

SommerAkademie Europa and Young Leaders for Europe

Russia and Turkey in 2030 –
scenarios from the 2017 alumni meeting



Young Leaders for Europe

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Introduction

It started as an experiment. And it turned out a success.

Gabriele Schöler

In October 2017, a select group of alumni of the “Summer Academy on Europe” and the “Young Leaders for Europe” projects, successively run as a cooperation between the Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Heinz Nixdorf Stiftung for almost 20 years, met in Berlin. In what we called a “scenario conference” they were supposed to deal with “The ‘neighbours of the neighbours’ – Russia and Turkey and their impact on EU neighbourhood relations ten years from now”.

Over the past years, Russia and Turkey and their regional and global role have become an ever “hotter” topic in the Young Leaders for Europe seminars, for obvious reasons:

Putin’s politics at home and abroad, in particular in the neighbourhood with frozen conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia as well as, most recently, the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the war in eastern Ukraine, have heavily burdened EU-Russian relations. In addition, Russian influence by way of “hybrid warfare,” such as interference in the U.S. presidential elections, has become more and more an issue for the West.

Turkey’s relations with the West have also become extremely tense due to Erdoğan spurning European values, democracy, rule of law, human and civil rights, and his repeated threat to cancel the EU-Turkey refugee agreement. Meanwhile, the country has also been trying to gain more influence in the Middle East. Under the impact of the war in Syria, the fear of a Kurdish state, and not least for economic reasons, Turkey has closed ranks with former enemy Iran and buried enmities with Russia over the shoot-down of a Russian fighter jet in 2015.

Without a doubt, both Russia and Turkey – together with Iran and Saudi-Arabia - have considerable influence on the neighbouring countries of the European Union. The latter will have to include these key actors in a political and societal dialogue, if it wants to promote peace and prosperity in the neighbourhood.

Yet how can the EU win them over as partners for its neighbourhood policy?

This was the starting point for our Berlin meeting. With a focus on the two actors Russia and Turkey, for our alumni meeting we wanted to launch into a very interactive exercise: divided into four smaller groups participants were to consider positive and negative future scenarios for both Russia and Turkey.

In very concrete terms: what would relations among Russia, its neighbours and the EU, on the one hand, and Turkey, its neighbours and the EU, on the other, look like in or around 2030 if they developed in a more positive or constructive way than today? And what would they look like if the development became even more negative or destructive than they are in 2017?

Before departing into the smaller working groups, a set of basic assumptions on the global and regional setting was agreed on by the entire group in order to avoid discussion about “yet what if XY happens in the global context?”

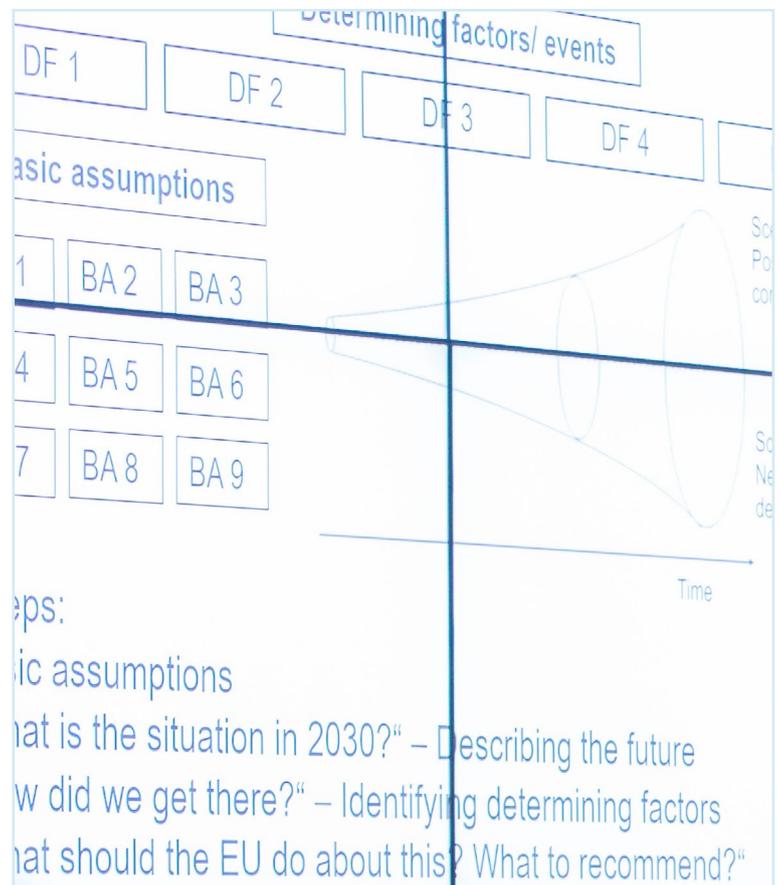
After the four scenarios were sketched in the respective working groups, participants were asked to do something rather unusual and imagine they were looking back from around 2030 to 2017 and develop what events might have led to the situa-

tion they depicted. Looking back seemed to be one of the major challenges as, usually, we tend to develop a real situation into the future, not the other way round, and yet participants made it work. The process was facilitated by a long-time cooperation partner, the Berlin-based company planpolitik, specialised on developing and carrying out tailor-made simulation games on different topics, very often in a European policy context and setting.

Participants willingly took up the challenge of scenario-developing. What they came up with at the end was tied together by one rapporteur per workshop. This little volume is less a documentation of the efforts but a summary of the results, enhanced by journalistic experience and just a bit of artistic licence.

We want to stress that these are fictitious scenarios, fictitious courses of events that led there, and fictitious persons mentioned in the reports. They were developed, though, by real individuals either living in, or working on, the countries and regions under debate. They are neither dreams nor wishes expressed by the participants and summarised by the rapporteurs, but rather scenarios developed on the basis of jointly worked-out basic assumptions. These scenarios, however, describe potential developments in their extreme cases. They do not reflect the opinions of the authors, facilitators, the Bertelsmann Stiftung or the Heinz Nixdorf Stiftung.

This brochure collects these “debates from the future”. Their aim, as that of the articles, was to help widen our horizon for potential consequences of current politics and show alternatives. The reports reflect the “playful” character as much as the serious background and dedicated discussions in Berlin.



At the same time, the brochure marks the end of a project which, over 19 years, brought together young people, initially mainly from Germany, later also from other EU member states and neighbouring countries, to think and talk about strategies and options for Europe, its progress at home and in improving neighbourhood relations. More than 600 “young leaders” from politics, business, the media and the NGO sector took part in the programmes, which, in 1999, started as an experiment. And turned out a success.

Turkey in 2030

A cosmopolitan country that blossomed after tough days

Sezin Oney, Sabine Rossi

It is the year 2030. On a sunny day in Istanbul, Anjel is sitting out in a tea shop at the Seraglio Point, where the Sea of Marmara meets the old Constantinople. She feels truly at the centre of the world. Her hair is shining in the sunlight, while she is talking to her friend Ayşe, who returned to Istanbul only a month ago. Ayşe's scarf is colourful. She just bought it at a pop-up-store during the last fashion show that turned Sultan Ahmet Square, where once the Hippodrome of Constantinople stood, into a street-based catwalk. The event was not an exception: elegant organizations and impromptu fashion shows and cultural events pop up all around the city as Istanbul flourishes as a magnet of innovation and creativity. International magazines and travel guides already call it the leading fashion capital.

nians to Jews, Greeks to Kurds, and Turks to Arabs. A colourful demographic kaleidoscope, a truly cosmopolitan mosaic – such as Anjel, who is of Armenian origin, and Ayşe, a Kurdish Alevi. Ayşe was expelled from the university as she signed the Peace Petition. She was among the academics losing their jobs and becoming the so-called “civilian dead” after the attempted coup in July 2016. Therefore, Ayşe and her family sought refuge in Berlin, Germany, in late 2016 and lived there ever since. Her childhood friend Anjel stayed back, but the two never cut their ties.

Finally, they are enjoying their beloved city together: Istanbul now stands out as one of the world's most historic cities as well as one of its most glamorous modern urban centres. And unlike many other megacities that face huge security problems, Istanbul is now one of the safest cities in the world.



Istanbul shines like a jewel as a major tourist destination and a 21st century metropolis. It is not only attracting the best and most skilful workforce in the region, but people from all around the world flock in to create start-ups and new businesses all over Turkey. The brain drain that Turkey faced in the 2010s has been reversed; citizens, who once left Turkey – such as Ayşe - are returning highly educated and with monetary capital. Ayşe is about to set up a business in Cihangir quarter in Istanbul. Her partner, Mustafa, fled the Syrian war in 2015. Like many other “once refugees” he obtained the Turkish citizenship and a legal residency, like him, they are faring well and contributing to the socioeconomic enrichment of Turkey with their culture, skills and human capital. The former refugees, mostly Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans, Iranians, Somalians, have proved to be outstanding assets to Turkey, and the positive in-

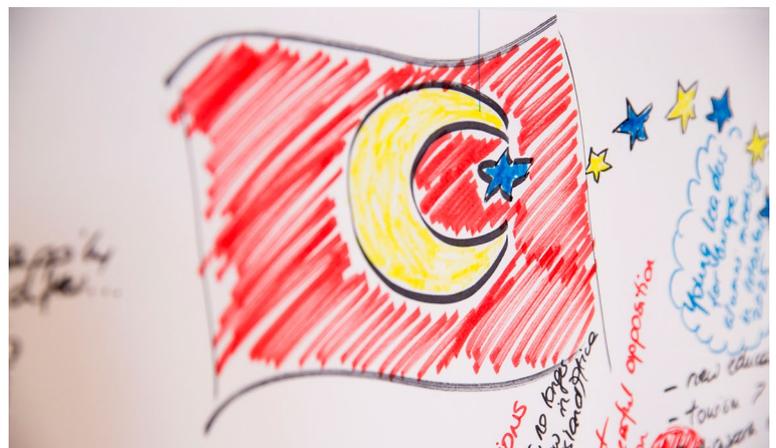
While Anjel and Ayşe enjoy their tea, tourists from all over the world rush by, exploring the only city in the world that stretches out on two continents. Istanbul is home to a diverse population, ranging from Arme-

fluence of their presence has created a whole new inspirational approach to immigration around the world, causing “immigration” to become a much desired phenomenon. Turkey buzzes with different languages, smells of spices mingle. Here at the Bosphorus one can find a collision of cultures that sets free new ideas. Istanbul is a spring of creativity.

Anjel is an environmental expert, and enthusiastically she tells Ayşe about latest investments in green energy in Turkey. While climate change has been affecting the globe adversely, Turkey managed to benefit even from the environmental changes, remodeling itself as a regional centre for solar power. In fact, Turkey serves as the hub of development of new “smart energy” strategies and technologies. The European Union has assumed a key role in Turkey’s new position as an energy hub. The relationship between the EU and Turkey, which has faced many rocky turns since the tempted coup in the summer of 2016 and beyond, now rests on solid foundations. While Turkey is not a full member of the EU, it is one of its most reliable partners and the parties have established an economic and political partnership through various agreements. Furthermore, Turkey is engaged in similar economic and political agreements with Russia, China and the United States. Nevertheless, the relationship between Turkey and the EU is far beyond this, constituting a special track compared to Turkey’s other international engagements.

