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European Union Enlargement: A Status Report on Turkey's Accession Negotiations

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Summary

October 2013 marked the eighth anniversary of the European Union's decision to launch formal negotiations with Turkey toward full membership in the Union. Throughout all of 2012 and the first half of 2013, little or no progress was made on any open chapters of the EU's rules and regulations known as the *acquis communautaire*, as formal accession talks between Turkey and the EU seemed to have reached a political and technical stalemate.

In February 2013, France, which has been part of a group in the EU that has expressed doubts about Turkey's EU membership, signaled that it was prepared to support opening at least one new chapter of the *acquis* (Chapter 22, Regional Policy) as a way to rejuvenate the accession talks. This step was supported by many EU member states, although some retained their doubts. Eventually, agreement was reached to open the first new chapter of the *acquis* in over three years and to resume the actual negotiations in June.

In early June 2013 public protests in Turkey over the future of a park (Gezi) and the government's tough reaction precipitated a harsh response from Brussels and a resolution from the European Parliament expressing its "deep concern at the disproportionate and excessive use of force by the Turkish police." Turkish officials responded with tough rhetoric toward the EU. After two weeks of rather nasty verbal sparring, and Ankara's continued crackdown on the protestors, several EU member states threatened to press for the postponement of the scheduled accession talks. Since neither side really wanted to end the accession process despite mutual ill-feelings, the EU agreed to open the new chapter but to postpone the resumption of the actual accession negotiations until October 2013 once the protests in Turkey subsided and after the national elections in Germany. The talks officially resumed on November 5, 2013.

In October 2013, the European Commission issued its annual assessment of the progress of the candidate countries, including Turkey. The Commission's report seemed more upbeat than previous versions restating Turkey's importance to the EU and offering a few positive conclusions including references to a new democracy proposal circulating in Ankara. However, the Commission expressed overall disappointment with Turkey's progress on a number of issues including its handling of the Gezi Park protests, freedom of expression and media freedom. The Commission again expressed concern over Turkey's continued refusal to extend diplomatic recognition to EU member Cyprus, and Turkey's position to basically ignore the Cyprus Presidency of the EU Council in the latter half of 2012.

For many Turks, EU membership seems to have lost its appeal with some public opinion polls suggesting only 35% of Turks felt Turkey would join the EU. Turkey's economy continues to thrive and Ankara continues to try to reposition and strengthen itself in its own neighborhood between secular Europe and the Islamist emergence in the Middle East. Many Turks seem to feel "being European" or gaining membership in the Union is no longer needed in order to secure Turkey's status or to have an otherwise normal partnership with Europe. European support for Turkey, never really that strong among the average citizenry, now seems even more ambivalent.

This report provides a brief overview of the EU's accession process and Turkey's path to EU membership. The U.S. Congress has had a long-standing interest in Turkey as a NATO ally and partner in regional foreign policy and energy security issues. Although some Members of Congress have expressed continued support for Turkey's membership in the EU, congressional interest and enthusiasm seems to have diminished recently.

Contents

The EU Accession Process 1
Turkey's Path to European Union Accession 2
Current Status of Turkey's Accession 10
New Agenda—Relabeled Approach 10
Movement Toward New Negotiations 12
Assessment 13
U.S. Perspective 16

Contacts

Author Information 17

The EU Accession Process[1]

The European Union (EU) views enlargement as an historic opportunity to promote stability and prosperity throughout Europe. The criteria for EU membership require candidates to adopt political values and norms shared by the Union by achieving "stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities; a functioning market economy, as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union."[2]

Under Article 49 of the Treaty on the European Union, any European country may apply for membership if it meets a set of criteria established by the Treaty. In addition, the EU must be able to absorb new members, so the EU can decide when it is ready to accept a new member.

Applying for EU membership is the start of a long and rigorous process. The EU operates comprehensive approval procedures that ensure new members are admitted only when they have met all requirements, and only with the active consent of the EU institutions and the governments of the EU member states and of the applicant country. Basically, a country that wishes to join the EU submits an application for membership to the European Council, which then asks the EU Commission to assess the applicant's ability to meet the conditions of membership.

Accession talks begin with a screening process to determine to what extent an applicant meets the EU's approximately 80,000 pages of rules and regulations known as the *acquis communautaire.* The *acquis* is divided into 35 chapters that range from free movement of goods to agriculture to competition. Detailed negotiations at the ministerial level take place to establish the terms under which applicants will meet and implement the rules in each chapter. The European Commission proposes common negotiating positions for the EU on each chapter, which must be approved unanimously by the Council of Ministers. In all areas of the *acquis,* the candidate country must bring its institutions, management capacity, and administrative and judicial systems up to EU standards, both at national and regional levels. During negotiations, applicants may request transition periods for complying with certain EU rules. All candidates receive financial assistance from the EU, mainly to aid in the accession process. Chapters of the *acquis* can only be opened and closed with the approval of all member states, and chapters provisionally closed may be reopened. Periodically, the Commission issues "progress" reports to the Council (usually in October or November of each year) as well as to the European Parliament assessing the progress achieved by a candidate country. Once the Commission concludes negotiations on all 35 chapters with an applicant, a procedure that can take years, the agreements reached are incorporated into a draft accession treaty, which is submitted to the Council for approval and to the European Parliament for assent. After approval by the Council and Parliament, the accession treaty must be ratified by each EU member state and the candidate country. This process of ratification of the final accession treaty can take up to two years or longer.[3]

The largest expansion of the EU was accomplished in 2004 when the EU accepted 10 new member states. In January 2007, Romania and Bulgaria became EU members. Croatia formally joined the Union on July 1, 2013 bringing the Union to its current 28 member states. The EU has continued to support the enlargement process. Currently, there are five candidate countries; Montenegro, which was given candidate status in December 2010 and formally opened accession negotiations with the EU on June 19, 2012; Serbia which was granted candidate status in March

[1] For more detailed information on EU accession see, "The Process of Joining the EU" on the European Commission's website at http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement.

[2] Conclusions of the European Council, Copenhagen, Denmark, June 1993.

[3] CRS Report RS21344, *European Union Enlargement*, by Kristin Archick.

2012 and could begin actual negotiations by January 2014; Macedonia, which has a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU, but whose negotiations have been blocked by Greece and Bulgaria, and Turkey. Iceland, which began the accession process in July 2010 and opened and closed several chapters of the *acquis* has come under a new government which has reportedly told the EU Commission that it was no longer interested in pursuing membership in the Union.

Prior to October 2009, in order for enlargement to continue, two barriers that existed had to be overcome. First, and although not explicitly stated, certain conditions established by the 2000 Treaty of Nice seemed to limit the EU to 27 members. In order for any other new country to be admitted to the Union, the Nice Treaty had to be amended or a new treaty ratified to allow further expansion of the Union. The Lisbon Treaty[4], which was agreed to in 2007 and took effect on December 1, 2009, permitted, among other things, future enlargement of the Union to continue. A second barrier to the current accession structure involves any candidate country whose accession could have substantial financial consequences on the Union as a whole. Under this provision, admission of such a candidate could only be concluded after 2014, the scheduled date for the beginning of the EU's next 7 year budget framework.[5] Currently, only Turkey's candidacy would fall under this restriction although it is unlikely that Turkey would be admitted inot the Union within this 7-year timeframe.

