

Talking Turkey in Europe

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In late 2006 the Rome-based Istituto Affari Internazionali, or IAI, and the Ankara-based Economic Policy Research Foundation, or TEPAV, launched a European network of experts to assess European public debates on European Union-Turkey relations. This resulted in a first book, "Conditionality, Impact & Prejudice in EU-Turkey Relations," http://www.iai.it/sections/pubblicazioni/iai_quaderni/Indici/quaderno_E_09.htm, which was presented at the European Parliament in Brussels as well as in Ankara, Helsinki, London and Washington in the course of 2007 and early 2008. This first cursory analysis revealed that Turkey is "talked about" in different ways both within and across EU member states. There is no single "EU debate" on Turkey, but rather a set of overlapping and interlocking European debates on the question. Having scratched the surface, the IAI-TEPAV "Talking Turkey" network opened further the member state box in its new book, "Talking Turkey in Europe: Towards a Differentiated Communication Strategy," http://www.iai.it/sections/pubblicazioni/iai_quaderni/Indici/Quaderno_E_13.htm, presented on Dec. 5 in Berlin. "Talking Turkey in Europe" tackles a set of interrelated questions:

♦ Who are the national stakeholders – including state institutions, political parties, business, civil society, academia and the media – within each member state on the Turkey question?

♦ What is the position and preference of these national stakeholders on EU-Turkey relations?

♦ Why are these views and positions held? What are underlying interests and beliefs underpinning stakeholder positions on Turkey?

♦ What are implications for an effective EU communication strategy on Turkey?

These questions are tackled in the context of eight member states, including member states which reject Turkey's EU membership, such as Austria and France, member states which support Turkey's EU bid, such as Greece, Italy, Poland and the United Kingdom, as well as

member states that are either lukewarm or divided on Turkey's EU prospects, such as Denmark and Germany. This list is far from comprehensive, but nonetheless sufficient to give us a sense of the variety of views and positions held across the European mosaic. The book also includes a chapter on Turkey, assessing which are the reactions of a diverse set of Turkish national stakeholders to these multifaceted European debates. "Talking Turkey in Europe" also broadens scope of analysis accounting for impact of the United States on European debates on Turkey. Indeed the United States has affected European debates by operating on three different levels. First, by influencing and lobbying directly the European Union and its member states on the Turkey question. Second, by interacting with Turkey and engaging Ankara in dialogue over its EU future. Third by shaping the wider regional and international milieu in which EU-Turkey relations unfold, first and foremost through its policies in the wider Middle East region. Precisely because American foreign policy has operated on these three different levels within different member states, its impact on EU-Turkey relations has varied greatly in time and space.

Finally, policy aim of the book is to develop ideas for an EU communication strategy on Turkey. Following the logic and approach outlined above, the idea is that such a strategy ought to be differentiated and dynamic in order to be effective. In other words, it must target the right audience, with the right message, delivered by the right messenger, at the right time. More controversially perhaps, we argue that a credible strategy should not blindly promote Turkey's accession process, but should engage in a genuine two-way dialogue with all interlocutors, including those who hold the most implausible and prejudiced views. This is because underlying these arguments we often find very real and genuine concerns, beliefs, interests, which cannot be dismissed out of hand. It is only by engaging with all these arguments, that an EU communication strategy can help inform, enrich and influence European debates on Turkey, and thus indirectly promote Turkey's European future.