment but still seen as hugely encouraging.³⁹

Turkey welcomed these words but hoped that the goodwill of the French would extend beyond one chapter. Even if the declarations do not result in an immediate resumption of negotiations - other, more powerful barriers, such as the Cypriot question, remain - the psychological consequences of this gesture are significant for all parties. The French believe that Turkey is holding back on reforms that would enable progress on 'openable' chapters (e.g. "Public procurement" and "Social policy and employment"). For a while at least, the disagreements are focused on the technical content of the negotiations.

However, since the start of negotiations in 2005, the difficulty of the interactions has intensified and politicised the exchanges between Germany, France and Turkey. The European debate has highlighted and magnified several potentially or openly conflictual issues, ranging from immigration and values to geopolitical preferences. This has meant the three countries are forced to talk issues over without often finding points on which they can all agree. Although dialogue is more frequent and significant, and although the parties are seemingly negotiating on a more equal footing, there is little in the way of actual understanding and agreement.

The crisis that built up in June and July 2013 around the plans to destroy Gezi Park in Istanbul is a good example of the politicisation of relations between the three countries. As it happens, Germany was the troublemaker on this occasion. Although the Turkish government's suppression of the protests drew calls for restraint from several European institutions - notably the European Parliament - Germany was the member state which took the strongest stance⁴⁰. Angela Merkel explicitly blocked the opening of the much-talked-about negotiation chapter 22, over which France had just backed down. Turkey denounced this position, which it described as pure electoral opportunism. Yet one could also argue that this is evidence that the political Copenhagen criteria are starting to play a key role in bilateral relations between Germany and Turkey. The strength of Germany's reaction was doubtless due in part to the presence of

³⁹ Frédéric Lemaître, "Angela Merkel relance les négociations d'adhésion à l'UE avec la Turquie", *Le Monde*, 26/02/2013.

⁴⁰ Jean Marcou, "Nouvelle épreuve de vérité pour les relations turco-européennes !", OVIPO blog, 22 June 2013.

Claudia Roth, the co-chair of Germany's Alliance '90/The Greens party, in Gezi Park during one of the attacks carried out by the Turkish police, and to her denunciation in the media of what happened⁴¹.

The accession issue is therefore a long way from being resolved and the debate has been re-opened concerning new negotiation chapters, something that now seems subject to political conditionality within the EU. In theory, however, this dispute should not overshadow developments in relations between Germany, France and Turkey in other areas away from the European negotiations. The three countries can now envisage ways of working together outside the European framework that magnifies their disagreements.

Common strategic concerns and external ambitions

These ways of working together will become even more crucial since the three countries have parallel ambitions of influence and strategic concerns over their borders. Their interests overlap, but the objectives and means differ. At the risk of competition, parallelism is becoming particularly evident at a time when Turkey is promoting its status on the global stage, France is adjusting its foreign policy and the economy is dictating that Germany is the dominant European power, forcing it (whether it likes it or not) to take on political responsibilities from which it has shied away for some time.

The economic crisis has made the prospect of a Franco-German rivalry a permanent topic of discussion in France, which feels it has been downgraded⁴². However, the most remarkable change of the three countries in question has come in the power profile of Turkey. For the last decade, the AKP has shown huge diplomatic ambitions and worked hard to put back among the great nations a country that had been inward-looking for too long. Turkey's strategy is based on two solid pillars. Conceptually, the theorisation of Turkish influence and the establishment of major diplomatic schemes by Ahmet Davutoğlu makes Turkey a rare modern example of a country with a doctrine of non-violent global conquest⁴³. Practically, Turkey is ensuring it has the means to match its ambitions: it is strengthening

⁴¹ Claudia Roth pulled no punches in an interview with Arte Journal on 26 June 2013, saying: "We wanted to show we are on the side of democracy in Turkey" and "Erdoğan is a divisive figure".

⁴² On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty, former French European minister Bruno Le Maire told *Le Figaro* that "Franco-German relations oscillate between rivalry and cooperation"; 20/01/2013.

⁴³ Interview with Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Les grandes ambitions de la diplomatie turque", conducted by Dorothee Schmid and Marc Semo, *Politique internationale* no. 137, autumn 2012, pp. 193-206.

its diplomatic network, increasing and redeploying its economic cooperation, and organising its cultural soft power⁴⁴.

