

# [Should turkey be allowed to join the european union?](https://assignbuster.com/should-turkey-be-allowed-to-join-the-european-union/)

### ExecutiveSummary

The membership of Turkey is one of the most controversial external relations issues of theEuropean Union(EU).  Turkey is an important trading partner for the EU and provides many economic advantages to the union.  Additionally, it has a strategic location, allowing it to play an important regional and foreign policy role.  However, there are issues related to Turkey’s accession, such as large migration flows to more economically developed EU-15 countries as well as a substandard human rights situation within the country (Gerhards and Hans, 2011: 751).  Overall, this policy note recommends that Turkey should be allowed to join the EU on the basis of EUeconomic developmentand foreign policy advantages.  Despite the issues related to accession of Turkey into the EU, this paper argues that EU-membership will work as a catalyst for Turkish institutional reforms.

## Introduction

Turkish entry into the European Union is ahighly contentious issue.  Turkey hasprogressed on the way to EU membership in spite of persistent and increasingdivergence of membership preferences (Schimmelfennig, 2009: 413-415).  Turkey, with itslarge, dynamic economy, is an important trading partner for the EU, it also hasa strategic location, including on energy security, and plays an importantregional role. Equally, the EU remains an important anchor for Turkey’seconomic and political reform (Progress Report, 2013: 1).

This paper will firstprovide an analysis and outline of the different factors relating to theaccession of Turkey into the EU.  It willexplore economic factors, cultural factors and political factors.  Finally, this paper will recommend thatTurkey should be allowed to join the EU due to its positive affect on EUeconomic development, as well as the fact that Turkey has made good progress inmeeting a lot of the Accession criteria set out in the Copenhagen agreement.  This paper will also make recommendations on whatTurkey must do in order to fully meet EU standards for accession.

## Context

Turkey first became affiliated with the EU in1963 after signing an associate membership agreement with the then European Community.  The decisions to giveTurkey a membership perspective and to open accession negotiations have beenhighly controversial among member state governments and have tended to producelong and conflictive negotiations as well as uneasy compromises(Schimmelfennig, 2009: 414).  A major breakthrough came at theHelsinki meeting of the European Council in 1999, when Turkey attained statusas a candidate for membership. It now has a so-called Accession Partnershipwith the EU, which means that the EU is workingtogether with Turkey to enable it to adopt the acquis communautaire , whichis the legal framework of the EU (Togan, 2004: 1013).

The Copenhagen Criteria cover astate’s ability to take on the acquis communautaire , the economiccriteria for a functional market economy, and above all, ‘ stability ofinstitutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respectfor and protection of minorities’ (Schimmelfennig, 2009: 420).  Overall, Turkey has madesignificant efforts to fulfil requested accession criteria throughsocio-economic and cultural convergence with EU Member States.

## Analysis

### Economic Factors

Many studies have shown that economic factorsplay a significant role in shaping attitudes towards different aspects ofEuropean integration. Turkey’sprogress on meeting the requirements of the Copenhagen Criteria is confirmed bysocioeconomic indicators that describe the level of modernization of thecountry (Alber, 2007).  Turkey is the 17 th largest economy globally, and the most current EU progress report states thatTurkey has sufficient macroeconomic stability and the medium-term capabilityfor integration into the single European market (Gerhards and Hans, 2011: 744).  Turkey is a large and fast expanding market, it is the largest market in the Middle East, Balkans and Caucasus. According tothe World Bank, Turkish GDP is as large as 80 per cent of Russian GDP (Togan, 2004: 1043).

Turkey, located at the crossroads betweenEurope, Eurasia and the Middle East, has the potential to act as a major linkbetween these markets.  Withharmonization of commercial legislation, EU companies will be able to useTurkey as a joint investment and export base for the Middle East and Eurasia.  Moreover, Istanbul is emerging astransnational corporations’ headquarters for operations in the Caucasus andCentral Asia. The EU will derive potential gains from increased trade in theregion (Togan, 2004: 1043-1044).

