



## **POLITICS OF EU-TURKEY RELATIONS; THE PROS AND CONS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The subject of this paper is simply the hypothetic Pros and Cons of Turkey's accession to the EU and, therefore, the level of impact it will have on the overall development of the European Union. The main goal of this paper is to determine the extent to which Turkey reached the level of development of the EU requirements, determine the characteristics and patterns of integration processes related to this state's accession to the existing union of countries whose level of development seems higher than its own, as well as to evaluate the prospective opportunities of Turkey's full-scale integration with the EU. The methodological basis of this paper is linked with a systematic approach using the historical method, the method of comparative analysis, as well as methods of political/philosophical analysis. It was discovered that Turkey's membership of the EU has a lot of benefits attached to it as well as challenges. Such challenges, this study recommends should not deter the EU from blocking Turkey's accession to the EU, but rather measures should be put in place to ensure that the severity of such challenges isn't overwhelming.

**Keywords:** EU, Turkey, Membership, Accession

## INTRODUCTION

This research paper seeks to investigate the historical antecedents of Turkey's quest to join the EU with emphasis on the advantages and disadvantages of such union. Research such as that conducted by Rubin in 1987 reveals that Turkey submitted a formal request for full membership, which was rejected by the European Commission in 1989 on the grounds that Turkey manifested grave democratic deficiencies. Notwithstanding, the door to Turkey's EU entry was not shut. The Commission's Opinion on Turkey's membership application in 1989 confirmed that Turkey, unlike Morocco, which also applied for membership in 1987, was eligible for full EU membership. The prospects for Turkey's EU membership brightened in 1996, when Turkey entered the EU customs union, marking the beginning of higher levels of economic integration and, in Ankara's eyes, the prelude to full EU membership.

The main reason the EU formed is because of peace after what was seen after the Second World War. Through the use of practical achievements and the created sense of common progress between member states, the EU has been able to achieve their main directives. The EU continues to push forward and expanding across the European continent so that they may give all their member countries all the same benefits to create a better unified nation, Wendicke, (2008).

The accession process was not to begin immediately, however, as in 1997 the European Council in Luxemburg underlined that Turkey, while eligible, still did not meet the standards for EU candidacy, Ustubici, and Irdam, (2012). The watershed came in December 1999, when the European Council in Helsinki granted Turkey its long-sought candidacy, albeit not opening accession negotiations as was done for all the other enlargement countries at the time (the Central and Eastern European countries, Cyprus, and Malta), Ustubici, and Irdam, (2012).

The argument was that in order to open accession talks, Turkey had to fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria for membership and make progress towards resolving the Cyprus problem as well as bilateral conflicts with Greece. In turn, the Commission was given a mandate to monitor progress in Turkey's domestic performance and to draft an Accession Partnership document for Turkey, recommending areas for Turkish reform. The EU also upgraded and adapted its financial assistance to Turkey, redirecting aid to provide more explicit support for Turkey's reforms Wendicke, (2008).

Turkey was one of the first countries to develop an association relationship with the newly established European Community (EC) in 1963. Thus, when the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) started their formal relationship with the Community, Turkey and the EC had already had an association of almost three decades. Ironically, perhaps, Turkey is still a candidate country with an uncertain accession date while the ten CEECs have already become EU members. The conclusion of an

Association Agreement between Turkey and the EC was indeed a natural consequence of the Turks' long-held desire to integrate with Europe. Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, almost all Turkish governments have claimed a European orientation. One of the main aims of modernization in Turkey has been to be recognized as a European state. This aim has been strongly held especially by the Turkish intelligentsia and bureaucracy.

The agreement envisaged the possibility of eventual Turkish membership of the EC as well as the gradual completion of a customs union (CU) between Turkey and the EC. However, the severe economic difficulties and political instability faced by Turkey prevented the expected evolution of integration in the 1970s and 1980s. Owing to economic problems, Turkey suspended its association obligations in the late 1970s. Political relations between the parties were also frozen after the 1980 military coup in Turkey.

