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AUSTRIAN VETO AGAINST EUROPEAN UNION MEMBERSHIP NEGOTIATIONS WITH TURKEY

ABSTRACT: The Austrian government is extremely sceptical about the accession negotiations which are conducted by the European Commission on behalf of the European Union with Turkey and calls for the negotiation process to end. Serious reservations of Vienna have been raised by the current political situation in Turkey under the rule of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, as well as by the standards of democracy in Turkey, which differ greatly from European standards. Serious deficiencies in rule of law, freedom of speech and independence of the judiciary, confirmed in the latest European Commission report on Turkey, do not justify, from Vienna's point of view, the continuation of talks with Ankara on EU membership. In fact, Austria's scepticism about the European perspective for Turkey has a longer tradition. This was marked previously in 2005 when the accession negotiations began. Until now, Austria's position has not had enough clout within the European arena. Pragmatic cooperation with Turkey as a strategic partner of the EU, both in the context of the migration crisis and security policy, proved to be a key factor. The question is whether Austria, which took over the EU presidency from 1.7.2018, will be able to more strongly accentuate its reservations about Turkey and even build an alliance of Member States strong enough to block Turkey's accession process.

Keywords: Austria, enlargement of the European Union, accession process, Turkey.

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1. Introduction

Political relations between the EU and Turkey, for many years, have focused on the integration efforts of Ankara. Efforts to bring Turkey closer to European structures were previously made in the 1960s by establishing an Association Agreement between Turkey and the EEC[1], while the application for full membership was submitted in 1987. One of the conditions for EU membership is the adoption of the entire EU *acquis communautaire*. At the stage of negotiations, the review of the candidate country's legislation takes place in terms of compliance with EU law, which, for the purposes of negotiations, has been divided into 35 areas. Finally, the accession treaty must be ratified by all Member States, which thus acquire the right to veto the membership of any new country. Although Turkey received official candidate status in 1999, the opening of the negotiation process took place only in October 2005.

Of all 35 negotiation chapters, only one chapter 25 (Science and research) has been temporarily closed. Another 15 chapters have been officially opened, but the accession process is very slow, and it is practically now frozen with no real chance for progress. Neither Turkey nor the EU (despite a separate postulate from Austria) want to risk an official break in negotiations. There is a number of political and economic implications to take into account, including the strategic role of Turkey in the region[2], particularly important in the context of the Syrian conflict. In addition, Turkey plays a very important role in NATO and is a significant European partner in the context of energy security. Turkey has recently proved to be a key link in overcoming the migration crisis.

2. EU-Turkey agreement on the migration crisis

Currently, the main axis of the EU-Turkey relationship remains cooperation on overcoming the migration crisis. In November 2015, the EU and Turkey agreed on joint actions aimed at stopping the wave of migrants coming

[1] Agreement establishing an Association between the European Economic Community and Turkey (signed in Ankara, 12.9.1963).

[2] P. Carley, *Turkey's Role in the Middle East*, Conference report, United States Institute of Peace, Washington 1995.

to Europe from the south along the route leading, among others, through Turkey. The agreement foresaw EU financial support for Turkey in the years 2016-2019 in the amount of three billion euros in exchange for holding back and taking care of 3 million refugees, as well as providing Turkey with an equivalent amount of financial support to help refugees in the following years[3]. An element of this agreement was also the promise made by the EU to accelerate accession negotiations with Turkey, which have been stuck in a deadlock for years. It was also decided to organise cyclical EU-Turkey summits (twice a year). As a result, a further negotiation chapter was opened in December 2015 – economic and monetary issues[4].

To meet the expectations of Turkey, the promise of a dialogue on a visa-free regime for Turkish citizens traveling to Europe was made. This was supposed to result in the liberalisation of the visa regime by the end of 2016, but this did not happen. Talks between Brussels and Ankara on the abolition of visas for Turkish citizens going to the EU, due to unfavourable political conditions, as well as numerous technical problems, have stalled. In June 2016, another negotiation chapter was opened – financial and budget arrangements[5]. Due to Austria's opposition, the Turkish postulate regarding the renegotiation of the terms of the customs union is unlikely to succeed.

3. Austrian postulate to break the accession negotiations with Turkey

Austria, as the only Member State, has called for an immediate break in the EU-Turkey negotiation process. Austria's radical position was articulated in August 2016 by the Social Democrat Chancellor Christian Kern. As the head of the coalition government of the Social Democratic Party of Austria (*Sozialdemokratische Partei* Österreichs, *SPÖ*) and the Austrian People's Party (Österreichische *Volkspartei, ÖVP*), Kern, just a few weeks after

[3] European Commission, press release, *EU-Turkey Cooperation: A €3 billion Refugee Facility for Turkey*, Brussels, 24.11.2015.

[4] Council of the European Union, press release, *Accession Conference at Ministerial level opens negotiations with Turkey on Chapter 17 – Economic and monetary policy*, Brussels, 14.12.2015.

