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**Turkey in the European Union:
a personal view**

MICHAEL LAKE



May 2005

A Definition of Federalism

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(*New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*)

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Note on the author

Michael Lake: EU Ambassador in Turkey (1991-98) and Hungary (1998-2001) European Commission official 1973-2001. Former Journalist 1953-73 (The Scotsman, The Daily Herald/Sun, The Guardian, weekly commentator on BBC World Service).

Preface

Earlier this year, Michael Lake edited for the Federal Trust an important collection of essays on 'Turkey and the EU.' He was eminently qualified for this task and was able to assemble a prestigious and authoritative list of contributors, from Turkey and elsewhere. Rightly, the book has been well received and bids fair to become a critical and commercial success.

As editor of this collection of essays, Michael was unselfishly happy to allow the expertise of others to dominate the limelight. His own knowledge, experience and enthusiasm formed the book's backdrop, but only the backdrop. Apart from a short Preface, readers of 'Turkey and the EU' had to rely on the range and excellence of the essays contained in the book to understand the solidity of Michael Lake's credentials for writing and speaking on the subject of Turkey's relationship with the European Union. This European Essay is the Federal Trust's way of filling that lacuna.

What follows is a timely and telling personal memoir of someone who has had for many years a privileged view of negotiations which both reflect and have substantially shaped social, economic and political developments both in Turkey and the EU. It is forceful, argumentative and rhetorical in style. It reminds us that our passage of the road leading to Turkey's eventual membership of the European Union will say much about Europe's view of itself. The current referendum campaigns in France and the Netherlands make much mention of the issue of Turkish membership of the European Union. Michael Lake's following contribution is a powerful exposition of the reasons which led the European Council, including the French and Dutch representatives, to conclude that it was not just in Turkey's interest to join the European Union, but that it was in the EU's interest as well.

Whatever the result of the referendums in May and June of this year, this debate will continue to be a central one for the future of the European Union.

Brendan Donnelly
Director, The Federal Trust
May 2005

Introduction

Over the past three years, Turkey has been more in the European limelight than at any time since its founding as a republic in 1923. The European Council's decision last December to open accession negotiations with Turkey in October 2005, a decision taken after more than two years of European-driven reforms in Turkey and a clear positive recommendation by the European Commission, has set the scene for prolonged focus on the country. The hope must be that this attention will produce a more rational, informed and fair appreciation of this important European ally than that which accompanied the Council's decision. The public certainly deserves to be better and more objectively informed than it was last December. The European Commission is rightly inviting the EU's civic society to play a leading role in a wider debate about Turkey's future in Europe.

Although media coverage of Turkey was intense during the year leading up to last December's summit, as the deadline approached it seemed to come as something of a surprise. The green light given by the Council to opening negotiations with Turkey unleashed an overnight wave of political and media doubt and uncertainty, even in Britain where support for Turkey is strongest. The reports and background noise were overwhelmingly concentrated on the difficulties ahead. This often smacked of discrimination and insufficiently reflected the real reasons for the European Council's decision.

Yet the long road to opening negotiations for Turkish accession had been clearly signposted since EU Foreign Ministers reaffirmed Turkey's eligibility for accession in 1995, the year Turkey completed a customs union with the European Union. This eligibility was again confirmed at the European Council in Helsinki in 1999 when, taking into account all the issues of geography, size, economy and religion, Turkey was declared an official candidate. The Copenhagen summit of 2000 promised to take a decision in 2004 to open negotiations 'without delay' provided the so-called Copenhagen Criteria of political standards were met.

In view of the European Commission's unambiguously positive Recommendation last October, laying out a detailed scenario for the negotiations, it would have been a damaging, retrograde step for the European Council not to have kept its undertaking to open the negotiations. This would have had consequences for the Council's credibility not only inside the EU, in the wider region and across the Atlantic, but worldwide, and at a time when the EU needs to boost its political and economic credibility so that it can play a more active role in regional and global affairs.