Turkey's Path to European Union Accession

Turkey and the European Commission first concluded an Association Agreement (Ankara Agreement) aimed at developing closer economic ties in 1963. A key provision of that agreement was the commitment by Turkey to establish a customs union that would be applied to each EU member state. In 1987, Turkey's first application for full EU membership was deferred until 1993 on the grounds that the European Commission was not considering new members at the time. Although not technically a rejection of Turkey, the decision did add Turkey to a list, along with the United Kingdom, of nations to have been initially turned down for membership in the Union. In 1995, a Customs Union agreement between the EU and Turkey entered into force, setting a path for deeper integration of Turkey's economy with that of Europe's. In 1997, the Luxembourg EU summit confirmed Turkey's eligibility for accession to the EU but failed to put Turkey on a clear track to membership. The EU recognized Turkey formally as a candidate at the 1999 Helsinki Council summit but asserted that Turkey still needed to comply sufficiently with the EU's political and economic criteria before accession talks could begin.[6]

In February 2001, the EU formally adopted an "Accession Partnership" with Turkey, which set out the priorities Turkey needed to address in order to adopt and implement EU standards and legislation. Although Ankara had hoped the EU would set a firm date for initiating negotiations at the December 2002 EU Copenhagen Summit, no agreement was reached. Two years later, 10 new member states, including a divided Cyprus, were admitted into the Union. In December 2004, and despite the fact that Turkey had still not met its obligations regarding the application of its customs union to the EU member states, the European Council stated unanimously that Turkey had made enough progress in legislative process, economic stability, and judicial reform to proceed with accession talks within a year. In the aftermath of the Council's decision, the

[4] For additional information on the Lisbon Treaty and EU reform see, CRS Report RS21618, *The European Union's Reform Process: The Lisbon Treaty*, by Kristin Archick and Derek E. Mix.

[5] "The Process of Joining the EU," op. cit.

[6] CRS Report RS21344, *European Union Enlargement*, op. cit.

European Parliament voted overwhelmingly to support the Council's decision to move forward with Turkey.

Although projected by many to require at least 10 or more years to complete the accession, the question of Turkey's membership in the Union became a debating point during consideration of the Treaty for a European Constitution in the spring of 2005. Many observers suggested that one of the factors contributing to the defeat of the Treaty in France and the Netherlands was voter concern over continued EU enlargement and specifically over the potential admission of Turkey, which was considered by many as too large and too culturally different to be admitted into the Union.

Under a compromise formula agreed to by the Council, Turkey, before October 2005, would have to sign a protocol that would adapt the 1963 Ankara Agreement, including the customs union, to the 10 new member states of the Union, including the Republic of Cyprus. Turkey signed the Protocol in July 2005 but made the point that, by signing the Protocol, it was not granting diplomatic recognition to the Republic of Cyprus. Turkey insisted that recognition would only come when both the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities on the island were reunited. Ankara further stated that Turkey would not open its seaports or airspace to Greek Cypriot vessels until the EU ended the "isolation" of the Turkish Cypriots by providing promised financial aid that at the time was being blocked by Cyprus and opened direct trade between the EU and the north. The decision by Turkey to make such a declaration regarding Cyprus immediately served to sour attitudes of many within the EU. In September 2005, the EU Council issued a rebuttal reminding Turkey that Cyprus was a full member of the EU, that recognition of all member states was a necessary component of the accession process, and that the EU and its member states "expect full, non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol to all EU member states ... and that failure to implement its obligations in full will affect the overall progress in the negotiations."[7]

The controversy over Turkey's accession continued until October 3, 2005, when, after a prolonged debate over the status of Cyprus and expressions of concern by some European member states over admitting Turkey at all, the EU Council agreed to a "Negotiating Framework," and opened formal accession talks with Turkey. However, the language of the Framework included an understanding that the negotiations would be open-ended, meaning an outcome (eventual full membership) could not be guaranteed. This language was to become a significant rallying point for some European governments such as Germany, France, and Austria, which proposed that Turkey be given a "privileged partnership" or some type of closer relationship with Turkey but one which fell short of full membership in the Union.

For Turkey, 2006 became a difficult year in its relations with the EU even as formal negotiations between Brussels and Ankara began. The membership of Cyprus in the Union, despite the Greek Cypriot rejection of a U.N.-sponsored unification plan, and Turkey's public stance not to deal with the Greek Cypriot government, served to aggravate relations further and, in the opinion of some observers, may have contributed to the beginning of a change in attitude within Turkey and the EU toward each other. At the outset, Cyprus expressed its opposition to formally opening and closing the first of 35 negotiation chapters unless Ankara met its obligations to recognize all 10 new EU member states, including Cyprus. On June 16, 2006, the EU Presidency issued a statement that referred implicitly to Turkey's continued refusal to open its ports to Greek Cyprus

[7] Enlargement: Turkey, Declaration by the European Community and Its Member States, Council of the European Union, September 21, 2005.

as required by Turkey's customs union with the EU. The EU again asserted that Turkey's failure to "implement its obligations fully will have an impact on the negotiating process."[8]

The then-EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn warned Ankara that the resolution of the Cyprus issue was a central stumbling block in the accession talks and that a "train crash" was coming later in the year if Turkey did not resume implementing reforms and honoring its commitments in the Accession Agreement and the additional Protocol.[9]

In Ankara, advocates for closer relations with the EU began to believe that European interest in Turkey was changing and that what should have been EU incentives to promote and encourage necessary reforms in Turkey had become conditions that many Turks felt were designed to discourage Turkey. As a consequence, many observers believe that the reform process in Turkey began to slow as a reassessment of the relationship with the EU began to take hold.[10]

In September 2006, the European Parliament joined in the criticism of Turkey when the Committee on Foreign Affairs issued a progress report on Turkey's accession. The Parliament's findings suggested that reforms in Turkey had slowed, especially in the implementation of freedom of expression, protection of religious and minority rights, reform in law enforcement, and support for the independence of the judiciary, and urged Turkey to move forward. The Parliament also stated that "recognition of all member states, including Cyprus, is a necessary component of the accession process and urged Turkey to fulfill the provisions of the Association Agreement and Additional Protocol."[11] On September 14, 2006, then-Cyprus Foreign Minister George Lillikas suggested that without Turkey's compliance with its obligations, Cyprus would likely object to opening any further chapters of the *acquis*.[12]

On November 29, 2006, the EU Commission issued its assessment of Turkey's accession negotiations. Although acknowledging that negotiations should move forward, the Commission noted that Turkey had not met its obligations toward Cyprus and recommended that the Council not take actions regarding the opening of any new chapters in the *acquis*. At the EU Summit in December 2006, a compromise was reached that averted the worst possible outcome but clearly enunciated a strong opinion against Turkey. Based on the recommendations of the EU Commission,[13] the Council noted that Turkey had not fully implemented the additional Protocol to the Ankara Agreement and, more importantly, decided not to open negotiations on eight chapters of the *acquis*, or to provisionally close any chapters until the Commission had confirmed that Turkey had fully implemented its commitments under the Additional Protocol.[14] The Council further required the Commission to report on Turkey's progress "in its forthcoming annual reports, in particular 2007, 2008, and 2009."[15] While the compromise decision prevented any

[8] See Council of the European Union - 15/16 June (2006), Presidency Conclusions, at http://www.consilium.europa.eu.

