

The 'EU-Turkey Deal', the Diplomatic Crisis and the Upcoming Referendum: Where Do We Go From Here?

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In an attempt to point out the culprit in the unprecedented diplomatic crisis between Turkey and European Member States the blame game is on between the two sides. The escalation was an accident waiting to happen, and still, so far no one has pulled the plug on the accession negotiations.

Some are clinging to the straw of shared interests in NATO, others are afraid of thousands of refugees being sent our way again. Can it get more cynical? Meanwhile, human rights, the rule of law and the very European values that we ask candidate members to meet, have disappeared from our own European political priority lists. That is a mistake, certainly when we look at the upcoming Turkish constitutional referendum on 16 April, a mistake etched in stone with the so called deal on migration.

With this cynical construct, that turned refugees into bargaining chips and gave President Erdogan plenty of room for blackmail, the EU threw its credibility overboard. It looks as if we have already lost Turkey in the process of gradual erosion of rights and freedoms, of checks and balances, and the concentration of power in the hands of fewer and fewer people. In a situation like this it seems impossible to guarantee that the referendum will be held under free and fair conditions.

I always believed the accession process was in the interest of the people in Turkey. It is a tragedy that a majority of Turkish people could now slam the door on Europe next month. But if they decide otherwise and say no to the further concentration of power, Europe must respond to this rejection of authoritarianism with a renewed, value-based engagement that puts people and principles first.