V4 COUNTRIES AND TURKEY: TRADE CARRIED OUT DIRECTLY, VALUES VOICED VIA BRUSSELS

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Although there basically isn’t anything like a specific chapter of V4-Turkey relations, all the five countries realize the importance of trade cooperation and strategic support. Yet, after Erdoğan tightened his grip to achieve even more power, Visegrad countries prefer to coordinate their positions on issues regarding human rights and civil society via Brussels.

Current political relations between V4 countries and Turkey are primarily determined by strategic questions – by the membership of all five countries in NATO as well as by the cooperation with regards to the European Union. The four Central European countries continue to support Turkey’s path to the EU, even though the statements by some of their leaders may often indicate otherwise. Bilateral relations are developing, in particular, based on trade and economic activities, yet cultural cooperation continues to play increasingly important role, particularly in the case of Hungary.

The struggles in the relations between Turkey and old members of the EU, resulting from the difference...
in perception of interests and threats are not directly reflected in the coope-
ration between Ankara on one side, and Prague, Budapest, Warsaw and
Bratislava on the other. Nevertheless, political situation in Turkey and the
nearby region, as well as the relations with Western allies are closely moni-
tored in all four Visegrad countries. These are the reasons why the Vise-
grad Four leaves the lecturing of An-
kara to Brussels.

**VISEGRAD’S FEELINGS TOWARDS TURKEY’S ACCESSION TO THE EU**

Since 2005, which is the moment Turkey officially became an EU can-
didate country, the V4 countries have generally expressed positive opinions
towards Turkey’s membership. In the past two years, however, the
focus has been on the need for de-

crmatization and respect of human

erights as fundamental conditions standing in the way of Turkey’s acces-
sion to the EU.

After the failed coup attempt, intervention in Syria, and the devel-
opment of closer relations between Turkey and Russia, even some of the
previous supporters of Turkey’s ac-
cession to the EU have voiced their


corporate concerns and called for freezing of


negotiations with Ankara or for

withdrawal of its candidate status.

With the rise of islamophobia and

negative anti-migrant narratives, which have become particularly spe-
cific for Central European countries, the negative sentiment towards Tur-
key has significantly increased des-
pite several politicians’ support for

the EU-Turkey deal. Arguments have been mainly political, security-rela-
ted (dealing with Turkey’s position in NATO), cultural and they also con-
cerned foreign policy. The discussion about economic issues – with the

exception of the debate on Turkey’s fi-
nancial instability since the summer of 2018 – has been missing. Overall,

Turkey receives very little attention in the public discourse in the V4

countries.

**CZECH REPUBLIC**

Prague supports Turkey’s candi-
dacy for EU membership and empha-
izes the size of Turkey’s market and

its strategic location as a NATO part-

ner with regards to Europe’s security. Since the Czech Republic’s accession
to the European Union, prime minis-
ters Mirek Topolánek and Petr Nečas both made positive claims about Tur-
key’s membership and Turkey’s candi-
dacy was also consistently suppor-
ted by the former president Václav
Klaus.

Among the leaders of V4 coun-
tries, it is the current Czech president, Miloš Zeman, who has held a particu-
larly relentless position. He has re-
peatedly spoken against Turkey’s candi-
dacy, while emphasizing growing
islamisation of the country, refused the EU-Turkey refugee deal by saying that Turkey was blackmailing the Eu-

ger-Union, and harshly criticized the

shooting down of Russia’s fighter

jet above Turkish territory in the win-
ter of 2015.

Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL)

remain the strongest opponents of

Turkey’s EU membership. It is them

who emphasize Turkey’s different
culture outside the framework of the

Judeo-Christian heritage thus toe-
ing the line of multiple other Chris-
tian-democratic parties in Europe.

Former Finance Minister and the

current Prime Minister Andrej Babiš

has stated multiple times that “nobo-
dy wants” Turkey in the EU and that

Turkey is only blackmailing Euro-
ppe in the migrant deal case. Despite

all of the above, he is himself invol-

ved in the negotiations to save the

Czech-Turkish project of Adularya

powerplant construction, for which the Czech Export Bank provided fund-

ning of almost half a billion euro.