While nipping on her tea, Ayşe wonders, “Anjel, you who spent all these years here, how did you manage not to lose hope?” Following the developments in her home country from her German exile, Ayşe admits that not even in her wildest dreams had she seen herself sitting at the Sea of Marmara in a multicultural Turkey. When Ayşe left Turkey, there were many debates concerning a split of the Turkish society between more religious and rather secular citizens. In 2017 and 2018, there was even sporadic violent unrest rooted in the growing tension between the two camps. About that time, the Kurdish conflict intensified as another source of violent conflict. But Turkey in 2030 recognizes the benefits of diversity and pluralism and cherishes its multicultural fabric. Harmonious coexistence of cultures, ethnicities, nationalities, religions, attitudes and diverse modes of living have crafted this wonderful and unique model of Turkey, aspired to be emulated by other countries in the region and beyond.

Turkey is one of the leading countries – if not the leading country – of the “Organization of Eurasian Cooperation” that includes countries from the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. About 75% of the world’s population live in the Eurasian region and this extended region also controls 75% of the world’s so far discovered energy resources. Turkey is not limited to leading the “Organization of Eurasian Cooperation” economically, it also plays a key role as a moderating and reconciling power.



Back in 2017, this development was unimaginable, but Turkey managed to bounce back. How could this happen? Just in times when all hopes seemed lost in Turkey, how did the country turn itself around, from the brink of undemocratic changes and a dooming autocracy to recreating itself from its ashes? In order to analyse the reasons for this change, we must return to the year 2017 and start following step by step how Turkey made its comeback.

Before it gets better, it gets worse: grim times first

The years between 2015 and 2017 were grim times for Turkey. After the general elections in June 2015, violence by terror organizations escalated and almost a thousand people died because of terror attacks. The attempted coup d’état on July 15, 2016 marked another catastrophic turning point: almost 260 people died, trying to resist the takeover by some factions in the armed forces. In the aftermath of July 15, Turkey was unable to turn a blank page after this vicious attempted coup and strive in a united manner for democratization. Instead, democratic deficits increased and human rights deteriorated. Hence, social and political polarization intensified.

By the end of 2017, Turkey was already inching towards an economic crisis. Its relations with the European Union and specifically with Germany, where a huge Turkish diaspora composed of scientists, such as Ayşe, artists, intellectuals and former members of the army had arrived in the aftermath of the attempted coup, worsened day by day. Moreover, relations with the United States also faced the direst crisis ever. In fact, Turkey's diplomatic relations with basically all its neighbours and beyond hit rock bottom. Nevertheless, the worst was yet to come.



At the beginning of 2018, Turkey conducted a comprehensive military invasion into Syria. The Turkish armed forces were already weak, destabilized and caught in internal struggles caused by the desertion and the cleansing following the attempted coup in July 2016. The military operations, planned as a brief intervention to weaken the Kurdish allies of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Syria, turned into a bloody military adventure of long duration with Turkey's military getting deeper and deeper into the quagmire of the Syrian war.

Meanwhile, foreign investment (which had already been dropping since 2015) literally collapsed by 2018 because of the instability both within and surrounding Turkey. The tourism business, already facing dire straits, completely flattened due to security concerns. In this situation Russia sought to benefit from Turkey's weakness - and it succeeded with its political manipulations of parts of the society

and the political elite. Moreover, Russia tried to intervene economically, threatening Turkey to close down the gas and oil-pipelines. Due to inner strife and the deep political and social polarization, Ankara was not able to protect itself and the country from Moscow's meddling.

Regarding the Turkish middle class, ever escalating domestic problems, deteriorating human rights conditions, constant reshuffling of the education system, as well as growing religious influence in schools and universities led to an unstoppable brain drain. Anjel's hopes, like the hopes of those who remained, vanished. They were not able to imagine that Turkey could return to its days of glory any time soon, with a robust economy and an optimistic future for the young generation, which made up a huge proportion of Turkey's population. While most Turkish citizens already struggled in 2018, many feared 2019 to be the worse, maybe even the worst in Turkey's republican history since 1923, since the country was heading towards a crucial electoral year.

Three elections in a row were held in 2019: the presidential, the local and the general elections took place on the same day. Moreover, the citizens had to cast a fourth ballot in a referendum with which the government headed to reintroduce the death penalty. Anjel followed the campaign period. It was overtly nationalistic and more intense than ever, with rising tensions. She shared the outrage about the possible reintroduction of capital punishment, which had been abolished in 2002 in Turkey.

Eventually, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) results slid down in the general elections and the party lost major cities in the local ones. Nevertheless, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was elected as the "first president" and in the referendum, reintroducing the death penalty was approved. The system was already styled as a rigid presidency through constitutional amendments since 2016 and the election of Erdoğan cemented the transformation into a full-fledged authoritarian presidential system.

Already in the dawn of the referendum, the European Commission and individual European countries such as Germany had made clear that the reintroduction of capital punishment would be their "red line". Hence, shortly after the 2019 election and

the approval of the legislation of the death penalty by the president, who bypassed parliament, the EU annulled Turkey's candidacy for membership. In consequence, Turkey's economy deteriorated, fuelling socio-political polarization. Meanwhile, the brain drain reached an extent that made certain businesses, especially the health and the IT sectors, face a huge lack of labour force.



Rebirth of Turkey - a phoenix from the ashes

After the election, Anjel almost lost hope. Her beloved brother Hayko was about to leave the country. Her sister Anahit and her brother-in-law Abdulrahman struggled to feed their children, since both lost their jobs. Even Anjel could barely help her parents to make it until the end of the month. At university a class-mate during one of the courses handed her a flyer: "Let's overcome the hate," was written on it. Anjel did not hesitate a minute. She had to join the group of young people who met once a week in her neighbourhood. All over the country civic platforms started discussing how to resolve the country's complex problems. Anjel met Kurds, Turks and young people from other ethnic backgrounds and with different opinions. Their search for common ground helped to diminish the polarization. Even some politicians initiated an exchange of ideas and began to cooperate. The high degree of popular support for this "socio-political rapprochement" indicated how Turkey's people from all segments of society were tired of polarization.

In the years 2020 to 2022, there were peaceful demonstrations all over the country advocating democracy, secularism and peace. Anjel took part in the manifestations in Istanbul. She once arrived when the police dispersed a crowd with tear-gas. Anjel took out the lemons from her pockets, cut them into slices and handed them over to the

people stumbling towards her. This was an old secret recipe to clean the eyes from the toxic gas learned well during the so-called Gezi-protest in 2013. But most of the times the demonstrations Anjel attended remained undisturbed. Severe measures by the police had proved to be counterproductive and as soon as they were put in action, civil unrest spread through the country. Anjel's mother Natali used to say, "If we all stay together as in the days of Gezi, eventually we will succeed." In the drawer of her desk Anjel kept the picture of a lady dressed in red who opposed the police and the tear-gas in 2013; Ceyda Sungur was her hero.

In the summer of 2022, Anjel participated in several demonstrations. Millions of citizens took to the streets in Istanbul, Ankara, and in the far east of the country. They demanded their rights as citizens and insisted that those held in prison without charges had to be released. Letters of imprisoned politicians and journalists circulated, talking about violence and overcrowded cells.

Anjel also joined newly created Facebook groups where protest was organized. Somehow it seemed to her like a déjà vu: "It was similar during the Gezi-protests or on Tahrir in Cairo, wasn't it?" To her surprise, the army never showed up at the demonstrations. Even though Erdoğan called for them several times, the generals and soldiers with their tanks stayed in the barracks, as did police forces.

On October 27, 2022, Anjel took a bus to Ankara. She wanted to join the people calling for restoration of rights, freedom, and democracy. The day after, shortly after midnight as October 28 turned into October 29, on the 99th anniversary of the Republic, the crowd got so big that it seemed everyone was in the streets in major urban centres and rural areas. The massive crowd in Ankara started to cheer and these images were broadcast live all over the world. "Democracy makes a comeback to Turkey," Anjel read the headline of CNN Turk on her mobile while tears were running down her cheeks. Anjel and the others celebrated until dawn when she finally managed to call Ayşe in Berlin.

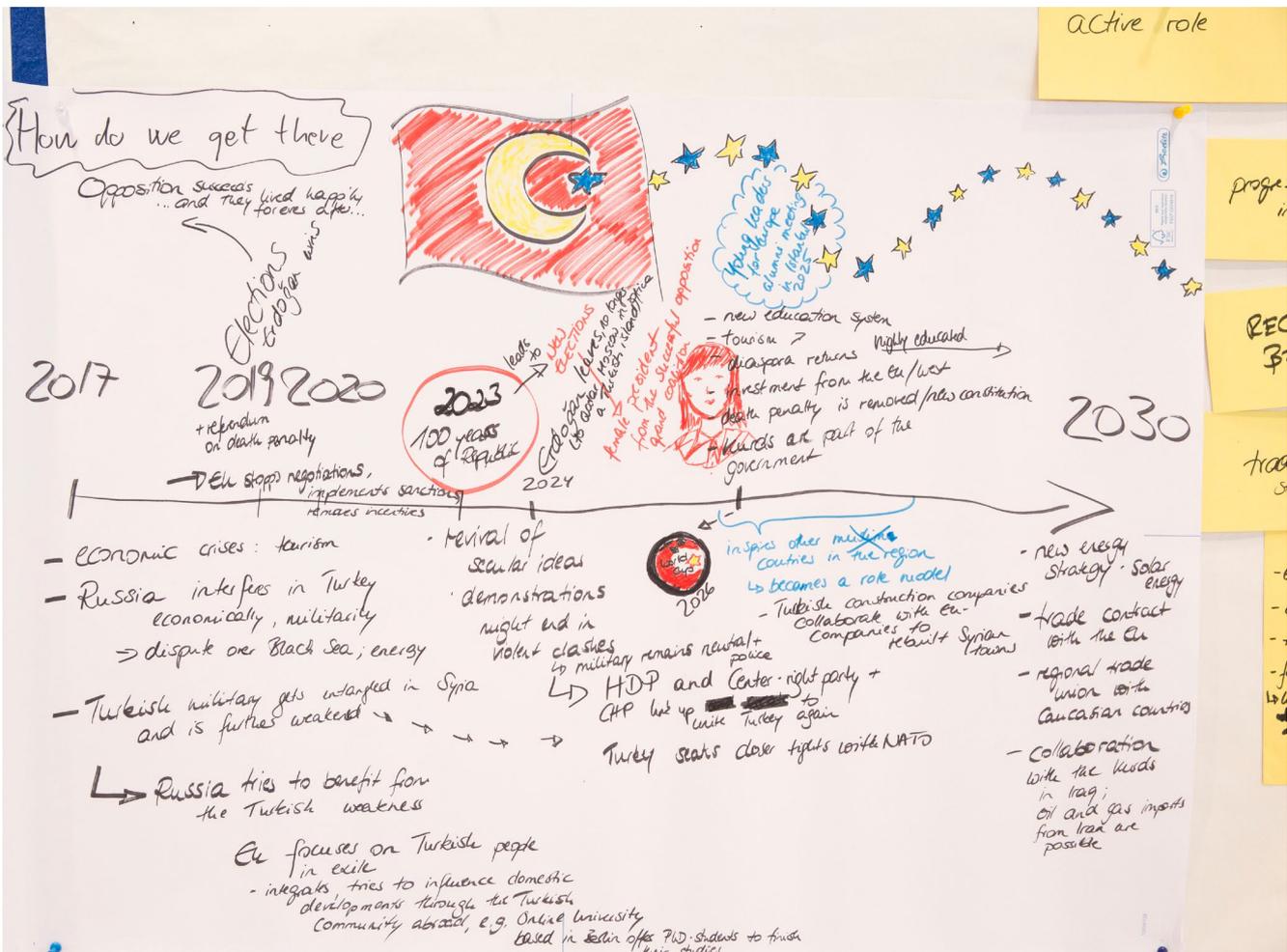
Soon after the demonstrations peaked on October 29, 2022, general elections were scheduled and subsequently held in mid-November. This time a coalition led by a female leader won an overwhelming

majority in parliament. During her campaign she emphasized the empowered role of women in society and tried to ameliorate the highly polarized socio-political relations.

