

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND SECURITY NETWORK

# TURKEY, THE EU AND DEMOCRACY: HOW PUBLIC OPINION DIVIDES ANKARA AND BRUSSELS



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## INTRODUCTION

As Europeans contemplate Turkish membership in the European Union, Ankara's candidacy has come to resemble the paradox of Xeno's arrow. The ancient Greek philosopher explained that regardless of an arrow's speed or location, the distance to its target could always be halved. An arrow that is perpetually covering half the distance remaining to its target will come ever closer to -- but never actually reach -- its intended destination. Following Brussels' decision to open accession negotiations with Ankara in October 2005, Turkey is closer than ever to joining the EU. Yet, despite beginning the final stage of the accession process, the prospect that Turkey will be offered full membership is dimmer today than during the Cold War, when the question was less if, but when, it would join.

This paradox is all the more surprising because it stems from the fact that both Europe and Turkey are growing more democratic. Popular opinion in Europe that Turkey is too big, too poor and too Muslim for the EU have raised fears in Turkey that Europe is no longer interested in Turkish accession. Turkish officials have responded by accusing the EU of presenting a moving target, requiring more of their country than of previous candidates and contemplating national referenda on Turkey's candidacy. In order to overcome European concerns, they stress Turkey's unique strategic position as a "bridge to the Middle East," rehashing arguments their predecessors made almost 60 years ago when Ankara was campaigning for NATO membership. With the "war on terror" emerging as the central struggle of the post-Cold War era, the strategic rationale for binding Turkey to the West seems as compelling as ever. This logic also dovetails with the view held by the US, which has lobbied Brussels on Ankara's behalf by arguing that a rejected Turkey would become a less-western Turkey, undermining both European and American interests in the Middle East. Yet, as the EU evolves into a more democratic body and its citizens contemplate its geographical (and cultural) limits, Turkish appeals to strategic considerations for inclusion grow less persuasive. Meanwhile, Turkish democracy, imperfect though it may be, has introduced a relatively new and potentially damaging factor to the equation -- rising Turkish opposition to the accession process. This has left officials there with two related challenges: convincing Europeans that the benefits of Turkish membership extend beyond

strategy, while making sure that European efforts to dissuade Turkey from pushing ahead with its EU bid do not undermine support among Turks for the long list of reforms that lie ahead.

In order to accomplish the first task, Turkish officials must develop a new public diplomacy that balances its strategic appeal with arguments that stress the concrete economic, social and political benefits of membership not just for EU relations with the Middle East but for the EU itself. As for the second challenge, Turkish officials must convince their own citizens that the reforms called for by the EU are worth pursuing regardless of whether Turkey is welcomed in or turned away.

## SEEKING LESSONS IN THE PAST

During the past half century, the prospects of Turkish membership in the European community have ebbed and flowed with developments in both Turkey and Europe. When seeking associate membership in the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1959, Turkish leaders thought the process would be relatively straightforward, seeing the EEC as an extension of NATO, which Turkey had joined in 1952. Since then, however, intermittent military coups, crackdowns on leftists and Islamists, and tension with Greece over Cyprus have led European officials to question whether Turkey is sufficiently “European.” Turkey also missed opportunities to advance its application in the late 1970s when the European Community (EC) recommended that Turkey and Greece apply for membership at the same time. The Turkish government led by Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit approved Greece’s re-entry into NATO, but declined to submit Turkey’s application to the EC.<sup>1</sup>

Since then, Ankara has watched successive rounds of EC/EU expansion from the sidelines. Following the end of the Cold War, concern spread in Turkey that it had lost its strategic relevance and would no longer be of interest to the West. Leaders there shifted their emphasis from containing communism to suggesting that Turkey could use its influence over neighbors to the southeast and east, including the newly independent Turkic states of Central Asia, in order to advance the West’s interests. But Europeans were not interested. Their focus had turned to uniting Europe and few felt that Turkey was a part of that project.

After the attacks of 11 September 2001 Turkey resurfaced as a frontline state (both geographically and ideologically) in a new global struggle. With the world’s attention focused on the threat posed by Islamic radicalism, Turkey’s track record as a secular, Muslim democracy was seen as a hopeful counterexample for all that was “wrong” with the Islamic Middle East and “rogue states” like Turkey’s neighbors Iran, Iraq and Syria. Given its renewed strategic importance, Turkish officials expected a warmer West, and pundits weighed in on how Turkey could best make use of its re-discovered strategic value to improve its EU prospects.<sup>2</sup>

Some Turks looked to their country’s successful NATO application for guidance, drawing parallels

between the war on terror and the Cold War. During a summer 2006 debate about whether Ankara should contribute troops to the UN peacekeeping force for southern Lebanon, a Turkish political observer drew the following lesson from Turkey’s experience in Korea:<sup>3</sup>

Just as sending troops to Korea provided NATO membership, sending troops to Lebanon will provide EU membership because it will demonstrate Turkey’s indispensability to European security.