[5] European Council, Council of the European Union, press release, *Accession conference with Turkey: Talks opened on Chapter 33 – Financial and budgetary provisions,* Brussels, 30.6.2016.

taking office, made it clear that in the face of serious deficits in democracy in Turkey, negotiations regarding its membership in the EU are without any basis. He called negotiations with Turkey, conducted only formally, "diplomatic fiction" and demanded to break from them and, at the same time, to present a concept of future EU-Turkey relations that would be an alternative to EU membership[6]. Kern called for Brussels to take a sober assessment of the realities in relations with Ankara and pointed out in this context to the very controversial actions of the Turkish authorities carried out towards their own citizens in response to the failed military coup of July 2016.

The opinion of the Austrian Chancellor was that, concerning these circumstances, the perspective of EU membership for Turkey cannot really be taken into consideration. Kern expressed his deep conviction that accession of Turkey to the EU will be impossible in the coming years and even decades[7]. Referring to the agreement concluded by the EU with Turkey regarding cooperation in the migration crisis, Kern stipulated that it should not place the EU in the role of Ankara's "petitioner"[8]. He also announced that Austria would raise its postulate of breaking talks with Turkey during the meeting of the European Council in August 2016.

The position expressed by the Chancellor was not an individual assessment, but it constituted the agreed position of the coalition government. In Austria, the long-standing political tradition of common rule of Social Democrats and Christian Democrats led to the consolidation of a political culture permeated by the paradigm of a political consensus[9]. Therefore, the statement of the Chancellor had been followed up by a similar argumentation presented by the Christian Democratic chief of diplomacy, Sebastian Kurz, who confirmed that the position presented by the Chancellor reflected the line of the coalition government[10].

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[6] D. Sauter, *Österreich fordert Ende der Beitrittsverhandlungen*, *Bayernkurier*, 4.8.2016, https://www.bayernkurier.de/inland/16172-oesterreich-fordert-ende-der-beitrittsverhandlungen/, accessed 30.5.2018.

[7] *Streit mit der Türkei: Österreich plädiert für Ende der EU-Verhandlungen*, *Spiegel Online*, 4.8.2016. http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/tuerkei-oesterreichs-kanzler-christian-kern-fuer-ende-der-eu-verhandlungen-a-1106049.html, accessed 3.6.2018.

[8] Ibidem.

[9] See A. Pelinka, S. Rosenberger, *Österreichische Politik. Grundlagen. Strukturen*, 3 ed., WUV, Wien 2007.

[10] D. Sauter, *Österreich fordert Ende der Beitrittsverhandlungen*, *Bayernkurier*, 4.8.2016, https://www.bayernkurier.de/inland/16172-oesterreich-fordert-ende-der-beitrittsverhandlungen/, accessed 30.05.2018.

Vienna's strongly critical attitude towards Turkey's membership in the EU corresponds to bilateral relations between Austria and Turkey, having been difficult and strained for a long time. Regular diplomatic disputes between Vienna and Ankara are, to a large extent, due to the attempts by the Erdogan regime to use the Turkish diaspora living in Austria for political purposes. The Turkish community in Austria amounts to more than 350 thousand members (including approx. 116 thousand Turkish citizens)[11] and forms a group that is not willing to integrate with the rest of Austrian society[12]. It maintains strong ties with the authorities in Ankara, which treat the Turks living in Austria instrumentally as the target of their political manifesto and regularly organises their election campaign events in Austria. This in turn leads to the irritation of Austrian politicians and mutual serious allegations[13].

4. Reactions to the postulate of Vienna

Kern's demands were met with the immediate critical reaction of Turkish and European politicians. Ömer Celik, the politician responsible in the Turkish government for European Affairs, accused the Chancellor of spreading "right-wing extremism"[14], and the chief of Turkish diplomacy, Mevlüt Cavusoglu, called Austria the capital of "radical racism"[15]. The Austrian demand for breaking the negotiation process with Turkey has been rejected by the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker. He

[11] Statistik Austria, Bevölkerung nach Migrationshintergrund, 2016, http://www.statistik.at/web_de/statistiken/menschen_und_gesellschaft/bevoelkerung/bevoelkerungsstruktur/bevoelkerung_nach_migrationshintergrund/index.html, accessed 6.6.2018.

[12] See G. Baumgartner, *6 × Österreich. Geschichte und aktuelle Situation der Volksgruppen*, ed. by Ursula Hemetek, Initiative Minderheiten, Klagenfurt/Celovec, Drava Verlag 1995.

[13] *Kurz kritisiert Erdogan für Wahl-Einmischung*, *Kleine Zeitung*, 20.8.2017. https://www.kleinezeitung.at/politik/innenpolitik/5271614/Nach-Streit-in-Deutschland_Kurz-kritisiert-Erdogan-fuer, accessed 4.6.2018.

[14] *Türkischer EU-Minister attackiert Österreichs Kanzler*, 4.8.2016, *Spiegel Online*, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/tuerkei-wirft-oesterreichs-kanzler-christian-kern-rechtsextreme-rhetorik-vor-a-1106100.html, accessed 3.6.2018.

[15] *Cavusoglu nennt Österreich "Hauptstadt des radikalen Rassismus"*, *Zeit Online*, 5.8.2016, https://www.zeit.de/news/2016-08/05/konflikte-cavusoglu-nennt-oesterreich-hauptstadt-des-radikalen-rassismus-05180206, accessed 3.6.2018.

stated that a unilateral break of the accession negotiations "would not be helpful"[16]. He also distanced himself from the authorities in Berlin, for whom the involvement of Turkey in overcoming the migration crisis was of key importance. Chancellor Angela Merkel recognised deficits in the area of Turkish democracy as justification for the decision not to open new negotiation chapters. However, Vienna's criticism towards Ankara was fully shared by the Bavarian authorities and politicians of the Christian-Social Union. The Bavarian Minister of the Interior, Joachim Herrmann, stated that in the face of trampling of democratic values in Turkey, membership in the EU is excluded[17].