Erdoğan went to an undisclosed location in the last days of 2022 and vanished from the public eye. Some speculated he was in Malaysia, others named Qatar. The "Grand Coalition" formed by all the parties represented in parliament - even the pro-Kurdish party and the Turkish nationalists - sought to mend social and political cracks and to overcome the deepening tensions and conflicts eroding society. One of the first moves by the Grand Coalition was to abolish the recently introduced death penalty. This move led to a rapprochement with the EU and diplomatic relations completely frozen for years were reinitiated. In general, Turkey sought to improve its relationship with the neighbours and the world and assumed a peaceful tone.

Anjel felt a new wave of hope. She was already looking forward to the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the Turkish Republic. People in the streets were discussing Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's ideas, the founder of the republic. These ideas were reinterpreted to proclaim a democratic and secular republic. Her friends sent Anjel a t-shirt with Atatürk's portrait from Berlin, en vogue among hipsters in the German capital and with the second and third generation of Turks in Germany.

Meanwhile, the next big political step was the preparation of a new constitution: this new constitution would replace the existing one, legislated by the junta of the 1980 coup. It was an old promise to replace the so-called "Coup Constitution" and now it gained shape: Anjel, like all Turkish citizens, was invited to work on the new constitution. On October 29, 2023, she received a letter, asking her to send in her ideas. Assemblies were formed throughout the country, where people came together and



discussed the constitution during the process of writing. In 2024, the second civilian constitution of the Republic¹ of Turkey was legislated after a popular referendum, coinciding with the 100th anniversary of the first constitution of the republic, dating back from 1924.

The highly participatory way of writing a constitution made Turkey a role model for other countries in transition. In 2030, neighbouring countries looked upon Turkey, which, at a central position at the regional trade routes, was prospering as a regional energy hub specialized in green energy whereby it freed itself from Russia's grip on oil and gas pipelines.

The EU's role in Turkey's getting back on track

Although relations between the EU and Turkey had deteriorated and eventually come to a complete halt in 2019, European countries had sought to keep open informal channels to the opposition and to secular Turkish elites. They had also tried to support the Turkish diaspora, such as Ayşe and her family. Ayşe had quickly found a job at one of Berlin's three main universities. There she had met academic colleagues, who had also left Turkey and founded an online university in order to teach their students back in Turkey and to help them finish their thesis and take their degrees. Ayşe was happy to send the information to her friend Anjel in Istanbul. Many students there had feared to drop out of university without the possibility to graduate since so many professors had left.

The EU tried to fulfil the demand of education by creating new scholarships, grants and other types of financial and tangible support. Anjel's brother

Hayko was one of those who continued their studies in Belgium. With this cultural and scientific exchange the EU managed to play an important role in the Turkish diaspora, a bond of long duration and an investment in future relations as these immigrants energized Turkey's and European countries' economic, social and cultural lives.

Even in times when diplomatic and institutional relations were deteriorating, the EU had not cut its support for new energy projects completely. Anjel's company, one of the pioneers in the field, continued to send employees to Europe for workshops, exchanges and apprenticeships. As soon as the political turbulences began to calm down, the EU revived its engagement and thereby helped to boost Turkey's infrastructure and to reinvigorate Turkey's economy.

The EU succeeded with this strategy because it managed that all member countries agreed to speak with one voice. The crucial point had been Ankara's move to reintroduce the death penalty. On the decline of democratic standards and escalation of human rights violations, some EU-members had argued that Turkey alone had to deal with its internal troubles and struggles and that these were of no interest for Europe. Yet none of the member states could turn a blind eye on the death penalty that also threatened some EU-citizens imprisoned in Turkey.

Back to the tea-shop with the view on the Sea of Marmara, Anjel leans over the table and whispers to Ayşe, "Ne oldum dememeli, ne olacağım demeli," meaning, "One should not say 'What have I become', but rather 'What shall I become'". This Turkish proverb had helped her to believe in a democratic Turkey during the dark times, Anjel admits.

1 In 1921, a constitution was legislated by the Grand National Assembly, but only the 1924 constitution was the first one after the proclamation of the republic in 1923.

Turkey in 2030

From ‘zero problems’ to aggressive realpolitik

Tim L. Poppenborg

When in July 2017, Turkey’s President Erdoğan vowed to “cut off traitors’ heads,” most observers wrote his remarks off as fiery rhetoric. After all, memories of the failed coup attempt one year earlier were still fresh. Now, thirteen years later, the President’s promises are taken more seriously.

In 2030, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has an ironclad grip on Turkish society. Elections are still being held but function as mere window dressing. Behind the scenes, Berat Albayrak, Erdoğan’s charismatic son-in-law, is being prepared to assume power once the 76-year old President decides to step down. Much

However, repression is just one feature of Erdoğan’s autocratic toolbox. In 2030, graduates from Istanbul’s prestigious Boğaziçi University are among the first to have progressed fully through Turkey’s remodelled education system. Built around a blend of nationalist and conservative Islamic rhetoric, schooling in Turkey seeks to educate youth in line with the AKP’s beliefs and values. Once mocked by international pundits for calling the theory of evolution into question, Turkey’s education system has since developed into a powerful instrument as – described by a Turkish proverb – “trees are bent when they are young”. Domestically, Erdoğan’s largest concern is the economy. After the EU suspended the customs union with Turkey in 2023, Turkey’s economy struggled to open up new export markets. Subsequent state bailouts have plunged the country into serious debt.

Abroad, Erdoğan’s Turkey has developed into an aggressive actor. The lessons of Ahmet Davutoğlu, architect of the AKP’s initial foreign policy and former prime minister, are forgotten. He had envisioned a Turkey using its “strategic depth” – its fortunate geostrategic position between Europe, the Caucasus and the Middle East, as well as its historical and cultural ties in the region rooted in centuries of Ottoman rule – to create a cooperative environment where “zero problems with neighbours” would allow Turkey to prosper. In 2030, Erdoğan ruthlessly exploits Turkey’s “strategic depth” to gain leverage over his perceived enemies.

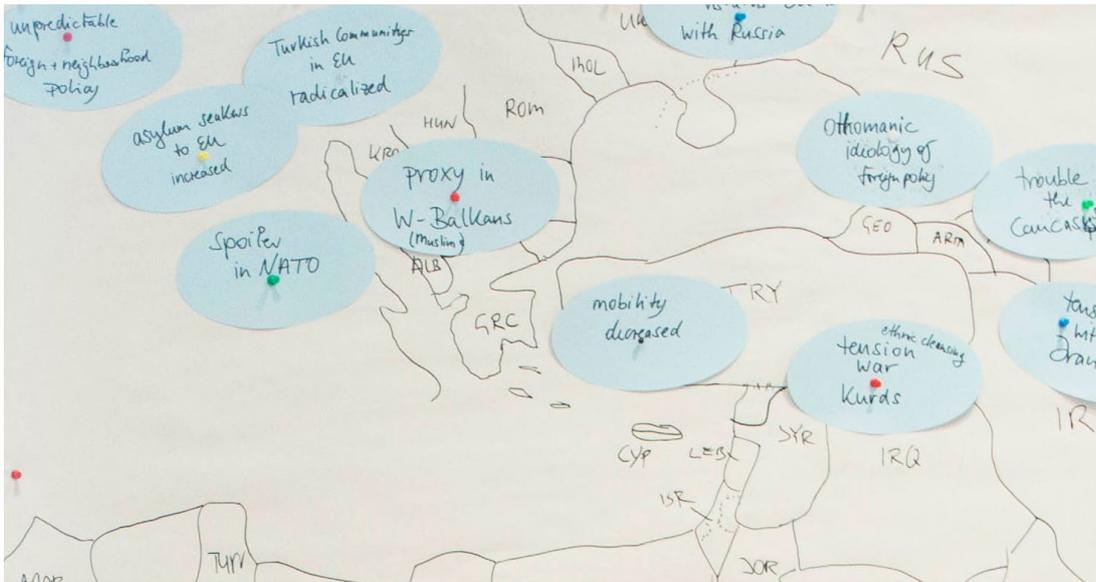
In the West, Turkey seeks to undermine the accession efforts of countries in the Western Balkans and destabilise existing EU member states. In some European countries, Turkey’s ever-growing network



opposition is not expected. After 28 years of AKP-rule, the economic elites have rallied behind Erdoğan, using their vast influence over what is left of Turkey’s privately-owned media in his support. Whoever still voices dissent is easily charged on the grounds of supporting terrorism, an offence that now carries with it the risk of capital punishment.

of schools, universities and media outlets is seen as a threat to stability, as the Turkish government uses its influence to fuel ethnic tensions and exacerbate political unrest. In Bulgaria, for example, a decade ago most of its sizable Turkish minority was overwhelmingly opposed to Erdoğan's rule. Now, AKP-sponsored parties in Bulgaria are on the rise. Even more troubling for the EU, some strongmen in the Western Balkans have abandoned fears of

seeks to square the circle. On the one hand, Turkey has found common ground with the Shia-dominated governments of Iraq and Iran, which each host Kurdish minorities and are also trying to curb their efforts for greater autonomy or even statehood. On the other hand, Turkey is committed to deepening economic relations with the majority Sunni GCC-states, especially Saudi Arabia. As the Saudi government is managing an unprecedented



“neo-Ottomanism” and openly embrace Erdoğan's style of governing, viewing it as a new model of pseudo-democratic rule that conveniently fills the coffers of those in power.

In the East, Turkey is engaged in a massive military campaign against various Kurdish forces. Dividing lines between the two main Kurdish actors, the Turkey-based PKK and the Syrian-based YPG, remain murky; a fact that Turkey regularly exploits to justify incursions into Syrian and Iraqi territory. International NGOs and UN bodies have accused Turkish forces of gross human rights violations, a fact that has severely increased tensions between Turkey and its NATO partners. In retaliation, Kurdish commandos have committed horrific terror attacks right in the heart of Turkey's bustling cities. The conflict has also had tremendous repercussions among the Turkish diaspora in Western Europe. Violent elements among Kurdish and Turkish minorities clash on a daily basis, especially in Germany, a country Erdoğan has long accused of offering a safe haven for PKK fighters. In the Middle East, Turkey

economic transition, attempting to wean the country off its dependence on oil and gas revenue, Turkish firms hope to integrate more closely with Saudi Arabia's supply chains.

In sum, Turkey's domestic development has followed a linear path towards increased authoritarianism and kleptocracy. However, to secure support at home, Erdoğan's government has developed an ever-more aggressive posture abroad, attempting to strong-arm the EU by manipulating diaspora-relations and further polarising Turkish society through a brutal military campaign against its Kurdish minority. How did the parties involved get this far?

November 5, 2023 – Cologne, Germany

“Not again, not again,” Serhat muttered, hastily walking down Keupstraße in Cologne's Mülheim neighbourhood. Earlier that morning, he had woken up to a notification from TurkApp, a state-sponsored entertainment and news application: “Breaking news: Turkish stores set ablaze across German cities,”

it read. So far Serhat's shop had been spared the Molotov cocktails, but this month alone the large windows had been smashed twice. Had the new steel shutters prevented the worst? His thoughts were interrupted by sudden commotion further up the road. "Next time, I'll knock your teeth out," a man shouted at a group of masked people waving the Kurdish flag.

