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Parliamentary Evidence

UK-Turkey Relations and Turkey's Regional Role

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Summary of evidence

- Instruments and strategies are needed to coordinate more effectively between the crown jewels of British diplomacy (ie the Foreign Office, UKTI, think-tanks, universities, cultural entities, and business and trade associations) to further bilateral ties with Turkey.
- Setting up a joint public-private sector facility to fund targeted research projects and events is one possible way of promoting UK-Turkey relations.
- Turkey is an important but not the leading player in the South Caucasus, Central Asia, Middle East and Western Balkans.
- Turkey's strategic location affords an enhanced British footprint in the South Caucasus, Central Asia, Middle East and Western Balkans.
- Turkish foreign policy is constrained by: the unresolved Kurdish issue; challenging bilateral relations with Armenia, Cyprus, EU, Greece, Iran, Israel and Syria; domestic economic capabilities; and over-dependency on Russian and Iranian hydrocarbon supplies.
- The governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) is an inspiration for Islamist-rooted parties in the Middle East and North Africa.
- Turkey itself is not necessarily a model for Muslim countries and organisations imbued with ethnic and sectarian diversity for numerous reasons ranging from a distinctive history to incompleteness of Turkey's nation-building process.
- Turkey's human rights' deficit and gender inequality restrains the full potential and quality of its democratic institutions.
- Turkey's Kurdish issue is a major litmus test of the maturity of Turkish politics.
- If the Kurdish issue is unresolved, it could escalate into a mass popular mobilisation along the lines of so-called 'Arab Spring' with regional implications.
- Turkey's EU membership is at a standstill driven by fears of its Muslim identity. Prospects for a Cyprus settlement in the near future look dim.
- There is nothing more that the UK can do in the short-term to re-mobilise the moribund EU-Turkey relationship and to encourage a settlement in Cyprus.

- Turkey will increasingly cooperate with individual or a group of EU member states rather than with EU as a whole. Libya and Syria demonstrate this relational change, where Ankara is coordinating with Berlin, London and Paris rather than Brussels.
- Turkey's geostrategic position offers opportunities for strengthening UK and EU energy security underpinned by one of the three competing pipeline projects: Nabucco, Interconnector Turkey-Italy-Greece or the Trans-Adriatic Pipelines.
- The chosen pipeline is intended to carry Azerbaijani and, perhaps, Turkmen gas to European consumers from 2017. So far, the Nabucco pipeline seems to be the leading proposition.
- Turkey's ambitions as a regional energy hub have lagged implementation.
- Turkey appears to be becoming more dependent on Russian energy supplies. It concluded an agreement with the Russian state-controlled Atomstroyexport to build a nuclear power plant on the Mediterranean coast of Akkuyu starting in 2013.
- Atomstroyexport will wholly-own and pay the full cost of construction, which is estimated at around US \$20 billion. It will be able to transfer up to 49% of its share in the Akkuyu venture to another party.
- Whether Turkey's recent abolition of the autonomy of the Energy Market Regulatory Authority portends a movement from an EU-style transparent, market-based approach in the energy sector to more opacity and state intervention remains to be seen.

Evidence

How should the Government's efforts to strengthen UK-Turkey relations be assessed, especially with respect to the economic and commercial spheres?

1. Turkey already has extensive close economic relations with the UK. Both countries aim to double bilateral trade volumes from US \$9 billion to US \$18 billion by 2015.

2. UK-based think-tanks (eg Chatham House), universities (eg the London School of Economics), cultural entities (eg British Council), business and trade associations (eg the Middle East Association) and government bodies (eg Foreign Office and UKTI) are quite active in promoting UK-Turkish links.

3. Arguably, the UK and United States are the only countries in the world enjoying such an enviable infrastructure for international outreach. But, their understated use in the UK may diminish this critical advantage.

Recommendation

4. The UK government should consider instruments and strategies to coordinate more effectively between the crown jewels of British diplomacy (ie the Foreign Office, think-tanks, universities, cultural entities, and business and trade associations). One step could be setting up a joint public-private sector facility to fund targeted research projects and events to promote UK-Turkey relations.

To what extent is Turkey a helpful partner for the Government's foreign and security policy, in the Middle East and North Africa, the South Caucasus, Central Asia or the Western Balkans? To what extent is Turkey such a partner for the UK in NATO?

5. The UK government cooperates very closely, both bilaterally and through NATO, with Turkey on the Middle East and North Africa, Central Asia, South Caucasus and Western Balkans.

6. Libya is a good illustration of how the UK, as opposed to France, drew Turkey very early on into the military campaign, giving added legitimacy to this policy.

7. Turkey's geostrategic position at the crossroads between Europe and Asia and proximity to 70% of global energy supplies offers the UK significant opportunities for a stronger footprint in some of world's most vital and volatile regions.

