

THE EMERGING TRIANGULAR RELATIONSHIP: TURKEY, EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES

EVENT SUMMARY

On April 18, 2006, the CSIS Turkey Project and the CSIS Europe Program jointly hosted H.E. Nabi Sensoy, Turkish Ambassador to the United States, who shared his views on the relationship between Turkey, Europe and the United States.

Beginning his presentation with a detailed examination of Turkey's relations with the European Union (EU), Ambassador Sensoy stated that Turkey's EU journey of forty years has not been "an easy ride" and would continue to be "bumpy." He emphasized "the continuing strong will and the commitment of the Turkish government to become a EU member," while underlining Turkey's expectations for "the same kind of political will" to be shown by the EU.

Noting that Turkey had quickly passed the reforms demanded by the EU, Sensoy said that Turkey had enacted eight harmonization packages and amended one third of the Turkish Constitution. He added that Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul had recently announced that a ninth reform package would soon be implemented. Sensoy also underlined the impressive economic performance of Turkey which would facilitate eventual accession. The stabilization program was working well and Turkey was already the 6th fastest growing market economy and the 20th largest economy in the world.

According to Sensoy, Turkey would be "a very positive element in the EU," however, it was "up to the EU to decide." Touching on the current problems within the EU and "the heated debate relating to its own future and identity," which was certain to affect Turkey's membership process, Sensoy said, "We need a clarity of vision in the EU. If the EU decides to become a very effective international actor, it will need to adapt itself to the reality of the day and Turkey will have a place there."

Sensoy said that there was an increasing level of convergence between Turkey and the EU – he said it was as high as 90 percent – and that Turkey was "aligning its policies to the common foreign and security policy of the EU and supporting the EU's policies." The similar convergence between the EU and the United States was particularly welcome to Turkey after the difficulties it confronted as a result of US-EU disagreements over the Iraq war.

Sensoy claimed that Turkey and the US had left "the tribulations of March 1" behind them. He said that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had recently assured him that there was in the US "the political will to have a strategic partnership with Turkey." Sensoy said that he was "a strong believer in the Turkish-American relationship" because it was "based on shared values of democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights and embracing a market economy."

While he would have said three months ago that “all was looking good in the relationship,” Sensoy said that since then there had been “two hiccups.” Nevertheless, the recent Hamas visit to Ankara and success of the Turkish movie “the Valley of the Wolves,” were just that and would “not affect the relationship in the long run.”

Referring to NATO as “the backbone of transatlantic relations,” Sensoy concluded by expressing the hope that a Turkey in the EU would “play the kind of role that the UK now plays between the EU and the US.”

In response to a question by Robin Niblett, the Director of the Europe Program about the most likely glitches in the EU process, Sensoy said Turkey was “ready to pay a reasonable price” but “political issues that have nothing to do with technical negotiations should not be on the table.”

Agreeing with the observation by Bulent Aliriza, the Director of the Turkey Project, that the US and Turkey had failed to satisfactorily redefine their alliance in the post Cold War era, Sensoy said that there had been “a shift in the geo-political position” of Turkey.

With respect to the current Iranian crisis, Sensoy said Turkey was more focused on “engagement than isolation” and expressed the hope that Turkey would be “understood when it has different methods to the same goal.” Nevertheless, Sensoy stressed, Turkey recognized the possible “threat to the international community” posed by Iran’s nuclear program and was “talking clearly to the Iranian leadership” on this issue.