That is not to say that today’s leaders in Turkey are confusing the EU for NATO. They are well aware that the EU’s purpose and aims are different, as are its criteria for membership and its decision-making processes. But for many Turks, a comparison is not altogether unwarranted. The Bush administration regularly draws parallels between the Cold War and the “war on terror,” describing the latter as “the decisive ideological struggle of the 21st [c]entury” and seeing Islamic terrorists as “successors to Fascists, to Nazis, to Communists and other totalitarians of the 20th century.”<sup>4</sup> And just as some EU leaders today fret about sharing borders with Iran, Iraq and Syria and insist that Turkey is “not European,” NATO officials first rebuffed Turkey in 1949 on the grounds that it was “not Atlantic” and that including the country risked dragging NATO into the Middle East conflict surrounding the newly-founded state of Israel.<sup>5</sup>

Given these parallels, some Turkish leaders have recycled arguments first heard more than 50 years ago, emphasizing the benefits of Turkish membership, while highlighting the potential costs of excluding Turkey. While opposition to Turkish membership was initially very strong in NATO, Ankara managed to secure membership by continually stressing its strategic importance. In order to counter the concerns expressed by NATO officials, Turkey argued that the Arab-Israeli conflict was distracting Arab states from the Soviet menace and that, as the first Muslim country to recognize the state of Israel, Turkey was uniquely qualified to mediate between the Jewish state and its Muslim neighbors.

Turkish officials also stressed that leaving Turkey out in the cold would prove costly to the West.

Then-president Celal Bayar warned that snubbing Turkey would unleash a wave of nationalist sentiment, threatening Ankara's ties with the West. Turkey's foreign minister at the time, Fuat Köprülü, argued that Turks saw their candidacy in NATO as an acid test of US interest in Turkey.<sup>6</sup> Today's Turkish officials not only repeat trite references to their country's function as a bridge between East and West, but they also argue that as both a Muslim state and an ally of Israel, Turkey has the trust of both sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict. By serving as a third-party mediator, Turkey could enable Arab states to turn their attention and resources toward other threats in the region, including terrorism. On the costs side, Turkish officials warn that Turks are at risk of turning inward and away from its traditional allies, as "moderate, liberal people [in Turkey] are becoming anti-American and anti-EU," especially "young, dynamic, educated, and economically active people."<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately for Turkish leaders, the lessons they can draw from Turkey's entry into NATO provide little instruction for its EU application. First, EU states are required to integrate much more than NATO members in social, political and economic spheres. This results in a set of membership criteria that are far more rigorous than those of NATO and include elements of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Second, NATO had a clearly defined mission to which Turkey could offer concrete contributions. The EU's mission is less precise. If its purpose is to prevent war from breaking out between European states, it is not clear how Turkey would contribute to that goal. Third, unlike NATO, Europe lacks a single, leading state to which Ankara can direct its case in hopes that other member states could be persuaded to support Turkey's candidacy.<sup>8</sup> Fourth, unlike some members of the Bush administration, most Europeans do not see parallels between the Cold War and the "war on terror." Having experienced various forms of ideologically motivated violence in the past, they tend not to reduce terrorism to "Islamofascism" and are less enamored of military strategies for fighting terrorism. Moreover, the EU has much more at stake than the US in Turkey's application. In a veiled reference to Washington's lobbying on Ankara's behalf, European officials have stressed that they will not allow Turkey's strategic utility to blind them to its political shortcomings.<sup>9</sup>

## A MORE DEMOCRATIC EUROPE

More important for Turkey's application than its leaders' ability to direct European attention toward the strategic reasons for including Turkey, are the profound changes occurring within the EU, in particular the growing influence citizens have over EU affairs. Over the long-term, this creeping democratization threatens to keep Turkey out of the EU no matter how important it becomes strategically or how much it brings its political, economic and legal systems into line with EU standards.

Following the fall of communism in 1989, the 12 states of the European Community set out on an ambitious project of enlarging the EC while simultaneously deepening the ties that bind member states. As legislation from Brussels grew more intrusive following the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, EU citizens began to insist on having a greater say in EU-wide affairs. Over time, this has led a number of states to hold referenda on important decisions that would affect the entire union. The clearest example of this came with the proposed EU Constitution designed to consolidate and streamline the legislative process after the group ballooned from 15 to 25 members.

After French and Dutch voters rejected the draft Constitution in spring 2005, the notion that the EU was suffering from "enlargement fatigue" gained favor, despite the fact that the proposed charter was about how to manage the EU's drive toward "ever-closer union" and carried no reference to Turkish membership or that of any other potential candidate. Nevertheless, the matters were linked in the minds of some French voters when opponents to Turkish accession pressured then-president Jacques Chirac into requiring a referendum for any future EU enlargement after Croatia.<sup>10</sup> Other states including Austria, where less than 10 percent of the population favors Turkish accession, are also considering referenda on future candidates.