[9] Interview with Olli Rehn on EU Enlargement, *Reuters,* March 28, 2006.

[10] A public opinion poll conducted by the German Marshall Fund in 2004 indicated that 75% of those Turks interviewed responded that being in the EU would be a good thing for Turkey. A similar poll in 2006 indicated that that number had declined to 54%. See *Transatlantic Trends*, German Marshall Fund, 2006.

[11] See "Turkey's Progress Towards Accession," Committee on Foreign Affairs, European Parliament, September 2006 at http://www.europarl.europa.eu.

[12] See "Cyprus FM: No More EU Chapters for Turkey Before Progress Report," Cyprus Embassy, September 2006.

[13] See "Commission presents its recommendations on the continuation of Turkey's accession negotiations," European Commission, November 29, 2006.

[14] This freeze on negotiations included chapters on the free movement of goods, right of establishment and freedom to provide services, financial services, agriculture and rural development, transport policy, and external relations, among others.

[15] Conclusions of the European Council, December 11, 2006.

dramatic action against Turkey, it did portend a slowing of the accession negotiations and, in the eyes of some Turkey skeptics, presented a deadline of sorts for Turkey to implement the Additional Protocol by December 2009, the final year of the Barosso Commission's term.

Between 2007 and 2011, the accession process muddled along with a mixed sense of direction and very little accomplishment. Turkey felt its EU aspirations had been dealt a serious blow with the EU decision to withhold negotiations on certain key chapters of the *acquis* until the Cyprus issue was resolved. In addition, the issue of Turkey's membership entered France's 2007 presidential election campaign, during which conservative candidate and then-Interior Minister Nicholas Sarkozy, in a campaign speech, stated that he felt Turkey should never become a member of the Union.[16]

During 2007, the EU agreed to open three additional chapters of the *acquis* and identify the benchmarks necessary to open 14 additional chapters should Turkey meet the requirements for doing so. By the end of the year, the EU Commission and Council in their annual accession progress reports noted some progress in the political reform process had been made but also pointed out areas where additional progress was needed. These areas included freedom of expression, the fight against corruption, cultural rights, and civilian oversight of the security forces. Both institutions also expressed regret that overall political reform had achieved limited progress and once again warned Turkey that it had not made any acceptable progress in establishing relations with Cyprus.[17]

Progress throughout 2008 continued to be negligible. However, despite ongoing internal political issues which polarized the political atmosphere in Turkey and the global economic crisis which began to consume the government's attention, six additional chapters of the *acquis* were formally opened by the EU. However, key chapters relating to energy, external relations, and security and defense matters had been held up by several EU member states, including France, although in the case of energy, France did propose to open this chapter during its 2008 Presidency of the EU Council.

In early 2009, Turkey in a sign of a renewed commitment to the accession process, announced the appointment of its first full-time EU accession negotiator, State Minister Egemen Bağış, a decision noted as a positive step by the EU Council. However, in March 2009 Turkey's accession process hit a political bump in the European Parliament. In a resolution on Turkey adopted by the Parliament, the members of Parliament noted with concern the "continuous slowdown of the reform process" and called on Turkey "to prove its political will to continue the reform process." The resolution also stressed the need to reach a solution to the Cyprus question and called for Turkey to remove its military forces from the island. Despite the concerns expressed by the Parliament, in June 2009 the 11th chapter of the *acquis* was opened, suggesting that Turkey was making some progress meeting the reform criteria.

As in all of their previous reports on the accession progress, the Commission, Council, and Parliament found positive issues that they could point to and noted in one year or another that they welcomed Turkey's continued commitment to the negotiation process, as well as advancements Turkey had made in judicial reform, civil-military relations, and cultural rights, relations with both the Kurds and Armenia, and its positive role in the Nabucco pipeline that the EU has sought to provide an alternative source for delivering natural gas to Europe.

[16] "News Analysis: Sarkozy May Cause Global Ripple," *International Herald Tribune,* September 11, 2006.

[17] Conclusions of the European Council, December 11, 2007.

Nevertheless, each assessment noted Turkey's shortcomings in the areas of freedom of expression and freedom of the press, respect for property rights, and in other areas. All three institutions continued to "note with deep regret that Turkey, despite repeated calls, continues refusing to fulfill its obligations regarding the Additional Protocol and normalization of its relations with the Republic of Cyprus."[18] The reports also noted that while Turkey has expressed public support for negotiations regarding a Cyprus solution, the EU expected Turkey to actively support the ongoing negotiations and was not satisfied that Turkey was fully engaged.

With little progress to point to, many Turkey skeptics in Europe had begun to suggest that the accession process for Turkey may have to be significantly altered. For instance, in an interview with Spanish news media in 2009, then-French Secretary of State for European Matters Pierre Lellouche reiterated his government's position that if Turkey failed to satisfy the requirements for membership or if the European Union's capacity for absorption did not permit it, alternatives should be considered. Although not specifically stating that the EU needed to prepare such alternatives by the end of 2009, Lellouche did state that "we wonder whether it is not the time to begin reflecting on alternative paths [for Turkey] without interrupting the negotiations."[19] This statement reflected France's (and perhaps others') continued opposition to full membership in the Union for Turkey and support for a then-to-be defined "special relationship" or "privileged partnership," which Turkey stated it would reject. Similarly, on September 11, 2009, Cypriot Foreign Minister Markos Kyprianou stated that while Cyprus was "a genuine supporter of Turkey's EU course," Cyprus was "one of the strictest supporters who are not prepared to compromise the principles and values that the EU is founded upon just for the sake of a speedier accession of our neighbor."[20]

In May 2010, the EU-Turkey Association Council, led by EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Füle and Turkey's chief negotiator for EU Affairs, Egemen Bağış met to discuss EU-Turkey relations. The EU welcomed the effort underway at the time to amend Turkey's constitution to strengthen democracy and rule of law but noted that more reform was needed in areas such as the fight against corruption, freedom of expression and of religion, and continued judicial reform.

