



EU ENLARGEMENT

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THE EU AND TURKEY – STRONG LINKS

The Bosphorus, a narrow strip of water linking the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, is the geographic border between Europe and Asia. However, it has not been a border for a long period, but rather a uniting ring between East and West, and today it is the main artery of modern Istanbul. In earlier times, when water was the uniting element like roads are for us, the Bosphorus marked a crossroads between Europe and Asia on the east and west trade routes. When ancient Rome collapsed, its imperial claims and literary archives survived in Constantinople, the "Eastern Rome". At the end of the Medieval period, when Constantinople's glory had faded, the city was not only conquered but also restored, as Istanbul, seat of the vast Ottoman empire and seat of the Calif. In the 20th century, the founding father of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, established a secular republic with its gaze set on European style modernisation. To break with the imperial traditions of Istanbul, a new capital was chosen: Ankara.



Did you know? Turkish was written in Arabic script until the 1920s, when Atatürk insisted on the adoption of the Latin alphabet.

Today, relations between the EU and Turkey are close. But there are opportunities for them to be closer. And this strategic neighbour aspiring to become a member of the EU can bring new experiences and benefits to the EU and its citizens.

A VIGOROUS PARTNER

The vibrant state of modern day Turkey, with its booming economy, its young and energetic population, and its powerful regional influence, is a close partner of the EU in many ways. In addition to being party to a special agreement which goes back some 50 years, the EU is Turkey's biggest trading partner, as well as the source of most of its foreign direct investment. In addition, there are links with EU foreign policy and Turkey contributes to EU peacekeeping operations. On a more personal level, every year millions of Europeans discover the delights of Turkish seaside resorts or explore the rich vestiges of the great civilisations that Turkey has been host to and experience the vibrancy of its many cultural and culinary traditions.

On the other side, millions of Turkish citizens – or their descendants with EU nationalities – live and work in EU countries – in every role, from football players and factory workers to distinguished scientists and prominent business figures.

DEEPER LINKS

The EU is a diverse group of countries with a wide range of cultural traditions. On the other hand, cultural affinities do not stop at borders, but can link neighbours. Thus, the EU and Turkey complement and benefit from each other. Turkey's application to join

the EU is an acknowledgment of this fact and so is the EU's recognition of Turkey as a candidate country.

Turkey's rapid growth has put it among the 20 largest economies in the world. It has strong manufacturing expertise and a thriving services sector, all of which is boosted by its position as one of the top ten tourism destinations in the world. The country has an international profile as a founding member of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the G-20 group of major economies. It also has the second largest standing armed force in NATO, after the United States. Additionally, its borders with Syria, Iraq, Iran, Armenia and Georgia make it a haven of stability in an often volatile region. The fact that Turkey is a predominantly Muslim country allows it to have a special relationship with the Islamic world.

However, the day when Turkey will be ready to join is not around the corner. Further developments are needed to move decisively forward, including the establishment of better relations between Turkey and Cyprus, improvements in terms of civil liberties in Turkey as well as the eventual alignment of Turkey with EU laws.

THE RIGHT LINKS

For the EU, Turkish accession - under the right conditions - could bring economic, cultural and even strategic advantages, as well as an endorsement of EU political values in an important new member state. According to Swedish foreign minister Carl Bildt, "It is up to Turkey to decide what is best for itself, but the EU with Turkey on board would be a stronger, more effective and dynamic global player".

For Turkey, the path towards the EU can help reinforce the country's modernisation, enhance its status, open up new markets and stabilise foreign direct investment. Much of the investor confidence of recent years has been driven by the expectation of Turkey's eventual EU membership.

The impetus in the negotiations over Turkey's accession have slackened however, though there is talk of a new opening. At present, Turkey's official position is that membership in the EU "continues to be our strategic goal" - "despite the current stalemate in our accession process." The EU side is now readying itself to open further chapters, on condition that Turkey continues to make progress in the reforms that bring it closer to the EU.

A TURKISH CITIZEN'S VIEW OF TURKEY FROM BRUSSELS



"Turkey needs to be a country of all sorts of freedoms -- individual, cultural, religious, ethnic and sexual. This is a matter of whether or not to be a competitive society in the world. In a pluralistic society, there will be always conflicts, but the country's non-stop progress towards more democracy is important. In a country where you don't have oil, gas, nuclear arms or great financial capacity, power stems from its human capital. This is possible only by promoting more democracy, a non-dogmatic education and full liberties".

- *Dr. Bahadır Kaleagasi, international coordinator of the Turkish Industry & Business Association (TÜSIAD), and the TÜSIAD representative to the EU and BUSINESSEUROPE*