

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
04VATICAN3196	2004-08-18 16:04	2010-12-10 21:09	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Vatican

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

Wednesday, 18 August 2004, 16:27

C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 003196

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/WE: LEVIN; EUR/SE; EUR/ERA

EO 12958 DECL: 08/18/2014

TAGS EU, PHUM, PREL, SOCI, TU, VT

SUBJECT: VATICAN STILL OPEN TO TURKEY'S EU BID

REF: A. 03 VATICAN 1164

[B](#). 03 VATICAN 5666 C. 03 VATICAN 5748

Classified By: Charge d'affaires D. Brent Hardt. Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#). (C) Acting Holy See Foreign Minister Parolin reaffirmed August 18 that the Holy See remained open to Turkish EU membership, notwithstanding recent critical comments by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. Parolin emphasized that the Holy See's position on Turkish membership in the EU had not changed from the stance it has described to us in the past (ref a). If Turkey meets the EU's Copenhagen criteria, Parolin said, the Vatican sees "no obstacle" to EU membership. He clarified that Ratzinger's skeptical view of EU membership for Turkey reflected the Cardinal's "personal feeling," and did not reflect the view of the Holy See. Parolin acknowledged that some within the Holy See harbored concerns about Turkey's EU bid and its potential impact on the EU, but maintained that he believed these concerns could be addressed over time, and would not represent insurmountable obstacles. He acknowledged that Ratzinger's statement was incorrectly seen as a Vatican position, and indicated a willingness to consider clarifying its formal position pending discussions with the Turkish Ambassador - - who had yet to raise the issue -- and with FM Lajolo on his return to Rome later this month. End Summary.

Holy See Still Open to Turkish EU Membership

[2](#). (C) Acting Vatican Foreign Minister equivalent Monsignor Pietro Parolin told Charge August 18 that the Holy See remained open to Turkish EU membership. He affirmed that recent negative comments about Turkey's EU bid by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger did not reflect any change in the Holy See's formal position. That position remained that, if Turkey fully meets the EU's Copenhagen criteria, the Vatican sees "no obstacle" to EU membership. Parolin made it clear that Ratzinger's take on the issue was his own, and that he was not speaking on behalf of the Holy See. "These were his personal feelings," Parolin added. "Although he is an important member of the Curia, he does not speak for the Secretariat of State."

SIPDIS

Turkey's EU Bid: Complexities, but no Great Obstacles

¶3. (C) While Parolin discounted Ratzinger's comments -- that Turkey had always been "in permanent contrast to Europe" and that linking it to Europe would be a mistake -- as not reflective of Vatican foreign policy, he did allow that EU membership for Turkey would present challenges. He noted the difficulty of European integration for a country with such a different cultural and religious background, citing existent problems with the integration of Muslims into European society as reason for caution when examining Turkey's EU hopes. He acknowledged that there were others, including former FM Cardinal Tauran, who share Ratzinger's concerns. Tauran had suggested the EU look first to Orthodox Christian countries Ukraine and Moldova before addressing Turkey's membership. Parolin affirmed that the Holy See's primary concern with Turkey's EU bid remained religious freedom, particularly the juridical status of churches in Turkey (ref a). In his view, the "difficulties and complexities" did not represent an insurmountable obstacle for Turkey's EU membership, but rather necessary topics of reflection that would have to be addressed before moving forward on accession.

At Odds with Papal Muslim Outreach

¶4. (C) Charge pointed out that as an EU member, Turkey could help to ease tensions between the Western and Muslim worlds, illustrating how a secular state with a Muslim population could cooperate with countries with a Judeo-Christian heritage. He noted that the Pope, in his outreach to the Muslim world, has constantly preached the doctrine of inclusion and integration, even while advocating recognition of Europe's Christian roots. Ratzinger's comments, by contrast, suggested a permanent state of conflict and division that appeared to run counter to the Pope's broader

outreach to the Muslim world, the Charge observed. Parolin acknowledged this contradiction, and indicated that he believed it was possible that Turkish EU membership could eventually help the Christian minority and others suffering from a lack of religious freedom in Turkey. "We certainly hope for that development," he concluded. Charge also pointed out that Turkey has for decades been an important member of NATO that had contributed significantly to the organization's success; there was no reason why it could not contribute equally to the EU.

Clarification Possible

¶5. (C) Charge noted the public confusion generated when a senior Vatican official as influential as Cardinal Ratzinger makes a political statement on such a sensitive issue, and emphasized the importance of clarifying its official position. In this regard, Charge passed Parolin an account of Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan's sharply critical response to Ratzinger's comments, including the strong reaction by the Turkish and American media. Parolin had not yet seen Erdogan's comments, and appeared concerned by their bluntness. He also indicated his surprise that the Turkish Ambassador had not yet contacted him, though he said it was possible the Ambassador was on summer leave. Parolin indicated that he would wait to hear the Turkish reaction, and would then

discuss with FM Lajolo the possibility of issuing some form of clarification of the Vatican's stance.

Comment

¶6. (C) As we saw most notably during the Iraq war when individual Cardinals offered personal criticism of USG policy (refs b, c), the media often characterizes the personal views of high-ranking prelates as "Vatican" stances. In this case, Ratzinger's lofty stature in matters of Catholic theology made the temptation to do so even greater. In fact, Ratzinger's influence in matters of faith and morals does not translate into direct influence upon Vatican foreign policy, where his expertise is much more limited. Ratzinger has been a leading voice behind the Holy See's unsuccessful drive to secure a reference to Europe's "Christian roots" in the EU constitution, and he clearly understands that allowing a Muslim country into the EU would further weaken his case for Europe's Christian foundations. In any case, the Vatican's official position remains one of cautious, skeptical openness towards Turkish integration to the EU. In fact, the Pope, in his February address to Turkish Ambassador Durak essentially acknowledged Turkey's future in Europe, telling Durak that "as Turkey prepares to establish new relations with Europe," the Church would insist on "fundamental human rights" for Turkish Catholics.

HARDT

NNNN

2004VATICA03196 - Classification: CONFIDENTIAL