

To the President of the  
House of Representatives of the States General  
Binnenhof 4  
The Hague

Date: March 2023

Re: Government response to AIV advisory report no. 123, 'The Geopolitical Role of Türkiye: Trends and Future Scenarios'

Dear Madam President

Together with the Minister of Defence, I am writing to the House to submit the government's response to advisory report no. 123 by the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) on the geopolitical role of Türkiye. The AIV published this report on 8 November 2022. In May 2021 the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in conjunction with the Minister of Defence, asked the AIV to produce an advisory report on the geopolitical role of Türkiye. Since that time geopolitical developments have gained further momentum, thus affirming the importance and usefulness of this report. The government is grateful to the AIV for its thorough and timely advisory report.

The report once again emphasises Türkiye's importance as a NATO Ally and a major partner of the EU. The Netherlands currently works with Türkiye at both bilateral and multilateral level (within NATO and the EU and other organisations) on a wide range of issues, such as security, migration and trade. A recent example of this cooperation was the response to the horrific earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria: the Netherlands immediately offered support to Türkiye, including the deployment of our Urban Search and Rescue Team (USAR) and a C-130 Hercules from our armed forces carrying medical facilities. The Netherlands also pledged €10 million in humanitarian aid to earthquake victims in Türkiye and Syria. The government feels great sympathy for the many victims and their families, and will look into whether it can offer additional support in the aftermath of this tragedy, and if so, what form that support should take.

As in any relationship, our two countries also discuss issues of concern and matters on which we disagree. The AIV advocates a proactive policy on Türkiye based on a recognition of the strategic importance of the Netherlands' relationship with Türkiye, coupled with a careful balancing of the Netherlands' interests. This is consistent with the government's planned policy on Türkiye in the years ahead.

Below is a point-by-point response to each of the recommendations offered in the AIV's report.

**Recommendation 1: Recognise and specify the geopolitical role that Türkiye can play in enhancing European security, containing Russia and mitigating the threat of conflict in the Middle East and Afghanistan, which could trigger migration flows to Europe.**

The government acknowledges the importance of Türkiye as a strategic partner and NATO Ally, and recognises the geopolitical role it plays on the world stage. Türkiye is important to NATO partly because it controls access to the Black Sea and because of its strategic geographic location and military capabilities. The government appreciates the unique role Türkiye has assumed in mediating between Ukraine and Russia and in working with the UN to broker the grain deal between those two countries which is helping to prevent a global food crisis. Without these Turkish efforts, the grain deal and the exchange of prisoners probably would have been impossible, or at least much more difficult. In the Netherlands' view, assuming an active geopolitical role entails certain responsibilities with respect to promoting stability and the international legal order. With that in mind, the government regularly reminds Türkiye of those responsibilities, such as the importance of maintaining NATO unity and the ramifications of its regional actions in Syria and Iraq, where Türkiye is conducting operations against Kurdish groups.

The major contribution that NATO Ally Türkiye provides to missions boosts the security of Europe, and thus the Netherlands as well. The ongoing threat of conflict in both the Middle East and Afghanistan remain matters of concern for the government.

Developments in these regions are a regular topic of discussion with Türkiye, in both bilateral and multilateral contexts. In addition, the government attaches great value to Türkiye's insights regarding the threat of terrorism in Afghanistan, where Türkiye is the only NATO Ally to still have an embassy. What is more, the annual bilateral security dialogue illustrates the value the Netherlands attaches to working with Türkiye on key issues like counterterrorism and fighting transnational crime.

**Recommendation 2: Consistently promote values and norms in the fields of human rights and the rule of law. The aim is to ensure Türkiye's continued participation in the international legal order. This includes supporting the infringement proceedings instituted by the Council of Europe against Türkiye.**

As stated in the government's response to the AIV's advisory report 'Human Rights: a

core interest in the current geopolitical context',<sup>1</sup> human rights are a crucial link between the rule of law, democracy and international security. The government therefore endorses the AIV's recommendation to consistently promote values and norms in the fields of human rights and the rule of law. As the government noted in its response to the above-mentioned advisory report on human rights, the changing world and certain hard geopolitical realities compel us to alter our foreign policy, including human rights policy. Effectiveness is a key guiding principle in this regard.