The recent cases of activists and

people from academia represent a specific example of the perception of

Turkish politics in the Czech Repub-
lic. Several members of the academia, who fled Turkey after the failed coup

attempt found jobs at Czech universi-
ties. The case of humanitarian work-

ers Markéta Všelichová and Miro-

slav Farkaš, who were detained while
trying to cross the Turkish-Iraqi bor-
der in November 2018, charged with

affiliation to Kurdish militia and ini-
tially sentenced to more than six ye-
ars in Turkish prison, has strength-
ened the negative perception of the

“new Turkey” in the Czech Republic.

The Salih Maslem’s case has reso-
nated just as well. In February 2018,

Czech court released the former le-

ader of a wing of Syrian Kurds after

Ankara had directly requested the

release.

Public opinion on the activities of the Czech humanitarian activists seems to be divided between the mo-
dern Left (including the Pirate party and a wing within the Greens), which

regards them as campaigners for fre-
edom, and others, who view Markéta

and Mirek as adventurers with bad

luck. Generally, however, the fact that

their sentencing was unfair is not dis-

puted. In the case of Salih Maslem,

the positive perception of Kurds in

the Czech public can be seen, which

has increased after the Syrian Kurds’
campaign against ISIS. It is further

influenced in the Czech Republic by

social media and websites celebrat-
ing Kurds’ bravery and shaping an

image of a rather progressive com-

munity, which the public perceives

as a counterbalance to Islamism and

the Czech islamophobia blown out of

proportion.

**HUNGARY**

Hungary, its Prime Minister Vik-

tor Orbán and Foreign Affairs Minis-
ter Péter Szijjártó declare full support for Turkey’s EU membership. Turkey

is viewed as a source of security and

an important economic partner. Bu-
dapest primarily seeks to avoid re-
peating of the situation from 2015

and 2016, when Europe was hit by

the wave of refugees.

Over the last two years, state-
ments of the Hungarian government regarding the Turkish leadership

have been rather favourable. Accor-
ding to Budapest, Ankara has the

right as well as the obligation to res-
pond to and deal with terrorist thre-
ats. Hungarian Foreign Affairs and

Trade Minister were among the first
government representatives from EU

countries who visited Turkey after the
coup attempt in 2016. Viktor Orbán

congratulated the Turkey’s president

after this year’s elections before the

initial results of presidential and par-

liamentary plebiscite were known.

A relatively new social pheno-

menon associated with Hungarian
domestic sentiment also related to

Turkey’s accession to the European

Union, is the growing neo-Turanism,

which is also becoming a part of

Hungarian agenda. Several organiza-

tions, groups and associations advo-
cate the idea of common Turkish heri-

tage in Hungary (including the Jobbik
party) and cooperate in organizing various events, for example the Ku\-rultaj Convention, which connects Turkic citizens living in the south of Hungary. The agenda is also enjoying some attention in Turkic countries.

The ruling party Fidesz evaluated the domestic trend and gradually opened itself to Turkic countries. Hungary, echoing the concept of common historical and cultural heritage, joined multiple organizations in this regard. In 2014, Hungary received an observer status in TÜRKPA (Parlia-

mentary Assembly of Turkic-speaking Countries), in September 2018, the Hungarian Prime Minister attended the Turkic Council summit.

And in November 2018, Hungary became a full member of TÜRKPA. “Our Turkic brothers have accepted us in their midst”, said the Chairman of Hungarian Parliament László Kövér during the ceremony.

Based on these factors, the Hungarian government does not tend to voice or emphasize the issue of human rights linked to the domestic politics in Turkey and, similarly to other Visegrad countries, leaves this task to Brussels.

Nevertheless, Hungarian media closely monitor the political trajectory of Turkey. While the government-friendly media tend to emphasize the importance of Turkey for Hungary’s security, other more critical media point out the authoritarian tendencies, the high number of detainees and the nature of the regime change in Turkey. Even the most recent visit of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan from October this year led to numerous critical opinions in the Hungarian media.