After returning to parliamentary democracy and initiating a series of reforms to liberalize its economy noted Mulhearn, (2008), Turkey officially applied for full EC membership on 14 April 1987. It was believed that Turkish economic liberalization would facilitate accession. However, although confirming Turkey's eligibility, the European Commission expressed a negative opinion in 1989 on Turkey's accession. Tensions in Turkey-EU relations tend to strengthen Eurosceptic feelings in Turkey. As emphasized by Mulhearn, (2008) controversies damage the credibility of the EU in Turkey and undermine the Turkish public's confidence in the EU and its institutions. Thus, relations between the two parties are becoming overshadowed by the problem of mistrust. In this context, the low level of trust of Turkish people in both the EU and EU institutions (about 35 per cent) is striking. The overall image of the EU is also on the slide. Only 43 per cent of the Turkish public found the image of the EU positive in the spring of 2006, compared with 60 per cent who found it positive in the autumn of 2005. Thus, it can be concluded that the inclination of the Turkish public and elites towards the EU is not unconditional; rather it depends on a number of factors. Tense or cordial relations between the EU and Turkey affect the position and credibility of pro-EU or Eurosceptic circles respectively. In turn, the interplay between these circles and the views of the Turkish public have considerable implications for the future of Turkey's political transformation.

The study conducted by Ugur (1999) titled ("The European Union and Turkey: An Anchor/credibility Dilemma"), noted that at that time, the Republic of Turkey had not received a candidate status yet. Later works such as Clesse's "Turkey and the European Union: 2004 and Beyond" or "Turkey's Accession to the European Union: Political and Economic Challenges" by Akçay and Yilmaz provide an analysis of the changes in the Turkish economy under the influence of the harmonization process, which started after gaining this status, as well as the estimates of adequacy of those changes in terms of the EU.

Turkey has been on the European Union menu for years. Since 1959 when Turkey first applied to join what was then called the European Economic Community, Europe has been scratching its collective head over whether a mostly Muslim country that lies mostly outside the geographic borders of Europe actually belongs Tekin, (2010). The relations between the European Union (EU) and the Republic of Turkey, namely in

the field of Turkey's gradual procession from an associate to full-fledged member of the European Union, dates back to the 1960's. In 1999, Turkey received the status of candidate for membership, however with greater doubts on the side of the EU member states than in the case of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (see Guerin and Stivachtis, 2011; Jiroudková et al., 2015).

As of today, most CEE countries are already EU members, whereas the accession negotiations with Turkey started only in 2005. The negotiation process was complicated by the emergence of various problems and has been repeatedly interrupted. Another important aspect to be noted in the context of the current state of Turkey-EU relations is the negotiations on the issue of visa liberalization. Despite of the fact that the visa liberalization process has long been promoted by the European Union as a key stage of deepening of bilateral cooperation with Turkey, as of today, the EU has not yet cancelled the visa regime for the Turkish population. The official negotiations between the EU and Turkey were launched in 2012, but have not much progressed since then. This is further adding to the tensions in the bilateral relations between the European Union and Turkey, and contributes to further slow-down in the process of Turkey's accession to the European Union. The latest achievement in this field is the readmission agreement signed between Turkey and the European Union in 2013, and the so-called Roadmap towards the visa-free regime. As of today, those documents are rather declarative, but they should play an important role in the visa liberalization process in the near future (Strielkowski and Glazar, 2014).

It would be naive not to recognise the changing mood in Europe and globally, with the rise of nationalism, populism and a nation-first agenda, in parallel to a growing aversion to globalisation, immigration and the free movement of labour. Mass immigration is straining the political and social fabric of Europe and exposing fissures which were perhaps never that far from the surface. Tensions have been further exposed by a decade of economic flux which followed the global financial crisis of 2008 (Strielkowski, and Glazar, (2014). Intolerance is on the rise, and politicians are defensive on issues such as immigration and all too often happy to hide behind cheap sound bites rather than try to find more complex and difficult policy solutions. A likely casualty is the EU enlargement process itself. It will be difficult to secure ratification across EU27 for the likes of Albania, Serbia, Macedonia and BiH, and then Turkey. Any aspiring EU members are likely to face a repeat of the referendum in the Netherlands on the EU's Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with Ukraine, which ended in defeat, even though there was no nod to Ukraine's eventual EU membership. True, the Netherlands' political elites secured a "fix" to get the Ukraine AA/DCFTA over the line, but I doubt that similar options would be possible for the ratification of new EU entrants — a much bigger deal all round. Getting future enlargement over the line will be acutely difficult, especially with respect to Turkey (Hale, and Ozbudun, (2009).

