



## **"US, EU and Turkey"**

*with*

**Engin Soysal**, *Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of Turkey*

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*Introduced by*

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***On April 4, 2005 the CSIS Europe Program hosted a Congressional Staff Forum to discuss the triangular and bilateral relationships between Turkey, the United States, and the European Union. The following paragraphs summarize the opening presentation of Engin Soysal, Deputy Chief of Mission of the Turkish embassy:***

From 1957 onwards, the U.S. has continuously supported the successive enlargements of the European Union, as well as Turkey's bid for membership in the EU. President Clinton declared in 1999 that "What Turkey does, and what we do together in the coming years, will help determine whether stability takes root in the Balkans and the Aegean, whether true and lasting peace comes to the people of the Middle East, and whether democratic transformation in the states of the former Soviet empire, from the Caucasus to Central Asia, actually succeeds." These remarks were echoed five years later by President Bush when he stated that, "Mustafa Kemal Ataturk had a vision of Turkey as a strong nation among other European nations. That dream can be realized by this generation of Turks. America believes that as a European power, Turkey belongs in the European Union. Your membership would be also a crucial advance in relations between the Muslim world and the West, because you are part of both. Including Turkey in the EU would prove that Europe is not the exclusive club of a single religion and it would expose the 'clash of civilizations' as a passing myth of history."

Both speeches are an excellent illustration of the consistent and strong support that different U.S. administrations have given, and continue to give, to Turkey's efforts to join the European Union. The first speech above was delivered by President Clinton in Istanbul just before the EU Helsinki Summit of 1999, when Turkey was finally granted the status of a candidate country. President Bush's remarks also came in Istanbul, in June 2004, before the EU Brussels Summit of December 17, when the EU heads of state and government took the decision to begin accession negotiations with Turkey in October 2005.

From 1999 to 2004, progress along the road map for Turkey's accession to the EU has been successfully achieved. This progress took place in five years where dramatic changes occurred in the international context, including 9/11 and its aftermath, Afghanistan and Iraq, transatlantic

challenges, drifts and repairs, EU enlargement (from 15 to 25 members), NATO enlargements (from 19 to 26 members), and eventually, the agreement by European leaders to the EU Constitutional Treaty.

The decision to start accession negotiations with Turkey in October this year will open a new phase in the evolution of the EU. It would be a challenging process in a challenging environment. The crux of the matter is that the prospect of Turkey's accession has always forced Europe to ask how it defines itself—in other words, "What kind of Europe do we want?" How EU countries address the process of Turkey's membership bid in the coming years will have an impact on the development of U.S.—EU—Turkey interaction.

Turkey's accession would have a very important significance for the Caucasus, Iraq, the Middle East, the Black Sea, and even for Afghanistan and Central Asia. It would bring added value to European policies in the Broader Middle East region. For instance, Turkey enjoys the confidence of both Israelis and Palestinians and a Turkish general led the ISAF in Afghanistan in 2004. Turkey remains convinced that neither unilateralism nor international paralysis is the answer to challenges such as terrorism. European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso put it very well when he said recently, "The fact that you have excellent relations with the United States does not mean you are less European".

***The following paragraphs summarize the comments of CSIS Turkey Project Director Bulent Aliriza:***

Turkey has been trying to join the EU since 1959 as part of its commitment after the creation of the Republic of Turkey in accordance with Kemal Ataturk's dictum that 'there is only one civilization, Western civilization.' In fact Turkey had applied to join NATO a decade earlier when the transatlantic alliance was enshrined in NATO but was initially turned down as 'not sufficiently Western or democratic.' However, Cold War strategic needs ultimately overcame cultural or religious factors and, as it needed Turkey in the Western defense system for global strategic reasons, the United States pressed the Europeans to drop their objections to Turkey joining NATO in 1952. Throughout the remainder of the Cold War, Turkey proved to be very important for the U.S. and the Europeans as it manned the eastern border with the Soviet Union.

However, since the end of the Cold War a decade and a half ago, Turkey has been in a period of uncertainty in the triangular relationship. The question has been how Turkey will fit into the Western community in the future, particularly as NATO's role is being refashioned. Everyone agrees that Turkey's role is changing but no one has been able to define it precisely in Washington, Brussels or Ankara. Although Turkey and the U.S. have patched up an ad hoc post-Cold War arrangement for their bilateral relationship, the limits of their alliance were exposed during the Iraq war.

At the geopolitical level, the U.S. administration and the EU have justified their support for Turkish entry into the EU in strategic terms, as well as in terms of the symbolism of Turkey linking the Western and Muslim worlds. However, while the United States is able to focus primarily on the macro level, the European leaders also have to think in local terms. The Europeans are concerned

about the effect of Turkey's admission into the EU on their national budgets as well as the impact of accepting 70 million more Muslims into their club. They are also concerned about the fact that with Turkey bordering the Muslim Middle East and the Caucasus, Turkey's membership would get the EU right into the troubled Muslim world.

The current debate in Europe on European Muslims and EU relations with the Islamic world has become more intense because of the Turkish application and because Turkey is led by a party with Islamist origins. Prime Minister Erdogan has been prompted to ask whether the EU wanted to be only a Christian club. Trying to turn the religious difference to an advantage, Erdogan has argued that Turkey's entry would help prevent a clash of civilizations and that the EU would only become a global power with Turkey. It remains to be seen how effective these arguments will be.

If Turkey had not backed the UN peace plan for Cyprus in 2004, the EU would almost certainly have raised it as a non-Copenhagen criterion. However, Cyprus still remains a problem because Turkey was late to act on the plan and the Greek Cypriots are in the EU. Despite his relative diplomatic isolation because of his opposition to the plan, Greek Cypriot leader Papadopoulos has been taking advantage of being on the other side of the negotiating table to insist on further concessions from Turkey. For his part, Erdogan has declared that there would be no more Turkish concessions on Cyprus and has essentially thrown the ball to the EU side. The atmosphere has also been poisoned by Turkey's other neuralgic issues, as the EU continues to press for further liberalization directed at the Kurds and has hinted at raising the Armenian problem.

While the accession negotiations look certain to start, they are likely to be difficult and, as they will be open-ended, could be suspended at any stage for non-compliance. Although it would ultimately be the Europeans who would have to make the difficult decision on Turkey's application, as the leader of the Western alliance and with its policies affected at so many levels, the United States is also very much an interested party. Accordingly, the U.S. will be indirectly but effectively involved in the process in which all the possibilities ranging from full acceptance in the EU to outright rejection and all the variations in between will be examined along with all their consequences for the evolving triangular relationship.