

Admitting turkey to the european union

Countries



Turkey's accession to the European Union (EU) has created such a hype over the years since its membership was suggested during the Helsinki European Council in December of 1999. Negotiations to Turkey's accession started in October of 2005 with the discussion of EU's set criteria for Turkey to examine and abide by.

The formal conditions to which the EU has presented in the negotiations were based on the Copenhagen principle that was created in the 1993 European Summit. It stands on three precepts: First, that the candidate member should fully adapt to the EU law legislation. Second, the candidate should possess a fairly functional democracy, which naturally illustrates the principles that most EU members adhere to, which are respect for human rights and maintain cordial relations with their neighboring states.

The last precept focuses on the candidate's economic stance in the international community, which demonstrates the EU's desire to maintain secure economies both domestically and internationally (Arnold, 2007).

Despite efforts to make Turkey's transition into the EU community as smooth as possible, its progress has been hampered by political and cultural issues that has plagued the country's socio-political environment, causing them to postpone its acceptance to the terms enlisted in the Copenhagen Criteria.

The negative opinions of other EU member states does not help in moving the accession talks forward either as major players like France and Germany have openly expressed their concerns about admitting Turkey into the EU and has suggested that Turkey should be given the privilege to develop a close partnership with the EU instead (Arnold, 2007).

These issues have been a topic of debate during the EU-Turkey accession talks and until both parties find a compromising position on all matters at hand, Turkey's admittance to the EU might take a little bit longer.

Geographical issue

According to Arnold, the EU's predicament regarding Turkey's accession is certainly deep-rooted in geopolitical terms. He has stated that a general consensus of creating the EU was to unify Europe, so in essence its precepts only encompasses those within the so-called European territory. It has been noted that what defines the EU is its geographical borders, clearly accentuated by lands and seas with centuries of shared political, cultural and religious histories.

Still, geography is an extremely difficult case for contention since it is an arbitrary construction which does not seem to correspond to any tangible reality. Moreover, the European territory is only real in the physical sense of the term, since Europe is part of the Eurasian plate (Arnold, 2007).

In this case, the dispute on Turkey's geographical location makes no sense as reservations about its European character has already been resolved by its default membership in numerous organizations, namely the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), of which Turkey is a founding member, and its participation in international sports competition such as the UEFA cup, of which it has its own football team. Turkey is also a member of NATO, a Euro-Atlantic alliance that justifies its European placement (Arnold, 2007).

Turkey location on the map is situated at the gateway to the Middle East, the Caucasus and central Asia, which makes them a key strategic player in all three regions. Based on these grounds, it is necessary for the EU to reconfirm the foundations of the core of all EU policies, and in particular, its geographical definition before it considers another country like Turkey as part of its community (Arnold, 2007).

Immigration

Cifti's article *Reviving Turkey's Stalled EU Drive* mentioned that if EU would grant Turkey full membership status, it would invite additional problems to its member states in terms of population. Given that there is an understating of general freedom of movement within the EU, internal instability in Turkey could result in the influx of migration to other parts of the EU member states.

It is expected of EU member states to comply in accomodating such changes within their communities since it is honored in treaties created on behalf of the EU and its governmental policies but it could be considered a dilemma by those countries receiving the migration flows, most especially in France and Germany where a good number of Muslims and Turks populate certain parts of their communities (Cifti, 2008).

One problem that could develop if ever this should come about, is the granting of citizenship to Turkish migrants, especially in countries like Germany, France and Sweden, who have no intention of granting citizenship to migrants living in their countries. Immigrants living in closed communities

usually have more social, cultural and political difficulties living in harmony with the native citizens of their host country.

This question gains additional weight as Europeans are witnessing efforts made by Turkish political, social and cultural institutions to target Turkish immigrants in EU countries (Demesmay & Weske, 2007).

There remain significant political challenges that Turkey must face up to, if it is to be ready for membership. For instance, the presence of the current Justice and Development (AKP) government has created hesitations among EU members of Turkey's ability to control its religious sect from affecting the democratic institutions of the country.

The recent move to amend the constitution and lift the ban on wearing hijab or Islamic headscarves on college campuses has established the notion that Turkey may not be ready to integrate democratic policies into their systems as it will be met by opposing forces from the Islamic-ran government, alienating further its Armenian citizens (Jimenez, 2008).

Based on this notion, Turkey presents itself to Europe as a country in which decisive political forces are said to be influenced by radical nationalism and religious fundamentalism and where much depends on the whims of the AKP government.