In the case of Türkiye as well, there are concerns about safeguarding human rights and the rule of law. The government consistently raises these issues in its dealings with the Turkish authorities. In a healthy bilateral relationship there is always scope for critical dialogue about issues where the two sides hold differing views. Obviously, this applies not only to the need to safeguard human rights and the rule of law, but also to the broader relationship between the Netherlands and Türkiye.

In addition, under the Dutch constitution the government has a duty to promote the international legal order. A strong international legal order is necessary for a just, peaceful and prosperous world. The government attaches great importance to Türkiye's continued participation in the international legal order and the respect for international rules that this entails. Within the Council of Europe the Netherlands actively promotes the supervision of the implementation of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, including the non-compliance proceedings in respect of Türkiye. The European Convention on Human Rights, the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and the supervision of their implementation are the cornerstones of human rights protections in the Council of Europe, and the Netherlands works consistently to uphold them.

**Recommendation 3: Act both strategically and with an eye to the future: keep Türkiye involved in the multilateral system.** The AIV urges the government to 'be alert to dynamics that could ultimately force Western actors to take irreversible steps, such as terminating the EU accession process'. According to the AIV this would 'not only extinguish the prospect of a common destiny but also remove much of the EU's leverage. Revoking Türkiye's EU candidate status and terminating cooperation within NATO should be considered only in the worst-case scenario, that is to say, in the kind of situation described in the future scenario of "explicit rivalry"'.<sup>1</sup>

On the basis of successive progress reports, the government believes it is appropriate

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<sup>1</sup> Reference: BZDOC-1235421577-13

that accession negotiations with Türkiye have effectively come to a halt. At the same time, the government considers that the EU should continue to support Türkiye in essential areas of mutual interest, such as the reception of refugees and cooperation on climate action and energy issues. This is in the interest of keeping Türkiye involved in the multilateral system, and it will enhance the EU's ability to nudge Türkiye in the direction of closer alignment with EU policy in certain areas. In that connection the government believes, in line with the AIV's recommendations, that the coming period should be used to reflect on whether the Netherlands' position in the relevant forums should be modified in areas of mutual interest.

**Recommendation 4: Given that the Netherlands and Germany share many interests, work in coalition with Germany to enhance relations with Türkiye.** The AIV states that the Netherlands should play an encouraging and facilitating role within the EU in maintaining as many contacts and as much cooperation and dialogue with Türkiye as possible. In this connection, the AIV advises the government to initiate tripartite consultations with Berlin and Ankara, based on the existing bilateral format of the Wittenburg conferences.

The government recognises the importance of the Netherlands taking a constructive stance in the EU's relationship with Türkiye, and believes that it makes sense for the EU to talk not only *about* but also *with* Türkiye, as a key partner. The government therefore welcomes the high-level dialogues that have been held recently between the European Commission and Türkiye, in areas like climate policy, migration, innovation and economic development. In the Netherlands' view these dialogues should be continued in the years ahead, in line with the European Council conclusions in which the EU states that it is open to a positive, phased, proportionate and reversible agenda on matters of mutual interest.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the European Council has stated previously that in the event of provocations or unilateral actions in the eastern Mediterranean that contravene international law, all instruments and options will be on the table to defend the interests of the EU and its member states and safeguard regional stability.<sup>3</sup> The Netherlands endorses this approach within the EU and will align with it in its bilateral contacts as far as possible.

In its relationship with Türkiye, the Netherlands already works as much as possible with like-minded countries, particularly Germany. At the same time, the Turkish-Dutch relationship also warrants its own explicit track – a track to which the existing bilateral

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/50763/2425-06-21-euco-conclusions-en.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/48976/250321-vtc-euco-statement-en.pdf>

Wittenburg Conference contributes.

**Recommendation 5: In the short term, increase outreach to the Turkish people to prevent them from becoming alienated from Europe.** The AIV urges the government to recognise and specify the value of the Netherlands' ties with Türkiye and Turkish society, and to involve the Turkish community in the Netherlands in this process. The AIV also advises the government to focus on shared interests, such as expanding the two countries' close trade and investment relationship and their social, educational and professional networks, and to take account of the needs of Turkish civil society and be flexible in this regard.