On October 26, 2010, EU Commissioner Füle told an EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee meeting in Brussels that the outcome of Turkey's September constitutional reform referendum was a step towards EU accession.[21] Füle said the EU's 2010 progress report on Turkey would mention positive steps taken by Turkey such as lifting restrictions on broadcasting in languages other than Turkish, furthering judicial reform, and improving fundamental rights, but it would also voice concern about Turkey's difficulties in guaranteeing freedom of expression, press, and religion.

The 2010 progress reports issued by the European Commission and Council once again provided less-than-ringing endorsements of Turkey's progress reading much like previous assessments. Nevertheless, Egeman Bağış, Turkey's chief EU negotiator called the reports the "most positive and encouraging" Turkey had ever received.[22]

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[18] Ibid. EU Council, December 8, 2009.

[19] "France Seeks alternative to Turkey's EU membership," *TurkishNY.com,* September 3, 2009.

[20] "Cyprus, one of a few genuine supporters of Turkey's EU Course," *Cyprus News Agency,* September 11, 2009.

[21] Press Release, "EU Enlargement: Turkey must do more to protect basic freedoms," European Parliament, October 27, 2010.

[22] "EU Scolds Turkey on Border Issues," *Wall Street Journal*, November 10, 2010.

This attitude changed when the European Parliament adopted a resolution assessing Turkey's accession progress for 2010. The Parliament sharply criticized the government of Turkey for a lack of dialogue among the various political parties and noted the continued failure to implement the Additional Protocols. When the Parliament reserved its strongest criticism for the lack of press freedom in Turkey, a representative of the main Turkish opposition CHP party declared that "the latest report is the toughest-worded document drafted since ... formal negotiations began in 2005."[23] The tone of the resolution and debate in Parliament also provoked the anger of Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan, who stated that "there was no balance in this report" and suggested that the resolution was written by people who did not know Turkey.[24]

The two rather bland assessments of Turkey's accession progress by the Commission and Council and the tough assessment made by the Parliament led some to conclude that "Turkey's accession talks with the EU were heading for stalemate"[25] and that "EU leaders have undermined support for accession in Turkey"[26]

Some observers believed that the various Commission and Council assessments between 2006 and 2010 could have been the subject of very difficult internal debate due to a lack of consensus among the member states on how to respond to Turkey's shortcomings in the reform process and its continued failure to meet its customs union obligations toward Cyprus.[27] However, in most instances while the debates have highlighted disappointment and frustration on the part of the EU, it does not appear that the debates in either institution had been difficult after all, and both the Commission and Council, perhaps for the sake of the ongoing negotiations on Cyprus, have been able to issue what they believed to be balanced reports giving credit to the Turks for some positive developments and offering criticisms where there were noted shortcomings.

Throughout 2011 the accession negotiations with Turkey continued at a snail's pace, with talks for all practical purposes reaching a virtual political and technical stalemate. No new chapters of the *acquis* were opened in 2011 and very little progress had been achieved within the chapters already under negotiation. This lack of progress led Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu to state that the talks were at a bottleneck due to "political blockages"[28] and Prime Minister Erdogan in May to complain that France and Germany [among others] "are determined to have Turkey give up its interest in joining the EU."[29]

Turkey, for its part, was distracted in part due to a national election that was held in June 2011, with a deterioration in its relations with Israel and Syria, and with the on-going dilemma of Cyprus. In the elections, the AK Party of President Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan again emerged victorious solidifying the party's acceptance by the people and reaffirming support for the direction they were taking the country. The elections also gave Erdogan another five-year mandate to continue implementing the reform programs he had championed. Although the AKP had not won the super majority it had hoped for in the Parliament in order to guarantee the adoption of a new constitution, the AKP victory was thought to have paved the way for a new constitution and reform agenda by the end of 2012, goals not yet achieved.

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[23] Statement of Kader Sevinc to the Hurriyet Dailey News, March 9, 2011.

[24] "PM slams European Parliament report as 'unbalanced'". Hurriyet Daily News, March 11, 2011.

[25] Katinka Barysch, "Turkey and the EU: Can Stalemate be avoided?," Centre for European Reform, December 2010.

[26] Sinan Ulgen, "Turkish politics and the fading magic of EU enlargement," Centre for European Reform, December 2010.

[27] Observations made by the author during discussions with EU and other officials.

[28] "Turkey's EU membership talks deadlocked, FM Davutoglu says," *Hurriyet Daily News,* April 20, 2011.

[29] "France and Germany accused of 'Black campaign' against Turkey's EU bid," Hurriyet Daily News, May 12, 2011.

During the election campaign, as in the previous fall's referendum on constitutional reform, the EU and the accession process appeared to have been of little consequence, leading to further speculation that the Turkish leadership and general population were growing more ambivalent toward the EU as the catalyst for further domestic political reform and that membership in the Union may no longer be a necessary goal.

Despite this growing view, in June, Prime Minister Erdogan announced the establishment of the European Union Ministry to take over coordination of Turkey's EU accession process. Egeman Bagis, Turkey's chief EU accession negotiator, was named the head the new ministry, signaling to the EU that Ankara still had an interest in EU membership even if it appeared that national enthusiasm was on the wane.

During the summer of 2011, the Cyprus issue emerged again as a significant stumbling block for progress on Turkey's accession process. Greek Cypriots have long claimed that Turkey's influence over exactly what the Turkish Cypriots will accept as part of any final solution to the Cyprus problem has been the principal reason for the lack of any agreement. In July, fresh from receiving his new five-year mandate as a result of the June national elections in Turkey, Prime Minister Erdogan visited northern Cyprus on the occasion of the anniversary of Turkey's intervention in Cyprus in 1974. In a speech to Turkish Cypriots, Ergodan seemed to have hardened his views on a Cyprus settlement when he suggested that a negotiated solution had to be achieved by the end of 2011 or the island would remain split.[30] In his speeches in the north, Erdogan also suggested that security and territorial concessions demanded of the Turkish Cypriots were not acceptable and that if, in his words, "southern Cyprus" were to assume the presidency of the EU Council on July 1, 2012, then Ankara would freeze its relations with the EU because it could not work with a presidency that it does not recognize.[31] Erdogan's statements drew harsh criticism from all sectors of the Greek Cypriot political community. Reaction from some quarters of the EU was equally strong with European Parliament member and member of the Parliament's EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee Andrew Duff suggesting that Erdogan's comments were an appalling twist to Turkey's policy toward Cyprus.[32]

An additional issue regarding Turkey and Cyprus arose in August when the Republic of Cyprus announced that in September it would begin drilling for natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean in an area off the coast of southern Cyprus. Ankara blasted the decision as illegal, indicated that such a move could negatively affect the Cyprus negotiations,[33] and suggested that it would increase its naval presence in the region. This again raised concerns within the EU, which called into question the implementation of Turkey's foreign policy initiative of "no problems with its neighbors."

