

## TURKEY LIKE A CANDIDATE OF EUROPEAN UNION

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### Abstract

*Turkey applied for associate membership in European Community in 1959, and signed the “Ankara Agreement” on September 12<sup>th</sup> 1963. Since 1964, Turkey has been a European Union Associate Member. Turkish accession will change the EU’s borders but it will also change Turkish relations with its neighbors. Overall, Turkish accession will extend and deepen EU foreign policy interests in its surrounding regions. Turkey will have considerable impact on the European Union, but it is an impact that can be managed as previous enlargements have been.*

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On April 14<sup>th</sup> 1987, Turkey made formal application to join European Community, but European Commission, in 1989, refused to begin accession negotiation. The same attitude was taken in 1997, when European Council in Luxembourg decided to start accession discussions with Central and Eastern European States and Cyprus, but not Turkey. Turkey was officially recognized as a candidate for membership at the European Union on December 12<sup>th</sup> 1999 at the Helsinki summit of the European Council, and the negotiations started on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2005.

Every country, that wants to join the European Union, has to fulfill some conditions. In June 1993 the European Council of Copenhagen, Denmark (from which they took the name) laid down the conditions (the so-called *Criteria of Copenhagen*) for the accession process of Central and Eastern European Countries to the EU. The *Copenhagen criteria* are the rules that define whether a country is eligible to join the European Union. The criteria require that a state have the institutions to preserve democratic governance and human rights, a functioning market economy.

The Copenhagen criteria are:

1. The political criteria: "Membership requires that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities."
2. The economic criteria: "The existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union."
3. The adoption of the *acquis communautaire*: "Membership presupposes the candidate's ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union."
4. The fourth criterion laid down in Copenhagen is "The capacity of the Union to absorb new Member States while maintaining the momentum of the European integration process."

In connection with the enlargement process the European Council of Helsinki of 10

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and 11 December 1999 confirmed that all States willing to accede to the European Union have to share the values and goals of the European Union as stipulated in its Treaties.

In connection with Turkey's candidacy for EU Membership, the European Council of Helsinki decided, in December 1999, that the criteria for accession, especially fulfillment of the political criteria are also to be applied to Turkey before the start of accession negotiations.

In addition, the Council formulated other political conditions for Turkey's accession, such as the resolution of the existing conflict between the EU Member Greece and Turkey, and the Cyprus problem.

The European Union opened accession negotiations with Turkey pressing the country to allow ships and aircrafts of EU's member Cyprus into its ports and airports and recognize the Greek government of Cyprus. Turkey has been refusing to recognize Cyprus' Greek government and has been supporting the unacknowledged Turkish state of Cyprus in the northern part of the island. Turkey said on 12 July 2006 it had opened one of its ports and an airport to Cyprus' Greek ships and planes.

The other conflict between Turkey and Greece over sovereignty and related rights in the area of the Aegean Sea is called the Aegean dispute. Since 1998, the two countries have been coming closer to overcome the tensions through a series of diplomatic measures, particularly with a view to facilitates Turkey's accession to the European Union. However, as of 2006, differences over suitable diplomatic paths to a substantial solution are still unresolved.

Talking about the other *political criteria's*, Turkey continues sufficiently fulfill them and has continued political reforms. However the pace has slowed during the past year. Significant further efforts are needed in particular on freedom of expression. Further improvements are also needed on the rights of non-Muslim religious communities, women's rights, trade unions rights and on civilian control of the military.

Regarding free expression of opinion, many problems still remain and in this respect the new penal code only constitutes limited progress. In the field of protection of minorities and the exercise of cultural rights, the prohibition on the use of the Kurdish and other languages was lifted, but these minority groups are still discriminated. Cultural rights in the field of broadcasting and training in minority languages are still considerably restricted.

There has been little change in the situation as regards children rights. Implementation of legal provisions concerning education and employment under the age of fifteen needs to be improved.

Women's rights receive growing public attention in Turkey, and civil society is increasingly able to play a positive role in this area. However in practice women's rights are not always protected, in particular in the poorest areas of the country. 'Honour crimes' need to be investigated more systematically and where appropriate followed-up with the prosecution and convictions.

And also there is limited progress on legislative reforms in the fight against corruption. Corruption remains widespread and still remains a serious problem in all sectors of the economy and public life.