In the now dominant global vision of Ankara, the EU is often described as a "strategic priority", i.e. a foreign-policy target rather than a system of rights and obligations dictating all the country's internal and external policy choices. Certain Turkish officials are quick to denigrate Europe while its international political standing is up in the air. For example, Turkish finance minister Zafer Çağlayan, upon the EU being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, described it as "the most hypocritical institution of all time", which "left Turkey waiting at its door for more than 50 years" and "was more deserving of a prize for its hypocrisy and duplicity"⁴⁵.

Boosted by steady and impressive economic growth over the last 10 years, the new Turkey is confident in its ability to influence international affairs, and the Middle East has become its favourite ground to test this out⁴⁶. The Middle East actually provides the three parties with opportunities to either work together or get in one another's way.

The expression of Turkish ambitions in the Mediterranean and the Middle East immediately puts the noses of Europe's leaders out of joint, because Turkey is an outsider rocking the boat. France is keeping a particularly close eye on Turkey's activism in an area it has long considered to be within its sphere of influence⁴⁷. The most dramatic disagreements between France and Turkey with regard to their respective Arab policies have centred on Libya: Turkey, which initially opposed NATO's decision to remove Muammar Gaddafi in spring 2011, was annoyed at being excluded from the consultation process organised by the French before operations began. The growing rivalry between the two powers became particularly clear during the almost simultaneous visits of Nicolas Sarkozy and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to the Arab Spring countries in September 2011. For its part, Berlin is concerned by the dispute between Turkey and Israel, as well as by the extremely militant pro-Palestinian position adopted by the Turkish government. Both Paris and Berlin are also troubled by the fact that the Cyprus issue is a long way from being resolved. With the threat of bankruptcy and the discovery of massive hydrocarbon reserves in the Levantine basin, there is a chance of resuming negotiations over the reunification of the island. However, Ankara

⁴⁴ "Le 'soft power', pilier de la diplomatie turque", *Zaman France*, 17/08/2011.

⁴⁵ "Turkish minister slams EU as world's most hypocritical body", Reuters, 16/10/2012

⁴⁶ Dorothee Schmid (dir.), *La Turquie au Moyen-Orient : le retour d'une puissance régionale ?*, Paris, CNRS éditions, 2011.

⁴⁷ Back in August 2009, the French foreign ministry organised a round table on the "Eastern enticement" of Turkey at the Ambassadors' Conference.

showed in 2013 that, although politically isolated, it was again up for a fight with regard to what is a hugely sensitive issue in Turkey⁴⁸.

However, the Mediterranean and the Middle East also give rise to shared strategic concerns, ranging from securing energy supplies to restricting terrorism and weapons of massive destruction and controlling immigration. The region has been beset by chronic conflict since the start of the Arab Spring. The political transitions in Tunisia and Egypt remain incomplete, new conflicts are brewing (Iraq, Iran) and the out-of-control civil war in Syria threatens to spill over into all its neighbouring countries. Geographically, Turkey is on the front line of these regional troubles. It is a crossroads and shares borders with Iran, Iraq and Syria, three countries that are either unstable themselves or contribute to the instability. Turkey's recently acquired political status also gives it responsibility: Tayyip Erdoğan has assumed the role of a leader in the region, and the AKP is often portrayed as a benchmark for Arab Islamist parties emerging from the Muslim Brotherhood, who are sweeping all before them in elections⁴⁹. For this reason, Turkey is sought as a representative and partner by both Arab and Western countries. It certainly seems more able to lead mediation, or at the very least to convey effective messages, than France, whose stance towards the Arab world has lost a lot of credibility, and Germany, which still lacks authority as a political player in the region.