The government endorses this recommendation and recognises the special bond between the Netherlands and Türkiye, which goes back more than 410 years. Through its missions the Netherlands maintains excellent contacts with Turkish civil society, both through the MATRA fund and through public and cultural diplomacy. Türkiye is a focus country within international cultural policy. Through cultural activities and visitor and exchange programmes, the Netherlands actively seeks to strengthen its cultural ties with Türkiye. Our large population of Dutch people of Turkish origin give this bilateral relationship an additional human dimension, which the AIV is right to highlight. For example, the Turkish-Dutch community plays a key role in promoting the countries' bilateral trade and investment relationship. Thanks to the many networks that exist, there are over 3,000 Dutch companies active in Türkiye. In addition, the many Turkish students at Dutch educational institutions and Dutch students at Turkish educational institutions strengthen the networks between the two countries. What is more, the EU uses its instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) to promote outreach to the Turkish people and knowledge exchanges between Turkish and European educational institutions. One way it does this is by financing Turkish participation in EU programmes and agencies, such as Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, the European Solidarity Corps and the Jean Monnet Scholarship Programme.

**Recommendation 6: Use the EU's strong negotiating position to encourage Türkiye, which is struggling economically, to improve its record on human rights and the rule of law.** *Implement this recommendation in line with recommendation 2 and the EU's existing conditional approach. Ask the European Commission to propose a range of measures aimed at promoting Türkiye's economic recovery and resilience. The biggest opportunities in this regard include modernising the customs union – with a focus on services, climate change and the Green Deal, and promoting digital cooperation – and visa liberalisation between Türkiye and the EU.*

The EU, as a trade bloc, is the largest foreign investor in Türkiye. The government agrees with the AIV's recommendation to use the EU's economic negotiating position to foster improvements in human rights and the rule of law.

The 1995 Customs Union covers industrial goods and requires Türkiye to implement the EU Common Customs Tariff and rules governing imports from third countries. According to the European Commission, after an initial period of compliance Türkiye has been deviating more and more from the agreed rules. The Commission regularly discusses this issue with Türkiye. The government shares these concerns and raises them with Türkiye, with reference to specific complaints voiced by Dutch companies about doing business with Türkiye.

The government also recognises that the modernisation of the Customs Union is part of the positive agenda agreed by the European Council in October 2020, and that, in combination with compliance with existing agreements, modernisation has a beneficial economic effect on the above-mentioned areas. Here, too, the government feels strongly that human rights and the rule of law should be an integral part of the dialogue and any follow-up steps. In future discussions about the mandate and negotiation guidelines for modernisation of the Customs Union, the government will press for clear agreements about expected progress on rule-of-law benchmarks in regard to trade relations with Türkiye. If the talks on the modernisation of the Customs Union do eventually get off the ground, this could be an opportunity for the EU, in addition to its interests-based partnership with Türkiye, to reintroduce rule-of-law elements into its dialogue with Türkiye so as to foster progress on the rule of law and democracy in Türkiye.

With regard to visa liberalisation, the government would stress that this is a technical, benchmark-driven EU process. The government remains committed to ensuring the fulfilment of all benchmarks of the Visa Liberalisation Roadmap before it agrees to the lifting of the short-stay visa requirement for Turkish nationals. The Dutch position on this issue will be guided by the progress reports issued by the European Commission.

**Recommendation 7: Ensure that the EU explicitly acknowledges Türkiye's role in refugee reception and that it commits to providing multiannual financial support in this area.**

The AIV advises the government to generously support Türkiye, which has taken responsibility for hosting more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees on a long-term basis. Financial predictability is very important to Türkiye. More transparent communication concerning how and on whom Türkiye spends these funds is also

important. In addition, the EU must honour its commitments under the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement regarding voluntary resettlement from Türkiye. At the same time, Türkiye and the EU both need to invest more resources in tackling the root causes of irregular migration and conflict. With a view to the future, the EU must actively seek alternatives to the current form of cooperation on migration with Türkiye.