So, where does Turkey go from here? And how does the EU behave? During the last enlargement process there were many doubts among candidate countries, among key officials and the media, that the EU was dragging its feet. Yet not only did the EU bring the second wave of candidates into one wave, it met all its commitments, precisely on time. The result was an enlargement of 10 new Member States, all surprisingly well up to the comprehensive standards the EU requires for membership, and the short-term success of which has surprised even the optimists.

Only the EU is capable of extending its values and its territory, by consensus, so regularly and so successfully. As a contrast to the more violent attempt to upgrade standards to the south of the EU its success could not be more stark. Why should we not expect the same success with Turkey, which is starting off from a stronger position than many of the earlier candidates.

The decision by the European Council to open accession negotiations seemed grudging. But the political weight behind the decision should not be lost on either Turks or Europeans. There is a deep commitment behind the decision based on the European Union's self-interest.

Nor is this commitment made in a geostrategic vacuum. It is part of a broader picture which makes the possibility of failure with Turkey both less likely and potentially more damaging. The EU has already made a conditional promise of membership to the entire Balkans, including such Muslim states as Bosnia and Albania. The International Commission on the Balkans, led by the former Italian Prime Minister Giuliano Amato, has just called on the EU to speed up its drive to welcome the Balkan states into the EU, to give them new direction, and to avoid isolating them in a sort of Balkans ghetto.

The orange revolution in the Ukraine has also changed people's perceptions of the limits of the EU. Mention of Ukrainian membership of the EU is no longer like swearing in church. It has become respectable, and under new management Ukraine is undertaking a specially tailored Action Plan as part of the EU's new European Neighbourhood Policy, a policy offering substantial integration with the EU to all countries from Belarus to Algeria and Morocco, including Israel and Palestine. The Ukraine is a test case for this new neighbourhood policy, and if makes serious progress in the first three-year Action Plan its claim to discuss eventual accession will be more difficult to resist. The arguments of size and poverty which are often played against Turkey do not sound so convincing when used against Ukraine. Yet Ukraine has the second biggest land mass in Europe and, with 50 million inhabitants its fourth largest population, and a huge, immensely valuable if under-developed, agricultural sector. In the Council of Ministers it would rival Britain, France and Italy in terms of qualified

majority voting. Indeed, if Turkey were already a member, voting would be more balanced than it is now: Today, Germany stands alone with 18 per cent of the vote in the Council; with Turkey as a member, Germany and Turkey would both have 14 per cent. In a yet wider European Union the UK, France, Italy and Ukraine would expect about 10 to 11 per cent of the vote. Given this vast regional integration prospect, singling out Turkey for rejection 10 or 15 years down the road would be madness.

The Negotiations

The insertion in the Presidency Declaration of 17-18 December 2004 - that the negotiations with Turkey would be open-ended, that the outcome was not guaranteed, that if the reforms were not implemented or if there were backsliding, then they could be suspended, that there might be permanent derogations from the *acquis* such as blocking free movement of people and so on and so on - was gratuitously offensive. Most of these conditions applied in previous negotiations, except that they were not so brutally spelled out, creating the impression that Turkey was uniquely on probation. Yet the EU has never opened negotiations with a prospective deadline; it has never guaranteed the outcome; it has always held the threat of suspension over backsliders. Only the threat of permanent derogations over such issues as free movement of people, one of the four freedoms of the internal market, is new, and it is a foolish threat which, if carried out, might well be declared by the European Court of Justice to be illegal on grounds of discrimination and which, anyway, future governments would also most certainly want to revoke.

The decision to open negotiations was not made as a favour or a capitulation to Turkey. You only have to look at the question from the opposite direction. If Turkish accession were not in our interests, or were against EU interests, can you imagine our governments opening negotiations? The proposition is absurd. The accession of Turkey on the contrary is regarded as essentially in the interests of the European Union, strategically, politically, socially and economically - and it will also be of great benefit to Turkey, which is also in the interest of the EU. These interests are discussed below.

Starting negotiations with Turkey will bring an immediate advantage of more predictability, reliability and commitment to shared values. This beginning phase also guarantees Turkish democracy since henceforth any attempt by a Turkish government, Islamic or secular, to weaken democracy, would wreck the negotiations or, post-accession, would result in its being judged in breach of the accession treaty and suspended from membership. This is an important new factor in the region, widely underrated.

