

# The Future of Turkey in Europe

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The Brussels European Council decision of 17th December 2004 to begin accession negotiations with Turkey marks a watershed in the course of Turkey's relations with the EU. An associate member since 1964, Turkey's path to formal candidacy has been uneven, marred by frustrations and reversals. Its 1987 bid for membership was rebuffed two years later, when the Commission indefinitely postponed an assessment of the application; the Luxembourg European Council declined in 1997 to grant Turkey candidate status, although it had concluded a customs union with the EU the year before. The Brussels decision came in the wake of the 1999 Helsinki Council, which recognized Turkey "as a candidate state destined to join the Union on the basis of the same criteria as applied to other candidate States,"<sup>1</sup> and of the 2002 Copenhagen Council which decided to open negotiations with Turkey "without delay,"<sup>2</sup> if Turkey was found to have fulfilled the Copenhagen criteria by December 2004. As a result of the far-reaching reforms (including constitutional amendments) made since 2001, the Brussels Council decided, "Turkey sufficiently fulfills the Copenhagen political criteria to open accession negotiations."<sup>3</sup> Turkey's membership, though not foreseen before the adoption of the Financial Framework from 2014, will

represent a major enlargement by itself, with a significant Mediterranean dimension comparable to the Community's southern enlargement in the 1980s. With its 4,768 km Aegean and Mediterranean coastline and 911 km border with Syria, Turkey stands to become the largest Mediterranean country in the EU, in addition to being the largest member state; its accession will extend the EU territory into the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East as well as the Black Sea region. After Turkey's entry, along with the anticipated future accession of Croatia and Albania, the entirety of the northern Mediterranean shore will have become continuous EU territory, with the insignificant exception of Monaco, leaving, with the notable exception of Israel, only the Arab-Muslim countries of the MENA region outside the EU.

Turkey's path to candidacy and negotiations has also been closely linked to its relations with its Mediterranean neighbors. The Helsinki decision was taken after Greece lifted its objections to Turkey's EU candidacy, as a result of the 1999 rapprochement between the two countries. When the 2002 Copenhagen Council decided to admit Cyprus in May 2004, despite lack of progress in the talks concerning the unification of the island, it took the risk of bringing into the EU an unsettled border dispute between an accession and a candidate country, in addition to the close involvement, in the same dispute, of a Member State. Throughout 2003, the Turkish government continued "its efforts to find a comprehensive settlement for all the Cyprus problem,"<sup>4</sup> but

<sup>1</sup> *Presidency Conclusions: Helsinki European Council, 10 and 11 December 1999*, see [http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/ACFA4C.htm](http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/ACFA4C.htm)

<sup>2</sup> *Presidency Conclusions: Copenhagen European Council, 12 and 13 December 2002*, see [http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/73842.pdf](http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/73842.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> *Presidency Conclusions Brussels European Council, 16 and 17 December 2004*, see [http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/83201.pdf](http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/83201.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> *2003 Regular Report on Turkey's progress towards accession and 2004 Regular Report on Turkey's progress towards accession*, see <http://www.deltur.cec.eu.int/english/2003RegularReport.doc> and [http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report\\_2004/pdf/rr\\_tr\\_2004\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report_2004/pdf/rr_tr_2004_en.pdf)

the talks remained in deadlock, giving rise to concerns that Turkey could face “a serious obstacle” in the way of beginning formal negotiations.<sup>5</sup> At the end of March 2004, Turkey’s prime minister, along with his Greek counterpart, participated in the Bürgenstock negotiations between the two Cypriot communities, organized under the auspices of the U.N. Secretary-General. Concomitantly, Ankara stepped up to its campaign to promote Turkish Cypriot support for the revised Annan plan for the unification of Cyprus. Although the Bürgenstock talks ended without an endorsement by the Greek Cypriots of the U.N. plan, referenda on the plan were nevertheless held in both parts of the island on 24th April 2004. While the majority of the Turkish Cypriot community voted for the plan, the Greek Cypriot community overwhelmingly rejected it. On 1st May 2004 the Republic of Cyprus, comprising the Greek Cypriot part of the divided island, joined the EU. Recognizing Turkey’s vigorous support of the reunification plan, in June 2004, Brussels Council welcomed “the positive contribution of the Turkish government” towards achieving a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem; at the same time it urged Turkey to proceed with the “adaptation of the Ankara Agreement to take account of the accession of the new Member States.”<sup>6</sup>

