

Turkey's Post-EU World

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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For the moment, at least, the notion that Turkey will become a full EU member state is no longer true.

In the past 10 years the relationship between Turkey and the European Union (EU) has transformed drastically. A decade ago, Turkey lacked any real economic growth, which translated into low self-esteem nationally. Turkey, believing its only solution was to become a member of the European community, desperately hoped for a successful bid into the EU. This perception, however -- that Turkey has to subsume itself under the European continent and become a member of Europe in order to succeed -- is now history.

A great deal has changed within the past decade, which has shifted Turkey's focus away from the EU. Europe's economic conundrums and problems arising within individual member states have made the EU a less attractive venture in the minds of many Turks. Beyond this, however, is the fact that in the last decade, the Turkish economy has grown significantly. According to some estimates, the GDP has more than doubled, income per capita has increased by three times and Turks are wealthier than ever before. This high rate of economic growth has given Turks a new sense of self-confidence as well as a newfound role for the country's foreign policy.

Ten years ago, Turkey's foreign policy would have been pretty much indexed to that of its Western allies. Currently, Turkey is more of an independent actor regionally and globally. It will work with the United States, NATO and the European Union, but it will not allow those alliances to solely drive its foreign policy. Turkey's new foreign policy is best characterized by President Obama and Prime Minister Erdogan's close relationship. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan reportedly receives more frequent phone calls from the White House than the British prime minister. With such close attention from Washington, who in Ankara feels the need to call Brussels?

While Turkey's perception of the EU has changed in the past decade, so has Europe's perception of Turkey. Many in the EU believe Turkey is perhaps too big to be successfully integrated into the union. Turkey is not a tiny country. The EU has a population of 500 million people and Turkey's population is roughly 75 million. Turkey's entrance would be a significant addition to the union. Not only this, but 10 years ago the EU had the money to integrate

countries such as Turkey from the fringes of the continent. It no longer has the capital available to do so.

The recent changes within Turkey have certainly altered the identity of the country as a whole. Turkey no longer sees itself as a country whose historic vocation is to join Europe. It is rather a country which has a European overlay to its identity but a very independent Turkish one as well. It is a country that is growing economically while every European country is going through a financial meltdown. It is a country brimming with self-confidence and an independent outlook to the future.

So what is the future of Turkish-EU ties? Beyond membership, the relations will enter a period of strategic dialogue. They will cooperate on a select number of issues, but they will also fail to cooperate on a number of other issues. The notion that Turkey will become a full member state of the EU is no longer the case -- at least for now.

Soner Cagaptay is director of the Turkish Research Program at The Washington Institute. ❖

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