The verbal skirmishes between Vienna and Brussels in the context of Turkey's accession process continued. The Austrian Chancellor attacked the President of the European Commission, accusing him of inconsistency. He would support the continuation of negotiations with Turkey formally, and on the one hand, he would admit that Turkey cannot become an EU member. This approach, in Kern's opinion, is unacceptable for both Turks and Europeans[18].

In December 2016, during a meeting of EU chiefs of diplomacy, Austria was the only Member State not to support the text of the declaration, in which it was decided that in response to the internal political situation in Turkey, new negotiation chapters will not be opened[19]. The Austrian Foreign Minister considered this step as insufficient and demanded a total break of talks with Turkey regarding EU membership[20]. Germany again opposed

[16] *Beitrittsverhandlungen: Österreich pocht auf Ende der EU-Gespräche mit Türkei*, *FAZ*, 27.8.2016, http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/europa/beitrittsverhandlungen-oesterreich-pocht-auf-ende-der-eu-gespraeche-mit-tuerkei-14408613.html, accessed 30.5.2018.

[17] D. Sauter, *Österreich fordert Ende der Beitrittsverhandlungen*, *Bayernkurier*, 4.8.2016, https://www.bayernkurier.de/inland/16172-oesterreich-fordert-ende-der-beitrittsverhandlungen/, accessed 30.5.2018.

[18] *Beitrittsverhandlungen: Österreich pocht auf Ende der EU-Gespräche mit Türkei*, *FAZ*, 27.8.2016, http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/europa/beitrittsverhandlungen-oesterreich-pocht-auf-ende-der-eu-gespraeche-mit-tuerkei-14408613.html, accessed 30.5.2018.

[19] *EU weitet Beitrittsgespräche mit der Türkei nicht aus*, 13.12.2016, *Zeit Online*, https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2016-12/eu-beitrittsverhandlungen-tuerkei-oesterreich-blockade, accessed 7.6.2018.

[20] Österreich blockiert Türkei-Erklärung der EU, *Tagesspiegel*, 13.12.2016 https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/beitrittsverhandlungen-oesterreich-blockiert-tuerkei-erklaerung-der-eu/14973322.html, accessed 5.6.2018.

this postulate, referring to the Turkish commitment to stop the influx of immigrants from the south. Due to Austria's negative attitude towards Turkey, a common decision could not be made, and Council Conclusions could not be accepted under this agenda item. On the other hand, the text which the majority of members supported was published, and the statement that *"under the currently prevailing circumstances, no new chapters are considered for opening"*[21] was placed into the text as a result of the Netherlands's request. The statement went public with the signatures of 27 countries.

5. Report of the European Commission on Turkey

Over recent years, Turkey has undergone undergo significant progress on its long way to EU integration. Above all, Turkey has made a major modernisation of the country, as evidenced by economic and social indicators[22]. It can especially boast of impressive economic growth, which in 2017 exceeded the 7% mark[23]. Sharp criticism of Turkey, however, is associated with the disastrous situation in the area of the rule of law and human rights. In the report on Turkey, the European Commission very negatively assessed the state of democracy in this country, pointing to a serious regress in the rule of law, freedom of speech and independence of the judiciary[24]. The Commission unequivocally stated that Turkey is moving away from the EU in big steps. Consequently, it did not recommend opening further negotiation areas. Ankara was called upon to overcome the negative trend and, first of all, to suspend the state of emergency. The Commission demanded from Turkey a strengthening of the system of division of powers

[21] Council of the European Union, *Outcome of the Council Meeting 3511th Council meeting General Affairs* Brussels, 13.12.2016, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21524/st15536en16.pdf, accessed 1.6.2018.

[22] J. Alber *Gehört die Türkei zu Europa? — Ein Sozialporträt der Türkei im Licht vergleichen- der Daten der Umfrageforschung*. Leviathan 32, 2004, p. 464-494; J. Alber, *Where Turkey stands in Europa and why it should be admitted to the EU.* Discussion Paper SP I 2007 – 205. Social Science Research Center Berlin, 2007.

[23] Statista, *Turkey: Growth of the real gross domestic product (GDP) from 2014 to 2024 (compared to the previous year)*, https://www.statista.com/statistics/263612/gross-domestic-product-gdp-growth-in-turkey/, accessed 2.6.2018.

[24] European Commission, *Turkey 2018 Report*, Strasbourg, 17.4.2018, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180417-turkey-report.pdf, accessed 1.6.2018.

and recommended closer cooperation with the Council of Europe in this regard. Officials from Brussels also drew attention to positive elements, i.e. Turkey's economic development and the involvement of the Turkish government in tackling the migration crisis.