The Cyprus issue arose as one of the challenging questions during the December 2004, Brussels summit. Although in 2002 EU-15 had not explicitly put forth the resolution of the island’s division as a precondition for beginning accession talks with Turkey (the only precondition being the fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria), and although Turkey stood “on a high ground because of the constructive role it played” in promoting the Annan plan<sup>7</sup>, it now had to reckon with the Republic of Cyprus as a Member State. Turkey’s dilemma was how to avoid recognizing the Nicosia government as the sole representative of the whole island while extending the customs union to the ten new Member States. An interim solution was found by having Turkey declare its intent to sign “the Protocol on the adoption of the Ankara

Agreement prior to the start of the accession negotiations.”<sup>8</sup>

The second set of challenges stemmed from the opposition, particularly strong in some EU member states, to Turkey’s full membership. Upon Turkey’s insistence, the Council declared, “The stated objective of the negotiations is accession,” but also stated in the next sentence, “These negotiations are an open ended process, the outcome of which cannot be guaranteed beforehand.” The summit Conclusions also referred to “long transition periods, derogations, specific arrangements or permanent safeguard measures.”<sup>9</sup> Even as Turkey has moved closer to membership, doubts about its ‘Europeanness’ do not seem to have correspondingly diminished. Although Turkey’s eligibility for membership has never been officially questioned by the Commission, an obsession with Turkey’s lack of adequate European credentials has continued unabated in [Western] European public opinion as well as in some politically influential circles within the EU. As a result, European debates on Turkey’s membership have focused more on the EU’s ability to absorb a country as large and different as Turkey than Turkey’s ability to fully adapt to European norms.

What will be the potential impact of Turkey’s membership on the EU? First, with Turkey in, the EU’s borders would reach Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan as well as Iran, Iraq and Syria, straddling two geostrategically important regions: the Middle East beyond the eastern Mediterranean and the southern Caucasus bordering on the Caspian basin. At the same time, the Union will also have incorporated an effective regional power: with its historical experience and familiarity with the neighborhood, Turkey would stand to provide greater weight and strategic depth to the EU’s engagement in these two regions. Far from representing a geographical overextension, the EU’s involvement, as a global actor, in both the Middle East and the Black Sea-Caspian region is in keeping with its own European Neighborhood Policy (ENP, which includes Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) and with its Euro-Mediterra-

<sup>5</sup> William Chislett, “Turkey’s Membership of the European Union: A Rose or a Thorn?” Real Instituto Elcano, Working Paper no. 17/2004.

<sup>6</sup> *Presidency Conclusions: Brussels European Council, 17-18 June 2004*, see [http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/81742.pdf](http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/81742.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Kemal Kirici, “The December 2004 European Council: Is it an Historic Turning Point?” *MERIA: The Middle East Review of International Affairs* 8 (No.4, Article 8: December 2004).

<sup>8</sup> *Presidency Conclusions: Brussels European Council, 16-17 December 2004*, see [http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/83201.pdf](http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/83201.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

near Partnership (EMP, alias the Barcelona Process), which includes Syria.<sup>10</sup> Even if Iran and Iraq are not listed among the EMP countries, the EU has already engaged with the former in a significant way (tying its initiative to abort Iran's nuclear ambitions to its new policy of transatlantic cooperation) and is likely to have no choice but to engage eventually in the rehabilitation of the latter. In addition to Turkey's potential future role as an active promoter of both ENP and EMP in the neighborhood, its membership can also be expected to result in a broader zone of stability around the Balkans as well as the Black Sea region as a whole. Turkey's membership, according to several EU political leaders, would also provide an effective deterrent against the spread of fundamentalist Islam in Europe. Bringing this secular republic with an overwhelmingly Muslim population into the EU, they argue, would not only anchor a geostrategically significant partner into the European structures but would also send a convincing message to the Muslim world as a whole of the EU's rejection of the "clash of civilizations" thesis.

The second is the potential impact Turkey's entry would have on EU institutions, decision-making, and budget as well as on regional disparities and migration, given its size, population, and economy. It is true that if Turkey were to join EU-27 today (assuming membership of Bulgaria and Romania), it would add 18 per cent to the EU-27 surface area, and 15 per cent to the population, but only 2.2 per cent to the GDP.<sup>11</sup> But assuming that Turkey vigorously adheres to its reform program, ensuring continued macro-economic and fiscal stability, it will enjoy a much higher growth rate (around 6-7 per cent per annum) than EU-25; it will be able to attract significantly increased foreign direct investment, resulting in even faster development in industrial growth poles such as the greater Istanbul area. Steady convergence with the EU over the next decade will not only reduce the disparity between the economy of EU-27 and that

