

## **Turkey and the EU: The Consequences of a Stalled Process**

Talking Points for CSIS Roundtable

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As we look at the five decades of European engagement with Turkey, it comes down to two fateful decisions. The first, taken in the 1978-1979 timeframe, the precursor to the European Union (EU), the European Economic Community, suggested that Turkey apply for EEC membership at the same time that it asked Greece to apply. Turkey declined the offer while Greece proceeded to join the EEC in 1981. The second fateful decision was made in May 2004 when a divided Cyprus joined the EU, which in part sealed the fate of Turkey's aspirations to join the EU.

The odyssey of the EU *acquis communautaire* process for Turkey has been long, complex and difficult since it began its accession negotiations with the EU in 2005. Six years later – out of a total of 33 chapters that must be opened, negotiated and closed – only one chapter has been closed (on science and research), 13 have been opened, and 17 have been suspended. In December 2006, the EU froze eight chapters of Turkey's membership bid for three years pending Turkey's implementation of the Ankara (or Additional) Protocols. In July 2005, Turkey agreed to extend its 1995 Customs Union agreement with new EU members which would allow Cyprus to access Turkish ports and airports. However, Turkey has not yet opened its port facilities to Cyprus.

Therefore, the process has reached a stalemate. For the first time, Turkey has been unable to open any new chapters under the former Belgian rotating presidency of the EU and yet to do so during the current Hungarian rotating presidency. In the second half of 2011, the Polish Presidency is favorably disposed to Turkish accession to the EU as is Denmark, which assumes the EU Presidency in the first half of 2012. However, the Greek Cypriots take the EU presidency in the second half of 2012 during which time the EU will most definitely not make strides on the question of Turkish accession; if anything progress is likely to roll back.

Looking ahead, only three chapters can technically be opened – those on Competition, Public Procurement, and Social Policy and Employment – but all three of these chapters require a great deal of “benchmarking” (complex pre-negotiations to even open the chapter). Thus far, Ankara has postponed several laws that would help with both the benchmarking and *acquis* harmonization process due to cost, signaling a recalibration of the economic costs with the political cost of a lack of future perspective in the accession process. There have been some suggestions that it is important to unlock the 17 chapters, which would require movement or a deal surrounding the Ankara Protocol. However, the Greek Cypriot government flatly refuses to negotiate and has put to use its veto authority paralyzing the EU and the entire accession process from moving forward. In recent days, Turkish officials have suggested that if forced to choose between the EU and (Turkish) Cyprus, they would choose Cyprus. The impasse continues.

Unfortunately, public statements and visits by European and Turkish leaders have only served to further strain Turkey-EU relations if not impair them. Officially, Paris is careful not to use the term “accession” in its public vocabulary vis-à-vis Turkey. They speak only of “negotiations.” In turn, Paris does not publicly use the highly charged phrase “privileged partnership” which speaks to the incredible political sensitivity of this issue. French President Sarkozy recently traveled to Ankara in his G8/G20 leadership capacity, but not in his EU capacity, which infuriated Turkish leaders. He has publically stated that Turkey will destabilize the EU if it joined. Meanwhile Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan has accused Germany of xenophobia and discrimination. While visiting Düsseldorf, the Prime Minister urged the Turkish community in Germany to integrate but not to assimilate. These visits and meetings are ultimately worsening diplomatic ties and the political environment.

Turkish officials suggest that Turkey’s future lies in the Middle East, North Africa, or further east in Central Asia, not in Europe. Conversely European officials seek to remind Ankara that that 90% of foreign direct investment (FDI) and 80% of Turkey’s technology come from Europe. The reality is that Turkey’s future lies in both East and West.

Finally, one of the most sensitive issues for both the EU and Turkey is the question of visa liberalization which touches at the core of Europe’s immigration policies and identity politics and now has become yet another symbol of the deepening gulf between Turkey and the EU. Turkish officials are incredibly frustrated by the fact that they cannot get traction on the

issue of visas with the EU, even though the EU has made significant recent strides with countries in the Western Balkans and the former Soviet Union. Today, approximately 740,000 mid to long term visas are issued to Turkish citizens for travel to the EU, of which 32,000 are Turkish students studying in Europe. However, the EU is seeking a readmission agreement which would require Ankara to take back illegal immigrants that have passed through Turkey into Greece from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and North Africa. Reportedly, there were 100,000 illegal immigrants that entered the EU through Turkey in 2010.

At the end of the day, the breakdown in the accession process stems from a fundamental misunderstanding by both sides as to the nature of the process itself. Turkey assumed the EU would accommodate its unique strategic geographic position, its growing economy, its history and its energy resources. However, the accession process is really about the aspirant country accommodating the law and standards of the EU, not the other way around.

As the gap between the policy rhetoric in Europe and Turkey regarding the accession process ceases and reality grows ever greater, both sides are hoping the other will blink first and step back, if not away, from the process. However, neither one will give the other the satisfaction of doing so. Politically, Turkey needs the EU in order to push through its own internal reforms but that process is winding down. Equally, the EU needs Turkey to justify its increasingly hollow enlargement strategy, a strategy which has largely grown stale due to a loss of vision, energy and enthusiasm due to both the European financial crisis and institutional requirements of the post-Lisbon era.

Today, we are seeing the consequences of a stalled process in the form of an unfortunate blame-game between the EU and the United States as both seek to identify which party is responsible for the current challenging state of EU-Turkey and U.S.-Turkey relations. The EU is pressuring the United States to stop talking publically about the future accession of Turkey into the EU, but the United States fears that if it stops pushing for Turkish accession, it will reveal the lack of an alternative American policy for Turkey other than EU membership. The United States hasn't thought through an alternative strategy because if Turkey is not Western-oriented in direction, we struggle to understand what Turkey will look like and how it will act in the future. Compounding the problem, the EU cannot seem to look beyond its own rhetoric due to political sensitivities associated with the accession process.

The time has come for a more nuanced American policy and a larger transatlantic strategy for the entire region. The EU and United States need a common understanding of the future of this region and ought to have a very candid transatlantic conversation about where we are heading. The European sovereign debt crisis, the transformation of North Africa and the Middle East, and the Iran nuclear question will only accelerate the importance of this region and Turkey's role in it. The status quo is no longer an option.