With their positions perfectly aligned, France and Turkey are officially working together harmoniously on the Syria issue. For its part, Germany shares its partners' concerns on instability in the region without becoming embroiled in a power struggle. However, it is powerlessness that unites all three countries as they try to deal with a situation that has become completely unmanageable. Turkish diplomatic success in the region is now only relative in light of the rapid spread of disorder and violence. The deterioration of Turkish-Iraqi relations, the recurring difficulties with Iran and the uneven energy partnership with Russia are all accentuating Turkey's vulnerability, which is fully exposed by the Syria crisis. The emergence of several powerful external players in the Syria crisis (Russia, Iran, the Gulf states) has forced Western players, who had not anticipated such a hard and drawn-out conflict, to temporarily retreat and ponder their feeble contribution to a solution. The effect of chaos in the Middle East effectively makes all courses of action equally viable and inevitably forces France, Germany and Turkey to close ranks.

⁴⁸ Guillaume Perrier, "La Turquie, un observateur inquiet de la crise chypriote", *Le Monde*, 28/03/2013.

⁴⁹ Dorothee Schmid, "La Turquie au Moyen-Orient : modèle ou acteur? ", in Thierry de Montbrial and Philippe Moreau Defarges (dir.), *Ramses 2013*, Paris, Dunod, 2012, pp. 136-139.

The US as a referee

The solidarity within NATO in the face of the Syria crisis is further proof of the compulsory alliance between the three countries when confronted with such a severe crisis. It is also an indication that Turkey has returned to the bosom of the West⁵⁰. The deployment of Patriot anti-missile batteries in Turkey at the start of 2013 was a significant step towards uniting strategic outlooks. Some of these missiles came from Germany, and Angela Merkel made a point during her trip to Turkey of visiting 260 German soldiers who were operating the missiles on the Turkish-Syrian border with their Dutch and US allies.

As an essential backdrop, the military alliance seems able to rid Turkish-European relations of most of their political difficulties: in an emergency, the equality of NATO partners takes precedence over the Copenhagen criteria. The pre-eminence of European democratic rules, which neither France nor Germany has really wanted or been able to defend up to now in the context of accession negotiations with Turkey, is on the back burner. The new set of priorities fits quite well with the agenda of the major NATO player in the region: the United States.

The deployment of Patriot missiles, which was a strong political gesture but not necessarily compatible with the military situation on the ground, was above all a sign of the US working closely with its Turkish ally. Washington sees Ankara as an essential tool in its partial and gradual withdrawal from the Middle East. Closer relations between Turkey and Europe remain a priority of US foreign policy, as part of a well-structured alliance. The strategic sponsorship of the US could help to provisionally overcome some thorny political issues between Europe and Turkey. This means that the US role of referee facilitates the strategic cohabitation between Germany, France and Turkey.

⁵⁰ Jean Marcou, "Turkey's Foreign Policy: Shifting Back to the West after a Drift to the East?", *Turkey Policy Brief* no. 8, TEPAV, April 2013.

Conclusion: shared responsibility

The choice of rivalry or alliance takes Germany and France back to a time before the creation of the EU. It was a time when the fate of Turkey was gradually detached from that of the European countries, and yet does Turkey not today find Europe in much the same state in which the Ottoman Empire left it? Fixed on a model of union of states, and adept at methodological bilateral isolation diplomacy⁵¹, Turkey will not be surprised - if anything, it will be slightly relieved - at Europe's disorganisation, even if it could suffer from the economic fall-out.

However, it is in the interest of none of our three powers to work alone. Their growth depends on economic integration; the conditions of their military and energy security are the same; and none of them can claim to be the only truly federative model of universal values in their region. Once again, the Europe issue is becoming a common horizon. Since the EU is going through a period of profound transformation, the outcome of which is still uncertain, the resumption (even if only partial) of accession negotiations with Turkey must go hand in hand with a shared reflection on the overall direction of the European project. Europe's strong reaction to the demonstrations in Turkey in June 2013 revealed a growing concern surrounding the compatibility of political practices between partners; it also highlighted the increase in daily interaction between Germany, France and Turkey. This closeness is, in itself, a good thing, even if disagreements need to be overcome.

We can only hope that the severity of the crises that have afflicted all parties brings us closer to the end of the period of mutual tests. After all, sharing responsibility will allow our three protagonists to put a stop to their permanent political haggling.

⁵¹ David Béhar, analyst at the French foreign ministry's policy planning department, speech at the Franco-Turkish Committee's round table, "La nouvelle politique étrangère turque : ambitions, succès, limites", Paris, Town Hall of the 10th arrondissement, 01/04/2011.

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