**DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO TURKEY**

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*To be shared with MS without assessment*

To:EEAS MD Angelina EICHHORST, Acting COM NEAR DG Maciej POPOWSKI

**Subject: Turkey – Does the improvement of relations with UAE affirm a “pause to ideological competition and mutual suspicion”?**

**Summary**

***The TR-UAE rapprochement efforts have been driven primarily by pragmatism, identifying common grounds mainly in the economic sphere.***

***Geopolitical changes in the region have contributed to TR’s change in its strategies in the region, which led to the acceleration of the rapprochement with UAE. Notably, US disengagement, confirmed by the Biden Administration, led the Gulf States, who relied on US support, to pullback from regional conflicts, engage in diplomacy and develop business links.***

***Having the Muslim Brotherhood been seriously rolled back, TR now looks less threatening over the legitimacy and stability of the Gulf monarchies. This took out a major hurdle in TR-UAE relations and allowed the swift rapprochement, even though key disagreements remain (notably in LIB). Nevertheless, at the same time, interesting pragmatic cooperation is emerging as in ETH, where both TR and UAE supported Ethiopian’s government. There, the need for reconstruction provides a big potential for synergies between the two countries.***

***Domestically, the highly visible rapprochement (with a much-publicised visit by President Erdogan last February) serves to provide an image booster for the President, while potential investments from the UAE Wealth Fund may supply much-needed financial support to TR’s weak economy.***

**Assessment**

After years of estrangement, mostly due to opposing views on the Muslim Brotherhood (which UAE saw as an existential threat, while TR considered it as the key to claim its leadership over the Muslim umma), TR and UAE came to more pragmatic approach, adapting to the shifting political and security environment in the region (US disengagement).

UAE acknowledges TR’s important role in the MENA region as well as its balancing games with RU and US. Similarly, TR came to acknowledge its own limitations and the cost of its isolation in the region, as even the GCC countries work to resolve their internal differences. Even if the geopolitical rivalry seems to be paused and both countries are much less interested in military confrontation compared to 2019 and 2020, the threat of a potential crisis remains.

With economic relations between the two countries expected to strengthen, their geopolitical rivalry could be handled with more caution and diplomacy. The Mediterranean area and the maritime issues do remain a splinter in their relations, which could cause political tension between the two countries. Similarly, even though rivalry over political Islam seems reduced, a resurgence in the future cannot be excluded, especially if popular discontent over economic management re-emerge. On the positive side, the two countries seem willing to cultivate approximate positions and avoid escalation.

**Detail**

1. The TR-UAE rapprochement efforts have been driven primarily by pragmatism, identifying common grounds of understanding mainly on the geo-economic sphere. TR is in need of foreign investment and UAE is looking to diversify its economic outreach. In addition, both countries share an interest in developing collaboration in business, energy, transportation, environment, and health and delivery services.
2. Apart from the economic factor, geopolitical changes are driving the rapprochement: the post pandemic recovery, the adaptation to the new security environment in the Middle East emerging from the new US approach towards the region, the nuclear talks with Iran, China’s growing international role.
3. TR looks less threatening than previously over the regime legitimacy and stability of the GCC countries. One of the main differences between TR and UAE was TR (and QAT support) to the Muslim Brotherhood, which less threatening following the developments in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya.
4. IL President Herzog recent visit to TR also re-assures UAE, who normalised its relations with IL in 2020. To be noted that Erdogan’s visit to UAE coincided with Herzog’s visit to Bahrain. Irrespective of the progress of the rapprochement efforts with IL, TR’s support to Hamas could be expected to be reduced, although TR does not seem ready to completely give up on Palestine.
5. Iran currently presents a common ground for TR and UAE to join forces and counter its influence in the region. The uncertainty on Iran’s nuclear development progress, the recent drone and missile attacks on UAE and the competition from Caucasus to Syria provide enough elements to pave the rapprochement. UAE wants to become less dependent on the Suez Canal and establish a trade land route via TR and IRN, which would reduce costs and transportation time to 6-8 days from current 18-20 days. This would be an economic advantage for both countries. Last November IRN has transported a shipment along this route. For UAE and TR having each other as a trusted parthen in dealing with IRN would be beneficial.
6. The Mediterranean could remain an area of geopolitical tensions between the two countries. One of UAE’s visions is to become a “global maritime player”, in which is heavily investing. TR on the other side seeks allies to strengthen its position for the gas exploration in East Med. UAE’s Dubai Port World (DP world) is a global leader in port management and infrastructure development. Although a private company, its deals often overlap with UAE’s foreign policy trengthening its political ties. DP World has reportedly succeeded in hatling TR’s negotiations with Sudan on the development and operation of the port on Suakin Island in the Red Sea.
7. Interestingly, in the recent Ethiopian conflict, TR and UAE both supported Ethiopian’s government. UAE’s intervention aligned with “its strategy in building an allied political and security system across the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa”. TR wanted to prevent a civil war in Ethiopia in order to protect its investments in the country and ensure that the conflict would not spread into Somalia and affect its most important “centre of influence” in Africa. The reconstruction of infrastructure in the destroyed areas provides a big potential for synergies between the two countries with TR construction companies and UAE’s funds.
8. On the domestic sphere, the Government’s primary objective from the regional normalisation is to project a new image of regional responsbile power and to reeduce the economic costs of politial isolation, as the country heads to elections in 2023 (at latest). UAE have the money to provide a “booster shot” in the Turkish economy. The two countries are complimentary to each other: TR is in urgent need of financial support (UAE pledged up to USD 10 bn in invesments) and UAE wants to diversify its economy and make investments beyond the oil sector.
9. Turkish mafia boss Peker, who was posting videos against Erdogan and other AKP official from his “exile” in UAE, has been completely silent since last November when UAE’s Crown Prince visited Turkey. The “silence” also coincided with the restrictive measures TR has taken over the Muslim brotherhood broadcasts in TR. While a direct link between the two issues cannot be proven, the coincidence provides for speculation of a mutually-beneficial deal. Recently, TR has officially asked UAE’s authorities Peker’s temporary detention and extradition to TR, but so far UAE has not implemented this request.
10. TR also counts that improved relations with the Gulf countries would attract more tourists in TR who will bring some hard currency.
11. Reportedly, UAE has also allowed access to Turkish news websites and some Turkish TV series that were banned since 2018.

**SIGN-OFF: N. MEYER-LANDRUT, HoD**