As Serhat closed in on his shop in Keupstraße, the man who had been shouting approached him. "Merhaba brother," he said, "is this your shop?" "Yes," answered Serhat. "Have you signed up to the local group?", the man asked. At once, Serhat realised what this conversation was about and mumbled an excuse. The man belonged to the so-called 'self-defence' groups, which had crept up all over Germany's bigger cities. To the public, these groups presented themselves as protectors of Turkish communities and their property. In reality, they formed biker gangs that – many rumoured – had been infiltrated by the Turkish intelligence service MIT to spy on dissidents and alleged PKK-members. Serhat tried to steer clear of such groups, but for people like him who showed little interest in politics and had Kurdish friends, life was becoming increasingly difficult.

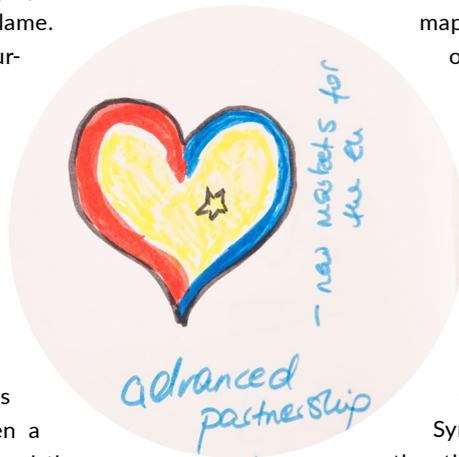


Relations had been slowly deteriorating between the Turkish and Kurdish communities living in Germany for a while, but the last few days had been a complete nightmare. The clashes had started one week earlier, on the day of the centenary of the Turkish Republic. Citing security concerns, the city council had long opposed the public celebrations. However, confronted with a hugely controversial debate about freedom of speech and expression, the council begrudgingly sanctioned the event. The authorities could not have known that on the eve of the centennial festivities, Erdoğan would launch his largest military campaign against Kurdish positions to date. Despite hopes that the celebrations at home and abroad would cover up the scale of the operation, rumours about a shocking death toll among civilians in Eastern Turkey and Northern Syria spread rapidly among the population. The next day in Cologne, just as the first speaker walked up to the podium, Kurdish activists broke through the barricades. The ensuing clashes left approximately 500 people injured, many of them children caught up between both sides. In the following week, parts of Cologne and other German cities became battlefields.

How had everything turned so toxic, so fast? A feature in a German newspaper Serhat sold in his shop argued that the events in 2018 and 2019 had been a turning point. In 2018, the first dozen EU citizens held in pre-trial detention in Turkey were charged and convicted, with some courts handing down long prison sentences. The images of crying children losing their mothers or fathers on the grounds of what appeared to be fabricated charges deepened anti-Turkish sentiment among European populations. At the same time, Kurdish forces exploited the power vacuum created by the collapse of "IS" to swiftly expand their territorial control in Syria. Turkey reacted by sending more troops into the country and launching a new aerial campaign against PKK positions in Turkey, which were vital for the transport of supplies to its Syrian counterpart, the YPG. This, in turn, prompted a surge in Kurdish terror attacks against civilians in Turkish cities. However, not all Kurdish plots were successful. When in September 2019 a group of alleged PKK conspirators was arrested in Istanbul, voices demanding the reinstatement of capital punishment grew louder. Erdoğan saw a chance to further cement his support ahead of the parliamentary and presidential elections in November 2019 and vowed to have the death penalty reinstated by parliament if voters trusted in his leadership yet again. The parting President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, reiterated his warning that this would be the "reddest of all red lines" for the already stalled accession talks. The warnings were ignored. The AKP won an absolute majority in parliament as well

as the presidency and, as promised, capital punishment was reintroduced just a few weeks later. As a result of this, EU leaders agreed to terminate the accession talks at the following summit.

On TurkApp, the story read a little differently. It was the fault of the EU, an organisation which was not prepared to admit a strong, independent Turkey to its racist and elitist club of nations. Germany and its alleged PKK sympathisers carried the brunt of the blame. Serhat found the news on TurkApp to be not particularly trustworthy. However, they had some good TV shows – the one about Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent and his wife, for example. In fact, Serhat found Muhteşem Yüzyıl, a similar series back from 2014, more entertaining. Despite its focus on Ottoman rule, it had been a huge success in the Balkans and the Arab world. However, the tale of a slave-girl turned Sultana was deemed too “indecent” and “disrespectful” by AKP officials. The 2023 version corrected these “mistakes”.



May 12, 2025 – Kobane, Syria

“That was close!” Leyla screeched in disbelief. She and her comrades had fired three missiles at a Turkish tank trapped in a courtyard full of rubble, but none would penetrate its protective armour. When the tank’s turret turned in their direction, Leyla and the other YPG fighters scrambled, sprinting out of their hideout just before the tank’s shell pulverised

the roof. It was certainly not the first ambush Leyla had orchestrated. At just 20 years old, she had already been on the frontlines for nearly two years. Like so many others, Leyla had joined the Kurdish militia after the Turkish military campaign of 2023. In hindsight, observers agreed that the cause for the new conflict lay in the failed federalisation process in Syria. A peace agreement between the Assad government and the remaining warring factions concluded in 2021 set out a road-map for the gradual federalisation of the war-torn country. At the time, Cem Özdemir, then German foreign minister, called the accord “a milestone in ending the Syrian conflict and a stepping stone to more comprehensive negotiations to solve the region’s most pressing security issues.” However, the borders of the new federal regions of Syria remained a thorny issue. Neither the Assad government nor many

Arab inhabitants of Northern Syria wanted the Kurds to rule all the provinces that they considered part of their Rojava region. After two years of fruitless negotiations, Syrian Kurds reportedly encroached on territory to the West of the town Manbij. The Turkish government seized the opportunity, declaring the Kurds actions as a breach of the peace agreement and a reason to intervene. Within days, aerial bombardments and shelling along the Turkish-Syrian border claimed the lives of hundreds of combatants and civilians. Furious at the prospect of Erdoğan having single-handedly undone one of the greatest diplomatic achievements of recent history and amid a rising death toll, EU leaders threatened to suspend the customs union. Most remained confident that a mix of economic threats and back-door negotiations would stop the violence. However, the Turkish government called the bluff – or so it thought. The massive military operations that began during the centennial celebrations in October 2023 fostered the belief among EU leaders that a strong signal had to be sent. Citing humanitarian concerns and faced with the possibility of another large-scale migrant crisis, EU member states agreed to suspend the customs union until Turkey, a signatory to the 2021 peace agreement, returned to honouring the accord’s terms.

“How many do we have left?” Leyla asked her local commander. “The anti-tank missiles?” he responded, “just a few dozen more”. The situation was becoming increasingly desperate for the YPG forces. Medical supplies had not been so scarce since the beginning stages of the fights against “IS” and the Americans had not delivered any heavy weaponry since the peace accord four years earlier. What was left was not of much use anyway. When the German Bundestag rejected the export of its latest main battle tank to Turkey, Erdoğan turned to Russia. Just a few weeks ago the first T14 Armata tanks had rolled across the border into Syria. “We fight Turkey, a NATO state, with American missiles, while Turkey fights us with Russian tanks,” Leyla jokingly pointed out as she was being interviewed by a Western reporter. Laughing away the suffering, putting on a tough face – Leyla had learned what Western media liked to see. To them, a female fighter still conjured up the image of an exotic warrior. But if it helped gain attention, she figured, it was worth it.

July 7, 2027 – Bursa, Turkey

Still tired from his last shift, Umut boarded the bus to the factory of Saudi Arabian Military Industries (SAMI), the kingdom’s new arms manufacturer. Assembling doors for armoured vehicles was not a job he particularly enjoyed, but after European car manufacturers had pulled out of Bursa, his hometown and the heart of Turkey’s automotive industry, industrial jobs became scarce. For decades, companies such as Renault and Fiat had manufactured engines and car parts in Bursa, making Turkey the 5th largest producer in Europe. However, with the exponential growth in sales of electric cars and the suspension of the customs union in 2023, traditional supply chains were disrupted and thousands of jobs relocated to countries with better access to the European single market. Similarly, with tariffs reinstated, Turkey’s massive consumer electronics manufacturers struggled to remain competitive.

As Umut looked out of the window, he could see the first signs of rust gnawing on the old metal factory halls. Entire sections of Bursa’s industrial zone seemed abandoned. But there was at least some hope. Along with his vows to make Turkey a more powerful, autonomous nation and leader in a more assertive Muslim world, Erdoğan had prom-

ised a range of new, comprehensive trade deals that would boost investments and lure in new capital. Indeed, just one year earlier, in 2026, King Muhammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia had visited Erdoğan in Ankara to celebrate the conclusion of a new trade agreement. The SAMI factory was one of the first investments to materialise. For Turkey, the deal offered a chance of becoming closely integrated with Saudi Arabia’s economic diversification efforts that formed an integral part of the so-called Vision 2030. For Saudi Arabia, the primary goal was to curb the influence of Iran, which – after the suspension of the customs union – became one of Turkey’s top five trading partners.

As the bus pulled up to the factory entrance, Umut was startled to see so many people line up at the guard post. Of course, security measures were tough, but ID checks were done electronically and usually did not take longer than a few seconds. Umut approached one of his co-workers: “What’s going on, Mustafa, why are the guards not letting us in?” “I don’t know, a guy told me that there was some incident at the nuclear plant in Akkuyu. Made the Saudis all nervous. They are keeping the factory closed until they figure out what happened.” “What, do you think it was a terror attack?” Umut speculated.

For hours, different rumours chimed onto the workers’ phones. Everybody knew that the Akkuyu nuclear plant had been a controversial subject. Constructed by the Russian state corporation Rosatom and finished in 2023, just on time for the centennial celebrations, Akkuyu was the first nuclear facility to start operating in Turkey. Back in 2017, the European Parliament had issued a warning, pointing to the risk of earthquakes in Turkey. But the Turkish government had brushed such concerns aside. After all, Akkuyu was located right on the Mediterranean coast in one of Turkey’s least active seismic regions.

