

## Turkey under the AKP: Neither a European nor a Regional Power (Part 3)

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Articles & Testimony

**R**ead [part 1 \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC06.php?CID=1518\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC06.php?CID=1518) and [part 2 \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC06.php?CID=1520\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC06.php?CID=1520).

Believing that the supposedly reformed Islamist Justice and Development Party, or AKP, could be a bridge-builder between Europe and Muslim countries, some promoted the AKP as a special mediator in the region, shielding it from those who worried early on about the AKP's worldview.

In 2002, many people celebrated the idea that the AKP was the herald of Europe to the Muslim world; now, though, it appears the AKP is the envoy of a politically charged and, by fiat, anti-Western "Muslim world" to Europe.

The AKP's foreign policy vision has failed. Turkey has moved away from Europe and, in doing this, has not become the regional power or trusted mediator in Middle East issues it sought to be. Much to the chagrin of those who want to see a powerful Turkey, it has not become the "center country" which bridges the East and the West, communicates with both Israelis and Palestinians and garners the trust of both Iran and Europe. The European Union needs to face the reality that, despite the country's NATO membership, Turkey can no longer be considered a European ally under the AKP.

### The Way Forward: Turkey Must Join Europe

There is a way forward: EU accession. If Turkey's EU accession had been stalled in the pre September 11 world, I would have said it was a real shame, but no catastrophe. Then, Turkey had room to be outside the EU but still part of Europe and the West. Now, with the EU pushing its boundaries into the Balkans and towards Turkey, and with al-Qaeda pursuing a war between a politically-defined and charged "Muslim world" and Europe, a gray area in which Turkey can position itself no longer exists. Turkey must become an EU member and part of Europe, or else fold into the "Muslim world," as per al-Qaeda's vision.

Turkey's foreign policy involvement produces unconstructive results for Europe and stimulates Islamist tendencies among the Turkish population. The solution is to take Turkey out of the Middle East, and put it in Europe, where it belongs. Therefore, European leaders should make Turkey's EU accession and NATO membership the dominant part of their discussion with the AKP and the Turkish public.

There is hope in this regard since Turkey remains a multi-party democracy and only one-third of Turkey's population supports the AKP. The AKP has been sliding in polls since the opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP, elected charismatic, pro-European, liberal, and social democrat leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu. As a result, following the Gaza flotilla incident, the AKP has been employing vehement anti-European rhetoric, conjuring hysteria to boost its popularity. It will continue to use populist, anti-European foreign policy to boost its popularity in the run up to next year's elections.

### And This Would Be Good for Europe, Too

But what if Turkey's EU accession talks fail to move? Membership talks have slowed to such a grinding halt that the proverbial Turkish-EU accession train recalls a joke about the trains in Brezhnev's Soviet Union: with Russia stagnating, the trains did not move and the scenery did not change, so the people said "choo-choo" to create the illusion of locomotion. This epitomizes Turkey's EU accession and, at some point, the Turks will realize that their EU train is not moving forward and will disembark. This will be a disaster, ending Turkey's consolidation as a liberal democracy and exposing dangerous consequences for Europe.

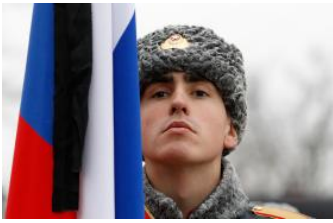
If Europe keeps saying no to Ankara, what kind of a message would the continent be sending to its Muslims?

On a recent trip to Paris, I received a forty minute lecture on Turkey's EU accession from a Parisian whose parents had immigrated to France from Mauritania. He was not only well acquainted with the historic details of Turkey's EU accession -- "Ankara applied to join the Union in 1963, before my parents came to France," he noted -- but he also knew more than I did about the details of the accession talks, including on which of the 120,000 pages of EU legislation France is now blocking Turkey. When I asked him why he followed Turkey's accession with such interest, he responded that "this is about whether there is room for me in Europe." What is good for Turkey is also good for Europe.

\* This column originally appeared in Limes (Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica).

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