The European Council's heavily laden decision may, however, delay some essential reforms: the military, for example, knows well that after the many substantial reforms it has already accepted, it has to accept more measures to remove its remaining autonomy from civilian rule, an autonomy which constitutionally guarantees secular democracy in Turkey, but may remain more hesitant than necessary because of doubts about the European Union's good intentions.

Turkey does not have to start the negotiations from scratch. It already swallowed a substantial chunk of the *acquis* in making a customs union with the EU. During the two years between the Copenhagen promise in 2000 and now, it has been following an accession programme, indeed a revised accession programme to take account of progress achieved and the setting of new priorities.

The programme will be in accordance with a long document called the National Programme for the Adoption of the *Acquis*, which is the roadmap to accession. European Commission and Turkish officials will work, dine and dream the NPAA for years ahead. Many of them are well familiar with it. By the time Turkey completes it, and negotiates and closes the 29 chapters of the *acquis*, it will entirely qualify for accession. Today's populist hand-wringing and protests over Turkey's lack of suitability or desirability for membership will look quite out of place.

In order for Turkey to reach a stage of regional and management development where it can eventually access the structural funds, the bigger regional development, social and agricultural funds which follow accession, it will have to adopt and implement, from now on - a Preliminary National Development Plan (PNDP). This Plan, a prerequisite for all aspiring member states, will pave the way for Turkey to access and absorb the maximum funds available on achieving accession, not to join up and then start learning how to access the funds. So the benefits of the PNDP will become visible in Turkey long before accession, properly targeted and accounted for.

Many of the issues raised by the accession process in Turkey will be difficult, some very difficult. Many measures will appear to the Turks to be interference in their internal affairs. The Poles found this even humiliating, but as every candidate country learns, those internal affairs which fall within the accession programme become the EU's affair, too. The strict adherence to the rules is aimed at getting the candidate country in, past the six-monthly scrutiny and approval of the Member States, through their 25 to 27 national parliaments and finally the European Parliament. This is the sharing of sovereignty. The EU will not change its rules; Turkey is joining the EU, not the other way around. Opposition parties would do well to remember that when making their standard complaints that the government of the day is giving too many

concessions to Brussels in order to reach agreements and to get into the Union. Those of us who have seen earlier negotiations - and I have been around since the Heath negotiations of 1961 to 1963 - know that opposition parties would have to do exactly the same.

In fact, negotiations will mainly be about transition periods, the extra time either side may want to implement a measure fully. A good example is the environmental *acquis*, which requires huge and expensive upgrading. This in its turn will depend on the terms of a transition period and co-financing between Turkey and the EU which does not create undue strain on resources, either human or budgetary, neither of which is in the interests of the EU. So, a transitional period will be agreed, possibly up to 10 years. It will be wise of Turkey not to demand too many transition periods. Every demand, by either side, slows down the process. The last group of candidate countries gradually realised this and severely trimmed their transition requests.

Indeed, some people think the process has slowed down in the four months since Turkey got the green light. Of course, the hectic pace of reform during the past two years was in order to meet the Copenhagen Criteria in time for the Commission's report last October. Since then, the passing of new legislation of political and social reform has almost stopped since Turkey has now met the Copenhagen Criteria, although the new law governing freedom of speech has been delayed in order to improve it. Now attention is focussed on implementation of the reforms.

Good implementation, such as the training of judges and the police, including the diminishing of human rights abuses by the police, tends to go unnoticed. Lapses, incidents, what Harold Macmillan called events, and occasional bizarre proposals and reactions from within government, give rise to harsher reaction in Europe than they would occasion in other candidate countries. Yet Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has shown that he and his government are willing and able to change course and to correct mistakes.