“No attack,” Mustafa exclaimed. “So, what’s the problem?” Umut responded. The problem, it now emerged, was indeed an earthquake. Not on the mainland, but off the coast between Crete and Cyprus. The seismic shock created a tsunami wave that reached the Akkuyu power plant early in the morning, swept over the facility’s wave-breakers and seeped into the plant’s reactor halls. As opposed to the incident at Fukushima Daiichi in Japan, the

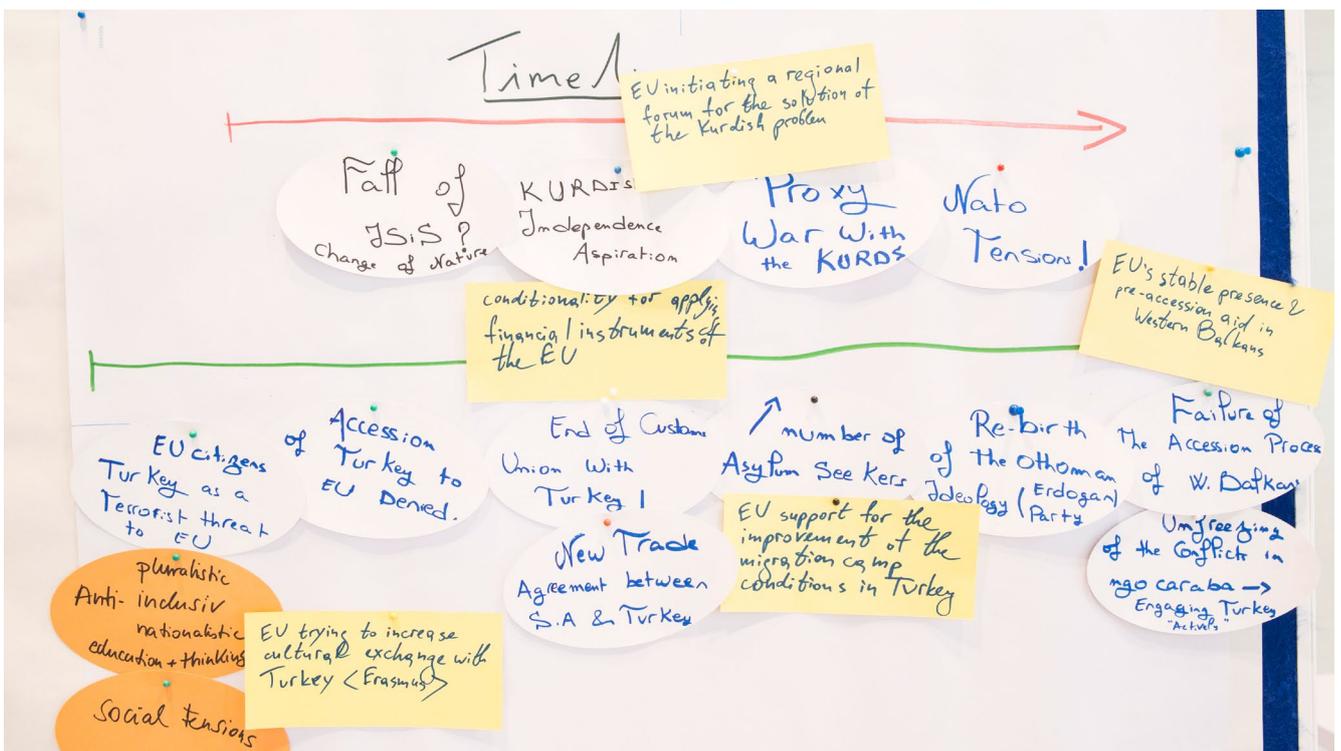
emergency shutdown was successful as the reactor's cooling system remained intact. However, the plant was severely damaged and many regions in Turkey experienced power cuts. In the following weeks, the broader ramifications of the tsunami dominated the headlines. Hundreds of families along the coast had lost their homes and a significant degree of Turkey's tourism infrastructure was devastated. Politically, the subsequent relief efforts were a PR win for Erdoğan. But the succession timetable was seriously delayed. After all, the Akkuyu plant had been built under the supervision of the envisioned successor Berat Albayrak, then energy minister.

Turkey 2030 - How to Prevent this Scenario?

While the above accounts are presently mere fiction, they are an extrapolation of current events and trends. The accounts highlight that, with regard to Turkey and its impact on the EU's neighbourhood, domestic, regional and global factors are closely intertwined and interactive in nature. In this scenario, structural factors and a fateful series of events create a situation where the relationship between Turkey and the EU as well as NATO reach a historical low-point, Southeastern European states become the stage upon which pro-EU and pro-Turkish actors fiercely compete for political influence,

the Kurdish conflict escalates, the Turkish opposition is effectively stifled and Turkey's economy severely disrupted. What can be done to prevent this scenario from materialising? The participants of the workshop proposed a multidimensional approach.

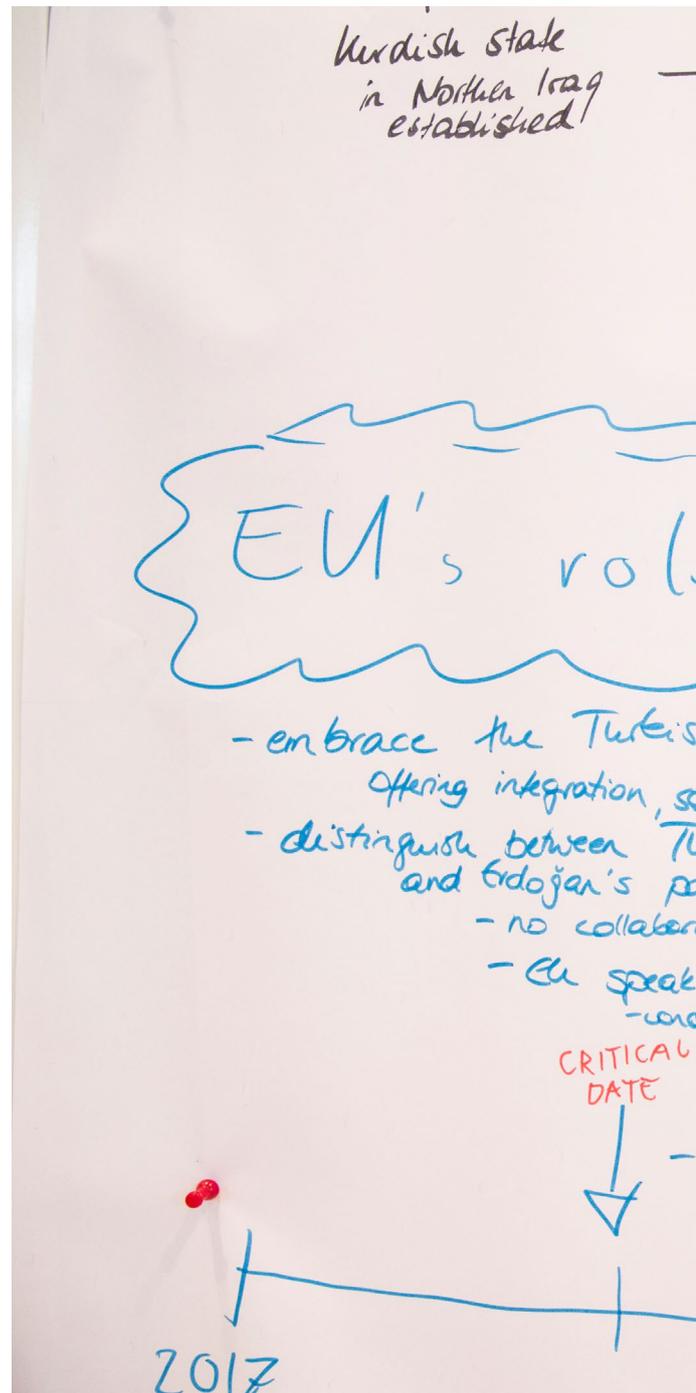
Given the electoral success the Erdoğan-administration has enjoyed by actively polarising Turkish society, it will be difficult to ensure that the AKP-led government in Turkey renews its commitment to democracy, political freedoms and pluralism. This is exacerbated by the fact that the EU's primary tool to influence domestic developments, the conditionality criteria embedded in the accession process, seems to have lost its teeth. No doubt, where EU citizens' rights are seriously impeded and non-negotiable accession requirements violated, a unified and carefully calibrated European response is required. This could involve cuts to pre-accession aid, but any punitive response should be tied to renewed offers for dialogue. Moreover, as the breathing room for civil society in Turkey is shrinking and the government is encroaching on the education system, mobility and interpersonal contact will become even more important. While visa liberalisation is off the table for now, mobility within existing programs, such as Erasmus+, should be maintained and actively encouraged.



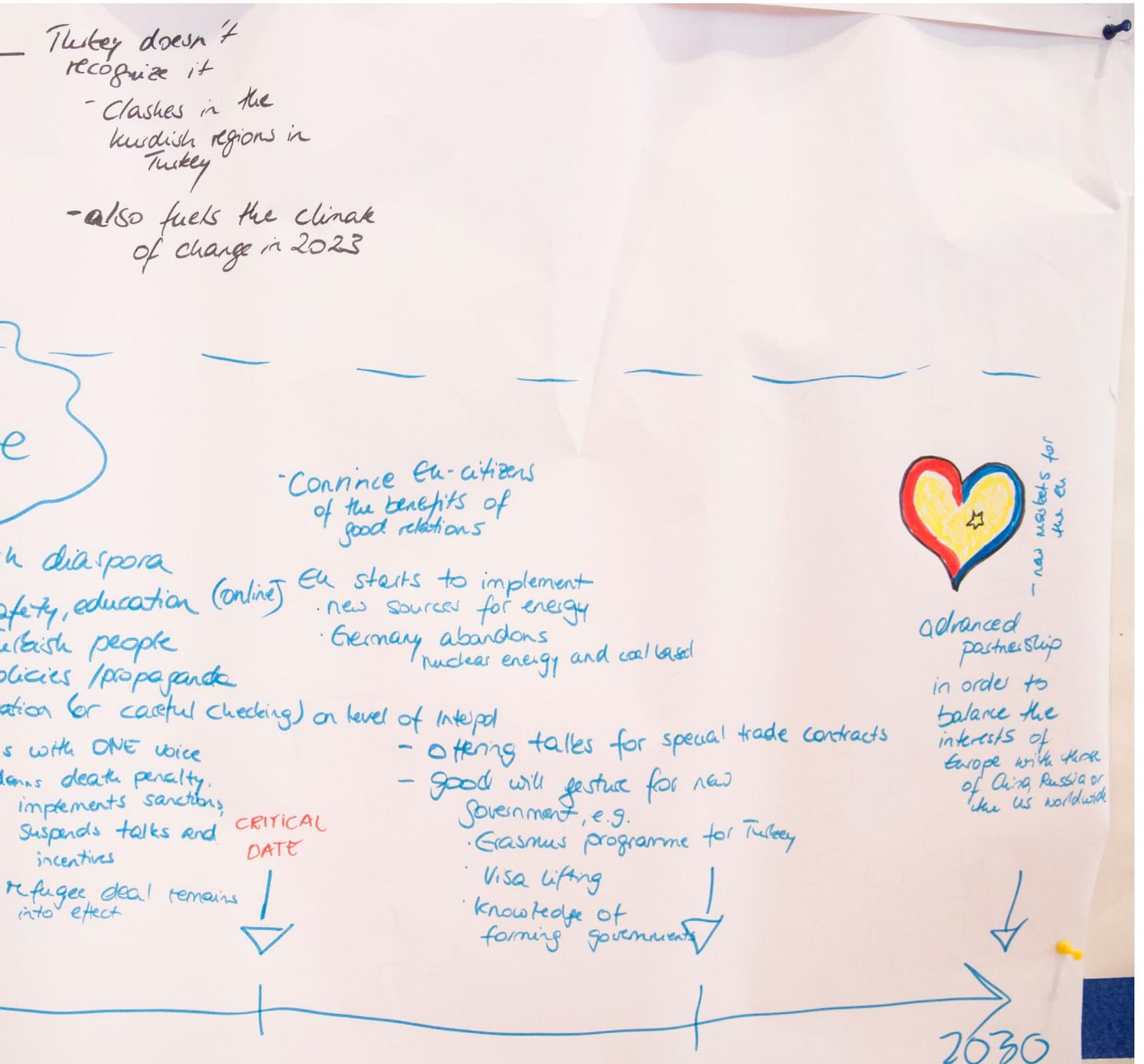
With regard to Turkey's Western neighbours, it is clear that the Western Balkans can no longer remain Europe's blind spot. Turkey – as well as Russia – can wield significant influence in this region. Participants across the board agreed that the EU's pre-accession aid should be ramped up considerably while maintaining strict conditionality criteria. Stronger socio-economic convergence is also in the interest of the EU as in most member states the public mood is less enthusiastic about admitting new countries for fear of large-scale labour migration. However, the election of EU-sceptic governments in Hungary and Poland as well as the corruption scandal surrounding the pro-EU governing coalition in Moldova demonstrate that, for multiple reasons, the EU's pull towards closer integration or even accession cannot be based on the attitudes and calculations of political elites alone. The EU should double down on its efforts to strategically communicate to the general population the benefits of EU membership but also the values it is based upon and the mutual responsibilities it entails.