8. However, the UK should be realistic in appreciating the circumscriptions of Turkey's influence in its surrounding regions. Turkey is an important but not the leading player in any of those regions. Russia and China are pre-eminent in Central Asia; Russia in the South Caucasus; Israel and Iran in the Middle East and North Africa; and the EU in the Western Balkans.

9. Crucially, Turkey's economy limits foreign policy ambitions, including its over-dependency on Russian and Iranian hydrocarbon supplies. Similarly, its fractious relations with neighbouring Armenia, Cyprus, EU, Greece, Iran, Israel and Syria confine the scope of Turkish foreign policy.

10. Turkey's dispute with Cyprus, for instance, hampers the deployment of NATO assets in EU-led peace-keeping and security operations and Turkey's participation in European defence cooperation.

11. Turkey's unresolved Kurdish issue seems to restrain Turkey's relations with Iraq.

Recommendations

12. The UK should maintain, if not strengthen, policy coordination with Turkey towards the Middle East and North Africa, South Caucasus, Central Asia and Western Balkans. Nevertheless, the UK should be realistic in its expectations of such engagement with Turkey.

13. In particular, it should take into account that Turkey is an important but not leading player in those regions. Additionally, Turkish foreign policy is constrained by the unresolved Kurdish issue; challenging relations with Armenia, Cyprus, EU, Greece, Iran, Israel and Syria; domestic economic capabilities; and over-dependency on Russian and Iranian hydrocarbon supplies.

To what extent do Turkey and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) function as models for other Muslim countries and organisations in a way that is helpful for UK Government policy, particularly in the context of the 'Arab Spring'? How should Turkey's role in this respect affect UK Government policy towards it?

14. Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) is an inspiration to Islamist-rooted parties in the Middle East and North Africa on active engagement in electoral politics and on promoting open markets, foreign investment and free trade.

15. Turkey itself is not a necessarily the most appropriate model for other Muslim countries and organisations imbued with ethnic and sectarian diversity for the reasons below:

(i) *Distinctive history*—Republican founder Mustafa Ataturk and the pro-Western military, motivated Turkey to emulate, albeit incompletely, European political and economic institutions, and social conventions. Arab militaries do not seem to share a similar European orientation.

(ii) *Highly centralised, unitary state*—This is best encapsulated by the first three articles of the Turkish constitution defining the country as an 'indivisible entity.'

(iii) *Exclusive national identity*—This is, again, best encapsulated by the first three articles of the Turkish constitution defining the country as a 'Turkish Republic' with 'Turkish' as the only official language.

(iv) *Majoritarian culture*—Turkey suffers from intense political and social polarisation undermining prospects for societal consensus on key political, economic and social issues.

(v) *Restrictive election system*—Turkey applies the D'Hondt method with an excessively high 10% threshold thereby excluding smaller parties from parliamentary representation.

(vi) *Underdeveloped civil society*—Turkey is marked by limited social capital and deep conservatism restricting the potential robustness of democratic politics and independent social action.

(vii) *Gender inequality*—Turkey is ranked number 101 out of 109 and 124 out of 126 countries in terms of gender empowerment by the United Nations Development Programme and the World Economic Forum respectively.

(viii) *Kurdish issue*—Persistence of the Kurdish problem suggests that the nation-building process in Turkey is far from complete.

(ix) *European Convention on Human Rights*—The European Court on Human Rights has assumed a critical role in promoting human and minority rights in Turkey. Such a judicial body does not exist in the Middle East and North Africa or in other parts of the world.

Recommendations

16. The UK government should view the governing AKP as a positive benchmark for Islamist-rooted parties in the Middle East and North Africa.

17. But, it should be cautious in projecting Turkey itself as a model for Muslim countries and organisations imbued with ethnic and sectarian diversity due to: (i) a distinctive history, (ii) a highly centralised, unitary state, (iii) an exclusive national identity, (iv) a majoritarian culture, (v) a restrictive election system, (vi) an underdeveloped civil society, (vii) gender inequality, (viii) the Kurdish issue and (ix) the European Convention on Human Rights.

Should the UK Government be concerned about trends in the quality of democracy, the rule of law and human rights in Turkey, including the rights of ethnic and religious minorities (including the Kurds) and freedom of expression?

18. Human rights and the rule of law are core values for the quality of democracy in Turkey.

19. Ronald Inglehart—a political scientist at the University of Michigan and Director of the highly-acclaimed World Values Survey—and Pippa Norris—a Harvard University lecturer—found in 2003 that ‘Muslims and their Western counterparts want democracy, yet they are worlds apart when it comes to attitudes toward divorce, abortion, gender equality, and gay rights—which may not bode well for democracy’s future in the Middle East.’