Judging by the state of domestic politics in Turkey, it is likely that the current AKP government will win the next elections and thus rule until negotiations are complete, or very nearly so. The Government will need to work hard to maintain political and public consensus behind the changes required by the EU as time goes on. Consensus is strong, around 70 per cent of Turks supporting the accession programme, but the negotiations will produce ups and downs, the public mood will fluctuate from time to time as politicians and the media overplay temporary difficulties. Strong political and public consensus is invaluable in overcoming difficulties, getting things done, both in Parliament and in society at large. Without it, the process can become fraught, slowed down or even embittered. In fact, on some issues, this nearly always happens, and

you have to hang on, to keep your eye on the goal. The process is not entirely unlike American gridiron football: there is a lot of tackling off the ball, but the object of the thrower and the catcher is to make 10 yards at a time, with the ultimate aim of crossing the goal line whatever else is going on elsewhere on the pitch.

The Economic and Social Background

Turkey is now regarded as an emerging or a 'converging' economy, although Turks are upset, with some reason, that Brussels does not yet accord it recognition as a fully-functioning market economy, since it has (among other criteria) fully liberalised flow of capital, an independent central bank, freedom to set prices and independent, collective wage bargaining. The economy will eventually become one of Turkey's biggest contributions to EU political strength and economic and financial reach. When Turkey signed the Treaty of Association with the European Economic Community in 1963 it was an agrarian economy with a heavily peasant society. This was the society that responded to invitations from Germany and elsewhere for *Gastarbeiter* to come and do the undesirable jobs, when people arrived in headscarves and baggy trousers, without the benefit of filtering through an urban transition, unable to speak anything but local Turkish. Turkey's economy and society has vastly changed, yet the original migration fuels still the perception on which much European prejudice against Turkey is based. Turkey is now a big industrial country, with large family groups breaking down into more and more households eager to buy more and more consumer goods. Its youthful society is largely urbanised, computerised, Europeanised and better educated than ever in its history. And already two-thirds of its trade is with Europe.

Yet to match the *acquis communautaire*, as it must, to meet the competitive challenge of membership, as it must, to qualify to join the euro, as it must, to qualify for the common agricultural policy and to meet all the demands of EU policy on justice and home affairs, Turkey has many more changes to make, just as the candidates before it. It must pass about 4500 to 5000 pieces of legislation, much of it framework law, and then adopt the necessary implementing legislation and practices to carry out the changes. The laws may be adopted in the capital, but most of the implementation, such as environmental policy, agriculture, consumer protection and transport, for example, must be carried out, monitored and approved beyond Ankara, from the Thracian borders with Greece and Bulgaria to the eastern borders with Armenia and Azerbaijan, from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, with local government bearing much of the burden.

The cost of this huge adaptation is high; the EU will help, first with pre-accession funds aimed at helping Turkey to qualify for joining the Union, and later with both structural funds for regional development and training, and so-called cohesion funds for infrastructure such as the environment and transport networks. A long-term aim is to continue the reduction in the wide economic disparities between the richer west of Turkey and the generally poorer east, while the country as a whole grows richer. All this should cause no surprise. We have now seen it happen before, and we are witnessing the early benefits of this policy in Poland and other new Member States. It has been spectacularly successful in Spain and Ireland.

As a 'converging' economy Turkey will continue to attract more foreign direct investment. Since many of Turkey's state-owned enterprises have long been privatised, investment will not flood in as it did into, say, Poland and Hungary when they sold off their communist relics. Nevertheless, FDI rose in Turkey last year by a record 52 per cent, from \$US1.7 billion to \$US2.6 billion. The economy has been growing at around five per cent a year - last year it grew by 10 per cent - with continuously lowering inflation, and seems likely to continue this trend; at this rate the Turkish economy would double by the time of accession.

Economically, Turkey has huge potential. It can easily be compared with Spain or, on a smaller scale, Korea. Much immediate comment surrounding the months up to the green light reflected Turkey's overall low GDP compared even with Poland. If you count the informal sector of Turkey's economy, the so-called black economy of small, short-lived, untaxed business, the GDP is probably a good deal higher. But economists are not allowed to include the black economy. Even so, Turkey has so much improved that American financial support, originally promised in 2003 to support economic and financial reforms, and to compensate for losses from the war in Iraq, has been cancelled as unnecessary. And Turkey has been highly praised by the both IMF and the World Bank for its reforms.

Just as reforms in any area expose the need for yet more reform, a need not to create new injustice and to do the job properly, so the deep and drastic reforms of Turkey's banking and financial system, and the management of the economy as a whole expose the need for more reform.

