

# Portugal and Turkey: Surprisingly Friendly Relations

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In the lead up to last June's parliamentary elections in Portugal, there were hints that a change of government was causing concern in Venezuela, since it was feared that the electoral outcome could disrupt bilateral relations between the two countries. As it was pointed out back then, there was no reason for concern.<sup>1</sup> Later on, political developments confirmed it,<sup>2</sup> as if recognizing that personal and ideological preferences are the sort of luxuries beyond the reach of those who exercise state functions.

Since Paulo Portas took office as the new Minister for Foreign Affairs in June 2011, a similar concern may exist regarding the future of the bilateral relations between Portugal and Turkey. In the last few years, Portas's Democratic and Social Centre-People's Party (CDS-PP) expressed reservations concerning Ankara's accession to the European Union (EU). CDS-PP advocated, as an alternative, a special status for Turkey instead of its membership in the EU.<sup>3</sup>

Under the leadership of the previous Minister for Foreign Affairs (June 2006 to June 2011), Portugal fully supported the accession of Turkey to the EU. Indeed, Luís Amado, as well as Portuguese President Aníbal

Cavaco Silva, regularly supported closer ties with Turkey.<sup>4</sup> Lisbon and Ankara regularly exchanged official visits and, more importantly, each one supported the political interests of the other. For example, during the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU in the last half of 2007, Portugal strongly supported the "continuity" of the membership talks.<sup>5</sup> In turn, Turkey actively supported the Portuguese bid for a non-permanent seat at the Security Council in 2011-2012, and Ankara's "generous support" was recognized later on by the former Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, João Gomes Cravinho.<sup>6</sup>

As recent events show, despite legitimate concerns, there doesn't appear to be any reason to fear the erosion of Portugal's diplomatic relations with Turkey. Graham Allison, co-author of the acclaimed book *Essence of Decision*, recalled elsewhere that "the observation that

1 Paulo Gorjão, "Portugal and Venezuela: continuity in times of change?" (*IPRIS Viewpoints*, No. 60, June 2011).

2 Pedro Seabra, "Is Portugal rediscovering Latin America?" (*IPRIS Lusophone Countries Bulletin*, No. 24, October 2011), p. 5.

3 "Política Europeia, Negócios Estrangeiros e emigração" (Grupo Parlamentar CDS Europa).

4 See, for example, "Portugal diz que Turquia tem de ultrapassar obstáculos" (*Lusa*, 13 November 2006); "Luís Amado defende adesão da Turquia à UE" (*Lusa*, 4 November 2007); and, "'A Europa precisa da Turquia', considera Cavaco Silva" (*Lusa*, 11 May 2009).

5 In December 2006, Turkey refused to open their ports and airports to the Greek-Cypriots. As a consequence, the EU suspended negotiations on eight of the 35 chapters in the membership talks. However, the chapters on Health and Consumer Protection, and Trans-European Networks were opened during the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU in December 2007.

6 João Gomes Cravinho, "A campanha portuguesa para o Conselho de Segurança" (*Relações Internacionais*, No. 28, December 2010), p. 29.



'where you stand depends on where you sit' was coined as a quip about positions taken by participants inside governments' policymaking processes".<sup>7</sup> In fact, this remark also applies to political players and parties in general. This month Portas visited Turkey for the first time. He demonstrated a clear pragmatism, and a break with his party, by calling for Turkey's accession to the EU, noting that Europe needs Ankara's vision and calling for "an open attitude in the negotiations, instead of continuing the stalemate".<sup>8</sup> Paulo Portas placed the Portuguese national interests above his political party's official views. Moreover, Portugal values Turkey from a multilateral perspective, as both a NATO member and potential EU member. As in the past, Turkey is a pivotal state, understood as a player "that could not only determine the fate of its region but also affect international stability".<sup>9</sup> Thus, Paulo Portas argued, "if Europe wants to be an actor on the world stage it will certainly need a good relationship with (...) Turkey".<sup>10</sup> Economic factors offer more benefits. As noted by *The Economist*, "for the past decade Turkey has enjoyed a spectacular boom, fuelled by equally spectacular foreign borrowing".<sup>11</sup> Turkey is touted as one of the next generation of tiger econo-

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mies, i.e. one of the CIVETS – Colombia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey and South Africa.<sup>12</sup> In 2011, the Turkish economy grew 8.5%, and although structural reforms still need to be completed, the fact is that the Turkish economy,

with its young population, will continue to be an excellent market for EU products in the future, as well as a much needed source of skilled labor. Last but not the least, EU membership also makes sense from an energy security point of view. Turkey could be an "energy hub", providing an alternative to Russian control of energy routes flowing from Central Asia and the Caspian into the EU.<sup>13</sup>

In 2009 Portuguese President Cavaco Silva stressed: "With the accession of Turkey (...) the EU gains a greater strategic importance".<sup>14</sup> Moreover, he could have emphasized that the bilateral relationship with Turkey confers added value to Portuguese diplomacy. Bilateral political cooperation between the two countries has offered mutual benefits in the past and, under

normal circumstances, will continue to do so. Turkey's active support for Portugal's bid for a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council for the 2014-2017 term will be welcome. In turn, Lisbon can be expected to support Ankara's bid for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for the 2015-2016 term. Both countries will also benefit from the expansion and consolidation of their economic relations. Portuguese exports to Turkey have grown 14% between January and November 2011, and it is likely that exports will

7 Graham Allison, "Foreword: Thinking about Zero: Could Elimination of Nuclear Weapons Make the World Safe for a Rogue Non-Nuclear Superpower?", in Simon Saradzhyan, *Russia's Support for Zero: Tactical Move or Long-Term Commitment?* (Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, August 2009), p. 2.

8 "Portugal pide a la UE una postura más abierta hacia el acceso de Turquía" (*Efe*, 3 April 2012); and, "Paulo Portas diz que é conveniente pôr fim ao 'impasse' nas negociações para a adesão turca" [3 de Abril de 2012].

9 See Robert Chase, Emily Hill and Paul Kennedy, "Pivotal States and U.S. Strategy" (*Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 1, January/February 1996), pp. 33-51.

10 "Paulo Portas diz que é conveniente pôr fim ao 'impasse' nas negociações para a adesão turca" [3 April 2012].

11 "Message to Ankara: Why Turkey is an economy to worry about" (*The Economist*, 7 April 2012).

12 John Greenwood, "After BRICs, CIVETS?" (*The Wall Street Journal*, 18 September 2011).

13 See Dario D'Urso, "Shifting Turkey: Ankara's New Dynamics under the AKP Government" (*Portuguese Journal of International Affairs*, No. 3, Spring/Summer 2010), pp. 20-21.

14 Pedro Ivo Carvalho, "Cavaco Silva dá novo empurrão à entrada da Turquia na UE" (*Jornal de Notícias*, 13 May 2009).



continue to grow in the forthcoming years.<sup>15</sup> Ongoing privatization of Portugal's economy might offer a window of opportunity for Turkish companies. Indeed, Portuguese companies could be a gateway not only for Turkish goods to spread through the EU, but also in the Lusophone countries.

With this win-win scenario, how could anyone think that a disruption of the bilateral relationship was a real possibility?

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<sup>15</sup> "Paulo Portas Boosts Trade Relations with Turkey" (Governo de Portugal, Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros, 10 April 2012).

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