The decision not to open new negotiation areas in the current situation is only symbolic, since the entire EU-Turkey negotiation process has stagnated. In the previous report, Turkey was treated more lightly by the Commission (the deal on the refugee crisis was being negotiated), although there were good reasons to criticise the democratic standards in the country at that time, too. However, the events that took place immediately after the failed military coup in Turkey in 2016 – mass arrests, persecution, many thousands losing their jobs because of being suspected as participating or supporting the coup – determined the devastating assessment of the government in Ankara[25].

6. "Turkey must be ready for Europe, and Europe must be ready for Turkey"

Chancellor Kern's critical statement was only one example of many sceptical signals coming from Vienna regarding Turkish accession to the EU. These signals have been recorded since the beginning of negotiations between Turkey and the EU. The Austrian Chancellor, by postulating the resignation from Turkey's accession process, pointed not only to political reasons, thus a drastic violation of democratic principles in Turkey, but also to another important issue – the low level of economic development in Turkey in comparison to Europe[26]. In this regard, he referred to the traditional Austrian arguments raised in the context of the Turkish/European perspective.

[25] *EU stellt Türkei bisher schlechtestes Zeugnis aus*, *Spiegel Online*, 15.04.2018, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/tuerkei-eu-stellt-beitrittskandidaten-schlechtes-zeugnis-aus-a-1203003.html, accessed 3.6.2018; D. Brössler, *EU-Kommission stellt Türkei vernichtendes Zeugnis aus*, *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, 11.4.2018, http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/eu-beitrittsverhandlungen-eu-kommission-stellt-tuerkei-vernichtendes-zeugnis-aus-1.3948005, accessed 3.6.2018.

[26] D. Sauter, *Österreich fordert Ende der Beitrittsverhandlungen*, *Bayernkurier*, 4.08.2016, https://www.bayernkurier.de/inland/16172-oesterreich-fordert-ende-der-beitrittsverhandlungen/, accessed 30.05.2018.

Previously in 2005, Austria tried to block the agreement with Turkey regarding the official start of accession negotiations. The tactical goal was to offer Turkey, beside the perspective of membership, another alternative formula of relations with the EU, such as a kind of privileged form of partnership. At that time, Vienna did not have enough clout in Europe and was forced to give up its postulate. However, Austria was able to force a very important reservation: that Turkey's accession, in addition to meeting the formal criteria, would require Europe's political and economic readiness. The text of the agreement seemed to be a compromise and was accepted by Turkey at the time, but in reality, it was an important political tool that can block Turkey's membership to the EU. Ultimately, it will be up to individual EU Member States to decide whether they consider Europe as politically and economically ready to accept Turkey as its member.

The accession of a new country to the EU is possible only if the candidate country meets the requirements set out in Article 49 of the Treaty on the European Union: *"Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union"*. In practice, the applicant country must therefore meet the so-called membership criteria. These were clarified in June 1993 and referred to as the Copenhagen criteria. These include both the political and economic criteria that must be met by the candidate state: *"the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, respect for and protection of national minorities, the functioning of a market economy, the existence of a potential that can cope with the competition and market forces of the Union, and the ability to meet membership obligations, including sharing the goals of political, economic and monetary union"*[27].

In relation to Turkey, however, an additional membership criterion has been formulated, but the fulfilment of this criterion is not Turkey's responsibility. The additional condition – the readiness of the Union itself to accept Turkey as a member country – successfully forced by Austria, serves, in practice, as a tool to block membership on the basis of not fully defined premises. However, the background to this reservation is the serious and widespread concern in Europe about the consequences for the functioning of the EU, which would result from the adoption of a large, almost 80 million strong Muslim country with a different tradition and cultural heritage. Due to its demographic potential, Turkey would have a strong voting power in the EU. This could significantly complicate the decision-making process in

[27] European Council, 1993, Conclusions of the Presidency, Copenhagen, 21–22.6.1993.

the EU and even lead to Union institutional paralysis in some areas. Hence the question arises whether the EU would maintain its ability to function after the accession of Turkey[28]. In this sense, the vision of Turkey joining the European Union is a great challenge. It is understandable that there are sceptics who doubt that the EU could be able to bear Turkey's membership and to deal with its political and economic consequences while maintaining European identity and operational capabilities.

Since the European Community has been established, the process of enlargement of the community to new members has been successively implemented. As a result, the number of Member States increased from 6 to 28. This process is to be continued, although its dynamic and the enthusiasm of the Member States and their citizens has diminished considerably in recent years.

This is partly due to the problems that Europe has been facing in recent years – from the financial crisis to the still unresolved migration crisis – but also due to the relatively negative experiences of the EU concerning the over-hasty accession of Bulgaria and Romania, who were not quite ready for membership[29]. In addition, the EU is facing other more absorbing challenges, such as the need for deep institutional reforms, which EU institutions and most Member States are more concerned about than the accession prospects of new members.

This is why the phenomenon of "enlargement fatigue" is commonly noted in the EU. As a result of increasing Eurosceptic tendencies in Europe, as well as the generally lower interest of EU institutions and most Member States in EU enlargement, it is no longer supported as much as in previous rounds. An important sign of this was the announcement by Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, who declared in 2014 that no new members will join the EU in the next five years[30]. In Jean-Claude Juncker's first speech to the European Parliament on taking office in 2014, he also declared there would be no further enlargement during his five-year term at the helm of the European Commission: *"I do not want to give candidate countries the impression that they might become members of the European Union*

[28] K. Lang, D. Schwarzer, *Die Diskussion über die Aufnahmefähigkeit der EU. Nötiger Zwischenschritt oder Ende der Erweiterung*?, Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik 2007, SWP, Studie 31, p. 22 ff.