First the reforms and their immediate success demonstrate what enormous capacity Turkey has for improvement. Turkey is now experiencing a phenomenon which occurs seldom, if only once in a country's history, a demographic situation where the majority of its population are between 15 and 45, the most adventurous, the most dynamic, the most productive.

Secondly, Turkey urgently needs to capitalise on this by greatly improving its educational system. Rather than losing time with wasteful arguments about wearing headscarves to universities or public buildings, or whether or not the graduates of religious schools can go to universities, Turkey needs to put huge amounts of new money into state education, with much the same revolutionary fervour with which Atatürk attacked the vast educational vacuum in the new Republic in the Twenties. The current lack of resources in state education has forced more into private education, (very good private education too) opening up a big gap between the two, a big gap in opportunities for higher education between the rich and the poor. Turkey cannot afford to waste its poorer society. They all need to benefit, contribute to the economy and prosper.

Thirdly, Turkey needs to put huge amounts into its social security. Probably only about 15 per cent of all Turks have any social security cover, let alone health cover. This is a problem with significant implications for tax reform, budgetary reform and distribution of wealth on a society whose greatest problem is the disparity between the richer west and the poorer east.

Given Turkey's determination to maintain fiscal rectitude, these imperatives regarding education and social security are a tall order.

Fourthly and equally important is the eradication of the corruption endemic in Turkey which is the legacy of long-standing, oligarchic political parties acting like private firms, an over-strong state economy (now much reduced), too many intimate relationships between banks, firms and politicians, poor public pay and unemployment. Corruption is a cancer at the heart of the Turkish economy and it will require radical surgery.

This is the long haul. But some changes will come about quite soon. In terms of strategic benefit, simply starting negotiations with Turkey, long before accession, will strengthen stability and security in the eastern Mediterranean, on the north-eastern flank of one of the most unstable regions of the world. Turkey is a large, weighty country with the strongest military in the region, stronger now than Russia's, and the second strongest in Nato. It will bring dependable added value to the EU's relations with Iran, Iraq and the whole Middle East. Since customs union Turkey has generally followed EU policy, even now in Cyprus, although any independent action in northern Iraq would certainly cause alarm.

Already Turkey is asserting itself more with its neighbours; it wants to be involved in the revival of the Middle East peace process and it has just substantially improved its relations with Russia, which has important implications for handling the Cyprus problem.

It has begun a serious study of the long-standing Armenian accusations of genocide in 1915, mainly pushed by the Armenian diaspora, against the former Ottoman rulers.

The upgrading of existing EU cooperation with Turkey, based on EU standards of management and control in all aspects of justice and home affairs, including border control, the fight against drugs, people smuggling, organised crime and terrorism, EU asylum and immigration policies, will all have a growing and direct benefit to the EU.

The full, zero-tolerance implementation of reformed legislation on human rights, the further improvement of freedom of expression, better legislation on foundations and the wider implementation of Kurdish language and other cultural rights will all be watched closely. Reforms unthinkable a few years ago mean that the heat has gone out of the issue of civilian control over the military, although there is still some way to go to meet standard European practices, and the military should stop briefing journalists on matters of civil political responsibility; indeed Prime Minister Erdogan continues to insist on his prerogatives in military planning and setting risk priorities.

The social benefits to the EU of a strong, democratic Turkey are promising. Turkish accession should contribute to social cohesion and stability inside the European Union as it undergoes prolonged religious and cultural change. Turkey is already a stable, peaceful society. At a time when the EU has not yet ratified its own Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, part of the new Constitutional Treaty, Turkey fully supports it and, as we know, is implementing a whole range of recent reforms to improve rights and benefits right across society. Apart from its emphasis on the rights of individuals and minorities, the Charter will include the European Social Charter which Turkey must eventually adopt, and may well even improve on by virtue of being up to date and using the most recent 'best practices' by the time of its accession to the EU. This is a long process involving widespread public participation. All this should enhance stability and confidence within a European Union which currently includes a Muslim population of about 12 million.