Turkey is a large country in population terms – there are some estimation that in 2015 Turkey will have a population of 82.1 million, and in 2025 85 million people and will be the largest EU member state.

As regards *economic criteria*, Turkey can be seen as a functioning market economy, as long as it firmly maintains its recent stabilization and reform achievements. Stability-oriented macroeconomic policies have contributed to strong economic growth and growing resilience to shocks, after 2001 crisis. Budget deficits and government debt levels have been significantly reduced and some key measures have been taken to enhance the social security system. Turkey's economy is characterized by major regional inequality.

On one hand Turkey had to fulfill these formal criteria's and join the European Union, but the other hand there are the other European countries, who already are members of EU, and they must think about Turkey as a different country, with different traditions and different religion.

Firstly, we have to raise a question if the Turkey is a European country? According to the Maastricht Treaty of the European Union and to the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe "*Any European State may apply to become a member of the Union*". Therefore it is essential to define whether the applicant is an European country or not. Geographically only 3% of Turkey's territory, called the Thrace lies in Europe. The rest of Turkey's territory is called Asia Minor. So, from a geographical point of view, Turkey is an Asian country. Turkey is a large but poor country, with strategically important but complex and sensitive geographical location.

Although, traditions and habits of Turks are totally different from European customs. Based on their religious-traditional background, up to 50% of women (according to Amnesty International) suffer from domestic violence, and there are still up to 300 "honor killings" per year in Turkey. ("Honour killing" is the murder of a female family member because of her improper behavior, such as not wearing a hajib, having sex before marriage, adultery suspicions and others). These deeply rooted customs can in no way be considered to be acceptable in Europe.

Even though among Islamic countries, Turkey is undoubtedly closest to the Western conception of democracy, it is impossible to ignore the threat of gradual but steady Islamisation.

Despite, a number of legislative changes have been adopted, Turkey still ranks among countries with substantial violation of human rights. Gender equality, fundamental freedoms including freedom of worship and zero discrimination of minorities seem far away. There are still a high number of incidences of prisoner torture and degrading treatment of women.

Also Turkey still hasn't recognized the massacre of 1,5 million Armenians in years 1915-1923 as genocide. Before World War One, the Armenians were the largest non-Turkish minority. The 1915/16 genocide of the Armenians, in the course of which at least 1 million Armenians were killed, led to an "ethnic cleansing" of Anatolia. Moreover, 500,000 Assyrian Christians fell victim to the genocide. Turkish official quarters still deny the Armenian genocide and the "ethnic cleansing". Far from it, it is commonly taught in schools that no genocide has ever occurred.

It was always going to be difficult to get Turkey into the EU. On top of complications arising from its poverty, its mostly Muslim culture and its mistreatment of the Kurds, it would be the largest member, with the most votes in the Council of Ministers and the most seats in the European Parliament. Even so, the accession talks have been unnecessarily fraught.

So these reasons shows that accession of Turkey to European Union is a long process and must be very well considered.

Otherwise, for the EU, a rejection of Turkish membership would represent a huge lost opportunity. Europe's foreign policy, and its hopes of global significance, would suffer a catastrophic loss of credibility if it were seen to be blackballing a moderate Muslim country that has NATO's second-largest army. The EU's reputation in the Muslim world, which is watching the membership talks with Turkey closely, would sink, perhaps even below America's. The election in 2002 of the Justice and Development (AK) party as Turkey's first single-party government in 15 years changed the political landscape. Under Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who became prime minister in 2003, the mildly Islamist AK party has undertaken ambitious reforms with the long-term aim of bringing Turkey into the European Union. These weakened the country's meddlesome generals and began reversing decades of corruption, economic mess and authoritarian abuse of power.

But formal talks on EU membership have stumbled badly since 2005. Meanwhile, an upsurge in ultra-nationalism, the long-term future of Cyprus and a festering Kurdish problem remain unresolved and damaging to relations with America and the EU. Discouraged, Mr Erdogan seems to be having second thoughts on further integration. At home, disturbing resistance from secularist generals in April 2007 caused him to call an early election, which his party is likely to win<sup>1</sup>.

Turkish accession will change the EU's borders but it will also change Turkish relations with its neighbors. Overall, Turkish accession will extend and deepen EU foreign policy interests in its surrounding regions. Turkey will have considerable impact on the European Union, but it is an impact that can be managed as previous enlargements have been.

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<sup>1</sup> „The Economist” – 3 May 2007