The government endorses the AIV's recommendation that Türkiye should receive recognition for the large number of refugees from the region that it has been taking in for years. Within the EU, as well as in bilateral discussions, the Netherlands highlights the responsibility that Türkiye is shouldering in this area. It is clear to the government that Turkish society needs assistance to continue providing reception to refugees. This support should be focused mainly on making the reception of refugees more sustainable and fostering their inclusion in Turkish society. In addition to its cooperation within the EU, the government is also considering how it can work more closely with Türkiye at bilateral level on the issue of migration.

The government is aware of the post-2023 uncertainty surrounding the discontinuation of allocated European financial resources for the reception of refugees in Türkiye, better known as the Facility for Refugees in Türkiye (FRIT). Any decision about multiannual financing for this purpose must be taken at EU level, however. Such a decision should take account of the existing pressure on the various areas of the EU budget. The government is in favour of continued financial assistance for the reception of refugees and support for host communities in Türkiye.

Looking ahead, the government would stress the importance of ongoing cooperation with Türkiye. It is open to discussing, in an EU framework, how such cooperation can be shaped going forward, without undermining current efforts in this regard. The role of Türkiye in the migration flows to Greece and Cyprus should also be taken into account in this connection.

As the House is aware,<sup>4</sup> the government has decided not to accept any new people within the framework of the EU-Türkiye Declaration. In the summer of 2023 this decision will be evaluated. The government still attaches major importance to the full implementation of the agreements by all parties, including those aspects relating to resettlement and return.

### **Recommendation 8: Play a proactive role in maintaining NATO-Türkiye relations**

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<sup>4</sup> Parliamentary Paper 19 637, no. 2992

**and invest in rapprochement between the US and Türkiye in order to strengthen the Alliance.** The protection of Europe's territory is dependent on the survival of the security axis between these militarily vital member countries. The AIV advises the government to provide expertise and mediation for the resolution of territorial and maritime issues in the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas. In addition, Türkiye should be offered access to and integration with Western, NATO-compatible systems as soon as possible.

The AIV is right to highlight the importance of Türkiye to NATO and the importance of a well-functioning relationship within NATO between the United States and Türkiye. The government agrees with the AIV that given the size of Türkiye's armed forces (the second-largest in NATO) and its geographic location, Türkiye is crucial to the security of the Euro-Atlantic treaty area. Working effectively with Türkiye in NATO is therefore essential.

In addition, for the Netherlands and other Allies, NATO is a forum where security-policy issues and other concerns can be discussed. In that light, NATO unity is vital, including with regard to the membership applications of Finland and Sweden. Türkiye is one of the two remaining Allies that has not yet approved the crucial applications of these countries. Here too, the Netherlands is reminding Türkiye at all levels of its responsibilities and advocating swift ratification, partly in light of the importance of strengthening NATO and security in Europe.

By investing in security relations with Türkiye, both bilaterally and with like-minded Allies, the government hopes to show that it is receptive to Türkiye's legitimate security concerns and to exploring opportunities to improve relations with Türkiye within NATO. At the same time, any ambitions in that connection should not be too grand: as the AIV repeatedly noted in its report, Turkish security and defence policy is largely determined by internal factors, over which the Netherlands has no influence.

With regard to the tensions in the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas, the Netherlands regularly emphasises the importance of dialogue, respect for international law and ongoing de-escalation in the region. The Netherlands attaches importance to good relations between NATO Allies, and this includes the relationship between Greece and Turkey. Rhetoric hinting at armed intervention is not helpful. With respect to the specific issue of tensions between Türkiye and Cyprus, the Netherlands supports the efforts of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and will continue to call Türkiye to account for stationing Turkish troops on the island without the permission of



the Republic of Cyprus. The Netherlands attaches importance to the UN process, which provides a platform for the two parties to talk, with the goal of arriving at a comprehensive solution, on the basis of a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation with political equality on Cyprus. This is also the position of the EU. The government does not believe that separate mediation on the part of the Netherlands would be beneficial to this UN-led process.