Turkish officials are right to be concerned about having European citizens deciding their fate in Europe. Polls indicate that two arguments at the heart of Turkey's case for admission - a more robust defense capability and improved relations with the countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean - have an ambiguous impact on a European public that sees risks as well as rewards

to further enlargement. For many Europeans, such risks are heightened in the particular case of Turkey, given its size, overwhelmingly Muslim population and its volatile neighborhood. According to a 2006 survey, 62 percent of EU citizens polled thought enlargement would boost peace and democracy along its borders, yet 58 percent felt "that further enlargement [would] make it even more difficult to develop a common European identity."<sup>11</sup> Sixty-three percent of Europeans think that further enlargement of the EU will help it play a bigger role in international affairs, but this figure is highest in the newest member states of Romania (85 percent) and Bulgaria (82 percent) and lower in more influential states, like Germany (48 percent) and France (54 percent).<sup>12</sup> Overall, EU citizens have grown less supportive of expansion, sharing a sense that the aim of unifying the continent has largely been achieved.

As a result of this trend in popular European opinion, the link between Turkish reforms and eventual EU membership can no longer be presumed. Since October 2001, Turkish lawmakers have approved two comprehensive constitutional amendments, seven harmonization packets and more than 150 legal changes that have helped bring its legal code into line with EU standards.<sup>13</sup> These reforms paved the way for the EC's October 2005 decision to begin accession negotiations with Turkey. Yet despite this progress, popular support for Turkey's candidacy has faltered in the EU. While 11 September may have underscored Turkey's strategic value, it has also generated concern in Europe about Islamic extremism and Muslim immigration. Polls highlight a direct correlation between opposition to Turkish membership in the EU and concern about immigration or Islamic extremism.<sup>14</sup>

Over the long term, EU referenda on future candidates raise the possibility that even if Ankara were to complete negotiations on all chapters of the EU legal corpus, the *acquis communautaire*, it might still be denied full membership. This prospect was raised in the EU's 2005 negotiating framework with Turkey, which refers to "the [U]nion's capacity to absorb Turkey" as another condition of Turkish membership. This is not a new clause. Such wording was originally approved in Copenhagen in 1993, along with the so-called Copenhagen Criteria, and was, at least in theory, applied to

the fifteen states that have joined since then. Yet, every country that has completed negotiations has been accepted. Negotiations between the EU and previous candidates have had an air of inevitability about them, with the EU holding candidates' hands and leading them through the legislative maze to membership. While Turkey has received comparable financial assistance, it is unlikely to receive the same political support as earlier candidates, especially from member-states whose citizens oppose Turkish membership.

### A MORE DEMOCRATIC TURKEY

As much as the EU's creeping democratization will influence Ankara's candidacy, Turkey's own democracy is of primary importance for two distinct reasons: First, it is seen as a barometer of Turkey's ability to assume the responsibilities of EU membership. Second, it determines how Turkey's political leaders can pursue the types of reforms required for EU membership.

The first of these two aspects is the more frequently discussed. Turkey's democratic shortcomings are highlighted by the military's habit of ousting popularly elected governments. Coups in 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997, have raised concern in Europe about the military's commitment to democracy. Another test came in the summer of 2007, when the military opposed the nomination of Abdullah Gül as Turkey's 11th president. Gül had been a member of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), a party with Islamist origins that the military sees as a threat to the secular nature of the republic. Sharing this sentiment were members of the Republican People's Party (CHP), who skipped a parliamentary vote on Gül's candidacy. Turkey's Supreme Court annulled the vote due to the lack of a quorum. That decision precipitated early parliamentary elections in July in which the AKP netted 47 percent of the popular vote, up from 34 percent in 2002. One month later, the new parliament approved Gül's candidacy. While many in Europe saw the crisis as a reminder of the fragility of Turkish democracy, it did much to shore up the country's burgeoning democratic institutions. The political and judicial systems reacted systematically to resolve the crisis as prescribed by the constitution. The elections also dealt a blow to the meddlesome generals, whose influence over politics has been a major European concern.

That is not to say that Turkey has evolved into a model democracy. EU officials are watching closely to see how (or whether) Turkey's sweeping

reforms are being implemented. They concede that Turkey has made considerable progress on paper by abolishing the death penalty in peacetime and passing legislation that expands the rights of religious minorities, eases restrictions on the press, and curtails the power of the military in political affairs. Nevertheless, some EU officials remain skeptical about the extent to which Turks have internalized the values behind the reforms. A recent slowdown in the reform process has given them pause. On the surface, the summer 2007 elections could be read as a pro-EU vote. After all, more than two-thirds of the electorate voted for the AKP or the CHP, two avowedly pro-EU parties. But the AKP government has not taken the vote as a mandate for more reforms. In fact, since negotiations on Turkish admission to the EU officially began in October 2005, Turkey's reform momentum has slowed dramatically. This backtracking has been part of an AKP strategy to secure its right flank against parties like the anti-EU Nationalist Action Party (MHP), which secured 14 percent of the vote, up 6 percent from 2002. The MHP benefited from a rising tide of nationalism in Turkey, which has been fed by the revival of the Kurdish insurgency in southeast Turkey, the US-led war in Iraq and legislation in Europe and the US that would label the massacre of more than a million Armenians by the Ottoman Empire during World War I as genocide. In such an atmosphere, the AKP is unlikely to pursue a rash of unpopular reforms.