20. In a related finding, Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel—Professor for Political Culture Research at Leuphana University—noted in 2009 that societies stressing gender equality and human rights tend to be the most effective democracies. By contrast, conservative societies tend to be less robust democracies.

21. Similarly, Yilmaz Esmer—a well-respected Professor at Istanbul-based Bahcesehir University and Director of the World Values Survey in Turkey—confirmed these findings in a recent interview: ‘What they [Inglehart and Norris] are saying is that what differentiates Islamic values from non-Islamic values is not democratic values etc. There is no difference. The basic difference according to them is gender and sexuality.’

22. Professor Esmer found that inter-generational values in Turkey have been stable and durable over the last 20 years. His findings are shared by other leading academics in this field, notably Ali Carkoglu and Ersin Kalaycioglu—Professors at Istanbul-based Sabanci University.

23. Turkey’s position on human rights and gender equality is measured by reputable global agencies. According to the Reporters without Borders’ ‘International Press Index’ 2010, Turkey is ranked 138 out of 178 countries for press freedom, lower than Algeria, Egypt, Iraq and Qatar, and 39 positions below the level for 2006.

24. US-based Pew Research’s survey on religious restrictions ranked Turkey as 19 and 24 out of 198 countries and territories respectively in terms of the ‘highest levels’ of government restrictions and social hostilities involving religion.

25. In addition, the United Nations Development Agency and the World Economic Forum ranked Turkey as number 101 out of 109 and 124 out of 126 countries in terms of gender empowerment respectively. At 23%, its Female Labour Force Participation Rate—the proportion of working-age women in employment—is less than half the OECD average of 58%.

26. Turkey's Kurdish issue is the key litmus test of Turkish democracy. On that score, there is evidence that political and economic frustrations may be fuelling ethnic antagonism between Turks and Kurds. Konda Research, a Turkish polling company, revealed in a June 2011 survey that 57.6% of ethnic Turks said they would not marry a Kurd, while 47.4% said they did not want a Kurdish neighbour. In comparison, 26.4% of Kurds said they would not marry a Turk, while 22.1% said they did not want a Turkish neighbour.

27. Arguably, the Kurdish issue, if prolonged, could follow the path of the so-called 'Arab Spring' by spiralling into a mass popular mobilisation. This development may accentuate tensions between Turks and Kurds and affect as well as get affected by regional developments in Iran, Iraq and Syria.

Recommendations

28. The UK government should pay close attention to the evolution of human rights' and gender equality standards in Turkey. Based on authoritative research, these values lie at the core of the quality of democracy in Turkey. In the absence of major changes in those values, Turkish democracy may not fulfil its full potential.

29. Turkey's Kurdish issue is a major litmus test of the maturity of Turkish politics, which, if not resolved, could follow the path of the so-called 'Arab Spring'. This issue could spiral into a mass popular mobilisation and can affect as well as get affected by regional developments in Iran, Iraq and Syria.

Is the Government correct to continue to support Turkey's membership of the EU? If so, what should the Government do to reinvigorate Turkey's EU accession process—for example, with respect to other EU Member States and EU policies, or the issue of Cyprus, as well as Turkey itself? Does Turkey still want to join the EU?

30. Turkey's EU accession process is essentially comatose. Neither the EU nor Turkey is enthusiastic to reenergise EU membership. Turkish public support of EU accession has dropped precipitously from around 70–75% in 2004–2005 to around 40–50% in 2010–2011. Accession barely registers in the political discourse in Turkey.

31. There seems to be a fragile EU consensus not to push the Turkey's European perspective in light of adamant opposition of France and Germany, the Euro zone crisis and lagging economic growth rates across the EU.

32. Turkey has commenced negotiations on 13 'chapters' or policy areas that it needs to adopt ahead of accession. Of the 35 chapters, only one is closed, 17 are blocked and a mere three chapters are eligible for opening. No chapter has been opened since June 2010.

33. Turkey's Muslim identity lies at the heart of European hostility. In a 2009 opinion poll by Istanbul-based Bosphorus University conducted in France, Germany, Poland, Spain and the UK, 39% of respondents agreed that Turkey is 'a Muslim country [...] incompatible with the common Christian roots' of Europe. Only 20% of respondents cited culture and religion as a prerequisite for EU accession when Turkey's name was omitted.

34. Cultural differences are also intensifying European doubts of Turkey's democratic credentials. TEPAV, a Turkish think-tank, found in a 2007 poll that around 50% of Europeans prioritised liberties and democracy as conditions for further enlargement. Mentioning Turkey's name raised that level to 85%.

35. EU leaders and their public seem convinced that Turkey's Muslim background is incompatible with European norms. Just 31% of the European public and 62% of European political elites accept that Europe and Turkey share common values, a 2011 German Marshall Fund Transatlantic Trends survey reveals. It also found that a mere 21% and 51% respectively are enthusiastic about Turkey joining the EU.