POLAND

When it comes to Turkey’s accession to the EU, Warsaw is also consistent in its support. The basis for this stance is rooted in the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, signed in 1993, in which both sides committed to mutual support in the effort to “overcome all differences in Europe.”

Ever since the beginning of Turkey’s formal effort to become a member of the EU, Poland has considered this step as a leverage for modernization of this Muslim country. This position has been preserved since the beginning of the previous decade and has not been undermined by the changes in the Polish governments nor the growing controversies and misunderstandings between Ankara and Brussels. The fact that this position has not undergone any modifications has shown the lack of real discussion in Poland about the possible accession of Turkey to the EU.

The official position of the Republic of Poland towards the key areas in the relations with Turkey is rarely stated. Questions regarding the domestic situation in Turkey and its relations with Brussels, EU Member States, the United States and its neighbours have become the subject of public debate, especially in the media.

Poland as an EU member state does not pass individual statements towards Turkey and coordinates its approach based on the position of the European Commission and the European Parliament. In certain cases, where the migration deal from March 2016 plays a role, Warsaw fully supports the Brussels’ model of cooperation with Ankara. Poland considers Turkey as the key country in solving the issue of migration in Eastern Mediterranean.

Just like other European countries, the government in Warsaw distances itself from certain actions against individuals and institutions by the government in Ankara, which Turkey blames for organizing of the failed coup attempt in July 2016, including the Gülen movement. Vistula University and Danube Foundation in Poland have especially been mentioned in this regard. Warsaw did not comply with Turkey’s requests to close down these institutions and extradite several of the institutions’ employees to Turkey. Poland does not accept Turkey’s argument and states that it is not enough for Poland to extradite specific individuals. There are also doubts these individuals would get a fair trial.

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Slovak Republic has been supporting the potential full EU membership of Turkey since the start of the accession negotiations and has been rejecting the “privileged partnership” or any other form of partnership.

Mutual relations between Slovakia and Turkey are currently superb and there are no unresolved issues between us, Slovak Foreign Minister said after his visit to Ankara in 2017. Miroslav Lajčák was equally optimistic during this year’s meeting with Turkey’s president, Foreign Affairs Minister and the Chairman of Foreign Affairs Committee of the Turkish parliament.

“Miroslav Lajčák has confirmed Slovakia’s support towards the Turkey’s accession process to the EU after completing all membership conditions while he highly valued the Turkey’s effort in this regard as well as material sources the country is distributing to cope with the refugee wave,” Slovak Foreign Ministry’s press release states and, at the same time, characterizes the current position of Slovakia towards Turkey.

Direct criticism of the way how certain cases are handled, where Slovakia could raise objections, especially in the field of human rights, were apparently not voiced in Ankara by the Slovak diplomacy. Slovakia falls behind in this area and relies on the activities of the European Commission or the European Parliament.

The strongest opponents of Turkey’s joining of the EU in the Slovak government are the members of the Slovak National Party (SNS). “Turkey belongs to Europe neither historically, nor culturally or geographically,” said Andrej Danko, the Party Chairman and President of the National Council, in 2013 and his opinion has not changed.

“European Union promises integration in the future and billions of euro if it does not allow 2.8 million migrants from Syria on its soil. In fact, 75 million of Turks constitute a much bigger threat for Europe than less than three million Syrians,” he said in 2016.

LINKS: TRADE, EDUCATION AND CULTURAL COOPERATION

Trade in particular is the common incentive for positive sentiment in the meetings of leaders from V4 countries and Turkey. Focus is, however, also put on other forms of cooperation, either in culture or in education. This mutual cooperation is subsequently expressly reflected in the positions of individual countries towards the support of Turkey’s membership in the EU.
**CZECH REPUBLIC**

Turkish market, with its 80 million customers, is among the major trade partners of the Czech Republic. The volume of mutual trade serves as clear evidence. Trade volume was almost €34.5 billion last year while the Czech exports accounted for €20.5 billion. Among the V4 countries, the Turkish Republic is therefore by far the most important trade partner for Turkey.