This points to a second important consequence of Turkey's imperfect, but maturing democracy. As the government grows more beholden to the people, popular opinion plays a bigger role in determining the speed and depth of reforms. The AKP has to convince the electorate that the required reforms are worthwhile – a tough sell when a majority of Turkish citizens believes the EU is not interested in offering Turkey membership. European leaders respond by insisting that Turks should be interested in these reforms for their own sake, regardless of whether they come with an offer of membership from the EU. They scoff at the notion that more democracy in Turkey could somehow hurt its bid or that the EU could somehow be culpable in Turkey's failure to qualify for membership.

But EU accession is a two-way street and European opponents to Turkish membership fully recognize and exploit opportunities to undermine Turkey's candidacy. Two types of opponents to EU membership have emerged among European leaders. The first comprise a small group that is



openly hostile to Turkish membership and feels that the EU should openly hostile to Turkish membership and feels that the EU should unilaterally cease negotiations with Turkey. The second set of opponents are more moderate and more numerous at present. Rather than reject Turkey out of hand, they would prefer to see Ankara fail to meet the requirements for membership or grow tired of trying and withdraw from the process of its own accord. As long as the second group remains bigger and more influential, negotiations between Turkey and the EU will continue, albeit in fits and starts.

These more moderate opponents to Turkish accession have tried to provoke Turkish nationalists on hot-button issues such as the divided island of Cyprus, and whether the murder of as many as 1.5 million Armenians during World War I constitutes genocide. Turkey has acknowledged that hundreds of thousands of Armenians died, but contends that the deaths resulted from a war in which ethnic Turks died as well, rather than from any decree issued by the Ottoman government. In September 2006, the French National Assembly approved a bill that would criminalize the description of the mass slaughter of Armenians as anything but genocide. Then-French president Jacques Chirac followed the decision by arguing that Turkey should not be allowed to join the EU until it accepts this same interpretation.

Cyprus is another potential pitfall for Turkey's EU application and a tinderbox for Turkish nationalists. Four years after Cyprus gained independence from the UK in 1960, the island's Greek and Turkish populations clashed over efforts by President-Archbishop Makarios to change the island's constitution. Turkey threatened to invade, but was dissuaded from doing so by a strongly worded letter from then-US president Lyndon Johnson. In 1967, Turkey's military was again on alert after a military junta in Athens encouraged Greek nationalists on the island to pursue *enosis*, or union with mainland Greece. Finally, in 1974 the junta engineered a coup against Makarios by the Cypriot National Guard, which proclaimed *enosis*. After the UK and Greece (the two other guarantors of Cypriot independence along with Turkey) ignored Turkish Prime Minister Ecevit's calls for them to intervene, he ordered an invasion of Cyprus, bringing roughly 40 percent under Turkish control. Since then, the island has remained "divided" in Turkish parlance, while Greeks see the northern part of the island as "occupied." In 1983, Cypriot Turks proclaimed the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus," which only

Ankara recognizes.

Repeated efforts to find a settlement for the island have failed. Most recently, a plan proposed by former-UN Secretary General Kofi Annan foresaw a loose confederation of two states – one Greek Cypriot and the other Turkish Cypriot – joined by a minimal federal government based on the Swiss model. This plan was put to a simultaneous referendum in late April 2004.<sup>15</sup> Sixty-five percent of the island's Turkish population approved of the plan, but 76 percent of Greek Cypriots were against. One week later, the Greek-controlled Republic of Cyprus joined the EU, which has demanded that Turkey recognize the Republic by opening its harbors and airports to Cypriot ships. Ankara had insisted that it would open its ports only after a *de facto* economic embargo on the Turkish-controlled northern part of the island is lifted, which the EU had promised in the event of Turkish approval of the Annan plan, but failed to deliver. A late 2006 offer by Turkey to open a single seaport and one airport to traffic from the Republic of Cyprus was rejected by EU foreign ministers, who proceeded in late 2006 to freeze negotiations with Ankara on eight of 35 chapters of the *acquis* that deal with transport and trade.

Unfortunately for Ankara, both the Armenian issue and that of Cyprus lie fully outside the *acquis*. There is no formal structure in which they are to be resolved and they are likely to remain obstacles to Turkish accession, as long as a majority of citizens in EU-states continue to oppose Turkish membership.

## MANAGING THE TRANS-ATLANTIC DIVIDE

Given these developments, some Turkish proponents of EU membership have grown frustrated and staked out what are ultimately counter effective positions in their negotiations with the EU, such as tapping into growing anti-Americanism in Europe and Turkey or raising the prospect that Turkey could turn radical and pose a threat to Europe if turned away.<sup>16</sup> They see a close relationship between Turkey and the US as a liability in the eyes of a European public increasingly distrustful of the latter's foreign policy. For them, the split in the trans-Atlantic relationship offers Turkey an opportunity to burnish its European credentials by turning its back on the US, as it was seen to have done in March 2003 when Turkey's parliament voted against allowing the US to open a northern front against Iraq from Turkish territory. This vote was not only seen as bringing Turkey in line with many western European governments, it also helped shore up Turkey's democratic credentials in some European eyes. Moreover, the decision weakened anti-EU elements within Turkey who have pointed to closer ties with the US and Israel as an alternative to the EU and its demands for human rights reforms and a compromise on Cyprus.<sup>17</sup>