**Comparing Turkey and an average EU member State:**

<b>ECONOMY</b>	<b>AVERAGE EU</b>	<b>TURKEY</b>
<b>GDP (Purchasing power parity)</b>	\$15.85 trillion (2013 est.) \$15.83 trillion (2012 est.) \$15.89 trillion (2011 est.) Note: data are in 2013 US Dollars	\$1.167 trillion (2013 est.) \$1.124 trillion (2012 est.) \$1.101 trillion (2011 est.) Note: data are in 2013 US Dollars
<b>GDP - real growth rate</b>	0.1% (2013 est.) 0.3% (2012 est.) 1.7% (2011 est.)	3.8% (2013 est.) 2.2% (2012 est.) 8.8% (2011 est.)
<b>GDP- per capita (PPP)</b>	\$34.500 (2013 est.) \$34.500 (2012 est.) \$34.600 (2011 est.)	\$15.300 (2013 est.) \$15.500 (2012 est.) \$14.900 (2011 est.)
<b>Unemployment rate</b>	10.5% (2013 est.) 10.1% (2012 est.)	9.3% (2013 est.) 9.2% (2012 est.)
<b>PPP GDP (\$M)</b>	552,780 (2013 est.)	1,665,332 (2013 est.)
<b>PPP per capita \$</b>	40,600 (2013 est.)	21,198 (2013 est.)

Source: [www.indexmundi.com](http://www.indexmundi.com)

**Turkey's Accession to the EU; ThePros:**

When all these aspects are taken into consideration and if prejudices and domestic politics are put aside, the emerging picture will reveal that Europe's interest in Turkey's membership is no smaller than Turkey's interest in joining the bloc.

1. The founding fathers of Europe were convinced that they had to define common interests and shared perspectives in order to overcome a culture of hatred and mistrust. In this process, they did not make a reference to religious belief or even to secular cultural notions and values. Neither the geographical nor the philosophical, cultural and religious affiliations were parts of the membership criteria and have never been a part of European history.
2. Any European state respecting the European values set out in Article 2 of the Treaty on the EU and committed to promoting them can become a member of the EU in accordance with Article 49 of the aforementioned Treaty. In that sense membership for the countries embracing European values and promoting common interests should not be subject to any other consideration or criterion.
3. Turkey's benefits of joining the European Union are various. There is the economic benefit that is

associated with the increased stability of the United Democratic system and safety of the member countries. The EU provides member countries with economic stability by creating the free transfer of goods and services. So, Turkey would most likely gain more favourable trade pathways as a member than they might as an independent nation.

4. In addition, because the EU is a collective, a member nation with an acute economic crisis can rely on the collective, often avoiding catastrophic economic collapse due to the resources available coupled with the collective stability of the Union.
5. Moreover, the membership of a secular, Muslim country could facilitate the integration of Muslim Europeans into their respective societies, as well as increase the bloc's ability to reach out to the Muslim world.
6. Becoming a member country also allows member nations to access to EU collective funds that are available to help in improving the new member country's economy as well as the country's overall standard of living. This allows the member country to use EU funds to rebuild impoverished areas and to raise the quality of living for local residents.
7. There are also social benefits, primarily in the ability of Turkey's citizens to move freely throughout Europe without travel visas or other documentation that member nation citizens don't require. All member country EU citizens have the freedom to live, work, study, and travel in any other EU country. The EU creates many jobs and financial opportunities allowing access to look for employment in any other member country.
8. Greater equality and social inclusion has been of great importance to all EU member countries. The European Union has worked towards raising the standard of equality for citizens. Citizens are protected from employment discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability and age because of the directives set in place by the EU and supported by its members.
9. There are also many environmental benefits to joining the European Union in the constant research and upgrading of energy efficient materials and machinery that is shared by the members. Also, European Union members consistently work to reduce and eliminate pollution throughout all of Europe and the world.
10. Turkish citizens would be able to travel, explore, study and work throughout Europe, often sending a portion of their earnings back to their Turkish family members. Turkish farmers, manufacturers and suppliers would gain open access to the European marketplace. The reverse is also true as citizens from other nations could freely live, work and play in Turkey. The influx of new friends would most likely produce lower prices on consumer goods while increasing values in an already sizzling real estate market.
11. Turkey would also distance itself from its proximity to problem neighbours including Lebanon and Syria by firmly committing to the EU as its foundation. Should problems in nearby nations spill into Turkey, its European neighbours are ready and willing to defend the country against non-member insurgence.

