Country: The Netherlands

Committee: European Council

Topic: Turkey’s accession to the EU

Turkey’s European Membership process began when Turkey signed an association agreement with the European Economic Community in 1963. After that in 1987 Turkey applied for full membership. In 1999 Turkey was recognized as an EU candidate. In 2005 formal membership debates began. Until 2016, only 16 out of 35 Chapters necessary to complete the accession were opened and just one of them was closed. These discussions were frozen due to the conflicts between Turkey and the EU.

 As one of the traditional supporters of Turkey’s EU membership, we played a key role in the European debates. But our support has never been unconditional or one-sided. Inside the EU there have always been unresolved problems about this topic. But as the Netherlands, we helped to pave the way for the opening of official negotiations. In the Netherlands we have a group of Turkish people that holds up to 2.4% of our population and this has always been a motivation source for us. On the other hand integrating a large Muslim country in EU would have a positive impact on the Islamic world. But of course there are conditions that Turkey has to reach like the Copenhagen Criteria. This had to be a long process that develops and makes Turkey a more European country. There was a certain optimism that with these debates Turkey would become a more democratic country.

But so many things changed after that. The opinions became much more negative after the national referendum about the European constitution made in 2005. This change in opinion was within context with increasing Euroceptism and taking an anti-Islam position because of the difficulties that local integration of Moroccan and Turkish minorities created. This made the Dutch society turn against their traditional politics. This was seen as a failure of the multicultural society by the citizens.

 In 2002 the populist politician Pim Fortuyn was assassinated but before this he talked about this topic on an anti-immigration and anti-Islam platform. In November 2004, Dutch filmmaker was murdered in Amsterdam by an Islamist militant. As a result some political parties turned against Turkey’s membership in the EU and some of them started questioning the situation. Recently Turkey’s situation has disappointed us. After the attempted coup of July 2016 the steps taken by the Erdoğan regime have been named out of proportion and unreasonable.

Despite the situations and negative political facts, we as the Netherlands try to develop and maintain a political consensus with Turkey. In the 2005 Eurobarometer polls 55% of the Dutch population is against Turkey’s accession but 41% of the population still has a positive approach, ranking 4th among EU members. As the Netherlands we can shortly name our approach by saying that it is ‘strict but fair’. We are not totally against or support the accession of Turkey. But if Turkey solves their problems and reaches the European criterias as a country we can support Turkey. We are open to discuss any situations that can occur and we  leave the door open to any ideas that are logical and solid.