Trans-Atlantic tensions over the war on terror notwithstanding, seeking to score points in Europe by moving away from the US would be a big misstep for Ankara. First, it mistakenly presupposes a single European position on matters related to the Middle East. The Turkish parliamentary decision on US troops may have temporarily improved popular opinion about Turkey in certain European circles. Yet, on the eve of the war, Europeans were far from universally opposed to the invasion. Second, such a strategy incorrectly paints Turkish relations with the US and the EU as an either-or choice.<sup>18</sup> While polls over the past few years indicate that an increasing number of Europeans oppose the Bush administration's foreign policy, those polls also show that Europeans hold their negative views of the current US administration distinct from their general opinion of the US.<sup>19</sup> In fact, there remains considerable agreement between Europeans and Americans about the importance of a wide range of international issues, including terrorism, migration, communicable disease and the growing power of China. Furthermore, citizens on both sides of the Atlantic often share common opinions on how to address these problems, including, for instance,

whether military force should be used to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons.<sup>20</sup> Though the current anti-Washington sentiment in Turkey may strike a chord with some Europeans, the present slump in trans-Atlantic relations is by no means permanent. It is impossible to predict how European opinion toward the US will develop under a new administration let alone 10 to 15 years from now when Turkey might finally be considered for EU membership. Along the way, Turkey will need US help when it comes to crossing the highest hurdles, such as the Cyprus dispute. Finally, an Ankara that doesn't have Washington's ear is a less valuable strategic asset to Europe.

## THE RISK OF REJECTING TURKEY

Turkish leaders seeking to advance the country's application should also avoid raising the specter that Turkey will slide toward Islamic extremism should Ankara be snubbed by Brussels. Such an argument is intended to highlight the costs of rejecting Turkey. At the same time, however, it supports those in Europe who insist that Turkey remains a risky proposition. Moreover, as will be discussed later, there are more persuasive arguments Turkey can make that highlight potential costs for Europe of rejecting Turkey.

That is not to say that rejecting Turkey comes without risks. Turkey will have no choice but to look elsewhere for allies. There are two distinct possibilities. The first is for Ankara to deepen its ties with Washington and perhaps Tel Aviv. A second possibility would have Turkey turning east, pursuing its interests in alliances with Iran and Syria. On the one hand, a case can be made that Turkey's ties to the West are too thick to be severed by a "no" from the EU. Beginning in the late 18th century, Ottoman reformers sought to "westernize" not in order to join Europe, but rather to defend the empire against Europe. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey and an ardent westernizer, was also a staunch defender of Turkish neutrality. Joining the EC/EU is a relatively new goal for Turkey - a means to the greater and longer-sought aim of modernization. Moreover, Turkey's powerful military is determined to keep Turkey facing west, whether as an EU member or not. On the other hand, there are signs that the West cannot take Turkey for granted. As important as the EU's democratization is for Turkey's candidacy, an increasingly democratic political system in Turkey will have a far greater impact on Ankara's future foreign policy orientation. Over the past two years, Turks have grown less supportive of their country's EU bid and are increasingly anti-American. Feeling that Europe has treated Turkey unfairly on the Cyprus and Armenian issues, a mere one-third of Turks support accession, down from nearly 70 percent at the end of 2005.<sup>21</sup> Turkish opinion of the US has also soured, with many believing that Washington has ignored Turkey's regional concerns by turning a blind eye to Kurdish terrorism, while fanning the flames of Kurdish separatism in southeast Turkey by supporting Kurdish autonomy in northern Iraq. Just nine percent of Turks look favorably on Washington.<sup>22</sup>

Turkey's July elections should not be viewed as a referendum on foreign policy, though they do reflect important currents in Turkish popular opinion. While two-thirds of Turks voted for the AKP and the People's Republican Party (CHP), parties that officially support Turkey's EU aspirations, the dramatic fall in support for joining the EU led the AKP to downplay its success in starting accession negotiations with the EU - surely its biggest foreign policy achievement over the past five years. Meanwhile, the CHP resorted to criticizing the AKP for submitting Turkey to a drawn out and patronizing process in which the EU tells Turkey how to run its affairs without offering any guaranteed rewards. (This was, of course, a disingenuous criticism as joining the EU has been a central aim of the CHP for years.) In addition, the right-wing Nationalist Action Party (MHP) ran on a staunchly nationalist, anti-EU platform and doubled its percentage of the vote from 2002, gaining 71 seats in the 550-seat parliament.

Rather than insist on joining a club in which they are not wanted and expect to be treated as second-class citizens, many Turks believe Ankara should seek to play a leading role in the Near East - an area once under Ottoman control and a potentially destabilizing source of conflict for Turkey. In part because of shared concerns over the creation of an independent Kurdistan, Turkey's relations with Iran and Damascus have improved over the past few years - in stark contrast to EU and US efforts to isolate Tehran and Damascus.