[29] T. Żornaczuk, *Rozszerzenie Unii Europejskiej a prezydencja Polski w Radzie UE* [Enlargement of the EU and the Polish presidency in the EU], 'Przegląd Dyplomatyczny' 2011, no. 1(59), p. 56.

[30] European Commission, Press Release, Brussels, 10.9.2014.

in the next five years. There will be no new members during this Commission's term of office: it is totally unfeasible"[31]. Juncker's announcement was widely seen as evidence of a waning interest in enlargement and stagnation in this regard and a clear indication that EU enlargement was no longer a priority[32]. In fact, it was a very clear signal of 'enlargement fatigue', although, in practice, the accession of new members to the EU by 2019 would not be possible given the length of the negotiation process.

Turkey is a country that, due to its economic, demographic and cultural diversity, can have a huge impact on the way the entire EU works. There are fears in Europe regarding EU enlargement and the accession of new members, especially those characterised by a lower level of socio-economic development, as well as diversified historical experiences. The potential negative impact of such countries on the functioning of the European Union was pointed out by Milczarek, who emphasised that the EU membership of these countries could, in the long run, mean that the EU would receive a "new political quality"[33].

Therefore, Austria wanted to ensure that the accession negotiations would not prejudge the fact that Turkey, even if it met all the criteria, would become a member of the EU. Such a reservation gives the EU greater room for manoeuvring in the enlargement policy so that the EU is generally in a more favourable negotiating position. The candidate country is in a much less privileged situation, not being sure that the reforms and transformational efforts undertaken will result in achieving the goal of accession to the EU, as they do not know if they are undertaking them "in vain" or not[34].

[31] J-C. Juncker, Statement in the European Parliament plenary session ahead of the vote on the College, Strasbourg, 22.10.2014.

[32] S. Lynch, *Europe Letter: EU may be suffering from "enlargement fatigue"*, The Irish Times, 17.12.2015, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/europe-letter-eu-may-be-suffering-from-enlargement-fatigue-1.2468842, accessed 23.4.2018.

[33] D. Milczarek, *Rozszerzenie Unii Europejskiej na Wschód –geneza, perspektywy* [Enlargment of the EU to the East – genesis and perspectives], 'Studia Europejskie' 2014, no. 1 (69), p. 13.

[34] A. Szymański , *Rozszerzenie Unii Europejskiej. Współczesne uwarunkowania i perspektywy kontynuacji procesu* [Enlargement of the EU. Modern preconditions and perspectives for the continuation of the process], Oficyna Wydawnicza Aspa, Warszawa, 2012, p. 39.

7. Public opinion in Austria

As another way for Austria to protect itself against accession of Turkey to the EU, an announcement was made that a referendum on Turkey's membership will take place in the framework of the ratification of the Accession Treaty in Austria. The requirement of obtaining direct acceptance of citizens for Turkey's accession to the EU confirmed in the referendum is a serious obstacle to Turkish ambitions. Public opinion in Austria declares an unambiguously negative position in this regard. According to the latest poll conducted in April 2018 by the Austrian Society for European Policy (Österreichische *Gesellschaft für Europapolitik,* ÖGfE), over three quarters of Austrian society (76%) oppose Turkey's accession to the EU, and only 9% of respondents declare explicitly to support it[35]. Thus, the official position of the government in Vienna, which is sceptical of Turkey's accession to the EU, corresponds to the general mood of Austrian society.

The announcement that Austria will hold a referendum on the accession of Turkey to the EU, taking into account the particularly strong scepticism of Austrian society towards this idea, means that Turkey's EU membership is not really possible under the current circumstances. On the European level, most citizens also reject Turkey's accession[36]. The main reason for this sceptical attitude is the fear that Turkey's membership will be associated with increased migration risk to the "old" EU members and with the loss of many jobs for their citizens[37]. In addition, the standard of living in Turkey is significantly lower in comparison to the European average, which, in conjunction with the much weaker economy in the country, as well as serious cultural differences, especially religious, may justify a strong scepticism of Europeans towards Turkey's EU membership[38]. This is one

[35] I. Steiner-Gashi, *EU-Erweiterung: Skepsis sinkt, aber Euphorie sieht anders aus*, *Kurier*, 15.4.2018, https://kurier.at/politik/ausland/eu-erweiterung-skepsis-sinkt-aber-euphorie-sieht-anders-aus/400021417, accessed 23.4.2018.

[36] J. Gerhards, H. Silke, *Türkei unerwünscht? Eine Untersuchung der Einstellungen der Bürger in den 27 Mitgliedsländern der EU zum Beitritt der Türkei*, Berliner Studien zur Soziologie Europas 2009, no. 18, p. 8.

[37] Ibidem, pp. 10-11.

[38] J. Gerhards, H. Silke, *Die Grenzen Europas aus der Perspektive der Bürger,* Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte 2008, no. 35/36, s. 6-13; J. Gerhards, M. Hölsche, *Kulturelle Unterschiede in der Europäischen Union. Ein Vergleich zwischen Mitgliedsländern, Beitrittskandidaten und der Türkei*. Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften 2005.

of the reasons why Turkey's accession to the EU is much more strongly rejected by the Austrians than the accession of the Western Balkans[39].

