

Turkey and the European Union : A Long Journey
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Abstract

Having been a secular republic, Turkey has participated in the formation of Western Alliance institutions such as OECD, NATO, Council of Europe and the EU. Turkey integration with the EU started with EEC when Turkey and the EEC has signed an Ankara Agreement in 1963. Further economic integration has evolved ever since, culminating in the Turkey's application for full membership. The candidacy was recognized officially in 1999 and despite controversy, Turkey believed becoming EU full membership will be a win-win situation for both parties.

The hallmark of Europe throughout its long history has been its distinctive diversity. Within that diversity, Turkey has had its place in the political, diplomatic, geographical, economic and military landscape of Europe for centuries. Drawing on its long association with European political affairs, Turkey adopted a secular republic after the end of the war of liberation (1919-1923) and remains the only such country with an overwhelmingly Moslem population. Following the cataclysmic events of the first half of the twentieth century, Turkey has taken part in the formation of and membership to major Western Alliance institutions, such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Council of Europe and Western European Union (WEU).

Turkey's association with the European integration process starts early on with the establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC). Following an application to join the nascent EEC in July 1959, the negotiations to define the relevant process culminated in the signing of the Agreement Creating an Association between the Republic of Turkey and the European Economic Community (the "Ankara Agreement") on 12 September 1963. The Ankara Agreement, which still constitutes the legal basis of the relations between Turkey and the European Union, aimed at securing Turkey's full

membership in the EEC through the establishment in three phases of a customs union which would serve as an instrument to bring about integration between the EEC/European Community/European Union and Turkey.

In the following years, the gradual establishment of a comprehensive customs union between the two sides was finalized on 6 March 1995, following the completion of talks at the Turkey-EU Association Council (comprising the Foreign Ministers of Turkey and then-15 members of the EU). The Customs Union not only provides for the unimpeded flow of industrial and processed agricultural goods, but also puts into effect a Common External Tariff, extending the European economic area fully to cover Turkish economy. As a result, the percentage of Turkish exports to the EU as compared to Turkey's overall exports reached 55% while the share of imports from the EU as compared to Turkey's overall imports is 47% for the year 2004. The figure for imports from Turkey as proportional to EU's overall imports is 3%, whereas the export to Turkey as proportional to EU's overall exports are 3,9%.

As Turkey thus completed its economic integration with the evolving EU, the process of political integration began in 1987, when Turkey applied for full membership to the EEC on the basis of the EEC Treaty's article 237, which gave any European country the right to do so. Turkey's request for accession, filed not under the relevant provisions of the Ankara Agreement, but those of the Treaty of Rome, underwent the normal procedures. In the following period, through certain ups and downs, the candidate stature of Turkey was finally recognized officially during the Helsinki European Council held on 10-11 December 1999.

Turkey views its membership to the EU as the next natural step in its political evolution and like other prospective members hopes to benefit from the stabilizing effect of EU membership on the economy as well as from the conducive atmosphere membership creates for foreign investment. For the EU, the Turkish membership offers the injection of a young and educated labor force already becoming competitive in the world. It further represents an

opportunity for the EU to reach out to the Moslem world and demonstrate first hand that it is not a union based on a certain religion. The core EU values of democracy and human rights are much more likely to spread further in the Middle East from a Turkey that is an EU member. Finally it presents Europe with an opportunity for increased relevancy in foreign affairs, with the inclusion of multi-faceted Turkish tradition of diplomacy into the European fold.

Turkey's membership EU membership ultimate is a win-win situation for both parties, and those difficulties therefore constitute a challenge that both Turkey and the EU should eventually overcome.