While the aforementioned factors suggest that Turkey is turning away from the West, many influential actors in the country have vested interests in supporting Turkey's continued pursuit of EU membership: For devout Muslims, it guarantees freedom of religion; for Kurds, it helps secure their cultural autonomy; business leaders see it as assuring a free market; nationalist Turks see it as a way to shield national borders; for the unions, it helps improve working conditions. These different interest groups will help retain momentum for Turkey's EU aspirations as long as membership remains attainable. If, however, the EU rejects Turkey or it becomes clear that the EU never intends to include Turkey, these groups will find little in common and choose different paths for securing their interests. A groundswell of anti-

EU nationalism might cause some to favor a move toward the US, while others might seek an alliance with the Muslim Middle East. Which groups would win out depends heavily on how democracy and electoral politics evolve within Turkey over the coming years.

## MAKING TURKEY'S CASE

One of the biggest challenges facing Turkish advocates of EU membership will be maintaining popular support for accession in the face of European opposition. While Turkey's opponents will seek to focus the debate on Turkey's size, its underdeveloped economy and its Muslim identity, the large contingent of undecided Europeans (40 percent, according to one poll) could be won over by a more nuanced discussion of the likely costs and benefits of Turkish membership for the EU.<sup>23</sup> This is a matter of framing the debate. Turkey's large population, for instance, makes it an important market for European exports. Its developing economy offers significant growth opportunities for European investors. Concerning the fight against terrorism, Turkish diplomacy should emphasize the "soft-security" benefits that Turkish membership would provide the EU in line with an emerging European consensus that terrorism must be fought with a diverse range of tools.

Important as they are, such arguments, by themselves, will not suffice. First, the benefits that Turkish membership can provide for Europe's relationship with the Middle East or the fight against terrorism remain vague. Turkish officials have yet to articulate precisely how having Turkey in the EU would help democratize Arab states or moderate radical regimes. Its own experience with the EU demonstrates just how difficult it is to reform a society from the outside. Ankara has passed a number of important reforms over the past six years, but these came with the incentive of eventual EU membership. Turkey has no such carrot to offer Arab states. It can only lead by example, but there is little evidence that a critical mass of citizens or leaders in the Arab world see Turkey as a model they would like to emulate. Many are critical of secularism, equating it with undemocratic regimes in North Africa and the Levant. Arab populations are also highly critical of Turkey's alliances with the US and Israel. Yet others see Turkey as the heir to authoritarian Ottoman rule over Arab land.

In order to steer the debate in Europe about Turkey in a more favorable direction, Turkish diplomats should begin by addressing European elites with the aim of enlisting them in convincing the wider public that Turkish accession carries more benefits than costs. Businessmen, academics and some politicians are more likely to see the

advantages that come with Turkish membership, such as secure access to Caspian energy reserves, a more coordinated approach to stemming illegal immigration and drug trafficking, and a young and eager workforce that can help keep European retirement schemes solvent. Rather than explicitly warn about the radicalization of Turkey if Europe should reject it, Turkish officials should float scenarios about the future of the Middle East and ask, "Where do you want Turkey - on the inside or the outside?" Instead of ignoring the dangers of Turkey pulling the EU into a Middle East conflict, Turkey should ask whether Europeans want to have a greater say in the critical regions of the eastern Mediterranean, the Black Sea basin, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. In recasting its application for popular European consumption, Turkey can learn lessons from countries like Greece and Bulgaria whose candidacies were once opposed on grounds that they were too poor and/or too orthodox. By opening cultural centers, forging party-to-party contacts and sponsoring internships, academic exchanges, and business lobbies, Athens and Sofia chipped away at this opposition and paved the way toward eventual membership. Turkey can do the same.

## CONCLUSION

According to a popular joke in Brussels, if the EU were a country seeking membership in the EU, it would be rejected for not being democratic enough. The joke draws laughs in Turkey too, where a slow and uneven, but nonetheless recognizable, process of democratization is underway. The great irony of a trend toward more democratic political systems in the EU and in Turkey, at least over the short-to-medium term, is that it pulls the two entities apart, rather than bring them closer together. Whether through referenda in Europe or by undercutting critical support for needed reforms in Turkey, the increased influence of public opinion is likely to hurt Turkey's EU prospects before it helps.

By portraying Turkey as a critical ally and frontline state in the war on terror, Turkish officials play to the country's strengths, highlighting its military muscle and its influence as a secular, democratic model for other Muslim states. As the EU develops its European Security and Defense Policy, Turkey's military assets and potential as a forward base will grow more attractive. Turkish leaders should not abandon the idea that membership provides the EU valuable strategic benefits. But these benefits are not nearly enough secure EU membership on their own. With national governments giving their citizens a greater say in EU affairs, Turkey must take its case directly to the European public. In so doing, Turkish leaders must downgrade the inflated value they attach to the notion of Turkey as a bridge to the Middle East. Arguments that focus on Turkey as a mediator or a model for the Muslim Middle East fail to address central concerns held by Europeans about the costs of Turkish accession in terms of development assistance, competition for jobs, and having 75 million new neighbors who are "strange" or "different." Until Ankara can effectively articulate to Europeans that these costs will be outweighed by concrete benefits, the prospects for Turkish membership will continue to worsen, regardless of the strategic advantages that come with it.