Škoda Auto automobiles continue to be the main export goods of the Czech Republic along with the accessories and auto parts. Turkey mainly exports vehicles to the Czech Republic; however, the volume of textile industry goods is also significant. The so-called portable entrepreneurship has gained prominence, with small entrepreneurs buying textile, fashion goods and accessories in Turkey and then selling them in the Czech Republic.

Besides tourism, construction industry is being developed within the service sector, where companies such as Metrostav-Ankara İnşaat, or BRC International, take part in tenders for various projects in the other country.

**HUNGARY**

After 2010, since Budapest has been trying to establish closer economic relations with non-EU members (the so-called Eastern Opening), Turkey has played an important role. In 2012 Hungary-Turkey Council was established within Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Budapest opened a trade representation in Turkey, Turkish and Hungarian trade have become regular events and the relations at the political level have further intensified after 2013.

Although leaders of both countries were planning to increase the volume of mutual trade up to €4.4 billion, its size was around €2.29 billion last year. Approximately 1.9% of Hungarian export flows to Turkey, while the import represents only 0.9%. Turkey’s share in the trade with Hungary is relatively low, however, it does play a notable role in several sectors.

There are roughly 70 to 80 smaller Hungarian companies operating in Turkey that do not belong among the influential actors and their activities focus on tourism and trade. Turkish companies in Hungary are active in several sectors, particularly logistics and transport, construction and tourism.

Almost half of Hungary’s livestock export goes to Turkey. Hungary imports mainly cotton, textile and agricultural goods and the country also attaches importance to the energy sector. Since Budapest plans to diversify its energy exports and seeks routes that bypass Ukraine, the Hungarian government intensely monitors and supports the Turkish Stream project, which puts the government in opposition to the views held in Warsaw, for example.

The cultural cooperation is appreciated primarily by Ankara. Together with Hungarian authorities, Turkey lays out efforts to preserve the Ottoman heritage in Hungary and strengthen its cultural presence in several institutions, for example through Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) or Yunus Emre Institute. In response, Hungary opened its cultural institute in Istanbul in 2013.

Even though the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia organize numerous events representing V4 in Turkey, Hungarian state and cultural institutions remain the most active stakeholders in this respect. They generate the biggest efforts in promoting the V4 concept (Vizegrad dörtlüsü in Turkish) in the country.

**POLAND**

In the long-term perspective, direct contacts in the area of economic and cultural cooperation, tourism, or student exchange between Turkey and Poland have been satisfactory and they are consistently developing. The volume of trade in 2017 reached €5.73 billion. The value of import from Turkey to Poland reached €2.7 billion, while Poland’s export to Turkey exceeded €3 billion.

There were 136 Polish companies operating on the Turkish market and, at the same time, 150 Turkish companies in Poland. Asseco or MCI Management are among the biggest Polish investment companies in Turkey, both operating in the IT sector.

Poland imports mainly automobiles, textile goods and food products from Turkey. On the other hand, Poland exports electronic devices, power-generating products or communication devices.

As a result of the financial crisis and the decrease in the value of the Turkish lira in recent months, the attractiveness of Turkish goods has increased for Polish businessmen and, at the same time, the ability of Turkey’s market to absorb the goods from Poland has declined.

Student exchanges represent one of the important factors positively influencing the perception of Turkey in Poland and vice versa. Between 2004 – 2014, Turkey was the second most favoured destination for Polish students participating in the Erasmus Programme (almost 4000 students). Turkish students represented the second biggest group of students in Poland under the same programme (almost 13 000 between 1998 – 2014).

As in the Hungary’s case, Yunus Emre Institute is the most active institution when it comes to promotion and support of Turkish culture. TIKA is present and relatively active as well. One of its roles, in particular, is maintaining Turkey’s relations with the communities that are linked with the Turkish population through ethnicity and language and that live outside Turkey. In Poland, such community represents especially the Tatars minority (approx. four to five thousand people).

**SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

Slovak-Turkish relations follow-up on the successful beginning of the Czechoslovak-Turkish cooperation. Since declaring independence, Slovakia has signed 17 different bilateral government agreements and treaties with Turkey in the area of economic, cultural, or even military cooperation. The most recent two government agreements were aimed to simplify the international road passenger and freight transport (2014) and broaden economic cooperation (2007).