12. If you were going to summarise all of these benefits into a single thought, it would be that Turkey would, to the outside world, finally come of age as a progressive nation. Although there are still a few barriers that are holding up Turkey's acceptance into the European Union, it is clear that Turkey is committed to membership and aware of the benefits that membership in the European Union offers to all Turkish citizens.

### **Situating the EU-Turkey Relationship within contemporary times:**

- ❖ The new Turkish government considers the EU accession process central to its domestic agenda. And Ankara and Brussels have developed new forms of cooperation, including on visa liberalization, irregular migration, and counterterrorism.
- ❖ A sharp regression in Turkey's rule-of-law architecture hampers the accession process. Negotiations are stalled as of late 2014 and will stagnate until the Turkish government returns to a higher degree of compliance with the EU's political criteria for membership.
- ❖ The EU-Turkey Customs Union is a major success but should be revised to reach its full potential. Turkey also requests to be included in the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).
- ❖ Turmoil along Turkey's south-eastern border, in Iraq and Syria, threatens both the EU's and Turkey's homeland security, pointing to the need for a reinforced foreign policy dialogue between the two.

### **Challenges Militating against EU-Turkey Relations; the Cons:**

1. Turkey Is predominantly Muslim population and secular state will contribute to the bloc's cultural diversity, which in turn could help to alleviate the rise of Islamophobia, xenophobia, and radicalization across the EU.
2. The EU has genuine concerns about Turkey's suitability, and these need addressing. In particular, there is a view, with increasing evidence to support it, that Turkey's human rights record does not stand up well. This is due to Turkey's repressive practices regarding journalists, certain media outlets and the violent put down of all forms of resistance to the country's dominant politics. Silencing academics, disrupting LGBT marches and the general sense of creeping Islamisation, in the public sphere, and in the private, in schools and universities, and in popular culture, is profoundly reversing the traditional centre-periphery divide that has characterised Republican Turkey since the 1920s. These authoritarian stances do not bode well for the future of Turkey vis-à-vis the EU.
3. For the deepest of sceptics, Turkey could never comply with the benchmarks for entry, but these standards shift as do the parameters of the political process. There are those who wish to keep the EU as a club of Christian nations, regarding Turkey's entry as a fundamental blight on the very identity of the Union. In order for the EU to move forward from its inward looking, imbalanced and disproportionate focus on the older partners, embracing Turkey would alter the political and cultural outlook of the entire

bloc.

4. For the Muslim world, Turkey’s entry into the EU would move aside the powerfully held notion that the EU can never include a Muslim majority nation. It would allow the entry of a technically skilled, young workforce into the labour markets of the EU. It would improve Muslim-Christian, East-West relations with a single move, one that could have significant ramifications for the entire world. The unique political, social and cultural character of Turkey, inherited from its transformation from an Islamic caliphate into a republic, means that the symbolism associated with Turkey’s entry into the EU would have far greater effect in the long-term.