Additionally, the AIV recommends offering Türkiye access to integration with Western, NATO-compatible systems. Türkiye already has access to NATO-compatible systems. With regard to certain systems, the possibilities for integration largely depend on the degree to which capabilities purchased (or yet to be purchased) by Türkiye adversely affect the integrity of NATO systems or those of NATO Allies. If Türkiye abandons the S-400 air defence system or decides not to start using it, a major impediment to integration will be lifted, and the path to further access will be opened. In addition, in line with the EU Council conclusions of October 2019 concerning Turkish military involvement in northeastern Syria, the Netherlands follows a strict policy with regard to the export to Türkiye of military goods and dual-use goods with military end use.

**Recommendation 9: Take steps to increase Türkiye's involvement in EU foreign and security policy.** *This can be achieved through meetings – such as those recently conducted in the framework of the European Political Community – or high-level dialogue on cooperation in the area of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and similar initiatives, but also in a practical sense through cooperation on substantive aspects of EU foreign and security policy in order to ensure better coordination between Turkish and EU policy. Until 2018, Türkiye was regularly invited to participate in informal consultations on these topics and co-signed political statements issued by the EU. As a geopolitical player, the EU must exploit the strategic advantage of its proximity to Türkiye. In addition, it will badly need the country to help manage migration from the Middle East and Afghanistan and provide aid to vulnerable and conflict-affected countries.*

The government agrees with the AIV that new forums, such as the European Political Community, offer opportunities to improve relations with Türkiye and to engage with the country at senior political and civil service level about issues that affect the Dutch foreign and security policy and the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Although decision-making in this and other policy areas ultimately lies with the EU itself and not with third countries, it is nevertheless important to speak not only about Türkiye, but also with Türkiye. This is being done, as evidenced by Türkiye's participation in the first

meeting of the EPC and also in the high-level dialogues referred to in our response to recommendation 4. In addition, the High Representative intends to invite Türkiye to the Schuman Forum Security and Defence Forum, which is planned for March 2023, where the EU will talk to partner countries and organisations about security and defence.

At the same time the government is aware that the priorities of Turkish foreign and security policy are not always in full alignment with those of the Netherlands and the EU. As an EU candidate country Türkiye is expected to align itself with the EU's CFSP. One way it has already done so is through its contribution to the EU mission EUFOR ALTHEA. Good diplomatic contacts at all levels remain crucial, however, so that in addition to their shared interests Türkiye and the Netherlands/EU can continue discussing matters on which they hold diverging views. In the view of the Netherlands, the previous conclusions of the European Council to the effect that all actors, including Türkiye, should be expected to make a positive contribution to resolving regional crises remain very much in effect.

The government supports the EU's appeal to all candidate countries, including Türkiye, to enforce EU sanctions against Russia. Vigilance is needed, since there is a risk that a number of companies will attempt to profit from the situation. The government welcomes the fact that Türkiye is engaged in dialogue with the European Commission about how to deal with attempts to avoid sanctions.

**Recommendation 10: Throughout government, utilise anticipation and early-warning abilities in order to identify early signs of changes in Türkiye (or relating to it) that may affect Dutch interests.** *Consider not one but several potential courses of action, based on different future scenarios, and examine the various policy options available to the Netherlands. Do this so as to be better prepared for unexpected developments in Türkiye – in the crucial year of 2023 – and develop contingency plans to facilitate a swift and effective response where necessary.*

The government endorses the importance of taking a government-wide perspective on relations with Türkiye, given the breadth of our bilateral relationship. In that connection, developments in and regarding Türkiye that affect Dutch interests are already monitored from an interministerial perspective. For example, there are regular interministerial consultations about the Netherlands' relationship with Türkiye, and the Multiannual Country Strategy is also formulated in an interministerial context. This strategy additionally outlines a number of future scenarios. Specifically with a view to 'early warning, early action', this concept is being better integrated into foreign policy, with the

goal of flagging possible conflicts early on and addressing them in a comprehensive fashion. The various ministries are obviously also taking into account that 2023 is a special year for Türkiye, due to the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections and the centenary of the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye.

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