

Should turkey be
allowed to join the
european union?



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Executive Summary

The membership of Turkey is one of the most controversial external relations issues of the European 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 EU economic development and 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 a highly contentious issue. Turkey has progressed on the way to EU membership in spite of persistent and increasing divergence of membership preferences (Schimmelfennig, 2009: 413-415). Turkey, with its large, dynamic economy, is an important trading partner for the EU, it also has a strategic location, including on energy security, and plays an important regional role. Equally, the EU remains an important anchor for Turkey's economic and political reform (Progress Report, 2013: 1).

This paper will first provide an analysis and outline of the different factors relating to the accession of Turkey into the EU. It will explore economic

factors, cultural factors and political factors. Finally, this paper will recommend that Turkey should be allowed to join the EU due to its positive affect on EU economic development, as well as the fact that Turkey has made good progress in meeting a lot of the Accession criteria set out in the Copenhagen agreement. This paper will also make recommendations on what Turkey must do in order to fully meet EU standards for accession.

Context

Turkey first became affiliated with the EU in 1963 after signing an associate membership agreement with the then European Community. The decisions to give Turkey a membership perspective and to open accession negotiations have been highly controversial among member state governments and have tended to produce long and conflictive negotiations as well as uneasy compromises (Schimmelfennig, 2009: 414). A major breakthrough came at the Helsinki meeting of the European Council in 1999, when Turkey attained status as a candidate for membership. It now has a so-called Accession Partnership with the EU, which means that the EU is working together with Turkey to enable it to adopt the *acquis communautaire*, which is the legal framework of the EU (Togan, 2004: 1013).

The Copenhagen Criteria cover a state's ability to take on the *acquis communautaire*, the economic criteria for a functional market economy, and above all, 'stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities' (Schimmelfennig, 2009: 420). Overall, Turkey has made significant efforts to fulfil requested accession criteria through socio-economic and cultural convergence with EU

Member States.

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Analysis

Economic Factors

Many studies have shown that economic factors play a significant role in shaping attitudes towards different aspects of European integration.

Turkey's progress on meeting the requirements of the Copenhagen Criteria is confirmed by socioeconomic indicators that describe the level of modernization of the country (Alber, 2007). Turkey is the 17th largest economy globally, and the most current EU progress report states that Turkey has sufficient macroeconomic stability and the medium-term capability for 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 to the World Bank, Turkish GDP is as large as 80 per cent of Russian GDP (Togan, 2004: 1043).

Turkey, located at the crossroads between Europe, Eurasia and the Middle East, has the potential to act as a major link between these markets.

With harmonization of commercial legislation, EU companies will be able to use Turkey as a joint investment and export base for the Middle East and Eurasia. Moreover, Istanbul is emerging as transnational corporations' headquarters for operations in the Caucasus and Central Asia. The EU will derive potential gains from increased trade in the region (Togan, 2004: 1043-1044).

Overall, the Progress Report on Turkey's EU Accession (2013: 4) states that Turkey is a functioning market economy, and should therefore be able to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union in the <https://assignbuster.com/should-turkey-be-allowed-to-join-the-european-union/>

medium term. Additionally, with Turkish accession current members will derive welfare gains from standard comparative advantage sources and also from growth effects of integration.

This report argues that accession of Turkey to the EU will bring economic benefits for Turkey as well as to the EU itself. The largest economic gains can be obtained through reforms of national institutions in Turkey that improve the functioning of the public sector and provide transparency to investors and traders (Lejour and Mooij, 2005: 117). Integration will remove the distortions in the price system, boosting the allocative efficiency in the economy, which in turn will make the country a better place to invest. Furthermore, with accession Turkey will be eligible for EU structural funds. The increase in infrastructural investments will contribute to economic growth in Turkey. In addition, Turkey will reap benefits from monetary integration, and finally, Turkey will benefit from migration of Turkish labour to the EU (Togan, 2004: 1042).

The key theoretical constructs investigated to explain opposition to Turkey's EU membership are related to rational economic self-interest and group-level interests and concerns (McClaren, 2007: 251). Turkey is relatively poor and agricultural, it can therefore be argued that Turkish membership is likely to increase the divergence of living standards in the EU, create a high potential for labour migration and instigate demand for high net payments from the structural and agricultural funds. Welfare gains that will be derived by Turkey from integration will have a price. The price will be the adjustment costs associated with the attainment of macroeconomic stability, 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 of Turkish accession, immigration. Hostility to Turkey's candidacy can be explained by the threatening context of Turkish migration (McClaren, 2007: 251). It can be argued that migration flows could have negative economic consequences, such as increased competition in particular segments of the labour market. In particular, countries in the more economically developed EU-15 are likely to be affected to the highest degree (Gerhards and Hans, 2011: 751), moreover it will likely take decades before Turkey attains an income level comparable to these countries. This will continue to be a strong incentive for migration from Turkey to other EU countries, EU-15 countries fear that the immigrants will 'depress wages, boost unemployment and cause social friction and political upheavals' (Togan, 2004: 1031-1032).