36. Complicating Turkey's EU accession is the unresolved Cyprus conflict. It is safe to assume that the current reunification talks between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots are at a standstill and at present look heading to a breakdown.

37. Both the Greek and Turkish sides have adopted increasingly strident rhetoric and hardline positions that do not bode well for future progress in the Cyprus reunification talks.

38. The confluence of the positive drivers for a solution in 2004—the prospective launch of Turkey's EU accession negotiations, Cypriot EU membership, UN support, and US and EU backing—no longer exist today. Ultimately, the failure of the peace settlement proposed by the then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan can be seen in retrospect as the last major opportunity to resolve the perennial Cyprus conflict.

39. The Cyprus issue is undermining effective EU-NATO coordination at a time of instability in the Middle East and North Africa. Turkey (in NATO but not the EU) objects to Cypriot (in the EU but not in NATO) participation in EU-NATO meetings and in NATO's 'Partnership for Peace' initiative. In retaliation,

Cyprus vetoes administrative arrangements between the European Defence Agency and Turkey. In addition, Turkey complicates European access to NATO military assets for peace-keeping operations under the laborious 2003 'Berlin Plus' arrangements.

40. Turkey is currently dealing with individual or a group of EU countries on an issue-by-issue basis rather than with the EU collectively. This can be seen vividly on the questions of Libya and Syria, where Turkey is coordinating closely with Berlin, London and Paris, as opposed to with Brussels.

41. The UK government is successfully accommodating the decline of the Turkey's accession process. London and Ankara are cooperating closely on a bilateral basis and should continue to do so.

42. The UK should avoid publicly or privately supporting Turkey's EU perspective unless more favourable circumstances emerge, such as more Turkey-friendly leaderships in France and Germany.

43. There is nothing more that the UK can do in the short-term to re-mobilise the moribund EU-Turkey relationship and to encourage a settlement in Cyprus.

Recommendation

44. Turkey's EU membership is at a standstill driven by fears of its Muslim identity. Prospects for a Cyprus settlement in the near future look dim. The UK should continue to successfully accommodate the fallout of the EU accession process by engaging bilaterally with Turkey.

45. The UK should avoid publicly or privately supporting Turkey's EU perspective unless more favourable circumstances emerge, such as more Turkey-friendly political leaderships in France and Germany.

How important is Turkey to UK and EU energy security? How compatible are UK and EU, and Turkish, energy interests? How should Turkey's energy role affect UK Government policy towards the country?

46. Turkey is strategically located close to 70% of global supplies of oil and gas in the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East. Pipelines criss-crossing Turkish territory can be part of an EU and British strategy to energy diversification.

47. There are three competing pipeline projects to transport Azerbaijani and, perhaps Turkmen and Iraqi gas via Turkish territory to European consumers

in 2017: the ambitious 31 billion cubic metre Nabucco pipeline; Interconnector Turkey-Greece-Italy (ITGI) and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP).

48. Nabucco seems to be the leading proposition at the moment, though which pipeline project is ultimately selected remains to be seen.

49. Turkey has plans to transform its Mediterranean port of Ceyhan into an energy hub encompassing gas storage facilities, LNG terminal, oil refinery and a petrochemicals plant.

50. So far, Turkey's energy ambitions have significantly outpaced actual implementation, suggestive that prospects of Turkey's contribution to UK and EU energy security may be real but limited.

51. Turkey appears to be becoming more dependent on Russian energy supplies. It concluded an agreement with the Russian state-controlled Atomstroyexport to build a nuclear power plant on the Mediterranean coast of Akkuyu starting in 2013.

52. Atomstroyexport will wholly own and pay the full cost of construction, which is estimated at around US \$20 billion. It will be able to transfer up to 49% of its share in the Akkuyu venture to another party.

53. Turkish regulation of the energy sector seems to be shifting away from the EU model. According to an underreported legislative change on 24 August 2011, the Energy Market Regulatory Authority (EMRA)—the equivalent of UK's OFGEM—is no longer an independent body. Turkey's energy minister is responsible for supervising the EMRA.

54. Whether such a major change in the legal status of the EMRA indicates a movement from a transparent, market-based approach in the energy sector to more opacity and state intervention remains to be seen.

Recommendations

55. Turkey's geostrategic position offers opportunities for strengthening UK and EU energy security underpinned by Nabucco, ITGI or TAP.

56. Notwithstanding these opportunities, the EU and UK should prudently assess Turkey's contributions to energy security. So far, Turkey's ambitions as a regional energy hub have lagged implementation.

57. Both the UK and EU should examine carefully whether the recent abolition of the EMRA's autonomy portends a movement from an EU-style

transparent, market-based approach in the energy sector to more opacity and state intervention.