**Percentage of Muslim Population in Europe:**

S/N	Country	Total Population	Muslim Population %
1	UK	58.8m	1.6m (28%)
2	Turkey	68.7m	68m (99%)
3	Switzerland	7.4m	310,800 (4.2%)
4	Sweden	9m	300,000 (3%)
5	Spain	43.1m	1m (2.3%)
6	Serbia and Montenegro with Kosovo	10.8m (including Kosovo) 8.1m (excluding Kosovo)	405,000 (5%) 1.8m (90%)
7	Netherlands	16.3m	945,000 (5.8%)
8	Macedonia	2.1m	630,000 (30%)
9	Italy	58.4m	825,000 (1.4%)
10	Harmony	82.5m	3m (3.6%)
11	France	62.3m	6.6m (8.9.6%)
12	Denmark	5.4m	270,000 (5%)
13	Bosnia – Herzegovina	3.8m	1.5m (40%)
14	Austria	8.2m	339,000 (4.1%)
15	Albania	3.1m	2.2m (70%)

**Sources:** Total population - statistics 2005, Muslim population of the various states foreign services

**CONCLUSION**

In this study titled “Politics of EU-Turkey Relations; the Pros and Cons”, it was emphasized that countries hoping to join the European Union are required to achieve a certain standard of democracy and

human rights. Since it first applied for membership, Turkey had made some gains towards these, including abolishing the death penalty and introducing tougher laws against torture, as well as moderate reforms to help women Evans, (1987). However, the government is considering reinstating the death penalty amid calls for the execution of the plotters of July's failed coup for instance. Again, there are also growing concerns about Erdogan's widespread crackdown on media freedom and other human rights. The breakdown of a fragile ceasefire between the state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party led to some of the worst violence since the 1990s. Turkey's territorial claim to northern Cyprus is another on-going bone of contention for Europe, as is its refusal to recognise the Armenian genocide of 1915. [Turkey] is waging war on an ethnic minority," writes Paul Mason in *The Guardian*. "Its riot police just stormed the offices of a major newspaper, its secret service faces allegations of arming IS, its military shot down a Russian bomber", Guerin, and Stivachtis, (Eds.). (2011).

The failed coup attempt perpetrated by the Fethullahist Terrorist Organisation (FETO) on July 15, 2016, disrupted the momentum that had been built following the November 29, 2015 Turkey-EU Summit. The coup attempt, the bloodiest in the history of the republic, targeted Turkish democracy, forced Turkey to declare a state of emergency and tarnished Turkey's image as well as disrupting Turkey-EU cooperation and the accession process. Turkey's process of integration with the European Union started back in the 1960's, when the country became an associate member of the EU Akçapar, (2007). Since then, Turkey has made many attempts to transform its official status of candidate for membership into the status of full-fledged member of the European community. However, as of today the country has not yet been able to complete its European integration process, and there have lately been declarations of Turkish officials that the country may officially suspend its European integration course.

On the way toward European integration, Turkey has already implemented a great number of reforms in all fields of its activities. Thus, the Turkish legislation in the economic and social fields has long been unilaterally harmonized with the regulations and standards of the European Union for the purpose of complying with the accession criteria imposed by the EU. In the early 2000s, Turkey implemented a wave of economic reforms destined to improve the country's economic indicators and financial results in line with the requirements of the European Union Bilan, (2014). Thanks to the effective results of those economic reforms, Turkey was able to fulfill the Maastricht criteria, and as of today, in economic terms, the country is compliant with the requirements for prospective members. Moreover, in the social field, the country was able to meet the EU's basic requirements to the protection of human rights and freedoms, and still currently undertakes steps to further improve the situation on this segment. However, the integration process has not recently substantially progressed, which can be explained by objective conditions.

There are important milestones in the long history of relations between Turkey and the EU. Though sometimes these relations came to the verge of a freezing point, they returned to the road of recovery in a

short period of time.

In evaluating the general characteristics of the relations over the years, it can be concluded that Turkey-EU relations have not been fortunately conducted. Even though relations have continued since 1959, Turkey was not given candidate status until 1999. Relations have gained momentum since 1999. Important steps have been taken, and Turkey started accession negotiations with the EU in 2005. The open-ended nature of the accession negotiations makes it hard to forecast their outcome. Yet, the slow progress of the negotiations suggests that there is still much to accomplish on the way to full membership.

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