

The Eve of Decision:

Will Europe Admit Turkey?

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Dec 15, 2004

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Brief Analysis

On October 6, 2004, the European Commission released its final report on Turkey's progress toward satisfying the EU's accession rules, known as the Copenhagen Criteria. Although the report stated that "Turkey satisfies the Copenhagen Criteria sufficiently" to enter accession talks, many European countries and the EU itself are still debating whether or not to take that step. This fact serves as proof that Turkish accession is not only a technical process -- defined for other candidate countries as satisfying the Copenhagen Criteria -- but also a political one in which other "non-Copenhagen" criteria and expectations play a role. Hence, even though Ankara has satisfied the Copenhagen Criteria, Turkey's EU membership is not yet a certainty.

On the popular level, the strongest objection against Turkish accession is cultural: Turkey's population is predominantly Muslim. Opposition parties in France and Germany are using this argument in order to raise their own domestic political profile. In France, Nicholas Sarkozy, new leader of the governing Union for the People's Movement (UMP) and a likely challenger to President Jacques Chirac, has adamantly opposed opening accession talks with Ankara and even suggested taking the issue to a referendum. In Germany, Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) has suggested giving Turkey "privileged partnership" -- in other words, no membership. In Austria, both the government and popular opinion are against Turkey's membership, while in Denmark and the Netherlands public objections have diluted the previous governmental willingness to see Ankara in the EU.

Among EU bureaucrats, objections center on Turkey's size. If it becomes a full member, Turkey may quickly become the most populous country in the EU (it now has 72 million people compared to Germany's 82 million, but its population is growing and Germany's shrinking). In any case, Turkey will be a major decisionmaker in the EU. Moreover, based on past precedent, Turkey would be eligible for significant aid from Brussels. Due to the slow economic growth that has befallen EU countries for many years, Brussels simply does not have that kind of money. Some of the most powerful nations in the EU are not ready to admit this shortcoming and are instead focusing on full

implementation of the Copenhagen Criteria in the hope of finding alternative means of delaying or even obstructing accession.

Will the Process Move Ahead?

The EU may demand that Turkey recognize (Greek) Cyprus as a prerequisite for accession, despite Ankara's significant efforts to date, such as including the Greek Cypriots in its customs union with the EU. The prospects for accession would also take a blow if Turkey were to militarily intervene in northern Iraq (e.g., in support of the Turkmen community in Kirkuk, if Turkish public opinion believed that they were put in harm's way by the Iraqi Kurdish maximalist agenda of maintaining exclusive control over the city and surrounding oil fields). These scenarios aside, as long as politicians such as Sarkozy do not succeed in turning their opposition to Turkish membership into official policy, the Turkish accession process will move ahead. Initially, there will be little progress due to popular opposition in Europe. Nevertheless, the process will inch along because Brussels has figured out that it has more leverage on Ankara if it keeps Turkey focused on the EU.

EGEMEN BAGIS

The Turkish and AKP View

In the late nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was known as the "sick man" of Europe; even at its worst, then, Turkey was regarded as a European country, and it remains a European country. The AKP government has made tremendous efforts to fulfill the Copenhagen Criteria, not just to attain EU membership, but also for the welfare of the Turkish people. Turkey does not want special treatment from the EU, but it does not want to be held to any special conditions, either. The AKP expects the EU to treat Turkey with fairness, as it has treated all other candidate countries. As Prime Minister Erdogan stated recently, Ankara is not planning to accept anything other than an unconditional "yes" when the EU hands down its next decision on December 17. Some EU leaders have suggested privileged partnership as an alternative to full membership, but such a concept does not exist in the union's rules and regulations.

Turkey and Northern Iraq

Kurds are one of the main elements of the Turkish nation. Turkey does not have a problem with Kurds in general, with the Kurdish authority in northern Iraq, or with Iran or Syria. Yet, it does have a problem with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is responsible for the deaths of more than 30,000 people. The Kurdish parties in northern Iraq have a longstanding relationship with Turkey, though like any other relationship, it has had its trials and tribulations. Turkey strongly believes in Iraq's territorial integrity and feels that it shares affinities not only with the Turkmens, but also with Iraqi Arabs and Kurds.

MARK PARRIS

America Is Not a Long-Term Alternative to Europe

The most salubrious era for modern U.S.-Turkish relations coincided almost exactly with the period after the EU refused to consider Turkish accession at the 1997 Luxembourg Summit. Over the next few years, Turkish-EU relations hit rock bottom, and the United States was Turkey's only viable link to the West. The result was a remarkable flourishing of the U.S.-Turkish relationship, especially in the commercial field (including energy cooperation). In the late 1990s, there were very few issues that Turkey and the United States perceived differently. Iraq was arguably one of them, but Ankara and Washington nevertheless found a way to deal with this issue.

That said, Turkey's location, history, culture, and economy all dictate that Europe should be Turkey's main partner. For its part, the United States has been, and will remain, one of the strongest advocates of Turkish accession. Washington views EU membership as the best way of ensuring that Turkey becomes a more prosperous and stable

country. Turkish success is in turn viewed as an irreplaceable asset in any discussion of how Muslim societies should relate to the rest of the world in the post-September 11 era.

Since 1999, when the EU offered Turkey candidacy, strategic differences between the United States and Turkey have increased. Currently, Turkish policy is very similar to that of EU countries on global issues such as the World Criminal Court and regional issues related to Syria and Iran. Ankara and Washington are focusing more on issues that divide them than on those factors that have traditionally united them. This trend resulted from a new brand of political leadership in Turkey that looks at world politics differently.

Europe and America are not mutually exclusive options for Turkey, however. This seems like common sense, but it has not always been the case over the past few years. Turkey should keep in mind that good relations with United States are a demonstrable asset as it continues its discussions with the EU.

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Nazli Gencsoy, a Dr. Marcia Robbins-Wilf scholar and research assistant for The Washington Institute's Turkish Research Program. ❖

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