Near the end of 2011, the European Commission and Council issued their annual assessment of Turkey's accession progress.[34] Both stated that "with its dynamic economy, important regional role and its contributions to EU's foreign policy and energy security, Turkey is a key country for the security and prosperity of the European Union ... that was already well integrated into the EU in terms of trade and foreign investment through the Customs Union."[35] Continuing on a positive note, both acknowledged that the changes proposed in the constitutional referendum and the

[30] "PM draws the line for Cyprus: Unity or split," *Hurriyet Dailey News,* July 20, 2011.

[31] "Erdogan: Cyprus at EU helm unacceptable," *Cyprus-Mail,* July 20, 2011.

[32] "Erdogan comments irk EU officials," *Cyprus Mail,* July 22, 2011.

[33] "Don't sacrifice talks in Cyprus for natural gas," Hurriyet Daily News, August 14, 2011.

[34] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Enlargement Strategy and main Challenges 2011-2012, Brussels, October 12, 2011.

[35] Ibid.

conduct of the June elections were positive signs and that Turkey had made progress on a number of fronts including civilian control of the military, financial services, competition policy, religious property and cultural rights, and in the judiciary. They also noted that the creation of the Ministry for EU Affairs was an "encouraging signal." On the other hand, both reports repeated concerns over a number of issues where both felt not enough progress had been made including in the areas of freedom of expression, freedom of the media, women's rights, and freedom of religion. Both the Commission and Council expressed regret at statements by Prime Minister Erdogan that Turkey would freeze relations with the EU Presidency during the second half of 2012 when Cyprus would assume the Presidency. The Council also expressed its concerns over Turkey's threats directed at what the Council called Cyprus' right to explore and exploit their own natural resources, a reference to Cyprus' discovery of natural gas in the Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone.

Not surprisingly, the reaction from Ankara was swift and negative. Prime Minister Erdogan blasted the EU for "slinging mud" and claimed that "the progress reports had once again shown the serious eclipse of reason at the EU."[36] Perhaps showing both his frustration and contempt for the EU, Erdogan was reported to have suggested the EU itself was "crumbling." Turkish Minister for EU Affairs Egemen Bağış claimed that the Commission's report zoomed in on the problem areas but ignored the real progress Turkey has made and that linking Turkey's membership to the Cyprus issue was a mistake.[37] On the other side, Turkey's main opposition party, the CHP, reportedly praised the Commission's report and stated that the "report shows democracy is not moving forward as the government claims."[38]

Earlier in November 2011, EU Minister Bağış had suggested that Turkey would not lose anything if no additional chapters of the *acquis* were to be opened during the Cypriot Presidency. It was reported that certain Turkish officials had indicated that due to the uncertainty of Turkey's EU membership, the government was reluctant to move forward with meeting required benchmarks in order to open the three remaining chapters of the accession *acquis* involving competition, social policy, and procurement.[39] As a result, none were opened.

Despite the less than positive assessments, one interesting issue arose when the Commission, in its assessment report, proposed to initiate a new relationship, or "positive agenda" with Turkey outside of the accession negotiations if Turkey followed through on its threats to avoid the Cypriot presidency of the EU beginning in July 2012.

The final piece of business regarding the 2011 assessment of Turkey's accession progress rested with the European Parliament. The Parliament's assessment reflected the earlier views of the Commission and Council. However, having in early 2011 considered an amendment calling on EU institutions to study the possibility of establishing a 'privileged partnership' with Turkey as an alternative to full EU membership, the Parliament expressed its support for the Commission's intension to develop a fresh agenda for EU-Turkey relations, stating that a positive agenda would build on the solid fundamentals of EU and Turkey relations and move the reform process forward. The resolution adopted by the Parliament noted, however, any new initiative should not replace the accession negotiations, but complement them in order to support reforms. [40]

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[36] "Prime Minister Erdogan lashes out at EU over the latest progress report, Cyprus," *Hurriyet Daily News,* October 16, 2011.

[37] "Turkish Minister chides EU for Greek Cyprus conditions," *Hurriyet Daily News,* October 12, 2011.

[38] "Turkey's main opposition says gov't needs EU report's advices," *Hurriyet Daily News,* October 14, 2011.

[39] Ankara unenthusiastic on new EU chapters, *Hurriyet Daily News,* November 21, 2011.

[40] For more detailed information see "Motion for a Resolution—on the 2011 Progress Report on Turkey, B7-0000/2011, Foreign Affairs Committee, European Parliament, March 8, 2012.

Current Status of Turkey's Accession

New Agenda—Relabeled Approach

As 2012 began, Turkey's accession negotiations with the EU had basically reached a political and technical stalemate with little anticipation of any additional chapters of the EU's rules and regulations known as the *acquis communautaire* being opened in the near term. In March 2012, Egemen Bağış, at the London School of Economics once again stated that Turkey would ignore the Republic of Cyprus' EU Presidency and apparently stated that "Turkey has 52 years of relationship with the EU, thus, six months is not a long time for Turkey"[41], referring to the length of the rotating presidency. These statements were not taken lightly both in the EU and in the Republic of Cyprus which was about to enter its own presidential election period in 2013 immediately following the Cyprus EU presidency meaning little, if any, progress was likely in Turkey's accession negotiations until possibly after a new government in the Republic was in place.

The EU Commission realized that the accession process itself would achieve little in 2012, especially if Ankara did carry out its threat to ignore at least the rotating EU presidency once Cyprus assumed that role on July 1. Not wanting to place relations with Turkey in a deep freeze until after the national elections in the Republic in early 2013, the Commission began to put into place the new initiative with Turkey that the Commission had proposed in its 2011 accession progress report.

On May 17, 2012, EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy Štefan Füle and Turkish Minister for European Affairs Egemen Bağış announced the launch of the EU's new "positive agenda" with Turkey. Both stated that the "positive agenda" was intended to bring fresh dynamics into EU-Turkey relations. Commissioner Füle indicated that areas covered by the "positive agenda" would include legislative alignment, enhanced energy cooperation, visas, mobility and migration, Customs Union, foreign policy, political reforms, the fight against terrorism and increased participation in people-to-people programs, all issues included in the frozen chapters of the *acquis*. In launching the "positive agenda" both Commissioner Füle and Minister Bağış had gone to great lengths to insist that the new initiative was not intended to replace, but complement, the formal accession negotiations and to strengthen the reform process in Turkey.

On the other hand, to some the concept was described as essentially an "institutional trick intended to circumvent the Cyprus EU Presidency,"[42] and that the technical discussions surrounding the "agenda" looked very much like an informal accession negotiation on issues included in those chapters of the *acquis* not yet opened. Still others saw the comprehensive nature of the "agenda" as perhaps a repackaging of the old 'privileged partnership' concept suggested by the French and others as early as 2009. The new "agenda" for some could eventually allow the EU and Turkey to achieve as close a relationship as desirable, for some a "virtual membership,"[43] while potentially allowing them to walk away from the ultimate goal of Union membership having developed stronger political, economic, and social relations with Turkey in the meantime.

[41] "Turkey will Ignore Cyprus as EU president," *Famagusta Gazette On-Line*, March 2, 2012.