of Turkey (although it will take several decades for the Turkish economy to catch up with that of the enlarged EU), but redirect the migration from Turkey's rural areas to its domestic growth poles, thus reducing the outflow to Europe of unskilled or semi skilled labor.<sup>12</sup> High-growth scenarios leading to Turkey's accession in 2015 consistently yield significantly lower migration flows to the EU-15 than lower-growth scenarios without a membership perspective, even when free movement of labor is calculated into the high-growth scenarios.<sup>13</sup> It appears unlikely that Turkey, as an EU member a decade from now, would export unskilled workforce to the EU-15; on the contrary, it is more likely that skilled persons and professionals, attracted by higher salaries, would be filling vacancies in the EU-15 which, by then, will be hard pressed to address economic challenges due to its aging population. The economies of EU member states would stand to benefit, although only slightly, from Turkey's accession that would open up a range of market opportunities as well as provide required labor supply; the Turkish economy, however, would significantly benefit from membership except for the slight negative impact of the anticipated 'brain drain' as a result of qualified labor migration to the EU-15.<sup>14</sup> Despite very large disparities Turkey would bring into the EU (both domestically within Turkey and as a poor Member State to the whole of the EU), and despite the large share of agriculture in its economy (second only to Romania), the cost of Turkey's membership to the EU is likely to be less than that of the 2004 enlargement (€37 bn vs. €41 bn in 1999 prices), if Turkey were given a financial package similar to that earmarked for Bulgaria and Romania.<sup>15</sup> While Turkey's impact on economic decision-making will be low given the relative size of its economy, its membership will "add to the relative weight in EU decision-making of the larger countries."<sup>16</sup> However, Turkey's voting weight will not be more than be 14.4 per cent (compared to Germany's 14.5), if it becomes a part of EU-28; under

<sup>10</sup> Roberto Aliboni, "The Geopolitical Implications of the European Neighbourhood Policy," *European Foreign Affairs Review* 10 (No.1: Spring 2005): 1-16.

<sup>11</sup> Commission of the European Communities, *Issues Arising from Turkey's Membership Perspective* Commission Staff Working Document SEC(2004) 1202, see [http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report\\_2004/pdf/issues\\_paper\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report_2004/pdf/issues_paper_en.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> ERZAN, Refik, KUZUBAŞ, Umut and YILDIZ, Nilüfer, "Growth and Immigration Scenarios for Turkey and the EU," Centre for European Policy Studies, EU-Turkey Working Papers 13 (December 2004).

<sup>14</sup> A.M. Lejour, R.A. de Mooij and C.H. Capel, "Assessing the Economic Implications of Turkish Accession to the EU," Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis, CPB Document 56 (March 2004).

<sup>15</sup> Kirsty Hughes, *The Political Dynamics of Turkish Accession to the EU*, Sieps: Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, Report 2004:9.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

the provisions of the constitutional treaty, it will be assigned the maximum number of 84 seats, representing 11.2 per cent of the seats in the EP, the same as Germany.

Turkey's membership in a decade or so will arguably depend on two conditions: political will and engagement in Turkey to pursue European criteria and practice in political, economic, and civic life on one hand, and political will and a sense of purpose among EU leadership, on the other, to communicate effectively to the public the contribution Turkey stands to make to the EU as member. Since its candidacy in 1999 Turkey's foreign policy has shifted towards an alignment with that of the EU, particularly in terms of adopting a multilateral approach towards the Balkans and the Caucasus. Further convergence is likely to make Turkey an effective producer of security (hard and soft) in the neighborhood. Support for the EU as well as Turkey's membership has been particularly strong in Turkish public opinion and, unlike most Eastern accession countries, it is expected to remain strong during accession negotiations, provided that

the EU does not discriminate, or be perceived to be discriminating, against Turkey. Though Turkey is expected to relate to the EU institutions and processes decidedly on an intergovernmental basis (rather than assuming a federalist approach), its preference ought not to be interpreted as a sign of its potential centrifugal effect that would distract the EU from achieving deeper political integration and stronger European identity. Multi-speed Europe (or an EU with a variable geometry) is now a fact of life, with some member countries remaining out of the Scene agreement and others out of the Euro zone. The recent enlargement as well as the anticipated ones is likely to reinforce this flexibility and take advantage of it, so as not to impose on new members obligations that they might not be able to meet. In the final analysis, it will have to be a far more cosmopolitan and Europeanized Turkey that will become a member of a larger and culturally much more differentiated EU which, by virtue of having embraced Turkey, will have resolved the Eastern Question that was created by its ancestors.