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David Cameron's Conservative Party wants to renegotiate Britain's membership of the EU, hoping to obtain a looser, more flexible relationship. Turkey may also soon ask for a new kind of 'associate membership'. Although there are different, and deep-rooted reasons for euroscepticism in each country, Turkey and the UK have certain things in common: an imperial past, great power aspirations and an attachment to traditional notions of sovereignty, sometimes at odds with EU supra-nationalism. They also happen to be fed up with the EU. But the similarities stop there.

Turkey began accession talks eight years ago but progress has been painfully slow. Negotiations have started on only 13 of the 33 chapters of EU law that Turkey needs to adopt to become a member; and no new chapter has been opened in the past 36 months. Cyprus continues to block parts of the accession talks, as does France, even under its new president, François Hollande. Meanwhile, the government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan is losing its appetite for democratic change and economic opening. In some areas, such as press freedom, it is moving backwards. The stalemate in the accession talks is creating a poisonous atmosphere that makes it hard for the EU and Turkey to work together in foreign policy, migration, trade or energy – all areas where there are potential synergies.

That is why Sinan Ülgen – an analyst at Carnegie Europe – suggests that Ankara and Brussels start

looking for a way out. His model of a 'virtual membership' for Turkey is not meant as an alternative to full membership. Rather, he hopes that new forms of association will create the kind of trust and goodwill that will be needed to rekindle the accession talks once political circumstances are more propitious.

Turkey does not want to join the long list of the Union's 'strategic partners' that includes Russia, China, Indonesia and South Africa. Strategic partners do not align their policies with the EU. But Turkey already has a customs union with the EU and has moved towards European standards in areas ranging from competition policy to prison management. Nor does Turkey want to emulate Norway and the other members of the European Economic Area. Having been promised full membership, Turkey would rightly refuse any model that requires it unilaterally to

adopt the *acquis* without delivering accession in return. That leaves only the 'Swiss model' of bilaterally negotiated deals in selected areas. Ankara would be consulted on EU rules in, say, trade and transport but it would not get a vote in the relevant EU bodies. Ülgen thinks that the Turks would be happy to trade minimal influence in Brussels for the right to decide in which areas they want to follow EU rules.

Many British Conservatives find the idea of a 'pick and choose membership' equally appealing. Yet a lot of Britons hope that the UK will retain strong influence in the EU; and they would not be happy with the customs union that Turkey operates with the EU. This union excludes services – so important for the City and the British economy – and it disadvantages Turkey whenever the EU strikes trade deals with third countries (these countries then gain access to the Turkish market while the country in question does not automatically lower its tariffs for Turkish goods). Cameron wants Britain to benefit fully from the EU single market and stay a member of the Union provided it can opt out of selected bits, such as social legislation.

But the biggest difference between the UK and Turkey lies not in their level of ambition for a new EU deal but in their starting positions. Turkey is an aspiring (if irritated) applicant looking for a workable relationship with the EU. The idea of an associate membership remains hugely controversial in Turkey. But within the EU, the ambivalence of the association model could appeal both to Turkey sceptics (such as France, Austria or Germany) – who will hope to

divert Turkey from the membership track – and Turkophiles (the UK, Sweden or Spain) who seek to prevent the rupture in EU-Turkey relations that could result from continued stalemate in the accession talks.

The UK, by contrast, is a long-standing member of the club. As such, it has much more leverage over the EU. But it is also expected to respect club rules and etiquette, which includes the principle that one member-state should not attempt to blackmail others. Cameron's emerging strategy of coupling the request for renegotiation with the 'threat' of a UK referendum – and ultimately an EU exit – is creating bad blood on the continent. Turkey, as an outsider asking for closer ties, does not have such problems. It is easier to negotiate a pre-nuptial agreement than a divorce settlement.

Ultimately, the EU may not offer a pick-and-choose deal to either Turkey or the UK. The European Commission finds the Swiss model complex, slow-moving and rather frustrating. Sensitive to growing European tensions, the Turks will be very careful not to associate themselves with the British strategy. But many Turks may secretly hope that the UK will succeed in creating more flexible models of membership that would also be more palatable for Turkey. If, however, the British end up voting for withdrawal, Turkey would lose one of its strongest allies inside the EU.

**Katinka Barysch**  
 Deputy director, CER

## CER in the press

### **Bild Zeitung**

23<sup>rd</sup> January 2013  
 As a former global power, London is used to setting its own agenda instead of laboriously searching for compromise. "London tends to think more global than European", says Katinka Barysch of the CER.

### **The Globe and Mail**

22<sup>nd</sup> January 2013  
 Mr Cameron "is gearing up for what I would call a counter-terrorism-light approach," said Rem Korteweg of the CER. But Britain will face huge challenges if the Mali conflict spreads to other parts of Africa, in particular Nigeria.

### **The New York Times**

15<sup>th</sup> January 2013  
 "This idea that Germany is a powerhouse dragging the rest of Europe along with it is a bit of a myth," said Philip Whyte of the CER. "You have a very weak periphery and a core which is not as strong as everyone seems to believe."

### **Le Monde**

14<sup>th</sup> January 2013  
 "[If Britain left the EU] Germany would run economic policy and France its security policy", Charles Grant of the CER told us. "The US would have less influence in Europe and EU policies would be more likely to diverge from those of the US."

### **The Daily Mail**

7<sup>th</sup> December 2012  
 "The consequences [of slump] are likely to be far-reaching. Not only will governments struggle to push through the needed reforms, but there is a risk of a broader backlash against the market economy and the EU," said Simon Tilford of the CER.

### **Reuters**

14<sup>th</sup> December 2012  
 Europe's common security policy is "stuck between the strategic realities of declining defence budgets, waning European power in the world and a lack of will and ability to project strategic force outward", said Hugo Brady of the CER.

### **Financial Times**

9<sup>th</sup> December 2012  
 Charles Grant, director of the CER, sets out in a new article what is at stake: "British withdrawal requires two conditions to be satisfied. First, the government of the day must call a referendum on whether to leave the EU; second a majority of voters must want to quit."

### **The Sunday Times**

25<sup>th</sup> November 2012  
 John Springford of the CER said: "To try to get employment rules changed, when lots of countries feel they are an integral part of the single market, will be very difficult."