[42] Dimitar Bechev, "EU-Turkey Relations: A Glimmer of Hope," European Council on Foreign Relations, July 27, 2012.

[43] Sinan Ulgen, "Avoiding a Divorce: A Virtual EU Membership for Turkey," Carnegie Endowment, December 2012.

To become an actual EU member, Turkey would still have to comply with the much more detailed *acquis* no matter how extensive or successful the new "agenda" would have become. However, by changing its name, but not necessarily its goal, Turkey, which had previously rejected the "privileged partnership", seemed to have embraced the new "agenda" with the EU. On July 1, 2012, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan, over the objections of EU officials, made good on his threat to freeze certain relations with the EU, including formal accession negotiations, which are normally overseen by the presidency, when Cyprus assumed the 6-month rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union. Erdogan's decision to actually ignore the EU presidency appeared to have been made with the understanding that since the "positive agenda" had been launched despite his threat, he had nothing to lose by suspending the accession talks for at least the next six months.

One consequence of the launch of the "positive agenda," however, was its impact on the Cyprus settlement negotiations. It could be suggested that the Turkish Cypriots concluded that since the EU's action appeared to signal that Turkey's long-term relations with the EU may no longer be dependent on Turkey's contribution to any measurable progress on the Cyprus issue, despite what the annual EU Commission and Council progress reports say about the need for Turkey to play a constructive role in Cyprus, there was little incentive to continue the negotiations thus fulfilling Ankara's and the Turkish Cypriot's warning that July 1, 2012, was indeed the deadline to conclude an agreement over Cyprus or the talks could end. With no agreement in the works by July 1, Turkish Cypriot leader Eroglu could hardly object when the United Nation's Good Offices in Cyprus essentially declared their role in promoting the talks suspended.

The Cyprus presidency was launched on July 1, 2012 and formal accession negotiations between the EU and Turkey came to a halt. However, working groups established under the "positive agenda" began a series of informal negotiations which could not be affected by the Turkish refusal to deal with the Republic of Cyprus. Engagement between the EU and Turkey did continue throughout the last six months of 2012 especially with respect to visa liberalization where Turkey is the only EU candidate country which does not have a visa agreement with the EU. Both sides have stressed the importance of facilitating access to the European Union to Turkish business people, academics, students and representatives of civil society and both sides made the goal to harmonize and simplify visa requirements a priority.

Beyond visa liberalization, it is unclear exactly what progress had been achieved under the "positive agenda" or how whatever advancements were made could be incorporated into the formal accession process in the future, whenever other chapters of the *acquis* are opened. It was also unclear at the time whether the "positive agenda" would end once the Cypriot EU presidency ended. Now that the EU and Turkey have resumed formal accession negotiations, including the opening of one new Chapter of the *acquis* in October 2013 it remains unclear whether the "positive agenda" framework will continue for those issues that fall under the chapters that will remain blocked by the Republic of Cyprus, France, and others. [44]

As 2012 ended and with little movement on the accession front, the EU Commission in October issued its annual progress report on Turkey. In its report, the Commission, while offering a few positive conclusions, expressed its overall disappointment with Turkey's progress on a number of issues leading Ankara to express its disappointment with the "biased" and "unbalanced" Report. Turkey's continued refusal to extend diplomatic recognition to EU member Cyprus, or to open Turkey's sea and air ports to Cypriot shipping and commerce until a political settlement has been achieved on Cyprus as well as Turkey's position on the Cyprus EU presidency were again cited as problematic. On December 11, 2012, the European Council released its conclusions on

[44] Based on a discussion with an official at the EU Commission.

enlargement. While the Council struck a more positive note regarding Turkey's importance to the EU, noted the implementation of the "positive agenda," and listed several issues where the Council felt Turkey had made progress, it nevertheless repeated the shortfalls outlined in the Commission's earlier assessment, including what the Council felt was insufficient progress on freedom of the media, expression, and assembly and an overall lack of judicial reform. Interestingly, it was reported that the Turkish Foreign Ministry frustrated by what EU Minister Bağış has described as the "skewed mentality in Europe," published its own first-ever progress report. The report was described as refuting many of the criticisms of Turkey's reform process found in the EU Commission's October progress report.

Movement Toward New Negotiations

In early February 2013, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius announced that the new government in Paris was favorably disposed to resuming the accession talks with Turkey and was prepared to lift its hold on opening at least one new chapter of the *acquis*—Chapter 22, Regional Policy. Even Germany and Cyprus seemed to have softened their views on resuming the negotiations although Cyprus felt Turkey needed to display a new attitude toward making significant contributions to the Cyprus unification talks once they resumed.

Technical discussions subsequently opened on Chapter 22 and it was agreed among the EU leadership that a new round of accession negotiations would begin in mid-June 2013.

The European Parliament, in a resolution adopted on April 18, 2013[45], issued its annual progress report on Turkey which mirrored the views of both the Council and Commission on issues such as judicial reform, freedom of expression, the media, and assembly. The Parliament also reminded Turkey that ignoring the Republic of Cyprus' EU presidency and its attitude regarding Cyprus' exploration of its own natural resources was not consistent with the EU's demand that Turkey pursue "good neighborly" relations within its region.

Like the Council and Commission, however, the Parliament seemed to send mixed messages regarding the Commission's "positive agenda" initiative. In Article 48 of its adopted resolution, the Parliament stated that "the EU is based on the principles of sincere cooperation and mutual solidarity amongst all its members and has respect for the institutional framework ... " [of the presidency of the Union]. At the same time, in Article 1of the resolution the EP commended the Commission and Turkey for implementing the "positive agenda" apparently forgetting the need for solidarity amongst member states (especially toward Cyprus) and respect for the institutional framework.

In early June 2013, as the resumption of the accession negotiations with Turkey approached, domestic turmoil rocked Turkey. Public protests over the future of Gezi park in central Ankara and the government's reaction precipitated a harsh response from Brussels over the use of force and the freedom of assembly and speech. A resolution was adopted on June 13 by the European Parliament expressing its "deep concern at the disproportionate and excessive use of force by the Turkish police."[46] Turkish officials responded with tough rhetoric toward the EU, including from Prime Minister Erdogan who said he "did not recognize decisions made by the European Parliament." [47]

[45] European Parliament resolution of 18 April 2013 on the 2012 Progress Report on Turkey (2012/2870)

[46] European Parliament resolution on the situation in Turkey, June 13, 2013, in Strasbourg.

[47] "I don't recognize European Parliament decision, Turkish PM Erdogan says," *Huriyet Daily News,* June 14, 2013.

After two weeks of rather nasty verbal sparring, and Ankara's continued crackdown on the protestors, several EU member states, including Germany, threatened to press for the postponement of the upcoming accession talks, again provoking an angry response from Ankara, including comments by Turkey's EU Minister Bağış that some European countries should "get lost"[48] if they decided not to open Chapter 22 or delay the start of the accession negotiations. Since neither side really wanted to end the accession process altogether or to further freeze the relationship despite mutual ill-feelings, the EU, in a face-saving decision for both sides, agreed to officially declare Chapter 22 open but to postpone the resumption of the accession negotiations until October 2013 after the social unrest in Turkey had subsided and after the German national elections had taken place.