The government's incapacity to fully assimilate democratic procedures, independent jurisdiction, and evaluation of respect for human rights have created huge setbacks in its progress for development, which in turn has clouded the judgments of EU member states to gain trust of its fair imposition of the law.

Other outstanding issues include restrictions on freedom of speech, which has been an issue of contestation as it is considered to be a pre-requisite for democratic processes, and the challenges faced by the Kurdish community over language rights and identity (Demesmay & Weske, 2007).

The problems connected with the Armenians and Kurds create strong and lasting doubts in Europe which points out whether satisfactory standards will be reached in the foreseeable future (Jimenez. 2008).

Foreign Relations

In Arnold's article, Political Arguments against Turkey's Accession to the European Union, he has stated that integrating Turkey would also be a strategic and diplomatic challenge for the EU, since its borders would run alongside countries as unstable and unruly as Iran, Syria, and Iraq.

Not to mention, the fact that the EU would have to face a possible handling of the Kurdish and Armenian problem since Turkey's population is made up of small Kurdish and Armenian communities that are scattered between Turkey, Iraq and Iran. It was reported that Turkey has not excluded the possibility of military action in the Iraqi Kurdistan if the latter supported the slight signs of an independence movement amongst the Turkish Kurds (Arnold, 2007).

On the side of the EU, it has been observed that the bloc lacks cohesion, especially in dealing with its position in international relations. Its limitations to act as a single entity in major international decisions would be further divided if Turkey is granted EU membership since it would have to deal with common border issues with Georgia, Armenia, Iran, Iraq, and Syria.

Politically, it would get sucked into the messy political problems of Western Asia, most especially the situation in and around Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Arnold, 2007).

Turkish foreign policy, moreover, is no longer passive since the beginning of the war against Iraq and the Turkish refusal to let American forces pass through Turkey has indicated that it has loosened its ties with the US and has begun to be active in the affairs of West Asia on a pro-Islam and pro-Arab basis (Arnold, 2007).

Although advocates of Turkish EU membership cheerfully label the Turkish role of being a bridge between Europe and the West Asia, its nature not be so loyally liberal and democratic and that the possibility and perhaps even the necessity of a Turkish orientation sometimes in the European, but at other times in another direction (Arnold, 2007).

Therefore, one should beg the question of whether social, cultural and political harmonization could be expected from EU's relations with Turkey, parallel to what each member states currently possess with each other, or would Turkey's accession to the EU perhaps only be possible if either camps were ready to give up essential parts of their cultural identity?

Such questions are related to the argument that Turkey's EU accession would be a historical milestone, as it sets forth in creating a European identity in Turkey (Arnold, 2007).

Economic Implications

On a positive note, Turkey could turn out to be a geo-strategic asset for the EU, notably by allowing the Union to bring an end to the US monopoly of the

West Asia and by allowing it to control the flow of petrol and gas from the Caspian sea and the Gulf, thereby securing, in part, energy supplies for its member states.

According to Barisch and Hermann, the key dynamics of the economic relationship between Turkey and the EU are clearly established. Records show that 56% of Turkish exports goes to the EU, which is ten times that of any other export destination. Consequently, Turkey is the fifth largest export market of the EU, with European firms annually investing over €3bn (Barisch & Hermann, 2007).

After economic setbacks in 1994 and at the turn of the millennium, economic reports illustrate that Turkey's average has grown an annual rate of 6.8%.

According to the World Bank, Turkey's eventual membership could boost its GDP per capita growth by 1.5% per year, and allow it to expand as a market for European goods (Barisch & Hermann, 2007). In essence, the expansion that would take place if Turkey was granted membership in the EU would signify more weight in influencing world affairs.

The Cyprus case

Another major hindrance to Turkey's accession is said to be its non-recognition of the Greek Republic of Cyprus. Common sense would argue as to how a country could ever become a part of an organization if the former does not recognize one of the organizations members?

This was the reason for the closing of eight of the thirty five chapters of accession negotiations in 2006 as the EU cannot fully proceed with these conditions if Turkey refuses to abide by them (Arnold, 2007).

The Cyprus problem is more complex than it first appears. In fact, the two parts of the island were supposed to reunify in 2004 and enter the EU together. But when the Turkish part of Cyprus voted in favor of the UN plan for reunification, the Greek part voted against it. The latter, therefore entered the EU alone, to the great displeasure of Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots (Arnold, 2007).