It should not be expected that European and Austrian public opinion on this matter will change significantly in Turkey's favour in the near future, especially due to the extremely controversial policy conducted by the current government in Ankara, which is showing more and more authoritarian tendencies. The widespread phenomenon of enlargement fatigue diagnosed in Europe may also be an important aspect in the context of Turkey's European aspirations. According to Austrian political scientist Gerhard Knaus, the way in which the bureaucrats in Brussels present the mechanisms and arguments for EU enlargement – in the form of incomprehensible legal formulas – gives Europeans a vague picture of the situation, so it is difficult to understand that EU enlargement serves their interests[40].

On the other hand, there are also alarming and even sinister predictions about the possible implications of Turkish membership in the EU. One Italian political scientist disproves the "myth of European Turkey" and points to Islam as a force that, after Turkey's accession to the EU, would dominate Europe – it could seriously endanger European democracy and secularism[41].

8. The new ÖVP-FPÖ government

The opinion of the majority of Austrian society, which opposes the accession of Turkey to the EU, corresponds to the official position of the Austrian Government, which consists of a coalition made up by Christian Democrats and the extreme right-wing Eurosceptic Freedom Party of Austria (*Freicheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ*), which are both staunch opponents of Turkish membership in the EU.

[39] I. Steiner-Gashi, *EU-Erweiterung: Skepsis sinkt, aber Euphorie sieht anders aus*, *Kurier*, 15.4.2018, https://kurier.at/politik/ausland/eu-erweiterung-skepsis-sinkt-aber-euphorie-sieht-anders-aus/400021417, accessed 23.4.2018.

[40] G. Knaus, *Wenn die Nachbarn um Einlass bitten*, [in:] Falter, no. 9a/15, 2015, pp. 19-20.

[41] R. de Mattei, übersetzt von J. Voller, *Die Türkei in Europa. Gewinn oder Katastrophe?*, Resch 2010.

As a result of the last parliamentary elections held in October 2017, the political landscape of Austria has changed[42]. In December 2017, a coalition government composed of ÖVP and FPÖ was formed. Thus, the Austrian government, in a new, far more right-wing constellation, not only upheld the Turkish reservations made so far by the Social Democrat Chancellor Kern, but strengthened the critical position against Turkey. In the coalition agreement of the ÖVP-FPÖ, the negative position of both coalition members to the accession of Turkey to the EU was clearly marked[43]. In the new Cabinet, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, upon the recommendation of the FPÖ, was taken over by Karin Kneissl, a Middle East expert known to the public for her sharp criticism of the EU-Turkey Refugee Agreement[44]. The Austrian Chancellor in the new government, Sebastian Kurz from the ÖVP, also spoke out clearly against another postulate of Ankara – renegotiation of the terms of Turkey's customs union with the EU[45].

9. The Bulgarian Presidency

The implementation of the EU-Turkey agreement on the migration crisis turned out to be the key factor for Bulgaria, which held the EU Council Presidency in the first half of 2018. Therefore, as previously announced by Bulgarian President Boyko Borisov, the stopping of accession talks with Turkey was not on the agenda of the Bulgarian Presidency[46]. There were fears, which have proved to be a decisive element for European decision

[42] From 2005-2017, Austria was governed by a large coalition composed of Social Democrats (Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs, SPÖ) and Christian Democrats (Österreichische Volkspartei, ÖVP).

[43] Deutsche Welle, *ÖVP und FPÖ bekennen sich zur EU*, 16.12.2017, http://www.dw.com/de/övp-und-fpö-bekennen-sich-zur-eu/a-41824637, accessed 25.4.2018.

[44] *Karin Kneissl: Nahost-Expertin mit kontroversen Ansichten, Tiroler Tageszeitung*, 16.12.2017, http://www.tt.com/politik/13796028-91/karin-kneissl-nahost-expertin-mit-kontroversen-ansichten.csp, accessed 1.6.2018.

[45] *Kurz gegen Modernisierung der Zollunion mit der Türkei*, 21.3.2018, *Kurier*, https://kurier.at/politik/inland/kurz-gegen-modernisierung-der-zollunion-mit-der-tuerkei/400008693, accessed 22.4.2018.

[46] G. Gotev, *Borissov gives a preview of the Turkey debate before an EU summit dinner*, 20.10.2017, *euractiv.com*, https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/borissov-gives-preview-of-turkey-debate-before-eu-summit-dinner/, accessed 3.6.2018.

makers, that Turkey's reaction on such a step would be terminating the deal with the EU on refugees.

Therefore, during the EU-Turkey summit in Bulgaria's Varna, in March 2018, against the position of Austria, the declaration of continuation of Turkey's EU accession process and the cooperation with Turkey on the stopping of the illegal migration wave to Europe was upheld. Turkey, however, failed to force the EU to make arrangements in the process of visa liberalisation. Previously, Turkish politicians had announced that they would strongly demand from the EU the abolition of the visa requirement for Turkey's citizens[47]. During the Varna summit, Austria still demanded the immediate end of Turkey's accession talks, but there was no chance to build a necessary group of Member States supporting this concept at that time. The idea of cutting off Turkey's accession negotiations to the EU, presented by Chancellor Kurz, was announced by the President of the European Commission as a "simple" and "superficial" idea[48]. The effective role of Turkey in stopping illegal migration to Europe turned out to be a determining factor influencing the current state of EU-Turkey relations.