Overall, the Progress Report on Turkey’s EUAccession (2013: 4) states that Turkey is a functioning market economy, andshould therefore be able to cope with competitive pressure and market forceswithin the Union in the medium term. Additionally, with Turkish accession current members will derive welfaregains from standard comparative advantage sources and also from growth effectsof integration.

This report argues that accession of Turkeyto the EU will bring economic benefits for Turkey as well as to the EUitself.  The largest economic gains canbe obtained through reforms of national institutions in Turkey that improve thefunctioning of the public sector and provide transparency to investors andtraders (Lejour and Mooij, 2005: 117).  Integration will remove thedistortions in the price system, boosting the allocative efﬁciency in theeconomy, which in turn will make the country a better place to invest.  Furthermore, with accession Turkey will beeligible for EU structural funds. The increase in infrastructural investments willcontribute to economic growth in Turkey. In addition, Turkey will reap beneﬁtsfrom monetary integration, and ﬁnally, Turkey will beneﬁt from migration ofTurkish labour to the EU (Togan, 2004: 1042).

The key theoretical constructs investigatedto explain opposition to Turkey’s EU membership are related to rationaleconomic self-interest and group-level interests and concerns (McClaren, 2007: 251).  Turkey is relatively poor andagricultural, it can therefore be argued that Turkish membership is likely toincrease the divergence of living standards in the EU, create a high potentialfor labour migration and instigate demand for high net payments from the structuraland agricultural funds.  Welfare gainsthat will be derived by Turkey from integration will have a price. The pricewill be the adjustment costs associated with the attainment of macroeconomicstability, adoption of CAP, liberalization of services and network industries, and complying with EU environmental directives (Togan, 2004: 1042).

### Migration/Cultural Factors

In addition to direct fiscal implications, EU member states are subject to another possible economic consequence ofTurkish accession, immigration. Hostility to Turkey’s candidacy can be explained by the threateningcontext of Turkish migration (McClaren, 2007: 251).  It can be argued that migration flows couldhave negative economic consequences, such as increased competition inparticular segments of the labour market. In particular, countries in the more economically developed EU-15 arelikely to be affected to the highest degree (Gerhards and Hans, 2011: 751), moreover it will likely take decades before Turkey attains an income levelcomparable to these countries.  This willcontinue to be a strong incentive for migration from Turkey to other EUcountries, EU-15 countries fear that the immigrants will ‘ depress wages, boost unemploymentand cause social friction and political upheavals’ (Togan, 2004: 1031-1032).

However, one assumption in theanalysis of Turkish migration is that all labour is homogenous.  In reality labour is highly differentiatedaccording to many factors, which results in the effects of migration for incomedistribution and social welfare becoming less clear-cut.  The empirical research on the economic effectsof immigration indicates fairly small and on the whole positive effects.  ‘ Employment opportunities are not affectedmuch, the wage of low skilled labour is depressed somewhat but that of skilledlabour is raised, and the net present value of public transfers is positive’ (Togan, 2004: 1043).  Therefore, this paperargues that with appropriate measures, immigration is not necessarily anegative consequence of Turkey’s accession into the EU.

It is not just the threat to resourcespresented by Turks that affects feelings about the Turkish candidacy, threatsto culture and way of life are likely to be particularly strong in the Turkishcase (Ivarsflaten, 2005).  In addition tothe possible problem of being perceived as traditional or backward, Turkeyfaces the potential difficulty of being predominantly Muslim (McClaren, 2007: 258).  The recent drawbacks in thenegotiations of the EU with Croatia, Serbia, and Turkey have been caused byissues of national identity related to legacies of ethnic conflict that arelikely to create high political costs to the target governments. As a result, whereas consistency has remained high, effectiveness is reduced (Schimmelfennig, 2004: 918).

Nevertheless, sociostructuraldifferences between Turkey and the EU Member States have been shrinking.  The percentage of the Turkish populationworking in agriculture has sunk, education levels have risen and the overallstandard of living has increased (Gerhards and Hans, 2011: 744).

