

Together Stronger

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Today, on 9 May, we are both on a joint mission. Admittedly, one of us is in Ankara inaugurating the Europe Fair while the other is a few thousand kms away, speaking at a Europe Conference in Prague.

But our goal is the same: bringing Europe closer to the people. And so is our challenge: making people understand the value and the benefits of the European project, and why it is worth pursuing it.

And there's yet another closely related project we have been jointly focussing on ever since we first met: Turkey's accession process. Although sometimes it feels like an obstacle course to both of us, we are both determined to move forward! Why? Because we also share a common conviction that the EU and Turkey would be better off together than apart, we both believe that Turkey' EU membership is a win-win case for both parties.

Turkey and the EU are closely linked by principles and values, trade and investments, contacts between people, fifty years of association and by accession negotiations. Turkey is a candidate country and a key partner for the European Union.

Recently, however, the accession process is facing serious problems. 13 chapters have been opened to negotiations but the negotiations in 17 of the remaining 20 have come to a standstill. None of us has been sitting idly watching. To give new momentum to the process we have launched our "positive agenda". The agenda is there to complement, not replace, the accession process, which we think is the best framework for the European Union's relations with Turkey.

The objective of the positive agenda is to make concrete progress in EU-Turkey relations in areas where progress is still needed and feasible, despite the impasse in the accession negotiations. Here are just a few examples: bringing Turkey's legislation closer in line with the EU's; working jointly on foreign policy challenges; increasing trade; cooperating more intensively on energy issues; or making travel of Turkish citizens to the EU easier, with the ultimate goal of visa liberalisation, thus enabling the strengthening of people-to-people contacts between our societies.

Turkey's work on a new constitution is another concrete step to bring the country closer in line with EU standards. A democratic, participatory process with the broadest possible consultation is currently taking place to make sure that this new constitution is to serve all Turkish citizens.

This new constitution will be vital to contribute to Turkey's democratization process and socio-economic transformation.

All this: is it a mission impossible, you may wonder. On the contrary. Thinking about all the positive feedback we get from many EU and Turkish politicians, business and civil society representatives, we know this is the way to go. Because in the end everyone can profit – the EU, Turkey but most importantly all European and Turkish citizens.