10. The Austrian Presidency

In the second half of 2018, Austria began holding the presidency of the Council of the European Union for six months. The EU enlargement policy was one of the priorities of the Austrian Presidency[49]. However, while Austria intended to intensively support the integration efforts of the neighbouring countries in the Western Balkans region, Austrian counter-initiatives with regard to Turkey's membership in the EU were to be expected.

[47] *Turkey to press for visa-free travel at Varna summit*, *euractiv.com*, 8.2.2018, https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/turkey-to-press-for-visa-free-travel-at-varna-summit/ accessed 3.6.2018.

[48] *Juncker: Kein Abbruch von Türkei-Beitrittsgesprächen", Wienerzeitung.at,* 26.3.2018, https://www.wienerzeitung.at/nachrichten/europa/europaeische_union/955106_Juncker-Kein-Abbruch-von-Tuerkei-Beitrittsgespraechen.html, accessed 3.6.2018.

[49] Statement by the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, *"Der Ratsvorsitz"* – https://www.bmeia.gv.at/europa-aussenpolitik/europapolitik/eu-ratsvorsitz-2018/, accessed 8.4.2018.

The question is whether Austria, with its recent regular postulate to break talks with Turkey on EU membership, would have a greater chance to be effective. Vienna could certainly count on close cooperation with EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn (an Austrian politician), responsible for the EU neighbourhood and enlargement policy. However, it seems that even this circumstance will not fundamentally affect the change in the pragmatic course of the EU as a whole towards Turkey. The key position will be taken by Berlin, which is undoubtedly very interested in working with Ankara to prevent the influx of a new wave of refugees.

In fact, apart from Austria, the Netherlands and France belong to the group of countries that are sceptical about Turkey's accession to the European Union and have expressed their concerns. The positions of these three countries, which share the sceptical attitude towards Turkey's accession, have recently moved closer in this regard. However, Austria still has the most radical attitude.

France sharpened its position on Turkey's accession to the EU in January 2018. During the visit of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to Paris, French President Emmanuel Macron has clearly expressed his opposition to the prospect of Turkey joining the EU. Due to political events in Turkey, he proposed a "partnership" with the EU for Turkey rather than full membership. The concept of an EU-Turkey partnership is in line with Austria's proposal and could point to some convergence between Paris and Vienna in relation to Turkey. In 2016, the Dutch government also expressed its critical stance on Turkey and called for a freeze on talks on Turkey's membership, as Turkish authorities massively cracked down on the public after the failed coup in 2016[50].

In fact, strong scepticism about Turkey's membership in the EU is shared by many European partners, including Berlin. This is evidenced by the words of the German Chancellor, who, in March 2010 during the visit to Ankara, expressed her opinion against Turkey's accession to the EU, preferring the formula of a "privileged partnership" with Turkey[51]. Merkel confirmed this position in September 2011. During the visit of Turkish

[50] Euractiv, *Dutch join push for EU-Turkey accession talks freeze*, 2.12.2016, https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/dutch-join-push-for-eu-turkey-accession-talks-freeze/, accessed 16.6.2018.

[51] *Kanzlerin in Ankara: Merkel lehnt EU-Beitritt der Türkei weiter ab*, *FAZ*, 29.3.2010, http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/kanzlerin-in-ankara-merkel-lehnt-eu-beitritt-der-tuerkei-weiter-ab-1953192.html, accessed 3.6.2018.

President Abdullah Gül in Berlin, she admitted: "we do not want Turkey's full membership, but we do not want to lose Turkey as an important country"[52]. However, since the outbreak of the migration crisis in 2015, a pragmatic rapprochement between Brussels and Ankara took place. The need for the EU to cooperate with Turkey on the issue of refugees means that Austria's demand to cease Turkey's accession process is falling on deaf ears.

The European Parliament, in the face of mass repressions carried out by the Turkish government against thousands of citizens in connection with the failed military coup, expressed an opinion which is similar to the one presented by the Austrian government and demanded the freezing of accession negotiations with Turkey[53]. This important political gesture, however, has no direct impact on the decision process in the EU, which is the responsibility of the Member States. At the meeting of European chiefs of diplomacy in December 2016, only Austria fully shared the position of the EP. Germany argued that breaking the negotiations would put the agreement on refugees with Ankara under threat. Meanwhile, Great Britain did not want to risk the alliance with Turkey within NATO. The ministers only issued a statement in which they announced that due to the current situation in Turkey, the opening of new negotiation chapters is not taken into consideration[54].

Moreover, one of the important aspects in the context of Turkey's EU accession process is the Cyprus issue. In this regard, there were optimistic signals and even hope for a targeted solution. The President of Cyprus, Mustafa Akinci, who was elected in April 2015, and the President of Cyprus, Nikos Anastasiadis, supported the unification of Cyprus in January 2016[55].