The commission critiques Turkeyon its human rights situation, on its limited freedom of speech and on its lackof gender equality.  However, accordingto the Freedom House Index, Turkey has improved consistently in its level ofdemocratization, political freedom and civil liberties over recent years(Gerhards and Hans, 2011: 744).  Overall, these improvements represent measurable developments regarding Turkey’s convergencewith the EU and its fulfilment of EU accession criteria.  Additionally, Freedom in the Press hasimproved, however, it still has a long way to go in order to reach the levelsof freedom held by EU-15 countries.  Keyprovisions of the Turkish legal framework and their interpretation by membersof the judiciary continue to hamper freedom of expression, including freedom ofthe media (Progress Report, 2013: 2).

### Foreign Policy

Thecommission emphasized Turkey’sincreasingly important foreign policy significance for Europe, for example itsintermediary role between Syria and Israel, its diplomatic approaches withArmenia, and above all, its role in the military conflict between Russia andGeorgia (Schmid, 2008).  Turkey hascontinued to play an important role in its wider neighbourhood, for exampleexpanding its activities as a non-traditional donor in the Horn of Africa, supporting democratic transition in North Africa, and enhancing cooperationwith and between Afghanistan and Pakistan. It has played a particularlyimportant role on Syria, supporting the development of a more unifiedopposition and providing vital humanitarian assistance to large numbers ofSyrians fleeing their country (Progress Report, 2013: 3).  This suggests Turkey is meeting criteria ofthe Copenhagen Agreement such as the rule of law and the respect for andprotection of minorities.

According to the Commission (2008b), expansion in generaland Turkish membership specifically would strengthen the EU’s foreign policyweight in the world.  Furthermore, Turkey’s geographic location makes it well-suited as a transit country for oiland natural gas and it could therefore play a strategic role in securing theEU’s energy supply (Gerhardsand Hans, 2011: 744).  Turkish membership could help to securestability and security in the Balkans and Caucasus. The EU could then increaseits energy security and also decrease its defence expenditures (Togan, 2004: 1043-1044).  This paper argues that thisis indication that Turkey should be allowed to join the EU.

## Recommendations

In order to maintain its impact on political reform underthe conditions of political unrest, the EU will need to reassure applicantgovernments of the credibility of its commitment to enlargement and movenegotiations with Turkey closer to the endgame. Creating uncertainty about admission even after full compliance destroysthis credibility and will reduce the effectiveness of conditionality even further(schimmelfennig, 2008: 933).  Overall, this policy note recommends that Turkey should be allowed to join the EU on thebasis of EU economic development and foreign policy advantages provided itagrees to make continued efforts in the realm of human rights.

The issues with regards to human rights in Turkey underlinethe importance for the EU to enhance its engagement with Turkey.  This paper recommends that the overall legalframework and practice on the intervention of law enforcement officers shouldbe brought in line with European standards to guarantee under all circumstancesthe right to freedom of assembly. Additionally, an ECHR-compatible legal framework has yet to beestablished on matters of faith and conscientious objection.  Substantial efforts are needed to effectivelyguarantee the rights of women, children and LGBT individuals (Progress Report, 2013: 2).  These shortcomings need to beaddressed in order for Turkey to be a successful member of the EU.

In regards to immigration associated with the accession ofTurkey to the EU, this paper recommends that government leaders will need toadopt measures to allay fears among EU citizens, perhaps including provisionfor a waiting period on the free movement of labour provision (McClaren, 2007: 274, Gerhards and Hans, 2011: 763).

In conclusion, this report argues thatEU-membership will work as a catalyst for Turkish institutional reforms.  Turkey has made progress towards meeting agood amount of the accession criteria, and by becoming a member of the EU, Turkey has to conform to all EU legislation and enforcement by the EuropeanCourt of Justice.  Furthemore, via themethod of open coordination, Turkey will regularly be assessed by the EuropeanCommission and other member countries on its economic policies.  EU membership can thus trigger institutionalreform in Turkey and reduce widespread corruption (Lejour and de Mooij, 2005: 101).

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