## APPENDIX: TIMELINE

- 1923: Republic of Turkey is established
- 1926: Turkey adopts a criminal code based on the Italian model and a legal code based on the Swiss.
- 1928: Latin alphabet is adopted in place of a modified Arabo-Persian alphabet.
- 1934: Women are granted the right to vote and stand in elections.
- 1945: Ankara declares war on Germany and Japan.
- 1948: Turkey becomes a member of the OECD.
- 1949: Turkey joins the Council of Europe.
- 1952: Turkey becomes a member of NATO.
- 1959: Turkey applies for associate membership in the European Economic Community
- 1963: Association Agreement is signed and the final goal of Turkish membership is acknowledged.
- 1970: Turkey and the renamed European Community (EC) sign an agreement foreseeing Turkey's eventual full membership.
- 1974: Turkey invades Cyprus by sea and air following the failure of diplomatic efforts to resolve conflicts between Turkish and Greek Cypriots.
- 1978-79: The EC suggests that Turkey apply for membership along with Greece. Ankara declines.
- 1980: The EC freezes relations with Turkey after a coup d'état.
- 1983: Relations restored following democratic elections in Turkey
- 1983: Cypriot Turks declare the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The state is recognized only by Ankara.
- 1987: Turkey applies to the EC for full membership
- 1989: The EC endorses Turkey's eligibility for membership and reaffirms that eventual membership is the goal, but defers the assessment of Turkey's application.
- 1995: Turkey and the EU form a Customs Union.
- 1997: EU leaders decline to grant candidate status to Turkey. Ankara reacts angrily, effectively freezing relations and contacts.
- 1999: European Council recognizes Turkey as a candidate on equal footing with other candidate countries.
- 2001-2003: In order to fulfill the "Copenhagen Criteria" Turkey overhauls much of its military-drafted constitution and passes sweeping human rights reforms
- 2002: The mildly Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) wins a general election after pledging to push Turkey's EU bid forward.
- 2002: The EU accepts Cyprus in May 2004 and proposes a December 2004 review of Turkey's progress in fulfilling human rights criteria. Turkey, seeking a clear 2003 date reacts angrily.
- 2004: The Turkish government and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus back the Annan Plan for Cyprus.
- 2004: The EU agrees to start negotiations with Turkey.
- 2005: Six chapters of the *acquis* are opened.
- 2006: Continued dispute over Cyprus prompts the EU to freeze talks on eight chapters.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Following the 1974 Turkish invasion of northern Cyprus, Greece withdrew from NATO, insisting that NATO should have come to the aid of Greek Cypriots. After the military dictatorship in Athens fell, Greece sought re-entry into NATO, which Ankara could have blocked as a member of the alliance. In 1978, the European Community (EC) recommended that Turkey apply for membership along with Greece, suggesting that the EC would look favorably at Turkey's application should Ankara accept Greece's re-entry into NATO. Since then, the paths in the Greece and Turkey relationship have forked. Greece joined in 1981 while Turkey was under military control following the coup of 1980. Ecevit's decision not to submit Turkey's application has since been seen as a missed opportunity in Turkey.
- <sup>2</sup> Turkey's foreign minister at the time, Ismail Cem, argued that "the unfortunate events of September 11, 2001 and ensuing developments [had] boosted Turkey's strategic importance." See "Cem: Turkish Model is Paradigm of Civilization." Interview given to *Turkish Daily News*, 7 January 2002. See also an op-ed written by Volkan Bozkır, the Turkish Foreign Ministry's deputy undersecretary for EU Affairs, entitled "Turkey Can Anticipate a Warmer West," *Turkish Daily News*, 3 October 2001. See also Orhan Gökce and Birol Akgün, *Değişen Dünya Politikasında Türkiye'nin Rolü: 11 Eylül'ün Getirdiği Fırsatlar, Riskler ve Tehditler* (Turkey's Role in Changing World Politics: Opportunities, Risks and Threats Brought About by September 11), paper presented at the first METU International Relations Conference, Ankara, 3-5 July 2002, p.14. This sentiment was echoed by American officials as well. Then-deputy defense secretary Paul Wolfowitz described Turkey as a "potential example for the Muslim world." United States Department of Defense, "Bridging the Dangerous Gap between the West and the Muslim World", *Remarks Prepared for Delivery by Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz at the World Affairs Council*, Monterey, CA on 3 May 2002.
- <sup>3</sup> Yusuf Kanlı, "Turkey's participation in a Lebanon force", *Turkish Daily News*, 14 August 2006.
- <sup>4</sup> "President Bush Addresses American Legion National Convention," White House Press Releases and Documents, 31 August 2006.
- <sup>5</sup> Turkey was not considered a potential member according to the North Atlantic Treaty. Article VI, which specified the geographical range of the alliance, referred to "Parties in Europe or North America." After Turkey acceded, "the territory of Turkey" was added. (Mark Smith. *NATO Enlargement during the Cold War: Strategy and System in the Western Alliance*. New York: Palgrave, 2000, p. 62-3).
- <sup>6</sup> George Harris. *Troubled Alliance: Turkish-American Problems in Historical Perspective, 1945-1971*. Washington DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1972, p. 40.
- <sup>7</sup> This statement was made by Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül. See Quentin Peel, "Anti-west Backlash is Gathering Pace, Warns Turkish Minister." *Financial Times*, 20 July 2006.
- <sup>8</sup> Once the US emerged as the pre-eminent member of NATO, Ankara focused its lobbying efforts on Washington. After switching to a policy of containment against the Soviet threat, US military spending on NATO rose dramatically, alleviating concerns about the alliance's ability to defend Turkey. The country had also grown more important following the 1951 decision by the Egyptian Wafdist government to abrogate the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. Britain's imperial grip on the Middle East was loosening and Washington concluded that NATO would have to fill the void quickly, lest the Soviets get there first. In a May 1951 report entitled "The Position of the United States with Respect to Turkey," the executive secretary of the National Security Council, James Lay, recommended that the US back Turkish membership in NATO "in order to assure Turkey's full cooperation in international security measures]..." (p. 3, 4) Lay also cited Turkish control of "important air, land, and sea routes" in concluding that its "continued alignment with the free world [is] of primary strategic importance to the United States." (p. 6)
- <sup>9</sup> Just one month after the attacks of 9/11, then-EU Commissioner responsible for enlargement Gunter Verheugen described any softening of EU criteria for Turkey as a threat to the credibility of European integration. Quoted in "Türkiye'yi Kaybederiz," *Milliyet*, 22 October 2001. See <http://www.byegm.gov.tr/YAYINLARIMIZ/CHR/ING2001/10/01x10x22.HTM# percent205>