In the context of the controversial constitutional referendum held in Turkey in spring 2017, which was designed to strengthen President Erdogan's political power, criticism of Turkey within the Member States

[52] *Vor Treffen mit Gül: Merkel lehnt EU-Mitgliedschaft der Türkei ab, Welt Online,* 20.9.2011, https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article13614695/Merkel-lehnt-EU-Mitgliedschaft-der-Tuerkei-ab.html, accessed 3.6.2018.

[53] European Parliament resolution of 24.11.2016 on EU-Turkey relations (2016/2993(RSP)).

[54] *Wiener Veto gegen Türkei-Gespräche*, *WienerZeitung.at*, 13.12.2016, https://www.wienerzeitung.at/nachrichten/europa/europaeische_union/861970_Wiener-Veto-gegen-Tuerkei-Gespraeche.html, accessed 9.6.2018.

[55] W. Landmesser, *Zypern: Neue Hoffnung auf Wiedervereinigung*, *Deutschlandfunk*, 28.1.2016, http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/zypern-neue-hoffnung-auf-wiedervereinigung.795.de.html?dram:article_id=343875, accessed 4.6.2018.

intensified, but serious discrepancies in this regard were also revealed. Luxembourg was in line with Austria and also called for the suspension of negotiations with Turkey. The opposite position was taken by Germany. Sigmar Gabriel, German Foreign Minister, praised the role of Turkey as a member of NATO and strongly rejected the option of stopping accession talks[56]. EU Commissioner Hahn, who, like Vienna, set a critical tone towards Ankara, pointed out the possibility of developing a different concept of EU-Turkey relations than the perspective of membership (e.g. development of the existing customs union). Eventually, the supporters of further cooperation with Ankara prevailed, and the EU chiefs of diplomacy took statement in the joint declaration of 28.4.2017 that they supported the continuation of the status quo in relations with Turkey. They also declared to respect the Turkish constitutional referendum[57]. In the following months, Austrian Foreign Minister Kurz continued a diplomatic offensive insisting on breaking talks with Turkey and appealed to the EU not to let be blackmailed by Turkey[58].

11. Conclusions

Very serious shortcomings in the area of the rule of law and human rights in Turkey are a strong argument for Vienna to question Ankara's European aspirations. In fact, Austrian scepticism about Turkey's membership in the EU, although formulated lately mainly in connection with the critical arguments against the autocratic regimes of Erdogan, has a wider basis. Vienna's position is that even if Turkey had fulfilled all the formal criteria for membership (which, in view of the current events in Turkey, is a very distant perspective), its accession to the EU would not be a foregone conclusion. The Austrian decision makers emphasise that even if Ankara

[56] T. Mayer, *EU-Außenminister uneins über Türkei –Beitrittsverhandlungen*, *Standard.at*, 28.4.2017, https://derstandard.at/2000056743229/Asselborn-Beitrittsprozess-mit-der-Tuerkei-ist-gestorben, accessed 4.6.2018.

[57] *Die EU will Beitrittsverhandlungen mit der Türkei nicht stoppen*, *Zeit Online*, 28.4.2017, https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2017-04/tuerkische-verfassungsreform-eu-beitritt-verhandlungen-venedig-kommission, accessed 4.6.2018.

[58] Ch.B. Schiltz, *Wir dürfen uns nicht erpressen lassen*, *Welt Online*, 23.7.2017, https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article166920045/Wir-duerfen-uns-nicht-erpressen-lassen.html, accessed 4.6.2018.

reached a formal "readiness" for EU membership, its accession would depend on the political and economic readiness of the European Union to accept it.

The positive impact of the European perspective as a great motivation for implementing reforms and transformation of the political system in EU candidate countries, which was mentioned by Mark Leonard[59], seems to be hardly visible in the case of Turkey. Unfortunately, in the case of Turkey, the effects expected of most candidate countries in the EU, which Sadurski has highlighted, namely the consolidation of democratic reforms, the strengthening of the protection of individual rights and the improvement of the quality of justice, are not to be expected[60]. The EU has turned out to be completely helpless in the face of the growing authoritarian tendencies of the Erdogan regime, and the influence of EU on the political situation in Turkey proved to be quite illusory. Brussels' room for manoeuvring is limited due to the need for close cooperation with the Turkish government in order to tackle the migration crisis. In this respect, the EU is turned over to the goodwill of the decision-makers in Ankara. The chances of making accession talks between EU and Turkey more dynamic are minimal, but Brussels does not want an official end to the negotiations in order not to upset the Turkish partner and not to provoke its withdrawal from the refugee agreement. Thus, EU-Turkey relations, although very tense and characterised by distrust, concentrate on pragmatic cooperation aimed at overcoming the migration crisis.

Besides to the supporters of Turkey's accession to the EU, there is a group of Member States, which, like Austria, are sceptical about the idea of Turkey's membership in the EU. This group mainly consists of Austria, the Netherlands and France. However, a formal blocking of the accession process with Turkey would be possible only upon the request of one-third of the Member States. It seems that Austria will not be able to build the required majority to force its postulate. The positions of individual States in this context are different and are characterised by various calculations. In the case of Germany, the political priority is to stop the wave of refugees at the moment, and in this respect, there is no alternative for cooperation with Ankara.

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[59] M. Leonard, *Why Europe will run the 21st century*, London-New York, Fourth Estate, 2005, p. 51.

[60] W. Sadurski, *Constitutionalism and the enlargement of Europe*, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 143.

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