On November 5, 2013, formal negotiations between the EU and Turkey resumed. Although the opening of Chapter 22 was seen as a symbolic victory for Turkey and a positive step by the EU, many observers maintain that opening new chapters of the *acquis* is less important than actually closing those chapters which had been opened and where the EU's criteria had been met demonstrating that the negotiations had been fruitful and the EU had been satisfied that a candidate state had taken a significant step closer toward membership. Thus, the real indicator of Turkey's march toward EU membership is not necessarily how many chapters have been opened but how many have been closed.

On October 19, 2013, the European Commission issued its annual assessment of the progress of the candidate countries, including Turkey. The Commission's report seemed more upbeat than previous versions restating Turkey's importance to the EU and offering a few positive conclusions including references to a new democracy proposal regarding tolerance for the wearing of headscarves, use of the Kurdish language in limited circumstances, and the lowering of the electoral threshold under which political parties could enter parliament, circulating in Ankara. However, the Commission expressed overall disappointment with Turkey's progress on a number of issues including its handling of the Gezi Park protests, freedom of expression and media freedom. The Commission again expressed concern over Turkey's continued refusal to extend diplomatic recognition to EU member Cyprus, and Turkey's position to basically ignore the Cyprus Presidency of the EU Council in the latter half of 2012.

Assessment

Relations between Turkey and the European Union have vacillated between support for and doubt over future membership on both sides, but not over the need for close relations. There is little doubt among most observers that over its first eight years, the EU accession process has been a major motivation behind Turkey's internal march toward reform and democratization. It has also been a factor in helping transform Turkey's economy and its political and military institutions, leadership, and political culture, both at the national and, in some respects, the local government level. And, it has helped forge a closer relationship between Europe and Turkey.

Economic ties between the EU and Turkey, despite the current problems within the Eurozone, have expanded over the past several years with nearly half of Turkey's exports flowing to Europe. Turkey's strong and growing economy offers a large and important market for European goods and services and will continue to do so for a long time. Turkish businesses are flourishing in parts of Europe and Turkey has become a magnate for foreign direct investment with much of that flowing from Europe. Turkey's role as an important energy hub and transit region for European energy supply diversification continues to grow as was recently seen with the decision to

[48] "Minister Bagis: If necessary, Turkey will tell EU to get lost," *Today's Zaman,* June 19, 2013.

construct the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) which will bring natural gas from Azerbaijan across Turkey, via the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP), into Italy and parts of Europe.

Continuing instability in Europe's southern neighborhood of North Africa and the Middle East suggest closer EU-Turkey relations although Turkey has been critical of what Ankara believes is the EU's lack of forceful policies toward the political situations in Egypt and Syria. The emerging activism in Turkey's foreign policy, begun in 2010 by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu with the intent of establishing Turkey as a more independent regional influence has led EU Enlargement Commissioner Füle and others to suggest that a "strategic dialogue" with Turkey on foreign policy should become a regular feature of the relationship. These examples reinforce the belief among many that both the EU and Turkey do need each other for a multitude of reasons.

The need for good neighborly relations, the current economic and financial crisis within the Eurozone and a continued healthy level of public skepticism or ambivalence toward EU enlargement to Turkey on the part of many Europeans, fueled by cultural and religious differences, however, continues to cloud European attitudes about Turkey, not as an important neighbor to Europe, economic partner, or regional foreign policy influence, but simply as a full-scale member of the Union. This attitude was highlighted in June when it was reported that German Chancellor Merkel's coalition partners, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Christian Social Union (CSU) included in their election manifesto that Turkey should not become a member of the European Union. A similar German view was recently expressed when an apparent policy paper developed by the advisors to Chancellor Merkel and her soon-to-be coalitions partners, the Social Democrats, seem to express support for further enhancing a "privileged relationship" with Turkey in lieu of full EU membership.[49]

In addition, it appears that a growing number of Europeans have expressed concerns regarding what seems to some as a change in Turkey's political, economic, social, and religious orientation. In a 2013 article, Diba Nigar Goksel suggested that Europeans believe that "Turkish public opinion polls reflect deepening cynicism about the EU and that the popularity of a [Turkish] leadership more keen on flaunting its affinity, solidarity, and close links to Muslim brothers than European friends exacerbates concerns that Turkey has an inherently non-European disposition.[50]

Despite these problems, a few EU member states, and in particular the EU Commission, still continue to publically express a desire to see Turkey's accession move forward.

On the other hand, it has been suggested that Europe's disinterest, skepticism or in the case of a few, outright opposition to Turkey's membership, along with the perceived EU foot-dragging in the accession negotiations have reinforced a growing ambivalence in Turkey about its future in the EU. Many observers have suggested that the AK Party's early embrace of the reforms required under the EU accession process was an attempt to help transform and legitimize the AK as a post-Islamist party. Many feel Turkey's leadership's goals were more about solidifying their own power and acceptance by the Turkish people than the long-term "Europeanization" of Turkey.[51] Others point to the September 2010 constitutional referendum and the June 2011 national elections as cases in point. Despite statements by Prime Minister Erdogan and others that the proposed constitutional reforms would help bring Turkey into line with European norms, some observers believe that Turkey's EU aspirations were not central to any of the Turkish

[49] "German Partners: EU may not be able to let Turkey join", *Reuters,* November 19, 2013.

[50] Diba Nigar Goksel, "Turkey and the EU: What Next," German Marshall Fund "On Turkey" Series, December 2012.

[51] Alessandri, op. cit.

political parties' messages during the referendum campaign[52] or the national elections and are not necessarily considerations in the writing of the new constitution.

Still others have suggested that after eight years of accession negotiations and various iterations of reform, Turkey's citizenry have accepted an unprecedented amount of change. But some now believe that the reform process has slowed as EU membership may no longer be the desired end point for Turkey's leadership.[53] For instance, writing in the *Hurriyet Daily News*, Semih Idiz commented that the EU Commission's 2011 progress report on accession, while performing as a mirror for Turkey, was more of a concern for Turkish bureaucrats and Eurocrats and that "the EU is not something the majority of Turks look to with confidence or enthusiasm anymore."[54] Further, he wrote that what drives Turkey's reform process today "is its own pressing needs." Continuing on this theme, Idiz reported the 2012 Commission assessment was "a report with no effect" that has "hardly created a stir among Turks."[55] Reflecting a similar view, columnist Mehmet Ali Birand wrote that "Europe is not on Turkey's agenda," that "for the first time in 47 years the influence of the EU over Turkish politics has reached almost zero," and that " today, Ankara does not pay attention to either the Council of Europe or the European Parliament."[56] Idiz, in another article, also pointed out that during Prime Minister Erdogan's 2012 three hour speech to the AKP party congress, "Turkey's EU perspective was not once mentioned."[57]