Concerning Turkey's southern neighbours, this scenario report has illustrated the dangers of an escalating conflict with the region's Kurdish population. There is no solution to the Syrian conflict that neither satisfies the Kurds' demands for greater autonomy nor addresses Turkish concerns over a Kurdish quasi-state on its southern border. Since efforts to end the Syrian civil war would bring together the main parties to the conflict – the Assad government, the opposition, all regional powers, as well as the EU, Russia and the US – the necessary, albeit difficult, task of reaching a peace agreement in Syria should be viewed as a unique opportunity. These negotiations could form the nucleus for a perpetual format that addresses the region's broader security challenges but, akin to the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), is complemented by a second track. Here, leaders would negotiate pragmatic, socio-economic issues where regional powers can achieve "win-win solutions" more easily and, thus, build confidence. So long as they are not a response to deteriorating relations between the EU and Turkey, deeper trade relations between Turkey and the GCC-states, as illustrated in this report, should be worth encouraging.

Finally, with regards to diaspora relations, the recent Turkish referendum about the adoption of the



presidential system revealed the strong support the Erdoğan administration enjoys among Western European citizens of Turkish descent. In the EU member states of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, a majority of eligible voters opted for the constitutional change proposed by Erdoğan. In fact, the majorities were far greater than in Turkey itself. First and foremost, Europeans should view this a legitimate ex-



pression of Turkish voters' intentions, not as a "test of loyalty" to their European home countries. At the same time, the question why so many Europeans of Turkish heritage support an increasingly authoritarian government while enjoying the freedoms of their liberal host countries should be carefully investigated. Most likely the answer will be multifaceted and complex, ranging from failed integration policies to discrimination and marginalisation to the

influence of foreign media and Turkish clerics. The strong within-country variance of the referendum results (e.g. Berlin 50.1 % yes votes vs. Essen 75.1 % yes votes) illustrates the need for a local approach that focusses on listening to communities' concerns.

The author would like to thank the participants of the working group for their excellent contributions.

Russia in 2030

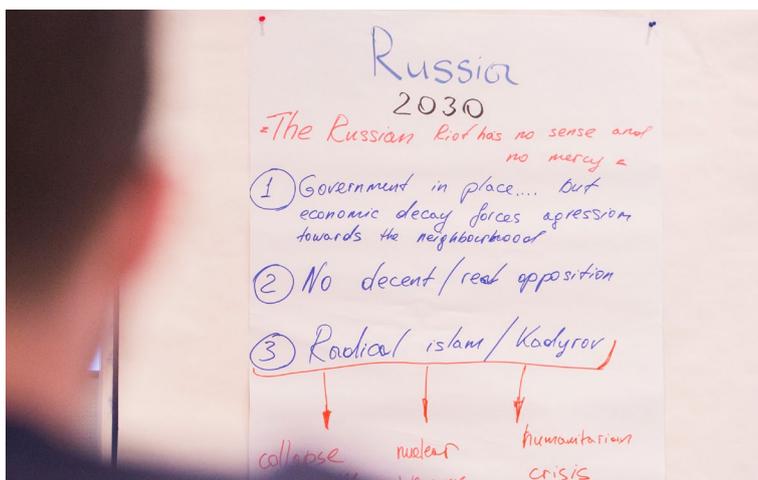
The neighbourhood bully – pure self-defence?

Lukasz Wenerski

After eighteen consecutive years as president, Vladimir Putin has finally decided to step down. In 2030, at 78, he does not see himself running for another re-election. Legally it would still be possible, as the amendment introduced to the Constitution of the Russian Federation in 2022 extended the limits of the presidency to five consecutive terms. Vladimir Putin, however, has other plans. His successor, Mikhail Suvorov, the 40-year-old minister of infrastructure, will take control of the country, provide Putin a safe retirement, and secure that Putin's "well-deserved" place in Russia's history is not taken away. Although the election is still two months away, no one doubts Suvorov's victory in the first round. After

But the outgoing president is leaving as his country is being plunged into crisis. He has failed to modernize the economy. The system based on the sale of energy resources as a main input to the national budget has been exhausted. Increased competition from American shale gas and continued tensions between Russia and the European Union has resulted in a substantial decrease of Europe's dependence on Russia as an energy supplier, and long-lasting low prices of oil and gas have made an already limited energy income even smaller. A considerable shrinkage of the national budget was inevitable. Simultaneously, new ideas for getting the economy back on track, such as "Road to AI Russia," a 2020 programme aimed at making Russia a global leader on the artificial intelligence market, were never successfully implemented. The ruling elite, while trying to change the economy, was not capable of moving beyond the interest of enriching itself via corruption schemes, consequently toppling any modernization efforts.

As a consequence, the Russian economy has become stagnant, its annual growth fluctuating between -2% to 1%. Unemployment in the working population has maintained a fairly safe level of 5%, but the real household income (in PPP) has been in decline continuously for over a decade. The number of people living below the poverty line has doubled since 2012.



all, the "tsar" himself, as foreign newspapers named Putin long ago, declared him the best possible candidate. Putin's will still remains the highest command for many Russians. Numerous years in power have not eroded the general support for him; recent pollsters show that 82% of Russians continue to see him as a positive figure, a great leader of the nation.

But many Russians have found no blame with Putin for this situation. State-controlled television and internet have been very efficient in directing people's attention away from the real issues, channeling their gaze toward fictitious successes, and convincing them that all problems are due to aggressive

turned out to be extremely helpful for Sobchak's campaign. Equipped with Navalny's professional campaign team and his electorate, Sobchak eventually managed to pull 22% of the votes. When not allowed to the second round, Sobchak and Navalny took the crowd to the streets. More than 100,000 protesters in Moscow and Petersburg respectively plus crowds in the thousands in more than 70 other Russian cities infuriated Putin. Massive arrests ensued. "No mercy for traitors of the nation and for their political paymasters from the West". These strong words said by Putin during his speech to the Russian people, which was transmitted on all public channels and via the internet, triggered a wave of extremely brutal lynch laws by pro-Putin activists accompanied by no less aggressive behaviour by police and OMON. Thousands of Navalny's and Sobchak's volunteers were put into detention and Navalny himself was found guilty of treason. Sobchak went into exile.

As the protests in Russia were unfolding, tensions escalated again at the contact line between Ukraine and the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk Republics. The number of casualties rose quickly, hard artillery was regularly used again. Who initiated it? Ukrainians or separatists? No one knows for sure, but for Putin the picture was clear. "The USA and Brussels paid traitors of the nation to start the revolution in Russia," raged Channel 1 and NTV, "the same Western elites supported Ukrainian fascists, who again started the war against the people of Donetsk and probably also plan to invade Crimea." The Russian army was back in Ukraine in early May 2018. The beginning of the intervention practically overlapped with the final stage of dealing with home protesters inside Russia.

"Anyway, who am I to question the decision of my president?" Dmitry Vasiliev asked without giving the journalist a chance to reply. "It has to be this way. This is all because of your people! What do your politicians want from my country? Do they really love this Ukraine so much as to organize a revolution in Russia?"

Grozny, Russian Federation, December 2024

"Ok chief, the enemy cell at Lev Yashin Street has been liquidated," a Spetsnaz officer reported to his direct principal, "The whole district is now free of

these insects. We can move forward. I hope that we can finalize the operation by the end of the year."

For most of 2024, Russia has been submerged into an internal conflict in Dagestan and Chechnya. Christened by journalists as "the third Chechen war," the conflict started as yet another Islamic revolution. Too concentrated on prosecuting political opposition and re-shuffling the situation in the neighbourhood, Russian authorities failed to notice the real problem of radicalization at home. Back in 2015 and 2016, Russian intelligence was carefully observing and analysing the process of radicalization of young Muslim Russians and closely following citizens who joined "ISIS". But once the war against the "Islamic State" had been won, Russian authorities slowly dropped this policy. After all, Moscow believed Kadyrov was in place, and other issues were more important. At the same time, Russia was slowly growing into a country perceived unfriendly to Islam. Its growing engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) on the side of "Republika Srpska" had intensified antagonism between orthodox Christians and Muslims and dangerously led to a direct confrontation within B&H. But unexpectedly, it was not B&H that experienced a civil war. It was Russia which witnessed an uprising on its own southern border.

The first bullets of the "Third Chechen war" were shot simultaneously in Dagestan and Grozny on the first day of Orthodox Christmas, January 7, 2024. Insurgents seized offices of local administration. Soon, they took control of the main roads connecting the two republics with other Russian regions and seized the port in Makhachkala. Ramzan Kadyrov, the mighty leader of Chechnya, was forced to flee to Moscow. It was revealed that Russian authorities had been receiving alarming signals of growing activism of radical groups in the region for months, but consequently downplayed the danger, being too concentrated on preparations for another election, talks with the EU on the future of Ukraine and Moldova, and on a new trade deal encompassing China and the Central Asian republics.

Russian authorities were expecting a quick and easy win against the rebels. Instead, they encountered a well-prepared opponent with established methods of recruiting men and obtaining weaponry, and ready to sacrifice anything to establish a new caliphate.

Fierce fights continued until September, when the insurgents' line of defence was finally broken. In December, special units of Spetsnaz, supported by regular Russian army, were in charge of revealing and eliminating the last cells of insurgents located in Grozny, Chechnya, and Derbent, Dagestan.

The conflict was again used by Putin to accuse other countries of interference in internal Russian politics. The Russian internet, now extremely censored



when it comes to sharing information contradicting that shared via official Kremlin channels, has consequently presented the uprising as an event inspired by someone from “the elite circles of either Paris or Berlin,” allegedly to “create a new Islamic republic to which both France and Germany would like to send their own radical Islamists, as they have completely lost control over them in their own countries.”

Grodno, Belarus, June 2027

“Mom, mom, what’s going on? What are those big cars?” six-year-old Victoria asked her mother while looking at the artillery parade going through the main street of Grodno. “Those aren’t cars,” her mother replied, “Those are tanks. They are here to protect us from our enemies.” “Oh, and who is our enemy?” Victoria asked. “I don’t know honey, but they have to be very powerful. The tank line is so long, I can’t even see the end... We should go home. It means nothing good.”

It has been a very strange decade of EU–Russia relations. Since 2014, the EU has been maintaining

sanctions imposed on Russia after the latter annexed Crimea and supported the separatists’ movement in Donbas. After the second wave of aggression in 2018, when Russian soldiers helped to extend the territories of the Donetsk People’s Republic and the Luhansk People’s Republic, the EU’s reaction was feeble and, in the end, limited to the next version of the Minsk agreements, which confirmed the status quo ante. Ukraine was de facto deprived of another piece of its territory and separatists were given the green light to create a separate state.