- <sup>10</sup>According to a Louis Harris poll published two days after the French referendum on the constitution, 22 percent of “no” voters listed opposition to Turkey’s entry into the EU as a reason for their vote. See Elaine Sciolino, “European Charter Architect Faults Chirac for Its Rejection,” *New York Times*, 15 June 2005. A committee headed by a former French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur has since recommended scrapping this provision on future enlargement.
- <sup>11</sup>German Marshall Fund of the US and Compagnia di San Paolo, Italy, “Transatlantic Trends 2006 Survey,” p. 21. For full details, please see [www.transatlantictrends.org/doc/2006\\_TT\\_Key percent20Findings percent20FINAL.pdf](http://www.transatlantictrends.org/doc/2006_TT_Key%20Findings%20FINAL.pdf)
- <sup>12</sup>“Transatlantic Trends 2006 Survey,” p. 13.
- <sup>13</sup>In addition to strengthening individuals’ basic rights, parliament has curtailed the power of the military, abolished the death penalty, allowed for greater freedom of expression, taken steps to limit torture, and passed more liberal language laws. See Heinz Kramer. “Die Türkei im Prozess der ‘Europäisierung’ in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B33-34/2004, pg. 9-17.
- <sup>14</sup> Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2005. For details, please see: <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?PageID=812>
- <sup>15</sup>For a copy of the Annan Plan, see <http://www.hri.org/docs/annan/>
- <sup>16</sup>The 2006 Pew Global Attitudes Project found that just 12 percent of Turks hold a favorable view of the US, down from 52 percent in 2000. For complete survey results, see: [pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=252](http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=252)
- <sup>17</sup>Ziya Öniş and Şuhnaz Yılmaz, “The Turkey-EU-US Triangle in Perspective: Transformation or Continuity?” *Middle East Journal*, vol.59, no.2, Spring 2005, p. 274. It is not a coincidence that Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) was able to push through some of its most difficult EU-related reforms during the summer of 2003.
- <sup>18</sup>For example of this view, see İhsan Dağı, “Kritik Karar: ABD ya da AB,” [Critical Decision: U.S.A. or EU] *Radikal*, 12 March 2002. Mehmet Ali Birand, “Will Turkey Choose the EU or the USA?,” *Turkish Daily News*, (Opinion: 19 April 2002) and İhsan Dağı, “Competing Strategies for Turkey: Eurasianism or Europeanism?,” *Central Asia and Caucasus Analyst* (SAIS Biweekly Briefing, Wednesday, 8 May 2002).
- <sup>19</sup>German Marshall Fund (2006), p. 6.
- <sup>20</sup> German Marshall Fund (2006), p. 4.
- <sup>21</sup>See Charles Hawley. “Is Ankara Gambling Away it’s Future?” *Spiegel Online*. (03 November 2006) <http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,446107,00.html> and Ali Çarkoğlu. “Who Wants Full Membership? Characteristics of Turkish Public Support for EU Membership,” in *Turkish Studies*, vol. 4, No.1, pp.171-194.
- <sup>22</sup>Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2007. See <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=256>
- <sup>23</sup>According to the German Marshall Fund, when asked whether Turkish membership in the EU would be a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad, a plurality of Europeans (40 percent) selected “neither good nor bad.” Thirty-two percent saw Turkish membership as a bad thing, while 21 percent saw it as a good thing.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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