Despite what some have categorized as dynamic changes that have taken place in Turkey, driven in part by its EU aspirations, the EU accession process continues at a relatively slow pace (a pace some have called comatose). Supporters of Turkey's EU membership understand that actions taken, or not taken, by Turkey have made achieving that goal more difficult. Turkey's long-standing refusal to recognize EU member state, Cyprus, and its continued refusal to open its air and sea ports to Cypriot commercial operations as required under the Additional Protocol will remain major stumbling blocks to any forward progress, even as the accession negotiations restart. Turkey's decision to ignore the Cypriot rotating presidency of the EU Council in 2012 further exacerbated the problem as has Turkey's tough rhetoric and occasional naval presence in the Eastern Mediterranean as part of Ankara's response to the decision by the Republic of Cyprus to begin exploring for energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean. The handling of the Gezi park protests in June also served to further alienate those in Europe who remain skeptical of Turkey's ability and willingness to meet the requirements established in all the chapters of the *acquis*.

With many in Ankara now believing it may no longer be necessary for Turkey to become a member of the EU in order to define Turkey or its place in the international community and with what appears to be a great deal of rhetoric but little real enthusiasm in Europe (except from the EU Commission) for Turkey as a full voting member of the club, observers have begun to question why both the EU and Turkey continue with the accession process at all.

Turkey and its supporters have continued to argue that at least an enhanced dialogue with the EU should continue. Clearly, the EU can benefit from Turkey's position as an economic partner and as a key regional actor with respect to the greater Middle East, and that Turkey will continue to play a growing energy role for Europe as a gateway to the Caspian and Central Asian oil and gas

[52] Ibid.

[53] "Getting to Zero: Turkey, Its Neighbors and the West," Transatlantic Academy, 2010.

[54] Semih Idiz, "EU report important despite skepticism," *Hurriyet Daily News,* October 13, 2011.

[55] "A Report with No Effect," *Hurriyet Daily News,* October 12, 2012.

[56] Mehmet Ali Birand, "Progress report an overstatement but not a lie," *Hurriyet Daily News,* October 13, 2011.

[57] "EU on the backburner for the AKP," *Hurriyet Daily News,* October 2012.

supply system. Many Europeans share that view and point out that Turkey already plays an important role in defense and foreign policy matters with Europe, including through its membership in NATO although some seem concerned that foreign policy developments in Turkey have become, and could continue to be, increasingly detached from the EU.[58] However, many European believe that while energy security and foreign policy are important elements for the EU, those issues comprise only two or three of the 35 chapters in the *acquis*, and Turkey must come into compliance with the requirements of the entire *acquis*. Turkey, for its part must rely on the European market for its goods and services and Europe's political good will and engagement for the longer term.

Nevertheless, and despite the doubts, Turkish leaders seem to have decided that at least for now they need to continue the accession process. This appeared to be the case when in a 2013 New Year's message Turkish President Gul stated that EU membership was still a priority and as the Turkish leadership pursued the resumption of negotiations and the opening of new chapters of the *acquis*. Some believe this approach is being used possibly as a hedge in the event Ankara's goal of becoming a regional leader and influence fails to take hold or that the Turkish people become concerned that the internal reform process, called into question by the Gezi park demonstrations and government reaction, will come to an end, which could impact Prime Minister Erdogan's future political plans.

Neither Turkey nor the EU appear to be prepared to actually end the accession process, although it has been reported that Prime Minister Erdogan may have suggested that "if they [EU] do not want Turkey in, they should say so ... and we will mind our own business and will not bother them."[59] As the accession negotiations resume if both the EU and Turkey feel formal membership in the Union is no longer an EU obsession or in Turkey's best interest, both could seek a way to mutually agree to end the formal accession process. These attitudes would not necessarily end talks between the EU and Turkey as the "positive agenda" could be revitalized and used to draw Turkey and the EU closer to each other as "privileged partners," or for Turkey, a "virtual EU member."

U.S. Perspective

Although the United States does not have a direct role in the EU accession process, successive U.S. Administrations and many in Congress have continued to support EU enlargement, believing that it serves U.S. interests by spreading stability and economic opportunities throughout Europe. During the George W. Bush Administration, the United States had been a strong and vocal proponent of Turkish membership in the European Union. Early on, the Obama Administration continued the support of Turkey's EU membership aspirations. President Obama's statements in support of Turkey during his April 2009 visit to Ankara, restated more recently, and his assertion that Turkey's accession would send an important signal to the Muslim world reaffirmed the U.S. position.

Vocal U.S. support for Turkey's EU membership had caused some displeasure among some EU member states who felt that the United States did not fully understand the long and detailed process involved in accession negotiations, did not appreciate the debate within Europe over the long-term impact the admission of Turkey could have on Europe, and defined the importance of Turkey in too narrow a set of terms, generally related to geopolitical and security issues of the region. This latter view seems to be one held by countries such as France, Germany, Austria and

[58] Tocci, op. cit.

[59] European Parliament report strains already fragile Turkey-EU ties, Hurriyet Daily News, March 10, 2011.

others. Some Europeans also feel that putting Turkey's accession in terms related to the Muslim world suggests that anything short of full EU membership for Turkey would represent a rejection of Turkey by the West, and by association, a rejection of the Muslim world.

Now, however, many in Europe have been somewhat relieved that the United States has scaled back its rhetoric and hope the United States will use its relationship with Turkey in more constructive ways for the EU. For instance, some Europeans feel that the United States should be more helpful in encouraging Turkey to move more rapidly on reforms and to comply with the Additional Protocol regarding Turkey's relations with Cyprus. When asked in an interview in June 2009 whether the United States could be more helpful on this point, former Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia Philip Gordon demurred, saying that "ultimately, this is an EU issue; we're not directly involved in it.... This is between the EU and Turkey."[60] The United States believes that Turkey's membership in NATO has demonstrated that Turkey can interact constructively with an organization dominated by most of the same European countries that belong to the EU and play a positive role in foreign policy matters that impact Europe, whether it is the Europe of the EU or the Europe of NATO. However, the United States has been disappointed that it has not been able to use its influence to help shape a more constructive EU-Turkey relationship in an attempt to promote closer NATO-EU relations.

Although some Members of Congress continue to support Turkey's EU accession, attitudes toward Turkey have changed somewhat and the vocal enthusiasm for Turkey's EU membership seems to have waned. While some Members of Congress have applauded Turkey for its stance on Iran's nuclear weapons program and its position on Syria, there have been expressions of concern in some congressional quarters over other Turkish foreign policy initiatives, particularly at one point towards Israel and continually toward Cyprus. However, these concerns do not appear likely to alter the views of those who support Turkey or for new EU approaches to relations with Turkey during the 113th Congress.

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[60] See Assistant Secretary Gordon's interview with Tom Ellis of *Kathimerini*, June 27, 2009, Corfu, Greece.

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