Simultaneously, Russian soft power was triumphant in Europe. Pulling different strings, the propaganda machine managed to elevate the position of political forces Russia considered useful. It was especially visible in Germany, where the Alternative for Germany (AfD) established itself as the third political power, only slightly after the CDU/CSU (Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union) and the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany), receiving 21% of the votes in the 2025 election. Similar trends were noted throughout Central European countries, whose political systems started to reflect the deep division of society over the issues of the future enlargement of the EU and the stance on Russia.

Although pro-Russian parties were strong in Europe, they were rarely included in the ruling coalitions. This allowed the EU to maintain the balance of moderate involvement in the cooperation within the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries and also to keep the sanctions on Russia in place. But the status quo seemed impossible to maintain. Populist parties were pushing governments to improve relations with Russia even at the cost of losing good relations with non EU-countries in the neighbourhood. At the same time, politicians of the EaP countries, especially Ukraine, were pushing to finalize the agreement which was to set a concrete date of joining the EU, a decision that Russia would never accept. What happened to Ukraine after Russia invaded in 2018 was extraordinary. A consensus among pro-European elites in Ukraine led to the de facto acceptance of the division of Ukraine just as Germans had had to accept the division between West and East Germany. For eight consecutive years, Ukraine has progressed enormously in modernizing the country and fighting against corruption and oligarchization. In 2026, Ukraine seemed to be the only EaP country ready to join the European Union

soon. Its politicians were pushing the EU to make a clear commitment to formally recognize the effort of the Ukrainian people. At the same time, the signal from the Kremlin was clear – Ukraine joining the EU would be unacceptable and could even be perceived as a casus belli.

After months of speculation, the future of Ukraine was finally to be decided at the European Council meeting on June 20, 2026. However, a few days before the event, EU officials received covert information that, if any agreement were made with Ukraine, Russia planned to deploy a 70,000-man force indefinitely to the borders between Belarus and Poland, Lithuania and Latvia.

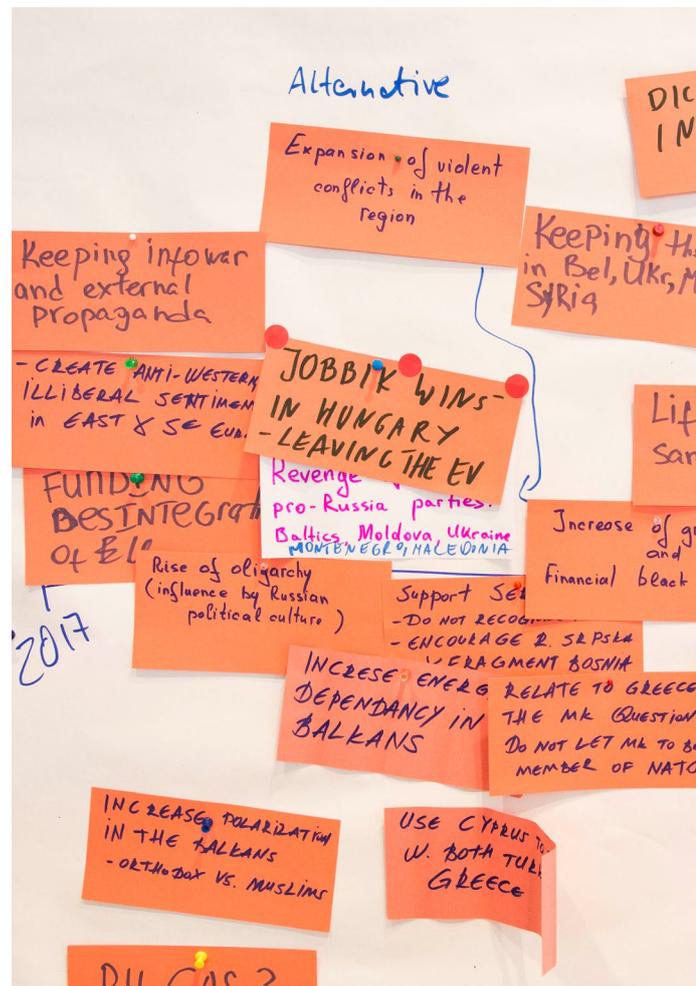
On the day of the meeting, the tense atmosphere was palpable. Politicians came to the meeting with the understanding that the Kremlin had decided not to wait for the decision of the European Council and had launched a full-scale deployment of Russian troops to Belarus. For the majority of attendees, the Russian actions meant two things: Belarus had, in practice, lost its independence from Russia, and offering Ukraine a clear prospect of joining the EU was impossible. “God knows what old Putin is capable of! We shouldn’t take a risk! Our people don’t want a war, Mr. Macron, and we don’t want it either,” the prime minister of Italy hissed to the president of France during a break at the EC meeting. “How can we possibly solidarize with Ukrainians at the moment?! If we agree to Ukraine in the EU, losing in the next election will be the least of our problems. And you know, Mr. Macron, whose breath I feel on the back of my neck? People who hate the EU, people who want to destroy it. Keeping our countries out of their grasp is the most important now.”

Ukraine received no invitation to join the EU. But it was already too late to convince Russia to withdraw its troops from Belarus. One year later, the Kremlin decided to expand its military presence in Belarus, claiming that Ukraine and the Baltic states are posing an existential threat to both Russia and the “Russian-Ukrainian Democratic Republic,” a country still not officially recognized by either the EU or the USA. In June 2027, the full scale deployment of extra troops foreshadowed something dangerous, probably much more dangerous than the 2014 war in Donbas.

Conclusions

The above scenario envisages negative developments of the situation in Russia, characterized by the growing authoritarianism of the Kremlin regime. Corrupted elites are unable and unwilling to stop the economic deterioration. To legitimize their power, elites continue to explore the concept of Russia as a “threshold surrounded by enemies,” Putin being the only possible leader that can really protect Russia. The picture is supplemented by the aggressive actions of Russia in the neighbourhood, either in a form of soft power (such as propaganda), which works as the main method of influencing the societies of the EU, or hard power, which in this scenario is used against neighbouring countries such as Ukraine.

Although the scenario discusses fictional events, it may be exploited to point out all the key elements that should be taken into consideration to maximize the effort to avoid the negative situations described.



The EU as well as other countries of the neighbourhood must closely monitor and counter Russian soft power. The false allegations spread by Russian propaganda target different topics in different countries but share a common goal: to foster opposition toward pro-European elites and societies and to introduce more chaos in the general public debate. Russian soft-power in conjunction with noticeable populist resentment in Europe is a dangerous combination, which, if not stopped, will result in the rise of powerful political forces. Such forces may sabotage the unity of the EU and common foreign policy vis-à-vis the eastern neighbours and Russia. The EU must also put into place a strategy which would allow to more effectively reach a Russian audience. All the accusations formed by Russian society towards European countries are mostly based on flawed information served by Russian media outlets. This can only be mitigated if the EU finds its own way to address these people.

The EU has to re-visit its vision of the Eastern Partnership. Making partners politically and economically stronger should be at the very centre of the EaP agenda, especially with the countries which signed an Association Agreement (AA) and a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA). The EU must expect that partners will successfully implement all provisions from the AA and DCFTA and not allow them to end up as laws on pieces of paper. At the same time, the EU has to create a clear roadmap with concrete milestones on the table for those countries in the process of joining the EU. The neighbourhood (Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine) can only be pro-European if it has a chance to be a part of the EU. Otherwise it may not only turn to Russia, but also become the source of other problems for the region (for instance, via internal conflicts).

The EU also has to have a sensible vision of cooperation with independent activists and politicians in Russia. It has to be a concept which, while ensuring the personal safety of these people, helps them to implement standards which are in accordance with European values into politics, business, local administration, etc.

Last but not least, the EU needs to have a clear concept of how to react to unexpected, even aggressive actions by Russia. Unanimity among the EU countries towards Russia is not easy to achieve, but the better crafted the strategy towards Russia, the more likely it will be to achieve a consensus within the EU on how to react on hostile Russian activities in the EU neighbourhood.



Russia in 2030

Love thy neighbour or – Remember the end of liberal democracy? How a weekend workshop for young professionals went on to change the world

Johannes von Weizsäcker

It is no exaggeration to say that in Berlin, on an autumn day 13 years ago, history was made, the global power balance of today shaped. Not by powerful men and women doing deals behind closed doors, nor by mass protests outside - although what took place on the second floor, among the sober minimalism of a Berlin conference location, would certainly go on to bring political leaders and entire populations together, overcoming divisions that had long threatened to send the whole of Eurasia into an ever-downward spiral of nationalism, economic protectionism and ongoing dismantlement of democracy. How, then, did a group of young professionals dedicated to European integration and improved relations between the Union and its neighbours avert this fate?

They had travelled to Berlin from all over Europe. They had been invited to take part in what might be described as a test of their imagination: over the course of a two-day workshop, their task was to develop various future scenarios concerning Russia and Turkey and their respective political and economic relationships with neighbouring countries. They would do so by splitting into four small groups, each one assigned a scenario in which either Turkey or Russia would enter 2030 as either a constructive or a destructive force in international politics. There would be a final presentation of each workshop's results.

In tackling the task, one of these small groups would go on to change the face of international relations - equipped with little more than a flipchart and some pens, and, so it seems, fuelled by mineral water only. "I remember they told us no coffee would be available until the coffee break. Very strict rules there!" laughs journalist Katarzyna A.², then a journalist in her native Poland, and one of five group members in charge of projecting a "constructive" Russia. Like her fellow group members, Katarzyna was at first sceptical of coming up with a credible scenario involving a liberal, open-society Russia that sees eye to eye with all its neighbours and enjoys deepened economic ties and socio-cultural exchange with them.

"It seems hard to believe but only 13 years ago the world was a rather scary place," Katarzyna goes on, speaking on Skype. "In the aftermath of the global financial crisis and with a huge influx of refugees from civil and regional wars in Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and Afghanistan, regimes with a tendency to isolate themselves internationally and a, shall we say, relaxed attitude towards the concept of separation of powers and rule of law were on the rise: Apart from Vladimir Putin in Russia, there was Erdoğan in Turkey, Orbán in Hungary, the PIS government in Poland. Donald Trump was President of the United States. Even more moderate European countries like France or Germany were experiencing significant right-wing populist upsurges. The previous year, the UK had voted to leave the EU..."

Perhaps the collective yearning for a caffeine fix helped the group bond and overcome doubts about imagining a future in which the crisis of liberal democracy had itself been overcome. But it was a real-life political event that kicked things off. Juliusz W., then a young civil servant with Germany's Federal Foreign Office, in his Berlin office reflects on that fateful weekend thirteen years ago, "The day before our workshop started, President Donald Trump had reiterated that he was withdrawing from the nuclear deal between Iran and the West that the Obama administration had been instrumental in forging. Both in real life and in our rather hastily drawn-up scenario, this was the starting point for a closer relationship between the EU and Russia." Vladimir Putin shared with EU leaders the major goal of continuing the deal without the USA. During the following talks, EU leaders began to take a different approach to negotiations.

"Back then, if you wanted to negotiate with Russia, you could not go in and tell them off for not doing things the way you would like them to do and then simply offer a few incentives," says Marta S., researcher with an Armenian think tank. (We speak to her on the phone while she is preparing to co-host an international gender equality conference in Yerevan.) "This had been a major misjudgement in most communication with Russia. The West had consistently underestimated the role Russia's history plays in its people's psyche. The Empire, the Soviet Union, the whole grand past. When doing deals with Russia, one had to make them feel like they were the ones in charge, like it was them who imposed reform in order to improve things for everybody. When I took part in that workshop, I was the only one to come from a non-EU neighbouring country of Russia. I made it clear that any future scenario would have to be rooted in a new, less EU-focussed negotiation strategy with Russia."