However, one assumption in the analysis of Turkish migration is that all labour is homogenous. In reality labour is highly differentiated according to many factors, which results in the effects of migration for income distribution and social welfare becoming less clear-cut. The empirical research on the economic effects of immigration indicates fairly small and on the whole positive effects. 'Employment opportunities are not affected much, the wage of low skilled labour is depressed somewhat but that of skilled labour is raised, and the net present value of public transfers is positive' (Togan, 2004: 1043). Therefore, this paper argues that with appropriate measures, <https://assignbuster.com/should-turkey-be-allowed-to-join-the-european-union/>

immigration is not necessarily a negative consequence of Turkey's accession into the EU.

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

Nevertheless, sociostructural differences between Turkey and the EU Member States have been shrinking. The percentage of the Turkish population working in agriculture has sunk, education levels have risen and the overall standard of living has increased (Gerhards and Hans, 2011: 744).

The commission critiques Turkey on its human rights situation, on its limited freedom of speech and on its lack of gender equality. However, according to the Freedom House Index, Turkey has improved consistently in its level of democratization, political freedom and civil liberties over recent years (Gerhards and Hans, 2011: 744). Overall, these improvements represent measurable developments regarding Turkey's convergence with the EU and its fulfilment of EU accession criteria. Additionally, Freedom in the Press has improved, however, it still has a long way to go in order to

reach the level of freedom held by EU-15 countries. Key provisions of the Turkish legal framework and their interpretation by members of the judiciary continue to hamper freedom of expression, including freedom of the media (Progress Report, 2013: 2).

Foreign Policy

The Commission emphasized Turkey's increasingly important foreign policy significance for Europe, for example its intermediary role between Syria and Israel, its diplomatic approaches with Armenia, and above all, its role in the military conflict between Russia and Georgia (Schmid, 2008). Turkey has continued to play an important role in its wider neighbourhood, for example expanding its activities as a non-traditional donor in the Horn of Africa, supporting democratic transition in North Africa, and enhancing cooperation with and between Afghanistan and Pakistan. It has played a particularly important role on Syria, supporting the development of a more unified opposition and providing vital humanitarian assistance to large numbers of Syrians fleeing their country (Progress Report, 2013: 3). This suggests Turkey is meeting criteria of the Copenhagen Agreement such as the rule of law and the respect for and protection of minorities.

According to the Commission (2008b), expansion in general and Turkish membership specifically would strengthen the EU's foreign policy weight in the world. Furthermore, Turkey's geographic location makes it well-suited as a transit country for oil and natural gas and it could therefore play a strategic role in securing the EU's energy supply (Gerhards and Hans, 2011: 744).

Turkish membership could help to secure stability and security in the Balkans and Caucasus. The EU could then increase its energy security and also

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decrease its defence expenditures (Togan, 2004: 1043-1044). This paper argues that this is an indication that Turkey should be allowed to join the EU.

Recommendations

In order to maintain its impact on political reform under the conditions of political unrest, the EU will need to reassure applicant governments of the credibility of its commitment to enlargement and move negotiations with Turkey closer to the endgame. Creating uncertainty about admission even after full compliance destroys this 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 the basis of EU economic development and foreign policy advantages provided it agrees to make continued efforts in the realm of human rights.

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

In regards to immigration associated with the accession of Turkey to the EU, this paper recommends that government leaders will need to adopt measures

to allay fears among EU citizens, perhaps including provision for a waiting period on the free movement of labour provision (McClaren, 2007: 274, Gerhards and Hans, 2011: 763).

In conclusion, this report argues that EU-membership will work as a catalyst for Turkish institutional reforms. Turkey has made progress towards meeting a good 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 European Court of Justice. Furthermore, via the method of open coordination, Turkey will regularly be assessed by the European Commission and other member countries on its economic policies. EU membership can thus trigger institutional reform in Turkey and reduce widespread corruption (Lejour and de Mooij, 2005: 101).

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