The adoption of the entire body of EU law, its implementation and recognition as full of rights as well as obligations, will force Europeans to look more sharply at their own existing rights and practices, especially where they are unfulfilled or poorly implemented. Many would argue that Mr Berlusconi's control of the Italian broadcast media flies in the face of the Copenhagen Criteria. And it is a nice irony in view of many French doubts about the fitness of the Turks for membership that of 1500 legal actions taken by the Commission against Member States for not implementing EU law, one third have been against France and Italy. In Britain, Michael Howard wants to revoke the country's adherence to the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees which is part of the acquis. Millions of Turks, after years of following their

own negotiations, will be experts on EU law and its implementation, just as the citizens of the new Member States are now.

Among those closely monitoring progress will be Turkey's hugely expanded civil society, which has virtually exploded during the past decade. At the beginning of the Nineties Turkish elites, such as the political and bureaucratic classes, regarded NGOs as not much more than a potentially dangerous nuisance. They have long since changed their minds, especially after civil society surpassed the authorities (and especially surpassed the much-respected Turkish military) in their quick and effective reaction to the disastrous 1999 earthquake, and, later, took a strong lead in pushing the Turkish case for negotiations to join the EU. Turkish civil society is widespread, democratic, articulate and effective. It covers hundreds of disciplines, has large international networks and has the ability to change things. NGOs are specifically mentioned in the European Commission's Recommendation to carry the burden of an intensified political and cultural dialogue between the EU and Turkey during the accession process, a dialogue which should help accustom and familiarise our societies better to Turkish membership. The Commission is currently preparing a proposal to the Council of Ministers for a Communication Strategy including much use of NGO's in the enlarged EU in support of the Turkish accession process and its wider acceptance by European public opinion.

Women are a driving force in Turkey's civil society, widely active and vocal. Part of the success of civil rights is that the protection of women and their rights has become a significant new focus of reform. Women were already working, alone, to improve their rights. The new climate of civil society has helped to broaden and enlarge their struggle.

One aspect of this is that family planning has long been a target of government policy, strongly supported by NGOs, but the lowering of the birth rate in Turkey has in fact been due to the voluntary will of families themselves, moving to cities, creating new households, not imposing so much on women and not having so many children. This is a clear demonstration, as well as the conscious choice of families, of women's rights.

The so-called 'glass ceiling' which inhibits women at work in Europe seems less evident in modern circles in Turkey. Women have been everything from Prime Minister to the Chairman of the Board of one of the world's biggest companies. Women own factories, businesses, shops and participate strongly, even chair professional and business associations in Turkey.

But the most improvement and modernisation is among the urban, western women. The poorer women of the more conservative east, and especially peasant women,

still need much more targeted support, including help against unregulated overwork, abandonment, domestic abuse and 'honour killings'.

Recent legislative changes, while improving the situation, in fact expose the reality that they have not gone far enough. There still need to be changes of mentality, in parliament, in the media, and among the professions including in the judiciary, which is male-dominated and sometimes enduringly old-fashioned where male versus women's rights are concerned.

All these improvements will have a new impact on today's citizens of the European Union. The natural assimilation of modern young Turks within the wider European working environment, like today's bright young hardworking Poles, will overcome outdated prejudices.

An important priority for Turkey this year is to make progress on Cyprus, in order to clear the way for final Turkish accession to the EU. Recent moves by the Greek Cypriot President Tassos Papadopoulos towards a resumption of proximity talks may present some progress, but it is difficult to be optimistic. Perhaps the obvious economic and financial benefits of a settlement, as well as Nicosia's isolation within the EU, are beginning to penetrate Greek Cypriot society. Recently, President Putin changed Russian policy on Cyprus. Last autumn he paid the first visit to Ankara by a Russian President in 32 years. Hitherto he had been seen as a supporter of the Greek Cypriots; billions of Russian dollars had passed through Nicosia for one reason or another during the past decade; arms sales were a big feature of the relationship; and Russia vetoed a Resolution in the Security Council in April last year which would have guaranteed peace in Cyprus, just a couple of weeks before the referendum on the Annan Plan in Cyprus. The Russian veto was widely seen as a help to the campaign of opposition to the Annan Plan run by Mr Papadopoulos.