In circumstances we will explore further below, the very negotiation approach embedded in a 13-year-time projection thrashed out by five participants of an innocent workshop was adopted during the real-life talks on the nuclear deal. It worked wonders in bringing the negotiation partners closer. It also laid a foundation on which a slow but steady shift in tone

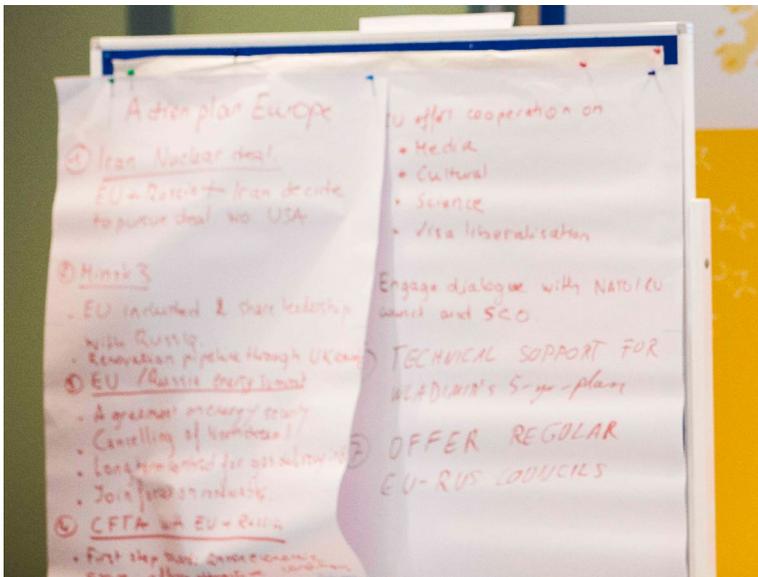
would grow. This was already felt in following meetings, most importantly, the 2019 Minsk III negotiations that ultimately led to a permanent ceasefire in the Ukraine conflict. There was, however, one more important factor: witnesses of those talks tell of a recently re-elected President Putin and his then Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev entering with an air of pride but also a new generosity. This psychological shift was widely put down to Russia having hosted and won the previous year's football world cup, beating Germany in a historic final. EU and Ukraine negotiators, sensing an opportunity, set about their task in a mix of flattery and concession-making: once again congratulating Russia's sporting and hosting prowess, they proceeded to agree to Russia's demand of complete withdrawal of any political, financial or military EU influence from Ukraine and at the same time casually proposed the idea of cancelling the Nordstream 2 pipeline in favour of a Russian-Ukraine-routed gas link.



Ukrainian officials later admitted to breaking into a cold sweat upon agreeing on losing EU support, but such was the convincing new charm of the so-called "3Ms" - Angela Merkel, Emmanuel Macron and EU Foreign Affairs Secretary Federica Mogherini - that they went along with it. And to everyone's astonishment, Vladimir Putin agreed to withdraw support for Donbas separatists. A short while later, negotiations on returning Crimea to Ukraine began. Today, Ukraine's original borders have been intact for years. But what made the EU's negotiators change their strategy? When asked this question, all involved workshop participants seem to break into the same elusive smile. "Let's just say a little bird was in the

² All names and characters of workshop participants quoted in this paper are fictitious. No identification with actual persons who indeed took part in the scenario workshop is intended or should be inferred.

room and then magically relayed our ideas to EU officials,” says workshop participant and marketing specialist Geraldine H. in a phone interview. (According to other group members, H. was instrumental in giving the fictional strategy presentation the clarity and vivacious spin it needed to sound convincing.) Research suggests that the little bird in question was in fact a small group of representatives of the hosts of the workshop, a German think tank with firm ties with various EU and member states’ officials and a record of activities dedicated to improving EU neighbourhood relations. Together with a Berlin-based company specialised in engaging conference and workshop participants in role play, the think tank had, several times, organised workshops simulating EU negotiations, thus trying to combat the EU’s image as intransparent and far removed from the people. Back then, the EU was in desperate need of an image change. As a result of this and similar activities, EU officials began to listen to their citizens. Accordingly, as years went by, more and more direct feedback from participants of those events filtered back to high-ranking EU officials.



Both the think tank and the Berlin company have declined to comment. At any rate, a look at the presentation notes of that day shows an uncanny similarity with real-life events. It’s all there, mapped out in remarkably crude handwriting (“I’m afraid I was responsible for that,” smiles W.), a large chunk of our shared recent history on an A1 paper: as a result of the Ukraine breakthrough, Russia gradually changed its foreign policy towards its neigh-

bours. A new era of political and military non-interference and acceptance of sovereignty began to dawn. One by one, Russia stopped engaging in so-called frozen conflicts in former Soviet republics, e.g. no longer delivering arms to regions like Nagorno-Karabakh. NATO began its talks with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, due to come to result in long-term security cooperation after its next summit later this year. Large-scale trade agreements began taking shape, in turn bringing with them visa liberalisation on all sides.

And then, in the course of the Russian elections of 2024, Vladimir Putin Snr retired to a backseat advisory role, handing power to his nephew Vladimir Jr. The transformation undergone by Russia under his 5-year plan is well documented: with advisory and technical support from the EU, the President has enforced freedom of the press, civil liberties and gay rights and actively driven the development of international academic and cultural exchange programmes.

Says Krzysztof O., the fifth participant in the workshop and retired Berlin-resident director of a government-funded organisation dedicated to international cooperation, “The cultural aspect was crucial to our scenario. If I remember correctly, we felt it was important that Russian authors be included in shortlists of European literary awards, as a demonstration of respect of Russia as a great cultural nation.” And sure enough, at the 2020 European Book Prize, the newly created lifetime achievement award went to Russian writer Elena Falainova for her body of work addressing the problems of dealing with personal historical memory and historical self-image.

Which brings us to the final big question: what of the current rumours that Western European secret services infiltrated Corpus Christi College at Cambridge University around 2019, at the time of Vladimir Jr’s studies there? The idea that the future Russian leader was selected, targeted, “westernised” and then secretly accompanied on his ascendency to power by the West still seems far-fetched, to say the least. But there really was any truth in it, did this idea stem from the Berlin workshop, too?

Most likely, we will never know. Obviously, all participants vehemently deny it. Their presentation notes or what’s left of them, make no mention of it. The hosts and organisers were unavailable for comment.

The authors

Sezin Öney

*journalist
and a political scientist*



Sezin Öney is a journalist and a political scientist from Turkey, based in Budapest, Thessaloniki and Istanbul. As a journalist, her specialization is on European affairs and global politics. Her interest in her subject area populism was sparked about a decade ago; she focuses specifically on populist leadership, populism in Turkey and Hungary. She is currently a part of the P24 Independent Journalism Platform based in Istanbul. She is a PhD candidate in Political Science at the Bilkent University, Ankara. She holds an MA in Nationalism Studies and Minority Rights from the Central European University, Budapest, and a BA in International Relations from Koç University, Istanbul.

Tim Lewis Poppenborg

*freelance author
and political scientist*



Tim Lewis Poppenborg is currently working as a freelance author and political scientist. He holds an MSc in Conflict Studies from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) as well as a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and History from the University of Muenster, Germany. His research focuses on democratisation processes and their role in peace-building as well as political movements and armed groups. Papers of his have been published by academic journals and quoted in international media outlets.

Sabine Rossi*radio editor
and producer*

Sabine Rossi is a radio editor and producer at the German public broadcaster Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR, part of the network ARD) and works for the international and intercultural radio program COSMO. She is specialized in the Middle East. Since 2013 she has regularly worked as a correspondent for ARD in Cairo, covering the events in the MENA region (Middle East, North Africa, Gulf states). She studied journalism at Dortmund University, attended the RAI School for Journalism in Perugia, Italy, and spent a year in Damascus, Syria (2008/09). In 2013 she was awarded the CNN Journalist Award for the radio diary “Call from Damascus”. In more than 50 episodes and frequent interviews with a young father in Damascus she showed how the war affected the Syrian capital. Her latest project brought her and her team to Lesbos/Greece, where she investigated the dire conditions in which refugees still live. The results were broadcasted in a four hours live program for WDR radio from the Greek island.

Johannes von Weizsäcker*freelance author,
musician and translator*

Johannes von Weizsäcker is a freelance author, musician and translator. He lives in Berlin, where he recently initiated the pop music project “Erfolg” (“success”). He studied musicology, English and composition for screen in Cologne and London, where he co-founded the somewhat experimental pop group The Chap in 2000. Since 2000 he has also been writing for the feature pages of daily Berliner Zeitung and magazines Spex, Freitag and Rolling Stone.

Łukasz Wenerski*analyst and
project coordinator*

Łukasz Wenerski is an analyst and project coordinator in the European programme of the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) in Warsaw. He holds a Master in European Studies from Warsaw University and a Bachelor's degree in International Relations and European Studies from Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. His areas of expertise include: relations between the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries and Russia, Polish Eastern Policy.

The project partners

The **Bertelsmann Stiftung** is one of the largest operative foundations in Europe, dedicated to the public welfare in the tradition of its founder, Reinhard Mohn. The foundation works with partners from all sectors of society to identify political and societal challenges early on and develop exemplary solution models.

As an independent force for reform, it seeks to establish a dynamic dialogue on contemporary topics of political reform. The foundation's activities include projects to further the process of European integration.

The Bertelsmann Stiftung offers policy advice with a focus on practical application and problem solving. The projects run in its European programme have produced trendsetting proposals relating to the completion of the single European market and monetary union, the political structure of European institutions, the content of the European constitution and the role of Europe in the world.

The **Heinz Nixdorf Stiftung** is a non-corporate, non-profit foundation established from the estate of Heinz Nixdorf, the entrepreneur and pioneer of decentralized electronic data processing, who died in 1986. The Heinz Nixdorf Stiftung is one of Germany's major private foundations.

It seeks to promote the positive personal development of people toward shaping social consciousness and achieving personal potential and is committed to a progressive democratic society in Germany and beyond.

The project

In 2000, the Bertelsmann Stiftung started the project “SommerAkademie Europa” (Summer Academy on Europe). From 2001 to 2013, it was carried out in cooperation with the Heinz Nixdorf Stiftung. The aim of the annual Summer Academy was to offer future decision-makers the space for an open debate on strategies and options for an integrated Europe and its global role. Presentations and workshops with high-profile speakers and discussion partners gave impulses for discussions. The participants were young professionals, nominated by mentors, i.e. decision-makers from politics, business and the media, mainly from Germany and the European institutions. The Summer Academy also served participants to develop their own network of professional contacts and personal relations.

In 2014, the project was modified to take into account the European neighbourhood. Until its end in 2017, both foundations ran the new project under the title “Young Leaders for Europe,” targeted at a similar group but with a more international outreach as participants now also came from other EU member countries and neighbouring countries to the east and south; in addition, mentors from the NGO sector were now also selected to nominate participants. The focus was on EU neighbourhood relations with all their challenges and chances, such as demographic change, economic perspectives, migration, and not least the conflicts and crises in the neighbourhood.

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Address | Contact

Bertelsmann Stiftung
Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256
33311 Gütersloh
Germany

Gabriele Schöler
Senior Project Manager
gabriele.schoeler@bertelsmann-stiftung.de
Phone +49 5241 81 81 205

www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/europaszukunft

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