There are almost 40 companies with Slovak capital operating in Turkey, particularly in the areas of automobile industry, tourism, wholesale, real estate, engineering and energy sector. Slovak Republic recognizes 36 Turkish companies with business activities in textile industry, services, automobile industry, gastronomy and processing industry. The overall volume of Turkish investments in Slovakia reached €3.28 million in 2017.

Slovak Republic’s export to Turkey reached €734 million in 2017, with nuclear reactors, furnaces, machinery, appliance and mechanical devices
along with equipment being the most exported goods. Among the most imported goods to Slovakia were vehicles along with vehicle accessories and parts and as well as clothing and clothing accessories.

Both countries would appreciate closer cooperation in the energy sector and based on a mutually approved memorandum, both countries are to cooperate in the field of renewable resources or nuclear energy.

The cooperation between Slovak Academy of Sciences and Turkey’s TUBITAK has recently brought about a notable and successful series of seven Slovak-Turkish science fora, at which science teams cooperated on projects in the field of biochemistry, neurobiology, pharmacology, physics, seismology, electrotechnology, chemistry, molecular biology, parasitology, biodiversity and informatics.

Given the fact that Slovakia settles the smallest number of Turks among the V4 countries (roughly 500), Turkey’s cultural activities in Slovakia are predominantly centred around the Turkish embassy in Bratislava. The same applies to Slovak embassy in Ankara, consulate in Istanbul and the honorary consuls in Izmir, Bursa, Mersin, Kuşadası, Kayseri, Trabzon, Edirne, İzmir, Manavgat and in Tekirdağ province. Their main role is to generate economic cooperation.

From the long-term perspective, Turkey belongs among the most visited destinations for Slovak tourists. A hundred thousand tourists travel to Turkey every year.

COOPERATION OPPORTUNITIES OF V4 + TURKEY ARE GREATER

Given the enormous market and the existing forms of economic and cultural cooperation between V4 and Turkey, a closer partnership of the five countries could bring an array of benefits. Little knowledge of domestic political situation, historical context and economic matters, however, significantly decrease the Visegrad countries’ capability to deepen their engagement with Turkey, although the current economic circumstances are encouraging.

Slovakia currently presides the V4 countries and, among other things, the country has committed to continue with the established format of V4+ negotiations in its programme from July 2018 to June 2019. Slovakia, along with the three other countries, intends to cooperate at different levels mainly with Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries, but also with the United States, Canada, Israel, South Korea and Turkey. It is simultaneously the only plan, in which Ankara is explicitly mentioned.

When it comes to the V4 presiding countries’ programmes, Slovakia seems to be the strongest supporter of the cooperation between “the Four” and Turkey. Over the last 18 years, Slovakia has been the one most intent to focus on broadening of the cooperation or voicing the support of the country’s EU membership. Since 2000, Slovakia has mentioned Turkey in different contexts in three out of its five presidency programmes.

The first time Turkey was mentioned in the Visegrad countries’ plans was in the 2009 programme introduced by Hungary. Hungary can be viewed as the strongest supporter of Turkey within the Visegrad Group: “Hungarian V4 presidency supports the preservation of the credible course in the accession negotiations with Turkey,” stated Hungary for the first time almost a decade ago.

In general, the cooperation between V4 and Turkey has been “on the table” in eight out of 19 presidency programmes since 2000. The four countries have never considered it their priority, though.

In all of the four Central European countries, the general discourse is affected by the inaccurate and misleading teaching on Turkish history and realities at schools, where Turkey or the Ottoman Empire are almost exclusively portrayed in negative context. According to analysts, information about the positive link between the country and Central European region as well as with Europe in general are missing.

From a broader perspective, it is difficult to look for any room for political cooperation between V4 and Turkey with the EU excluded. Ankara views Brussels and the largest EU Member States as its most important partners, while, with the V4 countries, it tends to prefer cooperation on an individual basis. In this respect, Turkey’s interest is to develop bilateral relations with economic cooperation playing the essential role.