In February President Putin called Kofi Annan, and threw his weight behind the plan and in favour of a peaceful resolution of the Cyprus problem. He welcomed Prime Minister Erdogan to Moscow the next day, and promised his support for a solution based on the UN's Annan Plan. Better late than never. Perhaps Mr Putin thinks that Turkey, on the southern flank of Russia's turbulent south-west sphere of influence, finally on its way into the EU, is a more important friend to Russia than the Greek Cypriots, and the two sides swore to build up their bilateral trade to \$15 billion a year, half of Turkey's current total overseas trade.

An important obstacle to rational progress in the current state of affairs is the long-standing judgement of the International Court of Justice in The Hague imposing the severe sanctions regime on northern Cyprus. Common sense and fair play indicates that this judgement is out of date and needs to be reversed.

It is instructive to reflect that all the remaining current candidate countries for EU membership were affected for decades by the outcome of the Crimean War of 1853-56, when Russia was defeated by Britain, France and Turkey, and Turkey became part of the so-called 'Concert of Europe', with the Ottoman Empire protected by the Treaty of Paris. Within 20 years the Russians were back in the Balkans, and there were bloody uprisings against the Ottoman Empire. In 1912-13 there were three regional wars in the Balkans. For decades, through two world wars, communism and ethnic cleansing, the region has been in some sort of turmoil, what we called 'The Eastern Question'.

The continuing process of European integration, the EU approach to south-eastern Europe, Russia's new position on Cyprus, its goodwill towards Turkey, the future integration of all the countries in south-eastern Europe and the peaceful reintegration of all their natural regions in the European Union all point to closure of the Eastern Question, peacefully, by consensus. It makes the opponents of Turkish membership look short-sighted, even blind.

Yet a key element of the grand plan is from now on hostage to the vagaries of another French referendum, some 10-15 years down the road, putting at risk - quite beyond the legal procedures laid down in the Treaty for accession of a new member state - all the work by many thousands of well-intentioned people, all the negotiations in good faith, all the pre-accession financial investment, the hopes of millions of people and the strategic vision. The plan for a referendum in France on Turkish accession now looks less and less of good idea, given the huge fluctuations in French public opinion towards the EU Constitutional Treaty. As usual and easily predictable, the constitutional referendum was hi-jacked by a number of short-term, domestic issues essentially holding the Treaty and the EU hostage. It is a bizarre, even an insulting way for Europe to manage its business. Much the same could be predicted for a referendum on Turkey even if the French government of the day, 12 to 15 years hence, were expected to support a Treaty of Accession which it had already signed (if it did not sign the Treaty it would have been negotiating in bad faith with Turkey and 26 other EU Member States for a decade).

A negative result seems not to be what France wants. Its new Ambassador in Ankara, Paul Poudade, who was previously my friend and colleague in Budapest and subsequently President Chirac's *Chef de Protocol* (who is close to the President), has stated firmly that France supports the accession negotiations, fully supports Turkey's bid for accession and that 'negative views of the French people towards Turkey's membership do not bind French state policies. Our state policy is in favour of Turkey's EU membership after fulfilment of necessary criteria,' he was recently quoted as saying.

The only way for the EU to conduct referendums in the future should be to hold them Europe-wide, to be decided by a double majority under the rules of the qualified majority vote. Unfortunately, the UK, among others, is unlikely to accept such a fair system in case it could lead to the UK being dragged into a war it doesn't like - something worthy of a wry laugh today - or some other manifestly exceptional issue.

There are, obviously, pitfalls on the way to Turkish accession, some of them in Turkey, many of them in Europe. The process will hold up a mirror to Europe's intentions and credibility. But the goal is right and in this dangerous world the policy should be implemented. We really should try to get this right.

is an independent think tank committed to enlightening the debate on good governance. It has always had a particular interest in the development of the European Union. In more recent years, it has expanded its work programme so that it is now comprised of three programmes, 'Europe', 'UK Devolution' and 'Aspects of Global Governance'.

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The Federal Trust launched its series of European Essays in the autumn of 1999 with the aim of providing its wide circle of Friends with regular thought provoking information and analysis on a broad range of European issues.

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