

## **National Debate on Future of Europe**

*Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation*

The European Convention will play a key role while the European Union is being re-established in a framework of common values. Having a new constitutional base, the democratic legitimacy and effectiveness of the Union will increase and have an additional value in the development of a European identity.

Despite being aware of this, Turkish interest in the European Union is very much focused on Turkey's accession. The national debate on the future of Europe has not been at the top of the agenda when the European Union is discussed in any platform in Turkey. The subject received more attention in the media recently as a part of Turkey's expectations from the Copenhagen Summit as a candidate country. There were discussions taking place in the newspapers after Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's draft constitutional treaty. But the Turkish media is much more interested in the discussions on the accession process rather than the Convention.

### **Players in the debate in Turkey**

Even though the specific issue of the Convention is not a major political issue in Turkey, at the government and NGO level the issue is being followed with close interest. The European Union membership is of great importance to Turkey. Overall the Turkish membership to the Union would be an assurance for the promotion and protection of human rights and freedoms, free trade and market integration, less state intervention in the economy and last but not least would lead to a consolidated democracy, objectively functioning within the rule of law.

Since the acknowledgement of the Turkish candidacy in Helsinki, Turkey has been working hard in order to join the European Union, through the achievement of both economic and social criteria. Since Turkey gained candidate status many developments took place to achieve EU standards. Harmonization law packages have been passed; amendments have been made in the Constitution.

It is important to point out that, with respect to Turkey's existing position, in which she still pursues policies towards attaining membership, the Future of Europe Debate in Turkey emphasizes a future for Europe with Turkey.

Within the 'Future of Europe Debate' the Turkish civil initiative and government support the notion of transforming the EU's founding treaties into a European Constitutional Treaty and point out certain measures that can be taken within that to strictly protect the basic human rights and freedoms of the citizens of Europe against the Union itself and the member state governments. Turkish suggestions draw attention to unconstitutional and extraordinary administrations that occur in states during the times of wars, guerilla wars and terror and violence, and accordingly propose that the European Constitutional Treaty sets up the restrictions for the limitations of basic human rights and freedoms at such unusual times.

The existing institutions have shown over time that they have the capability of staying balanced and coping with the new environments. But in the view of the coming

enlargement and the challenges that it is going to bring, it is more than reasonable to initiate reforms concerning the institutional balance and the working structure. In this sense, the authorities in Turkey suggest that the powers of the European Parliament should be enhanced in a manner such that the effectiveness of the European Commission is not undermined and the citizens of Europe are encouraged to participate more in the European Parliament elections. The most appropriate way to enhance Parliament's powers is envisioned as building common decision procedures within more policy areas. It is also recommended that the decision-making within the Council be based on the proportionality of the states' populations without weakening the stances of the small states. Such a reform could address the deficiencies in the EU, especially in the area of the growing democratic deficit.

Turkish civil society initiatives pictures the Union as an entity where the societal development, harmony and stability gain increasing importance. Hence, since security and stability are considered as the promise of the future these concepts cannot be limited to member states, and the Union should take responsibility within the global arena, contributing to the development of many states that should converge under similar democracy principals. Finally, the Turkish civil society initiative believes that the Union should maintain elements of both soft power and hard power while pursuing its foreign policy practices. Thus, it should follow non-military solutions over issues such as illegal immigration, control of borders, fighting with terror, trading of humans and illegal substances, and military solutions for issues such as defense and humanitarian peace interventions.

On the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Turkish government underlines that it is time to discuss how the Charter can supply protection of the fundamental rights without prejudice to the established European instruments, such as the European Convention on Human Rights. In order to achieve this, different legal systems in the EU should be avoided.

Concerning the simplification of the treaties, this is going to be helpful in giving the citizens of Europe the opportunity of having a better understanding of the basic structures of the Community law.

Strengthening its institutional structure as a stability center will let the EU be regarded as a stability element in the world. This stability will reinforce the EU's location in the global system. However, this element's strength depends on the re-establishment of democratic and transparent institutions and taking precautions concerning the new threats.